Receptive Subjects: Gender and Sexuality in Novels by Igbo Authors

by

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Abstract

This dissertation examines how characters construct and contest masculinities in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart,* Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows*, and Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees*. It explores how Nigerian novelists redefine what it means to be a man or a woman by articulating new ways of doing masculinity and femininity and challenging a culture that discriminates against its citizens based on sex, gender, or sexual orientation. Motivated by questions of a shared human vulnerability, my research also shows how these writers (re)imagine what it means to be human while contesting the valorization of gender or sexual identities. The writers create characters whose receptiveness, I argue, defines their relations to the other, affirming an affinity with the other.

While research on African masculinities is grounded mainly in ethnographic, anthropological, or psychological analysis and aims at health and policy development programs, my research emphasizes a literary critique of Nigerian men and women that extends our understanding beyond the gender binary. Postcolonial, feminist, and queer theories frame my study. I draw on ideas by Judith Butler, Michael Slote, Martha Nussbaum, Chielozona Eze, Emmanuel Levinas, Lee Edelman, and Michel Foucault and organize my dissertation thus: Chapter One, "Gender, Masculinities, and Queer Studies in Africa," situates my study of masculinities in Nigerian fiction within the existing scholarship on gender, masculinities, and queerness in Africa. Chapter Two, "'A son who is a man': Precariousness in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*," locates the protagonist's firstborn, Nwoye, as an example of "receptive" masculinity and argues that his receptivity towards others underlies his renunciation of male hegemony.

Chapter Three, "'A freedom to be, to do': Orthodoxy in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus,*" elaborates on Achebe's father-son relationships by arguing that Jaja, the male protagonist, serves as a source of trouble to the "disciplinary" masculinity personified by his father. Chapter Four, "'A real man': Tradition in Dibia's *Walking with Shadows,*" demonstrates that Dibia subverts gay stereotypes through

his portrayal of Adrian, the homosexual character, to disaffirm popular notions of what it means to be a man. I argue that he creates receptive characters such as Chike and Ada to emphasize the link between receptivity and queer flourishing. Chapter Five, "'Let peace be. Let life be': Hospitality in Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees,*" interrogates Okparanta's exploration of the mother-daughter relationship dramatized by Adaobi and Ijeoma and the familial negotiations around same-sex intimacy. Okparanta deploys an ethic of hospitality to underscore the centrality of family support to queer flourishing. I conclude that Achebe, Adichie, Dibia, and Okparanta underscore receptivity to reconstruct masculinity (and femininity) and call for gender redefinition.

Dedication

Wish you were here. For Michael—my Dad.

For Chidi Ike—if only you could see what you always knew.

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Introduction

The Language of 'Real' Men: Scripting Gender

When I was twelve, one of my uncles, now deceased, told me that it was weird for any man to be seen in a woman's space—the kitchen, precisely. He spoke of the kitchen in an odd tone, as if it took something out of men the longer they hung around there, as if staying in the kitchen left a void in men, a void not easily filled. I could not understand why he chose not to see that I liked helping my mother while she prepared dinner, that I was curious to learn how to cook and found cooking to be a fun activity, that I enjoyed cooking. The fact that I was skillful at football never swayed him. Traditionally, my uncle was not a 'real' man, at least in many people's eyes; although he was bighearted, he appeared passive, self-indulgent, and could never keep a job. Another interesting detail about him was that he did not aspire to act like any 'real' man; he yielded neither to entreaties to get married nor to the pressure to start a family of his own. He struck everyone as selfish. He smoked hard and drank hard. He appeared to live life on his terms, insouciant, nonconformist—perhaps, *antinormative*. Likewise, he was not a rationalist about relationships. In short, he did not plan his life.

In contrast, his elder brother—that is, my father—fitted the image of what a real man should look like: tall, muscular, fearless. He was pragmatic, too, and unapologetic about it. He had fought on Biafra's side during the Nigerian civil war of the 1960s and earned a reputation as a valiant soldier. Together with his platoon, he had repelled the federal military from annihilating our village.[1] As a young boy, I would learn from relatives that my father was a fighter. He was

[1] I am from Egbema, an oil-rich community in present-day Imo State, southeast of Nigeria. During the civil war, Egbema suffered a tremendous loss. However, it still suffers in the wake of the oil and gas activities of Shell Petroleum and other oil companies that have left its landscape disfigured.

nicknamed *Ebelebe*,[2] and I remember seeing people hail him on the street the many times I had walked by his side. I also remember people pointing at me whenever they saw me playing football in the playground or walking with friends after school: "That's Ebelebe's son." This was in Lagos of the 1980s. Meanwhile, my father never talked about the soldiers he killed or the impact the war must have had on him after it ended in 1970, with a death count running into millions.[3] Because he had neither the language nor the critical disposition to speak about his trauma, I assume, he let it encode an aspect of his worldview. Unfortunately, the war shaped his notions of manhood, and its aftermath would define his relationship with the rest of the family—his loving, at times violent, interactions with us. Yet he was surprisingly open, most times, to people in need, for he could not bear to see anybody suffer lack.

These images of my father and uncle illustrate contradictory facets of male identity or divergent expressions of masculinity, thus underlining its complexity. Much of my interest in gender studies stems from my childhood experiences. I can still remember how my mother made me appreciate qualities some men would readily put down as receptive and feminine, how my late father embodied a military persona that exposed me to the perils of hegemonic masculinity. In retrospect, I see that he had been struggling to be as manly as best he could. I also remember that my peers performed conflicting, even noxious, versions of manliness required to negotiate the turmoil of Lagos at the time—performances that engendered harm for themselves and the women in their lives. Growing up in a rough neighbourhood then, I always wondered: Is there

[2] *Ebelebe* is an Igbo word, used to loosely refer to anything extraordinary, mysterious, or incredible. One can exclaim, *"Ebelebe egbuole o*," meaning "Disaster has struck."
[3] For detail on the war, see Korieh, *The Nigeria-Biafra War*. See, also, Gould and Forsyth, eds. *The Struggle for Modern Nigeria*; Omaka, *The Biafran Humanitarian Crisis, 1967-1970*; Heerten, *The Biafran War and Postcolonial Humanitarianism*.

one way to be a man? What does it mean to be my father's son? Could I be a different kind of man, for instance, one whose sense of maleness is not secured by muscularity, aggression, stoicism, or heroism? A man who is not afraid to express himself emotionally or who hardly feels shame if he is moved to tears at the sight of an affecting scene in a film? Perhaps, one brave enough to accept his vulnerability, despite that the public expects men to mask any signs of it? These questions have motivated my academic interest in masculinities and, more specifically, my study of men and women in Nigerian fiction by female and male writers: Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall* Apart, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows*, and Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees*.

Masculinities in Nigerian Fiction

Although figures of masculinity populate Nigerian novels, not much critical scholarship appears to have examined the significance of alternative male and female subjectivities in such narratives—or how characters construct other subversive modes of being a man or a woman that gesture towards broader articulations of attitudinal and social change. A leading Nigerian literary critic, Charles Nnolim, has extensively analyzed African literature. His books *Approaches to the African Novel* and *Issues in African Literature* tackle the subjects of aesthetics, tradition, social vision, and feminism in the fiction by Achebe, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Mongo Beti, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Ben Okri, Flora Nwapa, and others. Nnolim's focus is mostly on male authors, which constitutes a reading practice that Florence Stratton has pointedly criticized. In *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*, Stratton highlights the invisibility of women's writing in African critical tradition, bemoaning how "women writers and their works have been rendered invisible in literary criticism" (1). Other female critics have equally pointed out this shortcoming among their male counterparts (Boyce Davies and Graves 1986; Ogundipe-Leslie

1994; Ogunyemi 1996; Nfah-Abbenyi 1997; Andrade 2011; Zulfiqar 2016). Throughout his discussion of those novels, Nnolim conceives gender in strictly binary terms, particularly evident in his discussion of feminism. Other eminent African critics such as Abdul R. JanMohamed, Eustace Palmer, David Cook, Gerald Moore, and Bernth Lindfors have also neglected the works of African women (Stratton 6).

In "Trends in the Nigerian Novels," Nnolim discusses the themes of cultural nationalism, Marxist ideology, modernist aesthetics, and radical feminist orientation in Nigerian fiction but fails to consider sexuality as part of the said trends. His consideration of gender revolves around normative portrayals of women in the novels of Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, and Zaynab Alkali. Nevertheless, he criticizes these writers for mobilizing their "weapons against the man and present[ing] a debased image of him while elevating that of woman" (200).[4] Perhaps, for Nnolim, the Nigerian novel revolves around the male experience, whether in the colonial or postcolonial time. Consequently, it should undertake "the rehabilitation of the image of the black man whose dignity has been bruised and damaged by the colonial master" (195). In another chapter titled "Contemporary Nigerian Fiction," Nnolim examines a group of writers that includes Maik Nwosu, Toni Kan Onwordi, Jonah Ageda, Wale Okediran, Omo Uwaifo, Chuma Newton, and Fola Arthur-Worrey, whose novels dramatize the themes of debauchery and crass materialism and then categorizes them as belonging to "the fleshy school of writers." These male writers are so categorized because their "main characters are in dire pursuit of the flesh, writers for whom the excitements and satisfactions of the body are far more important than the sanctity

[4] The observation Nnolim makes here recalls Mawuli Adjei's critique of the depictions of men by women writers. See, Adjei, "Male-bashing and Narrative Subjectivity in Amma Darko's First Tree Novels."

of the soul; for whom the pleasure of the flesh are of more moment than the essence of the spirit" (208).

Although Nnolim studies the novels of Adichie, Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo, Bina Nengi-Ilagha, and Promise Okekwe, his reading appears limited to the trope of the hearth. He contends that these women writers "have reverted to the hearth, to the home, to family life," commending them for their valorization of the hearth and for being less radically feminist in orientation (213). However, he declares in a puzzling manner that "[o]ne surprising aspect about contemporary female writers in Nigeria is the total absence of the ideology of feminism which preoccupied, even energized, their predecessors (213). Nnolim would have us believe that such writers scarcely present a "debased" portrait of masculinity, are only interested in the "reassertion of the importance of women," and therefore avoid a "demolition campaign of the male image in our literatures" (213). One cannot help but wonder whether such a reading does not constitute a narrow analysis of the feminist inclination in those narratives. As I show in Chapter 3, Adichie is a feminist, and unabashedly so, not only in her characterization of Aunty Ifeoma and her daughter Amaka (the protagonists' aunt and cousin, respectively) but also particularly in her depiction of Eugene (the protagonists' father), in *Purple Hibiscus*. In the novel, Adichie presents him as an authoritarian figure, a threat to female selfhood.

Despite the gaps in his accounts of Nigerian literature and gender, Nnolim questions the novelist's role in society, recalling Jean-Paul Sartre's assertion of the function of literature in his book *What Is Literature?* In the chapter, "For Whom Does One Write," Sartre raises questions about the writer and social commitment, stating that "the written work can be an essential condition of action, that is, the moment of reflective consciousness" (140). Perhaps it is against this background that Nnolim is critical of that generation of Nigerian writers who seem to glorify

carnality over morality. He understands that narratives can articulate "a change of vision and a new attitude of the mind" (240), so he expects these writers to be more socially committed to articulating a different social order that recognizes human suffering. Therefore, he implores the novelist to imagine a world beyond the "smallness of his canvas." According to Nnolim, "The one distinguishing mark of the Nigerian novelist is his timidity. He is not adventurous. He is not daring. He is afraid of exploring new frontiers. That is why he works on a very small canvas" (81). Nnolim makes an important point here, considering that many Nigerian writers of the 1980s and 1990s had limited themselves to narrating the climate of despair under military rule. Some of the fiction produced during those periods defined gender as an innate essence in men and women, ignoring, so to speak, alternative modes of being and affirming relationality. Moreover, Nnolim is correct to challenge Nigerian writers, urging them to eschew "imaginative timidity" and become "more imaginatively aggressive and expansive" (235). However, his comparison between the Nigerian and the European writers appears problematic and quite Eurocentric.

By contrasting the Nigerian novelist's social vision with that of his or her European counterpart, Nnolim inadvertently promotes the latter as the exemplar because the "European novelist writes with the universe as his canvas. His outlook is global. He is forward-looking and projects himself imaginatively into writing futuristic literature" (81). Nnolim not only valorizes the European novelist but also discounts the postcolonial project of the African novelist aimed at deconstructing colonial narratives on Africans. He conceives of literary traditions in terms of binary such as universals and particulars, progressive and parochial, suggestive of colonialist discourse, and fails to recognize the multifarious character of European fiction. That explains why Nnolim would assume that every European writer works on a "large" canvas; in contrast, a good amount of the fiction originating from Central and Eastern Europe tends to be different in

its treatment of family histories and national concerns from the fiction produced in North America and Western Europe. Furthermore, he deploys a set of familiar colonial registers such as "adventurous," "daring," and "frontiers," recreating a dualism between the West and Africa. This deployment presents the former as ever being adventurous and daring, and the latter as timid and backward. Indeed, Nnolim's understanding of "new frontiers" appeals to the fantasy of Western modernity, eliding its roots in (settler) colonialism. As such, he fails to recognize that stories of "new frontiers" usually reflect imperialist ideals of conquest, exploitation, and dispossession of other peoples and lands (Wolfe 2006; Massip 2012; Lester 2012; Altenbernd and Young 2014). Likewise, Nnolim overlooks the fact that the Nigerian novel is a creation of a colonial event: part of its ideological project is to write against the legacy of coloniality. Writing against this legacy is to debunk the myths about African consciousness and articulate new narratives that rehabilitate the multidimensions of African selfhood.

This is not to suggest that the Nigerian novelist must remain fixated on a particular discourse of cultural nationalism or Africanity,[5] but to emphasize how narrating any story about human life requires imaginative courage and that is by itself an affirmation of courage. I agree with Nnolim that oppositional writing—countering Eurocentric accounts of Africans—has been the dominant mode of much of African fiction published in the last few decades. I endorse his view that African writers must widen their canvas to reflect the dynamics and realities of contemporary society, but only to the extent that they do not hold Europe up as their paradigm. That notwithstanding, Nnolim provokes us to contemplate the lack of moral concerns portrayed

[5] Pinkie Mekgwe calls it "a colonial trap," due to African feminist scholars' fixation on the politics and polarities of defining themselves against the West(ern feminism) rather than undertaking an interrogation of the term "Africa(n)" itself. The implication, Mekgwe argues, is that such a fixation deters Africans from self-definition and total independence. For more of her commentary on this identity politics, see, "Theorizing African Feminism(s): The 'Colonial' Question."

in “the fleshy novels” of some Nigerian writers. If we approach fiction as involved in the decolonial project of redefining the human and imagining new forms of being,[6] if we accept that narratives orient us to confront important questions about relationality, then his critique of such writers seems apposite.

Nigerian literary critic and philosopher Chielozona Eze equally interrogates postcolonial literature by criticizing the reinvention of “a pristine essence” by African intellectuals (22). Like Nnolim, he is critical of how much of African literary scholarship is devoted to contesting Western narratives. Therefore, he urges African scholars to envision Africa outside the constrictive frames of fetishizing difference. To be clear, Eze does not ask Africans to forget the historical injustice and desolation Europe has wreaked and continues (through free-market neoliberalism and resource extraction) to wreak on the continent. Instead, he stresses that it is more fruitful and liberatory for African knowledge producers to expend their energies towards pursuing the good life for all of humanity. At the heart of his intervention is the recurrent question of the human. In his books, Eze has eloquently argued that narratives can help us recognize the humanity of those whom society has dehumanized by fostering empathy with such people. Accordingly, “The stories of others bring us within the ambit of their humanity. They excite our empathy and open us to their experiences” (170). His scholarship, which I discuss below, on the relation between literature and ethics reiterates the American philosopher Martha

[6] The “human” category remains a contentious term, especially given its genealogy in Western episteme. I recognize that the terms “human” and “humanity” are not neutral but political. As Rosi Braidotti has argued, both terms are loaded with power differential and they define who has access into the realm of humanity. See, “Necropolitics and Ways of Dying” on YouTube.
See Menkiti, “On the Normative Conception of a Person,” where he discusses the notion of personhood in African philosophy. Menkiti emphasizes the connection between the individual and the community.

Nussbaum's robust interventions in the humanities. In *Love's Knowledge,* Nussbaum stresses the nexus between literature and moral philosophy, claiming that "literature has tasks and possibilities other than that of illumination about our lives" (21). In her study of selected Euro-American male writers, Nussbaum describes the literary text as "the creation of human intentions and conceptions" (8). The novel is not merely an aesthetic genre portraying human moral experiences to satisfy its readers' pleasures but rather poses ethical questions about sociality. It enunciates "some views of the world and how one should live in it—views, especially, that emphasize the world's surprising variety, its complexity and mysteriousness, its flawed and imperfect beauty" (3). As I show in Chapters 4 and 5, Dibia and Okparanta use their writing to dramatize the complexity of identity and desire and the need for us to acknowledge our flawed and imperfect humanity.

Achebe, whom I analyze in Chapter 2, also extols the power of fiction to affirm human complexity and, more important, interconnectedness: "art is man's constant effort to create for himself a different order of reality from that which is given to him; an aspiration to provide himself with a second handle on existence through his imagination" (139). Fiction facilitates "imaginative identification," between human beings, that is, the capacity of a person to be receptive to the suffering of others, to develop "the imaginative power to get under the skin of another human being and see the world through eyes other than [one's] own" (149). What Achebe calls "imaginative identification" is what Nussbaum refers to as "narrative imagination," defined as "the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have" (95-96). Furthermore, narrative imagination involves "the capacity for genuine concern for others" or "the ability to imagine

what the experience of another might be like" (97). Imaginative identification and narrative imagination indicate specific modes of receptivity, as I argue in my study of the selected novels over several chapters. The writers I examine have created characters that are receptive to otherness and the suffering of another, underscoring the entanglement of all human lives.

We cannot over-emphasize the value of fiction; as the Czech and French writer Milan Kundera reminds us, the novelist is "an explorer of existence" (44). To Kundera, "existence is the realm of human possibilities, everything that man can become, everything he's capable of" (46). This "realm of human possibilities"—or the "possibility of existence" for the oppressed, stigmatized, and alienated—is what I underline in my reading of the novels of Achebe, Adichie, Dibia, and Okparanta. As Hayden White writes, "Narrative is at once a mode of discourse, a manner of speaking, and the product produced by the adoption of this mode of discourse" (32). The narratives we tell and share among family and friends, even colleagues or strangers, have the potential to recast our understanding of sociality, or what it means to be a man or a woman, like some passages in my primary texts bear out. In *An Autobiography of the Autobiography of Reading*, Dionne Brand, Canadian poet and writer, posits that "Narrative is not just the simple transportation of language but of ideas of the self, and ideas of the self that contain negation of other people" (27). The negation of the other through narratives is what Adichie movingly elaborates in her *Ted Talk* "The Danger of a Single Story," when she reminds us that "Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity." The postulations by Eze, Nussbaum, Achebe, Brand, and Adichie accentuate the link between fiction and ethics and the role that writers can play in articulating an ethic cognizant of "the fundamental sociality of embodied life" (Butler 28). As Nussbaum points out, "Built into

the very structure of a novel is a certain conception of what matters" (26). In engaging with the theme of receptivity and alterity in literary fiction, my dissertation contemplates the question of mattering as well.[7] Who matters? What is it that matters to men and women more than the desire to live and to thrive? Who can desire? Who can thrive? Who can live? These are questions that matter to every human being.

Indeed, questions about matter/ing, desire, and livability propel my examination of the literary texts under study. For me, they are questions freighted with ontological and ethical import, questions about why we must redefine the human and challenge Euro-American discourses framing what we tend to understand as the sub- or nonhuman.[8] The need to reconceptualize (or even exhaust the category of) Man outside Western humanist frames, or what the American philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler refers to as "the normative notion of the human" (34), is central to my project. Throughout this dissertation, I argue that Achebe, Adichie, Dibia, and Okparanta emphasize that we acknowledge all human lives, for humanity's flourishing is what matters in their narrative worlds. As these authors dramatize, gender and sexual identities count little compared to what is at stake for our collective thriving. My dissertation grapples with other questions, such as: How do the writers' depictions of male and female characters reinforce or undermine hegemonic norms? How do their articulations of

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[7] Although I focus on gender as a social practice in my project, I recognize the need for re-evaluating the ethics, ontology, and epistemology that attend to and account for our entanglement with the nonhuman other. It is not only the human that matters in our world, the nonhuman or "inhuman" does, too. Posthumanism has enriched my thinking on ethics and relationality. For example, I find Karen Barad's critique of the over-privileging of the human over the nonhumans salient. As she argues, "Rather, the point is that the very practices of differentiating the 'human' from the 'nonhuman,' the 'animate' from the 'inanimate,' and the 'cultural' from the 'natural' produce crucial materializing effects that are unaccounted for by starting an analysis after these boundaries are in place. In other words, what is needed is an account not only of the materialization of 'human' bodies but of all matter(ings)/ materializations, including the materializing effects of boundary-making practices by which the 'human' and the 'nonhuman' are differentially constituted" (124). For an in-depth elaboration of the relation between the human and nonhuman, see Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*. See also Haraway, *When Species Meet.*

[8] Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze has criticized the Western notion of the human that rationalized the unspeakable exploitation and denigration of Africans. See *Postcolonial African Philosophy*, 13.

masculinity help us question gender prescriptions? What new ways of reconceiving relationality do their narratives espouse? In short, how do Nigerian writers reimagine masculinities and femininities while emphasizing a common humanity? In addressing these questions, I aim to examine how Nigerian authors redefine our understandings of gender and sexuality; show that writers can reimagine subjectivity and relationality beyond categories and ideologies; establish the centrality of the human over cultural particularities and the importance of receptivity to the flourishing of men and women. Throughout this dissertation, I contend that the novelists delineate ways to rethink assumptions about manhood and womanhood by contesting the valorization of social identities and emphasizing the human desire to live and thrive. In redefining what it means to be a man or a woman in the African imaginary, Nigerian novelists challenge a culture that discriminates against its citizens based on sex, gender, or sexual orientation. Therefore, my dissertation expands the growing field of African men and masculinities[9] while contributing to the broader scholarship on postcolonial and feminist criticism by incorporating new perspectives from Nigeria.

Ethics in African Literature

Eze's outstanding analyses of African literary texts within the context of ethics inform my exploration of masculinities in Nigerian novels. His books *Postcolonial Imaginations and Moral Representations in African Literature and Culture* and *Ethics and Human Rights in Anglophone African Women's Literature: Feminist Empathy* argue against postcolonial perspectives that entrench differences and constrain sociality. According to Eze, such views reinforce the trope of

[9] Ouzgane comments that the study of masculinities in Africa is relatively young, compared to the established critical tradition in the Western academic institutions. See, *Men in African Film & Fiction*. See also, "Men in Africa: Masculinities, Materiality and Meaning," where Tamara Shefer, Garth Stevens, and Lindsay Clowes argue that the spread and impact of HIV/AIDS in Africa contributed to the growing research on men and masculinities.

African victimhood, thus foreclosing possibilities of self-critique, self-understanding, and self-determination. Eze is critical of that trope underlying much of African discourse and any narrative glorifying an African essence. Insinuating that there was nothing idyllic about the African past, he references, for instance, the "fault lines," "internal fester," and the dehumanization of the other in the Igbo society Achebe depicts in *Things Fall Apart*:

> From Nwoye and the *efulefus*' perspectives, things never actually stood together. Nothing could therefore have fallen apart. Strictly speaking therefore, things fell apart for the dominant class and privileged ones. Things fell apart for the privileged because the dominant class, in this case the African elders, no longer exercised unbridled control of discourse. Their moral framework fell apart; their authority was no longer the moral center of their universe. (*Postcolonial Imaginations*, 49)

Achebe's lucid depiction of precolonial Igbo society reveals the internal fissure and fester among its citizens. Consequently, Eze advocates that we interrogate local structures that reproduce models of coloniality in Africa, particularly as they disempower women and subvert female agency and women's rights. He describes these structures as the "manifestations of ideologies such as nationalism, heritage culture, tradition, religion, et cetera" (123). His position is decolonial, and it recalls a similar vein of thinking by Xhercis Méndez and Yomaira C. Figueroa that asks us to "contend with the violences and harms being enacted in our communities as well as within our communities" (81-82). In their reformulation of the human, Méndez and Figueroa expose the operations of local patriarchies in non-Western cultures, demonstrating "that unjust relationships between community members existed long before colonization, and are not simply an inheritance of the colonial encounter" (66). This point accords with Eze's critique of African cultures and his recognition of the "intergenerational impact of violences, such as slavery, colonialism, and settler colonialism" (Méndez and Figueroa 82). Eze considers the destruction

that colonial violence has left in its wake in Africa, though he implores Africans to look critically inwards and address the destitute local conditions. In other words, we must contend with the indigenous oppression rather than continue to focus on what the West thinks about Africans.[10] Eze argues that for collective progress to happen on the continent, African thinkers must look past the Manichean episteme that hitherto organized the colonial system.[11]

It is self-limiting and unproductive, Eze further argues, to continue dwelling on the past and on narratives of victimhood. For that reason, he cautions against the glorification of nativism because it occludes our view of the social degeneration and rampant injustice local elites perpetrate in our communities in the name of nationalism: "African cultures that impede rights as much as colonialism had" (vii). To buttress his critique, Eze favours the new generation of African writers because they "do not feel the need to confront the gaze of the Western world, but rather to address the unfairness that undergird how their world functions" (101). These younger African women writers "seek to subvert the obsession with the collective by drawing attention to the suffering individual, one that needs empathy from his fellow citizens, one that needs to be taken care of by those who share the same humanity in the same geographical and cultural space" (114). Eze's critique of the postcolony calls to mind the African American feminist

[10] Eze's position also recalls bell hooks's critique of black masculinity and black patriarchies in the United States. In a conversation with Kevin Powell, hooks stresses the need for Blacks to turn their gaze inwards on themselves. See, bell hooks in conversation with Kevin Powell on YouTube.

[11] See Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* for his discussion of Manicheanism. As he writes, "This compartmentalized world, this world divided in two, is inhabited by different species. The singularity of the colonial context lies in the fact that economic reality, inequality, and enormous disparities in lifestyles never manage to mask the human reality. Looking at the immediacies of the colonial context, it is clear that what divides this world is first and foremost what species, what race one belongs to" (3). Eze's critique of postcolonial African intellectuals draws attention to how the postcolonial context now mirrors the colonial situation in some way. At present, it seems that the colonized has replaced the colonizer, thus recreating "the compartmentalized [colonial] world" to encompass two species, not bisected by race, as Fanon noticed, but by class and economic inequality. Therefore, the Fanonian "ruling species," noticeably white and European, is no longer "the outsider from elsewhere, different from the indigenous population," but the black or African "insider" or the erstwhile colonized.

theorist bell hooks' conception of marginality "as position and place of resistance […] crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonized people" (150). hooks explains that "The struggle may not even begin with the colonizer; it may begin within one's segregated, colonized community and family. So I want to note that I am not trying to romantically re-inscribe the notion of that space of marginality where the oppressed live apart from their oppressors as 'pure'. I want to say that these margins have been both sites of repression and sites of resistance" (151). hooks is insistent that we recognize the complexity of power structures and how oppressors can emerge from oppressed communities.

In *Ethics and Human Rights,* Eze examines the works of Adichie, NoViolet Bulawayo, Okparanta, Warsan Shire, Nnedi Okoroafor, Lola Shoneyin, Petina Gappah, Chika Unigwe, Sefi Atta, and Patricia Jabbeh Wesley to underscore urgent issues of human rights such as female circumcision, child abuse, sex trafficking, and rape. He avers: "I understand a part of the writers' responsibility as exposing the structures that hinder human flourishing in Africa. In so doing the writer performs human rights" (71). Notably, he criticizes how people and institutions deploy the concepts of culture and tradition to subjugate women. As African feminist scholarship shows, patriarchal cultures disadvantage women as a social group, worsening the precarious conditions many of them already inhabit in Africa.[12] Eze writes that full human flourishing would be impossible to attain in Africa unless we recognize and attend to the woman in pain. Speaking about the female writers, he cites Adichie to elucidate his point: "Adichie is not afraid of making reference to universal ideals such as the belief in a fairer world and people's capacity to dream for that. When she dreams of a world of happier men and happier women, she seeks no more

[12] See Mikell, *African Feminism*; Oyěwùmí, *African Women and Feminism*.

than what we have already identified as human flourishing, a world devoid of needless pain" (46). In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie shows that patriarchal orthodoxy impedes female wellbeing.

In my exploration of the other's pain, I extend Eze's ideas on human suffering to include an analysis of men. I recognize the various ways patriarchal culture marginalizes women and the struggles women face in sexist and misogynistic spaces. We must continue to highlight the oppression of women by patriarchal systems in ongoing conversations about social change. My aim here is to expand the dimensions of "the African bodies in pain" or what Martin Buber describes as "the infinite variety of human persons" (147), considering that Eze focuses only on the representation of female experiences. Absent in his study of African literature is how patriarchal cultures make some men suffer "pain and privation" due to their repudiation of what I understand as the paternal legacy or the imperative to perpetuate masculinist norms. By discussing the stories of only female bodies in pain, Eze overlooks how men are "incapacitated by the ideologies of tradition and patriarchy" (vii). As a result, he fails to consider the masculinist culture under which some men suffer and the structures underpinning such a culture. Men also suffer, although certainly not as much as women do. By precluding men from the realm of suffering, Eze, perhaps unintentionally, furthers the unmarked category that men inhabit.[13] There is no doubt that he raises significant concerns about human rights in Africa. Yet, it is

[13] Ouzgane, *Men in African Film & Fiction*. He notes that "so much of African history and African literary and cultural traditions has been read and analyzed with African men as an unmarked category" (7).
Todd W. Reeser also comments that masculinity is unmarked because it is taken to be the norm and not usually thought about unless in opposition to femininity or homosexuality, which are marked categories people easily notice and label. See, *Masculinities in Theory*, 8-9.
This unmarked category is what Adam Jones's *Men of the Global South* attempts to address in his study of non-Western men and masculinities: "The tendency has been either to ignore men as gendered subjects, through a straightforward equation of gender with women/femininities; or to consign men to stereotypical gender roles, nearly always negative ones. Men's relationships with females, in particular, are generally depicted as exploitative and aggressive" (xix).

equally important that we show the perils men face when they choose to undermine gender and sexual norms in favour of livability and viability. That way, we can fully recognize the myriad ways by which men implicate themselves in or extricate themselves from the subjugation of their fellow men and women.

Eze simply neglects the writing of male authors in those texts. This is a gap my dissertation addresses through my inclusion of Achebe's and Dibia's novels, for I demonstrate how both male and female authors portray human suffering in its many contours and variations. Despite the limits of his analysis of African literature and culture, we must recognize Eze's commitment to the feminist project and the affirmation of a humanism that is attentive to the "individuals in pain who cry for attention and for empathy" (114). I foreground these issues not to discount his necessarily informed critique of male supremacy in local communities but to argue for the need to incorporate perspectives on men that deepen our understanding of the human body in pain. As Eze argues, "narrative aids our comprehension of human rights, not only because it articulates human development or that it provides an idealistic vision of humanity, but also because it simply presents humanity in all its imperfections" (23). Therefore, we should acquaint ourselves with the unmarked category of the human, in this case, men. Narratives of men's precariousness, together with those of women, offer an array of insight into how a concert of efforts can help dismantle the vestiges of coloniality limiting the freedom of women and men. Such insight can help us work to safeguard and "increase the sum total of humanity" (201). Nancy Dowd writes that

> Women's subordination and men's subordination are intertwined in the system of male privilege. At the same time, masculinity study offers another insight into the construction of power and privilege, with the aim of undermining it. It exposes in particular the odd reality that most men feel powerless rather than powerful, yet that powerlessness does not

> lead to alignment with other subordinated groups but rather to a defense of potential or actual privilege, even if it is privilege that particular men do not enjoy. (5)

In principle, my dissertation centres on men and masculinities but still attends to representations of women and femininities. This methodology is pertinent because insofar as men tend to perform manhood to reject the feminine, women may espouse ideals of manhood, with a view to destabilizing femininity. Since gender is a social practice and we often negotiate our identities in society, the performance of masculinity is not limited to male subjects. As Michael Kimmel, Jeff Hearn, and R.W. Connell note, "the gendering of men only exists in the intersections with other social divisions and social differences" (3). Masculinity and femininity depend on each other for meaning. A study of this scope must consider both categories, as imagined and reimagined by Nigerian writers. hooks reminds us that the goal of feminists is to "eradicate the underlying cultural basis and causes of sexism and other forms of group oppression" (31). Indeed, my study of men along with women is consistent with the feminist project of gender and social justice.

Thinking Alterity through Empathy

In *Political Emotion*, Nussbaum defines empathy in several ways; one of which she succinctly defines as "a recognition of the other as a centre of experience" (146). She writes that empathy is

> the ability to imagine the situation of the other, taking the other's perspective. Thus, it is not merely knowledge of the other's states (which might in principle be obtained without perspectival displacement, for instance, by inference from past events), nor is it the same as thinking how one would feel oneself in the other person's place, difficult though it sometimes is to make the distinction. (145-46)

Nussbaum adds that empathy "is not mere emotional contagion, for it requires entering into the predicament of another, and this, in turn, requires some type of distinction between self and

other, and a type of imaginative displacement" (146). In *Upheavals of Thought*, Nussbaum describes empathy as "an imaginative reconstruction of another person's experience, whether that experience is happy or sad, pleasant or painful or neutral, and whether the imaginer thinks the other person's situation good, bad, or indifferent (separate issues, since a malevolent person will think the other's distress good and her happiness bad)" (302). She clarifies that empathy also "involves a participatory enactment of the situation of the sufferer, but always combined with the awareness that one is not oneself the sufferer" (327). The following terms recur in her definitions: ability/capacity, imagine/entry, perspective/viewpoint, recognition/reconstruction, state/experience/situation, predicament/suffering, and participatory/enactment/awareness. What connects these terms is the fact that empathy enunciates various forms of imaginative connections between the non-sufferer and the sufferer.

Eze understands empathy as a "co-feeling" or "a concept that captures not only an affinity between one person and another, but also all forms of solidarity and human rights" (77). He views empathy as a way for Africans to disentangle themselves from the colonial trap, which, incidentally, has "block[ed] the colonized person's empathy towards others" (88). As he writes, "Empathy seeks to bring the pain of the victims closer to the awareness of the privileged, and dispose the latter to respond" (79). For Eze, feminist empathy is the ability to feel oneself enter into, or imagine, the experience of a woman in pain caused by society's construction of femininity (30). Therefore, feminist empathy is a capacity possessed by all subjects (female and male) but is always an empathy for a(nother) woman. Eze clarifies that feminist empathy does not "suggest that there are modes of empathy that are exclusively feminine" (30). His conceptualization of feminist empathy, in my view, all but constitutes it as a unique model of empathy directed only towards women. That is, one activated in response to the recognition of a

woman in pain. Gender notions, it seems, inflect this kind of empathy since it recognizes the woman in pain rather than humans in pain. Although one may wonder whether we can extend feminist empathy to the man impaired by male violence, stigmatization, and ostracism, it is worth noting that patriarchal culture has always excluded women from the human, ignoring their suffering and dismissing it as part of human suffering. As we examine men's suffering, we must not lose sight of women's suffering as peculiar and somewhat unlike that of men in general. I emphasize this point to show that however marginalized men are, we wield more power than women.

Eze's theory of feminist empathy serves as an analytical frame to help us apprehend the interlocking forms of suffering and oppression common to women in Africa, from which men, as a group, are exempt. His use of the concept emphasizes how the dominant male culture often excludes women's rights from the domain of human rights. As Eze remarks, "The goal of empathy, in this case, is to address the conditions that cause such suffering and therefore impede human flourishing" (7). We can understand these conditions as "abstractions," as he mentions, but they organize relationality and impact men and women in material and psychological ways. Tradition is one of such abstractions that condition gender practices, and yet men tend to wield it against women and their rights in society.

Empathy and Receptivity

For the purposes of this study, I distinguish between receptivity and empathy because, in my view, the former precedes the latter. There is no empathy without receptivity, for it is what lays the grounds on which the imaginative identification or participatory enactment can occur. We tend to use the two concepts interchangeably, but, to me, they seem to articulate different

affective positions. I define receptivity as the openness the self expresses in acknowledgement of the other's suffering. It is a mode of openness to one's surroundings, the injustice and violence contouring it. The self's opening puts us in a position to recognize the need for empathy, reminding us that we are prone to the same hurt experienced by the other who is hurting and inviting us to identify with them. It marks the prior state signalling the stirrings of identification—a precondition of empathy. For any individual to identify with another, they first must be open to taking in the very idea and presence of otherness. We must be open to the other before we can begin switching perspectives with them. To acknowledge and attend to the pain of the other, we must first acknowledge what Butler terms "the condition of primary vulnerability" (30). Conversely, if one is unreceptive to the *being* of the other—or to their environment—one cannot express empathy.

Throughout this dissertation, I understand receptivity as articulating such an openness that underwrites empathy and makes it possible. Achebe, Adichie, Dibia, and Okparanta narrate various iterations of receptivity by male and female characters. They depict its expressions through sensibilities, attitudes, and actions; their depiction of receptive characters demonstrates a shared vulnerability and human connectedness, not based on gender or sexual norms. In their texts, we encounter characters that identify with people living on the margins of society—the marginalized, the vulnerable, the abject, and the forsaken. These characters express concern for another human in precariousness. Dominant culture construes receptivity as a feminine principle, associating it with women. That type of view conflates receptivity with passivity. In this study, I recast receptivity as a virtue shared by all humans: female or male. I emphasize its potentials for activating and fostering ethical relationality. I employ receptivity as an analytic to reformulate assumptions about masculinity. In addition, I use "receptive subjects" to describe any gendered

or sexual being receptive to another. These subjects open themselves to the resonances and emanations of otherness. In the subsequent chapters, I examine how such characters articulate receptivity and challenge gender and sexual norms, redefining what it means to be a man or a woman in the process.

Vulnerability and Precariousness

In *Precarious Life*, Butler writes about vulnerability, precariousness, and embodiment to demonstrate the fundamental interdependency of human beings. She emphasizes the human community, despite the global violence that keeps reproducing the conditions of loss and grief and the ideologies enabling the other's dehumanization. How might our shared experience of loss compel us to appreciate kinship and collective flourishing? Butler posits that to be human is to be vulnerable. To be vulnerable is to suffer loss. Loss and vulnerability are elements of our social life. As she writes, "Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure" (20). Crucial to her reflections are the questions: "Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives?" (20). I have discussed elsewhere that the question of the human is invariably the question of life.[14] The latter question informs the degree of legibility or (mis)recognition we accord those we deem to be (non)human or illegible. Central to my discussion are questions about ethics, as well. The theme of human sociality and the ensuing discourses of normality frame my inquiry on men, women, and masculinities. I attend to such questions as, what makes a 'real' man or woman? Who is a 'normal' man or woman? In addressing those questions, I provide a critique of the violence of social and cultural norms.

[14] Review of *Beyond the Doctrine of Man* in *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*, forthcoming in spring 2021.

Achebe, Adichie, Dibia, and Okparanta narrate stories about vulnerability, precariousness, abjection, alienation, and relationality, thereby illustrating the conditions of humanity in dominant cultures. Each writer stresses the affirmation of human entanglement, establishing that receptivity is critical to the reconstructions of male and female subjectivities.

In thinking with these novelists as they redefine the human, or what should matter in the social world, given that "ethics is about mattering" (Barad 384), I draw insights from Butler, in particular, whose expansive formulations on gender and sexuality undergird my engagement with the subject of masculinities. In *Precarious Life*, Butler uses the horrendous political events of 9/11—the terrorist bombings of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in the United States on September 11, 2001—as an occasion to propose a new politics based on ethical relationality. She unearths the tensions inherent in the politics-ethics nexus and outlines the valences of loss and mourning as integral to how we frame intelligibility and enact solidarity. Political violence offers us a mode of introspection and self-critique rather than a resort to counter-violence or retaliation. As a result, Butler reimagines the norms of recognition outside the differential categories of humans defined by hegemonic cultures by stressing "the social vulnerability of our bodies" (20). She writes, "In a way, we all live with this partial vulnerability, a vulnerability to the other that is part of bodily life, a vulnerability to a sudden address from elsewhere that we cannot pre-empt" (29). Butler does not devalue but only de-emphasizes bodily autonomy, for: "It is important to claim that our bodies are in a sense our own and that we are entitled to claim rights of autonomy over our bodies" (25). She states that "The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to touch, and to violence, and bodies put us at risk of becoming the agency and instrument of all these as well. Although we struggle for rights over our bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are

not quite ever our own. The body has its invariable public dimension" (26). Implicit in her statements is that the body constitutes the site of primary vulnerability, an impetus for ethics.

In "Vulnerability, Vengeance, and Community," Robert E. Watkins writes that Butler views "vulnerability as an ontological condition of possibility for social, political, and ethical relationships" (192). Watkins adds, "This understanding conveys Butler's understanding of the always-social individual who because of interdependence is always implicated in the lives of others—indeed, always living in community with others, where community is understood to connote by sharing, not only the good and the bad but also the ambiguous namely, vulnerability" (192). Butler focuses primarily on the American dehumanization of the other, such as Arabs, Iraqis, and Afghans. However, she considers nothing about how the grammars of dehumanization, predicated in the precedents of transatlantic slavery, structure contemporary social relations between whites and non-whites. Since the era of slavery and its afterlives,[15] the Euro-American racist systems have constructed Black and Indigenous subjectivities as the subhuman or less than human. The plantation regimes that flourished during the periods between the 16th and 19th centuries designed the template for the subsequent dehumanization of racialized minorities in the present, including people from the Middle East.[16] Butler overlooks how the American state itself has persisted in deploying its repressive apparatus (or its sundry technologies of biopolitics) to decimate Black life in North America. The ideological apparatus

[15] See Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*; Curran, *The Anatomy of Blackness*.

[16] See Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death.*

of white supremacy continues to frame Blackness as the primordial face of abjection.[17] In *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, hooks argues that

> Seen as animals, brutes, natural born rapists, and murderers, black men have had no real dramatic say when it comes to the way they are represented. They have made few interventions on the stereotype. As a consequence, they are victimized by stereotypes that were first articulated in the nineteenth century but hold sway over the minds and imaginations of citizens of this nation in the present day. Black males who refuse categorization are rare, for the price of visibility in the contemporary world of white supremacy is that black male identity be defined in relation to the stereotype whether by embodying it or seeking to be other than it. At the center of the way black male selfhood is constructed in white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy is the image of the brute—untamed, uncivilized, unthinking, and unfeeling. ("Preface" x)

Butler appears silent on how the forces of petrocapitalism and extractivism have continued to make Africans live in ecologies of stagnation and destitution. Zygmunt Bauman states that globalization deepens the existing inhuman conditions, fostering weak, quasi-states in the global south. Homi K. Bhabha observes that even as "globalization propagates a world made up of virtual transnational domains and wired communities that live vividly through webs and connectivities 'on line,' it enables "the reproduction of dual, unequal economies as effects of globalization that render poorer societies more vulnerable to the 'culture of conditionality,' through which what is purportedly the granting of loans turns, at times, into the peremptory enforcement of policy" ("Foreword" xi-xii). Globalization perpetuates the presence of dual economies that "create divided worlds in which uneven and unequal conditions of development

[17] On discussions about the abjection of blackness, as construed by white supremacist epistemologies and institutions, see the following texts: Scott, *Extravagant Abjection*; Sharpe, *In the Wake*; Sexton, *Black Masculinity and the Cinema of Policing*. See also Moten, "The Case of Blackness."

can often mask the ubiquitous, underlying factors of persistent poverty and malnutrition, caste and racial injustice, the hidden· injuries of class, the exploitation of women's labor, and the victimization of minorities and refugees" (xii). Walter D. Mignolo views the impact of globalization as coloniality (destitution) in modern society. According to Mignolo

> Globalization isn't just trade, transportation, fast cybernetic interconnections, the sale of information, and all manner of things material and aethereal you could add to the list. Or better yet, globalization IS thought to be all of that, packaged in the language of progress and civilization, buzzwords of the West until WWII, of modernization and development recalling the talk of the fifties and sixties, and our lingo since the eighties of development and market democracy, the last chapter of the long story of Westernization: the neoliberal story of globalization. (8)

Despite that Butler, in her critique of US sovereign power, does not account for how these socioeconomic and political variables affect Africans, she nonetheless demystifies the paradigm of the Man/Human undergirding Western ideals of mastery and self-determination. She does this by demonstrating that both male and female subjects are "already given over, beyond ourselves, implicated in lives that are not our own" (28). Butler reconceptualizes gender in its performative character and its ethical aspects, remarking that "neither gender nor sexuality is precisely a possession, but, rather is a mode of being dispossessed, a way of being *for* another or *by virtue of* another" (24). Considering these definitions of gender and sexuality, one can see that Butler asserts the possibilities of reshaping sociality, perhaps, along the Levinisian responsibility for the other. In his reading of Butler's concept of precariousness, James Stanescu highlights this way of being *for* another as "being-together." In "Species Trouble: Judith Butler, Mourning, and the Precarious Lives of Animals," Stanescu writes, "Butler develops vulnerability and precariousness as an ethic, a social ontology, and a politics. It is because we are beings who can

be hurt and killed that we have sociality, that we have a capacity for being-together. Although precariousness seems to refer to an individual life, it is rather a way of thinking connections, of claiming kinship and relations" (572). In the same breadth, Stanescu comments: "Precariousness is a place for thinking the ethical because it begins with the Other, rather than with the self. To apprehend the Other's life as a precarious life is not, however, merely an ethical proposition" (572). Attending to ethical relationality, Elena Loizidou notes, is at the heart of Butler's conceptions of precariousness and human viability (156). Achebe, Adichie, Dibia, and Okparanta dramatize men and women who recognize human precariousness and therefore contest cultural norms impeding the viability of every life. Their fiction invites us to ponder the ethics of receptivity without valorizing gender or sexual ideology.

Receptivity as Ethics

Receptivity operates as an overarching theme in the texts under study. Accordingly, I draw and build on the concept of receptivity by the American ethicist Michael Slote, who understands it as a virtue. In his book *From Enlightenment to Receptivity: Rethinking Our Values*, Slote opposes Hegelian and Cartesian worldviews and asks that we reconsider the value society accords rationality and cease de-privileging emotion.[18] He cautions against our over-reliance on reason or living one's life according to a rigid plan, as this constitutes a form of instrumentalism. Instead

[18] In his essay "On Negrohood: Psychology of the African Negro," Léopold Sédar Senghor differentiates between European and African notions of reason and emotion. Senghor seems to ascribe receptivity to Africans, claiming that the Negro African, unlike his white European counterpart, "keeps his senses open, ready to receive any impulse, and even the very waves of nature, without a screen (which is not to say without relays or transformers) between subject and object" (1). However, Senghor evinces an essentialist understanding of identity and subjectivity, which works to reiterate the racial differences propagated by Western epistemology. This is what Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze describes as Senghor's "essentialist epistemology of the emotion" (129). See Eze's *Achieving our Humanity*, 2001.

of planning life according to some logical schema, Slote advises that it is more productive to cultivate an openness towards the possibilities that life may bring our way. He explains that "any attempt to understand our ethical values needs to understand the role receptivity plays in relation to other ethical values" (181). According to Slote, "receptivity is a value, a virtue, whose acknowledgement as such can or should make us aware of how different life can be and how much more potentially valuable it is" (224). The point here is to acknowledge the importance of developing a receptive attitude to human and nonhuman lives. In doing so, we resist perpetuating a "pervasive rationality" that underwrites the obsession to master and exploit our environment. Slote challenges man's inclination to control and dominate the earth (an inclination which I read as symptomatic of normative masculinity) and therefore stresses receptivity as one of the ways that we can work to facilitate the flourishing of all forms of life.

To be clear, Slote does not entirely dismiss the Western obsession with rationalism. Neither does he regard it as inconsequential. Instead, he aims to emphasize the connection between emotion and relationality and what implications such a connection might have on enabling what we may have to consider a viable life. He argues that it is counterproductive to approach life through "rational/critical scrutiny" because such a person would only expose himself or herself to avoidable stress over an outcome that may never happen. Slote also clarifies the distinction between openness and receptivity:

> Openness suggests that one is more than just willing to consider making a relevant change, and that holds also for receptivity or receptiveness, if one is receptive to someone's suggestion for change, then one is more than willing to consider making such change(s). However, it also seems to me (check your own linguistic intuitions!) that being receptive to the idea or suggestion of change implies more readiness to change than mere talk of openness does. So I believe we have a spectrum of attitudes here running from

> unwillingness to reluctant willingness to openness to receptivity and then finally, perhaps, to eagerness (and beyond?). (220)

Although this lengthy clarification is germane for conceptual uses, Slote explains receptivity mainly in relation to life planning. Specifically, he focuses on the self and how to apply receptivity to our individual lives. However, I expand his usage of receptivity to underscore modes of intersubjective relationality, an openness to others, an openness between the self and the other, who may be victims of social violence or a group of persons excluded by their community. Consequently, throughout this dissertation, I attempt to examine how Nigerian authors construct characters that enact receptivity to the other, how such characters through their relationships redefine what it means to be a man or a woman and, more importantly, broaden our understanding of the human. In her discussion of ethics, Nussbaum deprecates the "rigid hardness" of critical rationality while highlighting specific challenges that come with one having a receptive attitude to "the shape of the natural world" (80). She admits that "this openness is itself vulnerable and a source of vulnerability" because "the trusting person is more easily betrayed than the self-enclosed person" (339). Nevertheless, Nussbaum endorses the need for us to be receptive to the world, insisting that it remains vital to the pursuit of human flourishing. Thus, guided by the philosophical ideas of Eze, Nussbaum, Butler, and Slote, I engage fictional representations of receptivity in order to delineate how men and women reconstruct their subjectivity and relationality by challenging cultures that marginalize and oppress people based on categories of gender, sex, and sexuality. I contend that Achebe, Adichie, Dibia, and Okparanta create characters that subvert cultural paradigms of sociality and intimacy.

The Rationale for the Selection of Texts

One of the questions I wrestled with during my research was how to delimit my archive so that the texts that I finally chose to work on could provide broader comparative engagements with gender and sexual representations in the Nigerian cultural geography. This question was informed by the multiethnic, or perhaps, the multinational composition of a country like Nigeria. I realized that I would have to organize my choice of texts to reflect both female and male writers. The other rubric I considered was how to reflect the ethnic diversity of Nigeria. During my preliminary research, I assembled a broad literary archive on masculinities by Nigerian authors from different ethnic backgrounds. However, I soon found out that many of those texts hardly persuasively, at least for me, dramatized an ethic of receptivity. It was a struggle for me to omit them from my object of study in the end.[19] It is worth mentioning that while the north has a robust and thriving film industry known as Kannywood (Abubakar et al. 2019; Bala 2019; McCain 2013; Furniss 2005), it has less literary fiction than the south. Indeed, the north boasts of Hausa-language literature, popularly described as Kano market literature (Adamu 2006; Alidou 2002; Furniss 1996; Pilaszewicz 1985). The predominance of Igbo novelists in this dissertation is incidental,[20] which, I would argue, might be because the country's literary productions occur

[19] These are some of the novels that I reviewed during my initial research: Adébáyọ̀'s *Stay with Me*, Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* and *Swallow*, Barrett's *Blackass*, Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* and *Measuring Time*, Ibrahim's *Season of Crimson Blossoms*, Ile's *After Many Days*, Imasuen's *Fine Boys*, John's *Born on a Tuesday*, Kilanko's *Daughters who Walk this Path*, and Sule's *Sterile Sky*.

[20] I emphasize this due to my positionality as an Igbo scholar and writer myself. Braidotti's ideas have helped me rethink my positionality as a critic, thus providing me with a rationale for delimiting my study. She describes her methodology as "cartographical rendering," which means "a way of surveying the field. It comes from my perspective, so it is limited, and it is very partial. That partiality does not make it invalid; it makes it objective within very limited parameters. The privilege of partial perspectives. I couldn't possibly be all comprehensive, I couldn't and I wouldn't want to. The idea of cartographic rendering of a field of research is very important because then the dialogue will consist of comparing perspectives... [A] cartographic method is a way of daring to take on the present" (N.p.). See, "Posthuman Knowledge" on YouTube.

more in the south than in the north, and the Igbo compose the highest number of fiction writers currently recognized on the national and international literary scenes. Notwithstanding, a study of these writers' work cannot encompass the gamut of gender and sexual diversity in a multicultural country such as Nigeria since many of her citizens do not significantly stake a claim to any distinct national culture. National culture is a fraught and tenuous term among many Nigerians who remain disenchanted with the political class and a government that has conspicuously done very little to assuage divisiveness and strife among its citizens (Yagboyaju, et al 2019; Bayart 2009; Maier 2002). While I am well attuned to the geopolitical realities of Nigeria, my dissertation attempts to bring greater critical attention to literary texts that I hope mirror the most recent trends in gender and sexuality in the Nigerian cultural imaginary. The debut novels of Achebe, Adichie, Dibia, and Okparanta encapsulate this category because, to me, they appear to present a nuanced exposition of Nigerian male and female identities, thereby facilitating more robust engagement with variant gender and sexual expressions, rarely found in Nigerian fiction.

Much of the existing feminist literature on gender in Africa centres on women's experiences and roles, but very little research has excavated how men attempt to destabilize male hegemony and how men and women negotiate ideals calibrated by the patriarchal order. My consideration of Nigerian men addresses this gap and contributes to postcolonial, feminist, masculinity, and queer studies in Africa, mostly because masculinity is still an emerging field of study in African critical tradition (Ouzgane 1). The writers whose work I examine have committed themselves at different forums to advocating for social justice and human rights while denouncing attitudes and beliefs that promote discrimination against minorities. These writers expand the definition of masculinity and femininity beyond conventional understandings,

encouraging readers to reevaluate their preconceptions about men and women. For instance, Dibia and Okparanta narrate stories about non-normative sexualities, thus articulating a counter-discourse against the dominant heteronormative genre in Nigerian fiction. Together with Achebe and Adichie, they underscore shifts in the meaning of gender and sexuality.

Chapter Summary

Throughout this dissertation, I use "masculinity" and "masculinities" interchangeably. I understand the term masculinity to represent a particular position, whereas masculinities exemplify multiplicities. I also use "receptivity" and "receptiveness" in the same way. My usage of masculinities refers to the variations in gender and sexual identities. There are five chapters in this dissertation organized in a chronological, perhaps genealogical, order, beginning with an analysis of Chinua Achebe's novel and concluding with Chinelo Okparanta's novel. This chronological order highlights the tensions underlining the gender and sexual configurations in Nigeria and works to problematize the metanarrative of African heteronormativity. Methodologically, *Things Fall Apart* frames my reading of masculinities to a degree, making it useful for us to track how writers construct and reshape definitions of masculinity and femininity.[21] Of course, this approach rarely presents a holistic portrait of how Nigerians conceive and contest masculinity, yet it provides us with a glimpse of how writers can reimagine

[21] Achebe's work haunts Adichie's, especially, and even Dibia's and Okparanta's novels. His symbolic position as the "father" of modern African literature also positions his novel *Things Fall Apart* as a father-text in conversation with the other texts under study. It is not too difficult to imagine, to borrow Eve Eisenberg's term, "a progenitor-heir relationship" between Achebe and his "children"— Adichie, Dibia, and Okparanta. I would want to imagine the relationship here as one marked by both harmony and discord, as we see in their representations of father-child, or mother-daughter, dynamics in the various narratives. While Adichie seems to recirculate Achebe's articulations of the heterosexual family, Dibia and Adichie complicate the narratives of the heterosexual family by making the homosexual legible in their narratives. In Achebe's and Adichie's novels, the nonconforming progeny is a heterosexual, whereas in Dibia's and Okparanta's novels, the nonconforming progeny is a homosexual. See Eisenberg, "'Real Africa'/'Which Africa?'" p. 9.

what it means to be a man or woman in postcolonial Nigeria. While Achebe sets his novel in the early colonial times of Igbo society and recounts intra- and inter-cultural clashes, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Jude Dibia, and Okparanta narrate gendered experiences in the postcolonial period (featuring military and civilian rules). I suggest we read their novels as an amplification of the ethic of receptivity Achebe portrays in his pioneering text. Moreover, Achebe and Adichie dramatize the experiences of heteronormative characters, showing how men and women express receptivity. In contrast, Dibia and Okparanta describe the struggles of male and female homosexuals, lesbians, and bisexuals in Nigeria, challenging gender and sexual conformity engineered by traditional and religious discourses.

In Chapter One, "Gender, Masculinities, and Queer Studies in Africa," I present an overview of gender, masculinity, and queer studies in Africa to provide a historical context for my investigation into these fields of study. Chapter Two, "A son who is a man: Precariousness in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*," analyzes the theme of precariousness in the text to locate the protagonist's firstborn, Nwoye, as a model of receptive masculinity. I emphasize his openness towards the lonely, the marginalized, the disowned, the alienated, and the forsaken and how he refuses to be defined primarily by masculine performances. I argue that his receptiveness towards those in pain facilitates his renunciation of the paternal legacy. I conclude with an explanation of how his receptivity articulates a form of relationality. Chapter Three, '"A freedom to be, to do': Orthodoxy in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*," elaborates on Achebe's depiction of the father-son relationship to show the subversion of male hegemony. Like Achebe, Adichie narrates the conflicts between the patriarch and his progeny against the backdrop of political degeneration. Like Okonkwo's firstborn Nwoye, Jaja functions as another example of receptivity, emphasizing the human in pain. I outline Eugene's masculinity as rooted

in orthodoxy and discipline and its consequences on his family's flourishing. I argue that Adichie positions Jaja to challenge his father's disciplinary masculinity and articulate her vision of gender. I conclude with an analysis of Father Amadi, the Catholic priest, to further illustrate the significance of receptivity. My focus on Nwoye and Jaja in Achebe's and Adichie's novels is to examine young masculinities or how young boys demonstrate that boyhood or teenage-hood is a site for reconstructing masculinity (Langa 2020; Ratele 2013; Connell 2000).

While Chapters Two and Three examine the theme of receptivity within the context of heteronormativity, Chapters Four and Five analyze receptivity in relation to homosexuality. This methodological structure offers us a way to appreciate how receptivity is expressed in relationships between heterosexual and non-heterosexual people. Drawing ideas mainly from queer and feminist theories, I ask: What is the figure of the homosexual character in Nigerian fiction? How are same-sex intimacies portrayed? How do the authors' depictions of homosexuality challenge the norms of manhood and womanhood? I begin both chapters with a summary of the omission of queerness in Nigerian fiction and how the authors' treatment of male and female homosexual characters extends Chris Dunton's call for complex representations of homosexuality in Africa. In Chapter Four, '"A real man': Tradition in Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows,*" I underline Dibia's affirmation of Adrian's homosexuality to show his articulations of male identity. I argue that he subverts gay stereotypes to disaffirm cultural ideals of what it means to be a man. I also contend that his transformation of Ada and Chike (Adrian's wife and brother, respectively) demonstrates the need for receptivity towards sexual minorities. Chapter Five, '"Let peace be. Let life be': Hospitality in Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees*," considers Okparanta's critique of traditional femininity through her validation of same-sex love. While the previous chapters consider the father-son relationships, this last chapter

investigates the mother-daughter dynamics to expose the tensions surrounding female homosexuality. Okparanta's portrayal of intimacy between Ijeoma and Amina challenges and illuminates a kind of violence inherent in a heterosexual relationship—violence against the female body and violence enabled by the male body. I contend that Okparanta deploys an ethic of hospitality to highlight the link between family support and queer flourishing.

I conclude my dissertation by showing the significance of my inquiry into the representations of men and masculinities, given the need to amplify the ongoing conversations on gender-based violence and support social justice campaigns. The growing visibility of sexual minorities in Nigeria and the ensuing discrimination directed against them reinforce the urgency of advocating for social justice and human rights. [22]

[22] See Akinwotu, "Blackmail, Prejudice, and Persecution"; Nossiter, "Nigeria Tries to 'Sanitize' itself of Gays."

Chapter One

Gender, Masculinities, and Queer Studies in Africa

Introduction

In this chapter, I connect my dissertation to the existing studies on gender, masculinities, and queerness in Africa to examine how Nigerian writers represent men, women, and masculinities in their fiction while uncovering the various ways characters contest gender and sexual norms. By contesting such norms, characters can show that gender "is not a property of bodies or something originally existent in human beings" (de Lauretis 3). The earliest critical understandings of gender in Africa came from the Western archives. Indeed, missionaries, travellers, anthropologists, and colonial administrators from Europe produced the foundational scholarship on African gender during colonialism. Their motley accounts presented Africans in stereotypes (Arnfred 2004; Hoad 2007; Epprecht 2008; Epprecht and Nyeck 2013). It was not until after many African countries gained independence between the 1950s and 1960s that African scholars began to question and correct such reductive accounts. The emergent Africanist literature, broadly anthropological and sociological at the beginning, conceptualized gender as women's issues, and, as a result, the scholars, mainly female, theorized gender as anything related to the marginalization of women (Cole et al. 2007; Uko 2006; Nkealah 2006; Arndt 2002; Lewis 2001). It is problematic to define gender in this way because it ignores, even elides, others' experiences, such as male and female persons who suffer similar marginalization because of their sexual orientation.

An inclusive way of thinking about gender must encompass a variety of subjectivities. However, this does not discount the fact that women as a social group suffer more forms of

oppression than men. In this vein, my dissertation emphasizes a broader definition of gender and sexuality by demonstrating how Nigerian writers construct narratives that challenge traditional discourses of what a man or woman should be. As Caroline Rosenthal argues, "Narratives not only pattern the ways in which we think of ourselves as man or woman, but the narrative structure itself reflects gender codes" (20). Achebe, Adichie, Dibia, and Okparanta create characters that disrupt hegemonic social norms and models of gender and sexuality.

Gender Studies

Lloyd W. Brown is one of the earliest literary critics to contribute to African gender scholarship. His book, *Women Writers in Black Africa*, attempts to recover women's "unheard voices," thus addressing their marginalization in African literature. However, one glaring weakness of Brown's intervention is that all the writers but Bessie Head (from Botswana, the south of Africa) are from Anglophone West Africa. Likewise, Oladele Taiwo, in *Female Novelists of Modern Africa*, centres the female point of view in African literature by showing how women writers have responded to questions of agency within the tradition/modernity dyad. Despite its ambitious title, none of the authors referenced in the text is from the Lusophone or Arabophone countries. For a work that assembled over forty works of fiction by African women, it is not surprising to note that it fails to sufficiently analyze some of the texts and engage critically with the theme of masculinity.

In *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*, Carole Boyce Davies and Anne Adam Graves reconstruct female images beyond stereotypes by establishing that motherhood is a central trope in African women's writing. Irene D'Almeida follows a slightly different path in feminist scholarship by investigating and exposing the "critical silence" in African literature and in patriarchal societies. While projecting French-speaking female authors, she demonstrates that

literature can work to break the culture of silence, and these writers have used their art to amplify their voices against male culture and its subjugation of women. However, like Taiwo, D'Almeida also omits literary fiction from the Lusophone and Arabophone regions. Molara Ogundipe-Leslie challenges African women to recreate themselves in order to improve their socio-cultural and economic conditions. In stressing the value of utilizing African epistemologies to advance "critical transformations" in women's lives in Africa, Ogundipe-Leslie fails to elucidate feminist perspectives on African sexual minorities. However, her concept of Stiwanism, a brand of African feminism, tracks the multiple oppressions women face in androcentric societies. Eschewing Western perspectives on African cultural and literary productions, Chikwenye Okonjo-Ogunyemi posits the concept of "palava," a Nigerian lingo, to explicate gender relations in novels by Nigerian female authors. Palava describes her feminist vision of gender relations in Africa in that it advocates conciliation, collaboration, consensus, and complementarity (126). Okonjo-Ogunyemi's thinking resonates with Obioma Nnaemeka's concept of nego-feminism, which advocates "coexistence and interconnection" and accentuates the power of collective struggle rooted in negotiation, accommodation, and compromise (360-61). Popular culture also provides a way to understand gender in Africa, as the contributors to Stephanie Newell's *Writing African Women* demonstrate. Although Newell's focus is on West African women writers, Mariama Ba, who writes in French, is the only non-English speaking author included in the volume. In her essay "The Onus of Womanhood: Mariama Ba and Zaynab Akali," Ibiyemi Mojola, a contributor, argues that traditional practices and religious beliefs impede women's self-definition and reinforce their subjugation in society.

Subsequent works such as Juliana Nfah-Abbenyi's *Gender in African Women's Writing* have attempted to reformulate gender notions beyond normative femininity. Nfah-Abbenyi

explores identity, difference, and sexuality and probes how characters deconstruct gender and sexual categories in Africa. Her analysis of African women's writing challenges the Eurocentric feminist discourse on motherhood by noting that

> the critique of motherhood (that views women as forced mothers) and heterosexuality (that views women as sexual slaves), despite its emphasis on women and their rights over their bodies, can be problematical to most African women simply because motherhood and family have historically represented different experiences and social practices to Western and African women. Motherhood is a theme that runs through the writings of many African women writers, and they question whether women are merely forced mothers and/or sexual objects. (24)

Nfah-Abbenyi's comments correspond with Nnaemeka's critique of Western feminist discourse that associates motherhood with victimhood. In *The Politics of (M)othering,* Nnaemeka writes that "African women writers attempt most of the time to delink motherhood and victimhood the way they separate wifehood and motherhood" (5). She, therefore, offers an alternative reading practice that shows how African women writers reimagine subjectivity and agency. While Nfah-Abbenyi and Nnaemeka broaden our understanding of African literature, bringing marginalized voices to the centre, their work ignores how male figures on the margins reconstitute their subjectivities to destabilize gender and sexual dichotomies.

Lisa A. Lindsay is the only author who discusses Nigerian masculinity in *Africa after Gender*, a volume of essays edited by Catherine M. Cole, Takyiwaa Manuh, and Stephan F. Miescher.[23] Her ethnographic study outlines a genealogy of masculinity constructions in the southwest of Nigeria, stressing the relationship between labour and gender during the colonial

[23] Miescher and Cole focus on masculinities in Ghana, respectively. See "Becoming an Opanyin: Elders, Gender, and Masculinity in Ghana since the Nineteenth Century" and "Give Her a Slap to Warm Her Up: Post-gender Theory and Ghana's Popular Culture."

periods of the 1930s and 1950s. Lindsay conceptualizes the emergence of the male breadwinner ideal among the Yorùbá. In *Gender and Sexuality in African Literature and Film,* Ada Uzomaka Azodo and Maureen Ngozi Eke argue that African writers and filmmakers appear reticent to challenge heteronormativity through their film and fiction. None of the essays in their volume deals with Nigerian masculinities, although Egodi Uchendu's chapter on "Women-Woman Marriage in Igboland" reiterates some of Ifi Amadiume's arguments in *Male Daughters, Female Husbands,* which I discuss below. Uchendu examines women-woman marriage in pre-colonial and colonial Igbo society, highlighting its relevance, forms, and problems. Marriage in pre-colonial and colonial periods was about procreation, so it was obligatory that every Igbo male or female got married and produced an heir or offspring. Uchendu lists different types of marriage such as regular marriage contract, marriage through pawning, exchange or by abduction, and concubinage. She notes that woman-woman marriage serves social and economic purposes, unlike many marriage types that fulfill the objectives of political prestige and military alliances. Women practised this form of marriage for two reasons: procreation and prestige. First, a woman can arrange for a wife or "female husband" if she finds that she is barren or has "passed the childrearing age without begetting a male child" (141). Second, a woman who is wealthy and influential can obtain a wife "as a means of celebrating [her] wealth and for economic gains" (141). In most cases, women practised it to mitigate or even escape discrimination surrounding inheritance. Uchendu writes that woman-woman marriage helps women secure the inheritance due to them when their spouses are dead, since in Igboland "inheritance passed from father to son and never from father to daughter or from husband to wife" (144). Though this marriage type was popular in some Igbo towns such as Old Owerri, Aba district, Awka, Udi, Nsukka, Christianity and modernization would weaken it. As the colonial period wound down, Christian

churches began prohibiting such marriages along with polygyny. In time, it was only uneducated and semi-educated women who still explored woman-woman marriage. This period transformed woman-woman marriage into "a partnership between a female husband and a male consort for the good of the former" (149). Like Amadiume, Uchendu contends that homosexuality and lesbianism did not occur in woman-woman marriage because it was strictly heterosexual in practice. Sadia Zulfiqar's *African Women Writers and the Politics of Gender* problematizes Fredric Jameson's controversial postulation of all third-world literature as national allegories.[24] The significance of Zulfiqar's work lies in how she brings nuance to the subject of Islamic 'feminism' in African fiction, showing that Muslim women have agency even in spaces of patriarchy.

Ifi Amadiume's *Male Daughters, Female Husbands* and Oyeronke Oyěwùmí's *The Invention of Women* equally contest Western epistemologies by illustrating instances of gender nonconformity in Nigeria. Amadiume's work criticizes the "ethnocentrism of old [Western] anthropology" and the "the global presuppositions" of Western feminist theorists (4). Using precolonial Nnobi community as a case study, she argues that the Igbo operated a system that permitted flexibility in gender roles. Because gender was perceived as separate from sex, the system allowed women to access spaces hitherto reserved for men. Therefore, women could perform the roles of a female husband or male daughter/female son. Amadiume's concept of male daughter implies that a woman can position herself as a son if her parents have produced no male heir. In other words, women become sons to inherit their father's property, only if there are no male heirs in their lineage. Nnaemeka notes that "what Amadiume describes accounts for a

[24] See Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." Aside from Zulfiqar, other critics have countered Jameson's misreading of third-world literature. See, e.g., Aijaz. "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory.'"

different and new argument within feminist theorizing on sexual asymmetry, and male domination, and women's sexuality" (265). Indicting Amadiume for glossing over issues of homosexuality in such practices, Gaurav Desai, however, states that she refrains from defining women in essentialist terms (126). Although Amadiume's theorization demonstrates gender flexibility among the Igbo, her work is limited to what appeared to have been in practice in one precolonial society and not representative of gender configurations in many parts of Igboland. For her part, Nwando Achebe has questioned Amadiume's assertion that colonialism reconfigured Igbo gender order because her study of Ahebi Ugbabe, a female Igbo king in Enugu-Ezike (1880-1948), demonstrates that "colonialism created conditions that supported, reinforced, and extended the contours of acceptable gender transformations, allowing would-be female men to carry their quests for manhood further than would have been acceptable in the pre-colonial order" (53). Ugbabe was known to have subverted the highest royal male authority in the land and 'married' women, who gave her male heirs. Likewise, Elleke Boehmer criticizes Amadiume for "not always deal[ing] satisfactorily with the continuing predominance of *de facto* patriarchal authority in the community, and the status commanded by the roles of sons and husband" (266). I would argue that the symbolic 'male' role that Nnobi women took on could not exclude them from encountering discrimination since Igbo society has primarily been more patriarchal than matriarchal. Amadiume herself mentions that Nnobi did not "recognize females as having any rights to their father's property" (32). Adding to the discussion, Chielozona Eze comments that Amadiume's "suggestion that Igbo daughters could become sons and consequently male, that is, that they are not limited by their gender, fails to interrogate the patriarchal episteme that undergirds the practice of women marrying other women" (9). Nevertheless, Amadiume's study of the Nnobi gender arrangements sheds light on Nkiru

Nzegwu's discussion of the Onitsha gender system. In "Feminism and Africa: Impact and Limits of the Metaphysics of Gender," Nzegwu interrogates Western definitions of the category 'woman' to show that social identity is flexible and tied to roles among the (Onitsha) Igbo people. She argues that *nwanyi*, which loosely translates to a woman in the Western gender imaginary, cannot encapsulate the various femininities in Igboland. Nzegwu distinguishes between *nwanyi* and *agbala* as female categories, noting that "The Igbo word that most closely approximates the meaning of 'woman' in the Western imagination is *agbala*. It defines a category of self-assured, assertive females, who may or may not be married, and whose identity is not defined in relation to men. In sum, *nwanyi* and *agbala* refer to the female sex, but they do not ascribe specific social attributes, roles, or identities to them" (563). As Nzegwu writes, "*nwanyi* does not exclusively refer to an adult female person; it refers to both children and adults. It does not imply that females are psychologically passive beings who are or ought to be submissive and subordinate to men. No social attribution is made about women's state of being or capabilities at this stage" (562). Nzegwu's study of Igbo gender system further reveals that "gender identity is a flexible, fluid state of being" (563), a point Uchendu and Amadiume stress.

Oyěwùmí's *The Invention of Women* also contests what she labels the Western "bio-logic" or the ideology of biological determinism. Her critique parallels Chandra Talpade Mohanty's argument against Eurocentric discourses that homogenize "Third World" women and universalize their experiences of subordination.[25] Oyěwùmí localizes African women's realities by paying attention to the dynamics of social hierarchy in Nigeria and refuting the notion that

[25] See, Mohanty's "Under Western Eyes," where she argues against Western hegemonic discourses that erase the heterogeneity and complexities of non-European women in the third world, arbitrarily categorizing them as "Third World woman" and appropriating that category to "colonize" feminist humanistic discourses (335).

womanhood is commensurate with passivity. Contending that Western feminist discourse over-privileges anatomy, she insists that there are several categories other than gender that organize social positions and hierarchies since the Oyo-Yorùbá do not define male and female in biological terms. Age is one of such categories. Oyěwùmí's study illustrates the absence of gender among that community, showing that biology (the 'bio-logic') did not inform social identity at the time. She claims that "in no situation in Yorùbá society was a male, by virtue of his body-type, inherently superior to a female" (xiii). According to Oyěwùmí, "Social categories like 'woman' are based on body-type and are elaborated in relation to and in opposition to another category: man; the presence or absence of certain organs determine social position" (ix). Therefore, the Yorùbá understand gender within the context of seniority or age, which determines a subject's position or their relationship in the social order.

Bibi Bakare-Yusuf has criticized Oyěwùmí for falling into the trap of purity and authenticity and ignoring how other power variables organize the Yorùbá society. She notes that Oyěwùmí privileges seniority while ignoring how power shapes seniority and how people manipulate the categories of seniority and status to their advantage (73). Other scholars have also criticized Oyěwùmí's mystification of gender asymmetry in society. Desiree Manicom questions Oyěwùmí's reliance on linguistic evidence to interpret gender realities, asserting that "[l]anguage is not the best indicator of the social organisation of any society as it does not necessarily reflect oppression and inequalities" (135). Amina Mama insists that gender was still a feature of precolonial African societies, chiding Oyěwùmí for "inventing an imaginary precolonial community in which gender did not exist" (69). Eze also criticizes Oyěwùmí for failing to "interrogate the African patriarchal gaze, which is equally devastating to the African woman's body" (9). In contrast, Azille Coetzee commends the "significant decolonizing potential" of

Oyěwùmí's claims about the Yorùbá gender system (9). Keguro Macharia writes that "Oyěwùmí is critiquing the entire framework that subtends the constructionist critique of essentialism: the claim that gender is socially constructed carries little force for African communities that *already* understood gender as ritually conferred" (28). Despite the limitations of Amadiume's and Oyěwùmí's discussions of gender in the Igbo and Yorùbá communities, these writers show that gender constructions are contingent and performative and their meanings only cohere around established norms and behaviours.

In *When Sex Threatened the State*, Saheed Aderinto employs a historical lens to present an easily overlooked facet of the sexual imaginary of colonial Nigeria, uncovering the various attempts by colonialists and Nigerians to regulate, pathologize, and prohibit sex work. His book traces the anxieties and discourses around sexuality and the politics underlying it to elucidate how the policing of sex was perceived as necessary for the nation's health or "social and public order" (22). Aderinto underlines the "sexualization of nationalism" or the relationship between sexual politics and nationalism, demonstrating that sex was not only a national concern but also central to the project of nation-building. He also touches upon how the British colonialists racialized sex to denigrate African sexuality. As such, sex, if not regulated, could deter the progress of the new nation. Aderinto makes certain lucid contributions to the scholarship on Nigerian gender and sexuality. First, he incorporates age as an analytic in its discussion of prostitution while not ignoring other categories such as race, class, and education. Age defined how the colonizer and the colonized understood, discussed, and pathologized sex work. While society regarded adult sex workers as deviants and thus criminalized their activities, it considered child or underaged sex workers as delinquents and victims of sexual exploitation who required rehabilitation. Consequently, the colonial state punished (and repatriated if need be)

adult prostitutes and rehabilitated underaged prostitutes. The aim was to rid Lagos of illicit sexuality. Second, Aderinto analyzes the role that the female elite played in sex regulation in colonial Lagos, outlining how they challenged masculine authority and monopoly over sexual matters. The educated females saw that prostitution denigrated womanhood and worsened the condition of women and girls in society.

Aderinto attempts to foreground age as a crucial definer of prostitution in colonial Nigeria: however, much of his discussion confirms that social class is implicated in sexual politics, considering that activism around prostitution laws excluded uneducated and market women. As Aderinto notes, "the elite women viewed prostitution as a profession of uneducated, poor, and criminally minded women from the provinces" (168). Two issues stand out in his study of sexuality in Nigeria. Although he acknowledges that Nigeria is composed of many ethnicities and divergent ideological positions, he limits his investigation on sexuality to Lagos, thus overlooking variant forms that sexual politics might have taken in other regions of Nigeria. Moreover, his focus on heterosexuality presents Nigerian sexuality as a monolith, homogeneous rather than heterogeneous, making it appear as though sexual difference never existed in colonial Lagos. It would be interesting to ascertain what kind of discourse about homosexuality circulated at the time. Notwithstanding, Aderinto underscores how morality frames and determines discourses around sex work, even when they take on medical tones, thereby demonstrating that moralizing discourses reflect predominantly European sexual conventions and Christian ideals of monogamy.

Masculinity Studies

Simon Gikandi notes that "For many years African literary criticism, informed by the best of feminist and womanist theory, seemed uncertain about the place of the masculine trope in its

primary texts" (296). This, as Lindsay and Miescher put it, is because "men have rarely been the subject of research on gender in Africa" (1). The emergence of masculinity studies in Africa in the mid-1980s with its focus on male experiences has generated interest among several scholars. Nigerian authors such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Cyprian Ekwensi, Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Chukwuemeka Ike, Festus Iyayi, and Zaynab Akali, to mention a few, tend to portray men in essentialist terms of sex, gender, and sexuality, blurring the complexities of human beings and eliding other forms of social legibility. Their narratives deprivilege alternative masculinities.

Robert Morrell's text, *Changing Men in Southern Africa*, provides critical insights into the intersection of masculinity, race, and class in South(ern) Africa, during the (post-) Apartheid period. It unearths local patterns of masculinities and tracks the changes in gender relations in that sub-region. Morrell limits his study of male identity to South Africa. However, Lindsay and Miescher provide socio-historical frameworks to show "men's private lives as sites of contestation" in colonial and postcolonial Africa. Four essays in their collection interrogate Nigerian masculinities. In "And She Became a Man," Nwando Achebe explores gender transformation in colonial Igboland by recounting how the British installed a female king among the Igbo. Andrea Cornwall's "To be a Man is More than a Day's Work" suggests that the British colonial modernity in Nigeria brought about the crisis of masculinity in Yorùbá land. Lindsay's "Money, Marriage, and Masculinity on the Colonial Nigerian Railway" narrates how the political economy of colonial-era wage labour in Yorùbá society created the breadwinner model of masculinity. Carolyn A. Brown's "A 'Man' in the Village is a 'Boy' in the Workplace" delineates how white paternalism and the coal mining industry reshaped gender notions among the people of Enugu between 1930 and 1945.

Miescher's *Making Men in Ghana* offers another anthropological study on local figurations of masculinities. Employing a life-history approach, Miescher discusses how the normative colonial structures animated "cultural and historical constructions of masculinities" in Ghana (202). In *African Masculinities*, Ouzgane and Morrell chart "how African masculinities, African male bodies, subjectivities, and experiences are constituted in specific historical, cultural, and social contexts" (8). Their work explores black genitalia, homosexuality, male violence, and male infertility, focusing more on masculinities in South Africa and Egypt. Only one contributor, Frank A. Salamone, examines masculinities in Nigeria.[26] Although Egodi Uchendu, a Nigerian scholar, edited *Masculinities in Contemporary Africa*, none of the essays in her volume considers Nigerian masculinities. My dissertation fills these gaps by examining Nigerian masculinities from a literary standpoint.

Tanure Ojaide, Clement Okafor, and Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis analyze Nigerian masculinities in *Masculinities in African Literary and Cultural texts*, an essay collection edited by Helen Nabasuta Mugambi and Tuzyline Jita Allan. Ojaide examines how men deploy the *udje* dance-song performance to project and "distinguish[ed] oneself in established positive terms" (77), while Okafor uses Igbo proverbs to contemplate Achebe's narrative of "the redemptive potentials of womanhood in postcolonial Africa" (159). Etter-Lewis, however, argues that Chris Abani's *Graceland* deals with more "complex, alternative masculinities" than Achebe's and Emecheta's novels. In her analysis of Achebe, Buchi Emecheta, and Abani, she discusses "visual models of African masculinities" to show how these writers characterize men in specific ways mirroring cultural models of manhood. Etter-Lewis comments that they link masculinity to

[26] Salamone has investigated the phenomenon of "homosexual transvestites" known as *'yan daudu* in Muslim Hausa society. According to Salamone, the *'yan daudu* are "men who talk like women" and their performances of femininity challenge Hausa/Islamic norms of masculinity. See 75 and 80.

men's physical appearance, contrasting, for instance, Okonkwo's "strong and feline" appearance to Unoka's "thinness" and "stooped" looks and demonstrating their proximity to or distance from manliness (162). Furthermore, Etter-Lewis argues that Abani, unlike Achebe and Emecheta, creates a male character illustrative of alternative masculinities because he explores homosexuality. Elvis in Abani's *Graceland* is "situated between extreme versions of African masculinities" (168). Etter-Lewis concludes that "the meaning of being and becoming an Igbo man is locked in the reciprocal gaze of the performers as well as the audience" (177). I argue that Nwoye also represents alternative masculinities because he refuses to perpetuate male culture. There is no passage in *Things Fall Apart* where Achebe never discusses his sexuality, even though some may read Nwoye's closeness with Ikemefuna in homosocial terms.

In *Men in African Film and Fiction*, Ouzgane shows that gender as a construct seems to "reside more on a continuum of cultural practices than an absolutely opposite plane" (7). In that volume of essays, it is only Marc Epprecht who interrogates how African film and fiction participate in portraying "diverse homosexual or bisexual characters [to] facilitate a powerful critique both of contemporary African society and of Western presumptions about (and prescriptions) for Africa" (160). He assesses how African cinema and fiction have contributed to ongoing debates around sexual rights and sexual health, demonstrating that contemporary depictions of non-normative sexualities contest "old orthodoxies about African essential heterosexuality" (156). Although Epprecht lists several South African fiction and films dealing with non-normative sexualities, he identifies two pioneering films from West Africa: *Dakan* and *Woubi Chéri*. He states that much of African cinema is documentary and didactic and inadvertently reinforces traditional family and marital values. While his assessment reveals the significant number of artistic engagements with sexual alterity on the continent, he overlooks

literary and cultural productions from other regions of Africa, for instance, North Africa. The Moroccan writer Abdellah Taïa has published stories and novels about homosexuality, notably *Mon Maroc* (*My Morocco*) and *L'armee du Salut* (*Salvation Army*), both published in 2000 and 2009, respectively. In reviewing Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows*, Epprecht comments that Dibia looks "admiringly to the West" because he "casts the main European character as a betrayer who is irrationally, recklessly and self-destructively promiscuous" (160). I am not fully convinced about this because Dibia projects the West as the archetypical place of safety and liberation for queer lives, much as Abani does in *Graceland* where his protagonist is set to relocate to the United States. The end of Dibia's novel affirms his admiration for Europe since he has his own protagonist relocate to the United Kingdom. In the novel, Adrian claims that he would never thrive as a gay man in Nigeria. Consider how Okparanta chooses to end her novel *Under the Udara Tree* instead, keeping her protagonist and her lover in Nigeria.

Daniel Jordan Smith offers a contemporary ethnographic account of Nigerian, predominantly Igbo, men to illuminate the nexus between masculinity and money. His book *To Be a Man Is Not a One-day Job* revolves around three pivots—men, intimacy, and money—and maps how money is central to Igbo men's definitions and articulations of manhood. Smith employs "intimacy" as a theoretical concept to show how Igbo men relate to women and other men and how gender intersects with class and power among the Igbo. He argues that "The performance of masculinity is intimately bound up with class, and especially with aspirations and anxieties about having enough money" (88). His analysis of masculinity reveals a complex mosaic of what it means to be a man and the complexity of humanity, specifically not only the anxiety and agony of becoming gendered but also the moments of amity, joy, and triumph that characterize human sociality. There are two issues I find missing in Smith's extensive study of

Igbo masculinity. First, it ignores gender or sexual variance among the Igbo men. Smith is silent about LGBTQ. Perhaps, his "silence" reflects how mainstream culture treated such issues at the time of his fieldwork. Second, it recirculates a dominant narrative of Nigerian heteronormativity. Smith examines homosociality, but only in relation to heterosexual infidelity and extramarital sexual behaviour. One might wonder if there is no anti-normativity in performances of gender and sexuality among the Igbo between the 1980s and 2000s.

Ndubueze L. Mbah's *Emergent Masculinities* is the latest work on Nigerian masculinities, also focusing on Igbo masculinity. Published in 2019, it narrates the impact of the Atlantic and domestic slave trades on gender relations among the Ohafia people of southeast Nigeria between 1750 and 1920. Mbah argues that British colonialism and missionary evangelism reconfigured the dual-sex sociopolitical system in Ohafia. His concept of *ogaranya* masculinity describes how men and women employ wealth to assert hegemonic masculinity, revealing how masculinity operates as "a cluster of norms, values, and behavioural patterns expressing explicit and implicit expectations of how men should act and represent themselves to others" (Lindsay and Miescher 4). According to Mbah, *ogaranya* masculinity is a form of *ufiem* hegemony, a masculinity model built around notions of warrior and military accomplishments. *Ufiem* masculinity recognizes men only, whereas both men and women can aspire to and attain *ogaranya* masculinity. His historical analysis of Nigerian masculinities demonstrates the shifts in gender definition. As Mbah writes, "By performing ogaranya masculinity through trade, divination, and matronship, Ohafia women expanded the ideological scope of gender hegemony beyond colonial patriarchal structures" (158). Despite the work's depth, it only presents an historical understanding of Nigerian masculinities during the precolonial and colonial eras between 1750 and 1920. Still, it is a landmark work that provides insights into the constructions of female masculinities in

precolonial southeast Nigeria. My dissertation offers articulations of contemporary masculinities in the Nigerian cultural imaginary, addressing gaps in existing scholarship on masculinity.

It is pertinent to review some gender scholarship by Western theorists. For instance, in *Constructing Masculinities,* Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, and Simon Watson assemble an impressive array of writers on gender and sexuality to provide insights into masculinities, although only three of their contributors are African Americans, namely: bell hooks, Derrick Bell, and Michelle Wallace. Their intervention in this volume depicts how African Americans problematize Eurocentric notions about masculinities. hooks's "Doing it for Daddy" interrogates images of black men in popular culture that (mis)represent them as ever striving for and craving "daddy's favor" or the "white male love" (99). Such white cultural production, hooks argues, merely reinforces "white supremacist patriarchal values" (105). Bell's "The Race-charged Relationship of Black Men and Black Women" is an allegorical narrative that investigates the "twenty-seventh-year syndrome"[27] on black women and its decimating effects on black communities in the United States, while Wallace's "Masculinity in Black Popular Culture" contests how the dominant white establishment fetishizes and commodifies Black intellectuals and Black cultural producers. Out of the thirteen essays in *Theorizing Masculinities* edited by Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman, only Máirtín Mac an Ghaill analyzes what it means to be a Black male, precisely in the United Kingdom. In his essay "The Making of Black English Masculinities," he investigates how Rasta Heads, a group of Afro-Caribbean youth, deploy the

[27] Bell uses the "twenty-seventh-year syndrome" to explain Black life in America and the male-female dynamics in African American communities. He describes this "strange malady" as a social problem affecting able black women only and can be linked to the shortage of eligible black men. This, Bell says, is a cause of concern among black communities, especially in terms of procreation and sustaining their population in the face of ongoing white supremacy. Educated and successful Black women within the age ranges of twenty-four and twenty-seven remain single and cannot get married because they cannot find eligible black men with whom to start a family. See also, Bell's "The Effects of Affirmative Action on Male-Female Relationships Among African Americans." *Sex Roles* 21, 1989.

Rastafarian subculture to challenge British educational authority as well as stage "resistance to state authoritarianism" (188).

Adam Jones's voluminous book *Men of the Global South* presents the most diverse and multi-genre accounts of male experiences in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. The book's significance lies in the fact that it spotlights men in those regions, filling the gap in much of Western gender scholarship. It boasts of over thirty contributors and has only one essay dealing with Nigerian masculinities. In "Yorùbá Men, Yorùbá Women," George Olusola Ajibade examines how the traditional naming practices among the Yorùbá tend to reinforce patriarchy. As he observes, "Many other aspects of the traditional society point to this patriarchal structure. The Yorùbá Oríkì àbíso—praise names given to children at birth—differ, with those given to female children attesting to tenderness and elegance, while those given to male children demonstrate strength and manliness" (376). In *Exploring Masculinities*, C.J. Pascoe and Tristan Bridges enjoin masculinity scholars to note the interconnections between gender, power, and inequality. As remarkably significant as this collection is, it is only Mark Anthony Neal's essay that discusses the subject of Black masculinity. In "My Passport Says Shawn," Neal argues that the iconic African American artist and entrepreneur Jay-Z/Shawn Carter's performances of cosmopolitanism negate the stereotypes of Black manhood.

Queer Studies

The topic of homosexuality remains contentious for African writers and scholars, mainly because of the moral discourse, religious dogma, and cultural nationalism framing public conversations around African heterosexuality. Epprecht recognizes the role that "cultural outsiders," informed by masculinist and racist sentiments, have played in perpetuating "the hegemonic ideology of Africanness" (145). He also criticizes African scholars for reinforcing those heterosexist

discourses about African sexuality while attributing their complicity to nativist sentiments that view sexual diversity as a European lifestyle, which Africans must resist. In *Heterosexual Africa?*, Epprecht contests the use of queer theory to fully describe African sexualities, pointing out the disconnect between queer theory and queer practice. Although we should acknowledge its usefulness as an antinormative discourse, he advises that it is not helpful to promote it in research on African gender and sexuality. Epprecht argues that applying Western formulations to wholly describe African sexualities "could unwittingly deny or submerge African perspectives within a falsely homogenizing or 'homonormative' paradigm" (151). He also argues that "queer theory's most important and original contribution is simply to make explicit what is commonly implicit in, for example, critical men's studies and other antiessentialist research. Primarily it alerts us to ask about the often extremely subtle ways by which same-sex sexuality is rendered invisible or is stigmatized in hegemonic culture" (24). Implicit in Epprecht's contention is the need for scholars to be alert and attentive to sexual practices across disparate cultures.

Stella Nyanzi has described homosexuality as "an othered research topic" (70), while Mumbi Machera claims that "[i]ssues of sexuality in Africa, especially when they touch on the pleasurable aspects, are rather touchy" (168). Issues of procreation, family, and concerns about the nation and its purity are at stake in such conversations. The ensuing discourse, inflected by religious injunctions and centuries-old colonialist narratives, reinforces the binary between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Consequently, we regard the former as normal and the latter as an abnormality (Arnfred 15). Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe equally point out that African sexual discourses construe the homosexual as a contagion figure to be demonized (17). For her part, Chantal Zabus draws attention to how homosexuals are easily threatened with annihilation and killed in extreme cases because they are expected to restrain from same-sex

contacts; indeed, a reality that makes the news in many African countries. In *Out in Africa*, Zabus echoes Epprecht's argument about "the need to engage with local naming practices for queer sexualities" (10). While Okparanta refuses to describe her female protagonist or have her present herself as a lesbian, Dibia, conversely, allows his protagonist to refer to himself at various times as gay and a homosexual.

The following texts have also challenged the dominant perception of Africans as heterosexual: Chris Dunton's and Mai Palmberg's *Human Rights and Homosexuality in Southern Africa*, Neville Hoad's *African Intimacies*, Epprecht's *Hungochani,* Sylvia Tamale's *African Sexualities*, and Bart Luirink and Madeleine Maurick's *Homosexuality in Africa*. In their own way, the authors demonstrate the presence of sexual variance on the continent, debunking prevailing discourses that name homosexuality as incidental and anomalous to Africa. Signe Arnfred's *Re-thinking Sexualities in Africa* traces "fresh or alternative lines of thinking" about sexualities in Africa that transcends popular thinking and the conceptual frames of European imaginary.[28] Whereas Dunton highlights the denigration of homosexuality in African cultural imaginary, arguing for a "nonschematic depiction of a homosexual relationship between Africans" (445), Hoad delineates how colonialism, decolonization, postcoloniality, and globalization have reshaped the structures of desire, affect, and identity in Africa. It is instructive to note that in his exposition of African erotic practices Hoad overlooks female same-sex desire. In *Queer African Reader*, Sokari Ekine and Hakima Abbas write about the potentials of queer/ness to recast sexual politics in Africa. To Ekine and Abbas, the term enunciates "a

[28] For a collection that discusses alternative narratives on gender and sexuality to enrich understandings of African sexualities as varied, multiple, shifting, and situational, it is surprising to note that not one essay considers Nigerian sexualities.

political frame rather than a gender or sexual behaviour" and endorses a "dissident stance" against "oppressive heteropatriarchal-capitalist frameworks" (3). Viewed this way, queerness signals a disruption of normative structures of living in society.

In her contribution to African sexualities, Tamale has dismissed any discourse that homogenizes and essentializes people's sexualities, contending that "[t]he notion of a homogenous, unchanging sexuality for all Africans is out of touch not only with the realities of lives, experiences, identities, and relationships but also with the current activism and scholarship" (2). In *Sexual Diversity in Africa*, S.N. Nyeck and Epprecht indicate that "research on sexual minorities reveals hidden power dynamics in many spheres of social, political, and intellectual life" (5). Murray and Roscoe have attempted to differentiate sexual difference in North America and Africa, commenting that, unlike Western citizens, Africans generally do not define "individuals solely on the basis of sexual object choice" (272). They write that because African communities place a value on procreation, the homosexual person does not have to "suppress same-sex desires or behaviour but that she or he never allows such desires to overshadow or supplant procreation" (273). Murray and Roscoe's conception of African homosexualities resonate with the ideas expressed by such postcolonial queer theorists as Martin F. Manalansan, Gayatri Gopinath, and Joseph Massad.

Postcolonial Queer Studies

Postcolonial queer studies enrich my examination of variant sexualities in the novels of Nigerian writers. Homosexuality remains a matter of life and death for the non-normative man or woman—or the nonbinary person; thus, they do not have the freedom to assert their desire or

intimacy on the African continent.[29] Dibia and Okparanta write about homosexuality, thus charting a horizon of hope for sexual minorities; however, they recognize the precariousness and peril of being queer in Africa. The reality, of course, for the Euro-American queer subject is ostensibly different from that of their African peer, considering that many Western governments have since legally recognized sexual variance in their countries. As is generally agreed, the narratives of the Western queer subject usually follow a progressive trajectory—the closet, the coming out, and pride. The ethos there is liberatory and coming is celebrated in such narratives. Accordingly, postcolonial queer theorists explore queer precariousness in their societies, including in the diaspora. By contesting Eurocentric notions that construe gays and lesbians as universal cultural categories, these theorists show the limits and the pitfalls of visibility for sexual minorities living in non-Western countries. They also contest the politics of transnational gay rights activists that intensify homophobia in communities where it might not have openly existed. The writings of Manalansan, Gopinath, and Massad illustrate how Asian, African, and Arab queer subjects resist Eurocentric models of sexual identities. Their thinking helps us to appreciate the dynamics of queer constructions in the global South.

Manalansan's study of Filipino homosexuality demonstrates that "Filipino gay men, whether immigrants to America or residents of the Philippines, deploy multiple formulations (hegemonic as well as counterhegemonic) as they declare affinities and differences in response to global gay and lesbian agendas" (426). Manalansan questions the necessity of public visibility,

[29] Although such countries as Mozambique, Botswana, Seychelles, Angola, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Madagascar, Niger, Mali, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Djibouti, Cape Verde, and São Tomé and Príncipe have put in place laws decriminalizing homosexuality, many African countries, including Nigeria, still criminalize homosexuality and enact severe penalties on same-sex or LGBT+ relationships. South Africa is the only country that has legalized same-sex marriage.

stating that "visibility can be dangerous for gay Filipinos" (434). Massad challenges how the West attempts to internationalize gay "rights" in the Arab and Muslim worlds, framed around discourses of humanism and liberalism. In "Re-orienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World," Massad contends that Western gay international advocates and groups, working with an orientalist imaginary, seek to liberate and transform the Arab and Muslim "practitioners of same-sex contact into subjects who identify as homosexual and gay" (362). The project to universalize non-Western subjects, Massad explains, has dangerous implications for the Arab or Muslim because it simply "produces an effect that is less than liberatory" (364). Although Gopinath focuses primarily on queer female subjects in the South Asian diaspora, she also refutes Western assumptions about variant sexualities. In *Unruly Visions: The Aesthetic Practices of Queer Diaspora*, she criticizes how South Asian communities in the diaspora entrench a politics of exclusion around gender (feminism) and nationalism (nativism). Gopinath highlights how such politics recirculate heteropatriarchal ideologies and constrains the flourishing of queer women in the diaspora. She argues that a queer critique can broaden our understanding of the diaspora, enabling us to "imagine [it] differently, apart from the biological, reproductive, oedipal logic that invariably forms the core of conventional formulations of diaspora" (6). Manasalan, Massad, and Gopinath recognize the heightened vulnerability of postcolonial queer subjects, whether they live in the motherland or in the diaspora.[30]

Many African scholars tend to be wary about using Western theories, especially to explicate local realities on the continent. Such scholars have raised this subject at conferences and on forums that I have been, and decolonial and Pan-Africanist concerns rightly fuel it. Of

[30] See, for more detail, Massad, *Desiring Arabs*; Manalansan, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora.*

course, I use queer/ness as an analytical tool to investigate African same-sex practices that recognize alternative modes of intimacy and selfhood while resisting prescriptive ways of attaining individual or intersubjective sexual autonomy.[31] David Buchbinder's thinking about queerness resonates with me, for he argues that queer theory "problematizes the notion of identity as integral, stable, and self-sufficient, seeing it rather as the product of a range of exclusions and suppressions, and itself permitting only a selective and therefore limited range of behaviours, attitudes, practices" (112-13). Zabus argues that queer theory provides us with a lens to "interrogate what the mainstream discourse of heteronormativity tries to conceal. In doing so, it produces—unwittingly or consciously—sites of resistance from which alternative models of subjectivity can be generated" (12). Following Zabus, I draw on queer theory for its "definitional elasticity" and usefulness as "an expansive signifier" to show how Nigerian writers construct characters that contest sexual orthodoxies and regimes (Dickinson 5 and 38). This definitional elasticity echoes Stella Nyanzi's call for "creativity" and "multi-disciplinary" in "queer production of knowledge" in Africa (64). Consequently, I apply the term "queer/ness" to signify what is anti-authentic, anti-essentialist, anti-normative, anti-hegemonic, non-normative, non-binary, and even transgressive, but specifically, as these dispositions and positionalities relate to

[31] I am aware that some African(ist) scholars contest the use of queer theory because it can reinscribe Western cultural imperialism or undermine African ways of being and desiring that do not fit into Western notions of nonconformity. Others contend that Western perspectives cannot explain African gender and sexual practices. While I find these points helpful, I am more interested in how queer theory can deepen understanding of the tensions and contradictions surrounding constructions of identity, desire, subjectivity, be it male or female or anyone who rejects biological assignations. My understanding of queer theory, therefore, accords with Epprecht's argument in *Heterosexual Africa?* Epprecht writes that "queer" serves as "an antiessentialist approach to researching gender and sexuality that is open to the whole range of human sexual diversity; that underscores sexuality as a critical component in the construction of class, race, national, ethnic, and other identities; that analyses language and silences in relation to material conditions and struggles; and that engages with current debates about global economic and other inequalities coming out of African feminist, subaltern, and critical masculinity studies" (21).

questions about norms, identity, desire, subjectivity, and difference in the novels by Achebe, Adichie, Dibia, and Okparanta.

Chapter 2

"A son who is a man": Precariousness in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

Introduction

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* interrogates how the dominant culture frames what a man or a woman is—or who is human. Achebe dramatizes the perils of normative ways of being in society, showing how hegemonic culture creates differential categories of the human to exclude, marginalize, and alienate some of its citizens based on such categories.[32] Gender defines a norm of legibility by which we (recognize) organize positions and relations among men and women apropos of (or in opposition to) culture (Nyanzi 2014; Connell 2002; Bradley 2013). *Things Fall Apart* relates the tragic story of a great farmer and warrior, who rises from poverty, distinguishes himself among his people, but eventually hangs himself because he feels betrayed by them during a decisive confrontation with the British colonial emissaries. Okonkwo's story can be read as the pitfalls of hubris, that is, a man's failure to negotiate the sociopolitical dynamics of his time. We can also read it as a negation of the feminine by an archetypal male (Traoré 1997). As Achebe dramatizes, Okonkwo is haunted by the fear of femininity. This point resonates with my discussion of masculinity as I argue that Achebe depicts Nwoye, the firstborn of the

[32] In *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler writes that norms produce ideals of what it means to be human, how we valorize humans based on certain conditions, and establish who will and will not be human. Butler asks, "Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives?" (20).

protagonist Okonkwo, to reconceive masculinity while emphasizing the significance of receptivity as a mode of being in the world.

In this chapter, I stress how Nwoye demonstrates receptivity to the world, deemphasizes the value placed on gender, and redefines masculinity. I also argue that he expresses an openness towards the lonely, the marginalized, the disowned, and the alienated. This openness sutures his relations with this set of people in his community. Throughout the novel, Nwoye identifies with precariousness and otherness, even to the extent that he defines himself in that way. By rejecting the paternal legacy, he problematizes what it means to be a man and shows the limits of masculinity. As Butler clarifies,

> Gender ought not to be constructed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts.* The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body, and hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (191, original emphasis)

Nwoye's receptive behaviour challenges the notion of masculinity as an essence, an embodiment, a natural phenomenon. Through his actions, we realize that gender is a social enactment and a cultural fiction. His receptivity to otherness makes it possible for him to repudiate rather than reinforce "patrilineal perpetuity" (Bhabha 57). The capacity to open himself to the alterity around him constitutes him as a "trouble" to patriarchy. Nwoye troubles the norm of how a man must be, the norm to which his father is beholden. He is a trouble to the father's name.

As a radical alternative to normative masculinity, Nwoye illustrates how patriarchal ideology stifles what Chielozona Eze calls a "flourishing community"—one in which human beings are more interested in the quality of their social relations than in living within gender categories. Such a community sees its "men and women relat[ing] to one another in freedom and on equal grounds" (107). Considering how narratives reflect the livable life, Eze observes that "one of the ways that narratives appeal to us is by placing other people's vulnerabilities squarely before us and having them challenge us" (25). *Things Fall Apart* depicts instances of human vulnerability, and Nwoye recognizes and attends to vulnerability. His model of receptivity instantiates Achebe's critique of hegemonic norms. In what follows, I examine the forms of masculinity Nwoye's father and grandfather perform to contextualize our appreciation of his subversiveness. I then show how his receptivity represents alternative masculinity.

Honour, Failure, and *Efulefu* Masculinity

Things Fall Apart opens with two contradictory figures of masculinity: Unoka and Okonkwo, father and son. Achebe juxtaposes these opposite characters to show that there is not one but many expressions of masculinity (Connell 1995; Whitehead 2002; Mugambi and Allan 2010). The juxtaposition reveals the variability of masculinity— or, more precisely, that gender is a social practice people construct and often contest. There is nothing innately human about it. In the novel, Achebe positions Okonkwo as a figure of the masculine norm and Unoka as an opposition to that norm. Okonkwo represents what a 'real' man is, as understood in Umuofia, whereas his father contradicts what a man should 'be'. The former epitomizes success, while the latter reflects failure. On the one hand, Unoka appears to associate masculinity with leisure, mirth, and passivity: "If any money came his way, and it seldom did, he immediately bought gourds of palm-wine, called round his neighbours and made merry […] Unoka loved the good

fare and the good fellowship" (3-4). Okonkwo, on the other, links masculinity with work, achievement, prowess, and honour: "His fame rested on solid personal achievements" (3). In *Masculine Domination*, Pierre Bourdieu views honour as symbolic capital, and games and sports can provide men with a means to acquire and reproduce it (55).

In *Things Fall Apart's* opening scene, Okonkwo achieves honour at the age of eighteen by defeating Amalinze the Cat, a legendary wrestler. His prowess in that spectacular wrestling match brings "honour" to his community (3). Achebe imbues Okonkwo with an intimidating physiognomy that implicitly suggests that masculinity is inherent in the male body. Okonkwo is "tall and huge," has "bushy eyebrows and wide nose," he "breathed heavily," and his muscular body could stretch "to breaking point" (3). Okonkwo embodies masculinity and presents "a particularly embodied way of being in the world" (Morgan 73). In *Gender,* R.W. Connell writes that "Bodies cannot be understood as just the objects of social process, whether symbolic or disciplinary, they are active participants in social process" (39). Achebe highlights the connections between embodiment (the male body) and androcentric culture.[33] As David Morgan puts it, "Men's power is exercised in the public arena and this power frequently, one might say always, takes on a bodily form" (72). Okonkwo's physique, therefore, signifies plenitude. It is a body of excess, in excess. It also represents power, male power.

Unoka is the opposite of his son, physically, relationally, and materially. His body is "very thin" with "a slight stoop," and he is "lazy and improvident" (3-4). Unlike his famous son, Unoka is infamous, a coward, who recoils at the sight of blood, and a perennial debtor (10). He

[33] Many studies have shown the link between embodiment and culture. See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*; Feher, *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*; Bordo, *The Male Body*; Scott and Morgan, *Body Matters*.

contradicts all that Okonkwo personifies and esteems. Similarly, his values are contrary to those of society. This contrarian ethos makes him regard ambition and achievement as worthless. He is fond of saying that "whenever he saw a dead man's mouth he saw the folly of not eating what one had in one's lifetime" (4). There is something Epicurean, almost cynical, about such an ethic espoused by Unoka. Yet, he evinces a degree of receptivity much different from his son's rigidity to his environment, a receptivity we might regard as a radical way of being *human* in a hegemonic culture. In contrast, Okonkwo is an inflexible conformist who has "no patience with unsuccessful men," including his father (3). This is because he recognizes, right from his boyhood when his peers shamed him, that society usually judges—"a man according to his worth" (7). Okonkwo's village Umuofia is an achievement-based society that values worth as a descriptor of humanity. However, the way it defines worth creates a norm for the recognition, differentiation, and dehumanization of its citizens. Those who fail to acquire capital (symbolic, social, economic, or political) are deemed worthless. The *efulefu* compose this group. While "such undesirable people" are the worthless human, the *osu* or outcasts exemplify the type of utter abjection in Umuofia.[34]

The *efulefu* bring dishonour to the community. Unoka is seen to have introduced worthlessness to society. He does not reproduce but diminishes (symbolic and economic) capital: "When Unoka had died he had taken no title at all and he was heavily in debt" (7). Umuofia

[34] The *osu* is an Igbo caste system comprising any person or group of persons dedicated or metaphorically "sacrificed" by their community to the service of deities. As an exception of what is categorically human, they are regarded as the property of the gods (in a sense, included in the *polis*), yet by that same exception, they are ostracized by the community (excluded from the *polis*). They straddle the line between sacred and profane, denied access, as it were, to the political realm of citizenship. In other words, the political order forbids them from the social, for the *osu* can only associate with or get married to their kind. The *osu* are simply outcasts. They quite illustrate Giorgio Agamben's discussion of "the new biopolitical body of humanity" (13) or his notion of bare life—the *homo sacer*: "a human victim who may be killed but not sacrificed" (53).

regards him as worthless, an abomination. He lacks honour (worth), so his people treat him as an abject, an outcast. When he falls gravely ill, they cast him into the Evil Forest to die. In some way, he serves as an example of the Agambean bare life or the Butlerian ungrievable life because the community cannot mourn him. It is useless mourning him. Unoka's type of antinormativity recalls Jack Halberstam's ideas about failure. In *The Queer Art of Failure,* Halbertsam writes: "We can also recognize failure as a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline and as a form of critique. As a practice, failure recognizes that alternatives are embedded already in the dominant and that power is never total or consistent; indeed, failure can exploit the unpredictability of ideology and its indeterminate qualities" (88). Although Halberstam focuses on queer lives, her understanding of failure helps us to appreciate Unoka as an antinormative figure who rejects the logic of capital accumulation or "the folly of not eating what one had in one's lifetime" (Achebe 4). Unlike his son "who had taken two titles" (7), Unoka accumulates no wealth or success, thus failing to reproduce the norm and defining his personhood against the paradigms of legibility (Halberstam 88).

Nwoye resembles his grandfather in that he refuses to perpetuate his father's ideals. As the firstborn of Okonkwo, he might be seen to represent failure. Much like Unoka, he threatens his father with dishonour and his community with shame. Nwoye undermines the paternal legacy, which causes his father to "lose" the honour he fetishizes. Okonkwo dismisses him as "degenerate and effeminate"—an *efulefu* who opposes the norm of male hegemony, the Oedipalized order. As Okonkwo laments, "How could he have begotten a woman for a son?" (123). In the following section, I examine the existing scholarship on Nwoye and show how Nwoye reconstructs masculinity by identifying with the vulnerable.

(Re)locating Nwoye

African and postcolonial literature scholars have paid more attention to Okonkwo than to any other character in Achebe's novel. This is due, in part, to the tendencies among such scholars to mobilize him as a powerful emblem of the anti-colonial struggle, a metonym of the tragedy that decimated precolonial African society (Jeyifo 1993; Begam 1997; Nnoromele 2000; Adéèkó 2011; Hodges 2013). Despite the breadth of such critical scholarship,[35] only a few critics have considered it necessary to analyze Nwoye in close detail.[36] Ato Quayson remarks that, alongside Obierika, Nwoye reflects alternative values in Umuofia (qtd. in Okpewho 238). What might these values be and how are they expressed by Nwoye? Quayson does not exactly address these questions, although we can infer from his discussion of Achebe's treatment of gender that Nwoye seems to embody femininity that works against the patriarchal order. Nevertheless, Quayson prompts us to contemplate the presence of marginal but counter-normative subjects in dominant cultures. Nwoye represents one of such subjects whose identity may appear marginal to his father's hegemony but who attempts to assert himself against what constitutes the norm in Umuofia. Gareth Griffins points out that Nwoye has a "greater capacity for personal relationships and his deeper feelings for personal values" (70). Abiola Irele has mentioned Nwoye's psychology and how it recoils at Umuofia's practice of ejecting twins from its social order (qtd. in Innes and Lindfors 13). Where Abdul JanMohamed frames this sort of psychology

[35] See, for instance, Gikandi, Simon, *Reading Chinua Achebe*, 1991; Osei-Nyame, "Chinua Achebe Writing Culture: Representations of Gender and Tradition in '*Things Fall Apart*'." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 30, no. 2, 1999, pp. 148-64; Olaniyan, Tejumola. "Chinua Achebe and an Archaeology of the Postcolonial African State." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 32, no. 3, 2001, pp. 22-29; Quayson, Ato. "Protocols of Representation and the Problems of Constituting an African 'Gnosis': Achebe and Okri." *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 27, 1997, pp. 137-49.

[36] Quayson, Ato. "Realism, Criticism, and the Disguises of Both: A Reading of Chinua Achebe's "*Things Fall Apart*" with an Evaluation of the Criticism Relating to It." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 25, no. 4, 1994, pp. 117-36.

in terms of the apostasy by Nwoye (91), Imafedia Okhamafe tersely contrasts it with Okonkwo's masculinity (131). Ode Ogede insinuates that "Nwoye's refusal to submit to the influence of his father has deprived him of the guidance and nourishment every child needs to ease the pains of growing up" (29). His insinuation is problematic because Ogede appears to conflate Okonkwo's aggressiveness with his parenting style. That kind of reading abridges the effects of Okonkwo's violence on Nwoye's personhood. Even more problematic, I think, is how Ogede attributes Okonkwo's "good intentions" to the "temper of a habitual worrywart with a tremendous capacity for love" (72-73). There is much to contest in his reading of the text. However, it is enough to note that his sympathy lies not with Nwoye but with Okonkwo.

Julia Agbesiere has examined Nwoye's sensitive character, which, surprisingly, she sees as a problem (qtd. in Emenyonu 71). Conversely, Ada Uzoamaka Azodo considers how this sensitivity might function as a strength. In her analysis of *Things Fall Apart*, she lists demeanour as one of the seven processes from which Umuofia men articulate their identities. The other six processes include physical, economic, knowledge, structural, nurturing, and ideological. Azodo claims that Obieirka is an epitome of demeanour, although I argue that Nwoye equally, even more fittingly, exudes that quality. She explains that "it might be problematic to see *demeanour* as power because the subject acts from emotion of love, fraternity, friendship or other, which in general are viewed as weak emotions" (qtd. in Emenyonu 55). This set of "weak emotions," I suggest, is what humanizes Nwoye and constitutes his critique of social norms. My focus on his character addresses the critical gaps in existing scholarship on him while providing more nuanced interpretations of masculinity as well as deepening our appreciation of the text.

As I argue, Achebe positions Nwoye to reflect concerns about what it means to be human in society. Nwoye is interested in the viability of all forms of life. His father victimizes him for

refusing to reproduce traditional masculinity. As a victim of male violence, Nwoye occupies a unique position to contemplate the fate of anyone equally victimized by the norm. Because victimization connects him to the marginalized, the *efulefu*, for instance, he is well-positioned to highlight its operations in Umuofia. Just as he suffers violence in the name of masculine tradition, so too does this class of rejects and outcasts. Nwoye functions as a type of reflector, for not only does he reflect on the Levinisian "face" of the other, but also reflects, that is, reveals, the anomalies of the patriarchal culture and the "relationship between the amorphous character of masculinity and those behaviours of males considered problematic or dysfunctional" (Whitehead 9). A focus on Nwoye unearths the dimensions of human vulnerability.

(En)gendering as Pedagogy

Familial relationships form a central part of any child's development. John Stoltenberg argues that "Beyond being a personal and biographical exposure, the father-son relationship is an element of culture that replicates and reproduces many of society's most fundamental sexual political values" (60). Achebe portrays moments of gendering or "making of men" through the father-son dynamics and the tensions underlying such familial relationships, particularly if the father insists that the son conforms to a narrow model of manhood—or what Butler terms "restrictive frames of masculinist domination" (193). One way Achebe does this gendering is through storytelling: "So Okonkwo encouraged the boys to sit with him in his *obi*, and he told them stories of the land—masculine stories of violence and bloodshed" (42). Custom implicitly requires the father to regulate and enforce gender. Achebe uses Okonkwo to dramatize the disciplinary power of gender while showing that "competition, fear, and renunciation" usually characterize the relationship between father and son (Bergman 71). Michael Kimmel and Michael Messner explain that men are not born gendered but instead, they become gendered

through their participation in social life: “men make themselves, actively constructing their masculinities within a social and historical context” (2). Social institutions are instrumental in the construction of gender identity. The family is one of such formative institutions that socializes the child into the gender order, where it acquires a notion of difference existing between boys and girls. Within this order, the child comes to understand that there is a structure of hierarchy and privilege. That child soon learns about the reproductive and social distinctions between men and women.

Parents provide children with cultural scripts that mediate behaviours, practices, and relations in the social order. They also serve as the repositories, conduits, transmitters of such scripts and double as the regulators. Cultural scripts encompass visual, linguistic, and corporeal cues, codes, and gestures governing “the norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined” (Butler 23). These scripts equip the child with a set of vocabulary and frames of reference to apprehend what boyhood or girlhood entails, how they might begin to construct masculine or feminine identity, even reconstruct it, should the need be. The family transmits what is recognized to be gender-appropriate behaviour and that it does through various instructional, prohibitive, and corrective regimes. Sara Ahmed notes that “The family is” after all “where the child is cultivated” (48). The cultivated child must perform gender following the heterosexual norm. It cannot risk misrecognition because of the penalties that society attaches to cultural intelligibility, such as stigmatization, disinheritance, and alienation. As Connell writes, gender deviance attracts not approval but sanction (77). Of course, there are moments of negotiation, contestation, and resistance because the child is not utterly passive but active in some way throughout the gendering process.

Vision and Carelessness

In *Time and the Other*, Emmanuel Levinas reminds us that we can never escape the relation of the other—our proximity to the "face." He asserts, "we are surrounded by beings and things with which we maintain relationships. Through sight, touch, sympathy, and cooperative work, we are with others" (42). We are already always living with/in otherness. Levinas decries the self's propensity to act in overly autonomous ways that authorize indifference towards another's oppression. He objects to postures of rationality or "responsibility" that orchestrate the domination and abjection of others because, for him, "responsibility is initially *a for the Other*" that is primary to an inter-human relationship (96, original emphasis). In the same breath, he warns that "subjectivity is not for itself; it is, once again, initially for the other" (96). Levinas underscores the need for us to recognize vulnerability and be responsible for one another. There exists an "I" in the other, and it is this "I" as otherness that demands our responsibility. The "I" is the one for whom we are responsible, to whom we are subject. Levinasian ethics requires that responsibility for the other should never be conditional. Notions of reward or reciprocity should not ground our responsibility (111). Levinas, in short, advocates receptivity to the other.

In "The Truth of Fiction," Achebe writes that we should be sensitive in our relationship with others. Imaginative identification entails receptiveness and opens the pathways for human connections. Anyone who cannot "get under the skin of another human being and see the world through eyes other than his own" is indifferent and insensitive (149). The capacity to see with the other's eyes, to identify, even if imaginatively, with the suffering of fellow human beings, is what Martha Nussbaum labels moral vision, a way of seeing the "particulars" of reality. For her, perception is essential in forging interrelationships. Apathy to each other is a kind of moral failing, which Nussbaum describes as "obtuseness" or the "refusal of vision" (148 & 156). For

her part, Sandra Laugier avers the value of moral perception, claiming that those who lack it cannot see "the ordinary" amongst us.[37] That incapability or unwillingness to see the ordinary, she also refers to as negligence. Negligence manifests as a "contempt for ordinary forms of life." It expresses carelessness and a refusal to acknowledge the domestic, the female, the undervalued, and the neglected—those people living on the margins of society (208). Like obtuseness, carelessness functions as a perceptual deficit because it defines "what we are unable to see, but is right before our eyes" (211). Therefore, Laugier comments: "We have to learn how to see, how to pay attention, or be considerate" (263). Attentiveness to the other illustrates an ethic of care, a vital element of relationality. Achebe, Nussbaum, Butler, and Laugier consider vulnerability as part of what makes us human: ethics orients their vision of relationality.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe portrays Nwoye to draw attention to the abjection of the other. Nwoye often perceives what could easily pass "unnoticed." He remembers the stories his mother tells him because they dramatize precariousness: "Sky withheld rain for seven years, until crops withered and the dead could not be buried because the hoes broke on the stony Earth. At last vulture was sent to plead with Sky, and to soften his heart with a song of the suffering of the sons of men" (43). For him, such stories underscore the entanglement of all lives and not the dehumanization of the other. Nwoye recognizes the other's pain, and he allows himself to be acted upon by otherness. In the following section, I examine how he problematizes what it means to be a man.

[37] Laugier discusses this in detail in "Politics of Vulnerability and Responsibility" (2016).

Troubling Masculinity

Nwoye is presented as a source of trouble to his father the first time we encounter him in *Things Fall Apart*. When Achebe introduces him, he mentions that Nwoye is only twelve years old but is "already causing his father great anxiety for his incipient laziness" and adds that "[a]t any rate, that was how it looked to his father" (11). This additional statement comes across as contradictory. Although Achebe seeks to clarify what followed next, it shows that a contrary viewpoint on Nwoye might exist. The questions arising from these conflicting statements are: is Nwoye lazy? Could we read his laziness as something else? Might it be his way of disrupting activity as a norm? I read Achebe's descriptions of Nwoye as rhetorical. This, I suggest, is a deliberate narrative strategy on his part, which he deploys rather compellingly to stress the importance of a balance of stories.[38] Bearing this in mind, we can then appreciate the point Achebe is making, that is, Nwoye only appears lazy in Okonkwo's eyes.

Achebe provides more context by inserting "at any rate" and "how it looked" in his description of Nwoye's laziness. This gives us a chance to assess Nwoye outside Okonkwo's gaze. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the phrase "at any rate" is used to introduce "uncertainty, doubt, hesitation, possibility" (N.p.). It also indicates that what one has just said might be incorrect or unclear in some way. Based on these definitions, we might posit that Achebe is telling us that Nwoye is not lazy. "At any rate" denotes the possible negation of the prior statement about Nwoye's laziness. What Okonkwo views as laziness, the discerning reader might interpret it differently. I suggest that we read the laziness Okonkwo attributes to Nwoye as the latter's opposition to the idealization of hard work. Remarkably, Nwoye's laziness would

[38] See Achebe, *Home and Exile.*

prefigure his dissatisfaction with Okonkwo's normative ethos. We should note that Okonkwo is consumed by hard work because he does not want to be "a failure like Unoka" (3). He associates work with success and laziness with failure.

Work is crucial to the sustenance of society. It has economic value and provides a means by which we assign value as well as value people. Similarly, it defines a person's identity because one is deemed responsible if they are working. Work is associated with productivity and laziness stalls productivity. The irresponsible individual is one who either refuses to work or works against the benefit of the family and society. Such an individual comes across as unproductive, worthless, exactly like Unoka, because he cannot add any value to society. Moreover, work entails strength, endurance, and (self) mastery. For men, it functions as an activity for individual and collective affirmation, a means to exercise, establish, and perform manliness. By providing a man with ways to define himself, be recognized among his fellow men, and be distinguished from—that other category—woman, work makes it possible for him to reiterate and, in the process, assert his masculinity. As a critical factor in forming male subjectivity, work relies on some technologies of power. Recalling Michel Foucault's theorization on power[39] as discrete and ubiquitous, work operates as a disciplinary activity, a technology of the self, and a mechanism of power. By its structure, it underwrites power relations and, at the same time, is underwritten by such relations. Work can function as a mode of subjectivation: the worker is subject to and subjected by the processes underlying productivity. One is necessarily bound to work, which then becomes a principle (a norm) one

[39] See, Dreyfus and Rabinow, *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 1982.

must live by. We cannot discount the value of work since human survival in the present capitalist system depends mostly on it. Yet, it is relevant that we stress its link with gender norms.

In this regard, the adjectival "incipient" Achebe uses to qualify Nwoye's "laziness" needs consideration. Perhaps Nwoye has never been a lazy person because "incipient" means "budding" or "developing." Why would Achebe, then, inform us that Nwoye's laziness is just beginning if it has been there all along? Another point we can advance might be that Nwoye is only starting to realize that fear can cause someone to become dominated and consumed by work so that work itself constitutes the core of their identity: "[Okonkwo's] whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness" (Achebe 11). In other words, work overdetermines and objectifies the person such that they find value in nothing else unless it is related to work. Nwoye is no stranger to that fear and the objectification that accompanies hard work, having seen fear dominate his father and transform him into a compulsive workaholic: "It was deeper and more intimate than the fear of evil and capricious gods and of magic, the fear of the forest, and of the forces of nature, malevolent, red in tooth and claw" (11). He has also seen fear transform his father into someone who loathes leisure and is brashly dismissive of others who exhibit a different ethos to work: "And so Okonkwo was ruled by one passion—to hate everything that his father Unoka had loved. One of those things was gentleness and another was idleness" (11). Okonkwo, after all, is "always uncomfortable sitting around for days waiting for a feast or getting over it. He would be very much happier working on his farm" (30). Nwoye eschews such hard work and the conditions that organize his identity around it.

We need to appreciate the context where Achebe describes Nwoye's laziness in the passage. Before Achebe tells us about Nwoye, he gives us a portrait of Okonkwo's hypermasculinity. In that passage, Okonkwo is said to be ruled by fear, and he, in turn, instils

fear in his household by ruling them "with a heavy hand." The heavy hand here operates as a synecdoche for violence. He is even haunted by a greater fear, that is, "the fear of himself," so he ensures that his entire family members also live "in perpetual fear" (11). This fear imprisons Okonkwo, causing him to despise "gentleness" and "idleness." He translates his fear into work, allowing it to consume his being. It is not surprising that he works hard to disavow that which he detests—leisure and passivity. That fear expresses itself through his mentality of rule and control of his family. Nwoye seems hesitant to reproduce this and the norm of productivity. He also does not want to be "dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness" (11). He would not define himself primarily in terms of compulsive work; instead, he exhibits laziness to undermine the work ethic his father espouses. Still incipient, his laziness threatens the foundations of the paternal legacy and Okonkwo's valorization of success. Therefore, Nwoye articulates laziness to subvert normative masculinity.

Another instance might seem to undercut the reliability of Okonkwo's view of Nwoye's laziness. The hints of incredulity, exemplified by "at any rate" and "how it looked," conveyed by Achebe also appear in the passage where Okonkwo threatens to "stamp out the disquieting signs of laziness which he thought he already saw in him" (26). Okonkwo sees Nwoye's laziness as gentleness and idleness—features he resents Unoka for embodying. The verb "thought" introduces a tension to its companion verb "saw," a tension between what Okonkwo thinks or thought (cognitive) and what he sees or saw (perceptual), between the image in (his) mind and the image in (his) sight. This tension causes us to query the accuracy of his viewpoint. Could we accept what Okonkwo *thinks* he sees (in Nwoye) as definite and reliable? Achebe tells us that he has little patience for logic or dialogue, and he rarely indulges in careful consideration of issues. To Okonkwo, Nwoye's mastery of yam farming is more important than his well-being:

[Okonkwo] sought to correct him by constant nagging and beating. And so Nwoye was developing into a sad-faced youth" (11). How can we rely on what he thinks of or how he sees his son? The "thought" also indicates a one-sided "view" of Nwoye, coming directly, if not blinkered, from Okonkwo's eyes.

Achebe tells us that Okonkwo knows "inwardly" that Nwoye is "still too young to understand fully the difficult art of preparing seed-yams" (26). Yam is "an exacting king" to work with, but Okonkwo desires to mould his son to "work" like a man. In short, he "would sooner strangle" Nwoye if he "cannot hold up his head in the gathering of the clan" (26). If his son fails to perpetuate masculine industry, that is: "Yam stood for manliness" (26). To fail in this respect is to bring dishonour to his clan, which Okonkwo cannot accept. Achebe writes that Okonkwo is disinclined to contemplation—a man of action rather than thought—how, then, can we trust what he *thinks* of his son whose selfhood he is trying not to *see*—to efface, in the name of work and honour? Okonkwo obsesses over honour, how to gain and retain it, much to his detriment and that of his family. He strives to endear himself further to the community and seizes every occasion to re-establish his standing as a great man among his peers because he wants to be judged "by the work of his hands" (21). He, therefore, despises Nwoye's lack of industry.

Masculinity as Feigning

Achebe deploys Nwoye in one of the most salient scenes portraying masculinity as a "growing into," a "feigning." In the Butlerian sense, masculinity operates as fiction and fabrication. We know Okonkwo wants "Nwoye to grow into a tough young man capable of ruling his father's household" (42). Masculinity becomes an identity that one is compelled to "grow into," or one assumes and enacts according to the norm. Okonkwo suggests that a man must be not only tough but also be able to manage the paternal legacy—"the father's household" (42). If masculinity is

growing into (a persona/a position), it can also entail a growing out of (the persona/the position). To "grow into" suggests that Nwoye must become a particular type of man, one that is tough and able to "control his women-folk" (42). Simply put, he must grow into a man who believes that "it was right to be masculine and to be violent" (42), an image valorized by Okonkwo. But becoming that man also suggests other alternative masculinities from which Nwoye could choose or *grow into*, without compulsion. Perhaps he desires to become tough in different ways that do not employ or validate violence.

That passage in the novel recalls the observation Stoltenberg makes about masculinity being an ethical construction. For Stoltenberg, we construct masculinity "through our acts, through the things we choose to do or not do, through the acts we choose that are 'male' things we do" (85). His comment underlines the relationship between choice and action, between doing and not doing. It suggests that masculinity is neither fixed in time nor space and being a *doing*, masculinity can also be undone by the acts we choose to do or not do. Its *undoing* lies in the very negation our actions underwrite. As such, gender is how the dominant culture defines it and how we perform it to affirm our sense of self in the world. For Nwoye, performing masculinity is about relationality. At first, he performs it to earn his father's validation since masculinity "must be validated by other men, in its reality as actual or potential violence, and certified by recognition of membership of the group of 'real men'" (Bourdieu 52). He knows that Okonkwo wants him to be tough and prosperous, to demonstrate that he can rule his family, so he begins to construct an identity reflecting his father's desire, since the real man must be able "to rule his women and his children (and especially his women)" (Achebe 42). The emphasis on "especially his women" is striking because it indicates polarities—a binary that positions men as superior and the dominant, and women as inferior and the dominated. Insofar as masculinity is about male

power, to be a man invariably implies having the capacity to dominate fellow men and women. In other words, women are to be ruled, and men must make the ruling. Mark the verb "rule" in the above quote.

Okonkwo is impelled by the desire to "conquer and subdue." For him, a man is a potential ruler; in short, any real man must be a ruler of people, at least of his household. Doing or being otherwise meant that one is "not really a man," but a coward, a woman, an *agbala*—an old woman. It is no surprise that Okonkwo calls a man who "had no titles" a woman (21). He strives to instill this ethos—the disregard for "less successful men"—in Nwoye. He aims to gender him to see himself as a man who can proclaim that "especially these days when young men are afraid of hard work. I am not afraid of work" (17); a future ruler of men and women. This explains why Okonkwo declares that "[n]o matter how prosperous, a man who cannot rule his women and children was not really a man" (42). If Nwoye desires to be a real man (especially in his father's eyes), he must conceive of relationality in binary terms: the man who conquers and subdues and the one who is conquered and subdued. In other words, he must learn to dominate *his* women. A successful man is anyone who has mastered the art of controlling men and women. As hooks writes, "Patriarchal masculinity teaches men that their sense of self and identity, their reason for being, resides in their capacity to dominate others" (70). Therefore, Nwoye decides to construct that persona by doing "one of those difficult and masculine tasks in the home, like splitting wood, or pounding food," and "grumbling aloud about women and their troubles" (Achebe 42). To further bolster his persona, he shuns his mother's hearth, a space of domesticity, a domain of traditional femininity, and stops associating with anything to do with women. Instead, he spends time in his father's *obi,* a male space, a site of masculine authority.

The *obi* occupies a central position in Igbo traditional architectural discourse. It is cultural and symbolic. As a meeting house, Igbo men use it to entertain their guests. It also functions as an altar, where the patriarch houses his god—*chi*. Nwoye's rejection of femininity is significant because it inaugurates his assimilation into the male culture. This act instantiates what Bourdieu argues is the relational dimension of masculinity, as always being "constructed in front of and for other men and against femininity, in a kind of *fear* of the female, firstly in oneself" (53). Nwoye simulates the appearance of a man in control of others, dominating women, if need be, with a similar "heavy hand" since violence is part of the repertoire of dominance. As expected, his performance delights his father (Achebe 42). In his father's *obi*, Okonkwo regales Nwoye with "masculine stories of violence and bloodshed" and "tribal wars" (42 and 43). Violence and bloodshed operate as signifiers of manliness. In the preceding scene, we see how Okonkwo enlists the tools of narratives to represent a particular ideological view, the worldview of conquest and a "warlike clan" (137). He aims to cultivate in Nwoye the habitus required to live in a masculine world.

Stoltenberg comments that "Beyond being a personal and biographical exposure, the father-son relationship is an element of culture that replicates and reproduces many of society's most fundamental sexual political values" (60). By elaborating on violence and bloodshed, Okonkwo wants to masculinize Nwoye and socialize him into the warlike clan. Gendering takes place in a context, so it makes sense that Okonkwo would retail stories promoting warrior ideals, whereas his wife would transmit stories of "femininity." The gendering of narratives and the narratives of gendering form part of that socialization process Bourdieu terms the "psychosocial inculcation" (195). The stories Okonkwo tells are supposed to imbue Nwoye with courage and prowess, but we can see that the virtues he personifies feed off his fear of being a coward. His

display of courage masks the stubborn fear that mortally haunts him—the fear of him appearing weak or no better than his father (Achebe 49). Bourdieu's point is relevant here where he notes that "What is called 'courage' is thus often rooted in a kind of cowardice" (52). One could argue that performance is a trap, and it has its limits because people construct it. Nwoye's version aims to satisfy masculine norms and protect himself from further abuse by his father. He projects a persona that is simply all pretence, a beguiling act because he is only *feigning* masculinity.

If we replace the verb "feign" with such phrasal verbs as "to invent" and "to indulge" oneself, then the pretence that is masculinity becomes even more evident and more undeniable. Because we construct masculinity, it is charged with tensions. Connell tells us that "gender arrangements are in fact always changing, as human practice creates new situations and as structures develop crisis tendencies" (10). This also speaks to the fact that masculinity is situational and contingent upon practices within a context. Connell writes, "gender difference is not something that simply exists; it is something that happens, and must be made to happen; something, also, that can be unmade, altered, made less important" (14) Nwoye's construction and deconstruction of masculinity support Connell's observations. The internal conflict he experiences in feigning masculinity is symptomatic of the crisis surrounding the practices of masculinity. His resistance to adhering to rigid social norms exacerbates the crisis tendencies of gender identity. The conflict within Nwoye arises because he recognizes that he is not true to himself; his attempt to uphold a false persona, to feign normative masculinity, contradicts his receptive character. He is anything but ignorant of the consequences of growing into the kind of man his father valorizes. He knows that practising any model of dominant masculinity carries severe implications because it entraps men. Nwoye's performances also support Butler's argument that there is no substance to gender, and it is only by repetitive embodied acts that

gender comes to cohere and signify. Although gender norms mediate and circumscribe how we present masculine or feminine identity, we can choose not to perform or reinstate such models. This recalls what Connell explains as the need to make gender difference less important, or Butler terms the resignification of norms.

It is subversive if one chooses not to express the proper or culturally valorized models of masculinity. Doing so would amount to undermining the structures of male hegemony. To appreciate the conflict that Nwoye faces in rejecting the norm, we can look at three incidents, which I identify as characteristic of the contradictions within masculinity. My analysis of these instances will deepen our understanding of masculinity as a construct. The first instance tells us that "On receiving such a message through a younger brother or sister, Nwoye would feign annoyance and grumble aloud about women and their troubles" (42). The second reveals that "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" (42-43). The final instance says: "And so he feigned that he no longer cared for women's stories. And when he did this he saw that his father was pleased, and no longer rebuked him or beat him" (43). The word "feign" appears twice in those passages, calling attention to its significance. What is implied in the first incident is that Nwoye is not annoyed; he is only putting on a show—precisely, for his undiscerning father. It is an act, sheer performance. The outcome is that his show affects Okonkwo, causing him to be happy (42). In this way, he becomes the child that fulfils his happiness-duty to his parents.[40]

Beyond indulging his father, one could argue that Nwoye is happy to help resolve "women's troubles." He expresses annoyance to conceal his true feelings because he understands

[40] See Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, 2010.

that doing otherwise will attract his father's wrath. Regarding the second incident, we can identify the dialectic between what Nwoye *knew* and what he *preferred*. Although he knows that his father expects him to be masculine—of course, he knows this based on the prevailing patriarchal tradition—he still likes the non-masculine, the domain of femininity. This incident suggests that if Nwoye were to choose, he would prefer narratives affirming relationality to those extolling conquest without coercion or threat. It also implies that he likes and is attracted to the female space, as this is congenial to his receptivity. In the third incident, "feigned" is paired off with "cared for" to highlight affective links between act/activity and emotion; the "prefer/ence" preceding the incident is accentuated by the fact that Nwoye can only care for women's stories to the degree that he will not suffer rebuke or beating. If not, he will have to feign unconcern. What is most striking about the feigning is that it prefigures Nwoye's ethical investments outside male hegemony. If feign signifies a shallow, false attitude, care, in contrast, reflects something deep and real, an attachment. In this way, we can tell with whom Nwoye's heart lies, where his empathy is. He no longer cares for women's stories because he is forced to, against his own volition; he still cares because he is used to caring for them.

Whereas more positive affective words such as "care" and "love" are used to describe Nwoye's preference for the stories told by his mother, a less affective but cognitive word—"know"—is employed for the ones his father shares with him. Thus, he feigns to be annoyed by women, not caring for their stories, he still prefers and shows a liking for such stories. This demonstrates that Nwoye can hardly extract himself from the world of imagination and storytelling. This world nurtures his receptivity and provides him with a frame to better appreciate relationality over the "prosthetic reality" normative masculinity promises (Bhabha 57). Nwoye's feigning provokes us to think: if masculinity is part of human nature, a trait

intrinsic to anatomy, as essentialist thinkers would argue, why must one feign it? We can discern from the text that Nwoye's feigning functions as "the 'taking up' of an enunciative position" and "the assumption of a social gender" (Bhabha 58). Even more than that, the act of feigning, I contend, serves a practical purpose for Nwoye. It is not merely deception for its sake, but rather a survival tactic that he only employs to escape abuse and victimization and stay alive, even if momentarily. This is a tactic, as Michel de Certeau would describe it.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life,* de Certeau writes that a tactic "must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of proprietary powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprise in them. It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse" (37). Even as Nwoye feigns, Okonkwo fails to see that he is only *doing* masculinity to please him: "And when he did this he saw that his father was pleased, and no longer rebuked him or beat him" (Achebe 43). Okonkwo fails to see because he is fixated on valorizing normative masculinity: "[Nwoye] knew that his father wanted him to be a man" (43). Consequently, he cannot see that his son is in some way evading the disciplinary power of norms. Butler points out that gender is a fraught construction open to resignifications. The doer can rearticulate masculinity and femininity in ways transformative and less prohibitive. Nwoye's feigning reveals that social practice, however, embodied, can be reconstructed or equally deconstructed. He cites manliness ("grumbling about women") to mask his real feelings ("cared for women's stories"), all the while beguiling his father. It is hard work to keep up the persona of what one is not—to keep feigning in the service of normative masculinity. After all, having to play along can be tiring and frustrating. Eventually, Nwoye realizes that the type of man he desires to be is different from the image his father has cultivated for him. He does not wish to be a replica of his father nor promote violence in any form.

We can see from the preceding that Nwoye's receptivity is not a weakness but a strength. Achebe himself points out that any "person who is insensitive to the suffering of his fellows is that way because he lacks the imaginative power to get under the skin of another human being" (149). Getting under the skin of another person is what Nwoye appears to do well. There is a particular scene where he attunes himself to the precariousness of the other. In one of the folk tales Ikemefuna relates to him, Nwoye remembers the old woman Nwayieke, "who lived near the udala tree," and when the children start singing about Nnadi, he wonders "why he should live all by himself, eating and cooking" (28). Nwayieke and Nnadi figure as the other—representing solitary figures living on the margins, yet Nwoye allows himself to think about their conditions, identifying with their precariousness. He can position himself to the other. Consider that throughout the narrative, Nwoye never dwells on and rarely recalls the masculine stories his father tells him. He cannot ignore human precariousness, even as he feigns interest in his father's "stories of violence and bloodshed." He recognizes that such stories sever rather than foster human interconnection. As a result, he refuses to perpetuate male hegemony.

Achebe does not create moments where Nwoye can introspect about "men's stories." Yet, he gives detail and context to the women's stories—"the kind of story that Nwoye loved" (43). I argue that Achebe emphasizes these stories to demonstrate that Nwoye is invested in stories about "the suffering of the sons of men" (43). In doing so, he illuminates Nwoye's receptivity to the other. Furthermore, Nwoye's investment in stories about human suffering prefigures his conversion to Christianity. Towards the end of the novel, he is captivated by the narrative of "brothers who sat in darkness and in fear" (118). Irele observes that "Nwoye thus stands as a symbolic negation for his father, the living denial of all that Okonkwo stands for" (13). Nwoye reinforces patriarchal negation in a pivotal moment when Obierika runs into him and asks him

why he has joined the missionaries. Nwoye replies, "I am one of them" (115). The declaration illustrates his willingness to accept new forms of relationality that acknowledge and include the twins, *efulefu*, and *osu*. To his credit, despite his victimization at the hands of his father, Nwoye does not lapse into violence or self-destruction (as it befalls his father). Instead, he displays the strength of character in the face of paternal abuse.

Identifying with Precariousness

In this section, I examine Nwoye's ultimate repudiation of the way of the clan. His receptiveness towards the other reflects his capacity to extend his imagination outside of his inner world. By imagining his *self* in connection with the *other*, he can think with concern about their life. C.L. Innes describes this as his "imaginative sympathy" (22), which, I claim, is an aspect of Nwoye's receptivity. We can further appreciate Nwoye's character when read in opposition to the social logic at work in Umuofia. The logic undergirds the conditions under which the community grants or denies a clan member access to its body politics. This logic forestalls any recognition of collective dignity for all the members of Umuofia. It establishes a symbolic norm by which Umuofia assigns values of prestige and privilege to its members. It gives value to who or what should matter, who is considered a "real (hu)man" and not. The *agbala,* for instance. Nwoye recognizes this social logic; he also recognizes that certain lives matter more than others; that his community does not even consider some lives, such as twins. He repudiates the logic informing Umuofia's differentiation of its citizens on categories such as the caste system. His eventual disidentification with his clansmen is motivated by such logic, their unwillingness to recognize the dignity of all lives and accommodate even the twins as part of its community.

Who better than Nwoye understands violence in its protean form? Violence (the community) invoked in the name of the father? Or enunciated on behalf of the clan? He

recognizes what suffering is about, what it means for one to suffer, to suffer because of one's father's fears or ideals. Achebe employs Nwoye to critique the mechanisms of dehumanization at work in Umuofia. As someone victimized by his father's "savage blows," Nwoye attunes himself to connect with the infant cry, the individuals living in isolation, and the brothers sitting in darkness. He is never hesitant to acknowledge the other, allowing himself to be "carried away to the distant scene in the sky" (43). All this he does to emphasize a shared human vulnerability. In *Frames of War*, Butler comments that "one's life is also the life of others, even as this life is distinct and must be distinct" (14). Even as one's life is bounded and marked off by other lives, it also cannot escape its "nearness" or "adjacency" to the other. Following Butler's thoughts, one can appreciate Nwoye's relationship with Ikemefuna, which provides us with another example of receptivity and precariousness. Ikemefuna's story is a tragic one. His father had taken part in the murder of a daughter of Umuofia. The village averts war with its neighbour by offering Ikemefuna "and a virgin girl as compensation" to Umuofia (Achebe 10). Ikemefuna must suffer in his father's name—"atone for the murder of Udo's wife" (22), on behalf of the whole village. Ejected from his village, he is transformed into a scapegoat, a sacrificial lamb, a proxy for communal crime, which he has no hand in. Expendable, though, he ends up in Okonkwo's care. Soon enough, he and Nwoye become close.

Nwoye knows the kind of household Ikemefuna has been brought into, a family where suffering is normalized: "But his wives and children were not as strong, and so they suffered" (11). He recognizes that Ikemefuna has no one to alleviate his fears, loneliness, and sadness, having been estranged from his family: "Once or twice [Ikemefuna] had tired to run away, but he did not know where to begin" (22). What is telling in this situation is Nwoye's capacity to attend to vulnerability by offering Ikemefuna much emotional support. He understands the suffering

that comes with being displaced from one's home and the trauma a displaced individual would have to confront: "[Ikemefuna] thought of his mother and his three-year-old sister and wept bitterly" (22). Similarly, he understands Ikemefuna's precariousness—his "moments of sadness and depression" (28). For one whose lot is mainly suffering, his solidarity with Ikemefuna is remarkable: "But he and Nwoye had become so attached that such moments became less frequent and less poignant" (28). Given his victimization, Nwoye is expected to be uncaring, even miserly with compassion, but he identifies with the human in pain. Perhaps he is aware that there is much for him to learn from even an outsider. Nevertheless, he seems not to feel threatened because Ikemefuna is more dexterous than he, or that Ikemefuna might cause him to lose favour in his own father's sight. Instead, they become almost inseparable.

Nel Noddings argues that "the receptive mode is at the heart of human existence" (54). Nwoye's encounter with the crying infant in the bush equally illustrates his receptivity to alterity. We can read the encounter as an ethical address that "affects" his psyche so that its resonance still lingers, even after that singular encounter with otherness has long passed. Interestingly enough, we can see the stickiness of *affect*, how it sticks[41] on his mind and later manifests bodily[42] during the killing of Ikemefuna, transforming Nwoye into a more *feeling* subject. Nwoye seems to have a premonition on the day his father left with Ikemefuna. He breaks into tears when he overhears his father and a group of elders planning to take Ikemefuna home. Okonkwo beats him heavily when he finds Nwoye crying. The beating does not stop Nwoye

[41] In her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed elaborates on sticky feelings: "Feelings may stick to some objects, and slide over others" (8).

[42]Gilles Deleuze asserts that "A body affects other bodies, or is affected by other bodies; it is this capacity for affecting and being affected that also defines a body in its individuality" (see "Ethology: Spinoza and Us." In *Incorporations*, 625-33.

from crying throughout that day. It is pertinent to describe the sensations Nwoye feels on the day of Ikemefuna's death:

> As soon as his father walked in, that night, Nwoye knew Ikemefuna had been killed, and something seemed to give way inside him, like a snapping of a tightened bow. He did not cry. He just hung limp. He had had the same kind of feeling not too long ago, during the last harvest season [….] It was after such a day at the farm during the last harvest that Nwoye had felt for the first time a snapping inside him like the one he now felt. (49)

The "snapping" is caused by "the voice of an infant crying in the thick forest" (49). His encounter with the twins thrown away in the forest causes the first snapping Nwoye feels, but Ikemefuna's death triggers the second snapping at the hands of Okonkwo. What Nwoye feels on his way from the farm is intense and uncanny: "A vague chill had descended on him, and his head had seemed to swell, like a solitary walker at night who passes an evil spirit on the way. Then something had given way inside him. It descended on him again, this feeling, when his father walked in that night after killing Ikemefuna" (49).

According to Levinas, we cannot reduce the face to human features because it is "not a character within a context," but a "signification without context" (86). The face constitutes the conditions for otherness. It is what is other, although Levinas clarifies that it could include the weak, the poor, the widow, and the orphan (83). Note that in Umuofia, twins are considered abject, and they represent radical alterity. There is already a norm of what is the "paradigmatically human," so the twins are forbidden to *live* and relegated to a "state of deadness" (Butler 143 and 33). Their "humanity" appears doubtful and can be understood only within discourses of abnormality, considering that the community has rendered them unreal at their birth. Thus dehumanized, the twins cannot be grieved. They "were," after all, never real or human, to begin with. As Obeirika ponders, "What crimes had they committed?" (Achebe 100).

Permitting the twins to die outside the community, in the Evil Forest precisely, Umuofia absolves itself of violence to human life. As Butler would argue, "if violence is done against those who are unreal, then from the perspective of violence, it fails to injure or negate those lives since those lives are already negated" (33). It is this hegemonic logic, the violence of social norms that Nwoye revolts against and so he turns his back on his clan. He abhors their way, unable to accept the logic categorizing people into subhuman—the *efulefu*, the *osu*, and the *unreal*. The dehumanization of the other, that is. Some readers may argue that Nwoye's action amount to a betrayal of his community: he abandons his people for "the new religion" (Achebe 137), joining the colonial forces decimating his society. That argument has some merits, although I would add that his rejection of his clan is possible only because the conditions of being human in Umuofia do not appeal to him anymore. He feels his culture could no longer accept his kind nor satisfy his yearnings to include all types of people. Had Umuofia, perhaps, accounted for the alienated, the marginalized, and the dehumanized—"such undesirable people" (124)—Nwoye would not have felt compelled to become a Christian missionary. Likewise, had Okonkwo not been violent and abusive, Nwoye might not have repudiated the paternal legacy, an action Okonkwo will read as an abomination: "You have all seen the great abomination of your brother. Now he is no longer my son or your brother. I will only have a son who is a man, who will hold his head up among my people. If any one of you prefers to be a woman, let him follow Nwoye now while I am alive so that I can curse him" (138). Given Okonkwo's rage and propensity for violence, it comes as little surprise then that when Obierika runs into Nwoye and asks about him, Nwoye replies, "I don't know. He is not my father" (115). Nwoye's terse reply completes the rupture between father and son, epitomizing his break with his clansmen's culture—the paternal legacy.

Conclusion

This chapter considered the depictions of masculinity in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* to locate Nwoye, a somewhat overlooked character in the critical studies on Achebe's classic novel, as an example of receptivity. In analyzing his repudiation of paternal legacy, I demonstrated that Nwoye understands masculinity as a capacious category. This understanding signals the possibility of reworking masculinity along ethical lines cognizant of a common human vulnerability. Nwoye privileges human kinship over social positions since, for him, these tend to perpetuate discrimination, abjection, and the dissolution of other lives. For that reason, Achebe deploys him to embody alternative masculinity while interrogating and challenging preconceptions of what it means to be a man. Furthermore, by characterizing Nwoye as subversive, Achebe aims to illuminate how our lives are already socially entangled. Nwoye's power to imagine, introspect, and acknowledge otherness, including such solitary figures as Nwayieke who lives under the *udala* tree and Nnadi who lives all by himself reflect expressions of receptivity.

Chapter Three

"A freedom to be, to do": Orthodoxy in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

Introduction

In Chapter 2, I analyzed *Things Fall Apart* and argued that Achebe created a character whose receptivity defines his relations with the other to deemphasize the value placed on gender identity. Nwoye exemplifies this model of receptivity. He recognizes the other's pain and refuses to perpetuate male hegemony, prompting readers to rethink what it means to be a man. In this chapter, I discuss how Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie revisits the trope of father-son relationship in *Purple Hibiscus*, elucidating Achebe's vision of receptivity and underscoring human vulnerability. Achebe and Adichie set their novels in different historical contexts—*Things Fall Apart* takes place in pre-colonial/colonial Nigeria, while *Purple Hibiscus* in postcolonial Nigeria—yet they both dramatize the "falling apart" of the family and the nation. Their texts reveal the conflicts between the patriarch and his progeny against the backdrop of political degeneration. Like Nwoye, Jaja evinces receptivity towards the other's pain. Achebe and Adichie position both sons to identify with normative manhood and finally renounce it to their fathers' outrage. The sons reject the norm and subvert the reproduction of the paternal legacy. Therefore, I examine Adichie's portrayal of receptivity to argue that she positions Jaja to challenge the "disciplinary" masculinity personified by his father. Similarly, Adichie characterizes Father Amadi as receptive to demystify orthodox piety. Father Amadi is the young Catholic priest whom Jaja and his sister Kambili meet in Nsukka.

Purple Hibiscus tells the story of the Achike family and the tensions, misery, violence, and tragedy surrounding its daily reality. The family includes Eugene, his wife Beatrice, and their two children Jaja and Kambili. The fifteen-year-old female protagonist Kambili narrates the story, showing the oppression each family member suffers at the hands of Eugene, the patriarch, and the oppression Nigerians face during the military rule. The actions traverse Enugu, Abba, and Nsukka (southeastern Nigeria), and involve other characters, mainly related to the Achike family. The novel explores such themes as male violence, repression, rebellion, freedom, corruption, and religious bigotry. It also treats the themes of love, hope, resilience, sacrifice, and transformation. Adichie follows in the footsteps of other African writers by deploying the archetypes of the self-made Igbo man and the Big Man,[43] epitomized, in particular, by Okonkwo in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, to construct the character of Eugene in *Purple Hibiscus*. Critics have hailed Adichie as a literary heir to Achebe (Eisenberg 8) and some have uncovered parallels between her and Achebe's novels.[44] Others have addressed questions about the female voice and agency (Strechle 2008; Andrade 2011; Toivanen 2013; Taoua 2018), female bodies (Stobie 2012; Hillman 2019), faith and religion (Stobie 2010; Chennells 2012), nationhood (Cooper 2008; Uwakweh 2010), and childhood (Ouma 2009; Coker 2017) in *Purple Hibiscus*. I examine

[43] See the trope of the Big Man in the following African fiction: Chief Nanga in Achebe's *A Man of the People*, Babamukuru in Tsitsi Dangaremba's *Nervous Conditions*, Koomsom in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, and Cash Daddy in Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*. For current anthropological scholarship on the Big Man, see Daniel Jordan Smith's *To Be a Man is Not a One-Day Job,* 2017, where he examines the social reality of the Big Man in southeastern Nigeria and shows how money is central to the constructions of manhood among Igbo men. Steven Pierce also explores the 'Big Man' phenomenon in relation to the system of corruption in Nigeria, showing how Nigerian civilian and military governors exemplify the 'Big Man' paradigms. See, *Moral Economies of Corruption*, 2016, pp. 122 and 162. See also, Jean-Pascal Daloz's "'Big Men' in Sub-Saharan Africa" in *Comparative Sociology*, 2003.

[44] See Akpome 2017; Vanzanten 2015; Dyer 2015, Olushola 2015; Eisenberg 2013; Tunca 2012; Kurtz 2012; Whittaker 2011; Hewett 2005.

Adichie's characterizations of Jaja and Father Amadi to deepen our appreciation of her call for gender redefinition.

Adichie's Discourse on Masculinity

Many female critics emphasize the centrality of gender to African women's writing, [45] unearthing the forms of female invisibility and women's marginalization in society. As Harriet Bradley notes, "Although the term 'gender' is indeed a construct, it refers to aspects of our lives that are all too real" (5). African female novelists like Adichie use their art to narrate women's lived experiences and reimagine womanhood—or what it means to be a woman. In doing so, they project the female voice, subjectivity, and agency onto the public sphere. Adichie's redefinition of femininity shows that masculinity, too, can be reconceived to promote rather than hinder women's selfhood. In her famous *TEDx Talk* titled "We Should All Be Feminists," Adichie stresses the danger normative understandings of gender pose to human flourishing: "We do a great disservice to boys on how we raise them; we stifle the humanity of boys. We define masculinity in a very narrow way, masculinity becomes this hard, small cage and we put boys inside the cage" (N.p.). She urges us to "raise our daughters differently. We must also raise our sons differently" (N.p.). Her talk affirms her belief in the human capacity for change. *Purple Hibiscus* promotes her gender vision by narrating the repercussions of raising boys and girls in a way that intensifies social injustice. It also depicts the contestations of masculinity, attesting to its performative character. Adichie's feminist vision on masculinity evokes bell hooks's exposition on what she calls feminist masculinity. According to hooks

[45] See Newell 2017; Zulfiqar 2016; Andrade 2011; Okonjo-Ogunyemi and Allan 2009; Odamtten 2007; Azodo and Eke 2007; Emenyonu 2004; Arndt 2002; Cazenave 2000; Nfah-Abbenyi 1997, Okonjo-Ogunyemi 1996; Adebayo 1996; Stratton 1994; Chukwuma 1994; Davies and Graves 1986; Taiwo 1984.

> What is and was needed is a vision of masculinity where self-esteem and self-love of one's unique being forms the basis of identity. Cultures of domination attack self-esteem, replacing it with a notion that we derive our sense of being from dominion over another. Patriarchal masculinity teaches men that their sense of self and identity, their reason for being, resides in their capacity to dominate others. To change this males must critique and challenge male domination of the planet, of less powerful men, of women and children. But they must also have a clear vision of what feminist masculinity looks like. (70)

Throughout these sections, I analyze how Adichie deploys Jaja and Father Amadi to undermine hegemonic male structures. Michel Foucault's ideas on discipline will orient my analysis of Eugene's articulation of "orthodox masculinity," which I conceptualize as a form of masculine identity rooted in ideals of piety. Eugene illustrates the connection between gender and religion; how they interweave with and bolster each other to reinscribe norms that frustrate human flourishing. I contend that his notion of piety is a perversion of Catholic orthodoxy, which represses his capacity to become fully receptive to his family and father's precariousness. Piety anchors Eugene's worldview, his vision of intersubjectivity, and his understanding of what his roles as a husband, father, and son entail. His pursuit of piety culminates in his embrace of disciplinary masculinity. That is, a strain of masculinity that depends on the use of discipline to coerce, constrain, control, and punish individuals who undermine orthodoxy. Eugene personifies disciplinary masculinity because he appears to perceive relationality through the lens of regulation, surveillance, and the subjugation of others. He deploys discipline to transform his family into objects of control—pliable, "docile bodies." He is a man who must "have a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes" (Foucault 138). In my analysis of his character, I view orthodox and disciplinary masculine identities as interconnected and mutually constitutive. They represent normative variants that work to revitalize male hegemony. In what follows, I examine how Eugene performs orthodoxy and the repercussions of his performance on his family.

Piety and Orthodoxy

> But then, Papa was different. I wished that Mama would not compare him with Mr. Ezeudu, with anybody; it lowered him, soiled him. (20)

These are Kambili's thoughts when her mother comes into her room and reveals that she is pregnant. The conversation between mother and daughter soon switches to Papa (Eugene). Beatrice praises her husband for resisting his clansmen's promptings "to have children with someone else" due to her miscarriages (20). She compares him to Mr. Ezeudu, who married a second wife; the comparison, in Kambili's mind, seems to be an insult because she knows that Mr. Ezeudu may also be a Big Man, but he is not anything like her father. Comparing both men demeans and demystifies what her father represents: a quintessence of piety. From the text, we barely know why Kambili perceives Mr. Ezeudu as second-rate. Adichie herself provides no evidence to support Kambili's insinuation about his apparent "inferiority," so we can only rely on another source, that is, Father Benedict, who admonishes his congregation to "Look at Brother Eugene. He could have chosen to be like other Big Men in this country, and he could have decided to sit at home and do nothing after the coup to make sure the government did not threaten his business. But no, he used the *Standard* to speak the truth even though it meant the paper lost advertising. Brother Eugene spoke out for freedom" (5).

To Father Benedict, Eugene typifies the virtues Catholic orthodoxy promotes. He serves as an archetype of courage, uprightness, and altruism—a standard-bearer. By contrasting him with the "other Big Men," Father Benedict shows that Eugene is a man of distinction. Therefore, the whole congregation should not only "look at" but also "look to" Eugene. Father Benedict sermonizes on the sacrifices Eugene has made in the name of social progress, on behalf of the nation. His sermon is salient for three reasons. First, it operates as an exaltation countersigning

Eugene's singularity in the private and public milieux. Second, the sermon issues from God's earthly emissary, thus re-enacting exaltation in the name of the Father. Third, the exaltation occurs in a place as hallowed as the church, thereby lending deific validation. This "canonization" of Eugene makes it difficult for Kambili not to see him as different—after all, Father Benedict "usually referred to the pope, Papa, and Jesus—in that order" (4). We are not surprised that this is how she sees her father. Doubtless, Eugene is courageous in the national domain, deploying journalism to fight for democracy and social justice. He is critical of authoritarian leadership, though, ironically, he reproduces it at home. The public esteems him for his courage to stand for freedom, even conferring an award on him. However, his wife and children live in fear of the limits of freedom he prescribes for them. His newspaper, the *Standard*, is "the only paper that dares to tell the truth" (136). Yet Eugene disciplines his wife so that she can only "[speak] the way a bird eats, in small amounts" and his children, too, so that they are "always so quiet" (21). Adichie shows the disconnect between his politics and religion; she also shows the contradictions between piety as ideal and piety as practice.

Eugene is not remarkably unlike the dictator he usually criticizes in the editorials of the *Standard.* Leena Toivanen argues that he "is a profoundly complex character: on the one hand, he is an aggressive home tyrant who causes mental and physical injuries to his family; on the other hand, he is also officially a 'good Christian,' a successful businessman, and the fearless owner of a magazine that criticizes the flaws of the military government" (106-7). There is no doubt that Eugene is a complex character, but his obsession with piety predisposes him to violate his family. He has a complicated relationship with the truth. Consider how everybody but his sister identifies him with truth, as a speaker of truth, brave enough to fight for it, despite the possibility of his incarceration by the government. But we may also consider how he "quarrels

with the truths that he does not like" (Adichie 95). It appears that he cannot abide anyone who refuses to "idolize" him. He never steps foot in his father's house or attempts to greet him anytime he spends Christmas in the village. He forbids Papa-Nnukwu from entering his residence, only dispatching his driver if he needs to send money to him. Although he allows his children to visit their grandfather, he threatens to punish them if he finds out that they have eaten in Papa-Nnukwu's home. Kambili narrates, "Papa had offered to build him a house, buy him a car, and hire him a driver, as long as he converted and threw away the *chi* in the thatch shrine in his yard" (61). Eugene often ties his generosity to certain conditions, offering to buy his sister a car on the condition that she and her husband "join the Knights of St. John" (95). Kambili recounts seeing him screaming at an old man: "What is Anikwenwa doing in my house? What is a worshipper of idols doing in my house? Leave my house!" (70).

Some context is relevant here. Eugene and his family like spending Christmas in Abba. Indigenes there usually stop by at his "four-story white majesty" to "say welcome," knowing that he is "always prepared to feed the whole village at Christmas" (55, 56). Anikwenwa also visits him. However, Eugene finds his presence revolting because Anikwenwa, like Papa-Nnukwu, practises traditional religion. His antipathy towards the otherness exemplified by Anikwenwa and Papa-Nnukwu causes us to ponder: What defines the human for Eugene? Perhaps, the human is not a pagan since Western ontology shapes his understanding of the human.[46] Ifeoma already describes him as "a colonial product" (13). Corinne Sandwith points out that Eugene represents

[46] See Drexler-Dreis and Justaert. *Beyond the Doctrine of Man*. See, also, McKittrick, *Sylvia Winter: On Being Human as Praxis*; Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks.*

> an atavistic figure of the colonial potentate whose deployment of corrective violence is sanctioned by the church. In the disciplining practices carried out in his home, the aversion to the body, and the punishment of sin, Eugene continues the colonial project of civility, the enforcement of decorum, and the grooming of the native. Like the colonial potentate, too, Eugene conceives of his violent acts in terms of the burden of enlightenment. (103)

If we follow such colonialist logic, the pagan is less than human—or simply put, subhuman. That logic presupposes that Eugene would privilege the pursuit of piety over considerations of human suffering involving the Godless, as his encounters with Anikwenwa and Papa-Nnukwu show. It is worth noting that Anikwenwa remains calm throughout the altercation. In contrast, Eugene appears irate such that "the enraged timber in [his] voice made [Kambili's] fingers cold at the tips" (69-70). Both men appear to stage a symbolic opposition between European and African subjectivities. As Daria Tunca writes, in *Stylistic Approaches to Nigerian Fiction*, "This short incident epitomizes the self-righteousness with which Eugene looks down upon his ancestral culture" (32). Eugene views traditional religion as impure, abhorrent, but Anikwenwa dismisses him as "a fly blindly following a corpse into the grave" (Adichie 70). His death at the end of the novel barely surprises us.

Disciplining Subjectivity

In *Discipline and Punish,* Michel Foucault emphasizes the nexus between discipline and detail. He explains that detail is essential for a disciplined man. Yet detail is not merely crucial for its sake, but for the use to which we put it. It is part of the mechanism of power and is integral to the operations of power. Foucault also explains how detail is a norm of Christian traditions. Schedule, observance, and ritual are dependent on "the discipline of the minute" and "[f]or the

disciplined man, as for the true believer, no detail is unimportant, but not so much for the meaning that it conceals within it as for the hold it provides for the power that wishes to wield it" (140). According to Kambili, Eugene "likes order. It showed even in the schedules themselves" (Adichie 23). His obsession with order and control illustrates the utility of discipline in its production of "subjected and practised bodies, 'docile' bodies" (Foucault 138). Eugene designs a timetable of activities for each of his children. There is time allocated for study, siesta, family, eating, prayer, sleep, which he revises often. Time is also set aside for washing of uniform. Janet Duran says,

> The atmosphere of mindless repetition of rules, the sense that one is not free to question, and the overshadowing presence of Eugene, even when he is physically absent from the home, all have a great deal to do with the difficulties that Kambili and her brother Jaja have. Theirs is a form of confinement that goes beyond the physical—they fear for the safety and health of the unborn baby that their mother carries even before they know anything about the situation. (50)

Kambili even "wondered when Papa would draw up a schedule for the baby, my new brother, if he would do it right after the baby was born or wait until it was a toddler" (Adichie 23). That is the extent to which Eugene schematizes his family's life to discipline it into an "object and target of power" (Foucault 136). He obsesses about mastering bodies, time, space, and activity involving his wife and children. Similarly, he is fixated on the littlest detail around him, in the church, at home. He is a man of discipline, who disciplines—*punishes*—his emotions, his family, and whomever he likes, as he deems fit. He exerts control of his household, their bodies, their minds. He believes in and demands total submission from his wife and children and from his father and any other elder who attempts to challenge him. In sum, he epitomizes Foucault's image of the disciplined man. In *Purple Hibiscus,* Eugene recognizes that discipline and detail

are crucial to his normalization project, reproducing pious bodies and installing an order of piety in his home. He disciplines his wife and their children to transform them into manipulable bodies—subjects of docility. Viewed this way, his investments in religion constitute piety as a "disciplinary tool." The novel delineates several instances illustrating how Eugene disciplines his family, but the following incident is salient for our discussion. When Eugene and his family arrive at Father Benedict's parish residence, Beatrice complains of ill-health and wishes not to accompany him.

> "Let me stay in the car and wait, *biko*," Mama said, leaning against the Mercedes Benz. "I feel vomit in my throat."
>
> Papa turned to stare at her. I held my breath. It seemed a long moment, but it might have been only seconds.
>
> "Are you sure you want to stay in the car?" Papa asked.
>
> Mama was looking down; her hands were placed on her belly, to hold the wrapper from untying itself or to keep her bread and tea breakfast down. "My body does not feel right," she mumbled.
>
> "I asked if you were sure you wanted to stay in the car?"
>
> Mama looked up. "I'll come with you. It's really not that bad."
>
> Papa's face did not change. (29)

The above scene dramatizes an instance of discipline at work. Eugene's stare and words convey the threat of violence, although symbolic violence. Beatrice pleads with him—*biko*, the Igbo word for "please"—asking him to understand her delicate condition. Eugene ignores her, caring little that she has suffered miscarriages in the past and construing her reluctance to go with him as impiety. His questions are rhetorical, but they subject Beatrice into complying with his

objective. In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Judith Butler highlights the "performative and allocutory action that [the] 'I' performs" (66). In the communicative space, Eugene mobilizes the "I" to foreground the self's authority over the other. In the "scene of address" involving Beatrice and him, he installs himself as the subject who is not responsible for the other yet demands that the other give an account of herself. The former question (couched in the pronominal "you") opens a space for the other to equivocate. In contrast, the second question (articulated by the pronominal "I") closes the space and compels action from the other.

However, the action Eugene desires from Beatrice is the obligation of the other to comply and remain passive to the ego of the Self. His intention in asking her about her sureness "are you sure/if you were sure" two times is not to help her resolve her dilemma but nullify her voice and agency. Accordingly, the second question invokes "a doing." Beatrice stalls in her response, almost equivocating. She stalls only long enough since the dynamic in the dialogue—or instead, interrogation—has changed from a relation of mutuality to that of a power dynamic marked by asymmetry. She cannot resist the force of his speech because it requires not vacillation, not equivocation, but that she fulfils the perlocutionary act of attending to Eugene's desire for compliance. Beatrice cannot do otherwise because Eugene would punish her for attempting to subvert his desire. As we can see, her body may not feel right, but he disciplines it into feeling right ("not bad"). Consequently, she mortifies her body and prevents the "vomit," thereby reaffirming his authority. Her reply to his last question reflects her subjugation, completing her self-mortification: "It's really not that bad" (29). Although Beatrice has finally resigned to his authority, Eugene goes ahead to punish her when they get home later that day: Punishment is crucial for securing discipline (and perfection).

Recall that Eugene has earlier complained about the visiting young priest who "was singing in the sermon like a Godless leader of one of those Pentecostal churches" and whose kind would "bring trouble to the church" (29). It is not surprising that he understands his wife's action as a "trouble to the church," transgressive, an errancy—the weakness of the flesh, which he must discipline in the name of the Father. Eugene's obsession with piety undergirds his methodical approach as an oblate striving for perfection, "to make a perfect cross." Perfection is a symbol of piety, which orthodox and disciplinary masculinities work to legitimize. Martha Nussbaum criticizes "the absolutist rage for an impossible sort of perfection," which thwarts our capacity to appreciate the "uneven and often unlovely destiny of human beings in the world with humour, tenderness and delight" (16). For Eugene, his pursuit of perfection inhibits his capacity to cherish kinship because he regards perfection as a mandate that he feels obligated by God to fulfill, a mandate his sister rails at: "*O joka!* Eugene has to stop doing God's job. God is big enough to do his own job" (Adichie 95). Eugene remains dogmatic in his stance, undeterred. As he tells his daughter, "[God] expects much from you. He expects perfection" (47). In *Things Fall Apart*, fear consumes Okonkwo—the fear of failure, of being called a woman. In *Purple Hibiscus*, it is piety that consumes Eugene—the fear of impurity, of sin. The pursuit of perfection becomes a haunting for him, such that he works to "perfect" his family into pious "bodies." His children devise a way of speaking with their spirits and eyes to evade his disciplinary power (16 and 30). Kambili and Jaja improvise an "*asusu anya*"— a coded language of their own, a nonverbal means of communicating with each other. In short, a "language of the eyes" (305).

Purple Hibiscus portrays other instances showing Eugene's disciplinary character, but these two incidents would suffice. The first involves his whole family in Kambili's bedroom, while the second is between him and his children. The first incident takes place during the

Eucharist Fast on Sunday morning. Eugene's family has never broken the fast before. However, Kambili asks her mother for Panadol to soothe her menstrual cramps. Beatrice advises her to eat cereals before taking any medication; Jaja serves her some cereals. Eugene comes into the room just when Kambili is almost finished eating and goes into a rage. Beatrice and Jaja try to make him understand that Kambili has cramps, but he turns on them: "Has the devil asked you all to go on errands for him?" The Igbo words burst out of Papa's mouth. "Has the devil built a tent in my house?" He turned to Mama. "You sit there and watch her desecrate the Eucharist Fast, *maka nnidi*?" (102). As Eugene lashes at his family with his belt, he keeps "muttering that the devil would not win" (102).

The second incident happens after his children return from holiday at their aunt's home in Nsukka. He promptly punishes them for "living in the same house as a heathen" (191). He tells Kambili to climb into the tub; when she gets in, he burns her feet with hot water. While doing this, he tells her, "Kambili, you are precious." His voice quavered now, like someone speaking at a funeral, choked with emotion. "You should strive for *perfection*. You should not see sin and walk right into it" (194, emphasis added). Sandwith posits that "In keeping with the Christian colonial logic of the unruly body—source of sin and the site of repression—the forms of domestic discipline in the Achike household center on corporeal repression and punishment" (99). Before the "purification" of her feet with "hot water," Eugene explains to Kambili that punishment is part of piety. But his interpretation of what constitutes sin contradicts what the Bible sanctions; it is also dangerous because it provides him with the justification for enacting violence on his children. As Butler notes, "violence is the act by which a subject seeks to reinstall its mastery and unity" (64). For Eugene, violence is crucial for securing mastery.

Eugene functions as an incarnate of Okonkwo living in postcolonial Nigeria. Both male figures share similar attributes and political and social capital in their respective communities, unlike their fathers, who are "failures" in purely economic terms. Okonkwo and Eugene embody ideals of mastery, industry, and accumulation, representing hegemonic masculinity as well. Each man leans towards inflexibility in his outlook on life, despising the counter-normative ethos his father espouses. They strive to entrench the norm, much to the detriment of their families. They are equally prone to violent behaviours, mobilizing discipline and punishment in the process to subdue their wives and children. Although they attempt to resist the invasive forces of terror that threaten their societies, such as colonialism and military dictatorship, they become forces themselves terrorizing their households. Thus, they reinforce the notion that masculinity is inseparable from violence, constitutive of terror. I now examine how Jaja demonstrates receptivity to destabilize the paternal legacy.

Subverting the Paternal Legacy

In "Daddy's Girls?: Father-Daughter Relations and the Failures of the Postcolonial Nation-State in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Véronique Tadjo's *Loin de mon père*," Toivanen explores the "problematic" father-daughter relationship as symptomatic of the postcolonial/nationalist family drama, arguing that the father-daughter trope operates as "a vehicle for dealing with the failures of the postcolonial nation-state" (102). While Toivanen considers how the daughter undermines the masculinist space, I focus on how Adichie depicts the problematic father-son relationship to signal the urgency of reconceptualizing masculinity. Jean-Michel Rabate explains that "A father is not simply an 'individual,' but mainly a function; paternity is that place from which someone lays down a law, be it the law of sexual difference, the law of the prohibition of incest, or the laws of language" (74). In Lacanian terms, the father

embodies language and culture, incarnating the law and prohibitions. As Nancy Dowd argues, "fatherhood exposes how masculinities confer privilege with a price. Power is defined in a way that ultimately separates men from their children and makes it difficult for care and relationship. This not only harms children; it harms men" (105). Adichie's talk about how gender norms stifle the humanity of boys and girls is relevant here: "We define masculinity in a very narrow way, masculinity becomes this hard, small cage and we put boys inside the cage" (N.p.).

Chielozona Eze comments that "Adichie is more interested in telling stories, especially those of the bodies in pain than in accusing men of having oppressed women" (63). Adichie uses Jaja to render visible the bodies in pain: his mother's body, his sister's body, his own body, even his father's body. Each body is shown to bear the brand of pain inflicted by the patriarch. Eugene's home reinforces Adichie's imagery of the "hard, small cage." Onyemaechi Udumukwu avers that "Eugene is ruled by a sense of fear; that is fear of contamination from what he perceives as pagan values. Accordingly, his perspective is dominated by closure as exemplified in the closed doors, the high walls that barricade the family house both at Enugu and in the village" (197). Susan Strehle buttresses this point: "Indeed, Eugene interprets walls as forms of social and moral discipline designed to tame and domesticate" (107). The closure, that form of morality, arises from his perversion of Catholic orthodoxy, which Jaja revolts against in the end. Adichie traces the conflicts between Jaja and his father, describing how all of this culminates in the son's ultimate disavowal of the paternal legacy. Recall how Achebe deploys Nwoye's character to trouble the patriarch. Adichie likewise mobilizes Jaja to trouble the father. Even more critical, Jaja "is a role model for the future," exemplifying her "vision of transformation in gender terms" (Cooper 127).

Purple Hibiscus opens with a climactic scene of tension presaging the father-son conflict that will truncate family harmony. The tension stems from Jaja's refusal to partake of the communion. He has only just begun to find his voice, to define his idea of selfhood against patrilineal expectations. As the narrative progresses, we realize that he has often merely echoed his father's opinions, only speaking to evade punishment or to ingratiate himself into the niche of patriarchal norms. However, on this Palm Sunday, he confounds Eugene by distancing himself from Catholic orthodoxy. When Eugene queries him why he abstained from the communion, Jaja says, "The wafer gives me bad breath," and then adds, "And the priest keeps touching my mouth and it nauseates me" (6). His blunt responses and vivid linguistic choice verge on irreverence. Even scandalous is that he chooses to rebel on a day of symbolic importance for Christians worldwide, a day of holiness and victory. Kambili's apt reaction underscores the scandal that Jaja has just caused at home; her dismay reflects what Eugene, too, will later feel.

Kambili is also a victim of her father's proclivity for the disciplinary, so she attempts to rein Jaja in, rather telepathically, with her eyes, as is their habit: "I stared at Jaja. Had something come loose in his head? Papa insisted we call it the host because 'host' came close to capturing the essence, the sacredness, of Christ's body. 'Wafer' was too secular, wafer was what one of Papa's factories made" (6). Jaja's use of "wafer" instead of "host" instantiates a refutation of the sacredness of Catholic observances. His replacement of host with wafer desacralizes what is apprehended as hallowed. Kambili becomes afraid that "something" has "come loose in his head." But the something reflects Jaja's awakening; the lucidity of what he must do and whom he would become. He associates orthodoxy with sickness—piety, as practised by his father, generates "bad breath" and "nausea." Orthodoxy exudes a "bad breath" he can no longer stomach. Shunning the touch of hegemony, he asserts his bodily sovereignty and delimits its

boundaries. He would instead the priest desist from "touching [his] mouth" since it might transmit contagion that "nauseates [him]." Jaja cares little about the fact of spiritual death. In the intimidating presence of his father, he remains unapologetic about his irreverence. He has found his voice, even as his sister's "shocked eyes begged him to seal his mouth" (6). Edgar Fred Nabutanyi defines Jaja's action as "a verbalized rejection of his father's abusive authority" (81).

The communion represents "Christ's body." Christ here epitomizes the Master-Signifier in the signifying system of Christianity, for he "bears the signifier of signifiers, the phallus, [and] authorizes language" (Hanzo 35). As the Symbolic Father par excellence, Christ also "presides over the process by which the subject is created" (44). The realm of the Symbolic is where language belongs, where the subject is formed, even differentiated. Jaja appropriates the language of sickness to reframe his understanding of orthodoxy and to reconfigure the space of the home, or what Unifier Dyer describes as "a large prison like cell that echoes the silences of suppressed voices and expressions" (79). To Eugene, his son has committed a sacrilege ("mortal sin") by desecrating "the body of our Lord" (Adichie 6). By disidentifying with the symbol of Christ, Jaja affiliates himself with Godlessness, that is, death. Rejecting the "host" demonstrates that he is willing to die, perhaps in sin. This is what Eugene refuses to accept, to see impiety displace his power over his flesh and blood: "You cannot stop receiving the body of our Lord. It is death, you know that" (6). Jaja replies, "Then I will die" (6). The declaration consolidates his stance against orthodoxy. Death becomes an alternative more bearable and redemptive than the "life-giving" host. By embracing (spiritual) death over life, he renounces paternal interdictions or the Law of the Name-of-the-Father. He stages the ultimate rebellion by choosing death over life, even if it is a symbolic death.

Jaja stays unflinching in his seat throughout this ominous moment and holds his father's gaze, no longer intimidated by it. Eugene finds himself now disoriented by his son's stare. He cannot comprehend what has come upon Jaja, what has empowered him to counter pious authority. The fact that Jaja may have chosen to "fall" from grace disorients him. Eugene looks around the room, seeking answers: "as if searching for proof that something had fallen from the ceiling, something he had never thought would fall" (7). The imagery of "fallen" and "fall" gestures to that of "Things started to fall apart" with which the novel opens, anticipating the literal falling apart of male hegemony. It is tempting to read Nwoye, in *Things Fall Apart*, as a fallen son, as well. He deserts his clansmen to follow the British missionaries, renouncing the paternal legacy. Unable to find any "proof" of the motive behind his son's rebellion, Eugene resorts to what he is often inclined to—violence. He grabs the leather-bound missal and throws it at Jaja. It misses Jaja but cracks the top shelf of the glass *étagère,* bringing down "the finger-sized, ceramic figures of ballet dancers" (7). It is telling that the first object Eugene reaches for is a liturgical book, which he deploys as a weapon against Jaja as if to legitimize the necessity of violence. It is not violence for its sake, he might rationalize, given how he identifies it as essential to maintaining piety. It is violence as unavoidable, a father's violence provoked by a son's transgression. Jaja has transgressed the hierarchical, orthodox order: the priest, Papa, and Christ *(*the transcendental signified). As a result, Eugene feels he requires violence to punish transgression and re-sacralize Christ's body, to restore Jaja into the fold. He then construes violence as more restorative than punitive.

The violence appears to leave no effect on Jaja because he remains calm, unruffled, in his seat, whereas "Papa swayed from side to side" (7). His defiance signals a rupture in familial bond, shattering the "hard, small cage" of masculinity. It is a rupturing of the masculinized

space. The atmosphere is disoriented, as Kambili describes: “The off-white walls with the framed photos of Grandfather were narrowing, bearing down on me. Even the glass dining table was moving towards me” (7). Jaja’s transgressive behaviour disorients the Oedipalized home, leaving in its wake the cracks of what once appeared normal and homogenized. As Kambili realizes: “It was not just the figures that came tumbling down, it was everything” (15). Transgression disorients “everything,” decentring the Oedipal “figure of power” (Deleuze and Guattari, “Introduction” xx). Eugene is disoriented, too, unable to admit that he would be so disempowered: “something he had never thought would fall” (Adichie 7). He stays this way until his wife reminds him that his “tea is getting cold” (8). Jaja’s subversion of Oedipal authority is important for three reasons. First, it demonstrates that orthodoxy can be contested. Second, it shows that by affirming his selfhood he can realign the family dynamics at home. Lastly, it reveals that he has renounced the codes and scripts that make his own repression desirable to him (Deleuze and Guattari xx). Jaja’s defiance epitomizes his renunciation of the father’s law, the “many pieces” of orthodoxy lying on the floor.

Responsibility for the Other

Jaja’s transformation begins not in Enugu—but Nsukka. While living with his parents in Enugu, he has no voice or mind of his own. Like his sister, he is too cowed to assert himself before his father. He speaks most times to echo his father’s thoughts or compliment his opinions, consolidating rather than disrupting male hegemony. When his aunt asks if he wants to visit Nsukka, he replies, “If Papa says it is all right” (97). His reply makes Eugene smile. But Jaja soon realizes his responsibility for the other during the holiday he spends away from home. The following passage where Eugene catches Kambili eating cereal depicts this realization: “You are eating ten minutes before Mass? Ten minutes before Mass?”

> "Her period started and she has cramps—" Mama said.
>
> Jaja cut her short. "I told her to eat corn flakes before she took Panadol,
>
> Papa. I made it for her." (102)

In that passage, Eugene beats his wife and children with a belt, a scene reminiscent of Okonkwo's beating of Ekwefi and Ojiugo in *Things Fall Apart*. Jaja's attempts to step in and protect his sister and mother from his father's violence typify his caring disposition. In another passage, he demonstrates this ethic of care when Eugene queries him and Kambili for returning home later than when he allotted to them; Jaja responds promptly, "I wasted time, it was my fault" (69). Jaja is sensitive to the other's pain, showing sensitivity when he and Kambili visit their ailing grandfather. Conscious of the older man's destitution, he tries to make him feel better. As Janet Ndula remarks, "Papa's staunch adherence to Catholicism victimizes and silences even his father, Papa-Nnukwu, whom he has condemned to the negative side of the good/bad oppositional binary. Frequently referring to him as 'heathen' Papa has severed all family ties with him, including forbidding his children from interacting with him" (36). Jaja refuses to view the other through such a binary—godly/godless; Christian/heathen.

Although his father forbids him from associating with Papa-Nnukwu, Jaja does something radical. When he sees that his grandfather has died at his aunt's home, he gets a wrapper and covers the dead body. Kambili is aghast because she knows that "Papa would be outraged" by that "ungodly" act. She closes her eyes "so that if Papa asked if I had seen Jaja touch the body of a heathen—it seemed more grievous, touching Papa-Nnukwu in death—I could truthfully say no, because I had not seen everything that Jaja did" (184). Finally, she opens her eyes and sees, to her disquiet, Jaja sitting "on the floor, next to Papa-Nnukwu's sheathed frame" (184). Eugene will find out that his father has been living in the same flat as his children.

Incensed, he drives them back home. In Enugu, he tells his wife, “Ifeoma was busy tending to a heathen.” However, Jaja says, “Papa-Nnukwu is dead” (190), challenging his statement because he recognizes that the human life is more important than one’s piety. His statement is emphatic, categorical. It is even significant because he does not say, “Papa-Nnukwu has died.” He speaks of the deceased in the present tense, refusing to see him as a heathen but instead naming him as a human being. He shows that Papa-Nnukwu deserves respect even in death, something that Eugene refuses to acknowledge because he believes that the pagan or heathen is less than human; such thinking informs his declaration: “He has gone to face judgment” (190). Next, Eugene complains, “Ifeoma did not have the sense to call a priest before he died. He might have converted before he died” (190-91). Jaja thinks otherwise and replies, “Maybe he didn’t want to convert.” His reply shocks his father, who blurts, “What did you say? Is that what you have learned from living in the same house as a heathen?” The passage illustrates a highpoint of Jaja’s subversion of masculine authority, his refusal to further the dehumanization of Papa-Nnukwu.

We can trace Jaja’s receptivity to the bonds he forges with his cousins. Similarly, the awareness to redefine his masculinity begins in Nsukka, where his aunt and her children live. The university town plays a crucial role in fostering his receptivity, demonstrating that place shapes how people construct their identity. In the new location, Jaja grows more attuned to the suffering of another. Aunt Ifeoma lives in penurious conditions, though her flat teems with roses, hibiscuses, Ixora, and croton garden. Accustomed to having a room of his own, Jaja finds that he must sleep in the living room with his cousin. The (dis)location, which is what it seems at first, leaves him, and especially Kambili, feeling bewildered because it is “so unlike home, where the high ceilings gave our rooms an airy stillness” (113). Here he is exposed to the kitchen, where he watches his aunt preparing jollof rice until his cousins come home later in the day. Throughout

his holiday in Nsukka, he opens himself to his environment. He goes on errands with his cousins, watches TV after dinner, something his father forbids him from doing at home, and even washes his aunt's car. When he tells his aunt about the schedule he and his sister are supposed to follow, she chides him, "You are on holiday here and it is my house, so you will follow my rules" (124). She understands that he needs a space to blossom and *become* a different kind of man outside orthodoxy. Ndula explains that "Aunty Ifeoma's children, Amaka and Obiora, are allowed to question authority and make decisions for themselves. Such awakening prompts Jaja to reconsider his entrenched commitments which do not in any way reflect his personal preferences" (39).

Kambili emphasizes her brother's receptivity in a scene where he enthuses about the purple hibiscus: "Jaja's eyes shone as he talked about the hibiscuses, as he held them out so I could touch the cold, moist sticks" (197). The incident takes place in Enugu when he brings the rare plant with him from Nsukka, a plant symbolizing defiance and bloom (Ndula 40). As his aunt tells him, "Defiance is like marijuana—it is not a bad thing when it is used right" (Adichie 144). In the same passage, she says, "This is about to bloom," pointing at an Ixora bud. "Another two days and it will open its eyes to the world" (145-46). This moment allows Jaja to connect with the nonhuman other. Until he spends holidays in Enugu, he has never been interested in flowers. But he takes to tending his aunt's garden.

Spatializing Masculinity

Space is one of the mechanisms by which power circulates in Eugene's home. It is how he understands order and discipline; how he defines boundaries and transgressions. He takes control of "spaces" belonging to his wife and children, thereby "striating" their movements and routines, as he does with "time" and bodies. Jaja cannot enter Kambili's room if their father is around;

both children cannot enter their grandfather's compound without their father's permission; their movements are constrained and surveilled in spaces their father has delimited. Space operates as a means through which power can map, codify, differentiate, regulate, and discipline bodies while simultaneously structuring relations and mobilities. In *State, Space, World*, Henri Lefebvre writes that "Space is political. Space is not a scientific object removed from ideology or politics; it has always been political and strategic" (170). Eugene's home functions as the *perfect* locus where his disciplinary power materializes. However, Jaja reconfigures the domestic space, deterritorializing it in his favour.

After he and his sister return from their holiday in Nsukka, he asks his father for the key to his room. Eugene's outrage reveals how much that simple request disconcerts him: "What? What do you want privacy for? To commit a sin against your own body? Is that what you want to do, masturbate?" (Adichie 191-92). What is at stake here is, perhaps, not the key, which of course is mundane, but the prospect of symbolic castration. He ejaculates "What?" in the first and second sentences, showing his shock overlaid with fear of impotence and amplified by his visceral reaction: his "pupils seemed to dart around in the whites of his eyes." It is revealing that such a request could affect him so viscerally. But it does, showing his fear of being de-centred from male hegemony or "castrated." That exchange between father and son points out the tension underlying the desire for regulation and autonomy. Eugene desires to prohibit Jaja's desire for privacy; the key is what makes the object of each desire possible because it also secures desire. It is not a mere object but merely a phallus. Although we tend to associate the phallus with either desire or lack, in this case, it actualizes potency. Indeed, the phallus consummates male power.

Bice Benvenuto and Roger Kennedy argue that "the phallus also signifies the law of symbolic castration for it belongs to the father, the Other who forbids the enjoyment of the

mother-child 'symbiosis'" (178). Before the encounter between father and son, Eugene is the possessor of the phallus, something that Jaja seemingly lacks, having been castrated by disciplinary power. The phallus is what Eugene has, whereas Jaja must live with castration until that moment when he demands his key. Kambili is doubtful whether Jaja would get it because "Papa would never let us lock our doors" (192). Keeping hold of the key is the only way Eugene might prohibit privacy for Jaja, how he knows best to regulate the other's desire within the home space. In other words, he intends to bar Jaja from having unmediated ownership of his body and denying him sovereignty. If "[i]n French jouissance includes the enjoyment of rights and property" (179), as Benvenuto and Kennedy observe, then we could read privacy as characteristic of jouissance, and castration as a form of prohibition.

For Eugene to forbid Jaja full access to his room is to keep him castrated, to interdict against pleasure, as evident in his insinuation about Jaja wanting to indulge in carnal—rather than spiritual—enjoyment: "To commit a sin against your own body? Is that what you want to do, masturbate?" (Adichie 191). By retrieving the key, Jaja hopes to reclaim bodily autonomy. In that way, he revokes his castration. The key offers him a way to "smoothen" the otherwise "striated" space of his father's home, thus enabling spatial autonomy of sorts. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari write that "perhaps we must say that all progress is made by and in striated space, but all becoming occurs in smooth space" (486). Following Deleuze and Guattari, Tauel Harper comments that "Striated space has a resonance with homogeneity, whereas the smooth is constituted by difference and disjuncture" (137). Jaja renounces docility by striving to become agential. He realizes that he can resist the norm threatening to shape him into the image prescribed by his father.

Jaja's first "transgression" happens on Sunday morning after the family returns from Mass. His next transgression occurs during lunch. He violates the disciplinary principle of organizing the configurations of time, space, and activity at home between both incidents. Schedules discipline the body and serve as control instruments, a standard modality of power facilitating "compulsory alignment" of time, space, and body (Foucault 147). Nevertheless, Jaja resists the rhythm of conformity, which operates as a form of subjection. His schedule stipulates that he must stay in his room upstairs and read before lunch. But on this day, he chooses not to conform, as is customary, but remains "in the kitchen the whole time, with Mama and Sisi" (Adichie 11). He embraces the "feminized" space on the same day that he repudiates orthodoxy. His identification with Beatrice and Sisi in the kitchen, this archetypal domestic space, is pertinent because he now recognizes that area can also be gendered. He spends hours in the kitchen, unperturbed about his father's reaction.

Jaja's decision to remain downstairs with the women rather than spending time upstairs is subversive. Doing so, he reclaims control of time and space from his father, determined as he is to go anywhere or do things his way. He disrupts the established temporal-spatial domestic regime of the father. He carries this mindset to the dining room, where he finds his father already seated at the table. The atmosphere is still charged with his "undisciplined" behaviour, and its sour aftertaste lingers in Kambili's mouth: "I was certain the soup was good, but I did not taste it, could not taste it. My tongue felt like paper" (Adichie 12). The whole family is drinking cashew juice, one of Eugene's latest products. Each time his factories produce something new, they send a sample product to his home. As is the custom, every family member must compliment the product. Beatrice and Kambili gush about the juice, their nervous gestures belying the enthusiasm they express in Eugene's presence. The juice "tasted watery" and "watery yellow,

like urine" to Kambili, but she tries to "seem eager" for Jaja's sake in the hope that "Papa might forget that he had not yet punished Jaja" (12). Jaja remains indifferent to all that is happening around him, quiet until his father, "staring pointedly at [him]," asks, "Jaja, have you not shared a drink with us, *gbo*? Have you no words in your mouth?" (13). Jaja only speaks when his father asks him a second time: "Have you nothing to say, *gbo*, Jaja?" Jaja tells him, "*Mba*, there are no words in my mouth" (13-14).

By telling his father that he has "no words," he means that he is unwilling to indulge or compliment him. He has no desire to make him happy, for the only words he can utter merely convey his dissension. It is revealing that Eugene must ask him twice before he responds. When he does respond, it is all in the declarative (but negative), despite that Eugene speaks in the interrogative. Jaja does not prevaricate but instead establishes the autonomy of the "I"—the speaking subject. He asserts his personhood, refusing to play along like his mother and sister. The defiance not only unsettles Eugene but also puts "fear in his eyes" (13) because he is long used to having his way and having sycophants grovel before him. People venerate him, and he is used to intimidating others. Now his son has challenged him, causing him to be afraid. As is their practice, none of them is supposed to leave the dining table before Eugene says the prayer after meals. Yet Jaja flouts the norm, exiting the table even before his father does. If Jaja talked back to his father in the first transgression, he walked out on him this time, finalizing a break with the paternal legacy. Kambili expresses alarm: "He was also doing what we never did" and because Jaja's rebellion is unexpected: "This had never happened before in my entire life, never" (14). The incident shocks her as much as it does her father and mother. Everyone but Eugene lives in fear until this moment of rupture.

Considering that they have all been living in oppression the whole time, Kambili begins to anticipate trouble: “The compound walls would crumble, I was sure, and squash the frangipani trees. The sky would cave in” (14). Her father will have to punish Jaja for disobedience. But nothing happens. Instead, Eugene is found “pant[ing]” and later that evening, Jaja “did not come down for dinner” (15). He avoids the family routine, further destabilizing masculine authority and space. He bars his father from entering his room by pushing the study desk behind the door. He defies him not because he wishes to be hostile or delinquent but because he realizes that he needs to disrupt, even subvert, orthodoxy. It is defiance motivated by one’s desire to liberate the self (and others) from the proscriptions of hegemony, the desire for freedom. By defying the law’s figurehead, Jaja demonstrates empathy with the stifled voices and wounded bodies at home. He assumes his responsibility to protect his mother and sister from further male violence. That explains the sense of guilt he expresses to his sister: “I should have taken care of Mama. Look how Obiora balances Ifeoma’s family on his head, and I am older than he is. I should have taken care of Mama” (289). In his view, Obiora is a caring male who shows his caring disposition towards his mother, a widow struggling to raise her three children amid hardship. Karla Elliott remarks that caring masculinities include “masculine identities that exclude domination and embrace the affective, relational, emotional, and interdependent qualities of care” (13). Jaja strives to emulate an ethic of care, recognizing that he must protect his mother from her abuser. John Stoltenberg stresses the effect of battery on women, particularly when it is carried out by “the person she thought she trusted, the person she’s trying desperately to love” (200). He adds:

> What battery does is to beat down a woman’s will to freedom. What battery does is to make her think that safety and survival lie in a smaller and smaller life. What battery does is to make her afraid of speaking her own mind, of making any assertion of her human

> rights. What battery does is to make her so confused, so unable to figure out a logical relationship between the punishment she receives and whatever she did to deserve it, that she loses faith in her own mental faculties. (200)

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Beatrice is the battered wife, "wracked with more than pain" (Stoltenberg 200). Jaja cannot bear to have the law throw his mother into prison because he knows it may destroy her. He cannot stand by and watch her suffer more for her crime. Therefore, he takes it upon himself to protect her from juridical power, claiming "he had used rat poison, that he put it in Papa's tea" (Adichie 291). We can understand Jaja claiming culpability for his father's death because he felt impotent over the death of his unborn sibling, whom he and Kambili had vowed to protect from paternal violence, but they could not (23). Perhaps there is an opportunity for him to redeem himself: he exchanges freedom for unfreedom, sacrificing the freedom he long craves, so his mother could have hers. The act affirms his ethic of receptiveness: he must decentre himself for the flourishing of the other. By defying ego, Jaja "honour[s] connection to other human life" (Stoltenberg 204). Moreover, he articulates for himself "a different kind of freedom…a freedom to be, to do" (Adichie 16). It is a freedom that he hopes would protect his mother from the state.

Eze's comment on Jaja's sacrifice is relevant here: "Jaja's messianic stance reflects his awareness of masculine complicity in male violence. To redeem himself, he gives himself up to protect and make up for the toll on his mother and sister" (63). Jaja takes the fall for his mother. Eugene must have perceived him as "fallen" after their row over the communion and the key. The son who rebels against orthodox authority can only fall from grace. Some readers may argue that Jaja's action displaces female agency and renders his mother invisible and powerless. By claiming responsibility for her crime, he denies her agency and silences her voice while relegating her to the margins (where the patriarchal culture always wants women). This passage

calls into question the scope of Adichie's vision of female and the tension embedded within that scene. I would argue that Jaja's action neither decentres Beatrice from the orbit of (her) experience nor negates Adichie's feminist ethic in her novel because he desires to rescue his mother from continued oppression and the brutality she has long suffered.

Jaja recognizes his complicity in the structures of patriarchy and violence. As a result, he demonstrates responsibility for the other by liberating his mother and his sister from orthodoxy and the state's disciplinary power. The responsibility instantiates Stoltenberg's call for new ethical selfhood grounded in a moral agency: "[l]iving as a man of conscience means there is something different about how you deal with your knowledge of the pain you may have caused [others]" (178). Considering that male hegemony is tied to ethical abandon, the capacity of men to negate other men's and women's will to freedom, Stoltenberg advocates an ethical accountability that actualizes: "a radical new identity, a self that knows who it is in relation to reality [gender norms] and who it is in relation to truth [choice and change]" (197). Jaja's willingness to face punishment for a crime his mother committed exemplifies radical masculinity.

Troubling Orthodoxy

In this concluding section, I consider Adichie's presentation of Father Amadi's receptivity towards others. Like Aunty Ifeoma and her children, Father Amadi plays a significant role in Jaja's transformation. Although the young Catholic priest spends more time with Kambili than with Jaja, his presence in Nsukka provides Jaja with different intimations of piety and masculinity. Toivanen notes that "Father Amadi, with his tender and supportive attitude, becomes a new masculine authority for Kambili" (111). I argue that Adichie positions Father Amadi to demystify Catholic orthodoxy and articulate other modes of piety. The priest embraces

and celebrates otherness, and his recognition of the other contradicts Eugene's ideals. Nabutanyi comments that "The contrast between Eugene's religious violence and Father Amadi's life-giving Catholicism arise out of Eugene's association with Father Benedict and the St. Gregory's priest's brand of Catholicism that not only demands blind obedience but also endorses violence as a way of disciplining and raising children" (83). Eugene's seeming obtuseness contrasts with Father Amadi's imaginative identification with human suffering.

The first time Eugene sees Father Amadi conducting Mass at St. Agnes, he declares: "That young priest, singing in the sermon like a Godless leader of one of these Pentecostal churches that spring up everywhere like mushrooms. People like him bring trouble to the church. We must remember to pray for him" (29). He dismisses him as "that young priest" rather than address him by name, and so identifies him with something wild and unwanted, with Godlessness, with trouble. He denigrates the priest, questioning the religious authority bestowed on him. Father Amadi may signal trouble with his "unpriestly" attitude to the world by threatening the norm of piety that Eugene idealizes. Lily G. N. Mabura writes that "Father Amadi's threat, however, is not that easily done away with and despite Eugene's efforts, it lodges itself in Kambili and Jaja and can be said to contribute to their ensuing revolt" (213). On Pentecost Sunday, Father Amadi conducts the "Mass in a red robe that seemed too short for him" (Adichie 28). As if that were not "scandalous" enough, he sings an Igbo song halfway through his sermon. Father Benedict disapproves of his congregation singing Igbo songs because he regards them as "native songs" (4). The reaction to Father Amadi's song is instant, as Kambili narrates: "The congregation drew in a collective breath, some sighed, some had their mouths in a big O" (28). Eugene refuses to join the rest of the congregation in singing.

Mabura insinuates that "one may deduce that Father Amadi is actually anti-Catholic, at least in regard to the brand of Catholicism introduced in Igboland" (213). I contend that Father Amadi shows that one can be a Catholic and remain empathetic with the other. He challenges orthodoxy by practising a form of piety that is inclusive of all of humanity. He interacts with all kinds of people, regardless of age, religion, ability, or gender, and entertains no misgivings about their personhood. He plays football with children from poor neighbourhoods, and feels comfortable anywhere he finds himself, even making jokes with Jaja's cousins. Kambili describes watching him and the boys during a water break: "He brought peeled oranges and water wrapped into tight cone shapes in plastic bags from his car. They all settled down on the grass to eat the oranges and I watched Father Amadi laugh loudly with his head thrown back, leaning to rest his elbows on the grass. I wondered if the boys felt the same way I did with him, that they were all he could see" (178).

Father Amadi also supports Aunty Ifeoma and her children. When he hears that she wants to bring her father to live with her in Nsukka and she has no fuel in her car, Father Amadi offers to get her some, "We have some emergency fuel reserves in the chaplain" (149). It is tempting to view Father Amadi's closeness with Kambili as inappropriate, given the age difference between both. However, another way to look at this scenario is to consider that he inspired Kambili to recover her voice and assert her subjectivity. Throughout the novel, she comes off as reticent and has trouble asserting herself. This is understandable because of the effect that her father's violence has on her. She is not only reticent but fearful; although she tries to mask it, her aunt, cousins, and Father Amadi can see through her. There is a passage in the story where he confides in her that her aunt is worried about her. Kambili is drawn to him because he exemplifies a different model of masculinity from her father, who is prone to violence. Thus, by creating a

space for Kambili to accept her vulnerability, Father Amadi inspires her to break the silence and hesitancy that characterize her personhood. Indeed, his affability helps Kambili to overcome her prejudice towards others, as she recalls: "Father Amadi included Jaja and me in the conversation, asking us questions. I knew the questions were meant for both of us because he used the plural 'you,' *unu*, rather than the singular, *gi*, yet I remained silent, grateful for Jaja's answers. He asked us where we went to school, what subjects we liked, if we played any sports" (136). After that conversation with Kambili, Father Amadi visits again and takes her out to run and play football.

As Ogaga Okuyade explains, "Through Father Amadi she discovers a new brand of Catholicism, which is not mechanical and dictatorial but lithe, which is a direct contrast to the one her father and Father Benedict practice—one which makes room for dissent" (252). By modelling biblical examples of receptivity, he evokes the figure of Jesus whom the church leaders were known to criticize for his relationships with sinners (Luke 7:34). He demonstrates that religion is a mode of being responsible for the other. He neither judges nor discriminates against anyone. Unlike Eugene, who finds paganism revolting, Father Amadi refuses to interpret sin in a rigid and sanctimonious manner. When Kambili tells him, "I sleep in the same house as my grandfather. He is a heathen," Father Amadi discourages her from such thinking:

> "Why do you say that?"
>
> "It is a sin."
>
> "Why is it a sin?"
>
> I stared at him. I felt that he had missed a line in his scripture. "I don't know."
>
> "Your father told you that."
>
> I looked away, out of the window. I would not implicate Papa, since Father Amadi

obviously disagreed. (Adichie 175).

Father Amadi criticizes neither Kambili nor Eugene. He understands that her father's orthodoxy colours her view of her grandfather. He empathizes with rather than condemn Papa-Nnukwu. On one occasion, he stops by and visits Papa-Nnukwu at Ifeoma's home. Kambili describes his reaction when Ifeoma mentions that her father is recovering well. "Our God is faithful, Ifeoma," he said happily, as though Papa-Nnukwu were his own relative (163-64). Father Amadi's unorthodox approach to the practice of piety causes the hair-stylist Mama Joe to ask Kambili: "Did you say he is a *fada*?" When Kambili says yes, she asks again, "A real Catholic *fada*?" (237). Father Amadi's receptivity enables him to "see Christ" in the faces of others. His unorthodoxy facilitates his reconstruction of pious subjectivity.

Conclusion

This chapter examined Adichie's elaboration of the father-son relationship in *Purple Hibiscus*, as depicted in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, to illuminate the conflicts surrounding orthodoxy. Adichie presents Eugene's character to emphasize the perils of orthodox and disciplinary masculinities. Like his literary forebear Okonkwo, Eugene identifies masculinity with control, punishment, and violence. His obsession with Catholic ideals of piety undergirds his notion of masculinity. In contrast, Jaja dramatizes Adichie's narrative of gender redefinition. He and Father Amadi demonstrate receptivity towards the other, acknowledging a common human vulnerability. As a result, they undermine the version of Catholic orthodoxy practised by Eugene. Both characters show that we can reconstruct masculinity to make it more expansive and less prohibitive, especially for the flourishing of every human being.

Chapter Four

"A real man": Tradition in Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows*

Introduction

Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows* dramatizes the reality of sexual minorities in Nigeria. In Chapters 2 and 3, I focused on how heteronormative characters expressed receptivity to reconstruct masculinity in *Things Fall Apart* and *Purple Hibiscus.* This chapter examines receptivity and homosexuality. Dibia portrays Adrian, the homosexual protagonist, to contest gender norms and highlight how a homophobic culture can impede the flourishing of lives. I argue that Dibia subverts stereotypes to reframe what it means to be a man in Nigeria. This strategy enables him to critique heterosexuality and its denigration of the other—the homosexual. I begin the chapter by exploring how most Nigerian novels tend to avoid discussing queer sexuality. I then underline the significance of *Walking with Shadows* as a counternarrative on gender and sexuality. I show how Dibia's treatment of homosexual characters extends Chris Dunton's call for complex representations of queerness in African literature. Dunton argues that African writers pathologize homosexuality, treating it as a problem (422). Dibia reveals that the "problem" rests with society and not with homosexuality. In relocating the queer figure, he treats his characters with empathy, shunning "monothematic" characterization. Adrian is presented as sensitive and complicated so that readers can relate to his struggles. Lastly, I discuss how Dibia's depiction of Adaobi and Chike demonstrates that receptivity can enhance queer flourishing.

Against Tradition

In *Difference and Pathology*, Sander L. Gilman investigates discourses of pathology and human sexuality. He writes that "Sexual norms become modes of control. Thus, deviation, either in the nature of the sexual act or in its perceived purpose, becomes 'disease' or its theological equivalent, 'sin.' The analogy between the 'ill' and the 'perverse' is ubiquitous" (25). Many Nigerians reiterate such normative discourses to frame sexuality within binary understandings. It is not uncommon to hear people utter phrases such as "it is not our tradition" and "it is against tradition" during conversations about sexuality. They mobilize these phrases to stall the discussions from going any further. As a result, people deploy tradition as a buffer against any intimation or reference to homosexuality. On 18 June 2018, J.O.J. Nwachukwu Agbada, professor of African literature at Imo State University, chided the current generation of Nigerian writers for writing against "tradition."[47] Two novels with "many instances of sex" had clinched the highest literary prizes in Nigeria, and he appeared disturbed by this. He dismissed the books for dealing with the subject of sexuality since their "themes […] are against our traditions and laws" (Udenwe N.p.). Implicit in his critique is that the new generation of writers has failed to promote values and practices that are uniquely African. In other words, there is a traditional way of being sexual or doing sexuality in Africa, which the writers fail to reinforce in their narratives. The implication is African culture has not experienced any internal change and so has remained unalterable despite the centuries of contacts it has had with other cultures across the world.

[47] The term "tradition" is contestable because the sexual ideology Agbada refers to as tradition is part of the colonial legacy from Western Christianity. Colonialism unarguably destroyed much of traditional African cosmology. As a result, to invoke tradition is to appeal to a colonialist religious discourse and its regulation of sexuality. The two novels in question are probably Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* and Abubakar Adam Ibrahim's *Season of Crimsons Blossoms*, which won the Nigeria Prize for Literature in 2012 and 2016, respectively.

Judging from Agbada's comment, colonialism hardly reconfigured the cultural landscapes of Africa. Arguments that posit African sexuality as traditionally heterosexual are not new (Hoad 2007; Epprecht 2004; Sigamoney and Epprecht 2013; Chitando and Mateveke 2017). Neither is such anxiety over homosexuality in Africa, as Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi, another African scholar, had commented. She remarked that some scholars at the 17th Annual African Literature Association Conference in 1991 in New Orleans, Louisiana, USA had protested that homosexuality was not a theme deserving critical discussion (29). The protest, together with Agbada's outcry, reflects the norm of sexuality in Africa.[48] This norm establishes same-sex relations as uncommon because African sexuality has always been singular and homogeneous—not plural and heterogeneous. Therefore, Africans must marshal tradition against "European sexual decadence" (Amory 7). Marc Epprecht cautions against discourses of this kind that intend to erase the history of same-sex sexualities in Africa because they are false, harmful, and work to stigmatize non-heterosexual subjects (5). He also criticizes African scholars for being evasive about this issue, an attitude he attributes to nativist sentiments construing sexual diversity as a Western contagion Africans must repel.

Dunton and Mai Palmberg write that the invocation of tradition tends to "serve the interests of particular groups, or to provide a politically convenient and sanitized reading of history and of the nature of specific communities" (24). What might these interests be, if not ideological, political, or both? What is the nature of these groups, and who constitutes their membership? I suggest that the groups Dunton and Palmberg refer to are usually either religious bodies or state institutions, both determined to entrench purity (homogeneity) and procreation (futurity).

[48] In *Sexual Diversity in Africa*, Nyeck and Epprecht chide some African scholars for their silence on homosexuality. Both writers restate that African sexuality emerged out of a motley of discourses such as science, ethnography, psychiatry, anthropology, and travel narrative.

Perhaps, what tradition masks in all its discourses of sexuality is the idea of impurity—in other words, having to recognize difference.[49] As Gilman argues, "Difference is that which threatens order and control; it is the polar opposite to our group" (21). To recognize difference would necessitate the acceptance of identities that exceed what is culturally endorsed and idealized. That would undoubtedly work to denaturalize heterosexuality, exposing the phantasm that secures and stabilizes it (Butler 192). If that be the case, then one of the projects of tradition, in whatever form it may manifest, is to foreclose, even erase, any possibility of recognizing otherness in society. Even more than that, when dominant culture speaks about tradition, it is always implicitly about gender, primarily the position of the heterosexual male and securing that position through the structures of the family, kinship, reproduction, and property. To undermine the grounds on which tradition claims its legitimacy is to decentre the heterosexual man, thus destabilizing the gender matrix. It is to dislocate man from the centre of signification.

Sexualizing Tradition

Dibia's *Walking with Shadows* challenges the project of tradition and its idealization of gender binary. It also contests the heteronormativity characterizing much of the fiction produced in Nigeria.[50] Such fiction usually focuses on heterosexual experiences, implying that sexuality is homogeneous rather than heterogeneous so that one conceives of gender as "necessity and

[49] Mohsin Hamid gives a clearer definition of the ramifications of purity. He links the discourse on (im)purity to ethnic and national ideals and how this discourse can be used against those perceived as (impure) different from the ethnic or national character. "Once purity becomes what determines the rights a human being is afforded, indeed whether they are entitled to live or not, then there is a ferocious contest to establish hierarchies of purity, and in that contest no one can win. No one can ever be sufficiently pure to be lastingly safe" (N.p.). He also observes that impurity or "mongrelisation" has served as a catalyst for innovation and creativity in contemporary society. See, "In the Land of the Pure, No One is Pure Enough." *The Guardian*. 27 Jan 2018.

[50] It has been made into a film by Funmi Iyanda in collaboration with The Initiative for Equal Rights (TIERs). It premiered at the BFI London Film Festival in the UK on 9 and 10 October 2019.

natural" rather than a "cultural fiction" (Butler 190). Moreover, this type of fiction ignores other sexualities present in the social world, effacing the experiences of persons who reject compulsory heterosexuality. It denies readers access to the lifeworld of marginalized sexualities and the intricate, even perilous, ways people negotiate and undermine the norms of gender and sexuality.

Dibia, an Igbo from Delta state, is the award-winning author of two other novels: *Unbridled* and *Blackbird. Walking with Shadows*, his first novel published in 2005, was the first full-length narrative about the lives of sexual minorities in Nigeria. The story is about Adrian, his wife, and their families and his attempts to de-stigmatize homosexuality in the face of public contempt. It interrogates the otherness that same-sex desires constitute in the cultural imaginary by centring the male homosexual's struggles and articulating variant modes of desiring and being in society. In doing so, *Walking with Shadows* shows the shifting, contingent, and multiple dimensions of human identity, complicating our understanding of what it means to be a homosexual as well as a man. Dibia emphasizes the need for us to be receptive to alterity—the humanity of the other. Tunji Osinubi comments that the public discourse on homosexuality in Nigeria is conceptualized, interpreted, and understood through the sign of negativity ("Introduction" x). Dibia demonstrates that gender and sexuality are "creatures of culture and society and both play a central and crucial role in maintaining power relations in our societies" (Tamale 11). He elucidates the limits of the gender binary, urging us to recognize humanity's complexities.

(T)roping Homosexuality

In "Must La Victime Be Feminine?," Julin Everett notes that many African authors remain reticent in speaking about queerness. Her observation reiterates what Dunton has named an

"outburst of silence" among African writers—a silence enabled by identifying homosexuality with the West (445). A review of the following texts published in Nigeria appears to validate Everett's and Dunton's comments. Although Wole Soyinka is often credited as the first Nigerian writer to depict homosexuality, it might seem that J.P. Clark had foreshadowed it in his play *The Raft* published in 1964, a year before the publication of Soyinka's novel *The Interpreters*. However, they approached the topic differently. While Soyinka portrays a homosexual character to address questions about hybridity and belonging, Clark cites homosexuality as a typical Western influence in the Niger Delta.

Clark's play opens with Kengibe and Ibobo, two lumbermen adrift on a raft down the Niger River, bemoaning the hardship and rot in the country. Before long, they veer off onto the subject of "pleasure" and "some women." When Ibobo reiterates his desire to have sex with a woman, Kengibe chides him for not being "resourceful as others" (125). Ibobo asks, "What has being resourceful got to do with it?" to which Kengibe replies, "A lot. Didn't you know one white man/Will go to bed with another—even/In preference to a woman?" Ibobo exclaims, "That's beastly." But Kengide counters, "How do you think they keep sane/In their great barracks and boarding schools? Why,/ADO's and holy fathers do it on their boys"(127). Here homosexuality is localized in the barracks and schools, a white man's practice favoured by soldiers and students alike. Soyinka provides more detail about homosexuality in *The Interpreters*. Clark identifies homosexuality with white men, but Soyinka depicts the homosexual character as an African American professor, a mixed heritage person. Soyinka positions Joe Golder to critique the evasiveness of Nigerian intellectuals on issues of sexuality. The conversation between Golder and the Nigerian journalist Sagoe is revealing. Sagoe interprets homosexuality as a perversion practised outside Nigeria: "Listen you, it is true I have

spent some time in places where every possible perversion is practised, but I do not on that account jump to hasty conclusions. I happen to be born into a comparatively healthy society" (199). Golder counters him: "Do you think I know nothing of your Emirs and their little boys? You forget history is my subject. And what about those exclusive coteries in Lagos?" (199). His counterargument reveals the following points: first, Nigeria is no different in matters of sexual desire than the United States is; second, same-sex desire is evident not only among some cosmopolites in Lagos but also among the northern oligarchs; and lastly, same-sex relations transcend geopolitical and religious boundaries, seeing that the North is presented as conservative, whereas the south is supposed to be liberal. Golder's statement is problematic because it implies that homosexuality is the pastime of elites, limited to a particular social class. One might wonder whether the middle and lower classes are exempt from it.

Sagoe's subsequent response to Golder exemplifies the evasiveness which Epprecht criticizes. Here is Sagoe's reply: "You seem better informed than I am. But if you don't mind, I'll persist in my delusion" (199). By persisting in his delusion, Sagoe shows that he is unwilling to accept alternative sexualities. Instead, he would remain "blind" than "see" the reality of homosexuality in Nigeria, insisting that all Nigerians share singular sexuality. Furthermore, the "delusion" underscores the stance of some Nigerians who often locate homosexuality elsewhere—in "places where every possible perversion is practised" (Soyinka 199). Dibia contests that attitude in his narrative of homosexuality.[51] In *The Edifice*, Kole Omotoso expounds on the reference to the "holy fathers" and "their boys" mentioned in Clark's *The Raft*. In Omotoso's novel, the Nigerian student Dele views homosexuality as a Western lifestyle,

[51] In an interview with *Sampsonia Way*, Dibia remarks: "Some people's opinion changed on how they viewed LGBTQI+ persons. Some people were forced to question their humanity and of course, some people refused to even contemplate or consider the idea of a society with openly gay people. For me though, I was intrigued by the discussions it made possible" (N.p.)

recounting how his European teacher withheld his literature paper and invited him to come and retrieve it in his house. On getting there, Dele finds him standing naked in front of his bathroom mirror. The teacher tells him, "Come in here. Don't be afraid. Come in" (38). Dele is shocked, having realized what is going on. The teacher cajoles him: "Come near and hold me tight. Go on hold me tight. Are you afraid? I love you my boy, I love you" (39). Dele flees the scene, though he later finds out that consenting adults can indulge in such sex.

As if to further discredit Sagoe but confirm Golder's pronouncement in *The Interpreters*, Soyinka depicts a scene involving the "emirs and their little boys" in his subsequent novel *Season of Anomy*. He does not present details of male-male intimacy, yet the following passages hint at queerness. The guards bring a prisoner before the Zaki, a traditional ruler in northern Nigeria. We see a "young boy" with "languid eyes" known to giggle very much in the palace. Recall that in *The Interpreters*, Sagoe commented about Golder's "effeminate mannerisms" (199). *Season of Anomy* suggests that the palace boy is effeminate. In *The Desirable Body*, Jon Stratton recalls how the idea of effeminacy became instrumental in reifying stereotypes of the homosexual in modern Europe. He, however, notes the difference between a man possessing feminine qualities and an effeminate man. According to Stratton, the difference is "one of essence versus masquerade" (121). Stratton adds, "To have feminine qualities entailed an ability to express them from the inherent constitution of the adolescent male. On the other hand, effeminacy was the effect of a man behaving in a way that it was believed women behaved" (121). Stratton recognizes the discourse on gender essentialism prevalent in nineteenth-century Europe; however, her point is about gender performativity.

In *Season of Anomy*, Soyinka endows the giggling palace boy with feminine and effeminate qualities. Soyinka tells us that "The boy fluttered his long lashes, giggled and sent his

voice lisping down the hall" (119). In another passage: "The boy with the long lashes giggled and threw his head back" (120). The boy presents a site for the contestations of masculinity and signifies homosexual stereotypes. His appearance and behaviour are feminized and equally eroticized so that he comes off as anything but masculine—or not even masculine at all. The boy stands out among every other person present inside the palace. He is the only male who is rendered feminine among the retinue of the Zaki. His "lisping" marks a defect, signifying lack. His habit of giggling calls his masculinity into question. The way he eats hints at the feminine: "he nibbled [sweetmeat] daintily" (120). Even his movement conjures passivity: "The big man [Zaki] stood up. Immediately all the recumbent retinue leapt on to their haunches and gave the homage of the fist. Excepting the boy with the long lashes who rose lazily to his feet" (128). Soyinka never describes him as a homosexual, but he constructs him to signify queerness.

Soyinka presents the boy as a comic, almost a court jester, throughout the novel. One may wonder what function he serves in the narrative besides giggling. Perhaps Soyinka includes him in the story to highlight alternative masculinities in society. If we follow what Clark, Soyinka, and Omotoso insinuated about homosexual boys in their texts, we may locate the boy in the *Yan Daudu* subculture, a fringe group of Hausa men who dress, act, and talk as women, in northern Nigeria.[52] These men perform and celebrate femininity, challenging traditional models of Hausa masculinity. As Frank A. Salamone explains, "The presence of the '*yan daudu*, neither men nor women, offers glimpses into possibilities of alternative realities, as anomalous categories are meant to be. Moreover, the '*yan daudu* have sexual relations not only with homosexuals but also

[52] See Salamone, "Hausa Concepts of Masculinity" in *African Masculinities*, pp. 76-86. See Gaudio, "Allah Made Us: Sexual Outlaws in an Islamic African City" and "Male Lesbians and Other Queer Notions in Hausa."

with heterosexual men, offering a possibility at least for temporary escape from the rigid demands of Hausa Muslim masculinity" (78).

If Soyinka locates queerness in a youth's body, Chris Abani also does the same, demonstrating that Nigeria stigmatizes homosexuality. In *Graceland*, Elvis Oke, a boy named after the American musical icon Elvis Presley, performs femininity. He is fascinated with how his Aunt Felicia and her friends usually dress themselves up. One afternoon, he asks his aunt to dress him up. His aunt and her friends plait his hair into cornrows, smear his face in makeup, and clad him in a mini dress. Elvis thinks his father will be pleased with his "feminine" look. When he runs straight to meet him, he receives a blow that "nearly took his head clean off." Then his father roars, "No son of mine is going to grow up as a homosexual. Do you hear me?!" (62). The beating has little impact on Elvis, who ends up having sex with his friend Obed in an Anglican chapel because, for him, "this was something he wanted to do" (196-97). Unlike Clark, Soyinka, and Omotoso, Abani dramatizes homosexual sex.

Walking against Normativity

Walking with Shadows is set in Lagos and explores such themes as love, (self)acceptance, forgiveness, male violence, bigotry, and religious dogma. It employs flashbacks to tell the story of Adrian Njoko, husband, father, and manager at a multinational corporation. Adrian passes as heterosexual for close to eight years until a vengeful colleague exposes him, and his world finally falls apart. In *Out in Africa*, Chantal Zabus examines how Dibia challenges the moralizing and religious discourses that demonize same-sex relationships. She notes that "By propelling homosexuality into the realm of biological determinism, Dibia breaks with a line of West African writers, who exclusively confined same-sex practices to Westernized behaviour imports" (103). Neville Hoad remarks that *Walking with Shadows* offers useful insights for thinking

pedagogically about human rights issues, although he criticizes Dibia for being uncritical of class and gender politics. Hoad argues that "the novel's version of valorized gayness is committed to some of the very notions of respectability that are the powerful normative forces that produce Adrian's vulnerability on the question of his contested sexual identity" (176).

Lindsey Green-Simms interrogates "the politics of respectability" portrayed in *Walking with Shadows.* Like Zabus, she criticizes Dibia for circulating essentialist notions about homosexuality. Nevertheless, Green-Simms argues that Dibia "demonstrates multiple ways of being gay in Nigeria [and] also presents readers with multiple ways for Nigerians to accept and understand same-sex love and relationships" (150). Kerry Manzo analyzes how the novel adopts an "anti-anti-essentialist" tactic to contest normative discourses on sexuality. According to Manzo, "the novel suggests that people are retrospectively seeking signs of 'gayness' in Adrian's past and retroactively apportioning to those signs a meaning as an effect of an imagined internal sexual core" (155). Manzo's point about how discourses shape subjectivities recalls Evelyn Blackwood's perspective on the constructedness of homosexual identity: "The ideology regarding male and female roles, kinship and marriage regulations, and the sexual division of labor are all important in the construction of homosexual behavior" (331).

In "Locating 'Queer' in Contemporary Writings of Love and War in Nigeria," Brenna Munro equally considers the trope of respectability in Dibia's novel. However, she criticizes the homonormative ideals and reproductive futurity espoused by the protagonist. Yet, she comments that the story can be better understood as a "reflection on the difficult negotiations stigmatized people make with respectability" (133). In my reading of *Walking with Shadows*, I focus on how Dibia positions Adrian, the homosexual protagonist, to critique heteronormativity.

Stereotyping the Homosexual Male

In his introduction to *Homographesis*, Lee Edelman comments that "phobic culture marks homosexuality as the sign of difference from a heterosexual norm" (xviii). The sign of difference emanates from a system of stereotypes. In *Representations: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices,* Stuart Hall argues that cultures employ stereotypes to simplify and generalize and to reduce, essentialize, naturalize, or fix specific characteristics as belonging to certain people or a group (257). Gilman writes that stereotypes "perpetuate a needed sense of difference between the 'self' and the 'other,' which becomes the 'Other.' Because there is no real line between self and the Other, an imaginary line must be drawn; and so that the illusion of an absolute difference between self and Other is never troubled, this line is as dynamic in its ability to alter itself as is the self" (18).

Edelman writes that "Rather than being construed, therefore, as one possible *type* of man, the gay man must be conceptualized as being no man at all" (206, original emphasis). In *Walking with Shadow*, Dibia narrates how the normative culture represents the homosexual as a figure of difference, as an other, such that he becomes a human type whose body signifies difference. In other words, we can read the homosexual body for specific signs of difference. In the novel, heterosexual characters stereotype Adrian to question his masculinity and pathologize his humanity. They reduce his body to a type, and his homosexuality sums up his humanity. James Haywood-Rolling observes that "Identities are constructed from personal experience, from inter-psychological detritus, from cultural debris, from popular residue" (72). In the following scene, Ada, Adrian's wife, understands homosexuality as inborn, not an orientation. Consequently, she blames herself for failing to decode the signs of Adrian's masculinity:

> The signs had certainly been there. Adrian was a pretty man, gentle in spirit, with an elegant gait. She once told him he walked funny, a calculated yet animated strut. He spoke with such elegance and polish. His hair was always in place, always perfect. His eyebrows a perfect bow. His moustache eternally trimmed. The twinkle in his eyes when he laughed! His voice? Soft and musical. (37)

The passage rehashes a set of assumptions about homosexuality. For instance, pretty indexes a degree of beauty easily ascribed to women, and this adjective is what Ada uses to qualify her husband. Similarly, she uses plenty of adjectives correlating with femininity to describe him. In another passage, she visualizes him among "an endless stream of men, *pretty* men" (55, emphasis added). Ada can only imagine homosexuals as all pretty-looking, representative of a kind of femininity. Qualifying Adrian's way of walking and speaking with "elegance" consolidates the imagery of prettiness. Here elegance denotes a style, being fashionable so that in this instance, we see Adrian as invested in a fashion more than a "normal" man would. A classic stereotype that popular culture circulates about homosexuals is their grooming habits. Simply put, Adrian is a dandy, as Ada reveals to us, establishing a link between dandiness and effeminacy. Through her eyes, we see the portrait of a husband devoted to perfecting his looks. Adrian grooms himself diurnally, in a *perfect* way, as a woman would.

It may seem that Adrian likes looking neat and immaculate. However, Ada projects stereotypes from popular discourse onto his appearance, recalling Edelman's point about how society inscribes homosexuality within the logic of sameness and difference (197). For Ada, every homosexual must display any of the above signs since it defines their selfhood and accounts for who a person is or could be. She seems not to understand Adrian unless she reads him through stereotypes that construe him as *essentially* different from other *normal* men she has known. Roman Kuhar notes that

> The logic of stereotyping, which is used to reduce the complexity of the world in order to categorize it into tractable images, is simple: in defining some group, the most prominent place is given to certain selected characteristics presumably belonging to that group, which are then presented as inherent to all of its members from time immemorial. In the next step, these characteristics, which are usually a result of historical processes, become the explication of a specific position of that group in society. (48)

The "traceable images" are what Ada (mis)construes for signs that "had certainly been there," even though they are merely a reflection of her incomprehension of Adrian's sexuality. Edelman has traced how these "signs" emanated in modern society through discourse, representation, and disciplinary regimes. He notes that the dominant culture invested the homosexual subject with essence and then proliferated discourses enshrining that notion. Against this background, the homosexual's behaviour was no longer regarded "as a discrete set of actions" but understood "as an 'indiscreet' anatomy," while his identity was conceived of "as something legibly written on the body" (8 and 9). Before Edelman discussed the "invention" of homosexuality, Michel Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality*, has investigated how medical and juridical discourses constructed the homosexual as a species in the nineteenth century. According to Foucault, "Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away" (43). Implied here is that homosexuality is biologically distinct from the heterosexuality; that is, there is an essence in the homosexual body that makes its homosexuality evident. Foucault and Edelman question the project of heterosexual culture and its desire to stabilize identity as natural. Following their thinking, we can appreciate how the heterosexual characters portrayed in Dibia's *Walking with Shadows* discursively read Adrian for signs of homosexuality.

Because Ada is a product of the dominant culture, she cannot see that sexual orientation is rarely the definer of masculinity. Instead, she believes that if she had recognized those signs much earlier, she would not have been humiliated by his outing. Meanwhile, she alerts us to Adrian's body image, underscoring a link between embodiment and appearance. To her, his body looks problematic. It appears too gentle and elegant and perfect, including his "funny" walk. Another stereotype popular culture disseminates about homosexual men is the way they walk. By saying that Adrian "walked funny," Ada might be reproducing such a stereotype. In other words, she means that Adrian walks like a "gay," not as men walk or the way men walk. His walk does not suggest or convey masculinity; instead, he struts, projecting femininity. His gait is fancy yet funny. She deploys "funny" pejoratively to represent male homosexuality. Adrian is "funny" in a way that strips his masculine identity off him. And because he "struts," he appears feminine, since strutting, evocative of the catwalk, supposedly is not how "real" men walk. Comparing Adrian's manner of walking to that of a model reinforces the image of the homosexual as not a man at all. Ada underscores that there is a way the normative culture wants us to read the homosexual male body, perhaps "homographically" to show its signs of difference. Adrian's body could then be understood as an error in embodiment (Edelman 207). Ada's comment buttresses this point that she likes her "men rough around the edges"—not pretty, or elegant. Not someone with a soft voice, gentle spirit, or perfect brow, signifying unmanliness. By this, she implies Adrian lacks masculinity, compared to the "rough" and "hard" men she would have preferred.

Ada questions his masculinity by the way he even seems to make love to her, noting that Adrian "was gentle with her body" and she wants him "to be more aggressive, more *man*" (Okparanta 41, emphasis added). To her, his lack of aggressiveness makes him seem *less* man.

Given that she views homosexuality as equivalent to femininity, she thinks that "Only a woman would know another woman's body that well and with such precision" (41). She weaves all "the signs" and their correlates—pretty/beauty, gentle/demeanour, and elegance/fashion—to textualize his homosexuality, undercutting whatever claims we can make about his masculinity. Dibia negates these signs as fictive because he characterizes Abdul, Femi, and other homosexual male characters to demonstrate that homosexuality is not an essence, but an orientation, an aspect of an individual's subjectivity. Dennis Altman avers that there are different personality types associated with homosexuality (25). This implies that one cannot generalize about homosexuals. Yet, Ada seems to misconstrue her husband's distinctive self-fashioning as a natural sign of homosexuality because his "perceived anatomical" differences set him apart from the heterosexual. Ada's binary way of reading sexual difference reflects the hegemonic culture, which reproduces the stereotypes surrounding homosexuality. Dibia challenges this by narrating Adrian's vulnerability as a father and brother and transforming Ada to become receptive to sexual alterity, as I will show shortly.

Contagious Sexuality

Hall writes that stereotypes work to maintain the social and symbolic order. By stereotyping, we establish an opposition between the "normal" and the "pathological," which invariably differentiates "us" from "Them" (258). In *Walking with Shadows*, Dibia dramatizes the power of stereotypes and the "symbolic frontier" they establish in the service of the social. The dyad of the normal and the pathological underpins the trope of homosexuality as contagion, which Dibia recasts to humanize the homosexual male. The discourse of pathology frames Ada's understanding of homosexuality, and Dibia characterizes Ada at this point to mirror the prevailing prejudice against sexual variance. The moment she finds out that Adrian is a

homosexual, she becomes alarmed that he has "infected" her and their daughter (55). She is also scared because she believes that homosexuality is synonymous with promiscuity. Though her alarm may seem pointless, it is motivated by the heteronormative culture that designates homosexuals as carriers of diseases.

Ada exhibits this mode of perception and prejudice since we could argue that there is no evidence, no premise, for her to think or see her husband as diseased. Yet her alarm may not be entirely unfounded, considering her situation, the sense of shock and betrayal she must feel. We could argue that Ada sees not through her own eyes but through a "hegemonic point of view" that works to pathologize homosexuality as contagion. That stereotypical way of seeing is what makes her become so "hung up on the thought of Adrian in bed with another man" that she is unable to shake off the imaginary pictures of her husband amid "an endless stream of men, pretty men" anytime she closes her eyes (55 and 73). To her, the sex act represents the central aspect of his identity, for the homosexual never keeps his sexual urges under control. That is the reason why she pictures him as dissolute and sexually reckless. Therefore, Ada goes with her daughter to the hospital to have their family doctor run STD tests on them because she wants to be sure that they are free of any infection spawned by homosexuality: "She was among the first patients there and in no time was speaking with her doctor. Smiling nervously, she informed him that she would like to be tested, along with her daughter, for any STDs. She gave no excuse and her stern look dared the doctor to ask why" (58).

The test results came out negative. Ada and her daughter do not have any STDs. Her alarm and decision are rarely uncommon, a typical reaction of many heterosexuals, reflecting the extent to which Ada has internalized the hegemonic viewpoint that there exists a connection between homosexuality and disease. Her action evidences the discourse of pathology framing

conversations around homosexuality, especially during the AIDS crises of the 1980s and early 1990s in the United States. When the Nigerian government first reported HIV in 1985, many people regarded it as an American invention to discourage sex (AIDS). That was because the first case involved a 13-year-old female sex worker from a West African country. No one paid it any attention, so the disease spread unchecked. The government and the public soon found out that it was real when it was registered to be the cause of numerous deaths.[53] In the ensuing panic, Nigerians began to associate AIDS with homosexuality because American media at the time had proliferated this notion across countries. Nancy Knauer implicates the media in the construction of homosexuality as a contagion in the popular imagination. She points out how particular anti-gay rhetoric appropriated this discourse to argue that homosexuals "can so easily infect normal people, particularly children" (406). Altman has detailed the role the American media played in propagating AIDS as a "homosexual disease" or "gay plague" (17).

Walking with Shadows depicts another instance of homosexuality as synonymous with contagion in a scene between Adrian and his boss. It is telling that John is an American; from a Nigerian point of view, he is expected to be a citizen of liberal democracy and be much more accepting of sexual difference. Dibia shows that homophobia cuts across race and class. John's attitude illustrates this very point, especially when he learns that Adrian is gay: "Though John acted as pleasantly as always, Adrian could detect an uneasiness in his normally cool countenance. He offered Adrian a seat but quickly withdrew his hand after a brief handshake. It was as if John were afraid that by touching him, he would be infected" (69). John's usual cool disposition implies that issues seldom ruffle him. But right now, he is cautious in the presence of

[53] See Adeyi, Olusoji. *AIDS in Nigeria: A Nation on the Threshold.* Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies, 2006.

a "possible" contagion; if he could have done otherwise, he would not have shaken hands with Adrian. Yet his handshake is brief and quick. He withdraws his hand so as not to get "infected" from prolonged haptic contact.

But professional courtesy has its limits. John no longer feels the need to remain pleasant towards Adrian, not in the face of "homosexual pollution" (Butler 180). For him, this is a matter of "life," and decorum counts for little in such cases. The next time Adrian is in his office, John keeps his distance and does not shake hands. He responds to Adrian's greeting "in a very formal tone" and Adrian, of course, notices the air of formality as well as "the stiffness in John's manner" (Dibia 138). The congeniality is gone. John has shed his normal pleasantness; coldness now marks his countenance. His stiffness together with Ada's alarm instantiate features of homophobia, and this homophobia materializes in the workplace attitude following Adrian's outing as a homosexual:

> He replayed his last day at work that week and pondered on how dynamics in the office had changed as well. He had always been an early bird and most times he was the first person in the office. When the other staff started trickling in, anytime from 7.00 a.m., a number would come to his office to say hello and some even hung around long enough to enjoy a small chat and discuss their careers. He loved these little visits. He enjoyed inspiring people and usually was amazed by the quality of advice he gave out. He had once joked that if he were in the United States, he would have made a rather successful therapist. But the last two days had been very different. His office had been devoid of visitors. (83-84)

Adrian observes that even the security men "no longer hung around to greet him in the morning or after work" (83). Colleagues who once chatted with him now avoid him. The ones who used to seek his advice abhor him. No one wants to be seen around him any longer—the polluter.

In *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation*, Altman observes that "[t]o be a homosexual in our

society is to be constantly aware that one bears a stigma" (20). Tim Edwards reiterates this point when he mentions that "The stigmatization of male homosexuality also has much to do with his gender" (82). Adrian understands the linkages between gender and recognition and how heterosexist culture regulates nonbinary subjects. To identify himself as a homosexual implies unmanliness. As a result, he carries the stigma of not being man enough. That is how normative society operates by excluding and alienating anyone who fails to act as manly. Adrian realizes this; he also realizes that "this was the average person's attitude towards people like him" (Dibia 138). He cannot help but reflect on how quickly he has become the outsider, the outcast.

In the eyes of his colleagues, Adrian has ceased to *be* a man. He is some *other* thing. They perceive him as something much perverse and abnormal—"uncivilized and unnatural" (Butler 180). He is treated not only with apparent hostility but also threatened and harassed. Furthermore, the "almost hostile glare he received from many staff members" unsettles him; though a few "managed to mumble a pitiful 'morning,' he realizes that "none offered eye contact" (Dibia 136). What is in him or about his sexuality that impels coworkers to avoid making eye contact? What is it that they fear to see in or through his eyes? They ostracize him because his homosexuality positions him as "the wrong sort of man […] too lacking in masculinity, somehow incompetent at it, or simply effeminate" (Edwards 82). The office and his colleagues find Adrian fearful because his homosexuality threatens to undo the order of normality, the structure of heterosexuality, and the fiction of gender.

The Receptive Brother

This section shows how Dibia transforms Chika and Ada to become receptive to Adrian's homosexuality. Chika's and Ada's transformation challenge the bigotry the family directs at Adrian, demonstrating that receptivity is crucial for the flourishing of queer lives. Their

receptivity, I argue, helps Adrian to bolster his self-acceptance. I begin by analyzing Chika's and then Ada's receptivity towards sexual alterity. Chika is Adrian's younger brother, and Dibia's portrayal of him shows that, though he grapples with bigotry, he recognizes the vulnerability of the other. Chika dramatizes the relationship between receptivity and solidarity. In *Attentiveness to Vulnerability*, Daniel J. Fleming writes that solidarity can operate as a virtue since it expresses the character disposition of an individual or a community, enabling the movement towards the common good to occur (203). Although Fleming broadly conceives of solidarity to incorporate both the individual and communal aspects, his emphasis on attentiveness to the other's vulnerability is pertinent to my reading of Chika's subjectivity. Fleming defines solidarity as "a commitment to stand with *this* Other and in *this* ethical situation with a view to honoring her infinity and avoiding objectification and 'totalization,' and its further commitment to enable the active participation of all" (207, original emphasis).

In *Walking with Shadows,* Dibia presents Chika as a figure of solidarity, offering him introspective moments to contemplate questions about alterity and solidarity. Unlike his eldest brother Chiedu, driven by bias, Chika is the only one who decides to identify with Adrian in his moments of abjection. He responds to the ethical call, standing with and not dehumanizing the already stigmatized brother. He tells Chiedu, "We never tried to really know him."

> "That's not true," Chiedu defended. "That has nothing to do with his claiming to be gay."
>
> "Chiedu, Ebele isn't claiming to be gay, he is gay. And if you are really true to yourself, you will admit that you have always suspected."
>
> Chiedu sighed.
>
> "What can we do to support him?" (115-16)

The passage shows that Chika is neither judgmental nor critical of Adrian. He empathizes with him by claiming that he and Chiedu never attempted to "really know" Adrian. Now they have known who he is, they must find a way to support him. His question to Chiedu expresses intentionality and solidarity ("to support him"). It is not merely a question but an utterance declaring a stance, a proposition for fraternal action, an enunciation of responsibility for the other. That question transmits desire and ability, typifying its illocutionary force. Chika asks this question because he intends to *act*—to do something. The performative verb "can" is reinforced by another performative verb, "support," which doubles as a noun. The specific speech act Chika is performing here is "support"—not to condemn, to alienate, to further stigmatize the already-stigmatized other, but that the brothers stand with Adrian, in solidarity, regardless of his otherness. Indeed, the objective of that question is for both brothers to support the homosexual brother. When their parents denigrate Adrian based on his homosexuality, Chika seeks to understand; he does not scorn him but instead declares his love. As Andrew Tallon might put it, Chika is *affectively attuned* by the other (53). His attunement occurs in part through introspection, as the following passage describes:

> The truth was that he had not been too happy with the way Chiedu had reacted towards Ebele. He believed Chiedu should have been more sensitive […] His sense of guilt stemmed from the memories of their childhood. Ebele had always seemed to be the outcast. He was a lonely child and even at a young age, Chika had felt this loneliness and understood his pain. There were many times he could have spoken up for Ebele, but he hadn't. He had been afraid of being laughed at or, worse still, being treated the same way as his brother: ignored and forgotten. As a child he had asked himself time after time why his elder brother was different. (Dibia 110)

Introspection offers Chika a space to confront his complicity in Adrian's mistreatment while they were growing up. It opens a means for him to now respond to rather than insulate himself against

the other's address. In the above passage, Chika shows Adrian has never been their parents' favourite child, and everyone easily mistreats him. Instances of this mistreatment abound in the text. Tellingly, introspective moments such as this enable Chika to subject himself to self-critique. Chika knows that Adrian "had always been different" and so he asks himself, "But you don't hate people because they are different, do you?" (114). His recognition of Adrian's pain compels him to be not as hostile as Chiedu. He attends to the pain, and this attention culminates in his avowal of support for Adrian: "Chika was bent on supporting Ebele no matter what path he chose to walk" (115). The declaration demonstrates his responsibility for the other. Because he has sworn to support Adrian, he tells Chiedu over the phone that they "have been too hard on him" and inquires about what they can do to help their brother (115). Although Chiedu insists that they get a pastor to "save" and "cure" Adrian of "the devil" tempting men with homosexuality, Chika does not endorse such an "unorthodox" intervention.

His attentiveness to vulnerability shows in how he tends Adrian's bruised body after Pastor Matthew and his aides had stripped Adrian half-naked and battered him with a "long five-pronged whip" (174). While cleaning up his brother's wound, Chika and Adrian *encounter* each other in a face-to-face relation, revealing their vulnerability. The moment is affective and significant because it is herein that Chika verbalizes affection and support for Adrian. Tallow explains such an encounter thus, "When the self responds to this attunement in the face-to-face relation, the ground (the kinetic, temporal horizon) opens up between self and other. It flows first from the other (generalized and specific), affects the self, and then the entire experience of the self is a *response* to this initial being-affected" (48). After Chika reveals that he will stand by him, Adrian thanks him for being honest and supportive: "Chika shrugged slightly and squeezed Adrian's hand, which he still held lovingly. He wished he could have been more positive and

liberal-minded about his brother's sexuality but that was the best he could offer" (Dibia 179). The most important moment for Adrian in his quest for self-acceptance is when he hears Chika say: "I love you, bro…Take care." The passage below captures Adrian's astonishment: "What did you say?"

> "I said, take care," Chika said.
>
> "No, before that."
> Chika hesitated. "I said I love you, bro."
>
> Adrian moved back to the living room where Chika now stood. Without warning, he hugged him and as Chika hugged back, hot tears flowed down Adrian's cheeks. He let himself cry without holding back.
>
> In his heart, he had an overwhelming feeling of joy and happiness and yet he could not stop the tears from flowing. All his life he had waited for a moment like this, when someone from his family would say those very words to him. And with Chika saying them, Adrian did feel lighter in his heart. He knew then that he would be all right and that it didn't matter what anyone thought about him, what he would cherish and keep was the knowledge that in this world of hate, prejudice and pain there were still people who loved him. (155)

For Adrian, this is an affirming and climactic moment. It ends all the years of his longing for family support and acceptance. Chika's declaration proves that he is not unlovable and can be loved, despite his sexual orientation. It enacts an affirmation of his humanity, which the rest of his family members threaten to degrade. It is enough that Chika is willing to support him, to love him for who he is. Such an affirmation helps Adrian to consolidate his self-acceptance. Adrian drives away from Chika's house, reassured that love still thrives in a "world of hate, prejudice and pain."

The Receptive Spouse

Ada's transformation marks another climactic highpoint for Adrian, completing the pathway for his full self-acceptance. His meeting with her on the beach enables him to fully accept himself as a homosexual, a fact he has long suppressed in his desire to pass as heteronormative. Throughout most of the story, Adrian desires that society accepts him into its heterosexual culture. He wants to be normal. Acceptance and normality operate as two impulses structuring his desire. Ada's receptivity to his alterity encourages him to accept himself as he is. In the last analysis of Ada's character, we see a woman who is intolerant of homosexuality, treating it as a "foreign mentality" (130). From the time she discovers that her husband is "gay," she fears that she too would be stigmatized. Ada reflects that

> The issue of homosexuality was a topic never discussed in any civil setting she knew of, and was taboo where she came from. It was abnormal as far as Ada was concerned, and now her life was entangled with it against her wish. She feared becoming one of the 'new outcasts,' women rejected by society and scorned through no fault of theirs. And her daughter would have to also bear the stigma and the mocking of other children. These were the real issues Ada had to come to terms with. (104)

Ada is aware of the kind of homophobic society she lives in, one that is eager to relegate her to the status of a pariah. That makes dealing with the issue of Adrian's homosexuality "more complex" for her. However, she resolves to come to terms with it. Her transformation midway through the story is significant because it buttresses how familial support, even from a spouse, is essential to queer flourishing. Of course, the transformation is not dramatic and immediate but comes through moments of introspection and self-critique. As it happened to Chika, reflection also opens a space for Ada to probe questions about alterity and solidarity.

The first introspective moment occurs after she visits some socialite women living with their homosexual husbands. As she and Iheoma drive back home, Ada grows introspective, thinking "the world had indeed evolved around her and she had missed it all" (133). I would argue that the world did not evolve past her; she was only "blind" the whole time and suddenly became perceptive (from the visit or *attunement*) to what has been going on around her. Her narrow perspective was what prevented her from seeing the world in its complexity. The following passage illustrates the insight attunement eventually offers her:

> By the time Ada left that evening, it seemed *scales* had been scraped from her eyes. It was like she began to see things in their true, stark colours; not simply black and white, but all the grey as well. As they drove past the waterfront, she *took notice of* the little things she normally took for granted; the way people dressed, spoke and carried themselves suddenly seemed so western and sexualized. (133, emphasis added)

The emphasis here is on seeing/perception. In "The Will to See: Ethics and Moral Perception of Sense," Sandra Laugier writes that "We have to learn how to see, how to pay attention, or be considerate" (263). This receptivity—a willingness—to *see* what is right before our eyes is what she calls "moral perception." According to Laugier, moral perception involves "The capacity to perceive the details of ordinary life—to grasp 'what matters' against the background of a form of life—lies at the center of moral competence" (263). Furthermore, moral perception is a mode of attentiveness, integral to an ethics of care. We can then claim that before this visit, Ada has been suffering from inattention informed by the heteronormative culture. However, her encounter with women living with alterity grants her insight into other people's reality—the "true, stark colours" of things, into what matters for such marginalized people. The scales have fallen from her eyes. With insight, she now recognizes that reality can take the form of a spectrum rather than a binary (black or white).

The insight she has gained prepares and compels her to confront her bias towards sexual minorities. What is striking in her introspection is the fact that she can question her attitude: "Could she be as open-minded as they were?" (Dibia 133) The question reflects an openness, demonstrating that she is becoming aware of the pitfalls of bigotry. She does not address that question before going off to sleep because she appears already overwhelmed by the "whole new world" she now apprehends. Yet that insight enables her to see much clearer the next day she goes to her office and ponders the hybridity or impurity of cultures. This marks her second introspection, which comes with acuity, as she observes:

> She was selling modernity and globalisation through all the exotic pieces she used in her clients' houses. Most of her best pieces were imports from the West, from Europe and America. Yet while embracing the aesthetics of these places, she was not willing to adopt the parts of the culture that challenged that which she held dear as traditional African values. She still strongly believed that homosexuality was very much contrary to African culture. (135)

Her thinking here is romantic and essentialist, yet it mirrors the dominant perception in several African communities that view homosexuality as "an import" or "a borrowed trait" (Currier & Migraine-George 2017). Despite that, one must admit that Ada's interest in addressing those questions is germane because it functions as a self-critique mode. It comes as no surprise then that she would finally accept the women married to gay husbands: "she who had once despised what she believed they stood for" (Dibia 189).

The third introspective moment for Ada is when Nkechi discloses that she hit her son because she saw him playing with a doll. After a lengthy conversation between the cousins, she wonders, "But if Nkechi's fear was justified and someday Junior was to announce to his family that he was gay, would that change the deep feeling of love she had for him? Would she love him

less? Would Nkechi love him less?" (167). Ada muses to herself that "She could not advocate that Nkechi love her son any less because he was showing effeminate traits that may or may not point to his future sexual orientation. But in feeling this way, she quite clearly saw the incongruity of her situation. Should she love Adrian any less because he was gay?" (168). The "incongruity" places her in an ethical position where she must address questions about love and responsibility. She realizes that it is not only a question of sexuality but also one of ethical import. What does it mean to not love a human because of their orientation? Is the category of sex/sexuality what defines whom or how one should love another?

Ada ends up addressing those questions when she meets with Adrian on the beach the last few days before his relocation to London. The prejudice she used to feel towards him is no longer there. She brims with understanding and clarity: "I've promised myself not to judge you or your kind because I would never really understand why you are the way you are, and I will make sure our daughter is not prejudiced either" (192). She reveals to Adrian: "And then I began to question myself after Nkechi told me she feared that her son could be gay. She wouldn't love him less if he were, neither would I. So I had to ask myself why I could not accept you the way you are" (193). Ada questions herself, subjecting herself to self-critique and situating herself in the "I" of the other. Significantly, Dibia closes the meeting between Ada and Adrian with the revelation, which we might interpret as foreshadowing a horizon of happiness, considering what follows next after that revelation: "They both looked up at the sky as if they expected rain, but there was no grey cloud in sight. Looking back at each other with laughing eyes, an unspoken pact passed between them; that, no matter what, for the rest of their lives they would always be open and honest with each other and they would always be friends" (193).

Perhaps the absence of greyness in the sky, the relief that there might be no rain to dampen their new "unspoken pact," is what animates the laughter in their eyes. We cannot be too sure about this. Nevertheless, the "no matter what" countersigns, even secures, the moment of acceptance and recognition, the mutual understanding underlying this moment between Adrian and Ada. It is a critical moment, even as it finalizes the dissolution of their marriage. Ada has lost Adrian, but she now understands that homosexuality is not some abnormal quality; on his part, Adrian has lost Ada but now forgoes the prestige of heterosexual union for the value of true friendship. Remarkably, Ada says to Adrian, "Let us talk about happy things" (193). Sara Ahmed's discussion on happiness as "a feeling-state or state-of-being," is relevant here:

> Saying happiness can appear to generate the happiness that is said, or at least it provides us with a fantasy that happiness 'is' by being said. The word *happiness* is thus motivated and energetic. Given that happiness is a feeling-state or state-of-being that we aspire toward, then the word is often articulated with optimism and hope, as if saying it might mean having it, as if our feelings will catch up with the word, or even as if we will catch the feeling from the word. Creating happiness might even be a matter of spreading the word. Happiness offers what we could call 'a hopeful performative.' We hope that the repetition of the word *happiness* will make us happy. We hope that the word *happiness* will deliver its promise. (200, original emphasis).

Ada invokes happiness as performative, causing laughter and smile to saturate that space: "Adrian laughed," "Ada slapped his knee playfully," and "He was smiling and she smiled back" (Dibia 193). Happiness is a correlate of human flourishing. As Ahmed puts it, "The idiosyncratic nature of happy object choices, the intimacy of recognizing each other's likes, is how we share a horizon" (202). Friendship rather than heterosexual marriage introduces the horizon where we may glimpse happiness. It promises happiness since "Happiness can be what we want, a way of getting what we want, and a sign that we have got what we want" (Ahmed 199). That horizon,

already initiated by Chika's avowal of love and support, will become much clearer to Adrian as he later ruminates on the plane about his future abroad: "Whatever it was, one thing was certain; he was going away and in his new life he was determined to be happy, and nothing was going to make him afraid anymore" (Dibia 205).

Some readers may find the novel's ending problematic because it hints that "flight" appears to be the route for the queer Nigerian person who desires to flourish—or become whomever they wish to. The ending somehow problematizes how we might imagine queer futurity in Nigeria. The possibility of a "happy future" for the homosexual person appears to be tenuous, even foreclosed, given that happiness for someone such as Adrian has to be imagined elsewhere, *not here*, outside a country where "the majority of the people here still viewed his sexuality as abnormal" (202). Alternatively, by allowing Adrian to imagine happiness as being somewhere other than in Nigeria and by providing him with a route out of the country, Dibia disaffirms the narrative of queer negativity, espoused by Edelman. In *Walking with Shadows*, Dibia seems to be more invested in constructing optimism (hope) narratives rather than those espousing pessimism. In Adrian, we see a person who craves the same things that most people do—love, acceptance, and security. He desires to live and thrive as anyone would. Like the heterosexual characters, Adrian wants society to recognize him as human and not as a "mysterious physiology" (Foucault 43). Not, of course, as an abnormality or "a site of danger and pollution" (Butler 180). Dibia uses Adrian and the other characters to emphasize our common humanity, regardless of gender or sexuality. His transformation of Chika and Ada into receptive subjects reflects his investments in gender redefinition. He transmits his vision of social change by humanizing the homosexual and stressing the value of receptivity to queer lives.

Conclusion

This chapter examined how *Walking with Shadows* accounts for the absence of sexual minorities and their struggles in Nigerian literature. Dibia depicts gay masculinities to challenge the dominant heteronormative narratives of masculinity and the traditional understandings of what it means to be a man in Nigeria. He subverts gay stereotypes to demonstrate the complexity of human identity, on the one hand, and to highlight the homophobic impulses animating their (re)productions in society, on the other. His critique of the cultural and religious discourses on homosexuality in Nigeria proves that there is no one way of being a man. Moreover, Dibia emphasizes the need for acceptance of all lives, regardless of sexual orientation, by transforming Chika and Ada into receptive characters that respond to the other's ethical address. Their transformation demonstrates that familial support is necessary for queer flourishing.

Chapter Five

"Let peace be. Let life be": Hospitality in Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees*

Introduction

In Chapter 4, I analyzed how Jude Dibia's portrayal of male homosexuality contests traditional masculinity and underscores his emphasis on receptivity as crucial to queer flourishing. This final chapter examines *Under the Udala Trees* to illustrate how Chinelo Okparanta's depiction of female homosexuality subverts gender conformity. Okparanta characterizes the female protagonist, Ijeoma, to challenge traditional definitions of womanhood. While my focus has been on the father-son dynamic in the preceding chapters, I interrogate the mother-daughter relationship to expose the contestations around orthodoxy and the attendant familial tensions surrounding homosexuality. Okparanta emphasizes the connection between family support and queer lives. By using the mother-daughter trope, she redefines what it means to be a woman, undoes cultural expectations of femininity, stresses the need for female solidarity, and demonstrates the potential in female-to-female relationship. Although *Under the Udala Trees* primarily revolves around Ijeoma and her mother, Okparanta's portrayal of Adaora shows that maternal support is central to the flourishing of the homosexual daughter. Adaora's embrace of receptivity eventually signals a break with the dominant parental attitude towards sexual difference, as we have seen in Chapter 4. I contend that this break is significant because it reflects her recognition of the other's pain and acceptance of otherness.

Queer(ing) Nigeria

In *Female Masculinity,* Jack Halberstam argues that we cannot reduce masculinity to maleness since it is a practice that non-male subjects can equally construct and reconstruct. Female masculinity shows how nonbinary persons denaturalize gender and, therefore, "challenge hegemonic models of gender conformity" (9). The concept of female masculinity helps us to understand how the heteronormative culture tends to naturalize masculinity into the male body so it appears that gender and sex are inseparable. *Under the Udala Trees* narrates other ways of being a female and of desiring while affirming same-sex relations. By interrogating what Stella Nyanzi calls the "strictures of feminine propriety" (62), Okparanta reveals the threat that compulsory heterosexuality poses to homosexual women. Okparanta is fascinated by the theme of (queer) sexuality—or rather the intersection of gender, homosexuality, and religion in the Nigerian imagination. Her debut collection of short fiction, *Happiness, Like Water*, features two stories about this intersection: *"*America" and "Grace." As she comments in *Mosaic* magazine, she favours this theme because she hopes that the Nigerian public would address its unfounded "fear of the unfamiliar" (N.p.). Like those stories, *Under the Udala Trees* lends its "voice to all the Nigerians out there who have been forced to live in hiding" (N.p.). Although it is the first full-length novel exploring female homosexuality by any Nigerian writer, Okparanta is not the first Nigerian female writer to dramatize same-sex intimacies.[54]

Okparanta belongs to the generation of female writers who "raise questions of immediate ethical relevance" and "make a simple demand from their societies in regard to the relations

[54] Lola Shoneyin, Promise Okekwe, and Unoma Azuah have depicted same-sex attraction in their fiction: "Woman in Her Season," "Rebecca," and *Sky-High Flames*. See *Body, Sexuality, and Gender*, edited by Flora Veit-Wild, Flora and Dirk Naguschewski, Rodopi, 2005, pp. 129-41. Okparanta's work expounds on this discourse of female homosexuality by providing an elaborate narrative of love, hope, and resilience in more contemporary times.

between men and women; they demand fairness and recognition" (Eze 2). In her novel, she privileges the livable life over social categories; she also highlights the dehumanization of people based on their gender and sexual orientation. One of the novel's highpoints culminates in the orthodox mother ultimately accepting her homosexual daughter, something that is missing in Dibia's *Walking with Shadows*. In that novel, Adrian's father despises him, and his mother cannot bring herself to accept his homosexuality: "What did we do wrong with you?" She said more to herself. "We tried to harden you when we noticed you were weak…We did everything to make you normal" (182-83).[55] Nevertheless, Dibia and Okparanta narrate the extent to which the family can foster or hinder the selfhood of those figured as sexual deviants. In her essay "The Emergent Queer: Homosexuality and Nigerian Fiction in the 21st Century," Lindsey Green-Simms writes that "What twenty-first-century Nigerian writing often does, then, is to resist the dominant in ways not previously done before and to tell diverse stories about same-sex desire that are neither monothematic nor moralistic" (141). She labels Nigerian fiction dealing with homosexuality as the "emergent queer" to show how recent fiction has gone beyond the dominant discourses of sexuality to make visible what was hitherto unseen.

Green-Simms explains that such emergent fictions articulate an "anti-identitarian and anti-essentialist view of gender and sexuality" (144). Chris Abani's *Graceland*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Things Around Your Neck*, and Uzodinma Iweala's *See No Evil* fall within this category. According to Taiwo Adetunji Osinubi, "Okparanta keeps the company of Abani,

[55] Her lament seems to evoke Franz Fanon's observation about the discourse of normality in Western psychoanalytic understandings of subject formation: "A normal child brought up in a normal family will become a normal adult" (121). Her understanding of normality reflects how much she has internalised the public bias and contempt for sexual variance such that the homosexual is figured as abnormal, representative of abnormality. Implicated in this discourse of abnormality are tropes of pathology, contagion, and perversion. See, *Black Skin, White Masks.*

Adichie, Dibia, and Iweala in summoning individuals with non-normative sexual desires from their dispersed spaces" (676). John C. Hawley points out that many of those texts seem "didactic," but commends the authors for how they "not only acknowledge the presence of queer in the continent, but [...] also bring the future into existence for the LGBTIQ community by voicing what has (intentionally) remained unheard, silenced, erased, and forgotten" (121). Silence, erasure, and memory are salient themes in Okparanta's novel.

Bigotry and Violence

In an interview with Bernie Lombardi, Okparanta remarks that mother-daughter bonds are important because "this is how we create histories and this is how we create the future. To pass on anything, that is the role of tradition as well. In my tradition, the mother does a lot of the passing. The ways by which we pass on our histories are through these relationships, and that's how they are significant to my writing. Motherhood has a lot of power. It also has a lot of power to do damage" (26). *Under the Udala Trees* depicts the "damage" a mother can do in an attempt to "pass on" heterosexist scripts to her nonconforming daughter. Okparanta wrote the novel in response to the criminalization of same-sex relations in Nigeria by President Goodluck Jonathan in January 2014. Okparanta attributes the source of the criminalization to the "mentality of condemnation" common among many Nigerians ("Interview"). Her critique of the mentality of fear and hate of others underlines her investments in social change. The novel deals with other themes such as ethnicity, trauma, memory, and war. Using in part the Nigerian-Biafra war of the late 1960s as a premise to probe questions of belonging, identity, and desire, Okparanta recognizes Biafra as a spectre haunting the Nigerian political imaginary. As the Nigerian literary scholar Chimalum Nwankwo puts it, "The roots of the war are as deep as the history of the country" (7).

In memorializing Biafra, Okparanta shows that she is acquainted with the decades-old appeal Chinua Achebe made to African writers that they not "avoid big social and political issues of contemporary Africa" ("The African Writer and the Biafran Cause" 78). Most conversations about Biafra in the Nigerian public sphere are usually contentious, even veering towards violence. In recent times, the Muhammadu Buhari-led government has been swift to deal with unarmed protestors identifying with the Biafra cause, killing hundreds of people in the process.[56] As the poet and essayist Uche Nduka asserts, "Biafra is still veiled in silence in Nigeria. I don't understand why. Having once been a Biafran, I have to work against forgetting" (N.p.). Okparanta's Igbo ethnicity presents her as a Biafran. Her novel reveals that she is also working against forgetting the atrocities the Nigerian state executed in the name of unity. By prefacing the opening pages with war imagery, she asks Nigerians to remember that men and women can turn coldblooded in an environment where the state condones animosity towards its minorities. However, that is not the only taboo topic that she takes on; she also contends with another: female homosexuality—a subject regarded as unspeakable among many Nigerians.

As Kerry Manzo explains: "Okparanta allegorizes the war in order to critique both ethnocentric and heteronormative aspects of nationalist discourses by linking the chauvinisms of the war with the homophobia of the present" (154). Sarah Ladipo Manyika, US-based Nigerian novelist and university teacher, comments that Okparanta is "a self-identified Christian and a student of the Bible [who] not only questions some of the literal interpretations of the Bible" (N.p.). Throughout her novel, Okparanta critiques orthodox conceptions of the human, demonstrating that people can weaponize religious texts against the other.

[56] See the reports by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, respectively.

Coming of Age

Under the Udala Trees is divided into six parts and an epilogue. Each piece interconnects with the others, chronicling Ijeoma's development from girlhood to motherhood. The story avoids linearity. It is conveyed through flashbacks, looping around the protagonist's memories and oscillating between the past events (the civil war) and those of the present (post-civil war). The actions occur in the following towns: Ojoto, Nnewi, Aba (southeast), and Port Harcourt (south-south). Part one begins in 1967 with Ijeoma living with her parents in Ojoto. She recounts the effects of the war on their peaceful town, how her father is killed in an air raid while she and her mother hide safely in an underground bunker, and how her mother, unable to provide for both, decides to send Ijeoma off to Nnewi. In this neighbouring town, a family friend will take care of her. The narrative ends with Ijeoma spending her first night in the home of the grammar schoolteacher. Part two starts in 1970 with Ijeoma reunited with her mother in Aba, after the war has ended. She recollects how her mother used the Bible to educate her about homosexuality. She mentions her relationship with Amina, a Hausa girl who also lived with the grammar schoolteacher. The narrative ends with Ijeoma leaving for boarding school in another town.

Part three presents Ijeoma as a young woman who has finished her secondary education and now helps her mother in her provisions shop. She recounts how she met Amina, who lost her family in the war, and how the schoolteacher took Amina in, how their relationship began, and the night the teacher caught them making love in their room. The narrative ends with Ijeoma leaving Nnewi for her mother's house in Aba. Part four relates her experiences in an all-girls' academy in Nnewi. There, Ijeoma reunites with Amina, and they continue their relationship in a discreet manner. She soon finds out that Amina is no longer interested in her when Amina declares that she is getting married to a young Hausa man. The narrative closes with Ijeoma

feeling heartbroken. Part five details her relationship with Ndidi, a secondary school teacher, who introduces her to an underground community of sexual minorities. The narrative ends with Ijeoma marrying Chibundu, her childhood male friend. Part six opens in 1980 in Port Harcourt with Ijeoma pregnant. She and Chibundu have a fractious marriage, but they soon have a daughter. Chibundu confronts Ijeoma when he discovers that she had an affair with Ndidi, and the marriage deteriorates. Ijeoma finds herself getting pregnant again but suffers a miscarriage. The narrative ends with her fleeing her marriage.

The epilogue starts in Aba in 2014, with Ijeoma and Ndidi reflecting on their future. Ijeoma and Chibundu are no longer married, but their daughter Chidinma is now a university student. The story ends with Ijeoma's mother finally accepting her relationship with Ndidi. Although the novel opens with pastoral images of serenity masking the national crisis going on in the village, it ends with a note of hope, consistent with Okparanta's vision of "paradise will hopefully one day be" in Nigeria ("Interview" N.p.). One might read the novel's enunciation of hope as radical, a hope that anticipates a "forward-dawning futurity" for queer lives (Muñoz 1) or that projects "a glimpse of a future where intolerance throughout Nigeria might actually be replaced by an acceptance of LGBTIQ citizens...Such futurity, one might say, is the work of literary art as a precursor to political reform" (Hawley 123). In what follows, I analyze the father-daughter relationship to underscore the receptive character of Uzo, Ijeoma's father.

The Receptive Father

In the previous chapters, we saw how Achebe, Adichie, and Dibia portray father figures who are normative in their mentality and intolerant of alterity. These men enact violence on their sons, eschewing familial closeness for male hegemony. They stifle rather than nurture their sons' humanity. In contrast, Okparanta presents a different paternal model to demonstrate that a

wholesome relationship can occur between father and daughter. She delineates scenes affirming strong bonds between Uzo and Ijeoma. The trope of receptive fathers recurs in some of her fiction, as I will show shortly. In *Under the Udala Trees,* Uzo represents a figure of receptivity. During the civil war and the ensuing gloom, Ijeoma narrates how she often finds her father at his desk reading a stack of old newspapers: "He looked up and smiled slightly at me, a smile that was little like a lie, lacking any emotion, but he smiled it still" (6). Although "the country was falling apart" (5), coupled with the mental, emotional, and physical effects of the war on him, Uzo never takes his frustration out on her but manages to smile at her. Ijeoma recounts a poignant scene where he reassures her of his love: "I want you to know that your papa loves you very much. I want you to always know it and to never forget it" (8).

In that passage, he vocalizes and displays affection for her by taking her into his arms. She knows that her father loves her "very much," but that he tells her again, "like a reminder," is instructive. It lingers in her memory. Her father knows that the world is falling apart, so he wants her not to take love for granted. He might have given up on life, but he provides her with warm memories. Throughout the short time Uzo spends with his daughter, he encourages her to be open to life, supporting her to develop a broader worldview. Before his death, he regales her with "candlelight stories, folktales about talking animals and old kingdoms" (78). Even when he seems tired and "gruff from hours of silence at his drawing table, he told of kings and queens, of magic drums, of scheming tortoise and hares" (78). The stories he tells her are reminiscent of the kind of folktales Nwoye's mother tells him and his siblings in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Uzo also "spoke of allegories, and of the literal versus the figurative. He explained that certain things were symbols of other things, and that certain folktales were only allegories of certain situations in life" (78).

He tells these stories to help Ijeoma recognize the complexities of life. He makes her appreciate the world of meaning-making such that "something small, a simple thing like the dove" could be "used to represent something very big, a larger idea, something so big that often we don't fully grasp the scope of its meaning" (78). Her recollection of this story in adulthood is significant because it occurs during her mother's Bible lessons. Through narratives, her father teaches her about the literal and figurative dimensions of concepts, things, and phenomena so that she can appreciate other ways of seeing, knowing, and becoming. This critical lens on the world later helps her to reject a narrow, doctrinaire understanding of life. After his death, Ijeoma would recollect fond moments he shared with her. Remarkably, her recollections take place around the time something significant is happening in her life. His stories, perhaps, had prepared her for such a happening.

The Heterosexual Norms

In this section, I consider Okparanta's treatment of sexual politics in a heterosexual marriage. I argue that she critiques male hegemony and establishes same-sex intimacy as an example of sexual ethics. Uzo embodies a model different from the hegemonic father figures in *Things Fall* Apart, *Purple Hibiscus*, and *Walking with Shadows.* Unlike those men, he evinces an openness to the world. But such openness is missing in Chibundu, another central male character in Okparanta's novel. Chibundu is Ijeoma's husband, who valorizes patriarchal ideology and treats his wife as his "hostage," thereby transforming their marriage into "a captivity" for her (304). He brutalizes her until she cannot help but feel like "a washrag, worn and limp, not from overuse, but rather from misuse and manhandling" (284). In *Sexual Politics,* Kate Millett challenges misogynistic narratives of sexual domination. She argues that male-authored fictions reproduce discourses of male superiority and female inferiority. She criticizes Western novelists

as Henry Miller, Norman Mailer, and D.H. Lawrence for valorizing sexism in their writing. She contends that heterosexual relationships mirror the hegemonic order in society (33). Millett makes an important point here, although she overlooks the fact that there is a power dynamic that tends to organize and characterize human, including homosexual, relationships. In other words, no relationship is precisely devoid of some elements of power.

Okparanta portrays a lack of intimacy between the heterosexual couple, whereas intimacy characterizes her presentation of homosexual sex. She deploys the imagery of predation to describe the sex between Chibundu and his wife. However, she employs erotic language to narrate homosexual sex involving either Ijeoma and Amina or Ijeoma and Ndidi. Her narrative depicts heterosexual marriage as traditionally organized around a "power nexus" (Millett 7). This nexus legitimizes the structure of male domination and female subjugation, anchored to male violence. In the following passage, Ijeoma describes how she feels whenever she finds herself around Amina:

> It was certainly friendship too, this intimate companionship with someone who knew me in a way that no one else did: it was a heightened state of friendship. Maybe it was also a bit of infatuation. But what I knew for sure was that it was also love. Maybe love was some combination of friendship and infatuation. A deeply felt affection accompanied by a certain sort of awe. And by gratitude. And by a desire for a lifetime of togetherness. (150)

Love is associated with concreteness, reflected through Ijeoma's copious use of nouns: "friendship," "infatuation," "affection," "awe," "gratitude," and more importantly, "a lifetime of togetherness." These words resonate with positive affective charges. The passage is descriptive,

poignant, and brimming with pleasure. For Ijeoma, intimacy involves shared pleasure.[57] Love entails "a heightened state of friendship," a sensual experience of "awe," or a "togetherness" no man, it seems, could offer her. Okparanta is explicit and evocative in her diction when she is describing same-sex intimacy:

> Slowly she made her way to my chest. We'd never gone farther than the chest. But now she gently removed my nightgown, and then removed hers. She cupped her hands around my breasts, took turns with them, fondling and stroking and caressing them with her tongue. I felt the soft tug of her teeth on the peaks of my chest. Euphoria washed over me.
>
> She continued along, leaving a trail of kisses on her way down to my belly. She traveled farther, beyond the belly, farther than we had ever gone. I moaned and surrendered myself to her. I did not until then know that a mouth could make me feel that way when placed in that part of the body where I had never imagined a mouth to belong. (123-24)

I have quoted the passage at length to show that Okparanta can be effusive in describing homosexual intimacy. The scene pulsates with intensities, illustrative of "bodies in motion" or "bodies as sensations of movement" (Manning 24). There is movement, utterly sensuous. The yielding is not forced but mutual. It is body discovering body; a dissolution of the self and the other in mutual bliss, in and across time, in and out of space; a "reaching-toward enacted through shared touch" (89). There is neither dominance nor subordination in this corporeal space, just purely symbiotic. The scene conjures up Erin Manning's discussion of sensation in *Politics of Touch*, which she describes as "multiplicitous, multi-identificatory, multifaceted. There is never linearity in sensation: we have all experienced the way a sound can lead to a smell, to a memory

[57] This passage evokes Audre Lorde's description of the erotic as: "the open and fearless underlining of my capacity for joy" and "That self-connection shared is a measure of the joy which I know myself to be capable of feeling, a reminder of my capacity for feeling" (341 qtd. in Abelove et al.). See, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power."

of a touch, to a taste. The senses combine, layered, infused into one into another" (44). In that equally expressive passage in the novel, Okparanta presents another moment of lovemaking, but between Ijeoma and Ndidi:

> It did not take much time. She let out a cry, and I found myself overcome by emotion—warm feelings, feelings of affection, of happiness, of something like love; feelings of elation at being able to connect so intimately with her, at being able to elicit such an intense reaction from her. It was as if her pleasure was in that moment my own, ours, a shared fulfilment. (200)

The language and scene are replete with a register of affect, sensorial imagery of warmth, pleasure, happiness, and fulfilment. Okparanta seems to allude that same-sex intercourse is neither associated with power nor with an assertion of mastery. She shows that violence and domination mark the (hetero)sexual contacts between Chibundu and Ijeoma: "All of this I reasoned so that by the time he rooted me to the sofa, I had already relented. He planted a million and one more kisses on me, and when he moved to enter me, I made sure not to turn away" (242). Ijeoma lacks consent in this intercourse; she is rooted and can only relent. Subdued, she expresses the passivity the dominant culture requires of the female in such intimacy if we could call it that. But Chibundu moves and enters her, showing activity and possessiveness. As the penetrator, he "moves" into her, consummating his desire, while she remains, penetrated and unmoving, on the sofa. There is nothing amorous in that scene. Movement takes place, but only in one direction, void of mutual sensation and bereft of shared intensity. If anything, there is simply the fulfilment of male pleasure. Ijeoma tries as much as possible "not to turn away," since for her, "intercourse [operates] in the service of power" (Millett 6). Ijeoma describes another scene of sexual predation:

> "In the darkness, I watched as his murky, monster-like face came square above

> mine. His hands found their way to mine as he twisted the blanket out of my hold.
>
> "The sooner we get to it, the sooner we'll be done," he said.
>
> I stiffened.
>
> His breath above me was chillingly warm as he settled himself on top of me.
>
> There was the rough movement of his hands and legs as the bottom of his pajamas came off. His hands returned to the space between our bodies, holding me in place as he lowered himself, and as he writhed himself into me." (274)

The imagery of revulsion permeates the scene. Chibundu is cast as rapacious, a predator, whose "monster-like face" repulses Ijeoma. Vocabularies such as "chillingly," "rough," "holding me in place," "lowered himself," and "writhed" define his actions. He is possessive, master of flesh and desire. A grammar of property characterizes their heterosexual intimacy. Similarly, masculine presence dominates the sexual activity, inflected by the pronominal positioning of "his," "he," and "himself." As Okparanta seems to convey in her description of same-sex intimacy, there is no intimacy in the sex between Ijeoma and Chibundu; instead, abrupt penetration characterizes it. Sex takes on a mechanical form, more transactional than reciprocal: such force, no tenderness. Chibundu exemplifies what Millett describes as the "male assertion of dominance over a weak, compliant, and rather unintelligent female. It is a case of sexual politics at the fundamental level of copulation" (7-8). Ijeoma hints that sex with her husband is rape, as is conveyed through such verbs as "twisted," "rough," and "holding me in place." Where Chibundu is active, she is passive. Where sex with Amina or Ndidi affirms the erotic, it is non-erotic or a negation of the erotic with Chibundu. The whole process of heterosexual intimacy degrades, depersonalizes, and de-subjectivates her, emblematizing what Judith Butler might label "the structural asymmetry of heterosexuality" (142). Rendered invisible and insignificant, Ijeoma is reduced to a non-person, a

mere prey—the pliable, utilitarian object of male pleasure. There is no doubt that Chibundu's "murky, monster-like face" petrifies her; it "stiffened" her. Okparanta suggests that any form of lovemaking between Ijeoma and Chibundu is like rape—a woman being raped by a man. The themes of male predation and female dispossession manifest in Chibundu's degradation of Ijeoma.

Normalizing Abomination

Adaora employs biblical pedagogies to re-educate Ijeoma into compulsory heterosexuality. The Bible lessons serve as one of the novel's highlights because of the insights mother and daughter provide. I read the lessons to demonstrate what Butler describes as "the naturalizing narratives of compulsory heterosexuality" (200). Throughout their conversations, both mother and daughter express different understandings of the tensions between orthodoxy and ethics. Adaora is strategic in how she begins her study with Ijeoma: she designs a "course" informed by her readings of the scripture and sets a daily schedule for her daughter. The course commences the second week after Ijeoma returns home and lasts for six months. During this period, Adaora makes sure that they discuss several lessons from Genesis to Revelations. The central conflict between both revolves around each person's perspective on homosexuality.

While Adaora expects her daughter to accept her scriptural interpretations, Ijeoma rather contests them, disclosing that the text is rich in symbols and its meanings might be allegorical (Okparanta 84). Where Adaora is quick to cite the discourse of prohibitions in the Bible (74 and 76), Ijeoma prefers to stress the ethical relevance or "other possibilities" in each lesson (81, 82). Adaora believes that the devil is chiefly responsible for homosexuality, a belief incited by religious discourses on sexuality. She thinks "demonic spirits" can pervert one's sexuality (92). If any woman is not vigilant enough (perhaps spiritually), the devil will steal into her soul,

corrupting her "natural" desire for men. As a result, heterosexual relation is pure and natural since "God intended for it to be man and woman" (75). Adaora also believes that the Bible enumerates how one can perform an exorcism; with it, any mother can cleanse her daughter's soul and help her regain the "normal" sexuality, congruent with orthodoxy. For the most part, Ijeoma debunks such reductive interpretations.

On the first day of Bible study, Adaora begins with the creation story to underscore God's supremacy over matters of the flesh and to assert that every human essence derives from Him (66). Adaora never condemns her daughter directly and instantly. Instead, she starts by invoking the authority of God and His legitimation of marriage between opposite sexes. She makes this invocation to validate heterosexuality as prior, pre-discursive, and pre-cultural by legitimizing the binary nature of being. The logic behind that invocation underwrites how she organizes her pedagogy around issues of gender and sexuality. By restating the divine *logos* as the authoritative source of human intimacy, it establishes heterosexuality as originary and universal. She stresses that this is the traditional model that men and women must follow. She deliberately pivots her lesson on the creation story because it secures the originality of heterosexual relations; that is, right from the "beginning," God has already approved heterosexuality even before human creation. In short, there is an origin behind it, a beginning (*archē*) and an end (*telos*). Thus, the lessons function as a "corrective," integral to normalizing the abject or abominable subject.

Butler argues that "norms are what govern 'intelligible' life, 'real' men and 'real' women' and cultural intelligibility frames how we recognize "normal 'men' and 'women'" (206). Adaora deploys "God's statutes" as an apparatus of regulatory and disciplinary powers, to "hold sway" over Ijeoma's sexuality and retrieve her from "that terrible way" (Okparanta 73). She hopes to transform her daughter into a "real" and "normal" woman with the "proper" desire for men

rather than for women. When she gets to the verse that says "a man shall leave his father and mother, and be joined to a wife, and they shall become one flesh," she repeats it for emphasis: "*Nwoke na nwunye.* Man and wife. Adam *na* Eve. *I ne ghe nti*? Are you listening?" and then "shake[s] her finger, a reminder and a warning" (67). The reminder and warning hold some significance. First, the warning is to accentuate the point that "In the beginning," God "fashioned a helper suitable for [Adam]" and "for this reason...they shall become one flesh" (67). Given that woman is created from a man's ribs, as the Bible proclaims, it follows that she must channel her desire towards satisfying heterosexual pleasure. Second, the warning is to emphasize the repercussion should a woman violate the norm: "Man must not lie with man, and if man does, man will be destroyed" (74).

Adaora introduces Lot's story to re-emphasize the consequences of transgression: destruction by God. That is her strategy, underpinned by a deliberate logic informing her choice of starting the "re-education" from Genesis. In concluding that session for the day, she poses a rhetorical question to Ijeoma: "if God wanted it to be otherwise, would He not have included it that other way in the Bible?" However, Adaora is reluctant to name homosexuality since she views it as an abomination, so she refers to it as "that other way" (68). The evening of that day, she reads the Bible again and asks Ijeoma that they pray. They kneel in front of their chairs, and Adaora prays in an impassioned way, conveying the desperation she feels over her daughter's sexuality. In the previous session, Ijeoma observes that her mother has "the look of a person watching a gradually sinking boat from afar" (67), an image of dismay and resignation. In the morning before the next session, she thinks there is "something desperate and pleading in her [mother's] face" (69). Her "terrible way" is the source of her mother's desperation. Adaora pleads with God to protect Ijeoma "from the devil that has come to take her innocent soul

away. *Zoputa ya n'ajo ihe.* Protect her from the demons that are trying to send her to hell" (72). Implied in this prayer is that homosexuality is a form of temptation that anyone can resist with effort. Adaora ends her prayer by asking God to help Ijeoma remember "the lesson of our beginning, of Adam and of Eve" (72). The prayer reinstates Adam and Eve as foundational to the original project of heterosexuality.

If the introductory lesson were about Adam and Eve, the next study on Sodom and Gomorrah reinforces the penalty that same-sex partners would face. The former story is about the primacy of gender binary, whereas the latter narrates the perils of doing "that other thing" (74). During the study, Adaora tells Ijeoma: "It's that same behavior that led to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the same behavior that you and that girl—what's her name again?—engaged in" (73). She recounts how Lot offered his two virgin daughters to the men of the city "to do to the daughters as they wished, so long as they did not harm the guests, so long as they did not do as they wished unto the guests" (73). Adaora believes it is acceptable that the girls should suffer the harm meant for their father's male guests. This thinking implies that women are more easily disposable and violable than men. It associates women with violability, indicating that a woman's body is rarely hers, after all. That association repeats the narrative of genealogy that a woman's body is male property. Consequently, a woman's life is less grievable than that of a man.

Adaora stresses that the crux of Lot's story is that he preserved the two men from (while exposing his daughters to) instances of violability. Female violability is of little significance, for what matters the most in the lesson is that Lot protected his guests from "that terrible way" and her remark buttresses this fact: "Lot was a good man" because he "[w]as willing to protect his guests from sin" (Okparanta 73). Ijeoma disagrees with the remark because she cannot accept

that a father who sacrifices his daughters for other people's wellbeing could be called a good man. The exchange below clarifies her contrary stance:

> "And *that* is the lesson we are to take from the story?" I asked.
> She rolled her eyes at me but remained silent.
> "Maybe it was a lesson on hospitality," I said in a soft voice, though she had clearly struck a nerve in me. Still, I did not want to provoke her any more than I already had. "The idea that he was willing to put in danger his own belongings, and that he was willing to risk the welfare of his own family members in order to safeguard his guests. It could simply have been a lesson on hospitality," I said.
> "It isn't," Mama said. "Everybody knows what lesson we should take from that story. Man must not lie with man, and if man does, man will be destroyed. Which is why God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah."
> "It couldn't have been because they were selfish and inhospitable and violent?" I asked. "It has to be that other thing?"
> "Yes," Mama said. "It had to be that other thing. It couldn't have been anything other than that other thing" (73-74).

Evan Mwangi's observation about homosexuality in African communities being "a practice without a name" comes to mind (189). Adaora and Ijeoma prevaricate and speak about homosexuality in abstractions, designating it as forbidden and unnameable. However, Adaora manages to describe it as "man lying with man," but only to associate it with illegitimacy, a practice deserving punishment. Her conception of sin, or what is worth condemning, is questionable. The idea that a father allowing other men to rape his daughters is not so much a sin as men lying with each other is problematic. Ijeoma challenges this notion, the principle of female violability, by reinterpreting Sodom and Gomorrah's story in a rhetorical way that casts her mother as close-minded and judgmental. Adaora remains inflexible in her mentality. As part of regulating Ijeoma's sexuality while she will be away in secondary school, she hands her a list of ten verses from the Old and New Testaments (90). The list delimits conditions, constraints,

prohibitions, and punishments structured towards enforcing heterosexual propriety. It also formulates the parameters of (female) sexuality, for the "spoliation or pollution" that we ascribe to homosexuality "can endanger our idea of the future" (Edelman 113). Adaora's project of normalization must redeem her daughter from homosexuality, even while she is at school.

Reproducing the Future

Having concluded with Lot's story, Adaora quotes the Book of Leviticus to show that same-sex relationships violate tradition, genealogy, and divine law. Leviticus is the third book of the Bible, and it stipulates an array of instructions and rituals organizing Christian behaviour. Adaora draws her lesson from Leviticus to stress that homosexuality is "disgusting, disgraceful, a scandal" (Okparanta 75). When Ijeoma asks why homosexuality is described so, Adaora summarily replies: "The fact that the Bible says it's bad is all the reason you need" (75). This seems to be a mode of circular reasoning. Adaora recognizes that her argument is not convincing enough, so she resorts to circularity to ground her claim that sexual difference is abnormal and is against the original *telos* of sexual norms. More effectively, she uses it to invalidate any counterargument that may arise. Ulrike Hahn explains that circular reasoning operates based on self-dependent and self-referential justifications. One of the limits of circular reasoning is that "[n]o further evidence is typically needed to establish that a thought, an argument, or an explanation is worthless" (172). If, as Hahn points out, "argumentation is fundamentally about *belief* change" (173), Adaora's use of circularity fails to elicit the desired effect from her daughter. Adaora not only relies on that mode of argument but wields the Bible as a master-signifier, insisting that her assumptions and conclusion on the subject are not to be challenged since the Bible is incontrovertible. As *sola scriptura,* it is infallible and establishes the grounds upon which any

explanation about *eidos* (essence) is founded. To Adaora, the Bible has the last word on homosexuality.

Circular reasoning is limited, but Adaora relies on it again: "God intended for it to be man and woman. And God intended for man and woman to bear children. It is the way it should be, so yes, it is an abomination if it is not man and woman. It is an abomination if man and woman cannot bear a child" (Okparanta 75-76). She does not only appropriate the Bible to authenticate her arguments but invokes God as the guarantor of all meaning, recalling the Lacanian "ultimate guarantor of presence" or the Derridean "central signified" upon which every other signifier revolves. He becomes the point of origin as well as the point of convergence. According to Adaora, God "intended" means that God has spoken, and so His Word remains indisputable. In invoking divine sovereignty, or the absolute paternal law, she aims to stop any counterarguments from arising. Interestingly, she broaches the topic of procreation. It is not enough that a man and a woman should become one flesh, but they must reproduce the child that secures the family's future. As Adaora asks of her daughter, "Besides, how can people be fruitful and multiply if they carry on in that way? Even *that* is scandal enough—the fact that it does not allow for procreation" (75, original emphasis). Her speech reveals the link between heterosexuality and futurity/reproduction while demonstrating that childbearing is the totality of what femininity constitutes. The speech recalls God's directive to Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply, as written in Genesis chapter one verse twenty-eight. Adaora's words couple religious and biological discourses to assert reproductive futurity.

Her recourse to these discourses shows "that sexuality needs to be organized in the service of reproductive relations" (Butler 102). Nevertheless, Ijeoma contests the imperative in those words: "But even with a man and a woman, procreation is not always possible. Is that an

abomination too? I asked. What if there's nothing they can do about it?" (Okparanta 75). She wonders about the childless couple in Nnewi, with whom she lived. Still, Adaora insists that "it is an abomination if man and woman cannot bear a child," shocking Ijeoma such that her "head felt as if it were about to explode" (76). So, when her mother asks her to share her thoughts on Leviticus 19, Ijeoma replies pithily: "Mama, I have no thoughts" (76). Adaora's preoccupation with the subject of abomination blinds her to the fact of female pain. While she seems to detest sexual variance, she refuses to condemn the rape and murder in the stories of Lot and the Levite. For her, desire, which is always heterosexual, must take precedence over human life. She limits the whole of human existence to desire.

Ijeoma understands that her mother is too prejudiced to accept that identities are often "multiple, shifting, and self-contradictory" (De Lauretis 9). Adaora exhibits essentialist notions of gender and construes heterosexuality as a life-affirming force, which homosexuality, a "future-negating force," is attempting to destabilize (Edelman 127). Perhaps this is her worry: to behold a childless future, one in which her daughter will provide her with no progeny. Her concern evokes the point Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe make about homosexuality in their book *Boy-Wives and Female Husbands*: "In Africa, however, heterosexual marriage and procreation—but not necessarily heterosexual desire, orientation, or monogamy—are universal expectations" (272). Adaora's worry countersigns the idea that heterosexuality is pro-natal, whereas homosexuality marks "the place of the social order's death drive" (Edelman 3). The concern, even if repressed, manages to express itself through her distaste for homosexuality. To Adaora, there is a natural link between female sexuality and reproductive futurity, and the female is meant to be male-oriented, pro-natal, and family-centred. What the lessons she spent time inculcating in her daughter demonstrate is that sexuality and fertility are equivalent. She makes

this false equivalence when she states that because God intended for men and women to marry and produce a child, those who cannot bear a child are to be viewed as an abomination. In making such categorical statements, she ignores the circumstances that make it medically impossible for such couples to have biological children of their own, even if they desire one. In one passage, she declares, "There is nothing more meaningful than having a precious child of your own" (Okparanta 237). In another passage, she bursts into joy the moment she finds out that Ijeoma is pregnant: "You've made your mother proud" (249). Reproduction becomes the ultimate end of any sexual relation, the prerogative of heterosexuality, and the guarantor of kinship.

Ironically, the discussions between mother and daughter positions the former as an uncritical reader of the Bible and the latter as a critical reader. Although Ijeoma refrains from arguing about homosexuality, Adaora furthers her arguments by now resorting to ethnocentric discourses. As if her argument on procreation was not persuasive enough, she stokes up ethnic grievances, reminding Ijeoma that she can have no relation whatsoever with Amina since it was the Hausa people who killed her husband. She forewarns her daughter of "the mingling of seeds" with a non-Igbo girl, which, in her opinion, is against God's command and reminds her about how much atrocity the Hausa have committed against the Igbo (76). Ijeoma thinks otherwise because it does not seem that the Bible has foreclosed on "other possibilities of human existence" (83). She contemplates that although God created woman different from man, it "was simply a tool by which God noted that companionship was something you got from a person outside of yourself" (83). She views companionship as a mode of human interdependency, recalling Butler's ideas about "the sociality of embodied life." By this, Butler means: "the ways in which we are, from the start and by virtue of being a bodily being, already given over, beyond

ourselves, implicated in lives that are not our own" (28). Ijeoma's contemplation urges us to reimagine companionship outside social limitations and heteronormative categories. The following section illuminates the extent Adaora would go to "normalize" her daughter into heteropatriarchy.

The Maternal Legacy

Throughout the narrative, Adaora acts as a mother who thinks only in binary terms. That is because she hopes for her daughter to have her own family, thereby reproducing "the legacy of the mother" (Halberstam 174). This hope saturates her mentality and the many normativizing conversations she has with Ijeoma. She knows that to fulfil her legacy as a mother, she must successfully "discipline" her daughter into a gender norm. As American cultural anthropologist Gayle Rubin puts it, "is not only an identification with one sex; it also entails that sexual desire be directed towards the opposite sex" (180). Adaora condemns same-sex desire because it contradicts her orthodoxy and nullifies the reproduction of her maternal legacy. Therefore, she instrumentalizes the Bible to bolster heterosexuality against homosexual desires.

The following scene elucidates her maternal hope. One late afternoon, the grammar schoolteacher and his wife visit Adaora's home and reveal that Amina has "found herself a husband." That evening, after they have left, Adaora reprimands Ijeoma: "A woman without a man is hardly a woman at all. You won't stay young forever" (181). Shortly after, she tells her, "Time is passing. You need to get out there and find yourself a husband. Time waits for no one" (181). Her comments hint that it is the place of a woman to search for her husband, rather than the other way round, as social convention stipulates. Adaora sees nothing wrong with her daughter upending the tradition. Her first comment has some implications for it suggests that

woman— or womanhood—is a position of lack, an absence, whereas manhood constitutes wholeness, a presence. Of course, this harks back to the biblical creation story, with Eve created out of Adam. Her existence derives from the excess of man's ribs. Without a husband, a woman is nothing. Adaora understands marriage as a state of fullness, which every woman must aspire to and attain. It is what completes womanhood, the fulfilment that transforms any woman into a *full* human. She also understands that youth is a prerequisite for marriage because once a woman loses her youth, she becomes unattractive to any prospective husband. She emphasizes the ephemerality of female youth. A woman must keep watch over her youth, ever sensitive to the passage of time. The second comment equally underlines the fact of temporality, linking femininity and time. Here temporality is materialized by the candle's image, which Adaora references to reinforce the connection between womanhood and time.

This passage shows that connection: "She [Adaora] took what remained of the old candle and tossed it into the dustbin. Under her breath, she muttered, "If you're not careful, you'll find yourself like that candle, all burnt up and nothing to show for it" (181-82). Nevertheless, the parallel she draws between femininity and a candle is problematic, that is, if she aims to use the candle to represent womanhood. Of course, every candle has a function to shine light in the darkness; that is its primary value. A candle, once lit, will eventually burn up and congeal as wax. It is only an unlit candle with "nothing to show for it," because it has no value if left unlit (unused). Its use lies in its capacity to give light, even if briefly. That explains why Adaora pressures Ijeoma to make the most of her youth (time/to glow/to shine) since female youth appears more precious to men than to women. She insinuates that there is some chance that a woman can outlast time if she only "get[s] out there and find[s] a husband" and they reproduce an offspring.

Reproduction becomes the apotheosis of womanhood, and that establishes the legacy of the mother. Adaora's comments are charged with urgency, which she attempts to impress on her daughter. Ijeoma says nothing during this conversation. Adaora goes on to describe marriage mechanically, comparing it to a machine: "Marriage has a shape. Its shape is that of a bicycle. Doesn't matter the size or the color of the bicycle. All that matters is that the bicycle is complete, that the bicycle has two wheels" (182). By its composition, a bicycle has a functional value, and its functionality is to transport its rider from origination to destination. In this case, the goal of heterosexual marriage is procreation. Adaora's choice of imagery assigns concreteness to marriage, signifying interconnected parts that constitute wholeness. Moreover, the shape of marriage is *ab initio* binary, heterosexual. "The man is one wheel," she continued, "the woman the other. One wheel must come before the other, and the other wheel has no choice but to follow. What is certain, though, is that neither wheel can function fully without the other. And what use is it to exist in the world as a partially functioning human being?" (182).

In the above imagery, Adaora sutures hierarchy and harmony to explain the form of marriage. For there to be harmony in any relationship, the order must be observed. Man "must come before the other"—woman, and the woman must follow the man because she "has no choice but to follow." She places the man in the dominant position of the alignment. Simultaneously, the woman is consigned to the subordinate position, even though she claims that each constituent member (wheel) cannot "function fully without the other." In that configuration, man is the wheel that precedes the other wheel (woman). Conceptualizing human intimacy in this manner figures women as lacking in voice and choice—in short, women have little agency in marriage. It follows that it is neither complementarity nor equality, but hierarchy and asymmetry, which secure marriage. What is also striking in this bicycle metaphor, or Adaora's identification

of marriage with a machine, is the string of keywords and the grammar of functionality it evokes—"use," "exist," "functioning." It is hardly surprising that she views the unmarried woman, including her daughter, as "a partially functioning human being," denied the full status of womanhood unless she finds a husband.

A woman's fulfilment and functionality are possible only by her becoming a man's wife. Adaora's concerns about lack and functionality mirror her preconceptions about gender and sexuality. In asking her daughter, "And what use is it to exist in the world as a partially functioning human being?" she reiterates the notion of homosexuality as deficient and dysfunctional. Her vocabulary circulates a discourse of teleology. To *exist* in the world is to become full and functioning. A fully functional woman is one who has a husband. Likewise, to be human is to be useful. Perhaps our importance as humans becomes legible only if it has utility in reproducing heteropatriarchy. For Adaora, then, marriage is what invests life with meaning. If meaning comes from marriage, then the *telos* of human existence is rooted in and legitimized by marriage.[58] That is, we can only claim to be fully human unless we are married to the opposite sex. One cannot become *fully* human until he or she is in a procreative heterosexual marriage. Heterosexuality thus operates as "the assurance of meaning" (Edelman 127). That, perhaps, is the totality of human existence, as Adaora would have us believe.

Conversely, a partially functioning human being has not much reason to exist, to be, because, when you think about it, of what use is such an existence to reproducing the nation?

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[58] John S. Mbiti expresses this view on marriage and personhood in his *Introduction to African Religion*: "Marriage is the one experience without which a person is not considered to be complete, 'perfect', and truly a man or a woman. It makes a person really 'somebody'. It is part of the definition of who a person is according to African views about man. Without marriage, a person is only a human being minus" (112).

That is the *episteme* that Adaora wishes to transmit to her daughter. Yet, we should not lose sight that there is an economic motive underpinning her earnestness about marriage because she wants Ijeoma to have the security that marriage is supposed to provide. She is a widow, and the war has left her partly traumatized and struggling to make ends meet. She wants her daughter to be financially secured, and this is possible only when she is married to a man. She understands that society disregards and even stigmatizes the unmarried woman. Adaora recognizes the adversities sexual minorities would face having to live in an orthodox culture. Her prejudice towards alterity is motivated in part by her conviction that "A woman without a man is hardly a woman at all" (Okparanta 182). She condemns Ijeoma's queerness because tradition demands that women carry out the role of "bearers and reproducers of cultural traditions" (Currier & Migraine-George 143). She does not want to see her daughter suffer a fate much worse than hers. Her motives reflect the norms that femininity must perpetuate. That would explain the joy Adaora feels when her daughter finally ends up getting married: "It's not every woman who is lucky enough to snatch herself a husband, you know" (Okparanta 245). She advises Ijeoma to wear her "marriage like a badge of honor" (245). Her advice implies that heterosexual union confers honour on a woman, whereas same-sex relations bring dishonour upon her.

Losing the Mother

In "Unbecoming: Queer Negativity/Radical Passivity," Halberstam examines mother-daughter dynamic to advocate a feminism that is not only antinormative but also passive, silent, masochistic, anti-social. Halberstam calls us to reconsider radical feminism, asking that we think beyond the liberal notions of resistance and agency. Her feminism celebrates the denigration or the dissolution of selfhood. Accordingly, such feminism must be "grounded in negation, refusal, passivity, absence and silence, offers spaces and modes of unknowing, failing and forgetting as

part of an alternative feminist project" (146). Halberstam describes it as "a feminist politics that issues not from a doing but from an undoing, not from a being or becoming woman but from a refusal to be or to become woman" (146). Although the concept of queer negativity illuminates my analysis of Ijeoma's character, Okparanta shows that queer refusal can take many forms, not necessarily as a disavowal of the mother or as "the undoing of self," as Halberstam advocates. Okparanta's characterization of Ijeoma demonstrates the limits of queer negativity, revealing the series of negotiations around social norms the queer subject must confront, especially in a homophobic culture.

Throughout much of the narrative, Ijeoma is presented as passive and active in different circumstances, showing that flourishing is at stake for her, not self-negation. Her marriage to Chibundu dramatizes instances of "sacrifice" and "denigration"; it also shows how she rearticulates "refusal" not to undo or subjugate herself. Heterosexual union and motherhood constitute Ijeoma as a woman, but she refuses to remain *normatively* a woman. Of course, she declares, "I *did* want to be normal. I *did* want to lead a normal life. I did want to have a life where I didn't have to constantly worry about being found out" (Okparanta 220-21, original emphasis). Here, she associates normality with heterosexuality, and her ability to perpetuate "the legacy of the mother" (Halberstam 174). We can argue that there is something masochistic about Ijeoma's embrace of heteronormativity against her wellbeing. Her "only imaginable escape," she claims, lies in heterosexual marriage: "Perhaps by making me a mother, he would save me. Maybe motherhood would make me feel more invested in marriage. Maybe motherhood would cause me to forget Ndidi" (Okparanta 242). In her marriage, she recognizes that she should be anti-Oedipal, but only insofar as it does not impel her undoing in the process. In other words, she refuses to sacrifice her life at the expense of the maternal legacy. She desires life. That is what

most matters to her. She wants not only to survive but also flourish. She strives to love on her terms, even if covertly. Halberstam seems to overlook this ambivalence in queer struggles.

Ijeoma seems to articulate that desire is *a need to be* and *a need to live with one's being*. The desire to love is also a desire to affirm her sovereignty. The desire to love is also a desire to survive and, more importantly, thrive. Her sense of queerness becomes a refutation of tradition as well as an avowal of queer becoming. At the end of the novel, she returns to her mother, restoring the familial bonds and emphasizing that maternal support is vital to queer livability. Okparanta shows that the split in the mother-daughter relation is never total, for the daughter may passively, but never actively, completely, lose her mother. Ijeoma does not sever her attachments to her mother; instead, she appropriates them for her survival when her marriage endangers her flourishing. Insofar as she is committed to the negation of normativity, to subverting compulsory heterosexuality, she recognizes that familial bonds are necessary for her survival. Thus, she neither seeks the destruction of the self nor the (m)other. What she rejects is not female support but male hegemony. In the same breath, she leaves the imperatives of *hetero*femininity. I argue that her exit from her marriage still dramatizes queer negativity, a refusal of "history, tradition, and memory" (Halbertsam 174). By refusing to be constructed *normatively* as a wife, she ultimately opposes "the established order of society" (Deleuze and Guattari "Introduction" xxiii). In what follows, I discuss the circumstances surrounding Ijeoma's rejection of marriage.

Property and Emasculation

This section draws on Rubin's ideas to examine how heterosexual marriage perpetuates the dominant organization of "gender, obligatory heterosexuality, and the constraint of female sexuality" (179). Ijeoma's marriage exemplifies the connections between property and sexuality.

After settling down with her husband, she finds out that she cannot fit into obligatory heterosexuality. He even makes matters worse for her by antagonizing her shortly after she delivers a baby girl. Okparanta portrays Chibundu as a man invested in patriarchal ideals. For her first pregnancy, he expects his wife to produce a male child for *him*; when it turns out that it is a daughter, he takes to "snapping more than ever before" (Okparanta 266). His desire for a son transforms him into a brute, causing him to oppress his wife and daughter. When Ijeoma tells him that she is unprepared to "try for a son," he grows indignant and bursts out: "Are you forgetting that girls cannot pass on the family name? If for no other reason at all, you will give me a son to pass on my family name" (273). She does not budge because their daughter is barely eight months old. She expects Chibundu to have gone beyond "all that nonsense," so she tries to persuade him: "She's your child. Your flesh and blood. Your daughter." Chibundu counters her, "But she is no son. I want my son […] You'll have your girl, and I'll have my boy." He cuts her off before she can even reply, declaring that "You owe me that much" (273).

The passage reveals instances of sexual division and gender hierarchy. Chibundu reinforces male hegemony by deploying possessive pronouns, assigning abjection to women and autonomy to men. He deploys the possessives "you" and "yours" and "I" and "my" to stabilize notions of property and kinship. Boys *necessarily* belong to their fathers, and girls *customarily* to their mothers. He presents the female child as the other that adds no value per se to, but rather devalues, the paternal legacy. The female is exchangeable, disposable, and serves as a channel for "the reproduction of kinship" (Rubin 183). Conversely, the male child signifies honour and protects the lineage against the forces that threaten familial perpetuity. He is the preserver of the sex/gender system. By declaring that Ijeoma owes him, Chibundu associates womanhood with indebtedness. He claims ownership over her, for she is by the fact of marriage (rights) his

property—woman was taken out of man's ribs, after all. Men own women, and men own women through marriage. Simply put, the wife is indebted to the husband. Consequently, marriage is a form of debt, which a woman is obligated to settle in the name of kinship and reproductive futurity. And she can pay her debt only by (re)producing a male child, a normal boy, for that matter. Chibundu's disdain for women typifies an instance of sexism rooted in "a long tradition in which women do not inherit, in which women do not lead" (Rubin 164). This recalls the functionality and "use-value" to which Adaora alludes to when she compares marriage to a machine.

Chibundu's outrage does not stop with the quarrel he has with Ijeoma. When she refuses to accede to his demand that they try again for a son, he hovers above her with a machete and pushes it on the skin of her leg: "He keeps pushing the big knife farther into my leg" until she shouts at him, "Any more and you'll tear open my skin!" (Okparanta 273) Chibundu sees the harm he is about to inflict on Ijeoma, turns around, machete in hand, and walks out of the parlour. The novel shows other instances of his cruelty, such as when he forces himself on her; when he brands her a whore and throws money in her face. Four factors may account for his violence towards Ijeoma. First, he is frustrated that his wife denies him sexual pleasure: "Tell me, if it's not enough that I'm your husband, maybe I can pay you to do it. Tell me, how much I should pay" (293). Second, he feels betrayed that his wife only married him out of convenience to mask her homosexuality, thus rendering him "unmanly": "How do you know if you don't try? You can just try. It shouldn't be that hard to love me. Or am I that unlovable?" (285). Third, he feels his wife has emasculated and somehow "castrat[ed]" him: "You have finished me! You have finished me completely! How could you? How could you?" (283) Lastly, he detests his job: "And it's not just me. Even at work, everyone seems to be sad and depressed" (256).

Nevertheless, these reasons cannot justify his violence against his wife. As for Ijeoma, marriage has become an "unbearable life."

In *The Promise of Happiness,* Sara Ahmed writes that "The unbearable life is a life which cannot be tolerated or endured, held up, held onto" (97). There is nothing in the marriage for Ijeoma to cling to anymore. Aside from her mother pressuring her to find a husband, it was rarely her intention to become anyone's wife. However, she pays the price for conformity, broken as she is by its weight. Marriage becomes "too much" for her to endure in the end. She bemoans, "Chidinma and I were both choking under the weight of something larger than us, something heavy and weighty, the weight of tradition and superstition and all of our legends" (Okparanta 312). The tradition here indexes something that constricts, that asphyxiates, its weight being unbearable for the homosexual who desires normality. Ijeoma can bear only so much weight before tradition "breaks" and "shatters" her completely. The realization of the violence of tradition, the violence inherent in a marriage that constrains her subjectivity, a marriage whose violence is "heavy and weighty," causes her to pursue her own "happiness." On the night she resolves to leave her husband, she realizes that "The solution to my problems became clear. Why had it taken this long for me to act?" (312-13). She rises from the bed while her husband is still asleep, packs a few belongings, then bolts out of their home. As Ahmed notes,

> What makes for an unbearable life takes place somewhere between the subject and the world that throws 'things' up; sometimes, something becomes 'too much' to bear, where the 'too much' is experienced as the breaking of a long history of involvement or the endurance that sustains suffering insofar as it is borne. When 'it' is too much, things break, you reach a breaking point. (97)

The marriage has not only broken Ijeoma but has failed in several places, too. The breaking point for her, that is, when she discovers that she can no longer bear the misery, occurs that night she wakes up "with a start, frantic, drenched in sweat, gasping for air" (Okparanta 312). After that, she decides to reject tradition, leaving unhappiness behind and ceasing to reproduce heterosexuality.[59] With her daughter in tow, Ijeoma escapes the "home" of abuse.

Hospitality as Receptivity

This concluding section examines the turning point in the novel, which I read as indicative of the receptivity Okparanta envisions. I outline the circumstances precipitating Adaora's transformation from a bigot to a receptive woman, focusing on her character to show her shifting attitude, hitherto marked by bigotry, towards her daughter's homosexuality. This attitudinal shift is consequential and instantiates a break with the set of negative attitudes Adaora initially exhibited towards sexual minorities. I argue that her transformation emblematizes the novel's "vision of change." Okparanta recognizes that the dehumanization of queer sexualities will continue unabated unless there is some change in societal attitude. She urges families to foster inclusion and acceptance, so no one has their humanity reduced to pathology or abjection.

In *Feeling Backward*, Heather Love writes that shame, ostracism, and possibly death have always already overdetermined queer existence. Therefore, when Adaora hears how two female lovers, who are university students, have been stripped naked and beaten "all over until they were black and blue" and people "stood around watching and recording the incident with their mobile phones" (Okparanta 318), she says, "God forbid! What has this world turned into?" (318)

[59] Ibid. Ahmed argues that "heterosexuality functions powerfully not only as a series of norms and ideals, but also through emotions that shape bodies as well as worlds: (hetero)norms are investments, which are 'taken on' and 'taken in' by subjects. To practise heterosexuality by following its scripts in one's choice of some love objects – and refusal of others – is also to become invested in the reproduction of heterosexuality" (146-47).

The outburst captures her shock at the cruelty the young women received at the hands of their fellow humans. She expresses surprise at a world where a mob brutalizes sexual minorities in public, a world where a group of people can dispense justice on their terms based on heteronormative conceptions of who is a sexual being—or who is human. Although Adaora seems to distance herself from this world of mob justice and homophobia, she is also culpable for how the world has turned out. Her earlier bigotry helped to perpetuate the dominant culture that shames and demonizes the other.

After the moment of surprise has passed, she tells Ijeoma that: "You know, it is really a shame that our president, the really good-looking man that he is—between that handsome smile and his fashionable fedora hats—it's too bad he doesn't do anything to correct the situation. Such a waste of good looks. A handsome face has a way of persuading the masses. The least he can do is try and use his good looks for a noble cause" (318). The passage shows that she recognizes the suffering of the other. She identifies with the persecuted and disapproves of the president's handling of social injustice issues. She views him as a man who could even use his personality to stop the persecution of minorities, a part of the citizenry he is meant to protect. Adaora views the preservation of the lives of the other as "a noble cause." That is the reason why she associates the president with qualities of "shame," "bad," and "waste." She transfers the shame meted out to the female lovers to him, hinting that the shame has nothing to do with the disgraced girls but everything to do with a president who does nothing to "correct the situation." In this regard, the president is disgraceful and immoral because he presents a stylish demeanour, while his citizens have their dignity stripped from them. The "situation," which needs to be "corrected," is the type Ijeoma would point out that generates "the kind of fear [of the other] that leads to hate [of the other]" (318).

In an interview published in *Truthout*, Butler discusses how vulnerability "is not just the condition of being potentially harmed by another. It names the porous and interdependent character of our bodily and social lives. We are given over from the start to a world of others we never chose in order to become more or less singular beings" (N.p.). This condition of our embodied social life foregrounds the complex ways we are entangled with one another. The entanglement, or "intertwinement," reflects our shared humanity. Adaora now recognizes the predicament of the other. Consider for a moment: she once showed no empathy towards the rape of Lot's daughters and the Levite's wife and her subsequent murder. She stridently condemned homosexuality: "*Tufiakwa*! God forbid. Even among Christians, it can't be the same God that we worship!" when she read in the newspaper that "hooligans stoned and beat several members of a gay and lesbian-affirming church in Lagos, bashed their faces, caused their flesh to become as swollen as purple-blue balloons" (317). Her disapproval proves that homosexuality threatens orthodoxy. Likewise, her expression of disgust, "*Tufiakwa!*" demonstrates that certain human lives are less grievable than others. This moment can be read as what marks the shift in Adaora's attitude, in line with Okparanta's vision of change. As Manzo writes, "Okparanta seeks to initiate a conversation in a space transected by multiple normativizing discourses, yet still leaves open the possibility for transformation in the face of an indeterminate future" (156).

In Adaora, we suddenly find a *changed* woman, who now sees the fight against the violation of sexual minorities as "a noble cause." She identifies with the stigmatized citizens, whom she once regarded as abominable. She might have reached a *turning* point when she could not help but identify with the abjection of the other. Perhaps, she no longer wants the "fear of the unfamiliar" to condition her relationship with her daughter. We could argue that her change in attitude happens only when she already has a granddaughter, or at the point when the two female

lovers were brutalized, and it occurred to her that one of them could have been her daughter. We cannot say for certain what factors incited her new attitude. However, we can admit that Okparanta "leaves open the possibility for transformation in the face of an indeterminate future" (Manzo 156). Okparanta has spoken about family dynamics, and her short story "America," reiterates her assertion of queer flourishing:

> In any case, in writing this story, I wanted to protect my characters a little from this mentality of condemnation. I wanted to make sure that none of them unwittingly reinforced an attitude of non-acceptance, or even hate. I wanted to be sure to approach their resistance to Nnenna's homosexuality from a practical perspective—one of fear, rather than one of hate. And, I know that there is a small portion of the population that would see things the way her parents do, but they are perhaps trapped by fear, afraid to admit their acceptance in the polls. I wanted to show this fear in the story. Fear, rather than hate. (N.p.)

Adaora has begun to appreciate the emergence of a "generation of Nigerians with a stronger bent toward love than hate" (Okparanta 318). Her transformation is best appreciated when one analyzes the behaviour of Nnenna's mother in "America." In that story, the mother appears as a bigot, criticizing her daughter for desiring her fellow woman. She reminds Nnenna about the "penalties in Nigeria for that sort of thing" ("America" 97). Nnenna wonders what her mother "means by 'that sort of thing,' as if it is something so terrible that it does not deserve a name, as if it is so unclean that it cannot be termed 'love'" (97). Her mother believes "that sort of thing" is unworkable and declares that "A woman and a woman cannot bear children" (98). The theme of reproductive futurity—a trope in *Under the Udala Trees*—is invoked in this family discussion. The mother even attempts to blackmail her daughter:

> Mama began to cry then. 'Look at this skin,' she said, stretching out her arms to me. She grabbed my hand and placed it on her arm. 'Feel it,' she said. 'Do you know what it

> means?' she asked, not waiting for my response. 'I'm growing old,' she said. 'Won't you stop being stubborn and take a husband, give up that silly thing with that Gloria friend of yours, bear me a grandchild before I'm dead and gone?' (100).

An appeal is made to Nnenna to produce a grandchild because with homosexuality, "There can be no seed" ("America" 99). The mother thus prohibits a non-productive relationship, one that is anti-child. On the contrary, the narrator presents the father as non-judgmental: "Papa took it better than Mama had hoped. Like her, he warned me of the dangers. But 'love is love,' he said" (100). He does not demean his daughter's sexuality but instead encourages her "that perhaps America would be the best place for me and my kind of love" (110). His receptivity could be part of why Nnenna decides to remain in Nigeria, even though she could have reconnected with her lover in the United States. Her father's acceptance of her otherness is strong enough to give her hope. *Under the Udala Trees* provides Okparanta with another space to reimagine mother-daughter relationship. The mother in "America" refuses to shed her prejudice. In contrast, Adaora acknowledges sexual difference as part of human complexity. The novel's ending dramatizes a climactic moment reaffirming possibilities of attitudinal change. The night Ijeoma arrives at her mother's home, she blurts out that she can no longer remain in her marriage: "Mama, I can't. I can't anymore" (322). Adaora does not speak until Ijeoma repeats the statement three times. Then she carries her granddaughter, and they all work into the parlour. The scene is worth depicting:

> Mama said, "It makes no sense to send you back this late at night." We had been standing side by side, but she turned to look directly at me now.
>
> "All right," she said. "All right." This was an understanding. Discernment like tepid light, very understated, but an understanding nonetheless.

> And now she began muttering to herself. "God, who created you, must have known what He did. Enough is enough."
>
> Who knows how long she'd been deliberating it this way.
>
> She cleared her throat, and she finished: *Ka udo di, ka ndu di.*
>
> Let peace be. Let life be." (323)

The passage marks a definitive moment in both women's lives, especially for Adaora, who comes to finally accept her daughter for who she is—a homosexual. Adaora allows awareness to set in, replacing judgment with understanding. Here she embraces interpersonal affectability, welcoming the other. As Emmanuel Levinas writes, "The relationship between the same and the other, *my welcoming of the other, is the ultimate fact*, and in it the things figure not as what one builds but as what one gives" (77, original emphasis). In accepting her daughter, Adaora renounces her adversarial position on compulsory heterosexuality. At first, she considers sending Ijeoma back to her husband and then looks directly at her (bridging that intersubjective chasm), sensing the violence marriage has wreaked on her. As Clive Barnett says, "subjectivity is formed in opening up towards otherness in a relation of welcome" (8). The moment that Adaora encounters Ijeoma's precariousness instantiates a relation of welcome. Eze explains this encounter through the framework of Ubuntu as the capacity to "recognize the dignity and equality of the person, and it asserts that any disregard for him or her inevitably diminishes oneself" (32). Andrew Tallon reads such an encounter as "*affect as amplification*" that demands attention and elicits responsibility (52, original emphasis). Adaora realizes that there is nothing more important than having to support Ijeoma: "God, who created you, must have known what He did. Enough is enough." That is a significant shift in her orthodoxy, coming from a woman long used to demonizing homosexuality. Even more significant is Adaora's declaration that "Enough is enough," suggesting that she no longer will participate in the mistreatment of her

daughter. She has cast off the bias and condemnatory mentality, accepting the intimacy between her daughter and Ndidi, an intimacy that builds worlds and creates spaces for flourishing (Berlant 2). With Adaora's help, both women are able "to keep the whole thing a clandestine affair" (Okparanta 320). Her actions emphasize the centrality of family support to the flourishing of queer lives. Attuning herself to an ethic of receptivity, she ends her speech to her daughter on this note, "*Ka udo di, ka ndu di*"—Let peace be. Let life be" (323).

The pronouncement foregrounds an ethic of hospitality among the Igbo and is usually invoked to bring a disagreement to an end. It advocates reconciliation and collective harmony, demonstrating that there is no life in the absence of peace. There is life in the presence of peace. For human life to flourish in the community, peace must abide. *Ka udo di, ka ndu di* is ethics; it is hospitality. As Dan Bulley argues, "ethics is hospitality because every individual negotiation of openness and conditionality is an expression of an ethos, our way of being, the residence, one's home, the familiar place of dwelling, the manner in which we relate to ourselves and to others, to others as our own or as foreigners" ("Introduction" 7). At the novel's end, we see that Adaora has redefined her thinking. She is no longer prone to condemning "anything that was outside the norm" (Okparanta 228). It is telling that Okparanta closes her novel with this six-word declaration: *Let peace be. Let life be*. Perhaps social change is not a utopia; it might be possible, even if it manifests merely as an individual behavioural change.

In the penultimate scene, Ijeoma reflects that "change is the point of it all. And that everything we do should be a reflection of that vision of change" (322). Change is crucial to redefining gender and sexual relations, how we understand identity and difference, and how we negotiate desire and intimacy. Manzo remarks that "It is only through ongoing conversation—which is not just about participating in discourse, but about bringing about a conversion in

society's discourses, however slow—that process of conversation and conversion may be accomplished" (156). *Under the Udala Trees* opens the space for conversations about possibilities in human relations. It articulates a horizon of social change.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed how Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees* probes the tensions underlying the mother-daughter relationship and negotiations around the topic of female homosexuality. Okparanta deploys Ijeoma to challenge compulsory heterosexuality and ideals of womanhood. The novel critiques the mentality of condemnation and homophobic culture in Nigeria, reinforcing the argument that the categories of masculinity and femininity cannot encompass a person's humanity. I analyzed Okparanta's depiction of same-sex intimacy and argued that she characterizes Uzo and Adaora as receptive to demonstrate the centrality of familial support to queer flourishing. The text asserts human vulnerability, revealing that social change at the family's micro space is as desirable and crucial as a policy change at the macro level.

Conclusion

To the Self and Others: Re-Scripting Gender

In "Receptive Subjects: Gender and Sexuality in Novels by Igbo Authors," I have attempted to establish that writers can challenge hegemonic cultures by portraying alternative models of masculinity and femininity. Chinua Achebe, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Jude Dibia, and Chinelo Okparanta contest and redefine what it means to be a man—or a woman—in society. The characters in their novels reveal that gender is a contingent term whose meaning depends on how one articulates one's sense of self or identity. These characters also challenge the idea of identity as grounded in biology or essentialism. Achebe, Adichie, Dibia, and Okparanta delineate how we might rethink relationality, the relationship between the self and the other in ways that affirm each other's humanity. Indeed, ethics animates the structure and pulse of my dissertation, congruent with feminist thinking. As bell hooks remarks, "Feminist thinking teaches us all, especially, how to love justice and freedom in ways that foster and affirm life" (71). Gender operates as a lens through which I have grappled with what it means for a man or woman to perform masculinity or femininity in a (non)prescriptive way that avows another's dignity. [60] As the dominant culture prescribes, performing masculinity is to aspire to a fantasy of normality, ascribe normality to one's identity, and reinscribe a binary of the normal and the abnormal. Judith Butler writes in *Gender Trouble*: "Gender is also a norm that can never be fully

[60] Langa conceives of it as alternative masculinities that affirm "new ways of being a male person, one who is non-violent, non-sexist and non-homophobic" (*Becoming Men* 21).

internalized; 'the internal' is a surface signification, and gender norms are finally phantasmatic, impossible to embody" (192).

Studying Nigerian masculinities has provided me with a means to interrogate my own preconceptions and critique the dominant gender ideology expressed in fiction. A study of men and masculinities of this scope is very relevant. It makes a significant contribution to the fields of feminist, gender, queer, and postcolonial scholarship. It also demonstrates the potential of literature to (re)imagine other modes of being human—or "new forms of legibility" (Macharia 29)—that exceed social and cultural inscriptions, or what Michael Awkward describes as "calcified terms of signification" (9). Accordingly, this study opens a dialogic space for us to interrogate essentialist, nativist, and (neo)colonial thinking that seeks to reify identity and desire around constructs and categories while encouraging us to appreciate other modes of sociality illustrative of human complexity.

In *Memory Speaks,* Sto:lo author and poet Lee Maracle writes that study "is capable of moving people toward social transformation, dissolving inequities, eradicating dangerous assumptions, and altering oppressive conditions. It is also capable of rationalizing those oppressive conditions and upholding inequity by ignoring underlying assumptions that may prove dangerous to position" (231). For me, critique must challenge the other's dehumanization by uncovering social inequities and dispelling myths of what constitutes the human. In *Politics of Piety*, the Pakistani writer Saba Mahmood remarks that critique

> is most powerful when it leaves open the possibility that we might also be remade in the process of engaging another's worldview, that we might come to learn things that we did not already know before we understood the engagement. This requires that we occasionally turn the critical gaze upon ourselves, to open the possibility that we may be remade through an encounter with the other. (36)

The emphasis on the relation between the self and study— a remaking of subjectivity—has helped me to better appreciate the way gender intersects with power. As C.J. Pascoe and Tristan Bridges write, "[g]ender is one of the major ways through which power structures, privilege, and inequality are reproduced" (3). My central concern throughout the dissertation has been how to address the question of what or who is a man or a woman, as depicted in fiction, and how to highlight gender redefinition and the horizons of possibility expressed in such work. The ideas of Martha Nussbaum, Butler, Michael Slote, and Chielozona Eze[61] have grounded my thinking on narratives, ethics, gender, and masculinities, providing me with a deeper appreciation of concepts and their significance. Throughout this project, my approach to critique resonates as well with the ideas by Heather Love: "Criticism serves two important functions: it lays bare the conditions of exclusion and inequality and it gestures toward alternative trajectories for the future" (29). Unmasking figures of receptivity in fiction is one way I wish to reimagine the social.

In my analysis of figurations of masculinity by Achebe, Adichie, Dibia, and Okparanta, I attempted to track how definitions of manhood and womanhood have shifted and possibly evolved in the Nigerian cultural imaginary and how these shifts can facilitate our understandings of the human. Over four chapters, I underscored how the writers represent those changes in gender relations to human flourishing. They show that identity is a subject position and not immutable. Masculinity is not a "stability of self" (Pascoe and Bridges 329). Achebe, Adichie, Dibia, and Okparanta show that masculinity and femininity are forms of subjectivity articulating "a socially mediated process of relations and negotiations with multiple others and with

[61] I have benefitted from several conversations on ethics and decolonial thinking with the Nigerian scholar and philosopher Chielozona Eze and these conversations helped me to develop a "receptive" methodology of reading postcolonial African novels. As Eze notes in his book *Race, Decolonization, and Global Citizenship in South Africa*, his concern has always been about stressing our "openness to the humanity of others and how it can be achieved in a traumatized society" (169). Specifically, the book is about underscoring a new humanism in South Africa, but its vision is applicable to Nigeria, a society similarly traumatized, though by a civil war and military dictatorship.

multilayered social structures" (Braidotti 4). Nigerian writers understand masculinity and femininity as *becoming*—prone to influences, tensions, contradictions, and reformulations, and not as *being*—autonomous, stative, and ahistorical. They stress the heterogeneous character of gendered identity, delinking the social from the anatomical. As a result, they challenge us to think about the ethical implications of *doing* gender—or, perhaps, *undoing* gender (Butler 2004). Furthermore, Achebe, Adichie, Dibia, and Okparanta narrate stories about men and women as "enfleshed subjects," underscoring human affinity over social constructs. These writers value a common vulnerability over gender ideology and centre receptivity as critical to human flourishing.

In *Issues in African Literature*, Charles Nnolim asks, "What kind of society would Nigeria have in the year 2080? How would her citizens intermix? Would they then be real citizens of a free Nigeria or would state of origin be the criterion?" (82). The questions point to issues of human flourishing (what kind of a society), livability (citizens intermix), the human ('real' citizens), and citizenship (state of origin). Those questions emphasize ethics, which orients my exploration of masculinity around the themes of vulnerability, precariousness, and viability. The four novels—*Things Fall Apart, Purple Hibiscus, Walking with Shadows*, and *Under the Udala Trees*—I have analyzed tackle these themes. Central to each writer's social vision are questions about the human and the ensuing discourses on normality and realness (what makes a 'real' man or woman? Who is a 'normal' man or woman?). In addressing those questions, Nigerian writers help us to understand the ramifications of male hegemony and the violence it usually engenders. They also provide us with a means to recognize how culture mobilizes orthodoxies to perpetuate abjection, abnormality, and alienation within its community. Their work pulsates with feminist valences. Indeed, an ethic of receptivity frames their aesthetics.

This study has demonstrated that Achebe, Adichie, Dibia, and Okparanta reshape our understandings of masculinity and femininity by depicting receptive characters that subvert cultural norms and articulate alternative subjectivities. In examining their writing, I have argued that receptivity motivates us "to see other human beings as full people, with thoughts and feelings of their own that deserve respect and empathy" (Nussbaum 143). This mode of *seeing* attunes us towards recognizing "the diverse and multicultural humanity of others in the global family" as well as "tak[ing] an active and ethical stance against all social systems of domination…[including] other systems of oppression that limit the human potential of the black masculine self and others" (Mutua 7). This dissertation recognizes the possibilities of change, or what Rosi Braidotti terms the "social horizons of hope" (267). As I have noted in my Introduction and Chapter 1, the theme of receptivity informed my choice of the works of Achebe, Adichie, Dibia, and Okparanta. These writers portray characters that identify with the vulnerable, the marginalized, and the stigmatized, showing that human life is already entangled and always relational.

In Chapter 2, I examined the models of masculinities exemplified by Unoka and Okonkwo in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Accordingly, I located the protagonist's firstborn, Nwoye, as an example of "receptive" masculinity and argued that Achebe employed him to critique the hegemonic ideal Okonkwo embodies. I discussed how Nwoye acknowledged the precariousness of the other. In Chapter 3, I analyzed how Adichie elaborated on Achebe's father-son relationship in *Purple Hibiscus* and argued that she positioned Jaja to trouble the disciplinary masculinity personified by his father, Eugene. I also considered how Jaja and Father Amadi articulated alternative masculinities by undermining orthodoxy. As firstborns, Nwoye and Jaja refused to perpetuate the paternal legacy. Achebe and Adichie depict the family through the lens

of heterosexual relationships. Dibia and Okparanta employ the figures of homosexuality to challenge the heteronormative family. In Chapters 4 and 5, I examined how Dibia and Okparanta dramatized the struggles of sexual minorities by presenting male and female homosexuality in *Walking with Shadows* and *Under the Udala Trees,* respectively. In Chapter 4, I showed how Dibia employed Adrian, the homosexual protagonist, to undermine gay stereotypes. I also discussed how Ada's and Chika's receptiveness towards Adrian's sexuality demonstrated the connection between familial support and queer flourishing. Chapter 5 focused on the mother-daughter dynamic to show how Okparanta problematized the maternal legacy while critiquing orthodoxy and homophobia. I argued that she transformed Adaora into a receptive subject to emphasize the importance of family support to the flourishing of queer lives. Unlike Achebe and Adichie, Dibia and Okparanta narrate stories about "bodies and sexualities that are transgressing the concepts of gender" (Veit-Wild and Naguschewski, "Introduction" x). The four authors present multivalent ways of thinking about gender and relationality, helping us reconsider the categories that shape our understanding of what it means to be a man or a woman. Achebe, Adichie, Dibia, and Okparanta portray male and female characters that transgress the norm while reimagining what it means to be human.

"Receptive Subjects: Gender and Sexuality in Novels by Igbo Authors" intervenes in the ongoing conversations about men, women, and masculinities in Africa. Political, sociological, and ethnographic perspectives frame much of the discourse on gender and sexuality in Nigeria. My dissertation contributes to the existing scholarship on masculinity and gender by employing a critical literary perspective. It uncovers the presence of variant masculinities and femininities in postcolonial Nigerian fiction, expanding the archive on African masculinities. As Stephen Whitehead remarks in his introduction to *Men and Masculinities*, "to write of men in a critical or

questioning sense is to be inevitably aligned with a larger desire for gender equality—feminism" (2). Though concerned primarily with the representations of men and masculinities in Nigerian novels, this study extends the current conversations around the feminist projects of gender and social justice.

The proliferation of literary journals online and opportunities offered by networking with established writers across digital spaces have motivated a younger generation of Nigerian writers to showcase their art. For instance, Nigerian poetry has witnessed a resurgence, propelled by this generation. Romeo Oriogun, Saddiq Dzukogi, DM Aderibigbe, Gbenga Adesina, Chibuihe Obi, Emeka Patrick Nome, Chisom Okafor, and Logan February (predominantly male), to name a few, have utilized their poetry to reimagine what it means to be a man in Nigeria.

Receptivity in New Nigerian Writing

Here I would like to conclude my dissertation with an overview of Ukamaka Olisakwe's *Ogadinma*, or *Everything Will Be All Right* published in 2020 by The Indigo Press, United Kingdom. Olisakwe is among the third-generation Nigerian novelists,[62] including Adichie, Dibia, and Okparanta. Her novel echoes Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* and Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, especially in their characterization of traditional masculinity. Like those pioneer African feminists, Olisakwe deplores male hegemony and exposes the consequences of male

[62] Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dunton use the term "third generation" to rather loosely categorize the Nigerian writers born during or shortly after the period Nigeria gained her independence from the British in 1960. Many of those such as Uche Nduka, Promise Okekwe, Toyin Adewale-Gabriel, Esiaba Irobi, Unoma Azuah, Afam Akeh, Helon Habila, Nduka Otiono, amu nnadi, Ogaga Ifowodo, Emman Shehu, EC Osondu, and Maik Nwosu, had their work published during the military eras between 1980s and 1990s. Poetry was the dominant literary genre during these periods. Though Olisakwe was born in the 1980s during the Second Nigerian Republic under the Shehu Shagari government, we can still include her in this generation, considering that there has not been any subsequent delimitation of categories along generational lines since after Pius and Dunton published their seminal essay in 2005. See, "Nigeria's Third Generation Writing."

violence. Although her novel also critiques how women can reinforce rather than undermine the patriarchal order, it asserts female self-definition and agency through her portrayal of the eponymous female protagonist. Yet, unlike Nwapa and Emecheta, Olisakwe creates Nnanna as an example of a man receptive to the oppressed woman.[63] In the narrative, the young man articulates a different understanding of masculinity in his relation to women.

The first time we are introduced to Nnanna is at a motor park in Lagos when he and his father pick up Ogadinma. While father and son are talking in the car, Ogadinma feels "her chest suddenly tight" because she realizes how much she misses her father, who lives in Kano. Nnanna notices her discomfort and asks her, "Why are you crying?" When she prevaricates, he comforts her by rubbing her shoulder and "[s]something lifted from her chest" (37). When they arrive at her uncle's home, Nnanna prepares the bath for her, telling her to "go and bathe now before the water gets cold o" (39). As Ogadinma steps into the bathroom, she is surprised by how neat it is: "Without being told, she knew Nnanna had made it so. She could almost imagine what his room must look like" (40). By the time she is ready to have her breakfast, "Nnanna had arranged tins of Peak Milk, Bournvita, Ovaltine, Planta and a packet of Saint Louis Sugar on the table, and he had set out a plate of fried eggs and a loaf of bread" (41). These scenes illustrate moments of caring masculinity. In his relationship with Ogadinma, Nnanna exemplifies qualities traditionally associated with femininity: receptivity, sensitivity, and caring.

Throughout the narrative, Nnanna shows that he has no misgivings about befriending a woman who is five years older than him. As he says to Ogadinma, "I know what you are

[63] Ukamaka Olisakwe spoke about her novel in an interview with the researcher in 2020. See, https://africainwords.com/2020/11/03/qa-uchechukwu-peter-umezurike-interviews-ukamaka-olisakwe-author-of-ogadinma-2020/

thinking: she is older than me and shouldn't waste time. But, you know what I think? I just want to be happy with the person I have chosen to spend my life with" (236). When every relative appears to blame Ogadinma for the abuse she suffers at her husband's hands, it is only Nnanna who offers her emotional support. When he discovers that she has fled her abusive marriage, he says, "I see you are happier. And if ending your marriage with Tobe brought you peace, I support your decision" (237). Furthermore, he visits Ogadinma, knowing that she will need someone to understand why she can no longer condone her husband's violence: "So, how are you holding up here?" he asked. She grinned and said, "Everything is fine now. We are doing very well." He held her gaze, worry wrinkling his brow. "Are you sure you are holding up well, Ogadinma?" (162-63). Ogadinma keeps silent and turns away, knowing that "he was watching her. And he looked sad, his brows still creased with concern" (163). Nnanna never judges Ogadinma, even when he later discovers that she has dumped her son with his mother.

In *Searching for the New Black Men*, Ronda C. Henry Anthony reconsiders iconic figures of black masculinity by arguing that black men perform masculinity at women's expense. Her critique of black male identity encourages us to "challenge the tenets of hegemonic, ideal masculinity predicated upon the domination of women, children, and other men" (14). Nnanna's character embodies a form of progressive black masculinity, for his sense of maleness is not predicated on the subjugation of women or the abjection of others. We can include Nnanna in the list of young men redefining what it means to be a man in Nigeria. Nwoye in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Jaja in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* already exemplify alternative masculinities.

Finally, I want to reflect upon Susan Sontag's effort to rethink criticism: "What is important now is to recover our senses. We must learn to *see* more, to *hear* more, to *feel* more" (10, original emphasis). I hope that teachers and students will continue to engage with gender

and sexuality questions as we broaden the conversations about inclusivity and collectivity. The question to *un/do* masculinity in an *ethically* accountable manner that affirms the flourishing of the self and the other, regardless of how we identify, whom we choose to identify with, or what we choose to identify with, remains one that we must keep addressing, re-examining, and reimagining. Receptivity opens a means for us to attend to those questions, reminding us of our shared vulnerability. By being receptive to another, we may, after all, begin to foster kinships that transcend social norms and gender categories. That is ethics, a recognition of our shared vulnerability, an avowal of interhuman mutuality. A praxis of living, to borrow Walter D. Mignolo's phrase.

As the Igbo say, *Ka udo di*. *Ka ndu di*. Let peace be. Let life be.

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