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GENDER AND COLONIALISM: AN INTERGENERATIONAL CONVERSATION

IN AFRICAN LITERATURE

by

Khadizatul Kubra

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GENDER AND COLONIALISM: AN INTERGENERATIONAL CONVERSATION

IN AFRICAN LITERATURE

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University of Nebraska, 2023

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It is thought that African literature tends to be dominated by the masculine-oriented politics that also characterizes African public political life. In some cases, this is true, but there is a feminist movement in Africa, and many African women writers are using global feminist principles and global anti-colonial principles to write a different kind of literature. As a consequence, recent novels such as Yvonne Vera's *Nehanda* (1993), set in Zimbabwe, and Petina Gappah's *Out of Darkness, Shining Light* (2019), revise past, often male, African writers' approaches to depicting the genders, even as they also criticize, implicitly or explicitly, still-widespread colonialist stereotypes of African women. This thesis will analyze first Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958), and the 1959 play *The Lion and The Jewel* by Wole Soyinka for their representation of African gender politics under the stress of colonialism. It will then argue that Vera and Gappah represent a new approach to depicting women characters in relation to colonization and agency.

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INTRODUCTION

As countries of the African continent came under the role of European imperialism, the role of women and men changed dramatically. As a result, gender roles and their representation in past African literature are different than in the present. Scholars like Abrona Lee Pandi Aden, Charles C. Fonchingong, and Emmanuel Ngara discuss gender inequality, biases, value, and identity in African literature. At times, African male writers in Africa have presented submissive, weak female characters in their books. Chinua Achebe's representation of women in the novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958), for example, is criticized because, in this novel, women are dominated by male characters. The same is true for the 1959 play *The Lion and The Jewel* by Wole Soyinka. Some critics argue that women are not treated equally to men in these books, and African literature thus perpetuates a patriarchal bias. Still, these works demonstrate the pressures of colonialism and Western cultural hierarchies on African men and women as a dynamic relationship.

And new writers are carrying forward the representation of that dynamic with further attention to women, often representing women as equal to men. Novels like Yvonne Vera's *Nehanda* (1993), set in Zimbabwe, and Petina Gappah's *Out of Darkness, Shining Light* (2019), rewrites the story of David Livingstone, show that women also contribute to the development of their societies. In this thesis, I will argue that even though African literature is criticized as male-dominated literature, there are some recent books in which women are presented as strong and active public leaders. However, more broadly, there is an intergenerational conversation in African literary art about how to represent the effects of the coming of colonialism and its aftermath in terms of their

impact on gender roles and gendered agency. It is thought that African literature tends to be dominated by the masculine-oriented politics that also characterizes African public political life. In some cases, this is true, but there is a feminist movement in Africa, and many African women writers are using global feminist principles and global anti-colonial principles to write a different kind of literature. As a consequence, these recent novels revise past, often male, African writers' approaches to depicting the genders, even as they also criticize, implicitly or explicitly, still-widespread colonialist stereotypes of African women.

Gender and African Colonialism through a Feminist Lens

The feminist movement in Africa is diverse and complex, influenced by various social, cultural, and political factors. Feminism in Africa has its roots in the struggles against colonialism and the fight for independence, as well as in the broader global feminist movement. One of the key issues that African feminists have focused on is the intersectionality of gender with other forms of oppression, such as race, class, and sexuality. African feminists have also focused on issues such as violence against women, reproductive rights, and access to education and economic opportunities. There have been several critical feminist movements in Africa over the years. For example, in the 1970s, the Women's Liberation Movement emerged in countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, and Tanzania, focusing on equal pay and equal access to education. There are also some prominent African feminist activists and scholars, including Amina Mama, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and Fatou Sow, who have made significant contributions to the feminist movement in Africa.

The African feminist movement has had significant impacts on African literature. One of the significances is bringing attention to the underrepresentation of women in literature, both as writers and as characters. Literature that investigates women's lives and criticizes patriarchal standards has increased as a result of feminism and literature informed by feminism. African feminist writers and scholars have challenged simplistic and stereotypical portrayals of gender roles in African literature and have emphasized the importance of representing African women's diverse experiences and identities.

As patriarchy is one of the handmaidens of colonialism—or perhaps it is the reverse—women are dominated by men in post-colonial Africa. In pre-colonial Africa, women were given respect and social power. They had responsibility both in private and public activities. Apart from being wives and mothers, they were also farmers, educators, and priestesses. Especially in the West part of Africa, women were involved in agricultural and marketplace activities and also managed their family and community activities (Fadipe, 1917). For example, in Zimbabwe, a “woman was responsible for her home, the field, harvest, pottery-making, and many other activities that she learned from childhood.” (Schmidt, 1998).

Women also played the chief role beside men. In *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí writes that on the eve of colonization, there were female chiefs and officials all over Yorubaland. Ironically, one of the signatories to the treaty that was said to have ceded tbadan to the British was Lanlatu, an iyalode, an anafemale chief. (125)

In imperial Britain, politics and official work were limited to men. So during colonialism, the British colonizers controlled subject societies by giving high official positions only to British men, and sometimes, they allowed the native people—again, mostly men—to do governmental activities in the local area. So even though native male chiefs were accepted by the British colonizers, female chiefs were removed. As a result, women lost power as public leaders, while men lost authority to the colonial government or to missionaries (a transformation taken up in *Things Fall Apart*). The colonizers did not even allow their women to have higher positions during colonization. Colonization is considered a man's job also because in Africa, and especially in West Africa, the death rate was high; West Africa was known as the "White man's grave." European women were not allowed a role in any governing or professional activities except nursing, and even nursing was thought to be "feminine work." "If the women of the colonizer were so insignificant," Oyěwùmí says, "then one could only imagine the position of the 'other' women if their existence was acknowledged at all" (150).

After colonialism, things changed, and gender discrimination spread. In pre-colonial Africa, society was, admittedly, patrilineal. Still, women had responsibility for both domestic and public activities. They made food, reared children, and made essential family decisions at home. Even older women were given the power to decide matters for the community, and many older women became chiefs. Working in the field and trading products were also women's regular activities. Because African women maintained important roles in economic production and the home, their social domain was flexible. For example, a Zimbabwean woman was responsible for her home, the field, harvest, pottery-making, and many other activities she learned from childhood (Schmidt, 1998).

As a result, women had fewer limitations in their roles as society members and were active and influential in their everyday familial and social lives.

However, because of colonialism, women's roles in Africa changed dramatically. With the British, Victorian influence also entered African culture. In the Victorian period, Europeans believed that women should stay at home and men should be responsible for public, legal, and economic activities. Women—middle-class women, anyway—were idealized as pious vessels of maternal influence, sympathetic identification, and demure support for their husbands. Men wanted their wives to be submissive and ignorant of the outside world, and most Victorian women focused on getting married and maintaining family lives. According to one critic,

a woman was inferior to a man in all ways except the unique one that counted most [to a man]: her femininity. Her place was in the home, on a veritable pedestal if one could be afforded, and emphatically not in the world of affairs.

(Altick, 54)

In "Toward a Decolonial Feminism," Maria Lugones notes how Westerners thought of themselves as human, but colonized people were seen as non-human, animalistic, and savage.

Only the civilized are men or women. Indigenous peoples of the Americas and enslaved Africans were classified as not human in species—as animals, uncontrollably sexual and wild. The European, bourgeois, colonial, and modern man became a subject/agent, fit for the rule, for public life and ruling, a being of civilization, heterosexual, Christian, a being of mind and reason. The European

bourgeois woman was not understood as his complement, but as someone who reproduced in the service of the white, European, bourgeois man. (743)

When European colonizers came to Africa, this version of patriarchal influence entered the African community. The imperialist only allowed the native male to work and forbade the women to do outdoor work. As a result, women's traditional positions and social flexibility were impaired, and they were forced to become submissive to their men. While this process was not complete, as we will see, it is significant that its effects penetrated even into the works of the most incisive critics and literary artists of the continent. In many post-colonial African works of literature, and even to an extent in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, women are shown as submissive and inferior to men. Scholars (Aden, 2018; Fonchingong, 2006; Ngara, 1989) have raised questions about how gender identity is represented in African literature, interrogating implicit biases and inequality—since literature shapes the imagination, the choice of who to represent and how to represent human agency has an effect on that agency in real life. The representation of women as dependent and the heroic or tragic portrayal of men are worth close examination in the works of the male writers of twentieth-century Africa. Smith (2014) suggests that female characters are misrepresented, especially by male writers. These claims may be overstated, for as we will see, Achebe represents not only a range of women characters with different kinds of agencies but also male characters that are not all in the mold of the protagonist Okonkwo. Still, recent women writers have started to write about female identity in their writings in ways that explicitly center women's agency, in which women play major roles and have equal responsibility with men to manage their communities.

African feminism, for a long time, has fought for women's equality and freedom. Feminists compare the power of women in pre-colonialism to that of the post-colonial era. In their books, women writers like Ifi Amadiume, Ayo Coly, Amina Mama, and Oyèrónkẹ Oyěwùmí present their argument about colonialism's influence on African women's power. Ifi Amadiume is a Nigerian poet and essayist, who in her book *Male Daughters, Female Husbands* expresses her thinking about how the Western mind tends to think of African women as compared to the reality of the present situation:

Before British imperialism, Nbobi people used to prioritize women so much that women were given the responsibility to maintain houses and lands. These women were called 'male daughters' because the fathers allowed their daughters to take care of the lands in the absence of sons. "Women-owned land as 'male daughter' when they had been accorded full male status in the absence of a son to safeguard their father's obi, line of descent, and the property associated with it, as, for example, in the case of Nwajiuba. (Amadiume, 34)

Nwajiuba is the first 'male daughter' among the Nbobi people. In Igbo society, gender/sex conceptions are not like orthodox Western ones. Amadiume, in *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sexuality in an African Society*, describes the concept of "male daughters" and "female husbands," which are strange in the eyes of Western patriarchal society. Amadiume argues that in many African societies, biological sex does not correspond with ideological gender because sex is flexible. A woman could play "male roles" in terms of "power and authority over others" and have other women as her wives because roles "were not rigidly masculinized or feminized [and] no stigma was attached to breaking gender rules" (185). Lord Frederick Lugard, a British colonial

administrator, in his book *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, said that this marriage is “not normal,” an indication of how threatening such a system could be to English patriarchal norms. Women-to-women marriages exist in more than thirty African societies, and this marriage system is legal, as bride wealth is exchanged.

This marriage system is maintained for political and diplomatic reasons. A wealthy woman who cannot have children for a biological reason or who only has daughters might marry another woman. These other women can have “male love” and produce children for their “female husband.” Thus, the family line is secured. Wairimu Njambi and William O’Brien discuss this marriage system in their study “Revisiting ‘Woman-Woman Marriage’: Notes on Gikuyu Women,” in which one of the participants is reported as saying,

I ask myself, ‘What is it that women who are married to men have that I don’t have?’ Is it land? I have land. Is it children? I have children. I don’t have a man, but I have a woman who cares for me. I belong to her, and she belongs to me. And I tell you, I don’t have to worry about a man telling me what to do. (19)

This suggests that even before colonialism, some women dared to disrupt male domination in their everyday lives. Unlike even Western feminist notions of African women, these histories suggest that it was African women who enjoyed more freedom for a long time than European ones. That freedom is even discernible at the most basic levels of human communication: Sylvia Tamale writes that in many African grammatical formations, there is no difference between male and female in terms of using pronouns, “a more flexible semantic system, in which men and women can share attributes” (89).

Colonialism also affects the African female body. In *Postcolonial Hauntologies*, Ayo A. Coly argues that the colonial legacy has resulted in a “haunting” of African women’s bodies, which are often portrayed as exotic, hyper-sexualized objects for the pleasure of the Western gaze. The colonizers demanded that native African people, especially women, cover their bodies, as did Victorian women. Coly says that in the colonizer’s eyes, the unclothed African body is compared with the “unclean” African body (Burke, 1996) and the “unwell” African body (Vaughan, 1991). The colonizers thus differentiated themselves as civilized, and in the name of “civilizing” the native people, oppressed them:

The rhetorical dichotomization of unclothed Africa and clothed Europe, similar to the dichotomized juxtaposition of the fully clothed and demure Intended with the semi-naked wild African mistress in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899), served the colonial civilizing mission whereby clothing the African female body became a justificatory metaphor for the colonial project of reforming Africans. Clothing quickly delineated different regimes of African bodies and created a hierarchy of African bodies: clothed-civilized-religious African versus unclothed-uncivilized-heathen Africans. (Coly, 25)

Even in Ghana, Coly observes, women were ordered to clothe themselves as visitors took pictures of the nude women, and these pictures were shown to different countries to disgrace Ghana. As a postcolonial country, Ghana had to imitate the foreign culture. Coly argues that the notion of the “haunted” body is not only a metaphorical concept, but also a material reality, as African women continue to face physical and psychological violence, objectification, and commodification. In *The Lion and The Jewel*, Lakunle tells

Sidi, again and again, to cover her body with clothes, but Sidi ignores his request. In this play, even though men are shown as dominant, and women are shown as submissive, Sidi's rejection of Lakunle's marriage proposal indicates her respect for traditional Yoruba culture and disregard for colonial impact and its imitative regime. Though Sidi is ultimately subject to sexual violence at the hands of a traditionalist, her opposition to Lakunle hints that women in Africa were aware of and resisted colonial effects on their bodies.

Again, women in the nineteenth century before colonialism were engaged in marketing and earning income. From marriage payments for daughters to selling spices, fruits, and livestock, economic transactions were performed by women. They were often independent, their earnings managed only by themselves. Amadiume writes that

[m]ost marketing was done by women so that most of the cash passed through female hands from the sale of either their own or their husband's goods.

Following the principle of the sexual division of labor and gender division of crops, women kept their profit and what was considered theirs; nothing was considered as female and nothing belonging to women was sold by men.

(Amadiume, 34)

As the British had a patriarchal system in their society, they could not accept the strong position of women in African society. Hence, the British allowed only native men to do such activities. The British wanted to create a race whose social structure imitated theirs because, in this way, they could more easily control the native people. Native men were given positions as interpreters, court clerks, chiefs, or roles in economics and politics, while women were prevented from marketing and other public activities. Even

though women's positions were constrained by colonialism, still, women retained some power in their societies. While studying in London, Amadiume noticed that Western feminism tends to think of African women as domestic, powerless, and submissive. So she chose to write about women's active contribution to societies and families in the past and the present. Though colonialism has affected women in many ways, still African women are contributing by engaging in the market, farms, and job sector. There are women's organizations and councils that talk about women's rights and power.

“Although the economic position of women had changed,” Amadiume writes,

the ideologies which supported the economic centrality of women had not changed. Matrifocal notions and the ideology of hard work were still associated with females. While women, in general, fed their children and paid much of the school fees, wealthier women, instead of accumulating wives for themselves, paid bride price for male relatives, sons or husbands. (Amadiume, 162)

In pre-colonial Yoruba, people's names were gender-neutral, and “the differences between males and females are to be located in social practices, not in biological facts” (Oyewùmí, 08). Men were farmers and women were traders and housework were done by both men and women. But with colonialism, the scenario changed. According to Oyěronké Oyewùmí,

The imposition of the European state system, with its attendant legal and bureaucratic machinery, is the most enduring legacy of European colonial rule in Africa. One tradition that was exported to Africa during this period was the exclusion of women from the newly created colonial public sphere. (123)

Oyewùmí argues that in Yuroba before European domination, gender was not a discriminatory or “organizing factor.” But the colonizers imposed their customs on the Yoruba and thus created a division both between themselves and the Yoruba and one within the Yuroba people to control the natives more easily. Maria Lugones also supports Oyewùmí’s arguments, writing,

Oyewumi understands gender as introduced by the West as a tool of domination that designates two binarily opposed and hierarchical social categories. Women (the gender term) is not defined through biology, though it is assigned to anafemales. Women are defined in relation to men, the norm. Women are those who do not have a penis; those who do not have power; those who cannot participate in the public arena. (8)

The colonized male also accepts the European rejection of the colonized female from outdoor work as they (colonized men) were brainwashed by giving them important social positions. As in the European patriarchal system, the colonized men started to dominate their women. In *The Lion and The Jewel*, as we will see, Baroka and Lakunle fight over maintaining tradition and modernism, but they do not understand or feel a need to redress the violence that is done to women. Compared to the male characters in this play, women are still powerless, and men seem to enjoy that they can dominate women. Lakunle demands, for example, that Sidi wear a modern dress and Baroka seduces her by pretending to be an old weak man. Lugones identifies this lack of concern for women as a broader indicator of the colonial condition:

I am interested in the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality in a way that enables me to understand the indifference that men, but, more importantly to

our struggles, men who have been racialized as inferior, exhibit to the systematic violence inflicted upon women of color. (1)

It is interesting that even after colonialism, many male writers from Africa present their female characters as less significant than their male characters.

But recently African female writers have focused on resisting patriarchal behavior and representing strong female characters who are independent and powerful. Many feminist organizations created in Africa give women hope and encourage them to become responsible in political, economic, and educational fields. Amina Mama in “African Feminist Thought” writes,

It is as citizens of new nations that 20th-century African women have formed independent feminist movements that continue to demand freedom, equality, and rights, for example, by seeking freedom of movement, political representation, educational and economic equality, and perhaps most common of all, freedom from sex and gender-based violence. (1)

During British Protectorate Nigeria, women performed mass mobilizations against imperialism. Mama mentions Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, who was a national feminist, describing the terrifying situation of women as a result of colonialism:

Women owned property, traded and exercised considerable political and social influence in society. They were responsible for crowning the Kings on Coronation days. Whatever disabilities there [existed] were endured both by men and women alike. With the advent of British rule, slavery was abolished, and Christianity was introduced in the country, but instead of the women being educated and assisted

to live like human beings their condition deteriorated. The women of Nigeria are poverty-stricken, disease-ridden, superstitious, and badly nourished, although they are the main producers of their country's wealth. (Mama, 6)

Patricia McFadden notes that "We participated in anticolonial struggles as trade unionism, political leaders, wives, and mothers" (McFadden, 2).

One of the Tanzanian politicians, Bibi Titi, criticizes women's absence from the political field because the patriarchal society in Tanzania did not accept women's presence in politics. Bibi Titi played a major role in Nyerere's Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), which made her a leading mass mobilizer and propagandist:

She said, "I told you [women] that we want independence. And we can't get independence if you don't want to join the party. We have given birth to all these men. Women are the power in this world. We are the ones who give birth to the world." (Geiger, 1987)

This speech shows how African feminists like Bibi Titi have worked for women's rights and struggled against patriarchal society and colonialism.

Because of the emergence of feminism, women became aware of their unequal position, reinforced by patriarchal tradition in law and custom. Female writers started to talk about the negative effects of patriarchy, and they mostly blamed the colonizers for the creation of the patriarchal system in their culture. By writing literary works on female power and social contributions, they become able to resist male domination in society and gain freedom. In *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*, Trinh Minh-ha describes how writing literature for women's freedom helps female freedom.

“When asked why they write,” she says, “writers usually answer that they do so to create a world of their own, make order out of chaos, heighten their awareness of life, transcend their existences, discover themselves” (25).

This thesis shares those motivations. The emphasis of the writing here will be on how African female writers are presenting strong female characters by using the two novels *Nehanda* and *Out of Darkness, Shining Light*. In these two novels, women have the power to make decisions and take actions both in their political and personal lives. They do so in ways that contrast with the depictions of women in two works by leading African male writers of an earlier time: *Things Fall Apart* and *The Lion and the Jewel*. In chapter one, the relationships between men and women depicted by these male writers in post-colonial Africa will be shown; in chapter two, the response by recent African women novelists to both this depiction and the broader colonialist stereotypes of African women will be presented. All these works focus on the colonial-postcolonial historical hinge, which these writers take as a key site for depicting the tensions between the genders provoked by colonialism and its aftermath.

Vera’s and Gappah’s novels show how, because of global and African feminisms, postcolonial female writers have become aware of women’s contributions to their societies and the degree to which actively complex and positive depictions of those contributions can be a force for good. In *Nehanda*, Vera depicts a world before colonialism in which women were leaders, taking an active part in the development of their society. In this context, Sylvia Tamale writes:

In Africa, women’s struggles against oppression predate colonialism. There is a long history of women mobilizing in creative ways to resist patriarchal and

political domination, asserting their personal and collective rights. Several legendary women helped transform their societies even before colonizers stepped foot on their soil; examples include Queen Eyleuka (Dalukah) of Ethiopia, Queen Lobamba of Kuba (Congo), Princess Nang'oma of Bululi (Uganda), Queen Rangita of Madagascar, Queen Nzinga of Angola and Queen Nyabingi (northern Tanzania & western Uganda). (42)

There was, then, an expression of feminism all over Africa. This thesis takes up the representation of women in diverse parts of Africa—the East, the South, and The West. In each place, the nation-building that countries and people there have undertaken took slightly different forms. These three novels and a play, accounts of those moments of transition from a colonial to a post-colonial era, are all shaped by that effort to create a particular nation. As a result, the ways men and women and their roles and positions relative to tradition and political agency are depicted are shaped by that larger context of real-life political struggles. Consequently, the female characters have both similarities and differences, and the tension between the old and new ways is depicted differently, but with a common thread of women attempting to resist or transform patriarchal order.

Through their literary and artistic expressions, this thesis will argue, African women are reclaiming agency over their bodies and identities and contesting the dominant narratives of the colonial past. African feminist writers have done much to improve female identity and power in their writing by going beyond the representation of women in both European and previous African literature.

CHAPTER 1: “LIKE A SNAPPING OF A TIGHTENED BOW”: GENDER AND COLONIALISM IN *THINGS FALL APART* AND *THE LION AND THE JEWEL*

In his much-beloved and influential novel *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe shines a spotlight on male people in Igbo society and the roles that are only done by them. Men are the dominant figures in their families. In making decisions, protecting the family, and bringing prosperity, men are the responsible ones, in this world. If they don't perform their duties effectively or if they have to borrow money from other people, they are not considered men. People openly mock them, criticize them, and disrespect them. Children have to suffer if their fathers do not have a strong position in the clan. Similarly, in Wole Soyinka's play *The Lion and The Jewel*, male dominance is described as a natural social position. This chapter will discuss how male roles are described in these texts and investigate how colonialism is depicted by the authors as having an impact on ideas about gender and the relations between men and women. It will also show how masculinity is connected to power. “Masculinity is power,” Michael Kaufman writes, “But masculinity is terrifyingly fragile because it does not exist in the sense we are led to think it exists, that is, as a biological reality—something real that we have inside ourselves. It exists as ideology; it exists as scripted behavior; it exists within ‘gendered’ relationships” (10-11). It exists, therefore, in literary representation as well, and calls for examination.

Things Fall Apart and The Lion and the Jewel

Nigerian author, poet, and critic Chinua Achebe is considered one of the most important African writers of the twentieth century. His most famous work, *Things Fall Apart*, is a critique of colonialism and its impact on African societies and cultures. Throughout his

career, Achebe was a vocal advocate for African literature and culture and played an important role in establishing the field of postcolonial studies.

Things Fall Apart portrays the life of an Igbo (Ibo) community in Nigeria and the impact of British colonialism and Christian missionaries on their traditional way of life. The main character, Okonkwo, is a respected leader in his village, but he is haunted by his father's weakness, and he strives to be a powerful and successful man. However, his obsession with masculinity and reputation ultimately leads to his downfall. The arrival of white colonialists and Christian missionaries introduces a new way of life and beliefs, which gradually erode the traditional Igbo culture. Many members of the community are converted to Christianity, and their conversion leads to conflicts with traditionalists. The novel ends tragically with Okonkwo's suicide, as he sees no way to adapt to the changing world around him without compromising his beliefs and values.

Nigerian dramatist, poet, and writer Wole Soyinka is known for his critical examination of postcolonial African politics and society. Among the Africans, he was the first person who received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1986. Throughout his career, Soyinka has been an influential voice in African literature and politics, using his writing to address issues such as corruption, dictatorship, and the erosion of traditional values in African societies. *The Lion and the Jewel* is a drama that tells the story of Sidi, a beautiful young woman courted by two men, Baroka and Lakunle. The play explores the tension between tradition and modernity as the characters navigate their changing cultural landscape. Baroka, the traditional leader of the village, seeks to maintain his power by seducing Sidi, while Lakunle, who also desires her, is a young schoolteacher who represents Western education and modernity. In the end, Sidi chooses Baroka as her

husband, realizing the importance of tradition and cultural heritage. The play is a classic of postcolonial African literature and explores themes of gender roles, power, and identity.

In both texts, masculinity as an internal identity and public role is represented as playing a vital role in the power struggle between the indigenous society, policy, and the colonial administration. Gender being a dynamic relationship among identity categories, this chapter will explore how these male writers present both male and female characters in their works. Their nuanced portrayals of the pressures of colonialism and tradition bear witness to transformations in both men's and women's roles and conceptions of identity. Yet it will be argued that, in the end, women characters do not have as strong a voice as men characters and that these works do not offer models for readers of an agential postcolonial woman of equal significance with men for African futures.

“The only thing worth demonstrating was strength”: *Things Fall Apart*

The novel *Things Fall Apart* presents masculinity as “simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality, and culture” (Connell, 25). In this novel, the main character Okonkwo hates the feminine nature of men. All his life, he focuses on doing things that are opposite to his father. His success contrasts with the failure of his father—a gentle musician in debt to the entire community. He hates his father's idly nature so much that even the memories of his father scare him to death. This hatred drives him to fiercer and more hyper-masculinity. Okonkwo gains fame and

respect by winning a wrestling match against an undefeated wrestling champion. He is also the first person who brings to the village a human head won in the war. By doing hard work, he has achieved the title, social position, and three wives. In Umuofia's culture, power and authority are related to masculinity. Apart from the clan, Okonkwo's house is dominated by his authority. He performs violence on his wife also; "He has a slight stammer and whenever he is angry and cannot get his words out quickly enough, he will use his fists" (Achebe, 3). In Igbo culture as represented here, women are considered weak and object-like things. To show his anger and dominance, Okonkwo frequently beats his wives without guilt. He threatens Ekwefi with a shotgun to control her. As a leader of the clan, he takes Ikemefuna as a peace offering during the war between Mbaino and Umuofia. Okonkwo prefers Ikemefuna to his son Nwoye as Ikemefuna is more hardworking than Nwoye. But Okonkwo never shows his fondness to him, as showing emotions like love, value or compassion are forms of weakness to him. "To show affection was a sign of weakness—the only thing worth demonstrating was strength. He, therefore, treated Ikemefuna as he treated everybody else—with a heavy hand" (Achebe, 20). Nwoye seems feminine to him, as Nwoye likes to listen to his mother's moral tales and music and is emotional. Because of this nature, Okonkwo beats Nwoye many times. Nwoye is so scared of his father that even though he likes his mother's stories, he denies listening to these stories to please his father. After the arrival of Ikemefuna, Nwoye starts to change, becoming more hard-working.

When it is ordered that Ikemefuna be killed, Okonkwo kills him with his hand even though he was fond of Ikemefuna. He does not need to kill Ikemefuna by his hand as, indeed, Ogbuefi forbids him to do; still, Okonkwo kills him so that people will think

of him as brave and strong. Later he is haunted by this act and an emotional distance is depicted between him and Nwoye. Because his father killed Ikemefuna, Nwoye loses his belief in his father, his culture, and his religion. So, when the missionaries come to the village intending to convert the native people to Christianity, Nwoye joins them. Okonkwo feels so ashamed that he renounces Nwoye as his son because he thinks this act of Nwoye is womanly.

You have all seen the great abomination of your brother. Now is no longer my son or your brother. I will only have a son who is a man, who will hold his head up amongst 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. If you turn against me when I am dead, I will visit you and break your neck. (Achebe, 112)

Achebe presents a macho personality in describing the physical appearance of Okonkwo. The writer represents the connection between man's body and the androcentric culture by presenting Okonkwo's body as intimidating and strong. It indicates that masculinity is related to physical stature. As muscle power and ability are also associated with masculinity, Okonkwo is described in the novel as "tall and huge, and his bushy eyebrows and wide nose gave him a very severe look. He breathed heavily, and it was said that when he slept, his wives and children could hear him breathe" (Achebe, 03). David Morgan writes, "Men's power is exercised in the public arena and this public arena and this power frequently, one might say always, takes on a bodily form" (72). Okonkwo's body represents male power.

Achebe's representation of Okonkwo is deliberately larger than life and is only one point on a spectrum of depictions of manhood, as the portraits of Nwoye and

Unoka show. Okonkwo's father Unoka appears his opposite in every way. His body structure was very "thin' with a slight stoop" (Achebe, 3). He gets sick at the sight of blood, and he has a large amount of debt. The article "A Son Who is Man: Receptive Masculinity in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*" describes how people like Unoka are treated:

Okonkwo's village Umuofia is an achievement-based society that values worth as a descriptor of humanity. However, the way that it defines worth creates a norm for the recognition, differentiation, and dehumanization of its citizens such that those who fail to acquire capital (symbolic, social, economic, or political) are deemed worthless. The *efulefu* compose this category. While such undesirable people are the worthless human, the *osu* or outcasts exemplify the category of utter abjection in Umuofia. (Umezurike, 208)

Efulefu is the one who brings disrespect to society. Unoka is considered a worthless man as he has many debts. While he was ill, he was taken to the forest to die. Okonkwo is shamed by his peers because of him. In reaction, Okonkwo forces Nwoye to remove all the kind and emotional nature within him.

To satisfy his father, Nwoye tries his best to build a masculine persona.

According to bell hooks, "Patriarchal masculinity teaches men that their sense of self and identity, their reason for being, resides in their capacity to dominate others" (70). To prove his masculinity, he starts "splitting wood," "pounding food," and "grumbling aloud about women and their trouble." He even goes further to avoid his mother's hearth as the hearth signifies traditional femininity and spends more time in his father's *obi*. *Obi* is the place for men and this place represents male authority. Though he loves to listen to his

mother's stories more than the war and blood stories of his father, he feigns to dislike his mother's stories to please Okonkwo. But Okonkwo does not notice, as he is so focused on the idea of masculinity: "[Nwoye] knew that his father wanted him to be a man" (Achebe, 43). But he becomes silent and loses all his respect for his father as well as for the Igbo culture when he realizes that his father has played a role in the killing of Ikemefuna. Having a special bond with Ikemefuna, Nwoye senses Ikemefuna's upbringing system—it is a household where people accept suffering as inevitable. During the time staying at Okonkwo's house, Ikemefuna was scared and sad, homesick for his family. Achebe makes clear that Nwoye understands the pitiful condition of Ikemefuna and consequently tries to accompany him, which results in a good brotherhood. After the killing of Ikemefuna, he is so heartbroken that he feels a "snapping" within himself:

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. (Achebe, 49)

This "snapping" might be taken as a figure for the failure of masculine ideals to supply or maintain brotherhood, family, and peace. In Umuofia, twins are considered supernatural things that can bring damage to the world. So, when Nwoye hears the cry of the twins left in the forest, he feels a "snapping" feeling for the first time. The feeling comes back when he realizes that Ikemefuna was killed: "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” (Achebe, 49).

All these things make Nwoye rebel against his clan. The twins are just babies, and as Obierika says, “What crimes had they committed?” (Achebe, 100). Nwoye does not like how Igbo society differentiates among people like the *efulefu*, the *osu*, and the *unreal*. But he has respect for cultural norms and so he tries to follow them. He tries to follow his father’s path, though he is more comfortable living without having any rules. But his faith and respect for his cultural norms shatter when he sees how, in the name of masculinity, his father kills Ikemefuna who is harmless and son-like to Okonkwo. He is not the person that society wants him to be. So, he turns his back on his society and even his father. Though Nwoye is not a man in his father’s eyes, he is a man who can stand against his culture by joining with the missionary. Rather than proving masculinity by killing innocent people, he will go his way by acting outside of society’s expectations, in a form offered by colonial culture. So, when Obierika runs to him to ask about Okonkwo, Nwoye replies, “I don’t know. He is not my father” (Achebe, 115).

Obierika is another character contrasting with Okonkwo, valuing humanity more than masculinity. Obierika is the foil to Okonkwo in terms of their belief and perception. He does not approve when Okonkwo kills Ikemefuna himself.

You know very well Okonkwo, that I am not afraid of blood; and if anyone tells you that I am, he is telling a lie. And let me tell you one thing, my friend. If I were you I would have stayed at home. What you have done will not please the

Earth. It is the kind of action for which the goddess wipes out whole families.
(Achebe, 62)

Still, Obierika questions Igbo cultural norms and beliefs and appreciates the change in Igbo culture because of the arrival of the missionaries: “He remembered his wife’s twin children, whom he had thrown away. What crime had they committed? The earth had decreed that they were an offense on the land and must be destroyed” (118). When Okonkwo wants to use violence against the foreigners to prove his masculinity, Obierika realizes that it is already late to go against the British. Throughout the novel, Obierika is depicted as a rational and open-minded person.

Uchendu is the uncle on Okonkwo’s mother’s side. When Okonkwo has to come to his mother’s village Mbanta to seek shelter, Uchendu welcomes him and his family cordially. Okonkwo was depressed for a long time after his exile. So, Uchendu points out, why should a man come to his motherland when he feels hopeless? He should receive the support his motherland is giving to him. The soul of Okonkwo’s mother and the dead will not be happy if he denies the support of his motherland:

“Then listen to me,” he said and cleared his throat. “It’s true that a child belongs to its father. But when a father beats his child, it seeks sympathy in its mother’s hut. A man belongs to his fatherland when things are good, and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness, he finds refuge in his motherland. Your mother is there to protect you. She is buried there. And that is why we say that the mother is supreme. Is it right that you, Okonkwo, should bring to your mother a heavy face and refuse to be comforted? Be careful or you may displease the dead. Your duty is to comfort your wives and children and take them back to your

fatherland after seven years. But if you allow sorrow to weigh you down and kill you, they will all die in exile.” (Achebe, 100)

Uchendu represents someone who, although living in a patriarchal world, knows the value of the motherly role. Okonkwo, who only believes in masculinity, at the end of the day comes to his motherland for shelter. Uchendu is a foil to Okonkwo as Uchendu knows how motherly love is important in a child’s love. It shows his respect for women.

As depicted in the novel, patriarchy is dominant in the clan. Men have the power to control their houses. They are given more importance than females, even given the range of masculinities just discussed. Females are considered subordinate to their husbands. This is reminiscent of the notion of double colonialism. Double colonialism is a term coined by Ketu Katrak meaning that women in formerly colonized societies are colonized by both imperial and patriarchal ideologies (Ashcroft, 240). Achebe in this novel also presents how women are treated in nineteenth-century Igboland. Women are the possession of men, and a man is respected depending on how many wives he has and how he controls them. Women have to abandon their twin children as they are thought evil and kept in an earthenware pot and left to die in the forest. Some mothers cannot accept this norm, and this results in their conversion to Christianity. Women are also expected to get married based on their father’s approval. Male children are supposed to listen to stories about killing, blood, war, and victory, as these stories might influence them to become a great warrior, whereas folktales like “The Mosquito and The Ear,” “The Snake Lizard,” and “The Tortoise” told by women are considered stories for female children.

In Igbo society, children are given instructions according to their gender. Ezinma is the second daughter of Okonkwo and the favorite one because of her strong and smart personality. When she offers to bring the chair for Okonkwo, he quickly rejects the offer as it is a man's job:

“Yes,” and after a pause, she said: “Can I bring your chair for you?”

“No. That's a boy's job.” (Achebe, 42)

Many times, he regrets Ezinma's not being a boy. To him, men must be strong, violent, and hard workers. Though women do not have as much importance and power as men do as depicted in the novel, they are also shown as being important to balancing their families and society, and some women have control over men.

Chielo is the priestess of the Oracle of the Hills and Caves. She holds special respect from the village people as she is the messenger of the Goddess Agbala. Even men like Okonkwo cannot avoid her orders. When Chielo comes to Ekwefi's house to get Ezinma to please the gods, Okonkwo could not do anything. Though Okonkwo, at first, tries not to let Chielo take Ezinma, Chielo shouts and scolds him by saying, “Beware of exchanging words with Agbala (the name of the Oracle of the Hills and Caves). Does a man speak when a God speaks? Beware!” (Achebe, 95) Even though Okonkwo dominates his wives, he cannot do anything against Chielo to keep his precious daughter at home. On the other hand, it is Ekwefi who dares to neglect Chielo by following her even though she was ordered not to. This situation reveals a lot about Ekwefi; she appears bold and determined. Like the other two wives, Ekwefi suffers under the aggressive dominance of Okonkwo. Once, on New Year's Eve, Okonkwo accuses her of killing the banana tree. When she points out that the tree is not dead and talks back to him, he beats

and threatens to shoot her. But still, she is different from the other two wives. She dares to knock on Okonkwo's door at night. Her first husband was Anene from whom she ran away and came to Okonkwo to marry him. This scene shows how Ekwefi values her desire more than the social norms. In the article, "Overlapping Characters Variations in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*," Muna Abd-Rabbo writes that

This is an instance when Ekwefi puts her wishes ahead of tribal norms; on the level of her freedom, she tries to establish some space where a woman can be with the man she loves, not the man that society imposes on her. The narrator does not offer the reader an account of the tribe's position on Ekwefi's move, however. It is never mentioned that Ekwefi is censured by the tribe; she merely appears to go from one man's household to another's and that is the end of it. Even though Ekwefi's actions are against tribal norms, her act is more personal than an attempt to change social practices as a whole. (74)

Obioma Nnaemeka also talks about Ekwefi in her article "Feminism, Rebellious Women, and Cultural Boundaries: Rereading Flora Nwapa and Her Compatriots," noting that a strong woman is the one who can get out from an unwanted marriage, and Ekwefi is the perfect example. "If the ability to leave one's husband is gauged by which modernity measured, she writes, "African women were modern even before colonization 'modernized' them. It is Chinua Achebe who documents the first rebellious wife in African Literature" (Nnaemeka, 92). She also gives eggs to her daughter Ezinma which is not acceptable for children in Igbo culture as it is thought that eating eggs will make the children steal. One day, Okonkwo catches Ezinma eating eggs and swears to beat Ekwefi if she gives Ezinma eggs again. After that, Ezinma develops more appetite for eggs. So,

Ekwefi gives her the egg in her bedroom secretly. It indicates that both Ekwefi and Ezinma dare to deny the social norms when they please.

Yet one rebellious wife does not a feminist revolution make. Even though women in this novel can be strong, they live in the shadow of the male characters. Both Ekwefi and Ezinma break social norms many times, but they end up following Okonkwo and his demands, as Ezinma's decision to marry in Umuofia instead of Mbaino.

The colonial context highlights and upholds this male dominance. Okonkwo notices that the values of masculinity start to change after the arrival of the missionaries. For a great warrior like Okonkwo, masculinity seems to mean violence, fighting, and aggressiveness. When the missionaries come to the village, they focus on the people who are not respected in the clans. They aim to establish a strong position for the church within the village. Many people who do not have faith or respect in the clans start to join the church. Okonkwo believes that a masculine man will be sure of himself, his clan's values, and his gods. So, he considers,

None of his converts was a man whose word was heeded in the assembly of the people. None of them was a man of the title. They were mostly the kind of people that were called *efulefu*, worthless, empty men. The imagery of an *efulefu* in the language of the clan was a man who sold his matchete and wore the sheath to battle. Chielo, the priestess of Agbala, called the converts the excrement of the clan, and the new faith was mad dog that had come to eat it up! (Achebe, 101)

The converts are the ones who do not have any value among the clans. They are mocked or oppressed all this time. Chielo calls them "empty" men, and this is a scatological term showing a woman criticizing these men.

The colonial government, however, starts to protect these “empty” men and give them recognition. Okonkwo, continuing the scatological metaphor, senses the policy of the colonizers:

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

Masculinity means managing any situation that can harm the village people according to Okonkwo even though it needs violence to manage the situation. The Mbanta people are trying to negotiate with the missionaries instead of chasing them out of the village and Okonkwo hates this approach, as he does not believe the missionaries. Their presence, then, forces an explicit rift in traditional modes of masculine behavior.

Before leaving Mbanta, Okonkwo prepares a lavish feast for the people as a token of gratitude. The village’s elders appreciate that Okonkwo has prepared the feast, “doing things in the grand, old way” (Achebe, 118). After the missionaries come, the number of young people abandoning the Igbo cultural norms increases day by day. Okonkwo appears to be the last person who values the norms wholeheartedly.

When he comes to Umuofia, he sees that many people have joined the missionaries and the white people have taken control over the village. As expected, Okonkwo wants to fight with the White people, but Obierika forbids him:

“It is already too late,” said Obierika sadly. “Our men and our sons have joined the ranks of the stranger. They have joined his religion and they help to uphold his government. If we should try to drive out the white men in Umuofia, we should find it easy. There are only two of them. But what of our people who are following their way and have been given power? They would go to Umuru and bring the soldiers, and we would be like Abame.” (Achebe, 124)

The White people once hung Aneto for murdering a man. Before that, the earth was given the power to take justice for the victim. This is the first time the clans heard of giving justice by hanging the murderer and so the clans become afraid and surprised. So they start to join the White people because they think of them as powerful and want to build a “relationship of complicity with the hegemonic project” (Connell, 258). The clansmen think that compromising with the White people and not revealing them will make the situation better. A high-ranked man, Ogbuefi Ugonna, joins with the White men by rejecting his titles; the church thus becomes a place for not only the *efulefu* and “empty” men but for all people. Okonkwo is sad “for the warlike men of Umuofia, who had unaccountably become soft like women” (129).

Okonkwo’s belief in hyper-masculinity becomes the cause of his downfall. When the messengers come to the village, without having any consultation with the villagers, he attacks the messengers first. His pride and authoritative nature make him so blind that he kills one of the messengers. The clans have not taken any action to capture the rest of the messengers who were fleeing. He realizes that his actions have no value to his people, and they will not come forward to support him. Though he is aggressive and hot-headed, he is brave and sharp also. Among his clan, he keeps a deep sense as he notices the policy

of the White men who target the native people who have no strong position in the clan. To preserve his land and culture, he alone himself fights back against the White people. But this resistance is not enough, and as a strong-willed man, Okonkwo can no longer accept the situation and commits suicide.

Okonkwo knows that committing suicide is a disrespectful act, but he cannot endure leading a puppet life. Accepting White dominance means abandoning culture, religion, and values, and a person like Okonkwo, who believes in masculinity and fighting, cannot lower his head—it is the essence of his tragic position, caught between his society's transformation in the face of colonialism and his belief in a traditional order that given him personal and communal power. Okonkwo's suicide is indicative of an attempt to regain manhood, a phenomenon echoed in Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*: "From the moment that you and your like are liquidated like so many dogs, you have no other resource but to use all and every means to regain your importance as a man" (295). Thus, Okonkwo's suicide indicates his resistance against White rule and regaining his importance, even as it indicates an extreme of masculinity.

Tradition, Modernity, and Sexual Violence: *The Lion and The Jewel*

As in *Things Fall Apart*, masculinity also plays an important role in *The Lion and The Jewel*. Both Baroka and Lakunle want to marry Sidi as they see her as a prize to be won. Since Sidi is beautiful and a virgin and becomes popular after she is given a special place in a photograph, she is pursued by these two men. Marrying Sidi will prove their power over others; she is like a jewel-- a priceless object that is capable of upsetting and teasing men, but still an object. As Lakunle values modernism, he wants to marry Sidi so that,

by making Sidi a modern wife, he can perform a modern life and serve as an influence. Baroka wants to marry her as she is the village's most attractive young woman and marrying her in his old age will show that he is still desirable and powerful. He also wants to complete his harem. It is like he is collecting jewels in his house to show his authoritative position and Sidi is the most desirable gem. In this play, men are valued by the villagers by their social and economic position. Lakunle values himself as he is educated, and he wishes to bring education, modernity, and Christianity to Ilujinle. And Baroka derives his value from his role as the "Bale of the village." He is responsible for the village's safety, and he keeps many wives and children which means he is a successful man leading a rich life.

On the other hand, women are seen as the "sex" object. If she is a virgin and beautiful, a woman will be chased by the suitors. Tanure Ojajde asserts that Soyinka's attitude toward women seems traditionally African, wherein his women are sources of sex and his characters speak and are spoken to in proverbs, metaphors, images, and symbols that express their African experience. (767). There is a famous Yoruba folktale about a young girl who falls in love with a lovely stranger who subsequently turns into an ogre. Bernth Lindfors notes that these stories are used as a warning for young girls; their moral is "Don't let handsome strangers lead you into the woods" (Lindfors, 35). Soyinka also uses this theme in this play. As Sidi is beautiful and unmarried, she is pursued by both Baroka and Lakunle. Though Sidi knows Lakunle as a person, she doesn't like his idea of modernity. Lakunle in this sense is a stranger to her. Again, she is also not familiar with Baroka. She goes to Baroka's house to mock him about his impotency but ultimately becomes his prey. The play thus indicates how vulnerable the social position

of women in traditional Yoruba society is. Soyinka, by way of the character Sidi, warns women, "Do not always follow your curiosity." Women should not have "curiosity" as this curiosity will be a trap in their life.

Women's position is also noticeable in Lakunle's words. As he believes in modernity, he tries to impress Sidi with modern promises. He says, "I will not have you wait on me till I have dined...no wife of mine, no lawful wedded wife shall eat the leavings off my plate" (8). Women are not considered proper if they have dinner or lunch with their husbands at the same time and same place, as they are considered the weaker sex.

Not only unmarried women but also married women have to suffer from their male-dominated society. Married women degrade their marital status by looking for a new wife for their husbands. They even face discrimination even in their house as the favorite wife can stay with Baroka while others have to stay at the outhouse. Sadiku is the oldest wife of Baroka and she comes to Sidi with a marriage proposal from Baroka. K.N. Kumar argues that "the female characters like Sidi and Sadiku are the representation of the doubly oppressed in the society where female members are highly marginalized by the males. They are the symbol of marginality, particularly Sidi. She never allows any rational ideas into her mind which is advised by Lakunle," but "supports and argues for her society and its tradition. She does not want to come out of the conventional ideologies. She does not know that she is marginalizing herself for the ideologies of the society" (8).

Like Okonkwo, Baroka is not free from the masculine conception. When Sidi becomes famous because of the photo, Baroka feels threatened as Sidi's status grows.

That is the reason he wants to marry her, as he wants to keep her under his dominance.

When Sadiku comes with Baroka's marriage proposal, Sidi says,

You waste your breath...can you see? Because he sees my worth increased and multiplied above his own; because he can already hear the ballad-makers and their songs in praise of Sidi, the incomparable, while the Lion is forgotten. He seeks to have me as his property where I must fade beneath his jealous hold. (Soyinka, 21)

Because Sidi is more popular than Baroka, he cannot tolerate it. By marrying her, he can lower her status, as she will become his possession, and by that token, he can uplift his status. "He seeks new fame as the one man who has possessed the jewel of Ilujinle" (Soyinka, 21).

In the play, Sidi accepts Baroka as her husband. Sidi's marrying Baroka instead of Lakunle signifies the victory of Yoruba tradition over Western ideologies. In the play, Lakunle's dress style is described thus: "He is dressed in an old-style English suit, threadbare but not ragged, clean but not ironed, obviously a size or two too small. His tie is done in a very small knot, disappearing beneath a shiny black waistcoat. He wears twenty-three-inch-bottom trousers and blanco-white tennis shoes" (Soyinka, 3). He completes his education in a British school in Lagos, where he is influenced by British ways. He wants to modernize Sidi and the village and does not want to give the bride price to Sidi even though he loves her. He finds the village norms and customs abhorrent, but at the same time, he enjoys the village dance performance. He is like the mimicry man, a term coined by Homi K. Bhabha. Mimicry is an action of imitating someone. When a colonized man tries to imitate the dress, language, and culture of the colonizers, mimicry happens. In "Of Mimicry and Men," Bhabha says that in the colonized county,

mimicry is “the desire for a reformed, recognized Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite” (126). In clearer language, during colonial times, the colonizers wanted to dominate the colonized by forcing their (the colonizers) language, religion, and culture on them (the colonized). But at the same time, the colonizers maintained differences among themselves from the colonized so that the colonized people will never become entirely like the colonizers. Though Lakunle talks about modernism, he still likes the village dance performance and agrees at one point to give the bride price. So his ideology is not as firm as that of Baroka. Baroka values the Yuroba culture more than the British one. He is sure that he wants Sidi the way Sidi is. He does not want to change her. But at the same time, his act of raping Sidi also indicates how men—especially powerful men—want to force their masculine power on women. As women are considered the “weaker sex,” they are tricked and physically abused by men. His deflowering her indicates his owning her because, after the rape, Sidi will not have any choice but to marry him.

At the same time, Lakunle’s attitude is not always right either, as he wants to force his idealism on Sidi without her approval. He claims that he wants to bring modernism to the village but like the other people, he does not value Sidi’s opinion. He always criticizes Sidi’s dresses, as they show her shoulder and upper part of the chest. To him, her dress style is not womanly.

Baroka is like Okonkwo in terms of putting village and religion as priorities. All their lives, they focus on carrying on the responsibility of the village, so they do not get easily swayed by new beliefs. They always put tradition first. When a rail line is planned to be created in the village, Baroka bribes a railway engineer to divert the rail line from

the village. It is not that he hates progress. He wants to accept progress, but progress will be accepted only when it will not devalue tradition. Okonkwo also has a deep respect for his tradition.

However, the younger generation is depicted in these works as being easily influenced by the new belief. To follow the new belief or modernity, they do not hesitate to renounce their roots. When the colonizers come to Umuofia and try to convert people to Christianity, Nwoye does not feel too hesitant to renounce his culture and religion. He gets admitted to the missionaries' training without his father's approval. Again, Lakunle, from the first moment of the play, has little respect for his own culture. Making Sidi a modern wife, bringing Western education to the village, and maintaining a modern life are his goals. Without the bride price, Sidi makes it clear that she will not marry him. Even when Baroka proposes to marry Sidi, he still does not want to give the bride price to Sidi. The village people mock him because of his Western dressing style, his English speech, and his constant praise of modernity. Even Sidi gets irritated because of his little respect for their culture. But it is Sidi, the woman, who is truly trapped in the conjunction of colonial modernity and traditional ways, her role as a commodity and as a potential reproducer of the society serving as both her jewel and her curse.

Colonialism has a major impact on the lives of the characters of these works. White people start to interfere in the native people's daily lives and encourage them not to follow the native religion as the native religion has so many gods and goddesses. In White men's eyes, native religion is full of superstitions, and they call the native people barbaric and uneducated. Because of the lack of understanding of the local language, they

do not try to feel the value that the native people give to their religion and culture. Instead of trying to compromise with the native people, the colonizers criticize the native people's beliefs. Political domination is another impact the White people created. Since their main goal was to get resources from these parts of Africa, the colonizers created their government and made the native people follow the White people's rules by forcing them violently or by bribing or brainwashing them. But they were not successful always, as people symbolized by Okonkwo, Baroka, and Sidi did not get swayed by Western ideals. When the Igbo community is joining the new religion and abandoning their own culture, Okonkwo tries his best to preserve his cultural identity. Unlike Lakunle, who is so ready to remove the Yoruba cultural touch from his country, Baroka heartily fights to keep his culture. Even though Baroka knows that progress is important, he never allows progress to disrespect Yoruba culture. Sidi is also sticking to her culture when she never hesitates to argue with Lakunle about the bride price as the bride price is important for the girls in a Yoruba marriage, linking economics and affection under traditional structures.

Characters like Nwoye, Ogbuefi, and Lakunle join with the colonizers even though they are criticized by their fellow people. But didn't they join and follow the colonizers because they did not always agree with or feel valued by their cultural norms? Nwoye has to undergo all the suffering because he is not as masculine as expected by society. Again, the scream of the abandoned twin in the forest and the killing of Ikemefuna drive him into hating his own culture. Lakunle does not like the way powerful people in Ilujunle keep many wives. He wants to educate the people so that they can have a broad mind. He hates Baroka as Baroka stops to allow modernism to come to the

village. He also rebels against Baroka when he rapes Sidi. As readers, we are put by these writers in the position of seeing both good and bad in the traditional order, and the fractures, particularly in the lives of the female and “unmasculine” characters, that lead to a new order under colonialism.

Achebe and Soyinka present both positive and negative sides of native culture and colonialism. Igbo culture has many defects and, sometimes, these defects are so unbearable to people that natives do not hesitate to join the missionaries. But the attitude of the Christian missionaries is not free from defects, as the missionaries try to use the native people for their resources. Identity comes from culture, language, and religion, but also from a sense of self-determination. Though Igbo culture has many difficulties, it carries the identity and determination of the native people and, rather than following other people’s identities or prescribed choices. Okonkwo fights for his cultural identity and this act makes him a memorable person among his people. But at the same time, changes are needed in the norms of Igbo culture, and this is also indicated by Achebe. By representing the character Obierika who criticizes the defects of the Oracle and believes that changes in social norms are necessary, Achebe shows that, even though we should respect our culture, we can remove the social defects by accepting positivity. Soyinka in turn shows how Yuroba is more important than the Christian culture by showing Sidi’s choosing Baroka over Lakunle. Baroka is a rapist and manipulative but still, Sidi goes to him because Baroka will not devalue Yoruba. He will never allow other people to disrespect Yuroba and at the same time, he also agrees that progress is required. Both writers suggest that following one’s own culture blindly and ignoring the other culture will not bring development. As the world is moving fast, people should learn to accept

what will be good for their society without disrespecting their social identity. Yet it remained for a later generation of writers to take up the question of what a more fully empowered African woman—a leader, not fractured or raped by colonialism but fully resistant to it on her communal terms—might look like.

CHAPTER 2: “MY BONES WILL RISE AGAIN”: WOMEN’S POWER IN *NEHANDA*
AND *OUT OF DARKNESS, SHINING LIGHT*

Even though women characters are present in *Things Fall Apart* and *The Lion and The Jewel* and they contribute to plot development, they still live in the shadow of male characters as examples to women readers of women’s agency. Since the 1950s, women have begun to change this representation of women. Writers like Flora Nwapa, Ama Ata Aidoo, Nawal el-Saadawi, and others have written many books where women are centered. This chapter shows women writers revising the depiction of gender and colonialism in Africa writers like Achebe and Soyinka. Writers like Yvonne Vera and Petina Gappah show how under colonial pressure women have been able to assert agency and, implicitly, advocate for a larger role in the world of literary authorship at the same time. Their novels *Nehanda* and *Out of Darkness, Shining Light* present two female protagonists, Nehanda and Halima, who contribute to their societies so much that, they rival the portrayal of women’s power in European literature. And indeed, I will argue that these recent African women novelists are revising both the gendered visions of earlier African writers and those of the West at the same time.

In many Western novels, female protagonists are presented as “angelic figures—innocent, physically weaker, and nothing less than household commodities” (Shukla, 2016). In a novel alluded to by the title of *Out of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, it is noticeable that patriarchal society has created limiting expectations for women. All their action and speech revolve around Kurtz. The Intended is shown as a

perfect wife, not present except at the end of the novel when she has a meeting with Marlow. In Marlow's description,

This fair hair, this pale visage, this pure brow, seemed surrounded by an ashy halo from which the dark eyes looked out at me. Their glance was guileless, profound, confident, and trustful. (Conrad, 125)

As Pei-Wen Clio Kao argues of the Intended of Kurtz, "She exists only as she is perceived by him [Marlow], as the good little Victorian woman." (119) According to Marlow, she is a refined, pure, and decent woman who appears like an angel. Marlow seems to be fascinated by her perfect appearance. But as readers continue, they realize how weak a position the Intended has in the novel. Even after one year after the death of Kurtz, she is still in mourning. She views Kurtz as a hero, a wise man, and most importantly, as an inspiration. She claims to know Kurtz the best, but the reader cannot help thinking, does she know what Kurtz has done in Africa? Even Marlow lies when she asks him about the last words of her fiancé. Marlow thinks that telling the truth will devastate the Intended unnecessarily. He tries to portray himself as noble and a protector, but isn't he deceiving her? As a fiancée, she has the right to know the truth, but Marlow's decisiveness shows his idea of women, assuming she is so weak and naïve that she cannot bear the truth. It also shows that European men want their women to become ignorant of the black side of their personalities. They lock their women in an ideological cage and say that this is the world where the women think that they are free and can live arbitrarily. It is a portrait in miniature of the European assumptions about gender roles discussed in the previous chapter.

But Halima in *Out of Darkness* represents the foil of the Intended from *Heart of Darkness*. This historical novel takes its departure from the story of David Livingstone, a British missionary who came to Zimbabwe in search of the source of the Nile. He continued to explore the central African watershed as the vanguard of the colonial penetration of Africa. From the perspectives of two characters Halima and Jacob, the novel is narrated. Halima is Livingstone's sharp-tongued cook. During his stay in Zimbabwe, Livingstone dominates the area and people. But after his death, Halima with other people carry the body, papers, and maps of Livingstone for fifteen hundred miles across the continent of Africa so that his body can be taken to his home country England. But she doubts whether all the effort she and her people are making is meaningful or not, considering that Livingstone himself left his home and his family. Halima also loves Livingstone, but unlike the Intended, she does not hesitate to criticize the Doctor.

On the other hand, in *Heart of Darkness*, the Mistress is presented as the opposite of the Intended: violent, and wild, she is one of the reasons why Kurtz had to face tragedy. In the novella, the Russian sailor describes the Mistress to Marlow this way:

She got in one day and kicked up a row about those miserable rags I picked up in the storeroom to mend my clothes with. I wasn't decent. At least it must have been that for she talked like a fury to Kurtz for an hour pointing at me now and then. I don't understand the dialect of the tribe. Luckily for me, I fancy Kurtz felt too ill that day to care, or there would have been mischief. (Conrad, 36).

The Mistress is a prisoner of Kurtz, as he dominates the whole area. But the way she talks with Kurtz makes it seem as if she is the dominant one. Even her dress and her attitude reveal her dominant nature:

A wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman. She walked with measured step, draped in striped and fringed cloths, treading the earth proudly, with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments. She carried her head high; her hair was done in the shape of a helmet; she had brass leggings to the knee, brass wire gauntlets to the elbow, a crimson spot on her tawny cheek, and innumerable neckless glass beads on her necks. She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent. (Conrad, 35).

The Mistress stands for both an individual and all of Africa—mysterious, wild, and "fire." She is independent, courageous, and full of life, which makes the colonizer both want and dread her. Kurtz is a strong, high-ranking individual. But he is treated equally by this foreign Black woman. She follows her own heart and is free to come and go as she pleases and is not obligated to Kurtz. Kurtz is outmatched by her strength. She has an enticing appeal-attractive and seductive. These are the tools she can employ to control Kurtz. But the Mistress is described as both "savage" and "superb." How is it possible to be both "superb" and "savage" at the same time? Did Conrad mean to say that while the mistress is attractive, she lacks the sophistication and angelic quality that the European men want their women to be?

Achebe, in his famous critique "An Image of Africa," criticizes Conrad's representation of the Mistress. Achebe claims that Conrad depersonalizes the black characters, especially the Mistress:

The point of my observations should be quite clear by now, namely that Joseph Conrad was a thoroughgoing racist. That this simple truth is glossed over in criticisms of his work is because white racism against Africa is such a normal

way of thinking that its manifestations go completely unremarked. (Achebe, 176)

The description of the Mistress as “barbarous,” “tawny” and “savage” is, as Achebe says, an indication of the racism of the book. Yet at the same time, this character is powerful and uncontrollable, a sign of the limits of European power and hubris. In *Out of Darkness*, Halima also represents a powerful female character with the strength to enact her community’s values even upon the body of the would-be colonizer.

Nehanda’s Bones

The novel *Nehanda* depicts women as powerful in their society. The main character Nehanda can be described as a leader, fighter, and influencer whom both women and men respect and follow. Her representation in the novel is notably different from that of the women of Achebe, Soyinka, and many European novels. Vera wrote the novel inspired by the Zimbabwean spirit leader Nehanda Nyasikana. Nehanda Nyasikana is the name that inspired the Zimbabwean people to stand up for their status and self-determination. It is said that she possessed a spirit who gave her advice. At the suggestion of the spirit, she took up arms and gave divine advice to her people to fight against the British colonizers in the first Chimurenga, in the late 1890s. She was sentenced to be hanged because she killed Native Commissioner Pollard. She said then that her bones would rise again in the fight against colonialism. After 80 years, in 1976, her spirit came again and gave inspiration to the guerrilla fighters during the second Chimurenga. It is said that Zimbabwe won this war because of the inspiration of Nehanda Nyasikana. Many women

were also motivated by her sacrifice, and they also went to war to fight. They included Oppah Chamu Zvipange Muchinguri, Monica Mutsvangwa, Sabina Mugabe, Ruth Chinamano, Vivian Mwashita, and Margaret Dongo.

In *Mothers of the Revolution*, Stratton points out that without women, “the war could not have been won,” indicating that women’s role and participation in the struggle were crucial. In an interview, Vera said,

With Nehanda, I wanted to bring that woman who led the first war against the British to the forefront. I was conscious of the feminist elements there ... a woman had led the first rebellion not only physically, but spiritually, which, was the basis of our entire armed struggle that followed the Second Chimurenga. It’s based on the spiritual belief arising from her words, “My bones will rise again.” (Muponde & Taruvinga, 222)

According to the Shona religion, Nehanda is a powerful ancestral spirit. She uses women’s bodies as her medium. She protects the people and lands from all harmful things. In the novel *Nehanda*, this character tries to protect her people from the oppression of British colonialism. From birth, she seems to be special among her people. She can understand nature: “Nehanda can hear the rushing river. The lulling sound tells her where the river is deep and treacherous.... when she gets too close to the river the different sounds merge and she can no longer distinguish its different parts” (112). She has great knowledge and resourcefulness. She is the source of inspiration and hope for her people. Vera presents her as a leader who creates revolutionary energy. In *Nehanda* in general, as women bear children, they hold more power in society, not less.

Going out of their house, thinking reasonably outside of love and marriage topics, making people aware of the oppression they are facing, and breaking conventional rules—these elements of the female character are not present in Achebe’s and Soyinka’s novel and play. There, women are at risk of going against the social rules enforced on them by their fathers, brothers, and husbands. But in the Shona society of *Nehanda*, women’s decisions about their lives are depicted as important and valued. As Nehanda focuses on being a spiritual leader rather than a wife, her decision is honored. In her mother’s words,

Let us respect her silence. Let my daughter be perhaps that which wishes to be a part of her will not allow her to marry, she is a woman, is she not? She is industrious is she not? She has ancestors and a lineage and totems that she respects, does she not? Is it not enough? What is our power against the wishes of the departed? (47)

This respect for Nehanda’s wish not to marry indicates that her mother can also go against social norms governing women’s life choices.

Ekwefi from *Things Fall Apart* comes closest to this kind of depiction, as Ekwefi does not hesitate to go against Okonkwo’s orders. Though Okonkwo threatens to beat Ekwefi if she gives eggs to Ezinma, as in Igbo culture eating eggs may tempt children to steal, Ekwefi does not listen to her husband’s threats and gives Ezinma eggs secretly. Both mothers favor their daughters so much that they can go against the social norms to support their daughters’ wishes. Nehanda and Ezinma are similar in some aspects. Nehanda is a spiritual leader who focuses on freeing her country from the grasp of colonizers, while Ezinma is the daughter of the protagonist Okonkwo who fights against

colonialism. Okonkwo regrets that Ezinma is not a boy as, according to him, she has all the bold qualities that his son Nwoye does not have. Ezinma offers to bring the chair by herself for Okonkwo, and calls her mother by her name Ekwefi, breaking rules about gender and generation. More, self-possession and assertiveness are also present in Ezinma's personality:

“You have not eaten for two days,” said his daughter Ezinma when she brought the food to him. “So, you must finish this.” She sat down and stretched her legs in front of her. Okonkwo ate the food absent-mindedly. ‘She should have been a boy,’ he thought as he looked at his ten-year-old daughter.” (Achebe, 46)

Nwando Achebe in her article “Balancing Male and Female Principles: Teaching About Gender in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*,” talks about how people think that in the Igbo community, women are powerless, and people like Okonkwo are the ideal among the men. But according to Nwando, Okonkwo is not what Igbo society is. Certainly, Igbo people respect strength and power, but they do not like aggressive and cruel personalities like Okonkwo:

Many of my students, perhaps echoing in a sense, the opinion of some scholars of the African novel, have argued that Okonkwo is representative of Igbo cultural ideas about masculinity. I strongly disagree, for such an interpretation in my opinion reads too nearly from Western consciousness. In Igbo perceptiveness, Okonkwo is not, and cannot be, representative of his culture, because he is unable to achieve the balance or equilibrium that his people so strongly affirm. It is true, that he embodies the qualities that Igbo people admire strength, courage, and bravery: but, at the same time, Okonkwo exemplifies,

rather forcefully, those attributes that his people loathe: impatience, violence, arrogance, intolerance, and extremism. Moreover, each time Okonkwo allows any of these abhorrent attributes to the surface, he is promptly criticized, condemned, and/or, in many cases, punished by his people. (124)

Achebe says that Igbo is a peaceful land and Igbo cannot be defined by Okonkwo as the people of Igbo chastise and punishes Okonkwo whenever he makes any mischievous deeds. For instance, Ezeani reprimands Okonkwo for beating his wife during the Week of Peace. His house and properties are burned down, and he is exiled as a punishment because of his accidental killing of the elder son of Ezeusu. Nwando also says that women have as much power as that man in the Igbo community. She asks if women are not respected and valued in Igboland as Achebe depicts it, then why did the whole community want to go to war as one of the Igbo women was murdered by the Mbaino people? It was said in the novel that “Those sons of wild animals have dared murdered a daughter of Umuofia.” (11)

Nwando Achebe shares how Igbo women can fine or boycott or strike or force or even announce war if they face any wrongdoings by others. *Things Fall Apart* contains a scene where a cow is let loose and destroys women’s crops:

Immediately drive (the cow) back to its (male) owner who at once paid the heavy fine that the village imposed on anyone whose cow was let loose on his neighbors’ crops. When the women had exacted the penalty, they checked among themselves to see if any woman had failed to come out when the cry had been raised. (114)

This passage shows that women have the power to pass judgment. Again, most of the powerful goddesses and deities are women also. Achebe introduces many goddesses in the novel like- *Ogwugwu* (Spirit for Fertility), *Ani* (Earth Goddess), *Idemili* (Siver), *Ngene* (streams), and many more. Women also perform ritual authority. Chielo is the priestess of *Agbala* and she was feared even by Okonkwo. “Female roles in *Things Fall Apart* are complementary rather than subordinate to male roles,” Nwando Achebe concludes (122). Okonkwo cannot represent Igboland and the position of women in its community.

Ani is the strongest among all the goddesses and the Week of Peace is celebrated by the people to please Ani. So, when Okonkwo beat his wife during the week of peace, he was rebuked and fined by the people as Okonkwo angered Ani. But does it mean that Okonkwo wouldn't be fined and rebuked by others if he beat his wife any other day except the Week of Peace? Rather than being angry with Okonkwo's action of beating his wife, people become angry because of making angry the goddess Ani. Women indeed have strong power in Igboland, but still, it seems to me that women are present in the shadow of male characters. Even though Ekwefi and Ezinma rebel so many times against the social expectation of women, they end up following the other women in Umuofia. Ekwefi left her first husband to marry Okonkwo, and this makes her different as she was able to refuse social norms to fulfill her desire. But, in Okonkwo's house, she was beaten by her husband many times and she couldn't do anything except endure. So, women characters in *Things Fall Apart* do not seem to me as strong as *Nehanda*. And just as importantly, the narrative's focus on the failures of Okonkwo centers a vision of masculine conflict and self-conflict, leaving women's leadership as a form of indirect

action in the plot and their subjectivity as secondary in interest to that of the tragic male protagonist.

Nehanda is someone who follows her own heart and her roles, and Vera's narrative emphasizes Nehanda's subjectivity from the very outset of the novel. She is always concerned with her people. From her birth, she has a Christ-like spirit, and it is not surprising that she plays a savior role for her people and her community, and the male population also considers her special and important. When Zimbabwe is threatened by the White people, she immediately turns into a spiritual leader. The villagers do not doubt her spiritual power though she is a woman. "The crowd recognizes and salutes the spirit medium that has been sent to them for the sake of their relief" (61). To her people, Nehanda becomes a symbol of cultural nationalism and collective identity that provides them with wisdom and inspiration. Her influence is so strong on her people that even Moses leaves his employment and Mr. Browning's side. Though she does not have enough arms to fight, she does not hesitate. She realizes that as long as her country is under the rule of the British Empire, all the native people will be oppressed. She sacrifices her life and her family for the sake of her people.

But Nehanda is in some ways similar to the Mistress from *Heart of Darkness*. The Mistress had a small part compared to the Intended, yet (the Mistress) is in many ways more fascinating for her feminist potential. When she was separated from Kurtz, she fought against the gunfire of the Pilgrims. She could come and go as she pleased. And she was the one who was with Kurtz at the last moment. She also threatened the Harlequin because she found him meddling with Kurtz. Yet the Mistress was not bound to Kurtz and had a bold and commanding presence. Nehanda is like that, fighting against

the colonialists though she does not have the proper arms and tools. She has a love for her people and because of this love, she sacrificed her life.

Nehanda is not scared of the power of Mr. Browning and Mr. Smith. The colonizers are loaded with modern arms, but this does not scare Nehanda. She and her people believe in the sacredness of nature and spirits. As the people in *Things Fall Apart*, Nehanda's village people are hard-working, bold, and resilient. But the male Shona people are not depicted as being as harsh to the women as the Umuofia people. Both genders of Shona people accept Nehanda as their leader and follow her. To fight against the colonizers, they believe in nature, spirit, and Nehanda. Nehanda's speech makes her community brave. Even though Zimbabwe was under the control of colonizers, Nehanda's attitude toward the colonizers, like that of Mistress, is not submissive.

Apart from Nehanda, the women are also depicted in one sense as stereotypical mothers and wives. Yet they are also depicted as strong and active. When Nehanda is born, these women weave a circle of strength around her mother and are depicted as hard-working and resourceful. Among the women, there is a woman "who knew where the market was and how people lived in far-flung places" and a widow who owns "a circle of huts and the land of plant her crops" and has "no qualms about sitting on the stool like a man" (5). A Vatete, who brings life into this world and so is very respected, is often invited by "the elders to arbitrate in matters of the village, especially those concerning women." It is said in the novel that she is among "the shapers of the wisdom who determined the future," indicating that women have a place in society in terms of decision-making and politics of the village. In *Nehanda*, it is to women that the characters

look for strength, leadership, and wisdom—and by extension, to women that readers must devote careful attention to understand the novel.

Halima's Decorated Door

In *Out of Darkness, Shining Light*, the main character Halima also shows some distinctive qualities that reveal that she is a straightforward and fearless woman with leading capabilities. The novel is presented from her point of view. She is a Nubian former bondswoman who grew up in the service of the Omani sultan's representative in Zanzibar. As a cook for Livingstone, she knows everything about him. She both adores and resents Livingstone, whom she calls "Bwana Daudi." Though Halima is sad because of the death of David Livingstone, she is happy that she will be a free woman. She dreams of having her own house with a decorated door. She is an influencer who can control people. When Livingstone dies because of malaria, it is Halima offers the idea of transporting his body by first mummifying him under the sun. Halima seems to be an intelligent person with leadership capabilities. Though some people oppose her idea of mummifying Livingstone's body, they, at last, have to follow her instruction because there is no better way to carry the body. After they bury his heart in the village where he died, they start their journey to Zanzibar.

In a hostile environment, the journey becomes strenuous. Halima questions if Livingstone is worthy of the people's dedication. "Was he worth it? What were we doing? Taking a father to his children when he left one of those children to die." (Gappah, 88) Her questions show that she can think in a logical, sensible way. She loves

Livingstone, but she does not hesitate to criticize him when it is needed. In this novel, the character of Livingstone is overlaid with that of Kurtz from *Heart of Darkness*, as condensed emblems of the colonial imaginary of Europe, with all its desire, fear, violence, and costs to both the colonized and the home country. Like Kurtz, Livingstone also goes to Africa, abandoning his family in search of exploration. He spent his time in search of the source of the Nile; Halima describes his obsession with the exploration as “Nile madness” (44). In the novel, he selfishly dominates the area, as everyone obeys his orders. After his death, though most people feel sad, they also feel a sense of freedom. Halima, who serves him as his cook, also becomes happy that she will be able to lead her own life by her own decisions. He is like Kurtz in terms of his dominating the area for his selfish motives, yet the novel’s focus on the African characters renders a clearer critique of colonialism and a valorization of Halima’s community and her role within it—very far from the dynamic of savagery and attraction that dominates Conrad’s tale.

Halima’s character representation is more similar to the character Christophine from the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys (1966). Christophine is the opposite of the protagonist Antoinette. When Antoinette comes to her for a suggestion about what she should do with her relationship with her husband, Christophine suggests she leave him and become independent: “A rich white girl like you and more foolish than the rest. If a man doesn’t treat you good, pick up your skirt and walk out” (Rhys, 58). She senses that Rochester does not love Antoinette. Multiple times she says that Rochester marries Antoinette because of her money rather than love. She believes that “a woman must have spunk to live in this wicked world.” She is depicted as an example of a self-respecting person who brings up three children without being married. She does not give any scope

to the male society to dominate her— “I thank my God. I keep my money. I don’t give it to worthless man” (54). Her fierce confrontation even gains respect from Rochester as he thinks, “When I looked at her there was a mask on her face and her eyes were undaunted. She was a fighter, I had to admit.” (146)

Sadiku from *The Lion and The Jewel* also has similarities with the character Halima. Sadiku is Baroka’s eldest wife, who spends her time as a matchmaker for her husband. Even though she is loyal to her husband and tries to compromise with Sidi by explaining the benefit she can obtain by marrying Baroka, Sadiku also finds it fun and overpowers Baroka when she hears that Baroka has lost his manhood. She considers this as a victory for all women over men. Her personality reveals that she is aware of women’s power.

Even though the women characters discussed here are from different backgrounds, they are similar in finding ways of being true to their sense of their power. Halima is different from Nehanda, and Nehanda is different from Sidi. Indeed, from a feminist standpoint Sidi offers a strong contrast with Nehanda, since Sidi’s resistance to male domination does not bring her liberation or freedom. Nehanda’s resistance to colonial power results in her death, but also her spiritual immortality. In *Things Fall Apart*, women resist male power, and at times they get away with it. Despite these differences, these characters are similar in sharing a resistance to the patriarchal order. They all share, as characters, the quality of serving as examples of how African women resist either the colonially imposed patriarchy or traditionally enforced ones. Whether it is the African way of resisting or the Western way of resisting, in each case, women are not behaving the way men prefer.

Conclusion

As a woman, I appreciate the representation of women in both novels, *Nehanda* and *Out of Darkness, Shining Light*. I think that nowadays writers, and especially women writers, are becoming aware of their position both in literature and as creators of literature.

Reading these two novels made me realize that women are not playing submissive housewife roles in every African novel. Some African writers present their women as strong, bold, and independent. Their honorable representation of female characters in African literature also questions the female characters' representation in some other African literature and also in some European literature. In the development of this world, women have made the same sacrifices as men. Surely Achebe and Soyinka demonstrate vividly the conflicts of identity, politics, economics, and culture that have been caused for men and their subjectivities by colonial invasion and attempts at cultural assimilation.

Yet in some ways, women have lost more, and even those male-focused works reveal how women are caught on the sharp point of tradition and colonial modernity. Their loss is amplified when literature stereotypes women, or when it fails to provide models of positive, complex, agency-bearing womanhood—and men who respect it. In Western novels, writers tend to demean the people of the African continent, especially African women. In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlowe calls the Mistress “barbarous” because she wears bold colors, stripes, and fringes. The Intended was called “innocent” and “pure” while the Mistress was called “savage.” But the Mistress with her little scene had a stronger, more haunting presence than the Intended had. Women are more than that, and both *Nehanda* and *Halima* are examples. Moreover, the European colonizers colonized Zimbabwe in the

name of civilizing it. But can they be called civilized people when they think of a strong woman like Nehanda merely as “an old woman”? A woman is not for household things. Women deserve more recognition from society. Women like Charwe, Oppah Charmu Zvipange Muchinguri, and Sabina Mugabe show that women are the driving force behind all revolutionary things. The female characters of Vera and Gappah are manifestations of the bones of Nehanda, ready to rise again.

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