Legacies of Colonisation in Nigeria:

An Auto-Ethnographic Analysis of Gender Norms, Christianity, and Colonialism

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“This business of womanhood is a heavy burden.”

- *Tsitsi Dangarembga (Nervous Conditions*)

Introduction

Nigeria's colonial experience remains a central theme in its postcolonial existence, as the term "postcolonial" gestures toward its colonial history. These colonial histories matter in the present world (Stoler 2016, 3-4). In the case of Nigeria, could it not be said that having gained sovereignty and independence from British rule on October 1, 1960, it became responsible for its own state of being? The simple answer: the transition from colonial rule to independence is not simple. Colonialism in itself is a system that engages a complex web of ideologies, subsystems and institutions to effectively dominate all aspects of its target space. In the case of Nigeria, one of the realms affected were gender relations, and one of the shaping institutions was the advent of Catholicism.

It is my argument in this thesis that there are causal links between gender norms in postcolonial Nigeria, its history of colonialism, and the introduction of Christianity. This linkage deserves greater attention. In *The Coloniality of the Secular: Race, Religion and Poetics of World-Making*, An Yountae argues that the role of religion in the creation and establishment of colonial power is often overlooked in academic discussion (Yountae 2024, 10). Yountae's focus is on the decolonization of Indigenous narratives in the Americas, but his argument applies to the African context as well. We cannot overlook the significance of Christianity in establishing a rational for the penetration of precolonial African communities, and in luring them into succumbing to British imperial rule. Christian teachings and ideologies were imposed as "superior" and "true", above the varying ethnic beliefs and practices. In examining the Igbo ethnic group between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we see how absorption of Catholic-based gender ideologies into the culture knocked Igbo women into second-class citizens dependent on their husbands for their social identities. Colonial-imposed ideologies therefore stripped Igbo women of all forms of independence and redirected them towards the prioritization of gendered social responsibilities that has only

served to reinforce a system of patriarchy, supported by Christianity (primarily Catholicism, as it is the dominant faith among the Igbo people). This, coupled with the emergence of a fusion of the Christian culture with the Igbo culture, created a clear-cut description of a woman's place and role in modern Igbo society that has continued to exist in postcolonial Nigeria. Mainstream Catholic interpretations of Biblical teachings place the man as the head of his social unit, specifically his immediate family, and stipulates roles for women within the family and social unit that entails their amenability to male authority. This is an example of the ways in which colonial histories continue to affect the present and why considering colonial histories matters.

It is even more imperative to note that the ties of present issues to colonialism do not always have to be evident on the surface. The continued perpetration of colonial ideologies can, in some cases, be imposed by a colonized group to another colonized group. In commanding Christian concepts of gender norms on the Igbo people of southeast Nigeria, the people have no choice but to accept and maintain, or replicate even, this dynamic of gender relations and imbalance of power within the Igbo society, revealing a coloniality that outlives colonialism (the historical event and time period of its occurrence). Therefore, if these present-day gender issues are connected to colonialism, it is imperative to examine and identify – from a feminist lens – how these legacies are institutionalized in the affected society, because, as Sara Ahmed states, "feminist ideas are what we come up with to make sense of what persists" (2017,12).

Which tools do I employ to examine such colonial legacies and their effect on my society of birth? Strict adherence to so-called Western methods of knowledge seeking in academia would mean there would be no report to give here, because the Igbo society possess a different method of history keeping; one that is less acceptable with conventional Western academia. Oral traditions such as the conveyance of history from one generation to another

through conversations and storytelling, which is a valid source of knowledge within African societies, may pose an ethical challenge in a conventional Western academic setting. How then can I, as an Igbo woman – and as an African woman – write the place from which I speak, if the resources available are deemed inappropriate in the given context? This question leads to my reason for employing a decolonial methodology:[1] to validate the history of the place from which I speak, it is essential to challenge the status quo of research in traditional academia by incorporating such "unconventional" sources in conventional spaces.

In examining the intersection of religion and coloniality that exists within the Igbo space, I draw upon three primary methodological strands: autoethnography, literary interpretation, and a theoretical engagement with how religion informs colonial-based gender relations. More specifically, I combine (auto)ethnographic accounts with three books fiction by Igbo writers with themes that discuss the relationship between colonialism, Christianity and gender norms in precolonial, colonial and postcolonial Igbo society in Nigeria. My discussion of Christian theology and gender norms in this thesis refers to how these discourses circulate among Catholic members in my surrounding religio-cultural society. Those to whom I refer often reference gender norms that they attribute to their understanding of the Bible. I also engage with conventional academic texts, including published books written by Afrocentric and feminist scholars, to further elucidate my argument. I identify causal factors of problems in the present in actions of the past by including my voice and the lived experience of my female predecessors. Those who have lived so that we can learn.

[1] I define decolonial methodology as writing from the viewpoint/perspective of the colonized group, through which the writer is able to produce their own narrative of history by engaging non-conventional sources of knowledge (or forms of knowing).

Chapter One

Methods, Methodologies and Academic Discourse

Introduction: Location of Thesis in Feminist Scholarship

My interest in my thesis topic stems primarily from my personal observations while having grown up in Nigeria. Nigeria is a nation of two primary religious traditions: Christianity and Islam.[2] Churches and mosques could and still can be found on almost every street in urban areas. This omnipresence matters. These buildings give the impression that human acts must be governed by religious doctrines. In my personal experience, having been raised in a home which adhered to Catholic doctrines, my identity was expected to be shaped by the tenets of Christianity. Now, as a thirty-two-year-old woman, unwed and childless, according to this sociocultural context, I am a failure; I have been told so in more ways than one. It matters not whether this situation is what I want for myself. The pervasive belief in the socio-religious community in which I grew up[3] is that the job of every godly woman is to be a helpmate to a man. This belief includes and lays emphasis on childbearing and childrearing. Again, going by this doctrine, I was not born to stand alone. I exist to contribute positively to a man's life; to help him build his empire; to complete his dream.

From where do such notions stem? The Catholic community in Nigeria prioritizes this helpmate role for women,[4] and shame those who fail to co-create a cis-gender heterosexual

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[2] According to the U.S. government, as of July 2018, Nigeria has a population of 203.5 million people. A survey conducted in 2012 by the PEW Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life reports the Christian population to be the highest at 49.3%, and the Muslim population following closely with 48.8% of the population. However, within these categories, some individuals merge their practices of Islam or Christianity with Indigenous beliefs (Nigeria 2018 International Religious Freedom Report).

[3] Although ethnically from the southeast of Nigeria, I was born and raised in the southwest state and city of Lagos. Lagos includes people of diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria. Therefore, it is not uncommon to find that ethno-cultural practices are also observed by the smaller groups of these diverse ethnicities.

[4] It is important to note here that this belief is not limited to the Catholic or Christian community in postcolonial Nigeria; it cuts across religions and ethnic groups. However, for the purpose of this thesis, I focus on the Igbo Catholic community to examine why and how of this norm.

nuclear family. Study all you want. Achieve career success. Pursue your personal interests, but you are nothing if you do not have a head – a husband. Not just any husband, but a supposedly godly one, a Christian man.[5] If you are past your "youth" and have desperately sought one unsuccessfully, then settle for any man, as long as he lets you practice Catholicism. The goal is to live the life of a virtuous woman. Just as the Virgin Mary kept herself a virgin until God assigned her the task of bringing his son to the world, so too is my body expected to remain virginal until marriage. My body untouched is a gift to my future husband. Sexual pleasures are for cis-het men to experience. For a woman, expressing sexual desire denotes promiscuity, except done to please her husband, in which case it yields fruit. Procreation. To bear children. All of these things I heard from priests, men of God, Christian women in the society in which I was raised and many more eager to offer their unsolicited opinions. Back when I still considered myself Christian, I recall telling my Catechist[6] I had gained admission to study History at the University of Lagos, Nigeria in 2009. He did not hesitate to express his disappointment.

"You'll lose yourself," he told me.

By losing myself, he meant my Christian identity. I understand this now. This idea was part of a socio-religious script Judith Butler theorises as the phenomenology of acts (Butler 1988).[7] To him, if I did not abide by the doctrines of Christianity, then I had no

[5] This perspective is often based on an aspect of the book of Genesis, which states: "Yahweh God said, "It is not right that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper" {...} Then Yahweh God made the man fall into a deep sleep. And while he was asleep, he took one of his ribs and closed the flesh up again forthwith. Yahweh God fashioned the rib he had taken from the man into a woman, and brought her to the man. And the man said, "This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh! She is to be called Woman, because she was taken from Man". This is why a man leaves his father and mother and becomes attached to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Genesis 2: 18; 20–24, New Jerusalem Catholic Bible). From a mainstream Catholic perspective, therefore, a woman was created for the sole purpose of helping a man. Therefore a heterosexual marriage is seen by some Catholics as her life's purpose. The critics would often quote this part of the scriptures, stating that it validated their point because it is a directive from the Holy Book.

[6] A Catechist is a man who encourages or assists an individual or people with the process of their Catholic faith formation. Each Catholic church in Nigeria has at least one appointed.

[7] Act here is defined not in the theatrical context, but from a philosophical perspective. Judith Butler explains that an act is a phenomenon designed by social agents from social signs like language and deed (Butler 1988,

identity as a woman, or as a person. I wonder now, what he would tell me if I told him I was a student of Gender Studies in a Canadian university, or that it is my third degree. The last time I saw him, I was twenty-eight. I bumped into him at the filling station while queuing up to buy fuel for my car.

"Are you married now?" was the first question he asked me, smiling and expecting a yes, it seemed. When I responded in the negative, his smile crumbled. The disappointment again appeared.

"Why? You should be married now, and with children of your own. What's wrong? Are there no Christian brothers coming your way?"

I could only shrug. How does one respond to such questions? Once, in my undergraduate years, I had engaged him in a mini-debate on the enculturation of Christian beliefs in Nigerian ethno-cultural groups. If the British had not introduced Christianity to us through colonialism, would it be one of the two primary religions in the country? The introduction of indirect rule as a system of governance in colonial Nigeria eliminated the pre-existing socio-political structures of the cultures, with the exception of the Islamic north. Indirect rule refers to the British delegation of rulership and administration of the region to local or traditional authorities within the colony (Naseemullah and Staniland 2016, 14). In Northern Nigeria, these local authorities were Muslim clerics or monarchs who already had a socio-political structure that the British found favourable to colonial rule. From the Igbo society[8], which was egalitarian and acephalous, the establishment of a centralized governing

519-520). Gender identity and gender norms, which are acts, are not fixed but fluid, and are created through a "stylized repetition of acts" or a social script (Butler 1988, 519-520). Therefore, the recurrence of marriage, which is considered a necessary act by and for Catholic Igbo women in order to gain recognition and respect as a 'real' woman is a norm because it was established by the authorities of the Catholic church (social agents) who make references to the Bible as the source of this norm (script) recurrence.

[8] The Igbo society here refers to a group of people who are ethnically bound by the Igbo language, origin stories, culture and shared traditions. They existed as an independent ethnic group pre-colonization, as a part of the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria under British colonial rule and exist as the third major ethnic group (first

hierarchy created sexist problems between men and women that continue to exist in the present (Nzegwu 1995, 445). The British-appointed administrators were primarily men, whose authority stretched into female territory. Igbo women found that they were answerable to men with regards to social issues that were the previously handled by designated groups such as the women's age grade.[9] Rose Uchem suggests that gender norms existed in precolonial Africa, in that women were subjugated, but never marginalized until the appearance of colonialism and religion in the 19th century (Uchem 2001). In other words, she argues that although men were considered the superior gender, they were not more relevant than women in society. I questioned who women are beneath the illusion of an institutionalized religion, reimagining what the life of the Nigerian female would be now, living under a different script; a different set of norms that determine her thoughts, actions and life decisions. What if we were not one thing or the other? A Christian woman or a lost woman. Black or white on the colour spectrum. What if we were afforded more options?

"You should never have opted to study History. Look what it's doing to you now."

His response, although expected, baffles me still. How can a people[10] ignore such debates? A series of questions was triggered in my mind. It would begin my quest to understand Christianity as a religion practiced in Nigeria and the impact it had on my life as an Igbo female in Nigeria, questions I take up in this thesis.

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and second being the Hausa and Yoruba respectively) whose ancestral lands stretch across postcolonial southeast Nigeria. In line with this, the Nigerian society refers to a larger group of people from diverse ethnic groups – including the Igbo – bound first by colonial rule (from 1885/1886 – 1960), and then by a postcolonial government.

[9] Men and women in Igbo communities grouped themselves into social interdependent associations based on age. Usually, people born within the same year or within three years of each other fell within the same age group (Ndukwe 2015).

[10] By people, I mean Nigerians.

Rationale and Research Question

In the first year of my Bachelor's degree program at the University of Lagos, Nigeria, I undertook a course entitled, *Introduction to Gender Studies*. One of the recommended books for the course, Bolanle Awe's *Nigerian Women in Historical Perspective* (Awe 1992), was a revelation for me, providing me insight on the lives of thirteen selected African women, their involvement in communal politics and trade, as well as how they related to the controversial topic of marriage. I wondered if this meant that the concept of patriarchy was non-existent among them or if it was present, but shaped gender relations or affected them differently. Now, with the opportunity to pursue this question within academia, in this thesis I ask, from an auto-ethnographic perspective: **what, if any, are the relations between Catholicism, narrow gender norms, and colonialism in contemporary Nigeria, especially as related to my own family lineage?**

Although it has been my experience that these gender norms and the subjugation of women among the Igbo are not restricted to Catholicism alone,[11] I have focused my research on the Christian denomination in which I was primarily raised – the Catholic church – and its relationship with the Igbo.[12] Uchem argues that there is a correlation between the subjugation of women in the Catholic church and the Igbo culture, and this is perfectly depicted by the cis-het patriarchal family structure (Uchem 2001, 20). Furthermore, the subjugation of women in the Catholic community strengthens parts of the Igbo culture that oppress women,

[11] This experience spans the practice of Christianity in Nigeria in general, irrespective of denominations. However, Catholicism as a denomination thrived among the Igbo due to similarities between its doctrines and Igbo spiritual worship. An example is the similarity between the veneration of saints in Catholic practice and the veneration of Igbo ancestors in Igbo spirituality (Nwafor 2017). Both groups involve dead people who act as intermediaries in prayers between the living and the Creator.

[12] The Igbo are one of the three predominant ethnic groups out of over two hundred and fifty ethnic groups merged together under colonial rule that constitute the postcolonial state of Nigeria. They occupy the southeastern part of the country, primarily in five states: Anambra, Imo, Abia, Ebonyi and Enugu. Other states in Nigeria in which the Igbo ethnic group are situated in the minority include Delta state and Rivers state. Prior to British annexation of the region, the Igbo exercised an egalitarian/acephalous system of governance, also sometimes referred to as the dual-sex system (Nwaubani 2006)

and justifies subjugation as pervasive interpretations of the Bible encourage passiveness towards dictatorial and absolutist governments in Nigeria as well as other African states (Ibid). Being a religion that was introduced to the territory through 19th-century colonisation, I consider the concept of gender in pre-colonial Nigeria in comparison to colonial and post-colonial Nigeria. Nigeria as a postcolonial nation encompasses multiple Indigenous ethnic groups with differing cultures and histories; therefore, although Christianity cuts across these ethnicities, I focus on my ethnic group, the Igbo people, who occupy present-day southeast Nigeria.

The precise year in which Christianity was imposed upon southeast Nigeria is unclear. Chukwuma Okeke, Christopher Ibenwa and Gloria Okeke propose that it was introduced to Nigeria in 1842 with the presence of Methodist Missionaries led by Reverend Thomas Birth Freeman, and arrived in Igbo land to win converts by 1857 (Okeke, Ibenwa and Okeke 2017, 4). Elochukwu Amucheazi suggests that the arrival of Christian movements in southeast Nigeria began earlier, at Nsukka, in 1846 (Amucheazi 1986, 6). However, a boom of Catholicism in southeast Nigeria commenced with the arrival of the Holy Ghost Congregation from France in 1885, the same year as the Berlin Conference (Ekechi 1972).[13] The goal was not only to 'civilise the savage', but to 'convert the heathens' (Brantlinger 1985). Uchem suggests that Igbo feminist movement ought to be more advanced than its present state because of the egalitarian culture of the pre-Christian Igbo society that embraced gender equality and fairness (Uchem 2001, 19-20). Uchem's argument portrays the

[13] The 1885 Berlin Conference was attended by fourteen European countries and the United States of America. There, the continent of Africa was partitioned into colonies – without the consultation or participation of Africans – and assigned to seven European powers (Britain, France, Belgium, Portugal, Germany, Spain and Italy) and subsequently colonised. The purpose was to clearly define the land limit each of these powerful European countries had, in order to remedy conflicts over territorial ownership of strategic places as they scrambled over its economic potential and benefits to the West (Craven 2015) (Eyffinger 2019.). The region constituting present-day Nigeria was a colony of Britain thenceforth until 1960 when it officially became recognised as an independent nation. Africa continues to suffer the effects of this imperial act to date (Kalu 2019), as the continent is still being exploited for its resources by some of its previous colonial "masters".

importance of countering the colonial triumphalist narrative about the introduction of Christianity in Africa and in this case, that it is imperative to decolonize perceived false narratives about Igbo culture and spirituality as it relates to gender norms. According to Uchem, African scholars fail to mention the reality of empowerment and inclusion in pre-colonial African communities when bemoaning the ravaging of African cultures by colonialism (Ibid, 10).

As part of my analysis, I examine the available arguments of African feminist theologians on Christianity in Nigeria and how they further shape "the woman question".[14] Uchem theorises that in the Igbo Catholic community, manhood is defined by a man's ability to dominate a woman, while womanhood is determined by a woman's ability to submit to her husband and the willingness to be exploited for the material resources she provides (Ibid, 17). It is unclear if Uchem's argument is that this was also the case in 19th century Igbo society as it is now. However, Oyeronke Oyewumi argues that the question on womanhood is Western in its construction and not a universal problem for feminists around the world (Oyewumi 1997). This philosophy, she argues, has created the notion of a universal woman and a universal man in a world where the woman is placed as inferior or lower-ranking to the man. She refers to this concept of feminism as a "sisterchy", which she says reproduces the structure of colonial ideologies African feminists attempt to destroy. She points out that the experiences of women vary per society; therefore, all women do not encounter the same forms of oppression around the world. Her standpoint on the absurdity of universal feminist problems is not irrelevant. However, Oyewumi is a Nigerian feminist scholar of Yoruba descent whose perspective on gender relations in colonial and postcolonial Nigeria (and Africa) is shaped by the space she occupies as a Yoruba woman. Still, if colonial legacies

[14] First-wave French feminist Simone de Beauvoir debated and theorised what it means to be a woman in society in her book, *The Second Sex*, in which she attributes the subjugation of women and the female identity crisis to patriarchy, supported by religion, especially the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam (Beauvoir 1949).

such as Christian ideologies of gender roles linger in the practice of Christianity in postcolonial Nigeria, then perhaps the concept of womanhood in Nigeria differs from what it used to be within each ethnic group, and therefore "the woman question" has also become a relevant issue in contemporary African feminism by extension. I examine if such gender norms upholding the subjugation of women predate 1885, or if they were introduced through colonialism, and consequently, the teachings and doctrines taught to them by the missionaries of the Holy Ghost Congregation.[15] If the legacies of colonialism linger now, in varying aspects of the nation, ranging from the adopted governmental structure to adopted Christian beliefs and practices, then perhaps "the woman question" may not just be a problem in Western feminism, but a transcultural problem for African feminists, as well.

The purpose of this research is to analyse how religious gender norms affect women in Nigeria, with the hope that the conclusion of the proposed topic may problematize/illuminate issues with contemporary patriarchy in Nigeria and promote the visualization of the Nigerian woman as more than a wife and mother. This research addresses four key lines of question in relation to the main topic:

- What does my recounting of my lived experience as a former Catholic Igbo woman in Nigeria depict about gender norms among Igbo Christians in postcolonial Nigeria, especially in relation to marriage and childbearing/childrearing in comparison to the experience of the older generations of women in my family?
- In what way are gender roles and norms in postcolonial Igbo society reflective of the irony of Nigeria as an "independent nation"?

[15] This Congregation was founded by French seminarian Claude Poullart des Places in 1703. The initial objective of the group at conception was to provide assistance to underprivileged students aspiring to priesthood with the hope that they would in turn serve the poor faithful in France and do missionary work overseas. The missionaries of the Holy Ghost Congregation were also referred to as Spiritans and/or Holy Ghost Fathers (Founders of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit 2021).

To address these questions, I approach this research with the following methodological sub-questions:

- What are the perspectives of African scholars, authors and feminists on gender norms pre-colonisation and post-colonisation?
- How may my auto-ethnographic analysis of personal and fictional narratives contribute to feminist discourses on possible issues gender norms may cause or have caused in Nigerian society?

Aforementioned, I employ a decolonial theoretical approach. Decolonial theory here involves the argument that the socio-economic, socio-political, socio-cultural and socio-cognitive violence of colonialism established systems of power polarity, such as patriarchy and imperialism around the world. These systems, to in this thesis which I refer as colonial legacies, breed and uphold imbalances in contemporary postcolonial societies. Decolonialism also involves decolonial processes such as the use of epistemic sources considered unconventional to standard western research, yet a valid source of knowing within the Igbo people. In doing so, I centre my voice and the voices of the women who came before me by telling our side of the story – our side of history – alongside the arguments of other African feminists (and non-African feminists, such as Marie Lugones) to challenge the colonial narratives of my people existing in academic literature. First, I draw on auto-ethnography[16], which uses first-person account/narrative to analyse existing ideologies on the role of a woman within the Nigerian Igbo Catholic community, and second, on discourse analysis of three significant works of fiction: *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe 1994), T*he Joys of Motherhood* (Emecheta 2013) and *Purple Hibiscus* (Adichie 2004). I have chosen these novels for their

[16] In this study, auto-ethnography is both a method and methodology, because I am both the researcher and the researched, examining and detailing my experience in this context.

Afrocentric perspectives on African spirituality, gender norms and Christianity, all pertinent themes for my thesis.

Academic Discourses on Gender Norms in Nigeria

As an intrinsically patriarchal nation-state due to its colonial history, the Nigerian constitution enshrines the colonial cis-het gender structure of a man/woman binary, promising punishment for any existence outside of this binary. For example, same sex relationships and supporters of the LGBTI community risk an imprisonment sentence of ten years (Kamara n.d.). Within the binary, still, gender inequality remains a pervading issue across all ethnic groups in Nigeria. Narrowing the scope of analysis to the ethnic focus of this thesis, it is imperative to examine scholarly arguments in existing academic literature thus far on issues of gender inequality and gender norms in the Igbo society, and the role of religion in upholding the status quo.

In "Gender Role Ideologies and Prevalence of Violence against Women in Imo State, Nigeria" (Odimegwu and Okemgbo 2003), Clifford Odimegwu and Christian Okemgbo argue that the Igbo socio-cultural environment devalues and subjects women to the control of men. In other words, it is a patriarchal society that thrives on the oppression of women. This, they argue, is not unlike other ethno-cultural experiences in Nigeria, where women are expected to abide by certain social norms that control their public behaviour and actions. Women, as such, are considered to be nothing but extensions of their husbands. Odimegwu and Okemgbo assert that women encounter suffering because of their sex and the idea that a man is the 'head' or 'superior' to a woman by virtue of the Bible's Genesis-based creation story, as well as the bride-price he pays to her family during the marriage ceremony (Ibid, 228). Although Odimegwu and Okemgbo raise valid issues in present-day gender relations among Nigerians, specifically the Indigenous Igbo, they do not examine other ways in which

culture may affect or contribute to gender roles in Nigeria. They mention belief in and appropriation of the Christian creation story into the Igbo culture, but fail to examine if or how Christian ideologies have contributed to the corruption of Indigenous Igbo cultural beliefs and practices.

Other scholars have analysed the dynamic between Christianity and gender norms in Nigeria. In "The Role of Christianity in Gender Issues and Development in Nigeria," Anuli Okoli and Lawrence Okwuosa (2020) argue that people view themselves through the lens of gender, and a person's gender identity determines both behavioural patterns and relations with others in a socio-cultural environment. They argue that gender issues affect all aspects of human co-existence. They highlight the continuous subjugation of women to the benefit of men in Nigerian patriarchal society. The result of this hierarchy is a maligned relationship between men and women, as well as a hindrance on women in the realization of their capabilities and contributions to the development of the country. Their core argument is that Christianity has dominated the lives of Nigerian people since its introduction to the country. Christian doctrines have been adopted and have a heavy influence on Nigeria's cultural values, including those related to gender norms. My analysis critiques the relationship between gender and religion by incorporating the lived experiences of Nigerians in the examination of religion as a phenomenon.

In a similar vein, Colette Harris, in *Masculinities and Religion in Kaduna, Nigeria: A Struggle for Continuity at a Time of Change* (Harris 2012) analyses from a functionalist perspective, how specific gender norms introduced through Islam and the colonial religion of Christianity have been assimilated into the culture and are now considered as local traditions. Using Kaduna, a state in northern Nigeria as a case study, she discusses how these gender norms have become the strategies men use as coping mechanisms for rising poverty,

underemployment and unemployment in the country. These norms involve the endorsement of patriarchal traits such as the subjugation of women and children and default placement of the man as the breadwinner of a home. Harris argues that religion is also considered an essential tool used to reinforce scriptural ideas of male superiority. These strategies are particularly welcomed by financially underprivileged men because it validates their position of power and allows for the embodiment of masculinity through the perpetration of violence. Harris's argument reveals that the appropriation of Christian norms into Indigenous culture is not peculiar to the Igbo alone, but perhaps a national phenomenon.

Narrowing the focus to southeast Nigeria, Jamaine Abidogun, in "Western Education's Impact on Northern Igbo Gender Roles in Nsukka, Nigeria" (Abidogun 2007), explains that while perspectives on gender evolve constantly in every society, the combination of exogenous knowledge, transferred through colonial legacies such as the church and school, and endogenous knowledge transferred through Indigenous ethno-linguistic societal institutions have created a space for cultural conflict in Africa (Ibid, 29). Judeo-Christian norms are being taught as an academic discipline to students, causing them to forfeit Indigenous knowledge. As a result, Judeo-Christian ideologies on gender roles, especially regarding marriage and family are replacing Indigenous African beliefs and practices. These children possess little to no knowledge of their culture. Abidogun uses Nsukka, a community in southeast Nigeria as the case study for her ethnographic research and analysis. She attributes the loss of Indigenous cultural knowledge, gendered changes in roles within marriages and female political marginalisation to the appropriation of Judeo-Christian norms. She uses the Ibanko[17] ceremony, which is the traditional marriage ceremony among the Igbo as an example. Based on the tradition of the Nsukka people, the bride has to demonstrate a wilful acceptance of the groom on the day of the ceremony before witnesses

[17] Alternate spelling – *Igba Nkwu*.

(Ibid, 35). This model signifies a woman's independent decision to bind herself to the man of her choice, which Abidogun argues is contrary to the Christian marriage ceremony, in which the father of the bride hands her over to the groom. She questions her interviewees (a group of young Indigenous Igbo secondary school students) on why this ceremony is no longer upheld, to which their response was that they were now Christians. However, while in some Igbo communities such as mine, Mbaise, this ceremonial rite is still performed, such marriage remains unacknowledged under national law, but is considered valid to some in society. To ensure public and legal recognition, a culture of performing two marriage ceremonies, the traditional rite and the Christian/Western ceremony, was created. Abidogun's argument highlights the continuous reinforcement of Christian beliefs and practices in Nigeria, as well as the risk it poses to Indigenous African beliefs and identity.

Within marital life, Christian teachings appear to dominate perceptions on gender roles. In *Devotion and Domesticity: The Reconfiguration of Gender in Popular Christian Pamphlets from Ghana and Nigeria* (Newell 2005), Stephanie Newell analyses the lived experience of literature readers gathered through personal interviews in the countries of Ghana and Nigeria to consider the influence of Christian literature by evangelical authors on Christians in West Africa. She analyses the significance of gender in such texts, especially among the works that serve as behavioural guides for Christians, pointing out the different approaches of Christian authors, based on their gender. Male authors used their writing to propagate the submission of women in a Christian marriage as a divine rule. Christian female authors, on the other hand, wielded scriptural quotes from the Bible as a tool for establishing gender roles within a marriage. Newell explains that the result of these approaches is the creation of what she refers to as "marital utopias" that reflect the paradoxical nature of gender beliefs among Christians in West Africa, Newell's argument draws awareness to the ways through which the church may continuously perpetrate the subjugation of women in marriage

by highlighting the assignment and relegation of women to specific duties in alignment with Christian norms. This conditions the Christian woman to aspire to a divine ideal – through a ritualization of these assigned roles/duties – that stifles other aspects of her identity.

Theory

Decolonial Theory in African Feminist Literature

The conditioning of the Christian Igbo woman through the texts Newell criticises, combined with texts from the Bible depicts a coloniality of gender that necessitates a decolonization of the narrative this creates, in order to understand Igbo perspective on womanhood. The process of decolonizing the above issue of the relegation of gender roles in present day Igbo society involves two important theoretical components on which I draw to frame this research. I draw on Maria Lugones's concept of the colonial/modern gender system to explain womanhood here, and to explain what makes African feminist theory decolonial (Lugones, Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System 2007). This system consists of Christian ideas of gender, sexuality, an individual's location as a labouring body (a labouring colonized for the Crown) and religion among other factors. Lugones proposes that the practice of slavery/colonization, including the processes undergirding this practice, recreated the idea of gender, reducing it to biological categories of "man" and "woman" and social roles associated with these categories. Gender, therefore refers not only to the body type, but also the arrangement of power associated with it, in which case for a woman in this colonial system, is marriage and childbearing – her ability to reproduce (Mendez 2015, 45). In "Towards A Decolonial Feminism", Lugones explains that to the colonizers, the core dichotomy of colonial modernity was the hierarchy or ranking system between the human and non-human (Lugones, Toward A Decolonial Feminism 2010). This hierarchy was forced upon colonized people, followed by distinctions within the ranking, one

of which is distinctions within a gender binary (Ibid, 743). The binary of man and woman would become the identifier of who met the human standard and vice versa. Only the civilized could be categorized as "men" and "women". However, although the cis-het Christian "European bourgeois" was considered a "modern man…fit for modern rule", the European bourgeois woman was seen as less than a man; a means of reproducing race and capital (Ibid). Still, under this gender structure, European bourgeois men and women were considered to be civilized humans. The colonizers judged the colonized by their dispositions, which they termed animalistic, therefore unable to gender, unrestrained and sinful. The colonized, alongside intersex people, gays, lesbians, and non-submissive/unyielding women were viewed as abnormalities to male perfection (Ibid). European colonizers assessed the colonized for what the colonizers perceived/thought the colonized lacked to justify their inhumane actions (Ibid, 744). Man was defined as "human being par excellence", and thus, the colonized people were not human and could only be categorized as male and female (Ibid). The goal of the colonizer was not to civilize the people; rather they aimed to stir conflict among the colonized. For example, the imposition of Christian principles on the colonized created new perceptions of the colonized females' sexuality as evil. Such transformation in perception served to justify the colonizers' need to colonize the memory of the colonized, changing individual and collective self-perception of the colonized (Ibid, 746). Lugones further explains that gender coloniality[18] still lingers around the colonised, embedded within the intersection of gender/class/race as core constructs of the power system established by capitalism, and this coloniality allows the colonized to think about history only from the perspective of the oppressed (Ibid). Going by Lugones's explanation, if gender is colonial, decolonizing gender in African feminism involves the denouncement of colonial

[18] By coloniality, Lugones defines the classification of people in terms of power and gender, the process of actively reducing a people, dehumanizing them in a way that is perceivably apt to the dehumanizer, the act of subjectifying people and the attempt to transform the colonized into less than human beings (Lugones 2010, 745).

definitions and understanding of the individual colonized self and relations between the established binary, as well as a redefinition of gender roles in Igbo culture.

I draw on Lugones for two reasons: Lugones' theory, although focused on coloniality as experiences in the Americas, also applies to systems of coloniality in Africa; and also because of the issues associated with defining African philosophy within academic frameworks. Nigerian philosopher Sophie Oluwole, in "Africa", argued that African philosophy will remain incapable of development until Africans can establish worldviews to guide its men and women (Oluwole 2005). Dominic Griffiths explains that Oluwole's argument stems from the existence of conflicting positions on African philosophy: namely Negritude,[19] ethnophilosophy, professional philosophy[20] and sage philosophy (Griffiths 2022, 241).[21] In the world of "doing" feminist philosophy within academia, there is an absence of African feminism, on which point Griffiths corroborates Oluwole's argument that this is due to an absence of a cohesive definition for African philosophy among African scholars. This means that if African philosophy remains undefined to date, defining African feminist philosophy is "an impossibility" (Ibid, 244). Nonetheless, despite this absence of a clear definition of African philosophy, there exists Afrocentric literature and African feminist theories in post-colonial Nigeria, centred on highlighting the effects (both explicit and nuanced) of colonialism in postcolonial Nigeria.

Helen Chukwuma examines these effects in *Women's Quest for Rights: African Feminist Theory in Fiction* (Chukwuma 2007). She argues that although colonialism possesses some advantages, it introduced a culture of attaining pre-eminence through education, white-collar jobs and an economy motivated by money and these factors have contributed to the subordination of women in society. Women, Chukwuma states, have been

[19] Intellectual resistance to Western methods of thinking of and writing about African philosophy.
[20] This involves the use of Western methods and methodologies in analysing African philosophies.
[21] A study of the different native oral African philosophies and told by African elders or griots.

exploited as a result, maintaining a silence to their detriment, until the rise of African feminism in the 1960s. However, this was not always the case. Chukwuma dissects the difference among traditional societies in pre-colonial Africa. Domains of power and influence existed in communities to enable women to retain their collective and individual voice. She affirms that contemporary African feminism is a reaction to the colonial effects that plague a postcolonial Africa. In the decade after these colonial effects began, the continent churned out a number of feminist texts on these effects that have promoted the acknowledgement and importance of women in Africa. She identifies African feminist literature as an opus for the reassertion of the rights of the African woman disrupted by colonialism. Chukwuma's theory of colonialism as it relates to African feminism highlights colonialism as a strong factor in the subjugation of women in Nigeria, and is relevant to my analysis of possible differences between pre-colonial and postcolonial gender norms.

However, in her work, *Theorizing African Feminism(s): the 'Colonial' Question* (Megkwe 2006), Pinkie Megkwe takes a different spin in conceptualising African feminism from Chukwuma. According to Megkwe, although contemporary African literature has so far depicted itself as a visible attempt at decolonization, it only steered the growth of African feminism in the path of an anti-Western movement. This digression, she argues, is made evident in its anti-difference while at the same time attempting to establish itself as different from the West. In other words, she argues that although African feminists claim African feminism differs from Western feminism, they continue to tow the path of Western feminists by depicting men, especially African men, as being largely responsible for the problems of African women. Through identification of the complex relationship postcolonialism and feminism share in African literature, Megkwe explains how decolonisation and Africanity have exerted a heavy influence in African feminist debates. This relationship, combined with what she refers to as a paradoxical and ambivalent stance towards the real issues of African

women embraced in theories of African feminism, has resulted in disorientation in African feminism. In her view, such African feminist writers – like Oyewumi – used the racial categories of Black and White as an approach to distinguishable cultural difference, thereby simplifying complex models (Ibid, 15-16). Megkwe's use of the term "African feminism" implies a unified or pan-African feminism that involves feminists fighting against the same problems and sharing the same goals. However, ethnicities on the continent possess diverse socio-cultural views and structures that were differently affected by colonialism. For example, in northern Nigeria, where Islam is the predominant religion among the Hausa/Fulani, the incorporation of indirect rule as a system of governance by the British colonialists did little to alter the already existent socio-religious culture of the people. Still, Megkwe's perspective of decolonial theory in African feminist literature does not take away its relevance, but draws awareness to the ways in which theorizing decolonization can be poorly done.

More directly, Sanya Osha, in *Philosophy and Figures of the African Female*, takes on the lens of philosophy to analyse the concept of colonialism and its influence on doing black feminism (Osha 2006). Osha explains that by the nineteenth century, Black men had earned a level of acceptance and acculturation in Britain, Black men were considered the sexualized beast irresistible to White women. On the other hand, Black women were seen as the more untamed of both genders, therefore at the bottom of the preference list. This, Osha argues, marked the beginning of what would become the famous ideology of White womanhood, and the White woman's only option out of the desexualized and domesticated, gendered script she was made to act was for her to embody the concept of the sexual savage, visualised by the exhibition of Black 'Venuses' (Ibid, 183-184). This analysis highlights the significance of the Black or African body in discussing colonial perceptions of the Black woman and its relation to her subjugated position both in Africa and in the West. In relation

to this point, in my research, I explore if and/or how perceptions of the Black body during colonialism have shaped the assignment of gender norms to individuals in postcolonial Nigeria.

Nigerian Christian Feminist Theology

My exploration of colonial (religious) perceptions of the black body and its influence on gender norms in postcolonial Nigeria contributes to the limited literature on African feminist theology. Feminist theology remains a developing branch of study in African feminism. This could be due to a deep belief in religion by Africans, so that many find it difficult to analyse the concept of religion vis-à-vis African-ness. Since academic literature available remains relatively small, this means that Nigerian feminist theologians' perspective on the Igbo Indigenous religion is equally restricted. Still, some have dared, and continue to provide literature in both academic and non-academic formats to analyse these concepts. Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musimbi Kanyoro are of the view that it has dawned on African female theologians that if men and foreign researchers continue to maintain authority over culture and religion, then African women's stories would be similar to those of the dead (Oduyoye and Kanyoro 1992). In *The African Experience of God through the Eyes of an Akan Woman,* Mercy Amba Oduyoye theorizes religion in Africa from her personal experiences and observations of people's discussions on the concept of God (Oduyoye 1997/1998). She examines what it means to believe in the existence of God. She argues that Africans have always been an inherently religious people who are not sceptical about the existence of a God. The idea of God dominates the individual and collective life of Africans, and spirituality cannot be separated from them, as it constitutes who they are. Africans view nature and life on earth as gifts from God to enjoy, and how Africans experience God is reflected in language, particularly through the different names attributed to God. In relation to

this research, Oduyoye's theory of theology in Africa illuminates the society's understanding of God through pre-colonial to post-colonial times. Based on the intertwined relationship between culture and religion, understanding the African concept of God over the course of a given period allows for an analysis of if/how this concept has shaped social relations and gender identity in Africa so far. Oduyoye implies, by this argument, a unified African spiritual identity, therefore failing to consider the different precolonial indigenous African socio-ethnic understandings and interpretations of the concept of God and spirituality.

In Oduyoye's subsequent work, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, she analyses culture as a tool of domination in Africa (Oduyoye 2001). She argues that African women encounter double oppression from a double culture – from the Indigenous cultural practices of African people as well as from Western religious influence, of which the latter has been appropriated into African cultures to promote the already existing patriarchy. This notion implies that gender norms in Africa have always been detrimental to women, and the plight of women was doubled upon the introduction of Christianity to the continent. Again, the problem with this argument is that like Megkwe, Oduyoye implies that the experiences of African women are the same, irrespective of socio-cultural differences, and alludes to a unified or pan-African feminist movement in Africa. Nonetheless, by theorizing theology in Africa as it relates to culture, Oduyoye attempts to highlight characteristics of culture that focus on affirming the lives of African women, irrespective of which theology she uses, dismissing the notion that it has to be supported by the doctrines of Christianity. She discusses the relevance of recounting experience to give a voice to African women's theology and emphasizing its impact in women's lives. In doing this, Oduyoye implies that sometime between the onset of European colonialism and the present, certain Biblical practices became adopted and absorbed into African culture to the extent that African women can now recount Biblical events to portray their own lived realities. In other words, they have reconstructed

Biblical narratives to resonate with their experiences. Oduyoye's arguments in this book reveal that the goal of the African woman theologian not to decipher the complexities of the practice of religion in Africa, but to find a way to thrive irrespective of the religious restraints that trap her growth. She alludes to the possibility of a disruption of gender norms placed on women by religion.

Similar to Oduyoye's standpoint, Loreen Maseno argues that a number of African cultures are patriarchal and due to this, the African society contains an "asymmetric dualism" that serves to legitimize patriarchy and its power imbalance as a natural occurrence. Maseno projects African women as a unique group possessing certain varieties within African women's theology in "African Women's Theology and the Re-imagining of Community in Africa". She opines that African women's theology is dedicated to women's emancipation through the inclusion of their experiences and opinions in the analysis of the subjugation of women (Maseno 2021). African theology encourages appreciation of African cultures and integrity, and at the same time it only highlights the positive aspects of these cultures and fails to analyse the not-so-positive. According to her, while feminist theology originated from the West, African women in contemporary times have contributed to its development through writings and academia. Maseno's theory and analysis of feminist theology in Africa provides my research with a critique of theology in Africa, weighing both its positive and negative contributions to African societies.

Teresa Mbara Hinga, however, unlike Oduyoye and Maseno, steps aside from criticism of the concept of religion to lend a futuristic feminist lens to the use of religion in illuminating African women within theological communities (Hinga 2017). She argues that African women have been made invisible by opinions that do not validate their experiences or viewpoints. Hinga argues for the opportunity to allow African women to determine their own theological fate and to voice their truth in spaces where they have been unable to do so.

She urges that African women aspire to impact a theology that has both deprived and infused the African continent with life. Still, Hinga's analysis is limited by its focus on religion and its effects within the given framework of Western, male philosophy and does not challenge our understanding of the concept itself.

Methodologies

Decolonial Methodology

African feminist scholars like Oyeronke Oyewumi and Sylvia Tamale have argued the importance of decolonial methodology in rewriting Africa's history, and agree that this methodology is a way to put an end to false narratives of previous colonies (Oyewumi 1997) (Tamale 2020). Decolonial methodology, therefore is a writing approach that allows the writer(s) from a colonized group to repossess their own narratives by validating their indigenous source(s) of knowledge and preserving these forms of knowledge of their shared history. Similarly, Tamale seeks to understand the reason for Africa's continuous and seemingly futile struggle to free itself from the legacies of colonialism, imperialism and patriarchy many years after colonialism was officially declared over. Like Oyewumi, she separates Western feminism from feminism in Africa, which she refers to as Afro-feminism, denouncing the idea of universal feminism. She argues that for Africa to ease herself from the grasp of colonial legacies, Africans would have to discard inherited colonial knowledge of power relations that are still in practice. This includes Western concepts of family, sexuality and the colonial agencies of education, religion and law. She discusses Pan-Africanism as encompassing Afro-feminism. She calls for the embracement of internal influences of Indigenous African culture and the exclusion of external influences that strip away African identity while establishing alien notions of gender and spirituality. Also, Tamale's argument sheds light on the intersection of African feminism with colonialism and Christianity as a tool

of colonisation, which is the focal point of my research, and reveals the need for auto-ethnographic storytelling to enunciate the distinct nature of lived experience.

For this reason, I use both decolonial methodology and auto-ethnography in my thesis project. Decolonial methodology is important in this writing because I unpack colonial notions and influences that have covered and coloured our own narratives of ourselves as a people – as Nigerians, and in this context, as Igbo women. If Christianity as a religion was introduced to West Africa through contact with European colonizers, prior to this, how did traditional African worship influence the concept of gender? How has this evolvement impacted gender relations and assignment of gendered social scripts in the present society? Having personally denounced Christianity and its practices, this research would be a journey towards resituating myself within my cultural identity as a spiritual Igbo woman, as one cannot be separated from the other. Chinua Achebe explains this concept of spirituality[22] among this ethnic group. Based on his account, the Igbo do not believe in a universal concept of anything (Achebe 1998). This means that to them, nothing exists in a single form. If one form exists, then there must be another version of the form in existence. This belief extended to all aspects of human existence and social relations within the culture, including the concept of existence itself. There was no specific or particular way to live, as each person's journey is unique. For example, an Igbo saying goes, *"chi wu otu, Eke*[23] *awughi otu",* meaning, "each individual has a *chi*, but multiple destinies." A person determines what path they walk in life; they choose their destinies which they narrate to *Eke*,[24] the Creator, before being sent off to earth with their *chi*. The *chi* is believed to be the spiritual Other of the human Self. Therefore, the human form does not exist alone; it is accompanied by a *chi*. This *chi* does not harbour

[22] Interview with Chinua Achebe at the New York State Writers Institute. October 1998. Footage available at https://youtu.be/vKDupjm2fU8

[23] *Eke* is an Igbo word with multiple meanings. In this context, it translates to destiny, or an individual's life path.

[24] *Eke* here means Creator.

one path (or script) to fulfilment or destiny; there are multiple paths. Achebe explains that any existence in consciousness that existed as a lone figure was considered evil to the Igbo. Duality was the symbol of balance; of equality. For this reason, the Igbo were predisposed to egalitarianism, having long abandoned the idea of an absolute ruler or a leader in any form, because they believed among themselves that each individual was born to live life on their own terms (Ibid). In light of this belief, would an Igbo female then be marginalised, or considered "not woman" if she decided against marriage and motherhood, or if she chose to go against a common practice in pursuit of other personal interests?

Prior to my denunciation of both Catholicism and Christianity, my perception of myself was based on that which I had been told I was. An Igbo Christian woman. Igbo. Christian. Specifically, Roman Catholic, as we have been taught by the church[25] to define our religious identity in Nigeria. By extension I was expected to live the life designed for women in this category. If colonialism did not befall the region, perhaps I would simply be seen as an Igbo woman with her *chi*; a spiritual Other, walking the path/destiny I had chosen for myself in agreement with *Eke*, my Creator. Christianity and Roman Catholicism may have been alien assignations that had no relation to my identity and by extension, my social behaviour, life or acts as a woman. One identity is rooted in bloodline, land and ancestry. The other is an adoption of a culture that I have been told by colonised minds possesses a truer god than ours, and I am to live by the dictates of this god. Partha Chatterjee theorizes that the imaginations of the citizens of previously colonised territories would always be colonised, as there is nothing original left to imagine (Chatterjee 1993, 5). This seems to explain our abandonment of Indigenous spiritual beliefs and practices and adoption of that of another culture. Uchem posits the Igbo had the possibility to attain considerable gender justice and equality due to its

[25] This idea of Christian denominationalism was taught to me at Catechism classes.

original egalitarian structure, but its people have been held back by Christianity (Uchem 2001, 19-20).

The effects of this colonial legacy have created the need to understand the status and role of women in pre-colonial traditional Igbo society. Kingsley Okoro elaborates on Achebe's explanation; although the Igbo were not gender neutral in the assignment of roles, they were inclined towards an egalitarian social system, which warranted men and women to carry out their responsibilities separately, without violating the personal rights and space of each other (Okoro 2013, 62-63). This system is also referred to as the dual-sex political system, which extended to all aspects of interaction among them (Ibid) and reflects the symbiotic relationship between Igbo spiritual beliefs and socio-political interactions.

Auto-ethnography

Weighing in on this importance of experience in African feminist literature, I draw upon auto-ethnography as a methodology in my research. Autoethnography as a methodology allows for a subjective approach to research/knowledge seeking; it combines the strengths of life writing, the rich descriptions brought by ethnography and observation of the socio-cultural context in which the autobiographical is situated. Still, for the purpose of my research, I define auto-ethnography as a form of feminist research in which the researcher examines and incorporates personal experiences within the context of the research topic. In situating myself within the discourse I am able to present my truth as I see and understand it. As a methodology that encourages a subjective approach to research, auto-ethnography has stirred numerous debates on its legitimacy in academic feminist research and writing. Yet, objectivity in academic research remains a quagmire. What history could be more truthful to an individual other than that which they witnessed and/or experienced? Who decides what objective truth means within research? In “Decolonising Methodologies: Research and

Indigenous Peoples", Linda Tuhiwai Smith argues that the term "research" is considered to be one of the dirtiest words in the vocabulary of Indigenous people, awakening negative memories and eliciting distrust (Smith 1999). This is as a result of centuries of enduring the imposition of Western concept of research as the only objective way to seek knowledge. The problem with this, as Smith points out, is that it devalues our claim to existence, our right to self-determination and our methods of preserving cultural knowledge among others (Ibid, 1). In researching on Indigenous people in postcolonial times, there are debates on appropriate questions to ask. For example, whose research is it? Who owns the research? In whose interest is it done? Who stands to benefit from the research? Who designed the research questions? Who writes out the research (findings) and how does the researcher imagine the research conclusions will be received (Ibid, 10)? Therefore, the goal of the researcher looking into the history of any Indigenous group is to write from the perspective of the subject, as Indigenous history cannot be written from a non-subjective point-of-view.

Archana Pathak, however, in *Opening My Voice, Claiming My Space: Theorizing the Possibilities of Postcolonial Approaches to Autoethnography*, details both the significance of and conundrum in auto-ethnography as an academic method (Pathak 2010). Pathak highlights that auto-ethnography is not without its disadvantages. An intended auto-ethnographic work could end up as an autobiography, a memoir or voluminous words of narcissistic writing. For Pathak, auto-ethnography enables the writer to find meaning in the world, and lends power to the writer's voice as a woman of colour in a way that positivistic academic writing fails to provide. Pathak questions if a place existed in auto-ethnography for people whose natural voice was the academic voice, while ensuring they would not be denied intellectual validity for writing and analysing the place(s) in which they are situated. Pathak's acknowledgement of the contradictions in the use of auto-ethnography as a research method allows for the consideration of ways to circumvent this problem and establish auto-ethnography as an

authentic form of inquiry for an African and person of colour without reducing it to a mere form of doing body politics.

Likewise, Layla Brown-Vincent, in her article, "Seeing It for Wearing It: Autoethnography as Black Feminist Methodology", discusses the importance of auto-ethnography as a feminist methodology of critical inquiry from the angle of grounding it as a solid academic methodology for women of colour (Brown-Vincent 2019). According to Brown-Vincent, Black women in academia are often not given credit enough for their work. Influenced by the auto-ethnographic writings of anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston she opines that auto-ethnography is a profoundly Black feminist methodology because of its ability to ground theory in our lived or personal experience. Auto-ethnography as a methodology allows Black women to own their own narratives. She argues that it allows Black women to situate themselves in a world filled with white (and often male) literature. Again, this re-establishes the significance of writing from one's experience, as it is one of the few ways through which previously-held false narratives can be corrected. Agreeing with this perspective, I consider an analysis of the patterns of continued subjugation of women through the practice of the doctrines of a colonial religion achievable through recounting personal experiences and the emotions associated with these memories.

Another scholar with a similar argument to Brown-Vincent on knowledge production and the politics of race is Robin Boylorn (Boylorn 2016). Using the term "home" as a metaphor to discuss and insert herself in a position from which she views and experiences the world, Boylorn discusses the significance of auto-ethnography in navigating race and gender. Boylorn describes Blackgirl auto-ethnography as a way of being at home with herself in a world that fights to silence and make Black girls invisible. Boylorn explains that this auto-ethnography allows for the resistance of stereotypes that have come to be associated with

Black girls and has the potential to give a voice to the marginalised and the maligned in society. It serves as both a private and public platform to voice out oppression without risks. In narrating her personal experience and searching for an outlet through which to resist being silenced in her body, she propagates this methodology as a way for both Black and Brown scholars to reconstruct themselves without the anti-feminist influences of racism, classism or misogyny (Ibid, 44). Boylorn's argument reinforces the importance of situating myself in my research through accounts of my experience, especially as a woman in a patriarchal society.

Elizabeth Etorre also situates auto-ethnography as an important form of feminist literary and narrative writing (Etorre 2016). Furthermore, she recognizes the existence of multiple approaches to feminist writing, but argues for the equality of auto-ethnography. The narratives this method brings to feminism are a reminder of the existence of multiple truths. She argues that narrative methods are relevant to the generation of knowledge about individuals, groups of people and vulnerable language. She describes narratives as the means through which we position ourselves in the world. Etorre argues that personal narratives possess the power to transform the personal into the political by revealing the imbalance of power in the dynamics of human relationships. Auto-ethnography differs from autobiography. While autobiography focuses primarily on the "I", auto-ethnography establishes the "I" within the context of a culture. Like Boylorn, Etorre's explanation of the importance of auto-ethnography in feminist writing is relevant to my research because emphasizes the importance of deeply grounding myself within the culture I discuss. This would, in turn, aid in the construction of a more critical perspective on the culture as well as the experiences of my female predecessors and me.

Methods of Inquiry

Having established an understanding of autoethnography as a valid methodology in decolonizing a narrative, how then can an individual writing about themself inquire about the self in relation to the social group in which they are situated? In *The Evidence of Experience,* Joan Wallach Scott discusses the incorporation of experience as a way of exploring how difference can be established, its method of operation, and for understanding its constitution of subjects and their actions in a given society (Scott 1991, 777). Scott argues not only for the incorporation of experience, but for an analysis of how experience operates by giving some thought to the discursive outcome (Ibid). Experience, therefore, should not be the beginning of the account being written, but that which the writer aims to explain. For this reason, I engage two main research methods in this thesis: auto-ethnography and analysis of three select novels with the key themes of religion and gender. I consider my experience extremely relevant to this research because I have been situated in the society for most of my life. I journal significant events in my lived experience that have influenced my perception of gender norms and the practice of Christianity in Nigeria. I provide detailed accounts from memory work of situations involving socio-religious scripts in my years as a Christian Igbo female which I was expected to embody, as well as personal observations, which I combine with the three select works of fiction that are centred on the Igbo culture for insight on the socio-cultural environment in this discussion.

My analyses of the three novels are an attempt to comprehend gender norms in the Igbo community from precolonialism to postcolonialism. In consideration of the books being historical novels, the lines between fact and fiction, although blurred by the creative imaginations of the authors, produce important perspectives on the socio-religious world of an Igbo Christian in Nigeria. Anna Nguyen, in her article, ““Narrativizing Injustice” Through

Fiction," highlights key questions she considers important in the use of fiction in research (Nguyen 2021). What is the role of the writer? What does it mean to explain a novel outside of its intended context (the multiplicity of meaning)? In the case of using fiction as a method for art-based-inquiry, whose space is being invaded and why? She explains that the reading process is an intricacy between writer and reader. Also, the writing processes of fiction reveal our perceptions of social worlds and realities, and the use of this method has been confirmed as both methodological and theoretical. Nguyen argues that the objective of the reader is not to simply learn about the time frame of the existence of literature and fiction, but to understand how fiction has so far been instrumental to the legitimisation and production of knowledge. I examine how the authors engage the plots, settings and characters in producing knowledge of gender roles in precolonial and postcolonial Igbo culture.

The three novels selected are decolonial works of fiction done by Nigerian writers. The first book, *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe is a work of fiction that discusses Igbo culture vis-à-vis spirituality in a gendered precolonial and colonial southeast Nigeria (Achebe 1994). This novel was the first attempt by an Afrocentric and African writer to decolonise Africa's stories. Achebe depicts a realistic narrative of the Igbo people, in which his characters are neither wholly good nor bad, but generally flawed individuals. Drawing from his knowledge and perception of his culture, the novel explores socio-cultural relations in an obviously gendered precolonial community through the life and interactions of Okonkwo, his key character.

In the second book titled *The Joys of Motherhood,* Buchi Emecheta highlights the disadvantages of the transitional period in Igbo society to Igbo women. The cost of colonialism came high for the Igbo who were conflicted between toeing the path mandated for them by their local communities (in line with the age-old traditions of the people) and

caving in to the demands and following the newly mapped out path by the British colonialists. Emecheta narrows her focus on socio-cultural relations among the Igbo to the significance of marriage and childbearing through the lives of two female characters, Ona and Nnu Ego (Emecheta 2013). These two women struggle to find themselves in this conflict of direction; they are tasked with assuming traditional duties under an alien socio-economic system that neither validated them nor rewarded them. Ona, Nnu Ego's mother, born in the early days of colonialism, viewed herself as an individual; strictly as an "I". Nnu Ego on the other hand, who was born into twentieth-century colonial Nigeria, perceived herself as an "I, woman", and embarks on a quest to validate her womanhood, thereby highlighting other aspects of her often conflicting spiritual and gender identity. Emecheta's,[26] work reinforces the narratives of Okoro and Achebe that the African woman was considered "equal, yet different" from the man among Indigenous Igbo before colonial influence. Both Achebe and Emecheta's books are historical fiction.

The third book, Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, is contemporary fiction, in which Adichie destroys the notion of Indigenous African worship as a demonic practice, highlighting the ills of Christianity as an adopted colonial religion on the identities and behaviours of her characters (Adichie 2004). Similar to my experience, the story is centred on Kambili, a young teenage girl raised in an Igbo Catholic household. Adichie explores the journey towards the rediscovery, redefinition and comprehension of the protagonist, young Kambili's, identity in postcolonial Nigeria as she unravels questions within religion and culture. The three books were selected for the insight they provide on gender norms in Igbo culture between the 19th century and the present.

[26] Emecheta identified as an African woman with African values whose discourse did not necessarily align with that of with the feminisms of people of colour in the West (Nadaswaran 2012).

Fiction as a Method of Inquiry

In *Fiction and the Feminist Academic Novel,* Patricia Leavy argues for the use of fiction as a method of qualitative academic research (Leavy 2012). Although the line between fiction and reality has long been blurred within and outside academia, this method, she explains, experienced an increased use in academia since the 1990s. This perspective can be seen in my use of the three novels as a source of historical and feminist knowledge. Leavy opines that this increase is as a result of fiction's potential to raise consciousness of feminism, navigate difficult aspects of social life with relations to discussing difficult topics and awareness of the unimaginable, reveal the diverse nature of meaning, as well as its ability to key into a story's empathy-stirring power and resonate with the reader(s). According to Leavy, "fiction is a way of getting at the inner world or psyche of characters in ways that hopefully resonate with readers, which no other medium would allow" (Ibid, 517). Fiction employs two techniques that can make for a powerful transmission of knowledge in the social sciences: "dialogue" and a way into the "inner worlds of characters through interior monologue" (Ibid). These techniques have been employed in the above listed novels, and from which I analyse society's expectation of women in precolonial Nigeria, and of Christian women in post-colonial Nigeria.

Like Leavy, Carl Rhodes and Anthony Brown, in *Writing Responsibly: Narrative Fiction and Organization Studies*, explain that the use of forms of fiction by researchers searching for unorthodox ways of representing empirical material and ethnographic insight has been on the rise (Rhodes and Brown 2005, 472). In their analysis of the role of fiction in disrupting divides between reality and fiction, they argue against the notion that the use of fiction in academic research often results in an "anything goes" subjectivism. Instead, fiction

in research infers a deeper awareness of researcher-author responsibility.[27] (Rhodes and Brown 2005). They argue that social inquiry does not have to be influenced solely by the procedures of science, mathematics and logic because the creative arts offer a lot with regards to the derivation of knowledge. It is for the reasons of historical knowledge and insight on the writers' perspectives that I employ fiction as a method of inquiry; to consider the wealth of information it provides, nuanced or otherwise, relevant to my research.

Similar to the arguments of Leavy, Rhodes and Brown, Oscar Hemer, in "Fiction's Truth and Social Change: Preliminary Outlines for an Investigation of Fiction as a Research Method and a Means of Communication for Social Change", argues for the use of literary fiction as an unconventional and defiant means of investigation and at the same time, instruments for the identification of culture and social empowerment. Oscar Hemer explains that just as literature served a major role in constructing the imagined communities of colonial empires and nation-states within and outside of Europe, it could also contribute to the deconstruction of established mythologies and facilitate efforts to build a transnational world (Hemer 2006). In other words, fiction can be used to decolonize false narratives of a group of people. In his Introduction, he questions what fiction informs us about the world that science and technology fail to do. Hemer argues that literary fiction can be an unconventional and defiant means of investigation and at the same time, instrumental for the identification of culture and social empowerment. This may be visible in the continuous use of the selected novels in academia since publication. In applying Hemer's theory, I examine how these novels have served as harbours of cultural identification and social empowerment of women.

[27] Here, Rhodes and Brown mention that their use of the term "responsibility" is as defined by Jacques Derrida. In his book *The Gift of Death*, Derrida states that "Saying that a responsible decision must be taken on the basis of knowledge seems to define the condition of possibility of responsibility (one cannot make a responsible decision without science or conscience, without knowing what one is doing, for what reasons, in view of what and under what conditions), at the same time that it defines the condition of impossibility of this same responsibility (if decision-making is relegated to a knowledge that it is content to follow or to develop, then it is no more a responsible decision, it is the technical deployment of a cognitive apparatus, the simple mechanistic deployment of a theorem)" (Derrida 1995). In other words, the basis of responsible decision, which is knowledge, determines whether a person's actions are responsible or mechanical and thoughtless.

Auto-ethnography as a Method of Research

The three selected novels depict Nguyen's argument on the use of fiction to depict a writer's perception of their socio-cultural environment. In line with this thought, I employ the art of auto-ethnographic storytelling to narrate my own reality within the context of this research topic. I also examine and journal my personal experience as a Christian Igbo woman living in postcolonial Nigeria, comparing this experience with that of the significant female characters in the novels. In order to journal my experience, I rely on memory work. Memory work is an important aspect of both auto-ethnographic writing and fiction. Gabrielle Schwab, in *Haunting Legacies*, explains the ability of memory work to confront past injuries and bring them to the dystopian present in order to resolve its issues (Schwab 2010, 29). This implies the interconnectivity between the past and present. The issues of the past are the issues of the present. As both the researcher and the researched, I recall and examine significant histories that haunt my present. Esther Ohito, in her work, "Remembering my Memories: Black Feminist Memory Work as a Visual Research Method of Inquiry", argues that the purpose of memory work as a method of research to a Black feminist is to explain, assess and interpret poignant images, as well as to reveal and interpret autobiographical memories that have been repressed and events that trigger heavy emotions (Ohito 2021). She explains that a return to one's memories is a meditation on the experience of the human psyche and body over space, location and time while commencing on a methodological time trip through space and time (Ibid, 2). According to Ohito, every individual is an end result of individual and collective memories and geographical histories, thus, memory impacts upon the present (Ibid). Memory's power initiates the continuity of life by providing the present with meaning composed of the past. She argues that parts of ourselves that we work towards detaching from us by cutting and separating never really vanish. Rather, they return as haunting memories demanding our attention. To her, research is both ideological and rooted in the recollection of

experience. Here, Ohito's point is not dissimilar to that of Scott who explains that experience is the main discussion of the writer; it is the core of the writer's narrative (Scott 1991).

Ohito's arguments illuminate the relevance of memory work in auto-ethnographic writing, which is why I use memory work and consequently, journaling what I remember of these significant moments in my life that have come to shape my identity in this auto-ethnographic research. Memory work here also includes remembering and recounting the lived experience of my great-grandmothers in relation to gender norms as told to me by my parents. Altogether, I examine and journal the lived experience of four Igbo women – my maternal and paternal great-grandmothers, my mother and myself – in relation to Catholicism and gender norms. I do this through rememory – the use of one's imaginative power to discover a link (or links) to the unexperienced past from shared stories (Rody 1995). These retold stories highlight the relationship between storytelling and culture, as well as the importance of oral storytelling in passing down history from one generation to another in African cultures; the relevance or usefulness of oral history in the preservation of culture, which presently contributes to decolonizing Eurocentric narratives in written literature and history in auto-ethnography. Despite sharing similar characteristics with forms like auto-biography and memoirs in that they are accounts of personal experience, Heewon Chang explains that what distinguishes auto-ethnography from the rest is that it concentrates on an examination and explanation of culture past the bare act of storytelling (Chang 2018). According to her, this method merges "cultural analysis and interpretation with narrative details", complying with the inquiry approach of the disciplines of anthropology and social science, as opposed to that of performative and/or descriptive storytelling (Ibid, 46). In this "research guidebook" (Ibid 15), as Chang refers to her work, she states that a writer employing the technique of auto-ethnography must be prepared for deep memory work, sifting through the past to "excavate rich details" which they then pull forth to be examined,

labelled, pieced together and applied in the context of a socio-cultural environment (Ibid 51). Hence, auto-ethnography allows for reflection, recollection and examination of my personal experience in relation to a socio-cultural problem, and within an academic framework. Summarily, Chang's detailed work on the relevance of and steps to auto-ethnographic writing emphasizes how auto-ethnography can be a form of cultural and historical examination that traces the chronology of occurrences and patterns of change in a given context. In this regard, the experience of the four women exposes, if any, the sequence of change that has occurred in the four generations that set us apart.

Carol Rambo and Carolyn Ellis expand on Chang's viewpoint of auto-ethnography as an examination in their work, "Autoethnography", by describing auto-ethnography as a procedure of research as well as a result of the approach, used in the analysis of the self and lived experience while situated in external factors that may have influenced the self to advance sociological understanding (Rambo and Ellis 2020). In other words, it is both the act and the end-result; a method of inquiry and a culmination of the discovery. Rambo and Ellis explain that an individual incorporating auto-ethnography pulls from their personal experience as a point of commencement for social inquiry, depicting subjectivity of reason and perception sentiments and social operations. The flexibility in the use of auto-ethnography to discuss a range of topics from the quotidian to the extremely relevant makes it a potentially global approach to be adopted in doing research. This highlights the power of 'I' as an ex-Catholic Igbo woman in my research, as both the inquirer and the subject of inquiry, and its interconnectedness with larger social issues in Nigeria (Skrdlik 2022), which I discuss in the next chapter. In recounting the place from which I am situated as an ex-Catholic Igbo woman, I use four lived experiences of gender identity and gender norms to analyse and illuminate the interconnectedness of gender norms, colonialism, and Catholicism in relation to marriage and childbearing in southeast Nigeria.

Chapter Two

Ugwu Nwanyi Wu Di Ya

Introduction

As I spent the month of October 2022 thinking about how best to begin writing this chapter, a phone call with my maternal uncle back in Nigeria would avail itself as the much-needed prompt. What makes this conversation relevant is that it portrays the continuation – in the now – of the issues related to this research topic. My uncle had specifically asked his son to inform me via a Whatsapp text of his desire to speak to me. Immediately, I put a call through. Pleasantries were exchanged and we both inquired about each other's well-being. Then he went straight to the point, expressing his concern about the absence of a husband in my life. A good man. A Catholic man. These were his criteria for acceptance of and support for this potential husband. I sighed. The conversation was a repeat of many others with family.

"Honestly, Uncle, it's the least of my worries. I'm not interested in getting a husband." An ephemeral silence ensued. Finally, he spoke again.

"I've told you what I've told you." he said in Igbo. "Remember where you're from and remember that you're a woman. Even if you conquer the world, nobody will respect you if you don't have a husband." In that conversation, it dawned on me that although I was no longer Catholic,[28] which the elders in my extended family still refuse to acknowledge, I was still expected to abide by this social script,[29] because to them, I remain Catholic and Igbo, as though both were fused into each other.

[28] I renounced Catholicism (apostatized) in 2018.
[29] Judith Butler opines that gender roles are fluid, normalized through a "stylized repetition of acts" or a social script (Butler 1988, 519-520).

This is a personal story, and it puts me, the researcher, in the place of vulnerability by revealing aspects of my private life for public scrutiny. For this reason, I resolved to use the first names only of some individuals in my experience whose anonymity I hope to somewhat retain. Still, a personal story is not necessarily a political one, if it cannot be connected to larger social issues. What makes my story political? As Michael Jackson explains, every story is, in a way untrue because it reorganizes and modifies a person's experiences, but these modifications could serve distinct interests such as stirring sentiments and fostering action within us to challenge official narratives (Jackson 2013, 14). Jackson further explains that to use storytelling as a method of enquiry, we must resist the urge to draw out moral lessons from the story, which supports the status quo, or the existing social script (Ibid, 29). Instead, we could look to stories as avenues to create a better life; a means to realize the utopian. This insight brings me to ask myself, in what way is my experience connected to the larger contemporary Nigerian socio-political scene? To address this question, it became important that I begin with an analysis of gendered expectations in southeast Nigeria this way, as it allows for me to explain what makes this personal story political.

In order to identify the problems possibly associated with my research topic on a wider social scope, it is imperative to highlight the interconnectedness between the Igbo and Catholicism in the absence of a more emphatic statistic. Catholicism is the most dominant faith among the Igbo people and plays a public role in communal life, including churches, hospitals, work places, social environments and public institutions, and it is even more evident in southeast states like Enugu (Landy 2022). The Igbo are the third largest ethnic group in Nigeria and make up about 70% of Catholic Nigerians (Obadare 2022). According to the World Bank, the population of Nigeria in 2018 was about 198,387,623 people (Nigeria 2023), of which the Igbo made up 15.1% (Milazzo and van de Walle 2018), or about 29,956,531 Igbo people. In the same year, the Catholic population in Nigeria was estimated

to be 10.6% (Sasu 2022) which is about 20.7 million people. This gives an idea as to the estimated population of Igbo Nigerians. The population of Igbo Catholics in Nigeria, based on estimated calculations from the 2018 statistics is about 14.5 million people. Therefore, almost half of the Igbo population in Nigeria identify as Catholic, and/or were raised with Catholic ideologies. This chapter aims to analyse how the patrilineal structure of the precolonial Igbo family/clan unit enabled the emergence and normalisation of a patriarchal understanding of gender and gender roles under colonial rule vis-à-vis Catholicism, and preserved into postcolonial Nigeria through enculturation. In doing so, it also highlights the role of both the colonised and coloniser in the quotidian perpetration of colonial narratives of gender roles among the Igbo. This enculturation has resulted in issues such as stigmatization against and mistreatment of unmarried Igbo women, the subjugation of Igbo women in general (in which they are only recognised through their husbands and children) and a growth in illegal baby trade factories[30] within the postcolonial Catholic Igbo community.

Recognizing Issues in the Quotidian

In a 1998 Bill Moyers interview with Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe, Achebe explained that every event possesses three core players: the warrior, the agitator and the storyteller (Moyers 1988). The storyteller is often-times the survivor of the event. This puts the responsibility to preserve the history of the unfolding events on them, for the sake of posterity (Ibid). These stories are to be passed down across generations and often highlight how issues in the present are tied to the past, as well as how the future can be re-imagined. Therefore, storytelling is a threat, as it brings to the surface uncomfortable truths that may not be acceptable to the beneficiaries of the status quo. In this research, one uncomfortable truth to discuss is the notion of enculturation.

[30] Baby factories, also known as illegal maternity units in Nigeria are often small illegal facilities disguised as medical centres or charity homes for pregnant and unwed young women and predominantly in the southern part of Nigeria (Hamilton 2020).

Enculturation – the gradual acquisition of certain practices of a group or culture by another group or culture. This shift makes it difficult to detect what is alien and what is original to the enculturating group. In this context, the fusion of Christian ideologies with the Indigenous beliefs of the Igbo people corrupted the cultural narrative and produced a new social script that changed the concept of womanhood in nineteenth century Igbo society. For example, customs on marriage and divorce. Having observed my mother's experience as a victim of intimate partner violence for two decades, I asked my great-aunt why my mother never left her marriage. Why did she tolerate it? Was singlehood that repulsive an idea? Her response to me was that in our culture, a woman never leaves her husband. She is bound to him until separated by death.[31] The excuse of culture, it would seem, serves as a sufficient reason to perpetuate patriarchy, stigmatization and abuse through prioritising and/or mandating marriage for Igbo women. Yet, one wonders if this notion of marriage and womanhood is indeed strictly cultural. The precolonial (19th century) story of Mgbafo in *Things Fall Apart*, whose decision to leave her abusive husband was facilitated and supported by her brothers contradicts my great-aunt's assertion (Achebe 1994, 87). At the meeting to resolve the dispute that had erupted between Mgbafo's family and her husband as a result, her brother, Odukwe highlighted that the law of the community mandated the return of the bride-

[31] Legally (and in alignment with the Section 15 (1) of the 1990 Matrimonial Causes Act), a marriage is dissolvable only if it can be proven the marriage has been broken down beyond repair (Matrimonial Causes Act (Chapter 220): Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 1990. 2005). The Matrimonial Causes Act was introduced first in 1970 to guide statutory marriage dissolutions in Nigeria, but it created challenges to customary and Islamic marriages and divorce processes in the country, because all three types of marriages are founded on different traditions and principles (Rahmatian 1996, 281-285). Marriage laws in Nigeria are founded on legal pluralism; statutory law guiding this act were mostly inherited from colonial times, while customary laws differ per ethnic society (Ibid). Customary marriages are (potentially) polygamous, while statutory marriages are monogamous, per colonial establishment.
The dissolution of legal marriages can only be filed in the High courts within the state in which the marriage took place, but the High courts in Nigeria are few in number. However, in the case of customary marriage in Nigeria, the Igbo culture, in present times, considers divorce taboo, and a divorced woman is faulted as the reason for the failure of her marriage (Elochukwu 2021). If a marriage is being dissolved under customary law in Nigeria, although the woman is not prohibited from owning personal property within the marriage, she holds no claims to her partner's property, even if she contributed to its acquisition (Ibid). Under statutory/legal marriage, as guided by the Matrimonial Causes Act, personal properties belonging to one or both divorcing parties can be divided between them, on the determination of the court.

price to the husband. This implies that an Igbo woman in this time period could leave a marriage if she found it unfavourable.

Similarly, in *The Joys of Motherhood*, Buchi Emecheta introduces the fictional character, Ona, to explore the cultural script on marriage and childbearing in relation to womanhood in nineteenth-century Igbo society (Emecheta 1979). Ona is a woman who prioritised her freedom. Her father had decided upon her birth that she would never marry, because marriage, to him, and like Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, meant the yielding of a woman to the control of a man. She was free to take lovers, with the hope that any son she bore would bear her father's name, as he had no male heir. This act was not uncommon, as it was a way to continue a patriline, in a case where a man is unable to sire sons. As Ona grew into adulthood, she appreciated this decision as freedom to be and do as she pleased. She viewed herself as an "I" with no attachment to create for her the concept of her being. Eventually, her dying request to her lover, Nwokocha Agbadi, would be that he ensured her daughter, Nnu Ego, would have a life of her own, just as she did. To Ona, it was only fair that the "I" reserved the right to write her own script on womanhood.

Womanhood in Precolonial Igbo society: Okonkwo's wives

In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo had three wives. Not much is known about Okonkwo's mother. The book, in general, is centered on Okonwo's life, and an analysis of the female characters is related to his connection to them. Male power and achievements are emphasized, especially because of how they shape the male's public perception. The book depicts customary duties of both genders in the nineteenth century, right into the period the Igbo society fell under British colonial rule. A woman was expected to mind the home front. She provided sex on scheduled or preferred nights, in the case of polygamous homes. She also reserved the right to mind her personal and social affairs. Igbo men and women led both

separate and distinct social lives. The first wife in a polygamous home was usually the head wife, who ran the affairs of the home without the interference of the husband. This example is depicted in Achebe's description of Nwakibie's family. Nwakibie, who was considered a wealthy man with three huge barns, had three wives. When young Okonkwo visits Nwakibie at his home to ask for some tubers of yam with which to start his own farm, we are introduced to Nwakibie's first wife, Amari (Achebe 1994, 20). She is described as a "middle-aged woman, tall and strongly built". She is also seen as charismatic, with the author detailing that "she looked every inch the ruler of the womenfolk in a large and prosperous family" (Ibid).

Still, it would seem that perceptions on power dynamics between both genders differed per individual. Okonkwo's three wives – Nwoye's mother (who remains so-called throughout the book), Ekwefi and Orjiugo lived in fear of him, much to his preference. He was known as a man of few words and a fiery temper. To Okonkwo, manhood was defined by the ability of a man to control his women and children (Ibid, 52-53). A man incapable of control over his household was not really a man. For this reason, he was initially displeased at his son's "lack of masculinity", which he criticised heavily. At his visit to Obierika (Obierika was an elder kinsman who was also once renowned for his strength and bravery in his youth), another guest, Ofoedu, announces the death of a couple they all knew, Ndulue and Ozoemena (Ibid, 67-69). Although Ndulue had other wives, he considered Ozoemena, his first wife, as his partner and equal. Ndulue is discussed as incapable of taking any action without consulting Ozoemena. Ndulue died first, and Ozoemena was informed. She goes off to confirm the news first-hand. Upon confirmation, she returns immediately to her hut, where she was found dead later. The news and story of Ndulue and Ozoemena displeased Okonkwo, and he expressed his disappointment, saying, "I thought he was a strong man in his youth". Ofoedu and Obierika, however, disagreed with Okonkwo's newly formed opinion of the

contrary, reaffirming that Ndulue was once a strong man indeed. To the both of them, strength and bravery did not lie in the ability to dominate women, but to fight wars, as Obierika mentioned that Ndulue had led his people to war years ago. Despite the differing opinions on marriage and power, the three men were friends. Their relationship supports Achebe's explanation on the Igbo ideology of giving respect to the will or personal ethics of each other. Also, Ndulue and Ozoemena's famous marital bond may have been an exceptional act in the social script of the community, a novelty that elicited admiration as well as repulsion in discussion. Although men were prioritised for their role in the continuity of patrilines, women exercised their rights to make personal independent choices in their lives. Women forbade men from interfering in their affairs and vice versa. Both sexes viewed themselves as different, yet equal. In "Recovering Igbo Traditions: A Case for Indigenous Women's Organisation in Development", Nkiru Ezegwu explains from a radical feminist philosophical standpoint that the success of the pre-colonial Igbo egalitarian society was primarily due to the peaceful relationship between men and women, and to the consequences for those who acted otherwise (Ezegwu 1995, 446). If a man was found to have disrespected a woman, he would be humiliated publicly[32] or ostracized by women in the community (Ibid). The exercised free will of Igbo women was facilitated by indigenous laws that emphasized female assertiveness and collective action, and the cooperation of Igbo men was not out of fear, but respect for their authority (Ibid 447-448).

This respect was also reflected in marriage. Marriage was a choice, and an individual was not communally shamed for choosing to be uninvolved, as Emecheta depicts through the character Ona. As much as Ona desired a similar experience for her daughter, Nnu Ego, born in a twentieth century colonial Nigeria, it was not the case. Nnu Ego's experience differed in comparison to Ona's, alongside the influence of their society on their perceptions of

[32] Humiliation often involved being sat on by women.

themselves. Although Emecheta did not mention the exact year in which the character, Nnu Ego was born, she begins the story with a troubled woman (Nnu Ego) estimated to be about twenty-six years old, running to an unknown destination in the year 1930. This allows for a rough estimate of Nnu Ego's year of birth, which must have been in the first decade of the 20th century. This establishes a time frame for her lived experience, different from her mother's. The book chronicles her quest to fit a redefined concept of womanhood, which involved procreation within marriage. Her inability to bear a child in her first marriage became a cause of shame for her, and earned her ridicule from her husband's other wives. Nnu Ego's experience is ironical to the book's title, as despite having many children and thereby fulfilling society's expectation of what it meant to be a woman, she was left desolate in old age, and eventually died alone and lonely by the roadside (Emecheta 1979, 224). The distinct experiences of Ona and Nnu Ego reveal the gradual shift that was taking place behind the scenes, changes that had been made to the Igbo socio-cultural script regarding patriarchy and womanhood, influenced by Western perceptions of gender roles taught to the people through the missionaries dwelling among the indigenes in the period of colonialism.

Colonial Experience: Remembering the Past

Pam Hall explains that bodies carry knowledge (Hall 2017, 16). The body is aware, before the idea it carries is articulated through words (Ibid). The body experiences events, and processes, before transcribing them into words. The oral conveyance of knowledge and history has been one method of preserving historical knowledge among the Igbo for centuries. This reliance on collective memory to pass down history from one generation to another, demonstrates the importance of the research method of oral history, because knowledge is passed by word of mouth. But what happens when the body dies, or becomes lifeless and unable to transfer this knowledge when needed? How then can one extract

information from this lifeless body about its experience, and who gets the right to share this knowledge?

For the purpose of this research, re-memory becomes an essential form of knowledge extraction. As an African female, this is another variant of the preservation of history. It is a way to explore the knowledge in the dead bodies that can only be gleaned from oral history and stored away in the mind for such required situations. To recall the lived experience of my great-grandmothers, Adaeke and Worji, is to not only keep my heritage alive, but also to use their experience to address the above identified problems that affect my community. I recall the information I possess about them, passed down to me by my parents to examine their lives in relation to the research topic. One may argue that re-memory may not be a valid form of knowledge, but can a source such as oral interviews constitute knowledge while re-memory through oral tradition is seen as invalid? Both are information provided by the body, but extracted under different contexts; one with the intent of researching and writing, the other for the preservation of cultural heritage and cultural identity.

Still, the question on whether I possess the right to share these experiences may arise. In “A Glossary of Haunting”, Eve Tuck and C. Ree explain that in order to study social life, the researcher must confront its ghostly parts (Tuck and Ree 2013). The ghostly parts of my research include the lived experience of my ancestors, who are no longer alive to tell their own stories. In decolonizing notions of cis-het marriage and childbearing in Igbo culture brought about by the imposition of Catholicism on the people, re-memory becomes a way to keep their ghosts alive (Ibid, 647). In “Metis Storytelling across Time and Space: Situating the Personal and Academic Self Between Homelands”, Zoe Todd discusses the principle of reciprocity in decolonial research methodology as equal partnerships that involved equal responsibility as well as equal benefits (Todd 2018, 166). Stories, Todd argues, possess their

own life, and create a bond between the people providing the story and those who receive them beyond the boundaries of space and time. Therefore, if the ancestors took the responsibility of living the experience, and preserving this information through oral history, it is my responsibility to reciprocate by telling their stories in order to resolve present social issues by identifying their connection to the past. Here, I analyse the lives of both my great-grandmothers in colonial Nigeria, in comparison to pre and postcolonial Nigeria to highlight – if any – changes to Igbo socio-cultural norms and womanhood.

Both my great-grandmothers, Worji and Adaeke, died before I was born. On the one hand, Worji, my maternal great-grandmother, died the year before my parents conceived me, at the age of ninety-nine. Like Amari in *Things Fall Apart*, she was the head wife of a prominent man in her community. The number of wives her husband had altogether remains unconfirmed, for they did not all live in the same physical space. Unlike Amari, she lived in a different period, having been born in the last decade of the 19th century, in the thick of colonial rule. She was one of the few in her community who clung to Indigenous Igbo spiritual worship, in a period when being Christian was the norm (Ekechi 1971, 105). She was a Lolo, a title given to women who had attained great wealth or other significant achievements in the community. This title was not bestowed upon a woman by extension of her husband's prominence or influence. It was strictly on the woman's perceived accomplishments. As Worji was renowned for her relative wealth from years of trading in local crops, her authority and age within her community, coupled with the fact that she bore her husband six sons, a feat even more respected and encouraged in patriarchal colonial Igbo land, her community found it imperative that she be bestowed the title. However, in the final years of her life, perhaps bowing to social and communal pressure to give up her "idols" or caving in to threats of eternal damnation in the afterlife without conversion and having

bought into the promise of heaven, she eventually converted to Christianity – Catholicism to be precise – in her nineties.

According to my mother and my uncle, F (my mother's oldest brother), on Sundays, Worji would head on to church, garbed in her "heathen" attire, thick coral waist beads and heavy brass anklets that rattled as she walked, drawing attention from other Catholics in the community, her servant carrying her carved wooden stool in tow – a symbol of her title. Although my recollection of my mother's version tallies with that of my uncle, I am still aware of the subjectivity of narratives/accounts. What aspects of her story, in her journey of Christianity, was omitted or skewed in their process of remembering? The people who shared Worji's story – my mother and Uncle F, were both staunch Catholics when they recounted memories of their grandmother before her death. I think back to this story and imagine that Worji's appearance must have clashed with her newfound Christian faith. Where, once, she could walk around her compound as a 'heathen', breasts bare,[33] she had to cover up, as a 'godly woman'. Did she feel strange to her to consider her body as others would, infusing sexuality into parts of her physical appearance that previously held none? Could she comprehend *why* she had to 'cover up'? My mother and Uncle F did not share this opinion. "Nne Worji was 'saved' before she died," my mother would always say when she talked about her, sounding happy at the thought.

Before her death, she specifically requested to not be buried in accordance with the traditions of Christianity. She wanted to stick with our precolonial ethnic tradition of being laid to rest at her father's compound instead. The reason for this request remains unknown to me; neither Uncle F nor my mother got an explanation. Worji's wish was not obeyed. As a Catholic convert and first wife of her husband (who at the time was long dead and had never

[33] Within my ethnic community – and per my recollection, between the last decade of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first century – it was common to find elderly women move around (close proximity to their homes) with bare breasts and a wrapper tied across their lower halves.

been a Christian convert), she was, before the church, his only legal wife and mother of six of his sons, and for this reason, she was buried beside him at his compound, and her burial was officiated by a Catholic priest.

On the other hand, unlike Worji, not much is known about Adaeke. According to my father, at the age of fifteen, she was married off to her husband, my great-grandfather, estimated to be as old as her father, who was also a friend of his and they both belonged to the same age-grade association. Similar to the experience of Ekwefi, Okonkwo's third wife, she bore her husband eleven children, ten of whom died before adulthood. It is uncertain if this misfortune was the reason for her lack of repute and the silence surrounding much of her life. The stories in which her name was mentioned in my conversation with my father and paternal relatives are stories about my great-grandfather, her husband, and nothing outside of her role in ensuring her husband's bloodline did not end with him. Listening to my father speak of his grandfather, I had questions about his grandmother to which he had no answers. For example, outside of being a wife and (many times a grieving) mother, who was Adaeke? What did she think of herself, or of life? What did she think when her husband "inherited" a second wife?[34] Did she consider her womanhood threatened? Did that increase the pressure she felt to provide her husband with a living son? What was the relationship like between both women, if there was one? What did she think of Christianity and its influence on our culture? Adaeke died long before I was born, and although her grave lies beside her husband's on ancestral land, it carries no name, no date of birth or date of death. No marker/identifier, except for my vague memory of my father's index finger pointing at the slab to show me where she lay, her final resting place. I do not recall how old I was, or on the exact day this happened. I do not recall anything else but the finger, and knowing that I was

[34] In line with the custom of my community, when a woman becomes widowed, she is asked to choose a husband from among her husband's brothers (or male cousins, in the absence of a brother) if she pleases, or return to her father's home, where she may decide to remarry. This practice became uncommon and unpopular at the end of the twentieth century.

no older than ten years old when he pointed out the grave.[35] Buried with her was all the knowledge that her body held. Knowledge of her culture as she had learned it and as she had experienced it. Her history. Her people's history.

Both Worji and Adaeke existed in a period during which religious ideals brought by the Catholic missionaries were merging with pre-existent cultural beliefs, and this affected their identities as women in their communities. Worji's life value, in death, was simplified into her role as a good Christian wife and mother, although she had only accepted Christianity in the last decade of her life. Burying her beside her husband, irrespective of her request otherwise, symbolised that her worth was tied to her husband, and she could not be identified outside of it. Adaeke, who was also one of the few in her community who did not accept Christianity in her life-time, and had only been able to provide her husband with one living child and heir, was not given much thought, and in death, it would seem that she had been ensconced by silence. These two women were born in colonial Nigeria, and died in postcolonial Nigeria, therefore lived through the experience of religio-cultural and socio-political transitioning – the period of enculturation, in which Christian teachings – especially on gender roles – were becoming the new culture. My knowledge of both my great-grandmothers has come from the shared perspectives of my Christian relatives: my parents and Uncle F, providing insight on how they were possibly viewed by their predominantly Christian community in their adult years. If their stories could be told from a non-religious perspective, what would the narratives reveal?

Success of Catholicism in Southeast Nigeria and its Effects on Womanhood

The dominance of Catholicism among the Igbo in twentieth century Nigeria leads to an analysis of the conversion rate. Catholic missionary activities in Nigeria had already begun

[35] I know this because I recall confirming that the grave was Adaeke's with my paternal grandmother in August – during the break before I commenced secondary school.

as early as the 15th and 16th centuries, led by Portuguese missionaries, but they registered little success with the Igbo people until the 19th century, when colonialism formally began (churchlifejournal.nd.edu).

In 1799, the Church of England would form the Church Missionary Society (CMS) to evangelize in what would later become the British colony of Nigeria, after almost four decades of missionary dormancy in the region (Bassey 1991). Protestant missionary groups already in existence at the time included the Society of African Missions (Société des Misiones Africaines) from France (The Catholic Missionaries in southern Nigeria were mostly French and Irish), the Presbyterian Church missionaries from Scotland, Baptist missionaries from the United States of America and the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS) (Ibid, 36-37). Seeing as Britain's biggest rival in the scramble for Africa was France, it would be expected that the presence of French missionaries in Nigeria would pose a problem to the interests of the British government. Yet, it appeared the conflict existed among the missionary groups, who competed against each other for the most influence in the region. Activities of British missionaries in Nigeria began with the ideas of Thomas Fowell Buxton, an influential member of the British Parliament and trans-Atlantic slave trade abolitionist (Ibid). Buxton believed that an effective way to end the slave trade was the exploration of the hinterlands across the River Niger and the establishment of commercial trade treaties and relations with the Indigenous people, also known as the pursuit of the "Three Cs" – Christianity, commerce and civilization (Ibid, 37). Britain stood to benefit from this exploration as well; raw materials from the hinterlands would be purchased at a much cheaper cost, new markets would be established, and they would experience an increase in productivity (Ibid). This also meant there would be more employment opportunities for the British people, as well as financial success/profits for traders and industrialists. In the southern part of what would constitute Nigeria, the rivalry between the Protestant missionary

groups and the Catholic missionary groups was evident. Conflict between the two parties included theological differences and friction between nationalities (between the French and the Irish Catholic missionaries) extending to their interactions in the colony.

The struggle among the missionary groups for the most conversions of Nigerian souls commenced in 1885 – in the same period as the Berlin Conference. The introduction of Western education and the establishment of schools was seen by each missionary group as a way of winning the competition among them; they were also convinced that successful conversion of the local people required the establishment of academic institutions (Ibid, 40). The Catholic missionaries would win this round, because by 1919, about 310 Catholic schools had been established in Southern Nigeria (Ibid). Bob W. White, in "Talk about School: Education and the Colonial Project in French and British Africa (1860-1960)", explains that the Protestant missionaries taught literacy and manual skills, while the Anglican and Catholic missionaries focused on institutionalizing Western academic education (White 1996). The Indigenous peoples of the south displayed interest and enthusiasm in the education the missionaries brought, because they had been promised that the process would bring them a better life economically (Bassey 1991, 37), and bring them up to par with the modern world (White 1996, 15).

The absence of a clash between the British government and non-British missionaries was due to the liberal approach of the British government towards the activities of the missionaries, and this spared them the burden of education administration and policy making, unlike in the French colonies where the French government had taken up such responsibilities (Ibid, 13). In 1923, as a response to calls from White settlers in the African colonies for more investment in the education of the colonised, the British Colonial Office established an Advisory Committee on Native Education in the Colonies (Ibid). The Committee developed a

memorandum in 1925, titled "The Memorandum on Education Policy in British Tropical Africa", and the recommendations contained in the document created more room for French Catholic missionary activities and success in southeast Nigeria including:

- Control of education administration by the British government, but subject to cooperation with the missionary groups.
- Adaptation of teaching methods to satisfy local requirements and conditions.
- The use of local/ethnic languages in giving instructions in primary schools.
- Priority on female education (Ibid).

By 1935, an updated memorandum was published, and both documents became the foundation upon which educational policies were created and vetted (Ibid). In analysis of these developments, a question arises. Why was priority given to female education?

Fiona Leach, in "African Girls, 19th Century Mission Education and the Patriarchal Imperative" argues that this prioritization was a response to the interests and perceived requirements of the men (Leach, 2008). The focus on female education in the British colonies was a reflection of the socio-political transformation of British society. Although education for women was championed, rigid gender roles were imposed on them, to accept their place in society (Ibid, 338-339). The women were expected to mind the homefront, the more private space, while the men were expected to confront the public space of commerce, politics and governance, among others (Ibid). Leach asserts that female "education was to play a major role in promoting this 'domestic felicity' through a gender-differentiated curriculum in which girls were taught specific 'feminine' skills by female teachers, and preferably in separate schools" (Ibid). In other words, the focus on female education in the colonies was to replicate the gender ideologies of Europe among the Indigenous people of southeast Nigeria, as well as in other colonies. Having understood why and how Western

education was introduced to southern Nigeria, how then can one decolonise methods of knowledge in an institution that was designed to exclude their own stories and narratives (See Chapter 4)?

In this latter period of Europe's scramble for pieces of the African pie, France and Britain competed between each other for the territories that would form post-colonial Nigeria. Thus, after the 1884-1885 Berlin Conference[36] in which Britain was apportioned Nigeria, empirical data posit that French Catholic missionaries would refuse to accept this perceived defeat, clinging to the hope that their influence in the region would supersede and replace that of their rivals, the greatest of which was the British Church Missionary Society (CMS) (Okafor 2005). Their tactic did not work out as they had hoped. While the British missionaries succeeded in the southwest region (Ibid, 307), French missionaries would experience the most success in southeast Nigeria.

As much as the establishment of Catholicism was intertwined with colonial ambitions, certain factors contributed to the gravitation of the Igbo people towards the Catholic denomination specifically. The doctrines of the Catholic church were assimilated into the Igbo culture so thoroughly that it is now difficult to pinpoint where one starts and the other ends. The dividing line is blurry. Two French Catholic missionary groups dominated southeast Nigeria. One of these groups was the Society of African Missions (or Société des Missions Africaines, also known as SMA) (Ibid). As mentioned above, this group operated in the southern protectorate of colonial Nigeria, and on the southeast scene, their activities were mostly around western Igbo land. Their operations began in the 1860s, and continued through the 1900s (Ibid). The second group was the Holy Ghost Fathers from The Congregation of the Holy Ghost, also referred to as Spiritans. The Spiritans focused primarily on the Igbo

[36] The Berlin Conference, attended by fourteen European nations, partitioned Africa into colonies, defining the boundaries to each nation's possession of land, resource and people. No African participated in the Conference. (Eyffinger 2019)

communities. Their presence in the region can be traced back to December 1885, when, under the leadership of Father Lutz, Superior of Niger Mission, a group of French Catholic priests, most of whom were trilingual (French, English and Latin) arrived in the Igbo community of Onitsha, where they eventually set up their administrative headquarters for the whole of colonial Nigeria (Ibid, 309). Within twenty years, the Spiritans had spread their operations to other Igbo communities, and established Catholicism as a force that had come to stay. On the other hand, the Society of African Missions (SMA) was equally expanding through western Igbo land, across the River Niger (Ibid, 311).

The SMA, under the leadership of Father Zappa, did not encourage the education of its African converts, but urged the missionaries to learn the Igbo language in order to facilitate effective communication with the Igbo people (Ayandele 1966). Felix K. Ekechi, in "Colonialism and Christianity in West Africa: The Igbo Case, 1900-1915", points out that missionary evangelism encountered success in Igbo land right after the British Empire expanded its political authority into Igbo community (Ekechi, Colonialism and Christianity in West Africa: The Igbo Case, 1900-1915 1971, 103). This implies the existence of a connection between British imperialism and European missionary evangelization in the region. Again, according to Ekechi, in "Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland, 1857-1914" the help rendered to the Igbo people by the Catholic missionaries came with imposed conditions (Ekechi 1971, 75). For example, they provided free medical services, but on the condition that the ailing individual first be baptized, to prevent them from "dying in sin" (Ibid).

Furthermore, Andrew Porter, in "'Cultural Imperialism' and Protestant Missionary Enterprise, 1780-1914", argued that missions were the bridges for European expansion in Africa (Porter 1997, 367). Cultural imperialism, which involves the imposition of a foreign

culture on a group of people or a culture, was made possible because of Christian missions. As the missionaries settled into these communities, they began to mock the beliefs of the natives, subvert their customs and traditional authorities, damage their self-esteem and stir socio-political conflict among the indigenes (Ibid). These, in turn, caused an internal collapse of Indigenous culture, eventually paving the way for direct colonial rule. This argument can be seen in the chaos that trailed missionary presence in Igbo communities in *Things Fall Apart*. At first, as the missionaries penetrated the communities, their preaching appealed to the downtrodden and the ostracised. The *osu.*[37] The *efulefu.*[38] Women who feared they would birth twins[39] and did not want them killed. They lured Igbo Protestant converts into Catholicism by providing them with basic needs, such as food and clothing (Okafor 2005, 317). This attracted more Igbo people into the Catholic faith, and soon, they began to train some of the new Igbo converts as catechists (Ibid). The French Catholic missionaries also took on the responsibility of peace-keeping within these communities, championing the cause of oppressed indigenes, and mediating in the conflict between the Igbo people and the Royal Niger Company (Ibid).[40] As the missionaries in *Things Fall Apart* welcomed "all as equal" before the Triune God, these people, who felt disfavoured and disadvantaged by the gods, culture and traditions of their people were drawn to the promises of this new God (Achebe 1994, 143). These groups, each of itself, were minorities, but in their unification under conversion, became significant in number and strength and began to challenge age-long beliefs, customs, traditions and the power of local gods and communal spirituality.

[37] The Igbo operated a two-caste social structure: The *diala/nwala* and *the osu*. The *osu* were the lower caste whose ancestors were dedicated to deities and therefore seen as properties of the deities.
[38] The e*fulefu* were people whom other members of the community considered useless or worthless to society. This could be because they lack financial power, physical strength or qualities prioritized within a community.
[39] In many Igbo communities, twins were considered evil, therefore taken to evil forests where they were left to die.
[40] In Igbo communities where the resistance groups such as the ekumeku (a masked group that resisted colonialism. ekumeku, translated, means whirlwhind) existed, the missionaries and the British government, as well as their Indigenous government employees (Igbafe 1971).

Perceptions on gender roles were a part of the challenged beliefs under colonial rule. Liberties of the female gender became limited. The independence of Igbo women prior to colonial intrusion was supported by cultural traditions that emphasised female assertiveness and collectivity, and the exercise of this power over themselves was not considered socially unacceptable (Nzegwu 1995). Therefore, precolonial Igbo men were not considered weak for succumbing to or abiding by rules set by women in the society, as they were accustomed to seeing women exercise power (Ibid). Nonetheless, where gender relations among the pre-colonial Igbo had been egalitarian and its social structure considered dual-sex, colonization created a hierarchical power structure that placed the African female at the bottom of the ranking. Here, I use the description of Marie Lugones to explain the hierarchy and its significance. The colonized was considered non-human (Lugones 2010, 743-746). Gendering and categorizing the colonized by the colonizers was also done from the perspective of the colonizers, who did not consider the female an equal, but an appendage of the male. Therefore, a colonized non-human female was not thought to be the equal of a colonized non-human male, but beneath him, placing her at the bottom of the gender/power structure, where she was mainly dependent on the income man as the breadwinner of the home to care for the family (Ibid). Also, as mentioned above, Leach argues that the decision of the British colonizers to prioritize female education in its African colonies was a way to replicate in the colonies, the transformations occurring on the British socio-political scene (Leach 2008, 338-339). The education was to train the colonized female on how to become good wives, how to nurture the private space that was her home, while the colonized males were being educated on the public space of trade negotiations and politics (Ibid).

The success of the domestication of the colonized female lay also in the upheaval of female socio-political traditions. Judith Van Allen, in “Sitting on A Man: Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions of Igbo Women” argues that the real political power of Igbo women

was in their solidarity, made visible by their meetings[41] (Allen 1972). Furthermore, the actions of British colonizers weakened, and in some cases ruined completely Igbo women's political groups, which served as the strength base of Igbo women. This lack of appreciation for women's political groups caused them to exclude the colonised female from the politics of the colony.

As such, the assumptions of European patriarchy, alongside Christian teachings on gender roles, were foisted upon the colony of Nigeria to disrupt traditional gender roles. The perpetration of these colonial, cis-het gender ideologies through the medium of Christianity in postcolonial Nigeria has resulted in the continued subjugation of women in present times. These ideologies stand now in postcolonial Nigeria, where the decision to experience life as a non-Christian (in my case non-Catholic and non-Christian) Igbo woman who is also above thirty years old and unmarried is incomprehensible. This decision comes with certain consequences/challenges, such as the simplification of womanhood as the ability of the Igbo female to procreate within a cis-het marriage, the stigmatization of unmarried women/women who are not in a cis-het marriage, the power imbalance between men and women (patriarchy) and the boom of baby factories, which I examine below.

Postcolonial Problems

Motherhood and the Woman Question

The rise in baby factories in southeast Nigeria is not unconnected to the pressures and perceptions of marriage within the Igbo Catholic (and Christian) community, stemming from the colonial period. This makes one wonder who the buyers and sellers of the illegally traded babies are and why it thrives particularly in southeast Nigeria. Baby factories thrive primarily

[41] An example of such meetings is that of the *umu-ada*, a group of first daughters from each family within a community. The *umu-ada* group is responsible for handling issues concerning or involving first daughters of each family in the community.

in southern Nigeria, specifically southeast Nigeria, and are largely patronised by childless couples (Obaji 2020); (Okonkwo and Obi-Ani 2020); (2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Nigeria n.d.); (Momoh 2023). Uche Uwazuoke Okonkwo and Ngozi Obi-Ani imply that the lucrativeness/high patronage of this illegal business explains the wealth of the individuals who own and run this business (Okonkwo and Obi-Ani 2020, 405-407) In 2014, the Nigerian Police rescued a total of about 2500 teenage girls from a number of baby factories across the states of Imo, Abia, Anambra, Enugu and Ebonyi southeast Nigeria (Ibid).[42] Many of the girls were reportedly teenagers lured in with false promises of a job, assistance with abortion, required medical care during and after the pregnancy and/or payment for the children after birth. Women and girls are held, sometimes against their will to birth babies, who are then sold off to couples seeking children.[43] The cost of a baby is determined by the sex of the baby; boys are often sold at a higher price than girls due to the value placed upon sons in the country. The girls who are victims of this trade are usually unmarried young girls – impregnated from premarital-sex and accept the option of a baby factory as a way of avoiding the "disgrace" such pregnancy could bring to their families – subjected to improvised delivery methods and hostile living environments (Ibid).

Uche Uwaezuoke Okonkwo and Ngozi Anthonia Obi-Ani argue that there is both an economic and cultural dimension to the rise of these baby factories. Pregnancy placed these young females in a vulnerable position, of which the operators of the factories took advantage. For example, the rate of Nigerians living in poverty in 2018/2019 was above 40%, with 63% being multidimensionally poor (National Bureau of Statistics 2023), making the offer of money to the pregnant teenage girls in exchange for the baby a common bait. Chiedu Eseadi, Wilfred Achagh, Amaka B. Ikechukwu-Ilomuanya and Shulamite E. Ogbuabor, in "Prevalence of Baby Factory in Nigeria: An Emergent Form of Child Abuse, Trafficking and

[42] For other reports, see also (Okafor 2021) (Obaji 2020) (Udeajah 2023).
[43] In other cases, they may be sold off into child labour, prostitution or killed for ritualistic purposes.

Molestation of Women", argue in their study report that poverty and childlessness were two of the leading causes of the existence of the baby factories in Nigeria (Eseadi, et al. 2015). The study was conducted among 800 respondents within three southeast Nigerian states – Anambra, Imo and Enugu – because of the prevalence of human trafficking in these states. An earlier UNESCO report lists "poverty, perversion of cultural traditions, manipulation of religious rituals, harmful cultural and social realities, a lack of information, peer pressure and a weak legal framework" as key reasons for the existence of baby factories in Nigeria (UNESCO 2006, 31-40).

Culturally, child-trafficking and kidnapping existed among the Igbo prior to colonialism, but it was not a recognised method of child adoption in the sustenance of a patriline (Okonkwo and Obi-Ani 2020, 407-408). There were options to explore, such as the *idegbe,*[44] and female-to female marriages.[45] However, in more recent times, cryptic pregnancy, also known as stealth pregnancy as a method of resolving the issue of childlessness among couples has emerged. According to Okonkwo and Obi-Ani, married couples who are able to afford the cost of such pregnancy purchase the "pregnancy" pills, bloating them to create the impression they are pregnant before the public, after which they pass off a baby secretly purchased from a baby factory as their biological child (Ibid, 410).

Jacinta Chiamaka Nwaka and Akachi Odoemene explain that a rise in the number of unmarried pregnant young women caused religious organisations like the Christian Women Organisation, a Catholic body, to place sanctions on the women in order to end the trend within the community (Nwaka and Odoemene 2019, 4). They argue that these sanctions caused a rise in the population of homeless, pregnant women, and the existence of baby

[44] In the case where an Igbo man had no male child, his daughter may remain unmarried and keep lovers; all children birthed by her were recognised as her father's children (Amadiume 1987)
[45] Igbo women could marry other women for the purpose of procreation, especially in cases where the woman is widowed and childless. The child(ren) born into this union would bear the last name of the widow's husband.

factories began with the need to curb the growing number of unwanted babies dumped in the streets by their usually unmarried mothers (Ibid). Due to this problem, the Catholic community in the southern part of Nigeria initiated the "compassionate homes" or "needy homes" in a bid to provide shelter and protection for young, pregnant girls and women who had been abandoned or kicked out by their families as a result of the "shame" and "disgrace" the "illegitimate" pregnancy attracted. Amobi Ikika and Igwegbe Anthony, in "Unintended Pregnancy among Unmarried Adolescents and Young Women in Anambra State, South East Nigeria", report that between January 1998 and December 2001, there were about 136 unmarried teenage girls with unplanned pregnancies at a Christian hospital in Ozubulu, Anambra state, and over 75% of them experienced sex for the first time at about 19 years of age (Ilika and Anthony 2004). At least 69% of the girls had multiple partners and only 13.5% used condoms. About 95% of them had sex for money-related reasons and traded sex for money or the reception of gifts, and upon getting pregnant, 97% of the girls experienced at least one form of violence from their family members, and an unquantified number was subjected to job loss, end of academic education, religious sanctions, as well as social discrimination (Ibid).

Nwaka and Odoemene suggest that the first compassionate home was established in the southeast city of Owerri by Reverend Father Ononuju sometime between the last decade of the 20th century and the early 2000s (Ibid, 4). These homes were not only to shield the girls from the harsh life of the streets, but to protect them from public shaming by providing them with a clandestine opportunity to birth the baby and reintegrate themselves into their society without being ridiculed or discriminated against (Ibid, 5). Yet, irrespective of the high value the Igbo place on children, child adoption among the people in postcolonial Nigeria is not a popular option. In "The Challenges of Child Adoption and the Emergence of Baby Factory in South Eastern Nigeria", Charles Omeire, E.B.J. Iheriohanma, Agnes Osita-Njoku and Edward

Uche Omeire argue that Igbo people who adopt children do it as an "insurance policy" for their aged years, to have someone to care for them (Omeire, et al. 2015, 65). They explain the value placed on reproduction by the Igbo. Childbearing is seen as the primary reason for heterosexual marriage (Ibid). Therefore, should an individual decide to marry, it is assumed that they aspire to procreate. They highlight the irony, based on studies, that "infertile women" were unenthusiastic about adopting children (Ibid, 66). Similar to Okonkwo and Obi-Ani, they allude to wealthy women in the south needing children to pass off as biologically theirs, therefore creating a false impression of pregnancy, while privately planning to purchase a child from these charity homes also operating as baby trade factories (Ibid, 69-70) (Okonkwo and Obi-Ani 2020).

Taking a look at 19th century Igbo society pre-colonialism, the reason for the lack of enthusiasm is vivid through the characters in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe 1994). When Nwoye's mother, Okonkwo's first wife births her third son, Okonkwo slaughters a goat in accordance with tradition, to celebrate her accomplished feat. Not only did this act depict the importance placed on having children, but that male children held more value, because they were responsible for preserving the patriline. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, when Ona conceives and bears children for her lover, she is urged to marry him. Omeire et al. argue that culturally, the Igbo woman's ability to bear children proves her womanhood, and manhood is affirmed by fatherhood (Omeire, et al. 2015, 65).

In postcolonial southeast Nigeria, this ideology lingers, exacerbated by Catholic doctrines adopted by the community. For example, the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC no. 1665) states that one of the core purposes of the sacrament of marriage is to generate and educate children. The nature of the institution of marriage and love within a marriage is geared toward reproduction and education of offspring, and "in them shall it

(marriage) find its crowning glory" (CCC - The Sacrament of Matrimony 1994, 1997, 415). The stigma of childlessness and/or the perception of childlessness as acceptance of defeat in the battle against being labelled "barren" resulted in multiple married Igbo Catholic women seeking more clandestine means of affirming their womanhood.

Stigmatization and ill-treatment of unmarried Igbo women

The stigma attached to being an unmarried Igbo Catholic woman has driven young women within this community to enter and remain in religiously sanctioned marital unions that pose a danger to them, physically and/or mentally. Results of a study conducted by Chidi Ugwuanyi, Zbigniew Formella and Krzysztof Szadejko, confirmed that Catholic Igbo women often experience both physical and mental abuse (Ugwuanyi, Formella and Szadejko 2021). The research was carried out in southeast Nigeria, to which the Igbo are Indigenous. Three hundred and fifty-nine anonymous Catholic Igbo women consented to and completed a Domestic Violence Questionnaire that informed the conclusion. The victims of such abuse were usually women residing in rural areas and women who were separated from their husbands or remarried. In "Women's Perception of Partner Violence in a Rural Igbo Community", Amobi Linus Ilika suggests that Igbo women often excused gender-based violence due to cultural or religious beliefs (A. L. Ilika 2005, 77). Ilika's research was carried out among the women of Ozubulu, Anambra State, an Igbo community of 35,000 people of which most identified as Christian. While some of the women believed a man possessed the right to "correct his wife" by beating her, others argued that such physical violence produced more negative results and had also negatively affected their health (Ibid, 81). The women also disagreed with the concept of marital rape. They felt that a woman cannot be raped by her husband as she is expected to surrender to his sexual desires always (Ibid, 82). Also, fear hinders the report of marital rape to the police, as it could cause the man to end the marriage,

leaving the woman single again, and at the same time, a divorcee. The idea of "failing out of a marriage" was just as, if not more, shameful. Even more, the women added that the Catholic Church in the community would deny a divorced woman her right to sacrament if she chose to remarry, as her second marriage would be interpreted as adultery (Ibid, 85). Therefore, these abused women are stuck between choosing their own well-being and obedience to religious doctrines.[46]

Marriage as Dignity

The perception of such women as failures in a patriarchal, postcolonial Nigeria for their inability to get and/or keep a husband subjects them to mistreatment within their community. This perception was also present in my family. The first time I told my father about my disinterest in marriage, he was taken aback.

"Are you a lesbian?" he asked me. The word "lesbian" was uttered with contempt, for it has a negative connotation in Nigeria, especially to the older generation; an act that defied 'divine' norm. If I was unwilling to participate in a cis-het marriage, then something had to be wrong with me. And what was wrong with me was lesbianism. The "problem" with being a lesbian was that it was not a cis-het Christian relationship, therefore a sin. Still, being a lesbian should be no obstacle to finding myself in a heterosexual marriage, because I have been told by him recently that "even lesbians get married", therefore I have no excuse. Equally important to note from his statements is that his idea of marriage involved a man and a woman; the Judeo-Christian belief that God created humans as male and female from the beginning. As a result, "a man shall leave behind his father and mother, and he shall cling to his wife…and so, they are now, not two, but one flesh…what God has joined together, let no man separate" (Mark 10:6-9, New Jerusalem Bible). This ideology guides the concept of

[46] Issues such as where the woman may reside upon divorce are dependent on the individual involved as well as her family. In my case, I was told I would not be welcomed back home if I ever got divorced after marriage.

marriage within the Nigerian Christian society – an act that can only occur between a biological male (understood to mean "man") and a biological female (understood to mean "woman") under divine and procreative law – and anything that exists outside of this binary is neither religio-culturally nor legally acceptable. This thesis gives a contrary argument that there has been a shift in gender perceptions and gender roles from precolonial to present postcolonial Igbo society.

"I'm not. It's just never been a priority to me," was my response to his question on my sexual identity the first time. He shook his head at me, expressing his disappointment.

"You don't know what you're saying. You're clearly still a child. *Ugwu nwanyi wu di ya*," he told me. I was twenty-one years old.

Ugwu nwanyi wu di ya. A woman's dignity is her husband, in literal translation. In other words, my human self cannot be accorded any respect if I have no husband. In Igbo, it carries a deeper meaning. The essence of a woman, all that defines her is her possession of a husband; that she belongs to a man. It was not the first time I would hear that saying. On occasions too many to count, older family members had said the same thing to me, especially when chastising me for publicly acting in a manner a potential husband might find repulsive. For example, once, my mother caught me whispering – in a conversation with my sister – while at Mass. After the celebration, she gave the both of us a stern lecture on appropriate conduct as godly women in church.

"People are watching you. No family will take you seriously if you do not act responsible. Don't you know that ugwu nwanyi wu di ya? Do you want to become trapped in the mother's hands?" Not only was the congregation at Mass there to worship, but the environment doubled as a social setting for the evaluation of potential wives and husbands. If

we failed to behave accordingly, offers of marriage would be scarce.[47] If this happened, we would become pariahs in our community. What makes this even more problematic is the perception of this belief as a part of Igbo culture. But, is it, really? Has it always been this way? In order to understand this, an examination of the concept of gender identity and gender roles of 19th century Igbo land is essential, especially because it was the period in which Igbo culture was disrupted in the last two centuries by the Berlin Conference, marking the end of Igbo independence. What did it mean to be an Igbo woman in that period? Was the Igbo female's identity immersed in the existence of a husband, so much so that she was non-existent without him? The plots of both Chinua Achebe's historical fiction, *Things Fall Apart* and Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* highlight the patrilineal structure of a gendered precolonial Igbo society, and how this structure provided a platform for patriarchy within some families. Men were considered physically superior to women, and expected to lead the family unit. It appears that this expectation was more in line with the script of socio-cultural acts in a social contract between both genders than it was an imposition of male authority.

Conclusion

The socio-political structure of precolonial Igbo society has evolved from an egalitarian (different but equal), dual-sex system to a patriarchal system in colonial Nigeria, encouraged by the imposition of Catholicism on the Igbo people and the successful spread of the denomination. This imposition and success were made possible by the patrilineal structure and cultural practice of precolonial Igbo society, and patriarchy became a cultural norm under the guise of fulfilling cultural expectations. As a result, an imbalance of power between males and females emerged, relegating Igbo women to second-class position in the

[47] While it is not an unusual practice to find that young, single Igbo women live alone, it is still frowned upon by Igbo elders, due to the negative stereotype of sexual "promiscuity". I was raised to believe a godly woman could only move from her family home if she was married.

newly emerged Catholic Igbo community. Womanhood became primarily defined by the reproductive abilities in colonial Igbo land, where the concept of womanhood used to be abstract, and up to the interpretation of the individual. However, this did not mean that all women were mandated to marry and reproduce. Before the commencement of the Three Cs, women retained the right to choose their path, in alignment with their spiritual purpose, and this included individual perceptions of gender identity, roles and responsibilities (Amadiume 1987). Ona's story portrayed this aptly.

My examination of the socio-political and religious history of the Igbo community in relation to present-day perceptions of gender norms within the Catholic Igbo community renders me what Sarah Ahmed calls a "feminist killjoy".[48] According to Ahmed, being a killjoy "is to open a life, to make room for life, to make room for possibility, for chance" (Ahmed 2010, 20). Feminist investigation began with the experience of being a problem, of being up against structures working towards excluding me. In digging up the past, I am raising dust and disrupting the norm. I am bringing awareness to the enculturation of Judeo-Christian traditions, facilitated by the thriving presence of Catholicism in the Igbo culture, which has magnified the significance of men, marriage and motherhood, while stigmatizing women who live in the contrary. In the next chapter, I question the biblical phrase, the "virtuous woman" (Proverbs 31: 10-31), and what it entails among contemporary postcolonial Catholic Igbo women.

[48] Please see Chapter Four for a more detailed explanation of this concept.

Chapter 3

THE VIRTUOUS WOMAN

Introduction

Do you remember the first time your oncologist came to our home to check up on you? Do you remember what she looked like? Well, I do. I remember because the weather was as gloomy as your mood. She was a middle-aged woman, just like you, but of a different ethnic group, as her name and accent made evident. You both struck a conversation, even as you lay on the couch, sick from the chemotherapy session from the previous day. You talked about the poor conditions of medical facilities in the country and how the government did nothing to resolve the issues. And then she said something that made me suddenly irate:

"You know, it's all because of God. Our prayers have been our saving grace. That is why I get upset when work gets in the way of my prayers."

I looked at her. What exactly was it about the deplorable state of the nation made her think we were saved? The causal factor of our steady decline was the same reason she believed in a blonde haired, blue-eyed saviour. It was the reason you remained in your hell. The reason you took the beating. It was the reason we were not holding our politicians accountable. Instead, we spend endless hours uttering prayers. It was what made us pawns in the hands of those who sold you this God. Still, as you do not see it, getting out of the rut we face as a nation seems impossible. A number of times, you told me, a godly woman keeps her home, while a foolish one tears it down. It was a quote from the Bible. I have never stopped thinking about that either.

In this chapter, I primarily draw upon my personal experiences, the experiences of my mother and conversations that included the both of us, as well as Chimamanda Adichie's novel, *Purple Hibiscus* to elucidate my argument that the idea of the virtuous woman as

interpreted by my religio-cultural society, entails suffering for an Igbo woman with the expectation of a divine reward. This idea is fuelled by the worship and iconography of the Virgin Mary and the tribulation associated with being the mother of Christ. My focus on conversations and lived experiences – personal and shared – in driving this argument stems from the historical significance these methods hold in preserving history within African ethnic groups, and within the scope of this research, the Igbo society. However, one issue arises in contemplating epistemological forms of knowledge and knowledge production, how does a researcher from a colonized group use a colonial mechanism to argue against colonial legacies and effects?

Kathy Absolon and Cam Willett, in "Aboriginal Research: Berry Picking and Hunting in the 21st Century" are emphatic that "researchers must have a critical interpretation of colonialism and western domination embedded in research methodology" (Absolon and Willett 2004, 12). They further state that researchers (both non-Indigenous and Indigenous) interested in Indigenous research were expected to bring with them, quoting Gilchrist, "a thorough background on the history of colonialism and a broad-based knowledge of Aboriginal cultures when engaging in research", which the previous chapter illuminates (Absolon and Willett 2004, 12) (Gilchrist 1997, 80). Gilchrist adds that it is not until value neutrality and objectivity are demystified, history is contextualized and culture acknowledged will Indigenous people possess ownership of research about them and be able to improve its quality and value (Gilchrist 1997, 80). While the focus of Gilchrist, Absolon and Willett is on Indigenous research in North America, the above position can be applied to research on Indigenous ethnic groups and cultures in Africa. I attempt this validation of Igbo sources of knowledge in this chapter by bringing oral tradition into the academic space, as well as highlighting that certain lived experiences of persons involved in these stories align with the posited theories of second-wave Western feminists on religion, gender expectations and the

establishment of gender norms in societies. This perspective contradicts the implied arguments of African writers like Buchi Emecheta, who argued that the issues in African feminism were not that of Western feminism.[49] By highlighting key arguments from some second-wave Western feminist writers, I argue here that although Emecheta's argument is not invalid, as there are differences between and within the two feminist groups, African feminism and Western feminism share the issue of subjugation under Christian gender ideologies and norms.

Analysing Virtue

Observations, such as those quoted above from my journals, and experience within my community taught me that the term, virtuousness, when applied to a woman, meant a being in a perpetual state of suffering, and to remain long-suffering[50] while in that state. I hated it; I hated that I felt terrible about not desiring this concept of virtue. Yet, this, it seemed, was a fate I had to resign myself to; an inevitable path for a woman. An Igbo Christian (specifically Catholic) woman in Nigeria. It took meeting Hawra in Lancaster to learn differently. On an afternoon in the spring season of 2016, she invited me to her room for a chat. It was not my first time in her room; Hawra was both a close friend and a flatmate. I was twenty-three years old at the time. As I scanned the dimension of her living space, my gaze landed on a sticky note on her vision board, with the inscription "suffering is not a virtue". Seeing the phrase brought back to mind the idea of long-suffering as a virtue with the "divine" promise of rewards.

[49] Buchi Emecheta in 1989 interview, in Nfah-Abbenyi, Makuchi Juliana, *Gender in African Women's Writing: Identity, Sexuality and Difference* (Nfah-Abbenyi 1997, 7).
[50] Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines being long-suffering as exercising patience while "dealing with problems or another person's unpleasant behaviour patiently". See https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/long-suffering?q=long-suffering

In more recent times, and while speaking with another friend, Jim, about the concept of virtue and what it means to be a virtuous Igbo woman in postcolonial Nigeria, he asked, "How about you approach this from a different angle? Make a list of what it takes to be considered not virtuous." In that instant, I imagined the list would be a long one. The more I thought about it, the more I was certain it would be a lengthy list. Within the context of my research topic, however, I realised it boiled down to two primary things: an outright and public denunciation of the idea of marriage and/or opting out of procreation. This differs from wanting or desiring marriage and children, but resigning myself to an inability to realize the desire; the latter is considered fate and the former, choice, establishing the problem. My decision to not prioritize marriage and childbearing was what made me not virtuous within this context, for why would this not be the most important goal for any woman?

The virtuous woman = Virtue + Woman. .√Vitruous woman = to suffer and to be long-suffering (to be patient in suffering), yet beholden to men. The first time I paid attention to the term "the virtuous woman" was after coming across Zaynab Alkali's *The Virtuous Woman* (Alkali 1987). I was ten years old, reading while recovering from pneumonia at the hospital. It was not the first time I had seen the phrase, but it was the first time the word took on a different meaning to me; different, it seemed, from the biblical meaning explained by the priests at church, or my mother, even. Their explanation depicted the image of a woman who abides by the established rules of her society on womanhood; one who acts out the socio-religious Christian script of labour and perseverance perfectly. However, virtue, per Alkali's depiction through the protagonist, was not synonymous with the long-suffering wife who toiled/laboured daily to keep her husband's home a success. Virtue was not attached to marriage. Instead, Alkali's implied definition of a virtuous woman, using the protagonist, Nana Ai, was a person who possessed charisma and dignity unattached to her marital status, contrary to what I was raised to believe.

Virtuousness as being Long-Suffering: Rose (My Mother) and Beatrice Achike (Kambili's Mother)

My mother kept diaries; this I remember. It was never a secret. We knew that she detailed her experiences of abuse in them, and we knew this because she said so. I knew this also because I'd read them. In some, she wrote about the horrific details of each abuse, while in others, she barely noted a summary. It appeared dating the occurrence was what she considered important. She wrote to always remember, she had said repeatedly, because one good day was all it took to forget ten bad days. Although she made no attempt to hide her diaries, she wrote for her political (and personal) self. However, when she died, all but one of the diaries had disappeared. The one diary I found had many pages missing. I found one journal entry in it, somewhere in the middle. The entry was an outpouring of how she felt mistreated and humiliated by her partner in the marriage. In her words:

> My experience as been in husband's house cannot be overemphasized…No one to share my views difficult, especially when things become good or bad…Well, I still thank Almighty Father for blessing me with the fruit of womb. If not, according to him, I don't think I would be living with him by now. The way he talks to me, like a slave at times. As if I'm useless to him…Well, he who has faith in the Lord, and patience, wins the battle.

What struck me about this entry was not the abuse. That, I had witnessed on numerous occasions. I was rather interested in her gratitude to God for "blessing" her with children and her belief that her suffering would be rewarded "in the end". The imbued assertion that she had fulfilled her "divine" role as a woman, birthing children of both sexes within marriage, an accomplished feat for which she was thankful to her God. As this was priority, a religious obligation as a Catholic wife, all else was irrelevant. The issue of abuse pales in comparison to this obligation. That particular line prompts the question, what would marital life with him have been like for her if there were no children produced within the marriage? Would she also have viewed herself a failure?

The argument of Julia Kristeva in "Stabat Mater" becomes relevant here. Kristeva argues that Christianity considers the core function of the woman to be motherhood; her ability to reproduce (Kristeva 1985). The fusion of her Catholic upbringing and ethno-cultural beliefs shaped my mother's mindset; her womanhood was affirmed by our births. Kristeva argues that Christian constructs restrained feminism strictly to the maternal, as symbolically represented by the birth of Christ by the Virgin Mary, after which she is relegated to the position of the unnamed. The sacrifice of birth ensures the erasure or figurative death of the mother, and this symbolic interrelation between women and death therefore depicts the man as sovereign over death and its proclamations over women's bodies. A good Christian woman was expected to accept this wholly; to submit to the will of the sovereign – her husband – as stated in Corinthians 11 (Corinthians 11: 1-6 New Jerusalem Bible), while taking on the responsibility of building her (husband's) home as directed by Proverbs 31 (Proverbs 31: 11-12, 23 New Jerusalem Bible).

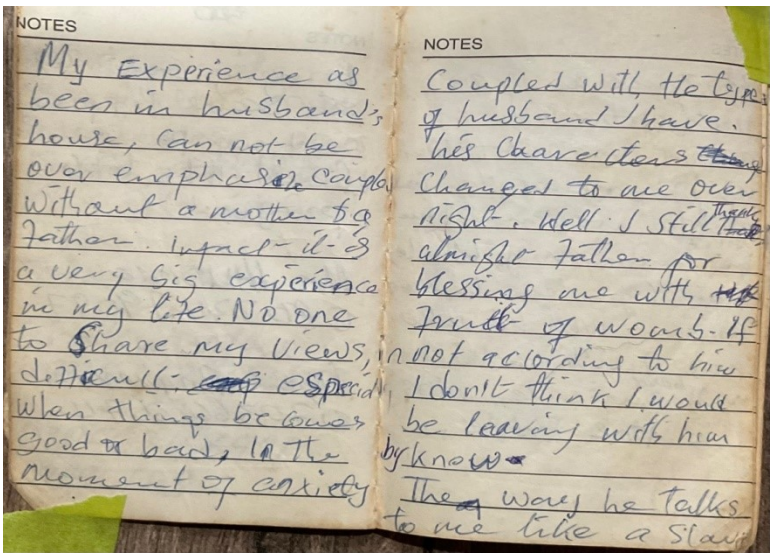
Annuli Okoli and Lawrence Okwuosa, in "The Role of Christianity in Gender Issues and Development in Nigeria" propose that because no gender is superior to another, Christianity must be compelled to commit to the promotion of justice, fairness, the exercise of human rights and peace in Nigeria and around the world (Okoli and Lawrence 2020). Quoting Klingorova and Havlicek, they explain that there is an existing inconsistency between the proclamations of 'gender equality before God' in the Christian faith (normative conditionality) and the reality of women in their interaction with men in the quotidian (practical conditionality) (Ibid, 3). The primary narrative of Christianity, according to them, depicts that social status of women in the time frame of biblical occurrences. They further argue that the absence of women's voices in that time frame was as a result of patriarchy woven into the structure of the society, from which the religion originated, subsequently destroying changes in the social position of women facilitated by the newly emerged religion.

They challenge Christianity to lead the fight for gender equality (Ibid, 2). However, this begs the question: would such an act not be considered a contradiction to biblical rules on the role of a godly woman in society?

Similar to my mother's wholehearted acceptance of long-suffering is the character of Beatrice Achike, the mother of Kambili and Jaja in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (Adichie 2005). The Achikes were a devout Catholic family. Eugene Achike, Beatrice's husband, sometimes referred to as Papa in the novel, was the patriarch of the family and a religious fanatic, who tortured members of his family whenever they disobeyed him, or if he was displeased by their actions. Terrified of him, his wife and children strived to stay obedient, but found themselves slipping up on occasion and getting punished each time. For example, he allows Kambili and Jaja to spend the holidays at Aunty Ifeoma's home, his sister who lived in Nsukka, a city in southeast Nigeria. While there, his estranged father, whom he despised for maintaining the belief and practice of traditional Igbo spirituality instead of Christianity, falls ill and is brought to Aunty Ifeoma's house so she may care for him. Eugene discovers that his children have been living under the same roof with a man he considered a heathen, and he punishes Kambili by scalding her feet in boiling water back at home. In the same period, the children also realise that in their absence, Beatrice has once again been battered by Eugene. Despite having lost several pregnancies to her husband's physical assault of her, Beatrice fails to leave or end the marriage, even when urged to do so by his sister, Aunty Ifeoma. Maintaining the unity of the household was her responsibility as a wife, even though the "unity" gave room for terror. Beatrice considered her husband a wealthy, godly and prominent man who meant well and needed her support as his spouse. To her, advice from Ifeoma was nothing but "university talk", the gibberish of gender equality, an ideal planted in the minds of people with university education, but devoid of the workings of

reality. Nonetheless, Beatrice confessed to poisoning Eugene in the end. The psychological effect of Beatrice's experience lingers: she barely spoke afterwards and often appeared lost.

The perceived submission of both Rose and Beatrice was in compliance with the rules as interpreted from the Bible – the script that laid out expectations on the behaviour of a godly woman. Yet, in the blank spaces her diary provided, Rose expressed the pain that came with her compliance. The diary became a space to purge and express feelings. In the same way that journaling served as a coping mechanism for Rose, Beatrice Achike found hers in collecting ballerina figurines, implying their search for self-expression amidst chaos and oppression.


NOTES

My Experience as been in husband's house, can not be over emphasis Couple without a mother & a father. Impact it is a very big experience in my life. No one to share my views, difficult. Esp when things be comes good or bad, in the moment of anxiety

NOTES

Coupled with the type of husband I have. His Characters Changed to me over night. Well I still almighe father for blessing me with fruit of womb. If not according to him I don't think I would be leaving with him by know The way he talks to me like a slave

Figure 1-1: Rose's Diary (circa 1994 - 2004).[51]

[51] There is no date on this diary. The estimated time period is deduced from the content of the diary. Rose mentions having children. Being the oldest child, this puts the time frame of the entry from the birth of her second child (1994) to the time I first discovered it (circa 2004).

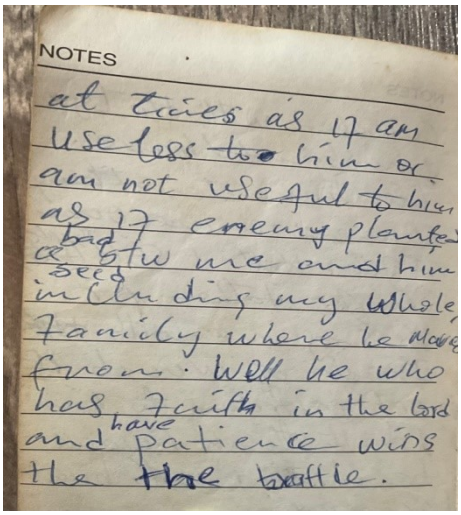


Figure 1-2: Rose's Diary (Ibid)

Memory, Re-memory and Evidence

My mother's diaries may have been her personal collection of proof, a way of remembering, because of the possibility of forgetting an experience. By writing, she affirmed, even if only to herself, that the experience did happen. For me, however, it becomes a way to rememorize; to bear witness to other occurrences from which I was physically absent, as well as the thought/belief that governed her (in)actions – a part I could not see. Recounting aspects of her lived experience which I came to know through conversations with her may cast aspersions on how "true" my version is, or if the incident(s) occurred (as I claim). The existence of her diary corroborates my recollection of history, albeit not always exactly. For example, my recollection of a particular incident that occurred when I was a child no older than four or five. The reason this particular incident stuck with me is because it is my earliest memory of the inequalities associated with gender in my society. I witnessed my father throw a bowl of warm, spicy soup at my mother. Years later, in 2018, my mother and I had a

conversation about that event, and she asked if I remembered, and if so, how much I did. I do not recall if it was the first time we talked about it since it happened, but I have no recollection of any conversation about it prior to 2018. She told me about a part of the incident I still do not recall to this day. According to her, on that same day, I had asked the question, "Why do you stay?" Her response as she recalled from the past was the same as 2018. She stayed back for us, her children, to ensure we were raised in a home with a father and mother, because it was the right thing to do, as a Christian woman. As a Catholic/Christian female, she believed it was important to raise godly children in a cis-het marriage, therefore she had to persevere with the marriage. Going by her recollection of the question I had posed to her, what was the significance of that experience to her? Also, what did it mean to me, and why was I unable to recall that I had asked her why she stayed? Nicholas Cooper Lewter and Henry Mitchell, in *Soul Theology: The Heart of American Black Culture,* argue for concrete experience[52] as an important principle in theorizing knowledge within African-American thought-systems. They argue that concrete experience could produce numerous levels of meaning when it is utilized as a basis of meaning. This also applies to the Afrocentric academic discussions on truth and meaning. These numerous levels of meaning are depicted in the distinctive interpretation of our[53] shared concrete experience highlighted above. I wonder, even now, if my inability to remember asking that question was because we had different views on the subject of Christianity and marriage. Her understanding of marriage came from the narrow lens of the Catholic tenets, which shaped her interpretation of it; mine came from my observation of our reality – as a person witnessing.

My mother also remembered having had on a green-coloured linen dress, as opposed to my memory of brown. Such discrepancies raise the issue of (un)reliability in human

[52] Knowledge based on experience.
[53] My mother and I.

memory, our (in)ability to recall the exact details of a historical occurrence. My mother and I both agreed that the event happened, and that she had on a linen dress, despite having somewhat varying versions. bell hooks, in "Writing Autobiography," recounts a similar experience (hooks 1998, 431). Her memory of a wagon, a toy she shared with her brother as a child, only at her grandfather's house, was discounted by her mother as untrue (Ibid). She recalled the bruises and scratches she had gotten from the wagon. Yet, her mother was confident it never existed. In accepting her mother's recollection over hers, hooks was forced to face the challenge of fiction as a part of remembering, thenceforth viewing her writing as both fiction and autobiography. This challenge lies here and now, in this shared memory with my mother. I remember she had on a brown dress, the colour of dust. I remember feeling my heart sink into my stomach. hooks explains that in this situation, the focus becomes the summoning of "state of mind" or the "spirit" of the specific moment which the autobiographer writes about (Ibid, 431-432). In other words, the autobiographer recounts the sensations associated with the moment. The autobiographer's truth lies in the evocations from recalling, instead of precise details of the occurrence. hooks further explains that a writer's desire to tell their story, as well as the act of providing the narrative is a symbolic gesture of wanting to retrieve history in a manner that allows for both "a sense of reunion and a sense of release"; to rediscover aspects of oneself that may no longer be a part of their present, yet remain a memory that influences the present (Ibid). Nonetheless, as I write about this memory, I am uncertain of my exact emotion on that day, in that moment, or if it was a later reaction triggered by remembering. Although I do not remember asking her why she stayed, I remember that we both lay in bed afterwards, as she continued her silent weeping, deep in thought, pain and what I imagined was regret, while calling on God to take control. I wonder whose account was more accurate between my mother's and mine.

Considering this challenge to the validity of personal experience and remembering in autoethnography, Robert Mizzi, in "Unravelling Researcher Subjectivity Through Multivocality in Autoethnography", gives a similar argument to hooks to ground the significance of the "I" in life writing (Mizzi 2010). Mizzi explains that one significance of autoethnography was that it critiques ethnography by situating the researcher's experience, usually ignored in traditional ethnography (Ibid, 2). Mizzi highlights multivocality as method of facilitating the "I" in autoethnographic research. Multivocality here is defined in two ways: as making available representational space for multiple narrative voices – that are also occasionally contradictory – inside of the researcher; and as interplay between the researcher and other persons who are subjects in the research, which I use in my analysis of the past (Ibid). According to Mizzi, multivocality serves three motives. It shows that multiple narrative voices from the past and present relate within and are mirrored on the subjectivity of the researcher. Also, as the researcher links the personal to the social scene, multivocality dissects contending tensions in the researcher. Lastly, it reveals the fluid state of identity as it weaves through different topics (Ibid, 6).

In the previous chapter, I also recounted that I had asked my great-aunt why my mother never left, and her response was that our culture forbade it. Yet, my analysis of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in the second chapter of this thesis depicts, through Mgbafo's experience with domestic violence and her family's reaction, negates my aunt's claim (Achebe 1994, 87). My recollection of my mother's response to why she stayed in the marriage and tolerated the abuse differs from my great-aunt's response, and both responses differ from the deduction I made from her diary entry: "He who has faith in the Lord and patience win the battle". The God factor. Faith. The belief that a virtuous woman was one who was long-suffering, and the belief that this suffering is a virtue that will be rewarded by

God in due time. This, in comparison with the words of the masquerade[54] in *Things Fall Apart* shows a shift in cultural ideology perpetrated by the imposition of Christian (or colonial) doctrines on Igbo society. The identified shift prompts an examination of theories argued by African feminist theologists on the perceptions of gender and gender roles of Christians in postcolonial Africa.

African Feminist Theology: Religion and the "Woman Question"

The arguments of African feminists on theology, colonialism and gendered relations in Africa pose a conundrum in comprehending the complex ties between the three subjects. For example, Loreen Maseno, in "African Women's Theology and the Reimagining of Community in Africa", explains that traditional African theology focused primarily on the positive sides of African community, and this was due to the enthusiasm of African theologians to maintain traditional African worship as a cultural heritage (Maseno 2021, 2). In other words, African theology has been romanticised by writers like N'gugi wa Thiong'o (Ibid), when in reality, there is no perfect culture. Attempts to depict African culture in idealistic light are unrealistic, because it also consists of oppressive aspects that are often overlooked. Hence, this research does not aim to uphold Igbo traditional worship or precolonial Igbo culture and tradition as an ideal ruined by colonial influences such as Christianity. Instead, my argument highlights that although it appears the dual sex system worked for them, the patrilineal structure of family and community made it easy to enculturate patriarchy into the society through the imposition of Christianity. Similarly, Mercy Amba Oduyoye reinforces Maseno's argument about the imperfection of African traditional worship. In "Introducing African Women's Theology", Oduyoye analyses culture as a tool of domination in Africa, arguing that African women encounter double oppression from a double culture – the Indigenous cultural practices of African people as well as from

[54] Also referred to as a spirit of the Igbo deities.

Western religious influence, where the latter has been enculturated into African culture to promote patriarchy (Oduyoye 2001). Oduyoye's argument implies that in the duration of the colonial experience, certain biblical practices were adopted and absorbed into African culture to the extent that African women can now recount Biblical events to portray their own lived realities. In other words, they have reconstructed biblical narratives to resonate with their experiences. Oduyoye alludes to the possibility of a disruption of gender norms placed on women by religion, while proposing that the goal of the African woman theologian is not to decipher the dichotomy of religion in Africa, but to find a way to thrive irrespective of the religious restraints that trap her growth. In agreement with the arguments of Maseno and Oduyoye, I posit that the bible is viewed as a norm for and source of African women's theology (Maseno 2021, 3; Oduyoye 2001). In this context, Igbo women identify as Christian (and/or Catholic) as a result of enculturation, just as in Western feminist theology.

Nigerian feminists such as Pinky Megkwe, Mercy Oduyoye, Oyewumi Oyeronke nonetheless have argued that feminism in Africa differs from Western feminism, as the two groups do not have a shared history of oppression and subjugation. However, I suggest that because colonialism ties Europe, the Americas and Africa together in history, Africa did inherit some of the causes of the subjugation and oppression of women. To be specific, one of these causes would be the Christian practices as described in the Hebrew Bible. My argument that Christianity as a practiced religion is a core rationale to protect patriarchy and therefore a significant cause of the oppression of women is not altogether different from the arguments of some first and second wave Western feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir, Mary Daly, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva. The summary of their argument was that Christian doctrines condition womanhood to be about the suffering of women within systemic patriarchy, which is not unlike the long-suffering "nature" of the Igbo Christian woman. If so, can we not then suggest that within the scope of Christianity as a practiced religion, the

"woman question" is not just a Western feminist problem, but a religious problem that cuts across and is also constituted through race and ethnicity and culture? To make headway in Nigerian feminism, perhaps the concept of womanhood would have to be re-examined outside of religio-cultural scripts, and the theories of some western feminists be reconsidered.

Earlier Western Feminists on Theology and Womanhood

One significance of examining the arguments of Western feminists on theology is that it allows for a comparison to the Igbo situation. To study religion, it is imperative to examine the power from which it emerges (Yountae 2024, 15). The study of the role of Christianity in postcolonial Nigeria and the capacity in which it exists is to examine the place of Christianity in Eurocentric spaces. Understanding the effects of Christianity in the West may provide clarity on the plight of the colonized, and highlights the way in which the issues within the colonizing and colonized groups intersect. For example, Western feminist theological arguments of Mary Daly and Pamela Sue Anderson, in which they identify theology as a human construct that fosters power imbalance within a gender binary. In *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*, Daly uses a radical feminist lens in the dissection of sexism and women's movement (Daly 1973). According to Daly, sexism is as religious a problem as it is psychological and political. She refers to sexism as "original sin" (Ibid, 47) that founded the patterns and conditions of collective human life, and argues that Christianity was deeply rooted in sexism. Using biblical scriptures and quotes from religious leaders, she highlights the demonization of women that Christianity promoted, asserting that theology as a concept was a product of patriarchy, designed to perpetrate sexism. From her analysis Daly explains the viewpoint that Christianity both as an institution and as a practiced religion was designed against women. Daly suggests the women's movement (or feminist activism), a perceivably radical wave at the time in which her work was written, as a revolutionary solution to this problem. The relevance of Daly's work lies in

the visibility of these viewpoints in the practice of Christianity in a different (non-Western) socio-cultural scene. One problem with Daly's theories is its inability to capture appropriately the struggles of women of colour because it depicted them only as victims preying on each other (Lorde 1979). Still, Daly raises salient issues that the Christian society in Nigeria reflects at present and are discussed in this thesis, particularly the subjugation of women in the practice of the religion, and based on the interpretation of biblical texts.

Similarly, In "A Feminist Philosophy of Religion", Pamela Sue Anderson explains that philosophy of religion and the approach which feminist scholars take makes it a strange discipline (Anderson 1997). This, Anderson argues, is because the existence of this discipline is yet another method through which feminist philosophers revamp old Western philosophies on religion done by men. Anderson challenges the acceptance of the theistic frame and structure of God. The concept of God as a being with absolute powers, she argues, is in itself strange, as well. This previously established structure of God is what she expects to be challenged by feminists, as opposed to using it as a yardstick to theorize religion. Anderson urges for a disruption of viewing God from the perspective of the familiar, as it is possibly a patriarchal corruption of our humanness. Anderson's arguments are particularly important because in challenging the normalized concept of God in Christianity, we also challenge the concept of a gender binary and gender roles that have been established as "divine order".

Closely related to Daly's argument (in the sense of its radicalism), Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, maintained that religion oppressed women in the same way as it did the proletariat (Beauvoir 1989). De Beauvoir argues that religion was a tool of oppression which men used to relegate women to a subordinate position in society, and they also employed this concept of God as rationale for their control of the society. Beauvoir's argument is that motherhood was the worst job assigned to women because it ensured they remained dependent despite working more, and it placed on them the responsibility of

producing offspring and heirs for men. By religion here, Beauvoir primarily refers to the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, but other religions are not excluded. Within these three religions, men lay claim to authority as God-given, therefore reserving the right to bear down on rebellious females who refuse to conform to their established laws. For example, 1 Timothy 2: 11-15 (1 Timothy 2: 11-15, New Jerusalem Bible) states that:

Let a woman learn in silence with all subjection. For I do not permit a woman to teach, nor to be in authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not seduced, but the woman, having been seduced, was in transgression. Yet she will be saved by bearing children, if she has continued in faith and love, and in sanctification accompanied by self-restraint.

The passage implies that a woman was second in place to a man, who was God's first creation, with the connotation that being created first meant it made him more important. It also depicts women as the weaker sex, prone to fall into temptation, therefore forbidden from decision-making over a man or men, while encouraged to remain silent in inter-gender relations and to seek salvation in childbearing. Such bible passages can be wielded within patriarchal Christian communities with the aim of subduing women, and to condition them to view reproduction within a cis-het marriage as a means of salvation from original sin. If the above bible verses quote the condition under which a Christian woman is mandated to live, then I argue here that the perception of suffering within a marriage is borne of this rule, as womanhood for the Christian woman involves dedication to a man and reproduction. It is imperative to note here that the act of subdual involves not only the male gender, but significantly, the female gender as well, in the facilitation and enforcement of what Raewyn Connell defines as masculinities (R. Connell n.d.). Connell contends that masculinities here are not the same as man/men; rather, they focus on the placement of men in a gender

hierarchy and explain the multiple forms of enactment through which individuals (in a patriarchal society) participate in the placement (Ibid). Masculinities possess an internally complex structure and contradictions. Connell also argues that women's significance in creating masculinities is based on how they relate/interact with boys and men (Ibid); (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). The involvement of women in the creation of masculinities is mirrored in the practice of Catholic/Christian women, such as my mother, female relatives and women within my former religious community, who work to reinforce Christian ideologies on younger girls and women, thereby fostering the imbalance of power in gender relations. In other words, the aim of this is to ensure the maintenance of the placement/position of men on the gender/power hierarchy, and choosing to live contrary to these ideologies is considered an act of rebellion within the community. My mother's occasional rebellion was a surprise to me. One memory of her speaking outside of her performance of colonized female thought. I do not recall how old I was exactly at the time, but I was an undergraduate student, therefore must have been between eighteen to twenty-two years of age. Her rebellion was a verbal defiance; a protest. Her rebellion was a piece of advice, directed at me, and in Igbo. "Learn your body yourself, because if you wait for a man to teach you what your body wants sexually, you may be disappointed."

"Mommy!" I exclaimed, partly in shock because it was out of character for her to talk about sex or sex-related topics, and partly to stop her from saying more. Sex was a topic from which she shied away, repeatedly verbalizing her displeasure to my siblings and me whenever she overheard conversations on the topic in the house. She did not repeat the advice to me again after that day, reverting instead to chastisement on why it was immoral that we discussed sex both as a concept and a phenomenon so publicly and shamelessly.

In examining sexual symbolisms and significance in Christianity, Luce Irigaray is another theorist who establishes a link between the phallus and Western theology in her

earliest published work, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Irigaray 1985). Although refusing categorization as a feminist, Irigaray takes on the lens of feminist philosophy in the deconstruction of the concept of God and its relation to the subjugation of women in society. In Western canonical texts, God, Irigaray explained, was a symbol of phallocentric logic, therefore casting the woman to invisibility, or to a space in which she is stuck with reflecting back to God (or man) as a form of his desire. She argues that the sexuality of a female is incapable of being completely understood or explored. She argues against the Western perception of a woman as a construct of men who lacks her own footing, in other words, a bodily extension of man bound to remain dependent on him. By re-constructing Greek mythology and scrutinizing Western theology and philosophy for comparison, Irigaray explains instead that a woman is essentially different from a man. She institutes concepts to dislodge existent ones done by Western males in religion, one of which is her argument that the overlooked sacrifice of body of the Other (in this case, mother), which Christianity disguises as a mother's self-sacrifice for her son was the principal figure in the cultural imaginary of the West. Within the context of this thesis, Irigaray's theory heavily reflects in the perception of womanhood and woman-assigned tasks of childbearing and child-rearing among the predominantly Christian/Catholic Igbo. Still, Irigaray's arguments create uncertainty in capturing her understanding of the term "womanhood" or the place of a woman, thereby limiting its application to the understanding of the gender identity and gender performance outside of cis-het Christian definition. Shoshana Felman, in "Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy", questions what it means to speak "for women" or "in the name of the woman (Felman 1975, 3-4). Felman describes this as a repetitive of the oppressive act of misrepresentation through which men have, throughout history subjected women to the position of an object that is "spoken for" (Ibid). Felman describes this failure of Irigaray's argument to deconstruct the concept of a woman outside of the masculine/feminine

binary as a weakness in her argument, because it is a reproduction of male ideologies of the female that retains the position of the female on the binary (and by extension, the perpetration of gender roles). At the same time, she asserts that Irigaray's work highlights that women's oppression exists in the understructure of "logos, reasoning and articulation" – the dialectic process through which we interpret meaning (Ibid, 4).

In the same year of the publication of *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Julia Kristeva, in "Stabat Mater" analyses the ambiguity in the term woman that makes the attempt to define woman/womanhood simplistic. She argues that matricide is the premise of religious practice, and although many previous civilizations have placed femininity under the Maternal, Christianity expanded it to its limits (Kristeva 1985, 135). She theorises that it is difficult to define what a woman is, because doing so would erase her distinction. She argues that within the ideologies of both Christianity and secularism, the function of the 'other' sex is essentially motherhood, which is my argument about belief and gender assignments among the Igbo Christian (and in this context, Catholic) community in postcolonial Nigeria. Kristeva states that feminists appear to associate maternity with the idealized misconception of primary narcissism (Ibid, 133). However, the term "virgin" used to refer to Mary was a translation error masterminded by western Christendom,[55] in which the fantasies of Western Christendom were cast upon the term, and consequently creating one of the most powerful fictional constructs to exist in known civilizations (Ibid, 135). In other words, the Virgin Mary was a construction of maternity fabricated by the West. Mary's relationship in the scriptures was established by the Church as the prototype of love relations and further accompanied the expansion of the two basic subcategories of Western concept of love, which included romantic/courtly love and parental love (Ibid 136). As a result, childbearing in Western Christianity, they explain, was not the birth of a child in pain, but the birth of pain

[55] They suggest that the word "virgin" was a Semitic word that described an unmarried girl, but this description may have been replaced with the Greek word *parthenos*, describing virginity (Kristeva and Goldhammer 1985, 135).

itself, as the child represents pain. This pain also engulfs the mother, who eventually surrenders to it, and believes in the promise of a position of uniqueness from other women, in a hierarchy that is higher than human inclination, just as the Virgin Mary is titled and revered as the Queen of Heaven and Mother of the Church (Ibid, 150). Iconographies of the Virgin Mary are found in Catholic churches and the homes of Catholics in my society, and our home was no exception. My mother wore a scapula, had two shrines created for the Virgin Mary in our home: one at a corner of the sitting room upstairs and another in her room, and said the Angelus almost every afternoon for as long as I remember. Many times, she explained to me that the Angelus was the most effective of prayers, and urged me to call on the Virgin, the Queen of Sorrows, who understood the suffering of a woman too well whenever I faced life's difficulties, or whenever I felt my faith was challenged by my burdens. Sexual experience under this construct left women with two choices: to experience sex in a state of hyperabstraction to ensure she stays deserving of divine reward, or to experience sex as an "other," a "fallen" woman (Ibid, 142). Therefore, I was also expected by my religio-cultural community to be chaste, devoid of "sexual immorality", in following the steps of the Virgin Mary/Queen of Heaven, or if I expected to have a solid connection with her. Where then, does this divide place the existence and performance of "other"; categor(y)ies outside the binary?

Kristeva refers to the suffering of the female/labour centred on her child as female masochism, which has been successfully employed by totalitarian governments to earn the support of women. According to her, although the construct of Christianity restrains femininity strictly to the maternal, as symbolically represented by the birth of Christ by the Virgin Mary, she is afterwards reduced to the position of the unnamed. This means that the sacrifice of birth ensures the erasure (or figurative death) of the mother. This symbolic interrelation between women and death thus elevates men to the position of sovereigns over

death and its command over women's bodies and creates the space for her continued subjugation in patriarchal societies. In the first chapter, I used my experience as a single woman to depict this theory. My unmarried and non-procreative status means I am failing in my purpose as a woman, within the Igbo community. It is imperative to remember also that this is the viewpoint from which all women are perceived by Igbo people – the expectation from any woman, both within and outside of Catholicism, as a result of enculturation.

Conclusion

Establishing the connection between African feminist theology and Western feminist theology challenges the arguments of feminist scholars and writers like Pinky Megkwe, Oyewumi Oyeronke, Mercy Oduyoye and Buchi Emecheta that both feminisms have nothing in common. The connection is the role of Christianity in the promotion of patriarchal ideals and the imbalance of power in gender relations by upholding a gender binary system as "divine order" and assigning gender roles within this system. As a result, this system places the Christian woman in the position of the subjugated, whose existential purpose is enduring suffering for a greater reward. At the same time, this argument does not imply the existence of a universal feminism; rather, it shows how some issues within these feminist groups may intersect, despite fundamental and historical differences.

The history of Christianity in Nigeria is a history of colonization, in which case Nigeria inherits the gendered issues of the Christian West. Within Nigeria, the colonial (Christian) experience varied per ethnic group, as discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, but was no less impactful. Sylvia Tamale, in an interview with Firoze Manji, at the book launch of her most recent work, *Decolonization and Afro-feminism* (Tamale 2020), explained that prior to the research required for the book, she had no idea how "powerful and all-encompassing" colonialism was; how it "seeped into every crevice of our lives",

dominating our thought processes and forms of existence.[56] To question or examine the social norms by which we abide; to question why I have to be a long-suffering Christian (or Catholic) Igbo woman; to trace this chronology from the colonial era to the present therefore, makes me a killjoy, as it means I am upsetting the occupants of the space of happiness on a broad scene. In agreement with the statement of Sara Ahmed, to be considered bad – or within this context, to be considered "not virtuous" – is to be considered a killjoy (2010, 20). Using my mother's lived experience to corroborate my argument makes these political issues also personal. The story of my mother is the story of many other Christian Igbo women, Catholic or otherwise, and vice versa (Ilika 2005) (Okemgbo, Omideyi and Odimegwu 2002) (Akinwotu and Ohiani 2022). It becomes an even bigger problem if we begin to teach the ideology of being long-suffering to the younger generation, or if we traumatize others by repeating the pattern of abuse we receive as a result (Nduka-Nwosu 2022).

What then is the way forward? In thinking of the different social systems that existed in Africa prior to colonialism, the complex structure of colonial rule in Nigeria, how the effects of colonialism in postcolonial Africa differ per socio-ethnic group (as well as intricacies of effect within each group), the geography and constantly changing forms of masculinities (as defined by Connell), the multiplicity of meaning in defining womanhood, the distinct way in which each African female (and each African social group) is affected and the different methods in which decolonization can be done, the impossibility of a universal approach becomes evident. Arguments by African feminists on the way forward seem to be split into different trajectories. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Teresa Mbara Hinga and Loreen Maseeno call for the reimagining of the role of females in African theology, similar to the idea of Luce Irigaray on the role of women in theology.[57] Still, reimagination varies across socio-ethnic groups, communities and societies, even. Maseno argues that although feminist

[56] At https://www.youtube.com/live/uaxz_zZBekE?si=q2klxjpG4PZNzaMU
[57] See Chapter 1.

theology originated from the west, African women have contributed to its development through writings and academia (Maseno 2021).

According to Maseno, theology is devoted to the emancipation of women by including their experiences and voices in academic discussions on the subjugation of women. Oduyoye deepens this involvement by asserting the symbiotic relationship between Africans and spirituality. Sylvia Tamale however suggests casting aside the colonial religion of Christianity and an embracement of Indigenous African worship and a re-imagination of African societies in the present creative art and literature in order to retain the autonomy possessed by women in certain precolonial African societies (Tamale, 2023). Two problems arise with this suggestion. The first issue is that in the case of the Igbo, an enculturation of Christian ideologies into Igbo culture occurred, making possible detachment from the religion complicated and difficult. The second issue is that Christianity in itself is not a distinct colonial legacy; it is intertwined with other legacies, such as the framework of the postcolonial state, its governmental structure and system, as well as the relations between the state and other states. Therefore, as much as Tamale's ideas on moving forward appear more plausible and potentially effective, the challenge lies in the process of doing. In what way does a group collectively unbind itself from a legacy that occupies both the physical and the psychic spaces?

Chapter 4

Killjoy

Introduction

In the first chapter of this thesis, I reviewed and analysed academic discourses on the role of Christianity historically in the establishment of gender norms in postcolonial southeast Nigeria. In the second chapter, I examined the belief and culture behind the Igbo saying "ugwu nwanyi wu di ya", meaning "a woman's husband is her dignity", and the role enculturation plays in the assertion of the belief. The third chapter focused on the Christian concept of the virtuous woman, and what being called one entails as an Igbo Christian woman.

Building on these ideas, I examine three focal areas in this chapter. This chapter argues that although colonization may have, in theory, ended in the twentieth century, postcolonial societies like Nigeria still suffer its effects, and drawing awareness to these effects and their causal factors makes me a killjoy to those in the space disturbed by awareness – the space of happiness. To understand this, I diverge my argument to – firstly – examine the concept of colonialism as well as what makes heteronormative patriarchy colonial in present day postcolonial Nigeria. Secondly, I examine who, if anyone within this patriarchal society, is affected by my research and the questions I raise, and why. Who occupies the space of happiness in this research? Who never has to explain their ideas, and is therefore affected by the questions I raise? Why is it important to be a killjoy and raise uncomfortable questions? And thirdly, I analyse what this thesis contributes to feminist discourse and praxis. In what way is being a killjoy beneficial to Nigerian feminist literature? African feminist theology in anglophone academia is a field I consider to be under-explored, despite being important to consider issues related to gender, ethno-cultural and national

identity in the continent of Africa. When African feminist theology is introduced, it is but a highlight under the umbrella of the decolonization of Western narratives of Africa, as opposed to establishing it as a distinct topic. Still, tracing the correlation between colonialism and theology in a patriarchal postcolonial Nigerian society means that one cannot be discussed without the other. I begin by consideration of how patriarchy is enforced through colonial politics.

Colonial Patriarchy

Definitions

The phrase "patriarchy is colonial" carries a dual meaning. On the one hand, patriarchy within the Igbo culture can arguably[58] be a result of colonial influence and enculturation of Western (British colonizers as well as French and Irish missionaries) cis-het and Christian-informed Biblical teachings brought on by the colonization of the southeast territory of modern-day Nigeria, as I explain in Chapter Two. According to Nkiru Nzegwu in "Recovering Igbo Traditions: A Case for Indigenous Women's Organizations in Development", colonialism, in the case of Africa, was an "alienating historical condition" that eliminated the voices of women, and in southeast Nigeria, the sexist administrative structure of indirect rule defrauded Igbo women of their powers, reducing them to the position of dependent minors (Nzegwu 1995, 445). On the other hand, and in current practice, this colonial patriarchy has extended beyond the annexation of territorial and cultural space, into bodily space, encroaching on both the physical and the psychic dimensions of self. To explain this habitus-like move, it is imperative for me to explain what I mean by both colonialism and patriarchy.

[58] Scholars like Mercy Amba Oduyoye in *Introducing African Women's Theology* argue that the Igbo society is structurally patriarchal, and in present times, Igbo women suffer from a double patriarchy – from the culture and from the colonial legacy that is Christianity (the Church). See Chapter One for more.

The term colonialism is a broad historical phenomenon. The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy defines colonialism as a "practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people to another", further stating that the challenge in defining colonialism is due its synonymous use to imperialism.[59] A. P. Thornton displays the interchange in use of the terms colonialism and imperialism in "Colonialism" (Thornton 1962). Thornton explains that "to be a colonialist is to be an exploiter…it is that view of the controllers which is held by the controlled…and what is being looked at is power" (Ibid, 335-341). By power, Thornton means power itself, and not the way power is used (Ibid, 341). Thornton notes that colonialism is both "negative and obstructive", and its meaning comes from the nucleus of the non-powerful; from people whose lives are controlled on the international scene, who are also inheritors of a war without knowing the history behind it or the reason for it (Ibid). Still, Thornton's argument is narrowed to the scene of relations between or among nations, limiting an understanding of how and where else colonialism could occur.

Chris Kortright offers a more paradoxical explanation to Thornton's definition of colonialism, in "Colonization and Identity" (Kortright 2003). For Kortright, both the colonizer and the colonized are manufactured from the colonial circumstance, and colonial circumstances are fashioned by people, who in turn are fashioned by the circumstances (Ibid). An individual's geographical and cultural perception of the world is determined by their abstract perception of the world, and cultural identities – founded on social, economic and political rankings – are carved from abstract ideas of comparison between cultures. From these abstract ideas, the colonizer designs the "other", which is the colony, thus creating an identity that opposes that of the colonized (Ibid). Although Kortright includes the

[59] PDF Version of the entry, "Colonialism" from the Spring 2023 Edition of the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2023 at https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2023/entries/colonialism/

perspectives of both colonizer and the colonized in the creating the concept of colonialism where Thornton argues the concept is as understood by the colonized, Kortright, like Thornton narrows this explanation to the context of inter-state relations.

Aimé Césaire explains colonialism as a more aggressive phenomenon in *Discourse on Colonialism*. Césaire argues that Christian dogma was the primary problem in colonization (Césaire 2000). Christian dogma equated Christianity to civilization, while paganism was equated with savagery. These equations have therein created victims who are non-European whites (Ibid. 33). By victims, Césaire refers primarily to the Indigenous peoples of the Americas, Africa and Asia, on whose lands the white European colonizers had established European colonies and who had colonial rule imposed upon them (Ibid). Therefore Christian ideology, from the viewpoint of the colonizer, was required to "civilize" the Indigenous "savage pagan". In doing so, this also establishes European ideology as synonymous with Christian ideology, and European knowledge as absolute knowledge, which non-European groups had to accept. According to Césaire, territorial occupations and colonial trade transactions inevitably transform the colonizer, for instance in how control of labour decivilizes the colonizer (Ibid, 41). To assuage their conscience, the colonizer alters their perception of the colonized as an animal, and treats the colonized as such. In this dehumanizing process, the colonizer is also transformed into an animal. Thus, relations between the colonizer and the colonized are characterised by dominance by the colonizer, and submission by the colonized which places the colonizer in the position of the controller, and establishes the colonized as a tool of production (Ibid, 42).Although Césaire gives an interesting dynamic of "predator versus prey" in an examination of the relations between the colonizer and the colonized, the definition does not highlight how this affects perceptions of gender and gender roles within the colonial structure.

Another famous explanation of the term colonialism is that which was provided by Frantz Fanon. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon defines colonialism as a method of domination that considered the reordering of the world of Indigenous peoples as essential to the success of the colonizer (Fanon 1963). Using an essay on Algeria's battle for independence from its French colonizers, Fanon implies that the church institutes an elaborate structure of political oppression on the colonized territory, and colonialism worked with Christian evangelization to ensure success within the colonies. Within this interplay between colonialism and Christianity, the colonizer's god establishes the binary of inferiority/superiority (Ibid). Fanon's arguments are not direct, but implied throughout the book, therefore making it challenging to discuss the work as a concrete, outright critique of the colonizers' concept of God and religion.

One key point deduced from Fanon's argument is that a key step in decolonization is the revival of indigenous cultures in postcolonial states, and the display of these cultures on the global scene. The problem with Fanon's suggestion on the promotion of culture in postcolonial nations is that within multi-ethnic and multi-cultural postcolonial nations (of which Nigeria is no exception), where the "divide and conquer"[60] invasion strategy of British colonizers merged diverse ethnic groups into a colonial state without the consent of these groups, and subsequently created ethnic and gender hierarchy and friction, further fuelled by the Nigerian Civil War and internal politics, what/which culture may be displayed? In a situation where colonialism and ethnic differences have worked to widen the chasm between ethnic groups and frustrate government efforts to create a unifying national identity, one may wonder if a "Nigerian identity", or "Nigerian culture" really exists, and if it does, what it means.

[60] See Chapter One for an explanation on "divide and conquer"

One of Nigeria's pioneer nationalists, Obafemi Awolowo argued that 'Nigeria was not a nation, but a 'geographical expression'. Nigeria was merely a 'distinctive appellation' to describe the people who lived within an 'artificial' boundary (Awolowo 1947, 47-48). Essentially, the imagined reality that was recognized as Nigeria lacked a homogenous culture, and "being Nigerian was not the same as being French" (Ibid). He further explains that within Nigeria, the distinct ethnicities possessed nation status, with great differences in language, socio-cultural and political histories (Ibid). Awolowo's point validates the argument of Partha Chatterjee, who explains in *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* that nationalism was also an imposition on the colonies by colonizers (Chatterjee 1993). For this reason, the imaginations of the colonized remain permanently colonized as there is nothing left to imagine; they are faced only with the models made available to them by the colonizer (Ibid, 5). Also, in considering the colonization of the psychic self, the conditioned mind, how does violent action act as a cleansing power for the colonized, as Fanon asserts (Fanon 1963, 94)?

Fanon's criticism of colonial institutions however, is equivalent to his criticism of postcolonial governments for their failure to attain freedom from colonial influences. Fanon faults the mediocrity of the ruling class in postcolonial states as the main reason for corruption, economic reliance (on international state and non-state actors) and ethnic conflicts. Fanon posits that since it is impossible to travel back in time (to return the past), the way forward is a redesign of the postcolonial state structure through a decolonization that does not focus solely on the colonized, but includes the colonizer (Fanon 1965, 32). The colonized seeks to understand the human behind the character of the colonizer (Ibid). The colonized wants to understand the designer and at the same time, the victim of a framework that has attempted to destroy the colonized's voice.

Building on the above explanations, I define colonialism here as an invasion and dominance of a given space belonging to a force by another/ an alien force for the benefit of the invading force. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, in "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses", explains that the term, colonisation, which is the process of being colonized, implies a "relation of structural domination, and a suppression – often violent – of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question" (Mohanty 1988). This invasion and domination could be for political, social, religious or economic reasons, or could be a combination of reasons. Colonisation could occur in any space; it could be just as bodily – the colonization of one body by another body – as it is territorial. It is also always mental. The psyche has to be invaded and conditioned for colonisation to be in full effect.

Understanding Patriarchy

Similar to the definition of colonialism, the term patriarchy is one with varying definitions by scholars. For example, Sylvia Walby, in her book, *Theorizing Patriarchy*, defines patriarchy as "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, exploit and oppress women" (Walby 1990, 20). Definitions as such focus only on the power dichotomy between men and women, and fail to capture the nuanced and varying ways in which patriarchy extends more systematically beyond the explicit exploitation of women. Closer to encapsulating the intricate structure of the concept is the explanation Heidi Hartmann gives in her work, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards A More Progressive Union". Hartmann defines patriarchy as a "set of social relations between men, which have a material base, and which, although hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women" (Hartmann 2021, 135). As much as the men in patriarchal societies are united by the shared relationship of female domination, interactions among them are based on a hierarchy comprised of class, race and ethnicity that also act as divisive factors. Here, Hartmann does not include religion

or religious beliefs or identities as divisive factors. In thinking of the term colonialism, these highlighted factors also play the same divisive role in colonialism. Although these definitions are not invalid, they fail to emphasize the influence of religion on colonial social relations. Alda Facio attempts a more detailed and encompassing description, including what makes patriarchy colonial. Facio defines patriarchy as "a form of mental, social, spiritual, economic, and political organisation of society produced by the gradual institutionalisation of sex-based political relations created, maintained and reinforced by different institutions linked closely together to achieve a consensus on the lesser value of women and their roles (Facio 2013, 2). These institutions interconnect not only with each other to strengthen the structures of dominion over women, but also with other systems of exclusion, oppression and/or domination based on real or perceived differences between humans, creating states that respond only to the needs and interests of a few powerful men" (Ibid). Furthermore, Facio expands on the idea of patriarchy in "The Parable of the Origin of Patriarchy", and alludes metaphorically to men and women as travellers and gardeners respectively (Facio 2018). According to Facio, travellers and gardeners once coexisted in love, peace, harmony and equality, recognizing their power, as well as their similarities and differences (Ibid, 156). An individual could be both a gardener and a traveller at the same time, and some could switch from one to the other as often as desired. This was the norm in relations between both groups, until the travellers grew jealous of the life-giving powers of the gardeners, and in a bid to dominate the gardeners as well as some of their own, the travellers began to abuse their own powers, creating an imbalance in the equality between both groups (Ibid, 157). This shift marked the birth of patriarchy, a system that undervalued life and instituted the idea of ownership and control of one group of humans by another group (Ibid, 158). The establishment of patriarchy as a system was achieved through the introduction of colonization

as a human norm, in which religion was one of the mechanisms devised[61] to solidify the system. From the group of travellers emerged a sub-group of hypertravellers. This sub-group dominated both main groups, and began to dictate and control the acts of the gardeners by establishing laws within the system under the guise of religious or cultural traditions that ensured the enslavement of the gardeners. Tradition enabled the hypertravellers to commodify the gardeners to satisfy their imperialistic ambitions, as the gardeners had been conditioned to believe that their purpose of existence was to cater to the desires of the travellers. At the same time, I recognize that Facio's parable, as well as her use of a parable[62] limits gender and gender relations to a universal binary system. In doing so, "The Parable of the Origin of Patriarchy" validates Soshana Felman's argument on Irigaray's work (See Chapter 3) that such theories reproduce male ideologies of the female that subsequently keeps the female in the same (heteronormative) position of subjugation (Felman 1975).[63] In relating Facio's parable to the Igbo gender politics, although Facio details the possibility of gardeners being travellers and travellers being gardeners, Facio's argument fails to imagine the possibility of an "other"; an existent being outside of this binary. Sthembiso Pollen Mkhize and Anele Mthembu in "Unpacking Pervasive Heteronormativity in Sub-Saharan Africa: Opportunities to Embrace Multiplicity of Sexualities" argue that heteronormativity encourages the idea that queer identities are unnatural and not African (Mkhize and Mthembu 2023, 382), and existent laws in postcolonial Africa that outlaw homosexuality were mostly established in the colonial era (Ibid, 384). The normalisation of heterosexuality is embedded in language and in a concealed curriculum that censors/suppresses the life of queer people through religious ideologies and colonial legacy in postcolonial Africa (Ibid, 381-382).

[61] Other mechanisms include laws, governments and wars.

[62] A parable is a narrative, but not always a narrative. It is an analogy, metaphor or simile, aimed at explaining or convincing the listener/reader on a certain viewpoint (or viewpoints) (Snodgrass 2018). C. H. Dodd describes parables as "natural expressions" that view "truth" in a concrete form (Dodd 1936)

[63] This is because parables have been visibly employed in religious texts, especially the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam to convey narratives deemed important, and with intent.

Gardeners, Travellers and "Other": An Insistent Third Category

The censorship of queer life and voices through the colonial legacy of Christianity continuously works to inhibit a third gender category that still exists within the Igbo ethno-cultural structure – the Ogbanje. Writers like Chinua Achebe,[64] Christie Achebe and Akwaeke Emezi discuss the Ogbanje as a being committed to the torture of the human mother of its host body by an unanticipated death, and a return in the body of the next child of the human mother, and a seemingly endless loop of death and return (Achebe 1958) (C. C. Achebe 2002, 32-34) (Emezi n.d.) (Emezi, Freshwater 2019). Christie Achebe explains that the concept of the Ogbanje resists an accurate classification in Western psychological understanding, going further to describe it as "mysterious, elusive and incomprehensible," even in Igbo ontology (C. C. Achebe 2002, 32-33). Akwaeke Emezi, author of the autobiographical novel, *Freshwater*,[65] and who identifies as non-binary in particular describes the Ogbanje as a "malevolent trickster" (Emezi n.d.). The Ogbanje are also a cohort, disassociating from each other at birth into humanness, and rejoining at death (Ibid, Last Segment). It is my position here that this description of a cohort also aligns with the polysemous Igbo proverb discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, "chi wu otu, eke awughi otu", meaning that the Spiritual Other of the human self exists as a single form, but its creations/destinies/paths are many. Emezi further writes that the Ogbanje are "never really here – if you are a thing that is born to die, you are a dead thing even while you live" (Ibid, Second Segment). Emezi further explains the statement through Igbo ontology on reincarnation (Ibid). All human beings are in a reincarnation loop; a person was their own ancestor and eventually becomes an ancestor in an endless loop within the bloodline. The Ogbanje, however, is an unwelcome interference in this loop; a stranger that arrived from

[64] Achebe, in *Things Fall Apart*, portrays his understanding of the Ogbanje through the character of Ezinma, the only child of his second wife, Ekwefi.

[65] *Freshwater* is Emezi's debut novel detailing Emezi's life experience and their journey to discovering their identity as Ogbanje. Emezi is both Igbo (by paternal bloodline) and Tamil (by maternal bloodline).

nowhere. Still, not all Ogbanje die at infancy; some grow up into functioning adults, but not without some effort to keep them here (C. C. Achebe 2002, 33), which includes finding and destroying the "iyi-uwa"[66] of the Ogbanje (C. Achebe 1958, 158). In order to prevent the Ogbanje from joining the loop of ancestral reincarnation within a bloodline, it is crucial that an Ogbanje never reproduce (Emezi n.d., Second Segment). It is for this reason that Emezi decided to undergo surgery, which they consider a mutilation to their body in the same way an Ogbanje child is mutilated or marked at death, so as to be identified upon return. However, to Emezi, mutilation is – a "shift from wrongness to alignment" – an act to get the human body to serve as a reflection of the spirit it harbours (Ibid, Last Segment). It is also my argument here that Emezi's surgery to customize their vessel makes them a killjoy, because this defiant act challenges the dominant narrative of a gender binary among the Igbo Christians. Emezi reminds the Igbo society, as well as themselves, of its indigenous perceptions of gender prior to colonial interruptions.

The Coloniality of Institutive Heteronormative Marriage

Within the framework of the male/female binary, Facio nonetheless explained that the normalization and concealed nature of the oppression of gardeners eventually led to the acceptance of this oppression as a "cultural heritage" by some gardeners, who began to subject their descendants of the same group to a similar experience, thereby perpetrating and continuing the tradition of oppression. Marriage – the submission of one (or more, depending on the religio-cultural tradition) gardener to a traveller – was one of such traditions introduced, in which the gardeners were groomed to believe from infancy that it was in their best interest and essential to their survival to be "by the side" of a traveller (Ibid, 158). A clear depiction of this theory is the conversation between Beatrice Achike and Aunty Ifeoma, her sister-in-law, in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. In Beatrice's opinion, "a

[66] A(ny) specific object that binds the Ogbanje to earth.

woman with…no husband, what is that...how can a woman live like that? A husband crowns a woman's life…it is what they (women) want" (Adichie 2004, 75). This is not dissimilar to the quote from my mother, that "a woman's dignity was her husband", which I discussed in the second chapter of this thesis. Yet, Facio explained that there were cases of rape within the marriage, and reproduction – alongside the responsibility of being the primary caregiver to the product – was imposed on the gardener (Facio 2018, 158-159). In some cultures, the gardeners did not possess the right to choose their traveller. Even more, gardeners who rebelled against the marriage mandate faced violent punishments and even death. Here, I think of myself and my cultural community; their perception of me as a "failure" for still being single – for not conforming – and the shame they expect me to feel for it. The stigma attached – something being "wrong" with me. My non-existent "dignity". My "iniquitous" self. This causes me to question how the gardeners of my ethno-cultural community came to normalize their own subjugation.

Ndubueze Mbah, in "Female Masculinities, Dissident Sexuality and the Material Politics of Gender in Early Twentieth-Century Igboland" argues that colonialism, Christianity and Western education were three intrusions that served to alienate women from the most important resources in their socio-economic development (Mbah 2017). These intrusions resulted in the masculinization of wealth in early twentieth-century Igboland. Where Igbo women played a vital role in farming in pre-colonial Igbo society by cultivating farmlands in the same capacity as the men to care for their families, possession of land in colonial Nigeria became a strictly male entitlement; the place of the woman was to serve/help her husband, and this would be one of the goals of western education – to train good wives and mothers, as the position of a woman was domestic (Chuku 1995, 39). Between denying them access to their primary source of economic and financial independence, and reinforcing Christian ideologies as the new socio-cultural norm, the foundation for the oppression of these women

and their female descendants was laid. It is my argument that with the declaration of Nigeria's independence and the physical "exit" of British authorities, the baton of power was ensconced in the hands of the male gender, and colonization, which, prior to this was as racial as it was gendered, became fully gendered, as in this case, Igbo men exercised dominance over women, wielding a fusion of Christian and cultural laws to keep them subjugated and focused on servitude to their advancement. A good depiction of this argument is my recollection of a conversation with my father on marriage and divorce in 2017. I do not recall why the conversation had come up, but I remember the year because the conversation occurred a few weeks after I returned from an out-of-state wedding of a friend of mine. I recall where we were. I was on the loveseat in the sitting room, while he was having supper at the dining area, secluded from the sitting room, but within full sight. I recall my mother was in the sitting room with me, and in the conversation. After hearing his stance on divorce, which he had just described as "against Igbo culture", and my mother's supporting line, "God hates divorce", I posed my question to my father. "What if I got married someday and my husband hits me? Would you not encourage me to leave him?"

My father let me know on that night that I would not be welcomed back in his house. "Stay back and resolve the situation. Marriage is for better, for worse. If you think I would welcome you back or support you, you must be silly". His response snapped me out of my naïveté, and into his reality of colonial patriarchy and glaring power play. All I could say after the shocking response was "wow", as I watched him resume his supper.

Mbah, however, explains that it would be incorrect to surmise that British colonialism empowered the men alone. Evidence of Igbo women penetrating the social circles of men in the colonial era lay in the carved wooden figures (of both male and female) on display at the community meeting halls of the Ohafia villages in southeast Nigeria. It may be imperative to note here that within the Igbo society, the Ohafia villages are the only communities known to

be matrilineal in its social system. The wooden figures or effigies were symbolic representations of people who exemplified what Mbah described as "wealth-power masculinity" by accumulating wealth in the trade of commodities such as European dresses, lanterns, and guns, as well as wealth in the trade of people – the slave trade (Ibid, 1-3).

Women, Mbah continued, also earned wealth by defying the Christian indoctrination rules that aimed to transform them into "good" spouses for the new social upper class of African-educated males. These Ohafia women were able to achieve this by establishing small businesses in crafts and skills like tailoring and cooking, as well as establishing independent nursing homes. Mbah describes these women, known also as "matrons", as by-products of the friction between an emerging patriarchy structured and established by colonialism, and the intervention of independent Igbo women. These women who accumulated wealth in fields dominated by men in the twentieth century, were referred to having attained *ogaranya* status, the crossover from the female gendered space into the space of masculinity.

This crossover, the attainment of *ogaranya* masculinity, parallels the argument of Ifi Amadiume in *Male Daughters, Female Husbands* (examined in Chapter One) in which Amadiume argues that the lines of concrete gender divide in pre-colonial Igbo society were blurred (Amadiume 2015). According to Amadiume, the fixed gender dichotomy in the Igbo society was a construct of Western feminist discourse, as gender roles were neither rigidly masculinized nor feminized. Women could be husbands as well as wives, Although Amadiume's work argues that the traditional Igbo society did not necessarily affix sex (biological male or female) to gender, it however reiterates Facio's assertion that women, at some point in history could straddle the gardener/traveller category, just as was expected of men. Still, like Facio, Amadiume focuses on gender embodiment within the binary, and does not take into account how the complex third category – the Ogbanje – embodies their gender. This begs the question, of what significance is gender embodiment? In Emezi's book,

Freshwater, Emezi's narration of their search for the self alludes to seeking autonomy over self (Emezi, Freshwater 2019). Emezi sought to understand who they were, to enable them establish the freedom to live in their truth. In their interview with *The Cut*, Emezi explains that undergoing surgery was a way of getting the vessel for the spirits, which was their human body, in alignment with their spirit (Emezi n.d.). In other words, not only was the surgery a form of self-expression and a way to establish autonomy over themselves, it also was a way of authenticating the vessel through which they navigate life. While Emezi's surgery may be seen as an authentication of the body to align with psychic dimension of themselves, it is also my argument that writing about the experience can be considered a method of resisting the colonial binary of the gendered self. Also, by sharing this experience with the public, Emezi portrays how "spreading awareness" could be another form of resistance; awareness of the existence of an exception to the current norm.

Research and Writing as Awareness and Resistance

In 2016, when I was a graduate student attending a class in International Human Rights Law at Lancaster University, the course instructor, Dr. Amanda Cahill-Ripley, put us in smaller groups for a class exercise. Within my group, each individual was to think about human rights violations in the societies or communities to which we belonged, and suggest ways in activism that could bring about effective change. Thinking about Nigeria as a whole and problems upholding and exercising the social, economic and even political rights of the female gender,[67] my response was "spreading awareness". Dr Cahill-Ripley nodded in agreement. "Yes, awareness. Really, it can be so simple sometimes." Nonetheless, "simple" answers could also pose complex problems.

[67] Nigeria ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1985 without reservation, after its adoption by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979 (Aniekwu 2006)

Three problems are raised with writing here. The first two problems are interconnected: sources of the knowledge which the writer extracts the information for the reader's awareness, and the language in which this information/knowledge is written. problem is the position of language. Similarly, George Sefa Dei, in "Rethinking the Role of Indigenous Knowledges in the Academy" states that that to discuss Indigenous sources of knowledge and the decolonization of conventional Western sources was both a "personal and collective" gamble. Dei suggests that restructuring school curricula, in which Indigenous knowledge becomes the primary method of knowing is a way to resist Western hegemonic knowledge (Dei 2000). This, Dei argues, is because the teachers among the colonized could find themselves as collaborators to colonialism if they are unable to resist the marginalization of Indigenous forms of knowledge and invalidation of Indigenous experience (Ibid, 3-4). However, Dei highlights that it is important to avoid falling into the argument of a "good versus bad" source of knowing, where the Indigenous knowledge is seen as good, while Western episteme is considered bad. This is because context, histories and environment matter when considering the source of knowledge to be used. Therefore, the goal is to confront colonial ideas of knowledge sources that dominate academia (Ibid) Indigenous knowledges, therefore, could serve as a way to counter hegemonic methods of knowing (Ibid, 13), because African worldview, for example does not consider sources of knowledge as something to be owned, but as that which comes from experiencing the social world, and to be used to survive, therefore open to all (Ibid, 14).

In terms of the language in which knowledge is conveyed, especially in the context of Indigenous knowledge, African writers such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o have argued for a decolonization of language in writing (especially creative literature), which involves eliminating the language of the colonizer (Thiong'o 1981; 1982; 1984; 1986). In *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature,* Thiong'o describes

language as possessing a dual character – being both a way to communicate and a conveyor of the culture and beliefs of its people (1986). Although Thiong'o's idea appears to be a method of ethno-cultural knowledge preservation, it also poses a communication challenge in multi-ethnic African states, in which different ethnic groups are unified in government and language as a result of their colonial histories. Specifically, Nigeria, as a postcolonial nation-state is made up of over 250 ethnic groups and about 500 dialectical languages, with English (or the local variant of it, known and spoken across anglophone West Africa as pidgin English) being the *lingua franca* and unifying language as a result of being colonized by the British (CIFORB).[68] An abolition of English language would pose a problem to the continued existence of the postcolonial state and its inter-state relations, if there exists, no other unifying form of communication among the different ethnic groups. Therefore, as much as Thiong'o highlights the importance of writing African literature in Indigenous African languages, it is also important to highlight the issues associated with a shift in language.

The third identified problem with writing as a form of awareness is defining the intended reader. If writing for the political self, could that also be understood to be private/internal form of resistance? For example, in the previous chapter, I explained that my mother kept journals so she could reflect and remember. In remembering, she may have found a way to remain aware of her lived experience. Perhaps it is from such awareness that she felt inclined to suggest that I learn/explore my own body/sexual self for myself, as explained in the previous chapter. Learning my own body in a sexual sense allows me to know my body, and to govern myself with the knowledge I discover in the process. Still, resistance and autonomy does not automatically fix the external/societal issues associated with static gender roles and power imbalance in postcolonial Nigeria.

[68] See Commonwealth Initiative for Freedom of Religion or Belief (CIFORB) Country Profile – Nigeria.

Human Rights Watch reported that Nigeria was placed at number 139 of the 156 in the Gender Gap Index of The World Economic Forum, indicating that there might be a regression in the representation of women in leadership (Ewang 2022). Furthermore, Human Rights Watch reported that although the Nigerian Constitution propagates gender equality and non-discrimination, Nigerian women were still faced with injustices and remained marginalized due to "discriminatory laws, religious and cultural norms, gender stereotypes, low levels of education, and the disproportionate effect of poverty on women" (Ibid). Religious and cultural norms ensure that the existent social script remains the status quo for the future, if they are not questioned and examined. Irrespective, when no questions are raised, especially within the context of power imbalance, oppression thrives, and the oppressed stay silenced. Hence, as a feminist writer in academia (in the position to amplify voices), the onus is on me to research, identify, highlight and discuss such issues within my society. As a feminist writer, it is my responsibility to document my research discoveries, as well as recommendations, if any, on navigating prevalent gender issues and the documented results of a topic serve to educate society as well as myself, the researcher.

In "Introduction: From Resistance to Resurgence" Susan Strega and Leslie Brown explain that researchers looking to address issues concerning marginalized groups and communities must first of all educate themselves on their socio-political history as well as the history of relations between the marginalised group and the dominant group (Strega and Brown 2015, 4-5). In tracing gender relations in the Igbo culture from nineteenth century pre-colonial Igbo society into colonial Nigeria, it is clear that the gender dynamics changed. The different-but-equal philosophy that guided the dual-sex social system was overthrown by the ideology of patriarchy imposed by the church to abet colonial rule. The fluidity of gender embodiment, which was a norm pre-colonization, became an alien concept, and fixed gender roles became concrete by the beginning of the twentieth century. A new religio-social and

cultural script had emerged. Strega and Brown also suggest that when deciding on a concentration area in research, as much as we ask, whose story it could potentially tell, we also need to ask whose story it will hide, why it hides it, for whom is it hidden and what, if any consequences are attached to this (Strega and Brown 2015, 6). For any life discussed in research, one must recognise that there are other lives being shielded (Ibid). In this research, whose story is hidden?

Problematizing the "Space of Happiness"

The hidden story in this research exists in the lives of those who occupy the "space of happiness". Sara Ahmed argues that contrary to the stereotype attached to feminists as a miserable people looking to spread misery, misery is not our mission, but if misery is what we stir with our words and actions, we are willing to keep at it (Ahmed 2023). In order to continue "spreading misery" and hammering at our society, we have to notice it (Ibid). Noticing could also be done by a pen or in this case, a computer (Ibid). In concurrence with Ahmed's statement, it is imperative I examine who occupies the space of happiness in this research, and why. Ahmed explains that "the face of happiness" appears to be the "face of privilege", and instead of assuming that "happiness is simply found in 'happy persons', we can consider how claims to happiness makes certain forms of personhood valuable" (Ahmed, Intoduction 2010, 11). Also, certain bodies occupy specific spaces by taking out the being of others which Ahmed terms "screening techniques" (Ahmed 2013). When a person is "screened out" as a result of the body they possess, said person becomes invisible to others, irrespective of how insistent they are to be heard (Ibid).

This thesis is about the invisibles of the Igbo society, and by using text/words to make them visible, the lives of those who occupy the space of happiness may be paradoxically ensconced here if I fail to identify them in this work, or question why they occupy the space.

How are spaces occupied by certain bodies that get so in tune with this occupation, they are unaware of it (Ibid)? Or, are they aware of the space they occupy, but refuse to disrupt their norm because they benefit from it? Ahmed posed the former question within the context of conventional academic writing and the inclusion of women in producing original contributions, but I extend these questions to my research area. More directly, who are those so involved in perpetrating patriarchy within the Igbo society that they are oblivious to the consequences? Or are they aware, but unwilling to make themselves uncomfortable because they currently benefit from it?

Moving Forward: Feminist Theology and Writing in Nigeria

The paucity of voices of African women in African literature may also be an indirect contributor to the maintenance of the space of happiness; voices in African feminist theology, particularly Nigerian feminists, are still emerging. Still, available local literature holds some suggestions for consideration. For example, Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, in *Recreating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformations*, argues that the deconstruction and demystification of the African woman as goddesses or Mother Supreme, who self-sacrifices and suffers both willingly and silently would be the key step in the empowerment of the African woman (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994). Leslie's description of the perception of the African woman is not unlike the descriptions of postmodernists like Luce Irigaray in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Irigay 1985) and Julia Kristeva in "Stabat Mater" (Kristeva 1985) as the cis-het perception/expectation of women, based on Christian virtues. As discussed in the previous chapter, these feminists explain that the religion of Christianity projects the purpose of women as procreation, after which she dies, or becomes insignificant. In the course of this essay, I have established that this perception of womanhood was not the norm in the Igbo culture, prior to the establishment of the region as a colony of Britain, and the imposition of Christian ideologies on the Igbo people in the nineteenth century. I have also explained the

enculturation of Christian beliefs on marriage and womanhood into Igbo culture, and the confusion trailing the Igbo woman in understanding the intermix of her ethno-cultural and gender identity and the social script attached to this identity.

Leslie goes on to explain that the African woman is burdened by six mountains of which she must rid herself. The first mountain is external oppression (colonialism and neocolonialism). The second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth mountains are the structures of tradition, her backwardness, man, her color/race, and her own self (Ibid, 28). Leslie explains that the first mountain, or obstacle, which is colonialism and neocolonialism brought to the forefront traditional beliefs of male superiority embedded in gender relations within cultures, therefore introducing and reinforcing other manifestations of oppression targeted at African women (Ibid, 30). The last four obstacles are tied to the first, for they are struggles that resulted from the conditioning of her mind – first, by external colonisers, and subsequently by the patriarchal system being run by her own people, serving to keep her both colonised and oppressed.

While Leslie makes salient points on the obstacles impeding the growth of African women, she also implies that all groups were affected in the same way and measure. Leslie assumes a homogenous practice of patriarchy – subtly or crudely – across Africa, failing to recognize that the structural difference of each ethno-cultural group meant that it may be affected differently. For example, within the nation of Nigeria, it varied per ethnic group. While the Igbo people of southeast Nigeria may have had a dual-sex system that recognized the equality between both gender groups and arguably the blurred line "dividing" them prior to British rule, the Hausa/Fulani people of northern Nigeria, who were and to date remain predominantly Muslim, ran a structurally male-dominated social system, where men were viewed as primary leaders (Odok 2020). It is for this reason that the British would retain the already existent socio-religious structure and gender dynamic in northern Nigeria, whereas in

the southeast, there was an overhaul of the Igbo social and gender structure. This challenges the idea of a continental patriarchy. Therefore, it would be problematic to conclude that both societies are affected by patriarchy in the same way – in equal measure. Then again, one cannot ignore that the patrilineal structure of Igbo communities, which guided social relations between both gender groups may have been a contributing factor to the introduction and successful facilitation of patriarchy within the culture. Thirdly, Leslie repeats the pattern of many African feminists by using the umbrella term "colonisation" in theorising the problems of the African woman, instead of fleshing out the specifics of it. The "how". What aspects of colonisation, or in what way does colonisation affect African women negatively, in which case religion could be examined as an aspect/element of it? Yet, Leslie highlights the prioritisation of suffering and motherhood as the norm for the African woman by her society. It has been my argument so far that the conditioning of both suffering and long-suffering – persevering with the concrete belief in the divine promise of a reward – stem from Christian biblical teachings on womanhood.

Leslie's implied idea of a homogenous patriarchy has been countered by the arguments of African feminist scholars such as Niara Sudarkasa, who posits that in pre-colonial West Africa, women were "conspicuous in high places" (Sudarkasa 1986). This includes female involvements in political and even military roles. An example of this is the all-female Fon warriors, also referred to as Mino (Murtala, Hamza and Lawal 2022). This example depicts the flexibility of the concept of womanhood (or what it meant to be a woman) in different pre-colonial African societies. In the colonial period, we see, through the practice of *ogaranya*, explained above, the individual attempts of Igbo women to defy colonial notions of gender identities and norms enforced on the Igbo society. Still, these women were few in comparison, and the imposition of Christianity among the society was a success with obvious effects in the present. One example of this effect is the continued

domination of the narrative of Igbo women by Igbo men. In a BBC interview with veteran Nollywood[69] actor, Pete Edochie, the self-acclaimed custodian of *omenala*[70] remarked that feminism was the reason behind intimate partner violence (2021). He further explained that feminism was not a part of the Black (African) identity, and upon marriage, a woman was answerable to her husband. He argued that a lot of young women in modern times were incapable of cooking, a skill necessary to keep a marriage. To buttress his point, he argued that his mother was uneducated, but catered to his father's needs and cooked a variety of meals for him always. A woman who is unable to cook for her home should not be called a woman. He states that feminism was the primary cause of women being beaten at home (in reference to spousal relationships). A woman who has the audacity to respond to her husband tempts him sorely to lay his hands on her. Women are thus culpable for domestic violence. He argued that feminism, which to him was the worship of women – is a culture that belonged to the West; Western women frowned upon male validation, while in Africa, it was the norm for an African woman to bask in male validation/compliments. He further stressed that the way contemporary women addressed men when speaking to them was also a trigger. Again, referencing his mother, Edochie explained that his mother always referred to his father as "our father", and his father never struck her, and because his marriage was similar to the example laid before him by his parents, no one could accuse him of domestic violence towards his wife.

Why does Pete Edochie's speech matter, one may ask? In consideration of the preservation of Igbo history through oral tradition, Edochie – by virtue of his age (76), fame and lived experience – is a body housing aspects of Igbo history to be gleaned by society, according to Igbo culture. The danger here lies in his claim to be both a custodian of

[69] The Nigerian movie industry.
[70] Igbo customs and traditions. Literally translated, it means "that which happens on the land".

omenala, as well as a devout Catholic (Edochie 2023). In a situation where one identity overrides the other, the result, as we can see, becomes a false narrative of one aspect of history, and a misrepresentation of gender identity and norms within the culture.

The consequences of colonialism on women determining their place in society cannot be separated from how it also affects the colonised society in which these women live. Weaponizing ideology (in this case Christian, cis-het frameworks) to establish compliance depicts the relationship between colonization and the poor relations between Igbo men and Igbo women. However, Syed Hajira Begum alludes to the contrary in "Against All Odds: African Womanhood in Postcolonial African Women Writing" (Begum 2006). Begum posits that African women writers have been successful in setting women free from the mystique attached to motherhood by revealing both the pains and joys associated with it, and in relation to broader social issues (Ibid, 106-107). While I do not agree with Begum that the demystification of motherhood has been a success (as news reports and the socio-political issues raised in Chapter One affirm) it cannot be denied that African feminist writers have set the ball of demystification rolling, and there is more yet to be done. Sylvia Tamale, in an interview with Sylvia Bawa and Grace Adeniyi-Ogunyankin, suggests that one way to achieve more is through African Futurism,[71] as it holds the promise of effective decolonization of the minds of Africans. Tamale argues that coloniality paints Africa freely as "an impoverished backwater", "land of disease, war, corruption and poverty". Although the context of the interview refers to the imperialist ambitions of neo-colonial agents, this perception extends to the colonial perception of women as incapable of autonomy and self-governance. Ifi Amadiume, in "Gender, Political Systems and Social Movements: A West

[71] African Futurism differs from Afro Futurism, although they share some similarities. Both are situated in science and technoculture, and revolve around setting an agenda in the speculation and re-imagination of Black future, but African Futurism focuses primarily on the "re-storying" of Africa (Oku 2021, 76-78). Futurism has always been a recurrent theme in African literature, and allows for a reconstruction of the historical past, as well as "a recasting of the narrative" to portray what should have been (Ibid).

African Experience", argues that the challenges faced by women's movements in defending their autonomy and self-governance remains the core feature of African women's movement on the continent (Amadiume 1995). The perceived inability to govern their individual lives independent of men is rooted in a "divine law" that places them as secondary to men.[72] Yet, should this not be all the more reason to question the concept of divine law? How do we establish what divine law means, and why it propagates gender inequality in which women are subjugated and rely on external bodies to formulate their identities and determine their lived experiences?

Conclusion

Being born in the final decade of the twentieth century means that I have no direct experience of the colonial era in Nigeria. Yet, I witnessed the effects of its institutionalised legacies, and continue to tackle these effects, because, as a cisgender woman, I am expected to conform to a patriarchal colonial script that underlines my performance within my ethno-cultural society. This social script strips me of autonomy while encouraging conformity. Devika Chawla and Ahmet Atay, in "Introduction: Decolonizing Autoethnography", describe this as a "hybridization" resulting from a "collision and coalescence" of cultures and traditions (Chawla and Atay 2018, 5). Therefore, I assert that by identifying and examining the complex relationship between colonialism, Christianity (specifically the teachings of the Catholic church that have been imbibed in the Igbo culture for over a century), and gender norms in postcolonial Nigeria, alongside the effects of this interplay, I have become a killjoy to occupants of the space of happiness; occupants who even now, enjoy the benefits of the conditioned minds in a postcolonial society. Without re-examinations and more research and academic literature on theology in postcolonial Nigeria, the continued existence of the

[72] Genesis states that a woman was fashioned from the rib of a man to be a helpmate. She was designed as an afterthought, and not a part of the original plan (Genesis 2:18-23, New Jerusalem Bible).

colonial legacy of Christianity means a continued normalization of power imbalance within a simple gender binary, reinforced as “divine order”. The subjugation of Igbo women by men within and outside of the ethnic group – to be seen as wives and mothers – and to have that be established within society as the most important accomplishment for a woman – continues, thereby fostering the longevity of patriarchy. This situation, in turn, will continue to foster further self-identity issues within the Igbo socio-cultural environment. If an Igbo woman remains unable see herself outside of colonial descriptions; if an Igbo woman is unable to describe herself outside the interwoven lens of culture and Catholicism (or Christianity in general); if she is unable to identify aspects of herself outside of the running script, or ponder, “Who am I without the script?”; if she is unable to establish her autonomy over herself, then the hypertravellers will continue to write the character scripts, and direct the narratives by which she is expected to live.

Conclusion

Beyond Religion and Gender

My discussion in this thesis on how colonial legacies in postcolonial Nigeria affect perceptions or understandings of gender and gender norms in no way limits these effects to gender dynamics alone. The legacies influence *all* aspects of the colonized society, from the individual perception of self (self-identity) to social identities and norms within the colonized societies. It is my argument that the so-called postcolonial state is but a colonial state with a redesigned socio-political structure. As Nigeria waded its way into independence in 1960, British colonizers began to discuss "decolonization" as a way of preparing Nigeria for self-rule. Olakunle Lawal, in "From Colonial Reforms to Decolonization: Britain and the Transfer of Power in Nigeria, 1947-1960," states that this decolonization was simply a transformation of formal control into an informal one (Lawal 2010). The goal of decolonization was to "teach" the Nigerian people the art of self-governance, something the British thought they seemed inept at doing (Lawal 2010, 43). Therefore, they had to "learn" this challenging act of rulership from their colonizers, to enable them progress into independence without assistance. This so-called progression was ensured through the machinery of colonization, which consists of colonial institutions such as religion (Christianity, and in separate colonization, Islam), Western education and the production of an educated and professional socio-economic and socio-political class, governance and state-building mechanisms served to enforce British colonial ideologies and imperial ambitions (Ibid) (Igba and Liaga 2021, 47). Capturing the role of religion more succinctly, SimonMary Aihiokhai, in "Alterity and Religious Violence in Nigeria: Toward an Interfaith", asserts that a denial of religion as a factor in the design of both colonial and postcolonial Nigeria is a failure to recognize the key ideology upon which Nigeria was built (Aihiokhai 2022, 571). It is under the legacy of the religion of Christianity – specifically Catholicism – that colonial

cis-het gender binary structure and gender norms were enculturated by the Igbo, destabilizing our precolonial knowledge of both our individual and communal self (socio-cultural identity and source of indigenous knowledge) as Igbo people.

Julie Ada Tchoukou, in "Religion as an Ideological Weapon and the Feminisation of Culture in Nigeria: A Critical Analysis of the Textuality of Violence through the Legal Regulation of Child Marriages," argues that the term, "culture" has become an increasingly used method of garnering support from the public by both national and international institutions (Tchoukou 2020). Tchoukou argues that the term has been stripped of its true meaning and its understanding is now enshrouded in mystery to hide the "exclusionary and silencing practices of the ruling class" (Ibid, 1515). As a result, cultural practices that violate women (and children) can easily be excused as "culture". In the second chapter of this thesis, I detail the moment in which I asked my great-aunt why my mother never left her marriage despite the abuse she encountered, and my great-aunt's response was her assertion that "it (divorce) is not in our culture". This example depicts Tchoukou's argument on the danger around the ambiguity of the term culture, when its meaning remains unclear. In the case of my great-aunt, she was unconsciously pushing a false narrative of our ethno-cultural views on marriage, and with no known (reliable) source of her claim. I explain this in the chapter by using the experience of the character of Mgbafo in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* to debunk my great-aunt's unfounded claim. However, I recognize that the colonial disruptions, especially the imposition of Christianity as a replacement to Indigenous Igbo spirituality has caused a forgetfulness among the Igbo; an amnesia that acts as an obstacle towards forging ahead. Tchoukou argues that African governments take advantage of the "authenticity" of African values to avoid being responsible for the design of an effective system/mechanism to protect women and girls, preferring instead to promote their dependency while intensifying the political and social position of men (Ibid, 1516).

In 2018, I was prompted by my observations of these intricacies/complexities in Nigeria's challenges to write the piece below on my now defunct anonymous blog:

In the period in which I was a practicing Catholic, it has been my observation that the preachers in our Nigeria demand that their congregation live by faith alone. They control the lives of their sheep, tugging at their strings like yo-yo balls and puppet characters. They mandate worship, threatening to unleash the wrath of their god on those who miss attendance. So you are ever present at weekly church programmes. Your partner strikes you, but you're told to exercise the patience of Job; marriage is indeed for better, for worse, and their god hates divorce. Your nation is falling apart, but they tell you not to worry, promising that their god will perform a miracle that will save Nigeria. They tell which of the recycled political aspirants their god expects you to vote for, because the lord revealed to them, through visions, his choice aspirant. Manipulation is at its best when you're told to sow an always monetary seed of faith to get what you seek from God even when you can barely afford two meals a day; to pay your tithe to the church or your life shall be tight even when you're unemployed and destitute; to key into the blessings bestowed upon them by their god by paying them large sums of money, and in foreign currency even when the closest you've ever been to leaving the country is a high-school visit to the Lagos-Benin Border. Yet, even as you try to walk in Job's shoes, even as you sow your seed, pay your tithe and key into blessings, the naira depreciates in the international market, its value on a steady decline as the years go by. The former president and his cabinet looted the funds in the National Treasury, treading the path of his predecessors. The current president is a liability saddled upon the nation as the people's punishment for selling their voices for loaves of bread, bags of rice and social media likes. At the next election, you will be stuck between the devil and the deep blue sea - between voting to keep the current liability or his rival, another potential liability. Your current employer overworks you, yet you're underpaid, not enough to sustain

your basic needs through the month. You cannot sue him for his disregard of the Labour Act because the judiciary is aberrant. But your pastor throws lavish parties every month on his yacht, travels around the world on his private plane - both, purchased with your mite.

Your religion gives a small window for dreams, dreams that only come through if you have faith enough, they say. You do, very much. Still, those dreams fail to become reality. You're told again and again it's not enough. Never mind that it is more than its fixed rate – the biblical mustard seed. Or that a part of you thinks - a thought you fight so hard so hard to suppress - that it's about time you took control of your own mind. They may argue that without religion, you'd be mentally naked, vulnerable and exposed - easy prey for mind predators. I would say the search for myself and my truth, is worth the risk.

Looking back, my piece highlights the "how" of continued colonisation in postcolonial Nigeria. This continued colonization of postcolonial Nigeria now involves a group of the colonized who inherited the reins of colonization from the European colonizers. Victims have now become perpetrators of that which they experienced. In lieu of this, I am uncertain of what "moving forward" means for the Igbo, and for Nigeria. I am uncertain of what the Nigerian identity could look like; blank in the imagination of its attainability. Then again, what is to be expected of a "nation" that was formed without the consultation or consent of its indigenes? As discussed in the body of this thesis, the partitioning of Africa at the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, also sometimes referred to as the scramble for Africa, had no Africans involved in the process. In the same vein, after the territory known today as Nigeria was seized by the British, the naming of the territory was also decided by the colonizers. Flora Shaw, a British journalist proposed the name Nigeria, coined from the terms "Niger" and "area", in the final decade of the nineteenth century (Meek 1960; 2009). The proposed name was adopted by the colonial administrators as the official name of the colony. Taking a step further, Frederick Lugard, the colonial governor of the British protectorates of

Northern and Southern Nigeria decided to merge both protectorates in 1914 (Afigbo 1971, 456), birthing a formal union of ethnicities with more differences than similarities, resulting in ethnic and religious conflict extending into administrative politics and social life, unhealthy inter-ethnic competition and general chaos that persists to this day. The British colonizers deployed the Hausa/Fulani, who are the predominant ethnic group in Northern Nigeria, and who possessed a somewhat similar monarchical system of governance to the British in establishing British control across colonial Nigeria (Williams 1987, 238) (Ugbem, Omobowale and Akinpelu 2019). In postcolonial Nigeria, the above group proclaimed "ownership" of Nigeria, resulting in the Civil War of 1967 and subsequent ethnic tensions that linger even now.

It is evident, irrespective of the above explained identity crises, that the only identity original to the people of Nigeria, which affords them some sense of pride and dignity, as well as being a reason for conflict within the nation, is the ethnic identity. If the nation of Nigeria was forged in the interest of British imperialist ambitions, why then do we expect a mechanism devised against us to work for us because we inherited it? Aihiokhai states that "colonialism operates with the intent to erase the other who falls victim to its sway", and a society traumatized by colonialism grapples with the fear of being erased (Aihiokhai 2022, 569). Would not a more obvious solution be to dismantle the former mechanism (by decolonizing colonial narratives of us as a people) and redesign mechanisms that illuminate who we are (reimagination of the future)? Would a way to approach this not include an examination of the self (the "I"), a re-centring of the individual self is within the collective self (community-ship), through telling our own stories in which we revisit our ethno-cultural histories prior to colonial disruptions of these histories?

In light of the above, it becomes just as important to mention that this thesis examines but a small aspect of a larger and complicated issue. The limits to this work lies mainly in its

scope and source. The primary focus of my thesis is on the effect of colonial legacies on gender norms in the Igbo society, especially in relation to marriage and childbearing. Still, it barely scratches the surface of this conversation. It does not deeply detail the intersections of gender with other fields of study, such as cultural philosophies on (gender) identity, and the position of gender in analysing Igbo (and subsequently, Nigerian) political economy over the time frame being researched in this context.

As discussed in the last chapter, patriarchy, as it exists in postcolonial Nigeria takes on many faces. It is a complex system that affects aspects of the gendered life outside of socio-cultural discussions. An analysis of colonial effects on postcolonial Nigeria as a whole would involve a broader discourse on political, social, economic and ethno-cultural life in Nigeria, as well as its relations with international (or foreign) agents (state and non-state actors). The Igbo group is only one of about two hundred and fifty ethnic groups in Nigeria whose precolonial belief systems and structures of (co-)existence were disrupted by colonialism, thus contributing to Nigeria's present national issues discussed above.[73] Nonetheless, I plan to revisit and expand on this discussion in further studies, with the expectation of more available academic literature from Igbo, Nigerian and African scholars to provide further insight on gender-related issues within African societies. This also requires an expansion of knowledge sources in my examination of these (possibly) effects on each distinct ethnic groups. Therefore, as it is a thesis written for a Master's degree, I narrow down my focus to a single ethnic group – that to which I belong – to contribute to the still developing African feminist literature on gender, gender norms and theology in the social life of the Igbo in postcolonial Nigeria.

[73] See Commonwealth Initiative for Freedom of Religion or Belief (CIFoRB Country Profile – Nigeria) at https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-artslaw/ptr/ciforb/resources/Nigeria.pdf

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Characters from Novels Analysed

Things Fall Apart

Ozoemena
Wife of Ndulue. Her relationship with her husband was a topic of discussion/analysis between Okonkwo, the book's primary character, and his friends and kinsmen, Ofoedu and Obierika.

Okonkwo's wives
Nwoye's Mother – Okonkwo's first wife
Ekwefi – Okonkwo's second wife
Orjiugo – Okonkwo's third wife

Mgbafo
Wife of Odukwe, and victim of domestic violence, whose case was tried publicly by the masquerades.

Amari
First wife of Nwakibie. Nwakibie is Okonkwo's kinsman and considerably wealthy.

The Joys of Motherhood

Ona
Mother of Nnu Ego. Date of birth estimated to be within the first decade of the establishment of Nigeria as a colony.

Nnu Ego
Ona's daughter. Date of birth estimated to be the first decade of the twentieth century.

Purple Hibiscus

Beatrice Achike
Wife of Eugene Achike, mother of Kambili and Jaja and victim of domestic violence.

Aunty Ifeoma
Eugene Achike's sister and Kambili and Jaja's aunt.

Kambili
Main character, Daughter of Beatrice and Eugene Achike and Jaja's sister.