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*Gendered Subjectivity: A Study of Gender
Ideology in Contemporary African
Popular Literature*



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DEDICATION

For Grace, Emily, Dairress Angelica, Ndinda and to mum, Dairress Nyauhango Nyaukandawile and Dad, Burnett Robert Kazinga Msiska and to the memory of grandmother Janet Nyamusiyeni Nyausiska, grandfather Titus Khwati Mkandawile and to the memory of the one who died at Ten O'clock when he should have been in class.

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ABSTRACT

This is a study of gender ideology in African popular literature published from the seventies onwards. First the thesis argues that, far from being merely the demonised Other of high literature, contemporary African popular literature can be profitably studied as a distinct modality of ideological signification. Secondly, it is argued that there are three dominant modes of representation of gender ideology in contemporary African popular literature. There is the conservative model which merely reproduces dominant gender ideology in a fictive modality. Then there are those texts which operate with a liberal model of ideological representation, within which the principle of pragmatic management of crisis within gender ideology is contained by an ideological ambivalence. The third mode of representation of dominant gender ideology employs a radical reading of gender difference and goes beyond mere analysis to envisioning the possibility of gender egalitarianism. Each mode of representation is illustrated by an in-depth study of select texts. All in all, what is offered is a materialist theory of cultural authenticity and taxonomy.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: THE HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN POPULAR LITERATURE

Literature is likely to be an important means of elevating and purifying the native.
(Duff Macdonald, 1882)¹

Closely connected with education is the matter of providing natives with the right kind of literature. If a man has learnt to read, then he ought to have something to read.
(M. W. Retief, 1958)²

Without Ekwensi and his heirs, literature would remain the property of the privileged, an enclosed area open only to initiates.
(Femi Osofisan, 1986)³

About sixteen years ago, the Nigerian literary critic Emmanuel Obiechina, utilising the pioneering research of such critics as Ulli Beier, Bernth Lindfors and Nancy Schmidt, among many others, brought, through his two publications *Onitsha Market Literature* (1972) and *An African Popular Literature: A Study of Onitsha Market Pamphlets* (1973), the phenomenon of African Popular literature to the attention of a wider public. Yet Obiechina's magisterial work, for all its theoretical and analytical lucidity and its unquestionable significance to African literary criticism, remains firmly a regional effort, one which on one or two occasions runs the risk of exaggerating the degree to which what happened at Onitsha market was unique. Admittedly, there have been others, like Bernth Lindfors who have moved on, with a great deal of consistent dedication, to

consider other popular literary traditions in the continent. However, for all the commendable quality of such work, it is scattered in numerous journals, thus making it difficult for a reader wishing to form an overall impression of African popular literature. In a large measure, this thesis is an attempt to build on the effort of the previous critics' work and provide a general picture of what is happening in this sector of the African literary system. I have also thought it profitable to restrict myself to one general aspect, the representation of gender ideology, instead of examining all the themes constituting the literature, for it is manageable when one is dealing with a finite body of texts of a closed literary system such as that of the now defunct Onitsha market literature to conduct a multi-thematic study, but when one is handling what has become one of the most active areas of literary production in the continent, such an approach is bound to degenerate into a dull superficial catalogue of thematic taxonomy, within which the character of the individual text is lost unprofitably. In these days when the author and the text have both been declared dead, my call for the integrity of the text might be misunderstood as an essentialist gesture in support of the view that texts intrinsically embody some abiding truth. Far from it; I am simply refraining from producing a formulaic knowledge of this variegated and internally differentiated genre and from uncritically transferring the structuring plurality of the object domain of inquiry into that of its epistemology. Nevertheless, my project, though continuing the effort of previous critics, is different in one major respect: it attempts to bring African popular literature into a critical dialogue with contemporary critical theory. Such an enterprise is bound to raise questions regarding the validity and wisdom of conducting a cross-cultural transfer of critical concepts fashioned for a specific ethno-centric cultural practice into another and different cultural practice. Such questions will be

addressed in the next chapter. For the time being, before attending to matters of theory, methodology and textual analysis, I would like to reconstruct the social and historical context of contemporary African popular literature, that is, the literature published in the seventies and the eighties, which constitutes the subject of my narrative, in order to show that what happened at Onitsha and what is happening now in this domain of African literature are part of a long struggle to provide the ordinary literate African with an imaginative literature that communicates with him/her.

The epigraphs to the chapter show that both within the colonial and post-colonial African social formations the provision of popular reading has generally been considered one of the vital aspects of social development. Thus, the roots of contemporary African literature are variegated and its institutional life within the African literary and cultural formation is complex. It is therefore important, though the focus of the thesis is on contemporary popular literature, to pause and reflect on the historical development of this kind of writing and its diachronic function within the cultural practices of the continent, if only as a way of acknowledging that whether in its glossy Macmillan Pacesetters covers or in its austere and rather unprofessional presentation of Aubrey Kalitera's novels, contemporary African literature has a long pedigree and an important place in the cultural life of the African peoples. Principally, the underlying objective of the chapter is to familiarize the reader with the salient contours of the history of popular fiction in Africa, and having done that proceed to analyse the production, distribution and reception of the literature. The first part of the chapter will be seeking to argue that it is the interplay of a variety of historical and social circumstances that has, to a large extent, shaped the present thematic and stylistic form of African popular literature: even at its most original moment,

contemporary African literature cannot avoid the imprint of its antecedents. In the second part, I will be attempting to illustrate the argument that, placed in an institutional framework, that of the African and the international book industry, African popular literature, more than any other form of literature on the continent, best foregrounds the relationship between culture on the one hand, and ideological and technological infrastructure on the other, thereby foregrounding the problems of cultural and economic autonomy and dependency, within which the question of cross-cultural transmission of values both aesthetic and ethical becomes of paramount significance.

A. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1. *The Emergence of Vernacular Literature*

It has to be said that the major precursors of modern African popular literature are the vernacular readers that were first introduced in the continent by the missionaries as part of the effort to introduce literacy and education. It was these readers, aimed as they were at the masses of the literate, that created a space for the development of modern African popular literature in both vernacular and European languages. The school reader was generally perceived as tool for introducing and entrenching the reading habit among the new literates. By the 1930s, a number of readers which were essentially translations of European literature had been published. They include John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, which had been translated into a number of vernaculars in the 1800s; *Robinson Crusoe*, translated into Kongo in 1928 and Yoruba in 1933; extracts from *Aesop*, and from The Arabian Nights,

Swift, Robert Louis Stevenson, Rider Haggard and Kipling appeared in Kiswahili. In the thirties, translations of the life-story of leading African and Afro-Americans such as Booker T. Washington and James Aggrey were also to be found in print. The African Literature Committee, in what Andrew Roberts describes as 'a moral uplift', translated the life stories of Washington and James Aggrey, as well ^{as that} of Seretse Khama. Aggrey's story also appears in *Vyaru Na Vyaru* (Other Lands), a journal published by the Livingstonia Mission in Northern Malawi. In the 1930s, the South African writer, Sol Plaatje, translated Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* and *Julius Caesar* into his mother tongue. However, Plaatje seems to have been an exception in this respect, since most of the translation work was undertaken by the European missionaries.

Already by the 1920's it was being felt, even among the missionaries themselves, that the objective of providing the indigenous peoples with a written literature could not be successfully accomplished without enlisting the authorship of the local intelligentsia. This is a period of intense debate on the role and function of literature in the development of the African mind. The journal of the International Institute of African Languages and Culture, *Africa* frequently carried enthusiastic articles on what should be done to develop an indigenous African literary tradition. R. M. East reports, in an article submitted to the same journal, his single-handed effort to enlist the Hausa intelligentsia to participate in a vernacular literature project he sought to implement in Northern Nigeria. East's view of his task and his work, in many respects typifies the general effort on the part of missionaries and colonial educators to lay a foundation for a popular literature:

In the Northern Provinces of Nigeria... there is a moderate, and rapidly growing number of literates in the vernacular, particularly Hausa, written in roman script. But until recently there has been no literature, and very little 'reading matter,' for them to make use of

their ability when they have got it. We have taught them to ride, but have given them no horses.... With the object, therefore, of first finding authors, the writer of this article visited the chief towns of Hausaland, and having assembled as many as possible of the intelligentsia, endeavoured to explain the scheme, and invite any who felt so gifted to try their hand at writing fiction. The first difficulty was to persuade these Malamai that the thing was worth doing.⁴

For others, the development of vernacular literature was not simply a case of aiding the process of educational development, but more significantly, a way of providing a vehicle through which Africa, like the rest of the world, could express and convey its weltanschauung through what was considered the highest form of linguistic expression. A. Victor Murray, was one such person. He argued that:

The cultural value of a language does not appear until that language has not only been reduced to writing, but also begun to produce an indigenous literature.... While in England literature came first and schools came afterwards, in Africa the schools have come first. School literature, therefore, is a makeshift produced by Europeans. Literature in the proper sense of the term will be the creation of the people themselves. The day for that is as yet a long way off, but one result of the right sort of education in the vernacular should be to bring that day nearer.⁵

Murray placed the question of vernacular literature in Africa in the broader historical perspective within which European language literatures had managed to evolve a distinct character despite such cultural upheavals as the Roman conquest and occupation. It has however to be said that not all those who argued for the development of African literature had the sort of positive and humane views as Murray's; there were some who encouraged the development of vernacular literature because they did not believe that the African could

achieve a mastery of the English language that would allow him/her to employ the language in creative writing. In this respect R.M East, for all his enthusiasm for the development of vernacular literature in Africa, displays views which are patently paternalistic and racist as the following quotation from his article illustrates:

However brilliant a boy may be, and however wide his reading, it is doubtful whether he will ever, at least in this part of Africa, achieve such mastery of the English language as to be able to use it for the first-class creative literary work. He must always remain at a great disadvantage compared with those to whom the language and its cultural background belong.⁶

There were also those whose resistance to the development of vernacular literature and languages was predicated on the belief that African languages were inherently inferior to European ones and least likely to facilitate the acquisition of abstract thought and science. Robert Laws, notwithstanding his forward-looking and ambitious educational policies as well as his generally positive attitude to Africans, essentially saw the acquisition of English and the extinction of vernacular languages as a necessary price to be paid if the African were to acquire western knowledge, culture and technology. Writing in 1934, he puts his case bluntly:

Whatever may be said with regard to the advisability of preserving the native languages, no one with practical experience of working in many districts of central Africa will hesitate to agree that the sooner many of these different languages become extinct, the better for the peace, prosperity, and the advancement of the country and its people. To the young in those regions, English is practically synonymous with progress.⁷

Clearly, the motivation for the development of vernacular literature arose out of diverse and sometimes opposing views. Sometimes, the purpose of such effort was to secure effective social control. Cullen Young ascribes the 1935 riots on the Zambian copperbelt to the 'absence of any sort of provision for the intelligent use of leisure time,' and commends the introduction, following the strikes, of a government-sponsored newspaper appropriately titled, *Mutende* (Peace).²⁰ Principally, however, it would appear that the need to promote and entrench the habit of reading both within and outside the classroom provided the major impetus for the founding of the vernacular literary tradition.

The mission presses on the spot and overseas organisations such as the International Committee for Christian Literature founded in 1926 and the International Institute of African Languages and Culture founded in the late twenties provided the initial institutional framework for the development of a vernacular literature written by Africans. It has to be emphasised that though the practice of encouraging Africans to produce their own literature brought in a measure of partnership between the Africans and the missionaries who in most cases controlled the means of cultural production, there was a great deal of missionary supervision in the production of early vernacular literature, some of which bordered on outright censorship. Cullen Young, for example, reports that in *Vyaru Na Vyaru*, a Tumbuka journal published by the Livingstonia Mission at Khondowe, the attempt has been made to avoid 'the obviously instructive and the predominantly missionary kind of material.' Yet he adds:

Much of the material from the Union (South Africa) cannot be printed as it deals with politics from the point of view of British versus Dutch in ways that show ignorance of the real situation. But the material supplied by these letters gives excellent starting points for editorial paragraphs. Tanganyika (Tanzania) territory has impressed its Nyasalanders (Malawians) by its obvious intention towards native development.²¹

Evidently, the missionary point of view which was still in evidence in the production of non-literary works such as newspapers also affected that of vernacular literature. At any rate, most of the writers had intimate links with missions either as teachers or members of the clergy.

It must, however, be added that in certain parts of the continent there was a measure of African autonomy in the control of the means of cultural production; this was particularly true of the media. The Afro-Americans who settled in Sierra Leone and Liberia established their own newspapers along the West African coast as early as the nineteenth century.¹⁰ The American connection in this area is further evident in the work of Nnandi Azikiwe, who upon returning from study in the United States launched a successful and dazzling journalistic career. In 1937, Nnandi Azikiwe, who had by then had the experience of launching a daily in Gold Coast, now Ghana, launched a newspaper, the *West African Pilot* in Nigeria. The paper had phenomenal success within a short of period of its founding.¹¹ Significantly, the *Pilot* published poetry and fiction. Emmanuel Obiechina has argued that the sensational journalism of Azikiwe's paper and the fact that the paper carried fiction and poetry contributed to the emergence, a few years later, of the pamphlet tradition which has come to be known as Onitsha market literature, which was, perhaps, one of the first indigenous large-scale institutional forms of popular literature in the continent.¹² The significance of the link between Nnandi Azikiwe's political and journalistic effort and the Onitsha market literature, is that it points to a relationship between popular literature and media in Africa which is still evidently in practice to this day. Apart from Nnandi Azikiwe efforts, within Nigeria itself by 1937 there were six regional papers with a combined circulation of 15,000 with 3,000 being taken up by a Yoruba language newspaper. In East Africa by 1920, a Luganda monthly owned and published by Africans was

already in circulation.¹³ Perhaps, some of the initiative for African ownership of the media in East Africa might have been encouraged by a much earlier and more robust tradition of black media ownership in South Africa.¹⁴ Even as early as 1884, John Tengo Jabavu, a former editor of a publication sponsored by the Lovedale Mission, set up his own newspaper, *Imvo Zabantsundu*. According to Andrew Roberts, by 1941 there were eight newspapers owned and controlled by Africans in South Africa.¹⁵

However, though there was a certain measure of African control of the media, it did not extend to the means of literary production, in most cases till close to independence. The Missionary-sponsored reader was the source of reading material outside the classroom for the average literate African. Even after efforts were made to transfer the task of book development to the semi-government controlled agencies, the numerous Literature Bureaux established from the late 1930s in most British colonies, the development of a secular popular literature, indeed of any form of secular literature was far away for the majority of the territories. Generally, colonial censorship may have interfered with the production and distribution of secular literature. In Malawi, for example, the colonial government banned Marcus Garvey's *Negro World* and Clements Kadalie's *The Workers' Herald*, publications which, ironically, were allowed in South Africa.¹⁶ Thus in countries such as Zambia and Malawi, the production of a genuinely secular popular literature was left to the post-independence era.

The readers produced by the missionaries, it is generally agreed, were overtly didactic. A. Victor Murray's comment on the genre of vernacular biography aptly describes the general content of such works:

(They are often) spoiled by the neglect of the story for the sake of the moral... This nearly always defeats its own end, and besides, literary studies should not be

'subjected to ulterior motive. We have a sense of fraud when we read a story which turns out in the end to be an advertisement.'¹⁷

A good example of such work is Samuel Ntara's *Mbiri Ya Nthondo*, translated into English as *Man of Africa*, a novel which won the first prize in the 1933 Chinyanja (Chichewa) competition organised by the International Institute of African Languages and Culture. The protagonist of the novel, Nthondo is born of a good family; his father is a distinguished village artisan and his mother, a loving and caring woman whom the whole village loves and respects. After a short illness, Nthondo's father dies, leaving no breadwinner in the household. Nthondo turns into a thief; he steals chickens and harvest. When he follows the route *taken* by many Malawians of his time to South Africa, he ends up in prison twice: the first time for stealing his boss's chicken and the second, for assaulting a colleague. When the time comes to go home, Nthondo has nothing to show for his long stay in South Africa: he does not have the expected material goods that everyone brings home from the South. Nthondo continues stealing until he gets exposed to the word of God. He then mends his ways and becomes a chief, but a christian one. When Nthondo dies the funeral service is taken by the teacher he has brought to the village.

^{of} The thematic intentionality of Samuel Ntara's *Man of Africa* clearly arises out the ideological conditions of its production. Christianity is offered as a panacea for all social ills without embedding it in the sort of complexity of characterization and narrative structure that would have given the novel what Mazisi Kunene, commenting on Zambian, Malawian and South African missionary-sponsored readers, terms 'the saving grace of aesthetic elegance.'¹⁸ A Foucauldian approach which posits ideology as inherently and permanently contradictory would perhaps salvage moments of resistance within the text.'¹⁹

Such moments would belong to the critical perspective rather than to the institutional practice of production and reception. These readers are on the whole the articulation of the Bakhtinian 'official discourse' where discursive plurality is never present both at the level of ideological theory and practice. If one is looking for instances of *heteroglossia*, moments when the unitary trajectory of Christian morality gives way to other voices, it is to a literary practice such as the Onitsha market literature that one must turn for an example.²⁰

2. The Secularisation of the Domain of Popular Literature: Onitsha Market Literature and the Incursion of Western Popular Culture.

Particularly after the second World War, there was general dissatisfaction with the kind of literature that was being churned out of the mission presses and the Literature Bureaux. This seems to have been a natural outgrowth of the twin policy of teaching English at School and encouraging African authorship only in vernacular languages. I have not come across a reference to a novel published in English by the missionaries or the Literature Bureaux; it seems all their output was in the vernacular. It would appear that in this respect the centrality of English in the day-to-day cultural experience of the African had been grossly underestimated. For if the missionaries had known, I am sure they would have tried to publish a form of literature which would have catered for the reader's interest in romance and marriage as, indeed, the post-independence church has done in recent years.²¹ The influence of foreign popular literature in most of East and Central Africa appears to have been limited merely to consumption rather than production. In fact the closest contact with western

popular literature in this area appears to have been through the reproductions of western popular narratives emanating from South Africa, where there was a more direct contact with western popular culture. One source of popular literature was *Drum Magazine*, which was run by Africans. *Drum*, which was widely distributed in East and West Africa besides Southern Africa, carried detective and romantic short stories. This magazine, where Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* was first serialised and to which Peter Abrahams was a contributor, carried tales about the courageous feats of private detective, Mark Makela alias 'The spear'. The magazine also published a regular section titled 'my first love,' to which those who could remember their first romantic encounters were invited to write for a prize. On the whole, the magazine allowed writers from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds to share in a rich diversity of literary experience. There was something for the literati as well as for those who sought light reading.

However, no book-size work seems to have ever come out of this effort to indigenize foreign popular literature. The production of monographs of a popular type emerged in West Africa. By the 1940s, a West African reader could buy from his/her local bookshop copies of British and American popular literature. Obiechina observes that the most popular foreign writers then were Marie Corelli and Bertha Clay. It was these writers and others who provided the aesthetic model for the literature that has come to be known as Onitsha Market literature. There is also evidence that romantic Indian films as well as pamphlets were another vital source of inspiration for the Onitsha market writer. Thus, beginning from the late forties, in the Nigerian town of Onitsha a first fully-fledged African popular literature came into being, combining the pedagogical and didactic function of vernacular literature with the secularism of the Western and eastern popular narratives.²²

One has to be a bit cautious about the monopoly of Onitsha market in the provision of popular literature. Kole Omotoso has argued, and rightly so, that Onitsha was not the only market that sold this kind of literature; there were other places such as Yorubaland where such literature was produced and sold in markets:

Obiechina admits that he cannot reply with any precision to the question, 'Why this form of literature developed especially at Onitsha?' (p. 346) Is it too simple to suggest that the reason he could not be precise is that Onitsha is not, was not alone, in the dissemination of a popular literature in West Africa? To name a type of literary practice after a market town is not wrong. But to have assumed for so many years that that type of literary activity was restricted to that market town alone is silly.²³

Indeed evidence points to the fact that what the critics perceive as a unique feat of singular achievement of Onitsha market may in fact have been a common practice in Nigeria. Market literature, which was the logical development of the missionary school reader, used the same means of distribution as had been used by the missionaries. East mentions the fact that when he and his colleagues sought to introduce the art of vernacular writing in Northern Nigeria, they used the markets to sell their wares: the books of Malam Bello and his younger brother Abubakar Bello could be procured from the market stalls just like Onitsha market literature. East describes the means of distribution they employed thus:

Arrangements have been made for the books to be on sale in the market-places of every town of any size in which there are Hausa literates. Usually they have been given to reputable stall-holders, who will display them alongside their other wares. In other places they are being taken round by a pedlar. The idea behind this is to convince the ordinary man that books are not merely another tiresome innovation of the new regime, closely connected with schools and other official institutions,

given away free by the white man (doubtless for his own advantage), or even one of those things one buys because the Emir has decreed that they must be sold. He must be shown that a vernacular book is essentially a thing of his own country, written by his own people in his own language - a commodity to be bought and used, just like anything else which is sold in the market.²⁴

Thus the distribution infrastructure which Onitsha market literature utilised was already an established practice in Nigeria. Therefore, Onitsha market can be seen essentially as utilising an existing mode of book distribution in order to entrench book culture as a popular practice. Perhaps it was all a matter of common sense rather than of the sort of theoretical consideration that a modern critic might attribute to the phenomenon: markets were the hub of economic life and offered a captive book market. This would appear to be the same thing as one notices in major department stores in the west which sell popular fiction and magazines. That aside, the point which needs emphasising is that there is a broad continuity in the manner of distribution between the mission-sponsored readers and the literature of Onitsha market, in which respect what happened at Onitsha was not as unique as some of the anthropologically-inclined authors have made it appear. Some of the fascination with Onitsha market literature has to do with its presumed quaintness of distribution.²⁵ It must be remembered that God's own holy book and those works which his messengers produced to save the souls of the 'natives' were also sold in open markets in Nigeria, sharing space, as East tells us, with yams and kolanut.

Generally, it would appear that Onitsha market literature did not hold a monopoly over the supply of popular entertainment, for contemporaneous with it there was a tremendously vibrant itinerant theatre. One of the founding contributors to this tradition was Hubert Ogunde, who continued the tradition of combining church music with drama. However, the former police constable moved

beyond providing a merely secular form of entertainment. He produced *Worse than Crime*, a play whose political content upset the colonial government so much that they detained him. His *Strike of Hunger* has been described by G.G. Darah as 'a tribute to the proletarian power of the Nigerian workers in the 1945 General Strike.' His other famous plays include, *Towards Liberty* and *Bread and Bullet*, both of which express solidarity with the twenty one coal miners killed by the colonial police in Enugu in 1949.²⁶ There were also popular theatre traditions in Ghana and other West African countries, but elsewhere it would appear that whatever little was there generally functioned as a vehicle for explaining colonial government's policies to the masses.²⁷

To return to the relationship between Onitsha market literature and the school reader, it can be argued that the essentials of the agenda that guided the choice of ethical and moral perspective in Onitsha market literature have a lot in common with those of the mission readers. The concern with the moral well-being of the society which in the mission reader might have been couched in overtly Christian propagandist terms in Onitsha market literature appears as a form of secular morality, drawing its authority from the proverbial wisdom of African tradition and the secular as well as biblical, ethical and moral values ushered in by western culture. The major area of concern in Onitsha market literature, as many other critics have observed, is romantic love and marriage. One such text is *Elizabeth My Lover* by Okenwa Olisa, alias 'the strong man of the pen.' This memorable play explores the conflict between a traditionalist father and modern lovers. The father, Chief Cookey would like his educated daughter Elizabeth to marry his friend, Chief Jaja. However, Chief Cookey and his friend are up against a form of romantic love with an indestructible invincibility, captured in the most fevered and excited prose:

Elizabeth: My Sweetheart Mr. Ototofioko, I wish to speak to you now from the bottom of my heart. From the abundance of heart the mouth speaketh. I love you with all my heart and so I can't hide anything (Sic) for you. You are mine and I am yours, no different. Where your (Sic) live is my home and where you die is my grave. I can't do without you and anything that happens to you directly happens to me because love is wonderful.....

Ototofioko: First of all my dear, let me agree with you that love works wonders. It can make and unmake. I am very interested (Sic) with the statements made by you in connection with love. ²⁸

There is a scarcely veiled biblical allusion in Elizabeth's statement of commitment to her lover: it is reminiscent of Ruth's statement to her mother-in-law, Naomi:

'Where you go, I will go, and where you stay, I will stay. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be burried.' ²⁹

Though the biblical example is about female solidarity, in *Elizabeth My Lover* it is used to illustrate depth of romantic commitment. The use of the bible as a source of romantic love attests to Obiechina's argument that Christianity played an important role in introducing the rhetoric and the practice of romantic love to Africa.³⁰ At the hands of the Onitsha market writer, the bible, Shakespeare, Maria Corelli and all things western are marshalled in support of a formidable opposition to the presumed conservatism of African tradition, particularly its patriarchal hegemony.

As a way of erecting a binary opposition between African tradition and modernity, the lovers' poetic expression of mutual love is disturbed by a rather prosaic and palpably autocratic opposition from Elizabeth's father, Chief Coockey. The chief is hardly impressed by the empty sophistication of modernity; he wants

the highest brideprice he can extract from the daughter's marriage:

Ototofioko: May it please you to hear that I come to marry you daughter Elizabeth.

Chief Cookey: Bush boy, hooligan, thief (Sic) thief boy and drunkard. You no go marry my daughter. You no having money. I don't see the big man wee go marriam. So go, I go beatam you with my walking stick.

Cecilia (Elizabeth's mother): This is never in the (Sic) list the way to treat somebody. It is offensive to refer to Ototofioko as a thief, hooligan and a drunkard. He is not. Under no circumstances will you beat a person who comes to marry your daughter. Take note of this. I am in support of the marriage.

Chief Cookey: Big woman, my master, I dey hear you. You want fighting again and you go see trouble run away. You don enter into arrangement with Otofioke, thankio. You go see with your eyes.....

Elizabeth: You cannot, under the fundamental human right choose a husband for me. This is my entire right. You cannot also impose a husband on me. If you refuse my marriage with him, well be informed that I will go with him, whether you like it or not.

Chief Cookey: Elizabeth I go beat you again. No talk again Otofioke no go marry you. Na Chief Jaja go marry you. Na my friend for long time. He getting money plenty and go pay me £250.

Jaja: I am a big Chief, Elizabeth, I go pay any amount your father charging me. This boy Otofioke is poor. He no get money.'

Elizabeth: Chief Jaja, my seeing you here annoys me. Please go with your money. If you like pay £1,000 to my father. You are not paying it on my head.....

Cecilia: You must change with the time. This time is no longer the olden days when fathers forced their daughters to marry 'contrary to their wishes.'²¹

The old paternal right of choosing a spouse for a daughter has given way to the belief in 'the fundamental human right.' In other words, in the tension

between tradition and modernity, the latter is privileged over the former. Indeed, on the whole, Onitsha market writers operate with an excessive dichotomy between African and western culture which involves a representation of the former as a backward practice, one which impedes the unfettered quest for the happiness of the modern man and woman. A device that is frequently used in order to create a binary opposition between the old and the new is the allocation of linguistic register. The old Chiefs and all others like them, who are considered backward, use pidgin English and the sophisticated characters use standard English, though often the form of standard English produced is not up to scratch largely as a reflection of the writers' own command of the language or, as other critics would look at it, as a result of the writers' attempts to (Sic) 'demesticate' the English language.²² Ironically, the language of the Onitsha writers is much closer to the register that they despise than the standard English to which they aspire. Thus the writers fail on the very criteria of sophistication that they have erected for their characters. On the whole the intended effect works extremely well as the contrast between Chief Cookey and Chief Jaja, on the one hand, and Elizabeth, Ototofioko, and Elizabeth's mother, Cecilia, illustrates. Nevertheless, underlying this linguistic binary opposition is a strong belief in the irreconcilability of traditional culture and modernity. However, as Obiechina has pointed out, there is still a measure of respect for tradition among the writers:

Ototofioko, the favoured suitor, even while insisting on the new code of marriage which allows him and Elizabeth to be the chief actor in her own marriage drama, also acknowledges the traditional concept of marriage as an alliance between families rather than the typical 'modern' concept of a contract between two individuals.²³

Even so, by and large, this literature like the missionary-sponsored readers presents African tradition as the demonised *Other* of Christianity and western culture. In other words, though there had been a shift in the relations of literary production from the missionaries to the autonomous African writer and publisher, the ideological content of the shift remained essentially the same: the support of the Christo-centric culture.

In fact the strategy of secularizing christian morality had also been tried by the semi-government controlled Literature Bureaux established between the late 1930s and the early fifties in most of the British colonies. The parallel between the readers and Onitsha market pamphlets is evident in the very stated objectives of the market literature. One of the writers Obiechina quotes has the following preface to his book, *Florence in the River of Temptation*:

My aim in composing this novel is to expose vice and praise virtue. To this end I hope my readers will find in this novel an unforgettable lesson which will be their guide in times of difficulties.³⁴

It is thus apposite to trace parallels between Onitsha market literature and other and similar attempts by writers who live in times of intense socio-economic and cultural change. Obiechina remarks that:

The Elizabethans through such booklets as Green's *Notable Discovery of Cosenage* and *Groatsworth of Wit bought with a Million Repentance* warned young Englishmen coming from the countryside into London against the wiles of pimps and prostitutes, rogues and swindlers of all sorts, as well as the evils of the taverns and such 'haunts of iniquity'. They put one in the mind of J.O Nnadozie's *Beware of Harlots and Many Friends*, Okenwa Olisa's *Drunkards Believe Bar is Heaven*. The early eighteenth-century conduct-books of Defoe and Richardson, books such as Defoe's *The Complete English Tradesman* and Richardson's *The Apprentice's Vade Mecum; or Young Man's pocket Companion* proffered practical

advice to ordinary people on such matters as the conduct of employers and apprentices or masters and servants, how to conduct one's working life, how young women could safeguard their virtue and make desirable marriages, the evils of clandestine and forced marriages, and so on. Their authors did for their time what the Onitsha pamphleteers are attempting to do for contemporary Nigerians.³⁵

The overt didacticism evident in both the fictional works and conduct books of the Onitsha market literature might have a lot in common with those of Green, Defoe and Richardson, but I would argue that there is a more direct local ancestry for this combination of art with moral didacticism: it is in the school reader which appeared either in the form of fiction, such as *Man of Africa* where the value of Christian living was illustrated through the experiences of the protagonist, or in conduct books such as *My Duties* and *Self Help*, which employed biography, poetry and fiction for the same didactic ends as Onitsha pamphlets, that the immediate influence on the moral and instructional content must be sought. A. Victor Murray notes that the values for which the model characters of *My Duties*, such as Chief Khama of Botswana, are commended such as punctuality, industriousness, benevolence, truthfulness, thrift, and obedience 'smack of the English Industrial Revolution, and (are) qualities which go to make an efficient office-boy or a respected member of a chamber of commerce.'³⁶ The most important link between the mission reader and Onitsha market literature is the extent to which literature is primarily perceived as utilitarian. Here there is no room for literature of mere entertainment; pleasure is the means by which moral edification is achieved. One suspects that the preponderance of the anthropological and the sociological thematic concerns in both contemporary African popular literature and mainstream African literature can in fact be attributed to the notion of literature which the mission readers, which are

still in use in certain parts of the continent, have popularised. Perhaps it is there as well that the source of the predominant use of straight realistic narrative that Kole Omotoso argues has impeded stylistic experimentation in Anglophone literature can be located.⁹⁷

3. *The Link Between Popular and High Literature: The Ambiguous Career of Cyprian Ekwensi*

The direct link between the school reader, the indigenous pamphlet and modern high literature is Cyprian Ekwensi. His first published work, *Ikolo the Wrestler and other Ibo Tales* (1947), falls within the same mode of folklore collections encouraged by the missionaries during a period when there was a growing interest in African culture: these were the days of grammars of vernacular languages and anthropological treatises on all sorts of arcane subjects on various cultural groups in the continent. However, it was Ekwensi's Onitsha publication, *When Love Whispers*, that was to have a lasting influence on his literary style. The luridly animated glow of his sensational prose which he carried over with him into the world of high literature has withstood the most vehement criticism of his work and the often repeated charge that he is an impostor in the corridors of high literature. The flair for the dramatic without any regard for narrative motivation and coherence, and the interest in romantic love and the bright lights of Lagos, all beloved of Onitsha writers, are there in those works of Ekwensi which Ulli Beier, in making a distinction between Ekwensi's populist origins and his membership of the high literature class of writers, terms 'intellectual.' But the most robust contribution to African literature, one which at once carries over the influence of his days in

Onitsha and connects him to other writers of the belles lettres, is *Jagua Nana*. This novel established Ekwensi as the *enfant terrible* of African literature.

Jagua Nana is about a woman who has had an unsuccessful marriage because of sterility. Jagua decides to try her luck in the big city and moves from Eastern Nigeria to Lagos. She becomes a prostitute at a club called Tropicana and through the diverse clients she entertains the reader catches a glimpse of the complexity of Nigerian social structure and political morality. Among her clients there are big-time politicians, intellectuals, and many others of rank and status in Nigerian society. At some stage Jagua joins an opposition party and runs against a powerful chief and a former client of hers. In the ensuing imbroglio both the chief and her trusted and long-time boyfriend Fred get killed. In the end, tired of the city and getting on in years, Jagua Nana returns to the East and decides to become a trader at Onitsha market. The novel explores the corruption of Nigerian political life, its brutality, its exuberance and its profound lack of genuine leadership. It is true that the Onitsha Market writers had written about politics, but their perspective was always that of outsiders to 'big' power, of those on the fringes of urban life who rely for their material on hearsay. However, for the Lagos-based long time pharmacist, director of information, broadcaster and writer, the fluidity and complexity of Nigerian political life are rendered with the trained eye of an inside observer. *Jagua Nana*, like other works by Ekwensi, has been criticised for glamorising the seamy side of Nigerian society. Yet there is a robustness of female characterization here that equals the best in African literature. Ekwensi's prostitute bestrides Lagos like that other ideological colossus, Wanja, in Ngugi wa Thiong'o *Petals of Blood*. Furthermore, long before women's rights were an issue in the continent, Ekwensi presented the figure of the prostitute, not as a social pariah of a hackneyed morality, to be pitied for her moral

failure; but rather as an energetic and constructive member of society, one who sometimes brings estranged members of families back together. In letting Jagua Nana participate in politics, Ekwensi demonstrates that woman is a full citizen of the polity. Ejected from traditional marriage because of her barrenness, Jagua transforms her subject position within traditional society into an instrument of autonomy. That she fails to achieve a state of genuine gender emancipation must be seen, not as a result of a lack of the necessary will to transform her own social situation, but rather as a statement about the inflexibility of male hegemony.

Thus, in *Jagua Nana* we have a novel of deep significance in terms of its exploration of gender ideology. Significantly, even as the novel ends, Jagua is resolutely trying again to make something of her life outside the space that tradition allots to a woman. There has however been some criticism of Ekwensi's preoccupation with the hustle and bustle of Lagos city life. Pyse, in welcoming Ekwensi's *Burning Grass*, a novel about the cattle Fulani, says:

This is truly Nigeria and these are *real* people, not cheap imitations from another culture imposed on the Nigerian scene... He is obviously much more at home in a rural setting than in the stews of the big city.³⁸

According to Susan Greenstein, Pyse displays an obvious lack of even the most rudimentary knowledge of the biography of Ekwensi and the nature of urban Nigeria.³⁹ Ekwensi's urban characters are as 'real' as his rural ones, for Ekwensi, for all his later sophistication, remains at heart the chronicler of his variegated background. He has written about most of the areas in which he has spent a significant amount of time. His stay in England, as an undergraduate student in Forestry and Pharmacy yielded *For a Roll of Parchment*, a novel which according to Ernest Emenyonu, 'was at the time of its conception in the middle

of the twentieth century, one of the earliest expositions of the indignities meted to African foreign students in England.⁴⁰ His upbringing in Northern Nigeria led to a fictional study of the Cattle Fulani. The civil war which forced him back to the East, led to the writing of *Survive the Peace*. It is also worth emphasising the fact that at a time when the major writers such as Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe were making a name for themselves by writing about their ethnic groups, Ekwensi, probably because of his upbringing among people of a different ethnic group from that of his own, was already trying to transcend narrow ethnic boundaries and attempting to capture something of the rich cultural diversity of the Nigerian nation. I would thus agree with Abiola Irele when he unashamedly declares that:

Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana*, for all its deficiencies of form is just as worthy of critical attention as Soyinka's *The Interpreters* - there is indeed a real sense in which the narrative content of Ekwensi's novel is rooted in a more immediate sense of social fact than Soyinka's. As George Orwell has observed there is such a thing as a 'good bad book.'⁴¹

Perhaps the significance of Ekwensi in the context of a literary history of popular literature lies in his unabashedly taking on the mantle of a literary entertainer. In a climate where the simple business of story telling is sometimes frowned upon unless it can be shown to be intentionally representing some form of cultural authenticity, or to be palpably fulfilling all the requirements of a true belles lettres, something that Abiola Irele has complained about, we should be grateful that there are writers like Ekwensi who still enjoy telling a good story without consciously pandering to the dictates of the aesthetics of the academy. Ekwensi has never made any pretensions of being anything other than a writer of popular literature, as he explains in the following excerpt from an interview with Bernth Lindfors:

I don't regard myself as one of the sacred writers, writing for some audience locked up in the higher seats of learning. I am just interested in writing about people, events, experiences, deprivations, hunger and so on.⁴²

Yet critics continue to blame him for all sorts of cardinal literary sins.

Michael Echeruo criticises Ekwensi as follows:

The episodic nature of the plot, its lack of organic development, its very 'innocence' can be traced back to the formula of the pamphlet.... This failure some have seen as a 'masterly blend of ingenuousness and sophistication!' Of course it is no such thing. The fact is that Ekwensi has not grown clear of the world of newspapers and of pamphleteering.⁴³

If one might ask, 'Why should a writer who tells the whole world that he writes solely for entertainment be asked to grow out of the very roots that nourish his chosen art form?' That would be like accusing Barbara Cartland of not being a proper George Eliot. I am not suggesting that Barbara Cartland and Ekwensi do not have anything of significance to say, but rather I am expressing the view that it is wrong to judge one literary practice by criteria employed in a different literary practice. Furthermore, behind all this critical posturing there is a rather naive view of the African literary system. In the days when African popular literature was defined in terms of the curious characteristics of the quintessential Onitsha market pamphlet, with bad grammar, and an apparent course sophistication, and when African literature in English was in its formative years with few texts to show for itself, the critics mistook Ekwensi's polished language as a sign that he, like his contemporary fellow African writers, was seeking to pontificate on those weighty 'ontological recessions' and 'rebushings' that a critic like Austin Shelton finds in *Jagua*

Nana.⁴⁴ Having included him in the canon they find him a rather incompatible bedfellow with 'serious' writers such as Soyinka or Achebe. It is at this point that the battle lines are drawn between those who see his writing as high literature and those who think he is only worth writing a complaining article on, but certainly not one to be hoisted before undergraduate students as a model writer. In all this, there is a manifest inability to recognize the fact that there is nothing to be ashamed of in popular literature and that there can be a polished and thematically complex popular literature, as the example of the British writer Eric Ambler suggests.⁴⁵ To put it bluntly, Ekwensi is a writer of popular literature, with firm roots in the tradition of market pamphleteering, who for no fault of his own, has been mistaken for something else other than what he himself has set out to achieve.

Femi Osofisan is one of the few critics who have found a proper place for Ekwensi within the African literary system. He argues that:

It is very significant that in the preceding decade, no writer apart from Ekwensi would have accepted the role of a mere entertainer. The dominant Mbari school, nurtured on a tradition of respectable European literature from Homer to Milton, from the Metaphysical poets to the latter-day Surrealists, developed a self-conscious attitude to literature, and held a conception of the identity of the artist which was, at best, romantic. It was this conception of the sacred role of the artist which led to a widening of the distance between the creator and his public, symbolized in the late Christopher Okigbo's now famous statement at Makerere, that he never read his poetry to non-poets... These men became responsible for raising our modern literature within a relatively short period to a status of high respectability; but their success has also been ironically responsible for the existing gap between creative writing and the flowing stream of national life. Until recently, Nigerian literature, as far as the Nigerian public was concerned, was an awesome beast to be confronted only in the classroom and to be hastily fled from as soon as the examinations were over. When the literate public sought entertainment, it turned to James Hadley Chase.⁴⁶

The Ekwensi model of popular literature has spawned many followers in the last two decades with the result that today it is popular literature rather than high literature that has proven more financially viable for most local and international publishers alike.⁴⁷ The success of this kind of literature might of course be dismissed as a sign of degeneration in literary taste. It would however seem to me that it is a testimony to the growing interest in an indigenous literature that responds to the changing needs of its readership. I would like to believe that it is within this domain of literature that an authentically African novel will emerge. Kole Omotoso has complained about the neo-colonial nature of the dominant narrative style of high literature in Africa. It is possible, as this growing literature continues to attract those well practised in the craft of writing, as is the case at the moment with the presence of works by Kole Omotoso and Buchi Emecheta in this category, that the binary opposition between high and popular literature, which significantly does not obtain within the area of contemporary vernacular literature, will be resolved profitably. It is only then that what Chinua Achebe has called for will be realised, that is, 'a kind of collectivization in which the writers and their audience will move together in a dynamic relationship.'⁴⁸

In a nutshell, it can be said that there is a continuity between the mission-sponsored reader and contemporary popular literature, which has made the bulk of African popular literature escape, to some considerable degree, the narrow individualist model which, according to Griswold and Bastin, characterises western popular literature. Overall, in African popular literature there is a concern with the larger social problems of human experience: problems of social change and cultural transition. However, the difference between African popular and its western counterpart must not be construed as suggesting that the former is totally autonomous of the latter, for as an institutional practice,

African popular literature in English is inextricably linked to the west through a whole range of discursive and material practices. It is as a way of focussing on the institutional status of popular literature that I now turn to a consideration of its mode of production, mediation and reception.

B. AFRICAN POPULAR LITERATURE AS AN INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICE

There are two helpful models regarding the analysis of the material conditions of literary production. One such model has been proposed by Robert Escarpit in his seminal work *Sociology of Literature* (1965), and the second is offered by Siegfried Schmidt in his book, *Foundations for the Study of Literature: The Components of a Basic Theory* (1982). Escarpit's model is helpful when it comes to reconstructing the diachronic relationship between writers and modes of literary production, but much less so when one wishes to examine the synchronic functioning of a given literary practice. It is for this reason that in this section, I will rely heavily on Schmidt's model. Schmidt describes a literary system as a network of action roles which includes producers, mediators, and the participants in what he terms the 'domain of text-processing.' Thus, primarily, a system is defined via agents rather than texts. Underlying Schmidt's model is the idea that a literary system is a communication practice, involving shared conventions and cultural space. For such communication to be successful, there is a basic infrastructure that has got to be in place. The preconditions for a literary system are the quality and even quantity of political, cultural and socio-economic conditions within which the relations of literary production enable the participants to achieve the maximum realisation

of the system's potential. It is such preconditions of the institutional practice of African popular literature that I wish to comment upon in the following discussion.

1. *The Production of African Popular Literature*

The first issue to be considered is that of authorship. In the review of the historical development of the African popular literature, I have pointed out that the authorship of popular texts in Africa arose under determinate historical and ideological circumstances. Aesthetic production within pre-colonial Africa was not individualist but collective.⁴⁹ The narrators of folktales were essentially mediating linguistic texts which were communally produced. However, with the arrival of chirography, there has emerged a new concept of authorship, where a determinate individual wears the title of author and occupies a specific place within a network of social relations. The missionaries on a number of occasions were worried by the possible effect of the conflict between the indigenous 'collectivist' and the emerging 'individualist' type. East succinctly captures this kind of anxiety in the following comment:

Folk-lore gives no scope for originality. The stories are traditional, and no liberties may be taken by the story-teller. If he varies the form of the story, or even departs from the well-known phraseology, he is liable at once to be pulled up by his audience.⁵⁰

Thus the movement from a predominantly oral to a chirographic culture must be construed as a shift from a mode of communal aesthetic production to one where

the role of the individual inventor of story is given greater significance. It may therefore be argued that the concept of authorship involved in the production of African popular literature is one which represents a cross-cultural transfer of the norms of aesthetic production from one specific historical epoch of one culture to another.

The desire for personal recognition seems to be one of the most important motives for the authorship of popular literature. The author in Africa, however he or she might be regarded elsewhere, has high social standing. Indeed, the concept of authorship is invested with a mystery which sometimes borders on hero-worship. Obiechina remarks that the Onitsha market writers regard authorship as an almost religious calling similar to priesthood:

For the authors of pamphlets, monetary gain is of secondary importance only. Unlike the printer-publishers, the satisfaction of being seen in print is often adequate compensation to the pamphlet authors. They hold authorship in high esteem, amounting almost to awe.⁵¹

Thus Cletus Nwosu, an Onitsha writer, declares that one of the reasons he decided to be a writer is, 'to add his name to the list of Nigerian authors.'⁵² In the editorial to the *Nigerian Authors Magazine* (1962), a publication set up by Nigerian popular authors, the attitude of the popular writer to his career is boisterously expressed: 'Author, is, in our own candid opinion, and in the opinion of those who matter in the literary field, a prouder title than 'King'.'⁵³ The popular writer's pride in his or her profession is also seen in the epithets they use to describe their labour: for example Okenwa Olisa describes himself as 'the strong man of the pen; the Malawian writer Aubrey Kalitera publishes his books under the imprint, 'Power Pen Books'.

The reverential attitude to authorship is often coupled with a firm grasp

of the demands of the profession. Aubrey Kalitera ran a series of lectures on creative writing for aspiring writers in his magazine, *Sweet Mag*. He advises the novice thus:

It's a lonely decision by an individual to become a writer - and making the decision stick which gives any particular corner of the globe its writer. Just as it's a lonely decision by an individual which makes him a doctor, statesman, mathematician, etc. And here it is better to understand the similarity.... Because it is where all young writers go wrong. A doctor needs years and years of training to be able to be trusted with the life of a human being on the operating table. Likewise a writer needs years and years of training to be trusted with the page of a publication. Any publication.⁵⁴

It therefore needs to be recognised that though one will find errors of printing and expression in the writing of African popular writers, it is not that the writers themselves are oblivious to the questions of quality, rather their faults in most cases are a function of the level of education attained and even the quality of the equipment employed in the production of their wares.

As Obiechina has pointed out in his study of Onitsha market literature, financial reasons also play an important role in the decision to become an author.⁵⁵ It is difficult to form an accurate picture of how much authors earn from their writing without conducting an empirical survey. However, judging by the fact that David Maillu of Kenya and Aubrey Kalitera earn their living by writing, one would suggest that writing popular literature in Africa can at times be a lucrative venture. The fact that Maillu and Kalitera earn their living by writing is also ample evidence of the emergence of writing as a career in the continent. One should not however exaggerate the degree of professionalisation in African popular literature: Maillu and Kalitera are an exception to the rule. The majority of writers are amateurs who engage in

authorship as a sideline. According to Kotei, even those writers who write high literature and are published by transnational publishing houses earn very little from their writing.⁵⁶ Besides, both Maillu and Kalitera do odd jobs such as printing and selling stationary, thereby supplementing the income they get from selling popular fiction.

This leads us to the consideration of the class location of the authors. By and large, most of the authors come from those who have achieved post-secondary education: among them are academics such as Kole Omotoso, Buchi Emecheta, and Dede Kamkondo; journalists like Nandi Dlovu, medical doctors such as Bolu Babarinsa; broadcasters and film-makers such as Sam Aryeetey as well as school teachers such as the Zimbabwean Alexander Kanengoni. Thus the participants in the production of popular literature seem on the whole to come from the middle class. If the school readers were predominantly written by school teachers and clergymen, and Onitsha market literature by school children and those who had barely completed their school certificate, the producers of contemporary popular literature are part of the cultural elite. Indeed, the authorship of popular literature in Africa, whether in its vernacular, market form or the paperback format of the Macmillan Pacesetters series, has always been in the hands of part of the elite, those who have had greater access to the international popular literary system through travel or education. It is thus important to bear in mind that when one is talking about contemporary African literature one is talking about a literature that is on the whole written by authors who are not radically different in terms of educational achievement and class position from the writers of high literature. The difference between the two types of writers essentially boils down to which literary norms from the west they have chosen as a determining influence in their works. The writer of popular literature will have been exposed to the

belles lettres as much as the writer of popular literature through the principal means of literary socialisation, the school and college curriculum. It may thus be expected that the sort of popular literature that such writers will produce will also exhibit some of the aesthetic norms of high literature. This would appear to be the case with Buchi Emecheta, Kole Omotoso and, to a certain extent, David Maillu.

The analysis of the cross-cultural transfer of literary norms is of great significance if one is to comprehend why writers such as Buchi Emecheta and Kole Omotoso can work both within the populist mode and that of the belles lettres or indeed if one is to appreciate the complexity of the relationship between African literature and its western counterpart. In their article 'Continuities and Reconstructions in Cross Cultural Literary Transmission: The case of the Nigerian Romance,' Wendy Griswold and Misty Bastin⁵⁶ give a summary of the major theoretical positions on the subject of cross-cultural transfer of values and norms. The *modernization* theory (Talcot, 1951) explains the cross-cultural transfer of cultural norms and values in terms of the view that:

As societies modernize, industrialize, and enjoy increasing economic and cultural interaction with the more developed world, they tend to converge around certain values and ways of thinking, and these will become increasingly represented in their indigenous cultural products... Modern societies will come to emphasize individual achievement more than ascriptive characteristics as the basis for social rewards; hence in modernizing societies, one would expect to see more and more cultural representation of individualism, entrepreneurial efforts, and the defiance of prescribed social roles.⁵⁷

The second theoretical position, described by Griswold and Bastin as *hegemonic* is that expounded by Jeremy Tunstall (1977), according to which the third world cultural space is overwhelmed by the more powerful culture of the metropole.⁵⁸

In other words, what is termed industrialization is another name for cultural colonization of societies without a technological infrastructure to resist the onslaught of a cultural *Other* which dominates the global cultural space. Griswold and Bastin suggest a third theoretical alternative to the question of cross-cultural transmission. What they describe as *contextual approaches* acknowledge the cultural hegemony of the industrialised west over third world cultural formations, but also recognize both the need for and possibility of resisting such a process.⁵⁹ It is in the context of this theory that I wish to explain the norms which inform the production of popular literature in Africa.

My analysis and that of Griswold and Bastin of the literature suggest that the aesthetics of production within this domain of African literature involve a mixture of both the acquired western aesthetic values and the local ones rooted in orality. At the level of surface aspects of presentation, African popular literature shares a great deal with its western model. The covers of the African romance novels are no different from those of *Mills and Boon* or *Harlequin Romance*, for example: in both cases you have glossy pictures of lovers, who visually signify the story content of the novel. You also have pictures of tough men with guns in their hands surrounded by beautiful women in detective novels such as David Maillu's *Ben Kamba 009 in Operation DXT* and *Ben Kamba 009 in The Equatorial Assignment*. The concern with romantic love and marriage which was present in Onitsha market literature is also an important theme of contemporary popular literature. There are also narrative features which closely resemble those of western popular fiction: there are quite a number of novels which narrate love stories from the woman's point of view, which is one of the features of the western romantic novel.⁶⁰ Structurally, one shared characteristic between western and African popular literature is the use

of the *continual pattern*, that is the focus on a continuing relationship between a man and woman. On the whole the similarities between the two forms, as Griswold and Bastin argue, exemplify the hegemonic influence of western popular literary culture on the domain of the production of popular literature in Africa. This tendency in fact was there even within Onitsha market literature. The Onitsha market writer J.A. Okeke Anyichie, in the preface to his novel *Adventures of the Four Stars*, complains about the difficulty of creating a proper cowboy or gangster novel in a country like Nigeria:

It is with profound practical experience of what happened in the Old Western Countries, the era of Texas gunslingers, the Cow Boys and the Red Indians; the idea with which I set to write the *Adventures of the Four Stars* depicting African guys in a set of Old Lagos Suburb. In the Western Countries of America they call it Wild Old West, but here in Africa, it is the era of the dope addicts and peddlers; the bad boys of Tinubu Square, the Wild Takwa Bar-Beach Boys..... But here is black Africa. Where the idea of Old Wild West of America, the days of the gunslingers and the hired gunmen, was a mere dream. With these thoughts I decided it would take another decade to produce tough guns. I mean like Robert Wanger, Billy the Kid, Jessy James and Durango Kid. ⁶¹

This particular writer exhibits a desire for the transfer not only of the western modes of popular representation but also the very experience which engenders such representations. The desire that Nigeria, or indeed Africa, should have its own Durango Kid and the rest of them, in order to provide proper real-life models for the writer of popular literature, is on the face ^{of} it patently ridiculous. However, Anyichie's view is only an exaggeration of a position which has its sophisticated variants in such cultural activities as the transfer of ancient culturally-specific academic traditions to Africa. Nevertheless, this sort of attitude demonstrates an unrelieved desire for the

mimetic reproduction of the dominant aesthetic paradigm that some of our popular writers exhibit, which is itself part of a specific view informing the selection of what norms and values of the west should be imported into Africa.

However, the majority of writers appear to demonstrate a desire to move beyond merely replicating western motifs. In fact, the Malawian popular writer Aubrey Kalitera sees the straight reproduction of western formulas as a sign of immaturity. In one of his lectures, directed at the aspiring popular writer, he chides writers like Anyichie, saying:

There is this feeling among our less experienced writers - it comes out plainly in their writing - that the local scene is so dull and that it can't have a story good enough for them to write. The feeling these people seem to have is that nothing worth writing about can and does happen in a society where pistols are not sold in shops like ball pens. It is writing from these uninformed people which contains armed bank robberies in Victoria Avenue (Malawi)! Fortunately, all such stories are a waste of time and are unequivocally thrown away at the publishing houses.

But then here, I am not against anybody writing, for example, detective stories. Only bear this in mind when writing them: the people who write detective stories in Europe or America do so with the idea of putting across something about the people and criminals of those areas. They do not write for us - even if we do read them! Their success is governed by how credible they are over there! Not here. ⁶²

It is the ethos represented by writers such as Aubrey Kalitera that has led to a creation of a popular literature which, while being situated in the historical and cultural contact between Europe and Africa, shows the possibility of developing a literary practice rooted in the immediate social context, discursive and material, of the African writer and his/her reader. The principal area of difference is narrative structure. Contemporary African popular literature is episodic. You can lose a character along the narrative journey when he or she

is no longer needed by the story. This is not new: the missionaries complained about the episodic nature of African vernacular literature. Again East's comments in this respect offer a good example:

The longer stories are merely a series of unrelated incidents, more or less loosely strung together by the narrator. The same incident indeed, often reappears in another story.⁶³

East blames this on the influence of orality:

This is natural, in view of the fact that up till now the art of story-telling has not yet progressed beyond the short-story stage. This will be apparent to anyone who has read a book of African folk-lore.⁶⁴

Griswold and Bastin have also noted the recurrence of the episodic structure in contemporary African popular fiction thus:

While some Nigerian romances follow this pattern (the western pattern) others have a much more episodic structure. The heroine's primary love interest may not appear until late in the novel, or may shift from one man to another in the sequential pattern. The novel may not end with the couple together forever, as in the ambiguous ending of *You Never Know* or the endings depicting the final rupturing of a love relationship in the *Hopeful Lovers*, *The Wages of Sin*...⁶⁵

What East perceives as a deficiency is seen by Griswold and Bastin as a positive stylistic value. They argue, and rightly so, that the episodic structure represents a different ideology underlying the practice of story-telling and narrative structuring in Africa. The requirement that a story exhibit organic unity, which is often presented as some timeless and universal truth, is in fact historically contingent and culturally specific. Thus the

focus in most of contemporary African popular literature, as in oral literature is in the movement of the story, without regard for the totality. The whole is important in so far as it produces an enjoyable story; thus if a character threatens to impede the story he or she is discarded and even replaced by another one. Thus the negation of structural coherence which is the hallmark of post-modernism, as Abiola Irele remarks, in Africa may be the most prosaic fact of creative practice rooted in the instability of the oral text itself. He says:

We did... not need Derrida and his Yale followers to remind us that a literary text 'deconstructs' itself even in its moment of production. Our oral literature provides sufficient evidence of this new intuition of Western scholarship.⁶⁶

In arguing that there is an area of difference between contemporary African and western popular literature consequent upon the former's resort to the oral narrative mode, one has to be careful of constructing a simplistic binary opposition predicated on a metaphysics of permanent difference, one that is blind to links between western popular literature and western orality. There is evidence to suggest that what Griswold and Bastin see as a unique feature of African literature is in fact common to all popular literature. As James Mellard shows in his article, 'Prolegomena to A Study of the Popular Mode in Narrative,' the utilisation of oral modes of narrative is not just confined to African popular literature nor only to popular literature in general; it can equally be found in western popular literature and indeed even high literature. He shows how, for example, Mark Twain in his short story, 'The celebrated frog of Calaveras County' uses the oral narrative mode for a work that is generally seen as part of American belles lettres.⁶⁷ Thus, popular literature as a stage in the shift from a predominantly oral culture to a chirographic one must be

seen as embodying elements of both domains, preserving the central function of the story in determining narrative structure typical of oral narrative whilst simultaneously submitting to the rigid rules of form that chirography seems on the whole to demand.⁶⁰ Even so, it would appear that whatever devices of oral narrative Mark Twain is employing, he is certainly not using the episodic structure that is characteristic of contemporary African literature. Perhaps what can be said in this respect about African popular literature, is that its uniqueness lies in the persistent use over generations of a specific mode of oral narrative, one clearly rooted in its own oral culture rather ^{than} the mere fact of using oral material, as Griswold and Bastin suggest. The obviousness of the oral form in African popular literature and its 'hidden' nature in western popular literature may be accounted for by the relative proximity to oral culture between the African popular writer and his/her western counterpart: the African is closer to a living oral culture than his/her western colleague whose link with his or her oral culture may be mediated by a number of secondary media, in which process his/her link with the original culture becomes less discernible.

Another area of difference between western and African popular literature is the representation of the social space. Whereas in western romance the story revolves around the fortunes of two lovers and the obstacles placed in their way to happiness, in African romantic fiction the solution to the problems of the heroine and the hero are generally facilitated by a relation or a friend. As Griswold and Bastin argue:

Thus while an Evbu or a Debola is 'on her own', both in terms of making her way within a large and unfamiliar city and figuring out her best options among a series of variously problematic men, the Nigerian reader or writer has little confidence that individual character or perseverance unsupported by social ties will be enough for her to succeed. There is no ideological *Pilgrim's*

Progress lurking in the background, advocating the renunciation of family and friends in the pursuit of self-interest, spiritual or economic. What there is in the background is a common sense that the solution to problems often requires a helping hand, and that an individual such as a romantic heroine loses none of her stature by accepting such a hand when it is offered.⁶⁹

The need for social support is seen even in the representation of the heroine of Okenwa Olisa's *Elizabeth My Lover*. Elizabeth's resistance of autocratic relations of traditional patriarchy is helped by her mother taking sides with her. This would suggest that the high regard accorded to the extended family or friendship in contemporary African popular literature, is in fact a continuation of the use of the social paradigm within African popular literature which was there in vernacular literature as well as in the intermediate stage represented by Onitsha market literature. One must, however, add that there are also, as can be expected, a number of novels in which the concerns of the individual lovers override the need to link them with the traditionally important network of social support. Such cases display a close resemblance to the western popular novel.

In short then, the norms and values which inform the production of African popular literature are both variegated: there is clear evidence of the utilisation of western as well as African aesthetic and cultural norms and values. The use of norms rooted within the African social and historical experience promises to liberate the domain of African popular literature from being merely a mimetic genre, one which is simply a purveyor of the western model.

There is still need to consider the relationship between author and publisher. Here one can isolate two relationships: the autonomous author-publisher, and the author who relies on someone else to publish his or her

works. In the first group of authors we have the example of writers such as David Maillu of Kenya and Aubrey Kalitera of Malawi. This practice is also evident in the production of high literature: the Cameroonian writer, Rene Philombe, has set up his own publishing company called 'Les Editions Semences.' Buchi Emecheta too has her own publishing company in Nigeria. Thus contemporary African popular literature does not have a monopoly over this practice. This practice is also evident in the production of Onitsha market literature. In order to show the operations of the author-publisher practice, I will concentrate on Aubrey Kalitera with whose work in this area I am most familiar. Kalitera used to publish his stories with established publishers; in fact his first novel, *A Taste of Business*, was published by Heinemann East Africa. He also published a number of short stories in the local press. It is not clear why he decided to set up his own company. However, one of the reasons might be that very few publishers are keen on publishing popular literature. As Per Gedin observes, transnational publishers in Africa are not keen to publish popular literature and the local publishers do not often have sufficient resources to allow them to take risks with either untried material or new authors. Kalitera has an old-fashioned printing press and works from his house. His company was first known as 'Sweet Surprise Publication' and he later changed it to 'Power Pen Books'. He uses colporteurs in order to market his books; they move from office to office and even stop people on the street to sell them books. Unfortunately, one time his agents did not return with the money, as he says in an interview with Bernth Lindfors.⁷⁰ As the example of Kalitera illustrates, the career of an author-publisher in Africa is fraught with immense financial and management problems. Kotei gives a story of the rise and fall of a number of such ventures.⁷¹ Even Maillu who is perhaps the most successful author-publisher has had some difficulties managing his company: his

'Comb Publishing Company' went bankrupt. He has however recovered and set up another publishing company called the 'Maillu Publishing Company'. The only advantage of this kind of relationship between author and publisher is that it allows an author such a degree of freedom that he can take more risks than when his work is scrutinised by an in-house editor who may not believe in the worth of popular literature or, indeed, who may have a different taste in popular literature from the author. Maillu's type of popular literature would not have been published by any of the Nairobi-based companies before he himself had proven that such literature was a viable commercial proposition.⁷² However, this freedom may also give rise to sloppiness in the writing and production of books. Kalitera's and Maillu's books sometimes have grammatical mistakes and even typographical errors which could have been attended to if the manuscripts had been handled by a professional editor. However, publishing through an established publisher may not necessarily and always guarantee perfection of presentation as the presence of errors in novels published in the Macmillan Pacesetters series demonstrates.

Whatever the weaknesses of the author-publishers, the present limited publishing resources in Africa are such that this kind of effort should be encouraged. There is however a growing appreciation for this kind of literature among the established publishers. Heinemann East Africa, Macmillan, and even the Oxford University Press (East Africa) are among the transnational companies engaged in the production and distribution of African popular literature. Indigenous publishing houses have also joined in, among which are the following: East African Publishing House, Oniboje Publishers of Nigeria, Fagbamigbe Publishers of Nigeria, Spectrum of Nigeria and Afram of Ghana. There is very little known about the relationship between a popular author and his or her publisher. For example, one does not know the extent to which authors who are

published by transnational companies are asked to conform to the norms and values of western popular narrative. There is need here for an empirical study, one which would compare the publications of author-publishers and those published through regular publishers, be they transnational or local. The most that can be said at the moment is that in the area of mediation the publications by indigenous publishers do not receive as wide a circulation as those published by transnationals. As the experience of Griswold and Bastin shows:

Novels put out by smaller Nigerian publishers or those who concentrate on popular fiction only may be underrepresented. English-based publishers such as Macmillan are probably also favored. Also underrepresented are some lines of novels whose formulaic status is unquestionable; for example, we know the publishing house of Fagbamigbe puts out a line of 'Eagle Romances,' but we have only been able to locate one title from this line in the United State.... Such selection biases, we believe may unduly emphasise those Nigerian romances that are the least formulaic, the most deviant from the western genre.⁷³

This is the case within Africa itself where movement from one region to another is still difficult. Maillu has managed to attract the attention of West African critics but not that of the readers, as Apronti's article would imply.⁷⁴ It is also true that apart from Ekwensi, there is very little locally published west African popular literature that is available in East, Central and Southern Africa. So the only means by which popular literature is mediated continentally still remains the transnational publisher. The Macmillan Pacesetters Series texts are issued locally both in Nairobi and Lagos, but no one on the other side of the continent will have heard of the 'Eagle Romances' or the 'Sunshine Romances' of Akure and Ibadan. It can only be concluded that the extent to which African popular literature is indigenous continues to be problematic.

Both at the level of production and mediation, those values and channels which constitute its relations and essential means of production and reproduction, are so intertwined with the general unequal relations between the metropole and the periphery that perhaps the uniqueness of contemporary African popular literature lies in the very special and ambiguous circumstances within which it is fashioned.

The same would be true of the domain of reception itself. The target audience of the literature is essentially urbanised, those who are most likely to read western popular literature. The illiterate or semi-illiterate peasants of the rural areas are certainly not the intended audience of the writers of popular romances and thrillers in Africa. Within the readership, as Griswold and Bastin's study would suggest, there is a growing gendered differentiation of literary reception, particularly in Nigeria. Romantic novels written by Onitsha writers seem to have been targeted at both male and female readers; however, it would appear that there are now romances which are produced for and read by women only. This is likely to be an influence of the division between masculine and feminine genre within western popular literature.⁷⁶ The most likely effect of the gendering of genre is that there will be genres whose sole purpose will be the unabashed reproduction of dominant gender ideology. The complexity of gender representation that is evident in the popular literary texts being produced currently is bound to degenerate into a formulaic representation of gender stereotypes. That would be essentially reproducing the worst aspects of western popular literature. One hopes that the general popular literature series, the ones which do not specialise along gendered genres, like the Macmillan Pacesetters Series will neutralise the influence of the romance lines that are mushrooming on the continent, particularly in Nigeria.

Conclusion

I have tried to show that in every instance the form and thematic content of African popular literature have been determined by its conditions of production embedded deeply in the general encounter between Europe and Africa. Underlying this state of affairs, is a continuing tension between the *centripetal* tendency, that is the search for an authentically African way of occupying the domain of the popular within the African literary system and the *centrifugal* one manifested in the desire to reproduce the western models. I do not think that this tension will be resolved easily, but it is out of it that a new popular literature, which responds to the totality of the experience of the contemporary African whose roots are as much in the imported culture of the west as in the ancestral groves of his native village, will eventually and slowly emerge. The attention this domain of literature is receiving from both the writers and critics of high literature will increase awareness of its significance. Nevertheless, the study of popular literature still remains an embattled terrain, something constantly in need of justification since its very name normatively signifies a lack of those qualities which are deemed requisite in an object that will give a satisfactory aesthetic experience. I have to pay my debt, in the next chapter, in the form of an elaboration of why I think this sort of literature deserves the kind of detailed attention that I give it.

NOTES

1. Duff Macdonald, *Africana or the Heart of Heathen Africa* (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1882, reprinted with an introduction, 1969), p. 261.
2. M. W. Retief, *William Murry of Nyasaland*, trans. Mary H. Le Roux and M.M. Oberholter-le Roux (Lovedale: The Lovedale Press, 1958)
3. Femi Osofisan, 'The Alternative Tradition: An Insider's Postscript,' in Albert S. Gerard, *European Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa I-II* (Akademia Kiado, Budapest: The International Comparative Literature Association, 1986), p. 783.
4. R. M. East, 'A First Essay in Imaginative African Literature,' in *Africa*, 9, No. 3 (July, 1936), p. 351.
5. A. Victor Murray, *The School in the Bush* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1929), p. 146-148.
6. R. M East, Op. Cit., p. 354.
7. Robert Laws, *Reminiscences of Livingstonia* (London: 1934), p. 138. However, in his letter to the Chief Secretary, Zomba, of 10th December 1925, Laws appears to show a marked respect for the local languages and presents a convincing argument for encouraging English: 'The knowledge of and use of English will do much to bring together the natives and their rulers, removing misunderstandings, and preventing friction, and promoting mutual and loyal help.' Anyone familiar with the intensity of the language issue in relation to ethnicity in contemporary Africa is bound to see in Laws' statement, one way of handling a diversity which often leads to incessant political conflict. Even so, Laws' attitude to local languages appears, on the whole, to be negative, though his reasons for holding such a position are perfectly honourable. See Robert Laws, 'Education 1922-1938' 'Livingstonia Correspondence' (Zomba, Malawi National Archives). I am indebted for this source and a great deal of other primary sources for this chapter to Dr. John McCracken, History Department, Stirling University, who made available to me his own private research notes. I also benefitted from the discussions I had with Dr. Peter Foster, Department of Sociology, University of Hull, who, also, provided me with his own research notes on mission history in Malawi. For some of my sources on the intellectual life in precolonial and early colonial West Africa, I am indebted to Dr. Robin Law, History Department, Stirling University. Dr. Robert Laws was the founder of the Livingstonia Mission which finally was located at Khondowe in Northern Malawi.
8. T. Cullen Young, 'The 'Native' Newspaper,' in *Africa*, 11, No. 1 (1938), p. 63. For an in-depth discussion of Young's interest in vernacular literature, see Peter Forster, *T. Cullen Young: Missionary and Anthropologist* (Hull: Hull University Press, 1989). Cullen Young was a missionary with the Livingstonia Mission from the twenties to the thirties.
9. T. Cullen Young, 'Vernacular Periodical, no. 4. *Vyaru na Vyaru* (Other Lands). Tumbuka, Nyasaland,' *Africa*, No. 4 (January, 1931), p. 13. For a detailed discussion of the relationship between popular literature and ideology within a colonial African social formation, see Hangson Msiska, 'The Development of

Popular literature in Malawi' in *Inter-Arts*, 1, No. 4 (1987), pp. 13-14, and p. 22.

10. Andrew Roberts, 'African Cross Currents,' in Andrew Roberts (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Africa Vol. 7. 1905-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 235-237.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 236.

12. Samuel Obiechina, *An African Popular Literature: A Study of Onitsha Market Pamphlets* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 5-6; 91-93.

13. Andrew Roberts, *Op. Cit.*, p. 235.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*, p. 233-234.

16. See John McCracken, 'Coercion and Control in Nyasaland: Aspects of the History of A Colonial Police Force,' in *Journal of African History*, 27(1986), pp. 127-147; and Martin Chanock, 'The New Men Revisited: An Essay on the Development of Political Consciousness in Colonial Malawi,' in Roderick Macdonald, *From Nyasaland to Malawi: Studies in Colonial History* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1975), pp. 234-253

17. A. Victor Murray, *Op. Cit.*, p. 201.

18. See Daniel Kunene, 'Problems in Creating Creative Writing: The Example of Southern Africa,' *Review of National Literatures*, 2, No. 2 (1971), p. 89.

19. Foucault's argument essentially assumes the existence of a permanent state of ideological 'contradictoriness' so that every form of subjection elicits a corresponding form of resistance. Michel Foucault's position in this respect is well summarised by Alan Sheridan, *Michel Foucault: The Will To Truth* (London: Tav/stock, 1980), p. 139.

20. Mikhail Bakhtin uses the term *monoglossia* in order to refer to the impression created by dominant ideology that there is a single ideological discourse within the social formation. He argues that social formations are in fact characterised by *heteroglossia*, a discursive plurality.

21. The Christian Literature Association in Malawi publishes a form of popular literature which presents the regular themes of secular literature in a Christian idiom.

22. Obiechina, *Op. Cit.*, p. 37-39.

23. See Kole Omotoso, *Discovering African Literature* (Unpublished manuscript), p. 76.

24. East, *Op. Cit.*, p. 357

25. A number of critics have belaboured the marketing aspect of Onitsha market literature, not as a way of explaining its links with the general mode of

cultural and economic production in Nigeria, but as a kind of titillating anthropological phenomenon.

26. See G.G. Darah, 'Literary Development in Nigeria,' in *Perspectives On Nigerian Literature*, Op. Cit., p. 5.

27. David Kerr, 'Mchira Wa Buluzi: The Process of Creating a Popular vernacular Play,' (Unpublished manuscript), p. 4.

28. See Okenwa Olisa, 'Elizabeth My Lover,' in Obiechina, Op. Cit., p. 6 of the Appendix.

29. 'The Book of Ruth,' in *The New English Bible With the Apocrypha* (Oxford and Cambridge: Oxford and Cambridge University Presses, 1970), p. 298.

30. Obiechina, Op. Cit., p. 39.

31. Ibid., pp. 18-19 of the Appendix.

32. G.G. Darah, Op. Cit., p. 7.

33. Obiechina, Op. Cit., p. 48.

34. Ibid., p. 19.

35. Ibid., p. 21-22

36. A. Victor Murray, Op. Cit., p. 177 and 179.

37. In his essay, *The Form of the African Novel* (Lagos: McQick Publishers, 1979), the Nigerian writer and critic Kole Omotoso has lamented the stylistic backwardness of contemporary African literature.

38. Elizabeth Pyse, 'Getting into Perspective,' *Nigerian Magazine*, 74, (1962): quoted by Susan Greenstein, 'Cyprian Ekwensi and Onitsha Market Literature,' in *Spectrum: Monography Series in the Humanities and Sciences*, 3, (June, 1973), p. 183.

39. Susan Greenstein, Op. Cit., p. 183.

40. Ernest Emenyonu, 'Cyprian Ekwensi,' in *Perspectives on Nigerian Literature: 1700 to the Present*, Vol. 2 (Lagos: Guardian Books Nigeria, 1988), p. 27.

41. Abiola Irele, 'Literary Criticism in the Nigerian Context,' in *Perspectives on Nigerian Literature: 1700 to the Present* Vol. 1 (Lagos: Guardian Books Nigeria), p. 105.

42. 'Interview with Cyprian Ekwensi,' in Bernth Lindfors (ed.), *Dem-Say: Interviews with Eight Nigerian Writers* (Austin: African And Afro-Caribbean Studies and Research Centre, 1974), p. 28: quoted by Bernth Lindfors, *Powre Above Powres 8: Nigeria's First Novelists* (Mysore: The Centre for Commonwealth Literature and Research, University of Mysore, 1986), p. 21.

43. Michael Echeruo, 'The Fiction of Cyprian Ekwensi,' in *Nigeria Magazine*, No. 75 (1962), p. 63. Cited by Bernth Lindfors, *Powre Above Powres 8: Nigeria's First Novelists* (Mysore: The Centre for Commonwealth Literature and Research, University of Mysore, 1986), p. 26.
44. Austin Shelton, 'Rebushing or Ontological Recession to Africanism: Jagua's Return to the Village,' in *Presence Africaine*, 18, No. 46 (1963), p. 49. Cited by Bernth Lindfors, *Ibid.*, p. 29.
45. Eric Ambler used the thriller in order to present a socialist vision of society. In the six novels he wrote before the Second World War, he attempted to express a social vision, in many respects, equal to those of high literature. In *Epitaph for a Spy* (1938), at the end of the novel we see the hero, Schmler, convert from social democracy to communism. Thus, it is erroneous to hold the view that every text that seems to say something serious belongs to high literature or that all texts belonging to the popular literature category have nothing serious to say.
46. Femi Osofisan, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 785-786.
47. S.I.A. Kotei, *The Book Today in Africa*, (Paris: Unesco, 1981), pp. 143-144.
48. Paraphrase by Kotei, *Op. Cit.*, p. 141.
49. See Hangson Msiska and Helmut Hauptmeier, 'The Production and Mediation of Literature in Malawi,' in the *Proceedings of the International Conference On International Literary Systems Held at the University of Kanazawa, Japan, 1988*. (Forthcoming). Siegfried Schmidt, *Foundations for the Empirical Study of Literature: The Components of a Basic Theory* (Hamburg: Helmut Buske Verlag, 1982); Robert Escarpit, *Sociology of Literature*, trans. Ernest Pick (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1977)
50. East, *Op. Cit.*, p. 352.
51. Obiechina, *Op. Cit.*, p. 12.
52. *Ibid.*
53. *Ibid.*
54. Aubrey Kalitera, 'Part V. Beginning to write and Keeping on Writing,' in *Sweet Mag*, (Blantyre, Malawi: Sweet Surprise Publications), 6, (April, 1982), p. 87-89.
55. Obiechina, *Op. Cit.*, p. 12.
56. Kotei, *Op. Cit.*, p. 144.
57. Wendy Griswold and Misty Bastian, 'Continuities and Reconstructions In Cross-cultural Literary Transmission: The case of the Nigerian Romance Novel,' *Poetics*, 16 (1987), p. 329.
59. *Ibid.*

59. Ibid.
60. Ibid., p. 329.
61. Obiechina, Op. Cit., p. 97.
62. Kalitera, *Sweet Mag*, 3, (November, 1981), p. 82.
63. East, Op. Cit., p. 253.
64. Ibid.
65. Griswold and Bastin, Op. Cit., p. 344.
66. Irele, Op. Cit., p. 100.
67. James Mellard, 'Prologomena to A Study of The Popular Mode in Narrative,' *Journal of Popular Culture*, 6, (1972), pp. 1-19.
68. See Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (Methuen: London and New York, 1982). I realise that Ong⁰⁹ makes rather unwarranted generalisations about the cognitive differences between a chirographic and oral culture, but his comments on the stylistic shifts from orality to chirography shed some light on the problem I am looking at.
69. Griswold and Bastin, Op. Cit., p. 347.
70. See 'Interview with Aubrey Kalitera,' in Bernth Lindfors, *Kulankula: Interviews With Writers From Malawi and Lesotho*, African Studies Series (Bayreuth: Eckhard Breitingen, 1989), pp. 3-13.
71. Kotei, Op. Cit., p. 75-86.
72. Per Gedin, 'Publishing in Africa - Autonomous and Transnational: A view from Outside,' *Development Dialogue: A journal of International Development Cooperation* Published by the Dag Hammarskjold Foundation Uppsala, 1-2, (1984), p. 104.
73. Griswold and Bastin, Op. Cit., p. 323.
74. E. O. Apronti, 'David G. Maillu and His Readers,' in *Pacific Quarterly*: MOANA, 6, No. 3, (1981), pp. 162-175.
75. The dichotomy between masculine and feminine genre in western popular literature is⁰ discussed in Janet Batsleer, Tony Davies, Rebecca O'Rourke and Chris Weedon, *Rewriting English: Cultural Politics of Gender and Class* (London: Methuen, New Accents, 1985), pp. 70-139.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF DIFFERENCE: AFRICAN POPULAR LITERATURE AND GENDER IDEOLOGY

Whatever their weakness may be, these novels are clearly helping in the cultivation of the reading habit amongst Kenyans, and, in any case, it is better to read local trash than imported trash.

(Henry Chakava, 1977)¹

I would disagree with Chakava when he espouses that it is better to read 'local trash' than 'imported trash'. Trash is trash no matter where or who produces it.

(A. B. Odaga, 1978)²

Why is it that the text, the many texts, the many signifying practices which are present in any social formation have yielded, as the administered curriculum of literary studies, these ten books up to the top; then these twenty books with a question mark above them; then those fifty books which we know about but which we only need to read very quickly; and then those hundreds and thousands of texts nobody ever reads? That hierarchy itself, which constitutes the selective tradition in literary studies, becomes the first object to be interrogated.

(Stuart Hall, 1978)³

Clearly the study of contemporary African popular literature is fraught with numerous theoretical problems. There are problems regarding the status of such literature as well about what methods should be employed in studying it. As can be expected, the number and range of views is wide. I will, nonetheless, attempt to summarise the important ones among them, with the purpose of offering an appraisal, on the basis of which a more sympathetic and

theoretically rigorous approach can be devised. In the first part of the chapter therefore, I shall be concerned mostly with showing the deficiencies both ⁱⁿ those positions which are against and those which support the production and study of African popular literature. I shall also be arguing that it is only within the post-Saussurian problematic that the study of contemporary African popular literature can move beyond the plot summaries offered by literary critics and the anthropological approaches which collapse the literature to its conditions of production without paying due regard to its discursive integrity as a specific mode of literary signification. In the second part, I propose a theoretical framework for the analysis of the representation of gender ideology in African popular literature. The approach brings together the functionalist approach to ideology proposed by Louis Althusser and the structural one advanced by Michel Foucault. It seems to me more profitable and helpful in the study of gendered subjectivity in contemporary African literature to combine the paradigmatic qualities of the Althusserian project with the syntagmatic trajectory of Michel Foucault. In both the opposition between high and low literature and that between male and female, the politics of representation seem to play a significant role in the social construction of difference.

A. THE POLITICS OF VALUATION

1. *Defending Moral Standards: Eustace Palmer and Bernth Lindfors*

To put it simply, very few critics consider popular literature worth the effort of a discerning critic. In Africa, apart from anything else, the principal reason such literature is considered low is ethical and moral. As Odaga's statement illustrates, the view that all popular literature corrupts is wide spread. In fact, one critic has said this kind of literature is good only for those who wish to learn about crime and such vices. E. Kezilahabi argues that 'these stories can really entertain and amuse, but the truth is they can provide education beneficial to thugs whose activities have escalated in our society.'⁴ Nowhere is this view more cogently expressed than in Eustace Palmer's evaluation of Ekwensi's *Jagua Na na* where he argues that:

Ekwensi hardly ever manifests a consistent moral attitude, his main preoccupation being the sensationalism created by vice.... What is Ekwensi's attitude to *Jagua*? This is central to one's evaluation. There is no doubt that *Jagua* is an immoral woman. Unlike *Moll Flanders*, she does not turn to prostitution because there is no other means of survival in a money-conscious man's world. She refuses several offers of marriage from the local boys with whom she has had sexual experiences, on the grounds that they are not sufficiently expert. *Jagua* is a nymphomaniac with a crazy passion for sex and the bright lights of Lagos. *Moll Flanders* at least was only kept by one man at a time; *Jagua* on the other hand is not content with one man..... All these faults might have been pardoned if she ever showed signs of remorse... One would expect a serious novelist to show some signs of disapproval of *Jagua's* conduct, but instead Ekwensi seems to try to persuade the reader to share his captivation with her: there is very little criticism, either of her or of the threat which the dangerous Lagos underworld presents to civilised standards.... The style is obviously that of the sex-and-crime school.⁵

Certainly, this is far from being the sort of objective literary criticism that Palmer himself recommends:

I will never accept that the critic should allow his commitment to influence his criticism.... He must

approach the work in question with an open mind, honestly prepared to evaluate and illuminate what he finds there. It is dangerous for any critic to try to read his ideological prejudices and preoccupations into a work. 6

The intrusion of Palmer's ideology into his critical practice is obvious: the passage I have cited is more of a sermon than the calm reflection that Palmer in his sober moments regards as the hallmark of critical practice. The form of ideological intervention operating here involves shifting the attributes of a character to its author in a trajectory where the relationship between author and implied author is never problematised. Chinweizu et al have criticised Palmer for being Eurocentric, but I think he hails from a more specific place: the same ideological spot from which the Aberdonian Duff Macdonald was declaring that literature was the means through which the 'native's' soul would be 'purified'. In other words, in Palmer we see the triumph of the 'civilising' mission of literature rooted in the production aesthetics and the critical practice initiated by the missionaries. Underlying such a critical attitude is a belief that the study of literature has to do with promoting specific moral values. Notwithstanding the commendable quest for a critical practice that responds to the onerous task of nation building and cultural engineering, the fundamental problem with such a position, at any rate as regards its articulation by Palmer, is that it is blind to its own ideology and more keen to remove the speck from the eye of the other than on removing its own. This is a demonstration of the inherent contradiction in a form of literary criticism which purports to neutrality in a world where one man's neutrality might be another's clear ideological articulation. As Roland Barthes reminds us:

The subject of the analysis (the critic, the philologist, the scholar) cannot in fact, without bad faith and smugness, believe he is external to the

language he is describing. His exteriority is only quite provisional and apparent: he too is in language, and he must assume his insertion, however 'rigorous' and 'objective' he may wish to be, into the triple knot of the subject, the signifier, and the *Other* - an insertion which writing (the text) fully accomplishes, without having recourse to the hypocritical distance of a fallacious metalanguage.⁷

The critic like the writer is located in the discursive and ideological formations within which his or her subjectivity is inscribed and produced. However, if in Palmer we have a scarcely veiled moral criticism, in Bernth Lindfors we encounter its more subtle version in which the defence of the category of high literature from the encroachment of what he terms the 'weed' is presented as a disinterested defence of aesthetic standards, where such standards are presented as a matter of *common sense knowledge*, in the Gramscian sense, among the practitioners of literary criticism. Bernth Lindfors, notwithstanding his consistent dedication to the study of African popular literature, presents himself as the apostle of the critical standards threatened by the emergence of this kind of writing. His is a combination of the outright didacticism of Palmer and the defence of aesthetic standards. In his assessment of the future of East African popular literature he expresses the fear that what had for a long time been perceived as a literary desert might in fact produce more literary weed than crop. He says:

It is perhaps too early to estimate the commercial success of these numerous experiments in local popular publishing, but the impact such books are going to have on the direction of the literary movement in East Africa seems clear enough already. The literary desert, after a slow and tentative initial flowering, is now germinating its first full harvest of weeds... The important questions for the future may well be: can East Africa sustain a wholesome variety of literary efflorescence or will it be increasingly dominated by the coarser vegetables and saplings? Will the proliferation of popular literature crowd out or stunt

the serious writing? Will new writers be inclined to produce pulp for easy publication and easy money or will they strive to communicate socially relevant messages in complex literary forms?®

Thus in the literary garden, to use Lindfors' metaphor, popular literature is the encroachment of *nature* on *culture*. The metaphysics, the norm system, underlying the construction of binary difference in Lindfors' project are hardly concealed: the supposed inherent propensity towards over-production of the weed threatens the economy of the privileged scarcity of the province of high literature. The critic must thus intervene in the domain of production and legislate on the proper boundaries. The critic is here truly inserted in a juridical discourse and is the very means by which dominant aesthetic ideology is enforced. The privileging of culture over nature is presented as a defence of cognitive value: it is argued that only 'serious' literature is capable of communicating 'socially relevant messages in a complex way.' First, the assumption that simplicity of form is tantamount to simplicity of content and conversely is logically not tenable. Secondly, the assumption that social messages can only be adequately represented through complex form leads Lindfors into an uncomfortable contradiction. One presumes that a socially relevant message will be one which will be comprehensible to as many members of a particular society as possible and if that is true then certainly if such a message were rendered in a complex way there is a high probability that there would be many members of that society who might be shocked to learn that the complex message which had befuddled them was in fact intended for them. The contradiction essentially arises out of the inclusiveness of the concept 'society' and the exclusiveness implied in the notion of 'complexity'. Underlying it all, is a view that rates the cognitive capacity of popular literature low.

In this regard, Rajimund Ohly is more forthright than Lindfors. In his essay, 'Swahili Pop Literature: The Case of Mbunda Msokile,' Ohly constructs a binary opposition between popular and high literature which is predicated on their relative capacity to embody cognitive and aesthetic value. He argues that:

The differences between popular literature and standard literature are clear-cut: pop literature constitutes an objectivised reproduction of emotions which were caused by the author's or others' experience, presented in an attractive form. On the other hand, standard literature is based on three complexes: the cognitive-instrumental, the moral-practical and the aesthetic-expressive. In other words, pop literature aims at stimulating emotions, while standard literature aims at stimulating cognitive processes. Both are concerned with everyday practice, but while standard works search for normative, social and psychological truth, pop literature is satisfied with general human truth whereby intellectual argumentation is combined with the demand for authenticity.⁹

While including the moral argument against popular literature that is evident in Palmer's and Lindfors' strictures, Ohly introduces cognitive and aesthetic capacity as important distinguishing characteristics between the two forms. In short the difference between the two forms is conceived of in terms of emotion versus cognition. Again, we are confronted with a view of literature which is predicated on the assumption that the distinction between popular literature and high literature lies in their intrinsic textual differences. It is certainly not true that popular literature is all emotion and high literature is all reason and thought. This binary opposition, underlying which is a metaphysics which constructs emotion and cognition as polar opposites, smoothes over the complexity of the relationship between emotion and thought in literary production. High literature as much as low literature uses emotion and it is

equally true that popular literature too can embody cognitive value. One must underscore the cultural signification of the terms of Ohly's argument. The terms 'emotion' and 'reason' have a determinate history in the critical practice of African literature. The French anthropologist, Arthur Gobineau, in his work *Sur l'egalite des races humaines* uses the opposition between reason and emotion as a basis for arguing that since the Negro race is oriented towards emotion and the Caucasian race towards reason, the former is inferior to the latter. The exponents of Negritude, in a feat similar to what Jonathan Dollimore terms *transgressive mimesis*, celebrate those very qualities which Gobineau sees as accounting for the inferiority of the Negro.¹⁰ The strategy of transgressive mimesis which leads the Negritude theorist to the romanticisation of the African past has been widely criticised as pandering to a dangerous racism, rooted in a dubious scientific discourse of race. Thus, when Ohly uses the same opposition in accounting for the difference between African popular and high literature, one is bound to view it as a project which, like Gobineau's and that of the Negritudists, transfers matters of cultural difference to the domain of a crude biologism. In Ohly's presentation of the difference between popular literature the hierarchy of aesthetic values is secured through an appeal to a socially constructed corresponding biological structure.

That aside, there is a much more profound problem in Ohly's argument. Why should the representation of 'emotion produced by the author himself or others' be inferior to the moral-practical or the aesthetic expressive? Why should the representation of a 'general human truth' be inferior to the concern with the psychological, social and normative truth? It is in his assumption of the self-evidentness of such normative statements that we encounter the operations of what Antonio Gramsci terms *common sense knowledge*, that is the representation of the arbitrary structure of values operating in a given social

formation as obviously and objectively true. As Gramsci has reminded us, it is in those assumptions that are presented as natural that specific forms of ideological hegemony are secured." In this case, what is being underwritten is a specific metaphysics and class structure. It is implied that popular literature is easy and most likely something that is read by those with less cognitive competence. In other words, we encounter here the shift from the simplicity of the text to that of its readers and producers, which is common in the discussion of the relationship between popular literature and its reception. It is in this sense that Ohly's argument can be seen as a conservative paradigm, one which merely presents a closed social and cultural model where the possibility of transformation is non-existent.

2. *The Defence of Popular Literature*

The use of aesthetic criteria in determining literary value forces Marxist critics into an extremely difficult position. Femi Osofisan accepts the value of popular literature in so far as it serves the socialist ideal of equal access to cultural production and reception. He argues that without Ekwensi literature would have remained the exclusive domain of the elite. Nevertheless, socialist egalitarianism gives way, in the same essay, to the reinstatement of the hierarchic literary relations on the grounds that popular literature is aesthetically inferior to high literature. The egalitarianism operating within the discourse of access is undermined by the hierarchy of aesthetic value:

It is good, I think, to develop a literature that is accessible to the masses, if only to sustain a continuous literate tradition beyond the colleges. But entertainment in art always carries its dangers, in that the writer can be easily tempted to forsake his

responsibilities to the public, and, as illustrated by Euro-American practitioners, to indulge in highlighting only those aspects of human experience that are unquestionably base, frivolous and primitive, all for the sake of quick wealth. In an age when moral values are constantly brushed aside in the mad rush for material wealth, there will always be a ready market for the trivial and the vulgarly erotic, an easy temptation for cheap talent and depraved publishers. Our civilization is endangered when Achebe and Soyinka are driven off the stalls by Osahon or Onyeama, or even by flesh rags like the *Lagos Weekend* and *Ikebe*.¹²

Osofisan's ambivalent attitude to contemporary African popular literature evinces a profound and contradictory approach to popular literature that Tony Bennett has attributed to the fact that most Marxist critics use the same traditional aesthetics of bourgeois critical practice in their valuation of popular literature. He points out that:

Popular fiction has been a neglected area of study within Marxism; that the bulk of Marxist critical attention has focused on the canonized tradition is incontestable..... The point that Marxist critics have, for the great part, merely mirrored bourgeois criticism, accepting its valuations and duplicating its exclusions, remains valid. If the gravitational pull of the concept of Literature has proved well-nigh irresistible with regard to the way the 'canon' has been approached and conceptualised, the pull of the mass-culture critique has proved equally strong in relation to the way Marxists have studied popular forms. The result has been, for a science which claims to be revolutionary, a highly paradoxical history in which Marxist criticism has functioned largely corroboratively in relation to the distinctions forged by bourgeois criticism.¹³

The defence of the canon against the presumed destructiveness of popular literature is heard loud and clear in Osofisan's anxiety that Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe might be driven off the shelves by the writers of popular literature. There is also the fear that the entertainment function is inimical

to aesthetic value. In Osofisan's project, therefore, there is a lack of the sort of contestation of bourgeois aesthetics which a truly egalitarian Marxist position must undertake.

Similarly, Stephen Arnold's Marxist analysis of Tanzanian popular literature dismisses all the Tanzanian popular literature written in English as cheap imitations of western popular literature. Commenting on the impact of the collapse of the East African Community on Tanzanian Culture, he argues that:

Tanzanian-English popular literature staples like *Inspector Rajabu Investigates and Other Stories* were never plentiful, and since better things have replaced them, they are probably unlamented..... No doubt the humour magazine *Joe*, from Nairobi, is missed by many. Even if the borders open again, the ban is unlikely to be lifted on the regional pornography heavy weight Maillu.¹⁴

On the whole Arnold's essay shows a partiality to the ideologically sound Kiswahili popular literature. I must confess from the plot summaries Arnold offers, these texts seem incredibly boring: they are texts about improving crop production and other similar practical subjects. It is not surprising that the texts are seen generally as part of the adult literacy campaign. I am not sure that I would describe such government-sponsored effort as popular literature; it seems to me that the texts paradoxically fall in the same didactic mode as the missionary school readers which, like the Tanzanian texts, merely use the medium of literature as a surface coating for an ideology that is offered as a finished product. To say this is not to diminish the significance of Arnold's concern with the hegemonic influence of western popular literature nor his call for the study of vernacular popular literature, but rather it is to underscore the point that dismissing the popular literature written in English, as in Arnold's case, is symptomatic of the dominant Marxist position which regards all popular

literary texts as bearers of capitalist ideology and the means by which the development of false consciousness is secured. Such a position, as Tony Bennett has reminded us, simplifies the relationship between ideology and the domains of literary production and reception both as it relates to popular literature and high literature.¹⁵

The implicit argument within Marxist critical practice that the only justification for popular literature in Africa is its positive function in supporting literacy is more clearly articulated by Henry Chakava when he argues that though popular literary texts are stylistically weak they should be tolerated because they help in the cultivation of the reading habit.¹⁶ This kind of defence, like those which denounce popular literature outright, is predicated on the view that popular literature is intrinsically inferior to high literature. It does not problematise the very topography of difference, according to which the boundaries between popular and high literature are drawn. It is the same problem we encounter in the sociological and anthropological studies of literature such as Obiechina's and Nancy Schmidt's. Such studies merely reduce popular literature to its sociological or anthropological value, using it as a transparent window into the culture of a given people. The whole question of mimesis and representation is hardly perceived as problematic in this kind of critical practice as it is presumed that popular literature, like other social or anthropological phenomena, reproduces the 'hard' sociological or anthropological fact.

On the whole, the defence of popular literature seems extremely weak either as a result of subscribing to the same relations of literary difference as maintained by those who are against popular literature, or as a consequence of defending it on grounds that would not ordinarily be considered sufficient criteria for according literary value to a text. Thus, in general, those who

defend African popular ^{literature} do not seem to dispute its presumed inferiority in relation to high literature, but merely ask that though inferior it be seen as important in so far as it serves cultural functions other than those which are purely literary. This defence of literary value cuts across ideological affiliation in a form of consensus produced by a determinate mode of critical practice, which Abiola Irele has described as a 'hieratic conception of literature.'

The defence of literary value in Africa arises out of the institutional reproduction of a specific mode of critical practice whose founding cornerstone is the hierarchic structure of literary relations both within the domain of high literature and between popular and high literature. Recounting his undergraduate days at the University of Ibadan, Abiola Irele maps out some of the means by which a specific form of Anglo-American criticism has been entrenched in the institutional practice of African literary criticism:

In my undergraduate days in the late 50s, we studied literature at Ibadan within the fairly rigorous but comfortable doctrinal positions defined by the Practical Criticism of the Cambridge scholars, I.A Richards and F.R Leavis, extended in its canons and procedures by their North American counterparts of the so-called school of 'New Criticism.' In a real sense, this is, by and large the dominant approach to the study of literature in Nigerian universities even today. But anyone who has tried to follow the development of literary criticism and theories of literature in the West soon becomes aware that this approach has become an old hat. 17

The notion of the great tradition which receives full expression in F.R. Leavis's book *The Great Tradition* and T.S. Eliot's essay *Tradition and Individual Talent* ^{the} is central to the values which underpin the 'administered curriculum' and its critical practice in the continent. When transplanted to a colonial formation

such as the one within which Irele grew up this kind of ideological defence of a set of aesthetic criteria based on a combination of morality with secular religion has the effect of, as Chris Baldick has rightly observed, erecting itself as an incontestable value system without which the very notion of literature is inconceivable. Kole Omotoso suggests that this form of purportedly apolitical criticism also becomes the means by which colonial discursive practice inscribes the colonial subject within an ideological formation where the constructed distinction between politics and literature is constituted as a strategy by which the colonial subject is prevented from developing the cultural means of ideological resistance.¹⁹ Thus, the task of the African critic working within this problematic, like that of his European counterpart, becomes one in which critical practice, to quote Irele again, is perceived as 'the cultivation of a minority culture whose natural institutional centre is the university.' Irele goes on to show the cultural exclusiveness which the defence of literary value has led to in African universities:

In the substitution of literature for religion, criticism came to play a role as kind of cult for the elect - a word which one notices is a variant of 'elite'. In this cult, terms such as 'maturity,' 'sincerity,' 'disinterestedness,' 'significance' and above all 'life' took on an almost liturgical ring. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the literature seminar became in this closed world the celebration of an aesthetic mass, with its priest and acolytes. For the latter the ascetic scrutiny of the literary text represented a form of initiation into the mysteries of the moral and spiritual life.¹⁹

The penchant for *this* approach has led to the canonization of a few texts, such as those by Achebe, Soyinka and Ngugi. Irele bemoans the fact that so much Nigerian literature, including popular literature, is never included in the body of texts considered worth critical attention. He mentions how a generation

of young Nigerian writers is hardly included on the syllabi of Nigerian universities. It is indicative of the magnitude of the problem when, in replying to Irele, Dan Izevbaye, a staunch supporter of the Leavisite position, says he cannot find the texts in the bookshop of the University of Ibadan. More apposite to our purposes, the situation has led to a mere transfer of European relations of literary difference into the African literary system without raising questions about the appropriateness of such distinctions in a cultural and ideological formation far removed from the smithies where they were fashioned. The irony of it is that even the most strident critics of Euro-modernism in Africa, the so-called 'troika' school: Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike, do not seem fundamentally to question the hierarchization of literary works. Their position on popular literary texts often takes the form of praising the oral elements in them.

In this, the 'troika' school is in broad agreement with the bourgeois romanticisation of African oral literature and its simultaneous denigration of popular literature. In most departments of English Studies in Africa you will find courses on oral literature, but none on popular literature. Oral literature is generally represented as the quintessence of an authentic African culture. Often such courses operate with a notion of oral literature as a pure untainted form, outside the movement and determination of history. The return to the past is in marked contrast to the critical reception of urban popular literature which does not have the advantage that oral literature has, of providing a cultural imaginary for the dislocated subject of the post-colonial social formation; if anything African popular literature foregrounds, in the most obvious way, the impossibility of founding an African cultural identity outside the historically concrete experience of cultural and economic imperialism.

In short then, both the denigration and praise of popular literature in

Africa appear to be misguided in so far as they collude with notions of aesthetic value whose underlying ideology represents the uncritical transfer of a specific politics of aesthetic valuation from the metropole to the cultural formation of the periphery. This is true of Marxists, 'the-return-to-our roots' school of Chinweizu *et al*, as well as the conservative critics such as Eustace Palmer and the liberal ones like Obiechina and Nancy Schmidt. This consensus bespeaks successful literary socialisation cutting across both the ideological and cultural location of the critic. Thus the notion of literary value that the student of African literature operates with is one which is still part of what is referred to as the 'humanist' problematic. A move in a more productive direction has been made by Irele who argues that the task of a socially responsible African critical practice must be the study of 'the whole field of creative literary endeavour' in the continent. Though Irele demonstrates an epistemological break with the reigning critical ethos, which has earned him a stiff upbraiding from Dan Izevbaye, he is rather vague as to the practical mechanics of the sort of critical practice he has in mind. Nevertheless, with Irele the question of literary value in African literature has been revealed as a function of the operations of ideology. Thus the task of a radical critical practice, or what Karl Marx would describe as a 'ruthless criticism' is not to construct a theory of literary value but rather to try and grasp 'the ideological conditions of the social contestation of value.'²⁰ So in the present study, I shall not be attempting, as others have done, to prove the literary worth of African popular literature, arguing that it has aesthetic and thematic complexity or some such values which characterise high literature. Instead, I shall be arguing that African popular literature, like high literature, is a signifying practice whose mode of signification in all its specific textual instances needs to be traced and elaborated by a symptomatic reading. Thus my

approach is not based on proving a similarity between popular and high literature but rather on mapping out how African popular literature constitutes itself as a distinct signifying practice.

3. *African Popular Literature as a Signifying Practice*

A brief discussion of signification and representation should help clarify some of the conceptual terms that constitute the critical discourse of the present intervention in the critique of African popular literature. The view that all cultural phenomena are signifying practices owes its emergence to the seminal work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure who, in a series of lectures collected together posthumously by his students into a work popularly known as *Course in General Linguistics*, elaborates a theory of language which has influenced many aspects of critical theory.²¹ The work of structuralists, those studies by such scholars as Grema^us, Claude Bremond, and Roland Barthes which sought to discover the various grammars of literary genre, also received its inspiration from Saussure's work. The influence of Saussure's ideas on anthropology is evident in the work of Claude Levi-Strauss.²²

Saussure conceives of language as being constituted of signs. Each sign is said to comprise two interdependent parts: the *signifier* and the *signified*. The *signifier* is the material basis of the *signified*, for example the letters in the word, 'cat'. The idea of a 'cat' embodied in the word is what would be referred to by Saussure as the *signified*. The most radical contribution of the Saussurian project is the notion that the link between the *signifier* and its *signified* is arbitrary, for example, the connection between the word 'cat' and the idea of certain a type of feline animal is not signalled by the word itself.

In other words, in a different language, let's say French or indeed, Tumbuka, the word 'cat' would not naturally signify what it does in English. However, in the manner that language operates, it creates the *illusion* that the constituents of the sign have a natural and immutable relationship. This illusion is effected by means of *convention* passed on *from* one generation to another. Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* is a good example of an application of the Saussurian notion of the conventionality of the sign to macro-cultural practices.²³ Barthes succinctly shows how ordinary events such as wrestling, striptease and cuisine employ elaborate rules of signification which are *naturalised* to the extent that the arbitrariness of the link between the *signifier* and the *signified* is substituted by the illusion of unity and permanent interdependence between the *signifier* and the *signified*. In looking at African popular literature, one could profitably focus on the way the *artificiality* of various narrative strategies and ideologically determined values are elided through specific modes of representation.

Saussure also talks of language as a system consisting of *signs* which have no *positive values*.²⁴ What he means is that the identity of a particular *sign* is not determined by its intrinsic properties but rather by its *difference* from other signs in a given phonetic or semantic field, for example, the letter 'p' in English is what it is not because it embodies in itself what it represents in the phonetic structure of the language, but rather by its being different from other letters such as 'b'. In other words, 'p' has a value in the English language not because of some intrinsic essence but rather by its location in relation to other terms within the language.

Two other important Saussurian concepts are *paradigm* and *syntagm*.²⁵ The term *paradigm* is used to describe elements belonging to one category and which have a relation of substitutability. Take, for example, the noun-paradigm. All

nouns can replace one another in a sentence without affecting the structure or syntax of the sentence, as in the following example:

Mary
John went to the market
The teacher

Thus, the nouns: 'Mary, John' and 'the teacher' can be described as belonging to the same *paradigmatic category*. However, each one of the nouns cannot be said to be in the same *paradigmatic category* as the verb 'went' nor the noun 'market' which is the object of a preposition. The relationship between such members of different *paradigmatic categories* is characterised not by a relation of substitutability but of *combination*. In this way the only possible relationship between 'Mary' and 'went', and one which would be grammatically correct within the conventions of English grammar, or *langue* is a syntagmatic one. This, in a way, is the operation of the notion of *difference* on the semantic and the syntactic levels, which is sometimes referred to as the level of discourse, that is, the level where the letters start to mean. The implication of these two concepts for the analysis of signifying practices is that if one assumes that a signifying practice is like a language or a discourse, then one can map out all the paradigmatic categories constituting the signifying practice in question, and then proceed to map out the rules governing their combinations. This is the sort of analysis that the structuralists conduct. In other words it is the *selection and combination* of what Fredric Jameson describes as *ideologemes* of a given signifying practice that constitute one of the principal areas of enquiry of a *symptomatic reading* of signifying practices such as African popular literature.²⁶ One way in which

I utilise this particular aspect of the Saussurian project, is by showing whenever necessary how specific forms of western and African popular culture are combined in given narrative. Such an approach is much more profitable than a mere catalogue of instances of western influence or an off-hand dismissal of the presence of western elements as cheap imitation.

One of the significant ways in which the Saussurian problematic has enriched the study of literature has been through the work of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida. Derrida's particular area of contribution has been in his reformulation of the relationship between the *signifier* and the *signified*. He has been able to demonstrate that in fact there is no such a thing as an absolute *signified*, for in the play of language what we end up with is a situation in which the *signified* is constantly being transformed into a *signifier* of some other *signified* and so on *ad infinitum*.²⁷ The search for the ultimate *signifier*, as far as Derrida is concerned, is a theological quest for ultimate meaning which is always *deferred*. The term *différance* of meaning is a transformation of the stability of the Saussurian notion of differential relations within which the identity of a given linguistic term takes a determinate form. As far as Derrida is concerned *différance* simultaneously signals *deferment*. The letter 'p' awaits its identity until the letter 'b' appears in the series to give it a relation of difference, thus its identity. Derrida has employed certain aspects of the Freudian project, for example on page 45 of *Of Grammatology*, in order to analyse the strategies of repression which are responsible for the deferment of meaning.²⁸

The use of Freudian psychoanalysis is central to contemporary critical practice. Sigmund Freud, in his *Interpretation of Dreams* shows how the narrative structure of dreams and its thematic elements are repressed through such devices as *condensation*, *displacement*, *considerations of representability*,

and *secondary revision*. Working within the Freudian problematic, Derrida conceives of the area between the terms of a binary opposition, or difference, as an area occupied by the elided *supplement*.²⁹ The *supplement* is that which, in an attempt to effect a *closure* on the plurality of signification in the interest of semantic or ideological closure, is elided. It is such instances that become the object of critical practice. Just as Freud interprets dream narratives as symptoms of the repressed unconscious, the symptomatic critic analyses all texts as instances of repression and concealment. This is what is termed the *symptomatic reading of texts*. On the whole, the objective of a symptomatic critical practice is to reveal, through a 'hermeneutics of suspicion', that which has been repressed in a given signifying practice, or discourse. As Pierre Macherey puts it:

The critic, employing a new language, brings out a *difference* within a work by demonstrating that it is *other than it is*.³⁰

The Freudian project itself has been refashioned by Jacques Lacan who, taking the cue from Freud's own awareness of the relationship between language and the structure of the mind, argues that the unconscious is structured like language. What this formulation allows us to do is to conceive of the repressed ideology as constituting a discourse, one which is amenable to the analysis of the sort that one would apply to any signifying practice. It is here that Fredric Jameson's intervention in his work, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* is crucial. Jameson demonstrates how the analysis of the political unconscious can reveal both the emancipatory and occluding discursive nodes in both official and marginalised or repressed discourse.³¹ Thus, for materialists, the unconscious is envisaged as political.

In other words, they read texts in order to discover the politics that is being repressed in the interest of dominant ideology. Pierre Macherey, whose early work is within the Althusserian problematic has made a significant contribution to the study of the political unconscious. In his book *A Theory of Literary Production*, he argues that the objective of critical practice is to make those politically cathected silences speak.³² It is this kind of approach that I use in the analysis of African popular literature I carry out in the thesis.

When I examine those diverse texts constituting African popular literature as a signifying practice, I trace moments of *ideological concealment* effected by the thematic intentionality of texts. I do not, as Obiechina or Lindfors, seek to discover the *truth* contained in these texts nor condemn them on the grounds of the ethics and values they champion, but rather I attempt to find the place where each text is inscribed within the discursive field of African gender ideology.

Thus, the informing critical values of the present study are predicated on the premise that African popular literature is a signifying or discursive practice, one which employs a whole array of strategies of communication. As any signifying practice, African popular literature is subject both to paradigmatic and syntagmatic location within the matrix of signifying practices that constitute the cultural formation in the continent. The fact that it is defined differentially in relation to high literature is one of those instances when it functions as an aspect of an ideologically determined cultural binary opposition. I have traced some of the factors which inform this area of difference. However, my interest in the thesis is to see African popular literature as a practice in itself, as an autonomous signifying practice where autonomy implies a separateness rather than discreteness. One of the ways in which African literature functions as a specific discursive formation, is in the

way it represents subjects of gender ideology. It is this central project of African popular literature, and also one that allows critical practice in Africa to contribute to the process of producing a knowledge of contemporary gender formation, that constitutes the thematic framework of the study.

B. STUDYING GENDER IDEOLOGY IN AFRICAN POPULAR LITERATURE

1. *The Critique of Gender Ideology*

There is little of significance on the representation of gender in contemporary African popular literature apart from the study of Nigerian romances carried out by Griswold and Bastian. They examine African gender ideology within the framework of cross-cultural literary transmission; consequently, their analysis is comparative. They argue that:

Some elements of the Western formula, such as the characterization of the female protagonist, are continuous with the Western model, while others are radically changed. For example, while Western romances centre on a single love interest and 'end happily ever after', Nigerian romances often involve the protagonist in several love affairs, and may have an inconclusive or tragic ending.³³

Nevertheless, illuminating as Griswold and Bastian's analysis is, it easily boils down to a catalogue of similarities and differences of gender representation where such features are not discussed in terms of the respective gender formations out of which they arise. The impression created is that the two

critics have scratched the surface without digging deeper into the cultural subterranean where the textually represented ideology draws its principal ideologemes. A more serious flaw with Griswold's and Bastian's article is that it lacks a well thought-out theory of subjectivity, as a result of which the study can be said to subscribe to that paradigm in gender studies that does not problematise the relationship between the biological basis of gender and its status as a social construction.

The same is true of gender in African high literature. Out of the welter of material in this domain, I will pick out one essay for discussion. The reason I have chosen Kirsten Holst Petersen's essay is that her article simultaneously represents one of the best efforts in the study of gender ideology in African literature as well as foregroundsⁱⁿ the major flaws of the paradigm of which it is an example. In her essay, 'First Things First: Problems of a Feminist Approach to African Literature,' Kirsten Holst Petersen discusses the question of gender in terms of its relationship to the issue of cultural and political liberation and concludes by suggesting an integration of the two problematics.²⁴ She argues that Buchi Emecheta successfully represents a production aesthetics which includes both women's and cultural emancipation. In the article, the complex interplay between femininity and masculinity as social constructs hardly features as it is assumed that what such labels signify has an untroubled relationship with the biological fact of being male or female.

The unproblematized notion of gender is also evident in the numerous studies of gender ideology, which can be described as being concerned with issues of economic development. Within this problematic, the study of women is perceived as an aspect of the processes of effecting such societal changes as would improve the general well-being of the African peoples. In this manner, the degree of participation according to gender in such areas of work as

farming and fishing constitute the major objective of gender studies. One of the recent issues of *Development Dialogue* gives a good sample of such studies.³⁵ These studies call for greater participation by women in the sphere of economic production, as well as arguing for the recognition of women's domestic labour. The only drawback with such studies is that they insert women within the discourse of development and international capital. To quote Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, in them 'the determinant of the subordinate role of women is seen.... to be relations of production, and the familial relations act as a sort of secondary mirroring of this determinant.'³⁶ The emphasis on the location of women in the relations of production often takes the form of policing their experience of being inscribed in capitalist relations of production. Even the most radical readings of this situation end up shoring up the very mechanisms which perpetuate unequal relations of gender. Most importantly, the emphasis on women's subordination reduces the complexity of the question of gender to a singular concern with the emancipation of women.

Largely, the present state of analysis of gender ideology in Africa, be it in terms of its textual representation or its articulation within processes relating to economic development, is that the majority of studies work with a notion of gender subjectivity culled from the domain of *common sense knowledge*, with the invariable and inevitable consequence that they tend to read gender in essentialist terms. As the experience of western Feminism shows the logical development of essentialist readings of gender is a crude form of Feminism which operates with a permanent and eradicable binary opposition between men and women to such an extent that it presents a female supremacist ideology within which men are seen as the *demonised Other*. As Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt put it:

These inclinations in feminist criticism... are part of larger currents in feminist theory and politics as a whole. Polarization of the masculine and the feminine, or of male and female; denigration of the masculine or the male as violent and possibly irretrievable; valorization of male power into a 'monolithic and unchanging out there; the construction of women as at once totally dominated and essentially good; and the celebration of a unifying woman's nature have in varying ways characterized the discourse of cultural/radical feminists in England and the United States.³⁷

Without an operational paradigm of how subjects are constituted within the discourse of gender ideology, the risk of constructing a simplistic binary opposition between male and female based on the biological sexual differences becomes unavoidable. It is as a way of seeking to capture the complexity of the representation of gender ideology in contemporary African popular literature that I use materialist Feminism as a point of departure for my model of gender subjectivity.

Materialist Feminism proceeds from the view that gender ideology is produced within a determinate set of conditions which are themselves inextricably linked to relations of production of a given social formation. The exponents of this approach see women as both agents and 'resisters' of patriarchal relations; their paradigm takes into account such factors as race and class as important determiners of gender subjectivity. The vision here is predicated on an inclusive egalitarianism within which gender is but one among several discursive domains which must be injected with a radical cultural practice. Materialist Feminism also lays emphasis on the need to specify forms of gender subjectivity that are articulated as specific instances of a gender ideology of a given social formation. In this respect, the occluding effects of universalism are side-stepped through an emphasis on the culturally and historically concrete.³⁸ It is in terms of this broad theoretical and political

paradigm that I construct a working theory of gender subjectivity. The term 'subjectivity' is close to the notion of identity save that, whilst the latter implies the existence of some essence, the former refers to an identity that is produced and located across a range of social relations of production. I borrow the term from contemporary French usages such as one finds in the work of Jacques Lacan, Louis Althusser, and Michel Foucault. However, there are differences between the three thinkers regarding the relationship between subjectivity and ideology. In the next section, I briefly discuss the similarities and differences among the three thinkers and propose an eclectic model as a working concept of subjectivity for my study.

2. On Gender Subjectivity

One of the most original and simultaneously unoriginal concepts of subjectivity is that offered by Lacan in his imaginative and innovative re-interpretation of Freudian thought. Lacan brings the Freudian project into productive play with Hegelian dialectics, and Saussurian and Jakobson's linguistics in order to produce, among other things, a reformulation of the notion of subjectivity. There are many ways in which Lacan's views on this topic could be summarised largely because of the deliberate intractability of his ideas. I propose to summarise his ideas in terms of the relationship between the Subject and the Other.

The Subject is that which is constituted through and by the Other, according to the following statement by Lacan:

What constitutes me as subject is my question. In order to be recognized by the other, I utter what was only in view of what will be. In order to find him, I call him

by a name that he must assume or refuse in order to reply to me.... Man's desire finds its meaning in the desire for the other, not so much because the other holds the key to the object desired, as because the first object of desire is to be recognized by the other.³⁹

Le desir de l'autre is central to the structure of the Lacanian subject. The mechanism by which desire for the *Other* is engendered and sustained as a life-long habit is through the mediation of the *Imaginary* and the *Real* by the *Symbolic*. In his by now famous notion of the 'mirror stage', Lacan shows that between the age of six and eighteen months, the child comes to experience his or her subjectivity as a *decentred* identity. As he puts it:

This jubilant assumption of his specular image by the child at the *infans* stage, still sunk in his motor incapacity and nursing dependence, would seem to exhibit in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and therefore before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject.⁴⁰

Thus the 'mirror stage' marks the entry of the child into the Symbolic order. The entry into the Symbolic order, if one might risk distorting Lacan's complex and ever shifting argument, marks the transformation of the *signifier*, that is the *Real* into the *signified*, the *Imaginary*. The *Real* is the material precondition of the *signified*, the *Imaginary*, as Lacan suggests in the following passage:

What is the real, if not a subject fulfilled in his identity to himself? From which, one can conclude that this subject is already perfect in this regard, and is the fundamental hypothesis of this whole process. He is named, in effect, as being the substratum of this process.⁴¹

There is however, a complex dialectical interplay between these terms characterised by simultaneous confirmation and negation, in each instance of movement. Consequently, while the Imaginary provides a sense of identity, of being something else, other than an Other, it is also precisely the occasion where the very idea of an autonomous ego is frustrated by being deferred and postponed.

One important area of Lacan's contribution to the epistemology of the subject is his view of authority and subordination as elaborated through the relations among the Real and the Imaginary and the Symbolic. The entry into the Symbolic order also creates a disjunction between the Real and the Imaginary as well as between the Imaginary itself and the Symbolic. It is through the Symbolic order, language, that the Law of the father is introduced into the experience of the developing child. Language alerts the child to the existence of the world of social values and norms, in short to the mechanisms of censorship and regulation where the ego is instituted. In other words, the Symbolic order also announces the limits of subjectivity. The relationship between the subject of the Imaginary and that of the Symbolic is one which is characterised by perpetual conflict. In this regard, the Imaginary represents the yearning for the space beyond the other, as well as for the *Other*, a desire that is constantly frustrated by the distance between *I* and the *Other*. Simultaneously, this opposition defines the structure of the Lacanian Subject. It is a split or *decentred* subject, a permanent enactment of disjunction between Being and Other. This represents Lacan's attack on the idea of a unitary Subject that is the hallmark of what is generally termed 'humanism'.

Thus the relationship between a *Subject* and dominant ideology is characterised by a quest for identification as well as for counter-identification. The only deficiency in the Lacanian structure of subjectivity is

that it is deterministic insofar as it inscribes within the structure of subjectivity a permanent binary opposition, between the desire of the subject and the frustration of such desire by the *Other*. In this manner, the relations of subordination and domination are not conceived of in their contingent and specific determinations but rather as sufficiently and necessarily and always an inherent feature of the structure of subjectivity itself. In other words, it is in the insertion of the principle of permanent difference in the structure of the Lacanian *Subject* that I read an attempt to sacrifice the idea of heterogeneity on the altar of a reductive formula which is cathected with such a breadth of explanatory purchase that it almost becomes useless in the domain of the historically contingent and specific as an explanatory tool for specific instances of subjectivity.

Louis Althusser's use of some of the terms proposed by Lacan, makes up for the universalised permanent disjunction of the Lacanian notion of *Subjectivity*. Althusser looks at the relationship between the subordinate and dominant subjects. He attempts to grasp the means by which dominant ideology constitutes its subordinate subjects. In his influential essay, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,' he argues that there are two ways in which dominant ideology constitutes its *Subjects*. Primarily, dominant ideology operates by means of Ideological Apparatuses. He says:

The school (but also other State institutions like the Church, or other apparatuses like the Army) teaches 'know-how', but in forms which ensure *subjection to the ruling ideology* or the mastery of its 'practice'. All the agents of production, exploitation and repression, not to speak of the 'professionals of ideology' (Marx), must in one way or another be steeped in this ideology in order to perform their tasks 'conscientiously'.⁴²

It is through such means that dominant ideology inculcates the values which ensure that the relations between the dominant and the dominated are passed off as natural. Here Althusser draws on Antonio Gramsci's idea of *common sense knowledge*. Furthermore, he argues that it is through the Ideological Apparatuses that the imaginary relation of the subject to the social relations of production is secured. This is similar to the operations of the Lacanian 'misrecognition' produced by the encounter between the real and the Imaginary.

Another method by which dominant ideology secures obedience is by using what Althusser terms the 'Repressive State Apparatus' whose role 'consists essentially in securing by force (physical and or otherwise) the political conditions of the reproduction of relations of production which are in the last resort *relations of exploitation*.'⁴³ Thus, whilst State Ideological Apparatuses mostly function by means of ideological *interpellation*, that is calling into being the subject position of the subject, the 'Repressive State Apparatus' functions massively by means of coercion and brute force. All in all, Althusser's notion of subjectivity is functionalist and specific. It defines vertical relations within the specific instances of ideological formation. Nevertheless, this notion of subjectivity seems wholly predicated on the idea of permanent dominance and subordination. Althusser shows the means by which subjects are oppressed but very little of how they can transform such relations in order to effect a fundamental change in their subject positions. The weakness in Althusser's model of subjectivity is primarily that he offers us a cross-section of an instance of ideological formation, similar to a cross-section of a plant or an animal which gives one the contours but not the totality. The ideological formation is here offered not as a process but rather as a static vertical structure. Consequently, the Althusserian subject is immobilised within the straightjacket of dominant ideology largely through being abstracted from

the total social formation and being constituted solely and wholly as a subject of ideological formation, in the process of which the subject is shorn of the capacity to intervene in his or her subjection to a given dominant ideology. To place Althusser's model against the model of discursive formation offered by Michel Bakhtin, Althusser's subject can be construed as a subject of *official discourse*, one who is oblivious or blind to the possibility of subverting dominant gender ideology through *carnivalisation*, the release of the discursive plurality in order to overwhelm the occluding *monoglossia* of official discourse.⁴⁴ It is in the work of Michel Foucault that we find a notion of subjectivity within whose structure is embedded the possibility of counter-identification with dominant ideology.

Michel Foucault views the ideological social formation as being primarily constituted by the distribution of power. His view of power is radical. Foucault conceives of power as follows:

Power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the 'privilege' of a dominant class, which exercises it actively upon a passive, dominated class. It is rather exercised through and by the 'classes' in this way, for power is not unitary and its exercise binary. What exists is an infinitely complex network of 'micro-powers', of power relations that permeate every aspect of social life.⁴⁵

Thus, Foucault, unlike Althusser, introduces a theory of resistance into his notion of subjectivity. Power is not merely, as Althusser suggests, a monopoly of the powerful, for to accept such a view is to concede unnecessarily that the dominated are permanently powerless, which would rob the subject of the possibility of counter-identifying with dominant ideology. In Lacanian terms the possibility of constituting an *I* that is offered by the reflection in the mirror offers the subject the chance of contesting the demand by the *Other* that

the subject identify totally with it. In both Lacan and Foucault, therefore, we have the dialectic of identification and counter-identification which is missing from the Althusserian problematic.

Nevertheless, Foucault goes to the other extreme by presenting power as diffuse. More startling, particularly in the context of the African social formation, is his patent denial of the need for radical transformation that is explicit in the following argument:

Power cannot be overthrown and acquired once and for all by the destruction of institutions and the seizure of state apparatuses.⁴⁶

Thus, I agree with Rosalind Coward when she criticises Foucault's view of power, which she says, ^{it} 'remains almost as a process, without specification within different instances.'⁴⁷ As Jeffrey Weeks puts it:

A notion of power which goes beyond, say, class reductionism is obviously useful in attempting to grasp the history of the subordination of women, or the regulation of unorthodox sexualities, but if power is everywhere it is difficult to understand how it can be resisted or broken out of.⁴⁸

We are thus faced with the timeless dyadic opposition between the Subject and the Other similar to the Lacanian conflict between the Imaginary and the Symbolic, and no different from the permanent relations of domination and subordination which characterise the Althusserian structure of subjectivity. What can one retrieve from all this as a basis for a notion of subjectivity which will be both specific and general, both functionalist and structural? Primarily, it is in the reformulation of the Althusserian problematic by Michel Pecheux that I find a more productive way of developing such a theory of

subjectivity.

In his work *Language, Semantics and Ideology*, Michel Pecheux makes a major contribution to the theory of resistance. Though his argument is complex and primarily aimed at developing a theory of knowledge, it can be summed up by the following:

The *first modality* consists of a superimposition... of *the subject of enunciation and the universal subject* such that the subject's 'taking up a position' realises his subjection in the form of the 'freely consented to': this superimposition characterises the discourse of the 'good subject' who spontaneously reflects the Subject... The *second modality* characterises the discourse of the 'bad subject', in which the *subject of enunciation 'turns against' the universal subject* by 'taking up a position' which now consists of a separation (distantiation, doubt, interrogation, challenge, revolt...) with respect to what the 'universal Subject' 'gives him to think': a struggle against ideological evidentness.... The subject, a 'bad subject', a 'trouble-maker', *counter-identifies* with the discursive formation imposed on him by 'interdiscourse'.⁴⁹

Pecheux's model of subjectivity and discursive formation specifies the conditions under which acquiescence and resistance are produced. If this position is enriched by a view that takes into account the structural movement embodied in social formation such as the one provided by the Foucauldian notion of subjectivity, that is, if one combines the vertical and the horizontal views of discursive formation, one can then have a theory of subjectivity that takes into account the specificity of the location of a particular subject within the structure of a given discursive formation, as well as the capacity of the subject to transform the particular instance of ideological formation and its overall social formation in which it is instituted into some other and different kind of social formation. What I am proposing here is that one needs a theory

of repression such as the one that Althusser offers, and a theory of specified resistance such as Pecheux adumbrates, but more than that one needs a diachronic theory of discursive formations, one which locates specific discursive social formations within a teleology of change and progress. Such a theory would take into account the open-endedness of the syntactic structure of ideological social formations, while simultaneously paying attention to the paradigmatic, in the Saussurian sense, hierarchic relations of a given instance of discursive formation. What I am saying is that we should move beyond merely looking at the functioning of ideological formations within given social formations, and develop a sense of the diachronic succession of social formations, a process to which the gestures of counter-identification of individual subjects within specific ideological formations contribute. This has the virtue of rescuing the actions of a 'bad subject' from being construed as mere rebellion and investing them with a significance that only the connection with the social formation as a whole can give them.

It is such a theory of subjectivity that I employ in my analysis of gender representation in contemporary African popular literature. It is a paradigmatic model, to the extent to which it focuses on the operations of power in given discursive formations. However, to the extent that it also works with a model of history which sees it as a succession of transformed social formations, it partakes of the *dynamism* of syntactic structure. The underlying teleological goal that informs my project is total egalitarianism both in the sphere of social relations and in the sphere of cultural taxonomy. In this respect, commitment to specificity demands that one define popular literature as a specific modality of ideological representation.

3. *The textual representation of Gender Ideology*

We have been taught by Aristotle, through his influential work *Poetics*, to regard the relationship between a text or the fictive universe and the world of experience as one in which the text *reflects* the latter. Indeed, even Plato, Aristotle's teacher, banished the poet from his ideal republic on the basis of a notion of literature as *imitation* of reality.⁵⁰ The idea that literature imitates reality has been central to Marxist aesthetics as well. Georg Lukacs, for example, whose work occupies an important place within Marxist critical practice subscribes to such a notion of literature. In his works such as *Studies in European Realism* and *The Historical Novel* he presents a view of the relationship between literature and reality which is predicated on the premise that great literature is that which captures the typical of a given historical period and its underlying harmony.⁵¹ It is such a notion of mimesis that is also at work in Ernst Fischer's work, *Art Against Ideology*. Generally speaking, this position is evidently at work in the Marxist critical tradition of African literature. The work of Omafume Onoge and Godini Darah, among others, operates with the notion that literature imitates reality in order to engender radical political transformation. It is in terms of this reflectionist position that popular literature is viewed as inferior by mainstream Marxist critical practice. It has been argued, for example, by the Frankfurt school that popular literature merely transcribes dominant capitalist ideology without subjecting it, as high literature does, to critical analysis. As Tony Bennett argues the assumption that all popular literature merely mirrors dominant ideology is simplistic. The textual representation of ideology in popular literary texts, indeed as in any other kind of texts, is varied and complex, always a function of a text's specific relationship to the matrix of discourses obtaining in the discursive

formation in which it is inscribed.

As Pierre Macherey argues, the production of a text is a form of labour which operates on the already ideologically cathected material of the so-called reality. Literature works with material that is itself a construction: the values and experiences that constitute our reality do not have an objective existence, they are themselves produced within determinate cultural and ideological circumstances.⁵² The significant point, however, is that the textually represented ideology is itself a construction, without a one-to-one correspondence with the ideological structure of a given social formation, that is to say, the representation of gender ideology that we encounter in African popular literary texts is not a mirror image of the actual gender ideology in Africa. The labour of production out of which such texts are fashioned necessarily involves selection and combination of ideologemes, which gives rise to a different and separate modality of ideological expression, one that is not similar to the object of enquiry of a sociologist or anthropologist of gender, for example. As Macherey puts it:

The work has its beginning in a break from the usual ways of speaking and writing - a break which sets it apart from all other forms of ideological expression. This is why writing cannot be understood by analogy with some apparently similar activity that is in fact radically different.⁵³

One area in which there is an evident gap between the ideological structure of the fictive universe and that of the social formation is the selection of the sites of ideological operation. The main areas which constitute the terrain of gender ideology in African popular literature are marriage, romantic love, and the parent-child relationship. It is in terms of these sites that I trace the representation of gender in African popular literature; nevertheless, it would be

misleading to present these areas as reflecting the main constituent parts of the gender ideological formation of the African social formation. These sites represent the labour of textual representation, a testimony to the presence of the Macherean gap between the labour of life and the labour of fiction as separate modalities of ideological expression.

Within the sites of gender articulation of the fictive universe of African popular literature, I discern three modes of textual representation of gender ideology. The first is characterised by a mode of textual representation that conforms to the Althusserian subject of ideology, insofar as it, like the Althusserian subject, merely reproduces 'the conditions of production' without contesting them.⁵⁴ Here patriarchal relations of gender, which constitute the dominant gender ideology in Africa, are legitimised largely through being represented as part of *common sense knowledge*. This form of representation is true of all the three sites of the gender ideology which have been selectively represented in contemporary African popular literature. Principally, all the texts in this category operate with a conservative model of society.⁵⁵ This model starts from the premise that social time is cyclical: past, present and future are constituted and reconstituted as part of an already given and perfect ideological structure. There is an incessant appeal to the sanctity of traditional African culture. It is this culture that is used to legitimise authoritarianism and unequal relations of gender. Furthermore, any attempt to challenge the status quo, within this model, is perceived as deviant and pathological. In short then, this mode of representation can be described as a mode of gender textual representation through which dominant gender ideology is produced and reproduced as a fictive discursive formation. It is a form of labour that repeats in another ideological modality the official discourse of the social formation.

The second mode of representation is akin to the Lacanian split subject. Abdul JanMohamed, in his study of colonial discourse, identifies two types of texts which respectively constitute the Lacanian *symbolic* and *the imaginary*.⁵⁶ It would seem to me that in fact the split need not always be between texts; it can manifest itself within a given text in the form of structural ideological ambivalence. Thus the second mode of representation we encounter in African popular literature is characterised by a conflict between the subject of the law and the subject of desire. Such texts show an awareness of the need to go beyond the gender status quo, whilst simultaneously supporting, in other discursive sites, the integrity of patriarchal relations of power. This can be described as a liberal model of society. As Joe Holland and Peter Henriot argue, the liberal model works with such concepts as 'pragmatism' and 'pluralism'.⁵⁷ Thus change is embraced and even contemplated on the basis of the belief in the evolutionary progress of society. The social space is conceived of as a 'cluster of free isolated parts - atomistic individuals, conflicting interest groups with no organic linkages'.⁵⁸ In contrast to the conservative or traditional model, this one emphasises the management of social change rather ^{than} its repression. Principally it is the model's adherence to the cushioning of moments of ideological crisis that erodes its radical potential, for its pragmatism merely massages unequal relations of gender which cry for transformation rather than mere management. As the first, this model is present in all three areas of the gender discourse of the fictive universe of African popular literature.

The third mode of representation is similar to the subject of Foucault and Pecheux. Here the emphasis is on counter-identification with the dominant gender ideology. Such texts employ a radical model of society. They emphasise the transformation of unequal relations of gender. Again as Joe Holland and

Peter Henriot argue, in this model, 'there is a time linkage between past, present, and future, but is a dialectical linkage whereby one stage emerges from another through a process of creative conflict.'⁵⁹ Society is viewed as a collectivity where the oppression of one member affects every other member. The vision here is of an egalitarian gender practice.

Within each mode of representation, however, the texts articulate their own specific relations with dominant gender ideology, thereby showing the immense variety of the modality of popular literature as a form of ideological signification. In a nutshell, the notion of ideological representation employed in the text is one which is predicated on the view that, far from being merely imitations of dominant ideology and therefore generally perpetrators of false consciousness, popular literary texts such as the ones I examine in the thesis evince a diversity of ideological representation, one of which commits itself to precisely those ideals to which Marxism as an ideology subscribes.

C. CONCLUSION

In the chapter, I have argued that discussing popular literature in terms of whether it is inferior to high literature or not is the least productive way of generating a knowledge of this separate mode of textual and ideological representation. In order to understand popular literature we need to look at it as an 'independent' signifying practice rather than assume that such literature is failed high literature. Anecdotally, this is like an exasperated father who told his overbearingly curious son that all Volkswagen Beetles were stunted Mercedes Benz cars. Most writers of popular literature do not aspire to the same kinds of values as those of high literature. They see their role as

entertainers. Consequently, as critics we must approach this kind of writing with the view of finding out its own ways of signification. Of course, there is nothing wrong with a comparison of ways of signifying between popular and high literature as long as such comparative work does not lead to the construction of an unproblematised theory of value. Furthermore, I have argued that if one is going to look at this kind of writing in terms of its representation of gender ideology, it is important to work with a clearly defined notion of gender subjectivity if one is to avoid falling into the trap of erecting a permanent binary opposition between men and women, which would not serve the interest of gender egalitarianism well. Finally, I have sketched the structure of the thesis; I mainly look at three areas of gender ideology: marriage, romantic love, and the parent-child relationship. Within each area, I discuss texts in terms of the model of ideological representation they fall under. I have specified three modes of ideological representation: the first merely reproduces dominant gender ideology; the second interrogates certain aspects of it while supporting others; the third calls for a radical transformation of unequal relations of gender as a necessary step towards the achievement of gender egalitarianism.

I have employed ideas both from Europe and Africa, something those who seek to develop an indigenous African set of critical tools, such as Chinweizu, would find disconcerting. I sympathize with the need for cultural emancipation in Africa, but I doubt whether such a project can be achieved by reinventing the wheel. Both the literature I examine and my own subjectivity are indelibly inscribed in the determinate historical conditions of the present social formation in Africa which is far from the world dominated by the production and critical aesthetics of pre-colonial Africa. If there is going to be cultural liberation at all, it will have to start from a realistic reading of our own present concrete situation, then weaving out of it something that is both

contemporary and relevant rather than seeking shelter in the sanitized ideal of a rarefied aesthetics which underlies the project elaborated by Chinweizu and his colleagues. Thus, the thesis, both at the level of theory and textual analysis, captures the broad ambivalence that is contemporary Africa while simultaneously showing the possibility of producing a cultural practice that will be African insofar as it arises out of the articulation of a specific and historically determinate cultural ambivalence.

NOTES

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6. Eustace Palmer, 'A Plea for Objectivity: A Reply to Adeola James.' *African Literature Today*, 7, (1975), p. 123-127; for the contradiction in Palmer's argument, I am indebted to the following work by Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike, *Towards the Decolonization of African Literature: African Fiction and Poetry and Their Critics* (Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1980), p. 136-139.
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11. See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), pp. 322-324.

12. See Femi Osofisan, 'The Alternative Tradition: An Insider's Post-script,' in Albert S. Gerard, *European Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa I-II* (Akademiai Kiado, Budapest: The International Comparative Literature Association, 1986), pp. 786-787.
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32. Pierre Macherey, *Op. Cit.*
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CHAPTER THREE

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MARRIAGE

Full freedom in marriage can become generally operative only when the abolition of capitalist production, and of the property relations created by it, has removed all those secondary economic considerations which still exert so powerful an influence on the choice of a partner.... The predominance of the man in marriage is simply a consequence of his economic predominance and will vanish with it automatically. The indissolubility of marriage is partly the result of the economic conditions under which monogamy arose, and partly a tradition from when the connection between these economic conditions and monogamy was not yet correctly understood and was exaggerated by religion. Today it is breached a thousandfold. If only marriages that are based on love are moral, then, also, only those are moral in which love continues.... That will be settled after a new generation has grown up: a generation of men who never in all their lives have had occasion to purchase a woman's surrender either with money or with any other means of social power, and of women who have never been obliged to surrender to any man out of consideration other than that of real love, or to refrain from giving themselves to their beloved for fear of the economic consequences.
(Friedrich Engels, 1844)¹

The grandeur and depth of political as well as moral commitment to gender egalitarianism in this most significant contribution of Marxism to the epistemology of gender cannot be gainsaid. Yet, Engels's statement displays the same naive utopianism which is evident in his and Marx's less cautious activist postulations when, to paraphrase Robert Tucker, their 'pens seem to be dipped in molten anger,' on which occasions their revolutionary zeal makes them

underestimate the resilience and flexibility of bourgeois cultural and ideological practice.² It is true that there ^ohs [^]been some improvement in relations between men and women since then, but such progress as has been made has certainly not led to the sort of radical transformation that Engels had in mind as can be seen from the following statement in the *Encyclopedia of Feminism* published in 1986:

Despite the many changes in the legal and social perceptions of marriage since the 1820s, reforms continue to be needed and worked for in the 1980s. The idea that a woman gives up her individual identity and becomes the property of a man when she marries is a tenacious one, still expressed in many areas of law and custom today. Although marriage is often said to be an equal partnership, the woman is still expected to submerge her personality in that of her husband by taking his name and accommodating her life to his needs.³

Lisa Tuttle's comments in the encyclopedia apply equally to Africa as exemplified by *The Dakar Declaration on Another Development* issued in 1982, to which significantly the famous Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o and the Ugandan writer Okello Ochuli are signatories. The document is one of the most candidly radical statements to date on gender ideology and practice in Africa as can be discerned from the following excerpt:

Another predominant and oppressive manifestation of the global crisis is to be found in the realm of culture, where trends such as cultural nationalism and religious fundamentalism tend to reinstate obsolete patriarchal systems and restrict social progress by physically and mentally demobilising women.... A vision of Another Development will only be possible if patriarchal relations and practices are eliminated. The first step towards achieving this is to redefine men's and women's roles in the family, with both having equal rights and responsibilities for shared parenthood. Secondly, there must be a profound revalorization of the day-to-day work of household and family maintenance. The equal participation of men and women in domestic work and

family and kinship relations implies a restructuring of the so-called working day in the wage labour sector.... Such social progress means not only improving the situation of women but also changing it by opposing all ideologies that define women's role as subordinate, dependent or passive. Feminism provides the basis for this new consciousness and for cultural resistance to all forms of domination. (My emphasis)⁴

However, though the declaration includes culture among the significant areas of social experience where repressive gender ideology is disseminated, it clearly pays little attention to the role of literature and media in the production and reproduction of gender ideology. The absence of any mention of literature in the declaration is all the more surprising in the light of the presence of Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Okello Ochuli at the conference. Literature, as other cultural forms, is implicated with the various discursive contestations that go on in society. I would argue that to a very large extent, gender ideology is more foregrounded, secreted on the surface of texts as it were, in popular literature. Antonio Gramsci is right in arguing that:

It is the despised and trashy fictions of the market, working as they do with the sedimented and mythopoeic materials of popular common sense, rather than the modern 'classics' of the high-literary canon, that have the closest relation to those ancient models, those enduring myths of power.⁵

In her study of popular romance fiction, Leslie Rabine puts the point even more poignantly:

Since in Harlequin (romances) the struggle to gain recognition for a deep feminine self merges with the struggle - however implicit or utopian - to create a new, more integrated world, a reading of these romances uncovers a certain power possessed by even formulaic narratives. Because they cannot help but recount a woman's life all of a piece, they may be able to reveal

certain insights about women's lives and women's desires that escape empirical science.⁶

Indeed, marriage and romantic love constitute the single most important subject matter in African popular literature. In the discussion of the representation of marriage practice in African popular literature which follows, I will examine six texts, representing three principal ideological categories into which African popular literature in general can be classified. The first category of texts, Aubrey Kalitera's *Why Father, Why* and *Mother, Why Mother* essentially serve as an example of texts which reproduce dominant gender ideology. The second group of texts, David Maillu's *Thorns of Love* and Dede Kamkondo's *Truth Will Out*, reflect a position which is middle-of-the road, often embracing certain aspects of traditional marriage practice whilst condemning others as inhumane. The third group of texts, represented by Buchi Emecheta's *A Kind of Marriage* and Helen Ovbiagele's *You Never Know*, offer a more radical reading of dominant gender ideology.⁷ Taken together these works suggest that the underlying factor in the social construction of gender subjectivity in marriage has a lot to do with the inextricable coalescing of patriarchy and the political economy.

MARRIAGE AS A DEFENCE OF DIFFERENCE IN KALITERA'S *WHY FATHER, WHY AND MOTHER, WHY MOTHER*

Aubrey Kalitera is one of the most prolific writers of popular fiction in Malawi. Since publishing his first novel *No Taste of Business* in 1976 with Heinemann East Africa, he has followed the example of David Maillu of Kenya by

setting up on his own: writing, printing and distributing his own works. Kalitera's *Why Father Why*, interrogates existing gender ideology, but squanders its radical potential by failing to question the discourse of masculinity underlying its ostensibly humanitarian project.² The novel sets out to condemn the practice of monogamy which it blames for the presence in society of countless children who have no fathers to look after them. The narrator, who is in the end offered as the paragon of approved fatherhood, is contrasted with his own father, and with Jack Lupembe, the hotel manager who callously abandons his childhood sweetheart, and Joe Phanga, the newspaper editor who impregnates his South African-born girlfriend.

Out of the three feckless fathers, the hero's father, George Supuni is depicted as the epitome of depraved fatherhood. The punishment that is meted out to the father at the end of the novel is anticipated in the text by the overall portrayal of men. He is perhaps the most important narrative device in the novel as both the narrative structure and the plot revolve around the hero's quest to find him, as he is the 'absence' that constitutes the object of desire, the *demonised* 'other' who must be found and punished. Recalling a moment of great anguish, in the opening chapter of the novel, the narrator reveals his strong desire to have the father punished for his crime and erects him as the one whose discovery will provide the narrative closure:

It was anger above everything else which made me vow to hunt for my father. He had cheated and deserted mum. And he had deserted me. When I found him maybe I was going to hit him. But it would be after I had asked him "why he had done what he had done to me". When he deserted my expectant mother he knew pretty well that there would be a child who would have to go to school. Who did he think would provide me with all that? (p. 13)

In this way, the father comes to embody that *alterity* which in the terms set up by the novel represents a conservative sexual politics. He is the embodiment of the conventional evil deserting father. He has no redeeming features in a first person narrative that precludes the opportunity of hearing his side of the story. The story of the relationship between the father and the mother is pieced together by the son, from the deserted mother. According to this version of the story, the father signifies the type of man that is solely interested in a woman's body and not in taking on the responsibilities which accrue from such relationships. Supuni is shown to stop at nothing in order to avoid looking after his offspring; he lies and flees the country.

The contrast between the two characters, the father and the mother, could not be greater; the former is portrayed as the villain whilst the latter is depicted as the victim. It is important to underline the fact that much as the surface structure of the text suggests that villainy is a personality attribute which the father shares with all the other members of his gender except the hero, the manner in which the notion of villainy is represented in relation to the opposition between the mother and the father rather reveals the extent to which the gender discursive formation which informs the narrative is interlaced with the discourse of capitalism. It is not the father's sheer absence from the mother that the son laments, nor the absence of a husband that the mother is concerned with, but rather it is his absence construed as the absence of what Pierre Bourdieu has termed *material capital* that they are protesting against.⁹ Indeed, the very basis of the relationship between the father and the mother, right from the start, is grounded on her material and his sexual needs, as the following passage demonstrates:

On this particular day, a Saturday, mum was going to town. The through road bisected the K.A.R. Officers' houses so I guess if mum hadn't met this man she would

have met another, possibly just as seductive.

The people at home knew that the girl had fallen in love the moment she got there. She had more meat, fish and groceries than the money they had given her could have paid for. And she had two tablets of bath soap. Only the very privileged besides people of races other than African used to bath with soap then .

My grandmother asked her, 'A man gave you the extra money?'

'Yes, mamma. He is marrying me. He'll be coming here tomorrow to ask you. (p. 10)

The juxtaposition of love and marriage on the one hand, and goods such as groceries on the other, firmly points to an exchange economy in which the fiction of marriage is denied the rarefied value of love as one of its properties, but is, instead and bluntly, shown to be invested with the value of commodity exchange which is predicated on the law of supply and demand. According to this law, the mother's value is reduced when she announces the news of her pregnancy; indeed she can be described as having suddenly become a liability to Supuni as the child was not part of the bargain. Furthermore, within the colonial capitalist discursive formation, the arrival of the child threatens to expose the father's imaginary subject position: his role as provider of a 'white standard' of life, which wins him the affections of the peasant woman can no longer, with the arrival of the child, be adequately sustained without difficulty. It is significant that the narrator's father does not run away to another woman, but rather to another job and a better one. He follows the path travelled by many of the men Landeg White interviewed in Magomero, the path that leads to an El Dorado: the Rhodesian farms and the South African mines.¹⁰ This discourse is obviously not part of the narrator's view of things in the novel. It is one of the *supplements* which are repressed and excluded from the interrogative stance of authorial intention. According to the narrator, the father is simply a guilty man who needs to explain himself for the

abdication of parental responsibility; there is very little attempt to explain the contradictions in the father's subject position in terms of his determinate location in a specific set of material conditions.

In a narcissistic gesture, the son transfers the sense of victimisation wholly onto himself, almost casting his mother's suffering to the margins. Essentially, he sees himself as an economic victim, the son who has been denied his right to the father's wealth. In a way, it is a quest of a dispossessed son for a legitimisation of his identity which will, presumably, give him the right of access to his father's property. The hero leaves us in little doubt regarding the economic argument underpinning his quest:

That afternoon I went round all my friends' homes. I noticed that all of them slept on beds. Some even on mattresses. And each had at least one good blanket. I slept on the most miserable mat on the floor and my blankets were all in rags.

'Mum, my father would have bought me a bed and mattress if he had not deserted me, wouldn't he?

'I guess he would, yes,' mother tried to sound casual.

'But at ten you don't need a father to have a bed.' (p. 14)

Perhaps the mother's suggestion that the son does not need a father at ten to have a bed, thus implying that the son is old enough to work, reveals something about the source of the son's view of the father as the provider. The son has been socialised to represent the concept of 'mother' as a signification of material deficiency, a presence that is essentially an absence of wealth. This viewpoint is an aspect of the discursive representation of the material practices which obtain in the Malawian social formation. The mother is, in essence, alienated from entering the domain of meaningful relations of production; she is *non-labour* in relation to the new capitalist dispensation which has so radically transformed the notion of labour that woman's labour

which had an important social role in peasant societies is hereby pushed to the margins of significant social relations of production.¹¹ The mother's attitude to herself and to her labour does also reflect a defeatist position. The penetration of society by money-based values is never questioned; what the mother represents is a *subjectivity* that merely reflects the values of a dominant ideology. She has come to attribute the unequal access to wealth between men and women to innate differences, thus leaving very little room for her own intervention in the existing sexual politics.¹² The mother is thus a reflection of a gender ideology which firmly places the responsibility of meeting the material needs of the family on the male members of the household. Her collusion with an ideology that undermines her freedom is indicative of that ideological practice that Louis Althusser, in a broader theoretical context, has termed the *interpellation of the subject by authority*, that is, the way in which social institutions such as the family or school inculcate in us ideas and beliefs which represent our subject positions as aspects of timeless structures outside history.¹³

Having been made to see himself as the victim of his father's withdrawal of economic privilege, the son sets out to redress the situation through economic vengeance. The hero comes to see the father as the *persecutor* who must be tracked down and punished. However, in the course of pursuing the *persecutor*, the victim himself turns into a *persecutor* and the *persecutor* into a *victim*. The motif of detection is subtly used to cast the father in the role of the villain who must be discovered and punished and, in addition, it provides a moral justification for the illtreatment of the father once he has been found. This example of the interaction between stylistic and thematic concerns suggests that the former are not free from the ideological contestations which are played out in and through texts. Most important is the fact that through

its imaginative use of a western popular literary narrative mode, the novel provides an excellent example of the process of localising received literary forms.

In addition to being a *persecutor*, the hero is also a rescuer. His vengeance against the father is not just for himself, but also for the deserted mother, for in the masculine frame of the text only the son can avenge the mother's plight. The object of the mission thus becomes double edged: it is personal as much as it is public. In a way, the narrator allots himself a role which is not new in the history of literature. Man as *rescuer* is a common motif in both oral and popular literature. A typical example of this motif can be found in 'Cinderella' where the handsome prince saves the Cinderella from poverty by offering her wealth and status through matrimony. Our hero is not very far from the prince in 'Cinderella' as he too saves his two girlfriends from poverty and the stigma of being 'single mothers' by marrying both of them. At every point in the novel, the hero's role as a defender of women is emphasised, and the means by which he manages to defend them are essentially economic. He needs to be financially better than the men who have victimised women in order to fight back successfully.

The hero pursues his victim to South Africa and once there, he sets about equipping himself for the denouement, the moment when the son will confront the father, not from a position of weakness, that of victim, but rather from a position of strength. It becomes clear that the site of the contest is going to be the financial difference between the two characters:

'George,' Sue asked me, 'Why didn't you have it out with him?'

She asked me that question the moment we had left the prison. And she kept repeating the question every time we were together for at least four months.

Each time I answered her the same way. That prison wasn't the right place for a showdown. Each time,

except this last time after four months. When I told her, 'You know what I have in mind, Sue?'

'No'

'I want him to answer the question when he is really vulnerable and I am really someone.' (The emphasis is mine) (p. 257)

In accordance with the text's view of power, the relationship between the father and the son must be changed before the confrontation can take place. If in their initial relationship the father is presented as a persecutor by his having denied his son material provisions, in the confrontation between the two that eventually takes place the son becomes the persecutor. When the father is about to come back to Malawi, the hero has already worked out the form of punishment he is going to mete out to the father:

If he returned home thinking that he was going to a rich son, he would really be hurt if, on arrival, I told him that on account of what he had done to mother and I - especially mother - we had to say goodbye. (p. 414)

The significance of economic power in the ordering of social relations is once again highlighted.

The final confrontation between father and son at the airport leaves bare the underlying power relations which constitute both femininity and masculinity in the novel. One can observe three discourses at work: that of class, that of gender and that of family. It would be helpful to recount the episode through the narrator's own words:

I gave him my hand. 'Hello, father.'
He shook it. 'Hello,' my dear son. How are you, son!' I freed my hand from his grip to greet the ex-soldier who looked every bit of it in the South African Police wear - which included boots which were not quite old. 'Hello, uncle.' (p. 429).... We were going up when my father asked, 'Your mother? I don't see your mother.' My mother was waiting for my decision. Whether she was

going to meet him at all would depend on whether or not I decided to have anything further to do with him. But I didn't tell him that; I merely said, 'She is at home.' (p. 431)... As we left the arrival hall he asked me, 'Which is our car, my son?' I didn't know if it was going to be his as well. But I said, 'The blue Mercedes Benz.' He wrapped his arm around my shoulders and squeezed me. 'That's it, son. That's it! Where we come from we never settle for the second best. Never!' I was waiting for the right moment. I got it when he had his hand on the door. When he was about to open it. 'What is it, son?' 'Can you tell me,' I drawled, 'what made you tell my mother things you didn't mean, use her like a toy and then desert her while she was expecting?... (p. 432-433) I gave him a lot of time to come up with an answer... I split the money fifty-fifty between the two men. to me, that was enough money to take each one of them to his home - if he still had a home. (p. 433-435)

The confrontation is essentially between representatives of two classes. The father who has just been released from prison represents the precarious nature of the Malawian proletariat whose wealth is dependent on the continued availability of work; it is a class whose members have got to keep fighting against falling back into peasantry, the lowest socio-economic stratum. As Landeg White shows in his book, it is a constant battle that is more often lost than won.¹⁴ On the other hand, the son has joined the new African elite of Blantyre, the new 'white' people who are as merciless towards their less fortunate countrymen as the white colonists. The frequent reference in the text to wealth as an attribute of a white skin is revealing of the exuviation of identity that the new elite have undergone. The hero takes great pride in talking to the South African whites on equal terms because of the confidence that money and social status have brought him. However, what little self-confidence he has acquired is undermined by his need to compare himself with that of the South African whites who are not as well off as he is. The constant need to be acknowledged as doing better than others belies a profound

lack of self-confidence on the part of the character and the class that he represents. This phenomenon might be typical of public discourse in contemporary Malawi. Joseph Hanlon has observed that some Malawian bureaucrats revel in the fact that when they go to South Africa they are treated like whites.¹⁵ One can only describe such a mentality of degrading identification as symptomatic of a subject position firmly entrenched in the colonial modes of symbolising and valorization. The idea of economic advantage as power is visibly at work in the discourses of gender and family being articulated during the confrontation between the father and son.

During this episode the relationship between the father and the son is reversed because of the changed positions in their financial situations. The son, by virtue of being rich and famous, can now dictate the terms of reconciliation. He is now virtually the 'head of the family' as even the mother has been marginalised. She is not allowed to make her own decision as to whether or not she wants to accept her errant husband back. One cannot overemphasize the autocratic nature of the son in his treatment of the parents. Yet, on the other hand, one can understand the conditions which produce such attitudes. If the power relations within the family are part of a wider discourse of power which links the distribution of power to the control of wealth, it is not surprising that the son behaves in the way he does.

In a perceptive statement, the father unknowingly deflates the son's attempt to offer polygamy as a solution to the problem of fatherlessness. Placing the question of polygamy in the domain of the political economy, the father innocently remarks that the son has married two wives because he is rich:

'Yes, you're very rich, son. My own blood. Yes you deserve more than one wife.' (p. 432)

Obviously, the poor father cannot imagine a man of his economic class proudly indulging in polygamy. It seems clear that Kalitera's proposition is not one that everyone can participate in as it is very expensive. It is not surprising therefore that the hero had to wait till he became rich in order to become a polygamist. For poor people, as Landeg White notes, it is not easy to support two wives, let alone to feed and dress and pay school fees for children, much as they might find the idea of polygamy attractive.¹⁶ Even in the rural areas of the country, where one would expect people to keep the practice as a matter of tradition, it is increasingly declining, largely due to the fact that the new cash economy cannot allow poor people to be polygamous as they are, even without the burden of a second or third wife, caught up in what Landeg White has referred to as a 'poverty trap'.¹⁷ What the father's statement does is to underscore the link between specific discursive practices and modes of economic production. If the contrast between the father and the son presents the nuclear family as the field of contestation between the manifest patriarchal discourse and that which discloses the material base of gendered and patriarchal subjectivity, the oppositions between the hero and the men who impregnate the women the hero marries at the end of the novel take the same argument further into the broader sphere of public life.

Principally, the two characters, Jack Lupembe and Joe Phanga, are narrative devices that create the conditions necessary for the major event in the novel, that is, the hero's marriage to two women. If the hero is to have an opportunity to assert the virtues of polygamy by intervening on behalf of fatherless children, the narrative needs some evil men who abandon women and leave children fatherless. Thus, Jack Lupembe is portrayed as someone who is interested in women so long as they do not get pregnant, but as soon as they do, he shows them the door. Writing to the hero while he is still in South

Africa, Mag reveals Lupembe's cruelty by describing how he had thrown her out of the house:

'Jack Lupembe, that man who fought so hard to have me say yes to him, chased me from his house at the hotel in Lilongwe last week. He gave me no reason at all. He simply said that I was to leave or he would commit murder. People who have known him longer than I tell me that I am not the first wife Jack has chased away. These people tell me that what Jack can't stand is a baby in the house.' (p. 274)

As in the opposition between the father and the son, here we have an essentialist representation of *motivation* for the actions of a character, for Lupembe's evil nature is depicted as a personality flaw rather than as a product of the social construction of gender and family relations. Once again, we are presented with a dislocation in the ideological trajectory of the text, an attempt to provide a *commonsense* view of the family crisis in terms of an essentialist viewpoint.¹⁸

The relationship between Jack Lupembe and Mag is essentially underpinned by economic values which ultimately determine the distribution of power between the two partners. When Jack Lupembe first meets the hero with Mag at Zomba plateau, he uses the fact that he has a car to great advantage. Attracted to Mag, he offers the two a lift to Mulunguzi dam and against their will he insists on offering them a lift back home. They have literally to run away from him, even hide from him. Even so, George Supuni is very impressed by the Manager's manner of dress: 'He was extremely well dressed.' (p. 94) It would appear that it is not Supuni alone that Lupembe has made an impression on, but Mag as well. When the two lovers are at the dam, she tells George that the hotel Manager wants her, and that she does not want him. When George asks her,

'How do you know that fellow wants you?', she replies with baffling superior wisdom:

'You men can be blind idiots. You didn't see him winking at me? You didn't see his breath quickening each time he looked at me?' (p. 98)

It later becomes clearer that perhaps she too is not uninterested in the hotel manager as can be discerned from the following conversation:

'If you say that you don't want him, I don't see why running into him again should worry you.'
'It is more complicated than that'... She didn't elaborate.' (p. 99)

The means by which the manager sets out to win the heart of Mag are economic, for example when the latter goes to a secondary school in Lilongwe Jack sends a chauffeur-driven car to collect her from her school. Notwithstanding the lying employed in the attempt to get Mag to bed, it is clear that right from the start the hotel manager uses the economic advantage that he has over both the hero and the woman to get what he wants.

In a revealing statement, Mag tells us that Jack Lupembe had employed the right kind of pressure to get her to bed. She says:

'George, every girl eventually cracks if there is enough of the right pressure. I walked in. But I intended that to be the first and last.' (p. 117)

If the relationship between Jack Lupembe and Mag Dupu provides an insight into the way men coerce women into wanting them even against their will, its revelation of the role of women in such matters is not flattering either. Mag is shown throughout the novel as having understood the language of gender

relations used in this particular social formation. She sees herself as a helpless victim of male cunning and accepts her fate as part of a natural order of things. Her emphasis on female weakness denudes her gender of any modicum of volition. In all this, just like the hero's mother, she avails herself of the existing discourse of gender in which she has been thoroughly socialised. Right from childhood, she has been taught to defer to men as the episode at the river demonstrates:

'I wanted to drink first. But the women laughed and shook their heads. No, I, the man, was to drink first, so I drunk first and Mag drunk last.' (p. 39)

Not only has she been taught to put the wishes of men above hers, but she has learnt the seemingly mysterious language of courtship as well. Unlike the hero, she can tell when a man's heart is 'quickenning'; she even knows about the 'right pressure' that breaks a woman, things that our naive hero finds bewilderingly strange.

Most important of all, it is the different roles she assumes in the way she relates to the two men in her life that reveal the complexity of the female gender role. In contrast to her role in her relationship with Jack Lupembe, in which she is an innocent victim who is being pursued by a cunning and financially powerful man, in her relationship with George Supuni, she is presented as the more aggressive and daring of the partners. After Jack Lupembe has dropped them off at Mulunguzi dam, she is the one who suggests to the hero that they bathe together and Supuni is shocked by her daring behaviour:

'The fun is in going under there together.' She was taking me by storm again. 'You mean ...' The idea was exciting. But then someone could come. There was no knowing how long or short we would have the dam to

ourselves.

'That is a risk we have to take, George.' When I hesitated, she caught my hand. 'George, please.' (p. 97)

She is even the one who proposes marriage to the hero. She organises a party without any prior consultation with George and asks him to bring his mother along. When asked by George the reason she wants the mother to be present at the party, she replies:

'I can tell you that. I would like you and I to become engaged formally before I go to school. And we can do that only with your mother and my parents present.' I was used to Mag taking me by storms now. (p. 105-106)

In many respects in her relationship with the hero, the expected gender discourse is inverted, not however as an assertion of resistance to the dominant gender ideology, but rather as part of the ideological project of the novel which seeks to represent the hero as different from the other men who pursue women even against their will. Her gesture of *counter-identification* contributes towards the narcissistic representation of the hero's *masculine mystique*. To a large extent, the narrative's desire to portray the hero as being different from the characters to which he stands in opposition, invests the character of Mag with those values that are being disapproved of in men. One can surmise, following the paramount role capital is shown to play in the text in privileging one partner over another within matrimonial and romantic relationships, that perhaps in Mag's 'manly' attitude towards the hero, we have an instance of male attributes being given to a female because of the economic advantage she has over the male partner. Mag, as has already been pointed out, comes from a family that is financially better off than the hero's and as a

result she has helped the hero with some of his material needs such as blankets and money. It is possible that the economic advantage she has over the hero shapes her attitude to him and gives her a space in which she can act out the role of man. On the other hand, confronted with a man who is a class above her such as Jack Lupembe, she must play the traditional role of a woman. Indeed, it can be argued that the reason the hero has to wait to marry Mag till he is rich and Mag is with child by another man is to regain the power over her that he had lost as a teenage sweetheart. In a sense, when the hero finally marries Mag, he becomes a Jack Lupembe, imposing his will on those over whom he wields economic power, on those who have no other means of social mobility except by identifying themselves with those who have power. However such machinations are rendered subtly in the text as they are presented as forms of redemption and philanthropy rather than economic and sexual oppression.

Philanthropy as a guise for exploitation becomes an important factor in the relationship between Sue and Joe Phanga, a relationship which, like that between Jack Lupembe and Mag, is evidently supposed to provide a contrast to the hero's treatment of women and his polygamous marriage. Joe Phanga, like Jack Lupembe, uses economic privilege in his relationship with women. He represents the epitome of callous cunning. To begin with Joe takes advantage of the fact he has a car and Sue does not. He offers her lifts to and from work every morning. After a week, he takes her out to a drive-in-cinema to watch 'The Spy Who Came in from the Cold,' a significant title in the light of the foxy plan Joe has up his sleeve. He arranges with a friend to turn up while they are at the cinema and ask Joe to help with his car which is supposed to have broken down a few miles outside Blantyre. When Joe and Sue reach the place Joe tells Sue that his car has run out of petrol and that petrol stations *

do not open at night. His friend's car is purportedly also out of petrol. Sue is forced into spending the night with Joe. The relationship between Sue and Joe continues until she falls pregnant and he tells her that in fact he is married and his wife is about to come back from Germany where she is studying medicine. The contrast between Joe and the hero in terms of attitudes to women seems indisputable when one compares Joe's treatment of Sue with the rescue operation that George mounts to save her from committing suicide. However when one takes into account George's abandonment of Sue as soon as they have arrived in Malawi, the hero's own attitude towards women is not entirely blameless. Having lost interest in Sue on account of having met up with Mag again, he starts ill-treating her in order to drive her away without seeming to. He tells us:

'My intention was to gradually annoy her till she begun to lose her temper. Which would only be the beginning. After that she would realise that trying to stick would only mean more and more pain. At that point, if there happened to be someone else chasing her, which I knew there would be, because of her sausage like body, she would go to him.' (p. 318)

Later he deserts her by moving house while she is away. Considering that he has brought her all the way from South Africa and that she has no relations in Malawi, he cannot be seen as different from Joe. The fact that he rescues her from a suicide attempt and that he later marries her for the sake of the child she is carrying does not minimise his irresponsible behaviour. In a sense, one suspects that he is the one who is to blame for Sue's falling into Joe's hands as it is he, the hero, who puts Sue in a desperate position by abandoning her without any qualms. Here we are confronted with a significant area of

blindness in the text, the production of an ideological excess that the narrative cannot account for without foregrounding its contradictions. The narrative desire to have Sue in a position where she is pregnant and therefore in need of rescue by the hero, overrides the attempt to present him as the most upright of all the male characters in the novel.

The narrative fissure noted above is symptomatic of a wrong reading by the hero of his subject position in his social formation; he has been rather quick to cast a stone at other men without examining his own position. The hero's radical views on the welfare of children do not extend to the children's mothers. The most telling evidence of the attitude is in the way he *images* women. When he is in South Africa he uncritically uses the language of Afrikaner patriarchy without stopping even for a minute to question its ideological implications. The reason he does not protest is because his attitude is not different from that of Pet Stoffel, his Afrikaner boss. One day as they are working on samples in the laboratory, Stoffel tells George about the affair he is having with the wife of the mine secretary:

'Oh, damn the sample! She's more important than all the samples in here today put together!' But he suddenly smiled. 'Boys will always be boys. You see, I am married and yet I won't disengage myself from that woman!' (p. 236)

Even the sexist conversation they have as they go to pick up Stoffel's girlfriend and Sue aptly demonstrates that despite the racial barrier and cultural difference between the two characters, their attitudes to women are very similar:

'You are going to have a lot of fun. That girl is an Angel.' It was a whiteman speaking highly of a black girl. 'There are two girls on the train. Both about the same age. Do you think that the black girl is

superior to the white girl on a woman to woman basis?'
'Purely on a woman to woman footing?'
'That is right.'
'Why by far. Love is one hundred percent sausage. At the club each of us has admitted it before our wives that if it hadn't been for the Immorality Act, we would be tearing each other over that girl.'

The hero's conformity with the discourse of male territoriality apart, his participation in a discursive practice that tropes women into a culinary sexual *ideologeme* suggests that though he has set himself up as a defender of women, he is still caught up in the very rhetorical representations that legitimize the situation from which he wishes to protect them. The degree to which the hero's mission is compromised by identifying with the dominant mode of rhetorical representations of gender is best illustrated by his sermon on the virtues of polygamy:

'Before the whiteman came our people married more than one wife. No matter who'll argue to the contrary, I will stand by my word that when it came to protecting girls and children, that system was the best ever. In those communities there were no mothers without husbands. No children without fathers. If you wanted a girl you simply married her regardless of the number of wives you had already..... One had to agree that the idea was beautiful. One man worrying with no more than one woman and the children by her. But which one man was so holy that he ignored every other woman the moment he got married? The idea had ignored the maxim, 'boys will always be boys'. That was the reason it was washout. Because everything which ignores human nature always failed.....

'You start talking about having nothing to do with any woman but your wife, they start asking you, 'What about when she has a small baby? What about when she is this and that? Moreover, you can't eat vegetables everyday. It ruins the appetite'. (My emphasis) (pp. 393-396)

As the passage shows, the ease with which our radical hero appropriates terms from what is essentially a masculine form of discourse is grounded in his

support of a gender ideology which takes gender difference as God-given. His argument that monogamy is unnatural provides the best example of how a humanistic ideological position with its insistence on the notion of an essential human nature can be used to underwrite and legitimize oppressive social relations. It is equally significant that the moment the hero contradicts his humanist stance, by acknowledging the role of history, he offers a version of precolonial history which supports the form of matrimonial practice that he has already *privileged*. The hero also appeals to cultural nationalism: 'before the whiteman came our people married more than one wife.' By appealing to nationalistic sentiments, he collapses gender difference into a collective identity within which male hegemony is secured and entrenched. There is yet another moment in the passage when the imaginary nature of the thematized humanist project is forced to acknowledge the centrality of social forces in the production of gendered subjectivity: 'you start talking about having nothing to do with any woman but your wife, they start asking you...' The contradictions in the project of the novel reveal how the text elides discourses which threaten its ideological trajectory in order to justify its preference for polygamy rather than monogamy. However, the most significant ideological elision in the novel is the transfer of the problem of fatherlessness from the domain of the political economy of gender to that of patriarchal philanthropy.

The contradictions which I have located in the text show us that a project that is radical in one respect might be found to be conservative in others. We have seen how the relentless attempt to protect the child is achieved at the expense of the mother. Secondly, we have seen how both women and men as gendered subjects cooperate in the oppression of women, which goes to show the complexity of gendered subjectivity, and the inadequacy of some of the Feminists' positions'⁹ which, by transferring questions of gender ideology

from culture to biology, have ended up producing a simple and false antagonism between male and female identity, which has, sometimes, alienated those men who have wanted to make a contribution towards the emancipation of women. We are thus reminded that male hegemony is not a matter of biology, but rather of culture. On the whole, it can be said that in Kalitera's project the emancipatory moment is simultaneously and principally an enactment of phallic power, in the most literal sense of the phrase. Here the vision is individualist and history is offered as the imaginary location of a masculine subjectivity whose memory of recent history is of cultural emasculation.

Kalitera's *Mother, Why Mother* is an impassioned display of female wickedness, shortsightedness and plain selfishness, on the one hand, and male selflessness, foresightedness, generosity, moral and intellectual superiority, on the other. Whenever negative moral qualities are attributed to a male character, they are presented as the deserved punishment for a rebellious woman, thus rendering male turpitude a regulatory mechanism of female transgression. In the novel, marriage and motherhood are offered as the quintessential constituents of recommended female subjectivity, and female autonomy as the pathological manifestation of the threat to social stability.

Constituting the major binary opposition, is the relationship between Juliet Mpunga and Jim Kamanga, within which the axes of economic power and gender difference are intersected by the elements of race/ethnicity and class. We are first introduced to the gender ideology of the social formation in the initial meeting between the two characters:

He was on his way home when he saw a girl leaning against the telephone booth at the Bus Depot.. In Jim's book no girl came easier than the deserted lass... He noticed that she was standing on the most wonderful legs he had ever seen on a woman. They made him remember how someone had once described a woman's shapely legs which were so nice they made you imagine that there was a tube

under the skin; a tube which enabled her to pump them to the right size for the right moment. (p. 10-12)

The image of masculinity that Jim represents in the passage is one of a predatory being, which reduces the figure of the woman into an inanimate object through a referential language that is charged with values which dehumanise not only the woman but the man as well. This form of representation is illustrated by the mechanistic imagery the hero employs in describing Juliet's legs. The dehumanisation of the 'Other' by the hero creates a space within which the hero himself can be free to play at being a thing/an object. Jim's interpellation of Juliet reminds us that dominant gender ideology functions by arrogating to itself the right to choose the discursive site of engagement, thereby foreclosing the possibility of *counter-identification* with its ideological trajectory. Furthermore, Jim's attitude to Juliet introduces us to an array of other masculine values which inform the kind of masculine identity that we are invited to experience in the novel.

Sexual congress is largely depicted as a game of conquest in which a male partner tries to elicit subordination from a woman whose physical attributes or exoticism or class provides a challenge to the hero. The issue of class is evidently central in the relationship between Juliet and Jim:

The man felt his self-confidence desert him. No, this woman was classes above him. If he had car, yes, he would have stopped to say hello. It was painful to decide that there was nothing he could do but walk on and go home.... (p. 12)

Jim's triumph is thus all the more exhilarating because of having 'conquered' someone who is, by socioeconomic stratification, beyond his reach. Kate Millet, notes that in literature there are are many instances in which 'the caste of

virility triumphs over the social status of wealth.²⁰ It would appear that biological difference, of gender or race, is generally the last resort of a socially disadvantaged male.²¹ It is in this sense that the notion of class must be seen as one which functionally pertains to a discursive universe where biological difference is less visible and therefore a less important factor in determining social differentiation. Added to the masculine need to level out class difference by interpellating a woman as subject of gender ideology, is the power that accrues from the conquest of the exotic:

When they got home he didn't intend to merely stare at this exciting half shona woman as if she was a bottle of poison. He wanted to make all his dreams come true. (p. 21)

A Rhodesian (Zimbabwean) woman in Malawi is seen as exotic if not sophisticated. In the colonial and Federal geopolitics of Central Africa, Zimbabwe was the El Dorado to most Malawians. That was where wealth and all the trappings of modernity were to be found. Thus, in a large measure Juliet's exoticism in the eyes of the hero is part of the *imaginary* produced by colonial discourse in order to insert the values of migrant labour in the very fabric of Malawian male subjectivity. An exotic woman, as the woman who is higher on the social scale, is perceived as a prestige 'object' by the outsider or socially inferior male. In this regard the acquisition of the exotic and strange must be seen as function of the attempt at domesticating the gap of difference. Far from being a substantive leveller of difference, exoticism is here shown to be a suspension of difference in the interest of colonizing the *Other*.

Anthropological curiosity is not limited to the Malawian male alone; it is visibly at work in the relationship between the colonial British police officers

and the local woman, as is evident in the following conversation between Jim and Juliet:

'Rather, I will point out the Police station to you.'
She told him, 'Oh, that is the last place I would turn to!'
He was surprised. 'Why?'
'They would take me to a white officer who would think I was a godsent present.' (p. 20)

The woman's choice of help seems limited as she cannot rely on the colonial police officers either whose attitude is no different from Jim's. Both public (*State Apparatuses*) and private forms of *rescue* are in effect forms of *persecution* whose underlying motive is not to provide succour, but to turn her into a *victim*.²² Thus, when she follows Jim home the game is over as she is now at his mercy and it is only a matter of time before she gives in. Juliet has been rescued from spending a night at a deserted bus depot, but at a price. Up to this point Juliet has mostly been portrayed as a passive victim with a very limited range of choices; indeed the very concept of choice is rendered as not being applicable to her. The hero's attitude to Juliet suggests that the social formation whose values are being reproduced here precludes the possibility of a woman and man seeing themselves in terms other than sexual. The only choice Juliet has is to negotiate within the area of intersection between gender and racial discourse, and between the discourse of officialdom and that of *private* power relations.

Juliet effects a form of *pragmatic identification* with dominant gender practice as way of survival. Juliet is shown to be far from being a passive victim of masculine discursive interpellation. Like Mag in *Why Father, Why* she has been thoroughly schooled in the gender practice of her society and shows little sign of having transcended the subject position that patriarchal authority

has created for her. It is noteworthy that her cooperation with her seducer involves her acceptance of the gendered role of woman in a household. She offers to cook for Jim because, in her own words, 'I never allow a man to cook for me.' (p. 27) By slipping into her feminine role Juliet has subtly accepted the sexual role that Jim is trying to force her into in order to minimise whatever amount of power she might have over him by dint of her superior class position. When moments later they make love, one is not surprised for at no point has she shown a willingness to resist Jim's attempts at finding her 'secret combination' through *interpellating* her gender subject position.

However there is more to Juliet than a mere passive collaborator with the masculine will to conquest: for although she has given in to Jim, she has not surrendered herself completely and it is this fact alone that creates the conditions for her to put paid to Jim's hope of a complete victory. She has merely played a survival game. She knows, as is evident in the following passage, that at the point of intersection between gender, class and race, it would be to her economic and social advantage to marry the white Zimbabwean Pat Jones rather than the black Malawian Jim Kamanga:

It wasn't a question of choosing her man between Pat and Jim. Jim was just a passing something, an experience. Something that gave her a chance to try out her own people before shutting the door between them and her irrevocably. Patrick Jones was the man God had sent her. He was Jim's superior a million times over. Jim had this house which was nice, Pat lived with his parents in Bulawayo. But when he came to Zomba, he was going to get a 'European' house which would be a million times better than Jim's. (p. 43-44)

Jim's intuitive feeling, when he first encounters Juliet, that he needs a car to impress her is not far from the truth. Juliet has come to understand the sexual politics of her social formation: it all boils down to an exchange of

sexual companionship for money. The choice between Jim and Pat is not a question of love, but of economic security. Of course Pat being white is much higher than Jim in the colonial economic hierarchy and she is going to go for him. In the racial and political circumstances that surround Juliet, her attitude to gender relations represents a radical attempt to undermine the existing gender discourse through a process whereby the *imaginary* elements of gender ideology, those aspects of ideology that produce false consciousness, are substituted with a pragmatic attempt to exploit an exploitative system. The way in which the value system of the novel comes to terms with Juliet's act of rebellion is by construing it as an act of a racial and gender deviancy.

The narrator's viewpoint and Jim's are motivated by what Freud has described as the '*narcissism of small differences*': the almost universal phenomenon of ethnic self-love which is often visible in the protection of 'one's women folk' from the males of another race or ethnic groups.²⁹ The claim to territorial power over the women of one's group often entails producing negative representations of the outsider. It is the same strategy of exclusion at work when Juliet is made to say, by the narrator, that the colonial white police officers are universally corrupt in terms of their attitudes to the local women. In essence, Jim's attitude to women of his racial group is no different from that of the white colonial police officers as both of them use whatever forms of power they have at their disposal to entice and coerce women into sleeping with them. The only difference is that the author thinks Jim has a greater racial claim to women of his group than the white colonial officers. Thus the large measure of disapproval of Juliet's behaviour has a lot to do with the fact that she looks outside rather than inside the race for an economic rescuer.

On the other hand, Jim's and the narrator's point of view might be

construed as a statement of protest against the differentially gendered access to power within the colonial social formation. The colonized female can have the fiction of power through sexual intimacy or matrimony with the ruling group, something that the colonized male will most likely have been excluded from through legal sanctions and ideological indoctrination. These double standards have been known to operate in the relationship between the black slaves and their masters in the United States.²⁴ The gendered unequal access to the realm of power between the colonized male and female is very similar to that which operates among the lower class. Kate Millett's observations on the differential access to privilege between lower class men and women sheds some useful light on the negotiation of gender and socio-economic structure within the colonial social formation:

It is possible to argue that women tend to transcend the usual class stratifications in patriarchy, for whatever the class of her birth and education, the female has fewer permanent class associations than does the male. Economic dependency renders her affiliations with any class a tangential, vicarious and temporary matter.²⁵

The underprivileged male's way of coming to terms with the 'easy social mobility', if it might be called that, that is open to his female counterpart is by dismissing those women who have moved up as materialistic and wayward, therefore a representation of abnormal femininity. This would appear to be the case with the overall portrayal of Juliet in the novel.

The relationship between race, gender and the political economy is further evident in the discursive consequences Juliet's intention to get married to a white man give rise to in the novel. As the following passage shows, Jim is hoping that Juliet's fear of bringing up an illegitimate child will force her to reconsider her decision:

'Okay, hear me out. It is true you are marrying a whiteman. Well and good. Now let us remember that you and I had our full sweet night.... Your marriage will blow apart. That is when you'll realise that you and I, after all, had been moulded for each other.' She told him, 'You are going to become God first.' (p. 80-85)

We have an instance here of the utilisation of sexual difference (anatomical and physiological difference) in the maintenance of gender ideology (the cultural representation of sexual difference). The reproductive function of the female is being appropriated for the imposition of the hero's wishes on Juliet as a way of both limiting her freedom of choice and reminding her of her ultimate duty, the reproduction and care of the 'species.' It is not accidental that the language used by the hero in announcing Juliet's punishment has biblical resonances. The phrase 'moulded for each other,' places the gender practice in a larger context where religion serves the interest of patriarchy, for example in the Judeo-Christian faith where maternity is presented as a form of punishment for the temptress Eve. The allusion to Christianity in *Mother, Why Mother* by a writer who in *Why Father, Why* lambasts Christianity for destroying polygamous marriage can only be seen as a strategic marshalling of available discourses, even if that leads to obvious ideological contradiction, in propping up a threatened male hegemony. Of course, this is not the first time religion has been used to underwrite unequal relations of gender: the 'National Church of Malawi' which supports polygamy and often looks suspiciously at monogamous members of the church is a glaring example of the flexible utilisation of religion by patriarchy.

The identification of the hero with God goes beyond the act of representing female sexuality and reproductive function as punitive, it incorporates the attempt to control woman through a privileged masculine

knowledge from which she is excluded. Like God, Jim would like to have Juliet's future in his hands. By denying him this form of power over her future through representing it to herself as fiction and refusing to acknowledge it, Juliet is articulating the desire to undermine the existing gender discourse in order, in the words of Existentialists, to define a personal space, *eigenwelt*, where the socialised self gives way to a vision defined, not by the norms and values imposed upon it by society, but by radical values which liberate it from the world of being-with-the-other, *mitwelt*, the world of social experience.²⁶ However, this attempt to *counter-identify* with the masculine interpellative gesture is diminished in its emancipatory value in the face of the ubiquitous omniscient and omnipresent masculine authority. The narrator, with a great deal of relish in his voice, wishes Juliet had been aware that such men as Jim are not to be treated lightly; they stick and haunt you for the rest of your life.

The appropriation of biological sexual difference for male hegemony is further evident in the relationship between Juliet and her husband Bob Hawkings. The letter that Bob receives from the father presents marriage solely in terms of the needs of patriarchy:

'Your mother and I read your letter with distress. As you know we always hoped that you would have a number of children. As you know, we always prayed that when such children came, you and your wife would be kind enough to let one or two or three come and live with grannie and grandie. Much as we would want to, your mother and I can't bring up coloured grand-children in England... You made a mistake by taking that girl to bed and you must now live with it.' (p. 165-166)

As far as Bob's parents are concerned, the role of a woman in marriage is to reproduce children, not necessarily for herself, but for the kinship group. Once again the role of maternity is rendered not as a matter of choice for a woman,

but as her inescapable matrimonial duty. This point is given further emphasis in determining the acceptability of Bob's marriage to a 'native': like Jim, Bob's parents argue that pregnancy must necessarily end up in marriage, a view that disregards the importance of elements such as compatibility between marriage partners. This position asserts the primacy of children within the institution of marriage and accords negligible space to the personal relationships between the partners which in the long run might be the most vital factor in the happiness of the children. Thus the procreation of children becomes implicated in the politics of gender which are ultimately rooted in the distribution of social and economic power within the social formation.

The instrumentalist view of marriage being presented in the novel is further revealed when Juliet's failure to conceive leads to the break up of her marriage to Bob. Having told the parents that the only reason he had married Juliet was 'nothing more than animal lust', Bob does not inform the parents of the 'miscarriage' because he is scared that they might ask him to leave Juliet; and as a result of his lying, the parents are making arrangements to retire to Nyasaland (Malawi) to look after their grandchild who in effect is nonexistent. Bob badly wants a child so that he does not appear a liar to them, but he and Juliet cannot have children. Consequently, Bob divorces Juliet. Significantly, it does not cross Bob's mind that it is just possible that the problem might be with him rather than Juliet. He uses a very crude biologism to add scientific validity to his belief that it is Juliet who is infertile. Juliet has told him that she miscarried when in fact she had abandoned the baby when she realised that it was black. Working on the information provided by Juliet, Bob constructs a pseudo-gynaecological explanation for Juliet's supposed infertility:

'Your child was still born so it never put its mouth to your breast.... The breast never asked the womb to switch off. So the womb should have been ready for

conception immediately the baby was born and lost... Suppose that the breast was never asked to manufacture milk, but then it asked the womb to switch off. That command will never be able to cancel the order when it stops producing milk in the first place. In that case, I hate to imagine the valve at the womb will always remain closed and you will never conceive again. (p. 169-170)'

Although the scientific validity of Bob's argument is of rather dubious quality, the recourse to a privileged knowledge, the kind that Juliet is evidently not acquainted with, takes us into an area where scientific discourse is shown to be gendered in as far as it is used to confound and produce representations of female identity over which women have little control. The radical feminists have not been wrong in seeking to deconstruct scientific discourse even going as far as changing the word, 'gynaecology' to 'gyn/ecology'.²⁷ However, of greater critical interest is the way the construction of woman's biology serves as a narrative device for ensuring that Juliet remains inescapably tied to the fate that Jim has decreed for her; it is meant to make her regret having left Jim and abandoned the baby. In other words, the whole motivation of the narrative action which centres around Juliet's sterility is revealed as being based on a gross misunderstanding of female biology, thereby making one wonder whether the observations the author makes on the psychological motivations for the heroine's actions are not themselves merely attempts to produce a pathology of female subjectivity which can then be used as a basis for making a general statement about the need for women to privilege marriage to local men, as well as motherhood and parenting, over considerations of personal interest.

The author relentlessly depicts Juliet as mercenary in her relationships with men. Her switching over from Pat to Jim and back to Pat and then to Bob is meant to portray Juliet as a 'tart', one who does not conform to the rules of

the existing gender discourse operating here, which demand that a woman be chaste while at the same time approving of male philandering. She duly and quickly entices Bob Hawkings whose racist views, we are told, vanish when dazzled by Juliet's physical beauty. She takes up values associated with masculinity, the kind we have already seen Jim employing when he meets her at the bus depot. By disturbing the gender discourse through using 'bad gender grammar' she produces a monstrous discourse which the narrator and the author have no means of correcting except by destroying her and asserting the invincibility of the socially legitimate rules of gender practice. The representation of Juliet as an amazon prepares the reader for what happens later in the novel when Juliet, realising that she has given birth to a black baby rather than a coloured one as is expected, tries to get rid of it. Through a series of attempts to get rid of the baby, she dumps it in Jim's flat in the hope of returning later to kill both Jim and the baby; however her plans are foiled by Bob's excessive attention to her. Jim finds the baby and decides to bring it up. The text suggests that Juliet has tied the role of motherhood to her economic interests. The only reason she would wish to have a child is to ensure that bringing up the child will protect and enhance her position of economic privilege.

Such an opportunity arises when she realises that the wealth she and her second husband, Frank Mapanga, have created might pass to the latter's son. Overall, Frank functions as an agent of what is considered a morally condign punishment for a transgressive woman. While Juliet is at the hospital as a result of a car accident she has been involved in, Bob sends her a letter which says that it is finished between the two of them. She meets a cunning hospital assistant who smells that Juliet has money and a relationship starts. Frank Mapanga, the hospital assistant, plots to marry Juliet without telling his wife.

Frank's motives for marrying Juliet do not leave any room for love between the two of them; it removes any fiction that has masked Juliet's previous relationships:

The man was not exaggerating his feeling over Juliet's money. He really felt that it was a fortune.... He was going to make that woman marry him. He had use for her money..... For a number of years now the man had this burning thought that if only he could grab a bit of money, he would turn into the protectorate's first black millionaire. (p. 196-198)

To Frank, Juliet is the means to economic success whilst for Juliet the relationship is a means to emotional security and social respectability. In this relationship, Juliet's role has changed from that of a recipient to that of a provider. The money Bob has left her does not allow her to choose a relationship which would ensure her happiness, but instead it attracts a parasitic male whose interest in her is not sex, as in Jim's case, or anthropological curiosity as in the case of Bob, but money. Her divorce renders her vulnerable to Frank's machinations: she has come to depend on Frank's friendship and he is aware of it. She marries him, not knowing that he has a wife and children in another district.

Perhaps what is even more undermining of her sexual identity is the fact that even after she has acquired what she wanted, money, she cannot stand on her own feet. We see her relying on a man who has nothing except his superior foresight. In a way Juliet is merely a conduit in the economic game of the social formation: a man has given her money and she needs another man to invest it in the sort of business that will ensure that she continues to live in comfort. She can only experience power vicariously through Frank's control of her money and businesses. Indeed, Juliet is given very little narrative space in

which to work out her own future since she is hastily shoved from one relationship to another by the narrator at a speed that could only be described as astronomical. In the characterization of Juliet then, we witness the operation, in functional terms, of a form of *interpellative practice* that operates by repressing the plurality of subjectivity and reductively representing the female subject solely and wholly in terms of her gender, and having done so proceeding merely to move her along the fixed gaze of masculine hegemony, finally creating the impression that it all flows from the logic of the characterization of the subject.

Juliet and Frank become very rich, but for Frank the wealth needs an heir and he wants to bring in his son by his first wife to whom he is still married without Juliet's knowledge. He argues that they need someone to whom the business should be handed over:

'You and I are fighting tooth and nail to build this business into whatever it will be one day. But then it is all a waste of time and effort if when we go, there will be nobody to take it from where we are going to leave it. Because we are not going to be around forever. As they say in America, 'What would happen if there was nobody to hand America over to.' (p. 233)

Juliet has hitherto been thinking in terms of herself and not in terms of the broader patriarchal discourse in which she is inscribed. Frank's request to bring in his son rudely reminds her of the practice of inheritance in which an older generation transfers power, material goods and traditions to the younger. The patriarchal principle of agnation by which property is inherited through male descent is subtly implied in Frank's speech. Although the wealth to be distributed has been generated by a woman, somewhere along the line it may have to be passed over to male guardianship. On the whole, the passage is meant to

remind us of the contrast between the short term female perspective and the long term one of the male. Reminded of her parental duty and her duty to the future of the family by Frank, she decides to make good her past mistake by getting back the child that she had abandoned years before. As she tries to trace Jim and the daughter, who has been named after her, she undergoes a series of humiliating experiences all of which are calculated to make her repent of her past behaviour.

From this point onwards, the novel celebrates Juliet's humiliation and her eventual death when she is rejected by the daughter. Frank, fearing that if Juliet gets her daughter back she might go back to Jim and break off the marriage with him, engages an assassin who kills Jim. Not only has Juliet shown her bestiality, that is according to the moral view point of the novel, by abandoning her daughter for money, but has also caused the destruction of a good man, the father, who is bringing up the child abandoned by a materialistic unfeeling barbarous mother. We are meant to condemn Juliet for indirectly rendering the child she has abandoned not only motherless, but fatherless as well. Nonetheless, the hypocritical stance of the ideological perspective adopted by the novel is still transparent, especially when one considers that Jim's angelic behaviour is not for its own sake but for the sake of making Juliet regret ever having refused to accept Jim's request for marriage.

Juliet receives her ultimate punishment at the hands of her daughter Jackie:

'What baffles me is your shamelessness. You didn't feel sorry for me when I was one day old and helpless. But you want to pity me now when I can fend for myself. You denied me your breast but now you think that I am too precious to walk six miles. If you want to know I would like to spit into your face. On the other hand, I feel that you aren't worth the trouble.' (p. 404)

Juliet is so hurt by her daughter's speech that she decides to commit suicide. It is worth noting that the poison with which she commits suicide was given to her by Bob. It might be of symbolic significance that Bob who gives her money also gives her poison, both of which only serve as Juliet's nemesis. It speaks a great deal about the single-mindedness with which the moral vision of the novel is pursued that Juliet is ultimately given very little choice even in the very personal act of suicide - Bob the economic rescuer has already given her the way out of her defeated life. As for Jackie, she comes across as an inadequate agent of moral retribution. When Juliet's lawyer tells her that she is the heir to a large estate she responds by showing greater concern over the administrative difficulties of running such a huge enterprise than over her mother's tragic demise. The hardheartedness with which she condemns the mother and the readiness with which she accepts the mother's estate render her statement that her mother deserves a respectable funeral hypocritical and lacking in the kind of moral stature that would have towered over that of the guilty mother.

Like her mother she is shown to need the help of a male, the uncle, in running her business, thus clearly foregrounding the discourse which has led to her mother's tragic end: the mother is dead but the larger gender discourse that has led to her tragedy is still alive and well. Jackie's identification with dominant gender ideology can be further discerned in her materialistic attitude to life. She is fascinated by Frank's son who drives a Mercedes Benz. If she is supposed to provide a moral contrast to the mother, her love of dazzling wealth seems to lead her life in the same direction that the novel condemns in its representation of the mother. On the whole, the text seems to have great difficulty in offering a model of its version of acceptable female subjectivity.

In the end, the novel becomes merely an ideological arena where female

materialism and inter-racial marriages are seen as a threat to the stability of a local gender practice. In the final analysis, the heroine who is meant to represent feminine depravity becomes a figure of pity who is seen as a victim not only of the gender ideology of the fictive space, but also of that of the social formation whose value system is reproduced by the novel. The norms and values on the basis of which Juliet's moral standing is measured are part of a discourse that is beyond her control and over which she has little say. There is a disturbing silence in the novel: Juliet's side of the story is never heard, it is rendered to us by a prejudiced masculine voice, whose self-fashioned moral and gender ideology elides those other voices which it *demonises* and silences. Like the novel we considered in the previous section, *Mother Why Mother* is not at all a progressive novel as far as the representation of women is concerned. Its failure is not, as in *Why Father, Why* one of preaching a superficial liberalism, but rather an outright articulation of a male supremacist ideological position. It is a novel that strongly attacks the disturbance of the status quo of gender stratification, role and temperament. In the brutal portrayal of the heroine, in the zealous and dogmatic protection of the institution of motherhood, and in its xenophobia, the novel reminds us of that inextricable link between racism and gender that Feminists have frequently discussed.²⁸

THE PRICE OF MARRIAGE STABILITY IN DEDE KAMKONDO'S *TRUTH WILL OUT* AND DAVID MAILLU'S *THORNS OF LIFE*

Unlike his fellow-countryman Aubrey Kalitera, Dede Kamkondo is part of the literary establishment in Malawi. He is a product of the Writers' Workshop

based at Chancellor College, University of Malawi, from which have emerged such internationally known writers as Jack Mapanje, Steve Chimombo, Ken Lipenga, Anthony Nazombe, Lupenga Mpande, Felix Munthali and Frank Chipasula.²⁹ In his undergraduate days, Kamkondo distinguished himself as a fine writer, winning a prize in a local *British Council Short Story Competition*, and in a *Department of English Playwrights Competition*, in addition to publishing numerous short stories in the local press. For a time, he was the editor of the student literary broadsheet, *Muse*, and under the tutelage of James Gibbs in the University of Malawi Travelling Theatre, he emerged as an actor of great promise.³⁰ He is now a lecturer in Communications at Bunda College, University of Malawi. Kamkondo's debut on the international literary scene with his *Truth Will Out* in the Macmillan Pacesetters Series is a welcome contribution to a genre that is fast becoming staple reading in Africa. Kamkondo's alliance with the populist trend in African literature exonerates him from the charge of being elitist which has been levelled against University-based writers in Malawi by the winner of the 1981 *B.B.C International Arts and Africa Poetry Award*, the Blantyre-based bank clerk Edson Mpina.³¹

Truth Will Out, like Kalitera's *Why Father, Why* and *Mother, Why Mother* situates Malawi in a broad international setting, bringing together through the experiences of the characters the historical links Malawi has had with countries such as Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Britain. Reading the two authors one is struck by the extent to which the cultural geography of Malawi is interpenetrated by other cultures, thereby confronting one with a national identity that is at one and the same time fluid as well as remarkably resilient. There is the touching solidarity of the Malawians abroad, in Zimbabwe and Zambia as well as in Britain. There is a sense of being different experienced by the returned migrant population in relation to those who have not been. It is in the

whirlpool of such cultural internationalism that the problem of what constitutes an ideal marriage is explored in *Truth Will Out*. The novel argues that the protection of traditional notions of ideal femininity and masculinity might in the end lead to the much-dreaded instability of marriage, which in the first place it seeks to minimise. In this respect, the novel is a perfect example of a handbook on how to succeed in marriage, thus falling squarely in the didactic narrative mode of the literature produced by the Mission-owned presses and the Government-controlled literature bureaux established in East and Central Africa during the colonial period. In content, the novel is not far from Chafulumira's *Mkazi Wabwino* (A Good Wife) which enumerates the qualities of a good wife.³² Thus, Kamkondo's *Truth Will Out* is as much part of a specific and determinate literary history as of a tradition in the making. Nevertheless, however much one is persuaded by the zealously argued need for the stability of marriage, one is well aware that what is offered as a universal representation of marriage is in fact particular; it is the health of the middle class marriage which is threatened by something lower than itself that is universalised by the novel. In this respect, the troping of marriage in the novel has broad political ramifications for the ideological location of the novel within the discourse of gender in Malawi, in particular, and Africa in general.

Although it is the marriage between Dr. Dan Moyo and Julia Masamba which constitutes the hub of the story, it is in the relationship between Julia and her parents that the tension between feminine ideality and the novel's version of recommended marriage practice is primarily elaborated. Julia's parents are migrant labourers in Zimbabwe where she is born and brought up. At thirteen, Julia is impregnated by Alphonse, an eighteen year old son of fellow Malawian immigrants. The Masambas who are Church Elders in the 'Church of Central Africa Presbyterianism,' in fear of the consequences of Julia's pregnancy out of

wedlock, send her off to a boarding school in Malawi, and Julia's mother disappears for a while and comes back with Julia's baby which she claims she has given birth to while away from Harare where they live. The mother more than the father attaches a great deal of importance to the public image and consequently she is the one who ensures that no one else apart from close members of the family knows anything about the true identity of the child she claims is hers. The mother's action foregrounds the link between gender ideology and Christianity within the Malawi social formation. Here we witness feminine ideal subjectivity offered as a function of a form of religious interpellation which places conformity to rules rather above the flexible interpretation of the law. When Julia is pregnant, the mother is more concerned about her own image as a Christian in the neighbourhood than the trauma that her daughter is going through. Julia tells us:

'Ma had been highly placed in her church. So if the people had known that her thirteen-year-old daughter had been allowed to 'get into trouble,' they would have developed a low opinion indeed of their church elder.'
(p. 119)

Mrs Masamba's sense of religious duty is tinged with a massive dose of ruthlessness which is not only demonstrated in her attempt to protect the image of a Christian family, but also in her view of those she considers sinful, for example she refuses to lend money to Alphonse's father which he badly needs to avoid going to prison. She tells the husband that if he lends money to the family, she will pack up and go back to Malawi. Alphonse's mother, sensing the hypocrisy in the religious attitude of Mrs Masamba, says:

'You're a cruel woman. May the Lord be with you, Mrs Church Elder.' (p. 11)

The lack of charity in Mrs Masamba extends to her parenting as well. She is a harsh mother who does not explain matters but hopes that through the fear of the cane the children will conform to her moral values. As Julia is lying in bed, wondering what her mother will say when she discovers she is pregnant, she stages a mock mental confrontation with her in which the mother's callousness is reconstructed:

She saw her mother pointing an accusing finger at her..... I didn't know adult games hurt you. You were to blame, too, for not telling me point blank that If I slept with a boy, he'd probably make me pregnant. You just used to shout at me, saying, 'I don't want to hear of you making a fool of yourself with any boy in the neighbourhood. If I hear anything, I will beat you up until you bleed...' But Ma, at thirteen, did you expect me to understand that? You used to hide all Human Biology text-books from me. (p. 20-21)

The mother's insensitive disciplinarian attitude to her children, which she sees as part of her Christian duty, creates a gulf between the children and herself. They fear her, but they also resent her immensely. This is in marked contrast to the father's approach to parenting. He is generally kind to his children and when Julia is pregnant he shows a great deal of sympathy towards her. To the mother, the father's attitude is a sign of poor parenting:

'I've never seen a father who was so lenient with his daughters. When I was a kid, my papa used to whip me with his belt until, we bled!'
'Children are not slaves, mind you,' her father pointed out...'
'You don't bring up kids by following radio programmes.'
(p. 14-15)

It is instructive that it is the woman rather ^{than} the man who is seeking the proper gendering of the children. The father has made an ideological break with

the traditional mode of parenting whereas the mother has not. This is true of the differing attitude to Naki's pregnancy between the father and mother in Sam Aryeetey's *Harvest of Love* which I discuss in chapter five. The attitude of mothers in the two novels suggests that sometimes it is the women more than men who react unkindly to the daughter's failure to conform to the female gender ideal. Mothers, who have the primary responsibility of ensuring that their daughters conform to the values of femininity obtaining in a given culture, take the daughter's failure to identify with socially defined requirements of womanhood as a symptom of their personal failure as agents of gender socialisation. Thus, the personalisation of *misgendering*²³ and the fact that mothers are the means by which female subjectivity is reproduced in and transmitted to subsequent generations may account for the anger that mothers feel towards their non-conforming daughters. On the other hand, the fathers' demonstration of understanding towards their daughters' failure to conform, might be explained by the fact that conventionally, it is not men's primary duty to participate in the gendering of daughters, and therefore they can afford the sort of detachment that allows them to perceive the behaviour of the errant daughter in terms as other than those which pertain to the public discourse of gender. The men's lack of identification with dominant gender ideology, in this context, can be read as a product of their being located outside the interpellative site of female subjectivity within the family. They too would respond in the same way as the women if it came to a son whose behaviour fell outside the socially prescribed masculine subjectivity.

The remorselessness with which Mrs Masamba attempts to bring back to the fold the fallen daughter further highlights the point that what is at stake in the discourse of gender being articulated and protected by the mother is the marketability of Julia to men, rather than a genuine concern with her future as

the following conversation between Mrs Masamba and her sister exemplifies:

'Sister, your mind seems to forget that Julia is still a school girl.'

'She can go back to school after she has - '

'And be a laughing stock?'

'A lot of girls have fallen pregnant while still at school. I don't see why - '

'Sister,... I'm thinking about the future, sweating for it. I do not want anybody to know that Julia gave birth to a baby, you see? It's going to be a secret between you and me; between your husband and mine. It's a family secret.' (p. 51)

It is the idea of upholding the principle of premarital chastity rather than merely a question of getting Julia back to school that seems uppermost in the mind of the mother. Later in life, Julia herself colludes with the family in upholding the secret as is evident when she is ruminating over the possible effects of the reappearance of Alphonse in her life:

'Can you see, Alphonse, what would happen if he knew I wasn't as pure as he had been led to believe? What would happen to me, Alphonse? You wouldn't expect me to marry you, would you?' (p. 20)

It becomes even more imperative to keep the secret tightly hidden in the class context of Julia's marriage. Alphonse belongs to the working class origins of the heroine and her marriage belongs to the new class, generally referred to by the author as the 'black Englishmen.' The author makes it abundantly clear that to a large extent Julia's fear of losing the privileged position which accrues to her as a result of her marriage to someone considered socially privileged adds to her need to bury the secret even deeper:

'My mother's love triumphed. She did what she thought was proper and here I am today, married to a well-to-do doctor. What else do I want? If I want a job today, tomorrow, I'll get it. But Dan does not want me to

work; not yet. And I'm not complaining.' (p. 24)

On the other hand, Alphonse is a doorman at a drive-in cinema frequented by the class to which Julia and her husband belong. He lives in the shanty location, called Ndirande in a single room. It is not surprising that the conflict between her and Alphonse takes the form of economic blackmail. He wants one thousand Malawian *Kwacha*, otherwise he will tell Dan that his wife has a child by him. Julia wonders how on earth she had ever slept with such a brute, for Alphonse's manner of dress and bearing is a far cry from that of the sophisticated and cosmopolitan Dr. Dan Moyo. The revelation of the secret will certainly deprive Julia of the privileged social life which she is enjoying by virtue of her marriage. If Julia's marriage breaks up, she will end up living in a lower class area, just like her sister Sibongile who has lost all the material comfort which she enjoyed while married to a rich Zimbabwean business man and consequently lives in Kanjeza, a place which is far from being comfortable:

Julia's sister lived in Kanjeza. Her house had two bedrooms but no ceiling, no veranda, no garage. Separating this house from the next was a brick wall which was so thin that you could hear your next-door neighbour snoring. Single ladies didn't like such houses for the next day they would get the question, 'We heard a deep voice last night in your house. Whose was it?' (p. 16)

But the secret must be revealed, for in the moral framework of the novel the notion of fate is central: the past haunts us and we cannot escape from it as sooner or later it catches up with us. It is significant that on the night Julia bumps into Alphonse, they are watching a movie in which the heroine, who is on holiday in Zimbabwe, discovers the train driver she has fallen in love with is in fact her step-father. The audience is clearly moved by the story:

The over-dressed, heavily-perfumed ladies clung to their escorts firmly as if afraid they would suddenly find out that the man they were with was their step-father. (p. 1)

There are echoes here of the ancient Greek beliefs in fate which were thoroughly disseminated in Malawi by the presence of Sophocles's *Theban Plays* on the first-year syllabus for well over fifteen years. One can argue, therefore, that in his use of the notion of fate common in ancient Greece, Kamkondo is showing the broad intellectual and cultural experience in which contemporary African popular literature generally tends to situate itself, perhaps as a way of proclaiming its claim to intellectual respectability. The same is true of Onitsha market literature where Shakespearean quotations lie side by side with pidgin English. Largely, Kamkondo's use of ancient tradition is a reflection of the cultural sophistication of some of the authors who have consciously chosen to write in a populist mode rather than a 'highbrow' style. Be that as it may, the inexorable logic of fate embodied by Alphonse, is supported by the inevitable revelation of the 'good' doctor's own imperfect past.

On the same Wednesday when Julia must give the money to Alphonse, Dan is expecting his friend Tom Nyirenda to bring the child he has had with a Jamaican woman in London while a medical student. He too has not told his wife Julia about it. He is worried about what to do. He cannot avoid it; he has to confess everything to Julia and live with the consequences. He writes her a letter of confession while attending a conference at Club Makota. She also sends him a letter of confession. The husband and wife are relieved now that they have both told the truth. However, Alphonse dies of injuries sustained while trying to stop robbers from stealing from the drive-in cinema. Even though Alphonse is dead now, Julia does not find anything kind to say about the

man who tried to ruin her life. It is a mark of an equalizing ethic that the author makes both the husband and the wife possess secrets in their past. In the end, it is not simply a question of the socially privileged husband forgiving a wife who is about to lose her social status, it also a question of Dan seeking forgiveness from Julia. In this manner the moral message of the novel, that honesty in marriage is important for both husband and wife, is poignantly driven home.

The novel's commitment to gender egalitarianism is also obvious in its criticism of traditional gender practice, which is conducted through an examination of the language and modes of sexism prevalent in the country. The author is clearly critical of the practice of 'sugar daddying' as can be seen from the following passage:

Most of the escorts knew how to handle women - they had been sugar-daddying for years. They merely stroked the women on the head rhythmically and squeezed their light fingers in a caressing manner. Among the very few ladies who had a husband for an escort was Julia. At twenty-five, she was convinced that life for her had a meaning because the man she was with was the best husband around town. There was simply nobody like him - so tender, so loving. (p. 1-2)

Where being a sugar daddy is considered a normal practice for men, Dan represents what in the text's view of recommended gender practice is a form of masculine identity that has weaned itself from the blatantly sexist practice constituting dominant gender ideology. Although he has opportunities to be a sugar daddy, he does not take them up. An incident at Club Makota, where he is attending an international conference, provides an opportunity for the writer to make one of the most important points on the matter of gender relations. Priscilla Mzengeza from Zimbabwe attempts to have a relationship with Dan, but

he tells her that he is thinking of his wife. Then Dr. Mwase from Tanzania joins them and lies to the woman that he is single. Shortly afterwards, another Tanzanian doctor joins them who reveals that Dr. Mwase's and his wife in fact teach at the same school, then the following conversation ensues:

'You didn't have to say that....'

'Say What?'

'That I was married.... *ndugu*, I was getting somewhere with that lady.'

'Dr. Lwiza patted both Dr. Moyo and Dr. Mwase on the shoulders and said, 'My dear friends, never underrate women.'

'Who does?' frowned Mwase.

'Most of us men do. If only we can learn that a woman can't stand lies, we'll never have broken homes.... We must tell the truth and no woman will blame us. If you fool around with some woman, better tell your wife and she'll understand, but if you wait for her to get the news from other sources, you're in trouble. I tell you, women appreciate men who speak the truth.'

'Don't talk as if I am your nephew, *Mwakikunga*,' the other Tanzanian said. (p. 93)

Dr. Lwiza's speech helps Dan decide to tell his wife the truth. Although Lwiza appears briefly in the novel he embodies that philosophical and sage-like quality through which sexist masculinity is interrogated.

Mwase's sexist attitude is not presented as the exotic behaviour of a foreigner, but rather as part and parcel of gender practice in Africa. It is equally to be seen in the attitudes of the passengers on Malawian buses as well as in those of the Malawian police officers. When Alphonse tries to kidnap his daughter, Tendayi, and she escapes by taking the wrong bus without any money on her, the discussion among the passengers on the bus shows the extent to which the sophisticated sugar daddys of Blantyre and the common man, despite their class differences, share the same representation of relations of gender:

'I bet if anybody is lost, it's got to be a member of the female species,' grunted a bachelor in his early

fifties.'

'Why a woman?' someone sitting next to a large female passenger wanted to know.

'Women are always lost, man!' came the answer, followed by hearty laughter from the predominantly male passengers.

'Who is talking about women? He must be unmarried,' the man sitting next to the woman said.

'Childless is a better word,' smirked the woman the man was sitting next to and she was immediately rewarded with the thank you-glances from the few other female passengers. (p. 79-80)

Here we are in the area of popular gender practice, and the author cleverly ensures that the bachelor who seems misogynistic suffers humiliation at the hands of a woman whose huge bearing seems to strike fear in the male passengers. The need to use a patently physically strong woman as an agent of resistance of dominant gender ideology foregrounds the extent to which physical prowess is an important factor in the distribution of power between men and women in this particular layer of the social structure.³⁴ Whereas the sugar daddy's superiority over his female counterpart lies in the strength of the money and status, the common man's lies in raw body strength. In this respect, the novel points to the necessity of using multiple strategies in combatting sexism. A bit of physical intimidation from the fat woman seems to do the trick in keeping the fifty-year old bachelor quiet.

Another site of popular expression of gender difference is the police station. When Tendayi is at a police station where she has been dropped off for boarding a bus without paying the bus fare, dominant gender values and national images intersect to reproduce sexism:

'Where were you born?'

'Zimbabwe.'

'That is it,' sighed the policeman, bored stiff. 'You can never get the truth out these Zimbabwean-born girls. I know what they are like. I went to school with some of them myself. They lie without changing either the

tone of their voice or the expression on their face. Bet this girl was out with some sugar daddy and things got sour.' (p. 86)

Later, while Julia and Sibongile are out to fetch Tendayi at Malosa, having mistaken it for Mulosa, they run into a road block at Domasi and the attitude of the police is clearly the same as in the quotation above:

'Got you,' the man muttered excitedly only to grimace when he realised the driver was a lady and so was her passenger.

'Women!' he called to his colleagues, his voice clearly disappointed.

'Don't take chances!' one of them bellowed. 'Confirm!' The man at the door leaned forward and touched Julia where it mattered. She reacted by slapping him hard on the forearm.

'Confirmed officer!' he announced smarting from the slap....

'Is this your car?'

'Yes. My husband's.'

'Where is he?' (p. 99-100)

It would seem that the sort of sexist conversation we hear from the passengers on the Blantyre-Zomba bus is also lodged in the *State Apparatuses* of the Malawian social formation. If in Kalitera's *Mother, Why Mother* the colonial British officers are shown to be sexist towards the Malawian women, in *Truth Will Out*, the progress made in this area since independence is presented as negligible indeed. This would appear to ^{be} part of a broader discourse of power being examined by the novel. The police seem to be extraordinarily powerful and their ubiquitousness on the roads seems to suggest a more profound lack of political egalitarianism. It is in this area that the novel's subtlety is much more evident: there is a political cryptic quality here that is similar to what one finds in the poetry and fiction of the Writers Workshop at the University of Malawi.

Yet for all its beauty of craftsmanship and its trenchant ideological commitment to gender egalitarianism, the novel does equally contribute to an occluding discourse, one which stands in the way of a clearly articulated position on gender relations. Beginning with the very choice of characters, the novel panders to the cult of the professionally and physically exceptional that is the staple of western romantic fiction such as the *Mills and Boon* 'Doctor and Nurse' stories, which are widely available in Malawi. Perhaps, in this, despite the overall imaginativeness displayed by the novel, we are witnessing a reproduction of the well-tried formula of western romantic fiction. The strategy of reproduction might facilitate the reception of the novel among readers accustomed to the western modes of romantic fiction, whilst introducing them to something new: an attempt to bring to the genre the sort of thematic and stylistic complexity that characterises African high literature. If that is the case, then one can argue that the strategies of marketing blunt the radical edge of the novel's thematic intentionality.

A more significant area of weakness in the novel has to do with the extent to which marriage is offered as the only area in which female subjectivity can be fulfilled. The writer is not at all critical of the fact that Julia, who herself holds a degree, is just sitting at home when there are jobs around simply because Dan, the doctor, does not want his wife to work. Taking into account the fact that Malawi has few educated people, one would hesitate to recommend the attitude of the couple to female labour as an example of a liberating sexual politics. The precariousness of Julia's position within marriage is substantially a result of her being completely dependent on Dan for her upkeep. The fact that, among the probable consequences of divorce she considers, the loss of the socio-economic status that her marriage has brought her looms high amply demonstrates the extent to which her dependency on her

husband makes her an unequal partner in marriage. This is further evident in the boredom that she obviously feels having to spend most of her time with the servant, Alone, when Dan is away at the hospital. It might thus be argued that by erecting marriage as be all and end all of female subjectivity, the novelist unwittingly finds himself supporting the norm system of gender which produces the sort of attitude displayed by the police officers who are surprised to discover that the driver of the car they are pursuing is a woman. In this case, the writer does seem to have failed to see the implications of the notion of female subjectivity he is working with. Julia is not an autonomous female subject but rather a traditional one despite the overall radical thematic context within which she is situated.

Underlying the construction of marriage presented by the novel is a specific ideological attitude to class relations. As pointed out already, to a large extent the relationship between Julia and Alphonse is mediated by their different positions in the Malawian socio-economic structure in which Alphonse is perceived as threatening the tranquillity of a middle class home. He is the reminder to the nouveau riche of the humble origins they wish to cast away from their active memory. In this context, the conflict over Julia between Alphonse, the doorman, and part time market vegetable vendor, and Dr. Dan Moyo, the famous doctor in Blantyre, is a reproduction of a conflict between two modes of economic production. Alphonse represents the class of the migrant workers who roamed the whole of Southern Africa in search of wealth and who in the days gone by enjoyed a great deal of social prestige. This class has been superseded by a more sophisticated class, those who have not gone merely next door to Zimbabwe or Zambia but overseas to Britain and other places, the class popularly known in West Africa as 'the been-tos'. It is at this point that the writer's collusion with the 'been-tos' becomes evident. Alphonse is described as

if he were an animal: his hands are referred to as 'paws,' his mannerisms are presented as incorrigibly coarse, thus demonstrating the workings of a stereotype about the working class people of Malawi, and specifically the criminal element among them. The writer's nervousness in handling the characterization of the working class is amply demonstrated in the resolution of the story. It is only his death that rescues Alphonse from his greatest humiliation: Julia, after confessing to Dan, wants to have the last laugh by telling Alphonse that his attempt to blackmail her has failed, but she is told that he died the day before. Death is the *deus ex machina* which enables the writer to execute a narrative closure now that the couple have confessed to each other. In the context of Alphonse's death, the happiness which the declaration of truth is supposed to bring between Dan and Julia seems like a plastic world far removed from the world of brutish struggle and violence that people like Alphonse are forced to endure. Ironically, the marital bliss that finally arrives after the couple have confessed to each other their respective pasts, something that represents the recommended morality of the novel, comes because of the much hated Alphonse. There would never have been the need for Julia to confess without Alphonse's blackmail. In other words, it is the *demonised* figure of Alphonse that becomes the agent of the novel's moral theme. Thus the bliss of the middle class marriage is revealed as dependent on that other class which is perceived as representing the forces of anarchy from below, thereby highlighting a greater dependency of an economic nature: it is characters like Alphonse, the doorman and vegetable vendor, and Alone the cook, that prop up the comfortable life style of the 'black Englishmen.' As it would appear, such characters are never left in peace even in the economy of narrative itself: having been used as the means for facilitating the morality of marriage, Alphonse is not allowed to go his own way in the resolution of the story, he is

killed off by the narrator. There is here perhaps a deeper middle class anxiety which commits both author and character to a wishful annihilation of the *Other* who reminds them of the precariousness of their own class position: in a country where a one-time distinguished representative to the United Nations is now a small-time fishmonger no different from Alphonse, the possibility of slipping back into a lower class position must be a real threat, one that induces the construction of a rigid mental barrier between 'One' and the 'Other'.

If through Julia we experience the class's fear of the lower class, through Dan we experience the tension between the Malawian male and his racial 'Other'. Dan and his girlfriend Tricia, when in Wales, come across an Englishman whose loudly expressed delight at meeting fellow English speakers costs him a few teeth at the hands of some Welshmen. The ubiquitous Jack Bedford later turns up at a football match Dan and Tricia are watching in London. The next time Dan encounters him, Jack is in bed with Tricia. Dan cannot afford to provide for Tricia's life-style, and so Jack Bedford steps in, so the narrator tells us. Soon after Julia and Dan are reconciled, Jack shows up in Malawi as a member of the Voluntary Service Overseas (V.S.O). The presence of Jack Bedford, of whom it is said, 'He likes black women all right,' (p. 35) makes one wonder about its likely effect on Dan's new-found happiness. Thus, the west, from which the new class draws its cultural and social legitimacy, seems at the same time its source of cultural and sexual anxiety. This form of anxiety is also evident in Helen Ovbiagele's *Evbu My Love* and Nandi Dlovu's *Angel of Death*, which I examine in the next chapter. In the present context, however, it serves to highlight a kind of metaphysical and social loneliness experienced by the class represented by Julia and Dan: caught between the threat from within in the form of the working class male Alphonse and from without in the form of the racial 'Other', Jack Bedford, the class's attempt to fashion and reconstitute

a sexual politics that corresponds to its class position and its cultural nationalism produces an endless anxiety which exceeds even the text's own attempt to bring it to a semblance of closure.

In short then, Kamkondo's *Truth Will Out* is like the proverbial curate's egg in its management of gender ideology. To the extent that it is critical of the idea of preserving female chastity as an investment in marriage, and appalled at the overt sexism displayed by men from the various social classes, it is radical, but in its attempt to collapse female subjectivity solely to the efficiency of marriage and in its uncritical reproduction of antagonistic class relations, it is far from being the kind of text that could be described as representing a liberating sexual and class politics. Above all, the novel significantly illustrates that the new marriage practice which has been woven out of traditional and western cultural practices may not be radically different, in its underlying gender ideology, from its traditional counterpart.

Maillu's name in East and Central Africa is a household name, thus one is not surprised when, in Kamkondo's *Truth Will Out*, the receptionist at Club Makota in Malawi is reading a Maillu novel. Maillu's *Thorns of Life* has a lot in common with Kamkondo's *Truth Will Out*: both are concerned with the stability of marriage amidst the threat of female extra-marital, or premarital sexual relations. The Maillu of *Thorns of Life* will hence be received by the moral critics of his earlier work as a responsible citizen, one who has shed his old habit of revelling explicitly in the sexual adventures of Nairobi sugar daddies. Some of Maillu's early works were banned both in Kenya and Tanzania, showing that when it came to safeguarding morality the two ideological adversaries were not really far apart.²⁵ Bernth Lindfors has pointed out how the *Pacesetters* Series Maillu is a little more discreet in the description of intimate sexual details than that of Comb Books and Maillu Publishing House.²⁶ This however

raises the whole issue of the autonomy of the African writer when he/she publishes abroad: it could be the case that the new Maillu is in fact a product of considerations of marketing and tailoring his work to a more diverse international audience than his predominantly East African and Central African one with which the author could take certain risks on the basis of a shared cultural and social experience. Whatever the reasons for this shift in style, *Thorns of Life*, which is full of Christian prayers and traditional African spirituality, demonstrates an attempt to excavate the deeper reaches beneath the author's earlier transcriptions of surface reality and to trace the cultural bedrock of which the fevered pleasures of the Nairobi 'Kommon man' are but one of the numerous actual and probable outcrops.

Marital infidelity, which in Maillu's earlier work would have provided him with an opportunity for lurid sexual detail, here is rendered with a solemnity that becomes the pathway to a meditation on the impact of western technological culture on the institution of marriage and other practices which had constituted the organic unity of traditional African life. What comes out is an argument about the need to provide a technological infrastructure in order to preserve the institution of marriage in the rural areas where cultural dislocation has led to a form of existence in which sex and drink have become the only palliatives to boredom among the peasants. In this regard, it can be said that Maillu is undertaking a class analysis of the Kenyan social formation within which the wealth of Nairobi and Mombasa seems grotesque in comparison with the poverty of rural Kenya and one does not need to be a Marxist like Ngugi to see this glaring anomaly. I would, thus, hesitate to assign an ideological label to Maillu's class analysis and declare him a Marxist: he is merely a good observer whose location within the Kenyan social structure is itself patently ambiguous. Hilary Ng'weno, the famous Kenyan journalist and author of a

detective novel, describes Maillu's early concern with the night life of Nairobi as the fascination of the rural boy who has just arrived in the big city, thereby suggesting that Maillu is not a true urbanite.²⁷ If Maillu's failure to be assimilated by the city provides him with a broader context within which he can give us a flavour of the heterogeneity of Kenyan society, then unlike Hilary Ng'weno we can receive the fascination of the country boy with the bright lights of Mombasa and Nairobi and the grinding poverty of rural Kenya as something with a more profound explanatory purchase of the internal dynamics of Kenyan social structure than the exoticism of Ng'weno's *The Men from Pretoria*.²⁸

Thorns of Life is a story about how the infidelity of the wife of Silvesta Maweu nearly ruins their marriage. When Silvesta marries the beautiful Swastika Nzivele, he leaves her in his home village to look after his ageing mother while he continues working as a bank clerk in Mombasa. He also hopes that the wife can start a chicken and coffee farm in the village to supplement his meagre income. The family chicken farm gets established and the care given to the mother, at this stage, is of supreme quality. However, after a while, Swastika starts going out with a local community development officer by the name of Simon Mosi. As a result of the relationship, Swastika neglects the farm and paying the servants, but most importantly leaves the aged mother of Silvesta to fend for herself. The mother, fearing what her son might do to the errant wife, does not report Swastika's relationship with Simon Mosi. Nevertheless, the news overflows the old woman's attempts to keep it hidden in the interest of the stability of her son's marriage: the whole village has come to know about it and soon Silvesta himself gets to hear about it. Silvesta beats up Swastika and she runs away to her parents' home. When Silvesta's mother dies the couple are reunited and the problem of sterility which had also

contributed to the instability of marriage miraculously disappears and Swastika is able to have a child. The dream of a family business in the village also comes true. Silvesta resigns from his job in Mombasa to run his successful business.

The novel evinces a contradictory attitude to female sexual transgression. There is an ethical argument which perceives the behaviour of Swastika as the manifestation of an innate feminine evil which is a threat not only to the stability of social institutions, such as marriage and business, but also to animal and human life. As an aspect of this thematic strand in the novel, Swastika kills both the family cat and dog. She particularly hates the dog because its bark alerts Silvesta's mother to Simon's nocturnal visits to the home. Her hatred of interference in her affair extends to the treatment of her mother-in-law, Kalunde. When Kalunde inquires into the riotous parties she holds in her house till the small hours, Swastika gets so annoyed with the old woman that she starts ill-treating her:

Grief fell into Kalunde's life. To start with, Nzivele began to cook her own meals in her own house, stopped paying the servants in an attempt to send them away and stopped giving Kalunde any help. She shed her old diplomatic way of talking to Kalunde and became rough and hard. She cursed the pets loudly, and began to sing provocative songs around her house. Now, when she sneezed, she did so proudly, then coughed and spat mockingly. The food she gave to Kalunde was tough, roughly cooked maize with a countable number of beans that Nzivele herself hadn't eaten. (p. 38-39)

One evening, Kalunde sat down for hours desperately trying to chew her food, which was the usual maize and a few beans. At the same time she was chewing over the mental distress of her life of late. She broke into tears at last for she had so few teeth in her mouth that eating such stuff was almost impossible. On that particular evening she wished that death would take her away. She had lost grip of Nzivele completely, who sometimes disappeared for days. (p. 42)

Swastika's treatment of the old woman is portrayed as lacking in basic human sympathy. Her love for Simon Mosi seems to be the only thing that matters in her life, for which she is prepared to sacrifice not only the stability of marriage, but most importantly those humane qualities which she so committedly espouses before her marriage to Silvesta. The *demonisation* of the heroine in ethical terms represents the *displacement* of the text's disapproval of female sexual transgression into an essentialist gendered view of moral and ethical difference in terms of which Swastika's unfaithfulness is presented as a symptom of some profound and deep corruption.

Swastika is destructive not only to pets and fellow human beings such as the mother, but to wealth as well. Such behaviour is shown to be rooted in her biological make up. In a conversation between Silvesta and his mentor, the elderly Wambua, the likelihood of Swastika's failure to comply with the ethics of marriage is seen as very high on account of her being beautiful:

'These beautiful women are difficult to keep,' commented Wambua.

'Why?' Maweu felt hurt.

'Because they know that they are beautiful and expect their beauty to make up for their short-comings..... Not that I want to imply anything negative or positive about Nzivele. Of course, there are beautiful flowers that also smell nice, that are lovely in every respect; the devil is not always ugly, in certain cases, he is very beautiful.' (p. 15)

Swastika's propensity to moral failure is written glaringly on the surface of her body. Nevertheless, in the masculine discourse within which beauty is decoded as signifying something morally negative, we sense a deeper anxiety: the acquisition of the object of desire seems to produce a permanent fear of loss, which leads to such a profound insecurity that can only be resolved through collapsing the individuality of the heroine to that of a stereotype. As Wambua

has predicted, Swastika misbehaves, thereby proving the validity of Wambua's *common sense knowledge*. The strategy of stereotyping the threatening *Other* would appear to be one which allows a formulaic management of anxiety within discursive practices where there are no templates for individuals but types. It is an attempt to explain the rich human diversity in terms of a deterministic discursive economy whose limited explanatory resources are never replenished, or if they ever are it is not the fundamental paradigmatic categories that are revised but rather their content.

The operation of stereotyping in the novel can be seen in the choice of the name of the heroine which locates the heroine in a specific history of evil. The name 'Swastika' conjures images of Hitler's notorious and cruel Weimar Republic. It is true that names like 'Swastika' and 'Hitler' along with such names as Churchill, Napoleon and Cromwell were given to children in Africa without regard to their specific ideological signification available to Europeans. They were all European names; that was sufficient. Despite the arbitrariness of child-naming in Africa in relation to the choice of European names, one is tempted to construe the congruence between the personality attributes of Swastika as evil and its use in Hitler's Germany as an exercise in the metonymic representation of evil. In this way, Swastika is depicted as a threat to nature, society and the economy. This tallies with the representation of Denis's unfaithful wife in Kalitera's *Why Son, Why*, where the wife is shown to contribute to the financial disaster of the hero. The massive disturbance of the moral and the economic landscape by female moral depravity can be seen as an operation of an ideological interdiction which seeks to forestall female rebellion by exaggerating the extent of its consequences. The device of exaggerating the consequences of the act of *counter-identification* reminds the present author of how in his society boys are discouraged from cooking by the

socially inculcated fear that if they spend a lot of time in the kitchen they will develop breasts. In such acts of ideological interpellation the fear of the grossly exaggerated consequences is used as the means by which the dominant ideology ensures compliance with its beliefs and norms. The ideology underlying the *demonisation* of the heroine has a lot to do with the text's view of the female role in marriage.

The ideology of marriage underpinning the relationship between Swastika and Silvesta is traditional. According to this particular view of marriage, the role of the wife is inextricably linked to the needs of the larger kinship group of her husband. This is particularly exemplified by the fact that the major consideration when Silvesta is deciding to get married soon after school is the need to find a woman who will act as a nurse to his ageing mother. He tells his mother:

'I think it wouldn't be a bad idea for me to get married quite soon, once I have found a job. I need somebody to help you. I'm interested in a wife who can live with you here while I work, one who can lend the best hand in upgrading and keeping this farm.' (p. 14)

Thus, to a large extent the primary function of the marriage between Silvesta and Swastika which is a modern one, is located within the traditional overlap between marriage and the larger kinship family, whereby, in most patrilineal African societies, a man marries a woman to serve his whole kinship group. This is also true of Waliye Gondwe's novel, *Second-hand Love* which I discuss in chapter five where the heroine, who is married by proxy to a Malawian living and working in Zimbabwe, continues to live in the village of her husband, despite having been rejected by him, in order to look after the husband's elderly father who has no one else to look after him. The use of marriage as a

social service in support of the elderly and the infirm which used to work well in a context of a shared work space and values in traditional Africa is shown to be in crisis in the face of modernity. Swastika who has been trained as a secretary in Mombasa obviously finds it difficult to stay in the village as a nurse to Silvesta's mother. Underlying the crisis in the traditional relationship between marriage and charity, is a conflict between the emerging nuclear family and the traditional extended one. When Swastika is in Mombasa visiting her husband, Silvesta's concern for his mother's health upsets her:

'What about my health?' she said defensively..... 'As long as I lived for her in good health, all was fine... let my health or let something bad happen to my health and there I am - I'm of no value. My body has blood, not water, just as your mother's.' (p. 39-40)

It is as a subject of modern marriage practice and traditional kinship that Silvesta finds himself displaying conflicting loyalties to his mother and his wife. In this respect, Swastika's failure to identify with dominant gender ideology is shown to have terrible consequences for the husband's kinship group as can be discerned from the fact that her unfaithfulness is the prime cause of the mother's death. On the whole, the characterization of Swastika in this respect represents an attempt to account for contingent female behaviour in terms of innate qualities, a patently humanistic project which is predicated on the notion of a human essence outside historical and social agency.

It is a mark of the text's intentional complexity that the *essentialisation* of female moral turpitude, in a moment of obvious ideological contradiction, is transferred to the domain of contingent and specific social and economic determination. When Swastika is finally driven away from home by Silvesta's violent expression of anger, she writes him a letter in which she

ascribes her behaviour to the difficulty of living on her own in a place where there is little else to do apart from drinking and fornicating:

'You may not believe it, but what has been happening to me has never really been my intention. I think I just found myself lonely, or afraid of myself, and I just got involved. Country life has many problems - it's a whole barren world in which you find yourself in no other company but that of village and poorly educated women. I am not trying to argue that I am better than they are; but it is that they and I belong to different worlds.....

After your day's work in Mombasa, you can stroll around, doing some window-shopping or sight-seeing, or go for a swim or to watch the sea as I know you like doing, or see a movie. But what do I have in Kyandumbi or at Koola Town? I am sure that I ^{am} not the only person seeing it that way. Until there ^{are} facilities in a places like that, you can expect worse things from younger people.' (p. 98)

The letter occupies a significant position in the characterization of the heroine, for it inserts into her subjectivity the element of social determination. By means of the letter a transfer of the heroine's actions from an essentialist discourse to one which acknowledges the possibility of transformation is effected. The mechanism by which such a shift is produced involves the *universalisation* of what in the context of the humanistic project is presented as particularistic. The problem of unemployment and lack of recreational facilities in the rural areas is shown to account for universal moral corruption in the area, particularly among the youth. Underpinning Swastika's observation is the concern with the growing gap between urbanised Africa such as Mombasa and rural areas. The transformation of African society which has been responsible for urbanisation is shown to have dislocated traditional cultural practices of rural areas and replaced them with a social vacuum within which individuals rather than the society as a whole have to find ways of dealing with their boredom:

'In the old days, people were kept busy by their social activities - dances, communal celebrations for circumcisions and childbirths, initiations, participation in clan affairs, looking after the livestock and large families, and so on. What have we in that place? Nothing, absolutely nothing. And yet one is expected to live there happily. It is a nice place, but it lacks other things. The desert looks very beautiful, with all those sand dunes, and so on, as you might have seen in films; but no one would like to live in it, because it lacks other factors that are essential to life.' (p. 99)

The break-up of traditional communal life seems to have left the rural area without a viable cultural substitute. In a way, through the heroine's letter, Maillu makes an important statement about the social consequences of the unequal distribution of wealth and facilities between the city and the village. Added to this, the low wages which force the low-paid like Silvesta to start small business ventures in the countryside and to use their wives as supervisors are shown to undermine the prized social institutions such as marriage. In other words, the instability of the marriage between Swastika and Silvesta is linked to a broader social fragmentation engendered by the lack of rural urbanisation.

Significantly, after getting the letter, Silvesta reconsiders his decision to divorce his wife and they reunite. Nevertheless, the prioritisation of the social over the *essentialist* reading of the causes of marital instability, implied in the reconciliation between the couple, does not sit well with the resolution of the relationship between filial duty and marital responsibility. Whereas marital stability is achieved by Silvesta quitting his job in Mombasa and starting a successful business in the village, the question of the mother is never satisfactorily resolved. When Swastika has run away from home, Silvesta employs a woman to look after his ageing mother, but the woman vanishes and

consequently she is left on her own. She falls into a well while drawing water and dies. It is of great significance that Swastika and Silvesta reconcile during the mother's funeral, which leaves one with the feeling that the resolution of the central conflict between tradition and modernity in favour of the latter, in a novel which obviously puts great weight on the suffering of the mother at the hands of Swastika, is obviously haphazardly conceived. The mother's incessant complaints to the local priest about the way her daughter-in-law treats her and the consequences of such treatment on her spiritual health as shown by the nightmares she has, all show the author's deep commitment to the survival of certain values of traditional Africa. However, in the resolution of the plot, the urbanisation of the rural area, rather than a synthesis of the traditional and the modern is presented as the only cure of the rural illness. The fact that the success of the marriage and the business only arrive after the mother's death is not accidental; it is part of a coherent ideological position which the hero clearly outlines when he takes Swastika home for the first time:

'You don't have to look at the drunkards and the dogs,' Maweu said defensively, as if both were his children of whom he was ashamed. 'Don't look at the dust and the rest, look at the people like ourselves, and the beautiful mountains. Don't worry, though, in a few years time, some of these drunkards will be dead and this place will be a nice town, with named streets, healthy people and good trade.' (p. 27)

Underlying Silvesta's dream of the future is an attempt to replace the culturally dislocated peasant of the countryside with a generation of entrepreneurs who will replace the rural subsistence economy with something approximating to a capitalist mode of production, thereby firmly situating the village in a network of capitalist relations of production. It is on this score

that one must be suspicious of the good social reasons given for the heroine's marital infidelity. The lack of recreational facilities in the rural areas and its attendant problems of drunkenness and easy sex redeeming as they are of the heroine's flaws, equally provide the narrative ideological trajectory with the substitution of a predominantly subsistence farming peasantry with a new class of the petty bourgeoisie. As in Kamkondo's *Truth Will Out*, what we are presented with here is a marriage practice located in determinate class relations within which the stability of marriage is implicated in something beyond the merely personal: the wholesale transfer of marriage practice from the pre-capitalist kinship discourse to that of the new social relations of the capitalist dispensation. The mechanism by which the transfer is effected is violent even on the moral and ethical terms of the novel itself, since what is offered as a replacement for the old way of life with its emphasis on the support of the elderly and the infirm, is a rather cold-blooded calculation of monetary profit and gain which is oblivious to the fact that the new entrepreneurs, like the peasants before them, will themselves age and perhaps need the kind of succour that the old way of life provided. Here we confront a formulation of the future of a society conceived of solely in economic terms, one which is emptied of any modicum of humanitarian consideration. Thus the disinfection of the rural area of the drunkards and the elderly for the stability of the petty bourgeois marriage is a proposition which comes across as a rather grotesque ideological closure in the novel.

Furthermore, the socio-economic explanation for Swastika's infidelity smoothes over the fundamental issue of unequal relations of gender which to begin with are responsible for her being in the village rather than in Mombasa where she had hoped to work as a secretary. As in *Truth Will Out* the

relegation of female labour to the margin is presented as natural. Swastika's boredom with life in the countryside, as is evident from the following remarks from her letter, is substantially linked to the fact that she has no proper job:

'I think I have one great problem, call it a weakness. I can't exist like that without doing anything. That is, I feel that I must engage myself or be occupied by something concrete. Not just trying to supervise some labourers digging coffee holes or making terraces. I need something more than that.... Had I been a teacher or something, maybe my time there would have been less boring. A friend of mine once told me that even Paradise would be boring without some form of occupation.' (p. 98-99)

However, in the resolution of the novel, Swastika is presented as happily returning to her role of supervising the farm workers and waiting for Silvesta to quit his job and join her in the village when the business is successful. Significantly, this time she has a child to preoccupy her. All these factors, according to the narrator, prevent her from thinking about her old lover Simon Mosi. Nevertheless, this new form of happiness does not herald a radical transformation of her conditions nor those of her marriage. It is as if the narrator, in a hurry to provide the promised happiness of the lovers at the end of a romantic novel, makes the heroine extremely busy with the baby and the supervision of labourers so as to ensure that she does not have time enough to consider resuming her relationship with Simon Mosi. The swift narrative pace towards the end of the novel is symptomatic of a profound anxiety in the text regarding the threat from outside the marital space. Such anxiety has a lot to do with the text's failure to resolve the fundamental problem raised by the heroine in the novel regarding the use of her labour. Her labour is located in Silvesta's vision of the future rather than in terms of her own, which in many respect recalls the use of female subjectivity we encounter in Aubrey Kalitera's

Why Son, Why where Hope is used as the means of realising her father's economic project. In *Thorns of Life* we have the same form of masculine strategic use of female labour in the interest of an economic project which is clearly constructed without democratic and critical dialogue. It is in this respect, more than in any other, that the happiness of the couple at the end of the novel appears merely as an erasure of the little and limited interrogative capacity allotted to female subjectivity in the novel.

Perhaps beneath the disjunction in the novel there is a much more fundamental authorial ambivalent attitude to modernity and tradition. Maybe Hilary Ng'weno is right in his assessment of David Maillu: Maillu's message in *Thorns of Life* somehow reminds one of that of Wole Soyinka's most memorable character, Lakunle in the *Lion and the Jewel*, who proposes, among many other bizarre solutions to rural backwardness, that when civilization comes all the trees should be cut down to provide parks for lovers. Whereas Soyinka is able to laugh at his own character through the device of irony, Maillu supports his character's rather half-baked notions of modernity. I would suggest that perhaps the difference between high and low literature might be in the degree to which the author is able to maintain an ideological distance from his characters: the distance between the views of an author and those of the characters in popular fiction seems shorter than in most high fiction save in explicitly tendentious texts.

To conclude then, Maillu's novel introduces us to the troubled relationship between marriage as an autonomous practice, one involving the nuclear family, and the demands and needs of the larger kinship group. When the hero uses an older discourse of family and marriage, his marriage becomes unstable; it is only saved by introducing a new discourse within which only those elements of traditional patriarchy which arrogate to the husband a central

space within the family are carried over whilst those which demand a great deal of social responsibility are abandoned. Thus, the novel can be interpreted as one which unwittingly represses an older and much more humane social dimension of marriage in the interest of achieving a form of marital stability which seems suspended in a cultural vacuum. Once again, we are alerted to the presence of a false closure, one which is not warranted by the fundamental premises of the ideological argument of the narrative itself. At the end of the novel, facilities such as old people's homes have not been erected in the novel, and one wonders what will happen to Swastika and Silvesta when they are old and their child has gone to work in Mombasa. The question raised by the novel is a grave one, but the solution it provides illustrates how the stability of marriage can be prioritised over other equally important areas of social responsibility. Roger Bromley is right in presenting 'the elimination of real social relations' as one of the ways in which popular fiction, particularly romantic fiction, produces and reproduces the *imaginary*.³⁹ In this strategy, we encounter an unrelieved fetishization of happiness, involving the evacuation of the text of all those social issues which impede the character's acquisition of a personalised package of happiness.

In short then, while the novel is progressive in refusing to accept the traditional deterministic and essentialist explanation of female sexual transgression, to the extent that its attempt to locate female transgression in a broader socio-economic sphere results in a violent privileging of the stability of the petty bourgeoisie marriage practice, within which relations of gender are far from being equal, over the fate of the rural folk, it can be said that *Thorns of Life* presents us with a version of marriage which is socially irresponsible and therefore one that is inimical to the founding of democratic

ideological practices which are indispensable to the development of gender egalitarianism.

RADICAL MARRIAGE IN HELEN OVBIAGELE'S *YOU NEVER KNOW* AND BUCHI EMECHETA'S *A KIND OF MARRIAGE*

As in her novel *Forever Yours*, in *You Never Know* the Nigerian newspaper editor Helen Ovbiagele explores ways of founding an egalitarian gender practice in Africa. The novel is about the marriage between Yetunde, a girl from a well-to-do family and Chibuzor or Chi, a 'penniless' civil servant. Although her father and friends think Yetunde mad to have sunk so low in her choice of a fiancé, she resolves to marry Chi whom she loves dearly. The couple is happily married for sixteen years. Then Chi makes the mistake of disclosing to his friends at his club that he has never had any extra-marital relations since getting married; his friends think him less masculine. To make up for his masculine deficiency, he starts philandering. One day, Yetunde catches him redhanded. She forgives him. The loss of trust in her husband makes her vulnerable to the romantic Yinka, an established artist who was once Yetunde's pupil. She finds herself more and more drawn to Yinka with whom she has more in common than her husband. They have a wonderful time together, painting and sightseeing, so that she begins to find her civil servant husband, who lacks any sense of adventure and who thinks appreciating scenery is a form of sentimentality not befitting a man of rank and status, far from exciting. Nevertheless, she manages to withdraw from Yinka when she realises that much as she and Yinka love each other, their relationship will eventually cause a lot of hardship for their two spouses. She stops seeing Yinka when he makes it clear

that he will not accept anything short of marriage. When the two lovers meet again, after a long time, during an engagement party for Yetunde's eldest daughter, the lovesick Yinka throws all caution to the wind and takes Yetunde into his arms. Unknown to the two lovers, Chi and the eldest daughter are watching the scene from different parts of the deserted living room. Chi and Yinka fight. Chi does not give Yetunde the chance to explain herself, instead he issues a series of instructions: Yetunde should move to the guest bedroom; she should quit her job and never travel without his permission; they should keep the appearance of being married for the sake of his public image and the children's happiness. She decides to take the option of leaving the house. He refuses her any of the money in the joint account. Thus, overnight, Yetunde finds herself homeless and without any money to live on. Chi fabricates a story: he tells the children that the mother has been taken to a mental hospital and that they should never spend a lot of time with her in future since she is mentally disturbed. Later, Yetunde manages to tell her side of the story to her daughter who is equally shocked by the father's cruelty. Chi has a heart attack from which he recovers. Yetunde comes home to look after him. He later suggests that they get back together for the sake of the children. At first, she accepts his suggestion, but her daughter advises her to go back only if she herself feels like it, not for the sake of them, the children. Consequently, Yetunde reverses her decision and does not go back. She continues seeing Yinka who has, by now, been left by his wife who herself has found another man. Yetunde, however, refuses to marry Yinka though she really loves him because she has come to cherish her new-found independence.

The road to Yetunde's ultimate *counter-identification* with dominant gender ideology initially involves resisting the interpellation of patriarchal ideology in the domain of class and marriage. Yetunde has been brought up in

the sophisticated environment of the city, where money and good looks are extremely prized. The last thing her friends expect to hear from her is that she has fallen in love with a penniless civil servant. The reaction of her friends, which deserves reporting in some detail, gives ample evidence of the connection between marriage and wealth that this particular socio-economic class has concocted:

'I hope you had the sense to turn him down.'
'I did nothing of the sort. I accepted....'
'You're pulling our legs,' said Tricia. 'You wouldn't do such a thing. You, who love expensive things and the company of important people. The marriage won't last a month, I can assure you.'
'It will last much more than that. It will last a long time. We love each other. Having lots of money is no longer a big thing with me. I'm a changed person....'
'Yes, but a man should be capable of looking after his family comfortably. You'll spend all your time pushing his broken-down vehicle to and from work. I understand he drives a battered Volkswagen Beetle.'
'You will age in no time,' said Tola, 'going from stall to stall in the market looking for bargains.'
'You won't be able to dress in the style you're accustomed to and when the children come things will be worse. You won't be able to afford to stop working in order to look after them. You'll have to get a nanny or drag the poor things to a day care centre every day.'
'Holidays, of course, are ruled out.' (p18-19)

In the catalogue of the terrible things that are likely to befall Yetunde once she marries a poor civil servant, we are given an impression of the life-style and values of the social class from which Yetunde comes. From the perspective of this particular class human relationships are primarily measured according to the extent to which they enhance or impede the acquisition of wealth. Accordingly, marriage is perceived as an economic transaction, just another site where the personal is subordinated to the social relations of production in such a way that marriage practice is executed as a terrain for a form of commodity

exchange where profit and loss are in the final analysis the most important considerations. One also observes that in the practice of bourgeois marriage, the *demonisation* of the masculine 'Other' serves the purpose of entrenching male territoriality.

There is an implicit interdiction in the dialogue between the women, which reproduces a specific form of male hegemony. It is through the female subjects who identify with the dominant class ideology such as Yetunde's friends that the exclusive access of the bourgeois male to his female counterparts is secured. If in Kalitera's novel, *Mother, Why Mother* the fear of racial and cultural adulteration is offered as the means by which males of a given culture restrict the field of choice for their female members as a way of exercising social control over them, in Ovbiagele's *You Never Know*, class is shown to operate with a similar device of *inclusion* and *exclusion* which similarly entrenches male hegemony. Again, as in Kalitera's novel, the exclusion of the *Other* involves the staging of masculine *difference* so that the *Other* is presented as the embodiment of abnormal gendering. It would appear that in the area of racial demonisation, as in Kalitera's novel, the representation of the negative *Other* takes the form of producing an *Other* that is an *excess*: the Englishman in the novel is generally portrayed as exhibiting an unbridled sexuality. This would appear to be also true of the representation of African male sexuality in western mythology.⁴⁰ If the representation of the racial *Other* is constituted as a *pathology of excess*, that of the class *Other* would seem to involve a construction of the *Other* as a *pathology of deficit*. That is, whereas the *demonisation* of the African male in western mythology and that of the white male in African mythology encode a figuration of the other as a dangerous surplus, in the area of class the lower class male is perceived as a threatening deficiency.

It is in this sense that the troping of lower class masculinity conducted by Yetunde's friends, Tricia and Tola, must be seen as the operation of the *univocal* voice of the *monoglossia* of dominant gender and class ideology.⁴¹ It is as agents of such discourses that they interpellate Yetunde whose attempt to contest her subject position they find treacherous. Their anxiety is however based on a deep collective class fear of falling back into poverty, which would suggest that it is among the *nouveaux riches* whose memory of what it is like to be poor is still fresh that one will find the most tenacious defence of class boundaries. This is a symptom of that stage of social transition or *liminality* which Edwin Segal, in his structuralist analysis of development ideology and its myths, describes as being characterised by a permanent ambiguity of identity.⁴² In the symbolic framework invoked by those who identify with dominant ideology the image of a poverty-stricken Yetunde seems a threat to the existing social spatial differentiation, underlying which is the fear of radical structural social transformation. In other words, at the bottom of the social anxiety unleashed by Yetunde's gesture of *counter-identification* is the desire to protect a traditional model of society within which class conflict is merely managed by invoking the sanctity of hierarchical relations rather than creatively transformed into an egalitarian social practice.

It is not only the relations of economic production that influence marriage practice in the fictive universe of the novel, but also physical appearance as well. Yetunde's father, Wole Adebayo, unlike Yetunde's friends, is not so much worried about people's economic position as their looks. It is said of him that:

He categorised people into good or bad according to their looks. 'Ugly people do ugly things,' he used to say. If a good-looking person committed the most

hideous crime, he was prepared to forgive him, whereas nothing an ugly person did ever impressed him. (p. 22-23)

Unfortunately, Chi is unlucky in this respect as well. When he is invited to dinner at Yetunde's house and rings the bell, the father goes to the door to see who is there and comes back to report to his wife thus:

'There is something at the door,' he said, with comical round eyes.

'Something?' asked his wife, puzzled.

'When I say something, I mean an animal. Sort of.'

'An animal, Wole?'

'Well, a person, if you like,' he admitted grudgingly.

'Big, all beard. Like a gorilla.'

'A gorilla! Wole!' said his wife reproachfully.

'That would be Yetunde's young man. Nice boy. They are very much in love. I told you he was coming to dinner.'

'That thing! Yetunde's young man! he cried in horror, looking at the photograph of his elder daughter which hung on the wall....'

'I ought to have been warned about what he looked like.'

'Why?'

'If I'm to spend the evening staring into a face of a bandit across my dining table, I have a right to know so that I can be ready with my indigestion tablets in my pocket.' (p. 23-24)

Once again, as in many other popular novels in Africa, of which Maillu's *Thorns of Life* and Waliye Gondwe's *Second-Hand Love* are good examples, physical appearance is regarded as a barometer of moral and ethical worth. However, the operations of a morality which is based on some form of biological determinism is presented in *You Never Know* as a device by which patriarchy seeks to invest the body with its metaphysic of difference, and having done that, reproduces such values as part of a shared knowledge free from the discourse of power. In keeping with his view of the social function of the body, the father displays considerable concern over the effect of Chi's ugliness on the appearance of his yet unborn grandchildren:

'I don't want grandchildren I can't take to the zoo for fear people will mistake them for little gorillas.' (p. 24)

Underlying the father's anxiety is a discourse which, through the mechanism of patriarchal control, hopes to influence the very physical make up of the next generation, which in itself is evidence of the will to perpetuity, where the subject's biological make up is perceived and rendered as a function of determinate choices made within a specific context of power relations of gender and class. The extent to which the father's defence of the privileged physical attributes is bound up with the desire for immortality can be discerned in his remarks when he goes to Yetunde's home to see her first born child:

'You don't have to look far to see where she gets her fantastic good looks. From me, of course.' (p. 28)

Hubris apart, in the father's ideological gesture there is an echo of the principle of biological selection which is the hallmark of Darwinism. However, whereas Darwin's theory of evolution emphasises natural selection, in the father's case it is personal and social selection that is the agency of the privileged human traits. Here it is not in the noisy fights of the jungle that the stakes are drawn but in the interstices of the discursive crossroads of gender and class relations. The father's desire is essentially a quest for a utopian ideal, one where beauty and moral worth are fused into a perfect blend, one reminiscent of the Platonic conflation of beauty and goodness in the *Symposium*.

On the whole, it is through the different ways in which the father and Yetunde's friends occlude the heroine's choice of a marriage partner, that a profound radical structuring occurs in the novel. Unlike in *Onitsha Market*

literature where the father is usually more likely to intervene in the marriage of his daughter for economic considerations, here the father's intervention is predicated on a less convincing argument. His defence of physical beauty, by and large, comes across as hilariously absurd and not nearly as powerful as the economic argument put forward by Yetunde's friends. The allocation of a weak position to the arch-agent of patriarchal discourse and the stronger one to subjects outside the family creates a gap, at the level of narrative *motivation*, through which the radical female subject can effect a successful *counter-identification* with dominant gender and class ideology without appearing, like the heroines of Onitsha market literature, to be privileging romantic love over all other equally important social relationships. In Okenwa Olisa's *Elizabeth My Lover* the treatment of the father by the daughter comes across as rather uncharitable and lacking in sensitivity, thereby rendering the heroine's radical break with tradition an unpleasant new hegemony that is as autocratic and self-centred as the conservatism of the father which is being decried. In this way, the critical reader is bound not to want to recommend the daughters of Onitsha Market literature as heralds of a humanising and egalitarian gender practice, since they appear as cantankerous women who use their education to overwhelm the pidgin-speaking and illiterate fathers whose major fault, if it might be called that, is that they have not had the privilege of access to a western education which is presented as the means of acquiring the new consciousness. It is such a simplistic dichotomy between modernity and tradition that is eschewed in this novel: the use of bifurcated opposition in *You Never* ^{KNOW} cleverly [^] allows the radical autonomous female subject to undertake her project without diminishing her respect and love for her parents.

The father's comical opposition easily yields to sense. In addition to embedding within the structure of the father's subjectivity a malleable rhetoric,

the writer ensures that Chi conforms to the most important aspects of the father's ideal of masculinity:

Later that night when they were alone, Mrs Adebayo asked her husband what he thought of Chibuzor.

'He seems all right,' he said reluctantly. 'At least he had the good sense to join the Civil Service. Most of our young men and women are so money-minded these days that they won't serve their government because of the poor pay. Many opt for the private sector.'

'They need the money for their lifestyle. Not everyone can pinch and stretch a kobo like we used to. I didn't enjoy it.'

'Maybe not, but I got a lot of satisfaction from serving the government. However, Chi, Chip, what's his name, seems an intelligent fellow. He has nice manners, too. Oh well, we'll see. I suppose it isn't his fault he looks the way he does.'

His wife laughed. 'Don't be silly. Chibuzor is a very attractive young man. Very masculine. Women would feel protected with him around.'

'Hm! Watch it, girl,' said her husband, baring his teeth. (p. 24-25)

Wole, Yetunde's father, finds a kindred soul in Chi's commitment to serving the nation. Chi like his father⁻ⁱⁿ-law believes in being honest and refusing to take bribes. In the Nigeria of the novel, Chi's honesty and sense of duty are exceptional indeed, just as his father-in-law's had been in his days in the civil service. Thus the point at which the *syntagmatic* opposition between the father and the prospective son-in-law shifts into a *paradigmatic* alliance is also the site where father and daughter are shown to share a common world view: both of them are exceptional in that they are not as materialistic as most Nigerians. This is a subtlety of characterization and narrative composition in which the heroine's victory over the forces of dominant gender ideology does not entail the caricaturing of the position of the father as would most likely have been the case if the novel had employed the mode of characterization typical of Onitsha market literature. Thus, by and large, the device of *bifurcated*

opposition and that of shifting the structural relationship between the father and Chi, and between the father and the daughter, has the effect of presenting the heroine's radical contestation of the gender ideology of her social formation not as a mere act of destructive rebellion, but as a sensitive, humane and constructive harbinger of a holistic egalitarianism within which the parent-child relationship does not degenerate into a permanent and irreconcilable binary opposition.

Nevertheless, the marriage does not nourish the interrogative capacity which Yetunde has engendered; it closes off her nascent autonomous subjectivity. The resulting situation impels her to effect an interrogation of traditional marriage practice. The major area of conflict is the extent to which Chi privileges the defence of his masculine identity over the happiness of his wife. In contrast, Yetunde sacrifices a lot for the happiness of the family. Right from the start the marriage is marred by a profound misunderstanding between the two partners. Though the father has offered them accommodation in his spacious house in the low density area in order to make life easier for his daughter who is not used to staying in a high density area where transport is a problem, Chi refuses to accept the offer for fear he might compromise his masculine identity:

'It's out of the question, darling. I know your parents are being kind, but it is unAfrican for a man to house his family under the roof of his parents-in-law. Call it male pride if you like. Why it would seem as if I'm unable to look after my family. My father would turn in his grave at such a thought.' (p. 26)

Whereas Yetunde has given up the privileges of her social class for the sake of her marriage, he is not prepared to give up the public trappings of his masculine identity. His dogmatic defence of masculine role within marriage

practice is significantly couched in the language of cultural nationalism. As in the case of the hero of Kalitera's novel *Why Father, Why*, African culture provides the ultimate defence of a threatened masculine hegemony. Chi's fear of losing his masculinity substantially produces unequal relations of gender in which Yetunde is put in a position where any amount of inconvenience in the family is resolved by her making further sacrifices. She is forced to resign from her excellent job with a flourishing advertising company and go into teaching art at a nearby school when she is expecting a baby, all because Chi has refused to take up the accommodation offered by her parents which is near her place of work. While her own career is going downhill, her husband's is going up: he is promoted to the rank of a deputy director, a position with a great deal of power and influence. All in all, at this stage, Yetunde exemplifies a form of female subjectivity which has achieved a partial *counter-identification* with dominant gender ideology: she has resisted paternal control over the choice of a marriage partner but has not transformed the relations of gender within the practice of marriage. Her commitment to marriage is shown to involve an unnecessary reduction in her autonomy as her subjectivity has been reduced solely to that of maternity and matrimony.

It is the example of an alternative gender practice within the discourse of marriage that prompts Yetunde into a thorough examination of her subject position within her family and marriage. A chance meeting with an old classmate Inyang shows her that women of her age who are married and have more children than her are still able to lead fairly autonomous lives, which brings them a great deal of professional and personal satisfaction. The meeting with Inyang is a major event in the novel; it raises the heroine's awareness of that troubled intersection between autonomous subjectivity and the subject of dominant family and gender discourses. We are told that:

That evening Yetunde stood in front of her mirror and took a critical look at herself. Thirty-seven, mother of four, teacher, flabby and unattractive, and leading a dull and uneventful life. She thought of Inyang again with some envy. Actually, she had been pretty contented with her life until the encounter that morning. The meeting had jolted her into realising that she had allowed herself to get into a rut. She must do something about it and get more zip out of life before she became senile. She would have to change jobs; probably go back to advertising or something equally challenging. It would mean long hours from the family but she was sure she could reorganise things so that no one suffered. (p. 34-35)

Her new awareness is only matched by her husband's lack of understanding of the fact that she finds what appears to him a happy life extremely boring. When she turns to him for some emotional support after failing to get back her old job with an advertising company, his reaction shows that a gulf has developed between husband and wife, one which will eventually lead to trouble:

'Why the bother? You have a good job you enjoy, and the pay is not bad for a housewife.'

'I don't enjoy teaching anymore. I've told you so several times. I need a change. Besides, the pay is poor.'

'It's Okay. We are not rich, but we are not poor either.'

'I know, but we could be a bit more comfortable and be able to afford little extras.'

'Who is complaining? Certainly not me or the children. I used to wish I had more money to lavish on my family like some of my friends, but I realise that being happy is more important - happy in your job, in your family, in....'

'But are we happy together as a man and wife?' (p. 36)
(My emphasis)

Behind Chi's inability to appreciate the magnitude of Yetunde's dissatisfaction is a deep-seated selfishness which is never capable of seeing another person's point of view. Clearly, in the spatial allocation of power

within marriage, Chi's success at work and the children's happiness have become the indices of Yetunde's happiness. Thus, in this example of dominant marriage and family practice, there is an elision of the mother and wife as an autonomous subject. The repression of female autonomy in the text is the work of a gender practice which reduces female subjectivity to matrimony and maternity, which is itself a symptom of a limited discursive economy. Indeed, it can be argued that behind such ideological interpellation, there is a discourse which is merely interested in managing and reproducing a limited range of female subject positions, which betrays the absence of an emancipatory agency within the very structure of the ideology. Such absence exists as an ideological closure within the form of masculine subjectivity represented by Chi and takes the form of an active absence, or radical *supplementarity* in the case of the awakened subjectivity of Yetunde.

Chi's commitment to masculine hegemony, which soon translates itself in the unequal relations of gender which are evident in his differential attitude to his own infidelity and to that of his wife, forces the repressed discourse to come to the surface. When Yetunde discovers that Chi is having extra-marital relationships she gets upset, but forgives him; however on the other hand, when Chi discovers that Yetunde has a relationship with Yinka he displays such depth of unforgiving cruelty that one wonders whether the mild manners that Chi has been showing hitherto are not in fact a mask. It is then that Yetunde discovers that all the sacrifices she has made for the sake of her marriage have not been equally reciprocated by her husband who is more concerned about the principle of male territoriality than her happiness and that of their family. At first she does not mind that Chi never likes to take holidays and never shares her passion for art and scenery, but when his faults are shown to be based on an egocentric world view, one in which the defence of masculine

subjectivity is more important than the happiness of the family, she realises that she has been wrong in putting the family above her needs. Even so, she still feels that she is being unfair to Chi by going out with Yinka with whom she has a lot in common.

Her sense of guilt, arising out of her relationship with Yinka, shows the ambivalence of the emerging autonomous subject. Much as Yetunde has realised that the marriage she has done so much for has failed to provide for her emotional satisfaction, she still feels the need to protect its stability. It is such ambivalence that is evident in the fact that she agrees to return to Chi when the latter invites her back. Even here, Chi's selfishness is evident: he cannot stand living on his own after he has had a taste of his former life of being cared for by Yetunde. She too wants to go back because of her commitment to the happiness of her children. It is remarkable that it is her daughter who facilitates her decision not to go back to her husband. When she resolves not to return to Chi, as usual he is only concerned about himself:

'You are deserting me when I'm helpless and on my sick bed?'

'I'm not deserting you, Chi, and you're not an invalid. You're much better now and the doctor said you could go back to work next week. However, for the past six weeks I've given up everything else to look after you despite the campaign of hate you carried out against me with the children. Your cruelty almost ruined my life.'

'So, now you're having your revenge?'

'No. I wouldn't be here if I were. I simply know that I cannot live with you again and be happy, and I certainly do want to be happy. Pretence would be no use. We'll remain friends of course and contact each other regularly.'

'Don't bother since you've made up your mind to leave me to die. Don't attend my funeral either if it would be distasteful to you.'

'Stop being over-dramatic,' she chided. 'You're perfectly capable of managing your own life and you have nanny and Udoh to look after you.'

'That notwithstanding, I still need care.' (p. 115-116)

Chi's attempt at emotional blackmail has certainly failed to dissolve Yetunde's resoluteness. Her moral standing towers above Chi's narrow selfishness which still needs a nanny of a wife. There is however a more tragic side to the form of masculine subjectivity we encounter in Chi: it never grows, to the extent that Chi sounds rather childish and a bit retarded in contrast to the breadth of moral and political awareness of his former wife. Even at the end of the novel Chi is shown to have developed very little, demonstrating his inability to interrogate his own subject position within Nigerian gender practice. It is a story about the tragedy of a masculine *self-closure* that has achieved a kind of ossified subjectivity which needs to be superseded by something else, which it is incapable of grasping and implementing. It is the search for an alternative male subjectivity that leads Yetunde back to Yinka who, even in poverty, sustains that zest for life that has right from the beginning shown Yetunde that there is something more beyond the routine life of a marriage run along the bureaucratic lines of the Nigerian civil service.

Nevertheless, the new man is also to a certain extent still a product of the ideological practice of his social formation. Yinka would like to marry Yetunde. In his reception of Yetunde when she goes back to him, where he waxes poetic, he demonstrates the sort of possessiveness that has ruined Yetunde's marriage:

'I've been waiting and was prepared to wait for a long time for you to come to me,' Yinka told her as soon as she stepped into their flat. 'I knew you would come for we belong together. You're mine for good.'
'She thought: 'We belong together? Sure! Yours for good? I don't know about that! I cherish my independence and I intend to hang on to it.' (p. 116)

Thus the quintessential autonomous female subject is presented as continually *self-regarding* or *reflexive* as a way of ensuring that even within a liberated sexual politics the charm of the new subject position does not turn into an occluding hegemony.

In this carefully crafted work, the task of achieving female autonomy is pragmatically located within the world of the real; there is a marked and responsible awareness of the need to formulate gender emancipatory strategies which have the chance of being practicable.⁴³ It is an attempt to bring the possible into the world of the real. The artist Yinka and the heroine Yetunde are never idealised; they are as imperfect as anybody else except for their resolution to transform marriage practice at the level of concrete relations of gender.

In Buchi Emecheta's *A Kind Of Marriage* the humane and pragmatic Feminist vision of Helen Ovbiagele gives way to an unrelieved hatred of men, so that the admirable and praise-worthy project of undermining male hegemony simply becomes the means of establishing female hegemony, thus subscribing to notions of individualism and authoritarianism which characterise patriarchy. Emecheta, who operates from London, has aligned herself with a specific brand of western Feminism, the *gynocentric* kind, which unlike Feminist-socialism, privileges the suffering of women over all other forms with the end result that its vision of the future of gender relations lacks the breadth of egalitarianism that we find in writers such as Helen Ovbiagele.⁴⁴ If it is true, as the Nigerian Marxist critic Femi Osofisan claims, that Buchi Emecheta draws 'largely on her own experience of a brutal and unsuccessful marriage, with a callous egoistic husband and parasitic in-laws and on her sufferings as a fugitive mother of six, all alone in racist London,' one can argue that Buchi Emecheta has allowed herself to generalise from the particular to the general, a kind of reasoning

which always gives rise to stereotypical and essentialist readings of the actions of the *Other*.⁴⁵ It is this sort of inductive reasoning which, for example, underlies racist rhetoric.

A Kind of Marriage is a story about how the marriage between Charles Ubakanma and Maria, which has been contracted in the United Kingdom while both of them are students, suffers when they return to Nigeria because Maria cannot conceive again after giving birth to one son. Charles's parents secretly arrange that Charles should have children by another woman in the village: he has a son and a daughter. When the Nigerian Civil War breaks out, Charles and Maria have to go back to Iboland where for the first time Maria is told about Charles's other wife. She decides to concentrate on educating her son and to let Charles handle the situation as he wishes. Charles still loves Maria and so he refuses to bring his second wife to Lagos when the War is over; however, he agrees to take the son he has by the woman. Afam, the son, is a problem child: he is rude to teachers. Consequently, he is continually expelled from school. He finally quits school and goes to live in Iboland. Afam's mother is tired of living on her own in the village and marries another man. When Osita, the son Charles has by Maria, qualifies as a doctor Afam's hatred of his educated half-brother increases in intensity. Osita decides to invite his brother to stay with him during his wedding. When Charles tells Afam that he better go home to the village to continue supervising the workers in their farm, Afam takes it that the father does not want him to enjoy the comfort of a city life-style. With a group of robbers, Afam raids his brother's house, and in the course of the robbery Osita is killed. The other robbers kill Afam as well. On hearing the news of the death of his two sons, Charles commits suicide. Charles's father, who had insisted that his son marry another wife, dies of shock. However, Osita's wife, Ruth is expecting twins. Auntie Bintu who is being told

the story by Amina, suggests that Ruth and Maria are 'a kind of family.'

The novel conducts a critique of traditional marriage practice which is predicated on childbearing and the continuity of the male lineage. Of course this is not the first time that Buchi Emecheta has addressed the subject. In her 'highbrow' works such as *In the Ditch*, *Second Class Citizen* and *The Bride Price* she interrogates the gender practice of the Nigerian social formation. Indeed, even in her first novel in the Pacesetters Series, *Naira Power*, which I discuss in chapter four, the same subject is examined. In an attempt to question the traditional gender structure as manifested in marriage practice, Emecheta constructs a total *demonisation* of African culture which reduces the complexity of African social experience to a manichean dichotomy within which the west is uncritically represented as the source of women's emancipation. The representation of Africa in *A Kind of Marriage*, in its gross simplicity, is akin to that of the Negritudist school with its praise of all things indigenous. The demonisation of Africa is effected through a series of generalisations.

The contrast between a progressive marriage practice and the traditional type is mapped on the antagonistic relationship between Africa and Europe. Charles and Maria have a successful marriage when they are in Europe which breaks down when they are back in Nigeria. There is nothing new in this particular structure: Kole Omotoso uses it in *The Edifice* in order to explore the relationship between gender difference and race, but what is different is that, unlike Kole Omotoso's thematisation of the relationship between marriage practice and cultural difference, where the success of marriage in Europe is shown to be predicated on determinate contingent factors, in *A Kind of Marriage*, there is an unproblematised assumption that the mere fact that Charles and Maria are in Europe by itself implies that their marriage is characterised by equal relations of gender.⁴⁶ The reader is not shown the process by which

Charles and Maria produce a marriage practice which is uniquely progressive while in Britain. In fact very little narrative space is committed to their life before going back to Nigeria. A large portion of the novel is taken up with the representation of the negative aspects of the marriage practice of Iboland. Embedded in the disproportionate allocation of narrative space is an essentialist privileging of Europe over Africa. Thus, marriage practice is shown to be a matter of cultural and geographical location rather than ideological choice, which is a form of cultural determinism, behind which there is an extremely naive reading of the gender practice of Europe, one which falls into the same mode of cultural perception as one encounters in the fevered and uncritical valorisation of all things western that is typical of Onitsha market literature.

The overall metaphysic of cultural difference of the novel has the effect of yielding an image of a traditional Africa that is characterised by ideological stasis. This is most obvious in the portrayal of the parents of Charles. Charles's parents are depicted as extra-ordinarily selfish and autocratic: the father whose name means, 'may we have many children,' is bent on ensuring that his son Charles makes up for his own failure to have many children. The father and the mother connive and blackmail Charles into sleeping with Obioma, the woman who becomes his second wife:

His mother started to urge him to come and look at this land they were negotiating for him. He could remember how very nervous he had been the first night with Obioma. His father had said that they were thinking of getting another young girl to help Maria with housework, and that this second woman could be his wife number two if he wanted. He had not paid any particular attention to what his father was saying until he felt Obioma in his bed at the dead of the night. He jumped up and protested to his parents. The girl began to cry and his mother told him that he was

condemning an innocent girl to a life of shame if he did not go to bed with her. She said Obioma would never be able to marry anyone else because people would always refer to her as Charles Ubakanma's cast off. No one would believe that Charles had not had anything to do with her. For they would ask, how can Charles Ubakanma not fancy a girl so young and so beautiful that her body could wake the dead? There must be something wrong with Charles himself, and not with Maria, could have been the rumour. (p. 67)

Though the general intention of the novel is to represent Charles as an innocent victim of tradition mediated through the parent-child relationship, it is suggested that Charles himself has given the matter some thought:

Though Charles was now in the Ministry of Labour he still had his eyes on the Foreign Service. And he could not dream of presenting someone like Obioma as his wife even though she would have been wife number two. Many of his friends had many wives, but this was something he did not want to indulge in, not whilst he was still working. He would think about it in retirement, if Maria did not produce another child. (p. 67) (My emphasis)

However, the major uncritical demonisation in the novel is that of Afam, the son Charles has with Obioma. Afam is morally corrupt; as a young boy he drinks and uses the sort of language that is not expected of a son of a Permanent Secretary in the Nigerian Civil service. Once again, we encounter an essentialist reading of human behaviour. Afam's corruption is presented as emanating from what the novel perceives as the unacceptable relations of gender characteristic of the traditional marriage practice. Furthermore, the representation of Afam partakes of the discursive division between the legitimate and the illegitimate child. Although in tradition the legal status of Afam is very clear, within the preferred discourse of monogamy and the nuclear family his location within the family is that of an outsider. He is perceived

as a threat to the stability of Charles's family. In the end, Afam kills his half-brother as an affirmation of his incurable evil nature which is presented as being rooted in his very biological make up. Thus the moral is very clear: the son of a second wife is bound to destroy all that you treasure. On the other hand, Osita is presented as an angel, one whose only fault is that he is kind to his half-brother. A lot of Osita's positive qualities are attributed to his having been abroad, which suggests an unproblematised belief in the civilising qualities of education and travel.

The celebration of the deaths of all the male members of the family as the herald of a new era of matriarchy reveals a profound sadism at the heart of the ideological trajectory of the novel, one that sheds light on the simplistic characterization which runs through the novel. Complexity seems foreign to this novel, even granted that it is a popular literary text. One obvious example of this is the representation of the attitude of Nigerian men to women, which argues that all of them think unaccompanied women are prostitutes. When Aunt Bintu, Amina's sister-in-law takes Amina out for a meal, the men mistake them for prostitutes. The episode provides an excuse for an authorial intervention which is in effect a sermon on how there would be no prostitution if there were no men to buy sex. More significantly, the episode provides an opportunity for Auntie Bintu to give the men a lecture:

'I am not one of them and I am here to buy lunch as I promised. No silly talk from the uncultivated men is going to force us to go away. For your information, I am a professor of English and this is my sister-in-law...' I did not have to finish my sentence. The confused men got up and some of them walked out of the restaurant almost without the use of their eyes, knocking against this and that in their hurry to get out. (p. 20)

The solidarity of women that the novel argues for seems to give way to class differentiation. Auntie Bintu who is the authorial voice seems to imply that it is alright if the men look down upon the prostitutes as long as they leave the professors alone. This amply suggests that what we are dealing with here is essentially a vision of gender egalitarianism that is limited to the interests of those, who by virtue of an education, have left the world of traditional Africa behind. It is little wonder then that the defence of gender egalitarianism in the novel boils down merely to a defence of a marriage practice of the elite in such a way that this form of marriage practice is never interrogated but is instead presented as inherently radical. Furthermore, the binary opposition between the common woman and the elite type is evident in the way the author represents the village woman Obioma. She is presented as a simple materialistic village woman. Her son tells her the reason she married Charles:

He reminded her that she did so because she was greedy and in search of a soft life. He said to her that after she had had him and his little sister, she had to take off with another family because the simple sacrifice many mothers make for their children was beyond her. She had to leave again because she was in search of a soft life. (p. 93)

Osofisan observes that Buchi Emecheta, 'who is more familiar with the urban world of Lagos and London than with the bush villages, loses her narrative when the locale of her fiction shifts away from the cities.'⁴⁷ Osofisan is right. I would add, that she displays a rather arrogant elitism, one which transfers the simplicity of its perspective to that of the object of perception with the result that it reproduces some of the most obvious urban stereotypes of the rural poor of Africa.

The negative representation of the rural woman is matched by a warm and more positive attitude to the urban educated woman. Osita's wife, who has a Ph.D in psychology, is presented as the epitome of beauty and moral worth. Amina describes her thus:

She is one of these new determined women who never undervalue themselves. I'm sure she'll have men friends, but she's going to stay loyal to her Osita. She was only saying the other day, 'Thank God I have my career. (p. 120)

In Buchi Emecheta's view of gender egalitarianism the career woman is the measure of women's emancipation. Such a view-point downgrades other ways in which women's labour continues to be employed. Most Feminists would argue that domestic work is as much work as the career of an educated woman in a city. This is true particularly of the rural woman whose labour in the agriculture sector contributes a great deal to the provision of food for the urban areas. Obviously, Buchi Emecheta's narrow vision of the relationship between gender, class and culture does not take into account this extremely important area of women's experience.

The overall elision of the rural woman in the novel is marked by her absence from the ideal of autonomous female subjectivity that we are offered at the end of the novel. The kind of family that is offered as the epitome of women's emancipation is exclusively located in the city. Though the solidarity of the female age-set group of Ibo culture is mentioned, no functional link is made between that and the urban matriarchal model proposed by the novel. The exclusion of the rural woman is also accompanied by the exclusion of men:

'I think Ruth, Maria and the twins have a kind of marriage and family. The two women have now got into a kind of marriage....'

'Auntie what do we need men for really?'

'We need them to give us babies, and after that I don't know....'
'And Auntie do they not say that you can have babies, without men, you know

It would seem that the matriarchal feminist model presented by Emecheta is predicated on the physical annihilation of men since what enables the ideological project is the absence of men through death. The numerous dead bodies at the end of the novel, which another artist might have used to make a statement about the tragic dimension of human experience, are employed by Emecheta for the triumphal celebration of a sectarian victory. It is the absence of a complex awareness of social experience that leads to a naive manichean dichotomy within which men are perceived as essentially bad and women as essentially good. Thus one agrees with Catherine Acholonu when she says:

Many of her female readers would argue against her.....
hatred of the menfolk.⁴⁰

In conclusion, it can be said that Buchi Emecheta's failure to transform sufficiently the stuff of personal experience into a more generalisable vision robs her of the opportunity of developing the radical potential of her vision into an all-embracing and sustaining gender practice. Her vision falls into the category of Feminism whose hatred of the male species occludes the possibility of cross-gender solidarity needed to undertake a radical transformation of existing gender practice. One is thinking here of the extreme forms of Feminism such as the type represented by Andrea Dworkin who sees all men as enemies of women. To put it bluntly, Emecheta demonstrates the dangers of an individualistic ideology which in many instances in the novel does degenerate into blatant racism and xenophobia, which is far from the dream of most

materialist Feminists who do not believe in ranking oppression. There are some men too who suffer either because of class or other forms of difference.

CONCLUSION

To conclude the chapter then, I have shown, through the discussion of Kalitera's *Why Father, Why*, how cultural nationalism is used in African popular literature to support marriage practices characterised by unequal relations of gender. I have argued that Kalitera's *Mother, Why Mother* is a good example of instances in African popular literature where relations of gender mediated through the principle of male territoriality lead to xenophobia and the production of a pathology of female subjectivity. In the discussion of Dede Kamkondo's *Truth Will Out* I have shown how a radical thematic project of gender can unwittingly find itself supporting other forms of difference such as class difference. In my discussion of Maillu's novel, *Thorns of Life*, I argue that the defence of marital stability can sometimes lead to the destruction of those positive values which had sustained traditional Africa. I then argue that Helen Ovbiagele's *You Never Know* offers a form of gender practice which displays a marked respect for female autonomy in equal measure to a deep commitment to the need for mutual dependency and respect between men and women. Finally, I dismiss Buchi Emecheta's proposition of a matriarchal marriage practice as an extreme and dangerous utopianism.

The overall impression one gets from examining the representation of marriage in African popular fiction is that it is a highly popular subject, one which attracts a wide-ranging body of opinion. The earnestness with which the writers of different political opinion engage with the subject demonstrates a

tremendous enthusiasm for matters of great import to the contemporary African. It is the relevance of the subject matter of these works to the needs of the contemporary African reader that, I think, accounts for their great success, as can be determined from the fact that most ^{of} the titles have been reprinted within a short time of their publication.

NOTES

1. See Friedrich Engels, 'The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and State', 1844), in Robert Tucker (ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Second Edition (New York and London: W.W Norton and Company, 1972), pp. 750-751.
2. Tucker, *Ibid.*, pp. xix-xxxviii.
3. See Lisa Tuttle, *Encyclopedia of Feminism* (London: Arrow Books, 1987), p. 194.
4. 'The Dakar Declaration on Another Development with Women' in *Development Dialogue: A Journal of International Development Cooperation* Published by the Dag Hammarskjold Foundation, Uppsala, no. 1(1982), pp. 13-15.
5. Antonio Gramsci cited by Janet Batsleer and others, *Rewriting English: Cultural Politics of Gender and Class* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), p. 79.
6. Leslie Rabine, 'Romance in the age of electronics: Harlequin Enterprises' in Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt (ed.), *Feminist Criticism and Social Change* (New York and London: Methuen, 1985), p. 250.
7. All references to texts in the chapter will be to the following: Aubrey Kalitera, *Why Father Why* (Blantyre: Pen Power Books, 1982); Aubrey Kalitera, *Mother, Why Mother* (Blantyre: Power Pen Books, 1983); David Maillu, *Thorns of Life*, Pacesetters Series (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1988); Dede Kamkondo, *Truth Will Out*, Macmillan Pacesetters Series, 1986); Buchi Emecheta, *A Kind of Marriage*, Pacesetters Series (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1986); Helen Ovbiagele, *You Never Know*, Pacesetters Series (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1982).
8. Versions of the section on Kalitera's *Why Father, Why* were given as seminar papers as follows: Mpalive-Hangson Msiska, 'Sexual Politics in Malawian Popular Fiction: The Case of Aubrey of Kalitera's *Why Father, Why*,' 14th Annual Conference on 'Research in Progress' 21-23 March, 1989, Centre for Southern African Studies, University of York, UK.; Mpalive-Hangson Msiska, 'Sexual Politics in African Popular Literature,' 2 May, 1989, Department of English Studies and Centre of Commonwealth Studies, Stirling University, Scotland.
9. Pierre Bourdieu makes a distinction between that part of the bourgeoisie that is concerned with the domain of material production and the section which produces cultural capital. See his essay, 'Symbolic Power' in D. Gleeson (ed.), *Identity and Structure: Issues in the Sociology of Education* (London: Nafferton Books, 1977), p. 15.
10. Malawi has historically supplied labour to the mines and farms of Zimbabwe, Zambia and South Africa. See John McCracken, *Politics and Christianity in Malawi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) and Landeg White, *Magomero: A Portrait of An African Village* (Cambridge: University Press, 1987).
11. Some African women argue that the unequal relations of gender in Africa are solely a product of the colonial experience and the advent of industrialisation.

See, for example, Wanjiku Mwangi, 'The Woman: So strong a Force,' in *Presence Africaine*, 141 (1987), pp. 71-81.

12. I use the term 'subjectivity' in the Althusserian sense. See Louis Althusser, *Essays on Ideology* (London: Verso, 1971).

13. Ibid.

14. For a view of the relationship between history and culture among the Yao and Lomwe, I have benefited from the following work by Landeg White, *Magomero: A Portrait of An African Village* (Cambridge: University Press, 1987), pp. 220-251.

15. See Joseph Hanlon, *Beggar Your Neighbours: Apartheid Power in Southern Africa* (London: James Currey Publishers, 1986).

16. Landeg White, Op. Cit., p. 232.

17. Ibid.

18. For the concept of 'commonsense' knowledge, see Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), pp. 322-324 and pp. 419-425.

19. I have in mind the kind of Feminist position exemplified by the tendency within the Feminist theory described by Iris Young as *gynocentric*. For a critique of the approach, see Ania Loomba, *Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1989), pp. 23-25.

20. Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (London: Virago, 1977), p. 36.

21. Ibid.; for a personal account, see Mpalive Msiska, 'Being Visible on the Streets of Stirling', *Central Scotland Community Relations Council: Annual Report, 1988-89*, p. 42.

22. See Althusser's distinction between *ideological apparatuses*, cultural practices such as schools through which the *subject* is interpellated by manipulation, and the *State Apparatuses*, the coercive institutions of dominant ideology, to which it resorts when ideological interpellation fails to achieve the desired goal: Louis Althusser, Op. cit.

23. See Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. Joan Riviere (London: Hogart Press, 1930).

24. See Calvin Hernton, *Sex and Racism* (St. Alban, Herts: Paladin, 1970)

25. Kate Millett, Op. Cit., p. 38.

26. The ontological structure I employ is based on the work of the Existentialist psychologist, who is said to have influenced the work of Michel Foucault, Ludwig Binzwanger; see also Mark Poster, *Foucault, Marxism and History: Mode of Production Versus Mode of Information* (Cambridge and Oxford: Polity Press with Basil Blackwell, 1984), p. 3.

27. For example, Mary Daly, *Gyn/ecology: The Mechanics of Radical Feminism* (London: The Women's Press, 1979).

28. For a materialist discussion of the relationship between race and gender, see Ania Loomba, *Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama* (Manchester: Manchester Press, 1988).

29. For more details on the University of Malawi Writers Workshop, see Angela Smith, *East African Writing in English* (London: Macmillan, 1989); Adrian Roscoe, *Uhuru's Fire: African literature East to South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 135-136; and Bernth Lindfors, *Kulankula: Interviews With Writers From Malawi and Lesotho* (Bayreuth: Eckhard Breitinger, 1989). All references to the text are from Dede Kamkondo, *Truth Will Out*, Pacesetters Series (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1986).

30. A helpful account of the University of Malawi Travelling Theatre and James Gibbs's contribution to it is given by Adrian Roscoe, Op. Cit., pp. 270-273.

31. Adrian Roscoe, 'Raw Pieces of Liberation: The Poetry of Edson Mpina', Unpublished manuscript.

32. E. Chifulimira, *Mkazi Wa Bwino* (A Good Wife) (London and Lusaka: Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland Publications Bureau in conjunction with Macmillan, 1951). For a discussion of the didactic element in Malawian popular literature, see my article 'The Development of Popular Literature in Malawi,' *Inter-Arts: A Journal of Third World Connections*, 1, No. 4 (1987), pp. 13-22.

33. By the term 'misgendering', I refer to the process by which the attempt to socialise children into gendered subjectivities fails. The failure need not be a result of the child's deliberate attempt at resistance.

34. Kate Millett demonstrates how among certain sections of the working class, such as truck drivers, physical strength is the ultimate acid test of masculinity; see Kate Millett, Op. Cit., p. 36.

35. See Bernth Lindfors, 'East African Popular Literature in English,' *Journal of Popular Culture*, 13, No. (1979), pp. 106-107. All references to the text are from David Maillu, *Thorns of Life*, Pacesetters Series (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1988)

36. Bernth Lindfors, 'The New David Maillu,' *Kunapipi*, 4, No. 1 (1981), pp. 130-143.

37. Bernth Lindfors, 'Interview with Hilary Ng'weno,' *African Book Publishing Review*, 5, No. 3 (July, 1979), p. 58. The details of the interview are cited by Richard Lepine, 'Spear Books: Pop-lit or You can judge a book by its cover,' *Ba shiru*, 10, No. 2 (1979), pp. 36-48.

38. Hilary Ng'weno, *The Men From Pretoria* (London: Heinemann, 1975).

39. Roger Bromley, 'Natural Boundaries: The Social Function of Popular Literature,' *Red Letters*, No. 7 (1978), p. 37.

40. See Calvin Hernton, *Sex and Racism* (St. Albans: Paladin, 1970); all references to the text are to Helen Ovbiagele, *You Never Know*, Pacesetters Series (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1982).
41. The terms, *univocal* and *monoglossia* have been employed by Mikhail Bakhtin to denote the operation by which official discourse presents itself as the only available language in a given social formation. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Carly Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: Texas University Press, 1981).
42. See Edwin Segal, 'Modern Myths: Ideologies of Development,' *Outlook*, 1, (August, 1986), pp. 44-62.
43. The following are some of the writers I am talking about: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland* (New York: Pantheon, 1979); Dorothy Bryant, *The Kin Ata are Waiting For You...*; Ursula Le Guin, *The Dispossessed...* Joanna Russ, *The Female Man*
44. The term *gynocentric* was coined by Iris Young (1985) to refer to the Feminist critique of *androcentric* (male-dominated) culture. It is popularly used to describe the sort of Feminism that privileges the oppression of women over all others.
45. See Femi Osofisan, 'The Alternative Tradition: An Insider's Postscript,' in Albert S. Gerard, *European Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa I-II* (Akademiai Kiado, Budapest: The International Comparative Literature Association, 1986), p. 795.
46. See Mpalive-Hangson Msiska, 'Cultural Dislocation and Gender Ideology in Kole Omotoso's *The Edifice*' (paper presented at Association of Commonwealth Literature and Languages Silver Jubilee Conference, August 1989, University of Kent, Canterbury, England).
47. Osofisan, Op. Cit., p. 795.
48. Catherine Obianuju Acholonu, 'Buchi Emecheta' in *Perspectives On Nigerian Literature: 1700 to the Present, Vol. 2*. (Lagos: Guardian Books Nigeria, 1988), p. 222.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE POLITICS OF ROMANTIC LOVE

It might be worthwhile to begin the chapter by pointing out that the concept of romance, the cultivation of a personal relationship between a man and a woman before marriage, is a concept that is not indigenous to Africa. In Africa, the relationship between a man and a woman has always been seen in the context of marriage rather than love. Particularly in traditional societies, young people are not encouraged to develop a personal sexual relationship if it is not clear that such a relationship will end up in marriage. As Samuel Obiechina has perceptively argued in his book, *An African Popular Literature* (1971):

In pre-colonial Africa, romantic love, whether as an autonomous experience or as a stepping stone to marriage was played down and subordinated to familial and community interests. Because of the close linking of the fate of individuals to that of the group to which they belonged, a peculiarity referred to by Durkheim as 'mechanical solidarity', romantic individualism was understandably curbed by stringent taboos. For how could families go on using the institution of marriage for making desirable allies of other families if young people were free to run off and get themselves attached to anyone they took a personal fancy to? In a situation of underdevelopment and fragile political and social infra-structure, families and communities depended for stability largely on the balancing of group relationships and the linking of families and segments in marriage alliances. To give free rein to romantic love would threaten the foundations of social stability and integration.

The point made here is not peculiar to traditional African societies, but appears to apply to all pre-industrial and traditional societies. Social anthropologists like Malinowski and Margaret Mead who

have studied societies widely separated from Africa have come more or less to the same conclusion. The Indian writer Chaudhuri, in his entertaining travelogue *Passage to England*, draws a sharp contrast between attitudes to love and marriage among Europeans and Indians. Chaudhuri's study shows that Indian attitudes to love and marriage are like those of traditional Africa.'

With the shift of large populations from traditional rural into urban areas and with exposure to the western concept of romantic love through both high and popular literature, film and media, and through the 'allegorical framework for both idealized and humanized love' offered by Christianity, the situation has changed radically, but not profoundly.² Romantic love still remains the sort of domain of interpersonal relationships in which the values of traditional society and those of the West clash. Many Onitsha market writers, for example, have dramatised the intense agony of young lovers as they are caught between the stringent code of traditional courtship and the western notion of romance which they perceive as liberal and sophisticated. In Okenwa Olisa's play, *Elizabeth, My Love*, the heroine is seen fighting the autocracy of arranged marriages:

CHIEF COOKEY: Elizabeth I go beat you again. No talk again Ototofioko no go marry you. Na Chief Jaja go marry you. Na my friend for long long time. He getting money plenty and go pay me £250.

CHIEF JAJA: I am a big chief, Elizabeth, I go pay any amount your father charging me. This boy Ototofioko is poor. He no get money.

ELIZABETH: Chief Jaja, my seeing you here annoys me. Please go with your money. If you like pay £1,000 to my father. You are not paying it on my head.

CHIEF COOKEY: Chief Jaja pay me £250 I go forcem marry you. Na my daughter, na me bornam. Na nonsense ide talk.

CECILIA (Elizabeth's mother): You must change with the time. This time is no longer the olden days when

fathers forced their daughter to marry 'contrary to their wishes'..... Elizabeth my daughter talk less, you are addressing your dad. My own is that you can marry Ototofioko. He cannot compel to marry this old, illiterate Chief Jaja with dirty teeth and dirty clothes. Your right must be respected.³

In the end modern romance triumphs over what is perceived by the author as a primitive custom. Nevertheless, it would be simplifying an otherwise complex state of affairs to suggest that the conflict is simply one between a conservative traditional patriarchal gender ideology and a progressive modern one, for both are equally implicated in the discourse of patriarchy in which the relations of gender serve the interests of an unequal distribution of power. For example, the familial alliances to which Obiechina attributes the origin of the absence of the notion of romantic love in traditional society are in fact not a case of groupings within which the interests of both sexes are treated as of equal importance; they represent the manipulation of the personal by a public patriarchal discourse. In other words the opposition, 'traditional/modern' runs the risk of masking power relations whose interests are served by the absence of romantic love in traditional societies. As the texts we consider in this chapter demonstrate, the central problem regarding romantic love in Africa today is that both within the traditional and modern contexts, it is still implicated in the discourse of patriarchy.

In my analysis of African popular literature, I have isolated three ways in which the relationship between patriarchy and romantic love is generally presented by the writers. First, there are novels which merely reproduce and reinforce a conservative gender ideology. This group is represented in the discussion by David Maillu's *For Mbatha and Rabeka* and *Benni Kamba 009 in Operation DXT* and Nandi Dlovu's *Angel of Death*. Then there are those texts

which interrogate existing gender relations, which in the end come up with solutions which are profoundly inadequate. Examples of such works are *Ebvu My Love* by Helen Ovbiagele, and *After 4.30* by David Maillu. Lastly, there are texts which constitute a radical intervention, texts which seek a radical transformation of the status quo. The following texts comprise the sample which I examine in this chapter: *Forever Yours* by Helen Ovbiagele and *Love's Dilemma* by Waliye Gondwe.

ROMANCE AS IDEOLOGICAL MIMESIS IN DAVID MAILLU AND NANDI DLOVU

In his novel, *For Mbatha and Rabeka*, David Maillu cleverly defends what might be described as the 'rural mode' of romance against both the traditional and the new urban types of romantic love. He criticises traditional relations between men and women for the lack of freedom of choice about which Obiechina speaks. On the other hand, urban love is seen as shallow and pretentious, lacking in substance and pandering to a neo-colonial culture.

The ideological intention of the text is to intervene in the larger question of the relationship between traditional and western culture. A student of African literature will immediately recognise the theme as the most popular fodder for the high novel in Africa. Indeed, this particular theme has been the forte of the writing of such famous writers as Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka. However, the aims of Maillu's novel are a little more specific than what we have in the writings of the famous writers of the belles lettres. Maillu directly intervenes in the complex articulation of gender ideology that characterises the current social formation in Africa.

The initial opposition in the text is between traditional romance and the semi-traditional romance of the literate generation. Roki, the son of a chief, is represented as siding with the traditional attitude to romance. Roki, who has become a problem in the village because of his uncouth behaviour, is, in accordance with traditional law, to marry Rabeka, whose parents owe the chief, Roki's father, some form of repayment for having accidentally killed the chief's cattle. The injustice of the action is graphically outlined in the novel:

Katiki had spent two days at her garden by the river preparing cassava to take to the market. Helped by two other women, she had peeled and cut it up and spread it on the rock for drying. The drying process took three days. But something happened that Katiki could not have imagined. The livestock, coming from far away, found the way to the rock and devoured the dry cassava. Then followed a terrible loss - thirty-three goats and sheep and four cows died... An unpleasant case rose between the Chief and Malonza. The Chief demanded full compensation... In an attempt to settle the dispute and beg patience and leniency from the Chief, Malonza slaughtered two goats for him. But even after eating the goats, the Chief would not listen to Malonza's request. He did, however, suggest a way to settle the debt once and for all. He had a son, Roki Mbaluka, a rogue who was the centre of ridicule and curses in many villages. Roki Mbaluka, the Chief said, would take Rabeka for a wife when she grew up; then the Chief would give a few more goats to Malonza, plus a cow and a bull to complete the dowry. (p.16-17)

In traditional society, female subjectivity is constructed as a matter of commodity value, an extension of the law of the Father. The fact that gender ideology in traditional society is presented as being subsumed under the juridical and political ideological practices further demonstrates the extent to which the illusion of the gap between the personal and the public, which forms part of modern ideology in Africa, is never allowed in the traditional social formation. Here, the intersection between gender and other public discourses is

visible in the very surface texture of social and personal action. Perhaps the most significant aspect of the arranged marriage is the extent to which it enters the discourse of political power. The arranged marriage is arrived at in a context in which certain parties are repressed. The Chief is presented as an autocrat, who uses his public office to square personal and private scores. However, in this particular instance, the score involves an equation, as in Kalitera's *Why Father, Why*, between human subjectivity and commodity value.

It is this attitude to the female subject that the narrator wishes to attack. The means by which the onslaught on traditional gender ideology is carried out in the novel is Mbatha. Mbatha and Rabeka are childhood sweethearts. Their love develops over a long period of time; they play and go to school together. When Mbatha goes to secondary school and Roki and his father sense that they might lose Rabeka, Roki employs the traditional method of eloping. He employs two friends to help him waylay and carry away Rabeka, which they do, but unfortunately for them, Rabeka is no fool. She tricks Roki by agreeing to go with him and later, when he tries to make love to her forcibly, she bites his fingers and one of his ears. When Roki attempts to kick her with his foot, she ducks and he, instead, kicks a stone. She runs away from him. Nothing can be done to the girl's family as the Chief has disappeared under mysterious circumstances the same evening.

Rabeka's resistance to Roki, when both Mbatha and her parents are virtually powerless to come to her rescue, is a radical gesture in the novel in that it does acknowledge the capacity of a female subject to intervene in her oppression and seek redress without recourse to superior male strength. However, this point belongs to the political unconscious of the text since the general thrust of the case being put forward by the novel erects Mbatha as the rescuer. Mbatha may have failed to act as a man and rescue Rabeka from Roki

and his father, but he is given a second chance. When Rabeka's parents no longer wish to continue paying school fees for her and urge her to leave school, it is Mbatha who comes to her rescue. Mbatha arranges with his parents to pay school fees for Rabeka. The exchange of gifts within a romantic relationship can be implicated in the questions of hierarchy and status. The French feminist, Helene Cixous has noted:

For the moment you receive something you are effectively open to the other and if you are a man you have only one wish, and that is hastily to return the gift, to break the circuit of an exchange that could have no end ...to be nobody's child, to owe no one a thing.⁴

It is significant that later, when Rabeka decides to break off the relationship with Mbatha, she decides to repay him for whatever he and the family had spent on her:

With grief, I realise that I am in love with somebody else.... However, there is one obligation that I will not overlook: I will arrange for a refund of any money you and your father have ever paid for both my school fees and general expenditure. (p.103)

The only way she can break the bond between her and Mbatha is by a cessation of any economic ties that have subtly undermined her independence and produced an element of valorisation and status in the relationship. So long as she feels that she owes her education to Mbatha and his family, she will have to continue to undermine her own independence and become more and more a dependent personality. As it is, however, the gesture of independence seems to obey the same economic principle that has characterised her relationships with men hitherto.

As we learn later, the reason she enters into a romantic relationship

with a city boy Honeycomb Mawa is that she is attracted by the promise of an abundance of material things. In this, the character of Rabeka becomes the means by which Maillu provides the moral of the story:

In Arabia, you ^{are} bound to meet a child or an adult who tells you a pathetic story, "My mother was carried away by a hurricane". Life has many of these cyclones, typhoons, hurricanes, but in other forms too, one of which once threatened to take me away: a fantasy about material things, for example... (p. 149)

The moral of the novel recalls Ann Rosalind Jones' description of the contents of a western magazine:

Their format was the story told by a heroine who tries some sexual adventuring, discovers how dangerous it is and how misled she has been and returns to her parents or her husband a wiser and better woman.⁵

This kind of thematic project displays the anxiety of patriarchy which essentially constructs woman as the threat to its notion of order. Such a discourse partakes in various myths, biblical and secular, in which woman is generally represented as a *transgressive excess*.

If in Rabeka's relationship with Mbatha, the narrative represses the economic conditions within which the relationship is inscribed, in her relationship with Mawa such conditions are foregrounded, not so much as a political gesture but rather as a way of representing Rabeka as a woman who would rather have 'mammon' than a good man. Rabeka is carried away by the myth of luxury and abundance when she is visiting her cousin in the city. Through her cousin she meets a character who calls himself Honeycomb Mawa, a name that he had picked up to give himself an image of 'a cool city guy'. He drives a Saab, and lives fast; he speaks English through his nose and uses an

affected style of expression characterized by words such as 'fantabulous'; he is a panel beater, but generally introduces himself as an engineer. Mawa tells Rabeka that he wants to be rich, international and successful. Dazzled by the material promise of the city as mediated through Mawa's version of city life, Rabeka breaks off her relationship with Mbatha and decides to marry Honeycomb. However, on the wedding day, the loan Mawa's boss had promised him falls through because his boss is under political detention. Mbatha rescues Rabeka from the embarrassment of a failed wedding by marrying her. They go back to the rural area where they live happily.

Thus Bernth Lindfors is right in suggesting that in the novel 'village virtue wins over city flashiness'.⁶ However, Lindfors's summary of the thematic structure of the novel does not take us further than the surface meaning of the text; it merely summarises the plot and identifies with the ideological trajectory of the novel without paying due regard to the multiple contestations going on ⁱⁿ the novel. In order to enter the field of discourses which constitute the text, I propose to recover the ideological framework of which the surface meaning of the text is but one of several possible versions. In other words, we must reconstitute from the text the ideological fabula, the ideological material that precedes the ideological narrative that is proffered and which makes the specific ideological closure we encounter in the text valid and logical. In order to undertake this task, we must read symptomatically the subject positions of the principal characters, for it is through the characters, as they live out the contradictions in their respective subject positions, that the ideology that has interpellated them, fixed them in the positions in which we behold them, is foregrounded.

To begin with, the principal characters Mbatha, Rabeka, and Mawa are constructed astride a linear movement which starts from the pre-colonial and

moves to the post-colonial phases of Kenyan history. Mbatha as ^a primary school teacher in a rural area stands in opposition to the traditional values represented by the figure of the Chief who manages to resolve the contradictions of his position in relation to the new dispensation in a way that ensures personal gain. From their shared critical vantage point, Mbatha and the narrator view the Chief as an embodiment of a *weltanschauung* that stands in need of radical change. It is not without significance that the representative of tradition that Maillu chooses is corrupt and self interested to such an extent that he undermines the discourse beloved of negritudist writers, the nostalgic quest for a pure pre-colonial past.⁷ It is in this sense that Lindfors' simplistic description of the novel as a defence of village life must be seen as wholly inadequate even at the level of the surface meaning of the novel.

Mbatha's own social position in the community as an educated man leads him to question the tyranny of the traditional patriarchal order that the Chief clings to. The narrator shows us that, in practice, this institution leads to abuse of power and privilege. He tells us that the Chief uses the institution in order to solve a crisis within his own family. His son is a rogue who molests women and smokes Indian hemp; he is not the most attractive candidate for marriage according to the criteria which guide the choice of a spouse in the version of traditional society that Maillu has created in the novel. However, the criticism of the traditional sexual politics supports the prioritisation that is at work in the ideological project of the novel: Mbatha cannot win on the basis of traditional mores, for he is a commoner and as such, within tradition he cannot contest the decisions of the Chief and get away with it. The only space within which a commoner can challenge the ^t constraints of tradition is within the antithesis to traditional life, western

culture. To his colleague, Kyonda, Mbatha is incurably western in his notions of love:

'You should have been born in Europe.'

'Why?'

'Where they talk and decorate and amplify this great fucking business which is merely the biological language of mating. Animals don't make that fuss about it....'

(p. 120)

Thus, what we have here is not simply a disinterested objective clash of tradition and modernity, but rather one in which the interests of the participants determine the agenda, the sites of struggle as well as the choice of solutions. The Chief's preservation of tradition is as motivated by considerations of personal gain as Mbatha's articulation of modernity. What needs to be underlined, though, is the absence of the female discourse in all this.

The female argument is absent insofar as it is subsumed under one side of the masculine discourse of the opposition. Rabeka, unlike her female ancestors, is a rebel. She has refused to acquiesce in the dictates of tradition by refusing to enter into an arranged marriage. She wants to marry a man of her choice, who is Mbatha. She suffers for her decision: she physically fights off the husband-to-be who has been forced upon her and as a result spends time in hospital and is beaten by the mother, who does not understand why her daughter cannot accept the marriage the family has planned for her. Evidently, her exposure to a western education provides Rabeka with the means by which to challenge the traditional mode of marriage. However, her conception of the problematic in the form of a binary opposition elides the critical *supplement*, that is to say her gendered subject position blinds her to the fact that what she construes as freedom is but an entry into yet another

form of repressive sexual politics. In other words, western romantic love as lived in rural areas, which in relation to traditional patriarchy is radical, offers a notion of freedom that smoothes over its own contradictions thereby creating a picture of a plenitude that in reality does not exist. The limitations of rural romantic love can only be exposed when challenged by another mode of love.

Honeycomb Mawa, the sophisticated man from the city brings into the text that discourse which reveals, not just in a metaphorical sense but in the literal as well, the poverty of the myth that Mbatha and Rabeka have constructed for themselves in order to contest the field of sexual politics in the rural terrain. The version of the city that Mawa brings to the novel is to a large extent determined by his position within the urban social structure. He represents that species of city folk that is neither working class nor middle class. He is the kind of ambivalence which is both white and blue collared; the epitome of the boundary between the lower and the middle class. Mawa does not live in the suburbs of Nairobi, but the locations; however, he drives an expensive car and maintains social intercourse with the greatest in the land. His best friend, who is Rabeka's cousin, is a medical doctor; among his acquaintances he counts many foreigners: Zimbabweans and people from the Caribbean. His choice of friends is largely determined by reasons of prestige. To enhance his position, he has picked up the habit of speaking only English, except when he is speaking to subordinates to whom he condescendingly speaks Swahili:

Mawa drove a Saab and lived and practised an expensive style of life after having, for many years, lived from hand to mouth. He talked in English, and only in Kiswahili to communicate with his subordinates who couldn't speak English. Very rarely, he spoke his mother tongue, Kikamba. When he talked in it, he gave it an exotic pronunciation to deceive the listener into

thinking that he had forgotten the bush language. When talking in English he swallowed and pushed the words through his nose in his attempt to talk with what he thought was an American accent. He knew many peculiar English words, especially abusive words. He chose his words carefully in order to give the right punch, as he put it, to the listener. (p. 59)

When telling Dr. Musau about his feelings for Rabeka, he says: 'The comeliness of your niece decoys my sentiments.' In many respects, the character of Mawa reminds one of Soyinka's famous character, Lakunle; both of them have seized the most ridiculous elements of western civilisation. However, while Lakunle's superficiality costs him the girl, Mawa's renders him attractive to Rabeka. One might ask, 'Why is it that Rabeka, who has shown a spirit of independence by fighting off the repression of women by traditional patriarchy, succumbs to a distortion of modernity?'

For an answer to the question, we must return to the ideological trajectory of the text. If the story of Rabeka is to serve as a lesson to women that they should not be carried away by material things, it is necessary that Mbatha's adversary must be a type that is less impressive than Mbatha himself. We have already noted that the same strategy is at work in the portrayal of the Chief, the defender of pre-colonial sexual politics. Caricature is, in this regard, the most lethal weapon used by the narrator in order to prioritise the sexual ideological interests of the class that Mbatha represents. The contrast between the characters is captured in their differing views on modernity; Mawa tells Rabeka that:

'I've friends from all walks of life. This city is very interesting to people who want to meet the world. African states are beginning to be the crossing point for all civilisations.... Travel and meet people and be educated. I plan to visit all the famous cities and countries of the world. Life gives you a membership ticket for anywhere in the world. It depends on you

whether you want to use that ticket just around your village, that is, grow up and die there.' (p. 72-73)

In another context, Mawa gives a variation on the same theme:

'I'd like to do all those things I've told you - travel, meet people, love dearly - all that. I want to be international and successful. I want to fly out of my mother's nest and see the world; and I don't beat about the bush saying that I would like to be rich, for life comes to you only once and, while it lasts, you must live it big, freely, and in the best possible style. Think of taking your life for a honeymoon, you'll get what I mean. But I also want to be and live for someone I dearly care for, a woman obviously, and an intelligent one whom I haven't met yet. Your life is the most precious present which must be risked or given only to the person you care most for.' (p. 64-65)

Mbatha's vision on the other hand is centripetal, rather than centrifugal; it is not expansive, but narrow. He tells Rabeka:

'If you have lived here for twenty years without those essentials you are enumerating, why is it impossible for you to live here happily for the rest of your life? I don't think I could buy that gospel of yours. I should also emphasise to you that my life is not an international commodity, at least for the time being, and as far as I can see and feel things. Mine is a life produced and processed here for local consumption on this small scale.... (p. 99).

Any development is first a matter born in the mind, not a thing you will automatically receive or achieve merely because you have duplicated yourself out of what other people are and by living in electrically lit streets. There's more to life than what you see. The Eskimos live a full happy life in spite of their environment... 'If we went to live in the city, would the hospital come here? Would there not still be people living here, human beings like you and I?' (p. 97-98).

Rabeka is convinced by Mawa's argument, which is characterised by a zest for life and a sense of adventure in contradistinction to Mbatha's which emphasises the virtue of accepting your station in life and being wary about the snare of

riches. Mbatha's use of the Eskimos' way of life as the paragon of a good life has a ring of simplicity that cannot adequately match the clarity and soundness of Mawa's flamboyant Promethean vision. Perhaps the text has posed a question for which it has not given the hero sufficient resources. Whatever, the case might be, what needs looking at is the way Rabeka comes to take sides in this debate. Following a pattern established in the struggle between tradition and modernity in which she supported Mbatha against tradition, in the debate between the city man and the rural man, she chooses the former rather than the latter. She is on the side of modernity except that this time around the form of modernity she chooses is not philosophically consonant with the ideological interests of the rural intellectual, Mbatha. The major question posed on the margins of the text begins to assume greater significance than the text had intended: 'At what point does the fight against tradition stop, and that against modernity begin?'

The answer provided by the text is that we must fight against those negative aspects of tradition which lead to the exploitation of the weak by those who wield power. This is radical in that it suggests the possibility of transforming pre-colonial values into a more humane and just ideology. However, in suggesting that the rural areas must remain the way they are and the people should in fact celebrate the absence of technology, Maillu runs the risk of presenting a view of the rural area that is reminiscent of ^{Jean} Rousseau's prioritisation of nature over culture. In other words, the argument is between the transformation of nature and living it as it is. In a conversation between Rabeka and Mbatha, the former turns nature into a *fetish*:

'How easily one can get rusty in this bush! Do you think you can live on the beautiful view of the mountains which you seem to cherish so much? What is poetic about a place like this where there is no water, no electricity, no telephones, no parks no theatres and.... who can count them?'

'Kid, you are getting crazy. There is water everywhere in this country. The water ^omy not be by the wall of your house, but it is there. You grew up washing with it and drinking it, in a nice environment without electricity, phones, and what have you. As for the parks, I think you don't know what you are saying. Why do you need parks in the country when the whole country is, by itself, the park? Again the telephones and the electricity may not be there, but here are other nice things: good people, freedom, pupils to educate, food.'

(p. 96-97)

The attempt to leave nature untouched by human intervention has ramifications for the gender ideology that the text seeks to present. It is implicated in the attempt to protect women from knowledge as it is in the interest of a static rural gender ideology to ensure that they are not exposed to values and a way of life which might threaten the authority of men like Mbatha. The relations of gender in the rural area are presented as part of an eternally stable system. It is at this point that another fissure occurs in the text. The attempt to elide the heterogeneity of the rural experience and to present it as a homogeneous experience within which access to power is equal founders as they are contradicted by the text's own revelation of social differentiation. The romanticisation of the rural area is revealed as superficial by the contradiction explicit in the description of the rural area we are offered elsewhere in the text:

To the north and to the south, double blue mountains ridged, thick and uneven on top like the line of a crocodile's back magnified a million times. The mountains were very cold, especially in June, when, for some reason unknown to scientists, the mountains produced the greatest number of mad people and murderers. If you turned three-hundred and sixty degrees on the church site, you could see a sprinkling of white iron-roofed houses scattered in the fields, each one attached to a patch of a garden in which the inhabitants grew their bananas, maize, cow peas, millet, lemons, oranges, pawpaws, sweet potatoes, cassava, coffee, guavas, mangoes and usually kept some species of

lean livestock, well-suited to the tough conditions of the country. The country dogs, who usually lived on eternal famine, ate the local diet or green maize in the garden like squirrels, when it was available and children's shit when conditions were more grave. (p. 141)

Evidently, the attempt to prioritise the rural experience reveals gaps that cannot be easily covered by the text. Far from dramatising the triumph of rural virtue, as Lindfors would have us believe, what we find in the novel is a defence of an old patriarchal order which has lost the means to sustain itself in the face of an onslaught from a more sophisticated, but equally repressive, masculine discourse. However, the conflict is mediated through the ideological structure of class stratification within which the rural mode of production and its supporting ideological structure are threatened by a new mode of production and culture. Nevertheless, the binary opposition offered by the text is revealed as fundamentally superficial since the two modes of production are represented through characters who inhabit the same space within the social structure of Kenyan society. Their fate depends on more powerful personages than themselves. Mawa's marriage fails because his boss cannot provide him with the loan since the latter is under political detention; on the other hand, the only practical reason Mbatha gets Rabeka back is because the marriage between her and Mawa has failed. In other words, the resolution of the narrative appears to undermine the significance of the binary opposition it has built by suggesting that the principal adversaries are in fact small fish in a pond populated by sharks. These 'sharks' are only reticently brought into the text as if the author is scared to talk about them:

An unexpected tragedy had hit Honeycomb Mawa. Mr. Katumbo, (his boss) who had been overseas on business longer than he had expected, had come too late for Mawa to change anything or put off the wedding of that kind,

and found himself victim of a new kind of Kenyan law. On his arrival at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport, he was instantly and quietly picked up by the security boys. This was just three days ago. But up to now nobody, not even his two wives, knew where the security people had taken him. (p. 145)

Mbatha, Mawa and even his boss, are all shown to be equally vulnerable. What is revealed here is the naked masculine discourse that Mawa has been using in his role of an adversary of a socially underprivileged rural teacher, and which in turn is used against him by those more powerful than him. Even more vulnerable is Rabeka, who as a woman is never allowed to articulate the condition of her own subjection.

In the end what *For Mbatha and Rabeka* reveals is a sinister continuity between the autocracy of the personal domain and that of institutional political power, thus suggesting that the way power is managed and negotiated at the personal level tells us something about conceptions and the practice of power in a given social formation. Maillu takes up the same problematic in his thriller, *Benni Kamba 009 in Operation DXT*.

In *Benni Kamba 009 in Operation DXT*, Maillu collapses the female subject into a masculine discourse of power and difference. The ostensible project of the novel is to protect the African continent from being exploited by multinational companies. This is not the first time Maillu has taken up the subject; in his *Equatorial Assignment*, Benni Kamba, his detective destroys a nuclear base owned by a superpower. In *Operation DXT*, the detective Benni Kamba is given another dangerous task. He must blow up a factory which manufactures a drug called DXT which is killing people in hundreds in a fictional African country called Darba. What Kamba discovers is that the man he is pitted against, the tycoon O'Tloot, is not the sort of man one can handle

carelessly. He is extremely dangerous. In the end, however, Kamba blows up the plant and kills the exploiting millionaire.®

The novel constructs a very simple opposition between the West and Africa. On the one hand there are the forces of good represented by Benni Kamba and the organisation he works for, NISA, and on the other, there is O'Tloot who is depicted as an international gangster who pretends to be a friend of the continent, when in reality all he wants is as much money as he can get out of it. The contrast in the way the two opposing sides are represented provides a useful point of entry into the ideological framework that is being articulated by the text. The central opposition in the text is constituted in the form of the outsider/insider binary opposition. Although he makes most of his money in Africa, O'Tloot lives abroad and his knowledge of Africa is limited to what he extracts from the African politicians with whom he is in league in the matter of exploitation. His view of Africa is presented as a false rhetoric, coloured with a form of paternalism that recalls the colonial notion of progress:

I have a big respect for the black man, no kidding, as Americans would say. If there is anything to come yet for the world, this time it will come from Africa. Today, it is Africa and Africa alone that has the chance of changing the world, in the sense that Africans have not been foolish enough to be tied down to the dogmas and rigid traditions that we have in Europe. I can assure you that you are on the right path to great civilisation. I find Africans open-minded, ready and curious to learn. That, by itself, is what creates advancement and great civilisation. Africans have, in the last few decades, gone throughout the world learning, patiently absorbing everything of good use to them in future. I find that the thinking of the African, the educated African - not the brainwashed one - is clean and unpolluted, just like his country. (p. 75)

Thus the figure of O'Tloot exemplifies the return of the repressed, a reconstitution of the values which had previously served to justify colonialism. However, for O'Tloot to succeed, he needs the partnership of the most powerful in the continent: 'Quite a number of heads of African governments and other developing countries went for loans to Mr. O'Tloot.' (p. 79). The fact that most African leaders are personally indebted to O'Tloot means that he can do whatever he wants since they are dependent on him for their extravagant life-style.

It is against this gang of exploiters that the former Colonel in the Kenyan Army, Benni Kamba, and his colleagues are working to save lives. Benni Kamba and his NISA colleagues are in a private business of protecting the continent from exploiters. NISA is run by African doctors in order to stop the continent from becoming a dumping ground for dangerous drugs and chemicals. It is suggested by the text that the politicians cannot help in changing the situation since most of them have already made their hands dirty by allowing themselves to be used by international capital. It will be recalled that the relationship between African politicians and multinational companies in East Africa has been examined by no less a writer than Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *I Will Marry When I Want* and *Devil on the Cross*.⁹ If politicians are portrayed as a bunch of self-interested capitalists, the African intellectual is not spared the condemnation of the writer. In a revealing passage Kamba lets his disdain of University intellectuals be known:

The three teachers were talking loudly, obviously free and ebullient. They sat there intellectualising, theorizing, and philosophising, sometimes getting drowned in the sea of metaphysics. Kamba noticed that they were draining bottles of beer like nobody's business. He began to listen more carefully to their conversation.

'Sometimes intellectualism is a bulldog. The good dog barks and bites,' one was saying as he drained his

throat nicely of the dust. His drooping moustache, that many a woman would hate, caught the white bubbles of the beer. He put his glass down and ran his tongue over the froth, not managing to clear it all. He was intensely inside the topic. It is well known that a professor can, sometimes, blow his nose and forget to clean it well because his concentration is elsewhere.

'This one should be called Professor Bubble,' Kamba thought, and chuckled at the name. Everything about the professor was untidy. His raven black hair was uncombed, sticking out like a forest. He wore a black suit, and a shirt with a collar that was frayed but clean. He had no tie. Kamba thought he looked about forty... 'We are always accused of talking too much,' Professor Bubble was saying, 'and doing too little.'

'My profession is talking,' returned Flatnose.

'And criticising!' the handsome one teased.

'Jah? who doesn't criticise?'

'Everybody does' Bubble said. 'While you are here drinking your beer, it's easy to criticise anybody and any leader; but the story is different when you get there. Criticising is sometimes a degenerated form of activity. Criticism must be balanced; that is, you should praise as much as you criticise. (p. 29-30)

The image of the intellectual being presented here is negative. This would seem to highlight the marginality of the African intellectual. In a perceptive analysis of the role of the intelligentsia in Africa, the Malawian critic Felix Munthali has shown how historically the relationship between the African intellectual and his/her society has been marked by conflict and misunderstanding.¹⁰ On the one hand, he/she is admired for his learning and given to understand that he/she is needed in the development of his continent whereas on the other, he/she is perceived as dangerous and weak. The most virulent attack on the African intellectual within the East African literary tradition is Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* which depicts him as effeminate:

I feel like vomiting,
For all our young men were finished in the forest
Their manhood was finished
In the class-rooms,

Their testicles were smashed
With large books!''

Just as in the rhetoric of the Maillu's novel one does not expect much from women, one cannot expect a lot from the feminized intellectual either. The very choice of the metaphor foregrounds the centrality of the question of gender in the very language in which power is constituted. Clearly, the aimless senior commonroom palaver described by Benni Kamba does not inspire trust since the intellectual is presented as loquacious to the point where he has come to accept loquacity as an end in itself. Incidentally, loquacity at certain historical moments has been viewed as *a* defining attribute of female subjectivity.¹² Much of the negative portrayal of the intellectual has to do with the need to create a space for what Roger Bromley has described as a *masculine romance*, a world of 'real' men or men of action, in which the obese politician and lean bearded intellectual have no place.¹³

NISA is an imaginative invention. It is a supernational organisation which is not based in a given African country. It is located in some African desert and operates on behalf of all African countries. Patriotism to the continent and to the race is the prime criterion for membership. The organisation is independent and powerful. It is committed to taking action against whoever threatens the well-being of the African continent. In this regard NISA represents a far cry from the world of the senior commonroom radicals at the University of Nairobi and similar institutions. Here the emphasis is on action rather than mere talk. On the whole, the negative portrayal of the African intellectual has to do with the narrative need to justify the method chosen by Benni Kamba and his colleagues at NISA. If intellectuals have more bark than bite, and the politicians have neither of the

two, it is left to NISA to protect and rescue the continent by means of violence, if necessary. In other words, the strategy of valorisation at work in the text ensures that the only characters with a moral vision are those through whom the ideological project of the novel is realised.

The barrel of a gun and physical strength are presented as the basis of power in the novel. In contrast to the politicians and the intellectuals, Benni Kamba is presented as the embodiment of masculine virtues: physically attractive, intelligent, strong and rich. Perhaps, no episode better illustrates the premium placed on physical strength in the novel than the following:

Kamba took the law into his own hands. First he drove fast ahead of the man, then stopped the car broadside across the road, got out and waited for his adversary. The Datsun stopped all right, its driver most likely thinking that the Citroen must have met with an accident. He got out of the car smiling. Hei man! Kamba stuck out his hand in greeting. The fellow glowed with pride as he came forward. But to his astonishment Kamba suddenly grabbed him by the shirt and gave him a violent blow that sent him crashing into the sisal plants by the roadside. Benni Kamba returned to his car and drove on peacefully as if nothing had happened, feeling much better. (p. 23)

The importance of physical strength is further signalled through the hero's use of the bulldozer when he is on holiday in Kenya.

For the kick of it, Kamba took a brief training on the bulldozer. 'It makes you feel powerful,' Kamba told the driver, looking at the machine. 'I like the way the machine eats the earth,' Kamba thought, turning it round. Its sound echoed everywhere, thundering and rumbling, making it impossible for people to hear each other. (p. 23)

It is revealing that when the hero finally manages to get the truth out of Viola, O'Tloot's female companion, a suggestion is made that O'Tloot may have been impotent, which on the one hand, serves to support the hero's

comodification of sexual relations as in: 'they laughed together in the memory of the night she had said goodbye to her virginity', while on the other it functions as a way of feminizing his adversary and thereby erecting his downfall as a flaw in his masculine identity. It would appear that this is a common strategy in *masculine romance* such as detective fiction. In their work, *Rewriting English*, Janet Batsleer, Tony Davies, Rebecca O'Rourke and Chris Weedon have observed that:

the authority of the hero is typically registered at the outset, in masculine romance, in terms of an explicit and normative heterosexuality. This might seem so obvious as not to be worth saying. But an interesting feature of the genre is that, in spite of an overwhelming presumption to the same effect, it seems compelled, with sometimes pettish insistence, to repeat the fact. Women's romances don't seem to feel the need constantly to reassure their readers that the heroine is sexually 'normal'.¹²

As Roger Bromley has argued, underlying the masculine romances such as we encounter in detective fiction is a mode of exchange which lays emphasis on the values of competition and gamesmanship. The game involves protecting one's own masculine attributes against being exposed as inferior to those of the adversary. It is thus not surprising that the defeated O'Tloot is feminised for in the mode of representation being re-enacted in the novel defeat is weakness and weakness is conceived of as a feminine attribute. It is in this mode of representation that the subjectivity of the female characters in the novel is inscribed.

Female marginality ^{the} in novel takes the form of exclusion from the dominant values of the master narrative and a secondary role in the very structure of the narrative. All the women we encounter in the text are dependent for their livelihood on men, which has the effect of producing an

overall image of femininity which is closely tied up with the domestic role of women. We have the hero's mother living in rural Kenya and depending on the hero for her upkeep and his girl-friend studying at the University of Nairobi relying on him for a bit of money. On the other hand, O'Tloot is surrounded by women who are essentially at his beck and call. The exclusion from economic and political power is never questioned by the text as it generally does not see anything wrong with the role and status created for women in the narrative. This form of blindness results from the function performed by the female characters in the narrative. Kristina, for example, is there in order to emphasise the extent to which the hero is indispensable to NISA. She is a good example of a character who is employed merely as a disembodied narrative device. Kristina is there to allow the hero to get away from his job so that the NISA headquarters can be looking for him desperately in order to blow up the ship which will be sailing into Darba carrying the largest consignment of lethal DXT. Because Benni Kamba wants to be alone with Kristina, he travels incognito. Meanwhile, everyone is looking for him. They finally locate him and it is with a great deal of difficulty that he finally agrees to take charge of the mission. All this searching provides dramatic tension as no one is ever certain that by the time Benni Kamba is found there will be enough time left to save the country. Also the act of reluctantly leaving his girl-friend to save the nation is very much a kind of folkloric motif, part of the general body of myths about masculinity and war. It is the usual story of the reluctant soldier who has to tear himself away from a wife or a girl-friend and family in order to pay the highest sacrifice for the motherland. It is not coincidental that before we see our detective in the thick of battle we encounter him first as a vulnerable son visiting his mother at home in Machakosi, and then we see him as a generous, loving and emotionally fragile

man in his relationship with Kristina. All this is a narrative strategy to underline how delicate the mission is and also to emphasise the hero's spirit of self-sacrifice. The female characters are simply narrative means for creating a sympathetic and prestigious context for the detective hero.

It is this function that Viola performs in relation to O'Tloot. Like Benni Kamba, O'Tloot needs to be surrounded with the requisite pomp of a millionaire. We are told that he keeps a lot of women for his visitors and himself. The women occupy the same places of prestige as other belongings of the rich man. However, Viola, after the death of O'Tloot, comes into her own as the main adversary. Even before this moment, the reader has already been sensitised to the possibility of Viola being potential trouble for the hero. She is used by O'Tloot in the role of a femme fatale. She tries to seduce Benni Kamba, but like a good detective he refuses her advances. She comes to occupy that space in detective fiction occupied by countless other enchantresses who are put in the way of the hero as some form of obstacle that he must surmount if he is to proceed further in his quest.¹⁴ Her duplicitousness is further revealed when we are told that, contrary to what she and O'Tloot say, she is not his daughter but a mistress. What one can deduce from all this, is that she is being used by O'Tloot to bait Benni Kamba so as to get as much information as possible from him since the latter is not well known to O'Tloot. Once again, the image of woman we are given is that of a dependent subjectivity, a subjectivity that is perceived and represented in terms of use value where the very notion of value is defined by a masculine narrative of power and competition.

It is revealing that no sooner has Viola lost O'Tloot than Benni Kamba steps in as her protector. Like Juliet Mpunga in Kalitera's *Mother, Why Mother*, Viola is not allowed narrative space in which to reflect on her own future; she

is merely transferred from one man to another. For Benni Kamba, she has the money and the looks, which is, in his reckoning, more than his girl-friend has. His view of a relationship comes across as an aspect of a property relationship in which the question of value is of paramount significance:

'You have a point. But, sometimes it is good to think about the material things, to be money-minded. Are you aware that if you married this girl, you would marry her with all her money? Don't forget that the guinea-fowl brings home with it its beautiful spots. I wouldn't blame you for getting attracted to a girl like this one, even for falling in love. You know something? A quinine tablet is pretty to look at but it is a different story when you chew it. Now man, face facts. Don't build your hopes on shaky things. How sure are you about that Kristina of yours? She might not live long. She might catch the eyes of a stronger man.... Think.' (p. 84)

However, though Benni Kamba's interest in Viola is primarily motivated by an interest in her wealth, through a process of ideological secondary revision, the material interests are cloaked in the rhetoric of romance:

Benni Kamba felt something heavy trying to pull him down, making his resolution waver. Then he wasn't sure of who he was and where. He made up his mind to put a full stop to it, trying to keep away from her; but the more he tried, the weaker he became. Then he didn't know how swiftly or, simply, it happened. He found her in his arms, his heart pulsating with something between pity and desire and an exciting mystery. He felt himself sinking into a place from which he might never be able to pull himself out, into an abyss where he found himself kissing her hard, searching into her soul. When the NISA helicopter arrived, they were still wrapped in each other's arms, as if each had grown into the other, rather like horrified children frightened by thunder. The helicopter dropped its cord. Their clothes fluttered in the helicopter's storm in the likeness of their fluttering spirits. The future would have to make the decision, Benni Kamba thought. (pp. 145-146)

Added to the rhetoric of romance we also encounter the rhetoric of philanthropy as experienced by Viola: 'He adopted me from Israel when I was a year old, he told me.' (p. 133) We see how this initial philanthropic act is displaced into sexual abuse:

Mr. O'Tloot never had any children of his own and was very fond of me. You probably think I am supposed to be accurately his wife simply because you found me in his bed. I see that on your face already. You are not the first person to think that way, anyway. It's something I have seen in all the faces of' she pressed her head between her hands.... 'There are some funny things. I call them funny because I have no other words, that Mr. O'Tloot wanted me to do to him for the last four or five years. I could tell you a lie if I want, but I won't... I don't think you will believe all this anyway. He never slept with me because there was something wrong somewhere. Possibly, he would have if everything had been all right.' (pp. 133-134)

Viola's suffering at the hands of O'Tloot casts the hero's relationship with her as a form of rescue. She is rendered as someone who had been kept in captivity by O'Tloot. In this way the hero takes on the mantle of a rescuer and Viola that of a victim. There is yet another discourse intersecting with the language of masculine philanthropy that the text offers. The version of philanthropy we are given here is shown to be self-interested to such an extent that the object of rescue is merely transferred from one site of oppression to another where the direction of change does not mark a fundamental change in the politics on the basis of which the gendered subjectivity of the characters is determined.

It is in this sense that one can argue that the subject position of the continent of Africa, like the female subject, is seen to be transferred from one autocratic discourse to another. If the neo-colonialists of this world such as O'Tloot represent an ideology in which Africa is seen in terms of

economic colonialism, Benni Kamba and NISA represent a new form of private colonialism. NISA is a private organisation rather than a state one. It functions in the novel as a private detective without any institutional links. We thus have here the stereotypic opposition between the law and the private detective that we encounter in the novels of Mickey Spillane, for example. The policeman is always presented as daft and not as shrewd as the private detective. In such novels private justice is presented as more efficient and more swift than institutional justice. Such a viewpoint represents a loss of faith in the efficacy of public institutions. The only problem with such a proposition is one of public accountability; how can our private detective be sure that he is defending the best ideals of a continent? How does one stop such detectives from going overboard in their enthusiasm to punish the culprits? Benni Kamba's fight with a silly driver on the roadside offers an insight into the pitfalls of a private morality. NISA is an example of a disembodied institution without any meaningful links with the larger society. It negates the very idea of social morality and justice. In other words, Maillu's proposition of privatisation of the business of governance does not represent a viable alternative to current models of leadership in Africa; if anything it represents notions and structures of power with a great deal of potential for abuse.

There is also the question of values which inform the subjectivity of the new breed of redeemers. We notice that Benni Kamba's life-style is no different from the corrupt politicians and even from that of O'Tloot. Benni Kamba has a lot of money to play with. For Christmas he hires a plane to impress Kristina and promises to pay for her flying lessons. Furthermore, as he is preparing himself for the great task of risking his life for mother Africa, we are told: 'Kamba sat quietly beside the General, thinking about his

beach house in Kenya and how he wanted to develop the plot.' (p. 60). In all Kamba has three houses. Certainly, the defender of Africa from neo-colonialists and their lackeys is indistinguishable from the people he regards as the enemies of the continent. Even the model of leadership that NISA follows is extremely autocratic. When Benni Kamba cannot be found the director of NISA, General Dr. Triplo, is so annoyed that he almost fires him:

'Do you want to keep the job or do you want to go on fooling around with us?'

Dr. Triplo lowered his voice a little, but became sarcastic. 'Perhaps you thought that, because you had blown up the Chengolama Base, you had done all that was necessary. Maybe you don't want to get further? We have too many people like that in Africa with small ambitions. Or are you now coming for your retirement benefits?.'

'Sir, all I can say for now, and I say it from the bottom of my heart, is that I wish to keep the job. I promise to do even better. I will never repeat the same mistake. Please accept my apology.' (pp. 57-58)

Thus the very model of leadership, and the relationship between subordinates and the superiors is characterised by authoritarianism. General Triplo's style of leadership is very familiar to the student of African politics. It is curious that this agency which is meant to protect the continent from exploitation has a military hierarchy with generals and colonels. We are also told that Benni Kamba used to be a colonel in the Kenyan Army. The choice of a military set-up as the means with which to fight neo-colonialism is predicated on the assumption that underlying the neo-colonialist project is a difference in military strength and that the solution lies in a counter-military offensive. It is however not easy to accept NISA, which is basically a bunch of military men in a desert, as representing a veritable way out of neo-

colonialism. Its masculine language and macho image present a fertile ground for the violence that it purportedly seeks to undermine.

All in all, what we are presented with in *Operation DXT* is version of romantic love which is employed to underwrite a masculine discourse of power. Womanhood is inserted in masculine gamesmanship without a space in which it can enter into a dialogic conflict with the master narrative. Both in terms of the images of women presented in the novel as well as the relationships in which the women are involved we are given a view of gender relations which is merely an expression of the dominant gender ideology. Perhaps the most important statement *Operation DXT* makes has to do with the way in which even in the vision of the future of Africa women are excluded not just at the level of numerical representation, but also from the very language in which concepts of power and identity are formulated. A lot of this may have to do with the historical identification between detective fiction and masculine romance. Some female writers such as Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers have contributed a great deal to the development of the genre, but on the whole it has been predominantly a masculine genre. The question must be asked whether the wholesale importation of the genre into Africa brings with it new forms of sexism which might not have been there before? Or is it the case that the African male has found in the genre of detective fiction material to be used in buttressing the privileges accruing from the unequal gender relations of traditional patriarchy? These are not easy questions to answer. Perhaps the best way to approach the issue is by examining a detective novel written by a woman and comparing its handling of the question of gender with what Maillu offers in *Benni Kamba in Operation DXT*.

Nandi Dlovu, a South African journalist, has the distinction of being the first African woman to ever write a detective novel. Her novel *Angel of Death*

is set in New York; however the special agent himself is an African. Zak Biko, we are told, is 'one of the most feared detectives in modern times. Born in Soweto in South Africa, his fame had spread throughout every city in the world.' (p. 1)¹⁵ One evening his car stalls on a deserted New York street and he hears a scream from a nearby house. Little does Biko know that one of the famous New York millionaires has just been murdered. It is as well that he is the first person to run to the house as he is attached to the F.B.I in order to solve some of their mysterious crimes. When he gets to the house he finds a frightened woman, Lynda Harvey, a niece to the deceased, Franklyn Harvey. As Zak Biko is trying to find out 'whodunit' a young boy with a bullet wound enters the house and collapses before he has had the chance to speak; however before he falls completely unconscious, he manages to say, 'Angel of Death'. Zak Biko's challenge then is to find out who the 'Angel of Death' is. After a couple of shoot-outs and imaginative ratiocination, Zak Biko discovers that Lynda Harvey is the 'Angel of Death'. She has been involved in drug trafficking and wants to get rid of her uncle and her step-brother in order to inherit the Harvey estate so that she can continue using it for distributing drugs in the United States. Having done his job in New York, Zak Biko, at the end of the novel, is about to take off for London where Scotland Yard are having problems tracking down people who are issuing forged money.

Zak Biko, as a detective, recalls some of the famous ones such as Dashiell Hammett's Sam Spade, in his delicate combination of suave urbane manners with a judicious mind, and a trigger-happy finger. However, unlike Sam Spade, he is not a private detective but a special agent, who enjoys institutional links with the police and the State. Of more urgent relevance to our purposes are the images of gendered subjectivity that we are offered in the text through the figure of the detective. A preliminary examination of the

novel reveals the extent to which gender and racial discursive formations are intertwined. I wish to argue that much of the conservative sexual politics of the text results from its implicit 'gendered racism' which is produced as much by the masculine nature of the aesthetic conventions underlying detection as a literary genre as by the failure of a female author to transcend a subject position interpellated by a master discourse of masculinity.

Detective fiction is essentially a masculine discourse as the very concept of a detective has come to signify a certain gendered role within society. Very rarely, apart from Agatha Christie's Miss Marple, does one come across a female detective in detective fiction or the crime novel. As Janet Batsleer et al. argue:

It is this correspondence between a lived ideology and a particular form of narrative, rather than any contingencies of content or readership, that makes it possible to talk of masculine romance as an axiomatically gendered genre or group of genres.¹⁶

However, to say that the genre has historically identified the function of detection with masculine identity is not to suggest that this is a natural relationship; rather the correspondence between the two is a construction of the popular literary industry and cultural history. Again, Janet Batsleer et al. have argued that:

The eternal charm' which so puzzled Marx...., must surely owe something to the persistence, across millennia of social change, of Homeric codes of male honour, bravery and cunning, of female beauty, submissiveness and treachery. And, as Gramsci recognised, it is the despised and trashy fictions of the market, working as they do with the sedimented and mythopoeic materials of popular common sense, rather than the modern 'classics' of the high-literary canon, that have the closest relation to those ancient models, those enduring myths of power.¹⁷

For a subjectivity produced by the conjunction between traditional African patriarchy, and western masculine discourse of power as mediated through colonial discourse, the attributes of male valour and honour and rationality that are embodied in the figure of the detective receive a double validation and are universalised by being situated in a cross-cultural scene. It ^{is} this cultural reading that must inform our understanding of Nandi Dlovu's management of the genre in her novel, *Angel of Death*.

To begin with, one must point out that the name of the detective exploits a specific political text; to most readers of the novel the only other Biko they will have heard of, apart from the detective, is the late Steve Biko, the leader of Black Consciousness movement in South Africa. Biko, the detective, gains in stature from being associated with such an heroic character as Steve Biko. African popular literature, according to Samuel Obiechina, loves to fashion characters after famous African personalities. He mentions that Onitsha writers have written not only about Patrice Lumumba, and Nnamdi Azikiwe, but some foreign leaders as well such as John Kennedy. Thus Nandi Dlovu in electing to employ the name Biko may consciously or otherwise be using a device commonly employed among writers of popular literature in Africa. The heroic stature of Zak Biko is further augmented by his being typical of a protagonist of a detective novel. Biko is the quintessential detective hero: he embodies the masculine values that are traditionally associated with a protagonist of detective fiction, cardinal among which is the requirement that the detective must be a 'tough guy':

Ignoring the heavy knocker and the faint gleam of a bellpush, he felt in his damp pockets for the useful instrument without which he never travelled. It had been made for him by an expert safe-blower who was now 'resting' in Sing-Sing jail. (p. 2)

His toughness is more accentuated by the fact that among his acquaintances is the outlaw in Sing-Sing jail. The outlaw is brought in to reinforce the superlative toughness of the hero. However, the identification of the hero with criminality, which serves the image of toughness, contradicts the very moral mission detection as a practice is supposed to represent:

I hunt men to stop the rot of civilisation. Franklin Harvey wasn't a nice guy. His death leaves America a better place. (p. 34)

The detective is generally licensed to use illegal methods in order to uphold the law. Much as he oftentimes works within the law there are times when the special agent finds himself in situations where to obey the law might not be the most reasonable thing to do and consequently the custodian of law and order finds himself breaking the law in order to uphold it. Jack Jones, Biko's immediate boss, is concerned about Biko's occasional excesses:

He came into the living room roaring to be informed what Zak Biko had been up to in the Larning penthouse.... The colonel glared. 'That penthouse. They found one dead body - previously shot through the knee then knifed. The knee must have been your doing, Zak.' (p. 89)

The concern displayed by the superior officer steers the hero back to the moral trajectory of the novel, and protects the narrative from degenerating into a carnival of violence. Nevertheless such steering back does not constitute a measure of moral censure of the detective's actions since such actions are often presented as justified by the circumstances. The detective is always allowed a bit of leeway in his dealings with criminals since the criminals themselves rarely use methods which are legal. Catherine Belsey, in

her discussion of Conan Doyle's *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, gives an example of how a detective text can account for and justify the illegal actions undertaken by its hero:

Conan Doyle presents the reader with an ethical problem. Milverston is a blackmailer; blackmail is a crime not easily brought to justice since the victims are inevitably unwilling to make the matter public; the text therefore proposes for the reader's consideration that in such a case illegal action may be ethical. Holmes plans to burgle Miverston's house to recover the letters which are at stake, and both Watson and the text appear to conclude, after due consideration, that the action is morally justifiable.¹⁸

In other words, the detective comes to occupy a space beyond the law where his being on the side of authority is sufficient immunity from being lawless. In this sense, the detective comes to embody both the limits of law and its ritual transgression, and in the process dramatises the contradictions in state apparatuses which are employed to enforce subjection to authority. One such contradiction can be located in the detective's use of the personal past in order to validate his claim to masculine superiority:

Speaking with an air of authority that made the girl jump, Zak continued, 'Look, I am going to take a walk around. Don't try any tricks. I've been an expert with a gun ever since I was ten.' He turned down the corridor, not waiting to see the effect of his orders. (p. 3)

Zak Biko was no stranger to violent death in all its forms. (p. 27)

'Men call me a man-hunter - right now I'm hunting for a man who should never have been born.' (p. 28)

The hero's history of participation in petty gangster culture is offered as one of the qualities that set him apart from the other members of the

Federal Bureau of Investigation. Biko's superior physical strength and mastery of the use of the gun make him despise weakness:

The doctor was visibly shaken. 'I was often afraid, Biko. Maybe you don't know what it's like to be afraid. At my time of life....'
Zak shrugged. He had no use for cowards, whatever their age. (p. 116)

Biko's dislike of weakness is predicated on a masculine code which equates weakness with femininity. It is not surprising that Biko represents women stereotypically. Recalling Batsleer et al.'s remarks on a narrative strategy in detective fiction which 'serves to establish the authority of the hero's point of view, his command of visual and ideological space, his sexual connoisseurship', Biko surveys women in terms of their physical looks and in the process presents them merely as objects of male sexual fantasy:

Inside the luxurious bedroom, lit only by a shaded lamp beside the silk-covered bed, Lynda Harvey in her transparent nightdress was a sight to please any man as she lay back on her pillows breathing gently. Zak Biko approached the bed with tightening lips. He reached out a hand to shake her awake - if indeed she was asleep. (p. 101)

Lynda Harvey was still in bed and looking more helpless and desirable than ever. She seemed to be at the end of her tether - her lips quivering with pent-up emotion. (p. 116)'*

Feminist critics have often argued that a visual perspective that solely focuses on woman's body has given rise to such notorious forms of gender repression as *Miss World* where what is enacted and rehearsed is the feminine subjectivity firmly designed to pander to a code of sexual acceptability that serves the ideological interests of male hegemony. In a startling remark Biko presents physical beauty and intellectual astuteness as mutually exclusive:

Normally young girls like Lynda Harvey are blessed with everything they need to send a man thinking about bedrooms - except brains. In Lynda's case she's got all the brains she can use. (p. 91)

Although, Lynda is presented as an exception this is done in the service of another discourse which equally serves to contain female subjectivity within a gendered discourse in which gender categories are rigidly defined and jealously protected. The discourse in question has to do with the narrative need to construct her as an example of demonised femininity in contradistinction to Sarah Mitchell, Biko's girl-friend, who is presented as the 'angel of life', so to speak. It is here that the binary opposition is employed to serve a racially gendered discourse.

It is from the contrast between the two characters that the underlying sexual politics of the text can be excavated. Lynda Harvey is presented as a femme fatale, just like Viola in Maillu's *Benni Kamba in Operation DXT*. She is a beautiful, but dangerous woman:

Zak turned to his colonel. 'Jack, you'll have difficulty in believing this, but I'd like to introduce you to the lady known in the gang as the "Angel of Death" - there she stands - aged twenty and lovely as Lucretia Borgia.' Lynda Harvey's teeth showed as her lips drew back in an animal snarl, but Zak ignored her. 'Lynda Harvey was a natural for the drug pushers. She has a built-in greed for money and even more for the power it buys. The murder of her long-lost father and kid brother meant nothing to her.....'

Lynda's face was a study in evil. (p. 121)

Her love of material things can be read from a statement she makes when she is being interrogated by Biko:

'Money lengthens a person's arm,' said Lynda unexpectedly. 'Without money, and plenty of it, one might as well be dead.' (p. 117)

A woman who is prepared to have her long-lost father and brother killed simply because she wants more money, in dominant gender ideology, represents the very negation of the qualities of tenderness and mothering that are generally associated with femininity. In contrast with Lynda, the hero's girl-friend, Sarah Mitchell, is represented as a plenitude of a socially sanctioned version of womanhood:

'My Sarah is all woman, beautiful body, keen mind. She graduated from college the same day as I did.' (p. 29)

'My Sarah was born in the deep south - she's a wonderful cook and she can sew beautifully. All that and a college graduate on top. She's got a figure like Venus, only better. Satisfied?' (p. 29)

'She wears clothes as if they were poured over her figure. She walks with more grace than any top model.' (p. 29)

Although among the requisite qualities of privileged womanhood is rationality which is generally not conceded to women in masculine discourses, the overall criterion being employed conforms to the conventional notion of female role: 'wonderful cook and can sew beautifully', and the notion of woman as object of male gaze, 'she's got a figure like Venus'. The contrast between the two women is used to show how irresistibly attractive to women the hero is as well as to offer the hero an opportunity to display his moral probity. His statements about Sarah are in response to Lynda's indication of interest in the him: 'You're a strange man Mr. Biko. Are you married?' (p. 29) The rejection of Lynda Harvey's demonised womanhood in preference to a conventional type

signified by Sarah shows the hero as being on the side of traditional assumptions about gender and morality. However, the form of gender ideology being articulated by the hero through the exercise of choice is one which lays emphasis on the commodity status of the female subject.

The commodity status of female subjectivity is used to validate a racial discourse of gender relations:

Lynda Harvey's flushed face looked away. 'I didn't mean anything . You..... you're an attractive man. I just wondered.'

For a moment anger appeared in his eyes. 'I'm black, Sarah is black.' (p. 29)

To put it bluntly what we have in the text is a demonisation of white womanhood and a prioritisation of black womanhood in a masculine discourse of gender relations. Sarah Mitchell is presented as a good woman whilst Lynda Harvey is depicted as the opposite. Unlike Lynda who wanted her step-brother killed, Sarah agrees to look after the boy:

Zak led her to the couch and introduced her to Jon. Sarah made friends with the white boy immediately. Jon smiled. 'I'm glad to know you, Sarah. Has Zak told you he must go to England in the morning?' The young face crumpled again. 'Jed must go as well, I guess.' Sarah smiled down at the him. 'Zak is a world famous man-hunter, Jon. And he needs Jed to press his suits. One day he'll marry me and then Jed can look after both of us. Until then, I guess you and I must look after this old apartment until they fly back home again. How about that?'

Jon's face lit up. 'Oh, boy!' The relief in his expression was something good to see. (p. 124)

It is revealing that the version of black womanhood that the text approvingly condones very much draws on the nurturing and mothering role traditionally allotted to women. Thus, in essence what the detective has done by exposing

Lynda as the 'Angel of Death' is to bring to book the transgressive female subject who undermines the law of the Father by assuming a masculine identity through such things as her love of violence and lack of female sensitivity. However, the opposing forms of femininity that the text presents us with are, according to the system of prioritisation employed by the text, a function of gendered racial difference. Thus black femininity is offered as the ideal form of femininity for, unlike white femininity, it is conventional: mothering and caring for the whole human race.

The question that inevitably arises is why a female writer such as Nandi Dlovu should produce a novel which in characterization as well as in basic thematic structure supports a stereotypic view of women? The short answer is that what Nandi Dlovu hopes to protect in the thematic concerns of the novel is the black woman's exclusive right to black men. This position is the female counterpart of the attitude of Jim Kamanga in Kalitera's *Mother, Why Mother*; it is an attitude which bespeaks sexual territoriality. As noted in my discussion of Kalitera's novel, underlying this sort of view point is a perception of gender relations as being a function of the law of property and commodity exchange. It might also be argued that such a position belies a form of insecurity on the part of the subject of racial discourse. There is a general belief among black women that successful black men tend to marry or go out with white rather than black women. Calvin Hernton, in his book, *Race and Sexuality* has explained the matter in the most clear manner:

One informant, for instance, complained bitterly about Negro men who 'ignored their own women to run after white trash'. She said that most Negro men who achieved some kind of status of fame desert their own women and marry white women. She mentioned Sammy Davis, jr, and Richard Wright, both of whom she described with utmost hatred and contempt. When I pointed out that some Negro women of status and fame - Lena Horne, Pearl Bailey, Lorraine Hansberry - married white men, she said she was unaware of this, and merely shrugged her shoulders. She

seemed to be totally unaware that intermarriage took place in two directions.²⁰

In this regard, the text reveals what Hernton describes as the 'race-sex-jealousy syndrome'. Perhaps the constant reference to the 'deep south' in the novel helps bring in a dimension of racial politics that is not common in African literature, save that of South Africa. It has been argued by students of American race relations, that the historical internalization of a negative self-image on the part of the black woman has had the consequence of the black woman envying the so-called lofty position occupied by the white woman. Hernton shows how the black woman in the United States has come to situate herself antagonistically in relation to her white sister. One is thus faced with the problem that Kirsten Holst Petersen raises in her discussion of a feminist approach to African literature: in rejecting an argument that might serve to heal the insecure ego of the black woman who has been brought up within social formations that have not been conducive to the cultivation of a healthy and confident racial identity, one 'tears away the carpet from under the feet of the fighter against cultural (and racial) imperialism'.²¹

Having said that, one might point out the presence of a contradictory narrative on the margins of the text, which suggests that the racial binary opposition erected by the text is but one of the many discourses comprising the text. Lynda who signifies demonised white womanhood has herself had her subjectivity inscribed in a masculine discourse and her response to her subject position has not been radically different from that of Sarah Mitchell, the epitome of black womanhood. Lynda tells Biko about how her own individuality has suffered under the conditions in which the law of inheritance has been extended to cover the ownership of her person:

Lynda broke in, almost whimpering. 'He owned me, do you understand? Uncle Franklyn used me like he'd use a well-known work of art. I was his property. I am glad he's dead. Glad. Glad!' (p. 22)

Uncle Franklyn owns not only Lynda, but her father as well:

Mr. Franklyn didn't only inherit the Harvey estate, he inherited Jonah along with it. (p. 23)

The only reason she gets involved in the heroin business is through her uncle:

'Uncle Franklyn wanted the money - then he decided he had had enough - mainly because he valued the nation's praise for his good works. They spoke of him as an honest to goodness American.' She laughed bitterly. 'He began to want to get out - so did I.' Lynda shuddered. 'It seems it was too late for all of us.' (p. 117)

Even when she is involved in drug-trafficking, it is because men like Larking, her boyfriend, and Sid Kendal, the house servant, want to use her as she is next in line in the succession to the Harvey estate. It would be wrong to construe Lynda's actions as solely a function of her being manipulated by men. There is a sense in which one can say that, as a subject of a masculine *discursive formation*²², Lynda enters into a transgressive identification with the ideology which is responsible for her subjection in order to experience the fiction of autonomy. By the end of the novel, she has been used more than she has used the discourse of power in question. It is at this point that we must locate the paradigmatic category subsuming Biko and the male gangsters such as Uncle Franklyn and Larking in an oppositional relation to the female characters, Lynda Harvey and Sarah Mitchell.

The two fictions that are offered to the women and which produce their

imaginary relationship to the relations of production are dashed by the end of the novel. Lynda Harvey's own attempt to resolve her subjection through identification with the Subject/Authority, as represented by the uncle, is revealed as a shortcut to her physical subjection under the state apparatus, signified by Biko and the other police characters in the novel. Her imprisonment, more than anything else in the novel, reveals the difficulty which the female subject has in finding a place from which she can articulate a form of counter-discourse which would ensure genuine autonomy rather than a mere displacement of subjection. In the end the reward of economic security that identification with the masculine discourse promises never arrives. On the other hand, Sarah Mitchell's promise of marriage is equally deferred: 'One day he will marry me..' (p. 124) and her nuptial bliss is counterbalanced by the needs of the masculine discourse of detection: 'women, marriage and special agents don't mix - not permanently.' (p. 91) In this regard, one can argue that the text's attempt to erect an opposition between black and white femininity is shown as a displaced representation of a more profound opposition between masculine and feminine culture.

The narrative closure we encounter in *Angel of Death* is used to sanction not only women's subordination, but class subjection as well, as the case of Zak Biko's servant, Jed, illustrates. Jed's future is articulated in terms of the interests and convenience of his employers rather than his own: "Zak needs....Jed to press his suits. One day he'll marry me and then Jed can look after both of us. Until then, you and I must look after this old apartment...." (p. 124) Nowhere is the relationship between Jed and Zak problematised; it is offered as part of the natural scheme of things. There is a master/slave element in the way Zak and Jed relate to each other, which is never questioned by the text. Probably, the problem here is similar to that which the text

encounters in its treatment of sexual politics: racial similarity is perceived as obliterating all forms of difference. In this manner, Jed and Zak both being black makes their relationship immune from being analysed in terms of the relative distribution of power just as at the level of sexual politics the fact that Zak and Sarah Mitchell stand on one side of the racial divide makes the text oblivious to the element of inequality which characterises their relationship.

In general, Nandi Dlovu's *Angel of Death*, like Maillu's *Benni Kamba in* ^{DXT} *Operation* exemplifies problems which arise in adapting a genre from one cultural formation to another. In adopting an obviously gendered genre such as the detective fiction, African writers may be introducing alien forms of gender representation which may in fact be inimical to the current effort being undertaken by African women to achieve greater equality.²³ As we have seen this is not limited to detective fiction only, but also to the 'boy-meets-girl' novels such as Maillu's *For Mbatha and Rabeka*. The uncritical reproduction of dominant gender ideology represents one way in which popular narratives in Africa negotiate and manage the questions of masculinity and femininity. However, this does not represent the whole story. In the following section, I want to examine novels which do not merely represent existing gender ideological formations, but actually query them.

UNEVEN RESISTANCE: DAVID MAILLU AND HELEN OVBIAGELE

Another way in which popular literary narratives represent romantic love is exemplified by the two novels I examine below. Helen Ovbiagele's novel, *Evbu My Love* and David Maillu's *After 4.30* are simultaneously mimetic and

interrogative in that both of them question certain aspects of the structure of existing relations of gender while, at the same time, supporting others and often explaining them away in a manner that blunts the critical edge of the general argument being presented. Such novels fail to offer a radical conception of gender relations because the solutions they propose to instances of *lived* oppression merely displace one imaginary condition for another without grasping the need to transform both material and discursive practices ^{which} produce and sustain the unequal distribution of power. Notwithstanding the bold attempt in both novels to highlight explicitly certain aspects of the oppressive relations of gender in Africa, by and large both of them, in the final analysis, offer a view of romance which supports precisely the gender ideology which they set out to criticise.

In *Evbu My Love*, a novel by the Nigerian Writer, Helen Ovbiagele, we are presented with a heroine, Evbu Isibor, who is engaged to a primary school teacher, a profession generally considered respectable in the Nigerian provinces and rural areas. However, one day there arrives in the provincial city of Benin a flashy man from the city by the name Jide Jones, sometimes called, for short, 'Double J,' who changes the whole outlook of the country woman. Jide tells Evbu about life in Lagos and she gets so taken up by his stories that in the end she decides to go with him. She runs away just a few days before her wedding to Osaretin. Once she gets to Lagos, Jide cannot accommodate her as he is merely a schoolboy without means. However, Jide arranges with a friend's girl-friend to look after Evbu. After two years, Jide goes to medical school. He promises Evbu that they will get married when he qualifies as a doctor. In fact he is going out with a fellow medical student and indeed other women as well on campus behind her back. In the end when Jide qualifies as a doctor, she learns that he is living with another girl.

Evbu is extremely disappointed and Jide is not happy with his married life. After a couple of years, Jide comes back to Evbu and tells her that he misses her a lot and he will divorce his wife and come back to her, but he gets involved in a car crash on his way back home and dies. At his funeral she meets an old friend of Jide's, an Afro-American by the name of Steve Mayo. Later, she falls in love with him. The novel ends at the point when Evbu and Steve have just married and are about to fly off to the United States of America.

What constitutes the *cognitive intentionality*, or project of the narrative, is an attempt to interrogate the negative behaviour of African men in romantic relationships. In order to display its ideological concerns, the narrative brings into play the discourse of neo-colonialism within which African masculinity is compared and contrasted with its western counterpart with the end result that the former is found wanting and the latter offered as the solution to the problems affecting relations of gender in Africa. In short, *Evbu My Love* though constituting a radical critique of African patriarchy, squanders its radical potential by erecting a simple opposition between Western and African forms of masculinity in order to privilege uncritically the former over the latter and offer it as a model to be emulated. Furthermore, the novel offers a critique of its own mode of symbolic representation, which goes to show the extent to which African popular literature has begun to be, to use Robert de Beaugrande's term, *self-regarding*, to be conscious of the discourse of its own production.²⁴

To begin with, the text queries the traditional patriarchy and its attendant values. It juxtaposes traditional and modern romance in order to foreground the negative attributes of the former when compared with the latter. Traditional patriarchy is represented as an ideology which inscribes

relations of gender in a mode of symbolic representation characterised by the commodification of social relations:

Evbu returned the things, but Osaretin was not discouraged. She was the prettiest girl around and he always liked the best for himself. All his life he had wanted to excel at things in order to show his father, who had deserted the family when Osaretin was very young, that he had succeeded without his help. Of all his father's sons, he had achieved the most. (p. 9)

As soon as he had paid the dowry, Osaretin regarded Evbu as his property. He took to calling at the shop and the house any time he liked. On Saturdays he would spend most of his time at the shop, scrutinising all the men who called in. Every evening he would call to take her home. At first Evbu was amused by his possessiveness and even enjoyed it, but after some time it began to annoy her. While Itota kept telling her how lucky she was that he cared for her that much, she felt stifled. She could not help thinking that if he behaved like that when they married she would run away, and repay the dowry later. (p. 10-11)

Not only is the traditional mode of romance an articulation of a position that erects female subjectivity as a function of the law of commodity and exchange, it is also a restrictive and rigid ideological position on matters of female status and role:

He knew he could have his pick of girls, but his dearest wish was to have Evbu for his wife. Evbu was bound to produce nice, healthy, good-looking children for him. She had been one of the most intelligent girls who passed through his school, but she always seemed to be in a world of her own. She had always seemed oblivious to men's admiration for her, even when she was at school. Then he had thought it was pride. That was why he had tried to subdue her by caning and detaining her at break time. (p. 9)

Thus the text introduces us to a very important aspect of the gender discursive formation in Nigeria, and indeed in the whole of the African

continent: the extent to which access to power can be used to bolster one's position in a romantic relationship. Osaretin uses his position as a teacher in order to enforce the traditional gender order which views woman predominantly in terms of her reproductive role. The new woman that Evbu has become cannot brook the idea of spending her life with a man like teacher Osaretin. As in the case of Rabeka, in Maillu's *For Mbatha and Rabeka*, Evbu becomes disenchanted with the narrow male chauvinism of traditional patriarchy as she increasingly comes to view the mechanical manner in which a man and a woman who have nothing in common may be forced together for purposes of marriage ^{as} stifling and undemocratic. There is also the simple question of the school teacher taking life a bit too seriously, which renders him rather unexciting to the youthful Evbu:

He brought her books to read, but not the type she liked. They were serious books dealing with philosophy and politics. She did not read them. (p. 9)

On the other hand, Jide Jones, the representative of the Western mode of of romance brings her books which reinforce the imaginary condition which in the first place attracts her to him: 'she did not dare let him (Osaretin) see the lovely pop magazines that Jide bought for her from a departmental store.' (p. 19) Thus for Evbu, Jide becomes the means by which the plain authoritarianism and emotional aridity of traditional patriarchy are challenged. In addition, Jide Jones becomes a flesh-and-blood incarnation of the characters she has experienced in romantic fiction:

He had opened up a new world for her. He did all the romantic things she had read about in novels, like helping her into taxis or reading out love poems to her. (18-19)

Evbu was amazed at his direct approach. Most boys who had approached her had taken weeks and sometimes months to come to the point of their visits..... Evbu's heart begun to thump. This was exactly how she had imagined a scene where a boy declared his love for her. (My emphasis)

Then, suddenly, he drew close and kissed her on her lips. It was her very first kiss and it was as lovely as she had imagined it would be. (My emphasis)
'I will miss you, Evbu darling,' he whispered. (p. 19)

Jide Jones does not only fulfil Evbu's romantic fantasy, but also promises to give her greater social status than she has been able to achieve so far:

Evbu was attracted and fascinated by the thought of going to live in Lagos and seeing the bright lights. To actually go to school in Lagos and be called a Lagos girl.... That would be nice... (p. 17)

The conflict between the urban and the rural areas is a common theme in African literature: it is to be found in such novels as, for example, Peter Abraham's *Mineboy*, Legson Kayira's *Jingala*, or Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*. Even the early vernacular literature dealt with this theme extensively. It may thus be said that what *Evbu My Love* enacts and rehearses in the opposition rural/urban is a recurrent binary opposition in both high and low literature in Africa. However, one must refrain from transferring it into the domain of transhistorical timeless structures, for underpinning this relation of opposition is a political economy produced within a determinate set of conditions. The conflict can be recast as a struggle between two modes of economic production: a predominantly peasant economy of the countryside and its relations of production are challenged by the new capitalist dispensation symbolised by Lagos. The text itself invites us to consider the political economy which is implicated with the heroine's actions:

Her father had been a farmer in Isi, but when she was five he had moved the family to Benin City where he got a job as a labourer at the aerodrome. Through hard work and devotion, he later rose to the rank of a supervisor. When she left Primary School at the age of sixteen, Evbu's father was in favour of her getting married right away before she became too old. Evbu would have preferred to go to Secondary School like some of her friends, but she knew that that was out of the question. Owing to financial difficulties even her brothers, who had left school some years before, were not able to go to Secondary School. One was working as a clerk at the Public Works Department. The boys were very ambitious and had begun to study for G.C.E examinations..... Their father was due to retire shortly which would mean less money in the house. (p. 5)

In such difficult circumstances as those in which Evbu finds herself, the image of a better life that the hero dangles before her makes her counter-identify with the hitherto stable *gender relations of production and reproduction* of the rural social formation. To put it differently, the antagonistic relations between the two modes of production open up a gap which allows Evbu to perceive the nature of her oppression. One might thus argue that the heightened perception of one's subject position can be produced by a moment when the ideology in which one's subject position is inscribed is challenged by an alternative discourse. It is not necessary that the opposing discourse be profoundly radical: an antagonistic relation within a discursive field is sufficient to offer the subject an awareness of his/her imaginary relationship to the relations of production.

It might also be helpful to consider for a moment the significance of the professional movement experienced by the heroine's father. One notices that, as in Aubrey Kalitera's *Why Father, Why* and David Maillu's *For Mbatha and Rabeka*, the rural mode of subsistence production is overtaken by the new cash nexus which forces peasant producers like Evbu's father into a new economic

and social structure: he moves from a 'classless' rural setting to the provincial town where he becomes a member of the emergent working class. However, the provincial working class and those of the capital exist in superficially antagonistic terms as they come to view each other in terms of prestige values. The opposition between the urban and the provincial further foregrounds the extent to which the legendary and almost mystical role of the teacher in an African village is superseded by a new relation to Western culture. The primary fascination with Western knowledge represented by the figure of the teacher in African literature, for example Waiyaki in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*, is superseded by a greater interest in prestige material things, such as the cars and refrigerators and hifi systems that we find in novels such as Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* and Ayi Kwei Armah's *Fragments*. I believe that this is an important distinction which needs looking into if we are to achieve a better understanding of the phenomenon of contemporary consumerism in Africa.

The values of wealth and 'feverish' romantic love which, in the first place, lure Egbu from the countryside to the city are exposed as an unsustainable dream. Because of a shortage of money, as a result of not having worked out the economics of maintaining a romantic relationship in the city with a schoolboy who has no job, Egbu is forced to recognise other dimensions to the interrelationship between gender ideology and material practice, to which the ethereal notion of romantic love mediated by popular narrative has not yet introduced her:

'I haven't got the money to pay the fees. I don't even have the money to pay the deposit. A letter came some days ago saying that if I don't pay up by Friday, that's in two days, my place will be offered to someone else. I have no money, no prospects of a job, and no one to help.... My people are poor and they cannot help. Jide cannot help either. Oh, I wish I had stayed in Benin

and got married to Osaretin. I would not have landed myself in the mess I am in now. Maybe this is God's way of telling me that what I did was wrong.' (p. 33)

Edith shrugged. 'I think you're thinking of the good-time girls in the provinces. This is the capital, and girls who do my type of work come from all walks of life - rich and poor, illiterate and educated.... Why don't you come to the nightclub with me?'

'To date men? Never! I could almost die from shame. What would Jide say when he hears about it? What would my parents say?..... Please don't be cross with me Edith. I was not trying to criticise your way of living, it's just that I have never looked at life that way. Can I come with you today? I can always back out if don't fancy it, can't I?' (p. pp. 34-36)

Clearly, from the ideological perspective of the text, though there are many short comings in the gender discursive formation of traditional Africa, the alternative to it is not the version of love offered by romantic literature. In the business of real life, as Evbu learns the hard way, romantic love might not provide the necessary ingredients for keeping body and soul together. Romantic love is also criticised from another angle: its lack of commitment. Jide Jones is clearly an incurable philanderer:

One day, he gave her a bracelet with the inscription 'I LOVE YOU'.

'I really mean what is written on it,' he said.

'Oh, come off it Jide,' she laughed. 'What about all your girlfriends in Lagos?'

'They really mean nothing to me,' he said shrugging.

'They have other boyfriends as well. At the moment you mean more to me than they do.' (p. 17)

Marriage with Evbu would be out of the question though, because his father had always impressed on him that he must choose his bride from Abeokuta. Apart from that, he considered Evbu's standard of education much too low for him. But of course he was not going to tell her that. (p. 22)

Romantic love which is supposed to provide more liberal and enlightened gender values is shown as merely a displacement of a code of sexual practice from one cultural discursive arena to another. All that seems to have changed are the external trappings of signs rather than their content. In this way one cannot speak of a substantive change in gender ideology as having accompanied the adoption of the sexual symbolic representations of Western society. The same values that operate within traditional African society are dressed in the sophisticated language of the metropole, and the African capitals: for example old Osaretin's insatiable possessiveness is displaced into a territoriality based on age and racial difference:

'I take it that you enjoy the duties you perform for the Chief. I can't stand the thought of old men pawing over you. Send in your letter of resignation on Monday, and come straight back home.'

'I can't just walk out on the man like that. He gave me a job when I badly needed one. I can't let him down like that. That would be irresponsible.'.....

'I think you're sweet on the old man. Admit it. There is more between the two of you than you've told me....'
(p. 62)

When their relationship is about to break up, because she has admitted to Jide Jones that she had had a white Australian businessman for a 'sugar daddy', Jide justifies his territoriality on the basis of a militant and xenophobic argument:

'You cheap filthy whore,' he exploded. 'Fancy you going out with non-blacks of all people. You know full well what I think of them and how I loathe and despise them for what they are doing to our race all over the world. I would not have minded much if you had a sugar daddy or something, but them! Goodness, I must be going crazy. To think that I have wasted years loving, thinking one day we would get married and ...'

'Marry! she hissed at him. You never intended to marry me in your life, you selfish flirt! What about Shade

Bayo? She lives in your flat doesn't she? You scheming son-of-a-bitch! What do you know about life? I did what I did because I come from a poor family and wanted to get educated. You have no excuse for luring me from Benin City and then ditching me to go and get engaged to another girl just because she is a doctor and comes from the same village as you. You have cheated on me with other girls too, but I didn't mind because I thought you were sowing your wild oats. If you actually cared about me, you would have helped me with my school fees. You talk about Pete. He was kind and sympathetic to me and did not despise me. You are nothing but a hypocrite, Jide Jones. What have I done that is so strange that it has been unheard of.' (pp. 84-85)

In relation to the 'other', the African sugar daddies as a result of which Jide Jones wants Evbu to quit her job all of sudden become preferable:

Black sugar daddies he could understand and perhaps swallow. It was the fashion these days - even Shade had had some. But foreigners! He had loved her passionately and she had let him down. Her excuse was that she had wanted to get more education. Just that! (p. 86-87)

Once again we are confronted with a situation in which a political position that on the surface appears radical, is, upon further analysis, revealed as the articulation of the very values that it purportedly sets out to undermine. Jide's position reflects a well-known phase that a subjectivity produced and sustained by an oppressive racial discourse undergoes. It is a position which seeks to counter racism and the terms of its opposition and valorisation by reversing the order of prioritisation, while essentially maintaining the initial structure of opposition. The Black Consciousness movement and Pan-Africanism in South Africa, as well as the Nation of Islam in the United States, are prime examples of the kind of structural rearrangement I am describing. For Evbu,

however, the mere reversal of the terms within the oppositional structure does not match with her personal experience with white people. Pete Jackson, her Australian 'sugar daddy', is more sympathetic and understanding than Jide:

Pete accepted Evbu's life-style without question. He recognised that all too often people have to do things quite alien to their natures in order to make things easier for themselves...

Evbu was happy. Pete's generosity meant that she no longer had to go to the clubs looking for clients and it was as if a great weight had been lifted from her. She was almost able to wipe out the memories of that part of her young life. (p. 47)

Jide was quite sympathetic but told her off firmly. He could not understand, he said, why a perfectly brilliant student could suddenly start doing very badly. She must be moving with an idle gang, he suggested. Pete was sympathetic and added his encouragement to study hard, reminding her that she had only two terms to go before the end of her course. He promised that if she did well in her RSA examinations, he would sponsor a trip to London for her.

In the way the two forms of masculinity, the western and the African, are represented the former is prioritized over the latter. Fundamentally though, there is very little difference between the two forms of masculinity. For instance, the gendered imaging employed by Pete reveals a system of values which is essentially as exploitative of women as the African version of masculinity represented in the text:

To Pete Jackson, Evbu was the best girl in the room. 'Oh! an African queen,' he had said to himself as soon as he saw her. Her tall and elegant appearance appealed to him. She seemed more like one of those who graced social events. His experienced eyes took in her clothes at a glance - cheap but tasteful, he decided. Those clothes probably cost a fortune here. It would be fun to buy her really great clothes. She had the figure to carry off anything. (p. 46)

Furthermore, the very fact that he supports prostitution, an institution which largely entrenches economic dependency and supports a code of symbolic representation within which the 'whore', the example par excellence of debased womanhood, functions as the negative Other of the 'madonna' suggests that the ground which permits a critique of African masculinity in relation to western masculinity does not point to a profound modifying dialect of the gender discursive formation. In other words, through a formal process of ideological displacement, the text conceals its subtext by directing our attention to a less important binary opposition. In Pete we have the epitome of a *conventional man* that the French Feminist, Helen Cixous, targets as *l'objet de la guerre politique*.²⁵ Most significant, the opposition between black and white masculinity, just like the opposition between black and white femininity that we encounter in Nandi Dlovu's *Angel of Death*, belies a deep structural similarity between the elements of the binary opposition. Both Jide Jones and Pete Jackson use their social and economic positions in order to reinforce the fictions that Evbu has come to want to realise in the contingent world. We notice that what primarily strikes her about Pete could easily have come from Ann Britton's and Marion Collin's guide to writing romantic fiction: 'He was a tall, handsome and athletic-looking man.' (p. 46). Perhaps Pete like Jide conforms to some of the characters she has encountered in the romantic fiction she has been reading.

Furthermore, Pete performs the timeless mythological masculine role of a *rescuer* of a female victim. Pete Jackson not only provides the means to a higher social economic status, but embodies the broader field of the international political economy in which the multinational/international Corporate masculinity triumphs over its local competitor. The triumph of the discourse of international masculinity is further elaborated in the choice of a

marriage partner. Like Pete Jackson, the Afro-American Steve Mayo, who ultimately provides the formulaic bliss expected at the end of every romantic story, is in Nigeria representing an American multinational company.

Steve also functions as the heroine's guide to 'true love', the kind that is the privileged ideological choice of the text:

Both young sisters were engaged to be married. She, at twenty-eight, had no marriage in sight. She did not lack suitors but she refused to have just anyone for a husband. It would have to be someone she cared deeply for, and who also cared for her. It would be terrible getting married to someone she did not love just so that she would not die a spinster. She believed so much in love in a marriage. (p. 110)

Getting married and settling down is great, but it is not an end in itself. If it comes your way and you're happy, that's good. If it doesn't right now, it will later. (p. 128)

One thing she was quite sure of was that she was in love with Steve. Oh, not the heart-thumping love she had had for Jide - all burning and feverish. What she felt for Steve was a type of love that was calm and secure, and which filled her with a glow each time she saw him or thought of him. She felt as if he was an extension of herself. (p. 134)

The text is full of contradictions both at the level of *cognitive and emotional intentionality*. Whilst being critical of traditional rural patriarchy, what it offers in the end occludes with precisely the values that the novel questions on the level of cognitive intentionality. The alternative it offers is demonstrably no different from that other conception of love and marriage that the text attributes to traditional African patriarchy. The very structure of the narrative shows the heroine moving from a level of naive romance to an understanding of that version of romance which represents it as a handmaiden of marriage. True enough in the course of the narrative many progressive

things are said about women, and indeed we see women presented as strong and independent; in particular, we are treated to the professional mobility of women in a male dominated society through the presence of the character of Mrs Niyi who is a managing director, but after all this we are given a strong dose of traditional sexual politics as the 'marriage-market system'²⁶ is offered not really as an option, but rather as the indispensable basis for women's security. It is in this sense that one can liken Helen Ovbiagele to Barbara Cartland. Both writers, perhaps in keeping with the aesthetic conventions of the genre, selectively present those values of romance which serve to support the traditional values of their respective societies.²⁷ I could not think of a better way of describing the value system within which romance as a genre is employed in the service of propping up social practices which are predicated on assumptions and beliefs about gender relations which privilege male dominance than the way Rosalind Brunt has put it in her penetrating analysis of Barbara Cartland's novels:

What I think the novels all express, in some measure, is a kind of 'political economy' of love. The heroine is typically established as marginal to family life - an orphan, say, or abandoned by her parents - and the plot therefore highlights the importance of the phase of courtship as a means of 'moving back in' - forming a new family with a man in order to obtain the only secure place for a woman that will guarantee her both cultural recognition and economic reward.²⁸

Given the inextricable link between patriarchal discourse and modes of economic production, it is not surprising that Helen Ovbiagele chooses that the hero should come from New York, that city which in the minds of readers of romantic fiction in Africa must surely present itself as part of an exotic world. The very idea of a girl from a rural area finally finding a man who

can take her to New York is construed as prestigious and the chance of a life time:

And now, Evbu and Steve were in the bus taking them to board their plane for the United States of America. Several incidents and pictures flashed through Evbu's mind - her family home in Benin City, her parents, her friends, special moments from the past.

She had been through quite a lot in her short life but she had been lucky. Yes, Lucky, very lucky.

As the plane flew over Lagos, Evbu said in her heart, 'Adieu Jide, rest in piece. I've found happiness now, and I hope you're happy wherever you are.'

She turned and smiled at Steve, who held her close and whispered into her ear.

She lifted her chin. Yes, she was ready, ready to face the future with Steve. Everything would not always be plain sailing, but she knew that such a future would be good and full of happiness. (p. 150)

Roger Bromley has remarked that romantic fiction has a way of smoothing over class contradictions by reducing the universe of the action to individuals rather than collectivities.²⁹ Certainly, the solution to the antagonistic relations of gender offered here is not accessible to all who might be in need of it. To suggest that women who have been treated badly by African men should wait for men from New York to whisk them away to safety amounts to an offer of the Orwellian 'sugar candy mountain', a rarefied metaphysics, to questions about determinate social conditions.³⁰ The very reason that the solution comes from outside rather than inside the cultural formation would seem to enforce the popular criticism levelled against romance literature: that it seeks the exotic rather than the ordinary. In other words, though at the level of thematic presentation the text suggests that the version of romantic love presented in romantic fiction is superficial and negative, in terms of its

own formal structure, however, it adheres to the same devices of action and characterization of which it is critical.

It is in this sense that one can argue that *Evbu My Love* which continues the tradition started by women writers such as Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta and others of providing the woman's perspective on the experience of women in Africa, is caught in a contradictory position where its manifest radical critique is undermined by the conventions of its generic mode. One can also make comparisons between the novel and Maillu's *For Mbatha and Rabeka*. Whereas in Maillu's novel, the woman who is attracted by the bright lights of the city is in the end 'brought back to her senses' and taken back to the village teacher, in *Evbu My Love*, the woman continues to move away from the rural environment and finally ends up in New York. It can be said that Maillu secures the 'errant' woman for rural patriarchy whereas Helen Ovbiagele's novel secures the 'liberated' woman for the 'international marriage system'. In both cases, though, romantic love is shown to support the same values that the fevered lovers presented in most of the romantic fiction in Africa would be the first to condemn as backward and undemocratic. They also reveal the extent to which the gender discursive formations are intimately intertwined with material practices: Steve Mayo, and Pete Jackson, as representatives of what Abdul JanMohamed describes as the 'hegemonic' phase of colonialism as opposed to the 'dominant' phase of colonialism, which is characterised by the presence and use of multinational companies, in economic terms function to foreground broader forms of dependence than those pertaining to gender ideology.³¹

Most important of all, *Evbu My Love* offers a good example of how a radical popular text can derail its modifying dialectic because of the temptation to offer a 'personalized' solution rather than one which helps the

whole social group of which the individual concerned is a member. It is the belief that what is important is the salvation of the individual rather than that of the whole class that finally detracts from an otherwise perceptive critique of African gender ideology.

On the other hand, Maillu's *After 4.30* presents us with a different problem altogether in the way it portrays relations between men and women. The central contradiction in the text lies in the incompatibility between its critique of ideology and the means utilised in producing the critique. *After 4.30* undertakes to interrogate a masculine discursive economy and the values which support its arrogation of power. The song explores how different classes of women within African urban patriarchy live out their gendered subjectivity: Emili, the copy-typist who is also a prostitute, represents the 'wretched of the earth' and Lili, the big boss's secretary gives us a glimpse into the life of the middle class woman whereas the boss's wife shows us how women who have a high social-economic status are nevertheless at the mercy of masculine power. In *After 4.30*, Maillu employs a form of narrative verse popularised by OKot p'Bitek, through his satirical songs such as *Song of Lawino* (1966) and *Song of Malaya* (1971). *Song of Lawino*, for example, is a lament of an uneducated woman who is critical of her westernised husband whose acquisition of Western values she perceives as a form of cultural castration. What the success of p'Bitek's narrative verses did was to open up a space not just for the expression of the indigenous poetic idiom in English, but also, and of more relevance to the present discussion, for the introduction of the antagonistic relations between men and women as a literary motif. That such a form should be transferred from the domain of elite to popular culture must in itself show the extent to which the form has struck a chord in the aesthetic heart of East Africans.²² David Maillu has utilised this form in other works

as well such as *My Dear Bottle* (1973), *The Kommon Man* (1975, 1976) with a great deal of success in terms of the reception.²³

After 4.30 is a lament of a former copy-typist who has turned to prostitution as a result of having lost her job on account of having protested to her boss at being treated like 'a dog'. It is important to contextualise the form of prostitution that we encounter in the song if one is to appreciate the complexity of the subject the author has set out to examine and avoid making the blanket charge of pornography that has been levelled generally against Maillu's songs by such critics as Bernth Lindfors.²⁴ Through Emili's plaintive song, prostitution is presented as an aspect of wider relations of gender which have been reduced to sex and money. In this regard, Maillu's song is similar to Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Malaya* which attempts to capture the experience of urban prostitution in Africa in order to show the hypocrisy of the middle class men. Through the character of Emili the plight of the female proletariat is highlighted. Their low wages, and the responsibilities they have as single mothers, are shown to make such women vulnerable to sexual exploitation. On a number of occasions in the text, Emili shows how impossible it is to make ends meet without indulging in prostitution. Her job brings her so little money that she cannot rely on her income to feed herself and the children. She is reduced to sleeping with her landlord and her boss in order to get an extra income. In a way, the situation in which Emili finds herself is a vicious circle: she has left home because she does not want to be married off by her father for profit. Having run away from home, and lost her first boyfriend who is kind to her, she lands into the hands of a man who cruelly kicks her out of his house together with the children she has had by him. As she cannot cope on her own, in a situation where it is hard for single women without a decent education to get a job, she has to resort to prostitution. She does not like

it, but there is very little she can do about it. She is presented as a caged bird restlessly wishing to fly away without much success.

The situation in which women such as Emili find themselves is, to a certain extent, produced by the link between family background and class differentiation. Emili does not have access to the only means available for social mobility. Her family could not afford to send her to school and consequently she cannot find herself a decent job. Family background is shown to be intimately linked to broader relations of power. The reason Emili cannot get a good education is because her father who has been in the War, presumably the Second World War, has become a social deviant to such an extent that he barterers his children and wife as a matter of habit. The presence of the Second World War in the text is brought in to show the impact of the world of *realpolitik* on the lives of ordinary people. The demobilised soldier goes home without the necessary emotional and psychological preparation to reenter society and ends up making life difficult for his children and his wife. In a society where the production of wealth is a preserve of men, the father's failure to provide Emili with an education would seem to foreground the failure of the ideals of patriarchy. As in the case of Kalitera's *Why Father Why*, no attempt is made by the child to grasp the material and discursive conditions that have led to the father's abdication of responsibility, something that creates tension between the child and the father. Once again, the force of patriarchal socialization is seen to play an important role in the different expectations that children have of their mothers and fathers.

Emili's plight exemplifies the manner in which masculine discourse operates strategically, choosing moments when the lower class women should and should not be included. During the times when they are excluded from money

and power they are consigned to the private world of poverty in the slums of Nairobi only to be brought back to dine and drink with the powerful when it is dark. Sexual relations become the only means through which the women and the big bosses of Nairobi can interact as equals. This form of equality essentially masks the gendered, and ideologically differentiated unequal access to wealth and power. Sexual intercourse is not the leveller of class and gender difference; it provides an imaginary solution to the problems that women face while at the same time presenting these women to the bosses as a field on which they can play out their sexual 'colonialism'. To a very large extent, these men see all the women as their possessions. That is why they do not take kindly to being refused as seen from the reaction of one of Emili's customers who calls her 'hedgehog' when she turns him down.

It is not only women like Emili who have to confront, on a day-to-day basis, the masculine interpellation of the female subject position; as we learn from the tribulations of Lili, the boss' secretary, even educated women are not immune from sexual harassment. Lili's boss hustles her day after day until she is forced to sleep with him. The rhetoric the boss uses is worth looking at closely. Lili's boss reproduces a masculine discourse which marshals existing discursive practices in the service of an affirmation of gender difference. The boss's attitude is justified by an appeal to some universal truth which has a ring of the biblical 'Creation story: 'woman is a flower created to be admired, to be looked at, smelt and touched by man'. The boss reflects a subjectivity which has clung to those elements of Christian belief that present the relation of superordination and subordination between men and women as a matter of divine law rather than as a consequence of the way in which a particular society conditions and trains its members. Even socialist egalitarianism, implied in the phrase, 'let's be comrades' is on this occasion

coopted in the legitimation of difference within the discourse of gender. It is important to examine the context within which socialist egalitarianism services unequal relations. The boss' attitude here is very similar to that of characters like Jide Jones in *Evbu My Love* and Mawa in *For Mbatha and Rabeka* who view anything western as sophisticated. For them socialist rhetoric is received in the same vein as the American slang of cowboy movies. It is in this context that the boss sets out to blackmail Lili by presenting his actions not as sexual harassment, a form of interpellation of the Other's subject position, but rather as an expression of western sophistication thereby suggesting that to reject his advances is to refuse to participate in a 'civilised' culture, something of which Lili, just like most Africans, would not wish to be guilty.

The boss's speech also foregrounds the extent to which the European notion of romantic love has been modified in Africa. The boss and the lovers in Onitsha Market literature employ the notion of romantic love in ^a way that is different from its European usage. Susan Greenstein, in her analysis of Onitsha popular fiction, has noted the tension between the 'sublime' rendition of love that has been borrowed from Europe and the use to which the practice is put in the African context. She observes that:

The attitude towards love around which so many of the plots of the Onitsha novels are constructed is one which at first glance strikes an odd note with the Western reader. Rhetoric going back to the tradition of courtly love is much indulged in, but the substance of romantic love as we understand it is missing.³⁵

The disjunction illustrates how in Africa the concept is overtly employed to underwrite traditional gender discourse. This is not to suggest that in Europe the concept has functioned differently. As Marilyn French argues courtly love,

which is the historical source of the tradition and practice of romantic love, serves to 'perpetuate and fortify the imprisonment of women within images of static perfection'.²⁶ Both the knight of *courtoise* and Maillu's character, whatever the differences between their respective strategies, approach women as objects of male conquest. That explains the boss's use of manifold tricks of persuasion in order to 'win' Lili's heart. The boss in *After 4.30* knows that at the end of the day it is not the singing of love poetry that will win him the heart of Lili, but an offer of material help. Here the imaginary, that is the sophistication associated with the new mode of romantic love, is demonstrably continuous with relations of commodity exchange that characterise rituals of patriarchal courtship and marriage in many African societies.²⁷ What is new is the rhetoric in which traditional relations of power are conveyed, reproduced and legitimised.

The text also examines the link between class and gender difference. Lili represents in the African context the equivalent of the lower middle class. It is not only as a female subject that she is viewed by her boss but also as a member of a class excluded from access from certain cultural and material goods as illustrated by the following conversation between Lili and the boss:

'Big money will open
opportunities to see and be
for the whole world.
Lili, you must be kind to yourself
do wean from this smallness
that you may be progressive.

By the way, next week
I'm off to Europe
what's your wish?' (p. 130)

Lili, unlike the boss, cannot afford the expensive prestige goods of Europe in a social formation where such goods are seen as status symbols. The only way she can redress this form of exclusion, according to her boss, is by using her sexuality. The boss enunciates a principle which offers identification with the dominant gender and class ideology as the only way forward for women. The overall class context of relations of gender are further bluntly spelt out by one of Emili's customers. Emili, the lower class woman is declared 'the dustbin of the city'. It is clear from the customer's indelicate language that the possession of economic power or lack of it substantially contributes to the gendered distribution of power. However, economic difference is also used to create a superficial binary opposition between women. The customer boasts about his wife who drives a good car in an obvious attempt to diminish Emili's social status and present that of his wife as higher. Though he is proud of his wife, he nevertheless views her as a prestige object in the same group as his farm, his employees, his friends, all of which constitute what he terms his empire. The prioritisation of the wife is thus shown to be a strategy that he employs as a way of articulating his superior status vis-a-vis another category of women, rather as a measure of a genuine high regard for his wife. More illustrative of his inadvertent diminution of his wife and, as Emili reminds him, his mother is the phrase, 'women are stupid', which demonstrates a typical case of stereotyping involving the generalisation from the behaviour of a single member to the rest of his/her group. Sexual stereotyping, as other forms of stereotyping, collapses an individual's identity into that of her/his class or group particularly when the behaviour of the individual concerned is perceived as negative. It is remarkable that his sense of superiority is punctured by a simple reminder by Emili that in essence what he is saying is that his mother is also stupid. She has rudely revealed a crack in the myth

of a coherent and non-contradictory masculine rationality, as a price for which she is violently put in her place. The false opposition the customer creates is further exposed by the song's portrayal of the plight of women of the same social status as that of his wife.

The boss' wife, though leading a much better life than that of women like Emili and Lili, is nevertheless a victim of the same oppressive relations of gender that the former experience. The boss' wife who represents women with higher social status than Emili and Lili casts light on the way these local 'emperors' manage their authority in the home. Mr. Mkoko, Lili's boss, like the character in *Desmond* (a BBC sitcom) goes home late and when his wife complains he shouts at her and asserts himself by giving a general lecture on the relationship between a man and his home:

'Why d'you ask me
where I've been?
A man can be anywhere
at any time.
A man can't be late
to come to his home.
The home is here
to wait for me.' (p. 220)

In the statement, 'This home shall contain one master', the home is presented as a space in which the gendered distribution of power is stratified. Clearly both the home, the office and the brothel belong to the boss in a discursive formation in which power is bluntly delineated as a preserve of men. However, the boss's attitude to his wife which diminishes the woman ironically undermines his attempt to keep her under his control. Since she feels neglected by her philandering husband, she considers having an affair with her own boss:

'I feel depressed
I'd love to make love
to a nice man, soft man
in tenderness, one by one
escorting me to the peak
to unload this burden
in a wild orgasm.

I'm weary of being mounted
in a hurry in an abuse
I'm afraid
of my husband's rapes
I'm looking
for a lover
lest I explode

My boss touched me somewhere
by a planned accident
I became adventurous....
If only
the real accident could happen.
My husband went to bed
and snored
and snored
I waited
someone has killed him
and left me alive.'

However, the solution that she has chosen feeds into the same gender ideology which is responsible for her plight. Here, Maillu shows how the gender ideology of the urban social formation in Africa reproduces itself in a series of endless reinforcing circumstances in which women who rebel against the norms and values of dominant ideology, at the end of the day, find themselves propping up the same ideological formation that they are trying to undermine. This is not different from the experience of Feminism in its early stages when women argued that if men could freely indulge in extra and pre-marital sex without being stigmatised they too were going to do the same in the name of gender equality. However, it was soon realised that they were essentially playing into the hands of a masculine discourse which they were seeking to undermine. Like Emili and Lili, the boss's wife fails to move beyond the

parameters mapped out for her by the dominant gender ideology.

The major reason that contributes to the failure of the women to move beyond the critique of ideology is that the system is immensely powerful and does not brook criticism kindly. Emili succinctly captures the extent to which men are prepared to defend their privileged position:

'Some men are merciless
when you threaten
their money security
run woman, otherwise
you'd be murdered
in broad light.' (p. 114)

The song shows how women who dare assert themselves incur both personal and institutionalised violence. When Emili refuses to sleep with her landlord, he threatens to forcibly throw her out of his house. She also tells us of how a certain Mkamba from Kitui kicked her in the vagina. Then there is the customer who beats her up when she reminds him that when he says all women are stupid, he in fact includes his own mother. Emili has been assaulted by all kinds of men, including the police. The memory of Sosipita's violence haunts Emili throughout the song. Even as the song ends she still recalls the nightmare when she came face to face with death. Lili too experiences similar violence: her boss who recites poetry to her in order to woo her when rejected spouts a tirade of abuse: 'Get lost stinking epileptic bitch!' (p. 155) When his wife complains about his philandering he tells her: 'Shut up! I will walk over you.' (p. 223) However, it is the lower class women such as Emili who bear the full brunt of male misogyny.

The lower class women are subjected to a brutal form of institutionalised violence enforced through what Althusser calls *state apparatuses*, i.e instruments of coercion which, unlike *ideological apparatuses*

that interpellate subjectivity through ideas ^{and} beliefs, coerce individuals into subordination. In this case the police, the politicians and the lawyers use their institutional powers in order to subjugate the lower class woman. When the police arrest prostitutes including Emili, she asks them why they have not arrested the men with whom they do business. Instead of receiving an answer, she is told:

'I'll teach you the dangers
of questioning certain things
you dreadful whore!' (p. 156)

The policeman beats her up. After all this, the policeman ends up sleeping with her and warning her to avoid being caught again, saying: 'they only had the order to execute; they did not make the law'. It turns out that the city is cleared of all prostitutes for the sake of tourists and visiting dignitaries. The prostitutes are perceived as a national economic liability though privately the lawmakers, the politicians, the policemen, the tourists and the representatives of foreign companies sleep with them. It all points to male hypocrisy which includes and excludes the women according to the sexual and economic needs of men. Thus there is very little room for women to change things since to attempt to do so is to invite masculine wrath which is secreted materially in the state apparatuses such as the judiciary and the police and discursively in a range of values and beliefs informing gender relations.

The song demonstrates the extent to which memory becomes the means through which the female characters relive intense moments of subjection and subordination. Lili can only remember men who have raped her as ghosts. She recalls:

'I was raped by a ghost once...
Ghost look like men
in everything they do and say
only you can't touch them.' (p. 96)

The term ghost is a signifier for the utterly incomprehensible dehumanised figure of the misogynist. That such experiences of subjection are reproduced through memory conveys the extent to which the female subject has been metaphorically effaced even as subjectivity and is completely occupied by the *other*. It is as if the act of rape has dissolved the very boundaries of distinct identity and produced a new power landscape in which the man as coloniser pushes the *other* to the very margins of the last bits of self. On the other hand, in depicting the violent male as a ghost, something unreal, Lili might be refusing to accept the corporeality of the misogynist and in the process be rarefying a concrete experience which is a logical extension of the kind of gender relations which obtain in her social formation.

In the face of a violently repressive patriarchal discursive and material practice, the women have little hope of ameliorating their subordinate position. The sense of hopelessness and despair regarding the difficulties involved in implementing a radical transformation of the gender ideology we encounter in the text is highlighted by the fact that at the end of the song no ground has been shifted. The problem is resolved within patriarchy. Emili, at the end of the song, affirms precisely the power relations which have alienated her from developing a meaningful sense of gender subjectivity: she upholds the patriarchal equation of power and masculinity:

'Child, dear son
I bank on you. Stand up
my shield. Your loving Mother
is proud of you
you are other men
in many, many ways.

In you
my husband and my father
return...' (p. 248)

Emili is never given hope in the text; she can only be closed off at the moment when she is haunted by the memory of a man who almost killed her and take refuge in an imaginary defence in the shape of her little boy. That the little boy should be seen as a protector of an adult shows the degree to which female subjectivity in this particular social formation is, regardless of age or experience, always in a relation of subordination to masculine subjectivity. As for Lili, the only hope left for her is to give in to her boss. Her boyfriend who is about to leave for America has made life so difficult for her because of his unfounded jealousy that the relationship is broken off. She too like Emili cannot hope for any improvement in the gender ideology which has produced her subject position. Her boy-friend's possessiveness, which itself is premised on the belief that women are incapable of making an independent choice, that they will always say, 'yes' to every sugar daddy that propositions them, puts Lili in a vulnerable position in which it becomes increasingly difficult for her to reject the boss's advances. Likewise, the boss's wife, at the end of the song, can only resolve her subjection by reaffirming it:

'I hear your commands
I'm your faithful dog.
Did I not wash your pants
and cleansed you
from the periods of women
then made the bed for you
because love is slavery.' (p. 245)

There is little substantiative change in the way the conflict is resolved. No suggestion is made that the boss will now leave his secretaries alone. It is

as if Maillu has forced a closure at a moment when the fundamental problem of gender relations within matrimony is far from being resolved.

Although, on the whole, the situation is presented as bleak, there are moments when women can envision the possibility of change. The need to go beyond superficial solutions to gender differentiation as a way of challenging male hegemony is provided by an analysis of the way female subjectivity is inscribed in modes of linguistic representation. In a searching conversation between Lili and Emili, the former displays a thorough understanding of the degree to which their alienation from the system of symbolising has meant wearing tags which define them in terms of their acceptability to men rather than in terms of their worth as human beings:

'Only the voice of a man
has the magic
to change you from a bitch
to a queen
They made you a queen
and an angel,
but demoted you
into a bitch
go and repent'

'I don't understand
how do I repent?'

'I don't know
go and ask them.' (pp. 95-96)

Feminists of all shades and colour have noted that the unequal relations of gender are produced and reproduced through modes of representation and symbolising. Working with Saussure's theory of language, which holds the view that there is no prelinguistic reality, they have studied ways of naming things and generally found them invested with patriarchal ideological values. In short, the analysis offered by Lili points to the importance of symbolic

representations in constituting gendered subjectivity and producing relations of superordination and subordination between men and women. Furthermore, it also demonstrates the unhappy and helpless condition of women since they do not have the means to change the language in which their subjectivity is forged; for any radical change in their situation they have to turn to men. It is this pervasive sense of despair and hopelessness that informs the analysis of gender relations in *After 4.30*.

The awareness of the role language plays in producing and sustaining their subject position, leads to a cynicism about *all ideological and state apparatuses*. Poignantly, Emili describes all such institutions as corrupt:

'The radios are lying
the televisions are lying
the movies are lying
men are lying
and there are so many
who nod to the lies.

The lawyer is lying
the politician is lying
the educationist is lying
the whiteman is lying
and the devils
are set loose
where in the world
do I keep the treasure my spirit,
where there are not moths and rust?' (p. 124)

Cynicism and despair lead Emili to contemplate the formation of gender apartheid:

'The world is made by men
for men
women live on the leavings
there's no democracy
between man and woman
there's demagoguery.
Each country should have
a female and male parliament
to be fair to woman.

To govern man and woman
the law should be made
by man and woman
on equal footing.' (p. 20)

Behind the sense of pessimism there is an anguished desire for a radical transformation of existing gender ideology as well as a recognition of the immense difficulty of bringing about such change.

Overall, through the song Maillu comes off as a good observer of his society. It is thus right to describe him, as Per Gadin does, as a Balzac of Kenya, 'a secretary of his time'.³⁰ This kind of virtue is not without its fair share of dross. The desire to reproduce a mimetic representation of African gender ideology has the effect, in the song, of presenting the plight of women as a thing that is dauntingly unchangeable. Texts which merely tell women about how difficult it is to change their situation, radical as they might be in terms of their critique of gender ideology, may have the opposite effect, that of suggesting that since patriarchal structures of power are so formidable the best one can do is to find a less discomforting place within the same structure of relations and suffer patiently. It is in this sense that Maillu's extremely perceptive critique of contemporary relations of gender in Africa is found wanting. However, the narrative closure in the song serves other ideological interests which, in fact, are far from being radical. The most negative feature of the text is the manner in which the strategy of *comic dismemberment* is used to provide a narrative that is parasitic of female oppression. The satirical mode introduced in African literature by the songs of Okot p'Bitek owes its success to the indelicate language of the female protagonists. Such usage is employed to indicate an authentic traditional African expression, one that is untainted by western prudishness of speech.

Although the link between an authentic African form of expression and indelicate language use is rather tenuous, one does not wish to dismiss it out of hand since it might be true of some African societies. However, the use to which the 'Balzac of Kenya' puts the p'Bitek narrative motif and language style runs the risk of degenerating into voyeurism. Consider the following passage:

'Call me Emili Katango
that's me
the gate into my kingdom
opens wide
men don't like me
they say I'm loose.

I look for a doctor
to tighten me.
Somehow.

Men have loosened me
in this unfair game
of hit-and-run
am I loose
in body or spirit?

Let me pass
I'm stark naked like this
that I may deal with men
ruthlessly
a witch is at her best
nude.' (pp. 1-2)

Jan Abdul Mohamed in his study of representations of the 'racial other' in colonialist fiction has suggested that *comic dismemberment*, as a narrative strategy 'solidifies and reinforces the distance between the reader and the world.' In the case of Maillu's song, one can see how a reader might explain away the disturbing description of sexual exploitation, by receiving the text as part of a genre of East African songs depicting the complaining woman in a comical way. The passage is a verbal striptease written in a masculine discourse in which the female body is seen as a source of titillation.

In other words, though Maillu's analysis of relations of gender in Africa in *After 4.30* ranks among the most penetrating and informative, his choice of the means of rendering his analysis force him to collapse female subjectivity, both at the level of narrative style and thematic presentation, back into the very conditions that he contests. From this perspective, it is clear why at the end of the song the women end up where they started. They have been inserted in a narrative mode that requires that they complain ad infinitum without the cause of their complaint being removed. Their plight is coopted in the very discourses of which the text is critical. In a nutshell, *After 4.30* is a radical critique whose ideological closure is foreclosed by what Macherey would describe as the 'means of textual production'.²⁹

BEYOND GENDER DIFFERENCE: HELEN OVBIAGELE AND WALIJE GONDWE

The two novels I consider below have the distinction of taking the question of gender beyond merely exposing the unequal distribution of power in which it is implicated; unlike the novels we have considered so far they articulate an overtly new gender subject position. The fictional representation of that space beyond the binary opposition male/female has for sometime now preoccupied western Feminists in their numerous and varied attempts to offer a sense of what a society without gender difference and privilege would look like. The tendency has been to envision a future society in which female role and, sometimes, sex difference are non-existent. Some of the work is utopian in the sense that it formulates alternatives which substitute for the present *androcentric* gender discursive formation what is

generally known in Feminist parlance as the *androgynous* social formation. Some conceptions of the *post-androcentric* era have posited a dissolution of biological sex difference and sometimes a complete absence of men.⁴⁰ However, radical African popular literature, in contrast with the *gynocentric* western texts, displays a remarkable preference for more pragmatic solutions, that is solutions which are clearly situated within the domain of the real and the possible. Thus the fictional universes constructed are usually *compossible* and *commensurable* with specific historical and social formations in Africa. In essence most of the texts operate within what can broadly be described as the mimetic mode of representation. In short, the novels that I consider below are marked by a lack of utopianism, and an affirmation of a pragmatic resolution of gender difference.

Walije Gondwe's novel *Love's Dilemma*⁴¹ tells a story about how a woman brought up under an extreme case of patriarchy develops gender consciousness. The story is told with great care for cultural detail, thus working within the explanatory mode that we are familiar with from reading the works of Chinua Achebe and the Malawian writer Legson Kayira, for example, where local customs and traditions are patiently described and explained for the untutored reader. *Love's Dilemma* is thus a novel written very much with the foreigner in mind. There is copious detail on the eating, courtship, and marriage practices of the Tumbuka of Northern Malawi. There is also the now tired use of the device of transliterating local aphorisms into English as in the phrase, 'by my orphanage.' (p. 55) Sometimes the anthropological narrative perspective tends to slow down the pace and encumber the narrative rather than facilitate it, particularly when the impression is created that the interruption of the storyline is solely for the sake of explaining some perceived cultural eccentricity of the Tumbuka. Be that as it may, the novel offers a great deal

of insight into the manner in which the gendered subject of patriarchy is constituted, and on how, once constituted, the subject is then located in various subject positions without radically changing his or her relationship to the dominant gender ideology in which his or her identity is inscribed. Furthermore, the novel acknowledges the inextricable link between personal history and awareness of gender difference through its location of gender consciousness within the frame of cultural and physical migration.

The first thing that one notices about the heroine Towera is that she is thoroughly gendered. The novel opens with the meeting between Towera and Luka, which leads to a meal at Towera's flat. In the way she relates to Luka, Towera immediately situates herself in a subordinate space thereby elevating Luka to a superior position. Female self-sacrifice being one of the constituents of female subjectivity in Tumbuka culture, the heroine offers the whole meal she has prepared to Luka and leaves nothing for herself. She tells us that 'she never ate with strange men.' (p. 9) Why in the first place bring such men around if they make one sleep on an empty stomach? It is obvious that Towera, like Mag in Kalitera's *Why Father, Why*, has been brought to defer to men, which is considered a feminine virtue in her society. This form of gender privileging is the hallmark of their relationship in the novel. Later, when Luka, who has just arrived in Mzimba as an agriculture supervisor, a position higher than Towera's and next to Sam Robinson the colonial agriculture officer, moves into his house, Towera offers to sweep his house, arguing that she 'had never known a man in Luka's position sweeping floors, at least she hadn't yet caught one in the act.' (p. 28) She continues helping Luka with his household chores, including cooking and washing for him. True enough this aspect of traditional hospitality is usually extended to strangers regardless of their gender, but in the story it has the effect of freezing the

relationship between Luka and Towera into gendered roles long before the two have fallen in love. It is significant that when Luka is proposing marriage he is at pains to dismiss the possibility of his wanting her for the domestic services she has been providing:

'The first thing is, do not think what I am about to say is because of what you have been doing for me, or because I am afraid that you might stop helping me.' (p. 41)

The truth is that, in the light of what we learn of Luka later, he is doing precisely what he is denying. There is a lot that is unsaid in the conversation between the two. By locating herself within the domestic role of woman, metaphorically Towera has placed herself in the position of wife and it would seem that Luka Mwaomba, much as he is not sure of what he wants to do with Towera, finds himself in a situation where he thinks that the only way to show gratitude is by proposing marriage. It seems that Luka interprets the fact that Towera takes a subordinate role as an indication of interest in marriage. There is a simpler reason that makes the relationship possible: Luka has got so used to being looked after by Towera that he cannot do without her help unless he finds another woman to do the work. Luka has never had to cook or look after himself. This is the first time he is forced to attend to domestic chores. The relationship is clearly a master-servant one. Even Towera is not completely blind to the exact nature of the relationship in which she is involved:

The existence of Luka's cousin had always been a source of anxiety for her, while she was at Mzimba she had felt more in control of him. She was the one who was physically closer and so could keep an eye on him. If he tried to put a foot wrong she was in a better

position to make him pay for his mistakes, even if only by sentencing him to his servant's cooking. (p. 75)

Thus the marriage proposal merely transposes the unequal structure of relations into a different category of gender relations. The same unreciprocal one-way exchange of labour can be seen at work throughout the whole period of informal engagement. In keeping with the unequal distribution of power between the heroine and the hero, Luka's marriage proposal is conditional:

'I heard many things about you, even before I came to Mzimba..... that many men go about with you. When I saw you at Chitezi I started to doubt this story. When I arrived here at Mzimba I found out that they were just jealous rumours. I began to realise that if they had been true it would have been a sad thing because then I had started to respect you, and I was also aware that your family was well-known....

Do not cry! I have told you these things because I care for you. I do not believe them now.

If you agree to be married to me then I shall tell my father. But I cannot hide the possibility that he will refuse. So you must be strong and wait a long time. He will refuse because you were married before, especially because you are not a young girl. I myself do not care about that. It is only important for me that you are younger than I am, by four years!' (p.41-44)

The element of uncertainty in the relationship plus the fact that Luka has fixed Towera in the position of someone who should be grateful that he has condescended to consider marrying her, operate to establish firmly Luka's supremacy and Towera's subordination in the relationship.

Having selected those elements of the discourse of gender which privilege his gender over that of Towera, Luka can proceed to profit from the the subject positions in which he has located himself and the *Other*. It is noteworthy that in his marriage proposal the hero diminishes any sense of self-confidence that Towera might have had by interpellating her as an object

of male gaze. It is her suitability as a marriage partner that Luka emphasises when he makes it clear that she is not the feminine ideal when it comes to marriage. The strategy he employs can be described as one in which the superior subject first interpellates the subject position of the inferior subject and having done so affects magnanimity by raising the inferior subject to that of an object of desire. The inferior subject feels grateful to the superior subject for being so considerate, thus firmly acknowledging the power of the superior subject over her as well as her helplessness. In this sense Towera's subjectivity is presented to her *refracted* and mediated by a masculine discourse. This would appear to explain the tears of joy and gratitude which Towera sheds:

Towera was moved by this. Her eyes began to moisten. She dabbed at them with a handkerchief, blew her nose and went on listening. (p. 42)

Towera's vulnerability is not simply and only a matter of the way Luka appropriates the semiotic signification of the divorced single-mother for a stratification of relations of gender; nor is it solely a function of the discourse of gender that erects chastity as the precondition of marriageability, but rather significantly and tragically it has a lot to do with that other discourse that inscribes the female body in a masculine discourse of aesthetic difference, thereby erecting physical appearance as the single most important criterion of beauty. On a number of occasions in the story we are told how the scar on her left eye constantly worries Towera:

Nearly halfway through the proceedings, a man Towera had never seen before got up and tiptoed towards her. He took the seat next to her on the right, her best side. She was always conscious of the scar under her left eye. (p. 2.)

She didn't know much about his cousin, but the one who was training to be a teacher had a perfect face (Towera could not ignore her own obsession about her scar). (p. 46)

Many years later when the two meet in London and Towera has had plastic surgery to remove the scar she asks him:

'Have you noticed any change about me?' (p. 124)

However, Luka cannot see what it is about her that has changed. We are told 'A sudden impulse gripped her to hurry to the surgeon and demand her money back, but also the very scar itself.' (p. 124) Towera, at last, has realised that she overestimated the extent to which the scar had made her unattractive. Nevertheless, the scar has had the effect of erasing her self-confidence to the point where she is always comparing herself to other women and convincing herself that she is ugly. The element of self-hatred plays an important role in her relationship with men.

In addition to worrying about her scar, Towera is extremely worried about the fact that her breasts are no longer as firm as they were. She never wants Luka to touch them in case he starts comparing them with those of his younger girlfriends. There is here a refusal to accept the biological changes that come with age. The negation of physical change, this wistful longing for eternal youth is symptomatic of a rather zealous and uncritical *valorisation* of the interests of the gendered *Other*. The general impression one gets of Towera is of a personality incapacitated by a deep-seated feeling of inferiority arising out of a feeling of being inadequate. The consequence of their unequal relationship is that Luka is given a space in which the last thing he does is to consider Towera's feelings. As soon as Towera has been

transferred to work in her village area, Luka impregnates a nurse who has just arrived at the hospital. He still however keeps on visiting Towera in her village. When the parents' expectations of *Thenga*, the traditional go-between, are frustrated by the fact that Luka's numerous visits have not yielded anything concrete, he decides that she should come and live with him in Mzimba. The day before she is supposed to go, she receives a letter, telling her that she should not go since he wants to go to Karonga to sort out the question of marriage with his father. However, Towera is advised otherwise by the elders. She goes to Mzimba to visit and finds out that Luka is about to go to Karonga to get married to his cousin. The relationship ends there. The whole episode reveals the extent to which Luka has all along known that his relationship with Towera would come to nothing. Towera has received a heavy blow to her ego since Luka is known to her parents and her friends. She feels humiliated by what he has done to her.

Considering that Towera is not the only woman that Luka has deceived, one might suggest that the superior position that Luka occupies in his relations with women, according to the operations of the existing gender ideology, make it difficult for him to respect women as individuals. Although he has had the opportunity of going to school, although his department is at the forefront of encouraging women to take up positions of leadership, Luka is using the selfsame discourse of gender characteristic of the village social formation. Through Luka, education and the encouragement of increased participation of women in decision-making are shown not to be necessarily, in themselves, manifestations of changed attitudes towards gender difference. In such circumstances, increased awareness of the complex and sometimes subtle relationship between gender difference and female oppression among women can be the only means through which the kind of surface gender egalitarianism that

Luka and his boss Sam Robinson practice can be interrogated.

It is only when Towera is in London that the opportunity of challenging the gender ideology of her early upbringing is afforded her. She makes up for what Luka had done to her when he visits her home. Luka, while at the University of Reading, decides to visit Towera who by now is living and working in London. He purportedly has come to apologize for his awful behaviour many years before. After apologizing profusely, come bedtime, he wants to make love to her, and, we are told that:

Towera stopped, looked at him straight in the eye and searched in her mind for appropriate words to use in order to let him feel the full force of the extreme contempt with which she regarded him.

'Are you sure you are sorry for all that you have done?' she half asked and half rebuked him, as she walked out of the room and he followed her.

'Forgive me! This is what being a man does to you!'

'Rubbish! You make it sound as if you are the only male that ever lived! You mean to say that being a man is an incurable disease in itself.'

With that she opened her own door and slammed it while he was still standing outside his own. (p. 122-123)

As they say, 'He laughs best who laughs last!' Towera has at last asserted herself to Luka, but it has taken years and long exposure to the values of a different culture to be able to stand up against Luka and by extension against the masculine discourse of Tumbuka patriarchy within which the unequal relations of gender are so deeply and well entrenched that there is very little chance of a woman relating to them other than in ways already predetermined by the existing gender ideology itself. In such a discursive formation, any form of *counter-identification* can be explained away as negative femininity, and since marriage is the prime consideration for any woman the prospect of being labelled a bad woman and therefore reducing one's chances of being

married must seem a big price to pay. However, from the vantage point of being in another culture and another country, Towera has the opportunity of revising her relationship to the gender ideology of Northern Malawi. It would be wrong to limit her rejection to that of Malawian or African gender ideology, for in Malawi she does also experience the international dimension of gender ideology, that is, if one assumes that the attitude to women demonstrated by her British boss Sam Robinson is representative of Western masculine discourse.

Her boss at Mzimba, Sam Robinson, is no different from Luka. When one of his assistants asks him to give a lift to his niece who is going home to get married, he asks Luka to coax the girl into sleeping with him. Luka instead sleeps with the girl himself and lies to Sam by telling him that the parents of the girl had picked her up at night. Sam Robinson and Luka compete for girls. When Sam realises that Luka is going out with Towera he transfers her and arranges to give her a lift with the intention of sleeping with her on the way. He is so shocked and upset when he realises that she is bringing her daughter with her that he changes his mind about giving her a lift. Both Luka and Sam, though different in terms of their cultural background, evince a similar attitude to women. However, in keeping with the principle of male territoriality that we encounter in Aubrey Kalitera's *Mother, Why Mother* and in Helen Ovbiagele's *Evbu My Love*, Luka protects the women from the foreigner while he himself does exactly what he does not want the foreigner to do to them. It is remarkable that when the relationship between Luka and Towera is breaking up the latter can see through the false binary opposition that Luka has erected between himself and the foreign *Other*:

'Let me tell you, all the time you implied that you had rescued me or that you were trying to protect me from the men who wanted only to play about with me, but I now know that you are the one who wanted to spoil my character. The men you had in mind, even Sam Robinson,

are all good ones, you are the one who is bad. They did not go to tell my father lies as you did. They never slept with me, or if they did, it was not in my parents' house.' (p. 101-102)

Perhaps the articulation of territoriality in relation to a male rival of a different culture, race, or even class is a strategy which is presented as an emancipatory gesture while masking the relations of domination from which it arises and which it sets in motion. A facade of homogeneity is erected to conceal other areas of difference within the supposedly homogeneous group, particularly the link between power and gender difference. This strategy also involves the exaggeration and mystification of the evil intentions of the *Other* thereby mediating and distorting the relationship between one's women and the masculine *Other*. In short, the sort of male territoriality that Luka displays in relation to Sam Robinson demonstrates the extent to which gender discourse is interminably intertwined with other discourses of *Otherness* such as racism. The heroine's recognition of the spurious nature of such a manichean dichotomy is an important step towards demystifying her gendered subjectivity as she now realises that the older discourse of territoriality, probably a product of internecine ethnic warfare, through its representation of her menfolk as protectors, conceals the fact that within the group itself access to power is differently allocated on the basis of gender and possibly other criteria of difference. The demystification of the imaginary is a necessary condition for the historic break with the politics of subjection.

The emancipatory moment in the novel also arrives at the end of a series of personal disappointments for Towera. While in England she marries a fellow African student who has no means of 'financial support.' The marriage breaks up because of accommodation and financial problems. The breakup of her

relationship with Luka and of her marriage have perhaps made Towera a little wary of men and have led her to reexamine the values of traditional patriarchy which she has taken for granted for a long time. It would appear that the novel posits negative personal experience as an enabling factor in the development of an autonomous female subjectivity. In Existentialist parlance, Towera can be said to have broken free with the world of *being-with-the-other* and worked out something resembling a healthy transcendence of the existing African gender discourse. However, such transcendence of gendered location as Towera achieves does not entail the heroine situating herself outside the totality of social discourse altogether as is generally the case with the typical existentialist hero such as Samuel Beckett's Murphy in *Murphy* or Albert Camus's Mersault in *The Stranger*. Judging by her acceptance of Luka's invitation to take her out to the London Planetarium, she is still firmly within the world of *being-with-the-other* save that this time around her relationship to the other is grounded in a confident belief in the principle of gender equality.

However, one should not exaggerate the extent to which Towera has radically transformed her understanding of the subordinate location of female subjectivity within Malawian gender discourse, for at the end of the novel something resembling a reaffirmation of the superiority of masculine discourse is alluded to. Before she parts with Luka, she asks him whether he has noticed that the scar has been removed. This would seem to be a manifestation of her old habit of hankering after approval from men. In other words, by the end of the novel, the liberated subject is essentially still inscribed in the male gaze. On the other hand, the absence of the scar, the source of the heroine's inferiority complex can, be taken as a signification of the absence of the

negative and distorted gendered consciousness to which it had given rise. In this regard, one must not underrate the extent to which the narrative is committed to gender egalitarianism. The novel argues that female migration can be an important factor in the development of gender consciousness among African women.

All in all, although the novel cannot be said to be overtly political regarding its position on gender ideology, the final stand the heroine makes against a system of gender values and practices that has made her suffer can be interpreted without the charge of exaggeration as a singularly bold critique of Malawian gender ideology and by extension that of Africa. For a more forthright and overtly political critique of African gender ideology, we must turn to Helen Ovbiagele's romantic novel, *Forever Yours*.

In Helen Ovbiagele's *Forever Yours*, the solution to the unequal relations of gender takes the form of showing how romance and marriage can be worked out in such a way that gendered subjectivity does not yield relations of superordination and subordination. In *Forever Yours* we are presented with a scenario typical of romantic fiction. Halima Kadizu, a beautiful and well-educated woman falls in love with Bala Sumiyar, a rich young Moslem who is separated from his wife. However, what seems like a typical love story, tapping the Euro-romantic romance motif familiar to the reader of Mills and Boon novels, is quickly revealed as a narrative about the heroine's developing consciousness about her gender subjectivity in a society in which women have been thoroughly marginalised from both personal and public power. Although Halima has a degree in French and Spanish from the University of Ibadan, and has been promised a job as a translator in the ministry of External Affairs, she is prepared for the sake of a man she hardly knows well to stay in the north and be kept by him. Bala rents a well-appointed flat for her and adorns

the flat with everything she could wish for. In return he expects absolute obedience. When Bala suspects her of cheating him, he kills the man whom he thinks she is interested in, leaves the corpse in her flat and dispossesses her of everything he has given her. It is then that Halima realises how foolish she has been in living solely for Bala, without developing a career of her own. She resolves to get into politics. Her party wins the elections and she is appointed a State Commissioner. She reunites with Bala, but this time 'she was quite confident that there was no way in which Bala could dispossess her of anything as he had before. She was somebody in her own right now.' (p. 146)⁴² Significantly, from a Feminist perspective, for the first time in African literature, a woman keeps her maiden name after marriage.

I wish to look closely at the critique of dominant gender ideology the text offers as well as at the solution to gender difference it articulates. In order to do so, I will examine the heroine's relationships with her lover, her family and friends, for the heroine's developing consciousness, to a large extent, is not solely a matter of an exceptional individual who rises above the rest of her women folk, but of a subjectivity that is helped by progressive family and social circumstances. In other words, the heroine benefits from other characters in the novel who, though middle of the road in terms of their sexual politics, nevertheless act as catalysts to the heroine's increased awareness of the need for women to defend themselves from men who might wish to take advantage of them. In this, Halima's family is shown to be extremely supportive. *For Ever Yours* argues for and underscores the fact that a progressive feminine discourse can only succeed when there are accompanying corresponding changes in other discourses.

Halima's parents adhere to a form of family ideology that is radically different from its traditional counterpart within which success is measured to

a large extent by the number of children one has. They effect a form of *counter-identification* with the dominant attitude to marriage and family:

The Kadizus had decided that two children were about all they could afford to love and look after comfortably and had turned a deaf ear to the families who had condemned their action as selfish. A woman who had no problem with childbearing should keep having babies until the supply gave out, parents on both sides had argued. (p. 1)

The mode of family that the Kadizus have chosen is accompanied by a more progressive form of parenting. Because of the small size of the family, the parents can afford to educate both children: Haliru, Halima's brother, has a Bachelor of Science degree in Agriculture. More significantly, the Kadizus have moved away from the traditional authoritarian notion of parenting which is characterised by parental intervention in the children's choice of lovers and marriage partners. The narrator tells us that:

Halima's parents were not enthusiastic about the relationship but they had no grounds for objecting to it. Not that they would have wanted to as they believed in leaving their children as adults to make their own decisions. (p. 24)

This is a far cry from the parents we encounter in Onitsha market literature or in Maillu's novels; or indeed in the novels of Chinua Achebe where, according to Eustice Palmer, 'the father's responsibility to choose a husband for his daughter is calmly taken for granted.'⁴³ Parental authoritarianism gives way to sensitivity, understanding and empathy in the relationship between the Kadizus and their children. Though the parents are not happy that Halima is going out with a married man, they are prepared to accept the relationship as a mark of their respect for Halima's right to make her own decisions regarding

her personal life. The respect and understanding that Halima's parents have for her helps Halima cope with times when her love life is tumultuous.

When Bala dispossesses her of everything, Halima can go back to her parents in the knowledge that she will find comfort and love:

'Do you want to talk about it?'

She nodded and in a quiet voice narrated the events of the previous day and handed over Bala's letter. They read it.

'Go on, Mum, say it,' Halima said wearily. 'Say, "I told you so."'

'No, my daughter, I will not. We all make mistakes. You've suffered enough. I can imagine what you have been through,' she added gently. 'Your love, faith and pride have all taken a beating. As a woman I understand.' She went and put her arms around her daughter. Mr. Kadizu left them together. (pp. 75-76)

Egalitarian family practice provides a space from which gendered authoritarianism can be questioned. However, the family is not free from the occasional return of the repressed discourse of traditional beliefs of family and gender. When Haliru, the brother, has been told by the father about how Bala, the Halima's boyfriend has treated his sister, he resorts to a discourse of family and gender territoriality typical of the traditional patriarchal discursive formation:

'Bala deserves to die,' said Haliru with a mad gleam in his eyes. 'He's disgraced my family and the only honourable thing for me to do is to kill him, for I'll never be able to live down the way he's treated my sister.' (pp. 78-79)

When the father says, 'You're in the twentieth century... it is a sin and a crime to kill' he has correctly identified the discursive site of Haliru's analysis. In a moment of mad anger Haliru locates himself and Bala in a

previous discourse, thus revealing a momentary nostalgia for the good old days when family honour and personal valour were significant defining characteristics of the masculine subject. The choice of a discursive site is determined by the present class location of the two characters. Being lower on the socio-economic scale than Bala, Halima decides to relocate the scene of the battle to a world where the ability to use a machete or a spear had a way of levelling out socio-economic difference. What we are presented with here is not necessarily an egalitarian alternative to unequal class relations, but rather an appeal to a form of masculinity predicated on an essentialist view of difference. Such forms of essentialism are challenged in the novel. It is remarkable that it is the older man, the father, who champions a modifying discourse when generally it is believed that the older one gets the more conservative one becomes, a position that is supported by the way fathers are depicted in Onitsha Market literature where the father usually speaking pidgin and the son or daughter using refined English are presented as diametrically opposed on the issue of tradition versus modernity. Halima's parents are not the only old people presented in a positive light in the novel; there is old Hajia Maryam, the stout politician who takes Halima in hand and shows her the political ropes. It might be the case that in setting up an opposition between the two men of different ages, Helen Ovbiagele is questioning the *essentialist* view that ideological positions are a function of age. Of greater significance is the fact that by depicting old people sensitively and showing that they are not always, by virtue of their age, enemies of progress, Helen Ovbiagele has brought back to African popular literature the traditional respect for elders typical of most African societies which the Highbred Maxwells of Onitsha Market⁴⁴ in their boisterous and headlong support for modernity threw out with the bath water.

The parents we encounter in *Forever Yours* are indeed different from their counterparts in most of African popular literature. Their commitment to the happiness of their children is more than abundantly illustrated in the crucial role they play in the eventual reconciliation between Bala and Halima. When Halima goes back to her parents, she is in fact pregnant; she decides not to mention it to Bala as she no longer wishes to have anything to do with him again. The child is left to be brought up by her sister-in law, Haliru's wife, while Halima is concentrating on her political career. Without informing her, the family allows Bala to visit the child. Everyone in the family knows this except Halima. The parents and the brother realise that though Halima is angry with Bala, she still loves him and they reckon that the best they can do is to encourage the now contrite Bala and leave room for an eventual possible reconciliation. When Halima receives the news that she has been made a State Commissioner, the family invites Bala to the private family party. She is glad to see him again. Bala apologizes for his past behaviour and he makes a marriage proposal which is accepted by both Halima and the family. However, before marriage Bala assures the family and Halima that he will not interfere again with her career:

'I know that the question of Halima's political career would be uppermost in your mind, sir - what might become of it when we are married. I promise before everyone present here that I'll not stand in her way at all, whatever the political position she would like to hold. I've given it all careful thought, and to drive my decision home, I'm moving my office from Kaduna to Jos so that we could be together and build up a home for Yusuf and the other children we'll have.... I'm prepared to do all in my power to enhance Halima's political career. She's given up a lot for me in the past and I feel very much indebted to her.' (p. 145)

Though the family provides the necessary ideological space within which the heroine's gender consciousness germinates and develops, there is a sense in which the parents can be said to be unnecessarily invested with superior wisdom. Parental knowledge is presented as more pragmatic and discerning than the heroine's with the end result that, though the relationship between child and parent in the novel is shorn of the authoritarianism characteristic of traditional familial and patriarchal structures, it is still one that argues for the need for parental guidance when it comes to matters of courtship and marriage. In this sense, the novel identifies with the dominant family and gender ideology which obtains in Africa. It is as if the writer wishes to ensure that her radical position on gender ideology does not appear to threaten the family. It might well be the case that the author invites us to consider ways in which existing family relations can be opened up to a radical rearrangement of gender relations without dismantling them. There is a genuine fear of the impact of Feminism on family structures in Africa. Even radical Feminists such as Buchi Emecheta have found it necessary to assure their prospective critics that they are not championing the destruction of institutions such as marriage and the family in their call for gender equality.⁴⁵ This might explain the privileging of parental wisdom in *Forever Yours*.

The importance of the community in the life of an individual is another area of traditional African belief that is incorporated in Helen Ovbiagele's Feminist project. The role of the community in engendering gender consciousness is nowhere more obviously represented than in the support that Halima receives from fellow women. Beginning with the mother who is always supportive and encouraging it extends to her personal friends and her political godmother, Hajia Maryam. Halima's friend Rahila tries to bring her to her

senses when she decides not to go to Lagos to take up her job as a translator.

She advises her:

'You seem completely overwhelmed by his personality and character. I've watched helplessly as you allowed your will to be gradually crushed by him and all for the sake of love. Don't misunderstand me, Halima,' Rahila said as the other was about to protest. 'I'm a romantic too and I think being in love is wonderful, but you should love with your head as you get older, and should be able to see things in their right perspective despite your emotion. Right now your life revolves round Bala. When he smiles you're ecstatic, when he frowns you're worried. Also he has to know where you are every minute of the day. In short he's taken control of your life.'
(p. 41)

Rahila is the heroine's mentor and acts as her *gender ideal* against which the heroine's relation to dominant gender ideology is measured. She constantly questions the extent to which the heroine has allowed herself to be completely controlled by Bala in the name of love. Rahila reminds the heroine of her subject position and her courtship with and marriage to Usman provide the heroine with a model of relations of gender which are based on the principle of equality. Rahila and Usman are able to develop their respective careers and there is no attempt on the part of Usman to treat Rahila as a lesser person.

Rahila has struck a happy medium between tradition and female emancipation. It is interesting that Rahila is the character through whom the reader first encounters Feminist language. She describes Halima's boss a 'male chauvinist'. Clearly, both at the level of rhetoric and day-to-day experience, she represents the new African woman, the type that the heroine will become by the end of the story. When later in the novel, Halima describes Bala as 'the conceited chauvinistic pig', it does not come as a surprise since the reader is already aware of the discursive ground that permits such symbolic

representation. Rahila, as the *Other* of the heroine's subject position, provides the teleological goal of the narrative as it is her emancipated gender subject position that will eventually form both the ideological and narrative closure of the novel. This sense of a developing consciousness locates the romantic novel that *Forever Yours* is in the literary tradition of the *bildungsroman*. That Rahila's voice of radical gender practice provides our heroine with a discursive paradigm for what is possible is revealingly and poignantly rendered during the heroine's moment of recognition, the moment when her commitment to a notion of love abstracted from the gendered reality is rudely shattered:

She had had time for a little self-appraisal and had had to admit that she had been the world's most stupid female. She deserved a medal for foolishness and lack of foresight. She had given up almost everything she had for Bala's love and in return he had kicked dust in her face, making her the laughing stock of the town. She was going to steer her own course in future, as she had always intended to before she fell in love. (p. 76)

There is yet another figure whose support for Halima is crucial to her political growth. When Halima decides to go into politics, a world dominated by men, she learns that her awareness of the unequal personal relations of gender needs to be augmented by opening up the public domain to a radical sexual politics. Nevertheless, the initial impetus to join politics arises out of what she has experienced at a personal level, namely the treatment Bala Sumiyar metes out to her:

'Think carefully, Halima,' advised her father.
'You've had a rough deal from a man you loved and trusted and if I may hazard a guess you probably want to go into politics to champion the cause of women in one way or the other.'
'You are right, Dad,' she agreed quietly. 'In this country women are downtrodden and taken for granted, and

they calmly accept their lot, attributing it to the dictates of nature. They hardly have any rights.'..... Women are hardly represented at federal or state level and as such no one thinks of doing anything to improve their status. The few female legislators there are have their views snuffed out of them before they have the opportunity to air them.'

'That's true,' agreed her mother. 'The press does not help either. They would rather focus their attention on what the female legislators wore to the House of Assembly than on what contributions they made to the debates.'

The men in the room maintained a diplomatic silence. (p. 76-77)

Halima's experience of gendered inequality within the domain of romantic love makes her aware of the need to fight against male dominance. It is worth noting that though the father and the brother will do anything to support her, they are stunned at being conceived of as standing in a relation of opposition to her and the mother. Perhaps, an egalitarian family practice does not entail acceptance of those discourses which threaten the stability of traditional gender practices. On the other hand, her mother, despite having little education, displays a remarkable understanding of female subjection. Her understanding of gender inequality is based on experience, thus suggesting that gender consciousness is not necessarily and always a product of formal intellectual analysis. She wholeheartedly encourages her daughter to join politics.

The greatest support that the heroine receives is from the elderly woman Hajia Maryam. Hajia is a veteran of the party which Halima joins and understands how difficult it is for a woman to rise within the ranks of the party. She has to be extremely hardworking. When Halima is offered a low salary for the job of party public relations officer, it is Hajia who ensures that she is given the kind of salary she can live on without struggling to

make ends meet. Hajia, like Rahila, becomes Halima's mentor, raising her gender consciousness:

'We women must stick together, Halima... I will do my best to help you settle comfortably into our Party. Through you I might realise my life's ambition of improving the lot of women in our state and in the country as a whole.... Even in our Party where we pledge equal opportunity for the sexes, members would hesitate to put up a female candidate, particularly when the rival parties are putting up a male candidate. Don't forget that in our country men are the decision makers everywhere. It is important to put up candidates that would be acceptable to a constituency, and rather unfortunately a large number of people think that a female member of the House would not be able to champion their cause and draw the government's attention to their area. It is an erroneous belief, there it is.' (pp. 99-101)

Old Hajia exposes Halima to the gendered space within which institutional political life is inscribed. Hajia can be said to understand the objective conditions which produce gendered differentiation in her society. Halima will need this kind of understanding if she is to be weaned from her rather idealised belief in the capacity of institutional politics to change the status quo. In order to help the younger woman Hajia uses her position in the party which she has earned through a life-long commitment to the ideals of the party and through the respect accorded her by virtue of her age in a society where old age is generally the leveller of gender difference.⁴⁶ It is once again thanks to Hajia and her husband Mr. Twup that Halima is given the job of a State commissioner:

Mr. Twup and Hajia Maryam stood firm. They claimed it was important to make her one in order to woo the youth who formed a large majority in the Party and who were eager to have young blood in the government. There were the women too who thought the world of her and who had wanted her as their spokeswoman in the House of Assembly. From her good performance at elections, it

was clear that she would be favoured by many and it would be unwise to displease so many people by letting her sink into obscurity. (pp. 131)

Clearly, Halima's journey towards radical sexual politics is helped by the presence of a collective female solidarity whose commitment to gender equality is best shown by the extent to which they facilitate her desire to inject a radical sexual politics into the political bloodstream of Nigeria.

Female solidarity is expressed in terms other than those which are overtly political. When Halima and Bala are out on a picnic and she falls in a river, contrary to what is expected in romantic fiction, Bala does not jump into the river to rescue her but instead goes to look for help and when he comes back he finds that a group of women have picked Halima out of the water:

When he got back with four men, thirty minutes later, panting and anxious, he found her sitting some distance away from the stream, with about six women fussing over her, cleaning her up. Apparently, as soon as he had left, the women, who had been on their way back from selling fresh milk and butter in the market, had called at the stream to wash their calabashes and fetch water. When they saw Halima they wasted no time at all, knowing exactly what to do. (pp. 14-15)

Evidently, Bala is robbed of the traditional role of a romantic hero: in a romantic novel an opportunity to save a beloved from some danger is heartily savoured and used to bring the rescued heroine closer to the hero, but here, in keeping with the ideological trajectory of the narrative, it is *deautomatised*, to borrow a term from Formalism, and revealed as an idealisation of masculine strength and feminine weakness. Bala's masculine identity is further insulted by the fact that when he offers to pay the women who have helped Halima for their services thereby legitimately claiming the heroic act of rescue for

himself through purchase, the women flatly refuse to accept his offer of money. What is being rejected in this episode, is an exchange economy in which gestures of kindness are invested with exchange value and appropriated for gender supremacy. There is another and, more fundamental issue being contested here: Helen Ovbiagele interrogates the fiction of phallic redemption that operates in Kalitera's novel *Why Father, Why* which is characterised by the device of allocating the task of liberating an oppressed group to a single man who is often endowed with special physical, mystical or intellectual abilities. Here the dispossessed themselves are endowed with the capacity to emancipate themselves. In this regard, it can be said that African popular literature, like some contemporary British popular literature, particularly some novels in the Mills and Boon Series, displays a capacity to come to terms with the presence of a gender counter-discourse set in motion largely by the Feminist intervention.⁴⁷

Wealth is the single most important element in the discourse of masculinity that we encounter in the novel. Bala uses the economic advantage he has over Halima in order to objectify. Bala's attitude to wealth is not solely produced by its tendency to corrupt, but also and more significantly by his Islamic faith. We are told that:

In a true Moslem fashion he felt he should provide for those less fortunate than himself, and if anyone showed any inclination to work, he employed him first and thought of what duties to give him later. (p. 30)

As Halima learns later, this form of religious philanthropy has got strings attached to it as it allows the donor to demand unqualified obedience from the recipient thereby creating and reinforcing relations of subordination and superordination. Halima is given everything by Bala, but he is so possessive

of her that he never allows her to go out on her own. She is always accompanied by the driver Bala has employed for her. All the household staff are essentially spies for Bala. Bala evinces an extreme case of possessiveness which is uninformed by any consideration of personal autonomy. A little episode in the novel reveals the ridiculous extent to which Halima has been taken over by Bala. When Halima has resigned from her job at the British Council and wants go to out and look for another one, Bala gives the following as the immediate tragic consequence of her rebellion:

'You know it's my exercise hour and I need to concentrate..... Don't be rebellious. You know full well I can't concentrate if you're not around somewhere in the house.' (p. 45)

Halima's identity has been collapsed to a space that is solely defined in terms of the gendered *Other*. Through the portrayal of Halima Helen Ovbiagele has captured the vexed intersection between the discourse of love and that of sexual politics. Halima's collusion with a masculine interpellation of gender subjectivity does not emanate from a position of ignorance. What has happened is that Halima has come to see love as autonomous of the discourse of gender equality that she apprehends at the cognitive level. In other words, she subscribes to the view that emotion and reason are mutually exclusive. The belief in the discreteness of discourse passes off the socially constructed prioritisation of love over reason as natural, and in the process represses the subject's emancipatory potential through the offer of an imaginary access to wealth and power. While with Bala, Halima comes to assume that the material goods that are at her disposal and Bala's social position are really hers. It is only when she is dispossessed of everything that the fiction of being wealthy and powerful is revealed for what it really is, a device for

reinforcing her imaginary relationship to the means of production of her subject position. It is this ideological operation that permits Halima to collude with Bala in her own subjection.

On the other hand, Bala is exactly the opposite: as far as he is concerned emotional feeling must never take precedence over reason. That is why even though clearly he still loves her, when she breaks one of his rules he punishes her by withdrawing all the privileges that he has given her. The letter he writes to her best illustrates how Bala views the troubled link between emotion and reason:

'This is the end of our relationship. You have brought it about.... What I do mind was the fact that you purposely deceived your driver as to your whereabouts by sneaking through Rahila's back door to join the others in their car which they had parked around the corner, to go to a nightclub. This was a most disappointing and undignified action from a lady I love more than life itself. By it you have lowered the esteem your driver had for both of us as he must have concluded that you had gone off to meet another man. Now, that's not my thought for I know how genuine and stable your love for me is. But I simply cannot forgive or forget this deception.

As I said this afternoon I have given you my heart (which is now broken forever) and I can never love nor marry another woman.

Goodbye my only love.' (pp. 71-73)

For Bala, unlike for Halima, the question of power is very much alive even when in love. Although Halima is shocked by the way Bala behaves by brutally curtailing their relationship, right from the beginning of the relationship Bala has made it obvious to Halima that he plays by the rules of power rather than those of the passion of love. As far as he is concerned there is no contradiction between the fact that he has treated her cruelly and the statement, 'goodbye my only love.' The conclusion one can draw from the

characterization of Bala is that he represents a form of masculine discourse which uses the domain of personal relationships as a means to power. His servants and Halima, as well as his money, are valued by Bala in so far as they bolster his private and public standing. People and objects for Bala are essentially seen as political investments. On the whole, the relationship between Bala and Halima leads one to the conclusion that, however subtle the condition of subjectivity, it contains within it the potential for violence since rebellion leads the dominating subject to consider less subtle forms of interpellation. It may also be argued that the fact that Halima achieves increased gender consciousness only after what Bala has done to her, suggests that coercive forms of interpellation can demystify the condition of subjection and lead to a radicalisation of a subject.

However, in the resolution of the novel, the central role that the element of power plays in the initial phase of the relationship is cleverly smoothed over and substituted with the idea that 'true love never dies'. The only promise Bala makes to Halima's family is that he is not going to interfere with her career. There is no evidence that he is not going to interfere with the particular masculine discourse within which his subjectivity is constituted. It is revealing that even though she has been given her own house as a Commissioner, for no apparent reason, he insists that they stay in his. True enough, Halima says that there is no way that he can dispossess her again, but the way he brings back his old driver to continue taking her to work does indicate that, though Halima has achieved great awareness of the unequal relations of gender and has done the most radical thing by keeping her maiden name after marriage, she still has a lot of work to do by way of transforming Bala's masculine identity which is anchored in strong religious and cultural beliefs and supported by a political economy within which male

dominance is perceived as natural and incontestable.

One gets a distinct feeling that something in the nature of the genre forces the reconciliation between Bala and Halima at the end of the novel. There has got to be a marriage at the end of a romantic novel. However, in this particular case, the marriage is offered rather hastily before the elements of the central ideological binary opposition have been allowed to coalesce. The marriage is an ideological dissonance. It demonstrates how ideological contradiction spills over narrative closure. The narrative device that enables the strategic closure at the end of the novel is one which involves the unproblematized transfer of the personal relations of gender into those of the public domain. When Halima has been spurned by Bala, she does not go about changing the way she relates to men at a personal level, but rather assumes that through the fight for equal representation in public, the personal domain will naturally be catered for. It is incorrectly assumed that participation in a public discourse about gender egalitarianism is necessarily symptomatic of the ability to manage gender difference and privilege at a personal level.

Even so, the novel effects a radical intervention in the discourse of gender in Africa. Helen Ovbiagele, like Buchi Emecheta, has brought the discourse of western Feminism to the domain of literary production in Africa. The novel affords one the opportunity to glimpse the social vision of a radical female subject, not as the work of an exceptional individual, but rather as the triumphal culmination of a history mediated by a collective human agency. Ovbiagele offers us the possibility of a transcendence of difference, not a transcendence that fixes one to a future disembowelled of history and located in a theology of the ultimate, but one that transcends in order to relocate itself in a dialectic of movement and stasis. *Forever Yours* amply

demonstrates the fact that, far from being merely a matter of pure entertainment, popular fiction in Africa is profoundly involved in the search for alternative ways of constituting social relations in the continent.

CONCLUSION

As is evident from the foregoing discussion, representations of romantic love in African popular fiction are heavily implicated in the question of gender ideology. There are those texts where this aspect of modernity is employed to reproduce the gendered distribution of power that is characteristic of traditional patriarchy. Then there are those which question certain aspects of traditional patriarchy whilst supporting others. Lastly, there are texts which propose a radical transformation of traditional and existing relations of gender. What emerges from the discussion is the complex diversity of engagement with dominant gender ideology that popular literature in Africa exhibits. Far from romantic fiction being solely concerned with mechanically reproducing false consciousness, it demonstrates a capacity to locate itself in a variety of positions within the African discursive formation, interacting and intersecting with other discourses with which it is inextricably entwined. A lot of this may have to do with the proximity and interpenetration of the public and the private in the African social formation. When all is said and done, the most significant feature about the representations of romantic love discussed is the extent to which they present an attempt by individuals to assert their difference from the collective consciousness. There is a sense in which such efforts represent an articulation of the value of the individual rather than that of the community. It is in this regard that I see romantic

love as one of the greatest onslaughts on the idea of communalism embodied in such notions of traditional beliefs as kinship. This represents a healthy development as it may lead to greater tolerance of an individual's deviation from what is considered the social norm. This might in turn lead to the respect for civil liberties, something that only happens when the concept of the individual has been thoroughly entrenched. Thus the quintessential disposition of contemporary representations of romantic love in Africa may in fact be symptomatic of broader political processes seeking to transcend the cooption of traditional structures of kinship and communalism by nationalist movements, which has invariably and generally led to a situation in which the interests of the individual are always subsumed under those of the state or the nation where notions of nation or state are never made available for critical discussion. In general then, one might argue that through its insistence on the value of an individual's choice in its reproduction and critical production of gender ideology, contemporary African popular literature represents a progressive trend, one from which the process of *degendering* will surely benefit.

NOTES

1. See Emmanuel Obiechina, *An African Popular Literature: A Study of Onitsha Market Pamphlets* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 34-35. All quotations are from David Maillu, *For Mbatha and Rabeka*, Pacesetters Series (London: Macmillan, 1980).
2. Obiechina, Op. Cit., pp. 32-41.
3. Ibid. p. 19.
4. Helen Cixous, unknown source.
5. Ann Rosalind Jones, 'Mills and Boon Meets Feminism' in Jean Radford (ed.), *The Progress of Romance* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), pp. 196.
6. Bernth Lindfors, 'The New David Maillu', *Kunapipi*, 4, no. 1 (1982), pp. 130-134.
7. See Chinua Achebe's novels such as *Things Fall Apart* (London: Heinemann, 1971) and *Arrow of God* (London: Heinemann, 1964); and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Weep Not Child* (London, Heinemann, 1966).
8. All quotations are from David Maillu, *Benni Kamba in Operation DXT*, Spear Books Series (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1986). For an analysis of Maillu's *Equatorial Assignment*, see Bernth Lindfors, Op. Cit.
9. See Ngugi wa Thiong'o's, *Devil on the Cross* (London: Heinemann, 1982) and *I Will Marry When I Want* (London: Heinemann, 1982).
10. Felix Munthali, 'Change and the Intelligentsia in African Literature: A Study in Marginality'. Unpublished paper presented to the Ford Social Science Research Fellows Meeting in Nairobi (Date unknown).
11. Bernth Lindfors, 'East African Popular Literature in English,' *Journal of Popular Culture*, 13 (1979), pp. 106-115.
12. Loquacity as an attribute of femininity was discussed at a one-day seminar organised by the Scottish Branch of Renaissance Studies at the University of Stirling, 1988.
13. See Janet Batsleer, Tony Davies, Rebecca O'Rourke and Chris Weedon, *Rewriting English: Cultural Politics of Gender and Class* (London: Methuen, New Accents, 1985), pp. 75-76.
14. Julian Symons, *Bloody Murder* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 200.
15. Quotations are from Nandi Dlovu, *Angel of Death*, Pacesetters Series (London: Heinemann, 1982).
16. Janet Batsleer et al., Op. Cit., p. 78.
17. Ibid., p. 78.

18. Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice*, New Accents Series (London and New York: Methuen, 1980), p. 110; for the function of the boss as representing moderation and order, see Umberto Eco, 'The Narrative Structure in Fleming' in Bernard Waites, Tony Bennett and Graham Martin (ed.), *Popular Culture: Past and Present* (London: Croom Helm in association with Open University, 1982), p. 246.
19. Batsleer et. al., Op. Cit., p. 76.
20. Calvin Hernton, *Sex and Racism* (St. Albans: Paladin, 1970), p.122.
21. Kirsten Holst Petersen, 'First Things First: Problems of a Feminist Approach to African Literature,' *Kunapipi*, 5, no. 3(1984), p. 39.
22. Michel Pecheux, *Language, Semantics and Ideology*, Language, Discourse, Society Series, trans. from French by Harbans Nagpal (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1982), p. 110.
23. For a lively discussion of the struggle for women's rights in Africa, see: *Development Dialogue: (A journal of international development cooperation published by the Dag Hammarskjold Foundation, Uppsala)*, no. 1 (1982)
24. Robert de Beaugrande, Oral presentation to the 1987 International conference of the International Society for the Empirical study of Literature. For the idea that a text can examine its own mode of production, I am indebted to John Drakakis' article on Othello: 'The engendering of toads: Patriarchy and the problems of subjectivity in Shakespeare's *Othello*,' in *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, no. 124 (1988), pp. 62-80.
25. Helen Cixous, 'The laugh of the Medusa' in *New Feminisms* (Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1981), p. 245. ^{French}
26. Batsleer, Op. Cit., p. 104.
27. For an analysis of the sexual ideology in Barbara Cartland novels, see the following: Batsleer, Op. Cit., pp. 86-105; Rosalind Brunt, 'A career in Love: The Romantic world of Barbara Cartland,' in Christopher Pawling (ed.), *Popular Fiction and Social Change* (London: Macmillan, 1984), pp. 127-156.
28. Rosalind Brunt, Op. Cit., p. 152.
29. Roger Bromley, 'Natural Boundaries: The Social Function of Popular Fiction,' *Red Letters*, 7(1978).
30. George Orwell, *Animal Farm* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1951)
31. Abdul R. JanMohamed, 'The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature,' in *Critical Inquiry*, 12, No. 1(1985), pp. 59-87.
32. All quotations are from David Maillu, *After 4.30* (Nairobi: Maillu Publishing House, 1974, 1987) Okot p'Bitek, *Song of Lawino* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1966). In addition to David Maillu, the other followers of what Bernth Lindfors terms 'the p'Bitek school of satirical song' are: Okello Ochuli, *Orphan* (1968) and Joseph Baruga, *The Abandoned Hut* (1969).

33. See E. O. Apronti, 'David G. Maillu and His Readers' in *Pacific Quarterly: MOANA*, 6, no. 3 (1981), pp. 162-75. Apronti presents an empirical analysis of the reception of works by Maillu in East Africa. As far as I know it is the only empirical study of African literature so far.
34. Bernth Lindfors, *Op. Cit.*, (1979), p. 110.
35. Susan M. Greenstein, 'Cyprian Ekwensi and Onitsha Market Literature', in W.L. Ballard, (ed.), *Spectrum: Monograph Series in the Arts and Sciences*, 3, (June, 1973), p. 184.
36. See Marilyn French, *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1986), p. 177.
37. In many traditional African societies courtship and marriage are marked by a man giving a woman some material token of his love. Such gifts represent the symbolic representation of an exchange economy in which marriage is seen as a commodity. It is illustrative that when marriage breaks down the gifts are returned. For a materialist analysis of the phenomenon, see Friedrich Engels, 'The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State' in Robert Tucker (ed.) *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1978), pp. 734-759.
38. See Per Gadin, 'Publishing in Africa - Autonomous and Transnational: A view from Outside', *Development Dialogue*, Nos 1-2 (1984), pp. 98-112.
39. Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. Geoffrey Wall (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).
40. See Lisa Tuttle summary of Utopian Feminist literature in Lisa Tuttle, *Encyclopedia of Feminism* (London: Arrow Books Limited, 1986), pp. 329-330). According to her, the following are the better-known Feminist utopian novels: *Herland* (1915) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman; *The Kin of Ata are Waiting for You* (1971) by Dorothy Bryant; *The Dispossessed* (1974) by Ursula K. Le Guin; *The Female Man* (1975) by Joanna Russ; *The Shattered Chain* (1976) by Marion Zimmer Bradley; *Woman On the Edge of Time* (1976) by Marge Piercy; *Motherlines* (1978) by Suzy McKee Charnas; *The Wanderground* (1979) by Sally Miller Gearheart; and *The Demeter Flower* (1980) by Rochelle Singer.
41. All quotations are from Waliye Gondwe, *Love's Dilemma*, Pacesetters Series (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1985).
42. Helen Ovbiagele, *Forever Yours*, Pacesetters Series (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1985).
43. Eustice Palmer, 'The Feminine Point of View: Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*,' *African Literature Today*, 13 (1983), p. 40.
44. Highbred Maxwell is the name of an Onitsha Market writer. It is supposed to create the impression of sophistication and to a large extent it represents an attitude to things modern shared by a large number of Onitsha Market writers. See Emmanuel Obiechina, *Op. Cit.* (1973), p. 13.

45. See Femi Ojo-Ade, 'Female Writers, Male Critics' in *African Literature Today*, Op. Cit., p. 178.

46. I have noticed that in certain African societies, for example the Tumbuka of Northern Malawi, old women are allowed, by virtue of their their age, greater access to institutionalised power than their younger counterparts. Hajia's influence in the party would appear among other things to be a result of such practice.

47. For a discussion of the attempt by British popular literature to come to terms with Feminism, see Ann Rosalind Jones, 'Mills & Boon Meets Feminism', Jean Radford (ed.) *The Progress of Romance: The Politics of Popular Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), pp. 195-218.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE GENDERING OF CHILDREN WITHIN THE FAMILY

Theoretical work and practical evidence strongly suggest that sexual identity...never takes shape in isolation or in a simply physical context. The child becomes male or female in response to the females and males she encounters in her family and to the male and female images she constructs according to her experience.

(Ann Rosalind Jones, 1985)¹

In the preceding chapters, I have been looking at representations of gender difference in the domain of personal sexual relationships. In this chapter, however, I examine non-sexual intersubjective relationships within the family such as the parent-child and sibling relationships as sites for both the production of and resistance to dominant gender ideology. Both Marxism and Psychoanalysis recognise the significance of such relationships in producing the gendered subject. Nevertheless, the traditional Marxist position tends to neglect the specificity of the category and consequently ends up subsuming it under the notion of class, thereby dissolving its boundaries into a sea of macro-discourses of social relations and political power without clearly elaborating the specific way in which such relations articulate and are articulated by other discourses. As Mikhail Bakhtin would say, such a position elides what he terms the *chronotope*, that is, the concrete embodiment and manifestation of a particular ideological narrative.² Rosalind Coward has aptly pointed out the limitations of the traditional Marxist paradigm in providing a

helpful way of grasping the complex interplay between the discourse of family and that of gender:

In so far as Engels's account of the family insisted on the analytic and political priority of the relations of production, the specific dynamic of relations between the sexes could not be adequately treated. For example, the insistence on the family as an economic unit made it impossible to consider the differential effects of family relations on the sexes.³

On the other hand, Psychoanalysis, as an explanatory paradigm poses a different problem altogether. Psychoanalysis removes the problematic from the macro-social processes within which they are inscribed and with which they interact in the production of gendered subjectivity.⁴ Following the example of materialist Feminism, I explore the way the two discourses mutually produce, reproduce and distort each other within representations of gender in African popular literature.⁵ It might be helpful to bear in mind that by the term family I am not referring to the nuclear family alone, but to the extended family as a whole for the reason that, to a large extent, in Africa the kinship group still plays an important role in the socialisation of children by providing values and practices which inform the child's gender consciousness.

At the level of ideological cognitive intentionality, the texts I examine below fall into three broad categories. There are texts such as Aubrey Kalitera's *Why Son, Why*, and Senzenjani Lukhele's *Tell Me No More* which merely reproduce unequal relations of gender within the domain of family. The second group of texts, which in my discussion are represented by Sam Aryeetey's *Harvest of Love*, and Waliye Gondwe's *Second-hand Love*, display an ambiguous relationship with dominant gender ideology by supporting some aspects of it, whilst interrogating others; and the last group which is represented by Kole

Omotoso's *The Sacrifice*, published in the Onibonoje popular literature series, and Buchi Emecheta's *Naira Power* demonstrates the capacity of African popular literature to resist dominant gender ideology by bringing to the fore a modifying vision of relations of gender within the family.

THE GENDERED FAMILY: KALITERA'S *WHY SON, WHY* AND LUKHELE'S *TELL ME NO MORE*

Senzenjani Lukhele's *Tell Me No More*, just like Kalitera's *Why Father, Why*, allows us to observe the process of gender socialisation and ultimately the very practice by which unequal relations of gender are rationalised as the defence of the defenceless female. In the novel, the parent-child relationship becomes a terrain on which a conceptual framework involving a binary opposition between normal and abnormal masculinity is grafted. However, in the final analysis the ostensibly humane project of thematic intentionality reveals itself as the moment of supreme female subjection. Put succinctly, *Tell Me No More* is a narrative in which the male and female subjects are respectively frozen into infinite gestures of domination and subordination.

Tell Me No More is a story about how a Swazi girl by the name Gugu is socialised in the cultural values of her society pertaining to gender difference. Gugu, to whom the mother La-Mncina gives birth before marriage, is adopted by her stepfather according to a traditional custom which stipulates that a child born out of wedlock can be adopted by the man who marries a single mother and once adopted must be treated as his own child. Though Gugu's stepfather Cele has committed himself to this age old principle, when he is told that Gugu and her boyfriend Velaphi have criticised the chief for

holding his meeting on the same day as a football match between the chiefdom's club and another team, in fear of losing favour with the Chief to whom he is a councillor, he disowns the daughter and calls her a bastard, which is against Swazi tradition. Gugu is then sent to her maternal uncle, who according to custom is the natural protector of his sisters. The uncle comes to inquire into the problem, but the uncontrollable Cele threatens to spear his brother-in-law to death, at which point the brother in-law who is a butcher reciprocates by threatening to shoot him. With the approval of the chief Cele seeks the help of the local police who arrest the brother in-law, the wife and the daughter. During the trial customary law triumphs over principles of English Common Law; the brother is said to be entitled to defend his sister since he is the eldest surviving member of the Mncina family. When Cele tries to persuade his wife to go back with him, she bluntly tells him: 'Please tell no more.' (p. 101)⁶

Thus Gugu in the novel becomes both the narrative and ideological locus around which the other characters are positioned. Through the father, Gugu experiences the brutally autocratic nature of patriarchal discourse. Until she quarrels with the father, Gugu has no inkling whatsoever that in fact she is not her father's biological child. According to the convention of adoption operating in Swazi culture, she is not supposed to be told about it until she is a grown up woman.⁷ What is significant here are the reasons which prompt the father to expose a family secret enshrined in the time honoured traditions of Swaziland. It would appear that reasons of political expediency and gender territoriality play a massive role in breaking the taboo. Cele has married Gugu's mother and agreed to look after the child not so much with the interest of the child at heart, as in the interest of the exercise of his masculine right to polygamy. In the context, the question of parenting gets subordinated

to considerations of the power and privileges that the practice of polygamy bestows on a husband. As a polygamist, Cele occupies a central place in the lives of his wives. He has his own hut in the centre of the compound and each wife brings him food and comes to sleep with him according to a prearranged roster. The women fend for themselves, tilling their gardens and looking after their children. The only thing Cele does as a councillor is to attend the chief's *Umgano*, assembly, the epitome of the differential access to power between men and women in the social formation under consideration. It is the elision of the live issue of the parent-child relationship that inserts in Cele's superficially harmonious marital relations the possibility of disintegration. Cele has cleverly utilised existing traditions in order to buttress his masculine image, and focussed his attention on the male privileges without realising the immense responsibilities that he has brought upon himself.

When his relationship with the daughter threatens to undermine his political position within the community he sacrifices it to the advantages of the latter, thereby producing a crisis within the very discourse of masculine power that he wishes to preserve. We have here an instance of *selective alignment* with dominant gender ideology. When it is reported at the meeting that his daughter, Gugu, has insulted the chief the first thought that crosses his mind is what this will cost him politically:

The messenger's report to the assembly had embarrassed Cele. After the council meeting he was still not free. He thought about all the allegations made against him....

He was worried his own name had been brought into disrepute. (p. 21)

Added to the fear of losing his political status is the whole question of male territoriality. It is mentioned at the meeting that his daughter is having an affair with the chief's enemy Velaphi, a famous footballer whose popularity in the village seems to threaten the chief. In a setting where children are not allowed to choose friends of the opposite sex without considering the political and social relationships between their families and those of their lovers, Cele's discovery that his daughter is going out with the chief's enemy provokes him to take drastic measures against her. When she comes to sweep his hut as usual, he insults her by revealing her identity:

'I have come to clean the house, baba,' she reminded him.

'Shut up, you bastard. I am still asleep.'

He had never called her names in the past. She was upset. She lost her temper and said:

'Tixo, Why do you insult me, baba?'

'Demur, get out of here.' (p. 24)

He later tells the mother:

'I need not remind you that I said everything I wanted to. It is finished. Bastards have no place in my house. I am son of a man, born of flesh and blood and I am proud of myself... I am of pure blood, flowing out of mama and baba and nothing else.... I don't know her, she is best known to you...since the day she entered your womb.' (p. 28)

The readiness with which Cele calls his daughter 'bastard' suggests that much as he has hitherto subscribed to the Swazi principle of adoption, his whole attitude is part of a value system in which the binary opposition between the legitimate and the illegitimate child is still intact. In other words, the dissolution of the terms of the binary opposition and their structure of prioritisation, which the principle of adoption tries to implement, has not had

much success with Cele. The dismissal of social paternity being asserted by Cele is premised on a contrast between the legitimate and the illegitimate. It is in the context of this that he compares himself favourably with Gugu who, according to him, is not of pure blood. In the deployment of difference that Cele articulates, Gugu's alleged faults are transferred from her personality to the circumstances of her birth on the assumption that being illegitimate inevitably produces moral and ethical abnormality. This must surely be the most illustrative example of the strategy of essentialisation which is often used to legitimise gender difference by transferring it from the domain of the socially-constructed system of values to the biological differences between men and women. What we have here is a pathology of origin in which character traits are presented solely as a matter of what is considered as an impure mode of reproduction. In this way filial obedience and disobedience are rendered as functions of biological make up. It might also be suggested that this form of essentialisation serves to create a relation of binary difference between the outsider and insider. To name someone's origins can be a way of freezing someone outside a valorised space by refusing to acknowledge the transforming role of time and history and by defining present and future as eternal extensions of an unproblematised past. It is in the context of this that the attribution of Gugu's negative character traits to her being a foreigner, someone who does not belong to the legitimate family space, must be understood. The articulation of the principle of difference between the daughter, on the one hand, and himself and his other children, on the other, represents the return of the repressed discourse which the principle of adoption seeks to elide primarily in the interest of patriarchal order rather than in the interest of the child.

The preservation of patriarchal order becomes the most important

preoccupation in *Tell Me No More*, particularly among the male characters. Thus according to Cele, Gugu's misdemeanour cannot be perceived solely as some less considered act of a young person, but in more grandiose political terms. Gugu comes to be seen as the impure threat that seeks to undermine his family, and more important to Cele, the very heart of village life: the chief. It does not help matters that in addition to criticising the chief she has had a relationship with Velaphi, the embodiment of what the chief perceives as dissent. There is yet another discourse informing the relationship between Cele and Gugu in relation to the latter's relationship with Velaphi. It has to do with the principle of paternal territoriality. In a society where the choice of a marriage partner is worked out in conjunction with one's parents, it is not surprising that Cele gets annoyed that his daughter, without his knowledge, is going out with someone, especially someone who threatens the political image of the family, which is itself, as can be determined from the composition of the assembly, inscribed in relations of gender which present male hegemony as ineluctable. The father's attitude towards the relationship between the daughter and Velaphi must be seen in terms of what the sociologist Durkheim has referred to as the device of 'mechanical solidarity' in which the fate of individuals is tied up with that of the kinship group of which they are members.⁹ Thus the conflict is part of broader representation of the conflict between fathers and daughters that has informed popular literature right from Onitsha Market literature to the most polished publications in the Macmillan Pacesetters Series, in which the father is depicted as clinging to rights of a by-gone era, a time that has been superseded by a modern form of parent-child relations which stress[^]the child's right to choose according to her own needs rather than according to those of her father or kinship group. In this sense, the conflict between Gugu and Cele is one between an older discourse of

romantic love and marriage and a new one, which though present in the social formation, is still marginal. Thus at the heart of the problem is the question of power: the older discourse bestowed more power on the parent than on the child whereas the new discourse stands for the converse of the power relations characteristic of the former. Cele is thus clinging to a sexual politics and to a mode of parenting within which the authority of his role vis-a-vis the female members of his household could be taken for granted.

However Cele's defence of patriarchal power against what he perceives as a threat from outside both the family and culture undermines the humane foundation of patriarchy through a series of actions which are visibly autocratic and authoritarian even within the discourse of Swazi patriarchy itself. The violation of the subtlety of ideological interpellation elicits the wrath of the very system that Cele seeks to protect. When he goes to the chief to inform him that he has kicked Gugu out of his house, the latter candidly points out to him that he has used a wrong strategy, the kind that violates a more cardinal principle of patriarchal governance:

'I could not let her work against you and the council. That is important.'

'Is it? If you had meant to take action for the sake of the council's good name you would not have chased her out without our consent. We are not a party to your action.' (p. 38)

In a way, Cele's dilemma recalls that of Sophocles' Creon in *Antigone* whose attempt to preserve political order violates other sacred beliefs of his own society. It is the drama of a kind of excess that a narrowminded sense of duty gives rise to by its failure to countenance the possibility of there being another context in which the actions deemed justified on the basis of some belief or law, can in fact be wrong and unjust. What we encounter in Cele's

treatment of Gugu, contravention of the socially prized practice of adoption and the valorised virtue of moderation, is the practice of reducing discursive plurality and complexity to a monolithic simplicism that robs human action of the sort of temperate tentativeness that insulates from the fundamentalism of thought and belief. Cele's overproduction of ideological commitment demystifies the objective of ideological interpellation by exposing its real objectives and revealing what should be left concealed: the imaginary relations of subjects to the real intentions of dominant ideology. The chief's displeasure with Cele must therefore be seen as an attempt at limiting an excess that threatens the integrity of patriarchal discourse and also as a way of reasserting its humane face which it uses to underwrite its own ideological imperatives regarding relations of gender and parenting.

The most bewildering moment for Cele is when he realises that his hasty attempt to protect the tradition by means of exorcising his house of the spirit of rebellion elicits an articulation of a more powerful assertion of patriarchal order in the form of Gugu's maternal uncle, Mncina. In accordance with the principle of primogeniture, Mncina as the eldest living brother to Gugu's mother comes to the rescue of Gugu and her mother. When he comes to settle the case, Cele threatens to spear him to death, and the latter, not wishing to be outdone, reciprocates by telling Cele that he would not mind shooting him if he ever tried bringing his spear near him. The confrontation between the two is dramatically set in Cele's village. Cele, who until then, has been exercising a great deal of power over his wives cannot brook the interference of another man in the affairs of his family:

'Remember, you can't dictate terms to me in my home.'
'The same applies to me. I am an elder looking after
the affairs of my father's children.' (p. 96)

Cele asserts the principle of territorial integrity which holds that a man shall reign in his house and that ^{he} shall not allow another male to exercise power within such space. Similarly, Mncina is asserting the territorial integrity of the kinship group which is predicated on the rule that male members of the family shall protect their female members, the same discourse that Haliru, Halima's brother, articulates when Bala has ill-treated his sister in Helen Ovbiagele's *Forever Yours*. The female subject in this masculine contest, La-Mncina, a wife and a sister is on the one hand reduced to an object of the discourse of the differential relations of marriage within which she is perceived as the weak one who needs to be protected by the other, and on the other to an object of kinship discourse in which she is the field on which the power of her male relations vis-a-vis other males is both defined and practised. It is significant that when Cele sues Mncina he resorts to the principle of trespass and the latter defends himself on the grounds that under customary law he is within his rights in going to Cele's village to defend his sister. It is worth noting that Cele, the traditionalist, appeals to English Common Law rather than customary law in his defence and it is Mncina, the Christian monogamist, who reverts to tradition. The decision of the court is clearly on the side of tradition:

'In view of the evidence before this court Section One of the Interference Act does not apply. Mncina, according to customary law, is empowered to intervene on his sister's behalf. It appears the complainant would have done himself no harm if he had referred this matter to the chief's council which is empowered in terms of customary law to decide on such matters.' (p. 99)

The reluctance of the chief to help Cele for fear of seeming to be partial has forced Cele to revert to English Common Law, but then even this channel seems

unhelpful to his cause. Thus, though both Cele's and Mncina's arguments are based on a valorisation of male territory, the latter triumphs over the former in accordance with the thematic trajectory of the narrative which wishes to prioritise the humane aspects of patriarchy in order to present Cele's masculine subjectivity as a distortion of its ideal which is embodied in the figure of Mncina.

It can be inferred from all this that in its very structure patriachal discourse embodies contradictory notions of duty. The imperative to solicit conformity and loyalty from the female subjects inevitably leads to authoritarianism, something that reveals the very aspects of patriarchy that it would rather were concealed, for every ideology seeks to present itself as emancipatory, as the defender of some positive values, but when its putative ideological objectives are contradicted by its practice it also evinces a tremendous capacity to resolve such a problem by personalising it and transferring it from its conceptual framework to its practice. It is deducible from the preceding argument that every ideology seeks to present itself as conceptually consistent and tries to explain its failures in terms of the imperfections of ideological practice. In other words, the problems inherent in every ideology and the solutions it provides are victims of a profound binary opposition, one that erects a dichotomy between theory and practice. However, such a dichotomy must be understood not in simple functionalist terms but in the dialectical and strategic form of its deployment. It can further be extrapolated that though ideological formations present themselves as univocal and unitary in the interest of propagation, it would seem from the example above that under certain circumstances it might be the acknowledgement of ideological dissonance that ^{is}, in fact, expedient to the objective of ideological interpellation.

Nevertheless, the device of ideological dissonance still, in the final analysis, functions as a device of interpellation. In *Tell Me No More*, it is Gugu who, as the focal point of the various discursive operations in the text and the witness to the workings of Swazi patriarchal discourse, becomes the ultimate object of ideological interpellation. Put differently, she is both the means and the supposed beneficiary of the constellation of patriarchal discourses constituting the text, as the conflict between the father, on the one hand, and the uncle and the mother, on the other, is played out for the sake of exposing her to the ways of her people. However, the ways of her people to which she is selectively introduced are those that, at the end of the day, dramatise for her notions of femininity and masculinity which are used in structuring social relations in her society. The first thing she learns is the principle of pregnancy damages paid to the male members of a woman's family by the man who has made her pregnant, (*timvimba*), as a result of which the mother could not marry her biological father who clearly could not afford to pay. The story the mother tells her introduces Gugu to the notion of paternity, which in Swazi customary law is not determined by the biological act of fathering per se, but more by the act of owning up to the fact of being a father by socially acknowledging it through the payment of the customary damages or by paying dowry to the kinship group of the mother of the child. The mother puts the whole case succinctly in the following passage:

'It is part of our tradition, Gugu. In your case you were fatherless, that is, as long as Msibi had not paid pregnancy damages there was no reason for me to wait for him. His failure to pay pregnancy damages, *timvimba*, was an indication that he was not going to marry me. Unless he had promised to do so I could not wait for him; we had to part company.... When I met Cele he already had a wife. I did not mind becoming his second wife as long as he was prepared to have you as our

adopted child as is our custom. For that reason you became Cele's child, according to our rule of adoption.'

Central to the education of Gugu is the way the fate of a woman is tied both institutionally and personally to the decisions and beliefs which serve existing and socially defined notions of masculinity and femininity. Both the irresponsible father, the biological father Msibi, and the responsible father Cele are using a space which has been allotted to them by the discourse of masculinity available to them in Swazi culture. A principle of paternity such as the one that operates here which specifies that failure to pay damages necessarily nullifies the notion of fatherhood, is seen to be open to abuse since counter-identification with it, as in the case of Msibi, exhausts the punitive possibilities available to a woman's kinsmen and consequently leads to a situation whereby the knowledge of the limits of the law itself becomes a mechanism by which the law can be defied willy nilly. In the case of Cele, he takes advantage of the customary belief which uncritically valorises marriage to the point where a woman's life is solely seen in terms of her marital status. In such a situation, La-Mncina's position must be obviously desperate and when Cele offers to take her as his second wife, polygamy is presented as an emancipatory cultural practice, one which rescues her from the state of being a single mother. In keeping with the rehabilitation function of the female subject that polygamy ostensibly performs for those women who have violated the principle of premarital chastity, the socially available principle of adoption is employed to 'normalise', as it were, La-Mncina's 'fallen' position. Nevertheless, the principle of adoption in a society that highly values premarital chastity is shown not to be the greatest safeguard against the husband's strategic use of such knowledge during moments when his wife or the

adopted child threaten his own position either within the family or outside the family or both.

Another lesson that Gugu learns during the conflict is about the precariousness of marriage and the ever present and abundant protection of the kinsmen, underpinning which is a representation of women as essentially weak and defenceless. In a sense, the conflict produces and rehearses femininity and masculinity as a way of gendering the young female subject. One day when she is married herself, Gugu will certainly not forget that her ultimate protection is from her uncles and other male members of her family. This form of masculine protection elides the exchange economy which it perpetrates. In Swazi culture, and indeed, in many other patrilineal cultures in Africa, the men receive the dowry and in exchange offer protection to the female subject. Gugu has in the space of a short narrative been offered a subject position in which the unequal relations of gender have cleverly been concealed and presented to her in the form of patriarchal philanthropy.

A more important lesson she learns however has to do with the cryptic interplay between Christianity and traditional African cultural practice. The failure of Cele to work out a successful polygamous marriage is subtly presented as a demonstration of the evil inherent in polygamy itself. The narrative is circumscribed by a veiled religious frame. At the beginning of the novel we see Gugu on the top of the hill overlooking the village on which there is a cross:

This was a cross of Jesus Christ, a cement structure painted in white. It lay on the ground. The hands of this portrait were nailed to the ground, resembling, no doubt, the cross of the king of kings. It could be seen by an observer some distance away from it. Its white paint and size kept it visible. (p. 2)

The figure of the cross watching over the ungodly Cele down below casts eternal judgement on his activities. He is, incidentally, frequently referred to sarcastically as 'the polygamist.' It is, however, less the judgement of God than the judgement of the author of the cross and those who have followed him:

It was said the portrait was planted on the mountain top by the first missionary of the Methodist Church who had arrived here signalling the advent of the Wesleyan faith. It was also claimed that the precursor had warned the local folk not to allow their livestock to trample over the cross of the king of kings. (p. 2)

The interdiction not to allow livestock on the patch on which the cross is inscribed, as the most important defining characteristic of Swazi culture is rearing livestock, can be seen as a limiting factor on traditional culture. Thus, Cele represents the negative *Other* of Christianity in the iconographic landscape of the novel. He has not identified with the omnipresent interpellation of the cross, but instead kept to the ancient ways of his ethnic group. It is significant that the character through whom Cele encounters his nemesis, Mncina, is monogamous. Mncina brings into practice what the cross can only signify, thereby continuing the work of the old Methodist priest. Through Mncina, the novel makes a connection between faith and wealth. Unlike Cele the polygamist, Mncina is a rich and successful businessman, a practice that recalls a prevalent doctrine among certain strands of Christianity which view poverty as a manifestation of sin. Nevertheless, the triumph of monogamy at the end of the novel is a syncretic admixture of tradition and Christianity since Mncina uses the very tradition that permits polygamy in order to present the argument for monogamy. Furthermore, the fact that the imperfection of polygamy arises not so much out of the practice itself, since the chief who is himself a polygamist never has problems, as out of Cele's own personality

weakens the case the text wishes to make against the practice of polygamy in general. In this regard, the attempt to present the Christian view of marriage and parenting finds itself strategically and in a contradictory fashion employing the very tradition with which it is essentially at variance. At bottom, the construction of the relation between men and women simply in terms of the binary opposition between monogamy and polygamy glosses over the specific ways in which the two marriage practices are implicated similarly and differently in unequal relations of gender. Both Cele and Mncina, regardless of their differing views, prop up a system in which the fate of the female subject is conceived of merely as the territorial jurisdiction of masculine subjectivity. Here the very possibility of female autonomy is present solely as a massive absence and silence. In this we come face to face with the whole question of privileged ideals which, as representations of ethical and moral plenitude, elide their own structural contradictions.

In essence then, what we see in *Tell Me No More* is a form of gender ideology that is non-reflexive and which presents itself as humane. As in Aubrey Kalitera's *Why Father, Why* the concern with the plight of the fatherless child is used to underwrite profound gender inequality. At a deeper level the humanitarian project of rescue is seen to repress the autonomy of the female subject. The novel is essentially about a male contest within which the female subject is reduced to that of a spectator of a gladiatorial contest. A lot of this has to do with the functions ascribed to female characters in the novel: they are merely aspects of the plot rather than full blooded characters in their own right, which goes to show that their insignificance in the overall narrative space is inscribed in the very means of narrative production. Consequently, their less important role in the overall fictional universe of the novel can be read as a logical extension of their being located differentially,

in relation to male subjects at the macro-level of the economy of the narrative.

In Kalitera's novel, *Why Son, Why*, as in his other novel *Why Father, Why*, we encounter a pathology of masculine subjectivity produced in the course of an attempt to return the modern masculine subject to some original form of masculinity of which it is a poor and distorted imitation. The axiological binary oppositions which, according to Jacques Derrida, characterise metaphysics are visibly at play here:

The hierarchical axiology, the ethical-ontological distinctions which do not merely set up value-oppositions clustered around an ideal and unfindable limit, but moreover subordinate these values to each other (normal/abnormal, standard/parasite, fulfilled/void, serious/non-serious, literal/non-literal; briefly: positive/negative and ideal/non-ideal).⁹

Within the framework of binary relations constituting the narrative, the precolonial mode of masculine subjectivity is constituted as the ideal and the modern urban one is depicted as its polar opposite. In the process of privileging one form of masculinity over another an autonomous female subject is constructed, not as a category that is valuable in itself, but rather, as a substitute that occupies the place that has been evacuated by the pathological male subjectivity as well as a marker of the extent to which the principal male character has deviated from what is conceived of as normal masculine subjectivity. In this way, the novel displays the flexibility of dominant gender ideology.

Essentially, the text contrasts two ways of occupying gendered space. The principal issue in the novel has to do with the production and reproduction of a patriarchal ideology and the concomitant task of transmitting

such an ideology through the structure of a specific gender ideology. The above problematic is entwined with a particular articulation of the nature of the parent-child, the sibling relationship and the whole question of the relationship between patriarchy and matriarchy, on the one hand, and principles of *uxorilocality* and *virilocality*, on the other.¹⁰ In the first instance, the father himself produces the patriarchal version of the past as well as the future in terms of which existing forms of masculine and female subjectivity are measured.

The father's project which is predicated on a strategically simple reading of the pre-colonial past and Western capitalism becomes the principal axiological centre from which the value of the ideological spatial locations of the other subjectivities in the novel are determined. The father wishes to secure the future for the children, a future of which he is merely an architect and which must be realised by the son as the articulation of the latter's patriarchally-defined gendered subjectivity. He informs his son, the heir to his vision:

'When I was young a man's status - we could call it security - was measured by the amount of land he was able to cultivate plus the amount of maize in store at any time of the year. To that we could add a good house.... Along the line everybody sort of lost direction. Almost all of a sudden a man was judged by the clothes he wore, the government house he occupied in town, the bicycle he rode. Nobody paused to ask himself how long he was going to remain in the house he didn't own. We all ignored the land and rushed to the town.'
(pp. 15-16)

Returning to the land, therefore, becomes not only a matter of ensuring the economic security of the family, but also a matter of asserting a particular cultural and gender authenticity. However, the form of cultural and gender

authenticity being expounded by the father is not mutually exclusive of the cultural *Other*, the European culture against which it is contrasted. The argument seems to be that the traditional African's attitude to the land is the same as that of the European coloniser except that the African's contemporary attitude which he/she mistakenly thinks is a mark of being modern is an attitude deliberately fostered by the European in order to control the means of production in Africa and leave the African in jobs which make him dependent on those who control the means of production, be they Europeans or African:

'What I find sad as I sit here is that we weren't learning from the whiteman we thought we were emulating. We failed to notice that when the whiteman came the first thing he did was to grab as much land as possible. It really pains me. Because I had eyes but I couldn't see. I should have asked myself the question: Why is it that the man, the creator of the glittering cities, feels that there isn't much in those cities? Why does he walk past them and sink his roots in the jungle?..... As Jomo recently put it in Kenya, when the whitemen came they gave us the white collar jobs and they took the land. Because those people were borrowing from centuries of civilisation. Where they were coming from there were glittering towns on the one hand and the seemingly primitive land on the other. But it was always the poor servants who worked and lived in the cities. The masters owned and stuck to the land.' (pp. 16-17)

Thus the form of cultural nationalism embodied in the father's project is not merely one that resists European patriarchal capitalism, but one that asserts comparable similarity to it. That Jomo Kenyatta, a man who owned a lot of property when he was president of Kenya, should be brought in to corroborate the vision is a further indication that embedded in the father's version of the future is an argument for indigenous capitalism. Jomo Kenyatta used the Kikuyu traditional attitude to the land in order to show that capitalism was indigenous to Africa; on the other hand the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o

has constantly both in his essays and his creative writing used the same tradition in order to show that socialist egalitarianism is the hallmark of traditional African culture.' It all goes to show how pliable African tradition is and how it is not a neutral body of experience but rather one that can be appropriated for varying ideological objectives. However, ideological uses of African culture often present themselves as objectively true as in the case of the version constructed by the father in *Why Son, Why*.

The father's concern with the economic security of his family arises out of an attempt to resist the urban masculine discourse which has had perceptible negative consequences for him. He himself had squandered the opportunity of building a firm basis for his life after retirement as a result of identifying with a culturally alien form of masculine subjectivity. He had come from a family with a bit of property and had had the opportunity of accumulating capital when he was working as a senior civil servant, but he had never utilised the opportunity with the result that after retirement he is as poor as any other villager who had not had access to the opportunities that he had. He had, as it were, identified with the myth of security that the job had given him. The father himself is a victim of the mythology of work and wealth that had been perpetrated by the Europeans and reproduced by the post-independence African elite. His father had had a good farm and upon his death, he the son had never bothered to take it over and consequently the land had been split up into bits and pieces by tenants. He ruefully remembers:

'When your grandfather died, your grandmother called me. She wanted me to keep the place going so that when she too died, it would all pass to me. My answer was that I had nothing to do with primitive villages.... I was secure in town then. I had just been promoted; I had moved into the bigger house; and I had bought that car. Nobody could have convinced me that there ever would be need for me to go back to where I belonged.... When I was retiring from the civil service. You see, I never

disclosed it to any of you; but retirement came to me as a shock. I didn't expect it. I was sure that I was going to die in the civil service. And they retired me off at the moment when I was beginning to believe that they meant to promote me to permanent secretary.' (pp. 94-97)

His neglect of the traditional capitalism has left him without anything to hand over to his children. This is the reason why he has to resort to his son in order to implement his new found vision. During the course of the discussion with his son, it is made plain that the father's vision is gendered in the sense that it follows the principle of patrilineal inheritance. Thus the security the family is supposed to produce is predicated on the belief that male members of the family have the prerogative of providing for the family. When Denis, the son, protests at being lumbered with the whole responsibility instead of sharing it with his twin sister who earns as much as he does, the father retorts thus:

'What I am trying to avoid is dual ownership. You let Hope invest an equal amount and it will be her husband investing an equal amount. That way you will lose absolute control; which you must have because what you are trying to create here is security for the entire family. And you won't want Hope's husband telling you who to let walk back here and who not to let walk back here.' (p. 20)

The father's statement provides an instance of gendering. The son is located in a relation of opposition vis-a-vis his sister. He is the heir to the throne, so to speak, and as such is firmly included in the family whereas, on the ^{other} hand, the sister is located differentially in a double relationship to the family. She is both an insider and an outsider. She is an insider insofar as she is defined as the weaker of the two children, the one who by virtue of her gender

will most likely need the help of the other. It is significant that the conversation between the father and son is held in the presence of Hope, the sister, and that she is not invited by the father to participate, which provides an instance of gendering through parenting. She is an outsider, in accordance with the principle of *exogamy*. She can thus be described as being located centripetally: she will move out of the family whereas the son who is located centrifugally will bring in someone from outside and continue to exist in the same space within the family. In other words, what the father is seeking to preserve and buttress in his vision of the future is a discursive formation of unequal relations of gender. The father's ideological intentionality is forestalled by the son's gesture of counter-identification for which he pays a price through being represented as the *demonised* and abnormal masculine subject.

The son refuses to accede to the form of masculine subjectivity proffered by the father. By refusing to conform to the gendered space allotted to him by patriarchal discourse, the son and not the sister becomes the outsider. The gesture of rebellion is itself inscribed in another form of masculine subjectivity. The son subscribes to a notion of subjectivity defined by the urban life, the kind that has led his father to a life of poverty in the village. Like Mawa in Maillu's *For Mbatha and Rabeka*, Denis is a city man and is every bit as materialistic. However, the city man's unbridled love of property does not extend to the control of the means of production, but rather is limited to the acquisition of finished prestige goods. Such a type of masculine subjectivity is perceived by the father as essentially a kind of 'economic femininity' in that it lacks what he considers the quintessential property of masculine subjectivity, autonomy. The father's vision is aptly

articulated by the daughter, Hope, when Denis says that his ambition is to become an editor of the paper:

'Maybe you will get there. On the other hand, do you realise that even if you do, it still won't be your paper. Do you realise that even if you rose that far, you still won't have built a nest for you and your children? You and your children would still be out in the cold. Because, since the paper won't be yours, you won't be able to tell your eldest son, here is what I have created with life. Take it from where I am leaving it.' (pp. 133-134)

Denis, however refuses to accept the gendered role that is proffered by the father. His gesture of counter-identification divests the patriarchal capitalism being proposed by the father of its means of institutionalised realisation: the patriarchal principle of primogeniture. Thus the son's refusal is indicative of a break in ideological circuit, the body of values and structures of relations which from time immemorial have ensured continuity of the gender ideology of this society. The refusal to be interpellated by dominant gender ideology also reveals a deeper cleavage between the father and the son in relation to their respective notions of 'autonomy'. For the father, being an autonomous subject means being economically self-sufficient where the autonomous male is inscribed in the autocratic patriarchal traditions of power; but on the other hand, as far as the son is concerned being autonomous means being free from the discourse of patriarchal dominance. In this regard, the clash between the father and the son can be understood as ^a fissure in that ideological stance that inscribes the family in the discourse of relations of production, which is characteristic of traditional African societies. It may be argued as well that what Denis is rebelling against is a specific mode of parenting within which the parent-child relationship is commodified and

inscribed in a network of social relations of production which support the continued male access to, and female exclusion from, the means of production. In a nutshell, the clash between the father and son signals a crisis within the traditional modes of gender and parenting. Even the thematisation of the conflict itself corroborates the fact that the crisis has been engendered by the clash between the values of the city and those of rural traditional Africa. Denis is presented in the same mode as that of Chinua Achebe's Obi Okonkwo. Like Obi Okonkwo, Denis represents, from the perspective of the older generation, the betrayal of age-old and cherished traditional mores and beliefs. Again as in the case of Obi Okonkwo, Denis's yielding to a mythology of male subjectivity that is produced outside the indigenous cultural space leads to a tragic end. The betrayer of African tradition is never allowed any peace, so it seems.

Denis's rebellion is rendered as a moral failure rather than as a form of resistance to a privileged patriarchal convention determining the uncritical privileging of men over women as the chosen means of transmitting patriarchal ideology. He is presented as the embodiment of evil in a Manichean economy within which the very complexity of human subjectivity is glossed over in favour of a generic classification between 'the bad' and 'the good'. His evil nature is exemplified by the text through his attempt to kill his father. Such a construction, on a symbolic level, seems to foreground the anxiety of the text in its perception of filial disobedience. Filial disobedience is perceived as signifying the death of the patriarchal order. In this context the death of Denis when he runs under a moving truck, both in concrete and symbolic terms, represents the demise of the Kanthu family establishment. The death of the father the following day removes the trace of male presence from the Kanthu household. It is at this point that one perceives a fracture in the

textualisation of the subject of the narrative. A text that sets out to prioritise male control of the future, ends with the male members, who are constructed as the legitimate producers and custodians of the patriarchal dream, dead leaving three women and an outsider, an in-law in charge of the patriarchally defined dream.

The incongruity between the ideological intentionality of the text and the actual textualisation of the project shows itself early in the novel when the rebellious son is substituted by the willing and obedient sister, Hope, thereby revealing the resourcefulness and flexibility of patriarchy as well as contradicting the discourse of male self-sufficiency and autonomy which underpins the argument being put forward by the text. Hope becomes the personification of the means by which the father's project is redeemed from failure, a device that brings home the allegorical nature of the narrative. Although Denis is not named after the metaphysical attribute he represents, it is obvious that he is the polar opposite of the values embodied and represented by his sister Hope. One might well ask about the function fulfilled by the differential attribution of allegorical signification at the literal level. It can be argued that through the device of naming, the narrative particularises and personalises masculine moral depravity by refusing to grant it the status of a universal, whilst, on the other hand, universalising the virtue of hope by deploying it as the *mise-en-scene* of the dramatic articulation and embodiment of some timeless spiritual value. In this gendered representation, evil is offered as a finite force and goodness as an infinite possibility.

The representation of male moral failure is not generalised but specified as a way of presenting it as a contingent manifestation of cultural

colonialism rather than as a symptom of a crisis within the masculine gender ideal of traditional patriarchy. To concede that it represents a fracture in the very notion of traditional male subjectivity would involve the text in a profound and obvious contradiction at the level of its narrative syntax, which would of course undermine its surface coherence. One might thus describe Denis's deviancy as licensed deviancy, one that still falls within the domain of the permissible in the *universe of discourse* of the text. On the other hand, the allegorisation of the female subject presents goodness as a non-contingent event, one that is inevitable. Here, female goodness is depicted as the norm rather than as an accident, which reveals a narrative device that closes off female autonomy even as a theoretical possibility. It is a refusal to countenance female revolt, a denial in conceiving of it, a silence that forestalls the radical potential of female subjectivity by laying in its very structure the absence of a capacity for deviating from the socially constructed feminine ideal. Here the feminine gender ideal is presented as non-contradictory and unitary, the timeless embodiment of moral probity. Thus whereas the male subject is licensed to dissent, the female subject is solely expected to conform. The choice of the allegorical mode of discourse pointedly testifies to the tendentious nature of the text as well as forcing us to reflect on the whole question of ethical and moral cross-cultural transmission and reception. The most influential source of allegorical literature in Africa, particularly in Malawi is John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, which was translated into the local languages as early as 1894 and which was required reading in school during the colonial period.¹² Another source might be oral literature, in particular folktales which utilise allegorical structures of varying complexity in the thematisation of moral and ethical beliefs. The choice of

the allegorical mode places the issue of gender identity into a moral and ethical framework, but in a such a way that the attribution of an essential goodness to a female subject and a contingent evil propensity to the male subject serve to coopt the female subjectivity into acquiescing with dominant gender ideology whilst showing that, despite occasional moments of stress, patriarchal power is invincible.

The essentialisation of an eternal female probity also reveals the structural dependency of male hegemony on the very supplement which it wishes to exclude. Much as the father does not wish, in conformity with tradition, to include his daughter in his vision of a future based on the patriarchal control of the means of production, the crisis within the circuit of patrilineal transfer of power forces him into a position where the assumed moral worth of the cause he is championing overrides the need to conform to the patriarchal ideals of female exclusion. When the father realises the son can no longer be relied upon to fulfil a function allotted to him within traditional patriarchy, he becomes more accepting of female participation in the family project. The father has to negotiate tactfully between the tradition and expediency. His daughter Hope candidly reminds him of the kind of ideological revision he needs to perform:

'I can start that farm. I am earning as much as Denis.'
'I know you are. But you will be marrying William shortly; and your income will be subject to his authority.'

The girl told her father just like that, 'There is no longer any William for me.... I am going to find another man. And he is going be a man who will most probably be a graduate in Agriculture as well. But then there is something we have to settle first. Are you flexible enough to allow a son-in-law to realise that dream for you?'

Her father was going to say something else when he checked himself and said, 'Maybe I will have to take a look at the son-in-law first.' (pp. 102-103)

Within the gendered family space, the daughter comes to be the means through which the patriarchal dream of the father gets realised. At one level, and one that conforms to the ideological intentionality of the text, the contrast between Hope and Denis in relation to the authority of the father is that between an obedient and a disobedient child. In this regard disobedience is shown to destroy the family good whereas obedience is depicted as leading to family harmony. Seen in this light, the objective of the narrative becomes a defence of the family against the threat of the modern culture whose emphasis on individual choice does not chime well with the ethos of parental authoritarianism characteristic of the traditional mode of parenting. However, when the opposing responses to the father's request are seen in terms of the factor of gender, it immediately becomes clear that the construction of the subjectivities of the two characters is not solely a function of an argument for filial obedience. Symbolically, when Hope offers to help the father, she transfers herself from her gendered space into that evacuated by her brother Denis. In other words, she becomes the substitute son. Her ability to play a 'masculine' role is predicated on her partial access to economic power. This form of access allows Hope a certain autonomy from economic dependency on men as in the case of Denis's girlfriend and his wife. The other women are poorly paid and have to depend on their boyfriends for money. Indeed, the 'masculine' qualities of Hope are frequently mentioned in the novel:

She was a good driver. So good, in fact, that many in Blantyre had accused her of driving like a man. Whatever that meant. (p. 62)

'They had only gone two kilometres when the man (Ned, the boyfriend) remarked, 'Why, you drive just like a man, Hope....'

'How are women supposed to drive their cars?.....'

'It is not easy to say. I guess it is that women drive

their cars less assumingly than their men counterparts.'
(p. 174)

The use of an autonomous female subject as an agent of a masculine project raises a number of questions. To begin with, one has to ask why a narrative that is committed to the ideal of the security of patriarchy, should install an autonomous subject as the means of production and reproduction of its ideological trajectory? On closer analysis it would seem that we are dealing here with a form of *functional autonomy*, one which is predetermined and circumscribed by the ideological designs of the narrative in such a way that while the subject enjoys certain freedoms at a micro-level her subject position in the final analysis is marshalled in support of macro-level features of the very discourse of which she is autonomous at a micro-level. In other words, the form of autonomous subjectivity that Hope represents contains within its very structure the possibility of its oppression. It is in this sense that we can interpret the relationship between Hope and the gender ideology of the fictional universe of the text as involving an extremely subtle case of ideological interpellation.

There is a related issue which needs addressing: why choose a female character, and not a male character as a substitute to an eldest son? It could be argued that the transfer from one gender *paradigmatic* category to another is not, as it would appear to be the case, a function of the need to indicate the dispensability of the son as the automatic conduit of patriarchal tradition, but rather part of a whole range of punitive measures taken against the male who dares depart from the law of the father. It would seem that female participation in the implementation of the future is not offered as a matter of expressing the capacity of women to undertake such an enterprise but as a

way of demonstrating the negative consequences of the son's abdication of his masculine responsibility, for the thing that father says he dreads most at the beginning of the story, the transfer of decision-making from the family to Hope's husband, does happen. The involvement of Ned Segula, Hope's husband in the father's project further indicates the limited nature of the form of autonomous subjectivity that Hope is allowed in the text. The thematised project needs a partially autonomous subject as an efficient device for elaborating itself. This is amply shown by the fact that being an independent woman Hope can exercise greater choice as to whom she marries than the dependent women we encounter in the novel such as Denis's wife who has to leave the man she really loves in order to marry Denis, a man who can provide for her. Hope abandons her boyfriend William who is a lecturer in Mathematics at Chancellor College for Ned Segula because the latter is compatible with her father's vision of the future.

Nevertheless, in the very exercise of the choice of a marriage partner, the interpellation of the dominant gender ideology is visibly at work. Once she has brought home the suitable husband, she ceases to be an autonomous subject since the major decisions about the farm are made by the father and Ned. Ned as an agricultural services manager with one of the banks in Malawi has access to the most generous credit facilities which he uses to finance the farm. In essence Hope's gender has been used to bring the much needed capital into the family. At this point whatever modicum of autonomy she has been given is erased and the fact that she is constructed to repair a crisis within patriarchy is foregrounded. She is merely a form of subjectivity that is used by dominant ideology in a range of positions at each of which she lives, in varying degrees of consciousness, the imaginary condition of her subjection. Bringing in Ned also serves to reveal the anxiety of the text over female

autonomy. If Hope were to be allowed to undertake the project on her own the text would be sanctioning female autonomy, which is against its central objective, that of calling upon all Malawian men to return to the land. It is in the light of this that the father's fear of dependency on 'foreign' males which he expresses to the son is glossed over when Denis refuses to participate in the project. The argument seems to be that so long as the project is run by a man, even if he is an outsider, it is better than letting Hope, a woman, do it on her own. It is here that the unequal relations of gender underpinning the father's project become most obvious. In other words, dominant gender ideology makes concessions to the female subject when she is indispensable to the realisation of its macro-ideological needs. A good example of this is the participation of women in Britain during the Second World War in jobs traditionally reserved for men and their subsequent withdrawal from such jobs with the end of the war. It is this principle of *strategic inclusion and exclusion* that seems to operate in *Why Son, Why*.

In a nutshell, underlying Hope's subject position within the gender discursive formation of the text there is a complex mechanism of ideological interpellation. The narrative needs an autonomous and confident female subject in order to provide an alternative to its version of abnormal masculine subjectivity embodied by Denis; however, such a female subject must be divested of any radical capacity, so that she does not undermine the patriarchal ideals within which it is enclosed. One way of ensuring the success of such an ideological strategy, is to render the female subject the means through which the prioritised ideal male subjectivity assumes control of the project that has been abandoned by the abnormal masculine subject, Denis. In this way, the autonomy of the female subject is dissolved into an alignment with the thematised intentionality of the text and consequently is shorn of its

radical threat to the unitary discourse of unequal relations of gender. Beneath all this is an argument clearly but cleverly predicated on an essentialist view of gender difference. By virtue of being a woman Hope cannot succeed; she needs the right kind of man. The very manner in which she proceeds to secure a husband who will implement her father's dream is revealing of the instrumentalist view of human relations being articulated by the text: the marriage between Hope and Ned is to all intents and purposes the means of reproduction of the father's economic vision. In short then, Hope's gendered subjectivity becomes just another terrain of the production, reproduction, and transmission of a blatant patriarchal capitalism.

However, in the text's attempt to use the daughter as the means of production and reproduction of the father's patriarchal project a narrative excess spills over the intended ideological closure by producing something that undermines precisely those patrilineal ideals that the text is at pains to protect. On the surface level, the very fact that a project which is purportedly masculine has to depend on a woman for its success reveals the indispensability of women in the realisation of a male-defined future as it suggests male dependency on female agency. On a deeper level, given the fact that the cultural area in which the novel is set is predominantly matrilineal and therefore the father's patrilineal project which emphasises the principle of primogeniture is principally an articulation of a 'foreign' discourse of marriage, family and parent-child relationship, the fact that by the end of the novel both the father and the son, the representative of patrilineal lineage, are dead, leaving Ned the in-law and an outsider and the three women, Hope, the mother, and Denis's wife in charge, suggests the triumph of the discourse of marriage, family, and parent-child relationship that is indigenous to the area. It is fascinating that the father's articulation of a patrilineal past, which is

historically inaccurate, is defeated by the empirically operational mode, the matrilineal descent system. Secondly, the very fact that a project that is supposed to provide for the security of the family leads to two deaths in the family, the very opposite of its *raison d'être* which is self-preservation, suggests that contrary to what the text sets out to prove, wealth in itself is not a guarantor of the future. Thus, though at the end of the novel, we are told that the father died a happy man and that an engraving of a bird's eye view of the farm is put on his tombstone, one cannot help but conclude that the voice of optimism at the end of the novel is rather contrived.

It ^{is} not only the patriarchal dream of the father that is erased at the end of the novel, but also and significantly his notion of autonomy from the *Other*. The reason the farm does so well at the end of the novel is because it receives international capital through the Malawi government. The involvement of the government and UNDP further illustrates the impossibility of the kind of absolute autonomy that underlies the father's vision. Such a project, as a dependent entity, will be subject to the vagaries of the changing national and international conditions.

It may thus be concluded that Kalitera's *Why Son, Why* primarily seeks to defend a patriarchal order within which the gendered parent-child relationship is presented essentially as a site of the production of a future within which relations of gender support male hegemony. However, its use of the device of flexible positionality produces an ideological excess which points to male dependency on female power, and on the cultural *Other* from whom the father wishes to be culturally autonomous. On the whole, in its emphasis on an essentialist view of gender difference and in its appropriation of gender difference for a project that essentially excludes women, the text represents that ideological position in African popular literature that has not yet made

an epistemological break with dominant gender ideology. The same is true of the text which I examine below.

In a nutshell then, the two novels I have considered in the preceding section demonstrate a marked preference for the gendering of children in accordance with a gender ideology which presents unequal relations of gender as natural and unproblematic. In both of them female subjectivity is seen largely in terms of the needs of the discourse of patriarchy. For an attempt to go beyond gender status quo, we must turn to the novels I discuss below.

EQUIVOCATION AS AN IDEOLOGICAL ART: SAM ARYEETAY'S *HARVEST OF LOVE* AND WALIJE GONDWE'S *SECOND-HAND LOVE*

The sixty-two year old distinguished Ghanaian film maker and producer Sam Aryeetey brings to the genre of African romantic literature a density of thematic structuring which suggests that African popular literature is not simply the stuff that is hurriedly churned out by an anthropologically fascinating group of authors, an impression given by critics whose knowledge of African popular literature is limited to, or influenced, by Onitsha Market literature.¹² *Harvest of Love* is in many respects an ambitious attempt to bridge the gap between the 'serious' literature traditionally published by Heinemann and the outright popular literature published by authors such as David Maillu of Kenya. In its complexity of plot, of thematic construction and of characterization, as well as in its refreshing stylistic adventurousness, qualities normally associated with high literature, on the one hand, and in its abundant usage of a prose style characterised by an emotive lucidity and a sustained usage of suspense, typical of popular literature and film, on the

other, the novel displays a remarkable integration of literary devices from both high and low literature, one which points to a welcome attempt to move beyond the binary opposition underpinning the classification of literature into high and popular literature.

Nevertheless, the novel displays an ambiguous relationship to dominant gender ideology in Africa. By criticising the excesses of female initiation it demonstrates a willingness to problematise the question of African traditional culture which is sometimes, as in the case of Maillu's for *Mbatha and Rabeka* and Kalitera's *Why Father, Why, Mother, Why Mother* and *Why Son, Why*, used to underwrite unequal relations of gender. However, the novel's critique of traditional cultural practice vis-a-vis the discourse of gender does not go far enough as it is merely an attempt to make a general moral point regarding the inhumane aspects of female initiation rather than one which seeks to interrogate the underlying ideology of female sexuality and unequal relations of gender of which the institution of female initiation is but its articulated *ideologeme*.¹⁴

Harvest of Love interrogates the inhumane aspects of African traditional culture, by focussing on its cruel and tragic excesses which are themselves products of an attempt to protect itself from modernity and produce a continuity between the values of yester year and those of modern Ghana. The novel shows the possibility of combining the enriching and humane features of African tradition and those of the modern culture, as can be read from the representation of the two characters, Abena and Kwashie, who demonstrate a healthy and coherent integration of the values of the new culture and those of traditional Africa. Primarily, the text is critical of the initiation of women which involves the ritual killing of any girl found unchaste. Naki, the most beautiful girl in the village, in a moment of intense passion makes love to her

boyfriend with the consequence that when the *Dipo*, female initiation ceremony, begins she is pregnant. She is discovered and sentenced to death by the high priest in accordance with the sanctions laid down by the people of Essandu since time immemorial; however she is saved by the fact that her boyfriend Padi, who has promised to run away with her, disturbs the messengers of the high priest who are about to kill her. By a series of mishaps, the two lovers cannot find each other and both of them separately run to the city for succour. Naki is taken in by Kwashie and his wife, whereas Padi fends for himself doing odd jobs. Little do they know that they are both in the same city. They are almost reunited by Korleki, the woman who had wanted Padi so much that she never forgave Naki for snatching him away from her. When Naki and Padi meet in the presence of Korleki, Korleki tells Naki that she and Padi will get married and on hearing that Naki runs away. As Padi is trying to run after Naki to explain to her that Korleki is lying, Korleki holds him back. Padi pushes her violently and runs after Naki; Korleki shouts, 'thief' and the mob at the market pursues Padi and falls on him as he is about to catch up with Naki. Naki turns round to protect Padi, but somebody kicks her in the belly and she collapses. Padi recovers in hospital but Naki dies giving birth to a baby girl.

The Kwashies refuse Padi access to his daughter and consequently Padi, blinded by grief, is run over by a lorry. The daughter Abena is extremely intelligent and she is awarded a scholarship to study medicine in Britain. When she returns home to Ghana she is asked to help out with a cholera epidemic in the area from which her father and mother had come. When she visits the village, the high priest, who years before had condemned her mother to death, mobilises the villagers against inoculation. She courageously defies him by talking directly to the villagers rather than by going through him. She

saves many lives and everyone except the high priest is pleased with her work. When she visits, in the course of duty, the home of her grandparents, they refuse to see her because she reminds them of their daughter Naki. Indeed, many villagers are intrigued by her resemblance to Naki. When she returns to the city, she asks her foster mother about her biological parents and they reveal everything to her. She then decides to open a practice in Essandu, the village of her parents. Everyone is pleased to know that the doctor who has saved their lives is in fact one of them. She decides to go through the *Dipo* initiation rites and successfully, unlike her mother before her, completes them to the jubilation of her grandparents whose dishonour after their daughter's failure to pass the test of womanhood had left them grieving.

The text is clearly sympathetic with the position in which Naki finds herself. It questions the inflexibility of an institution which cannot distinguish between those who flout its rules wilfully and those who do so by accident such as Naki. The inflexibility of the belief system of Essandu is amply shown by the inexorable uncompassionate hand of justice mediated through and executed by the high priest. When it is discovered that Naki has broken the taboo of premarital chastity, the way the high priest and his acolytes go about implementing the sanctions is cold, callous and lacking in human sensitivity. It is clear that the high priest is more interested in reestablishing and preserving social order than in any consideration of the impact of a blind adherence to the system on those who like Naki have contravened the law by accident:

If the lone heart-rending, wailing voice had any effect on the assembly, the expressionless faces which gleamed in the light of the torches did not reflect this. They seemed to be taking their cue from the tall middle-aged High Priest standing motionless and formidable in his conical hat, his piercing eyes unblinking, reflecting the flickering flames of the torches, highlighting his

grim, compelling face..... If he did not react to the wailing of the grief-stricken mother, the High Priest persuaded himself, it was more from the force of habit than an insensitive nature. The survival of the community was his primary concern. (p. 47-48)¹⁵

Thus the preservation of the abstract entity, society, is prioritised over the happiness of individual members of the society. What the author is contesting here is the reification of the notion of society that produces an institutional tyranny which becomes an unchangeable and pitiless oppressor of those who inhabit and constitute it. He expresses doubt about the validity of a juridical system which does not take into account human frailty. Such rigidity of ideological practice recalls the Spanish Inquisition and the trials of men of science such as Galileo by a religious practice whose narrowminded execution of its rules negates the principles of charity and mercy which constitute an important part of Christianity. The same could be said about what has come to be known as the 'Rushdie affair', in which the sanctity of Islam is given as an overriding factor in the dispensation of justice.¹⁶ In such practices we encounter the fetishization of the law in as much as subordination to the law becomes an end in itself rather than a means to an end. At a deeper level the novel raises an important question regarding the relationship between the individual subject and what Althusser, in a broader theoretical framework, terms the *State Apparatuses*, that area of ideological interpellation to which dominant ideology resorts when its attempt to produce a submissive subject, one that identifies with it fails. It is an area in which counteridentification is not simply repressed but erased as a final acknowledgement of the fact that the humane face of dominant ideology which is often used as a subtle mechanism for ideological interpellation is a facade. Fundamentally then, Aryeetey wishes to show how certain humane qualities are lost in the process

of forcibly executing the indifferent rules of society. The strategy of interrogation takes the form of counterbalancing the rigid application of law with the principle of flexible consideration of personal circumstance, and exposing contradictions within the code of cultural practice itself and finally by positing the possibility of cultural synthesis as a way of allaying the anxiety of traditional society over the encroachment of the cultural *Other*.

The text prioritises the particular over the generalised application of traditional sanctions by criticising the custodians of tradition in Essandu for failing to take into account the specific reasons why Naki and Padi contravene the law of premarital chastity. The novel proceeds to explain in great detail the circumstances which impel the two lovers to break the taboo in order to put its case strongly:

Padi released his hold and Naki fell down, pulling him down with her. They continued struggling on the ground, laughing. Suddenly the laughing ceased and they stopped struggling.

Naki remembered that day. It happened only once. Her whole body was alive. She remembered lying on her back across Padi's chest as it heaved up and down, his eyes closed. It was the dry season and the tree under which they were lying was shedding some of its flowers. One fell on her. She picked it up and stared at it thoughtfully. She felt happy to be with Padi.... It all happened so fast he had no time to think of the consequences.... Spasms of pain rippled through his body at the realisation that the life of his loved one had been placed in jeopardy. (p.14-16)

Furthermore, it is shown that the two are in fact, despite what what they have done, committed to one of the most important aspects of tradition: Naki and Padi intend to get married. In a society where sexual intercourse is solely perceived in the context of marriage, the fact that two people who intend to get married in accordance with society's marriage practices accidentally break

the taboo of premarital chastity should be a sufficient mitigating factor in the judgement of their actions, according to the text's point of view. It is through the character of Padi that this particular perspective is rendered in the novel:

He loved Naki and did not such things happen only between two people who were in love and who had decided to live together as man and wife? He would make Naki his wife after the Dipo ceremony! (p. 16)

In all this, the text pleads that the two lovers have done what they have done in the heat of passion rather than in wilful disregard of the beliefs and mores of Essandu. In other words their act is not one that threatens and undermines the belief system of their culture.

On a stylistic level, the inclusion of intimate details of sexual intercourse in *Harvest of Love*, unlike in some novels by Maillu, for example the *Kommon Man*, is employed in the service of developing a particular aspect of the moral and ethical theme of the novel rather than solely functioning as an opportunity for titillating the reader, which goes to show that *Harvest of Love* aligns itself with traditional attitudes to public representations of sex. Moreover, such a strategy displays the author's ability to use narrative action in order to locate the rigid exponents of tradition such as the high priest and those pleading for flexibility such as Naki and Padi in a relation of binary opposition within which the latter are prioritised as the conflation of what Seymour Chatman would describe as narrative voice and ethical point of view.¹⁷ In this way the reader's sympathy is drawn towards the privileged ideological position, which shows that it is primarily through a text's point of view that the reader is interpellated as a subject of the dominant ideology of a given narrative.

Having provided the reader with the unavoidable circumstances which lead to the situation in which the two lovers find themselves, the novel resorts to presenting the reader with the personal integrity and social status of the two characters in order to demonstrate further that they are far from being the sort of threat that the high priest as the custodian of Essandu belief has in mind. Their moral standing is conceptualised in terms of their having adequately occupied their respective gender spaces. To begin with, Naki is shown to have fulfilled all the other important criteria of Essandu femininity:

But not all those who were guilty of a breach of the taboo could be accused of wanton behaviour or disrespect for tradition.

Naki was one such girl. It was not surprising then that there was near consternation when word that she had broken the taboo went round the village. (p. 4)... She had grown into a tall, slim girl with calm, intelligent, brown eyes which sparkled when she was happy. Her smile revealed strong, white teeth kept in good condition with a chewing stick which could be seen dangling from the corner of her mouth every morning as she went to the village well to draw water. Her smooth, velvety black skin exuding good health attracted much comment. Naki, however, politely turned down all offers of marriage with a gentle smile which acted as a balm on wounded hearts, making her even more popular with the young men. This popularity did not go to her head. She continued to be well-behaved at home, helping her mother with her household duties and learning from her the art of pot-making. (p. 5)

In other words, the authorial protest is directed towards a reading of female subjectivity that elides the equally important ingredients of the female ideal operating in the Essandu social formation; it is a mordant critique against a partial reading of gendered subjectivity. If physical beauty and good manners and being well domesticated are prized, punishing someone who has actually fulfilled all these conditions for a moral failing committed unintentionally seems to be despicable according to the ethical perspective of the text. In

addition, the text shows the extent to which Naki has exercised self-control given that her physical beauty and moral integrity make her an object of the attentions of many a young man in Essandu. In fact, Naki is more than an ideal of feminine beauty and moral probity, she has become the very pride of Essandu: the reflection of the cherished aesthetic and moral ideals of Essandu, the physical embodiment of its collective soul. Similarly, her boyfriend Padi is depicted as the epitome of the masculine ideal of Essandu; it is said of him:

Padi, the twenty-three year old son of Afotey and Amaki, stood out among the other young men in the village. Well-built and reasonably good-looking he made a fetish of physical fitness. When he was not sitting behind the loom in his father's house weaving intricate designs, he would be seen chopping firewood for the neighbours to tone up his muscles or trotting round the village square watched by wide-eyed children, who, encouraged by him, would scamper after him in delirious ecstasy.

When later, with rivulets of sweat pouring down his body, he sat on a piece of tree trunk, polished and shiny from frequent use as a seat, to recover his breath, the young girls would crowd round him in admiration and offer him succulent oranges to soothe his parched throat. Padi was determined to win the next *Jama* contest which required both skill and physical fitness, and the girls encouraged him. He joked and laughed with them without showing interest in any of them. (p. 6)

Like Naki, Padi exercises a great deal of self control in his relationship with members of the opposite sex; in particular towards a woman whom the text sets up as a contrast to Naki:

On such occasions, Korleki, short, plump, full-bosomed and delighting in attracting attention to herself, would wipe off the beads of sweat from Padi's face with the loose end of a piece of cloth usually tied round her waist, or would belch out blasts of raucous laughter, throwing herself on Padi's lap. Still laughing uncontrollably, she would hug him and press against his clammy body until he pushed her off. Korleki would then

pout her lips, feigning anger, and the girls would tease and laugh at her. (p. 6)

Nevertheless, the attempt to produce conforming subjects who are simultaneously employed as a vehicle for interrogating dominant cultural practice finds itself taking on board the essentialist forms of differentiation and privileging within and between the dichotomous gendered space typical of the very object of criticism.

Though the attack directed against the inflexibility of tradition comes through clearly, the ground which supports the critique is revealed as an ethical ideology that still upholds the values of exclusion and difference that it abhors. Like most romantic fiction, *Harvest of Love* is a story about the exceptional, it is not a presentation of the typical. In this regard, it is a plea for exceptionality as an extenuating circumstance. Little wonder, therefore, that the text unproblematically accepts the valorisation of the values of physical beauty and masculine valour and only contests their exclusion from the central defining space in the structure of what is considered the ideal gendered subject. Looked at from this perspective, it becomes obvious that the contestation of discourses going on here is one about the hierarchisation of the range of values which constitute gendered ideality. The issue of ethical and aesthetic valorisation is visibly displayed in the overall thematisation of the binary opposition between the 'beautiful' and the 'ugly', in a conceptual framework where the 'good' and the 'beautiful', on the one hand and the 'evil' and the 'ugly', on the other are perceived as synonymous. The demonisation of the character of Korleki, the plump and ugly, and the delicate and sympathetic portrayal of the beautiful Naki amply illustrate the extent to which the humanistic project of the text is politically

aligned with the dominant gender ideology of the social formation in question.

The contrast between the two women further elaborates the binary opposition between recommended and interdicted femininity. Korleki's forwardness is represented as the right target of the moral wrath of Essandu rather than the reticent and self-controlled female subjectivity of Naki. When she later goes to the city in search of a scholar who can marry her, Korleki sleeps indiscriminately with anybody who professes to be a scholar. On the other hand, Naki's stay in the city is exemplary, leading the Kwashies, who have taken her in, to wonder at how a village girl such as Naki could be so well mannered and behaved.¹⁰ In this context, it would appear that though Korleki has passed the ritualised test of chastity, she is more corrupt than Naki who, though a failure in terms of the socially constructed test, is nevertheless monogamous in her relationship with men. What is being suggested here by the text, which is an essentialist and humanist reading of human subjectivity, is that the initiation ceremony does not measure one's innate propensity towards breaking the taboo of chastity, but rather the mere fact of being chaste at the time of the ceremony. It might be argued that the text is arguing against the mechanics of implementation rather than the axiomatic basis upon which the ideal of chastity is predicated, that which has been frequently referred to by Feminists as the binary opposition between the 'whore' and the 'madonna'. In this way, the text unconsciously supports the very dichotomy regarding forms of female subjectivity that is used by the high priest and the whole establishment of Essandu to underwrite its cruel attitude to those who do not conform to the taboo of premarital chastity and its gender ideal.

Furthermore, Korleki's subjectivity becomes the means by which the suffering of the two lovers is rendered as a product of a specific constellation of power relations. Korleki becomes part of those contingent

conditions in the text within which the abstract laws of tradition are refracted by human agency. She is the agent of the forces of evil which destroy the goodness embodied by Naki and Padi. For example, it is Korleki's jealousy over the relationship between Naki and Padi which facilitates the revelation of the fact that Naki is pregnant:

Stretching her short, plump body to its full height, her ample bosom stuck forward defiantly, she peered into Naki's face, breaking into a slow, knowing smile. Naki thought the pose rather funny, and she started laughing. But when Korleki spoke, there was no laughter in her voice; she sounded malicious.

'I saw it. You were trembling when your mother took your hand. You could not even look into your own mother's face. What is the queen-mother of Essandu afraid of?' Korleki's smile was not a happy smile. As Naki stared with surprise at the girl she had regarded as her best friend for many years, she saw a transformation taking place. She saw Korleki's eyes narrow into slits, her nose dilate, and the mobile and cheerful face she had known so well, and liked, slowly turn into a hideous mask. (p. 28-29)

She is also the one who puts a great deal of psychological pressure on Naki as the latter is about to sit on the sacred rock in the sacred grove which is the final proof of chastity. Unable to bear the taunts from Korleki who is just behind her, Naki loses her composure and fails to climb the rock and runs back home in disgrace. Furthermore, *KORLEKI* thoughtless and determinedly brutal intervention in the relationship between Padi and Naki when they are in the city engenders the events which lead to Naki's death and, indirectly, to that of Padi:

He looked at the pregnant girl, not believing his eyes, transfixed, stupefied. It is true. It is true. She is alive. It is Naki in the flesh. They were both speechless as they hugged each other, breathless, excited. It was true; they had found each other;

happiness, love. They laughed and tears flowed down their cheeks, tears of joy.

Padi had forgotten Korleki who was watching with eyes burning with hate and face contorted with jealousy. She suddenly tore at them, pulling them apart, standing in between them, her back turned to Naki who had only just seen her.

'I am sorry but you're mine now mine,' she told Padi, pushing him away from Naki. 'She's taboo and you'll have to forget about her.'

'Believe me Naki, this has nothing to do with me,' Padi said brokenly, pushing Korleki aside.

'So what Korleki said was true.' Naki did not wait for an explanation. She had waited too long and suffered too much to want to endure any more. If this was the way it all had to end then so be it. She was soon lost in the crowd. (p. 99-100)

When Padi extricates himself from Korleki's hold to go and explain to Naki that Korleki is lying, Korleki shouts, 'thief' and the shoppers at the market fall on him and beat him up badly. Naki turns round to protect him but someone kicks her in the belly and she faints. Both of them are taken to hospital where Padi recovers, but Naki dies giving birth to a child. Since Naki has not introduced Padi to her guardians, the Kwashies, they refuse to let him have his daughter. Many years later, when he visits the girl, she runs away from him. Out of grief, he gets extremely drunk and a lorry runs over him as he is on his way home. In other words, the novel tries to show that the events which lead to the tragic end of the two lovers, to a large extent, are mediated by relations of power which have little to do with the preservation of traditional Essandu culture.

The grounding of the narrative *motivation*^{1*} on human agency is meant to show that the way tradition is interpreted and executed is as much a function of the nature of the beliefs themselves as of the temperament and prejudices of the custodians and other members of society who use the sanctions of traditional culture in order to resolve personal power conflicts between them

and those who are deemed to have broken the law. Such thoughts are not far from Padi's mind as he is eavesdropping on the ceremony of banishment and death being administered to Naki:

The escorts stopped. They spoke to each other in undertones and it was obvious they were not going further. Padi was convinced they had killed Naki by the furtive way they surveyed their surroundings. He studied the shadowy human forms and it did not take him long to recognise one of them: the former champion of the village he had defeated at the Jama contest. He had not taken his defeat with good grace and Padi had every reason to suspect that the former champion would take advantage of the situation to dispatch Naki quickly to satisfy his deflated ego. (p. 52) (My emphasis)

Thus Naki becomes a site for the displaced masculine competition between Padi and the former champion: she becomes the means through which the endless definition and redefinition of masculine difference is articulated. From the perspective of the conflict between Padi and the former champion, one can discern the complex interplay between the cultural practice and gender discourse. One thing that this suggests is that secular forms of power such as Padi possesses by virtue of being the village masculine hero ultimately are secondary to their religious counterpart.

This is demonstrated by the overall prioritisation of priestly power over the institutionalised political form. Essandu has a dual power structure within which power is shared between the chief and the high priest, but:

Even though the chief presided on all festive occasions and was regarded as the custodians of the land, it was the High Priest who wielded real power. He was the representative of the gods on earth and it was he, therefore, who communed with them and interceded on behalf of the living through libation. (p. 3)

It can be argued that the power relations between the high priest and the chief may have a lot to do with the priest's dogmatic interpretation of religious cultural practice, the sole basis of his power. In this context, the suffering incurred by Padi and Naki can be seen as a consequence of contingent factors, central to which is the distortion of tradition through concrete power relations in which both the characters and those who victimise them are implicated. It is this argument which underlies the cultural solution proposed by the text.

It would be unfair to recount the ideological trajectory of the text simply in terms of the operation of the binary opposition between good and evil, masculinity and femininity; in Aryeetey's complex vision the possibility of synthesis is very much alive. If investing men, such as Kwashie and Padi, with qualities usually reserved for women, being compassionate and caring, provides an instance of degendering, that is, an attempt to found a gender subjectivity outside and beyond the existing relations of difference, then the depiction of Abena, Naki's daughter, becomes the means by which the cultural dichotomy between modernity and tradition is transcended. Abena is a representation of a syncretic African personality, one which combines the ingredients of African tradition and those of the west into what the text considers a happy blend. When the identity of her parents and their origin are reluctantly divulged to her by her step-mother Kuele, Abena goes back to her village and sets up a medical practice. Contrary to all expectation, she undergoes the *Dipo* ceremony, and comes out a woman. She succeeds where her mother has failed, thereby proving that despite staying for many years in Britain studying and living in one of the largest Ghanaian cities, she has maintained her chastity. It might be equally said that Abena's participation identification with the female subjectivity of her mother's culture rehabilitates the latter's soul into

Essandu cultural life, thereby exonerating Naki from eternal guilt. More than this, in the context of the moral and ethical framework of the novel, the fact that Naki's daughter becomes the means by which the troubled relationship between tradition and the city gets resolved, through her initiation as well as through the fact that she is the one who saves the village from the cholera epidemic, illustrates the biblical saying that, 'The stone that the builders threw away became the cornerstone.' Through Abena, what the high priest conceives of as the worst threat to the culture of his people is domesticated. However, the process of cultural synthesis is not without its own consequences for the high priest: he must relinquish those aspects of tradition which work against his own people. Thus the confrontation between modern medicine and traditional medicine over the issue of cholera is graphically presented in favour of the former. When one of his own messengers collapses while the high priest is bandying words with Abena, the efficacy of modern medicine is amply proven, with a touch of melodrama, when the messenger gets better as fast as he collapses.

It needs to be emphasised that allocation of the responsibility of reconciling the binary opposition between tradition and modernity to a female subject shows the extent to which the novel attributes the capacity of radical agency to the female subject. The respect for radical female subjectivity can also be noted in the fact that Abena, unlike her mother, is given the choice of whether or not to participate in the *Dipo* rites, which suggests that in the new dispensation participation in the values of traditional culture has got to be a function of an individual's choice rather than of the collective coercion under which Abena's mother has lived. However, the very means by which the narrative exposes the unnecessary ruthlessness of the system and works out the exoneration of Naki, can be seen as an ideological displacement of the most

salient issue in the novel: the economy of gender. Bringing Abena to take up her late mother's place within the culture of Essandu more than abundantly lays bare the privileged sexual politics of the novel. Its final proof of cultural integration is female identification with a form of gender ideology which is predicated on the control, regulation and surveillance of female sexuality.

The author's contradictory attitude to women and to culture is symptomatic of a moral vision that lacks any profound grasp of the power relations which constitute given cultures. The conception of traditional African culture as a transhistorical phenomenon, outside concrete relations of domination and submission, inevitably leads to a moral vision which is contradicted even on its own terms. This is demonstrably obvious in the way the text colludes with the dominant gender ideology in its construction of masculine plenitude. It is noticeable that beyond physical prowess and self-control the demands placed on the male members of this society are not as exacting as those imposed on their female counterparts. The rule of premarital chastity solely applies to women. One can thus deduce that in Essandu culture the female body becomes central to the society's sexuality and the target of mechanisms of control and regulation, underlying which is an ideology which conceives of female sexuality as intrinsically transgressive. This might explain the lack of elaborate rituals of male initiation in the culture of Essandu. While male socialisation is solely a matter of day-to-day apprenticeship and personal choice as is evident from the example of the athletic Padi, female socialisation is formally institutionalised and inscribed in the juridical and religious discourses of the culture: the high priest's prominence significantly comes to the fore during female initiation. Evidently, the unequal relations of gender in this society are inscribed in the

differential location of male and female sexuality within the overall system of beliefs. Consequently, though the breaking of the premarital chastity taboo involves both Padi and Naki, it is the latter who bears the full brunt of moral sanctions. Padi's suffering is essentially a matter of choice: it is because of his love for Naki that he suffers rather as result of socially prescribed sanctions.

To sum up, the central problem in the novel seems to be the gendering of female subjects, a process that is inscribed in elaborate juridical and religious rituals. The thematisation of the story is clearly against the excesses of the system, but on the whole, in its fetishization of ritualised female gendering we encounter a humanistic project which fails to take its critique beyond the underlying unequal relations of gender. As in the novels of Kalitera and indeed those of Maillu, in Aryeetey's *Harvest of Love*, we encounter a partial critique of dominant gender ideology in Africa simply because of a refusal to problematise the whole question of traditional African culture.

If Aryeetey's *Harvest of Love* shares in the valorization of the physical appearance of female subjects typical of its fictive social formation, in Waliye Gondwe's novel *Second-hand Love* there is clearly a difference of opinion between the thematic project and the fictive social formation. In this novel the elevation of physical beauty to a feminine ideal within Tumbuka gender practice is depicted as having negative consequences for a female subject who falls outside the ideal. Feminine deficiency is shown to exclude the protagonist from the equally valorized gender relations of romance and marriage, and the failure to participate fully in such relations further alienates the heroine from the society and its mores. In the end, though the heroine experiences the joy of surrogate motherhood, the lack of children of

her own and the constant contrast society makes between her and her beautiful sister, Chimika, lead her to commit suicide. Thus, contrary to Aryeetey's project which is predicated on an uncritical acceptance of the conflation of beauty and ideal femininity, here such an attitude is criticised and shown to be essentially inhuman. The novel conducts its critique of dominant gender ideology by examining the process of gendering within the extended family and by showing how the differential signification of beauty and ugliness determine the lives of the two principal characters.

The transformation of the sexual subject into a female subject is primarily produced by the interpellation of young female subjects by older male members of the community. Significantly, it is the father who drives home the fact that at the level of biological make-up, Masozi signifies a lack of female plenitude; it is her father who primarily reinforces Masozi's notion that her lack of approved physical attributes is a gender deficit:

'Come, then, Masozi. Come and greet me. Poor child of mine, so ugly!'

These immortal words were the first that I heard my father say to me in front of the scores of people who could possibly have been alive at that time.... I now wonder if during those years he had prayed intensively that when he got back home I would have become prettier - pretty, I should say. Hard Luck dear father... If I had ever been in any doubt before about my physical appearance that remark, by the man whom I still hold fifty percent responsible for it, would have dispelled the illusion altogether. (p. 1-2)

Thus the parent-child relationship is gendered right from the start. The father becomes the means by which the daughter comes face to face with the broader and differential cathectation of beauty and ugliness. The father's worry is premised on an instrumentalist view of femininity. In this particular social formation, a daughter is solely seen in terms of the prospects of

marriage. Through the institution of *Lobola*, bride price, beautiful daughters are more likely to bring in wealth than ugly ones. Later in the novel when Masozi has reached nubility, the father encourages her to get married by proxy to a man she has never seen and will not be seeing for a long time simply because the father is concerned that his daughter has been an old maid for a long time. It would appear that having daughters who are old maids or those who are divorced in one's house or village is a great source of embarrassment for the father, for example when Masozi's young sister, Chimika, is divorced the father is prepared to hand her back to a man who starved and battered her almost to death:

What was troubling my father was Chimika's reputation of being a 'has been' married. A broken marriage behind his daughter was something he never could have contemplated. (p. 47)

Considerations of personal prestige and economic value play an important part in the father's attitude to his daughters, among which having daughters whose chance of contracting marriage and staying in it is a cardinal one. The father then, represents the presence of the masculine seismography within the nuclear family and the conduit through which society at large reproduces in its daughters its gender values. He also foregrounds that complex intersection between gender ideology and the exchange of wealth among male members of Tumbuka society, within which women become important commodities of a subsistence economy. To a great extent, the most significant source of family revenue is obtained through bride price: the father has no other significant source of income apart from what he gets from the marriages of his daughters. In other words, the father's dissatisfaction with the physical appearance of his daughter Masozi has a lot to do with the fact that such negative endowments

reduce her value on the marriage market. In short, he is an agent of dominant gender ideology unlike the progressive parents we encounter in Helen Ovbiagele's *Forever Yours* who respect the autonomy of their children and who treat them as persons in their own right. The instrumentalist view of the father-daughter relationship is self-evident in the practice of arranged marriages to which the father subscribes. Worried that Masozi has been an old maid too long, the father arranges, behind her back, her marriage to the migrant worker Bravington:

My father and Bravington's father were good friends and it soon became known that before Mafela came to propose the two old men had been flirting with the idea of becoming related, *asewele*, that is, through their children getting married. So when the Khonjes sent their 'go-between' to negotiate the terms, it was only a formality. Everybody was happy, but none more so than my father. He suddenly started calling me by all sorts of endearing names. (p. 55)

The father's instantaneous change of attitude towards Masozi when he realises that she is capable of being married firmly points to the fact that the father-daughter relationship in the social formation represented in the *Second-hand Love* is merely a site for power relations of gendered subordination and domination which serve the masculine production of wealth.

The interpellation of Masozi's female subjectivity goes beyond the male members of her immediate family as shown by an incident when her grandmother sends her to get some tobacco from a certain old man. The old man, thinking that Masozi cannot hear him, tells his friend:

'That child is too ugly. She's quite frightening. She looks as if she is going to say, (and here he deepened his voice to demonstrate the full impact) "I am going to eat YOU!"' (p. 3-4)

It is not only the older members of the community who keep reminding Masozi of her plight, but her peers as well. The overall sense of being pathological in relation to the gender ideal of her social formation prepares Masozi for her most important rejection: the rejection she receives from the man who has married her by proxy, Bravington. When she reaches nubility, no man, contrary to existing gender practice, approaches her with a marriage proposal. The first and only marriage proposal she receives comes from Bravington, a migrant labourer in Zimbabwe. She marries him by proxy and moves to the man's village, but when she sends the man her photograph, he writes to his father that he does not want her and threatens to stay away from home if she is not kicked out of their village. He further says that he thought the woman they had organised for him was Chimika, Masozi's younger and beautiful sister. Masozi is hurt, but in a way she is not shocked because by this time she is well aware of the negative attitude people have towards her because of being ugly. She is however feeling guilty about leaving her father-in-law who is old and without anybody to look after him. She stays in the village. Her husband has an accident in Zimbabwe, which leaves him paralysed and he is therefore forced to come back home. She agrees to look after him, but the man is superlatively cantankerous: he insists on her wheeling him to drinking places and insults her continually. Since at this stage Masozi has turned to religion, she suffers his abuse patiently, believing she is doing God's work.

Masozi's story demonstrates how unprioritised female subjectivity can be forced to accept its lower status because of the knowledge of its condition. Put differently, the very knowledge of one's deficiency can become the means by which one's subordinate relations to dominant gender ideology can be perceived as natural, legitimate and as being beyond what constitutes the domain of that which can be interrogated. This state of affairs is further rationalised

through the discourse of religious self-sacrifice. Thus religion here becomes the means by which the experience of being oppressed is rarefied, displaced and turned into a saintly virtue whose reward is outside the contingent and historical. It may equally be argued that it is her belief in the correctness of institutional ideology that facilitates Masozi's spiritualisation of her concrete experience of oppression since the only way she thinks she can counter one form of institutional practice is by calling on the support of another. The failure of religion to solve her problem, suggests that institutionalised succour may in fact, in an intricate way, be supportive of the very discourses and practices one wishes to correct. Furthermore, the belief in the validity of institutional practice is shown to involve an elision of one's own capacity to engage in a practice which will undermine and transform one's condition of subjection. This can be described as a transference of the emancipatory task to another agency in the belief that the external *Other* is the sole means to ideological transformation. Recourse to otherness may also be a product of an awareness of oppression that lacks the necessary resources to transform itself into the labour of change. Thus Masozi's subjection is firmly placed within the binary opposition, outside/inside, a transcendence of which might entail the dissolution of the modes of cognitive categorization of her social formation, a task certainly far beyond the limited resources of the conforming subject that she is. An even more important lesson the example gives, is about how dominant ideology secretes itself in the very structures of knowledge about self-identity in order to erase the possibility of resistance and obtain acquiescence through the forestalling of the production of a counter knowledge. It is in the primary acceptance of the aesthetic values of her society that the heroine loses the possibility of ever questioning the relations of submission and subordination in which she is placed. The

reproduction of the dominant aesthetic values of the Tumbuka social formation is amply evident in the way the heroine refuses to contest the dominant aesthetic values of her society.

Like everybody else in her community, Masozi has come to accept that the difference between her and her sister, whatever else it might be, certainly has a lot to do with their differential relationship to the idea of the beautiful:

I think Nature had been on my sister's side since before her birth. Not that I ever begrudged her any of her good luck. In a way, especially as we both grew older, I was glad things had been arranged that way around. I adored my little sister - still do - and I'd have hated it if she had been the one to have had to endure the harassment and mental torment which I had gone through.
(p. 6)

Significantly, Masozi comes to accept the difference between her and the sister as an objective difference rooted in something called nature rather than seeing it as a socially and culturally specific convention. Having thus essentialised her own pathological identity and the sister's recommended one, Masozi undermines the very ground on which she could stand and oppose the fiction of her subjectivity. Nevertheless, behind Masozi's acceptance of her relation of opposition to what her sister represents there is the general discourse of identity which has been amply made available to her through the contrasting ways in which she and her sister are treated. Chimika as a beautiful girl is given a warm reception by everyone in the community including the father; for example, on the same occasion when he pronounces Masozi incurably ugly he does not conceal his love for Chimika:

On that occasion, then, my father's (un)welcoming words to me were in total contrast to the ga-ga spasms of delight he oozed out moments before, when he had taken my little sister Chimika to his bosom (p. 5-6)

Even when the girls go to meet boys all the boys want Chimika. However, Chimika's beautiful looks put tremendous pressure on her to get married. When she is about fifteen she falls in love with her teacher, much to the disgrace of the family. When the relationship breaks up, she marries a man by the name of Bakiri from Zomba. Bakiri is a lorry driver, but uses the lorry to ferry passengers and raise a lot of money. He becomes so rich that he buys his own Mercedes Benz car. Perhaps it is the car that sweeps Chimika off her feet. Despite her parents' efforts to dissuade her from marriage and encourage her to continue with school, Chimika marries Bakiri and goes to live with him in Zomba. However, Bakiri proves a monster of a husband. He beats her up and by the time Masozi visits her, she is nearly dying. He lets Masozi, rather reluctantly, take her home to Northern Malawi. The marriage ends there. Masozi's rescue of her is instantly declared a manly deed by all her relations:

Just at that moment I was declared a 'man, a REAL man,' they stressed, 'because you have the heart and courage of manhood.' This sudden change of gender began to bother me. As it was I didn't exactly cherish my single status. Now with a change of sex, what chance did I have? What man would have a mind to ask another man to marry him? (p. 46)

In the expression of care and love for her sister, characteristics which traditional gender ideology allots to the female subject, Masozi is seen as a man. Her rescue mission is represented by the community through the language of masculine redemption of the weaker sex. Perhaps here there is a suggestion that gender ideology is essentially binary in its interpretation of human action, since its language of semantic classification is limited to the economy of its dichotomous structure.

However, in contrast to the attitude of the men to Masozi's ugliness, the

women on the whole show a great deal of understanding towards her. When the father tells Masozi that she is ugly, the grandmother rebukes her son:

'There is no child who is ugly!' she proclaimed, with such authority that nobody could have dared to ignore it. There was a deafening silence, not even one baby dared to cough. 'Anyway, do people throw away those human beings who are ugly.' (p. 4)

Her mother assures her that:

'It is alright. We still love you very much!' (p. 8)

The gendered attitude to ugliness needs to be looked at closely. The women through whom often the values of femininity are reproduced counter-identify with the troping of femaleness which is divisive. I think the reason for this is that the women, unlike their male counterparts who operate with a conceptual distinction between gender and sex, articulate the overlap between sexual identity and female subjectivity. What is important for them is the fact that someone is clearly female on a biological level and thus they refuse to valorise on the level of gender. Such a strategy might equally be a function of the socially defined mothering role of womanhood which puts women in a position where they have to gather together the pieces broken by men. There is yet another puzzling feature of the discourse of difference and hierarchisation being articulated by the male members of the community. It would appear that the things they hate in women are the same qualities which they like in themselves. Illustratively, Masozi's ugliness is not that she is different from the father, but rather that she is similar to him:

The irony of all this was that I looked exactly like my father. Unfortunately for me, as I'm sure you appreciate, my father was a man. He was quite at

liberty to be as hideous looking as Quasimodo if he felt that way inclined, without incurring the wrath of anybody. Being a woman, I was not afforded the same privilege. My ugliness was a stigma worse than if I had committed a mortal sin. (p. 8)

The differential application of the concept of beauty to men and women, is shown to involve the absence of any specified attributes as desirable in men. The father's ugliness is a non-issue, but the daughter's is tragic. What does one make of this gendered binary difference? It would seem that in a social formation where it is men who propose to women rather than the reverse, immediate surface attraction, for men, is not as important as being able to have the courage to propose. In fact one need not even do it oneself as the example of Bravington who proposes to Masozi through his relations would indicate. Added to all this, the most important ingredient of masculinity seems to be the ability to provide for one's spouse. In essence, the fundamental difference between femininity and masculinity in the social formation in question is that whereas the former is a matter of natural endowment, the latter is socially acquired. I suspect that this strategy operates to produce what can be termed *female wastage*, which can then be recuperated to service the needs of the institution of polygamy. This is supported by the fact that when Masozi has been rejected by her husband Bravington for the reason that she is ugly, the latter's two brothers, at the instigation of their father, wish to take Chimika as a second wife. The flashy dancer Mafela whom Masozi had loved very much, but who would not look at her twice, is significantly one of the two brothers who wish to take her for a second wife. In brief then, at the heart of the masculine construction of a gap between gender and sex is inserted a sexual politics that ensures that there is always an abundance of women whose self-esteem has been so battered

that they see the offer of polygamy as a welcome form of redemption.

The demonisation of female ugliness is further evident in its being socially troped as a signification of untamed nature. In the games the children play, Masozi is often allotted the role of the hyena:

I was always cast as the hyena, with a high-pitched voice. I would roam outside the maize stalk huts, making appropriate female hyena noises as they supposedly slept inside, snuggling up to each other in fear. (p. 8)

This links female gendering with the whole question of institutional female domestication going on in the novel. Its most explicit practices are the female initiation ceremony and the constant examinations of chastity. As in Aryeetey's *Harvest of Love*, female sexuality in *Second-hand Love* is perceived as essentially transgressive and one which must be brought under control through a series of interdictions. It is here that the discourse of gender privileging based on the valorisation of physical beauty, or the capacity to be attractive, finds itself in trouble. Chimika who is beautiful and therefore a signification of the socially accepted ideal of femininity also represents a threat to the morality surrounding sexuality. Her beauty attracts numerous admirers, which is good, but the abundance of admirers, it is feared, might erode those forms of resistance and self-control which are mandatory in a female subject. Noticeably, when Chimika is having a relationship with her teacher, her relations panic and have her chastity checked by a group of women:

Chimika was summoned to Grandmother's house forthwith. There she was handed over to three other grannies, whose task it was to conduct the examination. I still can't put out of my head the piteous picture of Chimika being slow-marched to the back of the house and then disappearing off to the veranda, like a lamb being led to a slaughter house. Some grossly tense minutes later we saw the delegation approach our house. One of the

old ladies was clutching a covered bowl made of split bamboo against her chest. They walked leisurely, making shrieks of tongue wobbling, *kululutira* in Chitumbuka, which was a good sign. (p. 22)

In other words even the evidently ideal female subject is inscribed in the ambiguous and anxious intersection between what is acceptable and what is interdicted. In the way Chimika is treated in the above episode, we glimpse the very anxiety of Tumbuka gender ideology. It is never satisfied even with the physical quintessence and embodiment of its ideal of female subjectivity. Here we confront the general equation between beauty and loose morality. In other words, we are dealing here with what Terry Eagleton, in an altogether different context, refers to as a 'hermeneutics of suspicion',²⁰ a negation of the very notion of ideality and therefore an unwitting critique of its own absolutist notion of value. The critique of absolutist value is thematised through the question of androgyny.

If at the bottom of Masozi's misidentification with recommended female subjectivity is her ambiguous relationship to the dichotomous articulation of gendered space, her encounter with the concretely androgynous Agnes is a way of clarifying her problematic relationship with the dominant gender ideology as well as a way of confirming her feminine identity. In the presence of the androgynous female, the masculinization of Masozi is mitigated as merely a metaphor with a tenuous link with its referent. Thus a semantic gap is opened up between the biological and the social forms of female subjectivity, thereby revealing a vista where the gendered signified is arbitrarily assigned to the biological material base, specifically the sexual sign. It is the apprehension of this conceptual gap that explains the element of relief experienced by Masozi when in the presence of Agnes:

I would be very much a lesser person if I had missed the opportunity to be present during that part of her (Chimika's work as nurse) work. I shivered with fear as I looked at Agnes and saw how she was made. It was such a puzzle and made me think all over again about life in general and mine in particular. There was I, from as far back as I could remember, always being haunted by the stigma, if it was, of being unattractive. I had felt an abnormal person in some way. Now I had come across somebody who could not be classified as a man or as a woman. I kept asking myself the question: *Why?* I wondered how it was that Agnes had expected to achieve womanhood in the sense she had complained about. Could it be that she had never seen the other girls to compare with how she herself was different?... At twenty-five she must have known what other people, men and women were like. To me it seemed that she would never be fulfilled in the way she had been longing for.... What impressed me about Agnes were her extreme politeness and apparent happy nature despite her disability. That was why I thought that perhaps she had no idea about the female form, ridiculous as the suggestion was. (p. 117-118)

Agnes' lack of knowledge about the connection between sexual identity, that is the biological signifier, and female identity, that is the socially defined gender identity, further supports the Saussurian view that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary.²¹ In her *carnivalization* (in the Bakhtinian sense) of the privileged syntactic unity between the signifier and the signified, she represents a contestation of the unitary notion of sexuality as well as ^a ^{of} release a *heteroglossia* or plurality of sexuality.²²

Nevertheless, the very centre of the redeeming semantic labour foregrounds an absence of the cognitive apprehension of its own subversive signification. Agnes goes to see nurse Chimika because the promised signs of womanhood have not been fulfilled:

'My womanhood has not yet arrived.'... What Agnes meant was that she had not yet passed her puberty. Now this lady was twenty-five years old! Surely something could

have been done for her, if she had consulted anyone, and even if she herself had not, her parents would definitely have done so for her. (p. 116-117)

The very plurality of sexual identity she represents, within the limited hermeneutic resources of the existing dichotomous gender space, has been reduced and transposed to a polar end of a gendered binary opposition. Despite being hermaphroditic and having ambiguous secondary characteristics:

Body build? unmistakably masculine and heavily muscular.
Facial features? Distinctly ambiguous. Voice?
similarly confusing. Chest? Flat as a pancake. (p.
115)

Agnes has been socialised into a woman. In her insistence on full womanhood, we also encounter what Jonathan Dollimore has referred to as *transgressive mimesis*.²³ In Agnes, we encounter a gendered subject without the necessary and appropriate sexual infrastructure, and who insists on having those properties which are normally associated with the absent infrastructure. She is a signified in search of its absent signifier, in an almost Pirandellian style. It is in the apparent ridiculousness of the quest that the vulgarity and fiction of the unisexual basis of gender are brought home. In the face of the elided supplement which is implicit in the division of things into female and male, the conventionality and limited nature of gendered subjectivity is revealed as an elision of structural contradiction and a fetishization of the principle of *decidability* which, according to Jacques Derrida, is the hallmark of an occluding metaphysics.²⁴

However, the demystification of binary gender structure serves other teleological designs of the thematic project. It frames into the category of normality what is socially defined as abnormal femininity, that is the form of

femininity represented through the character of Masozi, thereby privileging it over the form of femininity which is biologically pathological such as the type represented by Agnes. The whole visit to the hospital, during which she is given the spectacle of Agnes's sexuality, is meant to lift her from the position of marginality to that of a member of the dominant female sexual form by making her see unredeemable forms of female subjectivity. The visit also provides the text with another form of femininity which is presented as morally less acceptable than Masozi's. At the hospital she learns about the woman who stole someone else's baby because she could not have children of her own. In contrast to this woman, Masozi, though without child for many years, is religious and therefore still morally acceptable. It is no surprise, therefore that the visit to the hospital makes Masozi feel good about herself:

I told Chimika as we walked back to her house that that was the most adventurous day I had ever had in my life. I would never forget it. Chimika expressed her doubts. 'Is it true?'... I swore that if there had been any day like that I couldn't remember it. The stories I had heard and the people I had seen had been a great source of inspiration to me. I even questioned my choice of vocation. Perhaps I should have been a nurse. True some of the cases were distressing, but it was a fascinating job, tiring as it was.

The visit, therefore, can be seen as a therapeutic voyage, which produces another binary structure within which Masozi occupies the valorized pole. From the vantage point of her new-found superior subject position, she can act the philanthropist. She adopts the orphaned children whose grandparents are too poor to look after them, and at last through the discourse of philanthropy she can enjoy the maternal bliss which her previous subject position has made impossible to acquire and experience:

I sincerely believe that if I could have got extra pleasure, happiness and life-fulfilment from my biological children if I had them, it would all have been of the abnormal sort. What I confess to is that I miss none of it. On top of it all, we now belong to three extremely happy families, and the twins, Mleza and Nyuma, are convinced that their mother is the most beautiful thing that ever graced the face of the planet.
(p. 131)

Thus philanthropic practice becomes the means by which the philanthropist's own gendered identity becomes confirmed and established, thereby suggesting, as in the case of George Supuni in Kalitera's novel, *Why Father, Why*, that perhaps in the philanthropic act both the giver and the receiver lose to and gain from one another. Even so, the greater benefactor seems to be the one who sets the process in motion for premeditated teleological ends.

However, even her new-found maternal bliss cannot erode years of internalised self-hatred: Masozi commits suicide at the end of the story, for the valorization of biological maternity is still privileged over the principle of adoption. In this regard, Masozi's surrogate motherhood is seen as unnatural and therefore an artificial mask, which in its very presence reveals what it hides. Masozi's suicide is an indictment of a society which places so much value on physical appearance whilst simultaneously presenting marriage and biological, as opposed to social, motherhood as the highest form of female identity. The power of dominant gender ideology is shown to supersede all attempts by the victimised subject Masozi, to ameliorate her situation. She tries education, but even that does not help her cope with the negative subject position in which she is cast; she then tries marriage, that too does not work. She then turns to the church where she is suspected of corrupting men and finally, surrogate motherhood itself proves insufficient.

Principally, Waliye Gondwe presents us with the tragic consequences of the unmitigated quest for identification with dominant gender ideology. The tragedy of Masozi is that she does not turn the knowledge of her oppression into a vision of gender egalitarianism. The same is true of the narrative itself which, to quote Jonathan Dollimore's statement about Elizabethan Drama, gives us 'not so much a vision of political freedom as a knowledge of political domination.'²⁵ It is in this sense that Waliye Gondwe's *Second-hand Love* can be seen as a partial critique of dominant gender ideology in Africa.

UNHAPPY GENDERING: OR BEYOND THE BINARY EQUATION IN KOLE OMOTOSO'S *SACRIFICE* AND BUCHI EMECHETA'S *NAIRA POWER*

The unhappy consequences of the paradigmatic opposition, masculine/feminine in Waliye Gondwe's *Second-hand Love* are intersected by the pragmatic needs of economic survival in Buchi Emecheta's *Naira Power*.²⁶ The thematisation of the problem of gender in this novel is very much reminiscent of Joseph Conrad's narrative framing in *Heart of Darkness* where the story is told as a yarn being given by Marlow to group of friends on a boat on the river Thames. The primary spatial location of the narrative is thus outside the setting of the story.²⁷ Similarly, in *Naira Power*, the story is told by Amina and her sister-in-law, Auntie Bintu as they are waiting for a thunderstorm to subside so that they can do some shopping for Auntie Bintu who is catching a flight to Britain later in the evening. The presentation of narrative as reported speech, just as in Joseph Conrad's novel, can benefit from a Bakhtinian analysis.²⁸

Bakhtin has argued, particularly in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* that literary language is essentially *dialogic*, that is to say that in its use of reported speech the novel, as a form, acknowledges the plurality of language which the dominant ideology, with a tendency towards a unitary language or *monoglossia*, elides in order to produce a linguistic and ideological reality that is shorn of the various class and regional and gender linguistic tensions.²⁹ It would be wrong to elevate this particular characteristic of the novel into some transhistorical law since clearly novels are differentially located in relation to the social-ideological structures of given social formations. Nevertheless, the acknowledgement of the operation of *dialogics* within the novelistic form facilitates the analysis of the novels such as *Naira Power* in which the *dialogical* frame of the narrative structure also introduces us to social heterogeneity of culture and gender.

Like Conrad's Marlow, Emecheta's Amina tells the story from the vantage point of an excluded space. In the case of Marlow, it is the boat and the sea which excludes the narrative act from terrestrial England and Africa, while at the same time within the narrative itself the excluded becomes the inescapable object of the story. In Amina's case, the excluded is the whole Nigerian socially gendered space within which the yarn she tells is essentially part of a forbidden discourse. As in the narrative space of *Heart of Darkness*, the absent and excluded is the principal subject of the story in *Naira Power*. To start with the very female discourse which constitutes the shared language between the narrator and the audience of the story is forbidden in the world outside the little car. One would not say the same is true of the language of empire and aristocracy within which Marlow's narrative and his moment of narration are inscribed. Be that as it may, the car, in *Naira Power*, represents that space or island where female dialogue is possible not as a premeditated

act, but rather as a function of contingency. Auntie Bintu and Amina, in the world outside the car, are suspicious of each other, because their shared language, which represents the Bakhtinian *carnavalesque* in relation to the dominant discourse of masculine domination, is marginalised and repressed. This is made abundantly clear when both Amina and Auntie Bintu spontaneously burst out laughing at Nerudeen's masculine vanity:

For that split second we forgot we were women. We forgot that we were meant to laugh only gently, in a subdued, feminine way. We simply gave vent to our feelings. Why not? There was no man around for us to act a role for. It lasted only for a split second, however, and my sister-in-law's laughter regressed into a mild, wobbly and uncertain smile. After all, Nerudeen was still my brother and only a husband to her. One could change one's husband as often as one wanted, one is stuck with one's relatives for life. And that kind of fact demands loyalty. I should be loyal to my brother and not indulge in laughing at him with his wife. (p. 6-7)

It is the way relations between women are mediated by their primary links with men which is presented as an occluding fact to their attempts at communicating with one another honestly and candidly. In this particular incident it is the sibling relationship between Auntie Bintu and Nerudeen and the marital relationship between the latter and Amina which circumscribe the degree to which the two women can be free with and trust each other. In other words, it is their gendered subject position that takes priority over the way they relate to one another. There is another principle that is at work here: there is obviously a relation of opposition based on blood relationship and a social relationship, within which the former is privileged over the latter. Blood therefore becomes thicker than female solidarity. The difference is embedded in the rhetorical representation in which the relationship between Amina and Auntie Bintu as sisters-in-law is couched:

I am a woman who has stayed more than half her life in the United Kingdom pursuing one set of studies and then another. I am in my prime, thirty-five or so, but I still call Amina my wife. In our society, a wife marries the family, not just the husband. That is a custom that still cuts across religion and across time. It was like that among Muslim families like ours. So, she even felt it an honour for me to refer to her as 'Amina my wife.' (p. 3)

Thus, in relation to Amina, Auntie Bintu is a man. She belongs with the rest of her male counterparts to that category of people on whose continued approval Amina's marital future depends. Consequently, the two women cannot relate to one another as woman to woman. The alienation of women from one another is an important theme in the novel. It is only in the little car in a thunderstorm that the possibility of communication between them opens up. Initially, Amina is circumspect as to what she says to Auntie Bintu until an incident takes place which forces them to talk openly. As they are parking their car, they see a mob dragging a thief to some corner near the market place and when Amina recognises the figure as that of a childhood sweetheart she had loved dearly, she uncontrollably lets out a cry and follows the mob to try and intervene, but she is never given the chance: within minutes the body of Ramonu is set on fire. A heavy thunderstorm starts and they can neither go into the market nor drive back home. Amina's sorrow is so strong that much as she wishes to hide from her sister-in-law why she is weeping over the death of a common criminal, she cannot help crying. Auntie Bintu intuitively realises that, whatever else the common criminal now burning may have been, he had been someone special in Amina's life. It is in the bond of empathy and sympathy that develops while Auntie Bintu tries to comfort her sister-in-law that the barrier between them slowly crumbles and they engage in a discourse beyond the gendered oppositional divide that mediates their relationship. It is this

discursive space, of which we catch a glimpse in the two women's laughter at Nerudeen, that opens up a chink in the gender ideology of the Nigerian social formation.

What is revealed when the barrier is removed is a story about the extent to which the relationships between men and women in Nigeria are superficial as a result of women's intelligent pragmatism and men's foolish and vain desire to be masculine. In the end, Ramonu's tragic ending can be seen as a symptom of a society that has chosen to live a lie where masculine power is predicated on the imaginary power which accrues from the possession of money, women and children. Of greater revelation is the fact that the Nigerian woman is far from being the fool she presents herself as. In the chapter titled, 'Woman to woman', Auntie Bintu is shocked by the discovery of an independent and analytical mind behind Amina's mask of stupidity:

I could not help smiling at Amina's familiarity. She was now beginning to trust me, that I could see. That Lagos woman's hypocrisy was melting away from her. I began to think I was starting to admire this side of her. Maybe the long story she was telling me was just a test. Maybe most of the hypocritical educated Nigerian women I had met so far were simply putting on a face, because they were not sure of their positions. Our mothers always told us that if you let your husband know all about you, you are asking for trouble.

'Amina,' I said all of a sudden, 'I am not a hypocrite you know. You do not have to pretend with me. I am your husband's sister, and in our custom you have to treat me with respect, as you know. But don't forget that I am a woman first. We are sisters, you know. I am educated, yes, but not a hypocrite. I can afford to be myself. I can look after myself economically and sexually. I don't have to pretend to be a nun or a mindless slave just because I bear a man's name, and am his wife. (p. 52)

The presence of a subterranean female power in the novel accords with the general critique of the view that power is necessarily visible and public: Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn in their lucid appraisal of gendered notions of power which characterise the work of Claude Levi-Strauss and other anthropologists argue that:

Levi-Strauss... considers women to be passive objects of male activity in the marital exchange, and disregards their frequent involvement as matchmakers and sharers in wealth or higher status. Ortner assumes that, if women are kept from the public realm in which men prevail, they are therefore necessarily inferior to men, and fails to question the priority assigned to public life or women's importance in less formal private roles... One anthropologist suggests that women and men may, in some cultures at least, hold two distinct models of the universe. Men, he claims, articulate the dominant structure in terms of their position within the world, while women, rendered inarticulate within this structure, form a 'muted group' whose model of the universe exist⁵at 'deeper levels'.³⁰

The model of power presented above is dangerously on the edge of slipping into the essentialist dichotomies which according to Feminists such as Helen Cixous characterise the male symbolic order: the representation of women as the hidden *Other* has connotations of something insidious and mysterious, and thus conforms with culture/nature opposition which Helen Cixous isolates as one of the elements in the phallogentric system.³¹ Thus, it is important to bear in mind what Foucault, in a broader statement on the relationship between power and sexuality, has said:

Power is everywhere: not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere... Power is not an institution, nor a structure, nor a possession. It is the name we give to a complex strategic situation in a given a society.³²

Through the aperture created by the plurality of the *dialogic* encounter between the two women, the repressed woman's point of view on the affairs of Nigeria erupts, not as something akin to the essentialist discourse of *l'écriture féminine*,³³ but as a language determined and conditioned by the historical and socio-economic relations in which woman's life in Nigeria is indelibly implicated. It is the plurality of discourses released that makes narrative possible in the story: the masked discourse of the first part of the narrative lacks an ideological point of view in its refusal to commit itself to any clear ideological statement about the relationship between the personal and the public in Nigeria in fear of upsetting the binary relation in which Auntie Bintu and Amina are antagonistically situated. The first part, preceding the quotation above, is a sanitised version of a personal story, one which conforms to the official language of gender, but the part that follows is a personal and human story about social and personal crisis, about the things that matter to a marginalised voice, and about a personal relationship to history and society. The interpretation afforded by the contrast between these two parts of the unfolding story suggests that the excessive use of the mechanism of *secondary revision*, is a function of *monoglossia*, a process by which the free play of language is given the strait jacket of official discourse. This is in consonance with Freud's identification of the mechanism of *secondary revision* with the whole apparatus of censorship and regulation.³⁴ It could further be argued that depersonalisation of narrative through generalisation, can be the beginning if not the symptom of subjection to a dominant discourse. However, in the case of Amina the obsessive use of the devices of censorship themselves, serve to draw attention to the existence of something other than the speech of the persona of officialdom, and as such presents itself as a call for help, a movement in the direction of liberation. It is this gesture above

the occluding voice of officialdom that leads Auntie Bintu to clear the way and tell Amina, 'Do not fear, I am also a woman.'

In the story that is told by the hitherto 'dumb' Amina, the source of her bifurcated subjectivity is laid bare for the education of Auntie Bintu who in her own way is marginal, not just as a woman, but as a deracinated Nigerian living in a different culture which has blunted her vision of the Nigerian woman. Thus the narrative becomes the means through which the Nigerian woman clarifies misconceptions about herself. In this regard, the novel presents itself as an enterprise of self-description to the cultural *Other* who is represented in the novel by Auntie Bintu. It is in the recognition of a difference between the liberated woman living in London and the Lagos woman, that the purportedly culturally inferior Nigerian woman is allowed to speak. This is a strategy of humility on the part of Buchi Emecheta, one which acknowledges that problematic relationship between the Western-educated elite and his/her fellow Africans that has not been sufficiently thought through, within the activity of narrative production, by many African writers. The recognition of the existence of an experiential gap between the Western educated and the local people shows a writer who is sensitive to social differentiation within what is generally perceived as a homogeneous identity. Once again, we come across the acknowledgement of the multiplicity and heterogeneity of social and cultural experience, which firmly points to the historicist nature of the thematic project of the novel.

The first form of plurality we encounter in the narrative is an occluding one: polygamy. Polygamy, which is extremely common in the fictive universe of the novel, is a site where women are primarily alienated from one

another through a well developed language of survival. It is a language in which the *arbitrariness* of difference is replaced by an affirmation of the naturalness of division, which closes off the possibility of counter-identification with dominant gender ideology. This is demonstrably true of the relationship between Amina and Nerudeen's other wives:

'You think my brother can afford to go on like this? Suppose he becomes ill or loses his job or something? How will he cope?' I asked tentatively.

'We don't think about that, Auntie. You know last time, when he had that hypertension thing, all the other wives came to the house, sniffing and looking for things to inherit. I pretended that I did not know what they were looking for. But my brothers who do business with my husband have told me what to do. I have kept all the important documents and things. You see, Auntie, this may be brutal to you, but that is how we survive. If I let myself be carried away by emotion, I will not get anything, and they will even accuse me of killing him. Luckily for all of us, he got well again, so I quickly returned all the savings books and the other important insurance papers. (p. 58-59)

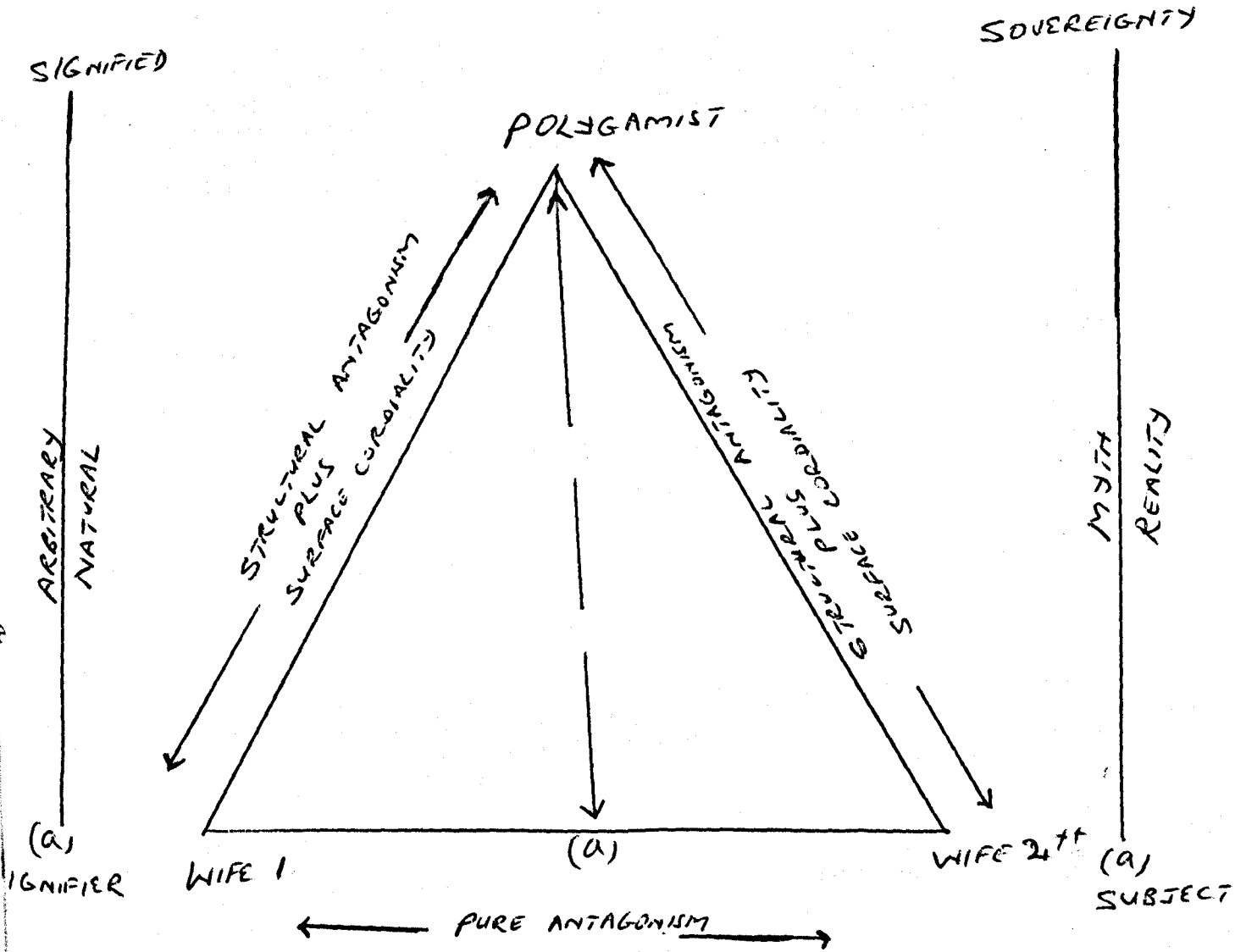
Thus the alienation of women from one another is not simply a matter of the contrast between the biological and social opposition which is at play in the way Amina and Auntie Bintu relate to one another, but also of a gender practice which operates with a specific pyramidal model of power and gender relations, a sketch of which is presented in the diagram on the next page. The diagram shows that the relationship between wives in a polygamous marriage is one of pure antagonism because their positions are defined not in terms of their common horizontal link with one another but rather in terms of their vertical relationship with the husband at the apex of their shared universe. Thus the alienation of women from one another in the social formation under discussion is embedded to a large extent in an ideological infrastructure within which their subject positions are mediated by a masculine sovereignty

whose very position within the structure of the relationship depends on the absence of dialogue among the women who occupy the base of the pyramid. It is in this context that the rivalry between Amina and her fellow wives, and between Alhaji Lemonu's wives, and the wives of Amina's father must be understood.

However, if the relations among wives are strained those between the men and their wives are no better. There is a measure of cordiality between the polygamous husband and his wives. Nevertheless, the basis of such cordiality is an instrumentalist view of human relations. Whilst the polygamist looks at the idea of having lots of wives and children as a source of social prestige, the women see such marriages as a way of securing their future:

'You can afford to stand up to our men and tell them to their faces that you will not take any nonsense from them. We cannot, women like me never dream of doing

FIGURE ONE



anything like that. You see, Auntie Bintu, if I went out to work, I could only be a low secretary or work in a factory or be a two hundred naira per month teacher. You know how much a room costs in a city like this? I'd be lucky to get an apartment for one hundred and twenty naira. Then how do I feed, and how do I clothe myself? I can't go back to my father's house, he is a man too. So, Auntie Bintu, all we are doing is giving and taking. Funnily enough, the men feel they are doing all the giving, but they forget that we provide the solid background they want and need so much. And as my reward, I have a roof over my head, hot food in my belly and in the bellies of the children I have for him and who bear his name. (p. 52-53)

Part of this 'survival armour', as it called by the narrator, is that the women do not reveal how much they know to their men and that they should always accept their position of subordination. However, theirs is strategic form of subordination which undermines the masculine form of power. An important part of the strategy for survival that Nigerian women have developed is to fool their men that they are stupid and unknowledgeable about anything except looking after children:

'Do you think I should tell a man like that, that I had had an adventure in my youth?'

'You think he would not understand?'

'I do not want to find out. How can you trust a man who has had two other wives? I am just one of the wives, remember?'

I nodded. Men with many wives end up by not having a single wife-friend among the women they work for all their lives. (p. 57)

Thus, the polygamist is the most lonely figure as those around him only look at him in terms of what they can get out of him. It is this myth of woman as ignorant that in fact subverts masculine power. In other words the official discourse, which sustains the unequal relations of gender here is shown to be intelligible to the very voices that it pushes to the margin. Once again,

Dollimore's useful concept of *transgressive mimesis* comes in handy here in explaining the relationship between the dominant and the dominated: the dominated have produced a knowledge, a language from which the dominant are excluded and they use this knowledge to undermine the dominant. Nerudeen, for example, wants to present himself as a man weighed down by masculine responsibilities, but the women know that they must not destroy his fiction of martyrdom as he moans about having to escort his sister Auntie Bintu to the airport when in fact she has made it clear to him that she really does not need his help:

I knew he wanted to help, but how does a woman tell her brother that his help is not that necessary? The men in our lives feel so hurt when you tell them that they are not needed, thank you very much. (p. 104)

The alienation which the gender practice has produced between men and women is only matched by the deadly silence between them as men seek to impose a mode of communication which serves their superior image. Here the principle of *monoglossia* is presented as a function of self-delusion rather than as one based on an objective understanding of its material relationship with other languages in its *dialogic* context. It is this fundamental relationship between the two discursive levels that, to a large extent, explains the connection between institutional gender practice, such as marriage, and the political economy.

The fiction of male power is nowhere more visible than in the tragic upbringing and death of Ramonu. Ramonu Lemonu, the protagonist of the story told by Amina is essentially a product of a society in which gender and political ideology are inscribed in a masculine form of power based on the

imaginary. His father Lemonu, an Alhaji, in accordance with the instructions of the Prophet Mohammed celebrates every promotion by marrying a new wife, which leads to terrible poverty in his household. When he marries the third wife, he more or less neglects his two other wives, and Ramonu sleeps with the Alhaji's second wife because he has helped himself to the love-potion the woman had prepared for the Alhaji. The Alhaji catches them redhanded and banishes his son from his house. By this time the Alhaji has over twenty-four children in a single-roomed house. Because the Alhaji could not afford to send Ramonu to school, when the latter is kicked out of the house, like everyone else in Nigeria he tries to make a quick buck, for in the Nigerian society of Emecheta's novel, without naira power one is never anybody. Amina tells us:

'If you haven't got naira here, Auntie, you are lost. Money can buy you everything even justice.' (p. 10)

For his naira, Ramonu becomes a hitman and a drug smuggler. With the money he makes he buys many friends and the forgiveness of the Alhaji. No one ever asks him about the source of his wealth. In the end, Ramonu is mistaken for a pickpocket and burnt to death by a mob. Even though it is a case of mistaken identity, Amina says:

'Oh Auntie, Auntie, was Ramonu really innocent? You know what our people say - a thief steals daily, the owner only needs to catch him once. Don't you think, Auntie, that today is the day of the owner for Ramonu?'... Today, Auntie is the day of the owner who cannot be bought or bribed with naira. The owner who sees and judges all things. Allah!' (p. 108)

Through the life of Ramonu, we encounter the effect of the fiction of masculine power in Nigerian society. First, it is through the changing

fortunes of Ramonu that the unhappy effects on children born and brought up in such families are delineated. To begin with relations between the father and the child are presented as superficial and lacking in friendship and love; for example, the relationship between the Alhaji and his children, if there is any, is simply a biological one rather than a social one since the Alhaji's marital schedule is such that he cannot find enough time to be with any of his wives, let alone his children. The mother-child relationship is also very much characterised by tension; since the mother is most of the time preoccupied with making herself more acceptable to the husband than the other wives, she ends up taking the affairs of children as belonging to the time remaining after the husband has been pleased. Thus, the Alhaji's uncritical implementation of the words of the prophet clearly leads to a situation of which, most probably, Mohammed himself would not have approved, according to Amina:

'I know that Mohammed the Prophet recommended four wives, but I am sure I have heard it said that only those who can afford to keep such wives in comfort should take them.' (p. 58)

We also know that the Alhaji's identification with dominant gender ideology is not solely a matter of religious practice. It is an institution in which people of varying religious backgrounds indulge. Religion therefore, in this particular case, is offered as rationalisation of a privileged structure of gender relations, one that is conceived of as an absolute indicator of Nigerian masculinity. For those with the naira, there might be other ways of fulfilling their gendered subject positions, but for the ill-paid like the Alhaji, it is the number of children and wives that offers the easiest way of being properly masculine.

Apart from its effect on the children, polygamy evidently also affects the economic progress of the country through its impact on population growth:

'But how can they do that when Mohammed the servant of Allah, recommended that a righteous and orthodox Muslim should have four wives?'

'Oh, Amina, you are now laughing at the nation, at the fate of the black man. And you are laughing at yourself. You can see for yourself that the government is spending money to improve education and medical facilities... You can see that fewer children die now than used to. And if the country had only to cope with, say, sixty or seventy million people don't you think the quality of life would be improved? That there would be fewer people in on the streets, and most houses would be owned by just one family and not the type you lived in at Isalegangan where many families had to share one house?' (p. 40-41)

The Nigeria of the novel is one which squanders its potential for economic growth because of the practical consequences of its gender practices. But the most important continual setback to any effort at improving the economic conditions in the country is the belief in the power of the naira. The materialistic attitude to life that has afflicted the country leads to rampant corruption and the fetishization of wealth:

We both agreed that the tragedy that was Ramonu was the fault of nobody, but that of a society that respects any fool who has naira. However intelligent or creative one is, if one has no naira, there is no place to rest. The language of naira is universal here. (p. 102)

The naira also contributes to an instrumentalist view of human relations, whereby it is the use-value of an individual that counts. When Ramonu loses his wealth the father, who was worshipping him because he was rich, turns round and says:

He had always known that that none of Kudi's children would come to any good. (p. 101)

Ramonu himself would not have wanted his relations to know how deep in poverty he had been before he died:

'Do you think you will tell his parents?'

'No, Auntie Bintu, like his trip to Cotonou, he would not want his parents to know about this. He only goes to his parents and friends when he has plenty of naira to throw about. When he has no naira, he does not want to be seen.'

'So they failed him in the end?'

'You mean naira, Auntie Bintu?'

'Yes, Amina, naira can fail one, as they have just failed Ramonu.' (p. 102)

It is a world in which illusions are more important than reality. The novel ends with the following depressing remarks:

'Ramonu's family thinks he is overseas on some important business. His wife gave birth to another baby girl, named Kudi after his mother. Nobody came to claim the charred remains of the body, so it was buried in a public grave. As for Moriamo, Ramonu's wife, she is still waiting for her rich husband to come home and bring her all the goodies from overseas. Please Auntie, don't let us ruin the dream of another woman.' (p. 108)

At one level, one can say that in the end *monoglossia* overrides the plurality which has made the critique of dominant gender ideology possible in the narrative, that is to say that in the last analysis the interrogation of dominant gender ideology taking place in the novel is overwhelmed by the pragmatic needs of survival. On another, one can see Amina's final words to Auntie Bintu as an assertion of the plurality of discourse effected through a strategic identification with dominant ideology which, as we have seen, is the

major defining feature of the subjectivity of the Nigerian woman. In this sense, Amina is identifying with the dominant discourse of gender while profiting from it. There is a third sense in which Amina's statement can be read: Amina, who has throughout the novel perceived other women as necessarily standing in a relation of antagonism to herself, for the first time articulates a language of female solidarity, what Auntie Bintu and she have shared through the story of Ramonu, which is in fact the story of a nation that chooses not to see beyond the shadows, as Plato would put it in his metaphor of the cave. It is in transcending the occluding and divisive language of patriarchy that the thematic project of the novel, which argues for the need for women to begin to move outside the forms of subjectivities produced by officialdom, becomes forward-looking and opens up the possibility of modifying the gender status quo.

Like Buchi Emecheta, Kole Omotoso is a well-established writer of high literature who has turned to popular fiction. In addition to *Sacrifice*, where he explores the subject of urban prostitution, a favourite topic for David Maillu of Kenya, he has published a detective novel, *Fella's Choice*.³⁵ In my interview with the writer, he has made it very clear that the role of an African writer has a lot to do with providing a literature that will appeal across the class divide.³⁶ The degree of importance Omotoso attaches to African popular literature is best summarised in the comment he makes in *Discovering African Literature*:

One must congratulate Macmillan for their 'Pacesetters Series', East African Publishing House for their attempts to counter David Maillu, Heinemann Educational Books of East Africa for introducing something easier to pick up and read than what is generally available to be treated with such levity.³⁷

However, Omotoso's view of popular literature as light reading should not be taken as a statement on what he thinks of the depth of engagement with culture and politics of which such a literature is capable, for in another context he argues that popular literature can imaginatively combine the thematic subjects of high literature with its formulaic devices such as detection:

When a story of crime is combined with a cultural issue, the result can always be interesting. This is the case with Ulli Beier's *The Stolen Image* where a school boy helps the police and the customs men to stop the illegal export of works of art stolen from some shrines in Nigeria. ³⁰

Omotoso's *Sacrifice* is one such text. The novel explores the connection between gender, class and cultural identity through the relationship between a mother, Mary, and her son, Dr. Lana Siwaju. Mary comes from a polygamous marriage, and at the age of seventeen loses her mother and has to live with her father's other wives. The father refuses to send her to school because it is a 'waste of money and, anyway a girl did not need any education.' (p. 19). Consequently, she gets a job as an apprentice with a local seamstress where the apprentices are in fact not given the chance to touch the sewing machines, but instead perform odd jobs for the proprietor. She is bored with her work, and the money she earns is little. It is at this stage that she meets the village photographer, Akins. Akins promises her marriage and takes a portrait of her which he mounts on his studio window. She is very proud and happy to have her photo on public view. However, as it transpires, she is not the first woman whose photo has graced Akins's window for a while only to be replaced by another woman's later. She falls pregnant and Akins does not want to see her face anymore. Her father disowns her. She gives birth to a baby

boy to whom she gives the surname Siwaju. After another heart-break, and failing to find a decent job which can earn her enough money to provide for herself and the baby, she gets into prostitution. There is another reason why she enters the profession: she wants to take revenge on men. Nevertheless, with the money she earns from prostitution, she manages to educate Lana Siwaju until he gets a scholarship to study medicine. Dr. Siwaju cannot stand his mother continuing as a prostitute as she has now become a source of embarrassment to his respectable social status. His wife, who is also a medical doctor, tells him point blank that if he does not do something about his mother she is going to leave him, which she does for a while. While his wife is estranged from him, Dr. Siwaju tries to persuade his mother to give up prostitution, but she does not want to give in to his demands sensing and abhorring the real reason why he wants her to give up her life-style. Dr. Siwaju considers poisoning his mother, but his wife protests against it. He then locks his mother in his store room while trying to get his fellow doctor to certify her as insane so that she can be taken to a mental asylum. His friend duly obliges, but by the time Lana gets home, his mother has hanged herself. Lana is relieved and his wife comes back home to join him the same day to help him in preparing elaborate and expensive funeral arrangements. Befitting the death of a mother of an important member of Nigerian society, the following announcement is published in all the major papers:

We regret to announce the sudden death, at the Specialist Hospital, Akure, of our dearly beloved mother, Madam Mary Siwaju.

*You have fought a good fight
You have finished your course
You have kept the faith
Henceforth a crown of righteousness is
laid up
For you with the righteous judge
Rest in peace beloved mother
In the company of the blessed*

*You departed this world when we needed
you most.*

Funeral arrangements will be announced later.

Son

Daughter-in-law

Dr. & Dr. (Mrs) Siwaju.

All the notables of Nigerian society, politicians, lecturers and professors and others, attend Mary's funeral. It becomes one of the most memorable funeral celebrations in the town of Akure.

Like Buchi Emecheta's *Naira Power* Kole Omotoso's *Sacrifice* is a study of a society in which considerations of personal prestige have coloured all forms of social intercourse including those pertaining to relationships between parents and children. Such relationships are deeply implicated with the discourses of class and gender. The novel examines the production of the female plight within Nigeria through the life of Mary. Evidently, much of what becomes of Mary later in life is a result of the conditions of her upbringing. The polygamous family she comes from operates as the initial and perhaps the most important determining factor on her future. With the death of her mother, Mary is virtually an orphan though her father is still alive. As a child of a rival wife, she occupies the same space as her deceased mother vis-a-vis her father's other wives:

Mary's father had emphatically said he would not send a girl to school..... If she couldn't go to the farm until a husband came along to pay her bride price and take her away, then she could go to the sewing institute and wait. Her father's two wives were enthusiastic supporters of their husband's philosophy. (p. 19) (My own emphasis)

The pattern of relations is clearly informed by a gender ideology which sees a woman solely in terms of her role as a mother and a wife. A girl who has

reached nubility is expected to while away time in other activities while waiting for her ultimate destiny, that of motherhood and matrimony. As in Buchi Emecheta's *Naira Power*, the polygamous family reproduces privileged values of gender, among which is the notion that men and women are unequal. Again, as in *Naira Power*, considerations of economic security among women account for the lack of political solidarity among them. Unlike in *Naira Power*, where Auntie Bintu and Amina break the ice and talk woman to woman, in this novel the relations among women are shown as permanently characterised by division, a situation which leads to female connivance with the realisation of official discourse, or *master discourse*.

However, as Mary learns quickly, the master gender discourse has its own contradictions. If woman's salvation lies in developing a relationship with a man, in Mary's case such a relationship leads to disaster. When Akins comes and promises marriage to her, what seems to be the arrival that her father and his wives had told her to await, turns into a nightmare. He merely impregnates and abandons her. It is at this point that we must reflect on the significance of Akins's portraiture. When Akins wants a woman he takes a photograph of her and posts it outside his studio and when he abandons her he takes it down. Akins's art is a cutting device which *decentres* the subject into the *real* and the *imaginary* in a process where the subject's fixation on the imaginary produces a gap through which subjection to masculine power becomes possible. In a kind of Lacanian trajectory, the *decentering* gesture of photography initiates the young Mary into an important binary split between the fiction of happiness promised by official discourse and its concealed bitter pill. Significantly, it is the offer of an opportunity to see her photograph that makes Mary forget that Akins is not the sort of man that she would wish to marry:

She looked over her shoulder and saw a short man smiling at her. She was tall for a girl and invariably took note of men's height. Inwardly she always said she would not be the wife of any man who was shorter than herself. (p. 20) (My own emphasis)

The seductive nature of photography is reminiscent of Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* where Sidi, a village girl, undergoes a radical transformation in her perception of her position in the overall power relations of the traditional set up. Ironically, in Sidi's case, as indeed in that of Mary, the very power promised by the *image* becomes the means by which traditional male patriarchy secures its hold over her. In other words, the alien technology which has the capacity to erase the traditional power relations becomes the domesticated tool of the same power structure it is meant to undermine. In a way, Akins foregrounds the shortsightedness of the so-called philosophical position of the father: by denying his daughter the means to economic autonomy the father has squarely made his daughter vulnerable to the whims and fancies of masculine interest. When she is rejected by Akins, all the father can do is disown her without the means of getting her out of her predicament. Significantly, both Akins and the father only turn up to see her when they realise that she has given birth to a baby boy:

It was a surprise to her to find her father waiting for her at the door congratulating her on the birth of her baby boy. Akins too called at the house later in the evening. She could have shot him if she had a gun. All she did was refuse to answer his greetings... When both men had left and she was alone with her baby she wondered why they had come to see her. Would they have come if she had given birth to a baby girl? She was sure they wouldn't. (p. 50)

The significance of the two men's visit primarily lies in what it reveals about gender preference in the Nigerian social formation. The privileging of the male over the female accompanies the initial reception of the child into the world. Mary sees a link between the way she has been treated by her father and Akins and the privileged treatment given to her son, and consequently resolves to revamp the structure of binary opposition which underlies existing gender practice:

Maybe it would be possible, she thought as she fed the baby, to bring up a man who would be grateful to a woman for once in life. It would be her duty to make this the child that would grow up to be an unselfish man, a considerate man, a man ready to see reason without thinking of losing his manly dignity. (p. 50)

The tremendous task facing Mary is how does one *degender* one's son in a society where the dominant gender practice is essentially and firmly based on unequal relations of gender? In a way this is the central question in the novel. The process of degendering begins while Lana is still young partly as an accident: Mary buys girls' clothes thinking that she is going to have a baby girl and as a result, Lana spends his first few years in girls' clothes. 'Even after these had been exhausted, she continued to buy him girls' clothes.' (p. 51) Mary even goes as far as reversing the gender roles by giving her son a doll which he ties to his back the way small girls do in Africa in preparation for their maternal role later in life. However, Mary gets tired of the rigid regime of degendering that she has imposed upon her son and does not consciously thereafter try to turn her boy into a girl.

Nevertheless, she continues to believe that through being kind to him, he will eventually be kind to women. However, Lana is extremely embarrassed by the fact that his mother is a prostitute; all the children at school laugh

at him. It is the stigma attached to ~~the~~ mother's source of income that in the end intervenes and destroys the otherwise amicable relationship between mother and son. When Lana becomes a doctor, class enters into the reasons for being embarrassed about his mother's livelihood. Ironically, Mary's market becomes better since her standing among the prostitutes and the clients is improved by the fact that she is known as 'the mother of the doctor.' In fact, the alienation between the mother and son begins while he is at boarding school:

I was ashamed to have felt happy going away to the boarding school. I contrived to spend all my holidays away from her. I wrote her letters but they were all letters demanding money, stating dates of school resumption. (p. 56)

In other words the project of *degendering* initiated by the mother is overtaken by the social reproduction of gender and morality that Lana undergoes when he is away from Mary. Increasingly, Lana comes to see the mother as a member of a degenerate class, a class different from his. However, the only way Lana and his wife Flor can articulate the difference between Mary and them is by rarefying it into a cultural problem. Using the motif of structural montage by juxtaposing each narrative chapter with an analytical philosophical dialogue between Lana and Flor titled 'notes', Omotoso creates a dramatic contrast between lived experience and intellectual discourse in such a way that the latter comes across as an escapist way of distancing oneself from the world of quotidian and lived experience. Contrary to what Femi Osofisan says, I would not describe Omotoso's use of the technique as a form of 'structural and stylistic' distortion.²⁹ The use of alternating discursive modes serves to indicate that social difference is not just a matter of economic and social difference, but rather a question of the models of reality and their

corresponding differing signifying practices which characterise class differentiation. We have here a mode of communication which lacks a *domain of consensus*, to borrow Siegfried Schmidt's term.⁴⁰ In this way the narrative voice presents itself as unabashedly partisan, taking the side of the victimised Mary and leaving Lana and Flor to retell her story in an artificial language of their own. Omotoso uses the same narrative device in his novel *The Edifice*, where the first part of the narrative is told by Dele the protagonist and the second by Daisy his British wife who has been treated badly by the hero. Beyond demonstrating the writer's pleasurable stylistic adventurousness, the use of the technique of *structural narrative montage* in *Sacrifice* also serves to democratize the narrative discursive field by allowing the master discourse and the marginalised *carnavalesque* voice to engage in a continual dialogue.

This is most obvious in the differing ways in which the two levels of discourse come to terms with Mary's experience. The intellectualisation of a concrete human experience being indulged in by Lana and his wife Flor seems a way of creating a distance between experience and theory. In the end it is the attempt to resolve the practical by means of a rarefied theory of culture that leads to the most inhumane moment in the novel, the moment when Lana sedates his mother and locks her up in his store room to give him time to get a letter from one of his colleagues certifying her mad. In accordance with the intellectual framework within which they seek a way of getting rid of Mary, Flor argues that Mary represents the collective African past which the contemporary African must forget in order to forge ahead:

Lana, you cannot go on with all these your double-decker values. And you throw adjectives around, adjectives such as 'African' you throw around as if you knew what you were talking about. You are no better than foreigners whose main interest in things African have to

do with the curious, the strange, the exotic, those things which their own societies left behind centuries ago. These are the things they bid us preserve, for their amusement, things which we ourselves appreciate little. I am more concerned with living.... My concern with your mother is that you should find a psychological as well as a realistic solution to her problem. (p. 14-15)

The manner in which Flor chooses the discursive terrain in which to locate the question of Mary's future and the consequent transposition of Mary into a generalised cultural phenomenon, suggests that ideology is the means by which the transfer of a problem from one discourse to another is effected and secured and that it is in the choice of discursive locations in which problems under consideration are conveyed that we must look for specific political interests which are served by such processes. In the case of Flor, shifting the problem of Mary from the discourse of family and gender serves to effect emotional detachment, a position from which Mary can be dealt with in an impersonal way since she has become an abstract sign rather than a social subject. Lana senses the danger of what Flor is suggesting:

I hate to think of her as my past, the way you ~~so~~ easily do. I detest the attempt to make her the symbol of all our collective past in black Africa. Flor, you're always searching for a way of expressing one thing or the other. She's my mother, not my past. Do you understand. She is my mother, not my past. (p. 76)

Lana tries to remove the mother from the category of a cultural and historical type, which constitutes the basis of her signification of the African past, and relocates her in the domain of the personal and familial discourse in order to reduce the distance which Flor has created between the mother and them. In this respect Lana tries to particularise, as it were, what has been presented

by Flor as *non-existential* and *universal* property, in the sense the two words are understood in symbolic logic, where the addition of an existential quantifier to a *universal* statement has the effect of bringing it down to the world of concrete and particular experience. It is in this sense that the dialogue between Lana and Flor can be described as a conflict between a position that construes Mary as pure sign, outside ideological context, and one that sees her as an *ideologeme*, a sign in ideology. Lana is at pains to convince Flor that it is not some abstract mother Africa they are talking about but his own mother. Perhaps in this little conflict between Lana and Flor, there is an important lesson for the over-enthusiastic post-structuralist, that in his/her fetishization of the sign he/she might find himself or herself evacuating the content of human experience from the subject and at the end of it, might find discovering that he/she is left with a shell of signifiers which signifies very little of human worth.

Nevertheless, the unrelieved hatred that Flor has towards the mother is shown to be based on an instrumentalist view of human relations, where what matters is an open declaration of mutual exploitation. Consider the philosophical basis of the following statement by Flor:

Lana, don't deceive yourself, there is nothing like love. Now just hold on to your breath and let me explain. You say your mother loves you. You say I love you and I have said it before... Fact is that if you were born by a Vietnamese she would love you as well. Or an Indian. Or any nationality. I accept the currency of the word 'love', but please don't let me accept the underlying emotion that it is supposed to symbolise. As a helpless child, you needed some basic requirements. If a wolf had attended to you with these basics, you would have called it 'Mama'.' It would have loved you. It would have been unnatural, uninstinctive if it didn't love you..... If you didn't show gratitude. Both gratitude and supply of essential survival needs are swamped under the cover of love....

(p. 45)

I would brave a new definition of love: to so use

another that we shall know that both of us get adequate returns for what we give. Wherever the word 'love' occurs in your life substitute 'respect' and you would have got my meaning.' (p. 47)

Flor's transfer of Mary's problem to a theoretical plane is seen to be based on some kind of utilitarian view of human experience and action. Here positive and humane values such as love and kindness, caring for one another, are seen as instinctual drives, outside human volition and therefore debased and indefensible within the sort of rational discourse being championed by Flor. Mary's maternal love, and her efforts at looking after Lana well and seeing to it that he has a good education are all reduced to an animal instinctual drive, and therefore in his rational consideration of the mother's situation Lana should not think in terms of the 'irrational' values of love and others. The elision of the element of choice in determining Mary's contribution to Lana's upbringing strategically serves to devalue such effort, thereby exonerating Lana from any reciprocal responsibility, which ultimately drives a wedge between Lana and Mary and secures Flor's position within her marriage. Though Lana is embarrassed by his having a prostitute for a mother, 'inside him he wondered why he had to have her for his mother', the knowledge that Mary had striven hard to put him where he is somehow, sometimes mitigates his outright abhorrence of her and makes him a little bit sympathetic towards her. However, on the other hand, Flor's position is one of outright condemnation of and disdain for Mary. When she realises that Lana is vacillating, she leaves him and tells him that she will only come back when he has done something with his mother and indeed, only comes back when she is dead. We have here, as in Mary's relationship with her father's two wives, a relation of antagonism between women. In this case the relationship is mediated by considerations of

class difference. Flor finds greater comfort in people of her own social class and finds the presence of Mary in her world rather a nuisance and a cause of acute embarrassment. In this context Mary's plight is not simply a matter of her gender but also of her socio-economic class.

Oddly enough, Flor subscribes to a feminist rhetoric of gender difference:

'So you will sacrifice your life to get your mother a new image! You do make me laugh cruelly sometimes. How many men in our so called traditional past from which you are so quick to quote, sacrificed their lives for any person other than themselves? How many of them were moved to such a pitch of empathy with their society? I can't remember any... How many statues have been erected to the memory of Moremi? Maybe you'll say that she is only a myth. Why are there no men myths such as these? Women were made to sacrifice. They are the ones who are always ready to forget the past, and face the future. And when that dream turns ashen, then they start anew, hoping, dreaming of another future. They alone have any historical perspective to life. I think the first slaves were sold by men alone, who could never see into the future, when women were away tilling the fields. You will call this statement feminine irrationality. I call it feminine intuition.' (p. 66)

In the light of Flor's attitude to Mary, the speech above has a ring of falsity. Her conception of the female capacity for sacrifice and martyrdom is patently true in the context of the novel, given that Mary does sacrifice herself for the sake of her son Lana, but Flor uses the lack of male sacrifice in order to dissuade Lana from helping his mother. In other words, what seems a radical Feminist reading of Nigerian history becomes the very means by which the less privileged woman, Mary, is crucified. By reminding Lana of an essentialist view of the male attitude to female suffering and social suffering in general, Flor manages to persuade him that his attempt to sacrifice for his mother's sake is in fact 'unmanly'. As in her notion of 'love', Flor uses

the question of sacrifice in such a way that it functions as a device of essentialising human action, by means of which she manages to persuade Lana that in caring about his mother he is being irrational and unnatural. Nevertheless, such an operation performs the same rarefying function by means of which she hopes to drive Lana to a position where he can do something about his mother. The reason Lana gives in so quickly is that, despite his mother's early attempt to degender him, his identity is to a large extent bound up with the whole question of class. In a way, it is through Flor that the dominant class ideology interpellates Lana, who has so far had an ambivalent attitude towards the personal circumstances of his mother. In the end Lana accedes to his wife's demands. It is ironic that Mary had prayed that her son would treat women with respect and consideration, but the only occasion Lana does so in the novel is when he agrees to do harm to his mother. He is a rather curious example of a degendered male!

Behind the whole overall production and sustaining of difference in the novel, there is an infrastructure of class discourse. This is most poignantly visible in the funeral arrangements for Mary. In death Mary has been coopted by the same class that rejects her when she is alive:

Two weeks later, on a Saturday afternoon, the procession from the Specialist Hospital moved, carrying the goldplated coffin of Mary from the hospital to St. David's Church... The procession moved slowly at state occasion pace. The coffin was borne on the roof of Lana's Mercedes Benz. Then followed by other Mercedes Benzes, followed by the Peugeot 504s, 404s, Kaddetts, VWs and others. After these came the people on foot. (p. 120)

The funeral procession reproduces the class structure. Mary has become a site where the values of the economically better off are rehearsed and reproduced.

The funeral celebrations become an excuse for Lana and Mary to affirm their membership of their class. The funeral celebrations are a lavish feast, one that Mary had never experienced in her life-time. The hypocrisy of the funeral celebrations is iconographically grafted on the plates and the cups being used at the funeral:

The paper plates carried a picture of Mary, that same picture taken so many years ago by Akins Photographer. Accompanying these special paper plates were specially printed napkins. These carried the same obituary as appeared in the national press two weeks previously. (p. 122)

The structural use of the photograph in *Sacrifice* recalls what the writer, Anthony Burgess recently said about the relations between the novel and music:

The difference between an ordinary, realistic novelist and one who is close to music... is that in an ordinary realistic novel, say a detective novel, you have somebody smoking a cigarette on the first page. Well, that is merely a piece of realistic detail. But if you have been influenced by music, that cigarette becomes important. It has to be repeated. It has to appear in some other place in the novel, perhaps on the last page.⁴¹

Although I would not wish to suggest the author, like Burgess, has been influenced by music, it is evident that the repetition of the use of the photograph adds a subtle symbolic dimension to the text. In the first instance the photograph is shown to be the means by which Mary is rendered exploitable by the dominant gender ideology and in the second usage it shows how dominant class ideology exploits her image for its own social image. In both cases something of the real subject, Mary, is left out, abstracted and consumed at a rarefied level where her subjectivity is important not in itself except in so

far as it props up official discourse.

This leads us to the significance of her death. Her suicide which denies her son the opportunity to dispose of her in his fashion, is evidently an attempt at resisting the dominant class and gender discourses which have triumphed while she is alive. Commenting on female suicide in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, Laura Donaldson says:

The fact that Bertha commits rather than attempts suicide moves her into a very different position.....; according to Chesler, women who succeed at taking their own lives outwit and reject their 'feminine' role at the only price possible: their deaths.... The direct encounter between the oppressed and oppressor grants Bertha's self-destructive act defiant subversiveness which it lacks in Bronte's text. In his study *Frantz Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression*, Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan comments that colonialism requires that the colonized deeply fear her own biological death, for the fear of physical death not only hinders the possibility of freedom, but also productive and meaningful living. Those who submit to oppression may continue to breathe, eat, sleep: 'unfortunately, however, they only exchange one form of death for another. This is so because as they submit to oppression and preserve biological life, they invariably suffer a degree of psychological and social death.'⁴²

A lot of what Donaldson says applies equally to the case of Mary; however, Mary's case does also show that female suicide is not always a triumphal enactment of resistance. It is in her death, when she can no longer resist her son's attempts to make her respectable, that the son succeeds in doing exactly what she had not wanted him to do to her: to make her the respectable mother of a doctor. Furthermore, her death solves Lana's problem: he does anyway contemplate killing her at some stage and he breathes a sigh of relief when she is dead. She is more of a problem alive than dead. This suggests that when one is dealing with a flexible power structure self-destruction is shorn

of its radical potential and may provide the means by which one's subjection to the relations of domination and subordination become firmly entrenched. What we are dealing with here is a situation of total oppression where no space is left unoccupied by dominant ideology for the subject to effect any form of *counter-identification*. Denying the subject the capacity to rebel must be seen as symptomatic of instances of total domination.

The thematisation of the project of the story is radical and humane. Kole Omotoso alerts us to the complexity of the discursive field in which the process of gendering takes place. The essentialisation of female goodness and demonisation of masculinity which we encounter in some of the radical Feminists like Helen Cixous and indeed, to a certain extent, in Buchi Emecheta, in Kole Omotoso's ideological framework is shown to elide the complex mechanisms of ideological interpellation within which the lack of female solidarity, and the oppression of women, are not simply a matter of the gender binary opposition but of a whole range of personal and social forces to which women, as much as men, are party. This needs to be recognized if the political task of eradicating male hegemony is to be shorn of the sort of hatred against men that Feminists such as Andrea Dworkin seem to revel in, in statements such as, 'Marriage is a legal licence to rape'; 'fucking is the means by which the male colonizes the female.'⁴³ This kind of thinking is far from embodying those political values that free human beings from the intolerance of difference, but instead encapsulates the negative values which in fact form the basis of what the Feminists are contesting in male hegemony. One would like to hope that the liberation of women will not entail the annihilation of men, as implied in Andrea Dworkin's rhetoric of hatred.

CONCLUSION

To summarise the chapter, I have endeavoured to map out the major representations of gendering in African popular literature. I have argued that texts such as *Why Son, Why* and *Tell Me No More* align themselves with dominant gender ideology; that *Harvest of Love* and *Second-Hand Love* display a mixed response to dominant gender ideology; and that *Naira Power* and *Sacrifice* seek more progressive and radical ways of gendering. As in the previous chapters, I have tried to capture and demonstrate the complex interplay between the issue of gender and the domain of political economy. One important subject that comes up time and again is the whole question of what needs to be salvaged from traditional practices of gendering and what needs to be adopted to meet the needs of modern Africa. No clear consensus emerges from the works I have considered in the chapter. The first group of writers is strongly in favour of upholding the traditional power relations between children and their parents whereas the second group is critical of some of these practices and at the same time accepts others. The last group of writers shows that what we call the African tradition is a social construction mediated by relations of power, such as class and gender, and that we need to be wary of the simplistic view that our tradition should be adhered to without sifting the chaff from the grain. It is the last group of texts which augurs well for the future of the intervention which African popular literature is making in the production and reproduction of gender ideology in Africa.

NOTES

1. Ann Rosalind Jones, 'Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of *l'écriture féminine*,' in Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt, *Feminist Criticism and Social Change: Sex, Class and Race in Literature and Culture* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), p. 92.
2. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: Texas University Press, 1981), p. 250. All references to the text are to Aubrey Kalitera, *Why Son, Why* (Blantyre: Power Pen Books, 1983).
3. See Rosalind Coward, *Patriarchal Precedents: Sexuality and Social Relations* (London: London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 187. The classic text on the family which Coward interrogates in her work is Friedrich Engels's, 'The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State', Robert Tucker (ed.) *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1978), pp. 744-759.
4. Rosalind Coward, *Op. Cit.*, p. 188.
5. Vide Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt, *Op. Cit.*; and Ani Loomba, *Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1989).
6. References to the text are to Senzenjani Lukhele, *Tell Me No More* Pacesetters Series (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1980).
7. This operates in Tumbuka culture as well.
8. Durkheim cited by Emmanuel Obiechina, *An African Popular Literature: A Study of Onitsha Market Pamphlets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 34.
9. Jacques Derrida, 'Limited Inc. abc,' *Glyph 2: John Hopkins Textual Studies* (Baltimore, 1977), pp. 236, 247-248) cited by Michael Ryan, *Marxism and Deconstruction: A Critical Articulation* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1982), p. 10).
10. The term virilocal, which is the opposite of 'uxorilocal', refers to the principle by which a woman transfers from her parents' village to that of her husband upon marriage.
11. Jomo Kenyatta is said to have denounced his former cellmate Kaggia for opposing his policies when he, Kaggia, had no piece of land to show for his manhood. (Personal Communication). For Ngugi wa Thiong'o's comment on the matter, see his collection of essays, *Homecoming* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1972), pp. 11-17
12. The allegorical mode was perhaps first adopted in the country by Samuel Ntara in his novel *Man of Africa*, ed. and trans. T. Cullen Young (London: Religious Tract Society, 1934).

13. See for example Ulli Beier, 'Writing in West Africa: A Chance to adapt and Experiment,' *Times Literary Supplement*, 10th August, 1962; and Donatus Nwoga, 'Onitsha Market Literature,' *Transition*, 4, no. 19 (1965), pp. 26-33.

14. For the term 'ideologeme', I am indebted to Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1981). In the way Jameson employs the term, it refers to an ideological sign that is a concrete signification of a specific ideological signified.

15. All references to the text are to Sam Aryeetey, *Harvest of Love*, Pacesetters Series (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1984).

16. I am referring here to the controversy provoked by the publication of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*. In the matter, the Iranian government's interpretation of Islamic law would appear to be very close to the inflexible attitude to tradition and custom we encounter in *Harvest of Love*.

17. See Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University, 1978)

18. In the assumption that a village girl cannot be well-mannered, we encounter yet another contradiction in the novel: Kwashie has been erected as one who has blended tradition and urban life extremely well, yet his view of a villager seems to partake of an urban stereotype of a villager.

19. I use the term 'motivation' in the way it is employed by Russian Formalists in their analysis of narrative structure. The term refers to the logical justification for the sequence of events and actions in narrative. For details, see V. Êrlich, *Russian Formalism: History, Doctrine* (The Hague: Mouton: Mouton, 1955) and L.T. Lemon and M.J. Reis (eds), *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965).

20. See Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1983) and also Laura Donaldson, 'The Miranda Complex: Colonialism and the Question of Feminist Reading', *Diacritics*, (Fall, 1988), pp. 65-77. I am grateful to Pratap Rhugani for bringing this source to my attention. References to the text are to Waliye Gondwe, *Second-hand Love*, Pacesetters Series (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1988).

21. I am referring here to the much discussed aspects of Saussure's linguistic theory, that the relationship between a signifier and the signified is a matter of convention. See Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (London: Fontana, 1974)

22. By the term *carnivalization*, Michel Bakhtin refers to the process whereby the official languages, or dominant modes of symbolising are overturned by the marginalised and unofficial languages. By the term *heteroglossia*, he refers to the multiplicity of languages within which a given utterance is inscribed. For a fuller account of Bakhtinian ideas, see Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: Texas University Press, 1981).

23. By the term 'transgressive mimesis', Jonathan Dollimore refers to the strategy by which the dominated identifies with the dominant ideology and in

the process produces a knowledge from the which the dominant is excluded. See Jonathan Dollimore, 'Subjectivity, Sexuality and Transgression: The Jacobean Connection,' in Mary Beth Rose (ed.), *Renaissance Drama* (Evanston: Lawrence and Wishart, 1981), pp. 322-324.

24. The Derridian concept of 'undecidability' holds that no formal account of the truth, as in logic, is possible since the axioms of any system can produce cases which contradict their validity. For a concise discussion of Derrida's use of the term, see Michael Ryan, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 16-17.

25. Vide Jonathan Dollimore, 'The Case for a Political/Cultural Analysis of Shakespeare: The Instances of Displacement and Perversion' in Manuel Barbeito (ed.), *Op. Cit.*, p. 38.

26. 'Naira' is the Nigerian currency. All references to the text are to Buchi Emecheta, *Naira Power*, Pace Setters Series (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1982).

27. See Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Penguin, 1973, first published in 1902)

28. For a Bakhtinian analysis of *Heart of Darkness*, see David Murry, 'Dialogics: Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*' in Douglas Tallack (ed.), *Literary Theory at Work: Three Texts* (London: B.T Batsford, 1987), pp. 115-134.

29. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems in Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

30. See Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn, 'Feminist Scholarship and the Social Construction of Woman,' in Gayle Green and Coppelia Kahn (ed.), *Making A Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), p. 11.

31. See Helen Cixous, 'Sortie,' in Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (ed.), *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* (Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press Limited, 1980), p. 90.

32. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Allen Lane, 1978), p. 93.

33. *L'écriture féminine*, is a term generally associated with the French Feminist Helen Cixous. It is a position which holds the view that there exists a form of language which is a product of the fact of being a woman. It is argued that women must discover and nurture this form of language in order to liberate themselves from the phallogocentric symbolic order. I have, elsewhere, criticised the essentialisation of gender difference implied by Feminists such as Helen Cixous: see Mpalive-Hangson Msiska, 'Sexual Politics in Malawian Literature: The Case of Aubrey Kalitera's *Why Father, Why*,' (Paper presented to the Centre Of Southern African Studies, University of York, England, March, 1989). For a helpful discussion of *l'écriture féminine*, See Rosalind Jones, 'Inscribing femininity: French theories of the feminine' in Gayle Green and Coppelia Kahn (ed.), *Making A Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), pp. 80-145.

34. Freud argues that the dream that we finally recount as a coherent narrative leaves out a lot that we are aware of as having been part of the dream material. He calls the device by which a structure is imposed on the dream material 'secondary revision.' It constitutes part of a series of censorship devices which repress the unconscious of the represented dream. Freud's comments on the narrative structure of dreams has been used extensively by post-structuralists of all shades. See Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976, first published in English, in 1953), pp. 381-628.

35. Kole Omotoso, *Fella's Choice* (Benin City: Ethiope, 1974); all references to the text in this section are to Kole Omotoso, *Sacrifice* (Ibadan: Onibonoje, 1976)

36. Mpalive-Hangson Msiska, 'Kole Omotoso: An interview' *Stirling*, June, 1989, (Unpublished manuscript).

37. Kole Omotoso, *Discovering African Literature*, (Unpublished manuscript), p. 75.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 84.

39. See Femi Osofisan, 'The Alternative Tradition: An Insider's Postscript' in Albert S. Gerard, *European Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa I-II* (Akademiai Kiado, Budapest: The International Comparative Literature Association, 1986), pp. 781-798. In the article Osofisan complains that Kole Omotoso's stylistic experiments impede communication. In my paper titled, 'Gender and Cultural Dislocation in Kole Omotoso's *Edifice*,' I show that far from impeding meaning Kole Omotoso's use of bifurcated narrative point of view gives the woman the chance to tell her own side of the story thereby showing how relative narrative point of view itself is. Osofisan does not even comment on Omotoso's use of such an imaginative mode of structure.

40. See Siegfried J. Schmidt, *Foundations for the Empirical Study of Literature: The Components of a Basic Theory*, trans. Robert de Beaugrande (Hamburg: Buske, 1982), pp. 24-44.

41. Antony Burgess in interview with Marco Adria, 'Anthony Burgess: This Man, Music, and Literature', *Aurora: An Athabasca University Publication*, 12, no. 4 (Winter, 1988), p. 25.

42. See Laura Donaldson, *Op. Cit.*, p. 76.

43. See Andrea Dworkin, *Letters From a War Zone* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1988). See Hermione Lee's review, which in many respects takes the same position as I do, in *The Times Literary Supplement*, no. 4,444 (June 3-9, 1988), p. 611.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION: AFRICAN POPULAR NARRATIVE AS A MODALITY OF IDEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICATION

It has been argued in the foregoing discussion that contemporary African popular literature is a distinct ideological signifying practice, one in which the contestations within the gender discursive formation are more foregrounded than in any other genre in the continent. Marriage, romantic love, and the gendering of children are the mainstay of the genre, currently. I have examined how the representation of gender ideology in contemporary African literature can be explained in terms of a traditionalist, a liberal and a radical model. As a way of concluding the study, I wish to summarise some of the principal strategies which the respective texts employ in order to signify gender ideology.

The traditionalist model's management of the crisis of dominant gender ideology within the domain of marriage, as the example of Kalitera's novel *Why Father, Why* illustrates, takes the form of overproducing female need for marriage and then simultaneously producing a scarcity of ideal masculinity. Having done that, the management of female excess is effected through the valorized labour of masculinity which is itself presented as the means by which a larger crisis, the crisis in the *weltanschauung* occasioned by the encounter with Europe, is resolved. In *Mother, Why Mother*, however, we are presented with marriage as the defence of maternity. Female counter-identification with this particular aspect of dominant gender ideology is presented as a function and

symptom of female pathology. Not only is female pathology a threat to the stability of marriage as a practice, but to the whole social order since it colludes with the demonised racial and cultural Other in the destabilization of what is considered an authentic cultural practice. Thus, marriage practice is seen as embodying within its very structure the roots of xenophobia. The defence of male territoriality over women of the same culture or race is shown as the means by which unequal relations of gender are legitimised through returning the woman to nature.

The liberal model of marriage essentially involves a pragmatic approach to the question of female chastity. Griswold and Bastian note that in Nigerian romances, unlike in their western counterparts, marital infidelity is not perceived as representing a subterranean corruption. They argue that:

Sex constitutes one of the obstacles that arise between lovers.... but it does not serve as a token of anything beyond itself. For example, the problem caused by infidelities of Tade or Ojiji is simply that of infidelity, not some flaws in their essential characters as revealed by their behaviour.¹

This would appear to be an attempt to resist the value placed on premarital chastity in traditional patriarchy. However, often accepting marital infidelity is shown to underwrite other marital priorities which give rise to unequal relations of gender. For example, in Dede Kamkondo's novel, *Truth Will Out*, Dan easily comes to terms with the fact that Julie has had a child before marriage because he himself has hidden from her the fact that he has a child in England. More important is the fact that in the notion of marital stability that Dan operates with, gendered differential relations are already secured through a division of labour in which the well-educated Julie is unnecessarily reduced to a position where she subordinates her labour to that of her husband. Moreover,

marital happiness in the novel is shown to be predicated on unequal class relations, in terms of which the lower class Other is perceived as a threat to the middle class. The management of class conflict is also an important consideration in the representation of marital stability in David Maillu's *Thorns of Life*. Here the defence of marital stability involves viewing it as a function of determinate economic conditions. The peasant mode of economic production inscribed within a capitalist economic formation is perceived as an arena where a modern marriage practice cannot flourish. Thus at the end of the novel, when the couple is seen transforming the rural economic landscape into an adjunct of the metropole, it is possible to have children and to achieve marital happiness. In this manner, both novels display an ideological ambivalence which can only be explained as a consequence of a failure to match an acceptance of surface aspects of change within gender relations with a sufficient grasp of the need to implement a more fundamental change at the infrastructural level of the discursive field. We thus have here the operation of the principle of selective inclusion and exclusion of female autonomy as a basis of patriarchy's management of marriage practice.

The radical vision of marriage practice, as illustrated in Helen Ovbiagele's *You Never Know* and Buchi Emecheta's *A Kind of Marriage*, is predicated on the failure by a husband to counter-identify with traditional gender practice, as a result of which the imaginary happiness promised by traditional marriage practice is fractured and revealed to be arid. In Helen Ovbiagele's novel the repression of female autonomy becomes the means by which the universal subject of dominant gender ideology comes to perceive the real conditions of her oppression and also becomes the point of departure for an emancipatory trajectory.² Female autonomy is articulated as a practice that transcends the ritualised institutional practice of marriage and one where

gender egalitarianism is possible for the reason that it is inserted in a happy balance between autonomy and partnership. In Buchi Emecheta's novel, *A Kind of Marriage*, however, the analysis of dominant gender ideology takes the form of interrogating the virtues of traditional patriarchy, particularly its valorization of maternity. The conception of marriage solely as an area of production is seen as undermining precisely those values which such a view attempts to propagate and protect. The contradictions inherent in this mode of marriage practice provide the means for a radical intervention in the dominant gender ideology in Africa. Buchi Emecheta argues for the dispensability of men. The ground that permits such an ultra radical position is one which involves reasoning from the particular to the general in such a way that the actions of one man come to represent those of the whole of his gender. The universalisation of the specific reduces the radical quality of the text.

In the representation of romantic love, in chapter four, I have shown that the attempt to domesticate this western practice, at every point, involves a dialogue with dominant gender ideology which is itself intersected by other discourses. In Maillu's *For Mbatha and Rabeka*, romantic love is shown to serve as a prelude to marriage. Furthermore, it is inscribed in social relations of economic production. Money and other material goods are presented as important considerations in the choice of a partner on the part of women. Rabeka prefers the city man Mawa to the village teacher Mbatha. The ideological intentionality of the text, however, argues that a relationship based on such considerations as wealth and prestige is bound to be a disaster. The means by which the moral of the story is secured is through the demonisation of urban masculinity. In this way, the extent to which both urban and rural masculinity undermine female autonomy is smoothed over in the interest of a limited moral economy. Thus female subjectivity in the novel is inscribed within the discourse of male

territoriality in such a way that it is never approached as a distinct mode of experience. In short, female subjectivity in *For Mbatha and Rabeka* is merely presented as a scene for a masculine contest. The reduction of female subjectivity to its conditions of production within patriarchy is also evident in Maillu's *Benni Kamba 009 in Operation DXT*. What we are presented with here is a world in which the detective Benni Kamba reigns supreme. He is committed to the defence of Africa from unscrupulous foreign exploitation such as the dumping of dangerous drugs on the continent. High as Benni Kamba's ideals are, the gender discursive formation in which his subjectivity is inscribed is characterised by unequal relations of gender. The phallogentricity of the world of the detective is evident in the way Kamba's women are objectified as part of those props which mark out the boundary, in the detective's favour, between him and the other men who occupy the other end of the binary equation. In the masculine contest that provides the narrative locus, clearly women are represented either as spoils of war or as minstrels singing the hero into battle. There is thus in the novel a distinct lack of the kind of female subjectivity that can lead to counter-identification with dominant gender ideology. On the whole, it would appear that matters of gender relations, in the novel, have been subsumed under a phallogentric radical nationalism. To a certain extent, this is true of Nandi Dlovu's *Angel of Death*, where some form of black power is celebrated at the expense of gender egalitarianism. The famed South African detective Zak Biko's arrival in New York to solve western crime involves him in a triangular relationship in which he is caught between an admiring white woman and his black fiancée.⁹ The white woman turns out to be a murderer and a drug smuggler in contrast with the polite and domesticated black woman. The valorisation of black over white womanhood, at the end of the novel, provides an example of how what Freud terms the *narcissism of small*

differences such as racism can impede the development of solidarity among the oppressed. It is such small differences, mediated, as they are, through the agent of the dominant ideology that produce an imaginary relationship between the subject of the dominant gender ideology and the real conditions of her subjection.

In Helen Ovbiagele's *Evbu My Love* we are presented with a form of female subjectivity that is immersed in romantic fiction, which according to the novel inculcates in the heroine a rather romanticised view of social relationships. *Evbu* colludes with the dominant gender ideology until she is no longer able to contain its most obvious contradictions. However, the moment when she stages a gesture of counter-identification is also the occasion when the novel panders to the formula of western romance by containing the emerging autonomous subjectivity in an exotic marriage which seems to promise infinite happiness. We observe here a strategy of solving a general gender issue by resorting to a personalised package of happiness.⁴ In Maillu's *After 4.30*, however, we are presented with a different sort of relationship. In the novel, the casual nocturnal sexual encounters of Nairobi constitute the ground on which the operations of dominant gender ideology are mapped out. The heroine of the novel effects a form of transgressive mimesis in which she is aware of being exploited and exploiting as well. Through the various relationships she has with men, a rather plaintive voice of disenchantment and anger comes through. Nevertheless, the critique of dominant gender ideology we are presented with by Maillu is shorn of its radical edge through a fixation on descriptions of female genitalia which has the effect of presenting the oppressed female body as an object of titillation rather than pity. In this work, one senses a conflict between the message and the demands of the market: Maillu's popular mode of near voyeurism is prioritised over the critique of the dominant gender ideology.

Romantic love in Helen Ovbiagele's *For Ever Yours* becomes a site for the development of female autonomy. A relationship that is characterised by unequal relations of gender gives the heroine an opportunity to take on the larger issue of female emancipation. When she has set up her political career, Halima, the heroine, returns to the now repentant boyfriend and marries him. On the whole, the novel shows the possibility of gender egalitarianism within a romantic relationship. Female awareness about unequal relations of gender is also the central subject of Waliye Gondwe's *Love's Dilemma*. In this novel the agent of the dominant gender ideology, taking for granted the heroine's previous submissiveness, is shocked to learn that what had worked in a different social formation is condemned by the heroine. The novel shows how female migration can become the means by which the African woman achieves counter-identification with the dominant gender ideology, thus defining female subjectivity as a function of cultural and ideological space.

In chapter five, I have explored the question of gender socialisation. In Kalitera's *Why Son, Why*, female subjectivity is presented as surrogate masculinity at a moment of stress within patriarchy, revealing the resourcefulness of the dominant gender ideology. Autonomous female subjectivity becomes the only means through which a phallogentric future is realised. Generally, the novel operates with a notion of female autonomy that secures its repression through the very fact of being autonomous. Thus, the process of gendering is here shown to be utilised flexibly in the interest of other discursive interests of a patriarchal formation. In Senzenjani Lukhele's novel *Tell Me No More*, the question of female gendering is mediated through notions of masculine strength and female weakness. Female dependency on the protection of male members of the family is rehearsed as an important paradigm of gender relations. In other words, what passes off as a humanitarian gesture embodies

the means by which female subjectivity is securely returned to what Pecheux terms the universal subject of dominant ideology, one who 'lives out' the imaginary conditions of her subjection.⁵

A more radical consideration of gendering is offered by Sam Aryeetey's *Harvest of Love*. In this novel, the subject of traditional gender ideology such as the one presented in Kalitera's *Why Father, Why* and Senzenjani Lukhele's *Tell Me No More* lives out the contradictions of her ideological formation. The failure to identify completely with the dominant gender ideology, one which arises out of an accident, earns Naki untold suffering at the hands of the custodians of traditional patriarchy. However critical the text's interrogation of dominant gender ideology is, it fails to mount a sufficiently radical critique of it, for in the final analysis it returns the subject of a changed gender formation to the valorised norms and values of traditional patriarchy; thus the search for a generalised cultural integration between modernity and the past becomes the graveyard of a radical reading of a repressive social formation. This amply foregrounds the pitfalls of a pragmatism that shifts specific instances of gender repression into general questions of cultural conflict. On the other hand, in Waliye Gondwe's *Second-hand Love* the reproduction of traditional gender ideology is subjected to a more intense radical reading. The fetishization of female beauty and the consequences of such a practice on the young centrally constitutes the basis of an interrogation of the constituents of the dominant gender ideology. Yet, for all its critical articulation, *Second-hand Love* closes off at a point where radical female autonomy should emerge, a hesitancy that puts the sexual politics represented by the ideological trajectory of the novel within the mould of an occluding liberalism.

In his novel, *Sacrifice*, Kole Omotoso brings to the question of gender the labour of class analysis. The relationship between a medical doctor and his

mother, a prostitute, provides a site for the investigation of the relationship between class and gender ideology, within which class is shown to be an obstacle to female solidarity. But more importantly, the novel presents a failure by a nascent autonomous subjectivity to insert a radical mode of gendering in a predominantly patriarchal discursive formation. The novel offers an example of what happens to a radical vision with limited ideological and material resources. If in Kole Omotoso's novel we witness the alienation of child from mother and woman from woman through the mediation of a form of patriarchal capitalism, in Buchi Emecheta's *Naira Power*, we are shown the possibility of solidarity, the solidarity between woman and woman that cuts across class differentiation. The discussion between Auntie Bintu and Amina unleashes the radical plurality of ideology in such a way that the marginalised unofficial languages of gender are used to interrogate dominant gender ideology, thus opening up the possibility of radical female autonomy.

THE AUTONOMY OF AFRICAN POPULAR LITERATURE

The question of ideological representation aside, the texts which I have discussed in the thesis represent variegated relations with western popular literature which, as it has been shown in specific instances in the thesis, still informs the production aesthetics of contemporary African popular literature. There are works such as David Maillu's *Benni Kamba 009 in Operation DXT* and Nandi Dlovu's *Angel of Death* which are modelled on western thrillers. In Nandi Dlovu's novel there is an attempt to replicate the western formula to such an extent that the story is not set in Africa, but in New York. Indeed, even the heroic code informing the production aesthetics here, the tough, sleek and

trigger-happy detective, is very much in the general western mode of the representation of the detective. This is one trend in African popular literature, though from the texts I have surveyed it does not appear to be as common as the critics of African popular literature fear it is. This mode would represent the first stage in any literature from a colonial social formation. As Gareth Griffiths suggests in his article, 'Imitation, Abrogation and Appropriation: the Production of the Post-colonial Text,' the first literature produced in a post-colonial social formation takes the form of the reproduction of the aesthetics of the metropole. Though his argument is made in the context of early missionary writing, one can extend it to include the literature written by the indigenous peoples as well. As my account of the development of African popular literature has pointed out, the early literature in the local languages as well as the early literature written in English such as Onitsha market literature are literatures of imitation. This form of imitation is necessary as a means of domesticating another culture. One acquires the language as well as the literature and its production aesthetics first. I would suggest that this trend is still visible in contemporary African popular literature but that it is, on the whole, fast giving way to an attempt to indigenize the various genres constituting western popular literature.

Maillu's *Benni Kamba 009 in Operation DXT* represents such an attempt, albeit a rather frail one. The thematic concerns of the novel would hardly fall within those of the average western thriller. The task of the hero is overtly political as well as ethical: he must save the continent from economic exploitation and since the academics and the politicians have failed, the need for a man of action is presented as a logical alternative. The setting is African and the concerns are *those* which any radical reading of the North-South dichotomy would, generally speaking, be sympathetic with, though it might

not agree with the means by which Maillu sets about rectifying the situation. Thus, here we have the beginnings of the *appropriation* of a western genre, though it has to be said that the heroic code Maillu uses, like Nandi Dlovu's, is still modelled on western thrillers. This might be a function of considerations of marketing since most African readers of popular literature still read western popular literature. Nevertheless, the indigenizing of the genre on the thematic level still leaves room for further stylistic appropriation and domestication.

A more obvious area of appropriation is in the domain of romantic fiction, as Griswold and Bastian have also noticed. Though there is a scattering of outright imitations of the western models of romance, when one looks closely at the thematic and stylistic features of African romantic fiction, one notices that it is hardly as formulaic as the western novels. Romantic novels I have discussed in the thesis such as Aubrey Kalitera's *Why Father, Why, and Mother, Why Mother*, Waliye Gondwe's *Love's Dilemma and Second-hand Love*, or Helen Ovbiagele's *Forever Yours, Evbu My Love and You Never Know* are a good example *of* such texts. These novels, unlike western romantic fiction, do not concentrate on a single love affair nor do they always have happy endings.⁶ More significantly, unlike the western romances, the African ones focus not just on the relationship between two individuals but also bring into the fictive space a broader social space and a wider range of social relationships.

There is a third type of African popular literature whose generic classification hardly fits the western system. Novels such as *Truth Will Out* by Dede Kamkondo, Aubrey Kalitera's *Why Son, Why*, Kole Omotoso's *Sacrifice*, Buchi Emecheta's *Naira Power*, David Maillu's *After 4.30* and others do not conform to the western economy of genre. They use the realistic mode of narrative in order to explore such subjects as marriage, romantic love and the parent-child relationships. I would argue that such novels move beyond mere appropriation

to the production of a new tradition, one that cannot be represented adequately by the genre system to which traditional literary criticism in Africa is accustomed. The interrogation of relations of difference characterising the received literary system taking place in the domain of the production of popular literature is symptomatic of a general contestation of literary value taking place in the continent. For example, in his work *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, Ngũgĩ has questioned the privileging of African English language literature over vernacular literature. In addition, the Malawian poet Edson Mpina has questioned the cultural validity of elite poetry. He has argued that there is need to create a poetry that can be appreciated by the common person. Furthermore, the Nigerian writer and critic Kole Omotoso has argued that it is only through a populist mode of writing that the African writer can effectively discharge his political obligations.⁷

The thesis represents an attempt to carry the critique of the dominant construction of relations of difference within the African literary system further. I have tried to relocate African popular literature outside the binary opposition between popular and high literature, where it can be examined as a distinct signifying practice. I cannot claim to have completely resolved the problem; there are still a number of questions which need to be answered and issues which need to be addressed. For example, there is need for further work on the narrative strategies employed by the different categories comprising African popular literature. There is also need to determine patterns of interaction between high and popular literature. Nevertheless, I hope I have amply demonstrated that 'pulp' need not necessarily yield 'pulpy' knowledge.

NOTES

1. Wendy Griswold and Misty Bastian, 'Continuities and Reconstructions in Cross-Cultural Literary Transmission: The Case of the Nigerian Romance Novel,' *Poetics*, 16 (1987), p. 343.
2. For the term 'universal subject' see Michel Pecheux, *Language, Semantics and Ideology*, trans. Harbans Nagpal (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 156-157.
3. Kate Millett in the following work shows how a triangular relationship can accord enormous power to the male, who occupies the apex: *Sexual Politics* (London: Virago, 1979).
4. Roger Bromley sees this strategy as one of the defining characteristics of popular literature. See Roger Bromley, 'Natural Boundaries: The Social Function of Popular Literature,' *Red Letters*, 7 (1978), p. 37.
5. Pecheux, Op. Cit., pp. 156-157.
6. Griswold and Bastian, Op. Cit., pp. 342-351.
7. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey Publishers, 1986); Adrian Roscoe, 'Raw Pieces of Liberation: The Poetry of Edson Mpina,' Unpublished manuscript; Mpalive-Hangson Msiska, 'Interview with Kole Omotoso,' Unpublished manuscript.

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