Religion as a Vehicle for Hypermasculinity in Things Fall Apart and The Poisonwood Bible

Sintès, Manon

Religion as a Vehicle for Hypermasculinity in *Things Fall Apart* and *The Poisonwood Bible*

MA Thesis Literary Studies

Student Name: Manon Sintès

Student Number: 3495825

Date: 10 June 2023

Supervisor: Dr. S.A. Polak

Second Reader: Prof.dr. P.T.M.G. Liebregts

Department of Literary Studies, Leiden University

Contents

Introduction: Situating Postcolonialism and Masculinity Studies

The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much.

Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

Chinua Achebe in his 1958 novel *Things Fall Apart* opens with an epigraph. It is the first four lines of the first stanza of W.B. Yeats's 'The Second Coming'. Achebe quotes:

> Turning and turning in the widening gyre
> The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
> Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
> Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world (Yeats 19)

This poem contains much of the central struggle of *Things Fall Apart* and Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible*. Yeats in his poem, particularly in its second stanza, presents an image of the second coming:

> Surely some revelation is at hand;
> Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
> The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
> When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*
> Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
> A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
> A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
> Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
> Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
> The darkness drops again; but now I know
> That twenty centuries of stony sleep
> Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
> And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
> Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born? (19)

What is described as a promise of salvation in Christian theology is instead the promise of anarchy and destruction for non-Christian communities. The prophecy of the second coming is therefore both a salvation and a destruction, salvation for one group, white Christian missionaries and destruction for those not of their faith. The second coming is a process that for Yeats represents historical movements that occur cyclically which he depicts through the symbol of the interpenetrating, spiralling gyres. Through a postcolonial understanding of the poem, Achebe's use of the first four lines of Yeats's poem represents the colonial enterprise in Nigeria, while the poem as a whole encompasses a wider view: the motions of history and the cycles of salvation and destruction that drive imperial ideology everywhere from the Western 'centre'. The poem is also relevant to Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible*, a novel about white Baptist missionaries in the Congo. Here, promise of Christian salvation that brings the Price family to the Congo in 1959, ultimately leads to the destruction of their worldview (aside from their domineering, fanatical father who does not change and self-destructively remains firm to his beliefs). Through their common themes and subject, the missionaries entering the Congo in *The Poisonwood Bible* can be dealt with analytically alongside the missionaries in Nigeria in *Things Fall Apart*. Both African countries possess their own history and circumstances, but like Yeats's widening gyre, the themes in one novel are reflected in the other and they are representative of wider cycles in colonial history.

These lines also deftly point to Achebe's concern for colonialism in its reference to the centre, which can be understood as the European or Western imperial centre as depicted in Pascale Casanova's centre-periphery model of world literature (Casanova 14). Theorising world literature, particularly through a postcolonial lens, can only aptly be done by understanding the inequality between the literary core and its peripheries. Casanova demonstrates that literary cores are internationally recognised by the number of works that enter their canon with the primary core literary languages being French, English, German, and Russian. Writing coming from other languages and countries on the periphery are less likely to enter canon and become internationally recognised. It then follows that for a peripheral nation to have literary recognition, the language of the core must be adopted.[1] Theorising world literature in this way does not mean, however, to perpetuate these unequal power dynamics, but to recognise that they exist and must be reckoned with. Achebe, coming from a 'peripheral' nation wrote *Things Fall Apart* at a time when Anglophone literature regarding Africa was largely known by Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, reduced to images of savagery that needed to be mapped and tamed by the more evolved white European. As a scholar Achebe has contested Conrad's

[1] There are different philosophies pertaining to this subject. For one, Kenyan contemporary to Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o followed an interesting path, where he initially wrote in English, the language of the literary core as James Ngugi, but in rejection of these values he adopted his Kenyan name and began to write in Gikuyu for a Kenyan literary audience.

racist depictions, and in an interview with Bill Moyers he said, "Reading *Heart of Darkness*, for instance, which was a very, very highly praised book, and it is still very highly praised […] I realized that I was one of those savages jumping up and down on the beach. I was not on Marlow's steamer, you see, as I had thought before. And once that kind of enlightenment comes to you, you realize that you need to write a different story" (PBS 1988). In the 1950s, Achebe wrote his African trilogy, which begins with *Things Fall Apart*, as part of a movement to regain national pride, entering Nigerian literature written in English into canon, painting a different picture of Africa and giving African writers control over the narrative.

Deleted: -

Formatted: Font: Italic

Deleted: '

Situating Postcolonialism

Critical to the understanding of religion and colonisation in African literature, such as Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, and literature about Africa, like Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible*, is an understanding of postcolonial theory through which I will conduct my analysis. In broad terms, postcolonial theory seeks to centre the colonised subject and their experience of colonisation and its effects, though the term is contested with much nuance in more recent scholarly work.[2] Founding scholars of the field include Edward Said with his seminal 1978 text *Orientalism*, as well as Frantz Fanon with his 1961 *The Wretched of the Earth*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak with her concept of the "subaltern" and Homi Bhabha through his definitions of mimicry, hybridity and liminality in his essay collection *The Location of Culture*. These central texts of postcolonial theory question the theoretical, cultural and material interactions and unequal power dynamics between the colonised and the coloniser and are a departure from prior racist and reductive images of the "Other" as found in *Heart of Darkness* and Joyce Cary's *Mr. Johnson*.

Things Fall Apart has been categorised as a postcolonial text by scholars as is it is literature produced in a colonised country, dealing with colonisation as its subject matter. As explained, Achebe's motivation to write was informed by the lack of representation of African culture in literature. In his interview with Bill Moyers he explains: "It is the storyteller, in fact, that makes us what we are, that creates history. […] The memory which the survivors must have, otherwise their surviving would have no meaning" (PBS 1988). Narrative thereby becomes an anti-colonial tool for Achebe, a means to situating the author within postcolonial theoretical frameworks. As a result of this situation, narrative rewrites the 'permanence of vision' – that their culture is internally fixed and only has the capacity to

[2] For example, there are distinctions between 'post-colonial' 'postcolonial' and discourse surrounding the underlying connotations of centring 'colonial' within a theoretical framework that often seeks to liberate or nationalise literature from oppressive imperial governing.

develop through external influence (Gikandi *Reading Chinua Achebe* 10). Achebe believes "colonization was the most important event in our history from all kinds of angles […] most of the problems we see in our politics derive from the moment when we lost our initiative to other people, to colonizers" (Achebe, *African Writers* 8). His writing at the height of the nationalist movement which the scholar Simon Gikandi describes as "a moment that promises a rupture in the colonial epistemology or a radical reversal of the colonial ideology" is thereby intrinsically linked to postcolonial and anti-colonial theory (7). Through narrative, Achebe reclaims the power of 'initiative' and demonstrates that Africa, and in particular, pre-colonial Nigeria was always capable of self-determination but was instead robbed of this by colonial intervention. In *The Role of the Writer in the New Nation* Achebe writes: "The worst that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and self-respect. The writer's duty is to help them regain it by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost" (*African Writers* 8). It is this emphasis on the loss experienced as a direct result of colonialism that situates *Things Fall Apart* as a postcolonial text, and Achebe as a postcolonial author.

Deleted: m

By contrast, *The Poisonwood Bible* is a novel about the Congo written by a white American woman. Despite Kingsolver's approach of the Congo in her text as a westerner looking in, the text is intrinsically postcolonial. While the novel is set during Belgian colonial rule in The Congo, it also traces the Congo's complicated path to national independence alongside the Price family's disillusionment with their religious mission, and by extension, colonial intervention. Kingsolver's critique of Christian missions into Africa, imperialism and US paternalism towards the Congo situates this novel as postcolonial. As the five narrators of the novel are the white Southern American girls of the Price family, the narrative is postcolonial but in a different way to Achebe's, as Kingsolver's novel does not write from within the African nationalism movement that it defends. Moreover, Kingsolver published *The Poisonwood Bible* forty years after Achebe wrote *Things Fall Apart*, with the foresight of Achebe's legacy and more established postcolonial theory. Through the white American Price family, Kingsolver is able to provide an intersectional view of colonial and anti-colonialism, that together with Achebe's text, provide a fuller picturing of postcolonialism. Kingsolver's perspective produces a narrative that traces her characters' trajectory of belief in the colonial project and proselytization, to their crisis of faith in their mission, and how they grapple with their postcolonial guilt.

Religion necessitates postcolonialism as historically, the two accompany one another. The Congolese philosopher Valentin-Yves Mudimbe called the missionary "the best symbol of colonial enterprise" (5). We see this symbol repeated in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and other African novels. The religion of the colonisers in conflict with the religion of the indigenous generate most of the violence and tension in both *Things Fall Apart* and *The Poisonwood Bible*. The colonial project in *Things Fall Apart* begins with

the spread of Christianity into Umuofia. It is the first vestige of colonialism introduced before the District Commissioner and the colonial government legitimise the practice violently. Likewise, the first chapter of *The Poisonwood* Bible begins with an epigraph from the Book of Genesis, verse 1:28: "And God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (Kingsolver, *PB* 1). This verse, when read literally, justifies religious and economic colonisation. This frames the Prices' missionary project as a colonial practice, especially considering the history of missionaries in the Congo. King Leopold II of Belgium "used democratic, religious rhetoric to control his rape and pillage of the Congo", one of his tactics being to use missionary service (Ognibene 20). Therefore, a postcolonial theoretical framework is crucial to examining religion in these texts as the two necessitate each other, especially being key themes in both novels.

Situating Masculinity Studies, femininity and hypermasculinity

I will also examine the texts through the lens of masculinity studies. The pre-colonial Nigeria that Achebe depicts has clearly defined gender binaries and the hypermasculinity of the protagonist Okonkwo forms the central feature of his personality and how he interacts with his environment. Masculinity studies is particularly important in the context of these novels as we see displays of violent hypermasculinity as a driving force of the religiously grounded conflict. Professor of black and African theology, Tinyiko Maluleke, explains that there has been a rise of violent masculinities linked to religion in many parts of Africa. He names 'the Lord's resistance army' and al-Shabaab in East Africa, and the Boko Haram of West Africa, which he explains "are all undergirded by fundamentalist religious notions of masculinity" (44). Central to my analysis is the intersection of religion and masculinity, and though the texts are works of fiction, the themes are relevant in wider historical gyres. Both texts provide an opportunity to examine masculinity in religion, through Okonkwo and the religious rites of Umuofia in *Things Fall Apart*, as well as the masculinity involved in *The Poisonwood Bible* through the Price family's patriarch, Nathan Price, and interestingly, how fear and weakness underlie these characters' violent masculinities. Alongside colonialism, gender forms part of a power structure that is legitimised by religion.

The natural progression of a masculinity-based theoretical lens is an analysis of femininity. As the main point of my analysis is how religion upholds violent hypermasculinity, femininity will be discussed insofar as it is about how religious doctrine expects women to behave and the position they occupy in a religious society. Discussions of gender and religion across either text are complicated, however, as

both contain exceptions to standard gender binary, and the rejection of religious misogyny on the part of the Price daughters is a central part of their character development.

While Achebe was writing in the context of gaining national pride, both literary and culturally, his discourse on women seems to originate from the colonising ideology he writes against which adheres to strict rules based on rigid constructions of gender and gender roles. Moreover, the novel's international reception perpetuates this pre-existing problem to an international audience who celebrate the 'authenticity' of Achebe's text and thereby do not critically examine the systemic oppression of women in the novel. It arguably adheres to an image of authenticity perpetuated by the lens of the colonising literary core. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe does not seem concerned with the question of women and their status in society. His protagonist, Okonkwo, rejects femininity in all its aspects, associating femininity with inherent weakness. Achebe thereby "formed the African literary world" with a text that undermined its female characters with the same patriarchal mindset of the coloniser (Gikandi, *Reading Chinua Achebe* 2).[3] This reflects the attitudes at his time of writing where the movements to celebrate black masculinity encompassed within the African nationalism movement, were central to his work and the work of his contemporaries. Gikandi interestingly points out that due to education rooted in colonialism, "the men and women who founded the tradition of what we now call modern African writing, both in European and indigenous languages, were, without exception, products of the institutions that colonialism had introduced and developed on the continent" (Gikandi, *Cambridge History* 379). This explains how in *Things Fall Apart* Achebe simultaneously writes anti-colonial and postcolonial literature about Africa, while presenting colonial gender discourse that is anthropologically inaccurate to pre-colonial gender norms.

While this is interesting to critique, as Edward Said argued in *Orientalism,* adhering to the truth of reality in a text is not its main objective. He suggests instead the elements to observe in a text are its "style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, not the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original" (21). The foregrounding of authenticity in the African novel is what Harry Garuba calls "the age-old problematic of the relationship between literary representation and reality" (259). He concludes his paper by suggesting "multiple perspectives" and "a plurality of subject positions" (260) as a more critical way to conduct analysis. In examining the "reality" of religion and masculinity in *Things Fall Apart* and *The Poisonwood Bible*, we approach the subject with multiple narratorial perspectives, both African and western, across

[3] That Achebe formed the African literary world is a sentiment that many scholars echo. However, in *Reading Chinua Achebe* Gikandi explains that it is important to acknowledge that Achebe is preceded by various writers writing in African languages, like Amos Tutuola in Nigeria, and that questioning Achebe's seminal status is to question the issue of literary canonicity itself.

masculinity and femininity studies, and with accordance taken to the imperial and postcolonial ideology which background the texts.

The first chapter of this thesis will analyse Okonkwo and Nathan's hypermasculinity as being undergirded by religion, and by weakness and cowardice. This chapter will link both protagonists to religion. Okonkwo's life will be examined through Achebe's accounts of Igbo cosmology, particularly through the concept of *chi* which recurs throughout *Things Fall Apart*. While *chi* will be given some accountability for Okonkwo's life path, I will ultimately show that his rejection of femininity and of weakness – that which his father embraced, is his driving force and leads to his downfall. In *The Poisonwood Bible*, Nathan's downfall is also linked to his rejection of femininity and weakness. He will be shown as a figure distinguished narratorly from the women in his family, and Orleanna's account of the changes in his character will show that his move to religious fundamentalism and violent masculinity are deeply connected, both motivated by a fear of weakness and cowardice. This chapter will therefore show how religions accompanies, and is often even a vehicle for, hypermasculinity but that this hypermasculinity is a fragile disguise of weakness.

The second chapter will look at femininity insofar as how it is rejected by masculine characters, and how the religious society of either novel leaves room, or doesn't leave room, for femininity. This is where religious characterisation changes between the novels. The Christianity of *The Poisonwood Bible* is stifling for the female characters of the Price family, and their characterisation is marked by a rejection of these values and the fundamentalist way of life. The religion of Umuofia, while primarily being foregrounded by men in religious rites and rituals, have women occupying important positions, and the female goddess of the earth is the most important in the life of Umuofians. The patriarchal society that venerates certain female godly ideals is explained in an analysis by Phanuel Egejuru whereby womanhood is revered in spirituality, but the day-to-day existence of a woman, the womanbeing, is disparaged socially.

The two chapters together will provide a rounder answer to the question of how religion is a vehicle for hypermasculinity, showing how religion accompanies violent masculinity while often disparaging women and femininity, though there are exceptions that vary from religion to religion. Masculinity studies therefore provides an important lens to understand my analysis, while a postcolonial framework accompanies discussions of colonial religion historically, while also providing a wider critical background to either novel.

Chapter One: Religion, Violent Masculinity and Weakness

Living fire begets cold, impotent ash.

Okonkwo, *Things Fall Apart*

Religion, particularly in the field of postcolonial studies, is a difficult concept to articulate as practicing religion forms an intrinsic and inextricable part of society and therefore resists linear definition. Even understanding Igbo cosmology differs from person to person across the same community, as according to Achebe in his essay collection *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, "Igbo people did not construct a rigid and closely argued system of thought to explain the universe and the place of man in it, preferring the metaphor of myth and poetry, anyone seeking an insight into their world must seek it along their own way" (94). However, both Achebe and Kingsolver demonstrate how closely related culture and religion are in their novels, particularly for the indigenous communities. This is part of what makes religion a fascinating tool in their literature to examine the intersections of gender, culture, and colonialism.

Understanding how masculinity intersects with religion necessarily requires a basic comprehension of Igbo cosmology and Christian doctrine to construct the worldview of the characters, to then understand how they adhere to or deviate from their religious and societal norms. These are far reaching topics so in this chapter I will only be dealing with religion as is presented in either text and not their entire religious systems from a wider anthropological and theological view. This will involve textual analysis of *Things Fall Apart* to construct an image of Igbo cosmology insofar as it relates to masculinity studies, the practical and moral implications this has for the Igbo community, and its interaction with the coloniser's religion.

Gikandi references Marxist and materialist schools of thought and their suggestion that "culture relies on myths because it lacks scientific knowledge about natural phenomena; that myths point to a gap of understanding, or consciousness in this culture; and that the culture manifests a fear of the unknown" (*Rereading the African Novel* 150). However, he expresses that myth is also "a source of insight", "an expression of collective dreams, aesthetic play, or even ritual", and how "a community expresses its deepest shared values or repressed feelings" (150). Interpreting ideology is therefore very important in spiritually centred communities and interpreting the fictional accounts of Achebe and Kingsolver can lead to analysis of the gender struggles and conflicting values at play within these religious communities. In *The Poisonwood Bible* the forefront of this gender struggle through religious

doctrine is seen in the figure of Nathan Price, the patriarch of the Price family and a Reverend intent on his proselytising mission. In *Things Fall Apart*, the male protagonist Okonkwo is not a religious figure, but will be this chapter's case study of the tension between the Igbo cosmological concept of *chi*, its masculine connotations of power and strength and how Okonkwo exemplifies violent masculinity through fear.

In *Morning Yet on Creation Day* Achebe explains the concept of *chi*. He argues that "without an understanding of the nature of *chi* one could not begin to make sense of the Igbo world-view". He defines *chi* as meaning "god, guardian angel, personal spirit, soul, spirit-double, etc." as well as the "transitional periods between day and night or night and day" (*Morning Yet* 93). A person's chi is their "other identity in spiritland -- his *spirit being* complementing his terrestrial *human being*," a concept bolstered by the famous Igbo proverb "nothing can stand alone, there must always be another thing standing beside it" (93). While not directly present in *Things Fall Apart*, this proverb is used to rationalise much of the duality present within Igbo society including the seemingly paradoxical gender norms, and the view of religion. The Igbo believe the *chi* is related to the spirit of the sun which they associate with the male deity Chukwu or Chineke. *Chi* in its conflations with the masculine sun deity Chukwu, and as the driving force of success thereby presents masculinity in Igbo cosmology as an active and powerful force, although there are no absolutes. This lies in contrast to the imperial and Western construction binaries of masculinity and femininity. As Achebe explains, a person will build a shrine to their *chi* when they reach a certain stage in their life, and this shrine will stand, representing a person's *chi* physically, until their death whereupon the shrine is destroyed. As a personal god, a person's *chi* has much power over them, more so than any other deity, controlling their wealth and success, their failures and misfortunes – which have been decided for a person before they are incarnated in a contract with their *chi*. *Chi* is therefore distinct to a person's character and deals more with success and failure than morality, although even this is not an absolute distinction as Achebe explains "nothing is *totally* anything in Igbo thinking; everything is a question of measure and degree" (*Morning Yet* 97).

Okonkwo's success according to Igbo cosmology must be a part of his *chi*, but this is not the full picture that Achebe presents in the novel. The narrator explains:

> If ever a man deserved his success, that man was Okonkwo. At an early age he had achieved fame as the greatest wrestler in all the land. That was not luck. At the most one could say that his *chi* or personal god was good. But the Ibo people have a proverb that when a man says yes his *chi* says yes also. Okonkwo said yes very

> strongly; so his *chi* agreed. And not only his *chi* but his clan too, because it judged a man by the work of his hands (20).

This construction of the *chi* departs slightly from Achebe's explanations where at this moment in the novel Okonkwo is shown to have more authority over his *chi* than traditional interpretations of *chi* in Igbo cosmology. For instance, at a meeting Okonkwo rebuffs a man with not titles saying "this meeting is for men" (20). The other men at the meeting dislike Okonkwo's attitude and "the oldest man present said sternly that those whose palm-kernels were cracked for them by a benevolent spirit should not forget to be humble" (20). The old man is alluding to Okonkwo's *chi* which he awards responsibility for Okonkwo's successes. However, the narrator then says "but it was not really true that Okonkwo's palm-kernels had been cracked for him by a benevolent spirit. He had cracked them himself" (20). This therefore provides a sense that Okonkwo possesses power and strength regardless of his *chi* and that he believes his material successes should be entirely attributed to his own work. Yet, with an understanding of Igbo cosmology and the true power of the *chi*, no matter how much Okonkwo tries to gain material success, if his *chi* decides he will fail, then he will fail. Blame is later placed on his *chi* for his failures and misfortunes. For instance, after Okonkwo's gun misfires and he accidentally kills a boy in his clan, he is exiled to his mother's land Mbanta and may only return to his father's land seven years later to rebuild his wealth and status.

Deleted: later

Okonkwo's exile is one instance that confirms the true disconnection between his desire for success, wealth and title, and the ruling of his *chi*. Following his exile, the narrator concludes: "Clearly his personal god or *chi* was not made for great things. A man could not rise beyond the destiny of his *chi*. The saying of the elders was not true - that if a man said yea his *chi* also affirmed. Here was a man whose *chi* said nay despite his own affirmation" (96). Achebe cleverly sets up the understanding of Okonkwo and his relationship to his *chi* throughout the novel. At the start the narrator leads the reader to believe that Okonkwo possesses power and success regardless of his *chi* but by the time Okonkwo is exiled the narrator re-evaluates their prior claim, emphasising the disparity between Okonkwo's ambitions and what his *chi* has planned for him.

Okonkwo's father Unoka may have had bad *chi*, being deemed a failure as "he was poor and his wife and children had barely enough to eat" (4). Despite people swearing never to lend him more money, "Unoka was such a man that he always succeeded in borrowing more, and piling up his debts" (4). His skill for accumulating debt and consistently failing financially can be attributed to his *chi*, but again according to Igbo cosmology this has no bearing on the goodness of his character. The narrator provides a lengthy passage about Unoka's ability to see beauty in music and the natural world, an

appreciation for taking things slow, loving kites and songs and fellowship as a young adult. He retained this gentle artistic character into adulthood, but it resulted that "Unoka, the grown-up, was a failure" due to his lack of material success (4). As a result, upon his death Unoka had no title and was heavily in debt (6). The narrator presents an image of Okonkwo's violent, hypermasculine characterisation as directly stemming from internalised fear of the weakness and dishonour with which his father died. Early in the novel, Okonkwo is described as ruling his family "with a heavy hand", instilling fear in them because of his "fiery temper" (10). But underlying this, "his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness" a fear "deeper and more intimate" than fearing "evil and capricious gods and of magic" (10). His fear "was not external but lay deep within himself" because his father had been a "failure" and "weak" (11). He resented that a playmate had referred to his father as an *agbala* which meant "woman" or "a man who had taken no title" (11). As a result of these resentments, "Okonkwo was ruled by one passion—to hate everything that his father, Unoka, had loved. One of those things was gentleness and another was idleness" (11).

This is part of where the tension between Okonkwo and his *chi* lies. Okonkwo guides his masculinity, his actions and his desire for success from his father's shortcomings despite living in a society where "a man was judged according to his worth and not according to the worth of his father" as his fear is deeper than custom (6). At the end of the novel he commits suicide, which according to the custom of the clan is an affront to the earth, leaving him with no proper burial or titles, only dishonour and shame. Xixia Yu compares Okonkwo and his father at the end of both their lives. She writes, "Here is a man who lacks manliness and another man who possesses manliness; yet, they share the same fate" (Yu 95). While Okonkwo attempts to distinguish himself from his father, his violent hypermasculinity still results in losing all he had gained throughout his life, which in Igbo cosmology is attributed to the work of the *chi*.

We can also see this tension between bad *chi* and fate through Ikemefuna, who is described at the start of the novel as a "doomed" and "ill-fated lad" due to his sacrifice in the clan three years later (7). Ikemefuna comes to Umuofia and to Okonkwo's compound as a peace offering from the neighbouring clan to avoid war. Despite initial fear and apprehension, Ikemefuna grows close to Okonkwo and Okonkwo's son Nwoye and accompanies Okonkwo like a son to village meetings and ancestral feasts. Ikemefuna even calls Okonkwo "father" (22). The narrator makes clear that "there was no doubt that [Okonkwo] liked the boy" (22). Despite beginning to feel at home in Umuofia and in Okonkwo's compound, Ikemefuna's 'bad *chi*' is still on course, and Ikemefuna is one day commanded by Chielo, Oracle of the hills and caves, the priestess of Agbala, to be sacrificed. This human sacrifice is a traumatic event for Okonkwo who kills Ikemefuna himself. It also traumatises Nwoye, planting seeds

of doubt within him regarding the righteousness and morality of the clan's spiritual practices. Damian Opata finds that fate is a governing factor in Ikemefuna's sacrifice, and the role Okonkwo played in killing him. He argues:

> Okonkwo's killing of Ikemefuna is instinctive. The immediate circumstances under which he had to kill Ikemefuna seem to have been forced on him by capricious fate. He was not in control of the situation. Rather, the situation was controlling him, and we should not apply the principles of morality to a situation in which he was inexorably led by uncanny fate (22).

Yu agrees with this comment suggesting that Okonkwo felt he should follow the decree of the gods, but I find that it was not respect for the gods that guided Okonkwo's actions but rather fear of weakness. As the quoted passage regarding Okonkwo's violent character and deep-rooted fear explicitly demonstrates, Okonkwo's fear runs deeper than "the fear of evil and capricious gods" (10) or of "the forces of nature" (11). As Ikemefuna runs towards Okonkwo, the narrator describes that, "dazed with fear, Okonkwo drew his matchet and cut him down. He was afraid of being thought weak" (44). Okonkwo was even warned against taking part in this sacrifice by an elder who expressly says, "That boy calls you father. Do not bear a hand in his death" (41). Yet, Okonkwo's construction of masculinity as inherently violent and in opposition to any form of weakness governs his actions, in direct rejection of the gentleness of his father, Unoka. This directly shows that deep-rooted fear of weakness comprises Okonkwo's primary motivation for this display of violence and hypermasculinity.

In *Morning Yet on Creation Day* Achebe tells the cautionary tale of a proud wrestler. This wrestler defeats every challenger in the world and decides to go wrestle in the spirit world. There, he manages to defeat every spirit, even the largest and most fearsome until there is no one left undefeated. The spirits beg him to gather his laurels and leave but the wrestler stays until his own *chi* appears "reluctant, thin as rope" (Achebe MY 95). The wrestler laughs at his *chi* and "moves forward contemptuously to knock him down whereupon the other lifts him clear off the ground with his little finger and smashes him to death" (Achebe MY 95). Achebe argues this tale is meant to curb man's greed of honour, excessive success, pride and reputation as an individual, that "the limit is not the sky; it is somewhere much closer to earth" (Achebe, *MY* 96). But further than that I find there are very close parallels between this proud wrestler and Okonkwo. Okonkwo is described at the very start of the novel by his strength as a wrestler in throwing Amalinze the cat, his reputation only continuing to grow "like a bush-fire in the harmattan" (3). At the start of the novel his character is described in this way:

> When he walked, his heels hardly touched the ground and he seemed to walk on springs, as if he was going to pounce on somebody. And he did pounce on people quite often. He had a slight stammer and whenever he was angry and could not get his words out quickly enough, he would use his fists. He had no patience with unsuccessful men. He had had no patience with his father (3).

Okonkwo's characterisation emphasises brute strength over emotional intelligence and ability to communicate, being "the greatest wrestler in the nine villages" with a widespread reputation, and a disdain for failure and weakness, having pride in his status as a "wealthy farmer" with "two barns full of yams [who] had just married his third wife" and "had shown incredible prowess in two inter-tribal wars" (6). Like the wrestler in the cautionary tale, Okonkwo the wrestler and warrior is focused on what it means to be successful and strong, desiring the greatest physical strength of those around him, and the greatest wealth and success. Being the greatest wrestler in the nine villages like the wrestler in the story is not enough, and as a result Okonkwo must reckon with his *chi*.

Just before the violent downfall of the clan and Okonkwo's suicide at the end of the novel, Okonkwo "had a feeling that was akin to happiness" "for the first time in many years" when his clansmen finally agreed to violent action taken against the church, listening to him with respect (140). He finds "it was like the good old days again, when a warrior was a warrior" (140). After repeated deliberations at earlier points in the novel where Okonkwo suggestion of violence against the colonisers is rejected and he laments the "womanliness" of non-violent decisions, at this point he is finally given the ability to exert his hypermasculinity in defence of his community. He burns down the Christian church with five other warriors, but they are arrested and treated humiliatingly by the District Commissioner. He also kills a white court messenger during a meeting where there was an attempt to rally the remaining clansmen that had not converted to the coloniser's religion. When their meeting is interrupted by the messengers, Okonkwo furiously beheads one of them, but the rest of his clansmen do not fight alongside him and allow the other messengers leave. It is because of this he finally realises that the subjugation of his clan, their way of life and spiritual beliefs at the hands of the missionaries and their government is inevitable. Jean Ngendahayo argues that Okonkwo's bid for violently masculine action goes hand in hand with the downfall of Igbo society, and I certainly agree with this assertion at this point in the novel (9). However, I think Okonkwo's path is primarily linked to Igbo cosmology, to the work of his *chi*, and is inextricable from Igbo religious and spiritual beliefs. Okonkwo's *chi* and violent hypermasculine character rules his life and following the death of the spiritual practice and cosmology of his village, Okonkwo himself cannot go on living.

In earlier points in the novel, we see evidence of how Okonkwo's brashness and violence causes other instances of conflict and tension with his *chi*,[4] for instance, during the Week of Peace he violates spiritual law and breaks the peace by beating his wife. As a result, "...people said he had no respect for the gods of the clan. His enemies said his good fortune had gone to his head. They called him the little bird *nza* who so far forgot himself after a heavy meal that he challenged his *chi*" (23). The story of the little bird *nza* is one that Achebe tells directly after the cautionary tale of the wrestler in *Morning Yet on Creation Day*. While the story is briefly explained in *Things Fall Apart*, in *Morning Yet on Creation Day* Achebe explains that there was "a little bird, *nza,* who ate and drank somewhat more than was good for him and in a fit of recklessness which inebriation alone would explain taunted his *chi* to come and get him if he could. Whereupon a hawk swooped down from the clear sky and carried him away" (Achebe, *MY* 96). Achebe argues this "shows the foolishness of counting on *chi*'s remoteness, for *chi* need not come in person or act directly but may use one's enemy who is close by" (Achebe, *MY* 96). Okonkwo's enemy is himself, the rigid construction of masculinity he imprisons himself in that rejects any demonstration of weakness, and which stems from internalised fear. Both cautionary tales of the *chi* emphasise that a smart man would not taunt the gods or his *chi* who are not so far removed from material reality as one may think, yet Okonkwo's fear runs deeper than the fear of the gods.

Despite Okonkwo's violent masculinity which had led him to defy the gods, he is still involved in Umuofia's spiritual life through the *egwugwu* where he occupies an important position. The *egwugwu* are masked spirits that are said to be visitors from the underworld and are the nine important ancestors of the villages of Umuofia, central to religious rituals and traditions. Achebe in his essay on *chi* in Igbo cosmology remarks that, "at least that is the story told to the uninitiated" (*Morning Yet* 95). In fact, "to those who know, however, the masked 'spirits' are only *symbolic* ancestors. But this knowledge does not in any way diminish their validity or the awesomeness of their presence" (Achebe, *MY* 95). Their voices are described in *Things Fall Apart* as "guttural and awesome", speaking an "esoteric language" (65). Hearing their voices causes a momentary backwards stampede for the women and children, and when they emerge "the women and children sent up a great shout and took to their heels. It was instinctive. A woman fled as soon as an *egwugwu* came in sight" (65). They are shown to be feared and revered. The *egwugwu* are an important symbol in Igbo cosmology of their longstanding traditions and that their spiritual beliefs are present and alive. We see the great fear and

[4] There appears to be an underlying conflict with the idea that you can have tension with your *chi*, particularly giving that the manoeuvrings of the *chi* are preordained before your body is incarnated. I believe that in life, Okonkwo attempts to gather material success through displays of hypermasculinity to bolster his reputation as a strong, respected man. But his *chi* presents him with failure, and the missionaries further disrupt Igbo religion. As he fails, he is confronted with his fear of weakness and cowardice and commits suicide.

respect they inspire, the privacy and mystery that surrounds them. The *egwugwu* are also notably only men. At the start of the chapter, it is described that "it was clear from the way the crowd stood or sat that the ceremony was for men. There were many women, but they looked on from the fringe like outsiders." (64) Later, it is explained that "women never saw the inside of the hut. [...] They scrubbed and painted the outside walls under the supervision of men. If they imagined what was inside, they kept their imagination to themselves. No woman ever asked questions about the most powerful and the most secret cult in the clan" (65). The *egwugwu* we are presented with in the novel are entrenched in the village's justice system, concerning themselves over "a great land case" (69) as well as a case where a woman fled her husband due to maltreatment, although others remark this to be a "trifle" that need not have been brought before the *egwugwu* (68).

The conflation of the spiritual life with the governing and justice-oriented bodies in Umuofia, Mbanta and other Igbo clans, further emblematise their downfall with the onset of the Christian missionaries. There are several instances where the new Christian converts treat their old deities and symbols disrespectfully. For instance, an important moment in the novel occurs when during the time of Okonkwo's exile to Mbanta, a Christian convert kills a sacred python, "the emanation of the god of water" (116). This is such a transgression that there was never a punishment prescribed for this occurrence as it had never happened before. The python was "the most revered animal in Mbanta and all the surrounding clans" (116). The man said to be responsible for killing the sacred python died shortly after by a quick illness, and no further action proceeded to be taken against this growing disrespect as it is reasoned that "his death showed that the gods were still able to fight their own battles" (188). Okonkwo disparages the lack of action and advocates for violent repercussions against the Christian church. He feels this transgression would not be dealt with in such a "womanly" way in his father's land Umuofia. Another instance of disrespect against the Igbo religion occurs in Umuofia where a man called Enoch unmasks one of the *egwugwu* on the day of the annual worship of the earth goddess, which this year fell on a Sunday in direct conflict with the Church's weekly sermons. To Enoch and the Christian missionaries, the unmasking of one of the *egwugwu* is evidence that the physical representation of the ancestral spirit in the costume of the *egwugwu* is fiction and pagan idolatry, yet for those who believe in the *egwugwu*, including a symbolic belief in the *egwugwu*, this is the death of an ancestral spirit and "one of the greatest crimes a man could commit" (135). This shows that the Christian converts are capable of literally and symbolically killing the old Igbo gods. Further violence follows this transgression as Okonkwo advocates for the destruction of the church, and result in Okonkwo's suicide.

The text deals with masculinity alongside the spiritual beliefs of Umuofia demonstrating that the two concepts are closely related. The text presents the villages as patrilineal and patriarchal, with the titled men of the clan playing important roles in the justice system through the *egwugwu*, thereby showing that the Igbo spiritual and religious structures uphold patriarchal order, and value masculinity. Father-related trauma, and fear resulting in hypermasculinity, are also central themes that run through the text evidenced by Okonkwo and Nwoye. The religious concept of c*hi* is intrinsically related to how these men experience their successes and failures, their hypermasculine attributes, and through their hypermasculine society, leads to the violently masculine way they handle their personal fears. This shows that hypermasculinity can be bolstered by religion.

Nathan Price, like Okonkwo, is a character whose deep-rooted fear manifests in violent and abusive masculinity which manifests directly through his religion. He is a fundamentalist Baptist preacher, self-righteous in his proselytization and a judgemental, stubborn character whose disinterest in adapting or changing leads to the suffering of his wife and four daughters. On her website Barbara Kingsolver mentions that there are critics of hers that find Nathan Price to be two-dimensional due to the stubborn fundamentalism of his character, but, similar to Okonkwo, I find that his character manifests in hypermasculinity due to internalised fear demonstrating three-dimensionality. On her FAQ page, Kingsolver writes of Nathan: "Nathan is single-minded, but I respect his complexity. Sometimes people do contain their own opposites, particularly his combination of ferocity and cowardice" (Kingsolver 2023). I find this can be said of both Okonkwo, and Nathan. Both of their violent masculinities have their origins in fear and weakness.

The Poisonwood Bible is narrated in contrapuntal turns between Orleanna Price and her four daughters: the eldest, Rachel, the twins, Leah and Adah, and the five-year-old Ruth May. Each sister has a very different personality and way of understanding and observing the way events unfold over their year and a half in the Congo. Orleanna, their mother and wife to Nathan, opens each of the five chapters with a voice that looks at the events through hindsight attempting to reconcile the events of each chapter and lay them to rest. Nathan, however, is not given a first-person perspective in the novel, only the women are. This lies in direct contrast to the narration of *Things Fall Apart*, where the third person narration focuses almost exclusively on Okonkwo and his hypermasculinity.

Barbara Kingsolver explains her reasons for this narratorial choice in the blessing that is her website's FAQ page, where she delves into her characters, her inspirations, her novel's structure and postcolonialism, amongst other topics. Here, I take her intentions for her characters to form part of the critical discourse on them. While some critics or literary theorists may argue that her status as

author does not afford her insights, such as on her FAQ, greater value than other scholars, or over the text itself, I think her opinions and the beliefs through which she constructed her characters to be useful in understanding them. I do not necessarily privilege her as an ultimate source that trumps all other scholarly discourse, but I find that her insight certainly has a place in how I examine her work. She explains that Nathan "represents an attitude" due to the allegorical nature of the book "in which the small incidents of characters' lives shed light on larger events in our world" (Kingsolver 2023). These larger world events in the Congo include its religious and economic colonisation, the independence movement led by Patrice Lumumba, CIA covert operations that led to his assassination, and the neo-colonial plunder of the Congo's resources by various men in high offices, like the US president Eisenhower. Kingsolver writes in her FAQ:

> We didn't make those decisions, we didn't call for the assassination of Lumumba; most readers, I'm guessing, didn't even know about it. We inherited these decisions, and now have to reconcile them with our sense of who we are. We're the captive witnesses, just like the wife and daughters of Nathan Price. Male or female, we are not like him. *That* is what I wanted to write about. We got pulled into this mess but we don't identify with that arrogant voice. It's not his story. It's ours (Kingsolver 2023).

Her reference to how "male or female, we are not like him" shows that this attitude is not necessarily underscored by gender, but in Nathan's case, it is clear his attitude is a result of his hypermasculinity and religion. Nathan Price, alone, makes the decision to move his family to the Congo, and he also refuses to allow them to leave when the political unrest accompanying the independence movement makes it too dangerous for them to stay. They are indeed 'captive witnesses' to their father's madness and self-righteous behaviour. Orleanna describes herself with this same language at the start of the novel. She describes herself as the wife of a man "who could never love her", "captive witness" to the events in the Congo, where she "had washed up there on the riptide of [her] husband's confidence", as "hell hath no fury like a Baptist preacher" (8). Nathan's hyper masculinity is a project of colonial paternalism in his mission to convert the "pagan" natives of the Congo, and in his tyrannical control of the women in his family. Adah, the most intelligent daughter whose commentary involves much sarcastic and insightful wordplay, calls the preacher "Our Father". Her private nickname for Nathan and its religious intertext shows the missionary project to form part of the colonial enterprise, as well as have dominion over the women of the Price family.

As Nathan's perspective is not presented, we must learn about his character through his wife and children. Orleanna possesses the deepest understanding of Nathan and reveals how they met, were married and how he became the violent, hypermasculine man we see terrorising his family. Orleanna reveals that in her youth, her interest in Christianity was only supposed to be temporary as she did not come from a religious family, attending tent revival meetings for a week. Yet, "when the tent folded up, I found I had Nathan Price in my life instead, a handsome young red-haired preacher who fell upon my unclaimed soul like a dog on a bone" (220). She was enthralled by his promises of "green pastures", his quoting of beautiful bible passages to her in their courtship, in contrast to other men she dated who the most religious thing they said was "'Christ almighty in the craphouse!' at any dress with too many buttons" (221). Shortly after their marriage, Nathan is enlisted to fight in the Second World War where he is hit in the head by shelling. He is concussed but survives by hiding overnight in a pig manger and the next day, by sheer luck, he is picked up on the beach by a PT boat and brought home. At the hospital, he writes to Orleanna a cheerful letter "about his salvation by the grace of God and a Jap hog manger" but she remarks "that was the last I would ever hear from the man I'd married - one who could laugh (even about sleeping in a manger), called me his 'honey lamb,' and trust in the miracle of good fortune" (223). This was before he found out what happened to the rest of his company, that they "died, to the man, on the Death March from Bataan", a tragedy of the Second World War (224).

Orleanna therefore traces the moment of his change to his experience in the war. She says, "He came home with a crescent-shaped scar on his temple, seriously weakened vision in his left eye, and a suspicion of his own cowardice from which he could never recover" (224). Orleanna finds that the Death March from Bataan was "an error of a commander's overconfidence, small in history, large in the lives of those men" (223-4). Like Yeats and the widening gyres, Orleanna finds this pattern repeated in the history of colonial rule where few men with too much power make life-altering decisions, the map of the Congo laid out between them "playing it like a chess match" (361). However, Nathan is blind to these patterns despite suffering from them himself in the war, and instead of reflecting on these power dynamics and the colonial system, he remains entrenched and complicit in them. Orleanna says, "Nathan aimed to scorch a path as wide as Sherman's," likening him to the US army commander (224). In this we can see his complexity of character that Kingsolver described in her FAQ. He has both the ferocity and overconfidence of an army commander and the cowardice and fear from his time as a soldier. He channels this into his work as a preacher. Orleanna writes, "He meant personally to save more souls than had perished on the road from Bataan, I think, and all other paths ever walked by the blight of mankind" (226).

He carries his overconfidence and ferocity into the Congo where he is deeply misguided. Nathan's inability to understand the Congo, and his unwillingness to learn, can be seen through his attempts to grow a garden by their house when they move there. This is mainly narrated by Leah who explains, "He planned to make a demonstration garden. […] It was to be our first African miracle" (41-2). Leah thought that through this garden they could "demonstrate to all of Africa how to grow crops" (44). Here, Nathan attempts to assert dominion over the land of the Congo with his seeds from America, planting "Kentucky Wonder beans, crookneck and patty-pan squash, Big Boy tomatoes" amongst other vegetables (41). He "hack[s] out a small square dominion over the jungle" and the red earth dries on him like "the blood of a slain beast" (44). In the path he leaves behind as he rips out the grasses and plants that grew there naturally, Leah remarks the "severed heads of many small, bright orange orchids" (44). This violent imagery is conducive to Nathan's ferocity and his forceful attitude towards taming the "savagery" of the Congo, a reflection of the Genesis verse that grants dominion over every living thing. Mama Tataba sees Nathan's garden, counsels him on pushing the soil into mounds, and attempts to warn him of the poisonous plant, the poisonwood, that he is ripping out with his bare hands. He ignores her, and he wakes up the next morning with a "horrible rash" and a swollen eye, shouting at his wife and children about the injustice of it (47). Mama Tataba meanwhile redesigns the garden, pushing the dirt into hills that will survive the Congolese flash floods and weather. Nathan stubbornly levels it out again. This is emblematic of his unwillingness to learn from the Congo, possessing a colonial paternalistic mindset bolstered by his status as a preacher, and his fundamentalist religious beliefs.

Unsurprisingly, without taking the advice of those who know this land the best, Nathan's American agricultural method fails with the rains. Adah describes that "the torrent had swamped the flat bed and the seeds rushed out like runaway boats. […] their little roots had not held them to the Reverend Farmer's flat-as-Kansas beds against the torrent" (73). Only then does Nathan follow Mama Tataba's advice. The plants grow successfully, but bear no fruit as he never took into account the lack of pollinators. He realises they need "African bugs […] Creatures fashioned by God for the purpose of serving African plants" (92). Looking at a wasp he asks, "Look at this thing. How would it know what to do with a Kentucky Wonder bean?" (92) Therefore, the transplantation of the seeds fail, embodying the Prices' unpreparedness and Nathan's ignorance in the family's own transplantation to the Congo. Christopher Douglas aptly argues, "The novel unmasks Nathan's universalist Christianity as a set of (relative) cultural practices and beliefs, and conversely implies via the plant metaphor that Christianity is ecologically appropriate for the US" (Douglas 141). By extension, the metaphor shows that the Price's religion and the mission itself are not ecologically appropriate for Africa. Douglas shows the

Christian mission to be incompatible with Africa and the plant metaphor links the transplantation of the American seeds with the transplantation of the Prices. Neither, on African soil, bear any fruit.

Yet, despite Nathan's character, Kingsolver does not mean for Nathan to be a symbol of all missionaries, though their complicity in larger systems of colonisation is undisputed. She explains on her website, "Nathan Price does not represent the missionary profession (or men). […] I created Nathan Price as a symbolic figure suggesting many things about how Western nations have approached Africa with a history of arrogance and misunderstanding" (Kingsolver 2023). This goes back to her earlier point that "the small incidents of characters' lives shed light on larger events in our world" (Kingsolver 2023). Yet on a character level, Nathan's arrogant approach results from his hypermasculinity, coupled with his religious rhetoric. In line with her view that Nathan does not represent all men and all missionaries, she introduces the character of Brother Fowles who she describes as "a Christian who does beautiful things with the notion of mission" (Kingsolver 2023). He introduces the key phrase: "There are Christians, and there are Christians." That summarises Kingsolver's view on not all Christians being as tyrannical and misguided as Nathan, or forming part of some colonial project. Brother Fowles used to run the mission the Prices took over. Leah says, "Father explained to us that [Brother Fowles] had gone plumb crazy, consorting with the inhabitants of the land" (45). This is before we are introduced to Bother Fowles in person, and demonstrates that for their father, engaging with "the inhabitants of the land" is something only someone who is "plumb crazy" would do. This already highlights the difference between the two missionaries, reinforcing that "there are Christians, and there are Christians."

Later in the novel, when they are visited by Brother Fowles, "consorting with the inhabitants of the land" is revealed to be open and honest discourse with the inhabitants of Kilanga and their chief, Tata Ndu, and marrying a Congolese woman, Celine. Upon this visit, it is explained that he gave up his mission for social work, to distribute milk powder, vitamins, tins of food and quinine pills. Of the Congolese that Nathan describes as pagan savages, Brother Fowles says "They are very religious people, you know, […] Everything they do is with one eye to the spirit. When they plant yams and manioc, they're praying. When they harvest, they're praying. Even when they conceive their children, I think they're praying" (278). Fowles uses much natural imagery in his understanding of Christianity, referencing a Congolese hymn to the rainfall on yam seeds at the start of his church services as "It's quite easy to move from there to the parable of the mustard seed" (278). He also remarks to Nathan, "I'm a plain fool for the nature images in the Bible, Brother Price. That fond of it. I find it all so handy here, among these people who have such an intelligence and the great feeling for the living world around them. They're very humble in their debts to nature" (284). Symbolically, his nickname amongst

the villagers of Kilanga is 'Tata Bidibidi', meaning 'bird', as he draws his spiritualism from nature, and practices ornithology. By being open to learn and understand the nature and culture of the Congolese, Brother Fowles is in a better position to discuss his view of religion with them, something Nathan does not understand as he is not open to discourse with the native inhabitants relying on his literal interpretation of the Bible. Brother Fowles tells Leah, "When I want to take God at his word exactly, I take a peep out the window at His Creation. Because *that*, darling, He makes fresh for us every day" (278). Brother Fowles finds scripture in the very land of the Congo, while Nathan as a fundamentalist takes the Bible at its word.

Brother Fowles and Nathan have a Bible-quote showdown where their differences are explicitly evident. As a metaphor to the Price's transplantation to the Congo, Brother Fowles recites:

> If the root of a tree is consecrated, the whole mass is, and […] so are its branches. If some of the branches have been broken off, and you who were only a wild olive shoot have been grafted in, and made to share the richness of the olive's root, you must not look down upon the branches. Remember that you do not support the root; the root supports you (283-4).

Fowles uses the verse to speak metaphorically here, pointing out that as missionaries they are the wild olive shoots that are sustained by the African root during their time in the Congo, and demonstrating the difference in attitudes between himself and Nathan. Interestingly, the name Brother Fowles, also evidences the difference of character between himself and Nathan Price, 'Our Father'. While the Brother/Father distinction is a matter of what order of the Church they belong to, it also serves a deeper purpose. In being called 'Brother' Fowles instead of Father Fowles, Fowles shows his rejection of the figure of the Christian patriarch, instead focusing on equality between people and brotherhood. He quotes a bible passage "Be kindly affectioned to one another with brotherly love" (285) in response to Nathan quoting Romans 10:15 asserting that the figure of the preacher is necessary to bring the word of God to the people. Nathan quotes "And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" (282). Nathan places himself as the absolute, patriarchal figure of Christian authority. Fowles, on the other hand, is focused on finding similarities or middleways in cross-cultural understanding, and using these common grounds to 'graft' changes onto the tree of indigenous Congolese religion. For instance, Brother Fowles describes his discussions with Tata Ndu. He explains: "Tata Ndu and I spent many afternoons with a calabash of palm wine between us, debating the merits of treating a wife kindly. In my six years here I saw the practice of wife beating fall into great disfavor. Secret little altars to Tata Jesus appeared in most every kitchen, as a result"

(290). This shows the greater success Fowles had in spreading Christian word to the Congolese than Nathan. Brother Fowles chooses to advocate for monogamy, and against wife beating, but shares traditional customs like the "calabash of palm wine" in accordance with local custom in a display of cultural hybridity.[5]

Over this visit, Brother Fowles introduces the concept of openness to multiculturalism and cultural hybridity that Nathan so rigidly rejected. In describing the various religious organisations that provide the stipends he and his wife use to dispense medication and food, he remarks, "we're terribly interdenominational. […] I even get a little stipend from the National Geographic Society" amongst the money he gets from The Methodist Mission and The American Baptist Foreign Mission Service (286). When Orleanna hears this, she remarks, "But *we're* Baptists […] and the Mission League cut off our stipend right before Independence!" In response, Brother Fowles answers, "For certain, Mrs Price, there are Christians and then there are Christians" (287). The difference between the Christian background that Nathan comes from and the more interdenominational, pastoral branches that Brother Fowles works with cannot be made clearer. Again, this comes with his willingness to learn, his critical perspective on religious missions in Africa, and the ways he finds he can make the best impact on the lives of the Congolese. Of their social work, his wife says, "We rely very much on our friends" to which he adds "and that means to get one good connection made, you have to understand the Kituba, the Lingala, the Bembe, Kunyi, Vili, Ndingi, and the bleeding talking drums" (287) that sound messages across the jungle from one village to another, also present in *Things Fall Apart.* This embodies Brother Fowles belief that to be in the best position to engage with the Congolese, understanding their methods of communication is vitally important. It is through Brother Fowles that Kingsolver provides us with a model of the missionary that works out of love, not fear. It is also through the presentation of this character that Kingsolver makes clear that it is not inherently patriarchy and men as a whole who, through religion, exert an abusive and misguided ideology, but that it can manifest this way depending on a man's character and how they engage with this patriarchal system. Nathan as "Our Father" places himself as the head of the system, but Brother Fowles engages with this religious system from a place of love and greater equality.

Nathan Price's character is therefore intrinsically linked to fundamentalist religious belief and hypermasculinity. The two qualities necessarily inform each other. Nathan Price had intentions to become a preacher prior to meeting Orleanna, but after the war, "with a suspicion of his own cowardice", his insecurity and fear manifested into abuse and religious fanaticism. As seen with

[5] Cultural hybridity, as a term that originates with Homi Bhabha, and a theme that is present in the characterisation of Brother Fowles further, situates this text as postcolonial.

Brother Fowles, this need not be the case. Brother Fowles operates from a place of love rather than fear, embodying a cross-cultural hybridity that emphasises mutual understanding and communication. This quality is lost on Nathan, who instead of working with the pre-existing religious and cultural values of the Congolese, like a wild olive shoot “grafted” onto a tree, he looks down upon the root that sustains him and his family. He refuses to communicate with the chief, Tata Ndu. He tries to organise a mass baptism in the river which scares away more people from his church as they believe he wants to feed their children to the crocodiles. He drastically misuses their language, preaching “Tata Jesus is Bangala”. As Adah explains, “Bangala means something precious and dear. But the way he pronounces it, it means the poisonwood tree. Praise the Lord [...] for Jesus will make you itch" (312). Moreover, she notes, “It is a special kind of person who will draw together a congregation, stand up before them with a proud, clear voice, and say words wrong, week after week" (243). Nathan’s unwillingness to learn and communicate with the Congolese contributes to the failure of his mission, and his mispronunciations and miscommunication become emblematic of the misguided nature of his mission, his ignorance and the arrogance of his personality.

Chapter Two: Religion and Feminine (Dis)Empowerment

Mother is Supreme.

Uchendu, *Things Fall Apart*

Masculinity Studies by Alex Hobbs provides a useful analysis of the field of masculinity studies, its intersections with feminism and its place in literary theory. Rather than view masculinity studies and feminist theory as oppositional, masculinity studies aims to deconstruct the common patriarchal structure of society that both men and women live under and are oppressed by. As Hobbs explains, "Rather than reinforce patriarchy (or bemoan its demise, as the men's rights movement does), men's studies seeks to explode the myth that men in general benefit from it, and celebrates a multiplicity of masculine identities over socially imbedded stereotypes" (384). This rejects any simplified analysis of masculinity reduced to stereotypes or "traditional" behaviour, instead demonstrating that masculine identities are as complex as feminine, and that there need not be any single set of attributes that comprise masculine behaviour.

In response to the idealised, often vague, and unanalytical ways of perceiving masculinity, Connell presents the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Connell writes that hegemonic masculinity is perceived as "the currently most honoured way of being a man, requir[ing] all other men to position themselves in relation to it" (832). We see the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity in Okonkwo. He shames other men for feminine characteristics, consistently advocates for violent action against personal, religious and political transgressions against himself or Umuofia. The irony of this presentation of hegemonic masculinity is that it defines itself against femininity which thereby incorporates femininity rather than rejecting it entirely as on the surface it appears to do. As Okonkwo defines himself against femininity, Nathan Price also defines himself in opposition the women in his family. He takes on the role of patriarch navigating their "mess of female minds" (42), and there are symbolic descriptions of his 'colonisation' of his wife Orleanna. It is therefore useful to examine how femininity is presented in both *Things Fall Apart* and *The Poisonwood Bible*, as both patriarchal figures embody hegemonic masculinity through religion. The presentation of women and their role within religion can give insight into the hegemonic masculinity of Nathan Price and Okonkwo.

Masculinity studies thereby leans heavily on femininity and women's studies. Likewise, as in much Gender Studies discourse, female agency is defined in relation to men. As explained in the previous chapter, Orleanna's narration explains that Nathan's fear of his own cowardice and his increasingly

fundamental proselytism originates from his experience in war, a traditionally masculine sphere as it exclusively involves men, and is usually ordained by men in high offices. Without Nathan's first-person perspective, Orleanna provides insight into his character. As female agency is often discussed in relation to men, we can observe her lack of agency, and her references to her body's colonisation by Nathan.

Orleanna portrays her domination by Nathan. She asks: "What is the conqueror's wife, if not a conquest herself?" (9). But she also questions this attitude in a postcolonial guilt. She says of people complicit in such a conquest, "That's what we yell back at history, always, always. It wasn't just me; there were crimes strewn six ways to Sunday, and I had my own mouths to feed. I didn't know. I had no life of my own. You'll say I did" (9). She criticises this attitude that we readers, and the "you" she often addresses, have regarding postcolonialism: that it is easy through a postcolonial lens to criticise her complicity. She expresses, as a woman under her husband's rule, his colonisation of her. She expresses her own difficulties and that she could not fathom, nor take part in, the wider machinations of the world such as the colonial enterprise. She criticises that is it easy for us who have not taken part to criticise her complicity, her passivity and lack of agency with our clean consciences. But perhaps we are deluding ourselves, and are guilty in other ways.

Orleanna's marginalisation due to her identity as a woman allows her to better understand the marginalisation of the Congolese, and form a connection with them. Her character is shown to be more open-minded in understanding Congolese culture. In this passage, she also likens the emptying out of the Congo of its resources by colonisers and profiteers, to the emptying out of her womb by Nathan: "He and all the other profiteers who've since walked out on Africa as a husband quits a wife, leaving her with her empty body curled around the emptied-out mine of her womb" (10). Therefore, not only does she connect better to the marginalised people of the Congo, but she personifies the land itself, that which colonisers and missionaries seek to have dominion over, and relates to it too. She is at once both a victim of the unjust gender dynamic expressed in Gender Studies discourse, as well as associating herself with postcolonial analysis. Orleanna is therefore a unique character that intersects these two frameworks.

In her later narration at the beginning of book two, "The Revelation", she reflects:

> I'd thought I could have it both ways: to be one of them, and also my husband's wife. What conceit! I was his instrument, his animal. Nothing more. […] I was just one more of those

> women who clamp their mouths shut and wave the flag as their nation rolls off to conquer another in war. Guilty or innocent, they have everything to lose. They *are* what there is to lose. A wife is the earth itself, changing hands, bearing scars (101).

This quote shows that while her marginalisation allows her to connect more easily to other marginalised groups in the Congo, she does not have the agency to effectively help either them or herself. She finds herself in a passive position which causes her guilt that she reflects on in a postcolonial framework. While remarking on her own passivity with guilt, she is also indignant, arguing that she had no other choice compared to men in power. She questions whether her lack of agency renders her as guilty as the men who did the conquering, the proselytising, and treating the independence movement of the Congo and its colonisation as a strategic 'game'. She explains, "I try to imagine these men and their game, for it helps place my own regrettable acts on a broader field, where they seem smaller" (363). Describing these actions as a game implies a level playing field and rules that either side must obey equally, but in reality the 'game' of conquering Africa and US intervention in the Congolese independence movement was markedly unfair. Rather, her point here is that for these men in power in the US, harming the Congolese, assassinating their democratically elected president Patrice Lumumba and replacing him with Mobutu is a game of strategy to aid their interests without considering or caring about the real lives they are affecting. Then, the word 'game' can take on a double meaning associating with hunting prey. The power imbalance between America and the Congo is better fitting to these connotations than the suggestion of a game with rules and an equal, level playing field.

Comparatively, she feels she did less damage than the men in power who "divided the map beneath [her] feet" and feels as ignorant at that point in time to the corrupt workings of the world as the "woman walking by with the roasted corn" (363). She asks, "Might she have been some distant kin of someone I haggled with on market days? How is it that neither of us knew the ways of the world for so long?" (363). With their common marginalisation by oppressive masculine powers, Orleanna likens herself to other Congolese women, reflecting that they had "no way to overrule the powers that governed [their] lives" (218). She laments that this is a common plight of all women, saying "this is not a new story: I was an inferior force" (218). While Orleanna may point out that she felt as passive with as little agency and power as the Congolese, Orleanna comes from a position of greater privilege being a white woman and entering the Congo as a missionary complicit in the colonial project. She sometimes acknowledges this privilege and struggles to reckon with her guilt, although she does not

explicitly describe her race as a point of privilege and argues that historically, all women are oppressed by men in powerful positions.

From the readers' perspective, it is clear there are differences between Orleanna, the missionary wife, and the Congolese woman walking past her, but Orleanna emphasises their similarities with regards to their common marginalisation, and lack of agency. Orleanna feels subject to Nathan's will and the power of men in charge. She also presents the Congolese woman as simultaneously subject to the whims of men in power, but also separate from any institution. In a later chapter, Orleanna explains, "When a government comes crashing down, it crushes those who were living under its roof. People like Mama Mwanza never knew the house was there at all" (435). Instead, Mama Mwanza is disfigured from her house literally burning down in an accident prior to the Price's arrival. Mama Mwanza's problems have more to do with her immediate physical reality, the goings on in Kilanga and her community rather than a wider perspective on the political manoeuvrings of world. This demonstrates the implicit difference between the Prices and the Congolese, a bridge that Orleanna does not convincingly cross in her descriptions of the similarities between herself and the Congolese.

Orleanna writes that at the start of her marriage to Nathan she was, "occupied as if by a foreign power. [...] every cell of me was married to Nathan's plan. His magnificent *will*. This is how conquest occurs: one plan is always larger than the other" (226). She widens the scope of oppression from Nathan's religious plans to the idea of political conquest and colonisation. As a result, she says, "Nathan was in full possession of the country once known as Orleanna Wharton" (228) so that "in the end, my lot was cast with the Congo. Poor Congo, barefoot bride of men who took her jewels and promised the Kingdom" (229). The use of the word 'kingdom' exemplifies the multiple meanings of political and religious conquest. Nathan offered her the Kingdom of God in their courtship, seducing her with images of green pastures (221). Instead, she felt that she was robbed, as was the Congo.

Orleanna compares herself to Lot's wife, an unnamed woman in the Bible who was turned into a pillar of salt from looking back at the burning city of Sodom as she was fleeing with her family. It is written in Genesis that:

> With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away" […] "Flee for your lives! Don't look back" […] But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt (Gen. 19:15 - 19:26).

The unnamed woman, only known in relation to her marriage to Lot, strikes a chord with Orleanna who "looks back" at the family's experience in the Congo over the course of the novel. All of Orleanna's narration is set apart from her daughters as she is narrating years in the future after leaving Africa, reflecting in postcolonial hindsight. She comments, "I was blinded from the constant looking back: Lot's wife. I only ever saw the gathering clouds" (112). She is tormented by her guilt, looking back at what has destroyed her, and what she has contributed to destroying, and finds it difficult to move forward with her life, she is figuratively paralysed, just as Lot's wife was paralysed in being turned into a pillar of salt. When her youngest daughter, Ruth May dies at the hands of religious men, Orleanna leaves the Congo with Leah, Adah and Rachel. Orleanna goes on to live in America and Adah writes that "she seemed determined to grow tragedy out of herself like a bad haircut" (462). Orleanna also then grows a flower garden contrasted to Nathan's gardening of only practical foods "for the Glory of God" (464). Orleanna is found to have an "extraordinary talent" for gardening flowers, blooming without Nathan. Adah comments beautifully, "She was an entire botanical garden waiting to happen" (464). Part of her blooming is her taking a more politically active life in America. She advocates for marginalised groups, marches for Civil Rights and fundraises for Amnesty International, although this may be her attempt to assuage her postcolonial guilt.

Moreover, Adah describes her mother's activism as her new religion. Yet, she says, "Although Mother has [religion] now […] she still suffers. I believe she talks to Ruth May more or less constantly, begging forgiveness when no one is around" (499). Orleanna is stil begging forgiveness. She still feels the weight of her actions and it hurts like religiou guilt. She has swapped out one guilt stricken religion for another. By no longer wearing shoes, Adah believes Orleanna aims to be in communion with the earth "for she constantly addresses the ground under her feet. Asking forgiveness. Owning, disowning, recanting, recharting a hateful course of events to make sense of her complicity" (558). Orleanna in many ways is like Lot's wife, though she tries to make moral amends, ask forgiveness through her activism, and ultimately move on and create a new life for herself. Yet, clearly her recreation does not mean she is burdenless. Destruction and creation go hand in hand. Orleanna struggles with the death of Ruth May, who at the end of the novel is revealed to be the "you" she often addresses. Adah says "Mother is *ruthless*" meaning, without Ruth May, and that "she will put down that burden […] on the day she hears forgiveness from Ruth May herself" suggesting she will never put down her burden (560).

The incorporation of this biblical myth is not only emblematic of Orleanna looking back in guilt at her time in the Congo, but also symbolically sets up her deliverance. At first glance at *The Poisonwood*

Bible and Genesis may suggest that Orleanna and Lot's wife are weak, giving in to their fears. Orleanna feels a lack of agency, unable to contradict or stand up to Nathan, while Lot's wife becomes inanimate when she turns to watch the destruction of her home city. Daphne Dodson analyses more metaphorical readings of Genesis which presents a different image of Orleanna and Lot's wife. She points out that in the New Testament, salt is associated with righteousness, "You are the salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13, NIV); "Salt is good" (Mark 9:50, NIV). This may be seen as a deliverance myth, that destruction is required for the women to be recreated, and to become liberated from oppressive powers (as Lot's wife returns to the earth, becoming conflated with the earth as salt).

Phanuel Egejuru explains in "The Paradox of Womanbeing and the Female Principle in Igbo Cosmology" that there exists a paradox in being a woman in Igbo cosmology. Both attitudes of reverence and scorn towards women existence alongside each other. There is a reverence of womanhood and the female principle, but also a disparagement of womanbeing in day-to-day life. The reverence of womanhood and the female principle originates in Igbo cosmology from the principle of Mother, and the conflation of femininity with religion and spirituality. This theory is also applicable to *The Poisonwood Bible* with how it handles hypermasculinity, femininity and religion. During her marriage to Nathan and during her time in the Congo, Orleanna is at once the biblically and societally praised figure of Mother, while in her day-to-day life she is the disparaged and used womanbeing, robbed of her agency, useful in her subservience. In *Things Fall* Apart, through religion and spirituality which are associated as feminine, there are several instances of female autonomy and power in contrast to hypermasculinity and the split view of womanhood versus womanbeing.

We see the principle of Mother and the reverence of womanhood in *Things Fall Apart* when Okonkwo is banished to his motherland for seven years. There, his uncle Uchendu teaches him about the importance of women in the origination of the common name 'Nneka', which means 'Mother is Supreme'. Uchendu explains, "A man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness, he finds refuge in his motherland. Your mother is there to protect you. She is buried there. And that is why we say that mother is supreme" (98-99). In his banishment to his motherland, Okonkwo must learn to find comfort in the maternal and the feminine, otherwise, Uchendu suggests that Okonkwo will have failed his wives and children and they will perish.

This attitude of reverence towards Mother exists in conjunction with patriarchal attitudes we have seen present in other facets of the novel. Uchendu acknowledges that womanbeing is looked down upon, and patriarchy is the system their society functions under in everyday life when he says, "We all know that a man is the head of the family and his wives do his bidding. A child belongs to its father

and his family and not to its mother and her family. A man belongs to his fatherland and not to his motherland" (98). Here, we see the patrilineal organisation of pre-colonial Igbo society as presented by Achebe. Moreover, as Uchendu gives this speech at their final meal together, and Okonkwo shortly returns to Umuofia continuing his violence, he does not actually integrate this lesson. Despite the oppression at the hands of the colonisers and occupying a disadvantaged and marginalised position, Okonkwo remains hypermasculine, he does not assimilate femininity into his character and his brashness does not aid his struggle with his village against the District Commissioner and the missionaries.

In the novel women are firstly viewed as mothers, and as a result of the nine deaths of her babies, Ekwefi, Okonkwo's second wife, is considered to be cursed. Due to her dead children, Ekwefi values and loves her sole living child, Ezinma, even more. She feeds Ezinma eggs and other treats despite Okonkwo disparaging this behaviour. When Chielo, the priestess of the Oracle of the Hills and Caves enters Okonkwo's compound to take Ezinma upon instruction of the male deity Agbala, Ekwefi defies the male deity and his priestess and follows Chielo all night through the forest to make sure her daughter is safe. Here, it is important to note the fear people have of the dark, writing: "[d]arkness held a vague terror for these people, even the bravest among them" (8). Ekwefi travels through the night, perceiving "ill omens", tripping and falling, thinking of "all the terrors of the night" such as the time years prior when she had seen an evil essence with her mother (76). Her strength in continuing her journey out of protection of her child rivals that of the bravest among the clan. Her defiance of Agbala, Chielo and the evil spirits of the night reminds the reader of the battle described between the founding father of Umuofia who "engaged a spirit of the wild for seven days and seven nights" which at the beginning of the novel is compared to Okonkwo's defeat of Amalinze the cat (3). Ekwefi's strength is therefore likened to Okonkwo's and to the strength of the clan's founding father, but not through violence or hypermasculinity. JanMohamed argues there is a distinction in the feminine domains of language, ritual, art, manners and religion, in contrast to the masculine virtues of "material success and courage in battle" (168). Ekwefi reconstructs these gendered domains, engaging religion and ritual with courage and strength against a male deity and in opposition to masculinity in her role as a mother.

Okonkwo is present during this episode offering his hypermasculinity in contrast to Ezinma's strength in motherhood. He follows Ekwefi after allowing "what he regarded as a reasonable and manly interval to pass" then going with his matchet to the shrine of Agbala (82). The narrator reveals that he made this journey from his compound to the shrine four times before he finally found Ekwefi there "and by then he had become gravely worried" (82). Bringing his matchet, which would have no use against the

evil spirits of the night, is evidence of his hypermasculinity and his tendency towards violence utilising his physical strength. This is the only care he knows how to give, as "he had felt very anxious but did not show it" (82). Carole Boyce Davies comments on Okonkwo's matchet, also arguing that as a "symbol of his male aggression, it is of no use at all in this context" (247). Yet, the presence of his matchet shows the extent of the danger that could've been present that Ekwefi braves alone, weaponless. Okonkwo's incursion with his matchet into the feminine realms of the night and religion demonstrate how he is out of place. In conjunction with this, in Appiah's analysis of *Things Fall Apart* he argues that "it is a reflection of Okonkwo's failure to seek balance between the manly virtues and the womanly virtues as understood in Umuofia, that each of the disasters that afflicts him can be seen as a crime against the earth [...] and it is through this flaw that he is destroyed" (xiv). His cosmology, the domain of the feminine, is in tension with his hypermasculine desire to succeed materially. His inability to integrate femininity or be appreciating of womanhood, womanbeing, and the female principle, results in his hypermasculinity and his ruin. This episode with Chielo, Ekwefi, Ezinma and his matchet is the feminine reconstruction of his hypermasculinity and inability, or reluctance, to adopt feminine values even if they demonstrate great strength and bravery without violence.

With the presence of Chielo the priestess of Agbala, there are strong religious themes in this episode that shed a light on the power of femininity and masculinity existing in conjunction with each other.[6] Matthew Fike presents an interesting analysis of the Jungian concept of anima and animus functioning together. Anima is the feminine unconscious that lies within men, while women possess an animus, the masculine unconscious. The masculine and feminine may work in accordance with each other and is important in the healthy functioning of the mind for any gender. This insight further exemplifies my point that Okonkwo has not assimilated with his feminine unconscious or accessed the feminine domains of spirituality and religion. Fike interestingly comments on Chielo's role in the episode with Ekwefi and Ezinma. He argues, "The female priestess of the god Agbala […] represents the anima's function as a bridge between masculine consciousness (the hut) and the feminine unconscious (the darkness, the caves, the hills)" (153). To take this one step further, Chielo as the female priestess of Agbala, who is a male deity, embodies this balance between masculinity and femininity. Likewise, the male priest of the female earth goddess, Ani, is a man named Ezeani. In spiritual matters, therefore, there is a balance struck between a deity and their priest or priestess, in accordance with the Igbo notion of duality. In neither of these cases is the feminine deity or priestess subordinate or revered

[6] Chielo's name notably contains the word 'chi', an extremely important concept in Igbo cosmology that I covered in the previous chapter. Her name including the word 'chi' is an additional nod to her spirituality and its close relationship with the feminine principle.

less than the masculine deity or priest. There is rather the feeling of gender being complementary rather than dichotomy in Igbo cosmology.

In fact, we see far more reverence of the female earth goddess Ani than we do of another deity, and Chielo is the most prominent spiritual leader as well. In the episode with Ekwefi and Ezinma, Okonkwo is powerless to prevent Chielo from taking Ezinma though he protests against it on account of Ezinma's illness. This does not stop Chielo, who has great authority. Ekwefi remarks later when she is following Chielo and Ezinma through the dark forest, that "it was not the same Chielo who sat with her in the market and sometimes bought bean-cakes for Ezinma, whom she called her daughter. It was a different woman - the priestess of Agbala, the Oracle of the Hills and Caves" (78). The priestess is an awesome and fear inducing character. Her "possessed chanting" makes Ekwefi "recoil" because "there was no humanity there" and Ekwefi is in awe of the possessed Chielo's strength in carrying Ezinma through the forest across all nine villages while Ekwefi, not carrying anything, is exhausted after several hours (78). Her physical strength contributes to this idea of Chielo embodying powerful masculine attributes alongside her femininity.

Egejuru also argues that Chielo symbolises the conscience of the nation (13). Indeed, Chielo speaking as an oracle orders that Ikemefuna be sacrificed. As an oracle she also decides for the village when or when not to go to war. Additionally, she weeps and cries out for revenge the night one of the nine ancestral spirits is unmasked and murdered:

> That night the Mother of the Spirits walked the length and breadth of the clan, weeping for her murdered son. It was a terrible night. Not even the oldest man in Umuofia had ever heard such a strange and fearful sound, and it was never to be heard again. It seemed as if the very soul of the tribe wept for a great evil that was coming -- its own death (136).

Womanhood is therefore revered spiritually and culturally, and Chielo embodies this spiritual reverence as the priestess of Agbala, and in this passage with her title "Mother of the Spirits". Likewise, the feminine principle of Mother is also shown to have great strength and power through Ekwefi as evidenced in her strength and bravery in protecting Ezinma.

There are other instances of womanhood being a powerful and revered principle, while the womanbeing is viewed as weak and disparaged. For example, the name Agbala, when capitalised, represents the male deity, while *agbala* in the lowercase is used as an insult to mean "woman" or "man who ha[s] taken no title" (11). Weakness or lack of title is thereby associated with femininity, while Chielo and the deity Agbala are fearsome and revered forces. The distinction of Agbala/*agbala* thereby embodies Egejuru's theory that womanhood is culturally revered while womanbeing is

culturally disparaged. Another example is shown through the *agadi nwayi* (old woman), who is said to be the most powerful principle in Umuofia's potent war medicine and being the reason "Umuofia was feared by all its neighbours" (9). All agree that "the active principle in the that medicine had been an old woman with one leg. In fact, the medicine itself was called *agadi-nwayi*, or old woman. It had its shrine in the centre of Umuofia, in a cleared spot. And if anybody was so foolhardy to pass by the shrine after dusk he was sure to see the old woman hopping about" (10). The female principle, the womanhood, curbs the war and violence that are the men's domains and lessens the conflict between Umuofia and its neighbours, yet it is respected and not thought to weaken the clan in any way.

The feminine principle thereby rules morality. For instance, the earth goddess Ani is described as having a "greater part in the life of the people than any other deity" being "the ultimate judge of morality and conduct" and "in close communion with the departed fathers of the clan" (27). Similarly, the *agadi-nwayi* only fights a just war, and "would never fight what the Ibo call a *fight of blame*" (10). Yet, while this womanhood is potent, comprising Umuofia's attitude to war, peace and morality, with a female deity playing the most important role in their lives, the women do not feature in the ceremonies of the *egwugwu*, or have a seat with the old men who council and feature centrally in the clan's governing. As Egejuru points out, this is due to the paradoxical duality of womanhood versus womanbeing. The two attitudes exist together. Religion and spirituality, while upholding the patriarchal structure of Umuofia socially, retains a complementary view of gender. Women are both empowered and disempowered by religion. They are empowered in their roles as mothers from a religious perspective, yet disparaged in their actual day-to-day experience.

Conclusion: Achebe, Kingsolver, and Cultural Hybridity

> Listen. To live is to be marked. To live is to change, to acquire the words of a story, and that is the only celebration we mortals really know. In perfect stillness, frankly, I've only found sorrow.
>
> Orleanna Price, *The Poisonwood Bible*

In postcolonial African literature, religion is used frequently to depict Western colonisation. It is a useful vehicle in literature as religion encompasses the worldview of an entire group. As Gikandi put it, it is an expression of collective dreams, ritual and how a community gather information about natural phenomena and channel it into insight. In direct conflict, as during colonial expansion, the fight for religious preservation embodies the fight for the spirit of a people. This is why in *Things Fall Apart*, when an ancestral spirit is killed "It seemed as if the very soul of the tribe wept for a great evil that was coming -- its own death" (136). The subjugation of the cosmology of Igbo of Umuofia is foresight of how they will inevitably fall apart. Achebe and Kingsolver both present Christianity and African indigenous cosmology to have conflicting worldviews, fundamentally incompatible with each other the same way the same way the plant metaphor shows missionaries to be fundamentally out of place in Africa, foreign transplantations that bear no fruit. Achebe and Kingsolver both present readers with an image of African nature-centric values that are integrated into daily life, in contrast to Christian dogma that seeks to subdue and have control over it, such as Genesis 1:28 that grants Christians dominion "over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (*PB* 1).

Religion remains central to the discourse as religion in Africa has been shaped into new configurations. The rise of violent masculinities linked to religion in many parts of Africa include 'the Lord's resistance army' and the al-Shabaab in East Africa, and the Boko Haram of West Africa. The foundation of the 'Might Men's Conference' in South Africa is based on 're-claiming' traditional masculine power for men. It is clear that even in the wider gyres of history, outside of literary texts, masculinity finds itself supported by religious institutions that operate on unequal gender power dynamics. In examining Okonkwo and Nathan and concluding that their hypermasculinity hides an innate fear of weakness and a rejection of 'feminine' values is to present this fallibility into wider culture. The novels demonstrate the danger of religious fundamentalism and the danger of a rigid and closed worldview.

As a solution to this problem of conflicting worldviews, readers are presented with an image of cultural hybridity in *The Poisonwood Bible* through the character of Brother Fowles for whom the duty of a "mission" involves open discourse between the indigenous, mutual respect and social outreach. Out of this mutual respect and with an awareness of the social impact of the colonial missionary project, Fowles departs from proselytization and instead focuses on social work. He adheres to his religious

beliefs that are compatible with the nature-centric worldview of the Congolese but does not seek to damage or disrupt Congolese communities. Fowles exhibition of this solution to religious conflict demonstrates a move from public action to a personal spiritual change. This is also a direct rejection of Western paternalism which possesses a gendered aspect that Kingsolver brings to light. Kingsolver uses Orleanna to lament the hypermasculinity and power of men in high office for whom colonial expansion in the Congo is likened to a 'game, whether that be of hunting or of colonial strategy. Both authors argue through their books that the people of Africa are capable and eager for self-determination.

As Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin propose in *The Empire Writes Back*:

> The post-colonial world is one in which destructive cultural encounter is changing to an acceptance of difference on equal terms. Both literary theorists and cultural historians are beginning to recognize cross-culturality as the potential termination point of an apparently endless human history of conquest and annihilation justified by the myth group of 'purity', and as the basis which the post-colonial world can be creatively stabilized (36).

Therefore, it appears the move forward is one of cultural hybridity and syncretism. Some authors and scholars reject the idea of post-colonial syncreticity and instead look to pre-colonial recuperation. For instance, Edward Brathwaite and Chinweizu see a return to African roots as fundamental to contemporary Nigerian identity. Meanwhile, Wole Soyinka and Wilson Harris are proponents of the view that cultural syncretism does not deny one's ancestry, but that the future of the African and Afro-Caribbean identity is enmeshed within a multi-cultural hybridized reality (*Empire Writes Back* 31). Williams (1969) sees the syncretic aspect of post-colonial societies as a unique strength. At first glance, Achebe's beliefs seem to reject commonalities and universalism between colonised African nations and Europeans. Achebe was writing at the time to recover a sense of the importance of African art - a sense of nationalism that distinguishes African art as separate but not inferior to European art. He was hailed by the *bolekaja* critics, namely Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike, which came by in the 60s alongside black nationalism movements, for his rejection of Eurocentric values.

Yet, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin explain that:

> Syncretism is the condition within which post-colonial societies operate, and accepting this does not, in any simple sense, involve hiding the role culture plays in the continuing neo-colonial hegemonic formation of the day-to-day experience of those societies (180).

A hybridized reality is not formed by rejecting one's past, one's ancestry, or denying one's nationalism. Achebe's work can fit into this formulation and has its place through his efforts to reclaim black nationalism, and the social commitment accompanying his writing. This is the path that contemporary scholarly discourse and wider public opinion is drifting towards, although the debate is still very much alive. In looking to literature, to Achebe and Kingsolver, this thesis has shown the inextricability of religion, gender and colonialism, and the importance of monitoring how these intersect in present-day political discourse.

This thesis has looked at the patterns of violence and hypermasculinity presented by Okonkwo and Nathan. While there is no doubt as to the injustice of Western colonialism, Achebe demonstrates Okonkwo's rigidity in his hypermasculinity to be fundamentally incompatible with Igbo cosmology and his *chi*. His inability to change or to incorporate femininity into his being due to his fear of weakness, is unsustainable and is a contributing factor to his suicide and the violence perpetuated by either religious group. His hypermasculine and violent character is an outward manifestation of this internal imbalance. This rejection of femininity and the reclamation of hypermasculinity is one we see repeated in violent masculine religious insurgencies. Literary analysis to uncover the weakness and opposition of femininity and the impacts of the colonial encounter have bearing on wider social commentary. Similarly to Okonkwo, Nathan possesses a "suspicion of his own cowardice" which manifests outwardly in rigidity of character and violence (224). He is the only character who remains the same throughout *The Poisonwood Bible*, presenting readers with a cautionary tale of the negative impacts of the colonial missionary, and rigid hypermasculine character traits. Some years after Orleanna, Leah, Adah and Rachel leave Nathan in the Congo, it is understood that he dies remaining fierce in his beliefs disrupting local communities with his proselytization until he is chased out and burnt down in a watchtower. Yet, very importantly, through the contrast of Brother Fowles and Nathan, Kingsolver clearly shows that it is not men as a whole who use religion to exhibit their hypermasculinity and promote an abusive ideology, but that this is dependent on a man's character and how they disrupt or are supported by the patriarchal system.

Multiple perspectives and a plurality of subject positions are thereby a useful way to conduct analysis, both in scholarly work and in wider social discourse. Cultural hybridity in all its aspects, and intersecting lenses – the masculine and the feminine, the religious and the secular, the African position and the non-African position – granted they are based on mutual respect, would form the resolution in both texts. Critics suppose that if Okonkwo did not respond violently to the District Commissioner and the missionaries, then perhaps things would not have fallen apart in such a drastic way. Head-on war, violence and conflict was not the best solution. I am wary of critical views that place the agency and

blame on the marginalised for the losses they suffered. It is my view that the best way to avoid the violence and bloodshed of colonialism is to not colonise. Yet, in examining the novel and how its plot unravelled, the meeting of multiple perspectives may have facilitated a greater readiness to establish the syncretic, culturally hybrid future that recent scholarship is pointing towards.

Yet, if a person has a right to their religion, then how can a view like religious fundamentalism be compatible with a culturally hybrid landscape that protects others' freedom of religion? Kingsolver seems to provide the answer for us in her novel: that it is not. Nathan does not change and therefore must meet his death head-on, being burned down by a mob tired of his threatening proselytization in an attempt to protect their community. Fowles is presented as the 'model missionary' and he is just that in virtue of giving up his proselytization for social outreach work. Orleanna attempts to assuage her postcolonial guilt through activism upon her return to the US. Kingsolver, like Achebe, seems to point towards the importance of a social commitment based on reciprocity, shared values, pride in one's ancestors and one's country, but mutual respect, understanding, and syncretism. The religious/gendered/colonial struggle within both novels shows this sort of future to be the move forward and demonstrates that hypermasculinity and fundamentalism are not.

The titles of the two novels are emblematic of this central struggle. *Things Fall Apart*, as discussed in the introduction, is a reference to Yeats' poem whereby the second coming of the Christian god signals the disruption of humanity as we know it, the falling of the 'centre' and the promise of salvation for a select group of people. *The Poisonwood Bible* is a reference of Nathan's closemindedness to hybridity emblematised through the garden metaphor, poisonwood being the plant he tries to wrench out of the African soil, not listening to Mama Tataba's warning. Poisonwood is the word Nathan shouts to his congregation: 'Tata Jesus is Bängala!' in a mispronounced attempt to proclaim that 'Jesus is great'. As a result of his rigidity, his unwillingness to communicate or practice cultural hybridity, he preaches 'The Poisonwood Bible'. Therefore, both books seem to warn against this rigidity of character, against the turn to hypermasculinity, and how religion can be used as a vehicle for these patterns of violence on a character level, and in the wider machinations of the world.

Deleted: my

Works Cited

"Achebe on Storytelling and Collective Memory", *A World of Ideas with Bill Moyers*, PBS, 29 September 1988.

Achebe, Chinua. "*Chi* in Igbo Cosmology." *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, Heinemann, 1975, pp. 93-103.

---. "The role of the writer in the new nation." *African Writers on African Writing*, edited by G.D. Killam, Heinemann, 1973.

---. *Things Fall Apart*. Penguin, 2001.

Appiah, Kwame A. "Introduction to Things Fall Apart." *Things Fall Apart*, Penguin, 1995.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. Routledge, 1989.

Boyce, Carole D. "Motherhood in the Works of Male and Female Igbo Writers: Achebe, Emecheta, Nwapa and Nzekwu." *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*, edited by Carole Boyce Davies and Anne Adams Graves, *Africa World*, 1986, pp. 241-256.

Casanova, Pascale. *The World Republic of Letters*. Harvard University Press, 2004.

Connell, Robert W. and James W. Messerschmidt. "Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept." *Gender & society*, 2005. pp. 829-859.

Dodson, Daphne. "Rebirthing Biblical Myth: The Poisonwood Bible as Visionary Art." *Jungian Perspectives on Rebirth and Renewal: Phoenix Rising*, edited by Elizabeth Brodersen and Michael Glock, Routledge, 2016.

Douglas, Christopher. "'The Poisonwood Bible's' Multicultural Graft: American Literature during the Contemporary Christian Resurgence." *American Literary History*, 2014, pp. 132-153.

Egejuru, Phanuel A. "The paradox of womanbeing and the female principle in Igbo cosmology." *Nwanyibu: Womanbeing and African Literature*, edited by Phanuel A. Egejuru and Ketu H. Katrak, 1997. pp. 11-19.

"FAQ." *barbarakingsolver.net.*
http://barbarakingsolver.net/faqs/
Accessed 26 March 2022.

Fike, Matthew A. *Anima and Africa: Jungian Essays on Psyche, Land, and Literature.* Routledge, 2017.

Garuba, Harry. "The Critical Reception of the African Novel." *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel*, edited by F. Abiola Irele, Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 243-262.

Gikandi, Simon. "African Literature and the Colonial Factor." *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature,* Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 379-397.

---. *Reading Chinua Achebe.* Currey, 1991.
---. "Rereading the African Novel: Myth, Language and Culture in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* and Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*." *Reading the African Novel*, Currey, 1987, pp. 150-167.

Hobbs, Alex. "Masculinity studies and literature." *Literature Compass*, 2013. pp. 383-395.

JanMohamed, Abdul R. *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa.* University of Massachusetts Press, 1983.

Kingsolver, Barbara. *The Poisonwood Bible*. Faber and Faber, 2017.

Maluleke, Tinyiko. "Of Wounded Killers and 'Failed Men': Broadening the Quest for Liberating African Masculinities." *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa*, 2018, pp. 33-78.

Mudimbe, Valentin-Yves. *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge.* Indiana University Press, 1988.

Ngendahayo, Jean D. "The Protagonist's Masculine Perceptions in Things Fall Apart as the Sign of Igbo Society Breakup." *Journal of Literature, Languages and Linguistics*, 2021, pp. 5-10.

Ognibene, Elaine R. "The Missionary Position: Barbara Kingsolver's 'The Poisonwood Bible.'" *College Literature*, 2003, pp. 19-36.

Opata, Damian. "Eternal Sacred Order versus Conventional Wisdom: A Consideration of Moral Culpability in the Killing of Ikemefuna in *Things Fall Apart*." *Research in African Literature*, 1987, pp. 71-79.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism.* Vintage, 1979.

The Book of Genesis. NIV.

Yeats, William B. "The Second Coming." *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*. The Cuala Press, 1920.

Yu, Xixia. "The Use and Abuse of Manliness in *Things Fall Apart*." *Celebrating the 60th Anniversary of 'Things Fall Apart',* edited by Désiré Baloubi and Christina R. Pinkston, Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2020, pp. 89-97.