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Governing Intimacy: The Politics of Love in African Fiction

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Abstract

Governing Intimacy: The Politics of Love in African Fiction
By Kathleen Hanggi

This dissertation examines portrayals of love in Sub-Saharan African fiction. Employing Herbert Marcuse's discussion of liberated subjectivity in *The Aesthetic Dimension*, I contend that the private desires of the individual offer insight into an alternative future. I trace the aesthetic rendering of love and its affective experience to argue that a critical reading of love reveals the complex negotiation the lover experiences between personal desire, subjectivity, and the socio-political order. Love is a critical site for understanding subjectivity because it is rooted in feelings of desire, but it also can develop into a foundation for intimate relationships that develop into socially-sanctioned marriages. Thus, it begins as an impulse or desire outside of the social order, but as it develops, it becomes implicated in the socio-political sphere. My analysis demonstrates that through love relationships, characters discover who they are, the world in which they live, and what its limits are. Narratives of love also give rise to the dream of a better world. I show that subjectivity, although socially constructed, is paradoxically a site of resistance to the social order, and in African fiction, loving relationships introduce the possibility of a world rooted in humanity and social justice.

Although under-theorized in the field of African literary criticism, love is a prominent theme in African literature deserving of critical attention. This project explores a range of love relationships, including polygamous marriages and interracial love under apartheid, to uncover the various manifestations of the individualization of the social within heterosexual love relationships. A study of this scope is long overdue and will serve as a foundation for discussions of love and affect in African literature. My dissertation provides a sustained analysis of heteronormative relationships and demonstrates love is a valuable index for comprehending how the affective dimension functions in concert and conflict with the socio-political order that shapes it.

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Introduction

Falling in Love in African Literature

In Onitsha, Nigeria, in the 1960s, English-language pamphlets sought to educate their readers on the conventions of romantic love. Love was not a novel feeling; it has existed since humans became sentient. However, across Sub-Saharan Africa in the twentieth century, love acquired a new value as it came to be a principal reason for marriage. These pamphlets drew upon the new status of love to inform readers of potential expectations, benefits, and consequences of romantic love. Although the topics of the pamphlets ranged from advice on hygiene to reprints of famous speeches, a major segment of these pamphlets focused on love. Some warned of love's consequences, scaring girls about unfaithful lovers and unplanned pregnancies. Others, however, served as instruction manuals in the art of love. One titled "How to Write and Reply Letters for Marriage, Engagement Letters, Love Letters and How to Know a Girl to Marry," introduces its readers to the Western custom of love letters as way to communicate with one's beloved. Here, it informs its male readers: "From your letter an intelligent girl will be able to tell the type of man you are and whether to say yes or no" (5). The pamphlet goes on to provide examples of correspondence to model the correct way to address and approach someone to marry. The manual on love letters educates its readers on the appropriate salutation, the tone, and content of the letters through countless permutations of the letter and its response.[1] Other pamphlets instruct through the indirect method of a narrative that offers its lesson through the tragedy of the couple. The melodramatic "They Died in the Game of Love" tries to dissuade young people from recklessly following love through its depiction of the dire consequences Thony and Cathe face after making love.

Cathe dies from complications during her pregnancy, and Thony kills himself after Cathe and his mother die.

The pamphlets tackle the novelty of pre-marital love in West Africa and educate their readers in its performance. From instructions on how to strike up a conversation with a girl, to advice on how to be a good wife or husband, these pamphlets draw upon the attractiveness of love among the younger generation. As Emmanuel Obiechina argues in his study of the pamphlets, *An African Popular Literature*, pre-colonial African cultures distrusted love as a foundation for marriage, so "romantic individualism was understandably curbed by stringent taboos" (34). Yet, in the 1950s and 1960s, after decades of colonialism and Christianity, the young generation began to see love as a path to individuality.

> Romantic love and marriage are the channels through which present-day West Africans express and emphasize their individuality and their liberation from traditional constraint and the customary impositions of the older generation. . . . The individual man or woman, they imply, has a right of free choice in love and marriage and should abide by the consequences of his choice. (69)

Obiechina demonstrates the social significance of these pamphlets in post-independence Nigeria, while simultaneously positioning love as a key value in the articulation of individuality. The proliferation of these manuals and stories reflect the broader social transformation of marriage during the twentieth century. The traditional forms of alliance marriages, marriages arranged by families to formal connections between families, give way to the notion of individual choice.

What the instructions and warnings depict is a tension between African traditions and Western modernity; these manuals target adolescents and young adults who seek to differentiate themselves from their elders and from their family. They establish a binary opposition between African customs and Western-influenced progress, a binary that includes opposing views on the role of the individual, the role of family, the ritual of marriage, and the practice of polygamy. Yet, the binary fails to account for the *felt* experience of this tension. These pamphlets, although consumed on a large scale, fail to communicate the emotional experience of love.

When the interior experience of love is juxtaposed with its novelty, the tension that arises is more complicated. In Nigerian writer Elechi Amadi's novel *Estrangement*, Alekiri applies her lipstick and recalls a significant moment in her relationship with her lover Major Dansuku: learning to kiss.

> Her initial reaction had been one of disgust. The only person she had ever kissed was her toothless baby. That was a spontaneous motherly reaction far different from kissing an adult, and a man at that. But she was a fast learner. At first she tolerated, then liked, and finally desired Dansuku's kisses. (10)

What the scene reveals is Alekiri's unfamiliarity with the gesture of kissing as an expression of affection or desire. She recoils because it is not an assertion of desire she understands. Although she has been married and she is the mistress of a soldier, she is unfamiliar with its meaning. She sees it as a motherly action, not one of sexual desire. Yet, she internalizes the lessons and begins to desire them herself. Her daily application of lipstick is intended to make her lips more kissable.

Alekiri knows nothing of kissing because it is not a customary indigenous expression of desire. The act of kissing is foreign to many African cultures, and yet, in the West, it is a near-universal expression of affection. Charles Carroll Bombaugh notes the act of kissing in Genesis, the first chronological book in the Bible and discusses instances of kissing from antiquity to his nineteenth century contemporaries. Philosopher Irving Singer's comprehensive study *The Nature of Love* discusses various ideological claims on kissing across Western history, including those of religious love and courtly love. In *The Culture of Love*, Victorianist Stephen Kern draws attention to the importance of the kiss in courtship, and particularly notes the chasteness of the Victorian kiss which gives way to more passionate forms of kissing as modeled in the close-ups of movies (173). Kissing has been a part of Western cultures for centuries, and it is considered a natural manifestation of attraction and affection, but as Alekiri's first reaction demonstrates, it is not a truly universal sign of love.[2]

However, the movement across cultural and national boundaries set in motion by colonialism introduced the practice and its value in a loving relationship to other parts of the globe. Indeed, Dansuku learns the importance of kissing from a British girlfriend he had while conducting his military training in England. Upon returning to Nigeria, he educates his romantic partners on the practice, and as Alekiri acknowledges, they learn to view kissing as a form of sexual intimacy. The text reveals how information about kissing and romance permeates national boundaries and becomes incorporated into African relationships. It is too reductive, however, to view the scene as a tension between tradition and modernity. If we pull back from the scene and put the kissing lesson in context, it becomes apparent that Alekiri and Dansuku are enmeshed in a matrix of social

forces, of which kissing symbolizes only one. It is wartime; Alekiri is married to someone else; Dansuku is Muslim while Alekiri is Christian; he is Hausa and she is Erekwi; and the intricacies that define their love are more complex and subtle than the original binary opposition allows for.

Postcolonial theorists attempt to characterize the relationship between indigenous cultures and Western modernity as they are observed in contemporary developing societies. Many employ the concept of multiple times, complicating Benedict Anderson's contention that the nation exists in "homogeneous empty time," (26), a concept Anderson borrows from Walter Benjamin. According to Anderson, the nation moves steadily through history as one unit. Postcolonial theorists adapt Anderson's idea of the nation to the postcolonial state, whereby the confluence of native traditions and Western modernity in the guise of capitalism, urbanization, individualism, and Christianity creates not an amalgamated time, but different permutations of the imbrication of worldviews, including new ways of being that are created in response to the combinations. For theorist Homi Bhabha, the multiple times of the nation-state are represented by "the discourses of minorities, the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities and tense locations of cultural difference" (Bhabha 148). Partha Chatterjee's work echoes the sentiment of Bhabha's work when he contends that the heterogeneous population of the postcolonial nation-state demands that the time of the nation-state is also heterogeneous. Rather than characterize the times as either pre-modern or modern, Chatterjee suggests that these 'other' times "are new products of the encounter with modernity itself" (7). Their focus on populations calls attention to the heterogeneous groups that comprise the nation-state. Anthropologist Ann Stoler uses the concepts of

ruins and *ruination* to organize the multiple senses of time that define the postcolony, yet her metaphor assumes a linear sense of time as before and after, or pre- and post-, which the others contest as too simple. In contrast, Achille Mbembe, discusses time itself, and he suggests that the postcolonial state "encloses multiple *durées* made up of discontinuities, reversals, inertias, and swings that overlay one another, interpenetrate one another, and envelope one another: an *entanglement*" (14). Mbembe envisions time in the postcolony as comprised of many unrelated, discontinuous, non-linear aspects that create unique experiences of life.

The heterogeneity of time in the postcolonial state is further complicated by the inner lives of the individuals. Bhabha, Chatterjee, and Laura Ann Stoler discuss the external conditions of time, those created by the social, religious, and political influences present in the postcolony. However, those forces interact with individuals' subjectivity and that interaction determines the individual experience of life in the postcolony. Even as social forces shape individual subjectivity, consciousness and desire remains outside their reach, creating a gap between the external forces and interiority.

Love offers a unique perspective on this process because it is distinct from the socially-sanctioned ritual of marriage. The ascendency of Western practices of individualism and capitalism introduce additional related values: education, urbanization, Christianity, independence, and sexuality among them. The infiltration of modernity transforms love from a de-valued emotion to one that determines the private lives of individuals. In Southern Africa, the stakes are different because of its longer history of European settlement. Racist national policy legislates which couples can marry and who can make love to whom, thus thoroughly infiltrating the privacy of the couple. What

differentiates love from marriage is that love is felt and processed internally before it makes its presence known externally through the enactment of socially prescribed signs of affection. In manifesting itself, love becomes subject to external forces through the recognizable signs, but also through the rite of marriage. The distinction between love and marriage creates friction between internal desires and external expectations, subjectivity and the social order.

African literature depicts this tension between the private inner lives of characters and the social norms relating to love and marriage. The couple may be the organizing unit of love, but love relationships are part of a web of broader relationships, including socio-cultural, political, and even governmental relationships. My dissertation, *Governing Intimacy: The Politics of Love in African Fiction*, gives prominence to this aspect of Anglophone African fiction. With attention to the affective dimension, I argue that a critical reading of love reveals the complex negotiation the lover experiences between personal desire, subjectivity, and the socio-political order. The public sphere sanctions and cultivates love into acceptable forms, which implicates the seemingly private relationship between two individuals in the social context. Through love relationships, characters discover who they are, the world in which they live, and what its limits are. Love also gives rise to the dream of a better world. It activates other emotions, affects, and actions that operate in tandem with it. I employ a textual analysis of the affects and emotions surrounding love to highlight the complex emotional experience of the individual in the postcolony, and I contend that subjectivity, although socially constructed, is paradoxically a site of resistance to the social order. Through an attention to love, I show how these texts imagine a better world.

My project constructs an alternative geography organized by colonialism and its structures of education, administration, and discipline. Rather than discuss texts from a specific geographical region, I focus on texts primarily from Anglophone Africa. The shared colonial past and the global present have established a narrative of love that transcends geographical boundaries. I recognize there is a dangerous precedent of viewing Africa as an undifferentiated unit, in both academic scholarship and popular culture. However, my work acknowledges the cultural specificity of each text I discuss, while making connections across geographical boundaries.

I employ the designation "romantic love," to mean the intimate feelings and attraction between lovers. My use of the term draws upon the definition sociologist Anthony Giddens crafts in *The Transformation of Intimacy*, where he defines romantic love as a belief that "a durable emotional tie can be established with the other on the basis of qualities intrinsic to that tie itself" (2). Integral to Giddens' definition and my usage is the belief in love's sustainability; the relationships I discuss expect love to last forever. Romantic love is idealistic, which is what enables belief in its lasting quality.

Although I use the adjective *romantic*, it does not follow that the literature under discussion fits into the genre of romance fiction. None of the novels I discuss are classified as romance; rather, the narrative of love is often realist and set alongside other narrative strands such as those pertaining to the community, the state, and everyday life. Yet, *romantic* coheres with my discussion more than the alternative term *sexual love*. Although the attraction is both emotional and physiological in romantic love, physical desire is often subordinate to the emotional. In the African novels under discussion, very few emphasize the sexual component of the love relationships.

I organize my analysis using Herbert Marcuse's theory of aesthetics and praxis in *The Aesthetic Dimension*. A Frankfurt school Marxist, Marcuse makes a compelling argument that challenges traditional Marxist theory. He contends that what inspires individuals, what matters most in their lives, is not the politics of their class status. Rather, it is their personal desires, drives, and suffering. He writes:

> Liberating subjectivity constitutes itself in the inner history of the individuals—their own history, which is not identical with their social existence. It is the particular history of their encounters, their passions, joys, and sorrows—experiences which are not necessarily grounded in their class situation, and which are not even comprehensible from this perspective. (*Aesthetic* 5)

Marcuse urges Marxist theorists whose critical focus is limited to the depiction of class status in art and literature to expand their horizon. He posits the domain of the personal, which is not synonymous with class-consciousness, offers insights into what inspires individuals. He contends that by understanding individual subjectivity and what motivates individuals, radical Marxists can utilize that knowledge to mobilize the masses to rise up against injustice. The examination of individual consciousness supplements the predominant theoretical lens of class status and the relations of production by illuminating what desires and impulses drive individuals, desires that reveal liberated subjectivity. Marcuse theorizes that only liberated consciousness, that which is not regulated by the "prevailing unfreedom" of capitalist society, can lead to a transformed society in which individuals experience true freedom (*Aesthetic xi*). For Marcuse, the key to revolution is in understanding the inner lives of people.

The premise of Marcuse's argument is deceptively simple: individuals are not identical to their class status. He suggests subjectivity exists outside of the socio-political realm: "With the affirmation of the inwardness of subjectivity, the individual steps out of the network of exchange relationships and exchange values, withdraws from the reality of bourgeois society, and enters another dimension of existence" (4). For Marcuse, what he calls "the inner history of the individuals," exists outside social and class determination. He contends that emotions, imagination, desires, and ideas are not consonant with class position, and for Marcuse, it is this disjuncture between individual conscious and class-consciousness that provides fruitful ground for comprehending how the individual experiences the social order.

The critique Marcuse makes of Marxists' limited focus is relevant to postcolonial studies, where literary analyses have overwhelmingly analyzed African and other postcolonial literature in terms of its political import. As Deepika Bahri notes in *Native Intelligence*, attention to the sociopolitical sphere of postcolonial literature often results in the literary text being read "as a primarily documentary text" (11) with very little discussion of the aesthetics of the text. The themes of violence, corruption, tradition, and gender position individuals as symbols of a much larger trend. The focus on the politics of a work often leads to the fallout of other dimensions of experience: the aesthetic, the personal, and the emotional dimensions of the narrative fall away. This method of reading limits the potential of postcolonial literary studies by narrowly defining the field and limiting the analyses of literature from a vast swath of the developing world.

For Bahri, a responsible method for analyzing postcolonial literature is situated at the interstices of the politics, aesthetics, and history of a text. This triangulation situates

the text within its sociopolitical context while simultaneously foregrounding the aesthetic stylization of that context as the material to be analyzed. In a similar vein, African literary scholar Akinwumi Adesokan contends the aesthetic form of African film and literature is fertile territory for understanding individual agency (*xii*). In the transformation of reality into literature, reality acquires a particular shape, through story order, word choice, repetition, narrative voice, and other literary qualities of the work. The particularities of individual experience are to be found in the aesthetic representation of their worlds. Although the main trend in postcolonial studies is toward the sociopolitical, recent interventions have sought, like mine does, to re-direct the focus of the field and consider how the other aspects of the postcolonial condition shape individual experience. For that reason, Marcuse challenges critics' attention to the orthodoxies of Marxist criticism in *The Aesthetic Dimension* by insisting on the relevance of individual experience, on the desires and emotions of the characters, rather than their socio-economic position in the world. Attention to the affective dimension reveals dynamic characters who struggle with the multiple claims on their existence, particularly when those claims conflict with their private desires. Since many of these texts incorporate the tension between tradition and Western practices, attention to subjectivity highlights the individual's navigation of the web of social forces acting upon him or her.

Marcuse's theory of interiority also considers how art acts on the inner life of the viewer or reader. Since Marcuse's aim is to incite a revolution that will bring about social justice and individual liberation, he is interested in how an artwork acts on audience. In art and literature, reality becomes stylized through its portrayal, and according to Marcuse, the re-presentation of reality impacts the reader or viewer: "Thus, on the basis

of aesthetic sublimation, a *desublimation* takes place in the perception of individuals—in their feelings, judgments, thoughts; an invalidation of dominant norms, needs, and values" (7-8). Art and literature act on the audience, and evoke a natural, emotional response in them. The reader connects emotionally with the characters and empathizes with their pain, their joy.

This attribute of art to evoke strong feeling in its audience is central to Marcuse's project of understanding what comprises individuals' realities. If art also acts on its audience, and makes real what the characters in a story experience, it creates the potential for appealing to readers and prompting them to recognize and identify the social injustices that define the characters' lives, and by extension their own lives. This aspect of Marcuse's theory illustrates why narratives of transgressive love or heartbreak are compelling to readers; readers recognize the universal emotions of desire, frustration, and suffering. Just as the reader seeks happiness in his or her own life, the reader also wishes it for the characters who emote in the same manner as the reader. With global literature, attention to the affective dimension reveals a similarity across geographical locations, between reader and character, that diffuses the sense of Otherness or difference that cultural differences might engender.

What makes Herbert Marcuse's theory particularly relevant to an analysis of African literature is the interconnectedness he sees between the inner life of individuals and social change. As a Marxist, Marcuse was deeply entrenched in the leftist revolutions occurring in the 1960s, and like many of his contemporaries, saw them as the beginning of a trend around the world of people rising up against the injustices of capitalism. His theory of aesthetics connect the world of art and literature to revolution because he sees

in art the space to imagine an alternative world: "[A] work of art can be called revolutionary if, by virtue of the aesthetic transformation, it represents, in the exemplary fate of individuals, the prevailing unfreedom and the rebelling forces, thus breaking through the mystified (and petrified) social reality, and opening the horizon of change (liberation)" (*Aesthetic xi*). Marcuse sees in art the ability to uncover the range of social forces that shape a character's fate. When a text uncovers those forces, it simultaneously suggests the possibility of a better world. Through the depiction of obstacles a character encounters, the text opens "the horizon of change" (*Aesthetic xi*). Even if the character cannot overcome the constraints of the social forces, the awareness that those forces are unjust, that they limit his or her freedom, speaks to the necessity of a better world.

Frantz Fanon initiates the discussion of a new world order as seen through a postcolonial lens in *The Wretched of the Earth*, when he writes: "What [the Third World] expects from those who for centuries have kept it in slavery is that they will help it to rehabilitate mankind, and make man victorious everywhere, once and for all" (106). Fanon calls for a new humanity, and he puts the onus on the developing world to create a just world. However, as postcolonial theorist Neil Lazarus argues in *Resistance in Postcolonial Fiction*, Fanon's messianic vision of decolonization as a revolutionary struggle appealed to African intellectuals, but when their efforts failed to bear fruit, their vision darkened to one of disillusionment at the absence of real change in the transfer of power from the colonial administration to the national government (12). In the years following independence, the enormity of government corruption, ethnic tension, and unchanged circumstances for the masses prompted many writers to depict an ambivalent view of the nation. Novels such as Ayi Kwei Armah's novel *The Beautyful Ones Are Not*

Yet Born, Wole Soyina's *The Interpreters*, Dambudzo Marchera's *The House of Hunger*, and Ben Okri's *Dangerous Loves* convey the sense of disillusionment intellectuals felt through their use of excrement, death, and waste as metaphors for the corrupt, unjust nation-state. These "novels of disillusionment" (Ravenscroft in Lazarus 23) depict the inescapability and the abject misery of life in the postcolony. This genre of African fiction forecloses discussion of a better world because in these texts, there is no escape from the drudgery of this life.

Romantic love, however, is founded on the possibility of a better world and the promise of happiness ever after, and these narratives that address romantic love deploy its values to imagine how the world could be more just. While fiction often depicts social practices and rituals, its aim is not to transmit reality. Instead, fiction is a place to work through contradictions; it negotiates social issues and imagines how to resolve them. It transcends the social issues through "the aesthetic dimension of representation" (Bahri 102). In *Native Intelligence*, Deepika Bahri suggests that postcolonial literature occupies a complex relationship between "the aesthetic, political, personal, and collective that allows the critic to raise the question of the value of art without losing sight of its submission to the socioeconomic forces of the administered world" (93). Through the aesthetic rendering of reality, art and literature explore imaginative solutions to their world's toughest problems.

Even in texts where love encounters its limits and fails, where the unjust world order remains in place at the narrative's end, the possibility of liberation is made apparent through what Deepika Bahri labels "utopian negation." When literature negates the happy ending of the couple the reader seeks, that negation simultaneously reaffirms that the

couple should be together. Despite art's reassertion of the conditions of reality, Bahri argues that the reassertion of unfreedom makes an implicit demand for change, for the utopia that enables the freedom to love that this couple seeks (89). This way of reading demonstrates that writers have not forgotten Fanon's call for a new humanity. They show the power of literature to imagine a new world order that respects the people whose situations resemble those of the characters.

Marcuse's aesthetic theory, which combines psychoanalysis with Marxist ideology proposes a unique way to read postcolonial literature. His work positions the particularities of a literary text within its broader social context, striking a balance between the personal and the political. His emphasis on the aesthetic qualities of literature also serve to remind us that postcolonial literature is a work of imagination; it is not primarily a historical record. As literary critics, we should be attentive to the aesthetic dimension of the texts because it reveals new layers of meaning within the text.

Love functions in constellation with other elements of life including: individuality, marriage, sexuality, gender relations, and family. These relationships developed over centuries in the West until it acquired its modern form, which is what gets imported into Africa. Much scholarship has been written on the history of love in Western civilization, and it offers insight into love's presence in twentieth century Africa. Irving Singer's comprehensive study *The Nature of Love* traces love's intellectual history from antiquity to its modern forms, and he argues that early, non-physical forms of romantic love, known as courtly love, developed from notions of love for God. Singer concurs with Friedrich Engels' position in *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, where he aligns the democratization of love with the demand for individual

rights in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Singer and Engels show that with the rise of the individual political rights came the private right to choose one's spouse.

The connection between the individual and romantic love appears throughout European fiction of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as well. Noted literary scholar Ian Watt discusses the juxtaposition of love and individuality in his classic study *The Rise of the Novel*, in which he contends love factors into the popularity of the novel form. Watt, whose thesis posits the novel's emergence as part of a growing trend in which individual experience becomes a more important version of reality than collective tradition (14), attributes the rise of the novel, in part, to women's freedom to choose whom to marry (138). Literary historian Lawrence Stone explores how this development plays out in fiction and emphasizes the tension between individual choice and family obligation in British literature at that time (228). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak also notes this trend in her reading of *Jane Eyre*, in which she argues that marriage specifically allows women to achieve the status of the individual because it places women within the recognized unit of the nuclear family. Marriage catapults Jane into "domestic-society-through-sexual-reproduction cathected as 'companionate love'" (*Critique* 244). British and European literature has rehearsed the tension in its various manifestations between the individual and the family, or the individual and society, through the narrative of the couple. In that debate, the couple is figured as modern, while family and their emphasis on social class, money, and tradition, are firmly located on the side of tradition. However, the texts' position on which side should win differs with each narrative.

As Western practices infiltrate new locales through the processes of colonialism and globalization, anthropologists and sociologists studying regions across the globe have

explored the transformations in love, marriage, and intimate relations. Anthropologist Laura Ahearn argues that love letters in Nepal are a sign of a culture moving away from arranged marriages. The collection *Romantic Passion* offers a cultural perspective on the incorporation of Western ideals of romantic love into regions around the world, including Polynesia, Nigeria, and Morocco, among other regions. The volume *Intimacies* more specifically explores the interplay between love and sexuality in the changing patterns of personal relationships. *Love and Globalization* considers how local practices and beliefs about love adapt to external views that are ever-present due to the flows of globalization.

African studies scholars have also noted the adaptations marriage makes in the face of new social values. Diana Jeater's *Marriage, Perversion, and Power* and the edited volume *Transformations in African Marriage* approach marriage as a dynamic practice that has changed with the imposition of colonialism, the introduction of Christianity, and the mass migration to cities. One article discusses a phenomenon sociologist Wambui wa Karanja labels "private polygyny," where young women in Nigeria aspire to become "outside wives," meaning long-term mistresses of married men where the men pay for housing and living expenses, a system that replaces traditional forms of polygyny (wa Karanja 257). The collection *Love in Africa*, edited by Lynn M. Thomas and Jennifer Cole traces various foreign media, such as British magazines in the 1930s, Bollywood movies in the 1960s and 1970s, and Mexican telenovelas in the 1990s, and discusses the impact of the imported narratives of love on popular culture. Lynn M. Thomas uncovers the rise of the "modern girl" in South Africa in the early 1930s. The cloche hats, pearls, and wide smiles reflect the trend's American and European roots, but it also prompts a desire for romance and dating prior to a marriage proposal. These localized studies trace

the novel forms love and marriage assume in order to accommodate new social arrangements.

African literary critics have noted the correlation between rights and love in various African novels, where the notion of *choice* of one's future spouse is a critical marker of individuality. Literary texts consider whether love is a stable foundation for marriage and how it positions the individual or couple against the family. Literary critics Yakini B. Kemp and Irene Assiba D'Almeida focus on the notion of choice in the novel of Mariama Bâ and D'Almeida also addresses the work of Buchi Emecheta and Bessie Head. Emmanuel Obiechina's study of the Onitsha pamphlets also emphasizes the function of love as a sign of independence among young adults in Nigeria. These critics note the importance of personal choice in contrast with the traditional model of a family choosing a spouse for a young man or woman.

Other critical discussions of love in African fiction center on particular texts. *The River Between*, by Ngugi wa Thiong'o prominently features a forbidden love, and much critical work has been done on the significance of the romantic relationship in relation to the political sphere. Ama Ata Aidoo's provocative novel *Changes: A Love Story* also engenders critical discussions of love and marriage as the female protagonist's desire to enter a polygamous union threatens to destabilize the connection of love with monogamy. Because I discuss these texts in my later chapters, I will include a more thorough discussion of the criticism in the relevant chapters.

My intervention in this critical literature provides a study that is long overdue and will serve as a foundation for discussions of love and affect in African literature. My dissertation provides a sustained analysis of heteronormative relationships and

demonstrates love is a valuable index for comprehending how the affective dimension functions in concert and conflict with the socio-political order that shapes it. This project aims to make an important contribution to the fields of African literary criticism and postcolonial studies since it takes seriously both affect and subjectivity, two areas that deserve greater contemplation in these fields. It also introduces a method that can be adapted to consider how other forms of love, or other affects, such as shame, fear, or hate, develop across African literature.

The following chapters seek to uncover various issues that develop in constellation with romantic love. Although much of the criticism I discussed focuses on the correspondence between individuality and love, the literature shows a more expansive set of issues that correspond to love relationships. My chapters consider the nation, the community, gender relations, ideology, and race and their relevance to love.

Chapter One, "Reading Love: Subjectivity, Desire, and the Nation," examines two novels by Nigerian writer Elechi Amadi and considers how they complicate common analyses of love. In *The Concubine*, which is set in a pre-colonial West African village, the opposition between tradition and community on one hand and modernity and the individual on the other is rendered incomplete with the introduction of a supernatural order in the love life of humans. The penetration between the boundaries of the natural and supernatural realms creates a different perception and value placed on love prior to the influence of the West. *Estrangement*, a novel set in the post-civil war era of Nigeria complicates the trope of love as an allegory of the nation because, at the outset of the narrative, the nation is broken and attempting to heal from nearly three years of violence, starvation, and chaos. As the rest of the Nigeria returns to its life, Alekiri must determine

if her future is with the husband she loves who rejects her for her infidelity, or with the soldier with whom she has also fallen in love. In this love triangle the allegory of the nation is fractured; it is ambivalent and anxious about its future.

The second chapter considers the convergence of love and polygamy from African women's perspectives and calls attention to the effects of gender inequality on these relationships. In "'You wish the conditions in life were different': Love, Polygamy, and Refashioning the Self," I argue that in the failure of romantic love, other forms of love, forms that are more stable, are activated to help the women cope with the pain of a broken heart. In Mariama Bâ's novella *So Long a Letter*, the characters Ramatoulaye and Aissatou, who both suffer a broken marriages when their husbands marry second wives, focus on self-love and the elevation of their own desires and needs, to forge new lives for themselves after their marriages end. The second novel under discussion, Ghanaian writer Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story*, explores the possibility of polygamy as a source of liberation for women. Esi, the protagonist, views polygamy as a way to balance love and a career, but in her misguided attempts to find happiness, what remains a constant form of support and love is her strong friendship with Opokuya, a woman who also struggles to balance her profession and her love. Aidoo's novel portrays the limits of both women's lives, but sees in their powerful bond the mutual respect and love each desires.

My third chapter, "Parenthetical Closeness: Love Across the Color Bar in Nadine Gordimer's *Occasion for Loving*" examines interracial love under Apartheid in South Africa. These unlawful relationships prove fruitful ground for South African writers as it allows them to consider the most personal prohibition under the strict, segregated system.

Using Nadine Gordimer's early novel *Occasion for Loving*, which depicts a white, liberal family's unintentional involvement in a white friend's affair with a black man, I argue that the acts of being seen or witnessing are powerful tropes throughout this body of literature. In *Occasion for Loving*, what one witnesses are events or sights that are out of the ordinary, disruptive, or unusual. For Gordimer, the act of loving and the reality of interracial coupling interrupt the everyday flow of things. I contend the motif of witnessing or being witnessed points to the belief that the private realm is always already infiltrated by the public sphere.

The final chapter, "The Power of Love: The Writing of Ngugi wa Thiong'o" discusses Ngugi's canon and the entanglement of love and liberation that define his work. Ngugi is known for the socialist views that pervade his writing, but my analysis shows that intimately bound up with his views on justice is a belief in love. Through textual analyses of his early novel *The River Between*, the mid-career fable *Matigari*, and the sprawling late-career satire *Wizard of the Crow*, I demonstrate Ngugi's unwavering commitment to social justice and bringing about a better world through the power of love. Each novel depicts a particular arrangement of social forces: the first takes place in the colonial period, the second emphasizes the neo-colonial forces at work in the postcolony; and the third depicts the position of an African state in a global economy. Across the various settings, his texts imagine love as a radical force that can thwart political power in real and devastating ways. I discuss how his overarching ideology evolves with his own politics, but that, despite the language he employs, Ngugi's commitment remains the same: another world is possible.

Chapter One

Reading Love: Subjectivity, Desire, and the Nation

Anthropologist Lucy Mair's study *African Marriage and Social Change* offers a careful discussion of traditional marriage practices among different ethnic groups across Sub-Saharan Africa in order to surmise how the customs were adapting to the changes in African societies. Mair contends that throughout most African cultures, marriages were contracted to support procreation, and that primary function signified that the families of individuals ready to marry were involved in bringing about the marriage and even in guiding the couple's early days of life together (4). In Igbo society, families arrange betrothals for their children before the child reaches puberty. According to her research, a person who refuses his or her parents' choice could be banished. Speaking generally about traditional practices of marriage in Africa, she writes: "Older Africans do not see why a choice based solely on mutual attraction of the couple should be advocated as the ideal. Indeed, they are apt to take the view that the more detached judgment of the elders is more likely to select a spouse with the right qualities" (4). Even as elders dismiss attraction as grounds for marriage, Mair's research advised that an increasing number of marriages were being contracted by individuals, rather than by their families (152), among other changes pertaining to issues of money and bride price.

What Mair uncovers in her work is the tension between custom and individual desire that plays out in the relationship between love and marriage, which several African novels take up in various ways. In Buchi Emecheta's novel *The Bride Price*, Aku-nna falls in love, but her family rejects him as a husband and refuses to consent to their marriage. In Amma Darko's novel *Beyond the Horizon*, the educated son Akobi returns

to his village and asks his family to find him an obedient village girl to be his bride, but he simultaneously keeps Comfort, an educated career woman as his mistress. In Ousmane Sembene's *Xala*, El Hadj loves both his wives, one who keeps to their traditional Muslim ways, and one whose fashion and sense are Western influenced. In Bessie Head's novel *Maru*, the chieftain Maru loves and marries a woman outside his ethnic group because of her difference, making the marriage a strategic political move to unite the tribes. As the examples above affirm, the intersection of tradition and love activate a range of relations between the individual and the prevailing social order.

The matrix of social forces that cultivate love and marriage is central to Nigerian writer Elechi Amadi's novels *The Concubine* and *Estrangement*. These novels depict the various forces that shape marriage while considering the consequences of favoring love as a pre-requisite for marriage. When love serves as the determining factor in marriage, the purpose for marrying—procreation and economic stability—gives way to attraction and personal choice. Love also sidelines families' roles in securing a spouse for their son or daughter. Love, then, is transformative for the couple and for the social order, and Amadi's writing teases out the tensions that arise out of this recent development in African marriages. Through transgressive love relationships, Amadi's novels *The Concubine* and *Estrangement* explore how private desires and feelings are cultivated by the social order. Whereas *The Concubine* is set in a pre-colonial village, *Estrangement* takes place in the aftermath of the Biafran War. Amadi crafts similar heroines in each text: beautiful, respected women who adhere to social norms. The very different contexts in which these women live and the ways they experience love reveals how dramatically the social value of love has changed over fifty years. Whereas *The Concubine* explores

the discord between the individual and the community, *Estrangement* complicates the notion that love functions as an allegory of the nation. Together, these novels highlight how individual affect is enmeshed in the larger narratives of community and the state. In this chapter, I contend that a close reading of love uncovers the experience of the individual within society while simultaneously shedding light on the forces that shape the world in which they live.

My reading is underpinned by the work of Frankurt school theorist Herbert Marcuse, who argues in *The Aesthetic Dimension* that the domain of subjectivity should be taken seriously by Marxist aesthetics. He defines subjectivity as "inwardness, emotions, and imagination" (3), and he claims that it exists outside of the socio-political realm: "With the affirmation of the inwardness of subjectivity, the individual steps out of the network of exchange relationships and exchange values, withdraws from the reality of bourgeois society, and enters another dimension of existence" (4). For Marcuse, what he calls "the inner history of the individuals," exists outside social and class determination. He states: "It is the particular history of their encounters, their passions, joys, and sorrows— experiences which are not necessarily grounded in their class situation, and which are not even comprehensible from this perspective" (5). He contends that emotions, imagination, desires, and ideas are not consonant with class position, and it is this disjuncture between individual consciousness and class-consciousness that provides fruitful ground for comprehending how the individual experiences the social order. Through an attention to love and the obstacles it encounters, I demonstrate how a textual analysis of love and the affective dimension of the individual reveals how private desires and emotions become enmeshed in the social realm.

I. *The Concubine*

The Concubine depicts a forbidden love between Ekwueme, a bachelor betrothed to another woman, and Ihuoma, a recently widowed woman. Set in a pre-colonial West African village with strict social tenets concerning love and marriage, the narrative follows these characters as they encounter village traditions that oppose their strong feelings for one another. Ekwueme announces his feelings for Ihuoma but reluctantly marries his fiancée Ahurole while remaining in love with Ihuoma. Recognizing her husband's love for another woman, Ahurole seeks a love potion, which in turn afflicts Ekwueme with listlessness and then delirium. In Ekwueme's potion-induced madness, Ihuoma serves as his anodyne, and they finally begin a romantic relationship with the community's approval. The couple, having finally overcome the obstacles tradition has put in their way, seems untouchable, until a final hurdle appears: Ihuoma is a divinity made human, and in her supernatural life, she is married to the Sea-King, a jealous lover who threatens to kill any man who marries his wife. Ekwueme, determined to marry the woman he loves, tries to tries to neutralize the god's power with the guidance of a medicine man, but he is killed before he can complete the ritual. The penetrated boundaries between the natural and supernatural worlds, as well as the tension between individual desire and the social order, transform this seemingly straightforward tale of love into an intricate story of desire and authority.

My reading of *The Concubine* considers love in the domain of the natural world and the supernatural world. Love threatens to destabilize the cooperative ecology that characterizes life in the village because of the value it places on individual desire. Within a setting where the social order and the gods they serve are so intimately connected, love

and the autonomy of the individual pose a threat to the world's stability because it places the individual's interests above those of the community while ignoring the role of the gods. Love simultaneously puts the individual lover at risk in this pantheistic communal world because there are unseen hands guiding him and reacting to his actions.

Much of the criticism of *The Concubine* has explored the relationship between the individual and the socio-deistic order. In *The West African Village Novel*, George Nyamndi likens the characters to animals in a pen: "game, cornered irretrievably by their god-hunter" (134). Likewise, Niyi Osundare contends that the humans are puppets that the gods control completely for their own entertainment: "There seems to be a kind of cosmic chain of oppression in which those at the top thwart and toy with the lives of those below" (104). In contrast, Oladele Taiwo contends that the text adopts a mocking tone in its adherence to the village's traditions in order to point out that this is a village on the brink of social change, and yet, as Ekwueme embodies that change, he encounters forces that oppose his marriage to Ihuoma, forces that are too strong for him to overcome. Each of these critics examines the relationship between the individual and the socio-deistic order, and their antithetical arguments can be attributed to the ambiguity of the text, which allows for multiple readings of the relationship. Yet, each of these critiques overlooks the particular importance of individual consciousness to this universal conflict. The depiction of this internal struggle in Amadi's writing calls attention to the affective dimension of the individual. I propose to foreground the text's aesthetic representation of the flight into inwardness, its emphasis on feelings of love, to illustrate how *The Concubine* depicts the multiple, contradictory claims on the individual.

The tension between the individual and the community is depicted in Ihuoma's and

Ekwueme's differing feelings regarding love. Ekwueme first makes his feelings known to Ihuoma with the statement: "'I like your ways,'" (47), which is his oblique way of declaring his interest in her. Elsewhere, the text provides more evidence of his love for her. When he and Ihuoma exchange private glances, Ekwueme feels "good and a little drowsy," (88). He daydreams of her "smiling wistfully, a deep affection glowing in her eyes" (107). Ekwueme has fallen in love with this woman, which is evident in the narrator's description of his lovelorn behavior. Telling Ihuoma "'I like your ways'" and then later "'Ihuoma, I want to pay some bride price on you'" (89), serve as proposals of marriage.

While Ekwueme follows his desires, Ihuoma opposes him in her commitment to upholding the rules of their community. Ihuoma acknowledges that she returns Ekwueme's feelings, but for her, those emotions are insignificant in the face of social traditions. She declines his proposal by providing a list of reasons they should not marry: "'But you need a young maiden who would obey you and give you the first fruits of her womb. . . .You would soon grow tired of me. My children would be a constant burden on you'" (91). Ihuoma employs excuses to explain why a widow and a bachelor should not marry. As a widow, Ihuoma's reputation defines her place within the patriarchal village, and she cannot risk losing the respect of her neighbors. For Ihuoma then, love is not a valid reason to ignore tradition, and she upholds the principles of the village throughout the text, opposing Ekwueme's faith in love.

The opposition that emerges between Ekwueme and Ihuoma concerning love reflects the broader tension between individual interest and social role. Ekwueme defends his right to choose a wife, telling Ihuoma: "'I really had no choice'" regarding the

engagement to Ahurole (91). He articulates the specific limit the community places on individual subjectivity: the right to choose. Ekwueme, a poet and singer, relishes his feelings, and he wants the right to act on those feelings. Social philosopher Marcel Mauss distinguishes between a person's social role and his or her personal interest: "This is the idea of 'person' (*personne*), the idea of 'self' (*moi*)" (1). Mauss classifies the "person" as the social, public identity of an individual, an identity that is often defined by a particular social role, such as mother, elder, or healer. In contrast, the "self" is the subjective, internal identity of an individual, where personal desire is expressed. Whereas the betrothal to Ahurole reflects his adherence to his social role as an obedient son, his offer to Ihuoma exposes his private self, the self that is not always in line with the social order.

The love Ekwueme expresses for Ihuoma reflects the private desires of his interior self. This decision—to act on his own—demonstrates Marcuse's argument about the power of subjectivity. Marcuse advocates critical attention to subjectivity because for every person, desire, sorrow, and pain "are decisive, they constitute reality" (5). What he means is that individuals live with their emotions every day, and they are more real, more intimate to them, than their social position or class status. In this private, inward dimension of existence, Marcuse continues, predominant social values give way to "the inner resources of the human being: passion, imagination, conscience" (5). In shifting the focus to individual subjectivity, new values emerge that are not consonant with the guiding social norms, whether they be bourgeois as in Marcuse's examples or communal, as in Amadi's text. The constant presence of affect, the consistent feeling of love, is a stronger motivator for individuals than their social position. Thus, the attraction

Ekwueme feels for Ihuoma is stronger than the sense of duty he feels as a member of the village.

The possibility of Ekwueme's marriage to Ihuoma offers a glimpse into what subjectivity liberated from the confines of the social order looks like. Implicit in Marcuse's argument about subjectivity is the relationship that still exists between the social and personal realms, or in Mauss's terms, the conflict between the *personne* and the self. Marcuse states that in the domain of individual consciousness, "the individual steps out of the network of exchange relationships and exchange values" (4). Yet, that separation of individual subjectivity from society is experienced internally; when those emotions or that imagination manifest themselves, they are subject to social norms. Thus, although the affective dimension is located outside the socio-political realm, the social realm simultaneously acts upon it, cultivating it into socially acceptable forms. Within the pre-colonial Ikwerre village of *The Concubine*, the communal values that shape the social order encourage individual subjectivities' subservience to the goals of the community, and not only in practices of marriage. In his analysis of *The Concubine*, Oladele Taiwo states of the community's relationship with the individual: "Every citizen is expected to put public policy above his private sentiments or emotion merely because this is the tradition that has passed unchanged from one generation to another" (202). In this community, the social realm wields considerable power over even the most intimate aspects of individual lives. In asking Ihuoma to become his wife, Ekwueme ignores the taboo against bachelors marrying widows.

When Ekwueme declares his love for Ihuoma, that action hints at the possibility of a subjectivity liberated from the limitations of social norms. Marcuse describes this

promise of freedom when he writes that a work of art may be classified as revolutionary if, while highlighting the "prevailing unfreedom," it also "break[s] through the mystified (and petrified) social reality, and open[s] the horizon of change (liberation)" (*xi*). In Marcuse's view, through its stylization of reality, art makes evident the forces that constrain subjectivity, and through this characterization, art suggests change is possible. The proposal to Ihuoma, which ignores Ikwerre taboos and is founded on love, offers insight into liberation from the rigid village order.

The text calls attention to social etiquette through the depiction of a sanctioned marriage proposal. By incorporating the marriage negotiations for Ahurole that follows custom and opposes Ekwueme's proposal, the text exposes the unprecedented nature of Ekwueme's offer of marriage. The beginning of the marriage negotiations signal an important event: each side gathers its male relatives and friends to represent the family's interests. Ekwueme's male relatives, led by his father, approach Ahurole's male relations with a symbolic gift of palm wine. A formal statement commences the negotiations, and the men dine together to celebrate the auspicious event. The sense of ceremony and ritual that circumscribes this meeting is exemplified by a minor character's uncertainty regarding the correct emotion to display: "Nwenike's face was set in a painful type of smile. His difficulty arose from the fact that he did not know exactly what facial expression was best suited for such an occasion" (120-1). Even sentiment must fall within a certain range of acceptable public emotions. This scene, woven into the narrative, illustrates how traditional Erekwi marriage proposals unfold. The men of the families conduct lengthy negotiations concerning bride price, while the bride and groom have

very minimal roles in the discussion of their futures. Although the event contains the formal elements of palm wine and a meal, it is a celebration for both families.

The juxtaposition of the two proposal scenes and the contrasting stances of Ekwueme and Ihuoma reveal an oppositional symmetry within the text that uncovers the emerging conflict between the individual and the community. The sanctioned betrothal illustrates how marriage and love figure into the Erekwi social order.[3] Ekwueme dreads the visit to Ahurole's family, and neither he nor Ahurole figure into the event. This event is the culmination of an agreement the two families made upon Ahurole's birth. As Lucy Mair's research states, many communities, including the Igbo in Nigeria, betroth their children at infancy (122). The reason for the marginal role of the couple destined to marry is the important role of marriage in the survival of the community. Social anthropologist Alan Macfarlane explains why families contract marriages for their sons and daughters in pre-colonial societies: "[M]arriage and the bearing of children is the basic political, economic and social mechanism for the future" (Macfarlane 37-8). The novel's narrator echoes Macfarlane's argument: "If a woman could not marry one man she could always marry another" (127). According to Macfarlane, marriage ensures the social reproduction of the labor force by effecting the propagation of the village, and thus, he claims, it "is too important a matter to leave to the individual" (38). In marriages of alliance, the families know and respect each other, and they expect the other family's child is being educated to be a good, kind, and honorable spouse. These marriages are based on the reputation and honor of a family.

Ekwueme's proposal to Ihuoma follows his private desires, but as the pairing of opposites shows, that proposal threatens the stable order of this community. The parents

of Ekwueme and Ahurole betrothed the couple days after Ahurole's birth, and both families have anticipated Ahurole's coming-of-age, at which time they can begin the discussions for marriage. Ekwueme's love for Ihuoma threatens the relationship with Ahurole's clan, as well as his family's status within their clan. It also threatens the ethos of the Erekwi people, which the narrator describes: "Omokachi village life was noted for its tradition, propriety, and decorum. Excessive or fanatical feelings over anything were frowned upon and even described as crazy" (127). If Ekwueme, considered an honorable, respectable young man, ignores village tenets, why should others not follow his lead?

Ekwueme's impulse to make his feelings known to Ihuoma, then, threatens to set in motion social change. *The Concubine* is set before the arrival of missionaries in this village, but a stray reference to smallpox implies previous contact with Europeans (15). With the impending arrival of missionaries, life in the village will change, and in particular, marriage practices will undergo transformation. Yet, in this setting, Ekwueme presages the transformation that relations between the individual and the community, between love and marriage, and between tradition and novelty, will undergo in the coming decades. What makes his actions more alarming is that Ekwueme acts based on his own desires, not on a new belief system, but on emotion, something his community distrusts as a stable foundation. The proposal to Ihuoma, then, acquires greater significance, as several critics have noted, because it marks a shift away from the communal way of life and toward a greater valuation placed on the individual.

The village desires Ekwueme marry his fiancée and forget his feelings for Ahurole, but the reader roots for the forbidden love because of the strong attraction Ihuoma and Ekwueme share. Their joy when they are together, coupled with the

obstacles they encounter, prompt the reader to pin his or her hopes on their being together in the end. The reader shares a connection with the characters' emotions and desires because, according to Marcuse, "Thus, on the basis of aesthetic sublimation, a *desublimation* takes place in the perception of individuals—in their feelings, judgments, thoughts; an invalidation of dominant norms, needs, and values" (7-8). The form the story takes appeals to the readers' affective dimension. Just as Ekwueme and Ihuoma desire to be happy, so too does the reader desire happiness, both for the characters as well as for him or herself. Thus, even as the village opposes change, the reader hopes for it, the reader wants to see Ekwueme's desires liberated from the limits of the communal society.

The text unveils a final set of oppositions which add additional pressure to the tension between individual interest and community desire. The juxtaposition between Ekwueme's marriage to Ahurole and his subsequent engagement to Ihuoma highlights the impact the repression of desire has in subjectivity. Ekwueme's dream of the perfect spouse crystallizes the differences between the relationships: "Like rain after a long dry season, her image came into his mind. She came with overwhelming tenderness and understanding in her eyes. The usual smile played on her lips, the gap in the teeth enhancing its innocent effect" (140). The metaphor of "rain after a long dry season" positions Ihuoma as the longed-for rain and Ahurole as the drought. What begins as disgust develops into apathy as he cannot tolerate Ahurole's unstable temperament. In his marriage, Ekwueme metamorphoses from a kind, warm man to a frustrated, unfeeling, cold husband. The emotional distance between the newlyweds is so great Ahurole seeks a love potion to focus Ekwueme's attention on her, which leads to physical illness and dementia.

The relief Ekwueme associates with Ihuoma becomes reality when, upon the conclusion of his marriage, Ekwueme and Ihuoma make public their feelings and plan to wed in a relationship now sanctioned by their friends and family.[4] In fact, Ihuoma becomes his savior when the potion-induced dementia causes him to lose reason, and his friends finds him hiding up a tree, refusing to come down or take the antidote unless Ihuoma is present. Beyond Ihuoma's restoring Ekwueme to health, their relationship affects them both, suffusing their appearance with the joy and excitement they feel. The narrator notes the change to Ihuoma: "She carried herself proudly and gracefully and a new radiant form of beauty suffused her face" (192). For Ekwueme, who is recovering from the shame of his delirious state, Ihuoma's willingness to confront the gossips and walk proudly with him through their village helps him overcome his discomfort and fear. As a couple, their joy extends to intimacy. Their interactions are playful, sensuous, and full of joy. Ihuoma calls him "my husband" and he reciprocates by calling her, "my wife," while they engage in cuddling and foreplay (214). This is a couple whose personalities are compatible, and they want to build a life together.

In this final pair of oppositions, the text speculates on the effect of a mismatched arranged marriage. The propriety of the village states: "If a woman could not marry one man she could always marry another " (127), but the two relationships show the maxim to be untrue. Ekwueme capitulates to pressure from his family and marries Ahurole, but the marriage destroys his personality. The stress and unhappiness make him a melancholy version of his former self. His affective dimension rebels against the coupling, but the dominance of communal principles undervalues individual desire. Where a bad marriage traps him, the engagement to Ihuoma liberates him. The text builds toward this forbidden

coupling, which, when permitted, brings with it a freedom from the social constraints that have limited the desires and emotions of these characters. Their happy ending offers a form of liberation from the injustice they faced when they were apart, what Marcuse describes as: "The reconstruction of society and nature under the principle of increasing the human potential for happiness" (56). The fictional couple's happiness simultaneously offers the reader the promise of joy. Their dream becoming reality is a cathartic moment for the reader, who experiences with them, their triumph.

The happy ending is short-lived, however, as Amadi introduces a final obstacle to Ihuoma's future with Ekwueme in the form of the Sea-King. The diviner Anyika announces that Ihuoma is a divine spirit married to the powerful Sea-King. As a divine creature, Ihuoma begs to become human, and, as his favorite wife, the Sea-King permits it. The revelation of Ihuoma's otherworldly marriage threatens to derail her pending nuptials because the Sea-King is jealous of any man who earns her love. Anyika attributes the deaths of Ihuoma's first husband Emenike and her aggressive suitor Madume to the jealous god, and he forewarns that Ekwueme's life will end in tragedy if he marries Ihuoma. Whereas the romantic conflict throughout the narrative has centered on the traditions and rituals of village life, the text introduces a previously hidden obstacle in the form of the supernatural realm. Although the divinities have been woven throughout the narrative, they have not entered into the love plot until Anyika mentions the Sea-King.

Why does Amadi introduce a *deus ex machina* in the form of the Sea-King in an otherwise very tight narrative structure? How does the Sea-King fit into the balance that organizes the rest of the text? In Niyi Osundare's analysis of *The Concubine*, he contends

that the Sea-King is illustrative of the total control the gods have over humans, and yet, the gods have had no role in the love plot until the final pages. Simon Gikandi echoes Osundare's view when he argues that the myth that *The Concubine* enacts teaches that: "[U]ncontrolled desire will not be allowed to have its own way, because this would be a recipe for chaos" (169). In contrast, Wole Ogundele argues that Amadi has two conflicting narratives, one realist, and one supernatural that allows him to both embrace the role of the gods and deny their presence, a reading which allows him to incorporate the ambiguity built into the text.

My analysis of this text has focused on the internal structure of the text and its use of oppositional symmetry to create a balance while illustrating how subjectivity and individual desire confronts the social norms that regulate life in the village. Yet, the Sea-King lacks an opposite; his appearance upsets the balance between individual desire and the social sphere that frames the romantic conflict. His singular appearance indicates the authority that he carries; while the narrative suggests that romantic conflict pertains to the natural world, the gods, too, claim an authority over love and marriage. I back off from Osundare's claim that the gods wield total control; instead, the gods and the supernatural realm contribute to the social matrix in which the individual lives. The Sea-King enters the text as the final arbiter in this once-forbidden relationship.

Although the Sea-King appears without warning, Anyika contends that the divinity's presence has been felt earlier in the text in the deaths of Emenike and Madume. The connection between the men's deaths and the Sea-King's presence suggests that the Sea-King introduces a different form of romantic love into the narrative; he is possessed by a jealous love for his wife which prompts him to destroy his romantic rivals. A review

of the scenes prior to Emenike's death reveal that the Sea-King is threatened not by Ihuoma's marriage to another man, but her love for that man. Prior to Emenike's death, the text depicts a common domestic scene which reveals the emotion shared between Emenike and his wife. Emenike happily spies on his Ihuoma dancing with their children, and they share an intimately playful scene: "She danced less seriously now, her cheeks dimpled with suppressed laughter" (13). The scene evokes the happiness of the family and the love Emenike and Ihuoma feel for one another. The scene concludes with an embrace between the couple, an acknowledgement of their affection for one another. When Ihuoma marries her first husband Emenike, they do not share the passionate love she shares with Ekwueme; only when Ihuoma experiences the happiness of love with Emenike does he die. The Sea-King views her love for her human husband as a betrayal of his love and his marriage to her, and rather than destroy his wife, he destroys her lover. The fulfilling love Ihuoma shares with her future husband Ekwueme, then, threatens the Sea-King's reign over his wife's heart, despite Ihuoma's unconsciousness of her divine life .

The asymmetrical role of the Sea-King, and the power the characters believe he wields, confers upon him the authority to determine the freedom or the subjugations placed on individual humans' desires. Structurally within the text, nothing exists to balance or mitigate his divine powers, despite the medicine man's efforts. This god places reiterates the restrictions on desire because he adds to the matrix of social forces influencing individual behavior. Whereas Ekwueme's love for Ihuoma signifies a society on the brink of change, giving way to the individual, the Sea-King appears to reinforce the social hierarchy in place. The Erekwi people have not abandoned their traditional

beliefs in favor of the rights of the individual, and the gods function as a final authority over human desires. The Sea-King's reappearance illustrates how closely linked the supernatural and human worlds are—that someone like Ihuoma can penetrate the boundaries—and in this world, individual desire cannot triumph over the socio-deistic order. The seemingly accidental death of Ekwueme, and the assertion of the Sea-King's power over the mortals denies the couple the liberation their loved promised them, and instead reaffirms the unfreedom of the affective dimension in this world. Amadi complicates the binary opposition between the individual and the community by introducing a third player, a force that is both real and unreal, to suggest the authority of the community and the gods who support it against the personal desire of the individual.

The tragic ending of *The Concubine* is disheartening for the reader, who hopes this couple will finally come together and experience the happiness they deserve. Ekwueme's death and Ihuoma's likely ostracism for being the cause of so many men's deaths reasserts the constraints on individual subjectivity. Despite the text's oppressive conclusion in which the socio-deistic order asserts authority over the love between Ekwueme and Ihuoma, the text offers the possibility of freedom from this world and a life lived happily ever after through the text's denial of it. Marcuse suggests that art operates in "the interplay between the affirmation and the indictment of that which is" (10). In other words, art and literature offers a hint of liberation in the gap between what is and what could be. When literature negates the happy ending of the couple that the reader seeks, that negation simultaneously reaffirms that this couple should be together. Deepika Bahri describes this transaction between affirmation and negation as "utopian negation" since, despite art's reassertion of the conditions of reality, that reassertion of

unfreedom makes an implicit demand for change, for the utopia that enables the freedom to love that this couple seeks (89). Thus, the unhappy ending of Ihuoma and Ekwueme's relationship, while tragic, offers to readers the promise of a better world in which the personal dimension has the freedom to love and act on that love.

II. *Estrangement*

Elechi Amadi replicates the device of the love triangle in his final novel, *Estrangement*, but the socio-political conditions in which these characters live make it a very different story. *Estrangement* depicts love in the years before, during, and after the Biafran War. Not only have the rules of love changed, but the social order has been transformed. The gods are absent, having been replaced by a monotheistic God who is less tethered to the day-to-day existences of His believers. The world of *Estrangement* is one that might be referred to as "disenchanted" since the supernatural elements no longer threaten the autonomy of the individual. The colonial structures of Christianity, education, and capital impact the social realm, creating a heterogeneous society that entangles tradition with modernity in unique and surprising ways. The framework of this narrative appears to be modern, and the love story is now a story that has been infiltrated by yet another actor, this time no less than history in the guise of war with its apparatus of urbanizations, territorial and national aspirations, and the breakdown of the social order. What is distinctive about this intervention is that it is modernity postcolonial-style, marked by tension, shifts, and unfamiliar situations.

Within this postcolonial society, the value placed on romantic love has also changed. Literary scholar Emmanuel Obiechina argues in *An African Popular Literature*, that love becomes a sign of individuality among the young adults in the 1950s and 1960s.

He writes: “Romantic love and marriage are the channels through which present-day West Africans express and emphasize their individuality and their liberation from traditional constraint and the customary impositions of the older generation” (69). His research examines the popularity of Onitsha market pamphlets and considers how their instructions as well as warnings about love suggest a cultural shift in attitudes about love and marriage. The writing of love letters, the wooing of a lover, the process of selecting a wife become important topics for young adults seeking to choose their own marriage partner. The shift toward marriages contracted out of love is evident in *Estrangement*, where the families’ roles in the marriage relationships are greatly diminished.

In this changed milieu, where the social order appears less involved in regulating love relationships, war enters the narrative and disrupts the relationships. Thus, Alekiri, a woman who is happily married to Ibekwe before the war, is captured by federal forces and nearly raped until Major Sule Dansuku rescues her. She ultimately survives the war as Major Dansuku’s mistress. Upon the cessation of violence, she returns to her husband, who rejects her out of anger. As the title indicates, the narrative depicts the emotional estrangement of these characters as they are estranged from the love they each knew. Alekiri must decide between the men: should she wait for Ibekwe’s forgiveness or should she consent to Major Dansuku’s offer of marriage?

The love triangle manifests as an allegory of Nigeria before and after the war. Yet, this allegorical rendering of Nigeria is unique because it does not evince unified nationalism; rather it contemplates the state in its most vulnerable position in the aftermath of war as Nigeria and its people ponder moving forward. However, despite the war’s conclusion, what have not ended are the pain and the suffering of the people, and

this is what *Estrangement* considers. In traversing the private affect of a love triangle, the public sentiment of a nation reeling from its recent history come into focus. Through a reading of love, I argue that the couples' emotions correspond to public sentiment about the nation-state, reconstruction, and its future, which differs from the official national narrative of reconciliation. In the parallels between the public and the private, this analysis suggests intimacy plays a role in public affect.

The relationship the text establishes between public and private sentiment offers valuable insight into the reconciliation process in Nigeria. As the first former British colony to go to war, the aftermath of that war differed greatly from the more recent conflicts on the African continent. Whereas the last two decades have seen the implementation of truth commissions and public outlets for testimony in South Africa, Liberia, and Rwanda, those apparatuses for healing did not exist in 1970. The federal government deemed those people in Biafra who lost their homes or businesses in the war were due no reparations ("Nigerian Civil War"). Economist E. Wayne Nafziger also contends that the factionalism exacerbated by the war contributed to increased unemployment in the postwar period (243). The war's conclusion did not signify the end of feelings of anger, distrust and fear that civil war could break out again. *Estrangement* reflects on these remaining feelings and considers how the nation should heal from the war.

Within the text, the nuance of the characters' emotions conveys a sophisticated characterization of public sentiment. The juxtaposition of the public and the private enact Herbert Marcuse's argument that art allows the viewer to witness "the individualization of the social" (*Aesthetic* 25). Marcuse refers here to art and literature's ability to expose

the social forces that influence individual lives. Yet, in *Estrangement*, "the individualization of the social" is literal. Amadi's novel shows how the same affects govern our private and our public lives, suggesting intimacy plays a role in both personal and public relationships.

The entanglement of politics and love in *Estrangement* invites an allegorical reading of the couples as analogies for the nation and its future. Reading characters as representatives of the state is a common analytical lens in postcolonial criticism. Marxist theorist Fredric Jameson infamously wrote: "All third-world text are necessarily . . . allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*" (69 emphasis in orig). According to Jameson, what makes Third World literature allegories of the nation is: "Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic—necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*" (69, emphasis in orig). Jameson's argument has received backlash from theorists such as Aijaz Ahmad, particularly for its totalizing approach that creates a binary opposition between the First World and Third World, in which the Third World creates works that are behind the modern advances of the First World. Jameson's essay conveys a tone of backwardness or inferiority of Third World literature with which I disagree. Yet, despite the superior tone and the generalizations, the essay offers valuable insight about allegory and the relation between the public and the private that are useful to my reading of *Estrangement*.

The particular combination of politics and love has been taken up by Latin American literature scholar Doris Sommer, whose monograph *Foundational Fictions* analyzes the dual presence of eroticism and nationalism in Latin American fiction. She suggests that these two concepts "become figures for each other in modernizing fictions" (31). Sommer's study is excellent, but major differences exist between the body of work she discusses and the novel under discussion here. One significant difference is genre; she studies romance fiction, whereas *Estrangement* does not adhere to the romantic genre. In the novels she studies, the political and romantic narratives are indistinguishable, and social wrongs serve as the conflict to be overcome. When the couple surmounts the obstacle, the nation comes into being. Although the war serves as an external conflict in *Estrangement*, the progressive trajectory she traces is ambivalent in Amadi's text. The reader is unsure if Alekiri belongs with her husband Ibekwe, her lover Dansuku, or someone else, and the plotting of the novel encourages that confusion.

The scant criticism that exists on *Estrangement* focuses on the allegorical reading of the couples. Maxine Sample explores the trauma associated with the war, claiming that the two stages of the relationship between Alekiri and Ibekwe represent prewar and postwar lives (453). Craig McLuckie focuses on the relationship between Alekiri and Dansuku to argue that Amadi articulates a conservative politics in which the war has achieved nothing (9-10). These arguments ignore the complex emotional negotiation that defines the characters' lives, and thus, the critics simplify the significance of the individuals in relation to the state. In his analysis of war fiction from the federal perspective, Onyemaechi Udumukwu contends that *Estrangement* "raises very fundamental questions and problems about the meaning of our existence in Nigeria, our

moral nature, and psychological and social relationships" (106). Udumukwu points to the complex personal and social issues *Estrangement* raises, but he does not elaborate on the questions and problems raised and what they mean for Nigeria. My reading attends to the nuanced emotions of the characters while also considering their relation to the state.

The primary question the first pages of *Estrangement* raise is: will Ibekwe and Alekiri reconcile? The war has ended, Ibekwe has returned from Biafra, and the status of their marriage is uncertain. Alekiri knows she must be prepared to defend her actions during the war, while also recognizing that that it may take Ibekwe time to forgive her. This initial encounter, then, governs the future of the marriage. When the spouses meet, the interaction is volatile. Ibekwe declares: "'So, this harlot is here at last'" (83), and Alekiri thinks: "The man coming towards her was not her husband. This was a mad man in the image of her husband" (83). The meeting erupts into a violent assault on Alekiri, with Ibekwe punching and whipping her. Alekiri accepts it as her punishment at first, but then, as it continues, she fights back, grabbing Ibekwe's penis and refusing to relinquish it until he stops unleashing blows. The tableau they create in the moment Alekiri fights back is ironic: "He slumped from his squatting position to the ground and lay facing his wife. A classic love position had turned into one of bitterness and agony" (85). The overlay of love and anger speaks to the complexities of their relationship, the dual presence of affection and repulsion. The picture they create at the fight's conclusion, the combination of violence and intimacy, serves as a visual metaphor of the state of their marriage, and by extension, the people of Nigeria.

The image of their bodies in the position of lovers refers to the intimate and loving past they shared. Alekiri remembers happy times together: "It was as if they had

never looked at each other lovingly, never spoken in whispers and planned secret meeting places where they cuddled and moaned in ecstasy, . . . never made love with bewildering passion to the accompaniment of tropical rainstorms beating wildly on the tin roof" (86-87). Alekiri remembers intimate moments of the couple's past that highlight the love they shared. Ibekwe, too, reflects on his attraction to his beautiful wife: "When, on Sundays, Ibekwe rode through Ohiamini community with his wife beautifully dressed and perching delicately behind him, every young man envied him" (28). These memories symbolize the affectionate state of their marriage. They were physically attracted to one another and shared a pleasurable sex life. Prior to the outbreak of war, they anticipated a long, happy life together.

The reminiscences of love and the couple's plan for a future together serve as a metaphor of public sentiment before the war. In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson writes of the origin of national consciousness and its role in shaping the modern nation-state. Integral to Anderson's discussion is his notion that individuals feel a sense of belonging to the "imagined community" of their nation-state. For Anderson, the nation inspires its citizens: "[I]t is useful to remind ourselves that nations inspire love, and often profoundly self-sacrificing love" (141). The nation-state becomes a replicable model, according to Anderson, because of the sense of belonging that accompanies it. For Anderson, national identity gives way to national pride and a sense of nationalism. Although I am not discussing nationalism as Anderson defines it, public sentiment is closely related to the idea of nationalism, because it refers to the people's feeling in a neutral manner. Public sentiment does not need to be in favor of the nation then.

The divergence from Anderson's sense of nationalism is necessary because, as histories of Nigeria reveal, that sense of belonging was never solidified in Nigeria. The British colonial administration established Nigeria as an artificial structure that allowed for efficient strategies of management, and when Nigeria then became its own state, ethnic factions struggled for power. How, then, does the love and marriage of Ibekwe and Alekiri illustrate the sentiment surrounding this turmoil? Although they select one another based on their mutual attraction, they also incorporate tradition into their relationship. Alekiri's memory recalls a moment with their extended family where the young couple "offered each other drinks in the presence of the elders to affirm their love" (86), a small gesture that carries weight among the community. They also hail from neighboring Erekwi villages, a fact which is important in traditional unions. As the marriages in *The Concubine* demonstrate, the Erekwi are endogamous, meaning they marry from a neighboring village, but within the same tribe. Because Alekiri and Ibekwe are both from the same ethnic group but from different patrilineal lines, they are suitable partners according to tradition. In keeping with their community's customs, their marriage illustrates the governing attitude of ethnic fealty because theirs is a union of sameness.

The insular marriage illustrates the factionalism that comprised Nigeria when it gained independence. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon anticipates tribal interests operating as a national party in postcolonial states: "The tribalizing of the central authority, it is certain, encourages regionalist ideas and separatism" (183). In Fanon's argument, ethnic ties outweigh national ones in the formation of identity, and leaders use that advantage to improve the conditions and the financial prospects of people in their

own ethnic communities. Tribal interests masquerading as national leadership defined Nigerian politics after independence and quickly led to war. The marked differences between the northern and southern tribes of Nigeria created conflict on the federal level, and national politics quickly became the purview of tribal interests, although the power changed hands in the years before the war.

Jameson's controversial essay on allegory offers an important insight on allegory as a form. He writes: "[T]he allegorical spirit is profoundly discontinuous, a matter of breaks and heterogeneities, of the multiple polysemia of the dream rather than the homogeneous representation of the symbol" (73). Here Jameson contests the one-to-one equivalence associated with allegory. He argues that allegory can be multi-layered or carry several meanings, which is how I read the allegorical structure of *Estrangement*. The marriage of Alekiri and Ibekwe reflects the prewar ethnic factionalism, but it also recalls the ethos of life before the war.

The love and marriage Alekiri and Ibekwe share before the war illustrate a second aspect of sentiment before the war, one outside the strictly political realm. Alekiri recalls the intimacy and love, while Ibekwe considers his success and enviable position before the war. These are memories of their life together, and the political realm does not intrude on it. What their life before the war demonstrates, then, is the split between the private and public realms that has been erased by the war. Theirs were the concerns of an upwardly mobile couple: fancy foods, increasing business, and making love. Yet, their interests are divorced from the nation-state; they are disinterested in what goes on at the federal level. The focus on self-interest, and the accompanying indifference toward politics is a way of life many in the postwar period long for.

Along with the reinstatement of a division between the personal and the political, the memories speak to the stability of their life. The war has destroyed any semblance of security, and Alekiri and Ibekwe recall fondly what they associate with dependability in their lives. Alekiri misses the security of a loving husband and a happy life, whereas Ibekwe, the wage earner of their family, misses his business and the success it bestowed on him. The stability they long for echoes a general desire for safety and security across Nigeria in the aftermath of the war. The social order crumbled during the war, affecting people in and around Biafra most seriously. Now that the war has ended, there exists a general desire to recover that sense of surety.

If the marriage symbolizes the tribalism that defined politics leading up the war, then the break-up of the marriage after the war signifies an end to ethnic factionalism as the politics of the state. Tribalism led to the outbreak of war, so when the war ends, so, too, must this form of politics. The violent end to the marriage calls for tribal interests on the national stage to be superseded by an inclusive form of politics. Yet, the violent fight between Alekiri and Ibekwe suggests the nation cannot so easily sway public sentiment.

Opposing the image of lovemaking, the beating depicts the "bitterness and agony" (85) of the actual violence between Alekiri and Ibekwe. Ibekwe rages against Alekiri for a number of reasons, one of which is the injustice he feels regarding their disparate wartime experiences. When he visits her home in Port Harcourt, he sees a comfortable life, a child who is not his, stacks of money, and photographic evidence of her affair with Major Dansuku. The evidence he finds in her house tell him a story of Alekiri's life without him: "So, she could live with and keep house for another man, lie with him, make love to him and perhaps moan in her characteristic manner, and above all, have a

baby with him" (41). The narrative he crafts of Alekiri's life evokes rage and anger: "No, that was the limit, the very limit" (41). The pictures and the child arouse in Ibekwe feelings an intense rage that prompts him to believe he would kill her if they lived together again.

He reacts so strongly to the narrative he conceives because it attests to her comfort and happiness while he and their daughter Wibari suffered in Biafra. Before they become separated, Alekiri and Ibekwe flee their home and live as refugees avoiding the attacks by the federal soldiers. Without a way to earn money, Ibekwe resorts to stealing to provide food for them and Wibari. Although the novel avoids describing his time apart from Alekiri, it conveys the sense of hardship and starvation during the war. The fictional narrative he constructs sharpens the contrast between their wartime experiences and permits Ibekwe to openly feel anger about Alekiri and about his own miserable state. As Ibekwe's anger demonstrates, these feelings are personal and intense. The beating that Ibekwe doles out to Alekiri is not typical of punishment an Ikwerre man might carry out against his wife. To the untutored eye, Ibekwe's violence may be read as a traditional response to his wife's infidelity. Yet, Ibekwe's mother Erinwo, who watches the altercation, warns Ibekwe: "'Don't use your fist. Use a cane if you must beat her'" (84). The fury that drives his blows overtakes his reason and threatens to kill Alekiri.

Alekiri, too, feels betrayed by her marriage. Ibekwe's bitterness toward her, even after he learns the truth of her circumstances during the war, breaks her heart. The overwhelming emotions prompt a tirade against love in which she concludes: "This love was now like the ghost that was said to escape from the body at death, leaving behind a stinking corpse. Her marriage was a stinking mess, bereft of its powerful love and

beauty" (87). Alekiri's anger is directed not at her estranged husband, but at love, for failing to live up to its promise of the vow of "for better or for worse." The images of death and decaying odor are uncannily reminiscent of the war, suggesting her marriage, too, is a casualty of the war.[5] Alekiri finds her daughter alive, her father and relations survived, but what fails to survive the atrocities of the Biafran War is love.

The pleasant memories of their intimacy and attraction paired with the pain of their marriage's acrimonious ending enact what Marcuse describes as the "individualization of the social" (25). Marcuse maintains the individual fate of characters lays bare to the reader the social forces and universal truths that define their lives. "[I]t is the personal fate which remains form-giving—the fate of the protagonists, not as participants in the class struggle, but as lovers, scoundrels, fools, and so on" (26). The narrative trajectory of love, marriage, and estrangement, the affective experiences of these characters, reveals how their fates are shaped by forces outside their control. The demise of their marriage, then, is tragic because political turmoil leads to war, and it is the onset of war and its accompanying instability that drive this couple apart. Through the individual characters' personal experience, the text communicates the unquantifiable cost of war to the citizenry. Without re-enacting battles or the struggle for survival, Amadi makes clear the intimate pain of war is not easily healed.

The emotional range of the couple also illustrates public affect in the aftermath of civil war. The sense of betrayal and the resentment the war causes remain with those who suffered under the war, just as before the war, people lived without a conscious awareness of impending violence. The pain Ibekwe and Alekiri feel, and the anger that derives from it, is not theirs alone; this is the pain and the rage of a nation that has

suffered a civil war. The duration of the war, the tactics employed to win, and the absence of consequences for those who seceded cause people on both sides of the conflict to feel betrayed and angry at the government. Anderson writes about nationalism and the perspective of the patriot, but what happens to feelings toward the nation when the nation has failed? War often increases nationalistic fervor, but a civil war, a war against one's neighbor, does not have that effect. Public feeling after the war is one of distrust and anger.

The equivalence the text establishes between the couple and the nation does not imply every individual experiences the same uncontrollable rage Ibekwe feels. On the contrary, throughout *Estrangement*, individuals express relief and joy the war is over. Humor underlies many of the stories, such as that of a man in a bar who regales his eager audience with tales of living as a priest to avoid conscription into the army. When Alekiri relates her relationship with Dansuku to her friend Mama Iyabo, the friend jokes at Dansuku coercing Alekiri to become his mistress, laughing: "'I hear the sound of shelling!'" (15), turning the sound of war into a bawdy joke. The return to peacetime is a welcome occurrence to those whose lives were disrupted by the war. Public affect differs from individual feeling; it is the feeling of a people for their nation.

The resentment and betrayal Ibekwe feels echo the general sentiment of the public on both sides of the war. Even as there is relief at the war's end, there are also feelings of anger and frustration. For those returning from Biafra, they are returning from a place noted anthropologist Stanley Diamond likened to "a concentration camp encircled by Nigeria" (360). He describes the emaciated children, whose malnourishment was so severe, it would affect a generation of people. For the people who remained in Nigeria,

the policy of the Gowon government at the end of the war was one of reconciliation. Social anthropology scholar Murray Last describes the effect of shifting the war out of the public eye: "There was no public judgment on what had been suffered, no reparations, no apology; almost no one was held to be accountable for what they had done. Nor were any medals award" (316). The absence of recrimination, or punishment of any of the Biafran leaders was a source of anger for some. The end of the war brought a sigh of relief and the greeting repeated in *Estrangement*, "Happy Survival!" (38), but the feelings of fear and anger regarding the war, its injustice, or its outcome have not disappeared.

If the end of marriage results in pain, anger, and self-reflection, then so too does the end of war. *Estrangement* begins with the war's conclusion because what follows is the difficult project of rebuilding amidst the pain and distrust. When Dansuku asks Alekiri what she will do if Ibekwe rejects her, she responds: "'I shall not reject myself'" (4), which indicates an ethos for reconstruction. Murray Last describes the policy of reconciliation established by the Gowon administration as "not allowing those hurts to stand in the way of everyday life" (Last 316). This policy asked people not to assign blame but to move beyond the war. In that spirit, Alekiri returns to college to earn her teaching certificate, and she finds work as a teacher, allowing her to support herself and her daughters. Her focus on building her own life diverts her attention from love, allowing her to heal from the emotional scars of the end of her marriage.

If coupling is a metaphor for unity in the nation, then Alekiri cannot pursue a future alone. The future of Nigeria, the text contends, lies with the relationship between Alekiri and Major Dansuku. Their coupling, developing from the violence of war, signifies the coming together of the differences that comprise people in Nigeria. Dansuku

represents to Alekiri the unknown: he is from the North; he is Muslim; he speaks Hausa; and her family does not know his. Marrying him would mean moving away from her relatives, and relying on his people whom she does not know. She also fears *purdah*, the practice of keeping women veiled and in seclusion, with which many older Muslims in his region comply. When Dansuku first proposes, at the war's end, Alekiri declines, because, she thinks, these problems will inevitably arise.

The fear of something different, of the new customs and way of life their marriage would mean, foretells the public's anxiety about the nation's future. As the coupling of Alekiri and Dansuku show, people in Nigeria live according to very different customs, and national unity raises concerns regarding how those traditions will be treated by others who do not practice them. When Dansuku proposes marriage years later, the same concerns weigh on Alekiri's mind, and she engages in a series of negotiations that will give her some authority over her future. She asks: "Are you sure you will let me finish my education? Are you sure you won't marry Habiba? Are you sure you won't beat me up and maim me when no one is around to defend me? Are you sure, are you sure?" (244). For Alekiri, the issue is not only the differences Dansuku represents, but it is also the memories of her painful break-up that ignite her fears. She dreads a repetition of the violence and the bitterness that marked an end to her marriage.

As Nigeria rebuilds, there are concerns that the tensions that led to the war will reignite violence. Widespread government corruption and continuing poverty in the villages could lead to a new justification for war. Issues of government corruption pervade *Estrangement*, and illustrate the risks of doing business in postwar Nigeria. Anxiety also exists at the individual level, as cooperation across ethnic lines is a necessity

for Nigeria to succeed. Just as Alekiri fears an alliance across ethnic lines, so too do ordinary citizens whose lives were already once affected by civil war.

Alongside the fear, however, exists hope for the future, which is evident in the love Alekiri and Dansuku share. Their intimacy opens the novel: "Major Sule Dansuku passed his left hand across Alekiri's smooth shoulders. She turned towards him and frowned a smile. It was a trick of hers. . . In it anxiety and pleasure were curiously mingled" (1). These first lines of the novel introduce the reader to Major Dansuku and Alekiri as a couple who know each other's looks, each other's reactions, and each other's body. Despite the fear of committing to marriage, they love one another. And it is a love that developed from a violent, unstable beginning. Ultimately, it is love that gives Alekiri the courage to assent to his offer: "[A]s in the act of love itself, she knew she had reached that point of no return" (244). She recognizes that, despite her protests, she will not refuse Dansuku. Their relationship, a compromise and acceptance of their differences, speaks to the nation's future. It enacts love as a metaphor for the nation in the hopeful terms articulated by Doris Sommer in her study of Latin American fiction. Their love represents the modern nation, where ethnic identities and divisions of language and religion are compatible with their national identity.

There is some dissent about the meaning behind the final coupling. Craig McLuckie's discussion of *Estrangement* suggests that the final coupling of Alekiri and Dansuku assures that "the predominance of the northern male symbolically places a reunited Nigeria back into the hands of the autocratic northerners, who were much to blame for the civil war" (10). McLuckie's argument treats the impending marriage between Dansuku and Alekiri as a signal of Alekiri's loss of autonomy, and for him, this

relationship signals the Southeastern region's loss of power to the North. His view of the union of this couple and their impending marriage assumes that it signifies a woman's acquiescence to male authority, which the text does not make clear.

However, I read the coupling of Alekiri and Dansuku differently. Their relationship, comprised of love and hope, as well as doubt and fear, reflects the national consciousness in the postwar period. The nation-state, composed of hundred of ethnic groups, still exists and tries to rebuild, but there is a fear of more violence, the return of war, of betrayal. This hope coupled with fear and uncertainty replaces the innocent belief in nationalism that defines the nation before the civil war. Instead of reading the final coupling as the South's capitulation to the North, the text concludes with a pregnant moment full of uncertainty: Will the marriage be happy? Will Dansuku keep his promises, or will he resort to violence to discipline Alekiri? How will their differences create conflict, or alternately, understanding in their marriage? How will they raise their children? As a metaphor for public sentiment regarding the state, this final moment of between Dansuku and Alekiri is equally full of possibility: can the state recover from war? Will a national identity develop as Nigeria becomes stronger? Will the different factions share power and develop a unified government? These questions remind the reader of the many directions available to the couple and to the nation as each begins anew. The reunion of Alekiri and Dansuku, then, comes to signify the possibility of a joyous, successful future, despite the violent past, and it anticipates a future in which it will have to face obstacles and challenges.

Amadi's rendering of love in a time of war aligns personal affect with public sentiment. In his world, the feelings of a scorned lover resemble the feelings of a nation

betrayed. This intriguing allegory implies that public sentiment, or the true form of nationalism, is key to the success of the nation-state. The parallels he draws between the public and the private suggest national reconciliation is a process of overcoming heartbreak, of acknowledging the pain while forging ahead.

A close reading of romantic love and the affects associated with it demonstrates how the individual is enmeshed in a range of prevailing social forces. This method of reading uncovers how the social order shapes individual subjectivity through the cultivation of social norms and rituals. Desire motivates the individual, but the individual's ability to act on it is limited by the external world. Affect also offers liberation from these constraints, both to the characters and the reader, and imagines the possibility of other worlds. The critical lens of romantic love offers a unique view into the two-way relationship between the personal and the political in its most intimate aspects.

Chapter Two

"You wish the conditions in life were different": Love, Polygamy, and Refashioning the Self

In Mariama Bâ's novella *So Long a Letter*, her protagonist Ramatoulaye relates the story of her friend Jacqueline, a Protestant, Ivorian woman who marries a Muslim Senegalese man who, upon their return to Senegal openly chases and beds younger women. Although her husband does not marry any of these other women, his unconcealed extramarital affairs torment Jacqueline until she experiences a sharp pain in her chest that medicine cannot explain. After months of failed treatments and Jacqueline's expectation of her imminent death, a neurologist saw the problem, "in her soul the source of the distress disrupting her organism" (45). The doctor's observation sets her on the path to recovery: "'[Y]ou are depressed, that is . . . not happy. You wish the conditions in life were different from what they are in reality'" (Bâ 45). The simple doctor's conclusion transforms the woman. For Jacqueline, understanding her ailment was the key to overcoming it. Ramatoulaye remembers her friend's ordeal as she contemplates her own dissatisfaction in her marriage and how to resolve it. Like Jacqueline, she wishes her situation were different.

The anecdote models other literary depictions of African women's encounters with love and polygamy. Although Jacqueline's husband does not marry additional wives, his affairs and womanizing destroy Jacqueline's belief in love and her well-being. In Myriam Warner-Vieyra's novel *Juletane*, the title character is a Guadeloupean woman who falls in love and marries a Senegalese man in France only to learn upon their return to Senegal that he is already married, which leads to her mental unraveling. In Amma

Darko's emigration drama *Beyond the Horizon*, Akobi marries his German wife Gitte to access her bank accounts while concealing his first wife Mara as his sister and his lover Comfort as his cousin. In Buchi Emecheta's novel *The Joys of Motherhood*, the protagonist Nnaina must witness her husband and his new wife's lovemaking when he brings his new wife to live in their one-room flat. *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* , a recent novel by Nigerian writer Lola Shoneyin explores the relationships between women in a polygamous union and the negative consequences polygamy can inflict on them. Women writers who explore this nexus depict it as injurious to women in a variety of ways.

What these novels illustrate is the ways polygamy has changed and in its adaptations, it has become a practice that enables men to act selfishly without regard for their wives' feelings. Just as Western-style education, Christianity, urbanization, and capital shape the social context in which romantic love begins to flourish, so too, must the practice of polygamy adapt. The homes of the wives might be in different parts of the city, as in Ousmane Sembene's *Xala* and Bâ's *So Long a Letter*, or one wife may live in the city while one remains in the village, as is the case with Ibekwe's wives in *Estrangement*. The motivations for marrying additional women have also changed. No longer is it to create a larger labor force, but rather, it is based on sexual attraction, status, or other reasons.

Just as Jacqueline heals from her depression and rebuilds her life, so too do the other women characters affected by polygamy and infidelity. The narratives follow an arc of the women's struggle with the injustice and pain of their union becoming polygamous then shifting to depict how these women recover their sense of self, their dignity. In this

chapter I discuss two novels that model this narrative trajectory. In *So Long a Letter* by Mariama Bâ and *Changes: A Love Story* by Ghanaian writer Ama Ata Aidoo the women watch their fantasy of love as a partnership crumble under the weight of gender inequality. Instead of love being the path to liberation for these women, an alternative replaces it. The texts' commitment to asserting an alternative future for these women emphasizes that women can find happiness through other means. I trace the activation of self-love through the notion of dignity in *So Long a Letter*, and my reading of *Changes: A Love Story* will highlight the importance of platonic love in the face of corrupted forms of polygamy. Each text contains elements of both tropes: self-love and platonic love as more stable options than romantic love. However, by focusing on just one form of love in each text, I simultaneously explore the different incarnations of polygamy that lead to these alternative forms of love.

In the previous chapter I demonstrate how a critical attention to love uncovers the social forces that act on and shape individual subjectivity. However, the forces that act on women differ in societies where uneven gender relations prevail. Gendered social relations in the realm of love are not unique to the African context. Second-wave American feminist Shulamith Firestone writes about the different approaches men and women have toward love. She argues that men's approach to heterosexual love is based on power: "it means ownership and control; it means jealousy, where he never exhibited it before" (163). Writing about love in an American context, Firestone acknowledges the disparity evident in heteronormative relations. Decades later in *The Transformation of Intimacy*, Anthony Giddens reiterates Firestone's observation, although he suggests that in the West, those inequalities are dwindling.

African feminists have noted the patriarchal structures that govern women's lives. Writing about the collection *Sisterhood, Feminisms, and Power*, African literary critic Obioma Nnaemeka reiterates the postcolonial theory term "double colonization" when she describes the "internally induced patriarchal structures and externally engineered imperialistic context" ("Mapping" 31). Nnaemeka offers a nuanced method for comprehending African women's power: "It may be more accurate to discuss women's power in *relative* terms by showing the ways in which the intervention of the colonial period created a situation where the earlier *relatively* powerful positions held by women were *further* eroded by the introduction of new power paradigms and opportunities for acceding to power that are rooted in gender politics" (36). Nnaemeka complicates binary thinking by arguing that it is Western ideas and practices that destroy the power African women once wielded. Sociologist Oyèronké Oyêwùmí builds upon the notion of double colonization by arguing that in a global society where white men hold power, the categories and attitudes about gender that developed out of colonial rule continue to hold sway (156). The unique situation of women in the postcolonial condition informs their experience of romantic love relationships and marriage while simultaneously offering them more reliable, fulfilling forms of love.

I. Dignity and Self-Love in *So Long a Letter*

In *So Long a Letter*, the recently-widowed Ramatoulaye writes a journal-like letter to her friend Aissatou, reflecting on their similar experiences of education, love, and marriage. Later in their marriages, each woman's husband marries second wives, and thus the two friends react to that unexpected reality. Despite the similarities that cemented their friendship, each woman responds differently to the news of a co-wife.

Aissatou ends her marriage to Mawdo abruptly when he marries Nabou as a gesture to appease his mother, but Ramatoulaye chooses to remain married to Modou, who marries their daughter's classmate, Binetou. Ramatoulaye also chronicles their individual achievements after their marriages end, highlighting how each woman has become stronger through her independence. Ramatoulaye considers their shared past, their different present, and how their lives figure into the story of the young Senegalese nation.

Ramatoulaye's missive reminisces about her and Aissatou falling in love and the unplanned courses their marriages take. Alongside the narrative of their relationships, however, is an attention to dignity, both in its incarnation in Islamic culture and in its individualized Western sense. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines dignity as "The quality of being worthy or honorable; worthiness, worth, nobleness, excellence" (*OED*). The ambiguity inherent in the definition is dignity's dual expression as both internal and external: it is a quality one possesses intrinsically, and it can also be conferred by someone or something, as in one's dignity is determined by one's social role. The Qur'an emphasizes the internal, inherent quality of dignity: "We have bestowed dignity on the children of Adam(*laqad karramna bani Adama*) . . . and conferred upon them special favors above the greater part of Our creation" (Q. 17.70 qtd. in Kamali 1). In the Qur'an, dignity is considered a sign of the grace of Allah. This duality is expressed in the two main characters in *So Long a Letter*: Ramatoulaye is attuned to the dignity expected in her role as a Muslim wife, while Aissatou's sense of dignity conveys her self-worth, and yet both are aware of the two iterations in their lives and try to seamlessly blend them. The tension between external and internal expectations of dignity arises when each woman learns of her co-wife, and each must decide how to act in accord with her dignity,

whether in her role as a Muslim or as an individual who maintains self-respect. My reading traces the intellectual history of Aissatou's understanding of dignity or self-love to her Western education, and I use that context to show that the individualized notion of dignity clashes with the Muslim beliefs that rule their homes. In the confrontation between romantic love and polygamy, the result is the activation of self-love that allows Ramatoulaye and Aissatou to rebuild their lives without romantic love.

In my analysis, I consider self-love to be synonymous with dignity, the term used in *So Long a Letter*, and self-respect, a concept theorized in feminist theory. The term dignity has evolved alongside individual rights discourse, which has firmly planted it in the public sphere. In recent decades it has become an important term in the debate on human rights. Theoretical discussions of dignity, then, often consider a person's dignity before the law. Critical conversations about dignity in the private sphere often employ related concepts, rather than the term dignity. Writing about self-respect, feminist scholar Robin Dillon argues that it comprises several problematic concepts: "personhood, rights, autonomy, responsibility, identity, virtue, and integrity" (53). Dillon's observation raises an excellent point. The language and terms of the critical conversation vary, but the concepts are very closely related if not synonymous. Feminist theorist Robin Dillon uses the term self-respect, and bell hooks discusses self-love in her work, whereas noted feminist legal ethics scholar Martha Nussbaum chooses the political variation with dignity. Yet, Nussbaum's definition of dignity includes a list of capacities integral to human dignity that exist in the private sphere: life; emotion; physical health and integrity; senses, imagination, and thought; reason; affiliation; play; living with other species; and control over one's environment (377-78). She includes self-respect and autonomy as part

of the expectations of human dignity. These terms coalesce around the idea of individual autonomy and a belief in one's self. Because of my critical focus on love throughout this dissertation, it is useful to consider self-love as synonymous with dignity and self-respect.

The universal themes of marriage, motherhood, love, and the nation makes *So Long a Letter* a very popular African title in college classrooms and literary criticism. In particular, criticism has focused on Bâ's depiction of polygamy and its relation to the tradition/modernity debate. In "Aesthetic Cognition," Esonwanne attributes the condemnation of polygamy to Ramtaoulaye's education at Ponty-ville. Wadia Njoya builds on Esowanne's claim, by tracing Bâ's own education, which is reflected in Ramatoulaye's, to argue that *So Long a Letter* builds on the stereotype of marriage as oppressive to women. In Nwachukwu-Agbada's article "One Wife be for One Man," he contends that the text only respects the Western institution of monogamous marriage.[6] In *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender, Florence Stratton argues that Ramatoulaye's distress is the result of* "the western model of womanhood she has assimilated in the course of her colonial education" (145). Although the foci of the essays differ, they concur that the problem is Ramatoulaye's exposure to and embrace of Western values, such as individualism, domesticity, and monogamy.

In contrast to this perspective on Mariama Bâ's novel, another body of scholarship adopts a Western feminist view and celebrates the women's rejection of polygamy. Murtuza suggests that polygamy is a "source of emotional trauma" that prevents women from reaching their fullest potential (Murtuza 178). In an analysis of genre, Shari Coulis contends that Modou's marriage to Binetou is an enactment of a new form of colonization under the guise of religion (Coulis 30-31). Brandy Hayslett's essay

about sisterhood states that Aissatou and Ramatoulaye, through education, possess the knowledge that allows them to "throw off their traditional roles and have the courage to change their lives" (144).[7] These essays overwhelmingly portray Ramatoulaye and Aissatou as victims who overthrow their oppressors.

The problem with the debate between African tradition and Western modernity, which overwhelming comprises the literature on *So Long a Letter*, is that it views the characters only in relation to the institution of polygamy. In this debate that condemns or defends the two friends who wrestle with the reality of a co-wife, the specificity of the characters' experience is overlooked, and they come to represent the monolithic experience of the African woman. In her well-received essay "Under Western Eyes," feminist theorist Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues that Western feminism constructs a monolithic Third World woman whose complexities and differences are disregarded. She classifies images such as "the veiled woman, the powerful mother, the chaste virgin, [and] the obedient wife," as images of Third World women that reinforce Western superiority over the Third World or Global South. Much of the scholarship on *So Long a Letter* reproduces this discourse in its characterization of Ramatoulaye and Aissatou as models of the third world woman whose choices seem to be the familiarity of tradition or the novelty of modernity without careful examination of what motivates these individual characters.

However, another branch of scholarship on *So Long a Letter* has articulated a middle-ground in this debate. Obioma Nnaemeka argues that the polygamy has become "monogamized polygamy" in the case of Ramatoulaye ("Urban Spaces" 175). In a similar vein, Mary Jane Androne contends that Ramatoulaye should be understood "as a

woman forced to change because of the pressures of her experiences and who negotiates the problematic conditions of her life" (47). Irene Assiba d'Almeida suggests that Bâ's writing displays a "malaise" similar to other African women writers of her generation (167). In d'Almeida's analysis of the text, she argues that choice functions to allow for the "ultimate affirmation of the self" (165). This body of criticism accepts the negotiation Ramatoulaye and Aissatou must undertake in the postcolonial nation, and they analyze what emerges from the characters' individual negotiations. My reading will align with this group of criticism, which accepts the postcolonial condition as given, and that the characters must operate within the imbricated ideologies of African tradition, Islam, and Western education.

Ramatoulaye recalls significant moments in her and her friend's past in her letter as she mourns the death of her estranged husband. A key difference between the friends that Ramatoulaye highlights is their reactions to the their husbands' decision to marry a second wife after years of monogamous marriage. Aissatou decisively breaks off her marriage and leaves Mawdo when he marries Nabou, but Ramatoulaye decides to remain in her marriage, even given its imperfect circumstances. The different decisions the friends make have been taken by critics to position the friends as opposites, where Aissatou radically diverges from tradition and Ramatoualye adheres to it, but that view simplifies the complexities of the decisions and their consequences. Ramatoulaye may decide to stay in the marriage, but she wrestles with the choice, and she acknowledges in her letter: "I was well aware of where the right solution lay, the dignified solution" (45), by which she means the dignified solution is to leave Modou. Moreover, despite her choice to remain married to Modou, he abandons her and their children emotionally,

physically, and financially, in favor of his new wife. Even though Ramatoulaye decides to stay in her marriage, her decision is rendered meaningless by Modou's behavior. Accordingly, Ramatoulaye's struggle with that choice and its resulting worthlessness position her feelings more closely to Aissatou's.

The similarity between the friends is exemplified by Ramatoulaye's recollection of Aissatou's letter to Mawdo announcing the end of their marriage. Ramatoulaye recalls the message with perfect clarity because of the memorable tone Aissatou adopts to write it. In an assertive and strong voice, Aissatou articulates her belief in her self-worth and its incompatibility with polygamy. Although she leaves her marriage because Mawdo capitulates to his mother's desire that he marry a woman with royal blood, Aissatou's letter does not convey anger or heartbreak. Instead, she focuses on dignity. In the letter's opening, she writes: "Princes master their feelings to fulfill their duties. 'Others' bend their heads and, in silence, accept a destiny that oppresses them" (31). After sharing this parable, Aissatou dismisses it, characterizing it as an absurd division in society. The parable positions Mawdo in the role of prince and Aissatou as one of the "others" who must accept their fate, or it is possible that Aissatou offers the choices between prince and others as the options available to her: accept the marriage willingly or accept it while feeling miserable about the arrangement. But she goes on to dismiss that ordering, rejecting the patriarchal structure that enables Mawdo to marry a second wife and demands that she accept it. The body of the letter describes how Mawdo's actions cause him to fall in Aissatou's esteem. She closes the letter with the line: "Clothed in my dignity, the only worthy garment, I go my way" (32). Aissatou calls attention to her own dignity and Mawdo's failure to live up to her expectations. Dignity may seem an unusual

quality to emphasize in a letter that announces the end of a loving marriage, but the message intimates that Mawdo's undignified behavior is the cause of their separation. Mawdo loses the respect he once commanded, while Aissatou leaves with her self-respect intact. Within the framing statements concerning dignity, the body of the letter offers insight into how dignity, love, and respect form the basis of her love relationship with Mawdo.

The centrality of dignity and respect in Aissatou's letter is traceable to her and Ramatoulaye's education. Earlier in Ramatoulaye's letter, she reflects on their education, which their teacher claimed their "'uncommon' destiny" to be among the educated elite (15). Educated in mission schools, Aissatou and Ramatoulaye learned to "appreciate a multitude of civilizations without renouncing our own, to raise our vision of the world, cultivate our personalities, strengthen our qualities, . . . to develop universal moral values" (15). Their education was a process of self-improvement through an understanding of philosophy and history. Based on Enlightenment thinking, their schooling teaches them the value of the individual and higher order thinking. Because these women were trained to be an elite cadre of teachers in the new country, they internalized the teachings and began to value themselves as individuals.

The value that their education places on Ramatoulaye's and Aissatou's individual worth to the nation begins to uncover the entanglement of individualism and the importance of dignity. Dignity becomes associated with individual rights discourse in Immanuel Kant's essay "What is Enlightenment?" where he contends that government will benefit if it treats its citizens "in accord with their dignity" (6). Kant suggests that governments should support the intellectual freedom of its citizens because it will in turn

benefit the country. In the twentieth century, the connection between rights and dignity is made in the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" in the first article: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood" (United Nations). In the legal sense, dignity is defined as an inherent right of all human beings and signifies a person's treatment in accordance with his or her worth as a human being. Martha Nussbaum clarifies the meaning of dignity in the context of human rights and social justice in the following terms: "[H]uman beings have a worth that is indeed inalienable, because of their capacities for various forms of activity and striving" (357). The concept of human dignity evolved with individual rights discourse, which formed a cornerstone in Ramatoulaye and Aissatou's education, which instilled in them the belief in their ability to effect change and to improve social conditions in Senegal.

Western education trained Ramatoulaye and Aissatou to value their intellect and the knowledge they can bestow on the youth of their country. Because of the value placed on them as teachers and intellectual leaders, they sought partners whose qualities and commitment to improvement equalled theirs and who would also value the women's skills. The connection between individual rights and love is also observed in European history. In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, Friedrich Engels argues that love marriages emerge out of the French Revolution: "In short, the love marriage was proclaimed as a human right, and indeed not only as a *droit de l'homme*, one of the rights of man, but also, for once in a way, as *droit de la femme*, one of the rights of woman" (112). Once a society articulates individual rights, even if they are the

rights of men only, love and the right to choose one's spouse, follow. Personal choice, based on attraction, serves as an important condition for marriage.

Their schooling's focus on the ideology of individual rights and their unique calling to serve the nation prompts Ramatoulaye and Aissatou to choose spouses whom they love, but who also have similar worldviews. Their marriages, then, are based on mutual attraction and respect, a shared commitment to improving the nation, and common interests. These aspects of their relationships weave together to form a strong foundation for their respective marriages. And the foundation proves strong, as each couple advances their careers, bears children, and maintains their feelings of love. Thus, for Aissatou and Ramatoulaye, love comprises all of these noble elements, and when their husbands marry second wives, those values are threatened.

The second marriages tarnish the image Ramatoulaye and Aissatou have of their husbands and their relationships because the men marry for inferior reasons. Mawdo marries Nabou to appease his mother's desire that he extend his royal tribal lineage (Aissatou is a goldsmith's daughter, and therefore is not of noble blood), and Modou chooses Binetou because he is sexually attracted to the much younger girl. Whereas the first marriages are based on love, respect, and shared worldviews, the men's reasons for marrying second wives pale in comparison. In their concession to baser motivations for marriage, the men's the pure, idealistic motivations for marrying Aissatou and Ramatoulaye gives way to something less unique, less valuable.

The ideology that serves as Aissatou and Ramatoulaye's foundation for teaching, life, and love has roots in Western philosophy, and when it encounters the Islamic tradition of polygamy, the two worldviews clash in a struggle over authority. The

marriages between Mawdo and Aissatou and Modou and Ramatoulaye *appear* to be partnerships where mutuality of attraction and respect are assumed. Yet, the couples live in a predominantly Muslim country and are practicing Muslims themselves. Islam positions the husband as the head of the family, and even as Mawdo and Aissatou and Ramatoulaye and Modou built their love and marriage on the premise of equality, their Muslim beliefs challenge that relationship. When the men marry second wives, that decision exerts the patriarchal authority of Islam over the monogamous unions. Polygamy interferes with the equilibrium of the monogamous unions. With the addition of a second wife, the balance of power shifts in their husbands' favor and destroys the sense of equality and mutuality that defined Aissatou's and Ramatoulaye's marriages.

The letter's discussion of dignity gives way to its opposite, shame, when Aissatou humbles her husband with her words. She writes: "If you can procreate without loving, merely to satisfy the pride of your declining mother, then I find you despicable. At that moment you tumbled from the highest rung of respect on which I have always placed you" (32). In describing Mawdo as "despicable," as having "tumbled from the highest rung of respect" and his reasoning as "unacceptable," Aissatou adopts a tone of moral superiority to rebuke her husband for his weakness in the face of his mother. He has also abandoned his belief that, "'Marriage is a personal thing'" (17), a principle which led him to marry Aissatou despite his mother's opposition. In marrying a second wife, Mawdo nullifies the values that unite him to Aissatou, and she reminds him of those values.

The emphasis on dignity and its opposite affect, shame, throughout Aissatou's letter speaks to the broader conflict their marriage encounters, that of tension between family and tradition on one side, and individuality, self-worth, and autonomy, on the

other. Mawdo's marriage to Nabou instantiates a patriarchal authority over Aissatou's life which had not asserted itself before then. Tradition, as well as her family and friends, expects her to remain married to Mawdo for her son's sake and for her own, but Aissatou's sense of dignity and self-respect cannot accept a lesser version of her marriage and her husband than the one she had. The closing of the letter emphasizes Aissatou's sense of self; she does not leave the marriage a broken woman. Instead, she leaves with her pride and her principles intact. Choosing to end the marriage, she disregards tradition and claims for herself a future on her own.

My reading does not conversely suggest that women in polygamous marriages have no dignity. Psychologist Evelin Gerda Lindner contends dignity is not a value in communal cultures; rather, she opposes dignity and honor. In her formulation, dignity is a value held in high esteem in cultures that advocate individual rights, and honor is a value of communal societies (8). Her argument is provocative, but it assumes that because dignity evolved with rights discourse in Western cultures, the two are identical, and that is not the case. As John Iliffe shows in his study *Honor in African History*, dignity was an essential quality of manhood and even womanhood in several cultures. African literature also demonstrates how dignity is preserved in polygamous marriages. Indeed, it is a system constructed on rules that preserve the dignity of each person involved. In many iterations of the practice, women have separate huts so that they are spared from being witness to the husband's sexual relationship with his other wives.[8] The husband visits his wives equally, and the women befriend one another and care for one another's children as one large family. If the husband or wives fail to live according to these rules, the injured party has recourse to apprise the family members who endorsed the marriage of the

problem. These rules and practices aim to protect the dignity of the women and men engaged in these relationships.

Aissatou internalizes the philosophical concept of dignity and her actions demonstrate how it guides her behavior in day-to-day interactions. Yet, Ramatoulaye, too, must contemplate her sense of self when Modou deserts her and their dozen children. Ramatoulaye confesses: "I am one of those who can realize themselves fully and bloom only when they form part of a couple" (55-6). Ramatoulaye identifies herself in terms of her roles as a wife and a mother; she does not consider herself an individual. To be strong single mother, however, she must develop a sense of herself without a spouse. Thus, at the end of Aissatou's letter, when she writes with pride: "And instead of looking backwards, you looked resolutely to the future" (32), Ramatoulaye seeks courage for herself in her friend's bravery. Just as Aissatou demonstrates a commitment to herself and the principles that have guided her, so too, does Ramatoulaye, who constructs an independent identity that establishes her self-love.

Ramatoulaye exhibits signs of self-respect when she voices opposition to Muslim tradition. Before she raises her voice against the patriarchal establishment within her family, she has acquiesced to it. Against her children's wishes, she remains silent when Modou remarries, and she follows the Islamic tradition of mourning when he dies. These are choices she makes inhabiting the role of a loving wife, as part of a couple, and in order to build a life of her own, she must shift her identity from that of a wife to that of an individual. She breaks from the mold of tradition, however, when, in accordance with Muslim practices, Modou's brother Tamsir proposes Ramatoulaye become his fourth wife. Her reaction is immediate and vehement: "'You forget that I have a heart, a mind,

that I am not an object to be passed from hand to hand. You don't know what marriage means to me: it is an act of faith and of love, the total surrender of oneself to the person one has chosen and who has chosen you.' (I emphasized the word 'chosen.')" (58 parenthetical in orig.). Ramatoulaye explodes at the thought of taking part in a marriage for the sake of tradition, rather than out of love, and she unleashes a voice that seeks to both shame her suitor and declare her selfhood. The strength and definitiveness of her voice surprises her: "My voice has known thirty years of silence, thirty years of harassment. It bursts out, violent, sometimes sarcastic, sometimes contemptuous" (58). When Ramatoulaye finds her voice, it becomes a strong, reliable illustration of who she is.

The moment Ramatoulaye assertively renounces Tamsir's claim over her is cathartic for her. In that declaration, where she lets loose the pent-up anger and sense of injury done to her, Ramatoulaye experiences freedom from the strictures that have shaped her marriage. This freedom she gains from voicing her opposition empowers her to articulate her opinions and beliefs in an assertive way. This action, which protects her desires and her selfhood, is an act of self-love. By rejecting a conniving man from his traditional right, she regains her dignity and orients a new path for herself. Indeed, the second half of the novella narrates various incidents where Ramatoulaye expresses her newfound sense of self. From attending movies alone to accepting and supporting her unmarried teenaged daughter's pregnancy, Ramatoulaye's voice continues to establish her self-love in her new life.

In finding her voice, Ramatoulaye makes a decisive break with patriarchal authority. Her refashioning of herself through the act of self-loving permits her to become

the woman she imagined she would become while she was at school. Rejecting tradition and embracing her dignity reactivates her "'uncommon' destiny" (15). Yet, the selfhood she has regained still hopes for a love that will meet her expectations. She sees in her daughter Daba's marriage a partnership she hopes for herself, one where the husband respects his wife's intelligence and aids her in the household chores. Daba explains to her mother her philosophy of marriage: "'Marriage is no chain. It is mutual agreement over a life's program. So if one of the partners is no longer satisfied with the union, why should he remain?'" (74). For both Daba and Ramatoulaye, marriage is based on a partnership of love and respect between both spouses, but Daba has taken the notion of partnership further than her mother, arguing that when mutuality disappears, it is right to end the relationship and seek happiness elsewhere.

Over the course of *So Long a Letter*, Ramatoulaye makes reference to the nuclear family as a metaphor for the nation while relating the story of her own nuclear family and the changes it undergoes. How does the family metaphor she employs accommodate the changes that she herself experiences as a wife? What does the metaphor suggest about changes to the nation? For Ramatoulaye, whose life changes dramatically over her narrative, women across Senegal must speak up and share their knowledge and insight. She argues, as a passionate advocate might, for the place of women in Senegal's Parliament:

> In many fields, and without skirmishes, we have taken advantage of the notable achievements that have reached us from elsewhere, the gains wrested from the lessons of history. We have a right, just as you have, to education, which we ought to be able to pursue to the furthest limits of our

> intellectual capacities. We have the right to equal well-paid employment, to equal opportunities. The right to vote is an important weapon. And now the Family Code has been passed, restoring to the most humble of women the dignity that has so often been trampled upon. (60-61)

Speaking to a friend who has a seat in the Parliament, Ramatoulaye sounds as if she could be addressing crowds. Ramatoulaye insists that women must no longer accept the professions designated for them but rather strive to reach the boundaries of their intelligence. She advocates for women to become active participants in their families, in their professions, and in the nation. Without their participation, there will be no one to represent the needs and rights of women. Ramatoulaye, then, sees the future of the nation in the equal participation of men and women in the nation-state. Hers is a call to the self-love and dignity of all women to challenge the inequalities they encounter.

II. Friendship in *Changes: A Love Story*

The similarities between Ama Ata Aidoo's novel *Changes: A Love Story* and *So Long a Letter* are often surprising. As Ramatoulaye gives voice to the rights of women, Aidoo's poetic narrator calls out the gender inequality women face in education when she suggests: "wanting to be a nuclear physicist but everyone telling you it's much safer to go into teaching because, you know, isn't that too much for a woman? . . . And wouldn't that be too exotic for Africa?" (144). Here, the narrator speaks the unspoken truths about the conditions that wear on women's nerves, including being railroaded into professions more appropriate to women. Aidoo's text shares Bâ's text's interest in improving the conditions of African women, although their methods diverge.

The commonalities between the texts continue, despite their very different narrative depictions of polygamy. Esi, the heroine of *Changes*, is a university educated sociologist working in the Department of Urban Statistics for the Ghanaian government, and like the women in Bâ's novel, she desires respect and love from her husband, and mutual respect from her colleagues, and she grows angry and frustrated when men refuse her the respect due her. Significantly, Esi's self-respect and dignity are important to her, even as she makes choices that threaten her self-respect. Another important similarity *Changes: A Love Story* has with *So Long a Letter* is the integral role of friendship. Whereas Aissatou remains an unseen correspondent to whom Ramatoulaye opens her heart, Esi's close friend Opokuya is a continuous presence throughout the narrative. Their friendship buoys one another as they listen to each other's marital woes and try to offer support when possible. Although both believe in the potential of romantic love and their husbands' role as their partner, the women more frequently find solace with one another.

In *Changes*, Esi leaves her monogamous husband, and later, she agrees to become the second wife of her married lover. With Esi's tumultuous love life and the unusual choices she makes in her quest for happiness and love, she hopes someone in her life will understand and sympathize with those choices. The decades long friendship between herself and Opokuya offers her the stability and the perspective she needs. As Esi experiences turmoil or events in her love life, the narrative order moves from love to friendship, which allows the friends to gossip about the earlier situation and Opokuya offers commentary on her friend's choices. My reading of Esi's love relationships focus on the back-and-forth narrative sequencing between love and friendship, a movement that positions Opokuya as an important interlocutor for Esi.

The convergence of love and polygamy in *Changes* takes a very different perspective than *So Long a Letter*. Esi has a successful career, but finds the additional claims on her time as a wife and mother overtaxing. She divorces her husband Oko and begins an affair with Ali, a successful, married businessman, finding his occasional visits liberating. When he proposes she become his second wife, she quickly accepts, believing a polygamous relationship will offer her the time to pursue her career while also providing her with companionship and love. Interwoven with Esi's attempts to find a man who treats her as his equal is the story of her friend Opokuya, a full-time midwife and mother of four who is married to Kubi, a man who expects his wife to work and fulfill her domestic duties. When Esi decides to marry Ali, Opokuya and Esi's family try to dissuade her from her decision without success. Yet, Esi's illusions quickly dissolve amidst the loneliness, jealousy, and anger she experiences as the second wife of an international businessman.

Criticism of *Changes: A Love Story* has debated Esi's decision and what her resulting unhappiness signifies for gender relations in contemporary Africa. Sally McWilliams argues that Aidoo moves beyond the binary opposition of discourses of African patriarchy on the one hand, and Western feminist discourses on the other in a complete rejection of heteronormative, patriarchal authority (334). Maria Olaussen's discussion examines the lovers and their relation to geography in *Changes*, and she echoes McWilliams' view when she writes: "Aidoo insists on a vision that tries to express the possibilities of female empowerment without succumbing to cynicism and manipulation" (64). Nada Elia's article also takes up these issues as she considers the different layers of feminist consciousness that Esi and the other women exhibit. Both Gay

Wilentz and Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi view the text in terms of its determination to rectify the neglect of the "postcolonial woman question" in postcolonial theory through the exploration of the intimate experiences of the women in *Changes* (Nfah-Abbenyi 282). In contrast Miriam C. Gyimah contends that Aidoo's narrative reveals how little sexual politics between men and women have changed despite the metamorphosis education and society have undergone (385). The foregrounding of the feminist debate is unsurprising given the unprecedented choices Esi makes. However, my reading of *Changes* enters the conversation through a focus on the role female friendship plays in the main narrative strand about love. It is through the platonic love Opokuya offers her friend that both challenges and emboldens Esi that the heroine can recover her sense of self.

The first incident between Esi and Oko, her first husband, that she later confesses to Opokuya, is the breakdown of her marriage. She wants a loving husband who allows her job to take precedence over her domestic responsibilities. Like the women of *So Long a Letter*, Esi desires a marriage in which she and her husband are equal partners. Her marriage to Oko falls short of this goal when Oko rapes her. The rape is a culmination of the struggle for power in their marriage, with Esi focused on her professional advancement and Oko desiring more of his wife's time and attention. Oko's assault on Esi reestablishes him as the authority figure in their marriage. Esi describes him as "some arrogant king" (10) when he saunters into the bathroom with the bed linens wrapped around him and trailing behind him. His behavior acquires the aura of a victor, someone who has won a lengthy battle. He has finally won his wife's attention and her body, with no regard for the cost. Because Esi desires equality in her marriage, and rape is the

ultimate act of denying a woman autonomy over her own body, Esi uses the assault as a reason to leave Oko.

Although the rape is an obvious transgression, she recognizes that within Ghanaian society, and even within her own family, it is not identifiable as a crime. She notes that popular opinion believes: "Sex is something a husband claims from his wife as his right. Any time. And at his convenience" (12). What she defines as rape, her family and friends will view as the right of a husband. Moreover, her family interprets Oko's sexual appetite for his wife as a welcome sign of his love and affection. They view her decision to leave him as foolish or even crazy because who would leave a man who loves his wife that much?

Since her family does not comprehend her choice, Esi turns to her friend Opokuya. Esi hopes to receive her friend's sympathy over the break-up of the marriage, and she hopes her friend will understand her since Esi sees her friend as an extension of herself. Esi refers to Opokuya as "almost her other self" (164), and the text bears out that comparison by depicting the friends as complementary. The two met at school, and although they hail from different regions in Ghana and they have lived apart for much of their adult lives, they are very close friends. "[W]hat was between them was so firm, so deeply rooted, it didn't demand any forced or even conscious tending" (33). The long friendship the two have shared make Opokuya an important ally in Esi's decision to end her marriage.

However, despite their closeness and the similar conditions of their lives, the two women approach their lives in very different ways. Esi makes her career a priority, travelling internationally to conferences and bringing her work home with her. In her

dedication to her job, her responsibilities of being a mother to Ogyaanowa and a homemaker fall to her housekeeper. Esi also prevents herself from becoming pregnant again by taking birth control pills. In contrast, Opokuya works as a midwife at the hospital full-time, and she is responsible for feeding and clothing her four children and her husband Kubi. Whereas Opokuya accepts the responsibilities of her family and recognizes that Kubi will not pitch in to help with the domestic chores, Esi expects her husband to support her decision to make her job a priority and accept her shortcomings as a wife and mother.

Thus, Esi wants Opokuya to sympathize with her decision to leave Oko, but Opokuya fails. As a complement to Esi, Opokuya speaks in the voice of reality, while Esi operates in the realm of fantasy. Esi desires equality and the right to make her career a priority and still have a husband and a child, but Opokuya chastises her: "'But remember it is always harder for some other women somewhere else'" (51). Opokuya disapproves of Esi's self-pity and demands her friend recognize that she is not the only woman suffering. As a midwife, she understands the unfair conditions women face, whereas Esi thinks only of herself. Because of Opokuya's recognition of the uneven gender relations African women face, she pushes Esi, challenging Esi's commitment to her occupation at the expense of her marriage. Their give-and-take does not indulge Esi's self-pity, but interrogates Esi's choices and places them within their social context.

The text's oscillation between love and friendship enables the two women to analyze the state of their marriages and offer one another insight and support. Both friends aim to balance their full professional lives with loving, happy personal lives, a balance which is difficult to strike. Opokuya remains grounded in reality and tolerates the

inequality that influences her life, but Esi dreams of an alternative situation where her sexual partner respects her love and her career. However, until that situation materializes, the women have one another to share their struggles and triumphs. The movement between love and friendship in the narrative sequencing then, moves from the instability of romantic love to the unconditional platonic love they have for one another.

When Esi falls in love with Ali, their relationship reproduces the power dynamic she rejects with Oko, but Esi is oblivious to the similarity. Ali proposes marriage to Esi and he insists she wear an engagement ring to signal that she is spoken for and she retorts: "'That she has become occupied territory?'" (91) to which Ali earnestly assents. Although Esi laughs off Ali's insistence that she wear the ring, he is emphatic that she wear his ring. Esi's mocking answer aligns hers with land or property and calls to the reader's mind the colonial project where countries claimed uncharted territory for themselves using the gendered metaphor of virgin land. Postcolonial theorist Ann McClintock, who has elaborated upon this systemic metaphor in her monograph *Imperial Leather*, argues "In myriad ways, women served as mediating and threshold figures by means of which men oriented themselves in space, as agents of power and agents of knowledge" (24). The engagement ring scene enacts a metaphoric violence over Esi which establishes Ali's authority over their relationship. The ring is not a sign of affection or commitment, but, according to Ali, is a symbol to alert other men that Esi has been claimed and they should stay away from her.

Esi laughs off Ali's insistence and ignores the similarities between the metaphoric possession of her body and its actuality in the sexual assault because she focuses on the freedom she believes polygamy will offer her. Although she justifies leaving Oko over

the rape, the rape only serves as the decisive end to their unraveling relationship. Esi separates from Oko because she feels suffocated by his constant demands. Immediately after the separation, when Opokuya asks if she will ever remarry, Esi responds: "'Another husband to sit on my back all twenty-four hours of the day?'" (46). With Oko, Esi feels nagged and pressured to give him attention, to make love to him, or to have another child, and she decides to remove this constant stress from her life. For Esi, the thought of a new husband who will make the same demands frightens her. However, Ali is wholly different kind of husband because he has another wife and children to fill his time. Esi imagines a marriage to him will give her the benefit of a part-time husband, which will allow her to succeed in her full-time job.

When Esi shares the news of her impending nuptials with Opokuya, Opokuya tries to help Esi recognize the fantasy of her vision of polygamy. Opokuya reminds her friend that other people are involved, or should be, in this marriage, asking: "'[C]an you see yourself and Ali's wife getting together? . . . Being friends? . . . You know, for instance getting together about Ali's strengths and occasionally trading gossip about his weaknesses? Can you see that happening?" (97). Opokuya asks her friend the questions that Esi wants to ignore in her decision to become Ali's second wife. Opokuya realizes that Esi knows very little about polygamy and how these relationships function among Ghanaians. Her parents are monogamous, and her family and education inculcate in her the Christian belief in monogamy, so her exposure to polygamy is limited. Opokuya's questions about Esi's relationship with her future co-wife Fusena expose Esi's naivety and her lack of knowledge about polygamy. Esi knows nothing of Fusena, nor has her

fiancée Ali alluded to a future meeting between the women, so Esi has not considered how Fusena figures into her marriage.

Opokuya pushes Esi to consider Fusena, the other woman in the marriage, and how Esi will feel about having a co-wife. Co-wives should be friends, and a second wife should have the first wife's approval because, according to Opokuya, a "stamp of approval was a definite requirement if anything was to become of the new relationship" (97). Opokuya wants Esi to understand that marrying Ali *should mean* joining Ali's family, which already includes a wife. The relationship that should develop between Fusena and Esi should be one of unity in support of their husband, but it should also benefit them as well. An alliance between the wives could work to challenge Ali's authority; it can balance the power between husband and wives. A relationship can also offer the wives friendship and solace against loneliness.

When Opokuya describes the relationship that co-wives should have, the relationship she describes echoes the one she and Esi share. The friends air grievances against their husbands; they seek solace in one another's company; and they gossip about their lives, their friends' lives, and goings on around Accra. They share an intimacy that has developed over their long friendship, and Opokuya implies that Esi should share a similar intimacy with Fusena, something neither Esi nor Fusena can imagine. Fusena remains a shadowy figure Esi does not have to contemplate, and for Fusena, Esi is an educated woman who destroys her happiness, and they persist as abstractions to one another. Any form of intimacy between them would force them to contend with the reality of a co-wife and the disparity in their situations.

The questions Opokuya asks and the education she provides Esi about polygamy raise a broader issue she wants Esi to identify. Her questions point to Ali's inadequate version of what a polygamous marriage will be. He has failed to introduce Esi to Fusena or their children; nor has he alerted his family of his intention to marry. When he first visits Esi's village, he brings employees of his company, which proves an unacceptable substitute for family. Esi exonerates Ali from blame, believing: "Ali couldn't help it if he regularly bruised traditions and hurt people" (133). Esi loves Ali and is attracted to having a part-time husband, so she forgives his imperfections. Yet, his bending or bruising of tradition affect those involved, and as Opokuya anticipates, it is his wives who feel the effect of his imperfections. The intersection of Islamic tradition with his modern lifestyle as a businessman lead him to practice polygamy in a way that works for him, without taking into consideration others affected. What Opokuya recognizes is that Esi's marriage to Ali will require her to acquiesce to his will, his schedule, and his needs. Just as Ali claims Esi as her property should warrant concern, so too, should Opokuya's questions that uncover the disjuncture between polygamy and Ali's version of it, which will only harm the women involved.

With her questions Opokuya hopes to broaden Esi's perspective on her upcoming marriage. Esi may see freedom and liberation accompanied by love, but Opokuya foresees loneliness and jealousy because Ali is not adding a wife to his family; he is legitimizing his mistress. Writing about *So Long a Letter*, Obioma Nnaemeka describes what she calls "monogamized polygamy" ("Urban Spaces" 175), meaning despite Esi's marriage, she remains in the position of his mistress, and Ali considers Fusena and their

children his family. Opokuya may not know how the issues will play out in Esi's new marriage, but she anticipates their unfolding and wishes Esi could see them too.

Opokuya's warnings go unheeded and the reality of polygamy hits Esi when she remembers what she had previously told Opokuya: "Ali was not on her back every one of every twenty-fours of every day. In fact, he was hardly ever near her at all" (138). She is jealous of the first wife who is synonymous with home for him, and she is envious of the beautiful secretary he drives home after work everyday. She does have ample time to complete her work, but it does not compensate for the loneliness she feels. Early in her marriage, Esi learns she cannot count on Ali to be present when he says he will, and she spends more of her time alone. Esi believed having an occasional husband would be perfect with her demanding work schedule, but she did not account for Ali's waning interest in her once she became has wife; nor did she believe he would stay away for so long. To compound her sadness, she feels even more alone since she cannot share her pain with the friends and family who advised her against the marriage and warned her of the difficulties of polygamy. In trying to find her way to a happy balance between her professional goals and her personal desires, Esi finds herself alone and sad.

Although Esi does not confide in Opokuya, Opokuya is attentive to Esi's silent pain. When they run into one another, Opokuya notes "the slightly lost look [that] never left her friend's eyes" (140). Because the friends know one another so well, Esi need not divulge the cause of her unhappiness; Opokuya recognizes it in Esi's affect. When Opokuya notices Esi's sadness after the break-up of her marriage to Oko, Opokuya observes: "any diminishing of that spirit got immediately noticed by anyone who knew her well enough" (35). Esi's personality has deteriorated over the course of the narrative,

from an outgoing, energetic woman, to one marred by anxiety and sadness. Despite Opokuya's attempts to dissuade Esi from the match, she empathizes with her friend's pain. The observations Esi and Opokuya make of one another whenever they meet speak to the intimacy of their friendship. These friends are attentive to one another's affect. Although the focus of my discussion has been on Opokuya's support of Esi, Esi reciprocates her friend's support. When they catch one another up on their lives at the narrative's beginning, Esi notices "A note of wistfulness had crept into Opokuya's voice" (34), and later, she remarks to herself: "And the one thing she had come to know about her friend was that all that cheerfulness sometimes carried great anxieties; personal and not so personal" (155). The friends recognize each other's struggles and try to draw one another out of her worries to feel joy and relief.

What is significant about their ability to recognize what remains unsaid between them is their husbands miss or disregard these visual cues. When Ali arrives at Esi's home after a long absence, she tells him "'I can't go on like this'" (158) but his reaction of "like what?" (158) suggests he has no idea why she is unhappy. Kubi ignores Opokuya's frustration and the added stress it causes when she pleads to drive the car to run her many errands. Instead, Kubi leaves the car parked in his designated parking spot all day. The gender inequality that Opokuya recognizes in her marriage, in her friend's marriages, and in her patients' relationships extends to emotional sensitivity. Their husbands remain immune or purposefully unaware of the stress, the anxiety, and the unhappiness the wives feel. Instead, it falls to female friends who experience similar feelings in their own marriages to recognize and validate those feelings.

The emotional intelligence the women display and the constant support they offer one another, even when one fails to understand the other, imply that more constant than the romantic love in their lives is the platonic love between friends. The women love their husbands, but the men expect to have authority over their wives and over their home, so the equality and mutual respect the women desire in their spouses exists only in glimpses and moments. Instead, female friendships offer women the support, understanding, and respect they desire. Where husbands are inadequate, friends fill the role.

A female character I have only discussed in passing is Fusena, Ali's first wife, whose reflection on her own friendships and love encapsulates the necessity of friendship. Fusena and Ali met at the university and were friends long before Ali asked her to marry him. Yet, years after they have been married, she acknowledges to herself: "[S]he was beginning to admit to herself that by marrying Ali, she had exchanged a friend for a husband. She felt the loss implied in this admission keenly, and her grief was great" (66). The text characterizes the intimate friendship she and Ali share before their marriage as one of equality, companionship, intellectual discussion, and laughter. The friendship is significant for both of them, and they look forward to spending time together. However, the dynamic between them shifts when Fusena becomes his wife. She gives up her studies to support him as he continues his academic goals, becoming caretaker, homemaker, and mother within the walls of their apartment, and he goes out into the world, attending graduate school and then building his business. The marriage removes her from the public sphere while also removing her from Ali's intellectual world.

Fusena's grief at losing her friend to have him become her husband illustrates the disparities between friendship and marriage. As a friend, she was his equal, but that disappeared once they married. In losing the person she cared for the most, she also lost someone who was incisive about her feelings and approach to life. Marriage denies her the equality and the ally she relied on throughout college. Fusena's keen loss of Ali's platonic friendship speaks to women's more general experience of love and friendship: African women flourish not in their love relationships, but in the bonds of friendship that push them and challenge them to question their beliefs, to acknowledge their capabilities, and to seek happiness.

Ama Ata Aidoo's novel focuses on the gender inequality women face in postcolonial Africa. Neither Opokuya nor Esi are fulfilled in their lives at the narrative's end. Opokuya loves her husband, but anxieties and stress are concomitant with that love. Aidoo forecloses the path to happiness though equality, instead focusing on the matrix of forces—professional and personal—that impact women's goals, desires, and achievements in life. In calling attention to these structural injustices through her characters' personal lives, she suggests the belief in happily-ever-after is misguided. For Aidoo, love and marriage initiate a range of issues that limit women's capacities.

Taken together, *So Long a Letter* and *Changes: A Love Story* raise the same issues when love and polygamy clash. In both texts, women seek a sense of dignity and recover a self-love to move forward in their lives. However, these women are not alone in their struggles. A platonic love bond between female friends provides mutual support, sympathy, and understanding when romantic love fails to provide these necessities. Both

texts place their trust in the love of friends as a means to a woman's autonomy and agency in societies built on gender inequalities.

Chapter Three

Parenthetical Closeness: Love Across the Color Bar in Nadine Gordimer's *Occasion for Loving*

The South African Immorality Act has been a rich source of material for South African writers in the twentieth century. The earliest law banning sexual relations between settlers and Africans dates to 1685 (Omond 26). The modern version of the law came into being in 1927, and it outlawed extramarital sexual relations between whites and blacks (Martens 223). When the National Party came to power in 1948, one of the first laws they passed strengthened the Immorality Act to forbid all sexual relations between whites and any other race. The National Party then passed the Mixed Marriages Act in 1950, which prohibited marriages between whites and other races (Sachs 146). The punishment for violating the Immorality Act was jail time for up to seven years with hard labor and ten lashes (Omond 28). Police utilized binoculars, tape recordings, and cameras to catch a couple being intimate. They also searched bed sheets for residual body heat and stains, and undergarments were often taken in and cataloged as evidence (Omond 29).

The shame and embarrassment of the police search was compounded by the media publicity of the trials. Official figures cite the number of people convicted under the Immorality act between 1950 and 1980 at 11,500 with more than twice that number charged (Omond 28). The sensationalistic nature of the testimony and the stories of well-respected white men and women breaking the law made for great copy (Sachs 146). The shame and misery of the trials prompted many white men to commit suicide, and many black women suffered the loss of employment (Mda 13). The combination of love,

passion, sexual violence, shame, fear, jealousy, and the politics of the law make it fertile ground for writers to mine.

Writers have taken up this taboo as a way to explore the personal experience of racial segregation and apartheid, and, more importantly, to condemn the laws of apartheid. The taboo on interracial sexual relations and marriage legislates the most personal and important choices a person makes. In South Africa, as in many other parts of the world, taboos concerning sexual relations across racial and ethnic boundaries came into being in order to establish social hierarchies in a colonial context. When writers and artists make the taboo a focal point of their work, that rendering of a law onto individuals challenges the ban by depicting it through individual experience. Herbert Marcuse, discussing Walter Benjamin's insights into the class critique of the poetry of Charles Baudelaire, writes: "[Baudelaire's work] does nothing in the struggle for liberation—except to open the tabooed zones of nature and society in which even death and the devil are enlisted as allies in the refusal to abide by the law and order of repression" (*Aesthetic* 21). Marcuse's argument, which builds upon Benjamin's, asserts the liberatory nature of Baudelaire's work through the interrogation of bourgeois social taboos. The point Marcuse makes in his comments on Baudelaire is to demonstrate how seemingly non-political literature makes inroads in the struggle for liberation by challenging the dominant social forces.

Marcuse's contention—that literature that "open[s] the tabooed zones" serves the goal of revolution—resonates with texts that take up the Immorality Act. These texts, with some exceptions, eschew public protests and political agitation to contemplate instead the private realm of life when the law so closely regulates intimate behavior.

These writers defy the stereotypes and myths the law perpetuates in order to challenge its authority and to call for a rethinking of apartheid. For writers, the Immorality Act constrains desire, attraction, and feeling, while activating (however unintentionally) a range of other issues. Some texts show how the law relies on the perpetuated myth of the black man as a sexual predator by debunking the myth through a focus on love rather than sex. Novels such as Peter Abrahams' *The Path of Thunder*, Dan Jacobson's *Evidence of Love*, and Richard Rive's *Emergency* depict interracial love relationships. Texts that counter the law's presumption that interracial desires are evidence of deviant behavior instead often foreground the perversity of the police, as they try to catch the couple in the act. Lewis Nkosi's novel *Mating Birds* deconstructs the myth differently, by characterizing the white woman as a sexual aggressor whose claim of rape leads to the death of Ndi Sibiya, a young black man.

A theme that recurs throughout much of the fiction is the fear of being caught. Athol Fugard's play *Statements After an Arrest under the Immorality Act* crystallizes this fear by stretching out the split-second when camera bulbs flash in the couple's face, allowing for multiple feelings and responses in that instant. Similarly, Nadine Gordimer's short story "Town and Country Lovers" characterizes the arrest of the town lovers and the trial of the country lovers. Zakes Mda's historical novel *The Madonna of Excelsior* takes a longer view of the implications of being caught in his fictionalized retelling of the scandal caused by the trial of nineteen people for their involvement in interracial sex parties. Mda looks past the trial and considers the life of a child born of this scandal, and how her origins shape her life and that of her family even as apartheid ends.

The fear of being apprehended translates to a fear of being seen. Arrest requires someone to report witnessing the couple engaged in "unlawful carnal intercourse" or performing "any immoral or indecent act" (Omond 26). To be seen is to be found guilty. Throughout these novels, characters conceal themselves behind drawn curtains and in abandoned spaces to avoid being observed. When in *Too Late the Phalarope*, the Afrikaner police lieutenant returns home after a tryst with a black woman to find a note tacked to the door that reads: "I SAW YOU" (Paton 149), the scene crystallizes the shame, the self-hatred, the fear, and the guilt Pieter feels in the aftermath of the act. Pieter believes this note means his life as a respectable man in the town is over.[9] For these couples, being detected by the wrong pair of eyes has the power to destroy their lives, so the fear of exhibiting signs of intimacy or affection permeates the narratives.

Nadine Gordimer's early novel *Occasion for Loving* adopts a stylized approach to the topos of witnessing and being seen. In this text, the characters watch and respond to other characters' actions, appearance, or way of being, in order to highlight the significance of what can be seen or perceived. This technique gives prominence to how witnessing functions as a foundation to apartheid society. For Gordimer, then, witnessing is central to the stability of the apartheid system. Moreover, it serves not only to identify unlawful or illegal acts, but it also recognizes everyday, routine acts that establish social norms, which in turn heightens sensitivity to any deviation from these social codes. To posit that witnessing and being witnessed are central to the apartheid system, and to the Immorality Act in particular, what is seen is not so much evidence of an affair, but evidence of a disruption in one's daily routine.

My chapter excavates Gordimer's depiction of love within the domestic setting of a liberal, white household in early 1960s South Africa in her novel *Occasion for Loving*. Through an analysis of the interlocking narratives of witnessing and loving, Gordimer shows how under apartheid, the private is never truly private. Eyes are always observing, even if the gaze is non-threatening. Gordimer considers the act of witnessing as part of a system whereby the fear of being seen breaking the law gives rise to the act of gazing at others. What develops in response to the constant observation each character experiences is a self-consciousness concerning how one appears to others; the characters reflect on and even modify their behaviors to influence how others perceive them. This matrix of observing, being observed, and anticipating others' observation establishes a focus on characters' adherence to social norms; deviance from routine signals transgressive behavior. Not only does the emphasis on gazing and perception highlight the experience under apartheid, but I contend that setting an interracial love story within this highly attentive social setting allows Gordimer to consider how love disrupts the rhythms of everyday life while depicting a compelling interracial love story.

Occasion for Loving explores white liberal couples and their ineffectual opposition to apartheid in the early 1960s as one among them begins an affair with a black man. The novel has four sections, and the first one depicts the self-reflective, analytical life of Jessie Stilwell, a white, liberal South African woman and her family as they welcome newlyweds Boaz and Ann Davis as boarders in their home. Jessie reflects on her marriage, her strained relationship with her son from her first marriage, and the new people in her daily life. At the end of first section, Jessie learns that Ann is having an affair with Gideon Shibalo, a black artist. The second section reviews how the affair

came to be and how it involves everyone in the Stilwell house. The third section takes place on the Cape, where Jessie is vacationing with her daughters, and Ann and Gideon intrude on the vacation, seeking refuge from the inhospitable conditions of rural South Africa. Jessie becomes wrapped up in the plans of Ann and Gideon, who decide to leave the country for Europe. Yet, in the final segment, when the trio returns to Johannesburg, Ann decides she cannot live with the racism she encounters while with Gideon and returns to Europe with her husband Boaz, leaving behind a destroyed Gideon. The Stilwells, witnesses to the affair and unable to ease Gideon's pain or condemn Ann's choice, can only find bittersweet solace in the repaired relationship between Jessie and her son.

Several of Nadine Gordimer's stories and novels have depicted interracial relationships under apartheid and in its aftermath. The story "Town and Country Lovers," originally published as two separate stories, depicts in succession two loving relationships that conclude upon the couples' being arrested under the Immorality Act. In *A Sport of Nature*, the interracial couple flees South Africa in order to be together. In *My Son's Story*, Will tells the story of his family: his father the political hero who has an affair with a white human rights worker, his mother, who goes into exile when she is arrested for her political activities, and his sister, who joins his father's revolutionary organization. The affair serves to destroy the heroic image Will has of his father, while also providing Sonny, his father, with someone with whom he can share his politics. More recently, Gordimer's novel *The Pickup* tells the story of Julie, an affluent white woman, who marries Abdu/Ibrahim, an Arab immigrant and her emigration to his unnamed country. This move drives the couple apart as Abdu/Ibrahim seeks a visa to the

West and Julie finds solace in the desert. The Immorality Act has been abolished when *The Pickup* takes place, and yet, interracial relationships are still taboo, especially in Julie's prominent family. Each of these narratives explores how relationships develop and how they react to the external pressures and realities they face; Gordimer explores individual experiences in a racially-charged state to contemplate the limits of these individuals and where their choices lead them. For Gordimer, love offers the most intimate, most personal, of transgressions, and the different eras, settings, and class statuses of these stories offer new ways to explore desire and politics.

The critical work on *Occasion for Loving* has focused primarily on the political statement the text makes. Both Dominic Head and Stephen Clingman situate the novel in the historical moment in which it was drafted: the Sharpeville Massacre. Clingman argues that the Sharpeville Massacre greatly weakened the multiracial anti-apartheid movement and the violence forced many black writers to flee the country, leaving Gordimer isolated from her black peers (74-6). Head takes Clingman's position further, reading the novel as an acknowledgement that whites and blacks cannot collaborate and the immediate future requires an acceptance of racial segregation (Head 62). Judie Newman and Kathrin Wagner read the characters' liberalism as ineffectual as a form of opposition to apartheid: it "offers no more than a personal path to a private absolutism for individual whites" (Wagner 17).[10] Abdul JanMohamed situates his reading differently, contrasting Jessie and Tom Stillwell with Ann and Boaz Davis, and arguing that the Stilwells display a keen awareness of the past and its influence on the present, whereas Boaz and Ann stand in for the irresponsible colonialist who abandons the colonial endeavor when it becomes overwhelming (94). In her broad study of interracial couples

in African, American, and Caribbean literature, Pia Thielmann criticizes Gordimer's depiction of Ann and Gideon's relationship as bound to fail because the couple is never in sync (271). The studies of *Occasion for Loving* overwhelmingly focus on Gordimer's declining belief in liberalism at this stage of her career; most critics view *Occasion for Loving* as a turning point in Gordimer's politics.

The arguments these critics make about Gordimer's novel provide insight into how *Occasion for Loving* fits into Gordimer's distinguished career, but most of these studies are less interested in the careful construction of the narrative and the aesthetic style Gordimer has adopted to tell her story. The emphasis on perception as well as the sequencing of the narrative complicates the story, offering insight into more than the collapse of liberalism as a viable anti-apartheid strategy. My analysis of *Occasion for Loving* attends to the experience of domestic life to highlight the undercurrent of normalization and disruption that define the characters' existence and inform their responses to the affair between Ann and Gideon.

The exhibit pertaining to the Immorality Law at the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg, South Africa, includes archival photographs of people shielding themselves from the camera's pervasive lens. The text accompanying these intrusive images describes police efforts to detect couples breaking the law, which included peeking through windows and staking out residences.[11] This historical reality of prying eyes is echoed in the literature and also in Gordimer's own experience growing up under apartheid. In an essay about writing in the aftermath of trauma, she writes: "Very young I entered a dialogue with myself about what was around me, and this took the form of trying for the meaning in what I saw by transforming this into stories based on what were

everyday incidents of ordinary life for everyone around me" ("Witnessing"109). Gordimer's observations of the incongruities, of the inconsistencies, she saw around her lead her to explore these issues in her writing. Writing permits Gordimer to contemplate the forces that shape the individual interactions and the scenarios she sees around her. However, she complicates that perspective by considering what others perceive and how subject-position influences observation. Gordimer writes to make sense of the world, and in *Occasion for Loving*, she shows how each character struggles to understand what they see and how others see them.

The text deploys the motif of witnessing through the omniscient narrator's indirect method of revealing characters' traits. The narrator describes a character's qualities through another's character's impression of him or her, a technique which foregrounds the importance of perception. For example, the characters' perception of Ann converges around a central characteristic: her childlike nature. "Ann might rush into things with her hands out before her, like the little girls after dragonflies, but it would probably follow that, like the little girls, she would not be aware of her own motives" (25). At another moment, Boaz describes Ann's behavior: "'it's like a child picking daisies . . .'" (144). Ann's interactions with the people around her evoke an innocent, childlike nature similar to that of Jessie's young daughters. Like the children, Ann lacks motivation for her actions; she acts on impulse. Jessie further describes Ann: "She was not pensive, not 'quiet,' not, perhaps, content. Nothing was projected from her. Jessie thought: she exists" (112). Ann follows her whims and does not consider the consequences or repercussions of those actions. The references to Ann's childlike way of

being in the world suggest both the carefree energy she boasts and, as Jessie indicates, the unplanned, unstudied way that she pursues activities.

A corollary to reading the characters' impressions of each other is that a character's insights reflect his or her subject-position. The way Gideon sees Ann, for example, differs from the others. He, too, recognizes Ann's childlike qualities, but what overshadows that perspective is his position as her lover:

> For she was that new being—beginning to appear, here and there—for whom the black man in a white city waited. . . . She was white, top-class beauty, young; young and beautiful enough for the richest and most privileged white man. . . . The truth was, she looked the kind of girl who would call you Jim Fish but dancing with her, sitting talking to her, you were man to her woman. The laws had not changed, the pass was still in your pocket; this simple miracle happened in spite of these things and far beyond them, in a realm where their repeal would have been powerless to release you, anyway. (92-3)[12]

Gideon sees Ann in terms of the qualities that have been denied to him throughout his life: a white woman who is beautiful, young, desirable, and, most importantly, his. The traits Gideon sees in Ann are based on his own subject-position as a black South African man. Another characteristic that he sees in Ann, due to her attraction to him, is bravery: "like many people he confused spirit with bravery, and he saw her old thoughtlessness and recklessness as courage" (274). Because Ann brazenly flirts with Gideon, and because she decides to runaway with him despite the illegality of both of these acts, Gideon sees her actions as courageous, but he realizes only after she leaves him that his

perceptions were inaccurate. She is impulsive, not brave. Characters' impressions of other characters can be unstable, as these observations are a combination of both the character being analyzed and the one processing the analysis. Yet, over the course of the narrative, these momentary reflections add up, so that some of the qualities appear dominant while others seem less important. They form a multi-faceted description of a character. The reader learns how to react to each character through the other characters' responses to behaviors and attitudes.

The disclosure of character traits and impressions uncovers the system of observation that functions within the household. Within this house, as outside the house, people watch one another, noticing particular behaviors or traits that characterize a person. For these characters, it is a way to acclimate to one another as they learn how to live together in the domestic space. Witnessing simultaneously, perhaps even unconsciously in the observer, detects routines and normal patterns of behavior. As the characters begin to recognize patterns in one another's behaviors, they can also detect disruptions, or aberrations to those norms. What emerges out of the novel's first section on routine within the household, is what is in accord with social norms; as educated white liberals, they spend their time entertaining or being entertained or attending the symphony when they are not working. These are people for whom leisure time is a regular part of their routine, and their interactions with blacks are limited to servants or to acquaintances at parties or at work. These events in the text demonstrate the types of social interactions considered acceptable under apartheid. Within these routines, within the code of acceptable behavior, then, what becomes apparent are any divergences from these norms.

Within the context of the *Occasion for Loving*, the motivation for witnessing varies. The threatening gaze prominent throughout the literature about interracial relationships is the witness who will report an illegal act to the state authorities. In *Occasion for Loving*, this gaze remains a pervasive threat, but is never realized. Instead, Gordimer depicts witnessing in a subtle manner, in the perceptions of one another's friends and acquaintances. Those impressions range from character traits to an attention to deviation from routine behavior. Recognizing the danger an interracial relationship poses for Ann and Gideon, the Stillwells and Boaz are attuned to visual cues of Ann and Gideon's coupling which might tip off others. In this anticipation of the law's force, the characters protect Ann and Gideon from recognition by a hostile observer. Thus, the characters are conscious of the ideology of the state and observe their friends in order to warn them of any danger their outward behavior might pose. Even as they oppose apartheid, the friends must adopt its perspective to understand and elude its authority.

The threat of aberrant behavior becomes evident in Ann's attitude when she is with Gideon. Ann behaves with Gideon as she would with any man to whom she is attracted, which, for Gideon, is a new and exciting experience: "The open flirtation, for the fun of it, meant more than going to bed with a white woman who was frightened to be seen with you in the street" (101). Gideon and Ann daily dine at one of the few Johannesburg bars that allow mixed patrons: "And the habitués noted the beginnings of a new grouping in their compositions, just as, if Ann had lunched with a white man at the Carlton Hotel, the daily presence of a champagne bucket at the table would have made the necessary announcement" (101). The daily presence of the couple signals to the bar's other patrons their relationship. People who encounter Ann and Gideon recognize

immediately that they are intimate; their way of interacting with one another bespeaks a closeness. This unabashed openness with Gideon endangers both of them because Ann is unconcerned with who might be watching.

Indeed, a comparison with Callie Stowe, the white woman with whom Gideon had an affair before Ann clarifies how aberrant Ann's behavior is. Callie is a Scottish political activist fighting apartheid and is keenly aware of the power dynamics that define her relationship with Gideon. She understands the danger both she and Gideon face if their relationship is detected by the wrong set of eyes. Thus, the couple conceals their affair unless among likeminded liberals. They attend concerts together and parties in people's homes, but they do not show affection or appear intimate outside of the privacy of someone's home or Callie's car. Their body language, their energy, does not betray their intimacy to outsiders. In contrast, Ann, with her childlike ways, lacks the consciousness to modify her behavior. Ann knows that the relationship between herself and Gideon is illegal in South Africa, but that knowledge does not influence her behavior. Because Ann acts without forethought, she does not consider the potential consequences of her affair.

Ann's obliviousness to the danger in which her affair with Gideon places them both is a reflection of her impulsive, childlike nature. However, it is also possible to attribute her naiveté to her status as a foreigner. Among the characters in *Occasion for Loving*, Ann is the youngest and she is the only one who hails from outside South Africa. Born in Rhodesia but raised in England, Ann never reveals the extent of her experience in the segregated Rhodesian society. The narrator implies that Ann's status as an outsider endows her with a more progressive view of race: "The surge of feeling against the

barriers of color was the ethos of the decade in which she had grown up; her participation in it was a substitute for patriotism rather than a revolt" (89). Ann does not view crossing the color line as a form of rebellion, which is how her South African friends see it; in her way of being, the color line is not a defining reality. This foreign conception of race, coupled with Ann's lack of self-awareness is what makes Ann's behavior with Gideon noticeable to anyone observing the couple. Ann's lack of self-consciousness of the impact of her own behavior compound the danger of the affair. Her friends hope she will regulate her behavior to forestall the threat of being seen.

The system of witnessing, being witnessed, and shaping perceptions gives rise to an attention to routine. Within this highly regulated system, observation serves to detect deviations from the norm, deviations which may include breaking the law. Yet, Gordimer highlights an event which always prompts disruption of one's routine: love. The novel's title is excerpted from the quotation by the twentieth century Russian writer Boris Pasternak that serves as the novel's epigraph: "We have all become people according to the measure in which we have loved people and have had occasion for loving." Jessie, the character who serves as both witness and interpreter (for the reader) of Ann and Gideon's affair, echoes Pasternak's characterization of love when she recalls her own occasion for loving with her husband Tom in the year before they married: "[T]hey had splendidly stopped living; that was what it amounted to—to celebrate love, you must do no work, see no friends, ignore obligations" (5). These two related views define loving as an event, a period of time in which one gives oneself wholly to the act of loving; it is all-consuming.

These commentaries on love implicitly differentiate loving from living. Jessie reminisces about her and Tom's withdrawal from their daily routines, when they were guided wholly by their passion. If loving is incompatible with living, then love transforms when one moves beyond that early phase of passion into the routine of life. When Jessie and Tom marry and establish a home, the act of loving gives way to living. Yet, the distinction Jessie makes should not imply that she does not love her husband. Rather, the act of loving gives away to a different form of intimacy. The narrator alludes to the "private harbor of their relationship" that the couple seeks when they return home from a day at work (4). In a phone conversation where Jessie lets Tom know that Ann and Gideon have sought refuge at her beach house, the narrator analyzes the gaps and absences of words as the result of their thorough knowledge of one another: "[F]amiliarity made their communication as elliptic as if they had been face to face" (218). Jessie and Tom share a shorthand way of communicating; they know one another so well each can anticipate how the other will respond. What their relationship demonstrates is that progression from loving to living; to a life together that is routine and stable. Their occasion for loving has come and gone, and what remains is a form of intimacy that holds trace remnants of the earlier period of loving.

The distinction Jessie makes between loving and living, then, indicates that love, in its passionate, consuming form, is unsustainable in the long term. The narrator reveals that Ann and Gideon also reflect on their affair's inevitable end: "In it they felt the parenthetical closeness of two people who have shared an experience outside the separate involvement of each in his own background" (149). The use of the rhetorical or grammatical concept of *parentheses* echoes Jessie's reflection on love as something that

is set off or apart from the rest of their lives. From the ancient Greek meaning placed alongside of, the modern definition of parentheses is: "A word, clause, or sentence inserted as an explanation, aside, or afterthought into a passage with which it has not necessarily any grammatical connection" (*OED*) that is visually marked in writing by rounded brackets, commas, or long dashes. A parenthetical clause can also be a digression from the main idea or argument. The use of parentheses as a metaphor for the affair, and for love more generally, reinforces the theme that the act of loving is set apart from the rest of life. When Ann and Gideon refer to their love as "parenthetical," they mean that in the scheme of their lives, the affair will have been a diversion, a disruption to the path each one's life was following. The similar characterizations of love as parenthetical and as requiring one to stop living taken together classify love as disruptive to everyday life.

Not only does love disrupt Jessie's life, it also structurally interrupts the narrative. The novel opens with Jessie's reluctant acceptance of Boaz and Ann living with her family and the couple's arrival. The first segment of the novel explores the new living arrangement and Jessie's acclimation to their presence in her home. The early chapters establish the rhythm, the routine of life in the house: how the couples get along and how the children react to new people in the house. This rhythm, which becomes normalized through repetition, is interrupted by the revelation of Ann's and Gideon's affair. Indeed, the reader does not learn of it until one-third of the way through the novel. Then, when Jessie, and thus the reader, learns of the affair between Ann and Gideon, it is a narrative disruption as well as a disruption for the characters. The story changes direction, and

Jessie and the others become witnesses to the affair and its effects on life in the household.

The opposition between loving and living is also expressed through the domestic spaces in the novel. Jessie identifies her house as a home because of how it differs from previous dwellings in which she has lived: "It was the first house Jessie had ever lived in that seemed to die back and put forth along with the humans; this, she supposed, was the organic quality that people were talking about when they called a house a 'home.' . . . This one would take anything" (46). The house reflects the continuous but changing life in it: "Gestures that ended in mid-air, interrupted sentences—a house full of growth, the careless and terrifying waste of nature, that propagates in millions and lets millions die" (7). The descriptions to the Stilwell home emphasize the continuity of the place, the pattern of life each individual has carved out in harmony with the others who live there. Even Gideon's one-room house, is described in terms of its lived-in-ness: "The room had the disturbed look of a place that is subjected to quiet neglect alternating with vigorous raids on its resources" (129). Even when Gideon has been absent, the room offers up vestiges of his life. These homes, then, acquire the attributes of the individuals who live in them; as their lives continue, so too does the house reflect their path. The residue of life visible on the surfaces of the homes and the toys left behind, illustrates the flow of life of the individuals. The homes illustrate the routine, the lives of their occupants, establishing visual cues of the act of living.

The continuity the homes present serve as the backdrop to the affair between Ann and Gideon, and the domestic spaces serve as contrast to the couple's temporary existence. A private space for their meetings is necessary since Ann lives in a house full

of people and Gideon lives in a township, where Ann's presence would call too much attention. Instead, they use the apartment of two white men in advertising who allow Gideon to use the place while they are at work.[13] In this domestic space, the unseen lives of its owners fill the scene: "Shibalo was supplied with a key, and everything in the flat was in the natural state in which the owners' continuing activities had left it—he constituted no interruption" (105-6). Ann and Gideon leave no trace of their presence in the men's apartment, despite being the space of the couple's intimacy. The couple also visits the Stilwell house, but the rooms that hold the others make no room for this couple; Ann's room is one she shares with Boaz and his research on traditional South African music is strewn about the room. To conduct their affair, Ann and Gideon must enter a foreign space, one that is not their own since they cannot have a space to call their own under apartheid. Ann and Gideon enter these spaces parenthetically; they do not disrupt the lives that live there; they make no imprint on the surfaces that are already occupied. Instead, they move about the available space, always leaving it before the rightful owners return to their homes and lives and before their relationship leaves a residue or a sign of their togetherness behind, which could be seen, read, and used against them.

The only space where Ann and Gideon seem to find a space to call their own is rightfully Jessie's rental home on the cape. This house, owned by Jessie's late stepfather, houses no one permanently: "The walls of such houses were not grown thick with layer on layer of human personality, but were thin and interchangeable as the shells that gave shelter to various sea animals, first holding some blob of animate mucus, then inhabited by one crab or another" (188). As a beach house built for transitory presences, there is no evidence of lives lived here. Instead, it is a house without a history: "Each room was like

a person who had no memory, blank, carrying the objects of its purpose—table, bed, cupboard—as a name-tag" (190). This house contains no traces of the people who stayed before Jessie. Its emptiness, its neutral identity provides refuge and even a home for the fleeing couple. They are able to share a bed overnight, to visit the beach daily, and to live. Gideon sketches while Ann plays with the children. Here, in others' parenthetical stops for vacation, Ann and Gideon find their own rhythm, one of lovemaking and play, that suggests to them the possibility of a life together. Even in this neutral space, however, they recognize that the dream of a future is impossible in South Africa. To be together, to establish a routine of living, they must leave the country and even the continent.

As a witness to their relationship, Jessie, too, recognizes the disruptive nature of their love. Because the external presentation of self is how a character exists publicly, it is imperative for the characters to monitor their actions and how others react to behaviors or attitudes. Yet, as discussed above, Ann lacks the self-consciousness to reflect on her motivations or the potential repercussions of her choices. Thus, Jessie, as witness to the affair tries to interpret Ann's behavior and anticipate the consequences if Ann's relationship with Gideon is discovered. However, Jessie is not an impartial observer; she is ambivalent about the affair for selfish reasons: she is concerned that her housemates' situation will change the way she and her family live. She tells Tom: "'The rest of our lives is all set out open for anyone to see. Then it actually hardens into that which anyone can see, so that it stays set, fixed, accepted. But if one wants to change? How is it to change while everyone's looking, being curious and making comment?'" (6). Jessie fears that people watching her, observing her daily routine will trap her into a particular

identity and way of being. For Jessie, the illusion of privacy and its accompanying sense of freedom her home offers her will be destroyed by the presence of others.

Despite her reservations, she becomes an accomplice to their relationship. When Jessie spends time with the couple at the apartment they use for their rendezvous, she thinks: "There is a magnetic field in the polarity of two people who are conducting a reckless love affair; the insolence, emotional anarchy, uncalculatedness, have the gratuitous attraction of exploding fireworks even for those who regard the whole thing as a bit ridiculous" (117-8). Jessie defines the affair in disruptive terms: the recklessness, the anarchy, the exploding fireworks. The images she employs suggest the chaos the government fears interracial relationships prompt. Even for Jessie, the unexpected and unruly nature of the affair and the attraction is dangerous to the couple and to life in the Stillwell house. Jessie sees the consequences, both legal and emotional, that Ann cannot: "It did mean that there was some element of calculable danger in the whole business, for Ann, she supposed—making love to Shibalo was breaking the law—as against the incalculable dangers of pain and disruption present in every love affair" (156). Keen to the reality of the Immorality Law, Jessie considers the dangers Ann faces, even when Ann refuses to face them.

Jessie's description of the affair has resonances with the earlier descriptions of Ann as capricious and impulsive. When Ann first meets Jessie, Ann states: "'Oh I like to find new things. Things I don't know. People not like the people I know'" (34). Ann also says: "'When I go somewhere I haven't been, I like to get into it up to the neck, don't you?'" (16). Ann acts upon her impulses, and the affair reflects that spontaneity and energy. In fact, it is possible to see Ann's life as a series of parenthetical activities: a

grouping of events that hold little in common with the rest of her life. Thus, for Ann, the affair with Gideon is something new to try, to keep her busy until a new activity or person comes along. Even when Ann decides to run away with Gideon, she does so without considering the consequences or the planning it actually requires.

Gideon's analysis of his relationship with Ann means something wholly different. To him, Ann represents something that he has been denied repeatedly his whole life. In particular, Ann replaces his earlier dream of furthering his study of painting in Europe. As a young man, Gideon wins a scholarship to undertake this course of study, but the government denies him a visa unless he agrees to never return to South Africa. His dreams of painting dashed, Gideon eases his pain with alcohol and gives up painting until he meets Ann. Her beauty and her seemingly courageous willingness to be seen with him and her decision to run away with him make Ann a surrogate for his original dream. Gideon puts his faith in a future with Ann, a woman who treats him not like a black man, but a man.

What Ann's character offers Gideon is something no one else in his life does: she treats Gideon as a man equal to her husband or any man. Her willful ignorance of the color bar and its implications for social relationships has its benefits. For Gideon, it means he can be treated as man rather than a *black* man. Unlike the other women who bed him and love him, Ann is not political, and their relationship is not a political statement. Ann's love for Gideon treats him like a man and gives him the dignity he deserves by not hiding her feelings for him. This quality of Ann's is one the others cannot replicate despite their intentions to do so. Ann's symbolic status for Gideon is further reflected in Boaz's reaction to his wife's infidelity. Boaz befriends Gideon, his rival in

love, because, as Jessie reminds Tom: "'Boaz wants to treat Gideon like any other man but he can't because Gideon isn't a man, won't be, can't be, until he's free'" (277). Because Boaz recognizes the inhumanity of Gideon's life under apartheid, Boaz cannot add to that inhumanity by hitting or fighting with Gideon. Thus, Boaz waits patiently for Ann to decide if she will end the affair or the marriage.[14] Yet, his reaction is problematic: he recognizes that Gideon is less than a man under the law, but in refusing to treat him as a man, Boaz, too, denies Gideon his status as a man. Ann's childlike nature makes her a danger to herself and Gideon, but she also offers him the freedom and respect he deserves and has so long desired. Thus, Ann's seeming immaturity and self-centeredness paradoxically make her so amazing in Gideon's eyes.

Only when Ann manages to reflect on her behavior is a final decision made. Ann confesses to Jessie her reaction when she and Gideon encounter a racist mechanic on their travels in the country: "'You know, when the man in the garage looked at Gid, and I stood next to him seeing Gid at the same time, it wasn't the same person we saw. . . .'" (274). Ann analyzes the mechanic's view of Gideon, whom he sees as less than a man, whom he sees as black. That moment, for Ann, becomes decisive in her relationship with Gideon because, while Gideon suffers that racist gaze, Ann bathes and dines in the nearby hotel for whites only. In that forced separation, Ann comes to another realization: "[F]or the first time in her life she was instinctively following a convention of behavior, fitting an identity imposed from outside herself" (242). Although she opposes apartheid and segregation, she finds herself forced to adhere to it, forced to adopt a certain attitude, one where she defines Gideon as her driver, in order to stay in this place. The exchange with the mechanic and the reality of segregation at the hotel thrusts upon Ann the

understanding the others have sought for her throughout the text: the relationship with Gideon is dangerous and even if they flee South Africa, there will be others who look upon Gideon with a similar disdainful look.

For Ann, for whom whims and spontaneity have defined her approach to life, the realization that a relationship with Gideon forces her to alter her behaviors, to be perpetually on the *lookout* for danger, for people who would oppose her love for Gideon and his for her, is overwhelming. Jessie again serves as a witness, this time to Ann's retreat and Gideon's misery. Jessie watches as Ann and Boaz return to Europe without a word to Gideon, leaving him in despair yet again because another dream has been denied him. Abdul JanMohamed's insightful reading of *Occasion for Loving* views Ann and Boaz's escape to Europe as analogical to colonialists abandoning the colonial enterprise. When the love affair with Gideon becomes too intense, they leave him and his feelings behind to focus on their own future.

Yet, it is significant that Jessie, who has become a champion for the failed pair, watches Ann and Boaz leave. She has observed and interpreted the relationships throughout the text, and their retreat and Gideon's pain call attention to Jessie's, and by proxy, all white South Africans complicity in this system. Jessie and Tom face this in the novel's conclusion:

> They came again and again to the stony silence of facts they had set their lives against. They believed in the integrity of personal relations against the distortion of laws and society. What stronger and more proudly personal bond was there than love? Yet even between lovers they had seen blackness count, the personal return inevitably to the social, the private to

> the political. There was no recess of being, no emotion so private that white privilege did not single you out there; it was a silver spoon clamped between your jaws and you might choke on it for all the chance there was of dislodging it. So long as the law remained unchanged, nothing could bring integrity to personal relationships. (286)

Jessie and Tom settle on the recognition that private beliefs cannot surmount the law in this moral to the story. As other critics have argued, private opposition to apartheid is inadequate for the monumental changes that must occur. However, even more so than the failure of the politics of these individuals, is their complicity, their role as witnesses anticipating the law's enforcement and advocating the regulation of their friends' behavior. Through the act of witnessing, which is built into the society, these characters, and by extension, all white South Africans, are complicit in the system of apartheid. Only radical action, such as Tom's musing that Jessie might blow up a power station, will lead to real change.

Gordimer's interrogation of the interracial love taboo proved to be a threatening topic in itself. The cheaper, mass-market edition of *Occasion for Loving* was temporarily banned in South Africa because it "'undermines the traditional race policy of the Republic'" (qtd. in "Censored" 59). Yet the more expensive edition, the one purchased by white readers, was published without delay. Gordimer identifies the government's intention to keep her book and other books on taboo subjects out of the hands of black readers in order to prevent the texts from inspiring rebellion. *Occasion for Loving* serves as a turning point in Gordimer's career, where the failure of liberalism is apparent, and more radical strategies for change are necessary. The government censored later novels

by Gordimer, including *Burger's Daughter* and *July's People*. In writing of taboo, illegal subjects, Gordimer opens her writing up to the surveillance of the government. Yet, within the text, witnessing and perception structure the narrative of *Occasion for Loving*, to establish the white, liberal experience of apartheid. That complex background, however, allows for the story concerning the contrast between loving and living. In the narrative of loving, Ann and Gideon undertake an affair that disrupts their lives and the lives of the people around them. Even as Gordimer writes of an illegal coupling, the couple themselves do not view race as a motivation for their affair, thus making the text more incendiary. However, the forces of apartheid prevent the relationship from evolving from its parenthetical form into a principal way of life.

Chapter Four

The Power of Love: The writing of Ngugi wa Thiong'o

The oeuvre of Ngugi wa Thiong'o examines the individual's experience of social injustice. *A Grain of Wheat* chronicles the experience of the Mau Mau fighters and the aftermath of independence where those who were sympathetic to the colonizer have gained power and stature. The play *I Will Marry When I Want* depicts the repressive role of Christianity when it is used to diminish workers' belief in fair wages and working conditions. *Petals of Blood* probes village life as it transforms under the aegis of neo-colonial money and the negative effects on the villagers who originally populated the village. Even novels that stray from the realism of his earlier fiction, such as *Matigari* or *Wizard of the Crow,* maintain a focus on the hardships the individual faces. In *Matigari*, it is the hardships the abandoned child, the prostitute, and the worker encounter in the neo-colonial power structure that leads them to follow the charismatic Matigari, and in *Wizard of the Crow*, it is the conditions of a variety of individuals living under the tyrannical rule of a dictator who himself faces the constraints of a global world order.

The writing of Ngugi wa Thiong'o maintains an attention on the power relations that shape the lives of his characters. As Ngugi tackles different eras in Kenya's and Africa's history, those relations and the issues they raise metamorphose. Thus, in *The River Between*, Christianity serves as a divisive issue between the neighboring villages, but in *I Will Marry When I Want*, Christianity becomes a tool deployed by the representatives of the neo-colonial bourgeoisie who seek to increase the docility of the workers. In a similar fashion, the ethnic fighting gives way to the colonial and the neo-colonial government, and finally, to the global order. Ngugi's fiction explores a range of

imbricated issues: the repressive nature of Christianity; the selfish greed of men and women in power; the unjust class system that emerges in the wake of Kenyan national independence; the gender inequality and sexual violence women face; and the hardships these forces cause in the lives of those living under these conditions.

Yet, this chapter proposes another trope be added to the list of themes and issues that emerge in Ngugi's novels and plays. Love features prominently throughout Ngugi's canon. Alongside the narrative of the individual's interactions with the public sphere exists a second narrative of the individual's personal life in which love figures centrally. In *Petals of Blood*, for example, Munira, Karega and Abdulla each espouse a different type of love for Wanja. In *The River Between*, the love between Waiyaki and Nyambura models for Waiyaki a peaceful solution to the brewing conflict between the ridges. The coupling of Kamiti and Nyawira in Ngugi's most recent novel, *Wizard of the Crow*, leads to an unusual politics of resistance and the possibility of a different world.

In this chapter I demonstrate that love occupies a prominent place in the writing of Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Moreover, this love operates in constellation with the themes of injustice, corruption, and resistance that motivate his stories. It acquires a political force that allows it to intervene in the prevailing form of power, disrupting authority and presenting an alternative vision for the world. Put another way, the love depicted in Ngugi's texts possesses a transformative quality, connecting the personal sphere to the political on in an intimate way, even driving the characters in their interactions with the public sphere.

A study of love and its relationship to the socio-political themes that weave throughout Ngugi's work demands a conscious attention to the worldview in which these

themes function. The critical conversation pertaining to ideology in Ngugi's work focuses on the shifting positions of Christianity and Marxism over the course of his career. One point of contention in the debate surrounding these questions is Ngugi's relationship to Christianity. Whereas David Maughan Brown argues that Ngugi held Christian beliefs while drafting *The River Between*, a question emerges about Ngugi's later work and whether the use of Christian symbolism is calculated.[15] Govind Narain Sharma Oliver Lovesey each read the deployment of Christianity similarly, arguing that the symbolism offers the author a language to appeal to the reader (Lovesey "Crisis of Representation" 182 and Sharma "Ngugi's Apocalypse" 303). Oliver Lovesey views the Christian elements of Ngugi's work more critically. Religious scholar Sebastian Mahfood, too, views the figuration of Matigari as a Christ-like figure a way to position Jesus Christ on the side of the postcolonial struggle against neo-colonialism (71). When Christianity exists alone, as it does in *The River Between*, there is little question of Ngugi's relationship to it, but as Marxist ideology influences his later writing, the function of Christianity becomes less certain.

As Ngugi's depiction of Christianity shows him becoming critical of Christian institutions, Marxist ideology emerges as its replacement to achieve justice. Postcolonial theorist Neil Lazarus emphasizes Ngugi's turn to the peasant as a move of solidarity with the people and an enactment of Frantz Fanon's anti-colonial revision of Marxism, while simultaneously serving as a turn away from the alienating intellectualism of his contemporaries ("(Re)Turn to the People" 14-15). In his essay "Socialist-Oriented Literature," Alamin Mazrui asserts that Ngugi's brand of socialism could be classified as "neonationalist" or the "socialism of utopia" (223, 225). In contrast, Peter Nazareth traces

several different versions of "Ngugi" across the corpus of his work, from the Village or Old Ngugi to the radical, political Ngugi who then gives way to the Latin American Ngugi, by which he means "a cynical, citified Ngugi who sees things going wrong . . . who sees people saying the right thing but doing the wrong things" (124). The metamorphosis in Ngugi's worldview has been an important dimension to the critical discussion surrounding his work. However, as I will argue, commonalities exist throughout his work, even as his political commitment shifts.

The one text that has generated commentary on its depiction of love is *The River Between*, which depicts a forbidden love relationship amidst tension between Christians and traditionalists during the colonial period. Literary critic Ato Sekyi-Otu's reading of the relationship as an allegory for reconciliation between the Christians and the traditionalists is highly regarded. For Sekyi-Otu, the notion of reconciliation is a negative one; it deters conflict in favor of one, unified view, and in that view, he anticipates "the repressive ideologies of solidarism" (172). Sekyi-Otu contextualizes the relationship in terms of the repressive single-party states that emerged in the wake of independence. Noted Ngugi scholar Simon Gikandi draws upon the work of Latin American literary critic Doris Sommer to echo Sekyi-Otu's critique of the relationship as an attempt to make "colonial modernity . . . palatable to the colonized" (68). Literary critic Apollo Amoko builds on to Gikandi's reading, arguing the relationship seeks to re-establish the male dominance of the tribe through the uneven pairing "for the restoration of what the text would have us believe was the natural order of things" (37). Whereas the critics above reject the narrative of love as having positive political potential because of its emphasis on reconciliation, one critic views this allegorical writing favorably. Elias

Bongmba interprets the romance in terms of Christian *Eros*, and thus sees the desire for reconciliation in a positive light. The criticism on the love relationship in *The River Between* treats love as instrumental; it exists only to establish the possibility of politics. These readings overlook the power love has over those under its spell.

The critical conversation pertaining to Ngugi's worldview explores the shift or break that occurs over Ngugi's career, but I am interested the repeated trope of love and the continuity it represents. The love his characters experience can be traced to *both* Christian and Marxist roots. Through these ideologies, love serves as the pathway to the dream of utopia that Mazrui mentions. As Lazarus states, Ngugi differs from his contemporaries in his attention to the peasant, but also in his refusal to participate in the "literature of disillusionment" that defines much of the African literature published in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s. Each of Ngugi's texts contains a vision for a just future, even as the discourse in his texts changes. Through a close reading of love and its interaction with the public sphere, I call attention to this sustained dream of a better society, one based on the principles of humanism, unity and love.

I. The River Between

The forbidden love between Waiyaki, a proponent of Gikuyu traditions and Nyambura, the daughter of the Christian minister, figures centrally into Ngugi's early novel *The River Between*. Their feelings develop amidst a background of brewing conflict between the Christians and the Kiama, the group of male elders advocating tradition. Yet, what sets apart this archetypal narrative of love between warring sides is the impact the feelings make on Waiyaki's attempt to end the brewing conflict. Ngugi

explores the possibility of a utopia born of the love between the two figures representing oppositional forces within a particular moment of history.

The River Between explores the conflict developing between two neighboring villages in the colonial period. One village is home to Christian converts and the other is home to Gikuyu traditionalists. Although Waiyaki is a young man, he holds a prominent position in the Kiama, the governing body of elders, because he proposes the creation of independent schools that would teach Western lessons but allow the students to remain faithful to their Gikuyu beliefs. The conflict between the two villages reaches a fever pitch when Nyambura's older sister Muthoni undergoes female genital circumcision and subsequently dies from an infection. The Christians claim Muthoni's death as a sign that the practice of female circumcision is wrong, while the Kiama claims her death as a symbol of the importance of becoming a woman according to Gikuyu beliefs. Nyambura and Waiyaki come together over Muthoni's death as they try to comprehend the motivation for her choice and the meaning behind her final words. The love that develops between the couple emboldens Waiyaki to seek peace between the villages, which results in their deaths.

The early encounters between Waiyaki and Nyambura emphasize their feelings outside of their social roles. The narrator describes their first meeting: "Something passed between them as two human beings, untainted with religion, social conventions or any tradition" (*River* 76). They meet outside their roles as Christian or non-Christian, as from the villages of Makuyu or Kameno; their mutual attraction precedes their social identities. They meet as "two human beings" who lack the social inscription that shapes their behaviors. Since they interact on a level that ignores their prescribed social roles, it is

their emotions that, although neither quite understands, inform them what they are experiencing. After another encounter, Waiyaki "felt a desire to hold her close to him and whisper many things to her" and Nyambura "felt a glow inside" (*River* 89). The context of these quotations supports the unexpectedness of these feelings as well as uncertainty about what they mean and whether to act on them. The emphasis on what each feels instinctually, rather than what each is consciously thinking, builds on their initial encounter as occurring between two people whose public identities do not matter. Even their meeting place—near the river—serves as liminal space between the two villages since the ridges share the water. The in-between space of the river and the path on which they meet, allows them to follow their desires.

The attraction between Waiyaki and Nyambura occurs at the interstices of the growing discord between the Christians and the traditionalists, which is amplified after Muthoni's death. Whereas the two factions each provide a reason for Muthoni's death, Nyambura, the sister who loved her, and Waiyaki, the young man with her when she died, seek to comprehend her decisions and her final words: "'[T]ell Nyambura I see Jesus. And I am a woman, beautiful in the tribe. . . .'" (*River* 53). Her final words, taken together with what she previously tells Nyambura: "'I am still a Christian, a Christian in the tribe'" (*River* 53), puzzle Nyambura and Waiyaki, for whom the reconciliation of opposing ways of life has never been a possibility. Yet, Muthoni has found a way to unite her heritage with her spiritual beliefs, which allows her to become the woman she has wants to be. Muthoni's contentedness with her decision and her peaceful death challenge the narratives each side advocates in the wake of her death. For Nyambura, who loves her sister deeply, and Waiyaki, who is intrigued by the young woman's resolution to find

peace, Muthoni's serenity in death compels them to seek each other out in order for solace. Their connection over Muthoni leads to the feelings of love described above, and through their attraction, they recognize Muthoni's death not as a warning, but as a guide to stem the fighting between the Christians and the traditionalists.

Waiyaki's love for Nyambura and their shared understanding of Muthoni infuses Waiyaki's dream of an alternative future where the differing factions forego the impending battle and instead coexist peacefully. As a descendent of clairvoyants who warn the community of imminent crises, Waiyaki dreams the following:

> It was the vision of a people who could trust one another, who would sit side by side, singing the song of love which harmonized with music from the birds, and all their hearts would beat to the rhythm of the throbbing river. The children would play there, jumping from rock on to rock, splashing the water which reached fathers and mothers sitting in the shade around, talking, watching. Birds sang as they hovered from tree to tree, while farther out in the forest beasts of the land circled around. . . . In the midst of this Nyambura would stand. The children would come to her and she would talk to the elders. The birds seemed to listen and even the beasts stopped moving and stood still. And a song rose stirring the hearts of all, and their longing for a new life in the future was reflected in the dark eyes of Nyambura. (*River* 120, ellipsis in orig.)

The central image of the dream is Nyambura, who attracts the attention of the children, the elders, and even the animals. In Waiyaki's dream, she is endowed with power, a power that she does not possess in the narrative's reality. Her venerable presence in

Waiyaki's imagination recalls the long past of the Gikuyus. Waiyaki's father taught him that the Gikuyu used to be ruled by women, but they became cruel rulers, and the men mutinied and seized power. The threatening violence between Christians and the Kiama may signal the point at which masculine rule would create conditions that are too harsh, causing the women to revolt and institute a new, matriarchal power structure. Thus, Waiyaki's fantasy of a future where the woman he loves is revered and a spirit of communion defines life on the ridges revises a lost past where women once held power.

Figuring Nyambura as an authority simultaneously reflects Nyambura's perceptive rejection of her father's brand of Christianity. As the daughter of Joshua, she does not have a direct role in the clash between the Kiama and the Christians. Yet, she provides insight into the complex depiction of Christianity, valuable insight that suggests she would be an excellent leader. When she ponders a future with Waiyaki, she thinks to herself: "A religion of love and forgiveness stood between them. No! It could never be a religion of love. Never, never. The religion of love was in the heart. The other was Joshua's own religion, which ran counter to her spirit and violated love" (*River* 134). Nyambura makes the distinction between the Christianity of her father and that of the Bible. Although Joshua teaches love and forgiveness, he denies it to his neighbors and even his own daughter. Nyambura recognizes the disjuncture between the two forms of Christianity. Her father teaches obedience and adherence. What he sermonizes each week is "Joshua's own religion" (134). It is possible to read Joshua, which is the Jewish form of the name Jesus, as a representative of Old Testament Christianity rooted in God's laws and Nyambura's understanding of Christianity as illustrative of the emphasis on love in the New Testament of the Bible. Waiyaki, Nyambura, and Muthoni function as the true

form of Christianity. Her recognition of the discrepancy between her father's sermons and their biblical source begins to uncover the complex depiction of Christianity in Ngugi's texts.

Too many critics have denied Nyambura agency in the love relationship and the political outcome of the novel. Whereas Apollo Amoko's analysis of *The River Between* reads Nyambura and her romance with Waiyaki as "the objectification of women as the territory of domestic stability and the subjectification of men as social and political agents," (48), Nyambura is far from the ignorant, uneducated girl Amoko depicts. Indeed, Nyambura's position demonstrates a nuanced depiction of Christianity in the text. Joshua's firebrand Christianity of obedience and punishment is perhaps typical of colonial missions, but Nyambura's comprehension of Christianity as a religion of love and forgiveness is more true to its source.[16] Thus, while Nyambura may serve as the revered figure in Waiyaki's dream because he loves her, it is her belief in love (in the non-romantic Christian sense) and forgiveness that echo the vision Waiyaki has for a future that does not involve war and make her a prominent figure in the dream.

The second prominent feature of Waiyaki's vision is the emphasis on nature and the possibility of the two villages working together. The meaning of this image becomes clearer when put in the larger context of how landscape functions in terms of the two villages throughout the text. The novel opens with the description of the two ridges as "like many sleeping lions which never woke" (1). Yet, the narrator insists that when one's perspective changes, so too, does the landscape. From the position of the river in the valley between the ridges, "the two ridges ceased to be sleeping lions united by their common source of life. They became antagonists" (1). When Waiyaki climbs a

neighboring hill with his father, he, too, gains a new perspective on his home and its antagonist: "The ridges slept on. Kameno and Makuyu were no longer antagonistic. They had merged into one area of beautiful land, which is what, perhaps, they were meant to be. Makuyu, Kameno and the other ridges lay in peace and there was no sign of life, as one stood on the hill of God" (16). The description of the ridges' landscape reveals their potential. As sleeping lions, the ridges appear similar, of the same species, and both have power and dominance. Yet, since the ridges sleep, they do not exude their strength; rather, they are vulnerable. Yet, from the perspective of the river, the perspective of the people, these ridges are antagonistic. This perspective is the reality the villagers' recognize. In contrast, however, is Waiyaki's perspective, gained by climbing neighboring hills, in which the ridges are no longer separate. Like the image of sleeping lions, the expanse of land is connected; it "[has] merged into one area of beautiful land" (16). The different descriptions of the landscape, based on the different perspectives of the viewer, communicate the potential of these ridges. In Waiyaki's dream, the relationship between the ridges has changed; it has become a relationship of cooperation and intermingling.

The dream establishes a clear tableau: children playing, the river throbbing, birds singing, animals in the forest. This picture of the future illustrates a cooperative ecology, one where the antagonism has given way to play and joy. The river, the provider of life to the two ridges, remains central and unites them, its "throbbing" serving as the heart of life on the ridges. The children play in the water, infecting their parents with their energy and enthusiasm. What the dream articulates is the attitude, the ambience of a cooperative spirit that defines the scene. Waiyaki describes it as: "a people who could trust one

another, who would sit side by side, singing the song of love" (*River* 120). Ngugi returns to this idea again and again in his writing: "It [art] needs to be active, engaged, insistent on being what it has always been, the embodiment of dreams for a truly human world where the progress of any one person is not dependent on the downfall of another" (*Penpoints* 6). Ngugi views art as the medium for conveying the possibility of another world, and in *The River Between*, that dream of utopia is a society where no one person's life is valued less than everyone else's. Love and the possibility of reconciling the Christians and the traditionalists serves as the future Waiyaki wishes to bring about.

Waiyaki's dream for a peaceful future quickly gives way to a nightmare of what the future could foretell: "They were all pulling her into pieces, as if she were a thing of sacrifice to the god of the river, which still flowed with life as they committed this ritual outrage on her. And he too had joined the crowd and he was tearing her to himself" (120). Not only does the crowd turn violent in this darker dream of the future, but Waiyaki, too, becomes one of the throng pawing at Nyambura's flesh, who morphs into Muthoni and floats away into the darkness of the river. In the dream, Waiyaki stands among the crowd, unable to touch Nyambura, who has again appeared, and he realizes he has not told the people to unite; he failed in his mission. The nightmare enacts the symbolic struggle over Muthoni's dead body, only now Nyambura, too, becomes a victim of the struggle while Waiyaki watches.

The transformation of the dream of a peaceful future into the nightmare of violence guides Waiyaki's approach to the Kiama and the Christians. In speaking to the ridges, he charts a course he learned from his love for Nyambura and the actions of Muthoni. He seeks to retain the differences of the present while appealing to the shared

past of the community. He tells the gathered crowd: "We are all children of Mumbi and we must fight together in one political movement, or else we perish and the white man will always be on our back. Can a house divided against itself stand?" (149). Waiyaki speaks to the commonality they share—their history on this ridges—as a way to forge solidarity against the colonizer, whose presence threatens to usurp Gikuyu land. However, he does so through a famous Biblical verse: "And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand" (*King James Bible* Matt 12.25).[17] Waiyaki unites Christianity and tradition in this speech to symbolize unity between the ridges.

The alternative future Waiyaki dreams fails to come to fruition despite the warm reaction the crowd has to his words. In response to his rousing speech, the Kiama publicly denounce Nyambura in order to dare Waiyaki to make his love for Nyambura known. When Waiyaki realizes what is happening, the narrator reveals Waiyaki's thoughts: "And she looked beautiful now. She looked like a lamb on the altar of sacrifice. And Waiyaki knew that he could not deny her now, that he could not go back on his love for her" (150). Waiyaki acts on his love Nyambura, acknowledging his feelings to the crowd and sacrificing his own life.

This final scene, where Waiyaki is given the chance to deny his love, recalls biblical imagery, which is further emphasized through the references to Waiyaki as a savior. When he first garners the audience's favor through his discussion of unity, the narrator describes Waiyaki as the people's savior (149). Nyambura, too, considers Waiyaki to be her savior, rescuing her from the uncertainty and the frustration of

Joshua's religion and Muthoni's death. Throughout the narrative, Waiyaki has been positioned in a leadership role, from his descent from famous prophets, to his idea to create independent schools, with which he was rewarded with an important role in the Kiama. Positioned as a savior, Waiyaki demonstrates a more radical love than perhaps is at first evident. He sacrifices himself for the woman he loves when he refuses to deny her. Indeed, he embraces her in front of the crowd, an allusion to Judas' kiss of Christ that betrays Him to authorities, but for Waiyaki is a final attempt to model the unity the communities should pursue, even as the crowd views it as confirmation of his betrayal. Having obtained the people's renunciation of their former leader, the Kiama orchestrates the young couple's death because they broke the oath Waiyaki pledged to uphold tradition.

Waiyaki's vision for an alternative future rooted in love and harmony fails to develop, but its unfulfillment is not due to its impossibility. Rather, this radical new society is abrogated because the communities, and particularly the men in power, are not yet ready to embrace a reality where people of different religions peacefully coexist. Instead of forgiveness and understanding, those in power seek dominance, which, as Waiyaki warns, will lead to their downfall as they face the colonizer divided. Ngugi's reflection on the colonial era re-imagines a past where his characters have the opportunity to choose a different path, a path that would empower them against the onslaught of the colonialism, but, as Ngugi knows, and history has shown, it is a path not taken. Yet, this story sets in motion the relationship between love and justice that reappears in different guises throughout his body of work.

II. ***Matigari***

Love serves as a guiding principle for the main characters in Ngugi's political fable *Matigari*, yet it functions in an unromantic capacity. Here, love shapes the characters' worldviews and determines their actions, despite the plot's emphasis on violence. The juxtaposition of love and violence reflects the intermingling of Christian and Marxist discourses in the text. Through the character of Matigari, whom the text depicts as a Christ-like figure who both appears to perform miracles and argues for social justice, these two philosophies come together to articulate a new vision for society based on justice and love. Matigari's impulse to battle is founded on love, and he espouses a radical Christian love to induce others to follow him in his mission of transforming society into a place of truth and justice. In *Matigari*, the blending of Christian symbolism and Marxist rhetoric give birth to a radical form of love that serves as a guiding principle for an alternative society.

Matigari adopts the form of the political fable to tell a story of neo-colonialism. Taking place in an unnamed country at an unspecified time, the fable tells the story of Matigari, a fighter whose name means "the patriots who survived the bullets," who finally defeats his colonial master and returns to civilization to rightfully take his place in the home he built on the land he cultivated (*Matigari* 20). However, Matigari finds that Settler Williams's son has taken his dead father's place, and he now owns the land, runs the factory, and controls the people. In seeking his family, Matigari encounters individuals who have been abused by the unjust conditions: Muriuki, a homeless child living among a band of orphaned children; Ngauro, a worker who has been cited for his attempts to unionize the workforce at the factory; and Guthera, a devout Christian-turned-prostitute whose death at the hands of the police is imminent until Matigari rescues her.

Matigari, stunned that his battle with colonialism has not won his people the liberation he sought, begins his search for Truth and Justice, the tenets for which he fought and which seem to be absent in the neo-colonial state. In the final showdown between the representatives of neo-colonialism and Matigari, the neo-colonial powers seem to win the battle, but when Matigari is defeated, the orphan Muriuki picks up the famed fighter's sword, prepared to continue the struggle for Truth and Justice.

Matigari is the second novel Ngugi composed in his native Kikuyu language, and in writing for a local audience, he chooses the familiar genre of the fable coupled with Christian symbolism, to appeal to his local audience.[18] At this stage in his career, however, Ngugi has also incorporated Marxist ideology into his stories to provide a language to oppose the neo-colonial policies and practices. Thus, *Matigari* blends Christian symbolism and a Marxist worldview through a political fable and the principle of communal love. In *Matigari*, a Christian love comes to dominate the topos of romantic love, but it is this notion of love that motivates Matigari's actions and comprises the foundation of his vision for an alternative world.

As I mentioned in the introductory section of this chapter, much has been written about Ngugi's complicated relationship with Christianity. Critics frequently focus on the relationship in terms of a period in Ngugi's writing career, and most agree that Ngugi's use of Christianity in *Matigari* is a deliberate move. David Maughan Brown argues that Ngugi's deployment of Christian symbolism in *Matigari* is highly calculated, "based on the reassessment of the cultural, and thereby political, significance of religion" (174). Oliver Lovesey, too, views the Christianity in *Matigari* as strategic, when he argues that Ngugi's dual structures of Marxism and Christianity do battle with the "'macro-narrative

of imperialism' and neocolonialism" (152). In "Radical Eschatologies," Sebastian Mahfood contends that the Christian symbols of apocalypse create a narrative of Christ as the postcolonial struggle against neocolonialism. (71). Mahfood's reading aligns with the messianic narrative of anti-colonial Marxism Frantz Fanon theorizes in *The Wretched of the Earth*. The dual philosophies each offer a messianic telos, which Ngugi combines to advocate a different future through the familiar language of Christianity.

The love that guides Matigari's worldview appears in several contexts. This love first comes to the surface as Matigari searches for his wives, children, and land upon his return from the forest. He recalls a song that his family used to sing: "Great love I saw there, / Among the women and the children. / We shared even the single bean / That fell upon the ground (6). The song first calls attention to the importance of family for Matigari. The lyrics of the song imply a family so united by love that they share even a single bean—which is not enough food to sustain one person, let alone a family. But the commitment to sharing resources and to providing equally, this family shares even something so small. Despite his years in the forest, his family is his home; it is for them he has been fighting and to them he expects to return.

The lines of Matigari's song signal the bonds that unite the people of the house; the song speaks of "Great love," a love that is defined by its selflessness. This selfless love is what prompts a family to divide a single bean. This is a communal love that regards the well-being of the others above one's self. Thus, when Matigari recalls his home and the love that ruled there, he reveals his motivation for fighting: he battles colonial forces in order to establish a community ruled by the principles of his family.

Guthera, the woman Matigari rescues from vicious police dogs, also shares with Matigari a belief in selfless love. When she relates her life story and how she came to be a prostitute, she tells him what her father taught her: "'Those Ten Commandments are all good, but they are all contained in this one commandment: *Love*. And there is no greater love than this: that a man should give up his life for somebody else. Imagine, a people ready to give up their lives for one another, for their country'" (34-5). Guthera's father taught her to live by a well-known verse from the Gospel of John: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (15:13 *King James Bible*). Guthera's belief in love comes from Christian teachings, whereas Matigari's appears to be handed down through tradition.

Unlike Matigari, who still believes in the strength of this love, Guthera rejects that love because it failed her. She was raised as a devout Christian following the tenets of love her father taught her and faces a crisis of faith as a young woman. When her father is arrested for assisting the fighters in the forest, the superintendent of police offers to spare her father in exchange for her virginity. He tells her: "'You are carrying your father's life between your legs'" (35). Guthera turns to her priest for advice, who pray for her to retain her purity. Thus, following the priest's guidance, she refuses the officer's sexual advances, and the state kills her father. After his death, her family loses its land and lacks money for food and school. The church members refuse to help the child of a terrorist, and she again faces the same dilemma. Although she follows the priest's advice and prays to God for answers, Christianity turns its back on her. She once believed in selfless love and Christian teachings, but Guthera turns away from the church in order to help her family survive. Despite the failure of love in her life, she shares the story of her father

and the belief he instilled in her with Matigari; this act of opening up and revealing herself to the stranger before her implies that a part of her still believes in her father's teaching. It is only when Matigari saves her from the savage dogs that she begins to believe in this love again.

The significance of Guthera's father's teaching comes into clearer focus through the Christian symbolism that characterizes Matigari's return to civilization. When jailed, Matigari breaks bread with his fellow cellmates and decrees: "Our kingdom come as once decreed by the Iregi revolutionaries: The land belongs to the tiller and not to parasites and foreigners! (63). The scene mimics the scene in the Bible where Jesus appears to travelers on the road to Emmaus who only recognize him when he breaks bread with them (*King James Bible* Luke 24.13-31). The phrase "Our Kingdom come" echoes the line from "The Lord's Prayer," which is given in the *King James Bible* as "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt 6.10). Ngugi swaps out "thy" for "our," a significant switch because Matigari is not striving toward heaven; rather, he seeks to transform his earthly home into a place of justice. The reference to Iregi revolutionaries alludes to the Mau Mau fighters who resisted colonial rule in Kenya in the early 1950s. Thus, they are the prophets Matigari seeks to follow in his effort to create a just society. This scene positions Matigari as Christ, a leader who promises a new society despite the danger to himself.

Moments after Matigari breaks bread with his cellmates, he invites them to a feast at his house, and a fellow cellmate tells him it will be impossible to get out of jail so quickly: "'Only Gabriel the angel of God can get you out of her. Amen'" (*Matigari* 65). As the drunkard says this line, the door to the cell opens, and a voice is heard to say:

"'Come out quietly. Don't make any noise, and don't look back'" (*Matigari* 65). Here, too, the text alludes to angels releasing imprisoned apostles (*King James Bible* Acts 5.21-25, 12.5-7, 16.23-27). The now-released inmates are witness to what they can only describe as a miracle: God has released them from their unjust confinement. The possibility of a miracle spreads Matigari's reputation quickly, making him the topic of conversation among the people, and a threat to those in power. However, it becomes unimportant that the text later reveals that Guthera releases the prisoners, using her sexuality to distract the guard so she could steal the keys. The significant references to the Bible positions Matigari as a prophet return to society on behalf of the people.

The allusions to Jesus Christ and the appearance of miracles position Matigari as the savior the people did not realize they were waiting for. Matigari's blunt questions of Truth and Justice and his clear demand for the land that he worked awakens the citizens from the unjust reality of the neo-colonial power in which they are living. Although they agree with this prophet's demands and his burning questions, they are simultaneously shocked by his brazenness for making such statements. Thus, Matigari becomes the redeemer for those peasants and those who are powerless.

The Christian symbolism and rhetoric extends beyond the characterization of Matigari. Guthera, the woman Matigari saves from vicious police dogs, has resonances of Mary Magdalene. Although not referred to as a prostitute in the Bible, Mary Magdalene has become characterized as one in subsequent centuries.[19] The mischaracterization may be a conflation of Mary Magdalene and the adulterous woman whom the Pharisees plan to stone when Jesus asks the men: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." (John 8.7). This story from the Gospel of John resonates with the scene in

which Matigari saves Guthera from death. Policemen threaten to unleash their dogs on the woman while a crowd a crowd observes silently. Matigari intervenes, shaming the audience for their complicity and publicly condemning the policemen for harassing Guthera. Matigari shows no fear of authority, and he treats Guthera with the respect others deny her, in much the same way Jesus saves the adulterous woman from death by stoning. He rescues her from immediate danger, but more importantly, he rehabilitates her sense of self. Matigari offers her the understanding and forgiveness that the priests and the church have refused her.

The Christian resonances of the main characters, coupled with their shared belief in love as a guiding principle, comes together in the Christian love of known as *agape* or charity in Christian theology. *Agape* is the term for God's love for humankind and the love that humans feel for God ("charity" *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*). Its meaning derives from Jesus's commandment to first love God with and second "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." (Matthew 22.39). Thus, *agape* is associated with self-sacrificing love. In Christian theology, many ethicists have sought to link *agape* with a call for social justice (Richardson and Bowden 9). They argue that loving one's neighbor means fair distribution of resources. Through this foundation of Christianity, then, the Marxist call for a society based on justice emerges: the call to love is in accordance with the call for a just society. Love, for Matigari, is synonymous with dignity and respect, and they are impossible without equality and justice.

This reference to Christian love echoes Nyambura's belief in a pure Christianity untainted by the politics of her father and the missionaries. As I discussed earlier, Nyambura senses that the Christianity of Scripture differs from the religion of her

father's sermons. Guthera, too, comes to recognize the schism between the Bible and its interpretation by the priests in the Church of Scotland. The church fails to live up to the radical values so much of the Bible advocates: self-sacrificing love, forgiveness, and justice. Instead, the forces that define society influence the interpretation of the Scripture. Throughout Ngugi's texts, characters who are representatives of Christianity appear as strict, unbending men who are unwilling to compromise. The minister in *A Grain of Wheat* preaches against his congregation's involvement in the Emergency. In *Petals of Blood*, Munira's father Ezekiel forbids his daughter's engagement to the poor laborer Karega, which sets in motion her suicide. In the short story "Wedding at the Cross," a bourgeois father uses Christianity and a church wedding as a status symbol his poor, uneducated son-in-law will never achieve, which the son-in-law obsessively pursues to the ruination of his marriage. The texts of Ngugi consistently portray self-serving men of the church who ignore the needs of the poor parishioners. However, in spite of the hypocrisy of these characters, Ngugi simultaneously recognizes the radical aspects of Christianity that align with his Marxist ideology.

Until now I have said very little about the Marxist philosophy that intersects with the Christian love. Yet, in the 1970s, Ngugi became known for the Marxist ideology that shapes his work, particularly the novel *Petals of Blood*, which depicts a rural village's transformation due to the construction of the Trans-Africa road and the coming to consciousness of the workers and laborers as they are cut out of the influx of money. In an analysis of *Petals of Blood*, Govind Narain Sharma suggests that Marxism offers Ngugi the concept of alienation of labor as it pertains to neo-colonial development ("Ngugi's Apocalypse" 304). Reviewers of *Petals of Blood*, such as postcolonial theorist

Homi Bhabha, assessed the novel as overburdened by its ideology with a form unable to support both the politics and the plot ("African Praxis" 989).[20] Whereas Neil Lazarus views Ngugi's focus on peasant life as a radical strategy, Sharma, in contrast, views the emphasis on the peasant as a turn toward Africa's past as a guide for political and social action ("Revolutionary Traditionalism" 28-9). The discussion of Marxist ideology in Ngugi's texts is enriched by Ngugi's own non-fiction writings on the social role of literature and art.

Ngugi has written extensively on his ideology and the role of literature in society. In the collection of essays entitled *Writers in Politics*, he discusses the social nature of literature and the problem with literature that ignores its socio-political context:

> Literature, then, does not belong to ethereal planes and surreal spaces, electing to have nothing to do with the mundanity of economics, politics, race, class, history. As a process and an end, it is conditioned by these social forces and pressures because imagination takes place within economic, political, class, and race contexts. (4)

Ngugi locates his writing in the engagement with the social context in which people live. Thus, as Ngugi writes about the contemporary situation in Kenya, as he does in *Petals of Blood*, the topic demands that he integrate neo-colonial policies. In *Matigari*, where the time and place of the story's setting are undefined, these social constraints again appear, although in the form of a fable, which allows Ngugi to characterize these forces in terms of archetypal characters who rule the populace.

The fabulist tone of the text informs the exaggerated characterization of power and its critique by Matigari. At a political rally aimed at quelling the workers' unrest in

the factory, the Minister of Truth and Justice introduces "The Permanent Professor of the History of Parrotology, the Ph.D. in Parrotology and the Editor of the *Daily Parrotry*," a person whose publications and views "parrot" those of the government (106). At another rally, a Member of Parliament suggests, in response to the rumors and interest spreading about Matigari, that the birth rates of poor women must be controlled: "'I shall get the USA to establish one of those open-air birth-control clinics where women can have their wombs closed'" (119). Not content with that solution to curb population growth, the same MP introduces an additional control that can be enforced on the poor: "'Pregnancies are the result of evil and wild desires. I shall ask the government to ban dreams and desires of that kind for a period of about two years. Fucking among the poor should be stopped by a presidential decree'" (120). The men in power in *Matigari* propose absurd legislation to tighten their control over the people.

The caricatures of men in power Ngugi creates reflect the fantastic form of the story, but more importantly, they seek to strip power of its authority and lay bare its ridiculous nature. Ngugi's depiction of these powerful men, seeking authority over the ungovernable aspects of human life, anticipates the argument of African theorist Achille Mbembe, who contends that the exaggeration of power, as depicted through political cartoons, caricatures, and mimicry, is effective because "it is precisely this familiarity that renders the image so plausible, and that so strikingly enhances its persuasive power—since the artifice is taken for an authentic testimony of reality and life" (160). According to Mbembe, the mimicry of power in the postcolony is appealing to the audience because of the potential for the joke to be truth. The caricature of power in *Matigari* proves itself to be plausible when, after the publication of the novel, Kenyan

police ordered the immediate arrest of Matigari, whom they heard was a subversive political figure the peasants were discussing. When the police learned that Matigari was a fictional character, they raided bookshops in Kenya, seizing every copy of the novel.[21]

The critique of power that punishes the poor is only one aspect of Marxist ideology in *Matigari*. As in Ngugi's other texts, the goal of the protagonists is a new world order based in justice, and this idea, which predates Ngugi's interest in Marxism, here acquires the language of Marxism. Thus, when Matigari, speaks, he focuses on the unjust labor relations that define the people's lives: "'The house is mine because I built it. The land is mine too because I tilled it with these hands. The industries are mine because my labor built and worked them. . . . One day the land will return to the tiller, and the wealth of our land to those who produce it. Poverty and sorrow shall be banished from our land!'" (124).[22] The belief in a new society recurs in *Matigari*, but in this version, the dream is couched in Marxist terms of labor production.

The dream of a new society uses Marxist discourse preached by a man figured as Christ. This intersection of a just future founded on Christian love reflects radical Catholic theology of the 1960s through the 1980s. Called liberation theology, this application of Marxist principles to Catholic beliefs developed in Latin America in the 1960s. Peruvian theologian and priest Father Gustavo Gutierrez was among the first theologians to call for church to be attentive to the poor and the underrepresented who were often invisible in social movements and the Church (21). In allying spiritual liberation with social and political liberation, Gutierrez and his colleagues aim for "a society based on respect for the other, and especially for the weakest and the insignificant" (25). Many theologians who used liberation theology to advance Marxist

philosophies or even violence were excommunicated by the Catholic church. While liberation theology took hold in the Catholic priests and churches of Latin America, it did not make as great an impact on Africa.[23] However, the juxtaposition of Christianity and Marxism, through the self-sacrificing love that guides Matigari, resonates with the principles of liberation theology.

Like Waiyaki and Nyambura, Matigari and Guthera seem to fail in their mission. Disappearing into a river, the two are presumed dead. However, unlike the protagonists of *The River Between*, Matigari and Guthera leave behind Mariucci, the orphaned child. Although Muriuki is not their child biologically, he is their progeny who will carry on the legacy of Matigari's work. After the elder two disappear, Muriuki unearths Matigari's Sword of Truth and his AK-47. "And suddenly he [Muriuki] seemed to hear the workers' voices, the voices of the peasants, the voices of the students and of other patriots of all the different nationalities of the land singing in harmony" (175). In *Matigari*, the vision for a just society does not fail; it is a dream deferred, a dream passed to the next generation that they may continue the fight.

III. *Wizard of the Crow*

"'Is there a knot more complete than the free union of souls?,'" Nyawira asks her lover Kamiti in response to his proposal of marriage toward the end of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's 2006 novel *Wizard of the Crow* (725). The love between this couple has been one of the main narrative strands in the sprawling novel, so it seems appropriate that they marry at the story's conclusion. Yet, Nyawira's warm rejection of Kamiti's proposal makes clear her feelings about their relationship: a marriage certificate is an unnecessary validation of her commitment to Kamiti. Her rhetorical question encapsulates the

dynamics of their relationship and points to its implications in the political realm. As in the other texts I have discussed, the love relationship in *Wizard of the Crow* influences the vision for a better world. However, unlike the other texts I have discussed, the utopia takes shape and becomes a reality. The love between Kamiti and Nyawira forces each to contend with the other's beliefs, and through that dialectical process, a new way of living emerges based on love for humanity and a respect for their environment.

The love relationship comprises only one aspect of *Wizard of the Crow*, a novel satirizing the political realities of postcolonial Sub-Saharan Africa. It chronicles the twilight of the reign of the Aburirian head of state known as The Ruler and his endeavors to secure funds from the Global Bank for a skyscraper called Marching to Heaven. The actions of this caricatured, totalitarian regime, in which The Ruler's ministers battle one another for his attention while the high unemployment numbers are ignored and ministers who have fallen out of favor suffer from a condition called "Self-Induced Disappearance" (697), convey the absurdity of this government. Interweaving the inner-machinations of this government are Kamiti, an unemployed university graduate, and Nyawira, who works by day as a secretary for a construction company and by night as a rebel seeking to disrupt The Ruler's through the outlawed protest movement, The Movement for the Voice of the People. Kamiti and Nyawira interact with political sphere in their role as the two faces of the wizard of the crow, a modern healer of souls in Aburiria.

It is in this context that their relationship creates a generative love that threatens the stability of the dictatorship. Nyawira and Kamiti find themselves thrown together as they escape a police officer in pursuit of them for begging in front of an event honoring the Global Bank. They create the wizard to scare their pursuer, but it morphs into a

successful venture. At the same time, they are attracted to one another, and Kamiti begins living with Nyawira. Their romance reflects the concerns of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century; their first sexual encounter is prematurely halted when neither has a condom. Although physical distance separates them for much of the novel, their attraction is unwavering, and they remain a couple despite the separation. Thus, the textual focus is not on the romantic tension that builds before they declare their feelings, but rather, it is on the relationship itself, on what develops *because of* this coupling.

The quotation with which I began my discussion of *Wizard of the Crow* offers insight into the relationship this couple shares. Nyawira asks Kamiti: "'Is there a knot more complete than the free union of souls?'" (725). Each part of this question reveals something about the type of relationship this couple has. For Nyawira, the emphasis on the "free union of souls" is particularly important given her first marriage to a social climber. John Kaniuru and Nyawira met at university and fell in love. Her bourgeois parents opposed the match because John lacked family connections and financial means, and they desired her to marry someone who would improve the family's social status. John, too, had ulterior motives for marrying the beautiful Nyawira: he sought her family's money and position. However, since Nyawira chose to marry for love, she broke with her parents, which in turn destroyed John's access to success. When Nyawira realized John's intentions, she divorced him. Nyawira, who married because she believed that she and John shared an unfettered love, becomes disillusioned with the restraints and conditions that her loved ones place on marriage.

Her marriage to John Kaniuru reveals to Nyawira underlying reasons that motivate marriage. Whereas she entered the relationship freely, her parents and John

viewed the marriage as a transaction. Each party wanted to gain: her parents sought more wealth and a higher class standing, and John expected financial security and social status. For each party, marriage literally made one person an *object* of the other's affection. What Nyawira learns from her marriage is that it was not a "free union of souls," but rather another form of the capitalist philosophy that made her parents rich and that John hoped to emulate. Nyawira, who actively protests the unjust policies of The Ruler's government refuses to participate in a relationship governed by the same capitalist forces.

In her relationship with Kamiti, then, Nyawira does not need marriage; in its current form, her love for Kamiti is entered into freely, and the text emphasizes this sense of freedom through the characterization of their sexual relationship. Although Kamiti stays at Nyawira's house in the city, the couple's physical relationship develops outside the city, in the uninhabited prairie outside the capital's boundaries. The first time they make love is described below:

> On the ground, in the cave, now wrapped in darkness, they found themselves airborne over hills and valleys, floating through blue clouds to the mountaintop of pure ecstasy, from where, suspended in space, they felt the world go round and round, before they descended, sliding down a rainbow, toward the earth, their earth, where the grass, plans, and animals seemed to be singing a lullaby of silence as Nyawira and Kamiti, now locked in each other's arms, slept the sleep of babies, the dawn of a new day awaiting. (*Wizard* 203)

The scene employs natural imagery to convey the emotion of the act. The passage emphasizes movement—they are "airborne," "floating," "suspended in space," spinning

"round and round," and "sliding down a rainbow"—which contrasts their literal stillness, "in the cave, now wrapped in darkness." The motion described suggests weightlessness; it defies gravity. The images evoke the dizzying excitement of sexual climax, and the joy of consummating their relationship and of finally expressing their desires, translate into a sense of freedom outside their physical bodies. Thus, even though the couple does not leave the cave, they experience a feeling of liberation. Their sexual relationship frees them from the constraints of the other aspects of their lives.

The natural imagery of the couple's lovemaking is compounded by the natural environment in which they are physically intimate. First described as a prairie surrounding the city of Eldares, it is also contains forest, streams, and caves. They find themselves in this unspoiled landscape because Kamiti has sought refuge from the greed and corruption of the city. This land free from traces of human civilization serves as a boundary around the capital, and yet, it remains untouched by its inhabitants. This land is productive, providing Kamiti food and medicinal herbs as well as shelter from the harsh realities of Eldares. This unpopulated environment, teeming with natural resources, stands in opposition to the capital Eldares and the civilization it contains.

The text depicts the city of Eldares as a caricature of a representative postcolonial African city; its layout is less important than its populace. Beggars line the streets and fill the jails. Upon learning about a possible job, the unemployed form a never-ending queue that covers the country. The poverty is juxtaposed by the extravagances of The Ruler and his advisors: he builds a palace to imprison his wife, he plans to build a skyscraper that will reach heaven, and he hosts lavish banquets for important visitors. Amidst these extremes of wealth and distress exist the absurdity of the ministers and businessmen who

create an endless loop of spying and greed. Kamiti's wretched existence in the city before he meets Nyawira speaks to the misery of conditions for the average individual. Although he has a university degree in business, Kamiti looks for a job for three years without finding work. When he applies for a job with Tajirika, Nyawira's employer, Kamiti is humiliated by the boss and is reduced to begging in the street. He finds food scraps and rest in the local garbage dump. What emerges from the characterization of Eldares is a city fueled by distrust and suspicion, both of which lead to misery and the barest form of survival for its inhabitants.

The juxtaposition of the city and the prairie positions the prairie as a place of freedom because it exists outside the purview of The Ruler. The police do not patrol in the prairie; nor do the eyes and ears of The Ruler operate in this environment. In its illustration of a space where natural life continues undiminished, the wild prairie reverses the binary of the civilized global city and the savage wilds.[24] Instead of the city as a place of freedom, the prairie becomes a place of life and liberation. Thus, as the site of lovemaking, the natural environment reiterates that this couple comes together freely—literally, outside of capitalist relations—and on equal terms.

This attention to the environment and the land reflects another thread that runs throughout Ngugi's writing. Although I have not touched on it explicitly in my previous analyses, the right to land and its role in shaping community appears in both *The River Between* and *Matigari*. However, in the latter, it is framed in terms of labor, rather than land rights. Ngugi is attuned to contemporary debates about land rights and the ambiguous role development can have on the land, as evident in *Petals of Blood*. As Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin contend in *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*, environmental

justice is a part of a larger whole, which also contains social and economic justice (13). Whereas the other texts focus on the present and future of inhabited land, *Wizard of the Crow* introduces the possibility of land unencumbered by politics as a site for freedom.

Toward the end of the novel, Nyawira describes the love between herself and Kamiti as a "knot" (725), but before the couple reaches that stage, they face a major obstacle in their contrasting worldviews. Although they both perform the role of the wizard of the crow, treating the long line of patients at their door, Nyawira's interests lie elsewhere. She is an active member in the Movement for the Voice of the People, a protest organization that stages interruptive performances to The Ruler's carefully planned events. For example, at The Ruler's birthday ceremony, the Movement disrupts the state affair by distributing rubber snakes through the crowd, which scare the audience into dispersing. At an event dedicating the site for the Marching to Heaven skyscraper, Nyawira coordinates a group of women dancers who, in unison, flash their buttocks at The Ruler: "'[T]his was only a simulation of what our female ancestors used to do as a last resort when they had reached a point where they could no longer take shit from a despot'" (250). The dancers humiliate The Ruler in front of the foreign dignitaries present, but they also capture the attention of the tens of thousands of people in attendance. They transform an event marked by its pomp and grandeur into absurd hilarity. This group avoids traditional protest methods such as forming a strike because The Ruler has outlawed political demonstrations. Instead, the Movement creates effective disruptions of The Ruler's power. In this way, they begin as a part of the crowd and they immediately melt back into the throng of people. Despite the ease with which they return to the masses, the group reaches the multitude; state events are broadcast live on

television, and large crowds of citizens are required to be present. Since their options are limited by what is legal in Aburiria, they use what we would now define as flash mob tactics.[25]

The philosophy of the Movement differs from the version of Marxism in *Matigari*. The guiding principle of Nyawira's group is simple: "'We oppose the right of might with the might of right'" (210). This maxim has resonances of Marxist thought, but the group's methods do not utilize a defined philosophy. Rather, their goal is to disrupt power and to call attention to the injustice The Ruler commits, such as imprisoning his wife. Yet, the maxim contains within it a commitment to a just society, "the might of right." Although it remains undefined in its specific terms, Nyawira seeks to bring about a just world.

Nyawira's commitment to a just world is countered by Kamiti's lack of interest in her political activities. In response to Nyawira's offer that he join the group, he states: "'The affairs of the people are too heavy a burden for me to carry'" (208). Kamiti's indifference to Nyawira's political commitment should not be read as apathy; rather, his role as a healer imbues him with a different perspective on how to help humanity. Although Kamiti did not seek his role as the wizard, he embraces it and performs it well, quickly comprehending his patients' most private fears and helping them to overcome them. Together with Nyawira, he develops the Seven Herbs of Grace as guidelines for well-balanced life:

> *Take care of the body, for it is the temple of the soul*
>
> *Watch ye what you eat and drink all the time.*
>
> *Greed makes death greedy for life*

Cigarettes arrest life; alcohol holds the mind prisoner

Life is a common stream from which plant, animal, and humans draw

The good comes from balance

Don't abandon yours for a mirage (275)

These principles emphasize awareness of the internal and external effects on the body and the interconnectedness of humans, animals, and their shared environment. As a healer, Kamiti wants his patients to treat their bodies and thereby their souls better. For him, well-being leads to balance, which leads to peace. Kamiti abides by this wisdom when he abandons civilization to restore his own sense of balance and health in the forest. Kamiti's focus is on the individual, and Nyawira's is on the nation.

The disagreements between the couple arise over whom they should treat. Although they wrote the *7 Herbs of Grace* together, Nyawira's politics inform her approach to their patients. Kamiti believes that he and Nyawira should minister to any soul, not making a distinction based on the power or money a person has, whereas Nyawira wants Kamiti to acknowledge the division of society between the haves and have-nots, and she wants to deny aid to those with position and wealth. This point of contention in their practice as the wizard prompts Nyawira to summarize their differences succinctly: "'You are drawn to the ministry of wounded souls, I to the ministry of wounded bodies'" (212). Their different worldviews threaten to end their intimate relationship, but rather than demand Kamiti participate in the Movement, she accepts his decision to defer her invitation until he has a stronger sense of his purpose in life. The acceptance of difference between this couple is what creates "a knot," the bonds that unite them (725). Allowing Kamiti to maintain his worldview while Nyawira keeps hers

is productive for the couple because, over time, they recognize the validity and the necessity of the other's view. Their love, entered into freely, accommodates the other's values without giving up or compromising their own.

The openness, the acceptance of this love echoes the political love theorized by political philosophers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their books *Multitude* and *Commonwealth*. Using a Marxist framework combined with the Judeo-Christian notion of love, they describe a radical form of love that has the power to intervene in the political sphere. They argue that love operates dialectically with rage: These two expressions—love and rage—are "the real foundation on which the constituent power of the multitude rests" (*Multitude* 353). In seeking a way to combat the new world order of global capital, which exceeds the boundaries of national sovereignty, they contend that power lies with the multitude—the people—to act, not as one mass, but as unique individuals in combination. Hardt and Negri conceive of political love in a very particular way: it is a generative love; it is productive, as opposed to reproductive because it produces something *new*, whereas reproduction is the production of sameness (*Commonwealth* 186). In discussing political love, they suggest that love unites individuals, but rather than blending their differences into a unified whole, this love retains individual difference. Thus, the individual subjectivity of each person is maintained and creates new assemblages or groupings—"a knot" in Nyawira's terms—from that union.

The work of Hardt and Negri is relevant to my discussion of *Wizard of the Crow* because the love between Kamiti and Nyawira reflects their idea of the production of something new. Kamiti and Nyawira freely come together and unite two different

ideologies, an obstacle which could threaten their close bond. Instead, the combination of these two worldviews gives life to the utopia each imagines. Although Kamiti only asks to become a part of Nyawira's movement at the novel's conclusion, it is clear that his perspective has infused the movement. The Movement for the Voice of the People has been transformed into movement whose aim is healthy bodies and souls. In the unspoiled prairie that Kamiti once introduced Nyawira to, she now shows him the new world the movement has built. He sees farms growing produce and medicinal herbs, farms that avoid the use of Western chemicals; he visits a shelter built among the caves; he meets a military trained to uphold social justice; he finds a library as well as a hospital built as a replica of the wizard's shrine; and finally, he enters a worship space, which houses the African deities he carved. The Movement has adapted the *7 Herbs of Grace*, creating an alternative world and a holistic approach to fighting the injustice of the totalitarian regime.

This foundation for a world in the prairie brings together the constellation of issues and concerns that drive Ngugi's protagonists to search for an alternative. The farm addresses the complaint made elsewhere in *Wizard of the Crow*, *Matigari*, *Petals of Blood*, and others, that the farmers should be able to reap what they sow. The just military reflects the concerns throughout the corpus of the corruption of those in power, such as in *Devil on the Cross* and *A Grain of Wheat*. The religious ecumenism responds to the tension in *The River Between* between Christians and traditionalists. The library serves to promote a fuller education, one that has been banned by The Ruler in *Wizard of the Crow*. The hospital, based on the shrine Kamiti and Nyawira built together, reinforces the importance of traditional methods of healing and treating patients. Finally, the rich

land, full of indigenous plants and undisturbed ecologies asserts the citizens' right to their country in a way that circumvents the capitalist relations that divide up the rest of the country. Here, in this liminal space between city and village, a new world is born. The alternative world that The Movement for the Voice of People has built has found a way to address the various forms of injustice that affect people's lives.

Kamiti and Nyawira's claiming of uninhabited land may seem like a new iteration of the colonial project, the couple's approach to the land reverses the colonial mentality. Kamiti has lived among the plants and animals and has learned the healing properties of the plants. The couple and the movement establish an ecological approach to the land, one which strives to keep intact the ecological systems while creating a shared communal space. They create a symbiotic relationship with the land they use, protecting the land in return for the refuge and resources it provides. This area continues to enact Hardt and Negri's theories of liberation through political love, or love outside of possession, which they associate the creation of "the common," a term derived from medieval England which described land held in common. For Hardt and Negri, however, the common is more than land; it includes knowledge and cultural products. The new society Kamiti and Nyawira build is founded on the premise of the common, as something collectively used and shared by the people.

The critical role of the environment in *Wizard of the Crow* is not a new feature of Ngugi's vision for a just world. Indeed, Ngugi has been invested in land rights and the future of the land throughout his corpus. The landscape in *The River Between* figures prominently in Waiyaki's vision for the future, as does the relationship between the land and the one who works it in *Matigari*. Critics, too, have highlighted Ngugi's connection

to land. In his study of Ngugi, Simon Gikandi shows the alienation of the people from the land to be a void in Kenyan history until Ngugi takes it up (8). Postcolonial critic Laura Wright associates Ngugi's literary importance with the creation of a counter-narrative that undoes the colonial devastation of the land (20). Christine Loflin's reading of his early fiction focuses on the aesthetic impact of his representation of the land as she argues Ngugi's focus has shifted from a single people's relationship to the land to a Pan-African view of the land and its transformation (5). These readings of Ngugi's fiction illustrate his commitment to social justice engages the people, their labor, and the land as necessarily intertwined.

Together, Kamiti and Nyawira form a new society, built on land unaffected by colonialism neo-colonialism, or globalization, that expands on their once-limited means for bettering society. Where capital and power influence the way of life in Aburiria, in this community, social justice and compassion shape life. They may not have overthrown The Ruler or attached the system of global capital that keeps the citizens in poverty, but they have created an alternative to the misery and hardship. This new community also provides a stable foundation from which to launch future attacks on injustice. The new society re-imagines the possibility of life in Aburiria, and it comes into being through the love between Kamiti and Nyawira.

The call for a society based on humanity has recurred throughout Ngugi's writing, and although the settlement Nyawira's movement builds is not explicitly founded using Marxist rhetoric, Marxist thinkers have long advocated for principles of justice and love as a foundation for an alternative society. Frantz Fanon imagines what a truly free formerly colonized country might would be. Although he is often cited for prophesizing

the failure of the post-independence African governments to live up to the promise of nationalism in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon was not only pessimistic about the conditions following national independence. He used his critique to discuss his vision of a different future. After outlining the injustices of colonialism, he writes of the expectation of Europe's responsibility to rehabilitate the Third World:

> This huge task which consists of reintroducing mankind into the world, the whole of mankind, will be carried out with the indispensable help of the European peoples. . . .To achieve this, the European peoples must first decide to wake up and shake themselves, use their brains, and stop playing the stupid game of the Sleeping Beauty. (*Wretched* 106)

Fanon, like Ngugi, dreams of a just world where this equality between races and greed has been overcome, to allow humanity to reach its potential. As Fanon argues in *The Wretched of the Earth*, the rhetoric of the nationalist movements called for liberation from the master-slave, producer-consumer paradigm. However, he also foresaw that rhetoric as devoid of content, which allowed the petit bourgeoisie to fill the role of the departing colonizers, keeping unjust relations the same. Where Ngugi diverges from Fanon is the role of the European; Fanon argued that Europe must pay reparations for its colonial project, and Ngugi recognizes forty years later reparations will not happen. Ngugi removes the West from the equation to develop the countries in Africa. Yet, Fanon's belief in the power of the peasant and the possibility of a just world tell a second story of possibility, just as Matigari, Karega, Nyawira, Kamiti, Waiyaki and Ngugi's other protagonists maintain faith in a different outcome.

The conclusion of *Wizard of the Crow* focuses on the life of its protagonists, unlike the other two texts I have discussed. Certainly Kamiti and Nyawira have come close to death, and The Ruler would like the wizard dead, but they live hidden among the multitude. They may have shed the public image of the wizard, but they keep the principles of the wizard alive in the Movement's utopia outside the city. Across the body of Ngugi's work, his characters remain committed to change and to the creation of a better society, and they often achieve this clarity in their life missions through experiences of love, both romantic and familial. With this commitment to personal joy as well as communal joy, reading Ngugi's texts through the lens of love reveals him to be a writer of hope. And finally in *Wizard of the Crow*, it begins to take shape in a manner that encompasses the various ideologies and goals of the characters and of their author. Despite the violence, corruption, and injustice his characters experience, they remain faithful to improving the world in which they love, not only for themselves, but for their families and for each other. This dedication to social change motivated by hope and love, even in the face of death, is intended to inspire readers, to strengthen their faith that the world can be a place of justice and equity.

[1] The Guinea-Bissauan film *Udju Azul di Yonta*, or *Blue Eyes of Yonta*, revolves around the mysterious poetic love letters Yonta receives but does not fully comprehend.

[2] Ugandan poet Okot P'Bitek also mentions the novelty of kissing in his essay "Acholi Love," which describes the customary habits pertaining to attraction, courtship, and attitude between Acholi lovers (188). P'Bitek argues that love between Acholi men and women looked *nothing* like Western notions of romantic love (190). Ghanaian writer Amma Darko also makes reference to the newcness of kissing among Ghanaians (36).

[3] Although called the Erekwi clan in the text, Alistair Niven claims that Erekwi is a fictional name for the Ikwerre, the ethnic group to which Amadi belongs. The Ikwerre are a small ethnic group whose land is adjacent to the much larger Igbo population in what is now called the Rivers State region of Nigeria. Because the Ikwerre population is small and shares many similarities with their Igbo neighbors, colonial administrators grouped them with the Igbo, which the Ikwerre found politically useful. Thus, little information exists on the Ikwerre's beliefs and ways of life. Elechi Amadi is one of a group of elders attempting to chronicle the beliefs, practices, politics, and culture of traditional Ikwerre life.

[4] Since Ekwueme is no longer a bachelor, he can marry a widow.

[5] Many African writers invoke death, excrement, or odious smells in their fiction to characterize widespread government corruption in the postcolonial state or to mark the lifelessness of the citizens who exist under harsh conditions. Ayi Kwei Armah opens *The Beautyful Ones are Not Yet Born* with a description of people on the bus as "walking corpse[s]" (2) and later, he writes a memorable scene in which the corrupt politician

Koomson escapes through the latrine. In *The House of Hunger*, Dambudzo Marchera employs stench and violence to convey the corruption of the city. Postcolonial theorist Achille Mbembe argues that satirical tropes are employed precisely because they are both familiar and plausible in the postcolony (160). Although Armah and Marchera and others do not refer to actual death, the idea of death and of living death is familiar to the postcolonial condition, making death, excrement, and stench a recognizable trope in fiction. See Sarah Lincoln's essay "Rotten English: Excremental Politics and Literary Witnessing" in *Encountering the Nigerian State*. Eds. Wale Adebanwi and Ebenezer Odabare.

[6] Nwachukwu-Agbada's sharp criticism of *So Long a Letter*, and in particular, Bâ's male characters, is tempered by his conclusion, in which he suggests that perhaps Bâ is not condemning the institution of polygamy, but rather, its transformation that disadvantages the women. However, that insight is buried in pages of negative views of the text.

[7] It is worth noting that the essays which take a feminist stance are written predominantly by scholars in the West.

[8] The importance of each wife's own space is highlighted in Buchi Emecheta's novel *The Joys of Motherhood* and Amma Darko's novel *Beyond the Horizon*. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, the protagonist Nnaina is forced to sleep on the floor and listen to the sounds of the nearby lovemaking of her husband and his new wife because they live in a one-room apartment. Mara, the heroine of Darko's text, fears that situation when she learns of her husband's lover. Urbanization poses a substantial problem to the traditional forms polygamy adopts.

[9] It is revealed later in *Too Late the Phalarope* that the note refers to something more benign: Pieter's friend Japie saw him having drinks with a woman who is not his wife. However, for several scenes, Pieter's primary focus is on the note, who may have written it, and how quickly the witness will come forward and make a formal report.

[10] See also Newman, Judie. *Nadine Gordimer*. Page 26.

[11] Apartheid Museum. "Immorality Law." Apartheid Museum. 19 July 2009. Johannesburg, South Africa.

[12] Jim Fish is a racial slur meaning "a black person common" in South Africa ("List of Ethnic Slurs by Ethnicity" *Wikipedia*).

[13] It is possible the unnamed two white men are lovers, which would add another dimension to the narrative of illegal love and the ways it hides from the world. However, Gordimer shies away from explicitly labeling them as such, repeatedly referring to them as roommates.

[14] It is worth noting that Boaz gets his name from The Book of Ruth in The Bible, where Boaz marries his dead kinsman's wife according to custom. Yet, Gordimer transforms the story because in the Bible, Ruth is loyal to her husband's family, but Ann, her counterpart in *Occasion for Loving* has no sense for loyalty. Rather, it is Ann's husband Boaz who is the loyal one waiting for his wife's return.

[15] In contrast to Brown's argument, Mark Mathuray shows how the messianic narratives, such as the one in *The River Between*, may also emerge from the Gikuyu tradition of prophecy. Thus, he argues, the "motifs and ideas drawn from the indigenous sphere exist in a contradictory and dynamic relationship to the explicit Christian discourse" (45).

Thus, Mathuray seeks to complicate the criticism about ideology by reminding us of the Gikuyu traditions that also shape Ngugi's works.

[16] In Ngugi's memoir, *Dreams in a Time of War: A Childhood Memoir*, he describes the Church of Scotland Christian mission near his home as considering African traditions "barbaric" and allied with the colonial administration. Ngugi writes: "So the struggle over female circumcision became a proxy for economics, politics, and culture and who and which organization had the right to speak for Kenyan Africans" (*Dreams* 112).

[17] It is worth noting that this verse also appears in William Shakespeare's *Richard II*. The Shakespeare lines are as follows: "O, if you raise this house against this house, / It will the woefullest division prove / That ever fell upon this cursed earth." (Shakespeare). American President Abraham Lincoln also invoked the verse in his 1858 speech at the Republican State Convention (Basler).

[18] As a work of translation, new issues of language and transmission arise. African literature scholar Simon Gikandi writes about these tensions in his essay "The Epistemology of Translation: Ngugi, *Matigari*, and the Politics of Language."

[19] According to Wikipedia, Pope Gregory is the first person to refer to Mary Magdalene as a prostitute, but that characterization followed in art and books over the centuries.

[20] In a review for the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, John Chileshe echoes Bhabha's critique when he writes "*Petals of Blood* is weakened somewhat by the conflict between the material ideology and the literary mode of expression used" (133). However, as Joseph McLaren's article on the reception history of *Petals of Blood* demonstrates, reviewers never reached a clear consensus on the role of ideology in the novel. However,

his research shows that many African critics commented favorably on it, whereas Western writers tended to critique its relation to the form.

[21] Ngugi relates this story in the preface of the English edition of the novel, but it has not been corroborated elsewhere.

[22] Similar statements appear in *I Will Marry When I Want* and *Wizard of the Crow*. In Wizard of the Crow, Ngugi writes: "In Aburiria there are those who reap where they never planted and those who plant but hardly ever reap what they planted" (*Wizard* 725). The repetition of these ideas across Ngugi's texts indicate a pattern of attention to social justice and better conditions for the oppressed communities in Kenya. Each of these texts rails against the injustices of society, and the illogical divisions that prevent those who farm from dining on their own harvests or from wearing the clothing they sow.

[23] For more on liberation theology on the African continent, see Chukwudom Barnabas Okolo's monograph *African Liberation Theology*.

[24] The opposition established between the city and the natural environment ignores the role of the village in the postcolonial state. In many African novels, including *Petals of Blood*, *A Grain of Wheat*, and *Devil on the Cross* by Ngugi, the village occupies the place of the prairie, standing in opposition to the city and its capitalism. Yet, in *Wizard of the Crow*, the village makes no impact on the characters. Kamiti hails from a village which he visits, but a return to the village is not considered a viable option for improving conditions in Aburiria. Rather, it is the uninhabited land, the land absent of human settlement that provides Kamiti and Nyawira the possibility of a new future. However, Kamiti carries with him the traditional beliefs of the village in his role as the wizard.

[25] The word "flash mob" came into its current usage in 2003, when the first flash mob was organized in Manhattan. Its use became popular the years following as groups used mobile technology to stage quick crowd spectacles in different public spaces across the globe (McFedries). In contrast to the technology associated with flash mobs, the Movement in *Wizard of the Crow* does not use mobile technology, but rather careful planning.

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