

**EYES ON THE PRIZE: CULTURAL HYBRIDITY
IN LITERATURE BY AFRICAN WOMEN**

Thesis

Submitted to

**The College of Arts and Sciences of the
UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON**

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree

Master of Arts in English

by

Mary Margaret Harvan

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

Dayton, Ohio

July 1994

APPROVED BY:

Faiza Shereen, Ph.D.

Brian Conniff, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

EYES ON THE PRIZE: CULTURAL HYBRIDITY IN LITERATURE BY AFRICAN WOMEN

Harvan, Mary Margaret
University of Dayton, 1994

Advisor: Dr. Faiza Shereen

In his introduction to *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said notes that to overlook the cultural encounters resulting from imperialism is to "miss what is essential about the world in the past century" (xx). African writers since Chinua Achebe have explored that interplay of cultures on the continent and in the diaspora. African women writers such as Buchi Emecheta of Nigeria and Ama Ata Aidoo of Ghana, though only recently gaining comparable critical attention, are no exception. But their works also focus on how such cultural encounters shift gender roles and relations, issues which male writers rarely address. As post-colonial African feminists, Emecheta and Aidoo write in a tradition that Carole Boyce Davies describes in her introduction to *Ngambika* as "a hybrid of sorts, which seeks to combine African concerns with feminist concerns" (12). In particular, Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost* explore how characters deal with cultural encounters by assuming or denying responsibility for negotiating their identities. When they do negotiate, they examine the conventions of each culture they

encounter and select which characteristics to adopt, which to transform, and which to reject. In so doing, they shape hybrid identities and hybrid cultures. These works portray women characters who take such responsibility. Though their actions often are limited by colonial and patriarchal cultures, they gain power in those cultures by shaping hybrid identities for themselves and their children. Indeed, these works demonstrate what feminist Gayatri Spivak notes in her essay "Explanation and Culture," that the personal and the political are of one fabric. In controlling hybridity at the personal and community levels, women shape national identity. Thus, these works also pose important challenges to theorists such as Frantz Fanon and Malcolm X, who advocate decolonization via separatism and violence. The women's works suggest that shaping hybrid cultures is a more creative, inclusive, and realistic means of decolonization. And, condemning the way motherhood has been used to oppress women, they present it instead as a powerful instrument for shaping culture.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis was two years in the making. That means it was also two years in the reading, for which I owe profuse thanks to Dr. Faiza Shereen, my advisor, and Dr. Brian Conniff, my reader. Without their critical acumen, patience, and generous flow of good ideas, this work could not have been accomplished. True mentors, they have shaped not only this thesis but my scholarly life. Faiza and Brian, thank you.

I doubt that I would have tackled this particular topic were it not for all the people who supported my work, my education, and my experience of cultural hybridity in Sierra Leone, West Africa. To my parents, Michael and Margaret Harvan, and my siblings, Kathryn, Christine, and Michael Harvan; to my fellow volunteer, John George; to our wise advisor, Brother Raymond Fitz, S.M.; to Alie Forna, Kanja Sesay, Abdulai Jalloh, and all our co-workers at the Association for Rural Development in Freetown, Sierra Leone; to Sentu Kamara and our other Sierra Leonean friends; and to all of our family and friends who supported us financially and spiritually: thank you.

To the people who put up with me day after day while I read, wrote, and rewrote--Kristina Kerscher, Carrie Rohman, and Martin Pleiss--thank you.

And Dad, thanks for driving from Canton to Dayton in the middle of the night the week before this thesis was due to bring me all the books I had left at home.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Partly because of empire, all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogenous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic.

--Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*

Colonial relationships, on the African continent and in the diaspora, are inherently unequal and unjust. When an imperialist aggressor comes into contact with a previously undisturbed people, assertions of power and resistance, often violent, color their relations. Post-colonial relationships, which in most cases remain imperialistic, can be similarly combative. But there is another story in colonial and post-colonial relationships, a more subtle and personal story: the story of encounters. Not devoid of power inequities, these encounters--of economies, governments, cultures, religions, and social conventions--affect individuals and their communities, challenging their identities. Individual responses vary: some people remain unconscious of the encounter; some acknowledge and resist it; and some choose to negotiate with the "other," often developing a new understanding or recreation of their own identity.

Discussions of these colonial and post-colonial relations often pit cultures, races, and nations against each other, seeking resolution of tension-fraught dualities through combat and victory and rejecting negotiation and integration. Many prophets of decolonization, such as Frantz Fanon and Malcolm X, advocate this confrontation, initiated by the imperialists, in their political and theoretical work. In so doing, they define themselves and the black race, continental and diasporan, in terms of white imperialists and supremacists. In *Race Matters*, Cornel West notes that such an approach can be "crippling for a despised people struggling for freedom, in that one's eyes should be on the prize, not on the perpetrator of one's oppression" (142). West, Edward Said, and others probing continental and diasporan decolonization have questioned the wisdom of perpetuating this polarity, pointing instead to the possibilities in accepting cultural hybridity. In controlling that hybridity, in taking responsibility for shaping new identities where cultures meet, individuals and communities assert their own power more constructively than they might in fostering separatism or making war. And they more creatively shape a world history increasingly characterized by cultural encounters.

Personal and cultural identity are more visibly negotiated in the diaspora than on the continent, where issues like national sovereignty and independence may detract attention from the formation of cultural identity. But such negotiation, if less obvious, is equally significant during the colonial presence in Africa. As colonizers placed economic, political, and social demands on a colonized people, power roles and relationships within that colonized society, particularly those of gender, shifted. And those shifts affected the ways individuals could respond to colonial encounters. Their

options were limited by the extent of the power they wielded in their own society and by the limitations colonial intrusions imposed. But they could negotiate: that is, they could choose whether and how to interrogate, resist, accede, cooperate, or feign cooperation in response to any of the colonizers' demands. Such demands and responses are at issue in much colonial and post-colonial literature. African literature since Chinua Achebe addresses whether and how literary characters assert their own will in forming, maintaining, and adapting their own identities vis-a-vis encounters with the colonizers. And literature about African women's identities in particular often addresses power relations between the genders as it explores the varied pressures of colonialism.

Buchi Emecheta, an Igbo woman born in twentieth-century Nigeria and a longtime resident of England, has written several works probing these themes, including *The Joys of Motherhood*. With the themes of colonial and gender relations, Emecheta's novel intertwines the tensions of movement between rural and urban colonized societies. The world of Emecheta's protagonist, Nnu Ego, and her husband, Nnaife, is a world of encounter and transition. Nnu Ego moves from rural Igboland to urban Lagos in the early 1930s to begin life with Nnaife. She, like Nnaife before her, brings along all her assumptions about the roles women and men perform and the way relationships work. But she also grows sensitive to ways Lagos is different from rural Igboland. She recognizes and reflects on the encounter of the British and the Igbo--in terms of religion, income-earning employment, marital and family matters--altering her assumptions and redefining her roles in the process. She considers the implications of the encounter and adjusts her thinking accordingly. And she sets a course of action,

given her limited options. On the other hand, Nnaife prefers to ignore the encounter and act on his rural assumptions, unless it is to his advantage to feign cooperation with the colonizers. The novel addresses the differences in their strategies for responding to the demands and changes amidst which they find themselves and their markedly different attitudes toward negotiating identity and accepting cultural hybridity.

Hybridity assumes new dimensions as diasporan peoples re-encounter the continent. The African diaspora is largely a product of the colonial period, that time in history when Europeans and Americans seized and sold millions of people, mainly Africans, into slavery. Over hundreds of years, those forced to work in foreign fields and homes raised generations of families in foreign cultures. Those families, though frequently torn apart by the slave trade and their own economic need, continually reshaped themselves, Africans of various ethnicities forming communities in changing locations. And in their communities, they blended their varied stories and traditions, digested elements of Western cultures, and handed on their heritage through generations of African descendants.

As African colonies regained independence and many African descendants fought for legal recognition of their rights and abilities, pride in a collective African heritage mounted. Some, like W. E. B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey, advocated a diasporan pan-Africanism that would return the attention of all people of African descent to the continent and even return them physically to the homeland: when Ghana gained independence in 1957, Kwame Nkrumah openly invited African-Americans to the country. With this renewed, vigorous pride, people of African descent set out to

rebuild Africa to the greatness it had enjoyed before imperialism and colonialism plundered the continent and scattered its people. Government leaders, church leaders, and social activists in Africa and in the West led the movement. Artists did their share as well. The negritude movement in art and literature flourished in Senegal and caught on in other African countries. In the United States, the Black Arts movement reciprocally supported and inspired the civil rights movement. Fanon notes the connections between celebrations of African culture on both sides of the sea:

The poets of negritude will not stop at the limits of the continent. From America, black voices will take up the hymn with fuller unison. The 'black world' will see the light and . . . will not hesitate to assert the existence of common ties and a motive power that is identical. (213)

Artists in these movements incorporated traditional elements of African art and literature into their own artistic expressions, celebrating and elevating their heritage and shaping the Western art world in the process.

Emerging from these historical and literary trends was a play by Ghanaian writer Ama Ata Aidoo. First produced in Ghana in 1964 and published in Great Britain in 1965, *The Dilemma of a Ghost* revolves around a young couple, an African-American woman, Eulalie, and a Ghanaian man, Ato, who have been educated in the United States. Eulalie and Ato move to his home in Ghana, where Eulalie wants to fit in with his family, to find in them the family, the roots, the African identity that she desires. But her actual encounter with African culture produces very different results, highlighting her Americanness before finally stripping it away. At the same time, Ato returns to what he assumes will be a familiar home. But he, too, discovers the difficulties of cultural encounter as he attempts to mediate between a Western culture

that he has accepted and unconsciously internalized and his traditional African culture that he cherishes and respects. In addition to the collision of and interplay between cultures, the drama explores the characters' changing notions of gender roles, which vary in definition and expression from America to Ghana. Ato, who seemingly enjoys the best of the African and Western worlds, finds his identity increasingly torn between the two worlds--and two women, Eulalie and his mother, Esi. Indeed, he fails to integrate the worlds as he had hoped, instead making a crucial mistake and alienating himself from both. Eulalie, on the other hand, seeks an identity, but resists the role of the African wife offered her in Ghana, particularly by Esi. She finally must lose her American individualism if she hopes to enter African culture.

In these two works, both written by West African women, distinct gender differences emerge in how characters approach cultural encounters. Women characters seem more willing than male characters to negotiate their identities. They accept and try to control the personal hybridity that these encounters make possible. In turn, their acceptance affects their culture, which women, in their roles as mothers and community organizers, have traditionally helped to shape (Association 15). As Gayatri Spivak notes, implicit in feminist projects is "the deconstruction of the opposition between the private and the public"; thus, what these women choose has implications beyond themselves ("Explanation" 103). Are these women selling out to the colonizers, leaving men the sole defenders of threatened cultural traditions? Are they seizing a chance to define identities hitherto more strictly circumscribed by patriarchy? Or are they asserting their individuality in new ways, seizing the power to define themselves in relation to changing environments? Closer readings of *The Joys of*

Motherhood and *The Dilemma of a Ghost* probe the ways women negotiate their identities, shape their communities, and promote cultural hybridity.

CHAPTER II

ENCOUNTERS AND NEGOTIATION IN *THE JOYS OF MOTHERHOOD*

Since Chinua Achebe's landmark novel *Things Fall Apart* was published in 1959, much African literature about the colonial period has focused on cultural encounters. Economies, governments, religions, cultures, and social conventions collided and in many ways merged during colonialism. Those dynamics affected individuals and communities in colonized societies, often shifting their power roles and relationships. Shifts in gender roles and power relations, largely neglected in literature by men, take center stage in much literature by African women, beginning with Igbo writer Flora Nwapa and including many of the novels of Buchi Emecheta.¹ Emecheta's novels, in particular *The Joys of Motherhood*, suggest that women and men respond quite differently to cultural encounters and the gender role shifts that result. In *Joys*, women and men choose whether and how to negotiate their identities, to interrogate, resist, accede, cooperate, or feign cooperation in response to the colonizers' demands. And people of both genders find that their status in Igbo society and colonial Lagos limits the practical ways they can enact their chosen responses. But women have an additional limitation: shifting gender roles tend to limit even further their own capacity to act, often leaving them fully aware of, but constrained in their response to, colonial demands and shifting roles.

Emecheta's protagonist, Nnu Ego, encounters British colonial values en force when she moves from rural Igboland to urban Lagos in the early 1930s to join her new husband, Nnaife. Both set out with rural Igbo assumptions about gender roles and relationships, but Nnu Ego eventually identifies differences between Lagos and rural Igboland. She reflects on the encounters of the British and the Igbo--in terms of religion, income-earning employment, marital and family matters--and redefines her roles in the process. She negotiates her identity between the two cultures, shaping the culturally hybrid identity that emerges. On the other hand, Nnaife mainly ignores the encounters, acting on his rural assumptions unless he finds personal advantage in cooperating with the colonizers. He neither adapts to the cultural mix in Lagos nor takes responsibility for shaping it, and those failures lead to his downfall. Emecheta's novel shows how gender relationships limit Nnu Ego's ability to enact her own strategies for identity formation and suggests that motherhood, in one sense a chain that binds her, finally becomes for her an instrument of power.

The contrast between the couple's responses to cultural encounters first becomes apparent in how the characters approach Christianity in Lagos. Christianity's religious tradition and teachings often conflict with Igbo tradition. For instance, Nnaife insists that he must marry Nnu Ego in church, lest he lose his job for failing to meet the Christian standards of his employer.² Nnu Ego, already pregnant by her Igbo husband, objects to that marriage, mainly because she considers it humiliating that he bends so to his British boss. She phrases her opposition in terms of gender roles: "Was this a man she was living with? How could a situation rob a man of his manhood without him knowing it?" (50).³ But her coming to accept Christianity, as

she worships weekly at St. Jude's Igbo Church, changes her attitude, too.⁴ Nnu Ego, after at first fighting with her husband about his acquiescence, learns from Christian teaching to "bear her cross with fortitude" (89). The religion gives her a language with which to justify the seizing of Igbo men for military service, to accept the kind of humiliation that at first had infuriated her: "The British own us, just like God does, and just like God they can take any of us when they wish" (148). Finally, much to Nnu Ego's discomfort, her Christianity challenges her Igbo marriage customs, particularly when she discovers that Nnaife is to inherit several wives. Her response is both strong and ambivalent: "She hated this thing called the European way; these people called Christians taught that a man must marry only one wife" (119). Yet her emotions resonate with Christian teachings. She wants "to be the sophisticated Ibuza wife and welcome another woman into her home," but she cannot; she feels her marriage is violated when Adaku enters her home (119). She has internalized some teachings of Christianity.

On the other hand, Nnaife assumes the guise of Christianity only when his first British employers require it. He can play by their rules, wittingly or unwittingly, without ever challenging his own assumptions, fostering a dualism, which Nnu Ego can not or will not sustain. By the same logic with which he argues for marrying in church, Nnaife justifies his additional marriages, prohibited by Christian teaching, by referring to his later employers who "employ many Moslems and even pagans" (119). Rather than wrestle seriously with conflicting values as Nnu Ego does, Nnaife approaches cultural encounters superficially, maintaining a relationship of convenience with the colonizers which he never interrogates. In contrast, Nnu Ego's role changes--

and *she* changes--as she tries to integrate Christian and Igbo traditions, never a smooth process, but a process over which she nonetheless takes some control.

These contrasting approaches to religious encounters also characterize Nnaife and Nnu Ego's reactions to British norms on income-earning work and family life, norms which also challenge their Igbo assumptions about gender roles. In the end, accepting colonial jobs in an urban setting makes it impossible for Nnaife or Nnu Ego to fulfill well either British or Igbo gender roles and impossible to blend both smoothly. What they can control, however, is the degree to which they take agency in the process of choosing work, income-earning and domestic, and in shaping their own identities.

Nnaife's job, washing and pressing clothes for Dr. and Mrs. Meers, a British couple living in Lagos, occasions the first conflict between Nnaife and Nnu Ego and helps to confuse his and Nnu Ego's gender roles. That such work is considered women's work in traditional Igbo settings contributes to Nnu Ego's initial impression of Nnaife as feminine (Njoku 14). His body is not shaped like Ibuza's "tall, wiry farmers, with rough, blackened hands from farming, long, lean legs and very dark skin"; instead, he sports a "belly like a pregnant cow," his unkempt hair "like that of a woman mourning for her husband" (Emecheta 42-43). She is shamed by his pride in this non-traditional work, at one point lashing out at him, "a man who washes women's underwear. A man indeed!" (47, 49). Nnu Ego's friend Cordelia, who has lived in Lagos for some time with her own emasculate husband, the Meers' cook, explains the dynamics of the role shifts: "Men here are too busy being white men's servants to be men. . . . Their manhood has been taken away from them. The shame

of it is that they don't know it. All they see is the money, shining white man's money" (51).⁵ The colonizers, by hiring men for such jobs, have shifted gender roles and relationships within the colonized culture. And though the women in this novel recognize the shift and try to explain it, the men do not.

Although both characters initially act on assumptions from rural Igbo life, the ways they respond to the resulting conflicts are telling. Nnaife, for instance, acts on the Igbo assumption that men should be the primary income-earners in their families. In *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, Victor Uchendu describes women's economic status as supplementary. In rural areas, men plant yam and cassava, the primary crops, before women plant the supplements: "the women's crops follow the men's" (24). Trading, primarily the women's province, is valued but seen as "subsidiary" to farming, primarily the men's province (27). Economic status is even more polarized by gender in the city, where wage-earning labor, most respected by the British, is men's domain. Nnaife finds the laundry job a relatively easy way to earn income in the city and ignores issues of gender roles his work raises. On the other hand, Nnu Ego is looking for an Igbo husband who fits the assumptions she brings from rural Ibuza. She is disappointed when she finds someone very different from her expectations, someone who seems deliberately to transgress them by foregoing more traditionally masculine types of physical labor available in Lagos in favor of laundry cleaning. Gradually, Nnu Ego comes to accept Nnaife's participation in this work, in part because he fulfills another of her expectations--making her pregnant--and in part because it does earn a salary that benefits the family. On the other hand, Nnaife seems only to have taken the job out of self-interest; it is convenient and easy for him.

This character trait reappears when the Meers depart and, rather than seek another job, Nnaife opts to wait for another English family to arrive and employ him. He waits in vain. At least at first, Nnaife recognizes neither the shifts in gender roles nor his dependence on the colonizers.

But he can no longer ignore these facts when his unemployment prompts Nnu Ego to resume her trade. Nnaife initially objects, reminding her of her obligation to their son, ironically demanding that she fulfill her primary role by Igbo standards while he neglects his. Eventually, however, he minds Oshia while she goes to market. In effect, they trade gender roles. And Nnaife resents that "not only did life in Lagos rob him of his manhood and of doing difficult work, now it had made him redundant and having to rely on his wife" (87). When he must do "woman's work"--in this case, child care--without earning a paycheck is when Nnaife recognizes his own emasculation. As long as he fulfills his image of himself as primary income-earner, or at least keeps the position vacant until he feels he can once again fill it, he feels like a man; when he relinquishes that role to his wife, his image and his power are gone. Perhaps it is that reversal that leads him to seek paid employment.

But his work removes him for an eleven-month shipping job and for a years-long stint in the British army, colonial work which has profound effects on his wife and children and his relationship to them. These stints allow Nnaife to earn an income, and thus claim to fulfill his duties. They even seem to restore his masculinity: he comes back acting every bit the "chief in his hut" (Uchendu 20). But his family benefits from his shipboard paycheck only at the end of the eleven months, and they receive his military salary only after they negotiate the confusing colonial

system that allows them to collect part of his earnings. Moreover, he brings home his shipboard earnings in a lump sum of cash, and he returns from the war shortly after Nnu Ego collects his cash salary. Thus, he takes control of how the income is spent, reserving much for his own personal use. He has more control over how the income is distributed than he might in a rural setting, where profits are primarily foodstuffs that automatically become family goods or are traded by women. When Nnaife has cash in hand, he decides to give his wives only a small amount for food and to save the rest for his own palm-wine parties. Thus, his employment fails to relieve his family's material poverty and in some ways exacerbates it. While he is in port, moreover, Nnaife claims his traditional rights as father. He acts, as Nnu Ego notes, as "lord and master" when he is home (112). He tells bold stories of the war and commands Oshia's respect and admiration as a war hero, although he was only reluctantly conscripted and had little to do with Oshia's well-being during his service. Finally, he misuses his regained power to berate Nnu Ego for her own trade. Though the children helped sell to keep the family alive, Nnaife tells Oshia that he might have won a scholarship were his mother not so money-hungry. His reading of the situation blatantly miscalculates the family's need and his own failure to alleviate it.

However, Nnaife's bravado eventually is challenged by the colonial courts, a government system that operates on very different social assumptions from those of the Igbo. Though Nnaife has opportunely benefitted from urban colonial society, he remains unable to identify its rules: his fundamental assumptions are still rooted in Igbo culture, as the crises of his arrest and trial indicate. When he charges into his Yoruba neighbor's house looking for his daughter, the neighbor must remind him,

"Look, this is Lagos, not your town or your village" (210). But Nnaife "thought he was in the Ibuza of his childhood where arguments of this sort were wont to be settled by sheer force" and threatens the man's life (210). His murderous impulse may reveal a misdirected hostility toward colonial oppression and its demands. Although he has not acknowledged those demands, they have clearly affected his life and limited his options, such as in his conscription for military service. According to Jean-Paul Sartre in his preface to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, "this mad impulse to murder is the expression of the natives' collective unconscious," a response of those who, like Nnaife, prefer to ignore rather than wrestle with the cultural encounters in which they are immersed (18). Fanon might describe Nnaife's behavior as avoidance. By defending his identity in tribal terms, such as against a Yoruba brother rather than European colonists, "the native tries to persuade himself that colonialism does not exist, that everything is going on as before, that history continues" (54).

But Nnaife's arrest and trial shatter that illusion and parade the confused gender roles of the Igbo in Lagos. To the amusement of the mostly European jury, Nnu Ego attempts to give Nnaife all the credit for her income-earning work and her laborious maintenance of the family. Her defense, ridiculous when measured by British standards of individualism, only hurts Nnaife's case. He is eventually punished according to British law for acting as he might in Ibuza. But he never seeks to understand his error. When released, he goes home to Ibuza "a broken man," never having evaluated his shifting identity nor taken agency in this cultural encounter (224).

In contrast, Nnu Ego identifies and weighs British norms and Igbo assumptions in shaping her roles as trader, wife, and mother. Particularly after the death of her

first child, Nnu Ego reflects on this cultural encounter and decides to relinquish her trade to focus on motherhood:

Were they not in a white man's world where it was the duty of the father to provide for his family? In Ibuza, women made a contribution, but in urban Lagos, men had to be the sole providers. . . . She had been trying to be traditional in a modern urban setting. It was because she wanted to be a woman of Ibuza in a town like Lagos that she lost her child. This time she was going to play it according to the new rules. (81)

Nnu Ego carefully considers the implications of the encounter. She reflects on both cultures and identifies her blind spots. And she sets a course of action, given her limited options. But despite her insight and intention, she cannot fulfill the roles she defines because of patriarchal and colonial limitations. First, Nnaife does not share this vision of the new rules, so she must account for his duties and her own when the family's welfare, which ultimately rests on her shoulders, is at stake. Second, the colonial economic opportunities that lure Nnaife from the area deprive the family of any help he might have been, had he seen their pitiable condition and tried vigorously to support them, financially or domestically. And third, Nnu Ego must try to absorb the duties of elder wife, a village position that becomes impossible for her to fulfill in Lagos with the demands of growing numbers of children. When these economic and family circumstances necessitate her return to trade, she reacts by attempting to balance economic support of her family through trade and nurturing support of her family through domestic work.

Not only is that balancing act tenuous, but the many roles that Nnu Ego must play are also complicated by cultural encounters. For instance, her role as elder wife in Lagos illustrates the complications that arise when a traditional role faces religious,

economic, and cultural pressures from a colonizing culture. Because Nnu Ego has adopted some Christian mores from her church in Lagos, she at first has difficulty accepting Nnaife's inherited second wife, Adaku, into their home. Having come to accept that one man marries one woman, she weeps silently when Nnaife sleeps with Adaku on their wedding night. Although the debate among African feminists over the value of polygamy continues, most agree with Carole Boyce Davies that "what should be attacked is the privilege that is accorded to males in marriage in general and the concomitant loss of status that is the females'" (9). Nnu Ego does attack this privilege, finding in Adaku an ally against Nnaife when the household money he provides is inadequate for their basic needs. They stage a cooking strike that clearly illustrates the difficulty of simply transplanting the village role to the urban colonial setting. As Susan Andrade notes, Nnaife does not go hungry, as he would in the village, since the men with whom he works at the railroad share their lunches with him (103). Thus the women's leverage is nullified and their strike rendered ineffectual. Eventually, Nnu Ego relents and begs for money to feed her children, an experience which causes her to reflect on the role of elder wife, much as she had reflected on her conflicting roles as trader and as mother. She recognizes that she has become a prisoner to her motherhood, that she must, as senior wife, almost impossibly balance roles of mother, wife, trader, household manager, and family spokesperson in Lagos without accruing the rewards that traditionally come to the senior wife in rural Igbo society. As Nnu Ego realizes, "all she had inherited from her agrarian background was the responsibility and none of the booty" (137).

Ironically, this rural/urban dichotomy traps her in city life; she cannot return to Ibuza to complain because people will not understand the urban problems attendant on her duties or the cultural encounters that occasion them. Another difficulty with the role of senior wife is that Nnaife misunderstands her work as a trader: rather than realizing how it both serves and complicates her motherhood, he believes it is what gives her the independence to challenge him in the domestic order. Further complicating her role is society's expectation that the senior wife will stoically bear difficulties, including the alarm that strikes the family when Nnaife fails to return from work after the cooking strike and their household money is gone. That expectation only further restricts Nnu Ego; she hears Adaku crying and "envied her her freedom" to express emotion (140). Finally, Nnu Ego can no longer maintain the role of senior wife. A visit to Ibuza reinforces her assumptions about how the role should be filled; indeed, people urge her to return to Lagos to fulfill those duties. But on her return she finds that Adaku, with fewer children to manage and support, has taken her place in the market and assumed her role as leader at family meetings. In contrast, Nnu Ego can barely support her many children through the backbreaking work of gathering and selling firewood and cannot be seen in public because of her shabby clothes. In effect, Adaku usurps Nnu Ego's position as head wife.

More importantly, in Nnu Ego's eyes and in the sight of Igbo and British society, her motherhood is the role through which all other roles emerge and by which all others are evaluated. Though she at first enjoys the rewards of trading immensely, she stops trading when she thinks it detrimental to her children, starting again only when necessary for their survival. The success of her marriage also depends on her

motherhood: Nnu Ego's first husband, Amatokwu, snubs her when she has not become pregnant after a year; she nearly attempts suicide when her first child dies; and she sees Adaku's economic success dismissed by the men in the family because the younger wife has not borne sons for her husband. But Nnu Ego cannot leave the family with her eight children as easily as Adaku does with her two. As the novel progresses, she realizes more and more clearly that "her love and duty for her children were like her chain of slavery," a bondage intensified by the additional demands of patriarchy and the colonizing culture (186). She realizes that she has spent her whole life trying "to live up to the standard expected of me by the males in my life, my father and my husband--and now I have to include my sons" (187). And most importantly, her attempts to identify and fulfill those standards are made more arduous by others' negligence, especially Nnaife's, of their own roles. The role of mother, which is central to the novel's Igbo and British societies, can only be properly fulfilled *in* a properly functioning society, where all needs are accounted for and where all complementary roles are also being adequately performed. Such is not the case in Lagos.

Though she never frees herself from the myriad social demands placed on her shoulders, Nnu Ego does realize those standards are senseless and takes responsibility for ensuring that her daughters' futures will be brighter than her own. In so doing, she adopts a key posture of African feminism, as Carole Boyce Davies defines it. Nnu Ego evaluates the social institution of motherhood, retaining the African perspectives valuable to women and integrating them with beneficial colonial perspectives as well. Like many African feminists, she "respects African woman's

status as mother but questions obligatory motherhood and the traditional favoring of sons" (Davies 9). She acknowledges and begins to exercise her power over social standards for women in colonial Lagos:

Who made the law that we should not hope in our daughters? We women subscribe to that law more than anyone. Until we change all this, it is still a man's world, which women will always help to build.
(Emecheta 187)

She realizes that she has the power to change society, first by throwing off what Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie calls the African woman's shackles of her "own negative self-image" and second by teaching her sons *and* her daughters the social value of women (qtd. in Davies 8).

At the end of *Joys*, Nnu Ego dies, alone and senseless, in the village from which she came. But several points suggest that her daughters will indeed have better futures, rewarding her hopeful, if belated, efforts on their behalf. She leaves one daughter married to the husband of her own choosing in Lagos. She charges another with becoming "a well-educated miss" (223). Her daughters send her financial help in Izuza, which indicates that they have at least escaped the poverty by which she was bound (224). And after Nnu Ego dies, women pray to her, but she never answers "prayers *for children*" (224, emphasis mine). Perhaps she thus offers future generations of women the opportunity for an education, freeing them from the repeated childbearing and its consequent domestic and economic struggles that limited her own life. As Davies notes, she challenges the gender stereotypes that "supported the notion that Western education was a barrier to a woman's role as wife and mother and an impediment to her success in these traditional modes of acquiring status" (2). That

Nnu Ego recognizes the importance of educating women and allowing them greater input in choosing their own husbands indicates her control of cultural hybridity. And that control not only shapes her own identity, giving her a new personal power, but affects future generations of her society as well.

Embroiled in the cultural transitions of urban Lagos, Nnu Ego does not capitulate wholesale to colonial pressures, but decides quite deliberately how she will shape her identity and her community in light of the religious, economic, political, and cultural forces she encounters and the gender role shifts they precipitate. At the same time, Nnaife denies that the encounter requires him or his relationships to change, and his rigidity problematizes Nnu Ego's attempts to enact the identity she has fashioned. Gradually, Nnu Ego comes to recognize that her role as mother, as much as she cherishes it, also confines her. It confines her partly because Nnaife will not accept any degree of genuine cultural hybridity: he refuses to redefine family roles amidst the demands of Lagos, increasing Nnu Ego's workload by marrying more wives; he piles economic responsibilities on her, whimsically accepting or rejecting colonial work without considering the impact on his family; and he fails to see how his children change as a result of cultural encounters, reacting to his daughter's relationship with a Yoruba man as he might in a rural setting. Nnaife prefers random and opportunistic collusion with the colonizers, behavior Nnu Ego cannot predict and therefore cannot figure into the new roles she shapes for herself. But she realizes belatedly an opportunity she has for freeing at least her daughters from the bondage motherhood often proved for her. The new opportunities she provides for her daughters at the end of the novel suggest her discernment of her power to shape her daughters and sons, to

form not only a culturally hybrid self that remains impeded by external limitations, but a culturally hybrid community that ultimately survives her.

CHAPTER III

ENCOUNTERS AND IDENTITY CRISES IN *THE DILEMMA OF A GHOST*

In his introduction to *Keeping Faith*, Cornel West suggests that Marcus Garvey "exemplifies the basic orientation in New World African modernity: to flee the widespread victimization of Euro-American modernity, . . . to find a 'home' in a safe and 'free' space" (xiii). Eulalie, an African-American woman in Ama Ata Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, is so oriented. She marries a Ghanaian man, Ato, and travels with him to Africa, hoping her cultural encounter with Africa will clarify and strengthen a shadowy, sentimental part of her own identity, nurtured by parents who gave her pride in her African heritage. But the encounter highlights her American cultural identity, particularly her individualism, and requires her to negotiate that identity if she wants to fit into Ghanaian society. She must learn to rely on others, to relinquish some degree of privacy and independence, and to participate in the vibrant life of the community around her. She is initially reluctant to make the changes although she considers motherhood as a means to this integration. In addition to the interplay between cultures, the drama explores the characters' changing notions of gender roles, which vary in definition and expression from American to Ghana. Though Eulalie seeks an African identity, she resists the role of a Ghanaian wife, offered her particularly by Ato's mother, Esi.

Ato, a native Ghanaian returning from America, faces similar cultural encounters, though less consciously than Eulalie. He assumes his return will be unproblematic. But he, too, discovers the difficulties of cultural encounter, as he attempts to mediate between Western culture and traditional African culture. What limits him is his failure to recognize the ways his own identity has been shaped by American culture. He sees that culture only as external to him and represented by Eulalie. Indeed, he finds himself increasingly torn between the two cultures--and two women, Eulalie and his mother, Esi. He fails to integrate the worlds as he had hoped, instead making a crucial mistake and alienating himself from both. Ato and Eulalie both experience, though only Eulalie finally understands, the futility of Marcus Garvey's orientation: Euro-American culture is hard to escape, especially when internalized; and a safe, free, purely African space is, in fact, impossible in a world of cultural encounters (West xiii).

As Ato returns to Africa, he repeatedly demonstrates the American individualism he has internalized but of which he remains unaware. His expectations for returning to Africa focus mainly on his relationship with Eulalie while his family focuses on his reintegration into the community. Ato tells Eulalie before they travel to Africa that they will "create a paradise" together, calling her "the sweetest and loveliest things in Africa and America rolled together" (10). He believes the move will nurture their relationship and further integrate their cultures. His confidence in making this promise suggests that he expects a smooth transition to life in Africa. However, his family members, before they even learn that he has married, are less optimistic. They already are anticipating the problems his own mix of cultures might

cause. Many of them greet him with an uneasy awe or fear of his scholarship, referring to him as "master scholar" and "our white master" to emphasize his difference from them (14-15). They tiptoe around him at first, watching his behavior closely, half-teasing, half-reproaching him when he acts inappropriately, such as when he fails to bring chairs for those gathering to greet him (14-15).

His mother's expectations are especially ambiguous. She fears he will try to dominate the family, to "kick us all around as if we were his footballs" (15). Such behavior would challenge her authority, earned the main way women can earn it: through motherhood (Davies 2). But despite Esi's fear, she hopes to have her proper African son back and to see her investments in him pay off. She hopes to get him married and to see him produce children. And she expects that her well-educated son will support her handsomely, or at least well enough to pay off the debts she has incurred in his upbringing, either with money he brings back from the United States or with the paychecks he starts earning at his office job in Accra. Whereas Ato's expectations are rather romantic, his family's, especially his mother's, are very practical. And whereas Ato's are centered on himself and Eulalie, the family's seem to incorporate their common interests as well. Essentially, Ato thinks primarily in individualistic American terms while his family's more African social consciousness escapes him.

In other ways, too, Ato reveals the unexamined cultural ambiguity he has developed from living in two vastly different cultures. Appropriately, perhaps symbolically, that ambiguity becomes apparent when he startles his family with the news that he has married an American. He forgets that they would assume she was

white and eases their shock by assuring them that "my wife is as black as we all are" (17). But he subsequently explains that she is a descendant of slaves, causing an uproar. To his family, lineage defines identity: his marriage into a slave family would bring shame on the whole family. Ato's assumptions indicate that his African perspectives on history and on family have been replaced by American perspectives, both pointing toward his increased individualism. From an American perspective, the history of African-Americans is changing rapidly: black Americans have assumed greater social status than their grandparents. And in his American perspective on family, he presupposes Eulalie's independence from her forebears. His bias toward individualism also has prompted him to marry her without the awareness, participation, or consent of his family. He has begun to approach marriage as if it were a matter only between man and woman, rather than consider it an intermingling of histories and families as his family does.

Ato's first months back in Ghana find him acting more American than Ghanaian, perhaps to legitimize his marriage despite his family's objections. But he also may be trying to strengthen his bond with Eulalie, who is not adapting well to the new environment. He jokes about his own culture as "primitive" to ease Eulalie's tensions and apologizes for having no refrigerator to cool her Coca-Cola (26). He helps her to avoid his relatives, taking her away for the day when it becomes clear that all his family members will be coming to visit (30). And he tries to mediate between Eulalie and his mother, especially when Esi brings a bag of snails as a gift for the couple and Eulalie refuses to eat them. He explains her unfamiliarity with the creatures to his mother, apologizing for Eulalie (33). But Ato's acting from his

American identity is not solely motivated by Eulalie's needs.

At a crucial turning point in the drama, Eulalie shows a willingness to adapt to African society, but Ato makes a decision that reinforces their American individualism, a decision with dire consequences for both of them. A few weeks into their stay--and, significantly, halfway through the drama--Eulalie, perhaps perceiving the family's wish for children, suggests to him that they consider starting a family (27). She shows a willingness to adapt her own life to her new society's values by offering herself as a means to perpetuate the Ghanaian community. But Ato casually rejects the idea in favor of their original plan to delay starting a family, unconscious of his individualistic stance and its implications. With the decision, he rebuffs Eulalie's communal gesture: he denies her a chance at motherhood, her primary means for finding a place in Ato's family and an important means by which women have traditionally shaped their surrounding culture. That decision has less significance for him than for Eulalie since he, as a Ghanaian and a man, can achieve status and influence in other ways. When he does begin to reintegrate into Ghanaian society, he leaves Eulalie childless, fostering an individualism that distances her from the family she had hoped to call her own.

Ato begins to reclaim his Africanness, as indicated by his renewed respect for his people's traditions and his changing expectations for gender roles. A year after their move, he wears again the traditional cloth for men, the long, colorfully woven strips of *kente* cloth sewn together. He drinks with the old men of his family, as is customary. That he enters with them the older wing of the house symbolizes his rekindling familiarity with the traditional elements of the culture he had forsaken (40-

41). When the opinions of his relatives and of Eulalie conflict, he begins to side more often with his relatives and to deal with Eulalie more as an African husband than an American one. He tries to hide her drinking, which his people find offensive in women, and defends his people from her cynical attacks (42, 46-48). Six months after their arrival, he rebukes her when she disagrees with him, scolding her, "Now you have succeeded in making trouble for me" (36). And when she drunkenly disparages his culture, he slaps her (48).

Ato cannot distance himself from Ghanaian culture for long. Yet neither can he shake his American assumptions. That double identity plagues him on a symbolic level, in a many-tiered dream predicated on a children's song. The song, to which the play's title refers, tells of a ghost's difficulty in choosing between traveling to two historically charged places in Ghana: Elmina and Cape Coast. The first is a fortified castle that held hundreds of thousands of Africans before they were shipped to destinations north and west and sold into slavery. The second is a nearby city that served as British headquarters in the Gold Coast for more than two hundred years. Both places carry the legacy of colonial oppression; they differ only in that one signals the tortuous origins of the diaspora, the other, domination on the continent itself. The dream foreshadows a haunted and unhappy future for Ato, whether he subconsciously moves toward an African-American identity or a Ghanaian one. That the song reappears at the end of the play, when Ato has alienated himself from Eulalie and Esi, indicates that in fact he does not make a decision, oscillating instead from one position to the other but ultimately opting for neither.⁶ The insubstantial ghost in the song, who lingers between life and death, represents Ato's wavering, uncommitted position.

Another turning point of the story comes when Ato makes a crucial decision that jeopardizes his relationship to his family and his marriage to Eulalie. He allows his family to mistakenly believe that Eulalie is infertile and that the problem is causing their childlessness, rather than confess that he has agreed to and, in fact, insisted upon remaining childless, a decision which defies his people's values. Why he fails to tell them the truth is a complex matter. In one sense, he seems to lack courage. In another, he seems overwhelmed by his elders' expectations, and he fears he cannot find a way to make his family understand the decision. Certainly, it would not be easily understood in an African context, where families are long desired and children are considered God's blessings upon a marriage. In yet another sense, Ato may actually regret having transgressed his culture's beliefs, abandoned Ghanaian tradition and adopted American values. His consequent shame, a painful product of cultural encounter and his transition, prevents him from confessing his part in the decision to his family.

As a result of this inability to be honest either with Eulalie or his family, to choose Elmina or Cape Coast, Ato inadvertently distances himself from both Eulalie and Esi, from his Americanness and his Africanness. He continues to act based on assumptions from both cultures, but when he yields his agency for shaping a coherent identity between the two, he can only bounce between them randomly, unpredictably, making coherent relationships virtually impossible. The longer Eulalie stays in Africa, the more she resists the culture around her and the increasingly re-Africanized Ato himself. When he rebukes her, she storms away from him, the first of many symbolic back-turnings (36). She leaves the room rather than let him take her drink away to

please his family (42). She accuses him of cowardice when she learns that he has failed to inform the family of their mutual decision about children (45). And she pours out on him all her disappointment in Africa, in the land in which she had hoped to find her roots, and berates him as a false savior, "a damned rotten coward of a Moses" (47). Finally, she leaves him, running away so that, though he searches the village and the nearby city, he cannot find her. When she finally returns of her own accord, she apparently wants to speak to him, but words will not pass her lips and she speaks to him no more before the drama ends. Their alienation is complete.

Ato also grows more at odds with Esi, first as he fails to live up to his family's standards, then, ironically, as he conforms to them. Six months after their return, for instance, Esi chides him for letting his wife's feelings and preferences overrule his own (33). Because he fails to repay the debts Esi has incurred for his education, she wishes that she had not spent all her money on him (34-36). And when the family discusses Eulalie and their marriage, Esi refuses to speak, interjecting only terse, bitter remarks (42, 45). However, Ato adjusts his behavior and begins to act more in accordance with African culture. Still he fails, as he tries to save Eulalie from sinking deeper into despair. He misses a family member's funeral he had planned to attend, for instance, and his mother admonishes him (50). She scolds him further for his failure to stabilize his family life despite his great learning (50). When he finally tells her the truth about their childlessness, she is displeased with him on several counts. First, she chides him for making the decision at all, pointing out his trespasses against God, to whom such decisions rightfully belong, and against African culture, which holds sacred God's role in blessing marriages with children. And because she assumes

that final authority for such decisions rests with the husband, she blames Ato for teaching Eulalie to insult their tradition as well (51). Because he has failed to live up to his role as a husband, she claims, he has failed both his family and his wife (51-52). Finally, she defends Eulalie against her son. As the drama draws to a close, Ato is left alone and still undecided about which culture, if either, is truly his.

Because Africa is the setting for most of the play, Eulalie's Americanness stands out against the backdrop of the defining culture. Yet she must relinquish much of the individualism and many of the erroneous expectations to which she clings if she is to have any hope of truly gaining acceptance in Ghanaian culture. Her initial romantic and academic expectations for encountering Africa prevent rather than facilitate her entrance into the culture. She has stereotypical romantic visions of life on the continent with Ato, her "Native Boy" (9). When she visualizes Africa she thinks first of its fashions and its music. She pictures palm trees and sunshine, exotic conditions like "the jungle and the wild life," rather than the people-filled homes and the physically and emotionally draining life she encounters (24). She also approaches Africa somewhat academically. She questions Ato about witch-hunting, explaining, "I thought I would learn all about these things," and Ato pointedly teases her about wanting "to graduate in primitive cultures" (26). That she objects to his teasing suggests that she recognizes the truth in what he says. She initially sees most Africans and African culture as "cute" and "quaint," almost as anthropological curiosities (24, 25).

Most importantly, Eulalie seems to have psychological expectations for her experience in Africa, some of which represent the collective yearning of diasporan

peoples for their origins, for the homeland. As her discussions with Ato and her extended reflections suggest, she hopes to find in Africa a family, a tradition, a people, a home. She believes her migration would please her deceased parents, who raised her with a sense of her African heritage. Her travel to Africa is a physical expression of the ethnic pride her family--and other diasporan families like them--tried to keep alive in their descendants. In "The Concept of Race," W. E. B. Du Bois explains that the connection has little to do with color. Rather, he notes that the "kinship" between African-Americans and Africans rests on the "social heritage of slavery; the discrimination and insult" and admits that "it is this unity that draws me to Africa" (*Dusk* 117). It draws Eulalie as well. She recalls her mother's urging her not to curse her blackness, despite rampant discrimination in the United States: "'Sugar, the dear God made you just that black and you canna do nothing about it'" (24). And Eulalie's quest becomes representative of the African-American community's proud reclaiming of its African roots. Eulalie nearly prays to her mother, who nurtured that pride, "Oh Ma! But I know you would pat me on the back and say, 'Sugar, you sure done fine.' Native boy is the blackest you ever saw" (24-25). To explore that heritage further, Eulalie seeks to become part of a real African family. In fact, Eulalie's psychological search for family is the one approach that proves most genuine and eventually is rewarded. However, in the process and amidst many hardships, she must relinquish her romantic and academic expectations about what she will find on the continent.

Her desire to find a family, though, is hampered by her differences from Ato's family and her difficulties with adapting. His family is prejudiced against her from the beginning because they resent Ato's having married her without their consent.

Moreover, that he has married someone from a culture so foreign to theirs prevents them, in some important ways, from participating in the couple's relationship and welcoming them with ease into Ghanaian society. According to Brenda Berrian, the family traditionally "plays an important role in instructing a young married couple" (156). But although Ato's family try to welcome Eulalie to their meetings and teach her their habits, she considers their efforts intrusive and distances herself from them. That they cannot pronounce her name or country, calling her "Hurere" and her country "Amrika," signals their alienation from her world (16-17). They frown on her strange habits, such as drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes, and resent that she must use "machines" for everyday tasks, such as the "sutof" for cooking and "something in which to put her water to cool" (36, 47). The chorus of women who comment on the action of the play describe her aptly through African eyes, saying that Ato "has gone for this/ Black-white woman./ A stranger and a slave" (22). Though Eulalie is as black as they, her American or "white" habits make her blackness foreign to them: steeped in American culture, she seems no more like them for being black. And if her family are slaves, this oddly dichotomized stranger can no more match them in social class, they believe, than in culture.

The Africans' perspective notwithstanding, this "black-white woman" parades her American culture and her ambivalence toward African culture. She carries the trappings of her Americanness like badges, entering one scene with "a packet of cigarettes, a lighter, an ash tray, and a bottle of Coca-Cola" (23). Though she realizes Coke soothes her homesickness and she drinks it for "sentimental reasons," she is somewhat flip about the African alternative, confusing Ato with the ambivalent tone of

her comment, "I could have had a much cooler, sweeter and more nourishing substitute in coconuts" (26). Although she looks forward to African drumming, she finds the reality different from her expectation. Whereas she anticipates something like jazz or "Spanish mambo," she is frightened by the rolling, insistent drums, which audibly represent the culture that confronts and overwhelms her (25). In fact, her familiarity with Spanish mambo drumming underlines her Americanness as well. Coming from a country that is a mix of cultures, she recognizes an offshoot of another constituent culture before she recognizes the sound of her own culture's musical heritage. About African culture she has a genuine curiosity, but it shows itself less in a concern for real people than in academic and material pursuits. For instance, she greets with interest Ato's attempts to explain witch-hunting, but then makes the distancing remark, "How quaint" (25). When she reflects on her first days in Africa, she thinks of clothing and of Ato's family, admitting, "I am finding all this rather cute" (23-24). She does not so much enter into the experience as observe it through her romantic and academic lenses.

At first, Ato encourages this Americanness, this distance, and he continues to facilitate her avoidance of his people even months after their arrival, acting as a sort of buffer between Eulalie and his mother in particular. Ato is the first to offer Eulalie drinks, specifically gin and tonic, though he later discourages her from drinking because his people do not accept it. When she raises the issue of a family soon after they arrive and proposes that they rethink their decision to postpone having children, he insists that "we better stick to our original plan" (27). Six months later, when she has come to know African culture a little better, Eulalie resents it even more. She still

uses a sunhat, a sign that she will not face the tropical sun unshielded, as Africans do (28). Having learned that if one relative comes for a visit, "the whole lot of them will be coming to see us," Eulalie tries to avoid them before they arrive (30). Ato indulges her, suggesting that they slip out to visit a new school.

Particularly illustrative of this buffered relationship is the scene in which Esi, in apparently a generous move, brings the newlyweds a satchel of snails to cook and eat. The first misunderstanding comes from Esi's entering the couple's room in their absence to deliver the snails. When Eulalie sees her emerging from their room, her American need for privacy is offended. But rather than express it, she turns to Ato, instructing him to "ask your mother what she wants in our room" (31). She uses him as an intermediary in part because she cannot yet speak his people's language and appears to be making no effort to try. But her tone belies the anger that might prevent her from confronting the woman even if she were fluent. When Esi's purpose is clarified, Eulalie plays the game properly, as she has learned, asking Ato to express her thanks, despite her disgust. However, though Ato begs her to save the snails for his mother to cook, she prefers to throw them away, lest she "give them the opportunity to accuse me of inadaptability" (32). She still *wants* to become part of this culture; it's the practical aspects of adaptation, like learning to eat snails and relinquish her privacy, that deter her. Her failure to adapt shames her, making her more strident about hiding that failure. To admit it might call into doubt her reasons for coming to Africa and for marrying Ato; her whole hunger for Africa might prove only stale sentiment, romantic self-delusion. Rather than confront those possibilities, she continues to rely on Ato's translation and intercession and to participate only

halfheartedly in things Ghanaian.

While Eulalie resists the culture around her and what she perceives as the interference of Ato's family, Esi reaches out to her in a number of ways as a willing mentor. Though she does not understand Eulalie and says so, she tries to overcome the cultural distance between them to welcome her, to teach her, and to introduce her to the culture she finds so foreign. She wants to teach Eulalie how to be an African wife by suggesting to her appropriate behaviors at opportune moments. For instance, she goes to Accra to visit the couple, wanting "to do as other women do--spend one or two days with [her] daughter-in-law, teach her how to cook [Ato's] favorite meals" (34). When the couple visit her in the village and she brings them snails, she tells Eulalie to go to the room to see what she has brought, explaining that "these are all women's affairs" (31). She models proper behavior by indicating that she is going to cook the evening meal and will send Ato's sister to cook for the couple while they are visiting (31). Her sending a cook may be the most pointed message; she feels Eulalie received her inhospitably in Accra, and she may be trying to demonstrate the proper way to treat guests.

But Eulalie continually rebuffs her efforts, consciously and unconsciously, angering and frustrating Esi. Eulalie wants a mother, it seems, but only on her own terms. She sees the gift of snails as another way to point up her lack of adjustment. She does not know how to welcome Esi to her home in Accra, offering her neither water to drink nor a seat in which to rest. Esi eventually resigns herself to the cultural conventions that Eulalie has introduced into their family. In a gathering of elders addressing the propriety of family involvement in a marriage, Esi reluctantly states

that "these days, one's son's marriage cannot always be one's affair" (42). When uncles Petu and Akroma argue with Ato about his marriage, Esi will say nothing except "I am very quiet" (44). Finally, it is Esi who overcomes her frustration with Eulalie to understand her point of view, her loneliness, fear, and isolation, and to chide her own son for not helping his wife to adapt but rather encouraging her cultural polarization. After Eulalie runs away and Ato comes to his mother seeking help, Esi tries to understand why Eulalie would say the things she does. She realizes that it is Ato who has betrayed his culture, or at least misrepresented it to the woman who has relied completely on him for its interpretation. Esi ultimately absolves Eulalie: "Who can blame her? No stranger ever breaks the law" (51).

Her understanding and mercy are well-timed. Eulalie runs away because she has hit bottom. Something must change for her; she can no longer live surrounded by but alienated from this culture. Drunk, she confronts Ato in the play's final act, as he prepares to go to the funeral of a distant relative, another event she does not understand and would not feel part of if she attended. Her verbal attack on him reveals how she has modified her initial visions of Africa and its culture, how she has been disillusioned by her real-life contact. And it reveals the utter confusion she has about her own identity. She jumbles Western and African histories, calling Ato "a damned rotten coward of a Moses," in part because he has taken to referring to "his people" as Moses did, and in part because he has led Eulalie figuratively out of a legacy of slavery in America to die in the desert of Africa (47). But he is a coward because, in his selfishness, he has led neither his people nor Eulalie to a better life or a better understanding of one another. In fact, Eulalie finally regrets having come to

Africa, as she realizes she has lost whatever historically confused African-American identity she previously claimed. She laughs grimly at the difference between Ato's British accent and her black American English, speaking in the latter as if to emphasize her utter disconnectedness with Ghana. She asks Ato, "Ain't I poorer here as I would ave been in New York City?" (47). And she notes that in trying to do all the right things to please Ato's people, she has lost sight of the things that she likes. Yet she rejects the African identity offered to her, disparaging Ato's people's "savage customs and standards" (47). The argument finally comes down to a conflict within the diaspora:

Ato: Shut up! How much does the American negro know?

Eulalie: Do you compare these bastards, these stupid, narrow-minded savages with us? (48)

The fight ends when Ato, assuming the role of the African husband, slaps his wife.

Despite Eulalie's downward trajectory throughout the drama, she ends on a positive note, thanks to her break from Ato and her acceptance of Esi's motherly mentorship on neither romantic nor academic but personal terms. Symbolically, she renounces that romantic distance through the miserable conditions under which she runs away from Ato and the brokenness and turmoil in which she returns. The scene is difficult: "She is weak and looks very unhappy," according to the stage directions, and she seems nearly ready to faint (52). She no longer harbors romantic illusions about cultural encounters. Moreover, she renounces her academic approach to such encounters. The chorus of women report her "sitting on the grass in the school/ With her head bowed," and she returns from this posture of resignation to accept the

personal relationship Ato's mother extends to her (49). Esi, on seeing Eulalie almost too weak to talk and too overcome to address Ato, "rushes forward to support her" (52). And Eulalie needs her support: she can no longer rely solely on her own strength, on an individualism that has kept her isolated from the community. Esi becomes the mother, the family, Eulalie has come to Africa to seek. As Esi tells Ato:

We must be careful with your wife
 You tell us her mother is dead.
 If she had any tenderness,
 Her ghost must be keeping watch over
 All which happen to her... (52)

Then, taking the mother's role, Esi addresses Eulalie: "Come, my child" (52). It is this position as wise and tolerant mother that enables Esi to draw Eulalie into the family in a gesture of inclusiveness, reconciling their cultural differences. Her leading Eulalie through the door to the old part of the house signifies Eulalie's acceptance into the family and the culture of which she had hoped to become a part.

Those who face cultural encounters, like Eulalie and Ato, must accept some degree of what Edward Said and Cornel West have called "hybridity" in order to live comfortably in their surrounding culture. Though such hybridity comes easily to neither Eulalie nor Ato, Eulalie eventually accepts its importance; Ato does not. In one sense, Eulalie must relinquish her American individualism in order to accept Esi's support and the communalism of Ghanaian culture. But in another sense, Eulalie affirms her personal power in freely choosing to accept both cultures. Also significantly, she finally chooses to align herself with another woman, a mother who has attempted to understand her American perspective, rather than with a man who impedes her acceptance into African culture and who never identifies his own

American qualities. Ato's failure to choose between cultures or, more appropriately, to integrate the two in his own identity leads to his eventual alienation from both cultures. *The Dilemma of a Ghost* asserts significant gender differences in how women and men react to cultural encounters. It presents a male approach to cultural encounters that is dualistic, an approach in which the male subject, unable to reconcile coherently within himself two cultural identities, locates himself externally and irretrievably between the two. It suggests a female approach that is at once more personal and more integrative, that involves a traumatic negotiation of identity but allows for powerful self-consciousness, self-assertion, choice, and finally an inclusive hybridity. And it points to the inclusive and transforming powers of motherhood, a capacity which may partly explain women's greater ability to negotiate identity and control hybridity.

CHAPTER IV

Decolonization, Feminism, and Hybridity

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon argues that granting political independence to African states did not effect decolonization. According to Fanon, the nationalist bourgeoisie of those states pandered to their former colonizers and imperial economic masters, perpetuating Africa's dependence on Europe (and also on America, as Edward Said notes in *Culture and Imperialism*) even after nominal independence. Fanon narrowly allows this type of collusion to define "compromise" with the imperialists (62). Rejecting compromise, he argues that true decolonization "is always a violent phenomenon" and requires nothing less than bloody revolution (35). His argument is based in part on psychological analyses of Algerians conducted during the country's colonial war. Almost exclusively men, Fanon's subjects frequently demonstrated criminal behavior, which he argues was the "direct product of the colonial situation" and could only be remedied by "armed conflict" with the colonizer (309, 294). Only a violent expulsion of the colonizers, their social structures, and the ideas they planted in the minds of the colonized could provide a clean foundation for building a new society unlike that of Europe, as Fanon envisions in his conclusion.

But several problems with Fanon's argument are highlighted by a feminist critique that is both African in the manner of Carole Boyce Davies and post-colonial

in the manner of Gayatri Spivak. Fanon asserts that national identity is formed mainly in opposition to other nations, economies, and cultures. But Davies notes that women's concerns often are not taken into account in this dualistic model. She defines African feminism itself as "a hybrid of sorts, which seeks to combine African concerns with feminist concerns" (12). Often the second half of that equation is missing in male-dominated struggles for national liberation and self-definition. Consequently, women who participate in such national liberation efforts often find later that "a new and more sustained struggle has to be waged against the men along whose sides they fought" (10).

Post-colonial feminism, rather than define national identity negatively against some polar "other," would highlight the construction of identity at the individual and community levels. At these levels, women traditionally have significant responsibility for shaping identity by means such as storytelling and socializing children. Though such acts occur in the domestic sphere, they are nonetheless political, as Spivak would note. Spivak, deconstructing the opposition between public and private, national and individual, suggests that "if the fabric of the so-called public sector is woven of the so-called private, the definition of the private is marked by public potential, since it *is* the weave, or texture, of public activity" ("Explanation" 103). Like Fanon's macro-level view of identity formation, this grassroots view is nonetheless marked by its context of power relations between colonizer and colonized. As Terry Eagleton notes, since any positive identity "evolves within oppressive conditions, partly as compensatory for them, it can never be an unambiguous political gain, and will always be to some extent collusive with its antagonists" (37). Yet feminism, with its

grassroots focus, sees identity formation as a much more positive, creative process than does Fanon, whose concept of identity formation as inherently confrontational depends heavily and negatively on the imperialist oppressor he despises.

A feminist critique also would question the unreconcilable opposition Fanon assumes between the "zones" of the colonizer and colonized. He declares decolonization "no less than the abolition of one zone, its burial in the depths of the earth or its expulsion from the country" (41). Feminism would point to the characteristics such cultures already share, such as patriarchy. Indeed, even as Fanon attempts to show the personal ravages of colonialism through his analysis of traumatized Algerians, he exhibits the patriarchal perspective common to many cultures. His analyses focus almost exclusively on men, one even exploring the painful "impotence in an Algerian following the rape of his wife" (254). If Fanon fails to consider the effects of colonialism on women, he also fails to consider the roles women might play in decolonization, other than to support the male revolutionaries by "crooning in their children's ears songs to which warriors marched when they went out to fight the conquerors" (114). Post-colonial African feminism, with its preference for negotiation over combat and inclusion over opposition, would ask why Fanon fails to consider cultural hybridity, the control of which may be a powerful means to decolonization.

Two self-proclaimed feminist African authors, Buchi Emecheta and Ama Ata Aidoo, raise the notion of hybridity in their respective works, *The Joys of Motherhood* and *The Dilemma of a Ghost*. In these works, African and diasporan women accept hybridity as a healing and powerful alternative to the dualistic approach to cultural

encounters that paralyzes and sometimes destroys African men. In accepting hybridity, they neither forfeit their own identities nor legitimize foreign domination. Rather, they negotiate, deciding what they will accept, co-opt, and transform from that "other" culture, what they will renounce from their own, and how they will integrate the changes in their own lives. Their criteria for such decisions vary. Nnu Ego in *Joys* tries to improve the conditions of life in Lagos for herself and her family by adopting some colonial expectations for family life and rejecting the usefulness of the senior wife's role in Lagos. And she tries to improve the lives of her younger daughters, for instance, by giving them access to the formal education the British offer. Eulalie in *Dilemma* seeks to integrate into her husband's family and culture and considers early motherhood as a means to that improved relationship. She is willing to sacrifice some of her own independence to achieve that goal. In accepting hybridity, Nnu Ego and Eulalie acknowledge their new environments, decide what they will give up and what they hope to gain, and act based on their assessments. Their decisions cannot always be successfully enacted, often because of patriarchal impediments beyond their control, but in shaping culturally hybrid identities they neither unproductively resist that other culture nor submit to it wholesale. They assert control over the meeting of cultures.

However, for asserting this power, women such as Nnu Ego and Eulalie are frequently criticized by African and diasporan men for dividing the ranks, for detracting attention from the oppositional struggle initiated by imperialists. Malcolm X, the prophet of black separatism, would deride their efforts as the work of "house negroes, who love and protect the white master," as Cornel West notes in *Race*

Matters (139). Indeed, Aidoo notes the similarities between black men's unease with cultural hybridity and their unease with feminist consciousness, though both offer similar potential for transforming Africa. In an interview with Adeola James, Aidoo says,

I think part of the resentment which our brothers feel about any discussion on women is because they feel it diverts from the 'main issues' ['social, economic, and political liberation of Africa,' according to James]. On the contrary, I feel the revolutionizing of our continent hinges on the woman question. It might be the catalyst for development. (26)

Recent development theory agrees with Aidoo. Development workers have begun to capitalize on the role women play in shaping society, both in their reproductive work as mothers and in their work as community organizers ("Gender" 15). They have learned that improving the health, nutrition, and general welfare of communities often depends on women's active participation in and control over development projects. At first, development workers tried to achieve these ends using the "Women in Development" (WID) model in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The approach sought to increase women's status and improve the welfare of their communities by making women more productive. But the model often proved harmful to women, as it increased their already sizable workloads and enmeshed them "in a production-focused economy that has often proved unhealthy for men and women" (14). The more recent "Gender and Development" (GAD) model still capitalizes on women's influence on their communities but also addresses "the unequal relations between women and men on a political, economic, and social level" (14). It seeks to increase women's control over economic resources, to increase their decision-making

power, and to integrate men into the domestic tasks women have traditionally performed, encouraging men to act as agents of change at the family level as well. Both WID and GAD theories, however, recognize that African women critically shape their families and communities, integrating and transforming material and ideological offerings of the West.

Emecheta and Aidoo have taken up "the woman question" in their work, thus performing such community-shaping themselves. And both authors specifically focus on women in cultural encounters, partly because of their own experiences. Emecheta studied sociology in England, where she has lived most of her life, and applies that education in her writing. Her intercultural experience has focused her work on the question of negotiating personal and cultural identity. As she tells James, "Everything coming out of Africa, in literature, is still concerned with colonialism, what the Englishman has done to us. . . . It is about time that we started writing about ourselves now" (39). Emecheta writes about Igbo village life. But, because she has never lived in a village, her work has drawn criticism from Chinua Achebe, who in lectures has panned her works for their inaccurate portrayals of village life. Yet her own writing career, which expresses her feminism and shapes feminist consciousness, evolved from hearing village orators. "I liked the power these women commanded as storytellers," she tells James (37). Moreover, she says she wants to provide more accurate portrayals of women than male writers have, and she draws comparisons between Achebe's portrayals of women and her own (42). Thus, her presentation of village life may not be inaccurate so much as foreign to Achebe's male viewpoint. Or she may eschew realism in order to more adequately communicate feminist themes. In any

case, her work shapes Igbo society and perceptions of it just as Igbo society has shaped her own life and work.

Aidoo's work, like Emecheta's, arises from her own intercultural experiences and feminist consciousness. A lifelong Ghanaian, Aidoo grew up in a newly independent Ghana in the era of Kwame Nkrumah. She recalls early contact at home with African-Americans and other diasporan peoples and a long fascination with Africans' having sold each other into slavery (James 20-21). Moreover, she writes specifically from her "position in life, in society, in history as a *woman*," taking W. E. B. Du Bois one step further by writing about the "double problem of being women and being African" (12).

This double burden of patriarchy and colonialism accounts for the serious difficulties Eulalie and Nnu Ego face when they try to negotiate their own identities. Their most difficult problem is knowing who they are, even before they decide how to adapt to new environments; they have been taught to see themselves through so many dualisms, so many "other" eyes. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois explains the phenomenon of being a product of two cultures in terms of African-Americans:

The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second sight in this American world, a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others. . . . One ever feels his twoness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body . . . (17)

Continental Africans experiencing cultural encounters may develop such a consciousness as well; Nnu Ego, who encounters British influence in Lagos, is a good

example. And some diasporan people, such as Eulalie, who encounter Africa anew may also experience this consciousness. However, those who choose to ignore cultural encounters may never experience it: Ato, for instance, experiences it only in a dream, and Nnaife never develops such a consciousness at all.

But for women, this double consciousness often is complicated by their additional sense of seeing themselves as men see them. Identity then becomes a complex knot indeed. Nnu Ego, for instance, learns from her first husband that she is worth little to him if she cannot bear children; her identity, he tells her, must be "mother." Eulalie's identity becomes increasingly confused as Ato begins to confront her with the demands of an African husband: she is not to drink, she should not oppose him, she must be a proper African wife. Little wonder then that both women court exhaustion and madness as they strive to assert their identities in entirely new situations.

Yet they enter the morass of muddled identities as Ato and Nnaife do not. The men, in ignoring the complexity of their own characters and the cultural encounters they face, "miss what is essential about the world in the past century," as Edward Said notes in *Culture and Imperialism* (xx). He refers to the imperialist assumptions in European literature when he says that "for the first time, the history of imperialism and its culture can now be studied as neither monolithic nor reductively compartmentalized, separate, distinct" (xx). But the same may be said of personal identities on the continent and in the diaspora, as Emecheta and Aidoo demonstrate. Oblivious to their own complex identities, Nnaife and Ato not only deny who they are but miss the chance to shape who they might become. The men opt instead for an

irreconcilable and paralyzing dualism, a combative pose that has been supported by theorists like Frantz Fanon and Malcolm X. Such theorists advocate violence as a means for addressing cultural encounter:

At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect. (94)

Yet for Nnaife, such violence sends him to prison and reduces him to "a broken man" (224). He lashes out not at the colonizer, but at his neighbor, a Yoruba man, and the colonizer punishes him for it. Similarly, Ato slaps Eulalie when the cultural gap between them has grown widest. Yet that violent act leads her to reevaluate her own identity and win his mother's support, while Ato is left alienated from both wife and mother, his personal ties to America and Ghana. In these two works, violence at the individual level is a debilitating, counterproductive force.

More productive is the women's form of self-assertion, their affirmation and adaptation of personal identity in the face of cultural encounters. To ignore the encounters would be to deny reality and to abdicate control over a process that affects them, their children, and their communities. To lash out violently, were it allowed them as women, would paralyze and destroy them as it does the men who choose that response. Instead, women choose to shape a new reality where they are. They analyze and reconcile the double consciousness that Du Bois describes, fulfilling that "longing ... to merge [a] double self into a better and truer self" and becoming "co-workers in the kingdom of culture" (17). In their role as grassroots shapers of culture, they creatively challenge imperialist oppression; in shaping themselves and their children, they foster gradual, if difficult, cultural change. Gloria Anzaldua explains

such a process in terms of Hispanic-American culture:

What I want is an accounting with all three cultures--white, Mexican, Indian. I want the freedom to carve and chisel my own face... And if going home is denied me then I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new culture--*una cultura mestiza*--with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar, and my own feminist architecture. (22)

Neither Eulalie nor Nnu Ego immediately respond in this way. Eulalie clings at first to her American individualism and tries to escape with alcohol the cultural encounter pressing upon her. Nnu Ego, even as she evaluates the cultural encounter, insists at first on teaching her daughters that women's primary role is supporting their husbands, economically and socially. But eventually both women acknowledge the inadequacy of their responses. As Terry Eagleton would note, they learn "to trace within the present that secret lack of identity with itself which is the spot where a feasible future might germinate" (25). And they begin to shape the future by "grasping the present under the sign of its internal contradictions" (26). They realize the importance of negotiating their identities, of shaping their children in terms of cultural hybridity.

Both Eulalie and Nnu Ego reach these conclusions when they recognize how patriarchy and colonialism limit their identities and their actions. Eulalie, who changes more suddenly and drastically than Nnu Ego, is fighting with Ato when she finally recognizes her internalized patriarchal and colonial self-images. Ato jeers, as would a white supremacist, "How much does the American negro know?" (48). To Eulalie's greater surprise, from her lips comes the white, colonial perception of Africans: "Do you compare these bastards, these stupid narrow-minded savages with

us?" (48). Then Ato slaps her, graphically demonstrating the patriarchy that would silence any woman's challenge to her husband. At that point, Eulalie disappears from the newer wing of Ato's house, which has been reserved for the couple since their arrival from America. When she returns to the house, she shuns him and turns to Esi, an African and a woman, for support. Having stared down patriarchy and colonialism, she embraces what she has hitherto rejected and shapes the self she has come to Africa to create. She no longer lets Ato define her, casting her as the American opposite his own Ghanaian. She takes charge of herself, demonstrating a new feminist consciousness. And she releases her grasp on American individualism to reach out, in the spirit of African community, for Esi's support and mentorship. With Esi, she then performs an act that symbolizes the integration of their two cultures. As Edward Said notes, "if there is anything that radically distinguishes the imagination of anti-imperialism it is the primacy of the geographical in it" ("Yeats" 77). Thus, as Eulalie walks with Esi into the older wing of the house, she reclaims an African space symbolically lost to her as she clung solely to her American identity.

Nnu Ego's recognition of her patriarchal and colonial constraints occurs at various points throughout *The Joys of Motherhood*; in fact, the novel traces her growing consciousness of her nearly lifelong constraints. But her most significant turning point, at which she begins to co-opt elements of the colonizing culture to shape herself and her children, comes when Nnaife rebukes her for sabotaging their son's education, only because she required Oshia's help in supporting the family. As she watches Oshia idolize his father, she realizes the power men wield in Lagos because of their economic independence, while women remain bound to their duties as

wife and mother (186). She recognizes that patriarchy helps define the roles that constrain her: "The men make it look as if we must aspire for children or die" (187). And she vows no longer to perpetuate women's traditional supporting role, asking "who made the law that we should not hope in our daughters?" and seeking a formal education for at least one of her daughters (187, 223). As Florence Stratton has noted, the novel draws an analogy between the vision of an independent Nigeria and the hope of advancement for women (153). Both visions are reflected in the names Nnu Ego gives her twin daughters born immediately after she analyzes Nnaife's rebuke: "Obiageli, meaning 'She who has come to enjoy wealth,' and Malachi, meaning 'You do not know what tomorrow will bring'" (Emecheta 187).

Both Emecheta and Aidoo could have political objectives for valorizing women, for presenting their gender as the one able to analyze and reconcile the Du Boisian double consciousness common to Africans and diasporans. As self-described feminists, the authors have an interest in promoting women's strengths and increasing their respect. But perhaps their portrayals are not skewed. Perhaps women are better placed than men to accept and control personal and cultural hybridity. As Nnu Ego and Eulalie's conversions demonstrate, they are socialized within the same patriarchal and colonial dualisms as men. But as women, they are also taught to be helpful, accommodating, and deferent ("Gender" 35). They are trained to build relationships and smooth conflict. Such training explains in part their greater adaptability and their greater comfort with cultural hybridity.

Women's capacity for motherhood also contributes to their adaptability. In Gayatri Spivak's discussion of how childbearing interrogates Marxist notions of

production, she cites "the physical, emotional, legal, custodial and sentimental situation" of children, and how that situation necessitates unique relationships between women-workers and the products of their wombs ("Feminism" 79). Indeed, in such relationships, women demonstrate their adaptability and their ability to shape the identities of themselves and others. Women's identities change with the conception and birth of children: they incorporate into their identities the roles of "pregnant women" and "mothers." As their children take shape in the womb, mothers' anatomies and lifestyles must change: children can grow only in the adaptive environment that women provide. And after childbirth, women are traditionally the primary socializers of their children. They shape the identities of the new people they have helped create, thus shaping, too, the communities that will outlive them. Both Eulalie and Nnu Ego eventually recognize the power of motherhood. In their own ways, they seek to free motherhood from its abuse by patriarchal and colonial forces, focusing less on its traditional function as a means to status than on its revolutionary function as a means for changing society. As Nnu Ego educates her daughters in British schools and Eulalie reaches out to her adoptive Ghanaian mother, the women challenge patriarchal and colonial polarizations. By focusing on emerging personal and community identities, on both their literal and symbolic children, the African women are resolving those polarities, shaping a cultural hybridity, keeping their eyes on the prize.

NOTES

1. According to Carole Boyce Davies in her introduction to *Ngambika*, men's writing usually renders not only gender issues but women themselves "peripheral" to "the social and political implications of colonialism and man's struggle within, and away from, its confines" (3).
2. Victor C. Uchendu, in *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, notes that "church marriage commands the highest prestige" of all marriage forms in Igbo society (87). Thus Nnaife may be motivated as well by a desire for greater social status.
3. This quote reveals much about Nnu Ego's assumptions and Nnaife's character. First, it indicates her belief that a man should be able to assert his own identity--his cultural identity, in this case--despite outside threats. Her frustration with Nnaife's unwillingness to do so suggests her own initial reluctance to negotiate her identity in terms of the colonizing culture. Yet she eventually does negotiate her identity; he only panders to the British without ever self-consciously questioning his own assumptions or the colonizing culture. Second, the quote positions Nnaife as victim, a stance his own words and actions reinforce throughout the work, and which, indeed, he is, because he never takes responsibility for his identity. Third, the quote problematically implies that the loss of masculinity is humiliating, potentially equating feminization with humiliation. Nnu Ego's visions of womanhood change as her story progresses, evident in her new, if belated, provisions for improving her daughters' futures.
4. The church's name comments ironically on the tenuous link between Christianity and Igbo culture: St. Jude is the patron saint of hopeless cases.
5. Whereas Igbo men seem to have accepted the notion that "wages are the only mark of value-producing work," a feminist position such as Cordelia's might echo Gayatri Spivak in interrogating that notion ("Feminism" 79).
6. That he cannot determine at first whether children are actually singing the song outside his window or whether he has dreamed the whole thing indicates his double consciousness as well. The children would indicate both an African social consciousness and a generational continuation of his dilemma; the dream, a psychological phenomenon, points to American individualistic preoccupations and the personal dimension of Ato's difficulty. His uncertainty may echo his two internalized cultural identities.

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