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**EXPLORING HYBRID MASCULINITIES OF THE MALE CHARACTERS IN
OKPEWHO'S *THE LAST DUTY***

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores Connell's Theory of Masculinity to examine how patriarchal privileges are subsumed under the tutelage of femininity with intent of producing varied configurations of hegemonic masculinity. The failure of both patriarchy and masculinity to accentuate their hold unto these privileges results in a cataclysmic disfigured form of subordinated masculinities that manifest in a hybridism of masculinities. Utilizing Okpewho's novel, *The Last Duty*, this paper examines how the novelist's portraiture of the male characters in the novel reveals a bastardized patriarchy strangled to the point of suffocation; its relevance to society is seen in the infirmity of hopelessness and nothingness. The salvaging element, the paper argues, is to view the male characters through the lenses of hybrid masculinities which interpret the diverse identity projects of patriarchy in gender studies as ephemeral.

KEYWORDS

Hybridism, manhood, patriarchal dividend, penetrate

Introduction

One of Okpewho's concerns in *The Last Duty* is to examine the consequential effects of war on human relationships and how humans, especially women, become both the subject and object of mental and emotional torture leading to chaos and debilitating suffering in society. Obviously, the image of war as presented in the novel is perpetuated in society to enhance the image of men who utilize it to produce and maintain their hegemony over society. War, as presented in Okpewho's novel, becomes a metaphor to legitimize patriarchy, and the male characters are presented, as it were, to exact what Connel (1987) describes as the 'patriarchal dividends'¹ (79). However, in the performatives and exaction of these 'patriarchal dividends', the male characters are embroiled in a series of complicated events which threaten their very existence and by extension the harmony in society manifesting what Bozzoli (1983) describes as the 'patchwork of patriarchies' (149). This manifestation of patriarchy (and masculinity) as portrayed in *The Last Duty*, this paper argues, operates as a disfigured form of hegemonic masculinities to reflect subordinated forms that manifest in a hybridism of masculinities. The forms portrayed in the novel thrive on envy, jealousy, greed, nervousness and a failed determination to reclaim a bastardized masculinity.

Recent scholarship on masculinity as theorized in gender studies (e.g., Kimmel, 1987; Morrell, 2001; Miescher, 2003; Ouzgame and Morrell, 2005; Beasley, 2008; Mugambi and Allan 2010) and various efforts by literary critics to utilize these concepts in interpreting Okpewho's *The Last Duty* have contributed greatly in providing new perspectives to reading the novel. Some critics such as Nwachukwu and Nwachukwu (2017) and Emenyi (2006) have studied the male characters in the novel to reflect the absurdities of patriarchy in a war situation and the failed attempts at engagements to reconstruct society. Emenyi (2006), for example, in an essay titled "Feminization of poverty: A reading of Okpewho's *The Last Duty*", examines how patriarchy is utilized in gender relations in the novel 'to deform the woman' whose existence is tied to the largesse and benevolence of men (96). In the analysis of the main female character, Aku, Emenyi opines that patriarchy still has a strong hold on womanhood imposing poverty and debilitating pain on them; in spite of recent global affirmative actions geared to promoting women's rights. The essay concludes with a revolutionary call on African writers to create 'a new woman who possesses power through her dignified association with men' (96). Emenyi's essay does not fully study the male characters to reveal their inadequacies and limiting posturing despite their grip unto the patriarchal dividends.

In his paper, "The contribution of patriarchy to the concept of manhood in African societies: A Marxist reading of Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty*", Sanka (2019) examines how patriarchy contributes to the subordination of women in the novel and by extension bolstering the image of manhood. Sanka observes that patriarchy ultimately suffers the same setback of marginalization and suppression. He portrays the evils inherent in patriarchy as demonstrated by the male characters (in the novel) and utilizes the Marxist theoretical approach to establish a sense of equalness between the male and female genders as far as subordination and oppression of humans are concerned. Both men and women become victims of the oppressive forces of patriarchy so long as societal expectations and certain cultural norms are in disarray. Sanka's analysis and rallying

¹Patriarchal dividends: For a full understanding of the concept, refer to Connel (1987) and Demetriou (2001).

conclusion (for both males and females to build a synergy to fight patriarchy as a bid to establish a better society) perhaps may not be convincing to answer the probing questions of the psychological traumas and emotional turmoil that the principal male characters – Ali, Toje, Odibo, Oshevire, and Oghenovo – experience at the end of the novel.

Almost all the principal male characters in *The Last Duty* manifest a disfigured masculinity which invariably questions their hold unto the supposed patriarchal dividend: for Ali loses his position as the commander of the Urukpe post; Toje and Odibo slash each other in a bloody combat to the point of death; Oshevire is shot dead leaving behind a distraught widow, Aku, and an innocuous orphan, Oghenovo. Perhaps, Johnson's (2005) view on the manifestation of patriarchy is worth considering. He suggests that 'the most efficient way to keep patriarchy going is to promote the idea that it doesn't exist (...) Or, if it exists, it's by reputation only, a shadow of its former self that no longer amounts to much in people's lives' (154). Okpewho's portraiture of the male characters in the novel reveals a distended patriarchy that is unable to hold its sway and balance in the staggering storms of life's vicissitudes. The relevance of the artist's skill in the portrayal presents patriarchy in a sanatorium of fruitlessness and vacuity. The saving element, this paper argues, is to view the male characters through the lens of hybrid masculinities which interprets the varied manifestations of patriarchy in gender studies.

This essay utilizes the qualitative method of collecting and analyzing data which will be used for a close reading of the text. It is structured into four main sections. The first explores the theoretical framework of hybrid masculinities (as theorized by Bridges and Pascoe, 2014) to provide some perspectives on how men incorporate several elements in their personalities and behavioral practices to make them a miscegenate of patriarchy. In the second section, the paper examines how patriarchy takes advantage of the soldiering profession to manifest a disfigured form of nervousness and misguided self-delusional identity, subtitled: "Nervous masculinities cloaked in army apparel". The third section is a continuation of the second. It studies the various identity projects that emerge from patriarchy when it is evaluated utilizing Miescher and Lindsay (2015) "big man" theorization, subtitled: "The African *big man* theology under trial". In the final section, the paper concludes with the differing images of patriarchy that manifest when Okpewho's male characters in *The Last Duty* are explored.

Hybrid Masculinities

The Gramscian (1971) notion of hegemony which most scholars have used to theorize on the multiplicity, fluid and dynamic nature of masculinities [e.g., Kipnis (1994), Morrell (1998), Demetriou, (2001), Connell and Messerschmidt (2005)] have given way to a collective gender identity. This identity defies a universal categorization but manifests differing character typologies in consonance with what Connell (1987) describes as varied 'configurations of practice generated in particular situations in a changing structure of relationships' (81). It therefore suggests that in any society there could be different identities, characteristics and forms of masculinity.

Hybrid masculinities is a developing body of scholarship devoted to studying the emergence of new disposition in the varied transformations which have characterized masculinity studies in the twenty-first century. Bridges and Pascoe (2014) provide a historical overview of the concept of hybrid masculinity. They trace its origin to the 19th century and how it has developed in the 20th century to suggest a reference to different humans and social groups 'to address popular concern with miscegenation' which manifests in 'processes and practices of cultural interpenetration' (246). They define

hybrid masculinity as ‘the selective incorporation of elements of identity typically associated with various marginalized and subordinated masculinities into privileged men’s gender performances and identities’ (246). The focus of hybridism in masculinity studies, in their view, is ‘concerned with the ways that men are increasingly incorporating elements of various *Others* into their identity projects’ (246).

Essentially, hybrid masculinities seek to explain the various shifts and changes that prescriptive patriarchal systems and femininity accommodate to rebrand themselves in subcultural ways and ideologies. In their analysis and theorizing on the varied changes in hybrid masculinities, Bridges and Pascoe (2014) cite Anderson’s (2009) theory of “inclusive masculinities” to account for the contemporary changes that occur in men’s behavioral practices and belief systems to manifest a dystopia of the hegemonic patriarchal benefits. This inclusivity, Bridges and Pascoe argue, has a horizontal structuring in which ‘men are increasingly adopting practices characterized by acceptance of diverse masculinities opening up the contemporary meanings of “masculinity” in ways that allow a more varied selection of performances to count as masculine’ (248) ultimately resulting in what Anderson (2009) describes as ‘the erosion of patriarchy’ (9).

The aim of hybrid masculinities is basically to challenge the foundations of hegemonic masculinity and offer the constantly changing forms of the systemic power structures in society, with its attendant inequality in practices and beliefs as far as gender theorizing is concerned. This goal has the capacity to produce what Messner (1993) regards as the different ‘*styles* of masculinity’ (732) which frames ‘shifts in styles of hegemonic masculinity’ to indicate ‘the arrival of a New Man’ who invariably is presented as ‘marginalized men as the Other’ (733). Recent theorizations of these “marginalized men” have yielded varied nomenclature of the forms of hybrid masculinities such as *mosaic masculinity* (Coles 2008), *sticky masculinity* (Berggren 2014), *hard masculinity* (Breu 2005, Malin 2010), *soft masculinity* (Heath 2003, Holyoake 2002), *heroic masculinity* (Holt and Thompson 2004), *caring masculinity* (Elliot 2016), *hyper masculinity* (Salter and Blodgett 2012), *sexuality masculinity* (Clarkson 2007), *disability masculinities* (Shuttleworth, Wedgewood, and Wilson 2012). These forms reflect a manifestation of a set of behavioral patterns and practices peculiar to men at any given period or location to ‘create spaces for imagining actual changes taking place in how men are positioning themselves in different societal spheres and relations’ (Haywood et al., 2017, 145).

This paper utilizes some ideas from these theorizations on hybrid masculinities to examine how Okpewho’s portraiture of the male characters in *The Last Duty* exhibits a disfigured form of the hegemonic masculinities, and how they are denied the full privileges of benefitting from the patriarchal dividends. To execute this task, the essay will examine how the selected male characters fit into varied societal configurations of men’s privileges and assess the various shifts and changes that occur in their identities.

Nervous Masculinities Cloaked in Army Apparel

Okpewho’s artistry that shifts the focus in *The Last Duty* from the vagaries of the physical war to the substantial effects of the actual sufferings in human relationships provides a lens through which a critic evaluates the agents of the war itself. In the micro-text, the portraiture of the soldiers and the deft manipulation of events, characters and point of view produce varying personalities who manifest a blend of a distorted image of soldiering and a nervous military adventurism in society. The image of the soldier, (especially in African societies) as suggested by Huntington (1957), generally is conceived as a

profession of liveried individuals whose core duty and existence are synonymous to the use of violence and brute force to further their interests in their pursuit of defending the state from external attacks (62). Such a conception, according to Janowitz (1960), views the soldier as possessing an inflexible mental trait which is ‘blunt, direct and uncompromising’ (4). Several literary studies [such as Ojinmah (1991), Asika (2017)] on the Nigerian soldier point to their despotic and tyrannical leadership clothed in the overtures of civilian attire to perpetuate oppressive rule. Invariably, these approaches confer on the military some benefits of patriarchal dividends which legitimize their presence in civilian affairs. Okpewho’s portraiture of the soldiers in the novel, under consideration, exhibits some characteristics of the soldiering profession to reflect a hybridism of heroic masculinity hoisted to benefit from the patriarchal dividend but, at the same time, emasculated to unfold nervousness through caring masculinity and ultimately fading into oblivion.

Major Ali Iddris

Major Ali’s portrayal, at the beginning of the novel, reveals a successful soldier who enjoys the privilege of a mini god receiving the approbation of a ‘deafening applause from a grateful population’ (Okpewho 3). The people of Urukpe confer their ‘overwhelming gesture of approval and goodwill’ to a soldier who had distinguished himself by wading off an aggressive attack from the Simbian army (3). Ali manifests what Holt and Thompson (2004) describe as the *heroic masculinity*. It is the idolization of ‘the man-of-action hero, an idealized model of manhood that resolves the inherent weakness in two other prominent models (the breadwinner and the rebel)’ (425). Ali’s success in quelling the Simbian forces demonstrates his capacity to handle the inadequacies and helplessness of the people of Urukpe. Even the “big chief” (Otota) and his council of elders have to depend on Ali’s heroic deed to become the “men” and “breadwinners” for the town. Ali recounts his victory and admits that ‘for a soldier this is an hour of triumph I must confess I feel great joy this moment, as all over the town the entire population raise their fits in solidarity, jumping and shouting and showing in every way how much they welcome our presence and our efforts’ (3). In this brief opening, Ali recounts his successes and the reader shares in the benefits of the patriarchal dividend conferred on him. His intelligence, sense of duty and pragmatism drive him to treat all citizens with respect and dignity, ensuring that no civilian (or the soldiers under his command) flout the law and order. However, the artist manipulates events in the narrative to focus on Ali’s nervous devotion to duty which ironically becomes his greatest failure as the commander of the XV Brigade. It is this twist that reveals a different soldier in Ali.

Ali’s masculinity shifts from heroism to a paternalistic form which dispenses benevolence and emotionalism to keep the heroic image alive. Like the *soldier-father figure* in Urukpe, he ensures that the helpless and down-trodden (such as Aku and her son) are taken care of; Toje’s clandestine and manipulative moves are poorly ‘handled’ as he exhibits naivety and impropriety in obliging his requests; and as he confesses later in the novel, ‘a man must do what he has to do. It may hurt a few people, but right and expediency must always be the determining factors in his decisions’ (15). Ironically, Ali’s decisions are largely motivated by an inward fear and nervousness to fail as a soldier. For example, the decision to organize the military execution over what he describes as ‘as a mere private love dispute’ (18) between two soldiers brings in its wake ‘an atmosphere of tension and insecure feelings [he has] been trying to keep under control’ in his

soldiering career (16). Though the decision is well-intended to serve as a deterrent for recalcitrant soldiers, it is one of the series of actions that Ali takes to initiate the nervous masculinity he had exhibited all through the novel; as he admits, ‘...as I was being driven home, I sat pondering the unglamorous grandeur of justice and bounden duty’ (23). Here is a soldier whose obsession with duty and reasonableness is questionable. He is quite unsure whether his actions and deeds fulfil the goals and aspirations of his role as the hero hoisted before the reader in the opening pages, especially when we consider the fact that neither the Federal Chief of Staff nor the Military Governor of the state attended the ceremony.

Okpewho’s deliberate manipulation of events in the narrative shifts focus from Ali’s heroic soldiering masculinity to a nervous commander who does not fully understand the issues and people he is superintending over in Urukpe. The series of air raids from the Simbian forces coupled with Toje’s mischievous and manipulative paternalistic gestures, in burrowing through Ali’s pride, cloud Ali’s judgment and make him question his own role as to whether he is in charge or not. Ali puts up a front of a nervous soldier cloaked in military apparel, but he is unable to inspire the same confidence he initiated at the beginning of the novel. For example, in one of the series of dialogues and interactions between Toje and him when the former complains about the attitude of the quartermaster, sergeant Alao in respect of the cuts in the bills he had submitted, the latter shamefully admits to the reader that ‘... if I truly hope to keep a secure post, if I hope to maintain a secure rear while I push forward my front, then I owe it to myself to be realistic and secure the goodwill of men like this [Toje] who can cut my heel if they have a mind to’ (47/48). Ali’s admission and subsequent restlessness he exhibits in his interactions with Toje portrays a nervous soldier ‘torn between duty and deference to a noble heart’ (51). He is unable to fix his gaze on Toje but merely responds ‘with elusive glances, uncertain’ (51) of himself and lost in thoughts as he sheepishly and naively acquiesces to Toje’s requests. Ali’s nervousness gives way to despondency and utter hopelessness as the air raids from the rebel forces challenge his heroic masculinity, transforming him to direct his energies to other duties that make him relevant in Urukpe as a caring and protective patriarchy. Anderson (2009) argues that when hybrid masculinity is challenged and incorporates several other performances which suggest ‘the erosion of patriarchy’, then men adopt practices which make them acceptable as masculine (9). Ali’s sudden obsession with seeking the welfare of Aku (and her son) as well as going ‘on an inspection and condolence tour’ (94) after the air strikes from the opposition forces confirm Anderson’s theorization. Ali transforms his frail and bruised patriarchal nervous masculinity into recounting the losses of the civilians, injured persons, destroyed properties and the grim anxiety and despair that engulfed the people of Urukpe, and muses thus:

...why should I, a soldier equipped no less by the present circumstances than by military training with a strong sense of danger, allow my defences to stand in jeopardy by letting civilian bodies, who are in no position to assess the military situation in those parts, to take sole charge of ensuring the goodwill of the people of this place? (95).

Consequently, Ali resolves to initiate to the fullest, the *caring masculinity*. Elliot’s (2016) theorization on this kind of masculinity suggests that ‘masculine identities reject domination and its associated traits and embrace values of care such as positive emotion, interdependence, and relationality [which] constitute a critical form of men’s engagement and involvement in gender equality and offer the potential of sustained social change for

men and gender relations' (240). Ali's bastardized masculinity seeks solace in ensuring the goodwill of the citizens in Urukpe by complementing the efforts of the Red Cross, Anglican school, and the Civil Defence Unit. His frequent visits to these centres, bereaved families, occasional interaction with God-in-heaven and sentimental comfort of Madam Dafe, 'whose only son was killed in the air raid and whose home was shattered' (96), become emblematic performances of Ali's 'visible power in their midst' and to provide 'every assurance of protection and a safety as well as a touch of humanity and simple fellow feeling' for the citizenry (97).

Momentarily, Ali regains his heroic masculinity as the bereaved and displaced families at the refugee camp ululate his caring gestures. However, the novelist manipulates events in the narrative with Toje's immoral activities which obviously have festered because of Ali's failure as the patriarchal military guardian of the people of Urukpe. Ali's personality slumps in the reader's eyes as he descends into an abyss of oblivion. He views his 'entire post in disarray' and admits that:

I can't yet face the enormous misery that I am bound to encounter everywhere, should I venture out. And I don't think I have the stomach to listen to people like Chief Toje lecture me on what I should have done or what I should do. I can gradually feel my prime duty as a soldier coming into harsh focus, and I think I have to face it if I am not to see my whole career terminated in disgrace (202-203).

Obviously, Ali's soldering career is clothed in nervous conditions fatally looming toward a tragic end. As the immoral drama involving the rotten relationship of the trilogy (Toje-Aku-Odibo) draws to a cathartic level of bliss, the same crowd of civilians that celebrated his grand success at the beginning of the novel now 'hoot at the soldiers trying to send them away. To think that not so long ago they were hailing Ali! Ali! Ali! with wild enthusiasm!' (215).

Ali's personality and performative roles in the changing phases of the lived experiences in the micro-text impinge on his conscience to admit the irony of his mixed masculinities as he strives hopelessly to exact the full benefits of his soldiering-patriarchal dividends. In the final scenes of the novel, Ali fights hard to counter 'the mood of strained vacuity that is beginning to grow on' him (219), during his interaction with Oshevire. He strives hard to re-assert his bastardized masculinity to the stature of the *commander* he had lost as he lamely assumes the posture of a *man* still in control of the Urukpe post. However, Okpewho's artistic skill deposes him from the command with his transfer to the Headquarters. The final statement that concludes the novel (credited to Ali), 'if I had the same chance...to hold this bloody post again, *Allah*, I'd make the same mistakes all over!', suggests the cyclical nervousness which had characterized Ali's career as a soldier, concretely conveyed by the graphological features of the italicization of the Supreme deity, *Allah*, who presumably endorses the nervousness in patriarchy. The nervous masculinities expressed in Ali's soldiering career manifest another form in his predecessor Major Akuya Bello.

Major Akuya Bello

Major Akuya Bello's portraiture contrasts Ali's personality to reflect Breu's (2005) theorization of *hard-boiled masculinities*. Breu contends that the personality that manifests hard-boiled masculinity is characterized by 'physical strength, emotional detachment, aggressive behavior and an amoral worldview' dovetailing between the

cultural imperatives of the high and low individuals in a specific society (19). Major Bello is presented as the immoral soldier committed to a drunken behavioral lifestyle and sheer lack of discipline. His exhibition of brute force in terrorizing innocent citizens (such as Oshevire) coupled with a complete disregard for the ethical code of good soldiering in managing the Federal's expectation from him (as a commander in a war-torn community) as well as his selfish ambitions makes him a threat to society. Major Bello's failure to properly interrogate Toje's false accusation against Oshevire and his blatant emotional detachment from Oshevire's assumed innocence during the trial at Iddu portrays him as a brute, nervous soldier. He is susceptible to manipulation by the rich (or affluent, Toje) and he becomes a conduit to be deployed as a tool of oppressive behavior.

Major Bello's nervousness in his soldiering career rises to a crescendo as he transitions from a misguided and self-delusional soldier manipulated by Toje to a debased posturing of an aggressive, rude and impulsive panel member of the Tribunal. The fact that Major Bello is unable to influence the final verdict on Oshevire's innocence at the end of the trial and he being subject to the Federal Command under the chairmanship of a superior during the trial make him exhibit varying shades of a demented patriarchy under trial, which obviously fades into oblivion.

Private Okumagba

Another soldier who manifests Breu's (2005) theorization of the *hard-boiled masculinity* in *The Last Duty* is Private Okumagba. He is a no-nonsense, self-conceited and egoistical military personnel hoisted as an image of the patriarchal dividend in soldiering with the trope of the *gun*. He is largely motivated by tribal sentiments rather than a nationalistic outlook in his career. His assignment of protecting Aku (and her son) as well as *supervising* the rotten relationship and movements among the trilogy: Toje-Aku-Odibo, puts him in a precarious situation of mediating his physical strength or aggression against his emotional detachment from the reality of a war situation as directed by his superior, Major Ali. Okumagba's ability to see through the flaws of Ali's details assigned to him, coupled with his inability to exact his patriarchal benefits of blasting open the brains of Aku and terminating Odibo's hulking life predisposes him to exhibit a hybridism of a nervous masculinity of tenderness towards Oshevire's plight as an innocent man (at the end of the novel) and a revulsion towards the shameless Aku. Perhaps, his philosophizing of the issues arising from the rotten relationship Aku has been involved in and the tenderness he expresses towards Oshevire's plight drives home the complexity of nervous masculinities clothed in army apparel. Okumagba declares, 'If I ever get married, and I have to go anywhere without my family, I will plug my wife's cunt with a hand grenade' (233). Is Okpewho proposing the feminization of the patriarchal dividends (associated with brute sexuality) linked to a soldier's ability to *protect* his woman's clitourethrovaginal features even if it meant initiating a war tactic such as using an explosive? Perhaps, the answer could be elicited in the combat between the two soldiers involved in the love dispute over a civilian girl and the consequent firing squad event as narrated by Major Ali.

Private Sule and the Sergeant

The two soldiers manifest the traits of Breu's (2005) *hard-boiled masculinities* theorization. The cold-blooded viciousness of Private Sule's savagery in killing both the girl and his superior, the sergeant, with the *gun* manifests the normal brute force and

aggressive behavior of soldiers when their personal interests (in sexuality) are threatened. It betrays, however, the soldier's lack of emotional intelligence and decorous behavior as anger and sheer jealousy drive his actions recreating a new personality of a villain only fit for the gallows. The subtle exhibition of nervousness and fear as Private Sule strives hard to enjoy the patriarchal dividends of *protecting* his girl only succeeds in transforming him into a despicable soldier. The sergeant, on the other hand, by his avowed posture of exacting his sexuality in the combat with his subordinate manifests the immoral super masculinity figure whose emotional detachments from the reality of fairness, truth and honesty in fellow soldiering relationship end in a disaster. The artist designs a retributive force of punching the ego of both soldiers in their tragic deaths. The fear and anxiety that precede and characterize their tragic deaths are powerful reminders of the grim hopelessness that soldiering patriarchal figures experience in their determined will to accentuate their hold on supposed patriarchal dividends.

The African “big man” Theology under Trial²

The theorization of Miescher and Lindsay (2005) on the African “big man” provides a lamp post a critic can utilize to penetrate and explore some of Okpewho's male characters in *The Last Duty*. The theorization suggests an impressive archetypal posturing of African men who work hard to ‘enlarge their households and use their “wealth in people” for political and material advancement’ (3). Such “big men”, Miescher and Lindsay argue, (citing Iliffe, 1995) build ‘large complex household[s] headed by a Big Man surrounded by his wives, married and unmarried sons, younger brothers, poor relations, dependents, and swarming children’ (94). These men are able to ‘gain people and power by distributing resources and providing for their followers’ (3). The portraiture of this “big man” syndrome, perhaps, partly reflects Okpewho's characterization of Toje in the novel. However, this paper claims that Toje's subscription to this phenomenon as a basis to benefit from the patriarchal dividend is fraught with contradictions, ironies and complexities that make him exhibit a hybrid of masculinities. He obviously manifests the African “big man” syndrome who is under trial through the artistic manipulation of Okpewho's skill to reflect varied shifts and degenerative changes in his performative roles and identity.

Toje Onovwakpo

In the novel, Toje is portrayed as a “big man” who dispenses resources and “protection” to the vulnerable in the Urukpe community. This portraiture reflects Coles' (2008) theorization of *mosaic masculinities* which describes the varying reformations that emasculated men respond to the ideal hegemonic masculinity. The theorization shapes masculinities ‘along the lines of their own abilities, perceptions, and strengths, and they define their manhood along these new lines’ to suit the capital or resources they possess (238). Toje's hold on the patriarchal dividend and his assumed infatuation with his status as a “big man” in the Urukpe community are manipulated to reflect a nervous and a diminished masculinity. His hasty recommendation of Oshevire's detention on charges of ‘collaboration with the rebels’ (4) coupled with him suborning Rukeme to formulate

² For the exegesis on the “big man” theology in pre-colonial and colonial Africa, refer to Miescher (1997), Miescher and Lindsay (2003), Ouzgane (2005) and Iliffe (1995, 2007).

outrageous charges against Oshevire as well as contriving to use Aku to prove his flawed manhood is a list of the performatives Toje exhibits to reassert his emasculated personality. The sordid account of his emaciated masculinity and manhood is related to the nervous encounter with his wife over the cause of his impotence. Okpewho records:

How shall it be told, how reported, that I cannot lie with a woman? Common fowls and dogs and goats do it in the streets, before the very eyes of the gazing world, and I cannot even enjoy the customary subconscious ritual of an early morning erection, which is the privilege of even the tiniest infant! What use is this flab of flesh, if it cannot perform the function without which a man is not worth the classification? (23).

The stylistic features of the rhetorical questions made concrete with the exclamation mark (in the extract), as well as the reference to the animal creatures (common fowls, dogs, goats) and even infants manifesting the privileges and benefits of the phallus are images which demonstrate Toje's debased personality. His assumed posturing as a "big man" of money, power and authority at home hangs in limbo as the wife brazenly challenges him to prove the assertion that she was behind his impotence.

Toje's bid to reclaim his bastardized masculinity seeks solace outside his home in ephemeral performatives. He manipulates Major Ali to believe that he, Toje, is the real "big man" who shows concern for the poor (Aku and son, and Odibo) and the welfare needs of Urukpe. Okpewho subjects these performatives before the reader who sees through the frailty of Toje's diminished masculinity. Toje is emasculated from the posturing of a business magnate in the rubber plantation into a procurer (or trader) of foodstuffs, negotiating prices of yams and plantains with Ali's quarter master as ordinary market women do. He is further emasculated in his inability to *penetrate* Aku despite his incessant hand exploration of her 'groin with such blind vigour' (158). In addition, Emuakpor (the herbalist) deceives Toje and describes him as a 'cock shorn of his comb' (164). These images depict the debilitating and diminished masculinity of Toje. Emuakpor concludes the portraiture of him thus:

I looked at him as he rode away, and shook my head. Was this the omnipotent giant? I felt sorry for him... I was sure that if a little child pushed him with a stick, he would fall over! (169).

In exploring these images of Toje's emasculation as a manifestation of his failed mosaic masculinity, Okpewho's artistic skill problematizes the legitimacy of patriarchy and brings into sharp relief the conflicted attributes of hegemonic African "big man" theology which on the one hand dispenses gifts and largesse ulteriorly for the comfort of the giver but on the other hand, ironically fails to appropriate the full benefits of the patriarchal dividends. In most artistic representations of this frail "big man" syndrome, a common trope utilized by African writers to portray such a frail "big man" is impotence or his inability to exact full control over his wife/wives. Similar portraiture of Toje finds comparisons in Rotimi's presentation of Lejoka Brown in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*; Soyinka's presentation of Baroka and Lakunle in *The Lion and the Jewel*; and Sembene's portrait of El Hadji Adbu Kader in *Xala*. Okpewho's deliberate injection of Toje with the impotence trope making him unable to enact the full *penetrative* sexual dividend on Aku as well as the tragedy of losing the prize of respect from both Odibo and the entire Urukpe community as a shameless adulterer becomes powerful reminders of the ephemeral configurations of the "big man" masculinities under trial.

Odibo

Odibo's characterization in *The Last Duty* may be seen as a distant reality from the "big man" syndrome as theorized by Miescher and Lindsay (2005). In the opening pages of the novel, Odibo is portrayed as a useless cripple who has nothing profitable to offer humanity. In fact, he even admits, *'I know I am nothing. I know I have nothing/ What use is this awkward mass of a body... if you cannot help yourself. And you have no mind. No use at all, not even to yourself. Utterly useless...'* (6/60). The deliberate italicization of Odibo's diatribe manifests his diminished masculinity which obviously the artist uses to portray what Shuttleworth, Wedgewood and Wilson (2012) theorize as *disability masculinities*. Such a masculinity examines the dilemma that disabled men face in their bid to become autonomous and powerful whereas their disability predisposes them to be dependent and helpless. Odibo's disability makes him dependent on Toje's largesse as he runs errands for him. However, his dreams of becoming a real full "big man", 'complete with everything, including two and healthy arms. Ruling over this whole town, and sitting comfortably on top of inexhaustible riches, and my house paved with gold' (61-62) seem to be portrayed in a blissful *penetrative* trope of *manhood* of a malignant tragedy as he dispenses both joyous and grieving benefits from the patriarchal dividend.

Okpewho's artistic skill projects Odibo's humanity and rising masculinity in the narratives which recount the comradeship and palliative care that blossom between Odibo and Oghenovo (Aku's son) on the numerous occasions that Aku abandons her maternal duties to her son in response to her whorish task of ministering to the animal desires of Toje. Odibo's maturation reaches a crescendo when he accidentally views the nakedness of Aku and later boldly pries into her bedroom to exact his "portion" of the patriarchal dividend (may be, unworthily). However, the author credits him with the privilege of manifesting a blend of *mosaic* masculinity, *caring* masculinity and a *heroic* masculinity. The varying shades of these masculinities reflect in Odibo's personality. He now assumes the posturing of a "big man" *dispensing* the "largesse" and "goodies" the femininity in Aku had been starved for the past three years. Aku's assessment of the two men's – Toje and Odibo – proclivity to satisfying her expectations in actualizing the full benefits of patriarchy finds expressions in her comparative description of their physique and expected outcomes. Of Toje, Aku says: '... I was shaken to find that I was facing a new kind of beast... [who] drowned himself in alcohol by the time I got there... the drooling figure of a man was sitting on the bed with his back against the wall, hardly making a reply to all my words of greeting.... When I got back in bed, he fell over me, and gradually levered his slobbering mass over my body.... As usual, he did nothing beyond that' (157-158). Of Odibo, Aku recalls 'imbibing fully a hot billy-goat smell that revived in me a feeling I had not known for years As he came nearer and nearer, I noticed... his imposing build. The swell of his shoulders and of the biceps of his right arm. The taper of his trunk.... He was every inch a man- his manhood scarcely faulted by the unfortunate loss of an arm' (159/162).

Aku's candid evaluation of the two men brings into sharp focus Okpewho's interrogation of the whole concept of who is the real "big man"? Is he one such as Toje who plots mischief against his fellow man (Oshevire), takes advantage of the wife's helpless condition to enact the mosaic masculinity by providing materiality but fails to *penetrate* her after a series of sexual arousals? Or, is he like an Odibo who cannot provide the material needs of Aku but provides caring masculinity in times of the woman's *need* and exploits her burning somatic desires through a successful *penetration* and satiation? Perhaps, the answers to the above questions are provided in the novelist's artistic vision.

Okpewho explores this “big man” theology and suggests that patriarchy’s bid to appropriate the mosaic masculinity (as in the case of Toje) to the neglect of the caring or *penetrative* masculinities is bad. In addition, patriarchy’s success in exacting the penetrative act itself (as exemplified in the performatives of Odibo) to satiate a forlorn and emaciated femininity in a shameless adulterous relation does not qualify to be endorsed as the manifestation of the “big man” theorization. The tragic ends of the two men in a machete bloody bath that the novelist designs for them metaphorically conveys the artist’s discontent with their false subscription to the African “big man” theology. Both men are denied the full benefits of enjoying the patriarchal dividends which obviously disadvantages matriarchy. Their portraiture only echoes a wailing patriarchy under trial suffocating towards nothingness.

Mukoro Oshevire

The African “big man” sensibilities, as Okpewho illustrates from *The Last Duty* cannot accommodate Toje and Odibo into the fold of men primarily because of their adulterous escapades with Aku who becomes a victim of false patriarchy. The reader appreciates the seeming poetic justice that exterminates the two men and also introduces Oshevire – the legal husband of Aku – acquitted and discharged from the false charges levelled against him. Momentarily, there appears to be some level of optimism and hope for both patriarchy and the real enactment of the “big man” theology within the broad framework of exploring hybrid masculinities. Oshevire’s character and personality, as presented in the greater part of the novel, are associated with tropes of the divinity – God – and a clear conscience. These tropes become emblematic images to suggest that he is a just, honest and truthful man. His kind of masculinity and patriarchy assumably accommodates four varying shades of hybrid masculinities: *heroic*, *caring*, *mosaic* and *hard*. From his series of monologues and diatribes during the trial scenes in the novel, he manifests some identity traits which dominate all the other forms; what he refers to as ‘*clear conscience and just manhood*’ (42).

The novelist highlights these identity traits and contrasts them with Toje’s “manhood” (which obviously manifests in his impotence), Odibo’s “manhood” (which manifests in his shriveled disability) and Ali’s “manhood” (which manifests in his nervous soldiering). Oshevire’s clear sense of just “manhood” in saving the little boy momentarily provides a mirror for the reader to evaluate all the other characters’ actions and inactions in assessing the devastating effects of the war and its consequences on human relationships.

In the accounts that relate to Rukeme’s false and inconsistent testimonies and Agbeyegbe’s Marxist ideologies of escape from prison, Oshevire’s “manhood” is defined in his caring and heroic masculinities. This is evidenced in his preference to uphold the values of honesty and trust in his marriage and family as against choosing the path of perdition. As he declares ‘... nothing - nothing at all - will deter me from the path of truth and integrity. I will forever stand up like a man’ (90). Though Oshevire is unable to clearly manifest the *mosaic*, *caring* and *heroic* masculinities towards his family at this point while in prison, his defining “manhood” is reflected in his unwavering conviction that ‘he knows he has truth and integrity on his side - whatever the odds are against him’, for he will not submit himself to cheap defeat (157).

Okpewho’s artistry, however, subjects Oshevire’s masculinities under trial to ascertain the extent to which Oshevire could exemplify the admirable *just manhood* in the series of events that follow his final release. Oshevire’s encounter with the madman – Eseoghene – becomes a metaphor the artist selects to explore his split and demented

masculinity. In the novel, Eseoghene is the last human being he saw three years ago when he was arrested in Iddu and the first person he encounters when he returns to Urupke. This coincidence, though artistically manipulated by Okpewho, prepares the reader for Oshevire's dementia and final tragedy at the end of the novel. The series of innuendoes and images of *Dead man* and *spoils* that characterize their short discourse (recalling the rotten relationship involving Aku) set in motion a nervous strain that afflicts Oshevire's uncompromising "manhood" surging in its wake a series of cataclysmic eruption of demented patriarchy and distended masculinities. Oshevire's resolve to re-enact his "just manhood" after Major Ali has told him about the events of the rotten relationship involving the trilogy: Toje-Aku-Odibo, manifests his shriveled hyper nervous "manhood" which conditions him to act irrationally. For as he pointedly declares:

What else can a man **do** but that which his mind urges him to **do** and he is genuinely convinced he should **do**, whatever the consequences are? To **do** otherwise would be to betray his *honest manhood*. And I would be the last to allow myself to fall under the pressure of fear. (236) (Emphasis mine).

Such block-headedness of Oshevire's supposed *honest manhood* manifests his intransigent posturing which obviously seems to deify his personality to assume a god-like stance to condemn all others except himself. He pitches himself against the entire Urupke community: he rejects Major Ali's offer of protection for his family; he defiantly refuses to eat the wife's food, (let alone talk to her) and he bastardizes Oghenovo's faith in a long-awaited father.

In the final accounts of Aku's 'prayer' seeking divine reparation for her errors, she attains a level of purity before the reader who metaphorically redeems her soul and transforms her into a *saint* as Oshevire descends into the abyss of a failed "big man", selfish masculinity and an unreasonable patriarch. Here is a man who for the past three years had not provided food, sustenance, protection and care for his family; yet he expects his wife and son to bestow upon him the benefit of patriarchal dividends. Okpewho does not seem to endorse Aku's unfortunate circumstances in the novel, but his focus is on Oshevire's intransigence and unreasonable subscription to his "just manhood". In Oghenovo's pen-ultimate account of the closing events in the narrative, rendered in the graphological feature of italicization, conveying a surrealistic nomenclature in dreams or hallucination or a mystic divination, Okpewho provides a final portrait of Oshevire's failed patriarchy. The images of Oshevire, portrayed as very angry and tying both hands and legs of his wife (feet-downwards from the ceiling) and son (head-downwards from the ceiling) and relentlessly punishing them with a 'fire-reddened cutlass' make him more of a tyrannical and sadistic beast reclaiming a shadow of a lost glory that no longer benefits its expectant dependents (240). All it unleashes is pain and limitless sufferings in contrast to what real patriarchy should provide.

Okpewho exploits a piece of Igbo cosmology (the concept of *Chi*) which invariably suggests a purely African philosophical principle in dealing with such demented patriarchy in which an individual sets out to disregard the wishes and aspirations of his people to do as he/she wishes. This theology, as explained and utilized by Chukukere (1971), Achebe (1975), and Agu (2017) prescribes that 'no man however great can win a judgement against all the people' (Achebe, 1975, 99). Oshevire's assumed "just manhood" which makes him disregard the protection offered by Major Ali (the symbol of state security) as well as defiantly disregarding the clear instructions from the soldiers (agents of the state and representatives of the will of the community) on night patrol to

stop; in addition to refusing to heed the cries, pleas and importunities from Aku becomes an emblematic pointer of a failed patriarchy. Okpewho portrays the tragic end of a demented patriarchy which must not ‘win judgement against all the people’ in the final monologue of Oghenovo. Oshevire’s tragic death brings into focus the question of whether *heroic* masculinity or *disability* masculinity has been manifested? The obvious answer lies in the fact that Oshevire’s subscription to the patriarchal structures and his determined aspirations of reaping the supposed benefits amount to emptiness in human’s lives. One of the objective ways one can discern from men’s complex and varying behaviours is to transpose them through the lens of hybrid masculinities which shape and orient them.

CONCLUSION

The varied theoretical models of masculinities utilized in this paper provide an explanation of men’s engagement with some masculine practices. They also serve as an attempt to categorize men’s behavioral traits and experiences within certain domains considering their subscriptions to the discourse on patriarchal dividends, and men’s failed attempts to project their identities. These ideas have been exploited and imposed on Okpewho’s artistic construction in *The Last Duty* to examine how the male characters manifest a disfigured multiple masculinities in their bid to legitimize hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy in a war situation. Okpewho’s artistry in the portraiture of soldiering as the main agency of the war reflects varying levels of nervousness, egregious emotional complexity, self-delusion, inflexibility and despondency fatally heading towards a tragic doom. The fates of Major Ali, Major Bello, Private Okumagba and the two despicable love-warring soldiers in the novel demonstrate the shades of transformative identity projects and discourses through which masculine subjectivism and patriarchy are feminized.

Another important consideration this paper interrogates is the conflict between the fiction of the fixed African “big man” and the real factual identity projections of masculinity as expressed in the trope of *manhood* of some of the male characters in the novel. *Manhood* is used to mean different discourses that position men in the socio-cultural realities as dramatized in the novel; for there is a contradiction between the assumed “big man” and the subjective performatives. Toje’s enactment of his failed manhood as manifested in his inability to *penetrate* a woman rather than inclusively provide materiality associated with the “big man” syndrome is compensated with a *penetrative* trope of manhood as exhibited by Odibo. Odibo’s *manhood* dispenses joy to a starved womanhood; but at the same time, the same *manhood* becomes emblematic of society’s abhorrence primarily because it was exacted by a shriveled and undeserving masculinity. Oshevire’s repeated enactment of his masculinity in the “just manhood” performatives characterized by his adherence to a modus operandi of pursuing truth, honesty and integrity (as a manifestation of his “big man” identity) is flawed by his engagement in dementialike attributes which ultimately frame him as a parody of patriarchy.

Okpewho’s portraiture of the male characters in *The Last Duty* manifests a hybridism of masculinities.

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The author holds a PhD in Literary Studies. He was a Senior Lecturer at Methodist University College Ghana, where he taught courses in both European and African literatures, and some courses in Communication Studies. Currently, he has changed his institution of affiliation and he is with the University of Professional Studies Accra where he teaches courses in Communication Studies. His current areas of interest include a surrealist study of the Ivorian poet and novelist, Veronique Tadjou, and the influence of Jonsonian comedy in some West African dramatists' works.

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