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RENAN CABRAL PAULINO

(DE/RE) CONSTRUCTING MASCULINITIES IN *STAY WITH ME*, BY AYỌ̀BÁMI ADÉBÁYỌ̀

JOÃO PESSOA
2021

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The problem with gender is that it prescribes how we should be rather than recognizing how we are. Imagine how much happier we would be, how much freer to be our true individual selves, if we didn't have the weight of gender expectations.

We Should All Be Feminists, Chimamanda Adichie

RESUMO

Nos últimos anos, as produções literárias Africanas de escrita feminina têm ganhado cada vez mais espaço no ocidente. A abordagem de temas como o papel feminino e masculino na sociedade Africana e os papéis de gênero são bastante recorrentes nesses escritos. Diante disso, o presente trabalho de conclusão de curso teve como principal objetivo analisar as performances de gênero em duas personagens da obra *Stay with Me* (2017), da escritora nigeriana Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀. Foram elas: Yejide e Akin. Porém, a investigação é centralizada na personagem Akin e como ela performa suas masculinidades. De modo a alcançar tal finalidade, a pesquisa se ancorou em pesquisadoras como Judith Butler, Oyèronké Oyěwùmí e Raewyn Connell. A partir da análise da obra, percebeu-se que as expectativas de gênero, no que tange ao casamento, à maternidade e à paternidade, assim como à masculinidade são extremamente impositivas na cultura nigeriana, mais precisamente na etnia Yorubá pós-colonial. Por conseguinte, as personagens analisadas configuram um processo de transição, no qual elas nem representam uma ruptura total com os padrões de gênero, nem seguem à risca essas expectativas. Concluiu-se, portanto, que Akin é um homem que transita de forma bastante conflituosa entre uma masculinidade tradicional e padrões masculinos que se afastam de uma masculinidade hegemônica.

Palavras-chave: Stay with Me. Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀. Masculinidades.

ABSTRACT

Recently, African literary productions of female writing have been gaining more space in the West. The approach of themes such as female and male roles in African society and gender expectations are quite recurrent in these texts. Therefore, this senior paper had as its main objective to analyze the gender performances in two characters from the novel *Stay with Me* (2017), written by the Nigerian author Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀. They were: Yejide and Akin. However, the investigation centers on the character Akin and how he performs his masculinities. In order to achieve this purpose, the research relies on researchers such as Judith Butler, Oyèronké Oyěwùmí and Raewyn Connell. From the analysis, it was noticed that gender expectations, with regard to marriage, maternity and paternity, as well as masculinity, are extremely imposing in Nigerian culture, more precisely in the post-colonial Yorubá ethnic group. Consequently, the characters analyzed configure a transition process, in which they neither represent a total break with gender patterns, nor follow these expectations to the letter. It was concluded, therefore, that Akin is a man who moves in a very conflicting way between a traditional masculinity and masculine standards that move away from a hegemonic masculinity.

Keywords: Stay with Me. Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀. Masculinities.

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1 NIGERIAN LITERATURE: UNDERSTANDING THE WHY(S)

When I got the acceptance letter in the English Language Teaching and Literature Bachelors at *Universidade Federal da Paraíba* (UFPB), I just knew that by the end of five years I would be able to teach English, as a High School teacher or in a private language course. In fact, during my undergraduate course, I discovered a world of possibilities, all of them connected to the teaching of English, of course, but with a wider perspective, once literature courses had a considerable workload. The first few semesters, English students have to face multiple theoretical courses regarding literature, illustrated by, Introduction to literary studies, Literary theory I and II, among others. In total, the course is composed of nine courses entirely concentrated on Literature, and, because of this, I fell in love with this form of art, meanwhile I became a reader, and immediately after I decided to research Literature[1].

During my academic years, as I decided to apply for Extension Projects that had to deal with literature teaching and literature appreciation, I had to confront a new challenge: to read. I confess I was not a dedicated reader, for I never tried to become one, or simply because I never found out my literary style. Nevertheless, I took part in projects such as "Literature Applied to the Classroom", coordinated by Dr. Maria Elizabeth P. Souto Maior Mendes, and "Reading Circles", coordinated by Dr. Danielle de Luna e Silva, and, while in these projects, I had to read so many titles that finding my style became an easy matter.

These projects dealt with topics such as social changes and differences, racial and gender issues and non-canonical literary expressions. Influenced by these themes, and always thinking about reading texts from new cultures and different parts of the world, I found in African novels what I was seeking. The raw way that African authors describe their social context, how they present their ethnical background and the way they deconstruct ocidental and ethnocentric perceptions against their cultural expressions made me feel curious and passionate about reading African works.

As previously mentioned, the English Language Teaching and Literature BA[2], at UFPB, even though it has nine courses regarding Literature teaching, three related to teaching literary theories, three of them focusing on English literature and three approaching North-American literary productions, these courses exclude productions from different English-speaking countries, rather than the U.S and sometimes Canada. Unfortunately, it was out of the classrooms that I discovered my research interests, and although I had this

[1] I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Glória Gama, for her passionate way of teaching literature. It was during her lessons that the love of this researcher for literature began.
[2] 2006 Curriculum.

opportunity to take part in institutional projects that positively influenced and enlarged my reading perspectives, many other students do not have the same privilege. However, in 2019, as the English Language and Literature Teaching curriculum went through a review and there exists more flexibility to present literature in English expressions, hopefully Professors may vary their reading indications during the semester, and include African literary texts in their courses. Nevertheless, this work aims to bring into light African literature in the English language expression.

The first African book I read was “Purple Hibiscus”, by Chimamanda Ngozi-Adichie. The narrative was so astonishing that after this book I wanted to read all of her writings, which includes short stories and also non-fiction. I have claimed her as my favorite author for quite a long time. After reading Chimamanda’s books, I decided to read more Nigerian authors, like Buchi Emecheta, Chinua Achebe, Oyinkan Braithwaite, and Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀. Consequently, as this research is mainly about Nigerian literature, it is important to have a brief discussion on this topic.

Nigerian literary traditions began with oral storytelling, that is, stories were meant to be told and spread by oral communication. Further, the oral Nigerian literature consisted of myths, legends, tales, songs, proverbs and epics, etc. Moreover, poetry is considered the genre with the oldest provenance among the various forms of literary production, especially among Yorùbá people, for they were used as chants for the Orishas, Yorùbá deities. However, the colonization process imposed new aesthetic forms that came with the English writing system, and, as oral traditions rely on the memory of humans, some of the narratives lost prestige, and disappeared (FASAN, 2010).

On the other hand, Nigerian traditions were also written in indigenous languages among the various tribes throughout the country. According to Emenyonu,

> It is important for any reader of fiction in Nigeria to realise that no matter how much the author denies or disguises it, every Nigerian who writes fiction in English today has his foundation in the oral heritage of his ethnic group… An authentic study of Nigerian literature must, therefore, begin by examining and appreciating the origins and development of literatures in Nigerian indigenous languages (EMENYONU, 1988).

However, even though Nigeria has a vast number of tribes and native languages, most of them are spoken only, and, in light of this, Yorùbá, Hausa and Igbo were the ethnic groups that published the most, for the writers of these groups used the Ajami, and Boko, a mixture of Arabic and Roman with native languages, to write their literature. Additionally, writings in

Ajami were first dated in the 17th century, and they were mostly a collective of poems, for they were used as chants and hymns for religious purposes (FASAN, 2010; YAHAYA, 1988).

With the imposition of English by the British Empire and their molds of education imposed in the African colonies, many of the manuscripts had to be designed in the language of the colonizer, English, for it was standardized as a way to express high culture and prestige. For this reason, Nigerian literature in English expressions tend to be influenced by indiginous oratures, focusing on ethnic elements suppressed by the colonization, as a matter to hold an activism which operates on the principle that literary aestheticism co-works with social relevance and functionality (FASAN, 2010; EMENYONU, 1988).

Nigerian writers of English are often divided into three different generations. The first generation was composed of those who wrote before or shortly after the independence of the country in 1960, such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, awarded the Nobel Prize of Literature in 1986, J.P. Clark-Bekederemo, and Christopher Okigbo. These writers focused on approaching themes such as urban versus rural life, while hoping for an end to colonial rule. Consequently, with Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), and after Wole Soyinka won the Nobel Prize of literature in 1986, Nigerian literature started to be in the African literature spotlight. (FASAN, 2010).

The second generation of Nigerian writers has its foundation in the first generation, however, the means used to approach the themes were expressed in a high standard English, that is, the complexity of the language construction was accessible mostly for language oriented people, with an elitist style of the language spectrum (JEYIFO, 1988). Authors of this generation include: Ola Rotimi, Femi Osofisan, Wale Ogunyemi, Bode Sowande, Tunde Fatunde, Olu Obafemi, and others. Nevertheless, female authors placed in this second generation were well recognized in a global sphere, for they were treating themes such as gender matters in contrast to a male dominance in Nigerian literary field expressions. Some of these writers are Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, and Mabel Segun. Also, the role of Nigerian women in Nigeria's female writing, male abuse, and women marginalization were by far themes very common among the writers of this generation (FASAN, 2010).

The third generation appears in the 90's bringing themes such social injustices and political crises. By that time period, Nigeria was experiencing political and military chaotic scenarios, since the country, from independence onward, has never experienced a democratic political environment. With this background of electoral crises, unemployment, constant closure of schools, and police and military brutality, such themes constitute the writings of

this third generation of writers. They are, Akin Adesokan, Maik Nwosu, Helon Habila, Sefi Attah, Chimamanda Ngozi-Adichie, among others (FASAN, 2010).

In general, contemporary Nigerian authors are influenced by these three previous generations. Many of these young authors live across continents, for many of them lived and studied abroad in places such as the United States and Western Europe. In light of this, these writers are not only concerned about themes previously discussed by former generations, but a new range of topics, as Black diasporic issues, citizenship, belonging and cultural break-ups, are frequently demonstrated in such writings (FASAN, 2010).

Nigeria holds a Nobel in Literature with Wole Soyinka, and has great names like Chinua Achebe and Buchi Emecheta, but it was after Chimamanda Ngozi-Adichie published her novels, short stories and nonfiction books, that Nigerian literature became more famous among Brazilian readers. She has published many books, such as *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), that describes how christianism changed cultural traces of ethnical groups in Nigeria, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), which is set during the Biafra war, but *Americanah* (2014) made her name echo as one of the most known Nigerian names of the literary spectrum.

TAG publishing house published in Portuguese some Nigerian novels. For example, *Joys of Motherhood* (2017), by Buchi Emecheta, *Things Fall Apart* (2019), by Chinua Achebe, and *Stay with Me* (2017), by Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀. This research will focus on analysing the latter. It aims at investigating gender expectations regarding two characters, Yejide and Akin, narrowing to the character Akin and how masculinity performances influenced his actions and the development of the diegesis. Beyond that, this Senior paper intends to contribute to the field of gender studies and African literature.

Lastly, in order to achieve the research goals, this work is divided into three chapters. The first is this introduction, which provides the reader with a brief discussion regarding Nigerian literature and the research rationale. The second chapter evidences the theoretical framework regarding gender studies, African and Black masculinity, and representations of masculinity in Nigerian literary art forms. Additionally, in the third chapter, a brief discussion on *Stay with Me* (2017), narrowing to the analysis of Akin in a masculinity studies perspective. Finally, in the conclusion section, final considerations regarding the novel and the character will be highlighted, in order to highlight the research findings.

2 DISCUSSING GENDER: FLUIDITY AND PERFORMANCES

The use of gender as a theoretical framework, first of all, intended on aiming acceptance and gaining credibility in the academic world by researchers that were concerned with studying the role of women and their place in society and in History. As a means to achieve that purpose, the word "gender" substituted the term "women's history", for, according to this former theoretical stream, in the 60's, the word gender has a broader meaning, with a neutral terminology, and, in certain way, politically detached from the "supposedly strident" politics of feminism (SCOTT, 1986, p. 1056). Because of this, feminist theorists substituted the sign "female" for "gender" to avoid retaliation regarding their research field, once the word has a heavy load of gendered prejudice related to it (SCOTT, 1986).

In this sense, the next generation of feminist scholars started, in the mid-eighties, a hard work to redesign and resignify this former simplistic concept of gender studies exclusively related to female matters. Furthermore, talking about female matters also includes topics related to masculine behavior patterns, since one is strongly connected to the other, and they cannot exist separately. Additionally, the term "gender" is concerned about investigating cultural constructions related to men and women roles and performances, once it allows a detachment between social roles assigned to women and men and sexual practices. Also, the terminology is used in order to understand unequal relationships between sexes, focusing on the models used by society to represent gender roles (SCOTT, 1986).

By the end of the twentieth century, researchers in the field of gender studies expanded their methods on the study of gender as social/sexual systems of relationships, finally using gender as a proper analytical category, for prior to this moment, gender was mostly associated with social and racial theories. Joan Scott (1986) designed her own definition of gender as one can read below

> My definition of gender has two parts and several subsets. They are interrelated but must be analytically distinct. The core of the definition rests on an integral connection between two propositions: gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power (p. 1067).

In addition, the author states that gender is constructed by kinship, politics and economics mutually. As a result, in a society moved by the idea of power imbalance, male

dominance in relation to women is meant to be a tool to concentrate this force, marginalizing women in political and economical intakes (SCOTT, 1986).

Furthermore, some scholars criticize this idea of Scott, for she affirmed, in 1986, that even though gender is a cultural construction, it is still correlated to biological sex. However, in a more recent publication entitled "*unanswered questions*" (2008), the researcher complains about misunderstandings regarding her text "*Gender a Useful Category of Historical Analysis*" (1986), and asserts that the use of the term must be combined with a question mark, for gender is not static, it is fluid. By this perspective, Gomes (2018) states that "using gender as a category of analysis is to understand that it works as a destabilizer of concepts such as woman, man, sex and even body." (GOMES, 2018, p. 68, personal translation), that is, there is a fluidity when using gender as a theoretical framework, and this malleability cannot be fixed by biological sex.

Teresa de Lauretis, in the 80s, criticized the idea of gender as being "a direct deviation of sexual difference" (LAURETIS, 2019, p. 126, personal translation), in this sense, as she aimed to conceptualize gender as a social construction, the researcher coined the term "technology of gender", reinterpreting Foucault's "sexual technology". To the scholar, technology of gender are tools "with power to control the field of social meaning and thus produce, promote and 'implant' gender representations", like cinema, for example (LAURETIS, 2019, p. 145, personal translation). So, to Lauretis, gender and gendered enactments are socially produced and reproduced.

Later on, Linda Nicholson (2000), in her article entitled "*Interpreting Gender*" (2000), asserts that gender and sex are distinct, and gender refers to traces of personality in consonance with cultural contructions. Hence, to prove her point, the researcher created the allegory of the "hanger", which compares the body with a clothes hanger and the personality aspects are clothes that can be hanged, thus, traces of personality cannot easily be removed like clothes from a hanger. By doing this, Nicholson implements new perspectives in the gender theory proposed by Scott and by many other theorists.

Besides, Nicholson (2000) also suggests that the correlation between gender and biological determinism must vanish, because there are multiple ways of perceiving the body, and these multiple ways influence the perception of what is male and what is female. So, amalgamating the concept of gender with a biological determinism is a mistake, once it creates the idea of gendered personalities and actions. In brief, the concept of women, according to Nicholson does not require a fixed definition, for as gender is not fixed and it

varies according to contexts and by the intersection of many different characteristics, such as social class and ethnicity.

Moreover, Afsaneh Najmabadi (2006) published an essay in which she discusses the use of gender as a category of analysis in the Eastern world, in order to add comments on Scott's previous research. The author states that, even though researchers want to separate gender from sexes, this framework still has a strong bond with the idea of the binary, male and female, all over the world. Likewise, she also states that gender studies researchers are still naturalizing the idea of what is to be a man and what it is to be a woman, reaffirming the heteronormativity ideal.

These statements of Najmabadi match Judith Butler's (2019) affirmations when she argues that the male/female dichotomy is still present in recent research. Butler (2019) says that her "concern is with a potential reification of sexual difference that, albeit unwittingly, maintains a binary restriction of gender identities and an implicitly heterosexual spectrum for descriptions of genders, gender identities and sexualities" (p.238, personal translation).

On one hand, this passage is tangent to the affirmations of Najmabadi (2006) in the point that even though gender studies tries to distance the lines between gender and sexes, sometimes, it is quite challenging. On the other hand, Judith Butler (2019), also conflicts with the former idea of Scott (1986), once the conception of gender coined by the scholar still, by the time it was published, have connections to biological sex. After reading Butler (2019), one can understand the body as a receptacle, that will absorb and incorporate performatic actions previously seen with the contact with the world, and these reproductions will mold the gender of the individual. To illustrate this affirmative, Butler implies that "[...] gender [is], then, as a body style, an "act", which is intentional and performatic, in which "performatic" has both a "dramatic" and a "non-referential" charge." (BUTLER, 2019, p. 226, personal translation). In other words, the body and its own way of speaking and reproducing speeches constitute what she calls gender performance.

Simone de Beauvoir (1989) affirms that a woman is made by the cultural and historical idea of what it is to be a woman, so it is a man. The individual adjusts itself to fit in frames that are meant to be fulfilled in the molds of what it is considered "normal", however, these adjustments are constructed and featured daily, avoiding problematic representation, for these can cause a symbolic violence on the performer. For instance, Butler states that

> As a survival strategy, genders are performances with clearly punitive consequences. Discrete genres are part of the requirements that guarantee the "humanization" of

> individuals in contemporary culture; and those who fail to get their genders right are regularly punished. Because there is no "essence" that gender expresses or externalizes, nor a clear ideal to be reached; because gender is not a fact, the various forms of gender acting create the very idea of gender, and without these acts there would be no gender. Gender is a construct that regularly hides its genesis. The collective tacit agreement to perform, produce and sustain discrete and polar genres as cultural fictions is disguised by the credibility of the production itself. Genres authors enter a trance of their own fictions, and through it the construction processes drive the belief of their necessity and nature. The historical possibilities materialized by different body styles are nothing more than cultural fictions, regulated by punishments, alternately incorporated and disguised by coercion. (BUTLER, 2019, p. 226, personal translation)

According to this, the performance of the gender and its reproduction are monitored by the individuals that are acting and by society as a normative system. So, there are performances which are more neutral in comparison to others, and these lighter ways of dealing with the body language and body performatic perspective are better accepted by these "regulatory agencies". The punishments, however, are ways of coercing individuals that don't develop what is expected from them, that is, an unexpected performance, as a masculine woman. Additionally, to Butler, the maintenance of the body transformation and the adaptation of gender is a process that takes time. It is consolidated and renewed through the passage of time.

Furthermore, when saying that these ways of body acting fall into a binary representation, the male and the female, the philosopher suggests that the performances of gender are connected to the biological sex of the actor/actress. Moreover, heterossexuality is considered the strategy of avoiding repression, because it should be the "normal/natural" way of performing. Women should act like women, men should act like men, whatever it means. These rules are learnt in the social contact with others, especially in the family, as one can understand by the following passage:

> It is not my intention to minimize the effect of certain gender norms that originate in the family and that are reinforced by certain family models of punishment and reward that, consequently, can be understood as highly individualistic, as these family relationships resume, individualize and specify pre existing cultural relations; they (gender norms) are rarely – if at all – radically original. The acts we do, the acts we perform are, in a way, acts that have been around since before we existed (BUTLER, 2019, p. 232, personal translation).

By saying that, Butler (2019) not only corroborates to the idea that some performances when well dramatized, such as the binary male and female, are rewarded, but, this well-acted performance confirms the idea of a "perfect" ideal, and this action keep on maintaining

cultural and social traces of heteronormativity. However, when not developed as they are supposed to, punishments can be assessed, as a way of fixing what has to be fixed. In this sense, gender performance is a script ready to be read and followed, in other words, this performance is the repetition and the maintenance of some patriarchal rules, learned by interactions.

Nevertheless, even though gender is conceived as a script, the ways of representing the script are completely individual, for the actors are unique. And, in light of this, individual acts are also actions that can be retained from a wider context. In light of this, they are absorbed and learned from the public environment, rehearsed in private to be performed in public. So, if one wrongly performs the role culturally designated to them, some coercitive act will fall upon the subject, but if the same individual develops their role well, they will be corroborating to the idea that the "normal" is right.

To conclude her thoughts, Butler affirms that:

> Genders are not passively inscribed on bodies, nor are they determined by nature, language, the symbolic, or the overwhelming history of patriarchy. Gender is what we invariably bring under control, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure. But if this continuous action is confused with a natural or linguistic fact, power is put aside, so that an expansion of the cultural field takes place, bodily, through various subversive performances (2019, p.238-239, personal translation).

Overall, gender is an action developed daily in order to fulfill behavior patterns. Nevertheless there are traces of such performances that are considered the standard model, the binary model of sex, and this model relies on patriarchal rules that places the hetero man on the top of an imaginary pyramid.

Contrastingly, Oyèronké Oyěwùmí, in her book entitled "*The Invention of Women*" (1997) discusses that gender as we previously mentioned is a Western construction, and categories such as "men" and "women" with meanings for beyond sex differences were imposed on Yorùbá culture after the colonization, for these terms were non-existent in pre-colonial Yorùbáland. She argues that with the influence of English, the words used to describe the signs "men" and "women" were translated in order to fit Western standards of gender, once the words in Yorùbá "*okùnrin*" and "*obìrin*" did not suggest a subordination of women in comparison to men.

In this sense, "*okùnrin*" and "*obìrin*" are used in Yorùbá language to differentiate the biological body only, that is, one can body bear children and the other cannot, and according

to this statement, these two nouns do not imply social impositions amalgamated to their meanings,

> because they are not elaborated in relation and opposition to each other, they are not sexually dimorphic and therefore are not gendered. In Old Oyo, they did not connote social ranking; nor did they express masculinity or femininity, because those categories did not exist in Yoruba life or thought (OYĚWÙMÍ, 1997, p. 34).

In other words, women are not a set of missing aspects in comparison to their male counterparts, and the biological aspects of the body do not imply social distinctions, as it happens in the Western world, where the body is seen as a way to attest positions of power, in which men are considered the norm, and women and the "problematic performances" are the Other. Additionally, to the scholar,

> Gender is not a property of an individual or a body in and of itself by itself. Even the notion of a gender identity as part of the self rests on a cultural understanding. Gender is a construction of two categories in hierarchical relation to each other; and it is embedded in institutions. Gender is best understood as "an institution that establishes patterns of expectations for individuals [based on their body-type], orders the social processes of everyday life, and is built into major social organizations of society, such as the economy, ideology, the family, and politics (OYĚWÙMÍ, 1997, p. 39).

Moreover, Oyěwùmí (1997) discusses that Yorùbá culture is not inclined to gender as the English, it is more related to "seniority", because in Yorùbá society it is more important to address the age of a person, in order to highlight respect, then to point out the gender, once gender is not a category of social distinction. To illustrate this, the author uses the following example:

> The differences between the Yoruba and English conceptualizations can be understood through the following examples. In English, to the question, "Who was with you when you went to the market?" one might answer, "My son." To the same question in Yoruba, one would answer, Omo mii (My child or offspring). Only if the anatomy of the child was directly relevant to the topic at hand would the Yoruba mother add a qualifier thus, "Onto mii okunriri" (My child, the male). Otherwise, birth-order would be the more socially significant point of reference. In that case, the Yoruba mother would say, Omo mii akobi (My child, the first born). Even when the name of the child is used, gender is still not indicated because most Yoruba names are gender-free (p. 42-43).

Additionally, when talking about marriage in Yorùbá society, Oyèronké Oyěwùmí (1997) stresses the importance of this social contract for bearing children, because having a child was the first obligation of the couple to each other (p. 55), and maintaining the kid's health was the second. That is why polygamous marriages were common among the Yorùbá people, but a single-partner marriage was considered the norm. Furthermore, subjects such as motherhood and fatherhood was an issue related to seniority, not to gender. In this account, the caregiving was divided by the whole community. Not only the parents, or more specifically the mother, were supposed to take care of the kids, but whoever was older had responsibilities with the younger ones, that is what Patricia Hill Collins (1994) calls "*Othermothering*".

Further, gendered division of labor was not common in pre-colonial Yorùbá society, for there were representatives of "*okùnrin*" and "*obìrin*" in any profession, and for that reason, mothers and fathers had the breadwinner roles, different from Western societies, that implies this specific role is more exclusive to men. To clarify gender, Oyěwùmí (1997) implies that

> in Western discourses, gender is conceived as first and foremost a dichotomous biological category that is then used as the base for the construction of social hierarchies. The body is used as a key to situating persons in the Western social system in that the possession or absence of certain body parts inscribes different social privileges and disadvantages. The male gender is the privileged gender. But these observations are not true of the Yoruba frame of reference. Thus gender constructs are not in themselves biological — they are culturally derived, and their maintenance is a function of cultural systems. Consequently, using Western gender theories to interpret other societies without recourse to their own world-sense imposes a Western model (p. 77-78).

Taking into account the concept of gender discussed by the author, as this research is concerned with dealing with performances of African and Nigerian masculinities, it is paramount that African theories are considered as part of the theoretical framework that this paper relies on. It is relevant, also, to enhance that Western gender theorists are also used as foundation for this research, since *Stay with Me* (2017) is set in Nigeria after the British colonization and the country suffered impacts and cultural changes. Nevertheless, African theorists regarding gender are also used as a framework, once the narrative is of African origins, set in Africa with African characters. Finally, when talking about masculinities, we are mostly using African researchers, to fully grasp masculinities in the African and Nigerian contexts.

Apart from this, many researchers have been moved by the wish to understand more deeply masculine and feminine behaviors and what are the performatic ways that enable enacting a normative gender performance. Also, many new papers have been published in the field of queer studies, transfeminism, and non-binary gendered approaches, and although more research in these fields are required, the present work deals with masculinity studies, and the aim of this section was to briefly discuss the historical background of gender studies until we reach the researches concerned with performances of masculinity. In the next session a brief discussion on masculinity will be developed as a way to clarify the thoughts about the fluidity of gender performances.

2.1 Hegemonic(s) masculinity/ies: tips of imaginary pyramids

As gender studies are concerned with researching the power imbalance between men and women and many other concerns regarding gendered roles, the studies of masculinities started to focus on the male perspective in order to understand where these differences come from. Based on that, Raewyn Connell (1987, 1995, 2005) started to design the concept of Hegemonic Masculinity, which she describes as an idea that, "can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (CONNELL, 2005, p.77). To the author, this notion is subdivided into four different non-hegemonic masculinities, they are: complicit masculinity, the closest to a hegemonic manly behavior, for it helps to maintain the hegemonic ideal of men; subordinate masculinity, a kind of masculinity, as suggested by the term, subordinate to other forms of performance such as deviation to the male standard; marginalized masculinity, when associated to class and race, and other marginalized contexts; and protest masculinity, that are compensatory performances of hypermasculinities used by marginalized male, in order to achieve the top of this imaginary pyramid.

Moreover, for Connell, masculinity is not static, it is malleable (2013). It is not a set of rules to be followed in order to achieve hegemonic behaviors. In light of this, masculinity is produced and validated by male and female, in a response to patriarchy rules (CONNELL, 2005; QUAYLE et al., 2017). Since masculinities are fluid and have dynamism (JEWKES et al., 2015), the place of hegemony is also dynamic. Nevertheless, the heterossexual model of not being gay nor female is a point in common regarding most of kinds of masculinities. So, as there are multiple male standard behaviors according to the context in which they are

inserted - social class, work position, among others -, there are also multiple hegemonic masculinities as well, divided into sub-groups, also specific regarding social contexts. In this sense, class and ethnicity may vary, but men in such conditions can also replicate a specific kind of hegemonic masculinity (MORRELL, 1998; JEWKES et al., 2015).

According to Jewkes et al. (2015), "Masculinities are constructed in ways that reflect poverty or power, regional cultures and neighbourhood dynamics." (p. 114). In this sense, male behaviors are absorbed from social dynamics, that is, in contact and in comparison to others since childhood (MORRELL, 1998). For instance, when expanding the subjects of his research and discussing about the violence present in masculine enactments, Herek (1987) implies that violent approaches are more common in hypermasculinities performances, for those who perform this kind of actions are deprived, most of the times, from achieving the standard behaviors of masculinity, as a result, they use violence as a means to pursue the "title" of masculine man. Nevertheless, according to Donaldson (1993, p. 645) hegemonic masculinity is "exclusive, anxiety-provoking, internally and hierarchically differentiated, brutal, and violent". Consequently, male dominance is prejudicial not only to women, but also to men (MORRELL, 1998, p.3).

Studying masculinities implies understanding the specific context in which that performance is dramatized, for according to location, masculinity is constituted of various particularities (MORRELL, 1998; CORNWALL et al., 2011). Hence, a research developed in South Africa concluded that "demonstrating strength, toughness and the capacity to use violence are very much part of hegemonic masculinity there" (JEWKES et al., 2015, p. 114-115). Moreover,

> another understanding of hegemonic masculinity that has been debated and examined is that it is a problem not only for women, but also for men. The system that keeps men in a collectively dominant position over women and in competitive relations to other men comes at a cost for men in terms of their health and quality of life (JEWKES et al. 2015, p. 115).

As one can observe from the above, men and women are negatively affected by the performances of these hegemonic masculinity. However, it is also important to understand that not all kinds of hegemonic masculinities recur to violence in its core (MORRELL, 1998). Thus, most kinds of male conduct are prejudicial to some degree. Certainly, as the focus of this paper aims to discuss African and Nigerian masculinities, the research will be narrowed to a more specific approach.

2.2 African and Nigerian masculinities

Even though hegemonic masculinity is the highest expression of male power, Connell (1995) implies the existence of segregated types of masculinity, those are complicit, subordinate, marginalized and protest. Hegemonic masculinity keeps its position through the subordination of other forms of masculinities to create a hierarchical relationship within the traditional ideal of gender binary (CONNELL 1987; CONNELL, MESSERSCHMIDT 2005).

To be a masculine male implies to follow a set of "social definitions of masculinity as being embedded in the dynamics of institutions—the working of the state, of corporations, of unions, of families—quite as much as in the personality of individuals" (CARRIGAN, CONNELL, LEE 2004, p. 153). In this perspective, "as members of any particular culture, community, or group, individuals are given a vast array of scripts that together constitute them as social subjects. Some scripts are branded onto individuals more emphatically than others" (GUTTERMAN 1994, p. 223). Evidently, from this quote, one can understand that the cultural construction of what it is to be a man is designed by social rules, cultural expectations, and History.

So, in order to discuss a topic such as African masculinity, it is important to understand Africa as a continent that had its culture changed after the colonization process (PASURA, CHRISTOU, 2018). Regarding this, when analysing the pre-colonial masculinities in Africa, Unchendu (2008) explains that:

> Men in patriarchal settings were irrefutably the favoured class: an esteemed group that grew from childhood to manhood culturally imbued with notions that made them believe they were superior and had multiple privileges, including inherent rights to dominate. Where matrilinealism diffused such masculine confidence, colonialism, which was uniformly patriarchal in its verbal and non-verbal expressions and social exportations in the continent, undermined non-patriarchal hegemonic masculinities (p.13).

Nevertheless, after the colonization process of African countries, the concept of these masculines articulations among African men have changed, for the process of globalization and the legacy of colonialism have impacted cultural expressions within the continent. In fact, some notions of African masculinities such as the breadwinner were brought to Africa with neoliberal capitalism. In this sense, while men were supposed to work on mines and move to urban centers to work, it was imposed on women to stay at home and take care of the household, that is, male mobility was acceptable but women were meant to be confined, subject to social retaliation, otherwise. Later on, as men and women were converting to

Christianity, they absorbed the breadwinner concept and internalized this new performance as a new trace of hegemonic masculinity.

According to Pasura and Christou (2018),

> A common aspect among the various versions of masculinities in Africa is that they are constructed under the influence of a patriarchal ideology that places men above women. Masculinities in Africa entail attainment of a level of financial independence, employment, or income and subsequently being able to start a family (p. 526-527).

Moreover, since Africa has always been seen as "the Other", traces of African masculinity after the colonization process have been stereotypically described as "immutable, violent, patriarchal, and oppressive." (PASURA, CHRISTOU, 2018, p. 527). However, Hegemonic masculinity in an African context is built with normative grounds that reflects what is more valuable to a man, but, unfortunately, these ideals cannot be achieved by any ordinary human being (CONNELL 1987; DONALDSON 1993).

These ideals are responsible for drawing identities and judge them as being successful or shameful, according to its performance. For instance, in a research developed by Quayle et al. (2017), in order to check women's ideals for masculinity in South Africa, the researchers were worried to understand what were the expectations of women regarding "manly" adjectives. After the collection of the data, the researchers concluded that in that context, in order to be masculine, a man must be: protective, masculine, courageous, strong, tough, hard working, confident, powerful, driven, ambitious, etc. The research also concluded that hegemonic masculinities in this specific context varied according to the setting, for example, characteristics of male individuals changed in different contexts, such as work environment and romantic partnership. In other words, the research described the ideal husband as "less sympathetic, helpful, and kind, as well as more strong, handsome, and hard-working." (QUAYLE et al. 2017, p. 62) This characterization of the ideal romantic partner matches the traditional romantic narratives, and it serves as foundation for gender inequity in domestic work. (BAXTER et al., 2013; BERNHARDT et al., 2008; DAVIS, GREENSTEIN 2004; TAI, TREAS 2013). Moreover, when these African men are not able to achieve what is expected from them, they play the role of hypermasculinity, which usually implies the use of alcohol and violence, maintaining the patriarchal ideal of a manly conduct (PASURA, CHRISTOU, 2017).

Gendered notions were also brought to Nigeria with the colonization. Ifi Amadiume (1987) argues that, before the impositions of the colonizer, the Igbo gender system was unique. According to him,

> The fact that biological sex did not always correspond to ideological gender meant that women could play roles usually monopolised by men, or be classified as "males" in terms of power and authority over others. As such roles were not rigidly masculinized or feminized, no stigma was attached to breaking gender rules. Furthermore, the presence of an all-embracing goddess-focused religion favoured the acceptance of women in statuses and roles of authority and power (p. 185).

Even though the author is not specifically talking about masculinity, he affirms that gendered ideals were imposed in native Nigerian societies as it was affirmed by Oyèrónkẹ Oyěwùmí (1997) when talking about Yorùbáland. Colonialism was responsible for the changes and impositions of gender roles, which directly impacted performances of masculinity, as well as women's.

Furthermore, in a way to understand youth perception of masculinity, Uchendu (2007) interviewed a couple of undergraduate students, male and female, to collect data for his research. Among the responses, he confirmed that the qualities required by a man, according to the masculine sample,

> include superior physical strength, firmness, fearlessness, decisiveness, an ability to protect the weak, to be principled, to control, to conquer, to take risks, provide leadership, to be assertive, to enjoy a high social status, and to display versatility in martial arts. Also added to the list are: intelligence, bravery, sobriety, unemotionality, and an absence of smiles. [...] Words used by female youths in connection with masculinity include violent, authoritative, stoic, independent and fatherly, the latter being associated with caring, being protective, and affectionate (p. 283).

It is clear that there are distant points between the perception of masculinity by male and females, but many others are tangential. Even though women describe men as being fatherly, Uchendu explains that this adjective is related to the traditional role of men in Nigerian society of fatherhood, and also as being the provider of the house. Additionally, the researcher implies that men tend to pretend courageousness when they are frightened, once fear is not meant to be part of a male personality.

Regarding virility, Uchendu (2007) concluded that,

> Virility was named as an important indicator of masculinity by more than eighty percent of male and female youths. Virility must be shown, according to the youths, through marriage to a female partner and through the ability of the male to impregnate the latter. In contrast, the non-virile male's masculinity is questionable. Such a disadvantaged male will not command respect in his society, unlike his favored colleagues. Merely possessing male genitalia does not accord privileges; rather, the dividends from such possession do (p. 285).

In these lines, the idea of masculinity is also related to body functions. Men and women tend to question the masculinity of a man according to his capacity of impregnating a woman. In other words, the penis is an important physical element that makes man a male, so, if the man is not virile, he is incomplete, but if he is virile and not fertile, he is also not considered a full man. As one can see from this passage, gender roles and performances are still correlated to the idea of the binary, which is remnant from indiginous societies as well as from colonization, that defined heterosexuality as the hegemonic pattern (UCHENDU, 2007). Another element that is crucial to the maintenance of Nigerian masculinity is marriage. To have success in this institution "means to have children and to exercise authority over the children and their mother. However, the emphasis was made that the ability to care for these dependents was an indication of masculine efficiency." (UCHENDU, 2007, p. 290). In fact, marriage is a way that Nigerian men can attest their virility, for they can only be considered a full man, if he has a wife and children to be responsible for.

bell hooks, moreover, in her book "*We Real Cool: black man and masculinity*" (2004), described the black masculinity as subordinate to a white hegemonic masculinity. In light of this, black masculinity in comparison to white has the following characteristics: virility, hypermasculinity, truculence, violence, hypersexualization and anti-intellectualism obscurantist. Additionally, the author also criticizes this misconception (re)produced by hegemonic discourses, for masculinity is constructed in comparison to others, and relies on expectations. Also, it is not possible to impose characteristics on masculinities, for this concept does not allow solidified notions.

On the other hand, men are trying to redesign pre definitions regarding masculinities. For instance, Daniels and Chadwick (2018) argue that men in African contexts are participating more in the caregiving to children and, by performing such acts, they are subverting norms of an stereotyped hegemonic African masculinity, the one that states that black men are careless. However, traces of the former hegemonic masculinity are still present, such as the obligation of fatherhood and the recognition of man as the breadwinner. Additionally, Pasura and Christou (2017) also implies that African men are (re)designing a

new masculinity, one that is more respectable. In light of this, these men are creating masculinities that do not totally rely on the grounds of patriarchy and in the gendered practices, as doing the household, for example.

For Nigerians, the concept of masculinity is also showing a deviation from the hegemonic. Nigerian male youth is trying to reduce gender indifferences by appreciating women's deeds and by accepting their participation in the financial contributions. These men are also more responsible for domestic affairs (UCHENDU, 2007).

In the next subdivision of this chapter, a short research that aimed to map how gender roles, and, more specifically masculinities, were represented in Nigerian literature. So, one can understand the paths trekked by Nigerian writers from different literary generations, until reaching the contemporary autor, Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀ and her novel “Stay with Me” (2017).

2.3 Mapping performances of masculinities in Nigerian Literature

Chinua Acebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is set when the English colonizer arrives in Umuofia and begin to impose cultural, political and religious changes in Igbo lands. The narrative focuses on Okonkwo, an Igbo warrior that has his fall related to the unacceptance of the British impositions, and for his resistance he is mostly read as a hero. Moreover, Achebe, when writing Okonkwo persona, created a mold to be followed regarding the performance of masculinity for posterior Igbo characters, be them tangent or opposite (ANYADUBA, 2019).

Anyaduba (2019), when arguing about the masculinity performed by Igbo characters in literature, explains that male Igbo characters enact a, what he calls, “hubristic[3] masculinity”, that is, an excessive arrogant way of behaving. Also, when expanding his search for hubristic masculinities in Nigerian literature, the author lists a number of characters that perform such masculinity, like:

> Ofeyi, the hero of Soyinka’s Season of Anomy; in James odugo, the journalist, and the coura-geous Samson ukoha in Cyprian Ekwensi’s Survive the Peace; dr.

[3] Hubris, intentionally dishonouring behaviour, was a powerful term of moral condemnation in ancient Greece; and in Athens, and perhaps elsewhere, it was also treated as a serious crime. The common use of hubris in English to suggest pride, over-confidence, or alternatively any behaviour which offends divine powers, rests, it is now generally held, on misunderstanding of ancient texts, and concomitant and over-simplified views of Greek attitudes to the gods have lent support to many doubtful, and often over-Christianizing, interpretations, above all of Greek tragedy.The best ancient discussion of hubris is found in *Aristotle's Rhetoric: his definition is that hubris is ‘doing and saying things at which the victim incurs shame, not in order that one may achieve anything other than what is done, but simply to get pleasure from it. For those who act in return for something do not commit hubris, they avenge themselves. The cause of the pleasure for those committing hubris is that by harming people, they think themselves superior; that is why the young and the rich are hubristic, as they think they are superior when they commit hubris (FISHER, 2015).

> Amilo Kanu in Chukwuemeka ike's Sunset at Dawn; and several representative male characters in buchi Emecheta's Destination Biafra, such as Chijioke Abosi, John Nwokolo, and Saka Momoh (ANYADUBA, 2019, p. 92).

Further, as the focus of his publication is on Okonkwo, Anyaduba (2019) affirms that Okonkwo is the main source of this hubristic man that is so reproduced in Nigerian literature. In this sense, the main character of Achebe portrays the qualities of a hero, for he is courageous, fearless and has an excess of hubris. Additionally, the researcher attests that Okonkwo's performance of masculinity cannot be seen as the Igbo hegemonic masculinity, that is why he compares Okonkwo's masculinity with Odenigbo and Ugwo's gender performances, depicted by Adichie in *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2007).

Half of a Yellow Sun (2007) is portrayed in Nigeria during the Biafra war. The plot narrates the story of Olana and Odenigbo, an Igbo man and a Professor at the University of Nsukka. Though Odenigbo is a middle-class, well-educated man, while drunk, he raped Amala, a peasant who worked for the family that was induced by Odenigbo's mother to seduce him, for his mother was not happy with the fact that Olana had not gotten pregnant after many years since she and Odenigbo got married. However, this male character tries to reproduce and replicate traces of a hubristic masculinity, during the development of the diegesis, the hubristic masculinity of Odenigbo vanishes away, for the war and his ego prevented him from performing masculinity like the hero Okonkwo, once his performances made him suffer, for he was incapable of being the brave man he was expected to be (ANYADUBA, 2019).

In the same way, Ugwo, the houseboy and servant of Olana and Odenigbo, is another Igbo character that enacts a hubristic masculinity, such as Okonkwo and Olana's husband. With Ugwo, the hubristic masculinity performed by him was what led the boy to enlist in the army at such a young age. In the war course, Ugwo had to face a gang rape of a bar girl by his coleagues. The fear of being called weak and not manly enough, propelled Ugwo to be accomplice to the violence. In addition to that, despite the fact that Odenigbo and Ugwo are members of two different social classes, one part of a middle-class society and the other a house boy, their performances of masculinity have intersectional points with Okonwko's. On the other hand, Adichie does not allow them to be perceived as heroes, as it happened with Achebe's character, for she seemed to punish the performance of this hubristic masculinity by pointing out the decay of these Igbo male characters (ANYADUBA, 2019).

Besides, Nigerian literature written by men focuses on the perspective of male characters, and this phallic literature implies the construction of male heroes. On the other

hand, Nigerian female authorship, such as Flora Nwapa's and Buchi Emecheta's, come in order to subvert the gendered discussion enhanced by male writers. In this sense, when discussing Nigerian literature written by women in the 60s, Oloruntoba-Oju and Oloruntoba-Oju (2013) indicate that in such writings, the role of man is described as secondary and the center of attention is on female heroism.

In light of this perspective, if one narrows the outlook on Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), it is possible to notice that Nnu Ego, the main female character, confronts the gendered expectations to nigerian women in the pace when she, in a moment of prayer, questions God: "When will you create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody's appendage?" (EMECHETA, p. 224). By this interrogation, the character goes against the idea of motherhood and wifehood so portrayed in nigerian society "as defining parameters in constructing the identity of african female" (OLORUNTOBA-OJU, OLORUNTOBA-OJU, 2013, p. 10).

Notwithstanding the fact that male characters in Emecheta's novels are quite secondary (OLORUNTOBA-OJU, OLORUNTOBA-OJU, 2013), as this section focuses on mapping performances of masculinity in Nigerian literature, in *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) the lenses will be turned to Nnaife, the husband of Nnu Ego. First of all, *The Joys of Motherhood* tells the story of Nnu Ego, a woman who believed that marriage and motherhood were the main road to having a successful life, once being a good wife and a mother are the main performances to be enacted by African women. However, in her first wedlock she got married to a strong and virile man, one that was the village warrior like her father. As she was not getting pregnant after many attempts, her husband took a second wife who quickly got pregnant, and right after that, Nnu Ego's first husband despised her, for she was incapable of bearing a child. Further, saddened by Nnu Ego's unhappy life, her father bought her back, and she returned home (EMECHETA, 1979).

In her second marriage, Nnu Ego was sold to Nnaife, a man that lived in the capital, Lagos, for a long time. As he was far from his culture, the performances of masculinities of this character were quite far from the masculinity performed by the men of the village that he and his wife were from. Because of that, Nnu Ego questions his masculinity because of his activity as a launderer in the Meers' house, an activity that old-generation Igbo men would refuse to develop. In fact, Nnaife's personality was being constructed by the process of acculturation and by the new capitalist environment that was growing in Nigeria after the colonization (PASURA, CHRISTOU, 2018). So, with this background, this character interprets the role of the breadwinner to his family, and as he could not develop the other

performances expected to him by his culture, wife's and village's, he starts to perform hypermasculinity, which implies the use of violence, as when he threatens to kill his own daughter, the excessive ingestion of alcohol and overacting traces to achieve masculine behaviors that are required, but not possible to achieve (PASURA, CHRISTOU, 2018; QUAYLE et.al 2017).

Furthermore, in *Second Class Citizen* (1974) and *In the Ditch* (1972), both written by Buchi Emecheta, Francis is the husband of Adah, a woman that has a better position in comparison to her partner and his family, once she works for the Nigerian government. But, as they live in a patriarchal society, Adah is always subaltern for the fact that she is a woman. Moreover, as her husband moves to England to study, she stays in her home country and sends him money, so that he can put all the effort into studying, to pass his accountancy exams. Thus, when Adah moves to England to live with the man she chose to live with, she perceives herself as a second class citizen, once she has to deal with racism, sexism, and has to face a struggling economical crisis, a reality very different then the one they had back in Nigeria. In this context, as Francis also does not develop the performances expected for him to develop, as being the breadwinner, and also his frustrations on his academic and professional life, the character starts to perform traces of hypermasculinity, like when he beats Adah and mistreat his children, and for he is a womanizer, because he has many affairs during the trama.

Nowadays, Nigerian contemporary literature is portraying a new perspective related to gender roles, which includes men and women performances. Hence, portraying male characters with feminist inclinations may help define a different African masculinity. As a result, Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀, Chigozie Obioma, and Romeo Oriogun are three young writers that approach masculinities through such lenses. So, according to Gleibermann (2020) these "evolved men [are] someone who permits himself emotional vulnerability, rejects aggression, supports a woman's autonomy, defines his sexuality freely, and finds self-worth beyond just material and social power. He strives, either intentionally or intuitively, to challenge the culture's confining prescriptions for manhood" (p. 37). However, Chinua Achebe's Okonkwo seems to be a burden for these male characters because of his toxic masculinity.

Thereupon, in order to subvert this hegemonic masculinity designed by Achebe, even though Obioma implies that "does not write intentionally about male identity or gender" (GLEIBERMANN, 2020, p. 38), depicts sensitivity and innocence in his Chinonso, the main character of his book entitled *An Orchestra of Minorities* (2019). Additionally, Oriogun "maps a full-body cartography of conflicts" (GLEIBERMANN, 2020, p. 39), once the writer is concerned about going against the ideal of Okonkwo as the real example of an African man.

To achieve that goal, Oriogun focuses on queer experienceses to talk about gender fluidity and malleable masculine performances in his collection of poems named *Sacrament of Bodies* (2020).

In short, this section provides the reader a better understanding on how gender roles and masculinity were constructed in Nigerian literature after the publication of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958). First, the comparison between Achebe's and Adichie's description of masculinities relied on the fact that once Okonkwo was seen as the model of hegemonic African masculinity, the hero, Odenigbo and Ugwo had undergone situations that had put in check their hubristic masculinity. Second, Emecheta male characters, Nnaife and Francis, were unable to develop their role as the breadwinner, and, in this sense, they overreacted masculine performances and ended up performing hypermasculinity. Third, Obioma, and Oriogun "reinvisions the masculine" in Nigerian contemporary literature (GLEIBERMANN, 2020, p. 36), presenting masculine personas that freed themselves from some gender expectations highlighted by Achebe's perspective of Okonkwo. In the same way, Adébáyọ̀'s *Stay with Me* (2017) also contributes to cultivating a different masculinity performed by her Akin, which will be more deeply discussed in the next chapter.

3 AYỌ̀BÁMI ADÉBÁYỌ̀ AND THE NARRATIVE'S BACKGROUND

This section aims to expose Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀'s life and work, some personal details about her writing and elements that can be crucial to the understanding of her art form. Moreover, a brief explanation on the Nigerian political context of the mid-80's to mid-90's is to be developed, for this is the background in which the narrative *Stay with Me* (2017) is embedded.

3.1 The artist behind *Stay with Me*

In january of 1988, in Lagos, the most populated city of Nigeria, Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀ was born. Shortly after that, her parents decided to move to Ilesa, a city located in the southwest of the country. However, to study her Bachelor of English Literature at the Obafemi Awolowo University, she had to move to Ifé. After completing her BA, Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀ enrolled in a Masters program in Literatures in English at the same institution. Additionally, she possesses a MA in Creative Writing from the University of East Anglia, England, where she was awarded an international bursary for creative writing (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2018).

Furthermore, Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀'s debut book *Stay with Me* was first published in 2017, but in 2013, the novel was shortlisted for the *Kwani? Manuscript Project* as a work in progress. After the publication, the workpiece was shortlisted for the *Baileys Prize for Women's Fiction*, the *Wellcome Book Prize* and the *9mobile Prize* for Literature. It was also longlisted for the *International Dylan Thomas Prize*. Additionally, the novel was named a Notable Book of the Year by *The New York Times* and a Best Book of the Year by *The Guardian, The Economist, The Wall Street Journal* and many other publications. Lastly, the book was published in many different countries and in several languages. In Brazil, for example, the book was translated as "*Fique Comigo*", published by HarperCollins and TAG Livros.

In an essay about her writing process for the Powell's website, Adébáyọ̀ stated that:

> After I finished that first draft, I didn't touch the manuscript for a month. I went back to writing short stories, hoping to return to the novel able to read it like a reader might in the near future. I was astonished, when I read the manuscript after my month away, by the distance between what I'd wanted to write (and thought I'd written) and what I was reading. I spent the next five years trying to close that gap. There were days when I felt as though I was bleeding the words onto the page. Some nights, I walked and walked, grateful for the long productive hours I'd been able to put in, but so immersed in my protagonist's despair that I no longer knew where her sadness ended and mine began. At those times, I wished I could ask the writers

> whose work I admired, "Really, how on earth do you do this? Do you have any tips?" (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017).

As one can see by the quotation retrieved from her essay, the process of writing *Stay with Me* (2017) was harsh and took around five years to be completed. In fact, she also states, later in this essay, that whenever she had questions to which path she would go within the narrative, she would turn to books, as a way to clarify her ideas. Moreover, the author also indicates that she writes short stories, as an example, "The Angels of the Peace Villa" (2009) and "Homecoming" (2014) (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2018).

Moreover, the literary critic Diana Evans has developed a review entitled "*Stay with Me by Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀ review – a big-hearted Nigerian debut*", and published in TheGuardian. In the text, Evans describes Adébáyọ̀'s work as we can see below:

> Adébáyọ̀ has been tutored in writing by both Margaret Atwood and fellow Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and though there is still room for growth, she has a thoroughly contemporary style that is all her own. Her clever and funny take on domestic life and Nigerian society is a welcome addition to her country's burgeoning literary scene. Despite the intense sadness of her subject matter, she has produced a bright, big-hearted demonstration of female spirit, as well as the damage done by the boundlessness of male pride (EVANS, 2017).

As implied by the critic, Chimamanda Adichie and Margaret Atwood influenced Adébáyọ̀'s writing, for they were her mentors during courses and over her MA in Creative Writing. However, she has a completely new way of presenting contemporary matters, typical from the third generation of Nigerian writers, such as Nigerian domestic life, but in a way that belongs only to her. In addition, Adébáyọ̀, in 2019, came to Brazil for she was invited to participate in the 17th FLIP (International Literary Party of Paraty), as a means to approximate Nigeria and Brazil.

3.2 Nigerian political impasses on the mid-80s: a brief consideration

After its independence from the English empire in 1960, Nigeria had suffered with unstable governments and six *Coups D'etat*[4]. In this sense, as the narrative *Stay with Me* (2017) has its background on 80's Nigeria, the description will be focused on Babangida's

[4] They were: January 1966 — General Aguiyi Ironsi - July 1966 — General Yakubu Gowon - July 1975 — General Muhammed Murtala - December 1983 — General Muhammed Buhari - August 1985 — General Ibrahim Babangida - November 1993 — General Sani Abacha (TOYIN, 2015).

dictatorship, that longed until 1993, when he stepped down and General Abacha took his position (TOYIN, 2015).

As a result of the tragic Nigerian history of corruption and instability within its heads of state, Nigerian political elites were not feeling represented by the Alhaji Shehu Shagari way of guiding the country and later with the General Muhammadu Buhari regime. In light of this, with the unpopularity of the Buhari regime, caused by his draconian style of leading the politics, civilians and military planned the fifth *Coup D'etat* in Nigeria's Republic, in order to lead the country to a bright new future. So, on the 27th of August of 1985, General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida carried out a putsch against General Buhari, however he claimed to return the country to a democratic rule after he finished with the improvements he intended to make (FALODE, 2019).

In the novel, Yejide and Akin were sleeping whey they received a call from Lagos telling them about the coup, as one can see in the following quote

> After he returned the phone to its cradle, he came to sit beside me in bed. 'That has Aliyu, he's head of operations at the head office in Lagos. He called me to say we shouldn't open the bank to customers tomorrow.' He sighed. 'There has been a coup.' 'Oh my God,' I said. We sat in silence for a while. I wondered if anyone had been killed, if there would be chaos and violence in the following months. Though I had been too young to remember the events, I knew that the coups of 1966 had ultimately thrust the country into a civil war. I comforted myself by thinking about how the tension after the last coup, which had made General Buhari head of state just twenty months before, had dissipated within a few days. The country had decided then that it was tired of the corrupt civilian government Buhari and his colleagues had ousted (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, 22-23)

Yejide narrates previous coups and their effects in Nigerian society, she also points out that she was worried about what was going to happen after the attempt, because the previous military *coups d'etat* usually resulted in chaotic situations for the Nigerian people. On the other hand, to gain credibility with society for his new regime, Babangida took a more friendly approach to leadership than had General Buhari. Babangida decided to open investigations into abuses committed by Buhari during his regime and overturned the political jail sentences. Babangida revoked some of the draconian decrees billed by Buhari, especially the ones used for gaggling the press between his mandate. Moreover, Babangida was the first military ruler to use the title of 'president', rather than use the title 'head of state', as if he was directly elected (GRAF, 1988; OLAGUNJU, ADELE, OYOVBAIRE, 1993).

When talking about Babangida, Yejide's narrative voice implies that

> Akin was home by the time I woke up. He was the one who informed me that Ibrahim Babangida was the new head of state. The most unusual thing about the next few weeks was that Babangida referred to himself, and came to be referred to, not just as head of state but as president, as if the coup counted as an election. On the whole, things appeared to go on as usual and, like the rest of the country, my husband and I went back to our routine (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 24).

As one can see, Yejide was feeling upset by the fact that Babangida declared himself the president of the country despite the fact that he was not elected democratically. However, his tyranny days were yet to come as we can understand by the following passage:

> From early 1986, after the initial period of relaxation and debate, the Babangida's regime came under sustained pressure from groups that were opposed to its programs of political and economic reforms. The firm resistance the regime encountered brought out its authoritarian and dictatorial tendency. The main opposition to the regime's authority was spearheaded by the NLC, students and university teachers (FALODE, 2019, p. 3-4).

In this article, Falode (2019) explains how the Nigerian territories were redesigned after Babangida declared himself president. Initially, he opted for a more conciliatory approach, but his mask fell when his pattern of governance resembles Buhari's, and it caused strong repression by some groups of people, especially among the academic community. Furthermore, General Babangida's regime averted two *coup* attempts, for the people, and also some military were not pleased by his attitudes. One of them was carried out by General Mamman Vatsa, in December 1985, with other officers. Vatsa and some of his co-conspirators were killed on March 5, 1986 after being found guilty in a military tribunal. Also, it was during his regime that the editor of *Newswatch Journal*, Dele Giwa, was murdered. During Babangida's regime, newspapers in Nigeria, such as *The Guardian, Punch* and *Vanguard* had experienced closure and persecution. According to Yejide "Giwa's death had taught Nigeria to be afraid of her leaders" (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p.91).

Yejide also talks about Major General Mamman Vatsa

> I read about the military officers who had been accused of planning a coup. I was drawn to the profile of two of the men. There was Lieutenant Colonel Christian Oche, who had been a PhD Candidate at Georgetown University in the United States until he was summoned back to the Supreme Headquarters. [...] And then there was the man whose fate fascinated the country, Major General Mamman Vatsa, sitting minister, award-winning poet and close friend to the head of state. Vatsa and Babangida were childhood friends who had been classmates in middle school; they were commissioned into the army on the same day and had commanded neighbouring battalions in the civil war. Babangida had even been the best man at Vatsa's wedding. [...] I read that Vatsa, Oche and eleven others had been sentenced

> to death, [...] the men had been tried for their intentions. The next day, I wept when I learned that ten of the officers, including Vatsa and Oche, had been executed. [...] At the time, Nigeria was still in the honeymoon phase of her relationship with Babangida, and like most new brides she wasn't asking probing questions yet (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 61-62).

In this quote, it is evident that Babangida was a tyrant, due to the fact that he killed his own close friend in the name of power. Also, Yejide declares her fear when Dele Giwa was assassinated, stating that Babangida's government was also as despicable as Buhari's, once he used to hunt the ones who were against his way of governing.

Lastly, riots, and tensions were also rife during the dictatorial regime. In 1993, when the elections took place, Chief Abiola won the presidential election. Unfortunately, General Babangida annulled the election result on June 23, eleven days after the elections because he intended to keep on governing. However, the whole Nigeria was found into a pandemonium and the resulting violence from the annulment forced Babangida to step aside, handing the power over to Chief Ernest Shonekan on August 27, 1993. Shonekan then became the head of the Interim National Government that ruled Nigeria until he was deposed by another *Coup D'etat* by General Sani Abacha (FALODE, 2019).

It is clear that the turbulent environment that the country is going through, directly impacts the characters lives. In other words, the Nigeria crisis is also reflected in the crisis of the marriage of Akin and Yejide. This transition of power that occurred in politics, can also be related to how these characters are transitions between old traditions and new forms of acting in the world. Hence, when one focuses on Akin, it is possible to understand that he is also living a conflict within himself and with the world outside, because he tries to confront the man he is with the man he is required to be.

4 STAY WITH ME: ANALYSING GENDER

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first aims to analyse gender differences and the power imbalance between male and female characters in the narrative. For that, this research will approach the expectations related to women roles in Nigerian society, more precisely among Yorùbá culture, such as wifehood and motherhood. Furthermore, the second section is concerned with investigating performances of masculinities depicted in the diegesis. So, this work will focus on Akin, one of the main characters. However, prior to the analysis, a brief summary of *Stay with Me* (2017) will be provided.

Stay with Me (2017) is Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀'s debut book. The narrative is developed in Nigeria and it narrates the life of a young couple, Yejide and Akin, married for four years but who never had children. Hence, as some Nigerian societies see marriage as a means to procreate (OYĚWÙMÍ, 1997), Akin and Yejide were facing strong pressure from Amope, Akin's mother. In this sense, as Amope needed a grandchild to fulfill her duty as a good mother, she wanted Akin to get married to a second wife, so that he could impregnate her. On the other hand, as Akin and Yejide were from a different generation, they were against the idea of a polygamic marriage (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p.20), but Amope never took it into account, for what matters is the grandchild of her firstborn.

Yielding his mother's pressure, Akin was forced to marry Funmilayo in secret, once he did not want to hurt his first wife. But, when Yjide discovered that the fact that not having a kid justified polygamy in her marriage, she got used to the idea that she needed to get pregnant prior to Funmi, otherwiser she would lose Akin's love for her (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 38). Social and Family pressures made Yejide look for the most controversial ways of getting pregnant, for everyone judged her as being barren, but it was Akin who was not able to impregnate his wife, for he never got an erection, once he was impotent (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p.222).

As Yejide was dealing with psychological issues regarding all the pressure to become a full woman, that is, to be a mother, she was also worried with fulfilling the expectations of her mother in law, and to not be abandoned by Akin. Her fear was so strong that she had pseudocyesis, a fake pregnancy. Meanwhile, Akin wanted to end the suffering of his wife, and also his own, so planned with his brother, Dotun, to seduce Yejide in secret, have sex with her in order to get her pregnant, once Akin does not want to reveal his secret not even to his wife (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p.162). Dotun agrees to cope with Akin's plan and Yejide gets pregnant three times.

The first time she got pregnant, she gave birth to Olamide, a girl who died when she was 5 months old. The second kid, named Sesan, died when he was five, for he had sickle-cell, a genetic disease. Consequently, because of the deaths of her two kids, Yejide was devastated, but when Sesan died, she was already pregnant with Rotimi, her third child. Regarding the caring for her third kid, Yejide could not get involved with the girl, once she believed it was only a matter of time before Rotimi dies of sickle-cells, because she was also born with the disease (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 179).

Once Yejide discovers Akin's and Dotun's plan, she feels worse than ever. She avoids Akin and treats Rotimi with indifference, afraid that she would die at any moment. One day, when Yejide travels with a friend and Akin goes to treat himself in Lagos, Rotimi has an episode and faints. The riots that were happening in the capital because of the military *coup d'etat*, preventing Akin from getting to the hospital, and for that reason he calls Yejide for help. When she answers the phone and he says that Rotimi was sick and he could not take her to the doctor because of the tumult, Yejide told him she was never coming back to him, for she could not bear the weight of living in the same city that she lost three kids (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p.246).

They have spent 15 years apart (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 5), and only met again because Akin found out where Yejide was living and invited her to his father's funeral. She accepted the invitation and returned to Ilesa, the city she had lived with Akin in the past. When she arrives at the funeral she sees Akin and discovers that Rotim, the daughter that she thought was long dead, was alive. They were ready to redesign a new story (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p.260).

Moreover, the novel's narration is divided between Yejide and Akin, they both share their perspective, and the reader can access both sides of the same story. The novel is also divided into four parts, the first and the latter are set in 2008, the diegesis present, but the characters go back in time, in part two and three, to describe what happened until they arrive in the narrative present time. In addition, the story has its background portrayed during the political crisis of Babangida's dictatorship, when the country was facing the fear of another civil war.

4.1 Women's/ Wives'/ Mothers' duties

Ifi Amadiume (1987) and Oyèronké Oyěwùmí (1997) argued that gendered ideals were imposed by the colonizers in Nigeria pre-colonial societies. According to the scholars,

the Western concepts of being male and being female and the social differences accompanied by gender were also brought to the country after the colonization process. Prior to that, gender was a way to separate biological bodies, one who could get pregnant and the other that could not, and there was no stigmatization attached to gender roles. As the narrative is set after the colonization, Western gendered concepts, such as gender power imbalance, male dominance over women and gender roles will be analysed in this session, relying on the researches developed by Western scholars and African researchers.

First of all, Oyèronké Oyěwùmí (1997) discusses that marriage is an important institution in Nigerian society, more specifically among the Yorùbá, not for the act of a couple getting together, but because these men and women who would bound themselves needed to become parentes, as it was their main obligation to each other and to their family. In the narrative, one can clearly understand that having kids or not can cause cracks even in love, as when Akin says that "before [he] got married, [he] believed that love could do anything. [He] learned soon enough that it couldn't bear the weight of four years without children" (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 18). From this statement, it gets clear that for a young couple, the need to have kids was a social and a family imposition requirement needed to successfully fulfil the expectations of marriage.

After many attempts of his mother on finding a second wife to Akin, because it was of paramount importance that her son would become a father, he finally decides to accept one of her indications, because his mother blackmailed him saying that if he did not accept any of the candidates, she would take them to his house, and present those women to Yejide, making her feel uncomfortable. In order to avoid conflicts with Yejide, he agreed to marry Funmi. In light of this, one can assume that Akin was thinking about the welfare of Yejide. And, because of that, Akin and Funmi got married in secret.

Yejide and Akin are a couple that feel complete without a kid and never wanted to have a polygamic marriage (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p.20). However, for society and for their relatives, they must have children once it is their duty (OYĚWÙMÍ, 1997). Because of this, one day, Iya Martha, first wife of Yejide's father and Baba Lola, Akin's uncle, suddenly appear in the couple's house with Funmilayo, Akin's second wife, to tell Yejide about the secret marriage of Akin and the girl. They tried to explain that Funmi, as she was younger then Yejide, would soon get pregnant and, after that, they assured that Yejide would get pregnant too, for Baba Lola says that to his people (Yorùbá) "it is one child that calls another one into the world" (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 9). According to Butler's (2019) concept of gender performativity, as everyone believed that Yejide could not perform the role expected for her to

develop, as becoming a mother, she was being punished, as her husband now got married to a second wife.

After Yejide realized that her husband had now a second wife, she was considered the *iyale*, the first wife, "a verdict that marked [her] as not woman enough for [her] husband" (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 11), once she could not get pregnant. Desperate by the fact that Akin now had Funmi, and afraid of being left once more, as it happened when her mother and father died, Yejide saw herself cornered, and decided that she "simply had to get pregnant, as soon as possible, and before Funmi did. It was the only way [she] could be sure [she] would stay in Akin's life" (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 38).

With this concern, Yejide tries to find comfort in her mother in law, but when she arrives at Amope's house, she is welcomed with the following question: "are you pregnant or not?" (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 40). Akin's mother also implies that the fault is on Yejide for not being able to have a baby, because she further questions Yejide "why won't you allow my son to have a child?" (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 40). In this sense, Amope is monitoring Yejide's gender performances, and the character is not attending the expectations, that is why she is being mistreated, for bad performances of gender are subject to retaliation (BUTLER, 2019).

In addition, the whole family used to blame Yejide for being barren, even Funmi, when went to confront Yejide in her saloon said that "I know that people say that you are barren, but there is nothing God cannot do" (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 32). Even Yejide believed she was the one that had problems getting pregnant. One of the reasons for that was that she was the daughter of "a woman without lineage" (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 30), and because of that, Yejide was the holder of a "bad blood" (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 31).

Later on, when arguing with Yejide, Akin's mother implies that the role of a "woman [is] to manufacture children and if you [Yejide] can't, you are just a man" (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 40). This passage contributes to the understanding of what Nicholson (1999) calls biological determinism, in which the physical functions of the body are associated with gender roles. By this, Yejide also does not fit in the moldes of what it is to be a woman for Amope and for Yorùbá culture.

In addition, Akin's mother questions Yejide why "Akin never touched Funmi" (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 41), and also said

> You have had my son between your legs for two more months and still your stomach is flat. Close your thighs to him, I beg you. We all know how he feels about you. If you don't chase him away, he won't touch Funmi. If you don't he will die childless.

> I beg you, don't spoil my life. He is my first son, Yejide. I beg you in the name of God (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 41)

When saying that, Amope not only posits the fault in Yejide for being barren, but she also infer that she needs a grandchild from her firstborn to be fulfilled. However Yejide "had so many tests done in the hospital and every one of them showed that there was nothing preventing [her] from getting pregnant" (p. 39), all the fault fell upon her. And, because of all the pressure of feeling that was losing Akin to Funmi and of her mother in law wanting her to have a baby, Yejide followed the advice of one of her customers Mrs. Adelou, and tried to find the cure with Prophet Josiah. She had "to bring a white goat without wound, blemish or a speck of another colour" (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 43), so that she could take part in a ritual in which she breastfed the goat, all to have Akin's child. After the episode, Yejide got psychologically ill, for she was diagnosed with Pseudocyesis.

Yejide, then, with the strong belief that was indeed pregnant, decided to start the antenatal and after the first session, while she talks to the nurse, who is also one of Yejide's customers, the nurse says: "Congratulations, my sister. Those men, they don't understand, but thank God all your enemies have been put to shame. Every time they will be blaming the woman and sometimes it is their own body that has a problem" (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 52-53). This is the first time that someone does not accuse Yejide of the fertility problem to be found in the husband, not the wife.

After taking some ultrasound exams, Dr. Uche confirmed that Yejide was not pregnant, even though she had symptoms, as it is in the quote below

> It happens, this kind of… pregnancy. The people who can't have… haven't had children. It happens- Pregnancy symptoms are there but no baby. We are agreed that you are not pregnant, right? Perhaps you could see a gynecologist again about this issue? I can see on your file that you have had a number of tests done before, but maybe we could run some more tests" (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 58).

It is clear by Dr. Uchi's speech that she also believes that Yejide is the one to blame for not getting pregnant, once the Dr. does not comment about the possibility of the issue being encountered in the man. Yejide, then, decided to go to a different doctor, Dr. Junadi, to certify that Dr. Uchi was mistaken. Once more, the doctor attested the veracity of the ultrasound and reaffirmed that she was not pregnant. He also questioned if Yejide and Akin, both, had undertaken specific tests, and she attested to it, not knowing about Akin's results.

Another matter regarding the polygamic marriage is related to the marriage of Akin's parents. In the day of Akin's father funeral

> Moomi has refused to come downstairs for the wake. As I wonder why, it occurs to me that my mother might be grief-stricken over my father's death. I almost laugh. I know as I climb the stairs, two steps at a time, that it has to be something else. I don't think they were ever in love. But they did tolerate each other until my siblings and I left home. Then Moomi stopped bothering with tolerance, and unleashed her long-held anger and resentment. My father didn't fight back, poor man had little energy left after dealing with four younger wives. Now that he's dead, I expect Moomi to feel some sadness, but mixed with a measure of triumph - she has outlasted him (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 74).

It is quite evident that Moomi was not happy with her old husband and with the polygamic marriage that she had to live during her entire life. Her marriage was not perfect, but still she had to stay with her husband until one of their deaths to fulfill expectations regarding women's roles, as to be a good mother and a good wife, and Moomi, if fact, fulfilled that role, for she was a wife, a mother, and a grandmother. In this sense, Moomi's performances served Yejide as a norm to be followed in order to be accepted (BUTLER, 2019).

Concerning power imbalances regarding gender, in the novel, as Yejide got surprised and frustrated with the news that her husband took a second wife, she argued with Akin in front of his uncle. Iya Martha intervened saying that she "must not abuse your husband, this child. No matter how things appear, he is still your husband" (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 12). As one can understand from Iya Martha speech, Yejide is required to behave in front of others, especially male relatives. This idea aligns with Scott's (1986) and Butler's (2019), when they affirm that family and kinship play crucial roles when it comes to social validation and the fulfilment of gender expectations.

Scott (1986), moreover, says that there are unequal relations of power if one compares women to men, further Lauretis implies that Technology of gender are social impositions that determine gender enactments (2019). As a consequence, in the narrative, there are elements that corroborate to Scott's and Laureti's affirmation. One was mentioned in the previous paragraph, in which Iya Martha told Yejide not to abuse her husband. Second, another element present in the story that places the man over woman, is after the ceremony of names of Olamide, the first daughter of Yejide and Akin:

> Everyone was congratulating me [Akin]. They called me Baba Aburo, Baba Ikoko, Baba Baby, then after the names had been given, Baba Olamide. Colleagues slapped me on the back, told me that the next baby had to be a boy. Friends said I had allowed Yejide to start with an easy hand by having a girl; next it was time for a boy- better stills, boys (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p 110).

It is clear by these lines that in a hierarchy, boys are preferred to girls, and though people were happy that the couple now had a daughter, it would be even better if she was born as a boy. Moreover, this difference regarding gender is also enhanced after Akin's and Dotun's fight. The family gathered to talk about the incident. In their conversation, when Amope says that their kids must explain why they 'want to disgrace [their] family and make [them] the topic of gossip in the marketplace' (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 199), her husband replied

> 'No, stop there. You mean to you, Amope. They have disgraced you. The whole world knows my name is a good name in Ijesaland'. [...] 'It is that way now, Baba? Now they are my sons? Useless man, of course they are my sons, since you never spent a kobo on them. I paid the school fees, bought uniforms and when they graduated from the university you just showed up for the pictures. But now again they have become my sons?' [...] Moomi hissed, 'But this is not your fault. It is the children of the orange tree that cause clubs and stones to be thrown at their mother (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 179- 180).

From this quotation, the interpretation one can have regarding Akin's father speech is that he had not contributed to raising his kids, placing the obligation to nurturing and caring for Amope, his wife. In addition, when saying that she was the only responsible for caring for her kids, Moomi acknowledges the cultural impositions that women are the only to be blamed when something happens to their kids, because they were the only ones managing the education of the offspring. In this sense, she helps in keeping the maintenance of such gendered rules, reaffirming heteronormative and patriarchal ideals (NAJMABADI, 2006).

The expectations do not end even after Yejide becomes a mother. When she lost her second child, Sesan, Yejide started to feel vulnerable and unfit to perform her motherly role for her third daughter, Rotimi[5], as she implies

> I did not know what to do with the screaming girl whom we were already pleading with, every day, every moment we called her name: Rotimi - stay with me. I closed my eyes when she suckled at my breast, careful not to make eye contact with her. I had the washerwoman come in every other day to wash the baby things. I was not strong enough to love when I could lose again, so I held her losely, with little hope,

[5] In Yoruba it means stay with me, the title of the novel.

> sure that somehow she too would manage to slip from my grasp (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 179-180).

In light of this, Yejide was not able to fulfill the expectations required to being a mother, for she was now vulnerable, and according to Moomi,

> ‘You must be strong for this child’ she said over and over until I covered my ears with my hands. She left our house the same day, even though there was no other grandchild for her to help look after. ‘She is your daughter. You take care of her, you are not dead,’ she said before walking out to meet Akin at the car. There was more she had to say; it was there in the anger and contempt in her eyes. The eyes that condemned me for grieving for too long, for being too weak to be a mother to my newborn child, for dwelling with the dead (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p.179).

In sum, the narrative portrays many gender ideals expected for a woman, a wife, and a mother. These gender assumptions learned in society and imposed by family are, most of the times, negative. As this research has more intent on dealing with masculinities, this section was brief, only to present some elements that evidence gender roles imposed on Nigerian women, and to understand how gender power imbalance operates. In the next session, however, we will focus on Akin, a complex character that even though enacts a respectable masculinity, he also has hypermasculine behaviors, once he cannot fully perform hegemonic masculinity.

4.2 Akin’s masculinity: reaffirming and redesigning old concepts

As gender is a set of cultural rules constructed socially (SCOTT, 1995; NICHOLSON, 1999; BUTLER, 2019), Connell (2005) states that masculinity is produced by man and women, learned in the social environment (JEWKES, et al., 2015). The set of traces that define a man vary according to the setting (GUTTERMAN, 1994), for masculinity, as gender, is a fluid concept and can only be constructed in parallel to different performances. According to this, this section will focus on Akin. The character reaffirms traces of Nigerian hegemonic masculinity, but once no ordinary man can achieve this hegemonic masculinity performance (CONNEL, 1987; DONALDSON, 1993), the character ends up enacting hypermasculinity, such as being excessively violent toward women (PASURA, CHRISTOU, 2017). On the other hand, Akin also disrupts some of the expectations imposed on men to perform, once he partially has feminists inclination, such as supporting women, caring for the kids, taking care of his health and permitting himself to be vulnerable.

First of all, this paper will look to Akin as he contributes to the maintenance of the performances of masculinity expected for him to perform according to the environment he is inserted, Yorùbá society.

4.2.1 *Reaffirming masculinity*

The imposition of having children after the marriage, not only fell upon Yejide but also upon Akin. His mother used to talk about his "responsibility to her as a first son" (p.18) and to compare him to Juwon, the son of his father's second wife. Akin's mother after questioning his responsibility of giving her a grandchild, more specifically a grandson, she also goes on comparing him with his younger half-brothers, who had kids before him, the older son, something uncommon regarding their tradition. By doing this, Akin's mother is not only questioning why he does not have children yet, but in some sense, she also is putting in check Akin's masculinity, because a man can only be complete if he has a family and kids to be responsible for. As a result, fatherhood in the sense of being the breadwinner is an important element that represents the masculinity of a Nigerian man (UCHENDU, 2007).

Also, since marriage is a way that men can attest their virility, since it is expected that they impregnate their wife/wives, this issue is also a matter that it is important to take into account when analysing Akin, once he was impotent and unable to achieve that goal. In these lines, Uchendo (2007) implies that for Nigerian male individuals, virility is an aspect that provides the characteristic of a manly man, but this category can also be expanded to most performances of masculinities across the globe. From this perspective, Akin could never perform a hegemonic masculinity. Actually, Akin's fears about people discovering his secret obliges him to plot a plan with his brother Dotun to impregnate Yejide.

Akin had planned that Dotun should be the one to impregnate Yejide, due to the fact that he knew that his brother, as being a careless man, would never make an effort to contest fatherhood and would never tell his secret, and in this way, Akin's 'flaw' would still be well-kept. In fact, Akin had planned all Yejide's pregnancies prior to contacting his brother, and Dotun would be the sperm donor and biological father of all Yejide's kids. Further, when Akin tells his plan to Dotun, the reaction of his brother was of atonishment, for he could not have sex with Akin's wife, it would be wrong, but Akin lectures him:

> 'You need to spend just a weekend. Next weekend, she'll be ovulating.' 'And Yejide? She agreed to this thing you are saying?' [...] 'Yes.' Truth is I hadn't discussed it with Yejide, but I just wanted him to agree to the plan so I could go to

> bed and forget the discussion. [...] No. No, I can't do it. I won't. It's wrong.' [...] 'I'm not asking you to rape her, damn it. Just once, get her pregnant and that's it. I've told you my problem. Do you want me to beg?' [...] 'If we arrange things well, one weekend will do for each child. All things being equal, three kids are OK.' He looked me in the eye, searched my face and sluped into a chair. 'You've thought about this. You've been thinkin about this for a long time.' [...] 'I'm doing this for her' (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 162-163).

In order to preserve his performative masculinity, Akin architects a way so that Dotun can seduce Yejide and have intercourse with her. By doing this, Yejide would possibly become pregnant, as it happened three times, and she would be complete as a woman, since she was now a mother. In addition, Akin would be a complete man, because after he became father he would be responsible for taking care of a family (UCHENDU, 2007), and the couple would avoid the retaliation regarding their bad performances of gender (BUTLER, 2019). Nevertheless, when Akin states that he plotted this plan thinking about Yejide, it can be reliable, for his love for Yejide is unquestionable during the narrative, but he also did it on his own behalf, to hide his impotence from the knowledge of others.

Furthermore, to help Akin with the fake preparation for impregnating Yejide, Dotun wanted him to drink beers in order to get fierce to have sexual relation with his wife, another performatic manly behavior, as one can see below

> It was Dotun who then brought the crate of stout to our table. He handed me the first brown bottle, while the other men at the table chanted: odeku, odeku, odeku. The men stood up to hand me the subsequent bottles, as though each one was a gift - their own contribution to solidifying my virility and populating my family with enough children to make up for the years when quite a number of them had asked me to do something about the barren woman in my house. They gave me bottle after bottle, cheered me on each time I slammed an empty brown bottle on the table like a warlord returning from the battle holding an opponent's head (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 110-111).

From this quote, one is able to interpret that virility is also taken into account when stating a manly man, as suggested by Uchendu (2007). In light of this, after Olamide's naming ceremony Akin has proven his worth, for now he was a complete man, one who had two wives and a daughter, maintaining the patriarchal ideal of gender performances (NAJMABADI, 2006; BUTLER, 2019). However, what everyone did not know was the fact that Akin was never virile. Actually, Akin was living a lie because of the burden that African men have to hold to be considered a man (BEN-DANIELS; GLOVER-MENI, 2020). Akin, for instance, as he was feeling emasculated due to the fact that he was living a fake life, started to enact hyperasculine behaviors.

Moreover, aware of his impotence, when Yejide is convicted of being pregnant, after taking the advice of a friend, Mrs. Adelou, and visiting Prophet Josiah, a priest, she starts to feel body changes, such as breast growth, and vomiting. Conflicted with these evidences, for he knows his medical condition, Akin asks if "[Yejide] have been having sex [...] with another man?" (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 50), once he affirms that she cannot be pregnant because "[he] have not even touched [her] in months" (p. 50). However, when Yjide confronts Akin, he gets violent, as we can see in the following quote

> [...] 'I want a baby and since you are too busy at your new wife's place to try and get me pregnant, I can get a baby from any man I want.' He got up and grabbed my arms just above the elbows. The veins in his forehead popped. 'You can't' he said. I laughed. 'I can do anything I want.' His nails bit into my arms through my shirtsleeves. 'Yejide, you can't.' I wagged my head. 'But I can. I can. I ca.' He shook me until my head bobbed and my teeth rattled. Then he let go suddenly. I crashed into a chair, grasping the table for balance. He picked up a saucer from the table and held it aloft. In one frightening moment I could see him breaking the delicate china on my head. He threw it across the room, the he pulled the table-cloth off the dining table. Plates, mugs, saucers and vacuum flasks crashed to the floor. My husband was not a violent man, and the man who lifted a dining chair and hit it against the dining table until the chair broke was someone I did not know.

As one can interpret, once he assumed that Yejide cheated on him, he started to act violent, performing hypermasculinity, due to the fact that he is not able to deal with the possibility that his wife could have had another man. Additionally, later in the narrative, when Yejide insists on the subject that she is still pregnant, even though many doctors had told her she was not, Akin became violent again:

> Akin stood up and held my shoulders. 'You have been sent away from antenatal classes, Yejide. You had five scans, five different doctors, in Ilesa, Ife and Ibadan. You are not pregnant, you are delusional!' Saliva foamed from the sides of his mouth. 'Yejide, this has to stop. Please, I beg you. Dotun, please talk to her. I have talked and talked, my mouth is starting to peel off because of all the talking.' His [Akin's] hands were hurting my [Yejide's] shoulders (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 95).

According to Morrell (1998), masculinity is prejudicial to some degree, not only to women, but also to men. In this sense, the social impositions that falls upon the Nigeria couple provokes Akin to become a violent man, since he was afraid of retaliation regarding his family, once he was not performing the roles suggested in his social script (GUTTERMAN, 1994; BUTLER, 2019), neither Yejide, for she was holding the weight of being barren, once Akin was cowardly hiding his condition from everyone.

In this sense, Funmi and Akin argued because she confronted him about his impotence, as it is stated below

> On the night Funmi died, the night of Olamide's naming ceremony, all I'd wanted was to make it to my bedroom without tripping on the stairs. Thanks to the bottles of beer I'd downed, the steps swam before my eyes. I held on to the banister as I climbed. Funmi was right behind me, slurring her words. "So how did Yejide get pregnant?' I didn't have to think before I answered, 'The way people get pregnant.' Funmi laughed. 'Do you think I'm a fool? Your lies and the fake nonsense you've been doing in bed, you think I don't know? Is it because I've not decided to expose you?' I kept walking up the stairs. Whether I was too drunk to respond or I trusted that my silence would be interpreted in a way that favoured me, I can no longer tell for sure.I do remember that Fnmi grabbed my trouser leg from behind, but that didn't bother me. '**Tell me,' she said. 'Tell me how a penis that has never been hard makes a woman pregnant?** And don't tell me again that it only happens when you are with me. I don't believe that anymore.' I've never been sre if Fnmi whispered those words or shouted them. But that night it sounded as though the words were being bellowed, it felt as though they were echoing through every room in the house. She'd already let go of my trousers when I turned around to cover her mouth with my hand. And my palm did touch her face, cover her mouth for a fleeting moment before she staggered, fell backwards, and tumbled down the stairs (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 222-223, personal highlights).

Funmi discovers Akin's and decides to confront him about the situation. The accidental killing of his second wife is the only possible way for Akin to avoid public shame. After all, Funmi's disclosure of his secret could ruin his reputation and masculinity. By these lines, it can be interpreted that hegemonic masculinity and the representation of extreme hypermasculinity behaviors are indeed toxic.

Another passage that shows Akin enacting hypermasculinity, is when Dr. Bello tells him that Sesan, his second son, could not be his biological kid, due to the fact that Sesan had sickle-cell disease, and Akin did not have the gene responsible for the disease in his DNA, so it was not possible that he could be Sesan's biological father. When the doctor explained the situation, the reaction of Akin was the following

> My limbs went limp. I covered my face with my hands and prepared an expression to meet the doctor's sympathetic gaze. 'Do you mean this?' I said. "Do you mean what you are saying? you mean that woman has been cheating on me? Are you serious? You mean this? Oh, my God! I'm going to kill her. I swear to God.' I allowed my voice to rise to its highest pitch and pounded my fist on the doctor's table. 'Calm down, sir, you need to handle this like a man, OK? Please calm down. Be a man, sir. Be a man.' I made sure I seemed angry enough to Dr. Bello. Behaved the way I imagined a man would when discovering that a child wasn't his. I punched a wall, yelled and slammed the door as I left the office (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 161).

In fact, Akin has to play the role of the betrayed man even knowing deep down that he himself had caused his wife to betray him by sleeping with his brother. Besides, the reaction he has to the doctor confirms that he is playing the role of the betrayed husband, but he was responsible for the betrayal 'in the first place', which gives him the character of a villain. On the other hand, regardless of this performatic behavior towards the doctor, when expressing himself about fatherhood the character says

> But I knew Sesan was my son and I loved him. I was planning for his future, and had bought shares in his name. I often thought of the day I'd buy him his first bottle of beer. Could hardly wait to teach him how to play table tennis at the sports club. I knew I was the one who would do all those things. Nobody else was going to do them. There are things scientific tests cannot show, things like the fact that paternity is more than sperm donation. I knew Sesan was my son. There was no test result that could change that (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p.161).

In light of this, Akin even when performing to the doctor traces of a masculinity that was not a part of his personality (NICHOLSON, 1999), he wanted to be a good father to Sesan. He wanted to be Sesan's father, but his secret, that would ruin his life, was a burden too heavy to hold. As a matter of fact, Akin acts differently in the public sphere and in his private life.

Another example that attests when Akin acts hypermasculinity is when the plan gets out of his control and he finds out that Dotun was "thrusting into [his] wife without [his] permission" (p. 192), as when he says

> When I walked in on the two of them the rage that had stayed coiled around my throat since that first Saturday stirred again, tightening its hold. My eyes met Yejide's and I felt ashamed. [...] I realised that while I I'd thought m brother and I would trade places once in a while, truth was that from that first Saturday he'd occupied vistas I'd never even glimpsed. I waited until Dotun rolled off her and saw me. He leapt off the bed. I took off my jacket, took my time, folded it, then placed it on the bed. There was no ready weapon within reach, no pestle, no sharp knife waitig for me to grab. I marched towards Dotun, armed with the only weapons I really needed - my raging anger, my clenched fists. [...] I punchd his mouth, his nose, his eyes. I felt his skin give way, heard his bones crack and saw blood flow from his nose. [...] I knelt over his bare belly and punched - his neck, his chest, the hands that tried to ward me off. [...] 'I trusted you!' [...] It enraged me, the still-moist, limp penis between his legs. I thought of where the penis had just been and **a lifetime of rage heated up my head**. [...] I knelt between Dotun's spread-eagled legs, grabbed his limp penis and twisted it. [...] There were soft hands on my shoulders, pulling me back. I kept twisting, twisting. 'For God sake, Akin. Don't kill him, please.' Yejide was on her knees beside me, still naked. I took my hands out off Dotun. 'Shut up, you whore.' [...] I hit him on the chin with the lamp, knocked him back to the ground. [...] 'You have killed your brother,' Yejide whispered behind me. 'You've murdered your own mother's son.' And I hoped she was right (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 192-195, personal highlights).

This quote shows the most violent episode of Akin during the narrative. When he saw that he had no control over the relationship between his wife and his brother, he became furious. Moreover, as we can see in the highlighted sentence, Akin hated the fact that his brother could penetrate Yejide, while he could not, proving Morrell's (1998) statement that most masculinities are prejudicial to women and to men.

Even though Akin was furious, he was conscious that the fault was only his, as he states in the quote below

> I wished Dotun were dead, that he'd never been born. But this was a lie. What I wished was that I was dead, that I'd never been born. I rought Dotun into our home, invited him, cajoled him, threatened him, did everything I could to convince him. Never imagined that I would ever in seven lifetimes have to see my brother thrusting into my wife, grunting like a pig as he came. As I factored unforeseen circumstances into my plan, I'd left out the things that would ruin it: sickle cell, Dotun losing his job, and all the mess of love and life that only shows up as you go along (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 196).

This quote provides us with the idea that Akin was feeling guilty for trying to make his life and Yejide better, but in fact he caused the whole family an attrition, all because masculinity did not allow him to be different then the expected, and he chose the path of avoiding the dialogue with his wife. On the other hand, Akin was irate with Yejide for he thought he could control the situation he had planned, but he could not. And they argue

> 'You bloody… bloody… did my brother behind my back. You are the unfaithful wife.' I trembled when I said this, kept my fists in my pockets, fought the urge to plant them in her smug face, because if I started I would never stop. 'You would have preferred it in front of you? Under your careful supervision? You are a cheat, a betrayer and the biggest liar in heaven, hell and on earth.' She spat at my feet, entered her new room, slammed the door. I let the range loose, punched the closed door until my skin bruised and bleed. And even then, I didn't stop. Couldn't stop. [...] I didn't have to stand alone in the corridor, speaking with my fists to a wooden door that wouldn't answer, lifting my shoulders so I could wipe sweat off my face with my shirtsleeve. Not tears. Sweat (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 198).

Akin is having a continuous fit of anger, for his incapability of being a hegemonic man, something that is impossible to any common man according to Connell (2005). In this quote, he enacts hubristic masculinity (ANYADUBA, 2019) for he is trying to be the macho, showing a strength that he was not able to have at that moment, and denying his tears, for he thinks that crying can be too humiliating for a man.

Further, when Dotun left Lagos, after the fight, he went to live in Australia. Dotun sent two letters to Akin, explaining why he left the country and expecting responses regarding the reasons why Akin was still angry with him. Because of Akin's fear about his truth being revealed, was the trigger who caused all the discomfort among the family. After the second letter, Akin stated that

> I felt no anger as I fed the second letter to the shredder. The shame I felt left no room for any other thing, not even hope. I was not angry with my brother anymore; already I was realising that all the rage had been an affectation. Something I'd reached for to use as a defence against shame. Anger is easier than shame (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p.212).

As it can be deduced by the previous quote, the hypermasculinity performances and even the hubristic masculinity enacted by Akin were only self-defence mechanisms. He had to show that he was angry for being cheated on, and had to show that he was the right and Yejide and Dotun were in the wrong. In light of this, what Akin was trying to do was to play the role of the regular macho, so as to perform a socially acceptable model of masculinity.

In addition to that, another trace that links Akin with concepts of hegemonic masculinity connected to patriarchal rules is the ability of a manly man to be strong and hide emotions (UCHENDU, 2007). When Akin was still engaged to Yejide, her father died. He offered himself to be the one to dig the grave, as Yorùbá tradition requires, however, as one can grasp from the following passage he was afraid of doing that:

> while your family made arrangements for the funeral, you told them that I should join the grave digging even though we were not yet married. Of course your stepmothers wouldn't allow it. And you wept until the whites of your eyes turned pink. I tried to comfort you, told you that it didn't really matter because everyone would be hiring laborers to dig graves in a few years anyway. I'm not sure you heard me or cared. You cried yourself to sleep that night. I couldn't tell you at the time, but I was relieved I didn't have to dig your father's grave. I believed in ghosts the, was terrified of graveyards. Yet, if your stepmothers had agreed to let me dig, I would have done it to please you (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 73).

These lines present a man that fears ghosts and graveyards, but in order to please Yejide, and also not to show his weakness, he would have dug the grave. At the same time, something similar happens to Henry, Akins brother in law, husband of his sister Arinola. Henry is digging Akin's father's grave with him, by hand, in order to prove to the parents of his wife "that he is good enough for their daughter" (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p.74), even though Henry is not Yorùbá (p.74).

Furthermore, when it comes to openly expressing his emotions, Akin prefers to hide his true feelings towards his wife who he wants back into his life again, but still he tries to preclude vulnerability of his life as he states in the following passage:

> I settled for hugging her until I could feel the rapid beat of her heart as though it was mine. Neither of us said anything. I couldn't speak, though my throat was clogged with words, clogged with emotions that paralysed my vocal chords. Even now I think I should have said something, told her how I couldn't stand to lose her, how the thought of it had almost made me lose my mind moments before, how I wanted to bind myself to her, so that she could be safe, so I could go with her everywhere she went (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 83).

This passage shows that Akin, even though in love with Yejide, suppressed some of his emotions towards her. He was not able to put into words what his real feeling was. In fact, Uchendu (2007) argues that men in Nigeria tend to avoid showing their real feelings, for toughness is a characteristic of a masculine male. In addition to that, Akin, according to Yejide, "never really allowed anyone to know him" (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 156). Beyond that, Akin is also a man that most of the time tries to suppress his sensible self, does not show weakness and wants to be considered strong, a characteristic related to Nigerian hegemonic masculine behaviors.

Also, when Olamide, their first daughter, suddenly died, after five months that she was born, Yejide and Akin became sorrowful. When mourning for Olamide's death Yejide said that

> Akin knelt beside me and laid his head on my stomach, one hand clutching my dress, the other hanging limply over the edge of the armchair, still holding the scissors. He would never admit it, but I felt his tears that day, they plastered my dress to my belly and validated my grief. I threw my head back and wept out loud (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 130-131).

Although Akin was permitting himself to be vulnerable at that moment, Yejide implies that he would never admit it, for being emotional is not a male behavior (UCHENDU, 2007), and as his virility was taken from him, as a birth condition, Akin did not allow any other trace of masculinity to be removed from him.

Briefly, this section was concerned with identifying characteristics that bounded Akin to performances of Nigerian hegemonic masculinities It was understood that this male character assumes the responsibility of pursuing characteristics of a manly man, and sometimes, as he cannot perform the gender representations expected for him to enact, he

ends up being extremely violent and hubristic. As a result, Akin has many traces that connect him to a toxic masculinity. Nevertheless, the next section will analyse the characteristics that push away traces of these traditional masculinity developed by Akin.

4.2.2 *Redesigning masculinity*

As Nigerian contemporary authors tend to construct characters that reinvisions gender roles, Akin, even though have and seek to have traces of the hegemonic masculinities ruled by patriarchal society, he is a character different from Achebe's Okonkwo. The character partially has feminists inclinations; supports Yejide's autonomy, takes care of his health and of his kids, and, sometimes, permits himself to be vulnerable (GLEIBERMAN, 2020).

For instance, regarding the care for the kids, more specifically Olamide, Akin's and Yejide first daughter, Yejide says that Akin

> spent his evenings singing made-up songs to Olamide and reading newspaper articles aloud to her. My daughter knew all about the proceedings of the constitution review committee and the constituent assembly before she was three months old. It was the most beautiful thing, watching my husband tell my daughter things she could not understand. It was so perfect, so surreal that I wanted to press the pause button on life in those moments (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 105-106).

In these lines, it is quite evident that Akin was a really commited father. He used to tell stories to his newborn daughter and spend time in her company, however Olamide died when she was 5 months old, interrupting Akin's fraternal practices towards her. Additionally, with the couple's second son, Sesan, this character was also a very careful and attentive father, as Yejide states when talking about how Akin interacted with the little boy:

> About a month after Sesan started kindergarten, Akin took him to the hospital for some routine tests. It was the sort of thin Akin did, like buying hundreds of shares for Sesan on every birthday, or having a children's school-fees savings account that he deposited money in every month for the day we got married, or a yearly medical and dental checkup for himself. So I was not surprised when my son came home and proudly showed me the invisible spot that had been pricked on his finger for blood samples (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 146).

As it is evidenced in the quote, Akin's fatherly dedication for his kids is a characteristic of his persona, because he acted with great care with both his offspring. Additionally, he is very vigilant not only to his kids' healthcare, but to his own, as he yearly visits a doctor and a dentist. Thus, according to Jewkes et al. (2015), men tend not to take

good care of their health, and in this sense, Akin contradicts some traces of hegemonic masculinity.

Likewise, as Yejide was not ready to fully dedicate her love to Rotimi, her third kid, she used to let the newborn girl with Akin, so that he could take care of the baby, once they were not sleeping together since the fight of Akin and Dotun. Regarding the care for Rotimi, Akin narrates in the following quote his relation to the baby:

> That day, I got home around 9 p.m. It was the first time I had arrived home before midnight since I'd received Dotun's letter. Yejide was in my room with Rotimi. She stood up when I walked in and handed Rotimi over to me. 'If she cries before eleven, give her some water.' She pointed to a bedside table where she'd placed two vacuum flasks and several feeding bottles. 'r some pap, she likes that with milk. There are nappies in the bag on the floor.' I dropped my briefcase so I could hold Rotimi with both hands, surprised that her mother was speaking to me. 'Don't come and disturb me. I want to sleep. I'll come for her in the morning, ' Yejide said as she left the room. Every morning, Rotimi woke me up at 5. Her wails were as punctual as an alarm clock. [...] Initially, our morning hours were quiet as long as I didn't try to sit down or let her go. And then one morning she looked up at me, one fist beneath her chin as though she was pondering what she was about to say, and said, 'Baba.' She said it two more times before she went back to sleep, as if she knew that I needed to hear the word again. Each time she said it, it was like an absolution. [...] I felt as though she'd given me a gift, something almost divine because it was perfectly timed. She'd claimed me as her father (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 213-214).

In this passage, Akin shows that, even though he is forced by Yejide to spend the night and take care of their daughter, he likes to pass the time with Rotimi. He adores being her father and nurturing her. Moreover, as Rotimi used to spend more time with Akin to Yejide, her first words were "Baba", which means, father. Akin inds peace in those words uttered by his baby girl, once Rotimi was not his biological daughter. This feeling proves that he was an affectionate father, for his behavior keeps on repeating with all the three kids. However, Akin also implies that

> [he] had thought that having children who called [him] Baba would change the very shape of [his] world, would cleanse [him], even wipe away the memory of pushing Funmi down the stairs. And though [he] told Rotimi the story many times, I no longer believed that having a child was equal to owning the world (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 218).

When thinking that, Akin questions the social impositions to men and women in Nigerian society, the ones that dictate fatherhood and motherhood in order for these individuals to be complete as men and women. By this, Akin sides against expected gendered roles, because he believes that a couple can be happy without having a kid, and in a certain

way, he is personifying a different masculinity. Although Akin is showing traces of a more respectable masculinity, when analysing this quote, one cannot be naive and put aside the fact that he is possibly feeling guilty for murdering his second wife, and this feeling might have changed his perspective of what it is to own the world.

Furthermore, there are some momentis in the narrative in which Akin permits himself to be vulnerable. One of these scenes happens when the character is remembering his old days with Dotun in Lagos. Akin openly talked about his erection problems with his brother, as one can see in the following piece:

> It was during that year that I told him I'd never had an erection. At first he laughed, but realising I was serious he scratched the back of his head and told me not to worry because it would happen when I met the right girl. And because he was Dotun, while we waited for the right woman to show up, he paraded a series of girls through our flat during the day and dragged me to red light districts on Allen Avenue at night. He was the one who, even after I started treatment at a private clinic in Ikeja during my final semester at university, bought herbs and miracle drinks that purged me but did not harden my penis. Thanks to him, I must have watched every pornographic video that was available in Nigeria. I watched it all: men and women, men and men, women and women - nothing worked (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 238-239).

This is the first time that Akin talks about his medical condition. It is clear in this passage that Akin relies on his brother and shares his secret, permitting himself to be vulnerable (GLEIBERMAN, 2020) and not entirely manly, since Dotun could mock him or even judge Akin for his dysfunction. This situation of emotional sensibility is also repeated when Akin called Yejide in Bauchi, a city that she travelled with Iya Bolu to attend her friend's brother's marriage. When called his wife, Akin

> [...] was planning to slip in a line about what [he] was doing in Lagos. [he] thought he was ready to discuss [his] condition with her, felt it would help that [he] wouldn't have to look at her, figured she couldn't walk out on [him]. As [he] told Iya Bolu that [he] would call back before the end of the day, [he] felt [he] was ready to tell Yejide anything, even about [his] desperate visit to a traditional herbalist. [...] [he] planned to sit her down when [they] were back to Ilesa, ask her if [they] could begin again on fresh terms (ADÉBÁYỌ̀, 2017, p. 240).

By this passage, the character was planning on confronting the fear of his impotence and discussing the matter with his wife, as a means to redeem himself from all the pain that his lies caused to them both. In light of this, despite the fact that the subject of his impotence was really hard for Akin to verbalize and talk over with Yejide, he was prepared to open his

heart and speak about his virility issues, once more disrupting some traces of a hegemonic masculinity.

In brief, this section tried to understand how Akin transitions between hubristic and respectable masculinities. This character wants to feel complete and manly, because it is required from him to exercise these roles. Nonetheless, Akin was impeded from being such a man due to him being impotent, and in this way he gets extremely violent. For instance, it happened when he psychologically assaulted his first wife, Yejide, also when he murdered his second wife, Funmi, and when he attacked his brother, Dotun, trying to attempt against his life. Contrastingly, Akin passes through a conflictual transition between a man that he needs to be, versus the man he truly is. This part of Akin's personality portrays a caring father, a man that deals differently regarding his health, and a supporting husband. In this sense, Akin can be considered a transition point between generations, he is not completely detached from the cultural impositions regarding his masculinity, but he is also not so attached to it.

5 FINAL REMARKS?

After researching gender and its fluidity, this paper discussed how enactments regarding women's and men's gender roles are constantly found in the novel *Stay with Me* (2017), written by the Nigerian contemporary author, Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀. First, the research overviewed Western and Eastern concepts regarding gender studies, such as the concepts of technology of gender, gender performances and seniority. As a result, it focused on female roles in Nigerian society, more specifically on Yorùbá culture, once the characters were members of this ethnic group. Additionally, the search narrowed these gender theories until reaching masculinity studies, with the center of attention on the notion of hegemonic masculinity and African and Nigerian manhood enactments.

When overlapping gender concepts in the narrative, it was possible to understand that even though cultural traces from native Nigerian ethnic groups were still very present in the narrative, such as the seniority discussed by Oyèronké Oyěwùmí (1997), western impositions after the colonization are very commonly encountered in the diegesis, once the narrative is portrayed after Nigeria was colonized by the British. From this perspective, it was concluded that gendered performances are imposed on Yorúbà women, but also on the men.

In the narrative it became clear that it was expected of Yejide that she had a child, once she would only be complete as a woman in case she becomes a mother. In fact, everyone believed that she was barren, but her husband, Akin, was the one who could not impregnate her, since he was not virile. When Yejide finally got pregnant from Dotun, her brother in law, she had to face many more expectations regarding her role as a mother, such as being strong after losing two kids and responsible for the child's care. Consequently, Yorùbá women are required to be good wives and good mothers in order to be considered worthy women.

Nigerian culture, which believes that motherhood and fatherhood are the main objective of an individual to be completed, creates a heavy burden in the lives of men and women. Because of that, when the research centers on Akin, an impotent male, it assumes that the character could never perform the hegemonic masculinity expected in his environment, because he could never penetrate his wife. For this reason, Akin had to create a hypermasculine and hubristic character to hide his secret. Because of that, he had extremely violent episodes, as when he shouts at Yejide and thinks about hurting her, also when he murders Funmi, and finally, when he almost kills Dotun when his plan got out of his own control.

Akin, in order to emphasize characteristics of a manly man, for virility was deprived from him by a biological condition, did not allow himself to show emotion. He was also successful in his career, once he was the director of a Bank, and was, sometimes, hubristic, all characteristics related to the ideal hegemonic masculinity that he wished to have. In addition, Akin's fear of verbalizing his condition was so intense that it prevented him from living without gendered expectations and ended up with the murder of Funmi when she directly confronted him. On the other hand, as this male character built a shield to avoid being persecuted for his incapability of not impregnating his wife, behind his armour Akin was not violent or hubristic, he mostly enacted these performances to be the man he cannot/ will not be.

Akin holds characteristics that go against the hubristic masculinity presented by some other Nigeria characters, such as Achebe's Okonkwo from *Things Fall Apart*, Emecheta's Francis, from *In the Ditch* and *Second Class Citizen*, and Adichie's Odenigbo and Ugwo, from *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Moreover, Akin is a man that has a strong connection to his children, even though they are not his biological kids. This male character also is a man that takes good care of his health and allows himself to be vulnerable sometimes, acts that are not in the list of gender performances of a Nigerian hegemonic man.

By the end of this research, we claim that Akin enacts hypermasculinity to avoid family and society's retaliation concerning his faultuous gendered acts, that is, for not being virile nor fertile. The analysed character also disrupts some hegemonic masculinity concepts, because he partially presents feminists inclinations, as he supports Yejide to climb her own steps, such as supporting her to finish her degree at University and renting a place in which she could open her own hair salon, so that she could be financially independent from him. Thus, Akin portrays masculinities that are only his, for he has different performances in the private environment and in the social sphere, transiting conflictingly between performative gender roles. He had to learn how to react in a society that was pressuring him on many different sides to be a husband, a father and manly. For him, there was a very high price to pay in the end for performing the role of a virile macho man.

To conclude this Senior Paper, it is important to highlight that further research is needed in order to compare Akin's masculinities in contrast to the masculinity enacted by his brother Dotun. Also, it is crucial to comprehend how kinship and Dotun's performances influenced Akin in building his own perception of hegemonic masculinity.

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