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Representations of masculinity in African women's literature and their implications for English FET education: A feminist study of Ama Ata Aidoo's Changes: A love story, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus and Sindiwe Magona's Mother to Mother

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Representations of masculinity in African women's literature and their implications for English FET education: A feminist study of Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A love story*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother.*

by

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A dissertation submitted for the degree of Master of Education in the Division of Languages, Literacies, and Literatures, School of Education, University of the Witwatersrand.

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Declaration

I, Morufane Relebogile Mohlala, student number 1668059, declare that this research report is my own original work. Wherever other resources have been used, they have been duly acknowledged. This dissertation is being submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education (Languages, Literacies, and Literatures) in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

Signed: 

Date: 1 July 2024

Dedication

This dissertation is in loving memory of my dearest father, Joseph Sekwati ‘Skrema’ Mohlala, the greatest man I have ever known and the greatest angel I have. You continue to be an inspiration in everything that I do in life. You influenced and contributed to this project in unimaginable ways. I hope that one day I can measure up to you in every way. I hope to continue living my life with as much purpose as you did and selflessly serve those around me. But above all, I hope to make you proud. I love you, Papa.

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Lastly, I want to thank God for being with me throughout this journey and being my strength in seasons of weakness. This dissertation truly tested my level of resilience and patience and I just want to thank the Almighty for helping me complete this project.

Abbreviations and acronyms

CAPS – Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement

DBE – Department of Basic Education

English HL – English Home Language

English FAL – English First Additional Language

FET – Further Education and Training

SADF – South African Defence Force

SAP – South African Police

TRC – Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Abstract

Masculinity is a socially constructed concept that prescribes certain behaviours and attitudes which are deemed acceptable for 'real' men. How an individual embodies or performs his masculinity is usually in relation to those around him and how they embody their own masculinities or femininities as well. This dissertation seeks to re-interrogate the representations of masculinity in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother*. It seeks to analyse the various forms of masculinity emerging from these three novels which have been prescribed novels in schools in South Africa, and to discuss the implications of these representations on English FET education. Using an African feminist analysis of the novel and an application of the African feminist conceptualisation of masculinities, the analysis of the three novels reveals three factors. In Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story*, the analysis reveals that Aidoo is guilty of only rewriting the conditions of her central female character Esi, while her other two female characters' conditions remain unchanged, as a result of the problematic masculinities enacted by the men in their lives. In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, the analysis reveals that Adichie can be given some credit as she introduces an alternate form of masculinity that is inspiring; however, Adichie still focuses on the problematic and un-transforming masculinity of her central male character and makes the transforming masculinity a secondary character. In Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother*, the analysis reveals that Magona makes a significant attempt at theorising the violent and violating masculinities that are found in South Africa. From the analyses of the three novels, this study identifies a gap that presents itself between the intended purpose of literature and the rudimentary way in which it is actually approached in South African English classrooms. To try and bridge this gap, I recommend the use of an African critical masculinity pedagogy to help teach these novels in critical ways that will move learners understand the nuanced meanings of masculinity.

Keywords:

African feminism, African critical masculinity pedagogy, African literature, African masculinities, African women writers, critical pedagogy, English FET education, masculinity, teaching masculinities.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Orientation of study

This study investigates the representations of masculinity in African women's literature prescribed for the English Further Education and Training (FET) phase (Grades 10 to 12) in South African schools. Deploying an African feminist theoretical approach and specifically the conceptualisation of masculinities by African feminists, the study analyses three novels by African women writers. In addition to exploring the various representations of masculinity in the three chosen texts, the study considers the implications of these representations for English FET education. It further seeks to unravel how the implications that arise from the problematic representations in the three texts influence a continued pattern of gender injustice within society.

African women writers' trajectory in literature can be described as turbulent, because their entry into the literary space was obstructed by systematic hurdles, such as gender, race and class power dynamics as well as colonialism, all of which hindered the African women writers' literary advancement, and partially that of their African male counterparts. Kiyimba (2008, p. 219) points out that "the odds against female writers are many, not least among them being the age old system of patriarchy that defines both men and women differently". This gender differentiation led to the African literary space becoming a male-dominated one; it marginalised African women writers because their works were deemed as not being of the same quality as those of male writers. The masculinised African literary space embodied the exclusion of African women writers from both writing and criticism. However, despite this initial turbulence, the literary journey of African women has over time become somewhat progressive, with more African women writers and diaspora African women writers constantly emerging onto the literary scene. Long before the significance of their work was recognized and acknowledged, African women writers were producing literary works and silently making their personal contributions to literature. Barker and de Kock (2008) note that the period of the 1960s may have served as a notable breakthrough for African women writers because it was during this time that platforms emerged for

the public discussions surrounding African literary works and, more specifically, South African literature to take place. It is through these platforms and discussions that African women writers such as South Africa's Nadine Gordimer, who won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1991, were finally able to make a meaningful and recognizable contribution to African literary spaces (Barker & de Kock, 2008).

The gradual endorsement of African women writers in literary spaces eventually opened the door to the admission of their works into the South African English syllabus. The inclusion of literary texts by African women writers into the prescribed list of texts for the English subject was a significant indicator of the recognition of the writings of African women in South Africa and Africa at large. Sadly, the works of only a handful of African women writers, such as Bessie Head, Sindiwe Magona, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Ama Ata Aidoo and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, have featured in the teaching of literature within the Further Education and Training (FET) phase in English education in South Africa.

The prescribed setworks for English FET in the years 2009, 2010 and 2011 published in the Department of Education's Assessment of Instruction 07 of 2009 reveal a very one-dimensional literary canon that includes only a few African literary texts and even fewer African women's literary texts. The ratio of African literature to Western literature for the English Home Language (HL) prescribed poetry setwork during the years stated above was 5: 9. This means that five of the prescribed poems were written by African male writers (Chinua Achebe, Charles Mungoshi, Sandile Dikeni, Mongane Wally Serote and Douglas Livingstone), while nine were written by Western poets, with eight by male poets (William Shakespeare, Percy Bysshe Shelley, William Butler Yeats, T.S Elliot, C. Day Lewis, Zulfikar Chose, John Keats and E.E Cummings) and one by female American poet, Sylvia Plath. Although the Grade 12 English First Additional Language (FAL) prescribed poetry setwork had a rather better ratio of African literature to Western literature, it still lacked the visible input of African women writers as the ratio was 4: 5: 1 (African literature to Western literature to literature of the African diaspora). The only women poets who were included were the South African Magoleng wa Selepe and the renowned African American Maya Angelou. The 2009, 2010 and 2011 prescribed short stories for Grade 12 English FAL seemed to show a beacon of light since all three short story texts were by South African women

writers – Bessie Head, Gcina Mhlophe and Dianne Hofmeyr. In addition, the English FAL setworks managed to squeeze in one African novel, *A Grain of Wheat*, by the prominent writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o. However, the prescribed novels for Grade 12 English HL in the same years suggest regression once more because all three prescribed novels, *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Animal Farm* by George Orwell and *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, were Western texts. It is evident from this ratio of African to Western literary texts in the prescribed setworks that the canon privileges Western texts over African texts and perceives Western texts as a fitting standard for English teaching in South African English classrooms. In addition, the canon is still gendered, because it privileges the works of male authors over those of women writers. This situation further proves that very little progress has taken place in transforming the gendered bias which exists within literary spaces.

Fast forward to ten years later and the literary canon for English FET seemingly shows a slightly noticeable transformation, with works by African women writers being included as part of the English HL setwork as well as the English FAL setwork. The literature catalogue for 2022/2023 reveals that all the novels prescribed for Grade 10 English HL and FAL, i.e. *The Mark* by Edyth Bulbring, *Mother to Mother* by Sindiwe Magona, *Finders Keepers* by Rosamund Haden and *Mhudi* by Sol Plaatje, are African novels, with three out of the four novelists being African women (the exception here being Sol Plaatje who is a male writer). However, the same progressiveness cannot be said about the Grades 11 and 12 literature catalogue for 2022/2023 that is still dominated by male authored literary works. The Grade 11 English FAL literature catalogue includes only one novel, *Dreaming of Light*, by a female writer, Jayne Bauling, who was born in England but has lived in South Africa ever since, while the other prescribed text, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, is written by the Western male writer Thomas Hardy. While this seems like a reasonable balance in representation in terms of the gender and race of writers, the Grade 11 HL catalogue shuts the door on African women writers by including only the novels of prominent African male writers, such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Athol Fugard's *Tsotsi.* The Grade 11 HL exclusionary literary catalogue is repeated in the Grade 12 HL canon that also leaves little room for African women writers, while opening doors for the texts of Western male writers such as *Strange case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hydye* by Robert Louis Stevenson and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde. The canon also

includes the novel *The Life of Pi* by the Spain-born Canadian writer Yann Martel, and *Cry the Beloved Country* by South Africa's white male writer Alan Paton.

The problem that presents itself here is that literature by African women writers is largely disregarded in the higher FET grades – Grades 11 and 12. This omission of African women's works from the prescribed setworks suggests a preference for the standard of writing presented by African male writers in their texts; it proliferates the assumption that literature by African women writers will not fulfil the desired purpose of teaching language proficiency in the later phases of English FET education. The ratio of the literary works of African women writers to that of male writers and, more specifically, African male writers, is still not of an acceptable standard because the works of male writers still dominate across the grades in the FET English syllabus. This situation exposes the inconsistent transformational trend in South Africa's prescribed English literary canon that takes one step towards African literary inclusion and two steps back to African women's literary exclusion.

Literature, in general, has a significant role to play in our lives since it is meant to "expand our universe [and] prompts us to see other ways to conceive and organise it" (Todorov & Lyons, 2007, p. 17). Literature not only plays a major role in our lives, but it plays an even more significant role in the classroom, where it can be used to "enrich, disrupt and extend learners' thinking about literature and themselves" (Kromhout & Scheckle, 2021, p. 1), thus allowing learners to explore new ways of thinking. Our perception of our reality is not fixed but rather changes from time to time, because it is notably influenced by the literature with which we engage. Thus, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009, p. 1) argues that we, as readers, are "impressionable and vulnerable in the face of a story". Therefore, as beings whose social perception is easily influenced by literature, it is vital for us to carefully consider every single detail presented by writers in the texts we read, because our reading has the potential to inform our daily practices and how we view the reality in which we live. More importantly for this study, how we read literary texts has the potential to inform what teachers teach as thematic concerns in prescribed texts and how they design lessons for their English classes.

1.2 Research problem

This research study seeks to examine and critique the various representations of masculinities found in three prescribed English novels by African women writers. In this regard, the study focuses on addressing the representations that can impede or forestall the African feminist cause that seeks to unpack oppressive structures, ideologies and practices that contribute to the inferiority of women, both inside and outside the classroom, while not neglecting the variations of masculinity that raise critical consciousness about gender justice. Kromhout and Scheckle (2021) note how South African English educators place importance on simply talking about literature as a way to grant learners an understanding of the text, rather than analysing the text in detail to unearth meaning from its many subtexts. In the 2022 National Senior Certificate languages diagnostic report released by the Department of Basic Education (DBE), the department identified a general problem amongst the examination candidates who wrote all the three English HL papers. The report states that candidates were still "struggling with the metalanguage of the subject [English HL]. Concepts such as tone, diction, intention and satire were misunderstood or unknown"(Department of Basic Education, 2022, p. 32). This report endorses the view by Kromhout and Scheckle (2021) cited above that analytical approaches to literary texts are missing in the classroom. The report goes on to provide a further diagnostic on the approach to novels and dramatic texts. It mentions two key common errors and misconceptions among the candidates, which are central to this study's focus. Firstly, it states that the essays which were produced by the candidates lacked a sense of critical thought and discussion (Department of Basic Education, 2022). Secondly, it highlights how the literary essays did not lay a good foundation for the development of arguments (Department of Basic Education, 2022). These two key issues confirm that there is an absence of a critical foundation in the teaching of literature in South African English FET classrooms. To remedy the latter misconception, which sees learners neglecting core arguments in their essays, we first have to address the former, which sees learners lacking critical ground. This is because opening up the space for critical discussions to take place in class will nurture the minds of learners who are higher order critical thinkers, who can use their critical thinking skills to formulate critical arguments. However, it is also necessary to note that it is hard to expect English teachers to help learners interpret literary texts meaningfully if they

themselves have not taken the time to read and analyse those texts critically from particular theoretical perspectives. This approach creates a problem in that the complexity of literary texts is disregarded, leading to those texts being taught with little to no engagement with the problematic masculinities featured in them. Such uncritical reading practice does both the learners and society at large an injustice by denying learners an opportunity to explore their critical thinking skills and address the gendered challenges within society. Teachers themselves need to be theoretically equipped enough to foster critical discussions in the English classroom. A research report by Umalusi (2008) highlighted that the focus of literature teaching has shifted from past aims in previous curriculums, which focused mostly on learners "developing a love and appreciation for literature and a flair for writing" (Umalusi, 2008, p.10). Literature now "seems to be less explicitly valued in its own right and more seen as a tool for teaching reading" (Umalusi, 2008, p. 11). Thus, literature is taught merely as an alternative approach to teaching literacy rather than as a discipline on its own that can help learners to question everyday injustices. Teachers need to be aware of this shift and of the disadvantages of trading literary appreciation for language teaching through literature.

Since it is argued that "teaching and learning is situated within social, cultural and political contexts" (Beach et al., 2016, p. 6), it becomes fundamental for educators to facilitate the interrogation of these three contexts within literature and understand how they interrelate. Johnson and Weber (2011) also put forth the argument that gender and other intersectional identities are an integral part of educational practices and research, meaning that we cannot be passive in our approach to these identities or ignore them; rather, we should critically engage them and apply criticality in our pedagogy. This research project holds the stance that approaching literature in traditional and conventional ways will not assist either teachers or learners to see and address the problematic representations of masculinities in literary texts and will only lead to their overlooking what is crucial for gender transformation to take place.

The problem that presents itself in the teaching of Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother* is the lack of critical engagement with the representations of masculinities that these African women writers put forward. There is a need to interrogate the

problematic representations of masculinities found in some of the texts as well as to re-interrogate the new ways of understanding the variations of masculinity that are also represented. Some of the problematic representations of masculinity continue to feed into the long-standing gender imbalance within society and foreground gender relations through the ways in which the masculinities are embodied. However, some representations of masculinity presented in the novels can be understood better through discussion, rather than by just being excused or justified.

When teaching literature, it would be wrong for us to approach prescribed texts in a rudimentary manner, because it is our responsibility as educators to help learners uncover how the “inequalities in gender relations still exist and act in the world” (Magaraggia et al., 2019, p. 3). Our responsibility to learners prompts us to encourage critical thinking and discussions and to teach learners not to be ‘surface’ readers who passively accept these inequalities, but to rather help them reach a phase of self-reflection and actualisation in order for them to be agents of gender transformation. Holter (2005, p. 29) points out that “to decrease and dissolve direct gender hierarchy, the broader structures that support it must be addressed”, meaning that we cannot tackle gender inequalities without confronting how masculinity often has been used or misused as a way of awarding men gendered power and privilege, thereby contributing to the superiority and inferiority complex of gender in society. It is, thus, important that we pursue an intense interrogation of these prescribed novels and adopt an African feminist pedagogy which “takes a critical look at gendered ideologies and practices and gives space to empowering and transforming learning arrangements that go beyond stereotypes” (Magaraggia et al., 2019, p. 3). Such an approach will help us develop learners who are consciously aware of what contributes to gender imbalance and how they can actively transform their perceptions and actions within their own capacity, both inside and outside the classroom. Therefore, this study identifies that a pedagogical gap exists between the prescribed literature and its critical gendered teaching and seeks to build a bridge in the form of an African critical masculinity pedagogy to help interrogate the representations of masculinity using the conceptions established by African feminists. Johnson and Weber (2011, p. 149) strongly argue that “it is through a genderful pedagogy that a gender just society is possible”. I infer from this that the introduction and implementation of an African critical masculinity pedagogy that creates room for gender injustice and male privilege to be examined

will enable FET learners to gain gender awareness and strive for positive transformation of society.

1.3 Research aims

This research aims to adopt an African feminist theoretical perspective to re-interrogate the representations of masculinities in the prescribed African women's literary texts under study and explore the implications which the representation of the texts have for English FET education. The study aims to make use of three prescribed literary texts by African women writers, namely, Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, and Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother*, for analytical purposes. Furthermore, this study seeks to demonstrate the vital role that literature has on our understanding of masculinities and, thus, places importance on the English teachers' need to critique these representations of masculinity in order to teach these texts in the classroom with feminist insight. Above all, this study aims to examine the nuanced understanding of masculinity to better equip the English FET teacher to critically examine the prescribed texts and, in so doing, raise learners' critical consciousness about gender injustice.

1.4 Research questions

There are four research questions guiding this study:

1. What are the various forms of masculinities that are represented in the three novels by African women writers?
2. In what ways are the representations of masculinities in the novels problematic?
3. How do the social and cultural views of masculinities in the novels contribute to the understanding of gender justice or injustice?
4. What implications can the representations of masculinities in the literary texts have for English FET education?

1.5 Research objectives

This research study's objectives are to analyse the different forms of masculinity that present themselves in Aidoo, Adichie and Magona's novels as African women writers. The study also seeks to engage critically with the masculinities represented in these three novels and to highlight the potential problems that can arise from such representations. This study also sets out to engage in critical discussions that will interrogate gender injustice and how it is perpetuated by socio-cultural conceptualisations of masculinity. In having these critical discussions, this research seeks to subjectively point out how English FET education at large can be influenced, shaped or affected – negatively or positively – by the masculinities that are portrayed in the three prescribed novels by African women writers. The study seeks to highlight the importance of contributing to the discourse of gender justice in English classrooms, through a critique of the concept of masculinity and its various manifestations in literary texts. In so doing, this study seeks to highlight how English FET classrooms utilising a critical approach to literature can be a powerful tool to breaking apart the gender injustices of society.

1.6 Rationale for the Study

Literature can be viewed as a representation of varied social realities that force us to critically reflect on these realities. It is, therefore, fundamental for readers to not embrace only one reality, and to see the world as just being black and white, but to rather critique the grey areas in between and explore the possibility of multiple or alternate realities. Our duty as readers lies in ensuring that we equip ourselves with the ability to allow "our doors of perception to be opened [and] adjust our conception of reality" (Beleaua, 2016, p. 169). This process can only be achieved if we do not naively adopt the dominant culturally and socially accepted views expressed in literary texts, but rather be bold enough to interrogate the problematic representations in these texts that are often taught without criticism in English FET classrooms.

Aidoo, Adichie and Magona are renowned African writers who have contributed meaningfully to African feminist studies. However, in some of their novels, specifically in Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story* and Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus,* their desperate

attempt to emancipate and empower their female characters results in them failing to simultaneously rewrite the male character's masculinities. They end up ignoring the other side of the gender spectrum in which men remain superior to women because of their male privilege. By contrast, Magona's *Mother to Mother* pays some attention to questioning masculinities. The one-sided reconstructive writing approach taken by Aidoo and Adichie may seem progressive at first glance, but the dangers of neglecting the concepts of self-actualisation and self-correction by the male characters in the novel is that learners studying these novels do not get to see what is positive masculinity and what is negative masculinity. Portraying only the male characters' negative qualities and not showing a potential for them to change and display positive qualities blindly ignores the reality that not all men are sexist or misogynist and that human beings always have a capacity for positive change. Complex portrayals of masculinity in literary texts are therefore just as important as complex portrayals of femininities, which was the goal that inspired African women's literature in the first place. Murray (2016) places emphasis on the importance of focusing on both sides of the gender spectrum, by arguing that gender justice can only be accomplished if we re-examine and challenge concepts of femininity and masculinity. Although some literary texts mirror our realities and often times our reality is influenced by literature, it is important to note that our reality cannot be changed unless our literature is interrogated and critiqued in relation to the inequalities that exist in society (Beleaua, 2016). It is, therefore, of paramount importance that we create cultural and societal change by teaching our learners to challenge negative tenets of masculinity (Elliot, 2018) by positioning themselves as agents who actively seek to denounce the problematic masculinities that persist in literary texts.

The various representations of masculinity that present themselves in the chosen African women's literature may in one way or another put forward elements that generally feed into the system of patriarchy and its objective of gender injustice, thus prompting a re-interrogation of the masculine representations in the texts. We can say that in making room for critical discussions surrounding these masculine representations in English FET education and utilizing African literature as "a thought-provoking tool" (Yadav, 2014, p. 395), we are actually opening up platforms for learners to rethink the ideals that make up the reality in which they live and to challenge the gender dispositions that have been unchallenged in the past. Critical literary

discussion is something that is profoundly lacking in South African English classrooms. The rudimentary pedagogical approach used to teach literature in South African English classroom does not foster critical thinking skills. One of many memories that I have of my teaching 'practicals' in the first and second year of my undergraduate degree in education is observing literature lessons in two Johannesburg-based secondary schools. I witnessed the supervising teacher to whom I had been assigned teach novels in traditional ways that allowed no room for critical discussions or engagement with the texts to take place. A literature lesson in which the focus was on teaching a novel would always commence with the teacher reading a few pages of the novel aloud and then assigning a few learners to read a further two or three pages also aloud, while they would be stopping each learner once twice to correct their mispronunciation of certain words. Thus, the lesson was not used to encourage literary criticism or engagement with the text, but rather as a language teaching exercise. The following day's lesson would be a repetition of the previous day's activities with the exception of a recap of the sections previously read. This pedagogical approach was undertaken not only in the teaching of novels but also in the teaching of other genres of literature.

Another memory that I have of a similar pedagogical approach was of a poetry lesson that changed from a literature lesson into a language lesson. Instead of a lesson dedicated to studying a poem, the teacher spent most of the time focusing on the poet's choice of words. Simango (2020) points out the importance of literature perception, as it informs how literature is received and engaged with within the classroom. From the approach in the classroom examples I have provided here, it is clear that many teachers (and by implication their learners) perceive literature as a language tool, because learners are constantly corrected on their pronunciation of words in the text. Simango (2020) also highlights that, within the context of South Africa, there are various factors that can influence the teachers' mostly negative perception of literature. He points out that this language approach to teaching literature could be because teachers view literature as being overrated or because they perceive English literary texts as colonial tools and, therefore, refuse to be agents who foster the beliefs of the regime; thus, they choose to neglect their own and learners' further engagement with the text and settle on using it as a language tool (Simango, 2020). Simango (2020) also states that some teachers and learners may perceive the

prescribed literature as foreign to their social context, due to the continual presentation of themes in the texts that are unrelated to their own experience. Unfortunately, this pessimistic perception of literature does the learners no justice. The pedagogical approach to literature requires that, instead of using these negative perceptions to close the door on literature teaching and engagement, teachers use them to actually open the door to debunking the colonial ideals and exploring the foreign themes in the texts.

The true purpose of literature is “to expose learners to different sociological aspects [and cultures]” (Simango, 2020, p. 13) and to enter new discussion spaces that will facilitate critical thinking within learners who will question not only what they read but also what surrounds them in society. Mavhiza (2019, p. 20) echoes the points above by arguing that teachers and, more specifically, South African teachers, fail to understand the true purpose of literature and states that if paired with a critical approach, “literature can transform, change attitudes and help eradicate prejudice while fostering empathy, tolerance and an awareness of global challenges”. Critical teaching and learning remains a joint effort that needs to be an objective for both teachers and learners. Simango (2020, p. 3) stresses that “learners should be critical in their reading and engagement with literary texts, but this can only be possible if the teaching strategies are suitable to enforce this critical engagement”. The teacher has a very important role to play in the classroom because learners cannot reach the state of critical thinking on their own and need to be prompted by the teacher through critical engagement and discussions in the classroom that interrogate gender biases and problematic representation (Simango, 2020, p. 3). Effectively, both the teacher and the learner need to be active participants in the engagement of literary texts.

It is clear from this discussion that it is not only learners who should be prompted to give critical thought to gender injustice and masculinities, but also educators who should open themselves to contemplating on “the roles that schools play in shaping the conceptualizations of masculinity and gendered patterns of power” (Elliot, 2018, p. 18-19). This is important because it will help them become more aware of the socializing power that lies in their hands. Swain (2005, p. 214) argues that “schooling not only reproduces but also produces gender identities” since dominant gendered ideologies emerge from the school’s hidden curriculum that places an unwritten

expectation for learners to adopt these gender identities. The hidden curriculum can be understood as the attitudes and beliefs that are promoted by the school but not taught explicitly in the classroom. Due to the fact that learners spend approximately thirty-five weeks out of every year at school, it should not be surprising that the school environment shapes their gender identity. Thus, it can be argued that the "hidden curriculum influences [not only] student's learning, but their personalities and worldview" (Vu & Pham, 2022, p. 5) as well. In addition, Vu and Pham (2022, p. 5) note that the "hidden curriculum may produce certain cultural contents and sustain dominant social practices", because the attitudes and beliefs that the school promotes, will always be those of the dominant and powerful social group. Moreover, within the African school context and, more specifically in South African schools, these environments are heterosexist and promote gender division and, ultimately, inequality (Francis, 2017).

As indicated previously, the three novels chosen for this study are written by African women and the female protagonists in the novels endure some form of oppression at the hands of the male characters. This study, therefore, seeks to interrogate and expose the representations of masculinity that are displayed in the three texts from a feminist perspective and probe the implications of these representations on the teaching of English literary texts at FET level in school. The reason for the scrutiny at the FET phases is purely because it serves as a crucial stage of development for teenagers who are constructing their own masculinities at this age and are soon going to transition into higher education and be contributing members to the gender justice or injustice society. Thus, FET level is fitting to be a stage where masculinities in novels are questioned in relation to the learners' own masculinities. Because "schools are powerful socializing institutions" (Elliot, 2018, p. 19), this project sets out to not only problematize representations of masculinity in literary texts but to also explore new ways of understanding masculinity that can be useful in an English literature classroom. In this way, the study creates awareness of the danger of passively accepting masculine ideals presented I texts.

1.7 Delimitations of the study

A great deal can be said about African literature as a whole and how male characters embody certain masculinities. However, this dissertation makes a conscious choice to narrow the analysis to African women writers' texts and, more specifically, their representations of masculinities. This dissertation acknowledges how much focus has been put on African women writers' representations of the female body or women's conditions within society. Thus, the study has chosen to shed light on how African women writers' choice of masculine representations may inadvertently contribute to gender injustice or inequality in society.

Because this study is purely conceptual, I have explored the implications of the representations of masculinity in the three novels from the perspective of *pedagogical possibilities* and not from actual accounts of how learners perceive the texts in the classroom. In looking at these pedagogical possibilities, I hope to sensitize English HL teachers to teach the three texts in ways that will raise both their own and learners' critical consciousness about gender injustice.

1.8 Organisation of dissertation

This dissertation is divided into eight chapters. Chapter 1 sets the premise of the study by highlighting the representation of masculinities in prescribed African women's literature as problematic for English education at FET level. It identifies rudimentary pedagogies as a major problem in the teaching of literature in South African schools and points to the importance of analysing literary texts for deep critical engagements before teaching them. The chapter also unpacks the aims and objectives of the research project and states the questions that guided the investigation. Chapter 2 studies previous research on the history of African women in literature and provides a review of how far African women's' writing has progressed in relation to their literary tradition. Chapter 2 also provides a review of the nature of literature and what it has become within the context of South African English FET education. Through this extensive literature review, Chapter 2 highlights the research gaps that emerge firstly from the lack of rewriting and reimagining of male characters in African women's literature and, secondly, from the way literature is perceived and taught within the

South African English classroom. Chapter 3 presents the study's theoretical framework that guides and informs the analysis of the three prescribed novels by Aidoo, Adichie and Magona. The framework makes use of African feminism as a theory and explores how African feminists have come to understand and interpret the concept of masculinity. Chapter 4 outlines the research methodology that the study employs, with key focus on feminist literary research. Chapter 5 begins the dissertation's data analysis by discussing and interpreting the representations of masculinity in Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story.* It explores these concepts under the umbrella of masculinity as a proponent of patriarchy, by firstly looking at the polyamorous and polygamous man, followed by an analysis of the entitled and powerful man/men as providers. This chapter ends with a discussion on the various implications that the uncritical teaching of masculinities in Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story* in South African English FET classroom can have on FET learners. In Chapter 6, the study's data analysis continues with an interrogation of the (un)transforming masculinities in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. This chapter analyses Adichie's male characters under three categories of masculinity: un-transforming dominant masculinities, inspirational masculinities and new-found masculinities. As in Chapter 5, the chapter also discusses how the highlighted representations of masculinity can affect the English FET learners who engage with Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* in the South African classroom. Chapter 7 concludes the study's analysis by re-interrogating the representation of masculinities in Magona's *Mother to Mother*. This chapter discusses the emergence of township masculinities in South Africa and uses that discussion to launch an analysis of the violent and violating masculine performances in *Mother to Mother.* The chapter ends in a section that discusses the implications of teaching Magona's *Mother to Mother*. It also considers what both the positive and negative implications will be for English FET learners in South African schools. Lastly, Chapter 8 provides a comprehensive conclusion to the study.

1.9 Chapter summary

This chapter introduced the study by identifying the research problem which revealed that literature in South African English classrooms is not employed for its intended use as a critical discipline, but rather as a tool for furthering literacy. The research problem highlighted how the pedagogical gap that exists between the intended versus the

actual way in which literature is taught presents a ‘roadblock’ in the way in which the representations of masculinity in the prescribed texts (Aidoo’ s *Changes: A Love Story*, Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* and Magona’s *Mother to Mother*) are interpreted, because these novels are engaged passively rather than critically. The research problem further highlights the danger that accompanies, or rather stems from, passive literature engagement – namely the reinforcement of gender injustice. The chapter proceeded to set out the study’s aims, highlighting its intention to explore the representations of masculinity in the three prescribed novels by Aidoo, Adichie and Magona and to show how it is important to approach these novels critically and from a feminist lens within the classroom, since literature has the power to alter people’s perception of society and the world at large. The chapter also outlined four research questions upon which the study is grounded: the first question seeks to identify the forms of masculine representations in Aidoo, Adichie and Magona’s novels; the second question dives deeper and explores how these masculine representations present themselves as problematic; the third question considers the different views of masculinity and how these perceptions play a role in the way gender injustice is conceptualised; the fourth question seeks to explore the implications of the problematic representations of masculinity on English FET education. The chapter then stated the objectives of the study to undertake a critical discussion of masculinity and gender injustice based on analyses of the selected novels. Lastly, the chapter outlined the study’s rationale that discusses the importance of literary criticism and its effective implementation within South African English classrooms. The rationale highlighted the importance of a critical approach to literature to help combat the gendered ideologies that form part of the hidden curriculum within South African schools.

Chapter 2

Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature on the history of African women writers within the African literary space and examines the factors that influenced the secondary positioning of women writers vis-à-vis male writers. It presents a timeline showing the extent to which the state of African women's literature has changed and assesses the various progressions or regressions over time. This review also examines existing literature on South African English FET education and extensively discusses the manner in which literature teaching is approached in schools, while interrogating whether the approaches are fitting to produce the desired outcomes that literature education hopes to achieve. This review concludes with an overview of the research gaps discovered in the literature discussed in this chapter.

2.2 The history of African women's literature

African literary history is said to have been mainly "shaped and mediated by gender" (Hunt, 1989, p. 359), which explains why in the years before 1990 there was an imbalanced literary representation in which one gender's literature was held above the other. The works of African women writers are argued to have been habitually marginalised and left out of the equation of African literary recognition, while the works of their African male counterparts were continuously considered, highly recognised and discussed in African literary conversations (Fonchingong, 2006). Eucharia (2020, p. 235) defines a literary canon as one which "contains mainly literary works by authors who are accepted as authorities in their field and their writings constitute a serious body of literature". From the above definition, one can derive that African women writers were left out of the literary equation because women were simply not viewed as authoritative within society. One can further point out that although it was never explicitly stated at the time that African women writers were inferior to African male writers, the exclusion of their works from literary spaces was a very clear indication that their works were not seen as having value or being equal to those of their male

counterparts. Eucharia (2020) highlights that texts that were included as part of the African literary canon were regarded as being of a high standard. Additionally, Olusegun-Joseph (2021) accounts for the marginalisation of African women writers from the post-colonial canon due to the fact that, after having been stripped of power and identity by colonisers, African male writers asserted their need to restore what had been taken from them and, in doing so, their 'spotlight' dimmed that of African women writers:

> Woman's marginalisation in African literature can be linked to an early postcolonial literary drive which, in its quest to inscribe an African racial, cultural and nation(alist) imaginary of difference and identity against colonial heritage, (un)consciously masculinised its discourse in an essentialist mode. (Olusegun-Joseph, 2021, p. 92)

Additionally, Nnaemaka (1994, p. 4) points out that in the past, there existed a "uniquely male literary tradition", one that was fully accepted by African male writers and which surreptitiously muted the voices of African women writers, their experiences and bodies of work. African women writers were disregarded during that time because African male writers, together with male critics, looked down on their literary work and equated it to emotional rather than logical writing. This dismissive attitude is pointed out by Eucharia (2020, p. 237) who argues that

> African male writers and critics adjudged [African] women's literary works to lack standard aesthetic elements, subject matter, innovation and authenticity because it dealt with gender [rather] than political and societal issues.

This statement shows that males considered themselves authoritative enough to decipher what topics constitute societal issues, and gender was not one of them. The stance of Black women's writing scholar, Carol Boyce Davies (1986, p. 125), on the exclusion of African women writers from the literary canon, is that "the way in which race, gender, and power intersect, is of particular relevance towards understanding the position of the African woman [in literature]". Stratton (1994, p. 7) reiterates the sentiments put forward by Boyce Davies and notes that "African women were subjected to interlocking forms of oppression; to the racism of colonialism and to the indigenous and foreign structures of male domination". Stratton's statement shows how African women writers faced multiple structures and institutions that enforced their alienation from literary spaces. Eucharia (2020, p. 238) likewise notes that "the attitude

towards women writers is an instance of the generally acknowledged patriarchal perception of women in society and their [African male writers'] authority to control and limit women's power". This observation further demonstrates that the deliberate marginalisation of African women writers' literary work was not based on their lacking the ability to contribute meaningfully to these literary spaces, but was biasedly grounded on the fact that they were female and powerless to contest the marginalisation.

Furthermore, Boyce Davies (1993) revisits her previous stance on intersectional forms of oppression endured by African women writers and extends it by noting that the gap in African women's literature is due to the fact that, as female bodies in a hierarchically disadvantaged society, they did not have access to equal publishing opportunities and that some of them may have undergone a writing hiatus because of the domestic pressures that they may have felt from society. Ashuntantang (2015) extends on this point by explaining that when African women writers were ignored by foreign publishing companies, publishing locally did not seem feasible to the majority of them because they would have had to fund their own work – this was yet another obstacle in their path because they could not afford to sponsor themselves. Nevertheless, it is important to note that limited access to publishing was just one amongst many adversities that African women faced.

An important factor that favoured African male writers and worked against African women writers was the sexist custom linked to education that saw African women being denied access to institutions of higher learning. Many African men received colonial education abroad that was sponsored by white colonial masters; thus, their literary tradition was nurtured and groomed in the Western tradition (Eucharia, 2020, p. 237). Substantiating the above claim, Eucharia (2020, p. 235) notes that "the African male writers' early access to Western education before women, necessitated their inclusion in the literary canon" and that it was because of this very education that they were able to address certain political issues through their writing. The denial of education for African women writers unfortunately closed the door on their chance to make any political contributions in literature, and they were rather limited to writing for themselves and finding solace in love stories. This fact greatly differentiated their work from that of African male writers who began to use writing as a means of political

revolution against colonialism. Güzel and Pinar (2013, p. 4) reinforce African male writers substantial writing approach by stating that “male-authored post-colonial novels are more concerned with economic, social and the cultural aftermath of colonialism”. Eucharia (2020, p. 235) notes that “a literary work gains popularity not only on the basis of its quality but more importantly on the relevance of the literary work in the social, historical and cultural context of the period”. Therefore, what made African male writers’ literary works so popular and worthy of being part of the African literary canon at the time, was the fact that authors such as Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Cyprian Ekwensi, Christopher Okigbo, Wole Soyinka, Athol Fugard and Gabriel Okara, to name but a few, wrote with political undertones and dared to challenge the colonial system. Effectively, unequal access to education created room for African male writers to not only dominate the literary space for an extended period of time but to also develop a process that laid a foundation of exclusion for African women writers.

In their writing, African male writers put forward a gendered, universalist and yet partial view of African women’s conditions that would go unquestioned prior to the 1960s. Further reiterating the gendered and subjective portrayal of African women in African men’s literary texts, Fonchingong (2006, p. 135) points out that the works of African male writers were infamous for “condoning patriarchy, [being] deeply entrenched in a macho conviviality and a one-dimensional and minimalised presentation of women who are demoted and assume peripheral roles”. African male writers have always presented a very limited and limiting portrayal of the African female body, entrusting it with the gender roles that are presumably fitting for women. Kimario (2014, p. 6) points out that “African male writers have displayed their bias when discussing gender issues by presenting their female characters performing domestic roles”. This monotone presentation of the African female body was informed by the instilled patriarchal ideals that believe in silencing women and objectifying them while giving a voice and authority to male bodies, as per the gender hierarchy in society. Furthermore, this biased representation of African women in African male literature intensified the dark literary period that African women writers endured. They had to work hard to break free from how they had been portrayed, while carrying out their body of work “under challenging circumstances” (Charlotte Bruner, 1983 as cited in Zulfiqar, 2014, p. 9), knowing that they were unlikely to receive formal recognition. In Marie Umeh’s paper,

Ama Ata Aidoo encapsulates the devastating impact of the challenges that African women writers faced prior to the 1960s by stating that “when the canonical establishment refuses to promote, print, distribute, read and critique your books, they kill you creatively” (Aidoo quoted in Umeh 1995, p. 22).

It is noted that 1966 served as an immense turning point for African women writers in literature, because it was the year in which Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru* became the first novel by an African woman to attain international publication status (Nnaemeka, 1994). The publication of this novel slightly opened the door for women’s writing, making way for other African women writers to seek international publication opportunities. Nwapa is described as a significant figure in African literature who

> initiat[ed] the inclusion of the female authorship in an overtly male dominated African literary tradition [and also] catalysed the presence of the intellectual African woman in postcolonial feminist debates. (Güzel & Pinar, 2013, p. 4)

Although Nwapa’s achievement served as a breakthrough for African women writers, the circumstances of her international publication status remained unfortunate, because she was marginalised by not being published within her African country. Tax et al. (1995) speak of this exclusion from publication as a form of “gender-based censorship” that many African women writers (Flora Nwapa, Tsitsi Dangarembga and Ama Ata Aidoo included) struggled with before eventually resorting to international publishing. Ashuntantang (2015, p. 4) highlights the point that “most of the [indigenous] publishing houses were established by authors who were frustrated by the lack of publishing opportunities”. It is because of these publishing adversities that African women experienced that Flora Nwapa is seen as a pioneering African woman writer (Emenyonu et al., 2004). The publication of her novel *Efuru* outside of Africa made a bold statement to the publishing companies that had excluded African women writers, declaring that women writers could still make it with or without their help. Nwapa understood her secondary status in society as a woman (Umeh, 1995) and ultimately established her own publishing company, Tana Press, in 1970, to ensure that her fellow African woman writers would not suffer the same struggles as herself and finally could have their works reach their intended audience. Andrade (1990, p. 98) notes that “[Flora Nwapa’s] *Efuru*’s entry into the male dominated canon of African texts marks the beginning of an Igbo dialogue on gender, one in which [other African women

writers such as] Buchi Emecheta will later participate". This comment further shows that Nwapa's novel was not only a statement piece, but also a revolutionary item for African women's writing.

Tax et al. (1995, p. 11) extend on African women writers' marginalisation from publishing spaces by conceptualising gender-based censorship as a practice that is "embedded in a range of social mechanisms that mute women's voices, deny validity to their experience and exclude them from the political discourse", while fully embracing the voices of men. Furthermore, African women writers were not just censored or alienated from literature during the 1960s because they were female, but also because they openly wrote about their African experience which at the time was seen as exposing or threatening the mainly patriarchal culture and traditions (Tax et al., 1995). Fonchingong (2006, p. 135) builds on the previous point by revealing that "most male writers in the early phase of African literature [also] encouraged the marginalisation of women [writers]", as a way of silencing them to maintain their dominant tradition. Therefore, gender-based censorship fully accounts for the dominant African male literary canon that held the space before the 1960s, because men had the advantage of having better access to publishing institutions than women, although they too faced some challenges.

Bejjit (2009, p. 17) argues that overall for British publishing companies such as Heinemann, "the idea of publishing African authors seemed to be ignored on the assumption that African authorship fell short of existing 'standards' and hence no market for African books could be established". However what seemed to put African male writers such as Chinua Achebe at an advantage is the colonial education they had received and their ability to produce literary texts that were written in English, both facts that eventually resulted in their works being published. Although African male writers managed to have their work published by British publishing companies, Ashuntantang (2015) explains why only one African male writer was published at a time. Apparently foreign or Western publishers could only handle one prominent African writer at a time, who was consciously or unconsciously given the role of the blueprint for African literature that all African writers should emulate (Ashuntantang, 2015). This practice unfortunately put other male writers at a disadvantage. Because African male writers' work was constantly being measured against the published work

of one prominent African male writer, when other African writers send their manuscripts to British publishing companies, they would receive editorial feedback regarding aspects they needed to change; however, their work would not be published even after revising their manuscripts (Ashuntantang, 2015). Another factor that seemed to be a hurdle in African male writers' publishing journey is that British publishing companies were in a dilemma because "politically, publishing a 'Black' African writer meant giving a voice to the colonised African writer to be heard and at the same time it meant shaping the consciousness of colonised Africans" (Bejjit, 2009, p. 27). This was particularly a challenge for British publishers since African male writers did not conceal their anti-colonial agenda in their writing.

However, despite the challenges that they faced, the work of African male writers was at least considered and eventually published, while African women writers were completely dismissed. Boyce Davies (1986, pp. 2-3) notes that gender-based censorship was not only enacted by men, but that there were women critics who were also conditioned to disregard the works written by African women writers:

> When the first major African women writers appeared – Ama Ata Aidoo (1965), Flora Nwapa and Grace Ogot (1966) – the same type of alliance which was created by male critics and [African male] writers was not formed between the women critics and [African women] writers. Instead, without the benefit of a feminist focus, there was a reluctance to bring the works of African women writers under serious but sensitive critical evaluation.

This reluctance to critique African women writers' work stemmed from the general view of their work as trivial and domestic, rather than political, or that it was not the type of material that critics sought to engage with at the time. The non-existent alliance between African women writers and women critics unfortunately left African women writers to fend for themselves within the literary space, which they did relentlessly until some form of progress was tangible. Clark (2023, p.165) claims that "a book is not just a book; critical reception and debate generated about the book ensures its success or demise". Therefore, without critique of their work or any form of positive or negative engagement, African women writers were left out of literary discussions and literary spaces since no reference was made to their works. Furthermore, it is through the boundaries that were broken by African women writers such as Flora Nwapa that other African women writers were granted recognition in literary spaces. It was not easy for

Nwapa to receive critical engagement with her text *Efuru* even after she had attained international publishing status, as critics still thought of her work as “useful only for understanding domestic Igbo life” (Andrade, 1990, p. 97). Nwapa’s case vividly illustrates how critics viewed issues of gender as trivial and not worthy of concerted critical attention.

Notably, African literary spaces were transformed slightly after the 1960s in terms of more African women writers having their works published. This was a significant achievement for African women. Nevertheless, Stratton (1994) points out that not much progress was made, because these literary spaces were still not inclusive of African women writers in conversations that took place about African literature, but rather there were separate discussions about African women’s literature. Stratton (1994, p. 4) reinforces her point by echoing the same concerns shared by Ama Ata Aidoo, stating that “what distinguishes African women from African men is the vast difference in the amount of critical attention paid to them”. She also argued that most, if not all articles that focused on African literary criticism, would only include and discuss literature written by African men, and in doing so excluded African women’s literature from the African literary canon (Stratton, 1994). Boyce Davies (1984: 3) had also noted previously that “there was a reluctance to bring the works of African women writers under serious but sensitive critical evaluation”, and this reluctance can be viewed as a direct result of the value placed on African women writers’ works. Such works were regarded as invisible in the African literature canon because they were not written by the dominant gender. Stratton (1994) notes that it is rather pointless to continue to ignore gender, since it is in some way an aspect of African literature because we cannot talk about African literature without distinguishing between African women and men writers and the literary traditions they both carry.

This historical account of the development of African women’s literature shows that African women writers did not find it easy to write and publish their works or to gain admittance into the world of literary recognition. How they fought hard to establish their own literary tradition is explored in the next section.

2.3 African women writers' prevailing literary tradition

Through the gradual rise and recognition of African women's literature from the 1960s onwards, there has been an unspoken need for African women writers to challenge African male writers' representations of women and to rewrite African female bodies in ways that show their authentic conditions of living and experiences of patriarchy (Azodo, 1997). Wilentz (1992, p. 388) points out that this subtle yet sometimes forthright desire to dispute the stereotypical narrative put forward by African men writers introduced "a female culture which has been suppressed, ignored, distorted but not destroyed". Arndt (2006) notes that the novels by African women writers which emerged post-1960 comprised a way for them to write back to African men's literature and finally make their own voices and stories heard. This practice was similar to the way in which African men writers wrote literature in response to Western writers who had misrepresented Africa, e.g. Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) which was written in response to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Emenyonu et al. (2004) note that it is African women writers such as Buchi Emecheta, Ama Ata Aidoo and Zulu Sofola who were said to be the among the first generation of women writers who helped redefine African literature by representing new perspectives of African women and their experiences, which had been silenced by African male writers. However, Nnaemeka (1994) argues that given the history of African women's literature and their exclusion from African literary spaces, we cannot ignore the possibility of African male literary traditions still lingering in the works of African women writers. Moreover, Nkealah (2006) warns us to be careful not to easily categorize every text written by women writers as a feminist text just because it seemingly highlights gender inequality and promotes equality. Nkealah (2006) notes that African women writers simply write their works from a place of familiarity, as a result of experiencing the injustices in society first-hand; therefore, their relaying of their experiences should not be mistaken for their being agents of the feminist movement. While acknowledging the validity of these points of view, we also cannot overlook how African women writers have attempted to overcome the biased male literary tradition to promote the rights of women in their published works.

Linking women's writing to a cultural obligation, Wilentz (1992, p. 389) points out that African women writers "see their existence as a continuum from their ancestors to their

descendants", implying that they consciously or subconsciously carry not only the histories of their ancestors but also their traditions and cultural customs, which they express in their writing. Echoing this point, Azodo (2002, p. 189) mentions how African women writers feel the need to carry with them the past while ensuring that they advocate for the marginalized group to which they belong, by taking on the responsibility of

> pursu[ing] a double goal of continuing the traditions of the past and at the same time, the legitimization of an African feminism whose ambition is to improve the lot of African women on the continent and the diaspora.

Similarly, Nnaemeka (1994, p. 142) claims that as a result of being excluded from literary spaces for so long, African women writers have consequently also shown "close affiliation with their male counterparts". Many African women writers, such as Flora Nwapa and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, have often noted that their literary influences also come from prominent African male writers. Adichie has often been referred to as "Achebe's literary daughter" (Tunca, 2018, p. 109). In an interview with Marie Umeh, Nwapa acknowledges that she has been greatly influenced by both African and Western male writers:

> Chinua Achebe influenced me a great deal. He influenced me in my adult life – but as a young girl in school, many writers such as Ernest Hemingway and Charles Dickens, also influenced me a great deal. (Umeh, 1995, p. 26)

Thus, it is possible to note similar literary traditions in the works of African male writers and African women writers. Sackeyfio (2021, p. 5) points out that one of the literary themes that have overflowed from African male literature into African women's literature is the "tendency towards the acceptance and glorification of motherhood and other prescribed female roles". The redundant representations of these traditional roles is unfortunately an inhibitor to women's empowerment. However, it is important to point out that the theme of motherhood tends to be an ambiguous concept, because many African feminists have insisted that motherhood as an experience (as opposed to motherhood as an institution) is central to feminist power and has been used by African women writers such as Buchi Emecheta and Mariama Bâ to highlight how "the presence or absence of children can have a devastating and/or empowering impact on women's lives" (Nfah-Abbenyi, 2005, p. 266). It has been argued, conversely, that

the overuse of the theme of motherhood as an institution in African women's novels "displays a static way of life" (Eucharia, 2020, p. 238). Bazin (1989, p. 16) also argues that African women writers tend to produce texts that "depict moments of extreme suffering in the lives of those Black African women". It is because of these representations of African women's extreme suffering that African women writers may be said to produce works very similar to African male writers' works that portrayed women as oppressed objects. Azuike (2020, p. 3) reinforces the above argument by noting that African narratives by both male and women writers have "numerously portrayed men who have treated their wives as common slaves or as inferior and insignificant 'other' because cultural norms permit it". Thus, it is clear that there are reoccurring themes of women's oppression in both African men and women writers' works. Additionally, Murray (2016) has pointed out that the theme of misogyny seems to be reoccurring in the works of Black women writers through the maintenance of the marginalised portrayal of their female characters and the unchanged representations of their male characters. Therefore, we can note that many African women writers are being accused of carrying out the same gendered approach that African male writers had been criticized for in the past.

Eromosele (2013, p. 99) notes that a reoccurring theme that presents itself in African literature generally, regardless of whether they were written by men or women, is the emphasis on "sociological issues like bad leadership, corruption, economic hardship, religious hypocrisy, female subjectification, etc.". This comment shows again how much literature is contextual-bound, meaning that both African men and women writers are informed by the same contextual influences, although they may be exposed to varying systemic oppressions and other gendered factors that influence their literary traditions.

The state of African women's literature today reflects the promising progress that has been achieved in terms of women publishing more and featuring more positive images of women. However, there is still more ground to be covered. Boswell (2020, p. 4) notes that African women writers have been "engaged in a series of boundary crossing – surpassing the threshold of expectation that view them as non-suitable producers of art", meaning that African women writers have been working actively to produce literary works that can be considered of quality and on par with literature from their

male counterparts. Sackeyfio (2021, p. 1) adds that “African female authors have moved beyond the margins of male-authored texts to command new spaces of prominence in the African literary canon”, meaning that they have embraced their space within African literature and continue to excel in their category of women’s literature. Looking at South African literature in particular, Boswell (2020) notes that a great deal of critical attention has been given to African women writers from the apartheid era, which signifies a big shift from the masculine tradition that ignored women’s writing previously. The irony, though, is that the new age post-apartheid writers, such as Kagiso Lesego Molope, seem to be overlooked, although they are the ones who are taking on divergent literary routes by critiquing a hegemonic society and including queer themes in their writing and sharing the real-life experiences of the gays, lesbians and transgender communities (Boswell, 2020). Contemporary African women writers shine a light on the “fluid and shifting constructions of African women’s identity as female” (Sackeyfio, 2021, p. 1), because they are sharing the experiences of different types of African women and have moved and progressed from the universalised African women to placing stress on African women from varying societies, be it rural or urban. This unconventional approach to literature is what has widened the door for their works to be recognised.

These new age African women writers have established a stepping stone in the form of contemporary African literature that seeks to shine the light on African women and their experiences. What distinguishes contemporary African women writers from African women writers of the first generation, is that for writers of contemporary literature, the focus is no longer on ‘speaking back’ to male hegemonic writing but rather instituting a tradition of their own which promotes ideologies of feminist empathy. Mekgwe (2008, p. 13) points out that when the first generation of African women writers emerged, they sought to “dispel the mal-representations of African womanhood that proliferated African literature at the time”. In contrast, contemporary African women writers have shifted focus from that approach to a new approach which seeks to get the world to see them, to feel their pain, and to support their quest for gender justice. As Eze (2014, p. 89) points out, “this generation [of contemporary African women writers] is sincerely concerned with the fate of Africa and Africans in the world, it is not burdened with defending Africa against Western normative freezing as the generation before theirs was”.

Contemporary African women writers fully embrace their task as feminists (Eze, 2014) and explicitly expose the unjust conditions experienced by women in African societies. Their use of feminist empathy – which Eze (2015, p. 311) defines as "the ability to feel oneself into the experience of a woman in underserved suffering" – hopes to shed light on and address the gender injustices faced by women. Additionally, African women writers in contemporary African literature not only seek to expose the bodily oppression suffered by women, but they also make an attempt at reclaiming women's bodies and sexuality and aim to "question the taken for granted privileged status of maleness and heterosexuality, whilst older [African women's] texts seem to shy away from matters of gender and sexuality" (Dlamini, 2015, p. 25). Additionally, Kiyimba (2008) highlights how modern African women writers help women restore control over their bodies through exploring the topic of sex that was previously perceived as taboo, but now is an accepted tool of empowerment for women, by depicting their sexual escapades as pleasurable moments that occur on women's terms rather than men's. Andrade (1990) also notes that pivotal themes such as sisterhood and strong female friendships are adopted in contemporary African literature and used as a feminist statement to show unity amongst women, whether it is in urban or rural areas.

African women writers of African contemporary literature have reclaimed and redefined the African woman in a way that not only is promising and gives a whole new perspective on their individualities but also brings hope to the shared objectives of the feminist cause. Contemporary African women writers boldly take on feminism and their unconventional approach to literature has led to praise and recognition within African literature. The 2013 novel *We Need New Names* by Zimbabwe-born writer Elizabeth Tshele, who goes by the pen name NoViolet Bulawayo, was included in the New York Times Notable Books of 2013, while Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was mentioned in the 2010 Fiction issue of New Yorkers 20 under 40 list – a huge achievement because Adichie was cited with other great writers of the world and not just Africa. Eze (2014) also mentions key contemporary African women writers that stand out for him as boundary breakers in African literature and amongst them are authors such as Sefi Atta, Unoma Azuah, Lola Shoneyin and Chicka Unigwe. These new age women writers are now considered to be at the forefront of African feminist writing and an overall beacon of light to African feminist literature scholars, because

they have made a significant contribution to the progression of African women in African literature.

2.4 Literature in South African English FET education

The inclusion of African literature, more specifically African literature written by African women writers, in South Africa's English FET syllabus seems to be leaning more towards a lethargic spectrum, rather than a positively progressive one. As shown in Chapter 1, there have been fewer African women writers included in the syllabus than African men writers. Comparing the purpose that literature serves in the English HL syllabus against its purpose in English FAL syllabus shows how undervalued African writing, and more specifically African women's writing, is. Samuel (1995, p. 99) distinguishes between the purpose of literature teaching in the English HL and English FAL syllabus by stating that for English HL literature is used as a tool for "serving utilitarianist aims", while for English FAL

> [the] teaching of literature was/is seen only as serving as a tool for the development of a new or more comprehensive vocabulary, a tool for language analysis and dissection rather than as a tool for everyday critical or creative thought.

The above statement, therefore, implies that literature is not something which is used as an interactive medium in the English FAL classroom but is rather seen as a language teaching tool. This corroborates my experience of studying literature in school, as outlined in Chapter 1 of this dissertation. Samuel (1995) further contends that literature in English FAL is given a marginalised status because it is not valued for its multi-dimensional purposes.

The Department of Basic Education's (DBE) Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for Grades 10 to 12 English HL, though released in 2011, still maintains the rudimentary ideals, as presented above, that treat literature as a basic tool for language acquisition rather than an interactive textual engagement process that exposes social, political and economic injustices. In a section dedicated to approaches to teaching literature that seem to be present in the HL version of the CAPS document but absent in the FAL version, the CAPS stipulates that "the main

reason for reading literature in the classroom is to develop learners' sensitivity to a special use of language that is more refined, literary, figurative, symbolic and deeply meaningful" (Department of Basic Education, 2011a, p. 12). Once again, this statement provides evidence that the studying of language is a focal point in literature teaching. Although the approaches to teaching literature is a section that is non-existent in the English FAL CAPS document, the English FAL CAPS document still makes it known that its aims are to support learners in meeting language proficiency standards which they will need to make use of in the later stages of their lives (Department of Basic Education, 2011b). Thus, both documents emphasise language learning through literature, while engaging thematic textual criticism as a goal is suppressed.

Moreover, a never-ending argument that has been raised countless times is whether the literary canon in the South African English syllabus needs replacement. The motivations, however, for the need for a transformational English literature syllabus has differed across scholars, with some arguing for decolonising the setwork and moving from a western dominated canon to an African dominated one (Chaka et al., 2017), and others arguing for a gendered transformation to a literary canon that is representative of different genders (Silverthorne, 2009). Interestingly, there have been scholars who have argued against literature reform, one of whom is Michael Samuel who points out that if we were to sit down and come up with a new literary canon, it would be no different from the one we have now, because it would also be reflective of our own dominant ideals and views (Samuel, 1995). Samuel (1995), therefore, opines that we should not solely focus on changing the literature that is being taught but rather look into changing the way in which we engage with that literature in the classroom.

The study of Shakespeare in South African English classrooms is also a topic that has sparked controversial debate which is yet to be settled (Silverthorne, 2009). Pillay (2021, p. 287) takes a stance on opting out of a syllabus reform and maintaining Shakespeare as part of the South African English curriculum, because she sees Shakespearean texts as an opportunity to introduce critical engagement with literature

in the classroom, stating that “critical pedagogy [can be used] to help students talk back to, question and challenge the beliefs and practices that emanate from [texts]”. Thus, knowing the resistance that learners have towards Shakespeare, teachers can adopt critical pedagogy as an interrogative tool in the classroom so that learners can have critical discussions on why they resist Shakespearean literature. Distiller (2005) also notes that the exclusion of Shakespeare from the South African English syllabus is not as simple a solution as it sounds, because there are African writers such as Sol Plaatjie, who have adapted and appropriated Shakespeare’s works. Therefore, if we were to remove Shakespeare’s works, then that would also mean that a review of other African writers’ works who utilize Shakespeare’s influences would need to occur (Distiller, 2005). Furthermore, Silverthorne (2009, p. 8) opines that a curriculum is formulated so that it is reflective of the “social and political vision”; thus, before the English syllabus is transformed we need to ask ourselves important questions such as whose political vision is the setwork based upon? Asking and answering such questions will allow us to understand that simply changing a literary canon will not solve all the social and political issues because it will never be reflective of all the societies’ visions, and will only reflect the current dominant parties’ vision.

It is, thus, important for teachers to not wait for a change in the setwork, but to rather take a transformative role in the English classroom and “equip themselves with new strategies of teaching reading to meet the learners’ academic, linguistic, and social needs” (Sosa-Provencia et al., 2019 as cited in Fesi & Mncube, 2021, p. 3). In doing so, teachers will be exposing learners to a new world of conceptualising and critiquing literature. As mentioned before, literature is multi-dimensional and presents many visible and hidden aspects that can be explored by the reader in creative and critical ways. Nevertheless, this multi-dimensional nature is not seen currently in the majority of South African English classrooms. The approach to teaching poetry that mainly focuses on the poet’s diction deprives learners of the “means of addressing the subject matter and [the] social, existential and political experiences which the author grappled with” (Samuel, 1995, p. 99), thereby preventing them from understanding how writing is informed and influenced by various societal factors. Furthermore, Samuel (1995, p. 100) argues that this ‘one-note’ teaching of literature is very much evident in the

examination system that “requires only superficial analysis of the literature which pupils study”. Once again, this remark shows that there is hardly any critical engagement with texts in the English classroom and learners are not being encouraged to push boundaries and challenge the different problematic societal aspects and injustices that are represented in literary texts. Newfield and Maungedzo (2006, p. 71) also highlight the surface approach to teaching literature in the schools by focusing on the genre of poetry and pointing out how it has “lost its position of prominence in [the] English classroom”, because poetry is no longer ‘engaged’ with but merely read and explained from a single perspective. In a study undertaken in an English FAL classroom at a high school in Soweto, Newfield and Maungedzo (2006) observed that both the learners and the teachers seem to prefer a passive approach when dealing with literature that they perceive to be challenging: teachers simply provide learners with the names of characters found in novels and give them the central themes that prevail in the text, and expect learners to annotate what is given to them without any active or critical engagement with the text. Similarly, Newfield and Byrne (2020, p. 7) highlight the rudimentary way in which poetry has been approached in South African English classrooms by claiming that most poetry lessons involve the “teacher reading the poem aloud to learners [and] telling the class about the texts”. They also noted that the “questions posed to learners tended to be closed, allowing learners only the option of answering ‘yes/no’ or completing the teacher’s sentences” (Newfield & Byrne, 2020, p. 7). The result is that the teachers miss opportunities for critical engagement through the asking of open-ended questions that prompt learners to think, re-think and question what the poem represents.

The debate on a transformational literary canon has overtime seen scholars who support this move. Mavhiza and Prozesky (2020) are among such scholars and wrote a paper in support of a change to the current poetry canon, making way for indigenous poetry that they described as fluid literature which was centred around the learners themselves, giving them the expressive freedom to write their own contextually-bound poetry. There are many issues that present themselves when looking at traditional Western poetry being taught in South African schools. Not only is the prescribed poetry unrelatable to both learners and teachers but it also proves to be challenging to teach:

> [many] teachers are afraid of working with poetry, often because they feel they lack the necessary knowledge and skills, and when they do teach it, they do so poorly, focusing on the technical aspects rather than the meaning of poetry. (Mavhiza & Prozesky, 2020, p. 2)

Mavhiza and Prozesky's (2020) suggestion of moving away from the traditional form of poetry to indigenous poetry can be seen as a decolonising effort in the hopes that literature is centred upon the learners' realities. In keeping with this decolonising path, Newfield and Byrne (2020) also advocate a move away from Western epistemology so that teachers can expose learners to literature that is not foreign to them. In their earlier paper, Newfield and Maungedzo (2006) propose new forms of poetry that can be implemented in English FAL classrooms, suggesting that learners can be active participants in literature education by composing and performing their own poetry and writing their own 'letter-poems' which require learners to write to one another. These suggestions do not seem valuable only to the teaching of poetry, but they also present a new way of engaging learners with literature as a whole. These pedagogic suggestions bring back value to literature and move away from the prescriptive form of teaching literature to a more student-led and critical pedagogy. Nkealah and Simango (2023, p. 69) describe this type of critical pedagogy as essential in the development of learners "profound awareness of the injustices around them", because it allows them to be active drivers in exploring their own knowledge. Nkealah and Simango (2023, p. 70) further note that

> by relating English content to their own contextual realities, students learn to think critically about how power relations work to include some people and marginalise others and are invited to interrogate these practices of exclusion and marginalisation.

Such a process of reflection facilitates learners' becoming critical beings who will not naively contribute to societal injustices, but rather actively work to break them down. Simango (2020, p. 97) states that "learners' engagement with literary content depends on the way teachers use pedagogical strategies to teach, assess and monitor the progress of the teaching and learning experience". Therefore, we cannot cite the acquisition of critical thinking as an objective in English classrooms without employing critical pedagogies that will help initiate critical discussions and engagement with literary texts, and eventually lead to learners thinking critically about everyday social problems (Simango, 2020).

With regard to literature teaching and learning in South African English classrooms, it is clear that both the teacher and the learners have their respective roles to play in the understanding and engagement of literature. However, the pivotal point remains that learners do not need the teacher to impose thoughts upon them, but rather need to be prompted with interrogative questions to reach higher order thinking levels and comprehensive engagement with literature, in order to reap all of its benefits. Overall, the greater mission is learners' critical engagement with literary texts. This may however seem like an overwhelming objective with an end goal but no starting point. It is, thus, crucial to break down the process for the educator into a pedagogy that commences with them personally engaging critically with the concepts that are found in African literary texts. This is what I have done in this project in which I analyse the concept of masculinity as represented in three novels by African women writers.

2.5 Teaching masculinities

As has been indicated previously in this study, the teaching of literature has been reduced to serving as a tool of language appreciation in the English HL CAPS document which states that "the main reason for reading literature in the classroom is to develop in learners a sensitivity to a special use of language that is more refined" (Department of Basic Education, 2011, p. 12). Such a process forces English FET educators to rely on a one-dimensional pedagogy that does not approach literature from its different angles. This rudimentary approach to teaching literature fails to encourage English FET learners in South African schools to critically engage with texts in ways that allow them to make their own critical interpretation of literary texts and re-theorise the concepts within them. It is vital that we consider how masculinities in themselves can be approached by English teachers when teaching literature. Harrison (2010, p. 48) notes firmly that "the duty of educators [is] to redevelop constructs of masculinity, rather than reinforce the dominant masculinity", meaning that teachers need to make an effort to critique masculine representations in their pedagogy. Thus, the teaching of masculinities in South African English FET classrooms requires a specialised lens or tool through which these very masculinities can be re-evaluated and critiqued, and critical feminist pedagogy is such a tool. Magagaraggia et al. (2019, p. 3) vouch for the adoption of a feminist pedagogy when teaching masculinities

because it “takes a critical look at gendered ideologies and practices and gives space to empowering and transforming learning arrangements which go beyond stereotypes”. This pedagogy does not overlook the contextual background or influences of these masculinities, but rather interrogates them in a way that brings to light new understandings of the construction of these masculinities. Brunila (2019, p. 20) also points out that the use of a feminist pedagogy when teaching masculinities allows us to “challenge the dominant hierarchical gender relations”, meaning that it provides scope for discussions in the English FET classroom surrounding the intrinsic link between power and masculinities and its contribution to gender injustice in society. Masculinities need not only be taught critically but also taught in a transformational manner, meaning that the aim should not just be to critique masculinities as a whole but to critique the problematic representations of masculinities and think of alternative ways in which they can be understood or represented. Reiterating the point above, Harrison (2010) points out that schools need to encourage learners, especially boys, to have discussions about the masculinities that are present in the literature that is prescribed for them, because talking about these masculinities will allow them to think about them and even question these practices and the way they are represented in texts. Furthermore, Magagaraggia et al. (2019) note that education has the power to transform our thinking. Teachers, therefore, should keep in mind that English FET learners are also teenagers who are constructing their own masculinities. Teachers should make room for the critical interpretation and re-interpretation of the masculinities presented in literary texts and foster an environment that stimulates transformational understanding of masculinity.

Moreover, Brunila (2019, p. 23) notes that a critical feminist pedagogy assists in acknowledging the “various socially and culturally formed prejudices and norms that both restrict and shape people’s being and doing”. This approach also helps with the understanding of how masculinities are influenced by dominant social and cultural views but, most importantly, shows how masculinity serves not just as an identity that one constructs, but also a performance which one enacts. Therefore, if teachers fail to share this knowledge with learners in their pedagogy of teaching masculinities, they merely reproduce the same problematic hypermasculine identities and performances that contribute greatly to the gender divide in society and overall gender injustice.

Masculinities need to be approached and taught in a way that requires critical discussions, a constant definition and re-definition of masculine constructions, an examination of their contextual backgrounds and an understanding of their performative influences. Such a method allows masculinity to be understood as a fluid concept that can be transformative.

2.6 Research Gap

The literature that was reviewed unpacked the history of African women's literature and found that, in the past, African women writers have been deliberately and systematically excluded from contributing to literary spaces. African male writers dominated the literary space for an extended period as a result of the gendered order within society that prioritised men and marginalised women. The reviewed literature also showed that, although over time African women writers gradually gained entry into literary spaces, their works seemed to display a close relationship to those of their male counterparts and that this link can be attributed to their feeling obliged to represent and carry on the African tradition. The literature review also revealed how feminist texts are not simply classified by being written by a woman and having a hint of women's rights advocacy but rather have to fully advocate for and work towards challenging the various aspects of gender inequality present in African societies. These feminist texts present themselves in three feminist literary categories distinguished by Susan Arndt (2002): the first is reformist feminist literature that shows subtle disapproval for patriarchal ideals; the second is transformative feminist literature that displays a strong critique towards patriarchy and its agents (men); lastly radical feminist literature that confronts or sees death or murder as the solution to dominant and violent masculinities. One of the overlooked gaps that the reviewed literature exposed is that most African women writers proved to be solely focused on liberating and rewriting their female characters but in the same breath they neglected to rewrite and (re)present their male characters in their works – an inversely biased writing approach which they critiqued African male writers for in the past. This is the gap that this study seeks to fill through an analysis of masculinities in selected novels by African women writers. The study aims to address how masculinities have been overlooked in the works of African women writers and critique how the emancipation of women cannot be long-lasting if the male characters are not reworked in the same way in

which female characters were redefined; the male characters need to display a conscious act of self-actualization and realise that their hegemonic, as well as non-hegemonic, masculinities impact gender injustice.

In addition, the literature review examined literature curricula in South African English FET education and identified some of the long-standing problems with the perception of literature and the teaching of literature in both English HL and FAL education. Studies that show how novels, especially African novels, can be taught in South African high schools from a critical feminist perspective are scant. This is where my study gains significance as it shows how African women's novels can be engaged critically to unpack important themes around masculine representations, not just focusing on the language of texts.

Chapter 3

Theoretical and conceptual framework

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 of this study provided a comprehensive literature review on the history of African women's literature. This literature review included discussions surrounding the marginalisation of African women writers' works and how they were denied the right to publish because their male counterparts' work was viewed as more valuable. The chapter also examined some of the literary traditions that African women writers still struggled to break away from. Thereafter followed a discussion of the state of literature in South African FET education that identified issues with the current prescribed literary canon. Through the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, a research gap was identified which revealed that there was a lack of attention paid to how African women writers represent their male characters that can potentially slow down the shift to gender equality because these male characters are left without the prospect of redefinition. In this theoretical chapter, I seek to explore African feminism as a fitting theoretical framework for this study, because it is an indigenous feminism that speaks to the socio-historical and cultural experiences of African women in conjunction with African men. This theory will help me to interrogate relevant systems of oppression that sustain patriarchal hegemony and impede gender justice. The use of African feminism will also allow me insight into how various African feminist scholars have come to conceptualise a complex concept like masculinity.

3.2 Theoretical framework: African feminism

African feminism is a theoretical approach that involves a close analysis of the conditions of African women in society. African feminist scholarship reveals that "in relation to men, women had been treated in ways that fell short of standards usually adjudged to be equitable and just" (Oloko, 2008, p. 104). As a social movement, African feminism has been branded and understood as a "broad-based and diverse movement that seeks to protect and promote the interests of women" (Ifechelobi,

2014, p. 17), to ensure that they are equally recognised and valued in society. African feminism has also been conceptualised as a theory that aims to “understand and deconstruct gender inequality ingrained in the structure of society” (Hirudayaraj & Shields, 2019, p. 320) to help improve the conditions of African women within African societies. Additionally, the objectives of African feminism are firmly grounded in “censor[ing] a system that unrepentantly places women’s needs as secondary to men’s” (Nkealah, 2006, p. 134). These objectives are geared at challenging not men but systems of oppression, of which males are agents.

In its entirety, African feminism has proclaimed that its main pursuit and focus is “the triumphant emancipation of the woman as a unique, distinct individual with a mind uncluttered by patriarchal beliefs and submission to tradition” (Nkealah, 2006, p. 135) and, ultimately, producing a self-aware individual who advocates for social change. Both Mekgwe (2008, p. 17) and Sackeyfio (2021, p. 9) claim that African feminism is not “antagonistic to African men, but it challenges them to be aware of certain salient aspects of women’s subjugation that differ from the generalised oppression of all African people”. The views of these scholars dispute the stereotypical idea that African feminism is against men, and these scholars note that African feminists rather invite men to be part of the gendered change women advocate for (Mekgwe, 2008; Sackeyfio, 2021). The feminist objective for women to stand up against patriarchy as a system of oppression is what has largely resulted in African feminism being accused of being anti-male. African feminist scholars have debunked this claim as being insubstantial because its goal is critiquing not men but the patriarchal behaviours that are displayed by men, which contribute to the oppression of women. Additionally, African feminism is not set on trying to disassociate women from men in society but it does seek to interrogate gender relations and address any system that impedes progression towards gender justice. Mekgwe (2008, p. 16) argues that “if African feminism is to succeed as a humane reformation project, it cannot accept separation from the opposite sex”. This argument further defends African feminism against the anti-male accusation because it highlights how both women and men are needed to achieve gender justice in society. Without men realising how their behaviours and attitudes promote patriarchal power, women’s freedom from oppression will only be

temporary, if at all. Thus, African feminism acknowledges that both women and men who have been socialised by and into patriarchal institutions play a role in the suffering and overall oppression of African women.

In an article on gender justice in the Islamic religion, Sa'diyya Shaikh supports the claim that women too play a role in other women's suffering by noting that

> there are some Muslim women who have internalized the patriarchal dimension of their heritage and become proponents, while on the other end of the continuum, there are those who have exited the religious tradition as a response to experiences of patriarchal realities. (Shaikh, 2003, p. 148)

Shaikh's statement above demonstrates how the issue is not with men themselves, but rather the institution of patriarchy that has the power to use both men and women as its oppressive agents. It is that institution that African feminists seek to critique. African feminism strives to confront the institution of patriarchy head-on and to challenge how it propagates patriarchal masculinities that have been broadly defined as "ideas about and practices of masculinity that emphasize the superiority of masculinity over femininity and the authority of men over women" (Greig, 2016, p. 14). Such ideas lead to an imbalance of gender practices within society.

In addition, African feminism has been defined as being "change-oriented" (Ferguson, 2017, p. 275) because it has been dedicated not just to understanding the experiences of African women in African spaces, but also to actively advocate for their liberation from African oppressive institutions. African feminism comprehends that "power is an integral concept of feminist theory" (Hirudayaraj & Shields, 2019, p. 326) and, thus, sets out to question the cultural, traditional and social institutions that distribute power unequally, leaving African women holding the 'short-end of the power stick', so to speak. Ifechelobi (2014, p. 19) further conceptualises African feminism as a feminism that is "not meant to castrate [African] men of their power and hand [it] over to women, but [rather] preaches co-existence". It is important to note that this co-existence does not paint a false utopian society. African feminism rather believes that by dismembering the ideals of social gender hierarchies that position men and women on different ends of the equality spectrum, women too can be empowered and gender

equality can be achieved. Kiyamba (2010) reiterates the above point by explaining that there are certain mechanisms used by society to maintain the gender divide, and an example of such a mechanism is gender roles. Kiyimba (2010, p. 35) further argues that

> the portrayals of the man as a husband, father and societal-political leader need to be examined more closely to highlight how they work as part of the broader mechanism that perpetuates a legacy of the powerful male dominance.

This statement correlates with the aims of African feminism, because it seeks to interrogate these rigid gendered roles. While fatherhood is an expected gender role for men to take on, the father is viewed as "the 'owner' of the children and the ultimate source of social legitimacy over them" (Kiyimba, 2010, p. 44). Motherhood, on the other hand, is a an expected gender role for women because they are presumed to be carers and nurturers, both practices that have nothing to do with power but instead demonstrate a lack of power.

African feminism has also been construed as a movement that "place[s] importance on the interconnectedness of gender, women's oppression, race, ethnicity, poverty, and class" (Chiweshe, 2018, p. 79), thus providing a more in-depth understanding of African women's daily struggles and experiences. It is, however, important to point out that over the years, African feminism has moved from just being understood as anti-Western feminism to developing into a diverse yet inclusive form of feminism (Decker & Baderoon, 2018) that seeks to cover many contextual grounds. African feminism has always rejected the universalisation of women's experiences (Mekgwe, 2008) and it rather insists that women across all parts of Africa do not share the same experiences, despite being on the same continent, and that each woman's experience is unique and influenced by many different factors. Furthermore, Arndt (2002, p. 32) points out that "the diversity of social realities on the African continent has had a lasting effect on conceptions of [African] feminism, making it necessary to use the plural with respect to feminism in Africa". Thus, as a theory, African feminism has been approached from different angles by various African feminist scholars who have established different models of African feminism to give broader perspectives on the vast experiences of African women. It has birthed African feminist models such as Mary Kolawole's 'African Womanism' (Kolawole, 1997), Obioma Nnaemeka's 'Nego-

feminism' (Nnaemeka, 2003), Molara Ogundipe-Leslie's 'Stiwanism' (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994), and Naomi Nkealah's 'Cameline Agency' (Nkealah, 2017), just to name a few.

Arndt (2002) has established three distinct categories of African feminist literatures (reformist, transformative and radical) that help to conceptualise the foundation upon which African feminist texts are built. The first category – the reformist African feminist literature – is classified by its rather careful critique of "individual, patriarchally-molded attitudes, norms and conventions, both century-old and modern, which discriminate against women and hinder self-realisation" (Arndt, 2002, p. 33). This suggests that the reformist African feminist literature is not brutal in its challenge of patriarchy and also does not group all men (active and complicit) as part of the patriarchal problem, but rather singles out those who enact oppressive practices. Arndt (2002) labels African women writers such as Sindiwe Magona, Grace Ogot and Flora Nwapa as reformist African feminist writers. The second category of African feminist literature – transformative African feminist literature – is the complete opposite of the reformist because it critiques all men and understands that they have played a role in enacting patriarchal power, although it acknowledges that this done in different ways (Arndt, 2002). The works of African women writers such as Mariama Bâ, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta are said to display elements of transformative African feminist literature (Arndt, 2002). Radical African feminist literature is the third category formulated by Arndt (2002) who distinguished it by the extreme violent abuse suffered by women, that then results in the abuser being killed – usually by the victim. Young contemporary writers said to be "born after most African independence (that is after 1960) and who started to write in the late 1980s" (Arndt, 2002, p. 34) are projected as writers of radical African feminist literature.

One of the criticisms of African feminism was its heavy focus in the early days on challenging Western feminism (Eze, 2015). This however changed over time, as evident in the statement by Lewis (2001, p. 4) that "African feminist dialogues have become increasingly less concerned with critiquing Western feminism and progressively more goal oriented and pro-active". This means that African feminism is now focused more on trying to carry out its objectives rather than trying to distinguish itself from Western feminism. Lewis (2001) also echoes sentiments shared by fellow

African feminist scholars by highlighting that African feminisms have also progressed towards an understanding that women should not be the only ones to interrogate their circumstances and femininities, but rather that men should be encouraged/driven to re-examine their masculinities as well.

In this contemporary age, with African feminism being theorised as more than just a project for women's empowerment and certainly not an anti-male movement, it is now embraced more heartily by African women writers than when it first emerged (Mekgwe, 2008). African women writers have reached a point at which they boldly accept the feminist title and see it not only as their duty to address gender relations and injustices within the African society, but also view these objectives as part of their day-to-day missions (Eze, 2014). Their projection of African feminism differs greatly to that of the older generation of African women writers who initially distanced themselves from anything related to the theory of feminism, with the fear that it was related too closely with Western ideals or that their work was considered feminist simply because they wrote about women. One of the older generation of women writers who accepted the feminist label conditionally is Ama Ata Aidoo, who expressed her frustration about the way the feminist label was loosely thrown around:

> I shall not protest if you call me feminist…but I am not a feminist because I write about women. Are men writers chauvinist pigs just because they write about men? Or is a writer an African nationalist just by writing about Africans? Or a revolutionary for writing about poor humanity? Obviously not…no writer, female or male, is a feminist just by writing about women. (Aidoo, 1982 quoted in Arndt, 2002, p. 31)

Aidoo's fellow first-generation African woman writer Buchi Emecheta has, however, argued that she accepts the title of feminist on the condition that the 'F' is not capitalised (Nnaemeka, 1995). Flora Nwapa as well refused to be associated with the feminism of her time purely because of how it was initially perceived as being anti-male, but overtime she gradually accepted the label after its objectives were further elaborated by African feminist research (Arndt, 2002).

Unlike their predecessors' initial dismissal of the feminist term, the new generation of African women writers has actively worked to re-theorise African feminism to ensure that it is a fitting theory to analyse African women's literature and to address the

conditions of African women (Eze, 2016). They, therefore, take a bold approach to feminism in their literary works. As a new generation African woman writer, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has been branded as the face of African feminism. In her globally received 2013 TED Talk titled “We should all be feminist”, Adichie laughs off the previously widely held perception of feminists as being lonely and miserable and boldly declares that she is a “Happy African Feminist” (2013, n.p.). Adichie (2013) also argues that it is important for one to take on the feminist title boldly and not to just reduce the feminist cause to a fight for human rights. In her TED Talk, she states that “feminism is, of course, part of human rights in general – but to choose to use the vague expression ‘human rights’ is to deny the specific and particular problem of gender” (Adichie, 2013, n.p.). Therefore, the new age generation of African women writers are feminists with a capital ‘F’, as Eze (2014) notes, and are unapologetic in their feminist approach in literature.

3.3 Conceptual framework: African masculinity

A conceptual framework is a framework that re-theorises existing concepts and demonstrates the interrelation to other concepts (Tamene, 2016). For this study, African masculinity serves as a conceptual framework that has been developed from the pre-existing concept of masculinity. As a conceptual framework, African masculinity narrows down the global concept of masculinity to that which is specifically African and can be unpacked more contextually.

3.3.1 Definitions of masculinity

Masculinity has been defined and understood not as an innate, but rather socially constructed idea of what a man is and how he should behave. This socially constructed idea prescribes practices, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that inform identities that are expected to be adopted and embodied by male bodies. Additionally, these social constructions are not universal, but rather context-dependent because different societies are driven and influenced by different cultural and traditional aspects. Thus, it is stated that “what it means to be manly does not always mean the same thing in all societies at all times” (Waliaula, 2010, p. 14). Additionally, as a construct, masculinity has been understood as “much about the psyche and its

contents as much as it is about where we are located in our society by means of laws, traditions, institutions, rules and discourse" (Ratele, 2013, p. 259). This means that how men see and perceive themselves will influence how their masculinities are constructed and how they embody them. Thus, masculinities are influenced by both internal and external factors. In a chapter in the book *African Sexualities* edited by Sylvia Tamale, Ampofo and Boateng (2011, p. 421) note that "the study of masculinity is an effort to make sense of the relationship between individual males and groups of males as well as between males and females", because men will construct their masculinities both in relation and in contrast to those around them. According to Hearn (2007), masculinities thrive off gender differentiation because men's identities are prescribed in relation to what is not feminine, further dividing power between the two genders and placing each in its own social hierarchical position, with masculinity being deemed superior to femininity.

Echoing the sentiments above, Ratele et al. (2007, p. 116) note that masculinity is "defined through its opposition to femininity through the normative gender binarisms of activity versus passivity [and] dominance versus submission". This statement further shows that it is an expectation for the one (masculinity) to be what the other (femininity) is not. Dlamini (2015, p. 23) adds to the comparative understanding of masculinity by explaining that it is a "social concept whose meaning and use depends on how a person acts and presents themselves in interactions with others", because it is only through the social interaction with other men that one sees how masculinities are taken on and embodied by men and through the interaction with women that one sees how masculine performances differ from feminine performances. Although masculinity is viewed as a non-universal concept, Thangaraj (2022) points out that there is one thing that may be common in masculinities and that is the patriarchal origins which seem to govern them all, in addition to all the other intersectional aspects. Scholars have argued that masculinity awards men power, but the masculine performances that show a link to or stem from patriarchal institutions are not all masculinities; they are rather the embodiment of hypermasculinity or dominant masculinities that are said to be distinguished by "unrivalled favouritism, exploitation and the abuse of power" (Ajibade Adisa et al., 2021, p. 188). Effectively, the performance of hypermasculinity serves to oppress the inferior 'others'. Gqola (2015) describes hypermasculinity as being deeply entangled with misogyny and violence,

because it seeks to embody and demonstrate very aggressive performances that oppress and violate inferior others, which in most cases are women. This violent culture that is associated with hypermasculinity abuses its power and obstructs the empowerment of subordinate groups. Manamela-Mongane (2019, p. 9) highlights the fact that it is these very hypermasculine performances that need to be called out and interrogated by African feminists because they exaggerate the ideals of hegemony and continue to stand in the way of gender justice for women. In addition, Dlamini (2020, p. 176) notes that “traditions and traditionalism continue to play a vital role in the process of masculinity creation”; meaning that masculinity is influenced gravely by society since it is constructed in relation to how things have been done previously or to longstanding norms. Morrell (2001) notes that although masculinities are influenced by society and various institutions, it should be understood that it is the individual who chooses to adopt a masculine identity and embody it.

Masculinity has also been explored as a set of qualities associated with true manliness which men are expected to adopt and re-enact to ensure that they maintain the gender hierarchy and power within society (Schippers, 2007). Dlamini (2015, p. 24) points out that attaining manhood is merely the first step to acquiring a masculine identity and that it is moulded in young boys as they are “socialised to aspire for it from the earliest age to the day they undergo the right of passage”. Shefer et al. (2007, p. 3) also point out that masculinities are “constantly being fought for through performances of idealised and normative versions of masculinity”. It is because of this practice that men are also constantly being measured against other masculine identities and performances. In addition, Chopra (2000, p. 1608) extends on the link between manhood and masculinity by pointing out that masculine qualities are not just acquired once, but rather they need to be “constantly learned, constructed and confirmed”, meaning that men need to prove their manliness in their everyday practices in order to maintain their masculinity in society.

Judge (2014, pp. 70-71) also notes that masculinities are constructed in relation to intersecting factors and that masculinities “have historical continuities with constructions and identification of gender, race and sexuality under colonialism and apartheid”. In their paper on gay identities, Andrews and Nichols (2021) point out how the concept of masculinities has been complicated and disrupted by gay identities.

The argument put forth by Andrews and Nichols (2021, p. 53) is that heterosexual masculinities have been perceived in society as “the socially accepted form of masculinity”, which means that any other male identity that refuses to conform to the idea of heterosexuality is then ‘othered’ and seen as not fitting within the masculine realm. Shefer et al. (2007, p. 3) also highlight the point that “heterosexual prowess [is viewed] as a key component of the achievement and performance of successful masculinity”, meaning that heterosexual masculinities are placed on a pedestal and seen as the expected masculine identity that all men should aspire to and it also means that anyone who embodies alternate or gay identities is viewed as having failed to acquire ‘true’ masculinity. Ratele et al. (2007) point out that a common belief held by heterosexual masculinity is that “a ‘true’ man in other words cannot be gay” and that if there are men who embody gay masculine performances, they are then viewed as an anomaly within the society. Dlamini (2015, p. 26) also points out that heterosexual masculinities work to ensure that both men and women follow the gender order in society through “regulat[ing] both the strategies of resistance used by othered [gay] masculinities and the manner in which men and women imagine and linguistically represent their bodies in interaction with each other and social structures”. This gender regulation or policing takes form in homophobic attacks against gay men and the gang rapes of lesbian women, because these identities are seen as a threat to heterosexual masculinities and, therefore, are forced to conform through violence. Gqola (2015) explains how heterosexual masculinities use corrective rape, or any other form of violence, as a weapon to achieve their desired hegemonic goals. Such practices show that heterosexual masculinities are understood as part of the hegemonic structure of society that maintains its superior position while the other forms of masculinities are inferior.

In addition to the various definitions of masculinity mentioned above, African feminists have also taken it upon themselves to further interrogate the concept of masculinity through a dissection of African masculinities and how they have been understood, constructed, reconstructed, embodied and performed by African men.

3.3.2 African feminist conceptualisations of masculinities

Masculinities have always been conceptualised through Western ideals with gender scholars such as Raewyn Connell leading the discussion. These Western conceptualisations tend to discuss masculinity in very general terms, disregarding the interwoven role that multiple societal, cultural and traditional factors play in the construction of masculine identities. The emergence of Raewyn Connell's masculinity model, that identified four main categories of masculine identities namely, hegemonic, complicit, subordinate and marginalised masculinities, placed masculinity in rigid boxes of definition, leaving little to no room for any form of masculine fluidity. Unfortunately, this Western conceptualisation does not seem to factor in any African context. Because of this problem, African feminist scholars have spent time re-theorising gendered spaces within African societies, with a focus on oppressive institutions such as patriarchy, and probing the various abstractions being anchored by it, one of which, is African masculinities. African feminist scholar, Pumla Dineo Gqola, shares the sentiments put forward by fellow scholar, Raymond Suttner, by emphasising the intrinsic link that seems to exist between historical/political contexts and masculinity, stating that "assertions of African masculinity can be [conceptualised as] expressions of both freedom and patriarchal power" (Gqola, 2015, p. 154). Gqola (2015, p. 155) notes that in order to understand the construction of masculine identities in African societies, it is essential to accept that "it is not just the mere claiming or evoking of manhood that matters, but also the specific ways in which contexts inflect the meanings of such assertions of specific masculinities". Her suggestion here is that looking extensively into the context in which these masculinities are formed will provide a broader perspective for conceptualising these masculinities better. This contextual conceptualisation of masculinities identifies patriarchy as being merely the tip of the iceberg and encourages us to understand the link that exists between patriarchy and broader systems of power and oppression – colonialism and capitalism, for example – that threshed their way into African societies and 'stripped' African men of their power, thus leading to African men feeling the need to reclaim their power. Dlamini (2015, p. 19) solidifies the above claim by arguing that if we accept that the apartheid regime in colonial South Africa played a major role in emasculating Black men and that they were "shorn of manhood and pride by the white supremacist regime", then we can go even further and understand the masculine constructions and

performances attained post-apartheid as a trauma response for Black South African men and a desperate need to regain the power that was inhumanely stripped from them. Morrell (2001) notes that because of South African men's experience and interaction with the apartheid regime, we can conclude that it birthed a strong yoke between South African masculinities and violence. Nevertheless, Morrell (2001) explains that these violent masculinities cannot only be understood as being caused by South Africa's violent past but can also be understood as a reflection of the country's violence.

The exaggerated masculine performances that emerged post-apartheid brought a very important fact to light, namely, that "the attainment of democracy catapulted the issues of gender and sexuality to the centre such that feminists who previously had refused to talk about them then became vocal on the gender issues" (Dlamini, 2015, p. 22). This is not to say that gender issues and injustices did not exist prior to democracy, but rather it shows how apartheid clouded these issues and made them look minor next to the racial oppression that was being fought against. However, it was during this apartheid period that South African men were constructing their own masculinities in relation, response and retaliation to the regime. Their masculine constructions were slowly brewing and were being influenced and informed by a violent system. Swain (2005, p. 215) notes that young Black South African males' interaction with the apartheid regime and even Bantu education produced "patterns of masculinity that promoted toughness, gender inequality and repression". The same is observed with the colonial system across Africa that served to dehumanise Africans, both males and females, and denied them of any power or a sense of being. Ratele (2021, p. 772) points out that "having been colonised [African men] have to deal with being reduced to lesser men while struggling for recognition of their basic human rights". Therefore, for African men, the need to embody dominant or hypermasculine performances stems from trying to cement their being and identity as both humans and men in society, after being objectified by the colonial system. Additionally, Ratele (2021, p. 769) states that "colonialism transformed existing masculinities and racialised gender relations, reorganising positions of supremacy and subservience along colonial racist difference".

Because African men constructed their masculinity in relation to their own interaction with colonial power, masculinity can be encapsulated as the assertion of power – gendered power (Holter, 2005). This reconfiguration of African masculinities through the influence of colonial power that Ratele speaks of is depicted in the works of African male writers such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, in which the author exposes the effects of colonialism through the masculine performances of his male characters. In the novel, the male protagonist, Okonkwo, displays his own form of defiant yet heroic masculinity when he chooses to hang himself, because he sees it as a better option than being stripped of his identity as a man and as an African through being ruled by the British. South African feminist scholar Jessica Murray (2016) notes how gender is and has always been a central focal point in society, informing the way dominant masculinities are meant to be portrayed. She states that there are "deeply embedded gendered assumptions which create a society in which gender violence becomes not only possible but a norm" (Murray, 2016, p. 16). In other words, society makes acceptable ways for masculinities to be 'misused' or exaggerated in rigorous and violent forms over female others. Gqola (2015, p.152) sees this normalisation of violence as yet another pandemic that our society suffers from, as she claims that "violent masculinities create a public consciousness in which violence is not just acceptable and justified, but also natural and desirable". Violence in South Africa has reached this point of glamorisation and celebration because the masculine performances that embody this violence have existed for so long without being challenged or interrogated.

Masculinity is said to exist only when taken on and enacted by an individual (Mfecane, 2018), although these masculine performances are bound to mimic one another, because they are influenced by the dominantly shared perception of what constitutes manly behaviour. In African societies, the concept of masculinity can be understood as stemming from cultures that pride themselves in upholding the role of the dominant man in society and authorising his duty to control and maintain the inferiority of the subordinate others from within the same gender space (other males), as well as from outside spaces (females and other feminised bodies). Mfecane (2018, p. 295) points out that "social structures prescribe gender norms but individuals make gender a reality through their everyday behaviour and can produce outcomes which either support or undermine the established gender structures". Therefore, there is a dual

meaning in how masculinity works because although masculine ideals are deeply rooted in gender conceptions and attitudes that dictate acceptable behavioural practices meant to be displayed by men, they also work to perpetuate the gender differences between men and women. Azodo (1997, p. 201) also argues that masculine ideals foster "endemic sexism, patriarchal attitudes and the force of blinding tradition [which] bond[s] African men in a hegemonic system that nourishes and protects their interests", while simultaneously disregarding and abusing the interests of African women. Additionally, the hegemonic forms of masculinity have over time been categorised as patriarchal performances that assume and impose the normality of heterosexuality and "sanctions the political and dominant role of men in the public and private spheres" (Brittan, 1989 as cited in Asiyanbola, 2005, p. 4). Thus, in advocating for and making issues of heterosexuality its focal point, the ideals of masculinity successively decree the feminine behaviours and ideals to which women are expected to submit (Ouzgane & Morrell, 2005).

Heilman and Barker (2018, p. 20) point out that "ideas about manhood and womanhood are also created and reinforced by dividing up spaces into those that may be considered male or female", and that a significant agent that enforces this gendered division is the institution of patriarchy. These spaces are divided and maintained by gender roles that drive the idea of masculinity versus femininity. Speaking at her 2013 TED Talk, Adichie gives concrete examples of how men and women have been socialised into their gender roles and that it is always considered a taboo when those roles are disrupted or taken on by the opposite gender. Ratele et el. (2007, p. 122) note that some of the gender roles that are expected to be taken up by dominant masculinities include "responsibility for a family, heading a household, the privilege of a social life outside of the house, heterosexual orientation, breadwinning for the family and a need for sexual activity". For women, the opposite is expected as they are required to play a subservient role in the household and ensure that they are available for sexual activity, whenever it is convenient for the man.

Although masculinity has often been discussed as a general term, we need to make a clear distinction between various masculinities, especially African masculinities, and understand that each contextual variation of masculinities has its foundations built on

multiple factors. Holter (2005) points out that we cannot look at gender or any constructions of gender (masculinity included) independently, and that we need to also consider the role that the cultural and social contexts play in the formation of those gendered constructions. For South African masculinities, it is important for us to factor in the country's political history of apartheid in order to understand how it plays a part in producing aggressive/violent masculine performances (Shefer, 2014 as cited in Bhana & Moosa, 2016). Ratele (2008, p. 533) also holds the belief that a homogenous conception of masculinity ceases to exist in a context such as Africa and that African masculinities are informed by "male experience and [cultural] practices" as well as long-standing traditions. Furthermore, noting that dominance not only exists between men and women but also between men themselves as a way of defining manhood, Ratele (2013) points out that men put pressure on themselves to be considered 'real men' and go to lengths to create and re-enact traditional and societal rules that will prove them as worthy of the title. Adichie (2013) also argues in her TED Talk that in the quest to acquire this real or true manhood status that requires men to adopt unwavering strength and emotional unavailability, men tend to have their ego's bruised and it becomes an expectation of women to pick up the pieces and repair the broken egos, while forgetting about self.

The use and misuse of masculinities are always influenced by societal and cultural prescriptions of manhood and these various forms of masculinity are represented in *Changes: A Love Story*, *Purple Hibiscus* and *Mother to Mother*. However, it is through evaluating and analysing the socially constructed idea of masculinity that one can challenge its various representations. For representations of masculinity that seem to feed into the general order of hegemonic ideals or display hypermasculine performances, I will argue for a more transformative gender construction from an African feminist perspective and that is where this study hopes to contribute to existing knowledge. On the other hand, for the representations of masculinity that are re-theorised, I will demonstrate how the re-theorisations of these masculinities can be used to understand the nuanced conceptualisations of masculinities.

Connell (1995, p. 3) points out that “everyday life is an arena of gender politics”, meaning that we cannot avoid the politics within gender, as we encounter them in our everyday politics. This study uses African feminist theorisation of masculinities to analyse representations of masculinity in the three chosen texts. It draws specifically on conceptualisations of African masculinity by African feminist and gender scholars, such as those cited in this chapter, to unpack different forms of masculinities in the chosen texts and how they promote or forestall the African feminist agenda of women’s empowerment. In Chapters 5 to 7, the conceptualisations of African masculinities are used to explain the different representations of masculinities in the three novels and highlight how each of these masculine types is linked to power. This is an appropriate conceptual lens because this study is looking at African novels and the representation of masculinities therein. The goals on which African feminism prides itself cannot be fully realised if we neglect to understand masculinities in-depth. Lewis (2001, p. 5) argues that African feminist theory is based on a “gender analysis of African contexts”, thus reinforcing the motive for the fundamental use of an African theoretical and conceptual lens to understand African masculinities as represented in literary texts.

3.4 Chapter summary

African feminism has come a long way in its mission to critique institutions and ideologies that hinder the advancement of gender justice. This chapter has explained the theory of African feminism and highlighted its concerns regarding gender relations in society. It also examined the institutions and ideologies that contribute to the oppression of women, as exposed by African feminists in their scholarship. Additionally, this chapter made clear the objectives of African feminist theory in relation to gender justice. It undertook a comparative discussion on the way African feminism is being projected by new age African women writers in comparison to first generation women writers such as Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa and Ama Ata Aidoo. This chapter also formulated a conceptual framework derived from African feminist theory. It first looked at how masculinities in general have been defined and how their constructions have been informed or influenced. The chapter then gathered African feminists’ perspectives and conceptualised African masculinities. The various African feminist conceptualisations of African masculinities revealed how masculine

constructions are influenced by interwoven factors such as culture, society and tradition. It also revealed how masculine performances are intrinsic to power and more specifically how African masculine identities were constructed in relation to African men's interaction with colonial power and specifically apartheid in South Africa. It also highlighted how masculinities can be used and misused by men, and that it is the excessive performances of hypermasculinity which can be understood as a patriarchal concept rather than masculinity in and of itself. The next chapter outlines the research methodology for the study.

Chapter 4

Methodology

4.1 Introduction

In the previous theoretical chapter, a detailed discussion of African feminism and its aims was presented. Chapter 3 also gave varying definitions of masculinity that have been presented by scholars. The chapter concluded with a discussion on how masculinities have been conceptualised by African feminist scholars. Chapter 4 seeks to outline the methodology that guided this study. This research is an African feminist analysis of the representations of masculinity in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother*. All research follows a particular method and the method is determined by the object of inquiry. In this research study, the object of inquiry is African women's literature in the English FET curriculum. Thus, the project is a literary study that is "primarily concerned with interpretation and construction and is aimed at constructing and reconstructing meaning" (Khan, 2013, p. 101). It is centred around finding new ways of interpreting literary texts with the use of a theoretical framework.

4.2 Feminist literary research

As indicated in the previous section, this study employs literary research that is concerned with the interpretation of meaning from texts (Khan, 2013). It seeks to find ways of employing critical thinking as a means of interpreting literary texts with the use of a theoretical framework. Literary research can also be seen as narrative research and involves the analysis of literary elements alongside character and theme analysis of literary texts. Coulter and Smith (2009, p. 578) explain that "narrative research uses literary devices to allow readers to make sense of the study in their own ways". My study fits in with this definition because it presents new and multiple interpretations of the prescribed texts. More specifically, and in line with the literary method, my study adopts a feminist lens to analyse three different literary texts written by African women, with a focus on masculinities represented in the texts. It is in line with feminist research which has been defined as research that "recognises the inescapable need to

approach the study of gender in a way that recognises the simultaneous nature of our complex selves and the ways in which multiple aspects of privilege or oppression are being exercised at once" (Leavy & Harris, 2018, p. 4). As feminist research, this study not only unpacks, but also critiques, the concept of masculinity in relation to both gender justice and injustice. Therefore, through centralising the concept of gender, the study draws insights from African feminist conceptualisations of masculinities, and demonstrates the problems associated with various forms of masculinity in the texts and the ways in which these impede gender justice. In Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story*, the various masculinities present in the text are studied and unpacked from an African feminist perspective. The African feminist lens is also used to critique and interpret the transforming and un-transforming masculinities in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. Lastly, the African feminist is deployed to highlight and unpack the violent and violating masculinities that are portrayed in Magona's *Mother to Mother*.

4.3 The selected texts

In this study, I selected the three literary texts by African women writers prescribed at the English FET level in both private and government schools using purposive sampling. The three novels by Aidoo, Adichie and Magona have all found a place within South Africa's English syllabus, with all of them being taught at FET level. These novels are fitting literary texts that can be used to analyse the representations of masculinity. These three novels depict stories of women protagonists who interact with male characters who display and use their masculinities to disadvantage their female counterparts. All of these African woman writers have faced adversities that have influenced their writings' contextual background. As African women, there is no denying that at some point in their lives, they have experienced the "triple oppression of race, class and gender" (Shober, 2017, p. 9), which now informs their writing. Curry (2011, p. 179) describes Aidoo as a woman writer who is known for "depicting the role of African women in a changing world", an African world that transitioned from colonialism to post-colonialism. Adichie, on the other hand, is identified by Tunca (2020, p. 246) as one of the most "controversial literary figures" whose works always attract the media's attention. Adichie's literature touches on societal topics that are seen as sensitive or sacred, one of which is religion, as seen in her novel *Purple Hibiscus*. On her part, Magona is described as a writer who "views her role as a scribe

for her people" (Shobber 2017, p. 9) because she also very often writes about the experiences of African women. What is overtly common among the three selected novels is the focus on women's experiences of gender dynamics. Male characters feature in all three texts and it is important to examine what masculinities they embody as they interact with the female protagonists.

4.3.1 Contextual backgrounds of Aidoo, Adichie, and Magona

Context is very important in African feminism since cultures vary. Thus, it is imperative to understand the context of the three selected texts for analysis and the starting point is understanding the writers' backgrounds.

Ama Ata Aidoo was born in 1943, 14 years before Ghana's independence from British colonial rule. She began writing after Ghana obtained its independence at the young age of 15 and is said to be "among the first generation of African women writers of the post-independence era" (Sackeyfio, 2023, para. 2). She has thus made a significant contribution to African literature in general and to African women's literature in particular. In 1982, Aidoo was appointed the Minister of Education in Ghana. However, this position was short-lived because she only served for 18 months. Gale (2016, p. 3) notes that "because of her radical views [which opposed the aims of the government], Aidoo was forced out of the position and [out of] her native country", moving to Zimbabwe where she continued her work in education. She has published numerous literary works, including plays such as *The Dilemma of a Ghost* (1965) and *Anowa* (1971) and short story volumes such as *No Sweetness Here* (1971), *The Girl Who Can* (1977) and *Diplomatic Pounds* (2012). Her poetry collections include *Someone Talking to Someone* (1985), *An Angry Letter in January* (1992) and *After Ceremonies* (2017). Lastly, her published novels are *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977) and *Changes: A Love Story* (1991) which has been chosen for analysis in this study.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a post-colonial Nigerian writer, born in Enugu in 1977. She started writing at a very young age and when asked why she chose to be a writer, she has often responded by saying that she did not choose writing but instead writing chose her (Azodo, 2008). Adichie has often mentioned that she gains her writing

influences from African writers such as Chinua Achebe, who has offered his approval of Adichie's literary works, describing Adichie as a fearless writer who is "endowed with the gift of ancient storytellers" (Sackeyfio, 2021, p. 9). As an African, Adichie points out that she has a sense of responsibility for sharing African stories and states: "I am a very keen observer of my world, and my experience as a Black African woman clearly plays a role in the things that interest me" (Adichie as quoted in Azodo, 2008, p. 3). Thus, all her novels, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) and *Americanah* (2013), centre around African female protagonists who share their African experiences. Prior to publishing novels, Adichie also tried her hand at poetry and play writing, publishing her poetry collection titled *Decisions* in 1997 and her play *For the Love of Biafra* in 1998. She has also published a collection of short stories titled *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009) and a feminist manifesto titled *Dear Ijeawele* (2017). Her latest publication is a memoir dedicated to her late father titled *Notes on Grief* (2021). Beside all her written works, Adichie is also very well known for her profound TED Talks such as *The Danger of a Single Story* (2009) and *We Should All Be Feminists* (2013) which have attracted millions of views online.

Sindiwe Magona is a South African writer originally from Gugulethu, Western Cape. She was born in 1943 and has since then built a prominent career in writing. She also served in the United Nations for two decades. She grew up in the apartheid era and was a product of the regime's Bantu Education that was implemented in 1953 and which stipulated that "all black schools would have to be registered with the government and that registration would be at the discretion of the minister [of Education]" (Christie & Collins, 1982, p. 66). The introduction of this Act was a security measure that "enabled the [apartheid] government to close any educational programmes which did not support its aims" (Christie & Collins, 1982, p. 66). Much of Magona's work is said to be based on her personal experiences of growing up in South Africa during one of its most critical times, especially for Black people (Segalo, 2021). Among her works, Magona has published an autobiography titled *To My Children's Children* (1990), a poetry collection titled *Please Take Photographs* (2009) and a short story collection titled *Awam Ngqo* (2014). Magona has also published post-democratic novels such as *Mother to Mother* (1998) and *Beauty's Gift* (2009). In the next section, I look at how the three sampled novels speak to each other.

4.3.2 Aidoo, Adichie and Magona in conversation

All three novels by Aidoo, Adichie and Magona have central female characters who, in one way or another, experience and/or are exposed to various forms of violence meted out by male characters. In addition, both the male and female characters in each novel are constructed from within a gendered space, ensuring that they each display their gendered expectations according to the norms of society.

Aidoo's novel is said to deal with and narrate issues relating to "women's education, marriage, sexuality and marital rape" (Tugume, 2016, p. 92), all of which are African feminist concerns. The novel's protagonist, Esi, is portrayed as a contemporary Ghanaian woman who seeks to thrive in both the public space of her workplace and the private space of her marital home. Unfortunately, her success is still stifled by African regressive masculinity displayed by the male characters she is surrounded by. Although Aidoo's portrayal of Esi as a working woman in a traditional society can be viewed as a progressive stunt for feminism, Tugume (2016) argues that African women can be as progressive as they want, but when they come back home into their private sphere, they have to deal with patriarchy and masculine dominance will always be the order of the day. One can therefore see that it does no justice to gender equality if African women only focus on rewriting one aspect of the gender spectrum (femininity) and neglecting the other (masculinity); true gender progression and transformation can only be achieved if both parts of the spectrum are reworked. The analysis in Chapter 5 will illustrate this argument using specific textual evidence.

Adichie's novel *Purple Hibiscus* is argued to contain a "thrust of feminism [although] the brand of feminism is very subtle in the first couple of chapters" (Okuyade, 2009, p. 249). In the novel, we see a female teenage protagonist, Kambili, her older brother, Jaja, and her mother, Beatrice, as they manoeuvre their way through life under the gaze of the tyrannical patriarch, Eugene Achike. Adichie's brand of feminism is categorised as subtle at first because the reader has no idea of what is brewing since the female protagonists are introduced to us as silenced and held captive by Eugene. The reader is introduced to Eugene's extreme religious nature that is said to "pervade the book" (Dube, 2018, p. 222), as well as his violent masculinity which oppresses not only female others but male others as well in different forms. Adichie portrays the

women in Eugene's immediate household in the stereotypical "image of African women as subdued, victimized, voiceless, and subservient" (Ifechelobi, 2014, p. 24). The novel's ending has often been referred to as sharing the same sentiments as Arndt's (2002) radical feminism, because it opts to remove Eugene from the family's equation in order for the women to be free of oppression. However, as shall be argued in Chapter 6, the novel's radicalism is not extended to its representation of masculinity.

Magona's novel has been categorised as a "docufiction" (Harlow, 2000, p. 91) because it explores the protagonist's navigation of motherhood while she's also trying to manoeuvre her way around the structural oppression that is South Africa during the period of apartheid. Magona's style in the novel, which includes having Mandisa recollect past events that account for her son's murderous actions, has been said to imply that "killers are purely victims of circumstance" (Bernard, 2007, as cited in Duvenage, 2020, p. 4). In this case, the novel is seen as excusing the perpetrators' actions rather than holding them accountable, thereby contributing to upholding the ideals of patriarchy. The novel mimics the decisions made by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) that was established in South Africa in 1996. With the understanding that the country's shift from apartheid to democracy still left hatred, guilt and trauma lingering in society, the TRC was set up to acknowledge those at fault through truth and to bring healing to those who were hurt through reconciliation (Stanley, 2001). However, many victimised people did not get justice from the TRC and this became one of the biggest criticisms levelled against it. Similarly, Magona in her novel neglects to condemn patriarchy and its agents by not making Mandisa to condemn her son for killing a white girl. This aspect of the novel can be seen as a hindrance to gender justice and transformation. However, as shall be shown in Chapter 7, the novel can be read in an African feminist way to argue that what Magona offers her readers is a re-theorisation of Black masculinities in South Africa that take African historical contexts into consideration.

What Aidoo, Adichie and Magona have in common, as African women writers, is their literary approach that is centred around their female characters. However, although their female characters are placed in the front line, they are in one way or form victims of gender injustice due to the destructive actions of the male characters in the novels.

4.4 Chapter summary

This chapter laid out the methodology that informs the study. It first discussed the study's choice of a feminist literary research methodology and why it serves as a fitting approach when conducting an analysis of data from literary texts. The three literary texts written by Aidoo, Adichie and Magona constitute the primary data that is analysed in this study. This chapter then discussed the selected texts in a bit more detailed form. It highlighted the need to engage critically with Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story*, Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Magona's *Mother to Mother*, as these texts prescribed for English FET show traces of problematic masculinities that need interrogation. Chapter 4 next gave a detailed contextual background of Aidoo, Adichie and Magona, to provide readers with a better understanding of factors that might have influenced these women's literary traditions and approaches. Lastly, this chapter engaged in a literary dialogue by looking at Aidoo, Adichie, Magona in relation to one another as African women writers. With the study's methodology laid out clearly in this chapter, the next chapter presents a critical analysis of the first novel, Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story*.

Chapter 5

Representations of masculinity in Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story*

5.1 Introduction

As mentioned in Chapter 1, this study investigates representations of masculinity in a selection of literary texts by African women writers. These texts have been prescribed texts for the English FET phase in South African schools. The study seeks to unpack what types of masculine representations feature in these texts and ascertain the potential impact that such representations may have for English FET education. The intention is to adopt an African feminist lens and the African feminist conceptualisation of African masculinities to decipher any underlying problematic messages or nuanced understanding of masculinity that contribute to gender injustice, as revealed in the novels. This chapter is an analysis of Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story*, to interpret Aidoo's conscious or unconscious representations of masculinity. The chapter begins with a detailed synopsis of the novel, followed by a review of previous research conducted on Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story.* Through this literature review, I highlight how my analysis seeks to differentiate itself from past interpretations of Aidoo's text. This literature review is followed by a discussion that unpacks patriarchy and masculinity as they emerge from the novel. The discussion takes place in three sub-sections, with the first looking at polyamorous and polygamous masculinities, the second at entitled and powerful masculinities and the third at providing masculinities. Lastly, the chapter explores the implications of the various representations of masculinity found in Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story* for English FET education in South Africa. It explores these implications in relation to learner empowerment, curriculum, pedagogy and, finally, teacher development.

5.2 Synopsis of *Changes: A Love Story* by Ama Ata Aidoo

Ghanaian writer, Ama Ata Aidoo's novel, *Changes: A Love Story*, was published in 1991 and relates the story of a 21st century woman, Esi, who attempts to juggle and balance being a working woman on the one hand and being an African wife and mother who is expected to perform her traditional/cultural duties on the other hand. The

novel's opening chapter introduces the reader to Esi, fully immersed in her work life as a government official and finalising travel arrangements for a business trip. Upon her arrival at one of the travel agencies, Esi meets the charming Ali Kondey and the two immediately have an unspoken attraction towards each other. Ali helps Esi complete the paperwork required by the travel agent and even goes to the extent of offering her a ride home, unaware of the fact that Esi had driven herself there.

The novel then progresses and invites the reader to share Esi's home life as a wife to her husband, Oko. Aidoo sets the scene of an inharmonious household, in which Oko and Esi are in the bedroom fighting about their marriage, while their young daughter, Ogyaanowa, listens from the other room. Oko expresses his frustrations with Esi's priorities, or lack of priority for family, as he would like to have another child. He is angry that Esi's work takes preference over her duties as a wife and mother. Feeling that his argument for a second child is falling upon deaf ears, Oko forces himself onto an unwilling and protesting Esi and has sexual intercourse with her. The narrative shows that he feels no remorse for his actions. Esi utters no words after this violation; she simply walks out of the bedroom to continue preparing herself for work. At work, Esi questions whether she has been a victim of 'marital rape' and begins to undertake research on what exactly this taboo term means and if it exists within her African culture. Esi ultimately decides that she is going to end her marriage to Oko, a decision she follows through with.

In the next chapter, the reader is introduced to Esi's long-time best friend, Opokuya, who seems to be happily married to her husband, Kubi, with whom she has four children. One morning, while getting ready for work, Opokuya instigates a familiar and redundant discussion with Kubi about borrowing his car to get to work instead of taking the hospital transport that is taken by her nurse colleagues. Kubi gives his 'valid' reasons why it is unethical to let Opokuya drive the car that his work is funding for him as a civil servant. After work, Opokuya meets up with Esi at a hotel for drinks and they catch up on what has been happening in both their lives. Esi informs a very stunned Opokuya of her decision to leave her husband, Oko. While deep in conversation, Opokuya observes the undeniable chemistry that sparks as Esi spots Ali who walks into the hotel and interacts with them briefly.

Following this episode, the novel gives more insight into Ali's life and his childhood friend turned wife, Fusena. Despite being married, Ali begins an affair with Esi and the two fall deeply in love with each other, which results in Ali proposing marriage to Esi. After some hesitation and doubtful conversations with Opokuya and her mother and grandmother, Esi agrees to enter into a polygamous marriage and become Ali's second wife. After a simple traditional ceremony uniting the two in Esi's maternal village, Ali goes home to his first wife Fusena, leaving Esi to return to her bungalow alone.

At first glance, Ali and Esi's marriage seems extremely convenient for Esi, who has more time to spend on her work without the demands of being a traditional wife, because she hardly sees Ali, who splits his time between Esi and Fusena. However, Ali spends more time with Fusena because he has family traditions with the three children they share that he does not want to disrupt. After a while, Esi begins to feel neglected. She realises that the once blissful second marriage has now turned into a materialistic relationship, as her husband, Ali, showers her with endless and expensive gifts as a way to compensate for his disappearance and extramarital affairs. Feeling overwhelmed and lonely, Esi experiences an emotional whirlwind and is comforted by Kubi who arrives unexpectedly on her doorstep moments later looking for his wife, Opokuya. Things suddenly change when Kubi tries to comfort Esi with sexual affection and starts kissing her. Esi takes a while to decide what she wants and what this sexual encounter would mean for her friendship, or rather sisterhood, with Opokuya. She ultimately prioritises her relationship with Opokuya and puts a stop to Kubi's advances. In the end, Esi estranges herself from Ali but never officially divorces him, yet she continues to maintain an intimate relationship with him.

5.3 A brief review of literature on Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story*

Changes: A Love Story has been described as a novel that contains multiple gendered encounters (Sackeyfio & Sackeyfio, 2007). The novel "displays the 21st century African women's situations and how their western education takes precedence over their marriage" (Diakhaté, 2021, p. 69), through its depiction of Esi as a successful career-driven woman. Key concerns emerging from the novel are "women's education, marriage, sexuality and marital rape" (Tugume, 2016, p. 92), which can be described

as feminist concerns. The novel not only portrays African women's oppressive experiences, but also projects these women as headstrong and self-empowered. Esi's husband, Oko, is said to be a traditional man who aims to live up to society's ideals of manliness and believes that the role of an African wife is to "be submissive and docile" (Diakhaté, 2021, p. 70). Oko's excessive demands are also argued to be an attempt to force Esi to "conform to the standard of behaviour [that is] appropriate to African womanhood" (Oloko, 2008, p. 113). Such conformity reinforces women's second-class position in society. Diakhaté (2021, p. 70) argues that Oko's decision to rape his wife "results from his deprivation of sex by Esi", which suggests that Oko feels justified to punish Esi for failing in her conjugal duty as his wife. Furthermore, Diakhaté (2021, p. 71) characterises Esi as an African woman "corrupted by Western education and brainwashed by female theories". In addition, Tugume (2016, p. 91) describes Esi as a "female chauvinist, who feels too powerful to be controlled by a man".

It is significant how these scholars' analyses of the novel find fault only with Esi and seem to justify the actions of Oko. Looking at how Esi has been characterised in these studies, the decision she makes to divorce her husband, Oko, after the marital rape feeds into the commonly-held belief that women who are highly educated and express strong opinions cannot fully participate in the successful institution of a traditional heterosexual marriage.

Existing scholarship on Aidoo's novel also construct marriage as a means by which African women access respectability. Oloko (2008, p. 114) interprets Esi's second marriage to Ali as an attempt to "appropriate the social respect which marriage confers on a woman in her [Esi's] society, but on her own terms rather than that of her society". Oloko (2008, p. 114) further argues that Aidoo's novel "demonstrates how, in a changing society, the freedom sought by women can complicate their condition when not handled effectively". Oloko's words suggest that there's a 'right' or acceptable way in which women need to handle the freedom they are given. Esi's actions then are seen as the actions of a woman incapable of managing freedom. Women's freedom is then projected as a negative force that can cause societal upheaval if not carefully controlled. It is not difficult to read the patriarchal ideologies embedded in the views of Oloko about Esi.

The studies on Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story* reviewed here reveal how much responsibility is put upon women to ensure the success of a marriage and the growth and stability of a family. They seem to agree on the expectation of women to fulfil their given gender roles of wife and mother and putting aside any other pursuits that may hinder their performance of these feminine responsibilities. In this chapter, I seek to differ from the above literature by shifting critical lens from femininity to masculinity as I aim to interrogate Aidoo's representation of masculinity in this novel. My analysis centres on the hypermasculine performances by the male characters that stand in the way of gender justice in society presented in the novel. In the section that follows, I look at how patriarchy works in tandem with masculinity to forestall gender justice.

5.4 Patriarchy and Masculinity

The institution of patriarchy is one that has governed and informed many African societies for countless years. It has its interests and beliefs in promoting the superiority of the man and the inferiority of the woman to ensure a 'harmonious' heterosexual society that is maintained by gendered roles. In so doing, an unequal power divide exists which conditions both men and women to be on opposite sides of the gender spectrum, leading them to relatively think of themselves consciously or unconsciously as superior or inferior. Patriarchy as an ideology has been defined as "a set of social relations between men, which have a material base and create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women" (Coetzee, 2001, p. 301). Patriarchy achieves its objective of a male-led society by setting apart the man and giving him enough power to subordinate others [women] to continue the 'natural' order of gender. Mshweshwe (2020, p. 1) notes that "the patriarchal cultural beliefs and traditions that emphasize male assertiveness and domination of women influence the constructions of masculinity". By setting apart the man, patriarchy also lays out a set of beliefs, values and behaviours that need to be mimicked by the man in order to maintain his control and power over the inferior gender. These beliefs, values and behaviours collectively form and define masculinity, while the exaggeration of masculine performance is displayed in the form of hypermasculinity. Chapter 3 of this study pointed out that masculinity is not innate, but is rather socially constructed and prescribed. Nyanzi et al. (2009) claim that these prescriptions can start as early as the day a man is born, because he already has his path set out for him, since he is

separated from females and is moulded into manhood through conditioned masculine behaviours. Chapter 3 also conceptualised African masculinity in relation to femininity. Nyanzi et al. (2009, p. 78) extend this discussion by noting that “in their [society’s] discussion about what constitutes maleness or masculinity, there is a tendency to define what is masculine by discussing what is socially proscribed against females”. In other words, in defining masculinity by dictating what and how it should be enacted, femininity is then established as the opposite of masculinity. Thus, despite Aidoo’s novel being praised for being a progressive feminist novel that depicts a “thought provoking portrayal of African women’s redefined roles” (Curry, 2011, p. 179), one cannot turn a blind eye to the conditioned masculine behaviour being enacted by the male characters. Their masculinity tightens the shackles around women’s freedom and empowerment. Aidoo successfully focuses on rewriting femininity in her novel and demonstrating two very similar yet different female characters who represent modern working women who inspire, support and empower one another. However, this utopia that she tries to present in her novel falls short because she fails to rewrite the masculinities found in Ghanaian society. As a result, her female characters still in one way or another suffer at the hands of the male characters in the novel who bear problematic forms of masculine performances. The male characters represented by Aidoo are all constructed from patriarchal ideals and attitudes that contribute to gender inequality. They promote the institutions and beliefs that view women as being part of the inferior group, while serving their own interests as men. They partake in certain practices, such as polyamory, for their own benefit.

5.4.1 Polyamorous and polygamous masculinities

In Aidoo’s novel *Changes: A Love Story*, the practice of polyamory by the male characters is a recurring theme that is not considered taboo within African society, because African masculinities have oftentimes been defined in terms of sexuality. In this study’s conceptual framework, it was demonstrated that heterosexual masculinities are characterised by male sexual prowess. This prowess of male sexuality is usually in the form of polyamory, which is defined as the practice of non-monogamy (Klesse, 2014). Polyamorous behaviour has not only been normalised in many African societies, but it is an expectation for men to freely practice their heterosexuality by having multiple sexual relationships with women, and it is

presumably only through such promiscuous practices that one can acquire the true social status of ‘real’ manhood (Nyanzi et al., 2009). Tugume (2016, p. 99) notes that Aidoo’s male characters “relate to the women protagonists through sexual contact”, meaning that the male characters objectify the female characters sexually, in and outside of marriage. Gqola (2015, p. 8) warns that this sexual objectification is something that overtime has been socialised for us to “believe that this is the function of women’s bodies – to please men sexually and symbolically”. It implies that it is the duty of women to avail themselves for this sexual objectification, while it is the role of men to actively objectify women. This entitled sexual expression is seen as a societal expectation for the male characters in Aidoo’s novel.

Sackeyfio and Sackeyfio (2007, p. 90) analyse Ali’s character as a ‘womaniser’ who uses his charm to attain what he wants. His marriage to Fusena is a typical African heterosexual marriage that necessitates Fusena’s career taking a ‘backseat’ to allow her husband’s career to ascend, while Ali seems to engage in extra-marital affairs that Fusena never challenges. Aidoo writes that “there was an unspoken agreement between them not to talk about these affairs, that was all” (p. 78). Ali’s extra-marital affairs are seen here as nothing more than a common masculine practice, with Fusena understanding the power difference that separates her and Ali, leading to her never questioning Ali’s polyamorous masculine performances. Fusena never confronts her husband for his promiscuous lifestyle, because she too understands her subservient position as a wife to Ali and has also been socialised into believing that men are allowed and expected to have multiple sexual partners as a way of exercising their heterosexual masculinity.

Throughout the novel, nothing is mentioned or suggested that Kubi, Opokuya’s husband, has any mistresses or steps out of his marriage. However, toward the end of the novel he makes a bold move by making sexual advances on his wife’s best friend, Esi. Kubi’s bold move is very much hypocritical because previously, throughout the course of the novel, he had shown some form of resentment towards Esi for divorcing Oko, whom he considered a friend. Ironically, this resentment is forgotten when he tries to comfort Esi sexually in her moment of weakness and vulnerability. Kubi’s sexual advances on Esi are described by Tugume as insensitive (2016), as he tries to engage in sexual intercourse with Esi, not because there is something lacking

in his marriage or that Esi initiated the advances, but simply because he can. He can then be read as a heterosexual man embodying promiscuous masculinity. In the moment of seeking sexual gratification, he objectifies Esi and views her as something to use merely to entertain his sexual desires. Therefore, he prioritises his own needs and does not even stop to think about the immorality of engaging in such behaviour with his wife's best friend and his friend's ex-wife. Baloyi (2013) notes that one sided practices such as polyamory within a heterosexual society not only promote the suppression of women but also put them at risk of contracting various sexually transmitted diseases that have been stigmatised, thereby further alienating them in society.

More commonly in African societies, polygamy has been practised as a more culturally open, recognised and acceptable form of polyamory. Ndabayakhe and Addison (2008, p. 89) point out that polygamy "remains a sign of the reconstituted patriarchy still prevailing in many African societies today". It can be said that the 'p' in polygamy is representative of patriarchy, as polygamy seeks to achieve the objectives of patriarchy, because for the women involved, they are forced to compromise or rather sacrifice much and suffer at the expense of the men benefitting from this institution. This makes polygamy a sexist practice. Azuike (2020, p. 3) notes that "African culture permits a man to marry as many wives as 'he can afford' and to cheat on his wife without any feeling of remorse [while] on the other hand a woman cannot practice polyandry [marrying more than one man] under any law or cultural circumstance". It is evident from this statement that the practice of polygamy is there to suit men and their needs and overall is viewed as a masculine performance that not only disregards women but also oppresses them. Ratele (2006, p. 173) endorses the idea of polygamy being an oppressive practice by defining it as a "patriarchal view of sex which promotes male supremacy and perpetuates the gender imbalance in society". Polygamy has also been defined as "a culturally determined, socially acceptable and legally recognised form of permanent marriage where a man has more than one wife at a time" (Gaskiyane, 2000, p. 97 as cited in Baloyi, 2013, p. 166). Therefore, it can also be understood as a more 'ethical' and 'moral' form of polyamory, because it is usually undertaken with the wife's knowledge, although there are exceptions when it is contracted without her knowledge or approval.

In Aidoo's novel, polygamy is also a central theme that persists throughout, with various characters, including the protagonists, being involved in it. Prior to the ending of Oko and Esi's marriage, Aidoo points out that Oko's family had been planting seeds of polygamy to help him expand his lineage, because his wife Esi was very satisfied with having only one child and for them one child is never sufficient for an African man. In this case, Oko's family is seen encouraging Oko to adopt polygamous masculinity, because in their view this is normal. The novel states:

> The fact that his mother and sisters were always complaining to him about the unsafety of having only one child only made him feel worse. One of them even suggested that he did himself a favour by trying to be interested in other women. That way, he could perhaps make some other children 'outside'. (p. 8)

Oko's thoughts quoted above provide a common reason for polygamy within African societies: men's quest for additional children and in some cases a quest specifically for male children. It also exposes the sad reality of how polygamy is not only promoted by men, but is also sometimes promoted by women, which is ironic because women are expected to show care for one another. For African men, having many children is desirable, because "a traditional man needs many children (especially sons) to ensure the survival of the lineage and to increase his power within the clan" (Nhlapo, 1992, p. 143 as cited in Baloyi, 2013, p. 169). Therefore, in Oko's case, it is not only having one child that is stressful, but also the fact that he has a daughter and, thus, no male heir to carry on his family name. Polygamy is often seen and used as a solution in the case of infertility within a heterosexual marriage (Boloyi, 2013). However, in the case of Oko and Esi, Oko's family sees it as a solution not because Esi is infertile, but because she does not wish to bear any more children. Aidoo also casually mentions how Fusena was almost married into polygamy, prior to marrying Ali; her suitor was described as "an important man in the government with lots of years between him and Fusena, lots of other wives, lots of new money and heavy political power" (p. 58). Although it is unclear as to why the suitor seeks to accumulate more wives, Baloyi notes that "monogamy has been associated with people of lower social class" (2013, p. 164), while Precious and Onyango (2020, p. 806) suggest that "polygamy was encouraged in society by the desire of men to accumulate". Therefore, the suitor's polygamous route can be seen as an attempt to show that he has the power and

wealth to acquire as many (young) wives as he can, thereby embodying materialist masculinity.

The central polygamous relationship in this novel is the one between Ali and Esi. In adopting a very different approach from his previous extra-marital affairs, Ali makes the major decision to make Esi his second wife. On the one hand, Aidoo uses this polygamous marriage between Ali and Esi as an emancipatory act for Esi, who willingly enters this second marriage for its convenience because it serves her in the sense that she 'gets to have her cake and eat it too' i.e., she has the freedom she desires within the security of marriage. For Esi, this polygamous marriage allows her to still have the comfort of a man, but since that man does not live with her, she is excused from the expected duties of a wife and, thus, has more time for building her career as a modern working independent woman. On the other hand, Aidoo's attempt to emancipate Esi, through this polygamous marriage, has the opposite effect for Ali's first wife, Fusena, who is further oppressed by this arrangement. Aidoo writes from Fusena's point of view and states: "and now here was Ali telling her [Fusena] that he was thinking of making a woman with a university degree his second wife" (p. 67). Ali does not feel it is necessary to first have a conversation with his wife or get her opinion on the second marriage; instead he just tells Fusena as if his decision will not impact their marriage and, ultimately, her life as well. As previously highlighted in the study's conceptual framework in Chapter 3, African men have an expected role to play within their families as head of the household, meaning that all decisions lie with the man, while women are expected to take on a subservient role. Therefore, Ali's instructing of Fusena on a decision that he has taken that affects their union constitutes his enacting a domineering masculinity, because his close-ended decision silences Fusena's feelings and options as his wife. Ndabayakhe and Addison (2008, p. 102) point out that "polygamy is a stumbling block in the path of female emancipation and self-expression", and the credibility of this view is clearly seen in the fact that Ali denies Fusena a voice on the matter, further reinforcing how polygamy seeks to achieve the objectives of patriarchy by protecting and promoting the privileges of the man at the expense of the woman.

Moreover, when Ali proposes to an unsure Esi, he reassures her by telling her how common the practice of polygamy is in their society, that it is not only driven by religion

but also by culture: “We have marriages in Africa, Esi. In Muslim Africa. In non-Muslim Africa. And in our marriages a man has a choice to have one or more wives” (p. 90). Ali’s statement once again reinforces the culturally sexist basis of polygamy and ultimately highlights how the religious basis of polygamy also promotes the principles of patriarchy (Faucon, 2015), because it only provides the man with a choice and not the woman. Moolman (2017, p. 45) points out that “masculinity and hence male privilege are implicitly established and promoted through authorised power and systems of legitimacy such as customary practices”. Therefore, polygamy offers men both the choice of taking multiple wives and the power to do so, laying the ground for them to embody powerful masculinities. Effectively, while Aidoo can be praised for presenting in her novel self-emancipated African women who embody the ideals of African feminism, she stands guilty of parading in this novel polyamorous and polygamous masculinities that do little to advance the African feminist cause of gender equality, complementarity and justice.

5.4.2 Entitled and powerful masculinities

Patriarchy creates and fosters the unequal power divide between genders in society. It achieves this stance through enacted heterosexual masculinities that believe in the ‘natural’ hierarchy of men as superior and women as inferior. One cannot talk about masculinity as being unrelated to power because as Holter (2005, p. 26) points out, “masculinity is deeply entangled with power”, and that power is usually misused in a way that oppresses women and strips them of their voice within social spaces. One of the most common ways in which men within society tend to exercise their power over women and entitlement over their bodies is through violent sex, more especially rape. Heilman and Barker (2018, p.18) note that sexual violence “is an avenue for men to exert their unjust yet socially sanctioned power and control over women’s bodies and sexual agency”. Gqola (2015, p. 14) identifies rape as an “exercise of patriarchal violent power against those who are safe to violate”. Therefore, men who embody these raping masculinities target their victims and chose to exert their power over those whom they regard as inferior. We see this clearly demonstrated in the beginning of Aidoo’s novel, when an early morning argument between Oko and his wife Esi results in him forcing himself onto Esi and raping her.

> Oko flung the bed cloth away from him and sat up, pulled her down and moved on her. Esi started to protest. But he went on to doing what he had determined to do all morning. He squeezed her breast repeatedly, thrust his tongue into her mouth, forced her unwilling legs apart, entered her, plunging in and out of her, thrashing to the left, to the right, pounding away. Then it was all over. Breathing like a marathon runner at the end of a particularly gruelling race, he got off her, and fell heavily back on his side of the bed. (p.9)

Aidoo's choice of diction with verbs such as 'plunging', 'thrashing' and 'pounding' demonstrate violence – this marital rape is a sexual violation of women, like any other form of rape. Additionally, Aidoo's simile which compares Oko to a 'marathon runner' demonstrates aggressive masculinity. This aggressive performance embodied by Oko illustrates the competitive nature of marathon runners, who always want to outrun their competitors. Symbolically, like marathon runners, rapists always want to outperform other men by showing domination over the female bodies within their reach. Therefore, Oko's act of sexual violence on Esi can be seen, not as driven by sexual deprivation, but as premeditated. It is Oko's attempt to regain the power that he feels he is entitled to as a 'man', because it comes after he had told Esi that his friends were questioning his manhood due to the state of his marriage: "My friends are laughing at me … they think I'm not behaving like a man" (p. 8). For Oko, masculinity is defined by power and being able to control one's wife. Therefore, resorting to rape is the only way that he thinks he can prove to himself that his friends are wrong and that he is indeed a 'real' man who still has power. His behaviour reinforces Moolman's point that "heterosexual masculinity is not only about what a male says or does about sex, but equally about the techniques of power" (Moolman, 2017, p. 56). Oko's actions can also be understood as a way of defending and protecting his masculinity from those (his friends) who have been questioning his manhood because masculinity is not passive, but rather active because it needs to constantly be affirmed and secured (Kiyimba, as cited in Mugumbi & Allan, 2010).

Aidoo writes that after the rape had been concluded, "Oko was collecting his thoughts together. He was already feeling like telling Esi he was sorry. But he was also convinced he mustn't" (p. 10). Oko assures himself that Esi does not deserve an apology for his actions, a fact that Gqola (2015) explains as a common belief held by

men, that sex is something that they are entitled to at any time and from anyone. This also means that rape is a completely foreign concept to rapists. Oko believes that as a man and husband to Esi, he is very much entitled to her body and does not need her consent to engage in sexual intercourse with her, further showing how the hypermasculine man thinks he owns a woman's body. Furthermore, Aidoo never reveals if Esi confides in anybody about the rape nor if she reports it to the authorities. However, the reader assumes that she does not, because in her conversations with Opokuya, whenever Esi is questioned about what happened between her and Oko that resulted in their divorce, she avoids giving a definite answer. Esi herself battles with believing that she has been raped or, more specifically, with believing that marital rape actually exists. Gqola (2015, p. 6) accounts for this very rigid view of rape held by society and blames patriarchy for it, as she argues that a patriarchal society "seduces us into thinking that rape only looks a certain way and therefore we should only believe rape when it fits into that very narrow idea". Esi struggles to grasp the fact that being forced against your will to engage in sexual intercourse by her husband actually amounts to being raped. This uncertainty is due to the commonly held belief that men are entitled to engage in sexual activities with women and, more especially, with their wives. From an African feminist perspective, one can then argue that the collapse of Esi's marriage is not the result of her pursuit of a career but rather the devastating consequence of entitled heterosexual masculinity.

Throughout the novel, Aidoo occasionally mentions Ali's father and when she does, his name always appears within the same sentence as the words 'young virgins':

> Like most men everywhere and from time to time immemorial – who have been able to pay for the luxury – Ali's father preferred his women young and tender. They had to be virgins of course. (p. 23)

Ali's father displays exploitative masculinity as he shamelessly uses his power and wealth to lure powerless young girls into sex and abuse their purity. Islamic feminist Mernissi (1982, p.183) argues that the virginity of a female often has very little to do with her and everything to do with the men, because the fate of her purity is always in another man's hands instead of her own: "a man secures his status by controlling the [sexual] movements of women". In Aidoo's novel, Ali's father's obsession with virgins

is a true testament of Mernissi's argument because he wants to claim the girls' purity for himself.

Furthermore, men feel the need to exercise possessive power over the women with whom they form a relationship. Smith (1986, p. 104) notes that "possessive power leads to dominating power over persons, in a way which oppresses their humanity". Therefore, for men to mark and claim their territory over women, they ultimately view them as objects, thereby dehumanising them. Aidoo describes Ali as a man who understands boundaries and never approaches women who were already 'spoken for': "growing up from boyhood into a man, he had trained himself never to feel sexually attracted to other men's women" (p. 71). Ali's choice of not becoming involved with women who were romantically involved with other men is definitely not out of respect for the women or their relationship, but rather out of respect for the men with whom they are involved, or rather the men who had 'claimed' them because they are seen as the men's possessions. It is unfortunate for women that, as a result of their relationships, they are deemed to belong to men, while the men are not regarded as belonging to anyone. They are rather seen as individuals who have the choice of free will despite their relationship status, and are thus not judged for displaying promiscuous masculine behaviour. In addition to this fact, impregnating a woman is seen as a man's way of marking his physical territory – the woman. In the novel, Ali and Fusena are married just before Ali is set to further his studies in England and he receives guidance or rather instructions from his elders that he should ensure that he plants his seed in Fusena before he leaves: "One thing both families insisted on was that Ali should make sure that Fusena was pregnant before he left the country" (p. 64). This decision is not based on Ali or Fusena's desire to have children, but it is rather made out of social pressure and the worry that his stay in England will make other men think that Fusena does not 'belong' to another man and is free to be 'taken'. This explains why Nfah-Abbenyi (1997, p. 17) points out that "men and patriarchal ideologies control women's reproduction", because a pregnant woman or a baby equates a man's physical territory. Moreover, later on in the novel, Ali asks Esi to marry him and insists that she wears the ring which he gives her. When Esi protests, Ali informs her that the ring's purpose is "the same reason that any betrothed or married woman would wear any man's ring. To let the rest of the male world know that she is bespoke" (p. 91). Ali is seen here displaying territorial masculinity, because for him the

ring is not a symbol of the eternity of his love for Esi, but it is merely reduced to a physical mark of his ownership of Esi. Entitled and powerful masculinities in Aidoo's novel therefore position the text as failing to rewrite African masculinities. This failure is a massive taint on Aidoo's record as an advocate for gender justice.

5.4.3 Providing masculinities

A patriarchal society is driven by gender hierarchies that are maintained by the prescription of gender specific roles for men and women. Men maintain and enhance their masculinity through adopting and performing their gender roles and also ensuring that they supervise the roles that women perform as well. This study's conceptual framework revealed that there are characteristics that are expected to be embodied by heterosexual or hegemonic masculinities, and these characteristics are in the form of the long-standing gender roles of the man being the economic provider and essentially given the title of head of the household. In *Changes: A Love Story*, Aidoo portrays Ali as a man who continuously flaunts his wealth, thus displaying materialistic masculinity. His materialistic masculine performances are a way of proving or confirming that he is indeed a 'real' man, according to society's gender expectations. Prior to marrying Fusena, Ali worked with her at a school and was comfortable with having her as his colleague and friend, but as soon as they were married, he wanted Fusena to stop working and take on her assumed gender roles as a wife and mother. Aidoo writes that he told Fusena that "he would earn enough to look after all of them" (p. 67). Ali understands that it is a man's responsibility to provide for his family because it is a widely held expectation within society (Stern et al., 2018). In contrast to being providers, women are expected to be caretakers within the household. Ali tries to confirm his masculinity by proving to those around him that he is more than capable of being the economic provider for his family. In many instances, Aidoo writes about Ali sending countless gifts to Esi and taking numerous gifts to Esi's family and friends when he meets them for the first time. Tugume (2016, p. 99) notes that Ali's gestures can be seen as manipulative masculinity because he "uses gifts to bribe her and soften her heart". Beyond being a form of manipulative masculinity, such behaviour is a form of competitive masculinity because Ali is trying to prove he is a better man than Esi's previous husband, Oko. It is his attempt to present himself as a superior provider and the overall alpha male in comparison to Oko. Moreover, the excessive gift-giving can

be seen as Ali trying to defend his masculinity to both himself and those people around him. This highlights the study's conceptualisation of masculinities as being constructed in relation to other men and their masculinities. Overall, Aidoo seems to portray various problematic forms of masculinity that might have grave implications in an English FET classroom.

5.5 Implications of findings for teaching *Changes: A Love Story*

Aidoo's novel *Changes: A Love Story* is a complex novel that contains both empowering and disempowering moments. Thus, in the teaching of this novel, educators need to ensure that the pedagogical approach they employ will allow learners to critically engage with both of the above aspects, rather than neglecting the one and focusing on the other. It needs to be pointed out that in this novel, Aidoo can be given credit for her feminist efforts in the depiction of her female protagonist, Esi. Esi can be viewed as a positive representation of a career-driven woman who, despite the oppressive challenges that she faces, still manages to rise above them and remembers to put her interests and desires first. Her choice at the end of the novel to dismiss Kubi's sexual advances and choose her friendship or rather sisterhood with Kubi's wife, Opokuya, is a central theme that is often depicted in feminist texts, in which women form an unbreakable sisterhood and support system for each other regardless of their circumstances. Esi's character and her sisterhood with Opokuya, therefore, can be critically engaged with in the classroom by analysing how these traits are representative of female empowerment. This sisterhood, as represented by Aidoo, is identified as a central concept of African feminism (Oyewumi, 2002). Therefore, focusing on this theme will promote African feminist ideals that can foster learner empowerment for South African English FET male and female learners.

However, as pointed out earlier, it would be a disservice to the learners to only focus on the 'golden' feminist moments in the novel and neglect the problematic masculinities that stand in the way of feminist objectives. While Aidoo focuses on attempting to empower her female characters and their feminist conditions, she fails to rewrite or reconceptualise the masculinities of her male characters. The analysis of her novel presented above has revealed that there are hypermasculine performances by Aidoo's male characters that cannot be ignored in the South African English FET

classroom. This study's conceptual framework explained how masculinities have been conceptualised by African feminists and among these theories there was a focus on the fluid nature of masculinities and how masculine constructions are easily influenced by society. Therefore, it is of paramount importance for educators to establish critical discussions surrounding the various representations of the masculinities found in Aidoo's novel, to allow the FET boy learners to become conscious of and question their construction of their masculine identities and performances. Ratele et al. (2007, p.112) notes that "adolescence has been foregrounded as a volatile period in which the transition from boyhood to manhood is articulated". FET boy learners are at this transition stage of their development and, thus it is important that the teacher capitalises on teaching them the importance of critiquing or interrogating different forms of masculinities and understanding how easily these practices can be constructed and reconstructed and how such masculinities impact gender injustice. By not adopting a feminist pedagogy that critiques such representations in prescribed literature, educators can contribute to the reproduction of the abuse of masculine power and hypermasculine performances that dominate women and so called 'inferior' men, thus, negatively impacting gender equality in society.

Therefore as discussed in earlier chapters of this dissertation, it is necessary to revert to using literature as a critical tool that allows "learners to understand themselves and their environment" (Simango, 2020, p. 2), through adopting an African critical masculinity pedagogy to help both educators and learners interrogate these problematic masculine representations in the English FET classroom. This African critical masculinity pedagogy requires judicious engagement from both the learner as well as the teacher, and, therefore, fosters development for both. Simango (2020) argues that teachers cannot expect learners to engage critically with literature of their own accord, but rather learners need to be prompted to reach that state of critical thinking. Critical responses will not occur in the English FET classroom through a process of osmosis, but require the educator to pose challenging questions in relation to the text being studied.

5.6 Chapter summary

This chapter analysed the masculinities that are portrayed in Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story.* It revealed how masculinities are used to perpetuate the ideals and objectives of patriarchy. In this analysis, various representations of masculinities were deconstructed, starting with Aidoo's representation of men engaging in polyamory and polygamy. This discussion looked at polyamory and polygamy as sexist practices that seem to only benefit the men in the novel and disregard the needs and wishes of the women involved. The analysis also critiqued masculine power and entitlement over female bodies. It looked at marital rape being used by men as a tool to defend masculinity and regain control over women's bodies. Through this analysis, the existing link between masculine constructions and their entanglement with power was revealed. This chapter analysed the patriarchal idea of men as providers and how this notion reinforces gender roles within society. The analysis revealed how masculine identities, such as materialistic masculinity, prove that masculinities are always in competition with one another as they seek to gain dominance. Lastly, this chapter examined the implications that arise from teaching Aidoo's novel in South African English FET education in relation to learner empowerment, pedagogy and teacher development.

Chapter 6

(Un)Transforming masculinities in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

6.1 Introduction

This chapter serves as a continuation of the study's data analysis that seeks to adopt an African feminist theoretical perspective to interrogate the representations of masculinity in African women's literature, using African feminist knowledge on masculinities. In this chapter, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's debut novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, is analysed and the representations of masculinity that she explores and puts forward are interpreted. Adichie presents key male bodies, namely, Eugene Achike, Father Amadi and Jaja Achike, all of whom portray and enact differing masculinities. This chapter questions and critically discusses the various un-transforming and transforming masculinities presented by Adichie in her novel. The trajectory of this chapter is as follows: a detailed synopsis of *Purple Hibiscus;* a literature review of the novel; an interpretation of the un-transforming dominant masculinities in the novel through a critique of Eugene Achike's character and his embodiment of his masculine performances; the interpretation of Father Amadi's masculine performances as an embodiment of transformed masculinities; an examination of Jaja Achike's construction of his newfound masculinity as a form of transformation; a discussion of the implications that the teaching of this novel and its masculine representations could have on English FET education; and, finally, a chapter summary.

6.2 Synopsis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's 2003 novel *Purple Hibiscus* is narrated through the viewpoint of fifteen-year-old female protagonist, Kambili. Although Kambili is not a confident speaker due to her timidity, her lack of speech does not take away from her heightened sense of sight and observation and she narrates the novel vividly in four parts, inviting the reader into her silent, yet detailed, world.

In the first part of the novel, titled "*Breaking God: Palm Sunday*", readers are introduced to the tensions within the Achike family. The family comprises the father, Eugene Achike, also known as Papa, the mother, Beatrice, and Kambili's older brother, Jaja. In the opening line of the novel, Kambili paints the picture of a chaotic family when she states: "things started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the étagère" (p.1). The phrase "things started to fall apart" is an allusion to Chinua Achebe's highly acclaimed 1958 novel *Things Fall Apart,* and hints at impending tragedy for this Nigerian family. Kambili and her catholic family are returning home from Sunday mass and her father, Eugene, is extremely furious with Jaja for deliberately refusing to take communion. Eugene is a religious extremist and cannot accept the thought of his family member not following and obeying what he considers to be 'the ways of God' and, more especially, the ways of the church. The reader is introduced to Eugene's violent ways when his immediate response to Jaja's rebelliousness is to launch his church missal across the room, an act which results in Beatrice's sentimental ceramic figurines shattering onto the floor. After the encounter, Eugene is served tea, with his children sitting beside him at the dining table, waiting to partake in the family's tradition of taking one sip of his scorching tea that leaves their tongues raw, a practice that Kambili calls the "love sip" which is fittingly the symbol of her father's painful love. However, on this occasion, Eugene does not invite his children to partake in this ritual. The unusual lapse of the family's traditions continues throughout the course of the day, with Jaja dramatically dismissing himself at dinner without fearing the repercussions of his brave but rebellious acts.

Kambili's narration then moves back in time to reveal the events that led up to the fateful Palm Sunday. These events are narrated in the novel's second part titled "*Speaking with Our Spirits: Before Palm Sunday*". The family goes on a Christmas holiday visit to Eugene's home village in Abba, where Eugene organises a feast for the immediate community and is praised for his generosity and philanthropic ways. While there, Eugene unenthusiastically allows both Kambili and Jaja to visit their paternal grandfather, Papa-Nnukwu. However, his strict 'do's' and 'don'ts' for the visit mimic that of a maximum security prison and includes instructing them that they may not under any circumstance stay longer than fifteen minutes and may not eat or touch anything in the house of the 'heathen'. While the Achike family is in Abba, Eugene's

sister, Ifeoma, also visits her brother's family with her three children: Amaka, Obiora and Chima. Aunty Ifeoma, as Kambili refers to her in the novel, insists that Kambili and Jaja must visit her in Nsukka where she lives, before the schools reopen, so that they can bond with their cousins. This is a request to which Eugene surprisingly, yet reluctantly, agrees.

During their visit to Nsukka, Kambili struggles to fit in with Aunty Ifeoma's family and life away from home, because daily procedures are conducted very differently from what she is accustomed to in her Enugu home. Aunty Ifeoma introduces Kambili and Jaja to a life of freedom and, more specifically, freedom of speech – a life that is not constrained by Eugene's strict and suffocating daily schedules. Aunty Ifeoma also introduces Kambili and Jaja to Father Amadi – a catholic priest who, unlike Eugene, is not a religious extremist but rather a moderate version of Eugene's representation of religion. During their time in Nsukka, Papa-Nnukwu falls ill and is fetched from Abba and taken to Aunty Ifeoma's house. Despite their awareness of being forbidden to remain in their grandfather's presence for more than fifteen minutes, Kambili and Jaja do not say anything about the presence of their grandfather to Eugene whenever he calls Aunty Ifeoma's house to speak to them, until he eventually finds out about his children sleeping in the same house as the 'heathen' and furiously fetches them on the morning of Papa-Nnukwu's death.

On their first night back in Enugu, Eugene punishes his children in the most unthinkable way for committing the gravest sin (in his eyes) of sleeping under the same roof as a 'heathen', by pouring boiling water on their feet as an analogy of walking into hell's fire. On another occasion, Eugene enters Kambili's room unannounced and catches her and Jaja looking at a painting of Papa-Nnukwu that they brought back from Nsukka. Eugene rips up the painting in rage, resulting in Kambili's unexpected response that shocks everyone in the room, including herself, when she falls to the floor and holds onto the pieces of the painting in a foetal position. This action leads Eugene to presume that she has been possessed and, as a result, he kicks her hard on her ribs. Kambili later wakes up in the hospital after suffering internal bleeding and broken ribs and requests to speak to Aunty Ifeoma. Beatrice then informs her that she will be going to Nsukka with Jaja as soon as she is discharged from the hospital. During yet another stay in Nsukka, Kambili and Jaja continue exploring their freedom

and finding their voices with the help of Aunty Ifeoma's family and Father Amadi. After a few days, Beatrice arrives in Nsukka in a cab looking battered and informs Aunty Ifeoma, Jaja and Kambili that Eugene had broken a table on her body, resulting in her miscarrying yet another baby. Beatrice later travels back home to Enugu with both Kambili and Jaja.

In the third part of the book titled "*The Pieces of God: After Palm Sunday*", Kambili yet again narrates how unusual things were in their home after that fateful Palm Sunday when Jaja refused to take communion. Eugene slowly starts losing his physical strength and begins to have strange rashes all over his face and, in his weakness, Jaja becomes more and more defiant, telling Eugene that he and Kambili are going to visit their aunt in Nsukka with or without his permission. While in Nsukka, Kambili realises that her feelings for Father Amadi have intensified and confesses her love to him, which he gently rejects. Aunty Ifeoma and her family also receive approval for their American visas for a new start away from the turmoil that is unfolding in Nigeria. Later in the chapter, an unexpected call is made to Aunty Ifeoma's house: Beatrice tells Aunty Ifeoma, Kambili and Jaja that Eugene was found dead in his factory. Kambili and Jaja travel back to Enugu to be with their mother and they are shocked when Beatrice confesses that she has been slowly poisoning Eugene. After discovering the cause of Eugene's death, the police arrive at the Achike home to make an arrest and, to everyone's surprise, Jaja falsely confesses to murdering his father.

Finally, in the fourth and final section of the book titled "*A Different Silence: The Present*", Kambili relays a newfound and free version of herself. She writes letters to Father Amadi who has gone to Europe to continue with his missionary work, and to Amaka who has settled with her family in America. After Jaja has been in prison for three years, Kambili travels to the prison with Beatrice to inform Jaja of the good news of his imminent release from prison.

6.3 A brief review of literature on Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

Purple Hibiscus has been said to contain a "thrust of feminism [although] the brand of feminism is very subtle in the first couple of chapters" (Okuyade, 2009, p. 249). Kambili's character is understood as being "positioned purposefully within the domains

of patriarchal control" (Nwokocha, 2019, p. 369). The representation of the Achike family is quite reflective of an African society, in which the male is the head and, therefore, leader of his family. In addition, Kambili's family is depicted as being paralysed by silence, a silence that maintains the social stratification of a patriarchal household (Nwokocha, 2019). Nwokocha (2019) describes Eugene's character throughout the novel as insensitive to his wife's suffering, pointing out that Eugene's main priority is to dominate his wife and have his family obey him due to his position as a man in society and the head of his family. Eugene resorts to measures of "torture to regulate [desired] behaviour and to enforce compliance" (Nwokocha 2019, p. 371). In addition to being a religious and patriarchal tyrant, Eugene's character has also been analysed and described as "wicked" (Ifechelobi, 2014, p. 20). Adichie is accused of showing Beatrice as a "stereotyped image of African women as subdued, victimised, voiceless and subservient" (Ifechelobi, 2014, p. 24), because Beatrice continues to submit to her husband and does not resist the abuse until much later in the novel. Although Beatrice plays the role of the subservient wife throughout the novel, the shocking revelation that she kills her husband by poisoning him is what Nwokocha (2019) argues to be an act that rejects the victimisation and passiveness imposed within the institution of patriarchy. In other words, Beatrice manages to perform the unthinkable and put an end to her and her children's suffering. Ifechelobi (2014, p. 26) points out that "the sudden death of patriarchy brought freedom and liberation to the household of Eugene Achike". As a result, Kambili and her mother are able to embrace a new era of femininity by the end of the novel.

From the above review, it is evident that there has been extensive analysis of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, with particular focus on her male character, Eugene Achike. However, this chapter's analysis differs from the existing literature in that it looks not just at Eugene's character, but also his masculine identity. It attempts to explain why his embodiment of masculine performances can be understood as un-transforming masculinity. It also analyses how Father Amadi's caring masculinity can be considered transformative, because it is constructed positively in relation to those around him. Lastly, this chapter's analysis also differs from the studies reviewed in this section in that it focuses on Jaja's masculine constructions throughout the novel and showcases the fluidity of his masculine identity.

6.4 Un-transforming dominant masculinities: Eugene Achike

In Chapter 3 of this dissertation in which masculinities are defined and conceptualised, it was shown that masculinity has often been characterised by its desire and need for male dominance over supposedly inferior others – be it on the premise of gender, race or social status. This dominance takes many forms and each time it is exerted on inferior bodies, it reaffirms one's 'true' manliness and maintains the power dynamic that exists between the superior dominant man and the inferior group. Ratele (2011, p. 414) reiterates that dominant masculinities are intertwined with power and "occupy a ruling position in a society or group". This dominant form of masculinity is evident in Adichie's characterisation of Eugene Achike in *Purple Hibiscus*.

Eugene is a devout catholic and a successful businessman who owns wafer and juice-producing factories. He is also the publisher of a newspaper titled *The Standard* which is known for its radical articles that expose the Nigerian government. Eugene not only micromanages all his factories' products and every newspaper article published by his editor, but also rigidly regulates every single aspect of his household. Umezurike (2022) summarises Eugene's character by describing him as a fervent controller who maintains dictatorship through the use of discipline. This is reflective of a dominant masculine identity which sees the man at the forefront leading rather than being led. As indicated previously in the synopsis of the novel, Eugene is furious at his son, Jaja, for omitting to take communion at Mass and is even more infuriated by his son's refusal to accept his equation of the wafer that is given by the priest to the body of the Lord. The reader is given a first glimpse of Eugene's violent masculinity when his response to Jaja's disobedience is to throw an object at him:

> Papa looked around the room quickly, as if searching for proof that something had fallen from the high ceiling, something he had never thought would fall. He picked up the missal and flung it across the room, toward Jaja. It missed Jaja completely, but it hit the glass étageré, which Mama polished often. (p. 7)

Umezurike (2022, p. 570) states that "Eugene valorises and displays hegemonic notions of masculinity and disciplinary power", hence he resorts to any form of violence to reel his family back into his captive perimeters whenever he feels he is losing control

over them. In an interview with Pumla Gqola, Thembinkosi Goniwe (2005, p. 82) states that masculinity "is obsessed with authority [and] becomes paranoid and apprehensive when its source of authority is probed". Therefore, Eugene's resorting to violence illustrates how dominant masculinities often adopt hegemonic masculine performances when feeling threatened.

Furthermore, Eugene's obsessive control over his family sends a wave of crippling fear throughout his household. Okuyade (2009, p. 247) describes the Achike household as "capacious yet stifling and the bedrooms as roomy yet stuffy", because Eugene keeps his children and his wife imprisoned in their own home, with no free will to do anything without his consent. Gqola (2021) theorises this form of domestic fear and how it works as a masculine tactic to ensure the aims of patriarchy. She explains that "fear is an excellent way to keep people under control because it forces us [inferior beings] to police ourselves" (Gqola, 2021, p.113). Therefore instilling enough fear in his family to the point where they start condemning themselves is Eugene's way of ensuring that they are passive and even unconscious contributors to the hegemonic system. Eugene creates schedules for Kambili and Jaja, dictating every single aspect of their day-to-day life, restricting them from any social time with anyone outside their home. Even when they are not within the same vicinity as himself, Eugene still ensures that they are being watched and micromanaged by someone who will report to him. Eugene has a routine way of acting and cannot be coerced by anyone to deviate from his set ways, beliefs or practices and this situation represents his embodying of un-transforming masculinity.

Eugene's adoptive rigid military-like leadership style highlights his need for dominance and patriarchal control (Sam & Saboro, 2022) over those people he regards as inferior beings, because he gains satisfaction from being the puppet master of those who are passive and silent. This military leadership style embodied by Eugene can be conceptualised as a militant masculine performance. Roy (2022, pp. 44 - 45) notes that "Eugene was aware that to be masculine requires not only self-reliance and self-control but control over other people". Therefore, Eugene's controlling ways can be seen as him enacting his expected masculine power. Ifechelobi (2014, p. 23) points out that "patriarchy leads to silence which in turn leads to fear" and this can be seen in Eugene's dictatorship that produces the desired results for him because he has

trained his family to speak only when spoken to. In the novel, when the Achike family visits Father Benedict's house one Sunday after Mass, Father Benedict commends them for how well-behaved Kambili and Jaja are: "they are always so quiet" (p. 57). The irony here is that the children are not quiet by choice, but rather they are silenced by Eugene. Okuyade (2009, p. 248) notes that such "silencing is not only a mechanism or weapon of patriarchal control but of domestic servitude". Kambili is so used to Papa speaking on her behalf that she does not realise that he even thinks on behalf of his family. In the novel, when Eugene's sister, Ifeoma, suggests that Kambili and Jaja visit her and her family in Nsukka, Eugene answers almost immediately and tells Ifeoma that Kambili and Jaja do not like being away from home (p. 97). Eugene's response is representative of silencing masculinity, because he talks for his children without consulting them. Chiweshe (2018) explains that the act of silencing inferior bodies boldly highlights how dominant masculinity and power function simultaneously.

Furthermore, Eugene is given a God-like status, in his home, community and, ironically, by his church as well. Umezurike (2022, p. 570) highlights that there are "underlying links between masculinity, status and institutions". This fact is evident in the novel because Eugene acquires this God-like status due to his financial success: "He [Eugene] led the way out of the hall, waving at the many hands that reached out to grasp his white tunic, as if touching him would heal them of illness … the men and women all rose when Papa came in" (p.91). There is an allusion here to a biblical scene in which a woman who had suffered from a bleeding condition for twelve years was healed by merely touching the hem of Jesus's garment (Luke 8:44). The use of this biblical allusion confirms Eugene's idolised masculinity that is equated to a God-like status in the eyes of the members of his community and church and they rise in his presence out of respect. Kambili notes how highly Father Benedict speaks of Papa and includes him as part of the Holy Trinity of the church: "during his sermons, Father Benedict usually referred to the pope, Papa, and Jesus – in that order. He used Papa to illustrate the gospel" (p. 4). The intentional capitalisation of Papa and Jesus while the pope is left in lowercase shows just how much status is associated with Eugene and also implies that he is probably seen as being more worthy of respect than the pope himself. People blindly follow Eugene as if he is leading them to the 'promised land'. Kambili notes that Eugene is worshiped both in and outside of the church and given a status that is unattainable by any other man because "he is the accepted model

of maleness and a god-equivalent" (Sam & Saboro, 2022, p. 101). His family worships him out of fear, while the larger community worships him in admiration of his wealth.

At the end of the novel when Eugene is murdered, Kambili struggles to come to terms with the death: "I had never considered the possibility that Papa would die, that Papa could die. He was different from Ade Coker, from all the other people they had killed. He had seemed so immortal" (p. 287). Kambili is not mourning or shocked because she has lost a parent, but rather because it is Eugene who has died – someone she never associated with death. This immortal status further reiterates the un-transformative nature of the masculinity embodied by Eugene, because the comparison to God implies perfection, thus making him exempt from any transformation.

In addition, during their Christmas visit to Abba, the village chief comes to see Eugene in his home and this situation is a big shock to Amaka, Aunty Ifeoma's daughter, because it is unusual for the chief to pay such visits because of the status that a chief has: "I thought the Igwe [chief] was supposed to stay at his palace and receive guests. I didn't know he visits people's homes … I guess that's because your father is a Big Man" (p. 91). The chief's unusual gesture shows that he believes that Eugene's status as a wealthy man is greater than his as chief. Kambili reveals that Eugene is given public acknowledgment and awards for his "philanthropic" activities of helping the poor: "they did the big story on him after Amnesty World gave him a human rights award" (p. 5). The fact that Eugene receives a human rights award is highly ironic because he lacks humanity and violates Kambili, Jaja and Beatrice's right to both freedom of speech and protection from harm, by silencing them and abusing them both mentally and physically. The portrayal of Eugene's character throughout the novel proves to be both contradictory and hypocritical (Sam & Saboro, 2022).

Eugene's 'philanthropic' ways can be tied to patriarchy because he helps others as a way of maintaining masculine control and power over them. Thus, he refuses to help people who will not 'dance to the beat of his drum' and submit both to him and Catholicism. Gqola (2015) theorises this as an embodiment of heroic masculinity. However, it has very little to do with true saviourship and everything to do with power, status and control. Okuyade (2009) characterises Eugene as a materialistic being who

does not have a genuine connection with those around him but, instead, buys his relationships. The novel unravels the complex relationship that exists between Eugene and his biological father, Papa-Nnukwu. The challenges in this relationship result from the differing belief that each holds, with Eugene being a reformed devout Catholic and Papa-Nnukwu being an unreformed traditionalist. Eugene has the ability to provide for this father's needs, but he chooses to punish him by withholding his financial assistance, because Papa-Nnukwu refuses to conform to Catholicism. Kambili recounts how Papa-Nnukwu had relayed the story to them:

> Papa-Nnukwu had told the umunna [council] how Papa had offered to build him a house, buy him a car, and hire him a driver, as long as he converted and threw away the chi in the thatch shrine in his yard. (p. 61)

Eugene struggles with a severe superiority complex and blurs the lines between God's truth and his truth. He sees himself as being a personal servant of God set on Earth with the purpose of maintaining the righteousness of the people of his community. However, he fails to realise how unrighteous he is. In the novel, it is his sister, Ifeoma, who comments on his narcissist tactics: "Eugene has to stop doing God's job. God is big enough to do his own job" (p. 95). He has long prayer sessions with his family during which he prays for everyone whom he believes is ungodly and reprimands people for their ungodly behaviour, as if he is God's personal shepherd who has been put in charge of the herd. One of Eugene's consistent disciplinary measures is the use of violence as a way of achieving the desired results, but he masks this act by implying he is doing it on God's behalf: "He enacts violence on his family in the name of piety" (Umezurike, 2022, p. 566). Eugene claims to enforce violence to get his victims to submit to God, when in actuality he is enforcing violence and inflicting fear so that his victims will submit to him. Eugene's actions are extremely hypocritical for a man who considers himself a pious Catholic: he looks down on people who submit to other traditional gods yet he wants his victims to bow down to him. Although Eugene might claim to be the embodiment of the tenets of Catholicism and what it represents as a church, he does not represent any of these principles in his home (Ann, 2015). His unrighteous acts are the result of his judgemental stance, not loving his traditional neighbours, abusing his family and idolising himself.

Eugene's tyrannical acts know no limits as is portrayed in the novel when he hits his wife, Beatrice, Jaja and Kambili one Sunday morning before mass because he had caught his wife and son 'helping' Kambili to break her fast by eating cereal so that she could take Panadol for her menstrual cramps:

> He unbuckled his belt slowly. It was a heavy belt made of layers of brown leather with a sedate leather-covered buckle. It landed on Jaja first, across his shoulder. Then Mama raised her hands as it landed on her upper arm, which was covered by the puffy sequined sleeve of her church blouse. I put the bowl down just as the belt landed on my back…as he swung his belt at Mama, Jaja, and me, muttering that the devil would not win. We did not move more than two steps away from the leather belt that swished through the air. Then the belt stopped, and Papa stared at the leather in his hand. His face crumpled; his eyelids sagged. "Why do you walk into sin?" he asked. "Why do you like sin?" (p. 202)

Despite there clearly being a valid reason why Kambili had to break her fast, her father's complete disregard for her situation and inconsiderate response demonstrates the ideals of patriarchy that do not wish to understand or empathise with the female body but rather seek to inflict pain and suffering on such bodies, because they are viewed as objects rather than as humans. Ifechelobi (2014, p. 18) points out that the "underlying factor in patriarchy is power and status". In addition, as was noted in Chapter 3, some forms of masculinity gain and maintain power from oppressing and controlling inferior groups (Dlamini, 2015). Masculinity and power are linked in Eugene's actions as his actions are the embodiment of powerful masculinity. He also lacks self-conviction because he accuses his family of walking into sin and he makes them believe that they are to blame for his abusive acts. This psychological tactic that Eugene employs on his family, together with his violent disciplinary measures, can be identified as a form of 'gaslighting'. Gaslighting is defined as "a type of psychological abuse aimed at making victims seem 'crazy', creating a surreal interpersonal environment" (Sweet, 2019, p. 851). Eugene's whole family, especially Kambili, suffer severely from the effects of his gaslighting. Kambili develops Stockholm syndrome – a psychological response performed by victims of abuse whereby they form fictitious emotional connections with their perpetrators (Adorjan et al., 2012). Kambili admires

Papa and does not see him as her abuser, because he has invaded her psyche and made her believe that her supposed wrongdoing is responsible for all the incidents of his abuse and that she deserves to suffer for letting her father down.

In addition, Eugene's disciplining of his wife with a belt, like a child, shows how little he thinks of her, a situation that again promotes the ideals of patriarchy that thrive on female subordination and oppression (Ifechelobi, 2014). Also, the novel recounts that Eugene's physical abuse is responsible for the multiple miscarriages endured by Beatrice. On one occasion while Kambili and Jaja are visiting Aunty Ifeoma in Nsukka, Beatrice arrives unannounced after a brief hospital admission due to another miscarriage as a result of being severely beaten by her husband:

> … that small table where we keep the family Bible, nne? Your father broke it on my belly…My blood finished on that floor even before he took me to St. Agnes. My doctor said there was nothing he could do to save [the baby]. (p. 248)

Eugene's lack of self-control shows itself once more because he fails to realise that beating Beatrice whilst pregnant and eventually causing the death of their unborn child could be deemed a form of murder, which is a sin in Christianity. He exercises his masculine control by choosing what he puts value on (Hillman, 2019) and his wife and children – both born or unborn – are at the bottom of his value chain.

In addition, one of Eugene's most tyrannical punishments of his children happens on the night that he fetches Jaja and Kambili from Nsukka, after learning that they have been sleeping under the same roof as their 'heathen' grandfather. He chooses to act as God on Kambili and Jaja's 'judgment day', deciding that a fitting punishment for their 'sin' would be to pour boiling water on their feet, because the pain they suffer is equivalent to the 'burning pits of hell'.

> He lowered the kettle into the tub, and tilted it toward my feet. He poured the hot water on my feet, slowly, as if he were conducting an experiment and wanted to see what would happen. He was crying now, tears streaming down his face. I saw the moist steam before I saw the water. I watched the water leave the kettle, flowing almost in slow motion in an arc to my feet. The pain of

> contact was so pure, so scalding, I felt nothing for a second. And then I screamed. (p. 194)

Eugene's crying while punishing his children can be viewed as yet another psychological trick that serves to manipulate and "provoke reassurances from his victims" (Stobie, 2010, p. 427). This behaviour can be related to the previously mentioned concept of gaslighting, because Eugene is inflicting one of the most intense forms of pain on Kambili, yet he victimises himself by crying, thus coercing his 'victims' into believing that he suffers the most at the expense of their 'sins'. Once again, he blurs the line between himself and God, because he says that he is punishing them for disobeying God, yet he finds a way to make himself the focus of such behaviour. His actions evince a perverse masculinity in which he resorts to the 'feminine' act of crying while enacting a most cruel deed.

In addition, the novel relates that during Jaja's childhood years, he was punished so severely by Eugene that he lost a piece of his finger:

> When he was ten, he had missed two questions on his catechism test and was not named the best in his First Holy Communion class. Papa took him upstairs and locked the door. Jaja, in tears, came out supporting his left hand with his right, and Papa drove him to St. Agnes hospital. Papa was crying, too, as he carried Jaja in his arms like a baby all the way to the car. Later, Jaja told me that Papa had avoided his right hand because it is the hand he writes with. (p. 145)

Okuyade describes Eugene Achike as "a pack of contrast" (2009, p. 254) because he obsesses over his children striving for perfection, yet he himself is also an imperfect human being. It is also ironic that Eugene is the one who cries, yet he is the one who hurts his son. Additionally, there is irony in the way that Eugene carries Jaja like a baby to the car, yet he also treats him like an outcast. Eugene has a very unrealistic understanding of what it means to be human and an even more distorted view of Christianity as a whole because he views "perfection as a symbol of piety" (Umezurike, 2022, p. 574) even though the bible shows in different gospels how God still uses unrighteous people as his servants instead of dismissing them because of their

imperfections. Eugene understands masculine dominance as being acquired through violence. Umezurike (2022, p. 575) notes that Eugene "reinforces the notion that masculinity is inseparable from violence, and it is constitutive of fear", hence he is overwhelmed when Kambili does not fear him or his punishment when he catches her looking at the painting of Papa-Nnukwu that her cousin Amaka gave her. Eugene beats Kambili like an animal and she sustains a broken rib and internal bleeding when she boldly falls to the ground to clutch the pieces of the painting to her chest after he had ripped it: "'Get up!' Papa said again. I still did not move. He started to kick me. The metal buckles on his slippers stung like bites from giant mosquitoes" (p. 210). Eugene's panic/reflex response can be seen as evidence of what happens when men feel that their masculinity and the patriarchal system at large are threatened: they try to maintain their control through extreme forms of violence. Effectively, their masculine anxiety becomes a root cause for masculine violence.

At the end of the novel, Beatrice frees herself and her children from Eugene by slowly poisoning him until he dies. Ann (2015) notes that Beatrice's drastic action is a radical feminist response to Eugene's patriarchal domination and violence because it is the only way that their 'freedom' can be ensured. Eugene's masculine identities are in line with un-transforming masculinity. Although his masculinity is heavily influenced by the colonial ideal, as well as patriarchy, he forecloses his masculine identities and allows for no further masculine reconstruction. His masculine identities are rigid and can be equated with hypermasculinity, because his masculine performances continuously contribute to the oppression and subordination of those around him. Adichie's representation of Eugene is similar to Aidoo's representation of Oko and Ali in *Changes: A Love Story* as all three men enact forms of masculinity that oppress women and other weak bodies such as children. In this respect, both Adichie and Aidoo can be said to brandish in their texts uninspiring models of masculinity for their readers. The difference between them, however, is that Adichie makes an attempt to offer a counterfoil to Eugene's problematic masculinity while Aidoo's novel offers no such counter representation.

6.5 Inspirational masculinities: Father Amadi

In contrast to Eugene, Adichie presents the reader with an alternative form of African masculinity that is represented by Father Amadi. Her representation of Father Amadi as an alternate, gentle and inspirational masculinity brings hope to the reader as we see positive transforming forms of masculinity that Aidoo failed to represent in her novel. Father Amadi and Eugene Achike are two males who both share a love, devotion and passion for Catholicism, yet they enact contrasting forms of masculinity. Stobie (2010) describes Father Amadi as a breath of fresh air while Sam and Saboro (2022, p. 109) describe him as "an embodiment of the hope of Africa" because he takes on contemporary masculinities that seek to redefine and reform African traditional masculinities. Umezurike (2022, p. 575) notes that "Father Amadi plays a significant role in the transformation of Eugene's children" because he subtly teaches them, especially Kambili, to locate the voices that have been frozen in their throats by fear and to make use of them. Father Amadi understands that he can only help people within his own capabilities and does not have to hijack God's throne in order to perform the Lord's work. Umezurike (2022, p. 575) states that "Father Amadi shows that one can be a catholic and remain empathetic with the other". Father Amadi's empathy stems from his humanity, not his religion, and that is why he is able to help those around him, whether they share the same religious beliefs or not. Father Amadi uses his masculinity not to oppress inferior groups, but rather "acknowledges the suffering of others" (Umezurike, 2022, p. 570). Although he is not oblivious to social gender hierarchies, he chooses not to be an agent that reinforces those gendered roles and hierarchies. This is evidenced in how he invites Kambili to play football with him (p. 149), showing that he does not associate football with gender. In addition, Father Amadi does not naively adopt all the Western ideals of Catholicism. He still incorporates Igbo songs in his prayers to acknowledge his culture and to appeal to his community. Thus, his "performances of piety demonstrate that masculinity can be reformed" (Umezurike, 2022, p. 570).

Furthermore, Father Amadi presents the reader with a gentle-type masculinity through his interactions with Kambili. He redefines the concept of masculinity for Kambili and teaches her that violence and dominance are not always a mirror reflection of masculinity. Fischer (2016, p. 12) notes that the reader sees Kambili's conception of

masculinity change when her “attention shifts from admiring and fearing Eugene to admiring and longing for Amadi”. Father Amadi cares for Kambili and takes her to have her hair dressed – an action that shocks the hairdresser, Mama Joe, because this type of progressive masculinity is considered rare and almost non-existent in African societies. Mama Joe tells Kambili that “a man does not bring a young girl to dress her hair unless he loves that young girl, I am telling you. It does not happen” (p. 238). The hairdresser’s reaction shows her assumption that generous masculine displays must stem from selfish interest, because she believes Father Amadi would likely expect sexual favours from Kambili in return for spending money on her.

Moreover, later in the novel when Kambili confesses her love for Father Amadi, his rejecting response is unexpected, yet commendable, because he does not take advantage of Kambili’s naivety:

> I said, ‘I love you.’ He turned to me with an expression that I had never seen, his eyes almost sad. He leaned over the gear and pressed his face to mine. I wanted our lips to meet and hold, but he moved his face away. ‘You are almost sixteen, Kambili. You are beautiful. You will find more love than you will need in a lifetime’. (p. 276)

Although Adichie does not reveal Father Amadi’s age at any point in the novel, his rejection of Kambili’s declaration of love can be viewed and understood as his consideration of the age gap that exists between Kambili and himself. His rejection can also be tied to his vow of celibacy in priesthood (Stobie, 2010). Thus, Father Amadi’s ability to remain true to his vow and beliefs as a Catholic priest by gently rejecting Kambili and telling her that there is more to life than she has so far experienced is a complete contrast to Eugene’s practice of forcefully thrusting his beliefs onto others. Adichie subtly crafts Father Amadi’s character, leading the reader to believe that his embodiment of gentle and considerate masculinity is what other male bodies should be inspired by and aspire to. This aspect is what was profoundly absent in Aidoo’s *Changes: A Love Story*. Nevertheless, one fault that can be attributed to Adichie is that she makes the problematic and un-transforming masculinity of the main character the focus of her novel, instead of centring Father Amadi’s transforming masculinity.

6.6 New-found masculinities: Jaja

Jaja constructs his masculinity gradually throughout the novel by considering what kind of man he does not want to be through his interactions with his father and deciding what kind of man he wants to be through his interactions with his sister, Kambili, his mother, Beatrice, his aunt, Ifeoma, and his cousin, Obiora. Swain (2005, p. 213) explains how different contexts contribute to the construction of young masculinities and states that they offer young boys "ways of being male and possibilities for forming views of themselves and relations with others". In the novel, Nsukka becomes a very influential site for Jaja that helps him construct his expressive masculinity. *Purple Hibiscus* reveals Jaja's journey of self-discovery as he constructs his own form of masculine identity, which is very different from that of his father. From very early on in the novel, Jaja enacts a defiant masculinity, which is very much in keeping with his name. We learn from Aunty Ifeoma that Jaja takes after his namesake, the historical figure, Jaja of Opobo.

> Ifeoma turned to Jaja and added, 'I told your mother that it was an appropriate nickname, that you would take after Jaja of Opobo.'
> 'Jaja of Opobo? The stubborn king?' Obiora asked.
> 'Defiant,' Aunt Ifeoma said. 'He was a defiant king.' (p. 144)

Here we see an example of historical allusion, which is defined as the "phenomenon of one historian closely reproducing another" (Leven, 2011, p. 8). From Aunty Ifeoma's perspective, Jaja is a replica of the defiant king Jaja of Opobo who launched an intensive battle against colonial domination of trade in the Opobo territory of Nigeria, located in present Rivers State and Akwa Ibom State. This historical allusion illuminates Jaja's character as a person defiant for a good cause. His masculinity is therefore constructed as a saving masculinity.

In the opening scene of the novel, Jaja makes a bold statement when he purposefully misses communion at Sunday Mass; his actions proving to his father that he is no longer a little boy or rather a puppet that Eugene can control, and that he has now found his voice as a man. Jaja uses a defiant masculine approach to enact his

transition from boyhood to manhood. In addition, Jaja becomes a symbol of refuge for Kambili throughout the novel because she states that she felt free to express herself only in the presence of Jaja: “It was only when I was alone with Jaja that the bubbles in my throat let my words come out” (p. 154). Okuyade (2009, p. 249) notes that the relationship that Jaja shares with Kamibili is strong, to the point that “they live for each other”. Beside this deep connection that Jaja shares with his sister, he is also aware that, other than their mother, Kambili has only him to protect her. Thus, taking on the masculine role of protector comes as second nature to Jaja. This fact is evident when Eugene confronts him and Kambili for spending longer than the stipulated time when visiting Papa-Nnukwu. Jaja takes accountability for this action and tells his father that he was the one who wanted to stay longer before Kambili can think of a response (p. 62). On another occasion, when Eugene catches Jaja and Beatrice helping Kambili break her fast before Sunday mass to take Panadol for her period pain, Jaja does not even think twice before opening his mouth to take the blame, with the hope that he will receive the harsh punishment while his mother and sister will be spared: “I told her to eat corn flakes before she took Panadol, Papa. I made it for her” (p. 102).

Furthermore, Jaja continues to define his protective masculinity through his observation of his cousin, Obiora, who has now become the ‘man of the house’ since his father died. Jaja is inspired by his cousin’s ability to appropriate the behaviour of ‘real’ men, especially on the morning of Papa-Nnukwu’s death when Obiora remained strong for his family:

> ‘I will clean where the *ozu* [corpse] lay, Mom,’ Obiora said. He let out sporadic choking sounds, crying deep in his throat. I knew that the reason he did not cry out loud was because he was nwoke [the good man] in the house, the man Aunty Ifeoma had by her side. (p. 184)

Ratele (2013) notes that the pressure that men endure to be considered ‘real’ men is what leads them to create and follow traditional and societal rules that define manhood. This practice is seen in Obiora offering to clean the area the corpse lay and holding back his tears because the patriarchal society has conditioned him to believe that ‘real’ men do not cry, since it is a sign of weakness. Fischer (2016, p. 11) also highlights how this action can be seen as an example of “traditional gender roles [that]

propose men as strong, determined and rational". Because Obiora thinks that his mother does not have the emotional strength to perform this unpleasant task, he decides that as a man (although he is still a child), it is his duty to do it. Ratele (2013, p. 145) further notes that

> men learn about masculinity by being addressed by others, by comparing themselves with others and by comparing themselves with an image of themselves at an earlier point in their lives.

Jaja embodies comparative masculinity by looking at his cousin's display of strength as representing 'true' manhood and feeling the need to act likewise for his own family. Jaja feels an immense sense of guilt when he returns home to Enugu after his father's death and feels that he did not protect his mother sufficiently: "I should have taken care of Mama. Look how Obiora balances Aunty Ifeoma's family on his head, and I am older than he is. I should have taken care of Mama" (p. 298). Jaja views masculinity as being intrinsically linked to men's protection of women and so performs the extreme act of protection by giving away his freedom and taking responsibility for Eugene's murder:

> The policemen came a few hours later. They said they wanted to ask some questions. Somebody at St. Agnes Hospital had contacted them, and they had a copy of the autopsy report with them. Jaja did not wait for their questions; he told them he had used rat poison, and that he put it in Papa's tea. They allowed him to change his shirt before they took him away. (p. 291)

Without wasting time, Jaja takes the responsibility of killing Papa, thereby allowing his mother to escape jail. We see here his enactment of restorative masculinity – masculinity that seeks to restore to women that which they had been robbed. Jaja's going to jail restores freedom to Beatrice, the freedom Eugene had denied her of. In addition, Jaja being allowed to change his shirt can be understood as a significant moment during which he is granted dignity, a sensation that his own father denied him. Putting on a new shirt can be read as symbolising Jaja's restored dignity and newfound masculinity, especially as from now on he would be the man of the house, albeit in prison. Wallace (2012, p. 479) classifies *Purple Hibiscus* as a "story of redemption". Therefore, Jaja's feeling of the need to falsely confess to Eugene's murder to protect

his mother can be understood as an attempt to redeem his manhood after failing to protect his mother from Papa's violence while he was was alive.

6.7 Implications of findings for teaching *Purple Hibiscus*

Adichie's novel *Purple Hibiscus* shows both positive and negative representations of masculinity. This chapter has analysed these representations as either transforming or un-transforming masculinities. This process shows how this novel cannot be taught on the basis of masculinity as a monolithic concept and should rather be approached with the conceptualisation of masculinity as a pluralistic concept. If masculinity is taught as a rigid concept, it gives learners the false impression that all masculine performances are bad and that there is no opportunity for the emergence of transformational masculinities. The danger in this approach is that it can potentially lead to learners constructing their own masculinity from hegemonic ideals because of not understanding that there are possibilities for alternative masculinities. McBean and Johnston (2018, p. 81) point out that a great deal of English educational focus has been placed upon *Purple Hibiscus* as a postcolonial text that can "empower teachers and students to reflect on their own cultural understanding and to see themselves with[in] historical contexts and potentially to allow their worldviews to be altered". However, by solely focusing on the novel as an ideal of post-colonial literature that shows the Western impact on African cultures and traditions, other elements that come into play are missed, such as the construction of masculinity. Therefore, this chapter highlights the impact that this type of one-dimensional approach can have for English FET education. It is of paramount importance that an appropriate pedagogical approach is carefully considered when teaching a text that is heavily laden with interconnected concepts and ideals, as are found in *Purple Hibiscus*. The critical teaching and interrogation of *Purple Hibiscus* will make room for connections to be made between the effects of colonial power on African masculinities and the effects of patriarchal power on African men's sense of masculinity. Moreover, if the teacher adopts a pedagogy that fosters critical engagement with the various representations of masculinity in the novel, it will help learners distinguish between the masculine performances that are transformative and inspirational from those that are oppressive and demoralising. Such teaching can make a progressive contribution to gender justice within education and, by implication, influence societal transformation, because

learners can interrogate the problematic un-transforming masculinities that contribute to the perpetuation of gender inequality and masculine bias.

6.8 Chapter Summary

Chapter 6 engaged in a comprehensive study of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus.* It provided a detailed synopsis of the novel before engaging in an indepth analysis of the masculinities enacted by the male characters in the novel. This discussion started with a critical evaluation of Eugene's performance of dominant masculinity that uses uncompromising discipline and violence to maintain patriarchal power. The chapter then engaged with the refreshing contemporary masculinity displayed in the novel through the character of Father Amadi. Lastly, this chapter examined Jaja Achike's self-discovery and construction of his own masculinity through acts of redemption.

Chapter 7

Violent and violating masculinities in Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother*

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the third analysis of the representations of masculinities in African women's literature. It performs an analysis of Sindiwe Magona's masculine representations in her 1998 novel *Mother to Mother* that is set in Western Cape's Gugulethu Township. This chapter will use the study's African feminist theory to analyse the problematic masculine performances portrayed by Magona's male characters and conceptualise these representations from an African feminist lens. To achieve a detailed analysis, this chapter's format will commence with a synopsis of *Mother to Mother*, followed by a brief review of literature that has already been undertaken on the novel. This review will then be followed by a discussion of the emergence of township masculinities in South Africa that sets a historical context for the analysis of the problematic representations of masculinities in *Mother to Mother*. With regard to the analysis itself, the first theme is on violent masculinities, followed by a discussion on violating masculinities in the novel. The chapter will then discuss the implications of teaching the novel in English FET classrooms and conclude with a summary that will give an overview of the chapter.

7.2 Synopsis of *Mother to Mother* by Sindiwe Magona

Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother* is a 1998 novel depicting events that take place in apartheid South Africa, and is set against the backdrop of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The novel is set in a period when South Africa is at a watershed moment: a murder of an unarmed white woman (Amy Biehl) has taken place in the township of Gugulethu, and the accused is Mxolisi, the son of Mandisa, the female protagonist.

The novel begins with Mandisa addressing Amy Biehl's mother hypothetically and explaining how her daughter was in a place she should not have been at the time of her death. Mandisa then narrates two different contextual, social and racial versions

of the same day, as she accounts for Biehl's relaxed morning and hours leading up to her death. She also accounts for her own chaotic morning and hours leading up to the unease in Gugulethu.

As the novel progresses, Mandisa reflects on her childhood, recollecting how she grew up in apartheid South Africa and how the uprooting of her family resulted in their living in Gugulethu Township. Mandisa paints a picture of her strict childhood for the reader, with a mother who made it a daily mission to ensure that no grandchildren would be born into her house, by physically examining Mandisa to see if her virginity was still intact. This regular virginity testing, however, led to Mandisa and her boyfriend, China, exploring other ways of sexual intimacy without penetration, which then resulted in the accidental conception of their son, Mxolisi. China and Mandisa's relationship changed once he learned that Mandisa was pregnant and he claimed that he could not be the father of her child because he had not penetrated her. After a while, China was accompanied by his family to Mandisa's homestead to claim the baby and also to request for Mandisa's hand in marriage. Mandisa recalls how her father initially dismissed China's family's request, just as they had dismissed Mandisa's pregnancy at first. In a conversation that Mandisa had with her father, she asked him if she could opt out of the marriage and focus on completing her schooling instead, to which her father agreed. However, Mandisa was overcome with shock when she found out that her father had reconsidered his decision, and that she was now being forced into marrying China. Mandisa and China's inharmonious marriage was short-lived because China went to work one morning and never returned home.

Mandisa later describes her son Mxolisi's childhood as a young boy raised without a father figure, leading him to find solace in his close friendship with two older boys whom he followed around everywhere. Mandisa recounts how Mxolisi was left mute for years after he innocently told the police where the two older boys were hiding, which led to him witnessing his friends being beaten to death by the police.

Later in the novel, Mandisa's narration returns to the present day and recounts events that take place after Biehl's killing. The police come barging into her home one night, harassing her new husband, Dwadwa, and children, Lunga and Sizwe, and interrogating them about Mxolisi's whereabouts. Without receiving any concrete

answer, the police eventually leave Mandisa's house, but not without overturning every piece of furniture and beating Lunga violently for not knowing his brother's whereabouts. Mandisa begins to suffer the consequences of her son's alleged actions, because she is given questioning and disapproving looks by her neighbours and feels shunned by her own community.

Nearing the end of the novel, Mandisa receives coded messages sent by Mxolisi through messengers to tell her about his whereabouts. Mxolisi arranges a secret meeting with Mandisa to let her know that he is well. Mandisa uses the opportunity to question her son about the events of Biehl's killing and whether it was his knife that stabbed her. Mxolisi avoids answering the question directly by informing his mother that he was not the only one involved in the violent act.

7.3 A brief review of literature on Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother*

Sindiwe Magona's novel *Mother to Mother* has been categorised as a "docufiction" (Harlow, 2000, p. 91) that explores Mandisa's navigation of motherhood, while at the same time depicting her efforts to manoeuvre her way around the structural oppression of apartheid engulfing South Africa. The novel is said to "generate an empathetic dialogue across the colour line and reclaim the subdued maternal identity and voice" (Dey Roy, 2021, p. 162). In the novel, Mandisa, a Black woman, appeals to Amy Biehl's mother, a White woman, throughout her narration, in the hope of explaining her perspective as a Black mother in a South African township. Whitehead (2012, p.185) notes that in Magona's novel, "motherhood is clearly posited as the common ground that brings the two women together" and Mandisa tries to bridge the racial gap that exists between her and Biehl's mother through finding commonality in what they both share – motherhood.

Dey Roy (2021) argues that at the beginning of the novel when Mandisa addresses questions to the deceased's mother and asks what business her daughter had in Gugulethu, it shows the reader from the onset that Magona shifts the lens from the male perpetrators who took part in the violent ordeal and rather focuses on the slain woman, further feeding into the patriarchal apparatus that constantly regulates the female body while excusing the males. Samuelson (2000, p. 229) states that through

Mandisa's recollection of childhood events and the killing of Amy Biehl by the community mob, the novel demonstrates the "tensions within the idealized standard of ubuntu". These tensions are demonstrated in Mandisa's recollection of her youth as a pregnant teenager who was made to marry the father of her baby, China, because her decision to stay unmarried was not considered during the decision-making processes of the two families. In contrast to her resolution, a consensus was reached by the elders with the belief that people live life and make decisions in relation to others, in the spirit of Ubuntu (Samuelson, 2000). However, later in the novel, these same tensions arise after Biehl's killing, because the neighbours' 'concerned' visits to Mandisa's home are no longer received as acts of Ubuntu, but rather of nosiness (Samuelson, 2000). Furthermore, in Mandisa's narration and address to Biehl's mother, it is argued that, by implying that "the killers are purely victims of circumstance" (Bernard, 2007 as cited in Duvenage, 2020, p. 694), Magona mimics the decision made by the TRC to excuse the perpetrators' actions and view the act of killing as politically motivated rather than to hold them accountable for the murder.

The existing literary research conducted on Magona's *Mother to Mother* has placed little focus on Magona's re-theorisation of South African masculinities through the portrayal of the masculine identities and performances of her male characters. No attention has also been paid to Magona's use of irony and satire to highlight the negative impact of apartheid on constructing these violent and violating masculinities in South African townships. Instead, the literature focuses on the narrator and protagonist, Mandisa, and her use of her maternal voice in her dialogue to Biehl's mother, as illustrated above. This chapter seeks to analyse Magona's novel from an African feminist perspective by interrogating the masculine representations that have been neglected by previous literary scholars. This scrutiny seeks to provide a thorough contextual background to where and how the masculine identities represented in Magona's novel emerged. It also seeks to demonstrate how these masculine identities can be conceptualised as violent and violating masculinities within South Africa. What Magona offers about masculinity in her novel which is different from what was presented in Aidoo's and Adichie's novels is the notion of masculinity as context-bound, a notion propagated in African feminist scholarship on African masculinities, as shown in Chapter 3. It is therefore important to preface the analysis of Magona's

novel by outlining the historical context that has produced the masculinities dominant in South Africa today.

7.4 The emergence of township masculinities in South Africa

South Africa's apartheid regime played a pivotal role in shaping and re-shaping the masculine performances of Black South African boys and men who experienced the oppressiveness of this system. As noted previously in Chapter 3, men construct their masculine identities in relation to the people and social structures around them. Therefore, the harsh conditions that South African boys and men navigated in their struggle to gain a sense of belonging within their own country, and their interaction with the apartheid regime and the enforcers of this system, influenced how they constructed their masculine identities. These masculine identities were also fluid, because Black boys and men had to adapt to interacting with new social structures after the forced removal of Black people from suburban areas to townships. The apartheid National Party legislated the Group Areas Act of 1950 to ensure the relocation of 'inferior' races (Black, Indian and Coloured) away from the 'superior' race (White). The Group Areas Act of 1950 is said to have been "one of the key instruments used to reinforce the ideology of apartheid" (Maharaj, 2020, p. 39), because it ensured both the physical and social segregation of races. It is through the enforcement of this Act and its 1957 and 1966 revisions that social relations were interrupted and became dysfunctional – a situation that ultimately influenced the construction and emergence of various township masculinities.

Langa (2020) distinguishes between two broad types of township masculine identities, one being perceived as a positive and heroic masculinity and the other being perceived as a negative and terrorising masculinity. These two township masculinities are the result of Black people being caught in a power struggle with the apartheid system and its ideologies. The dilemma that the two township masculinities faced was whether to stand up and confront the apartheid system and fight to gain power back for both women and men, or rather to gain their own power within their own race in a larger system that left them powerless (Langa, 2020). The dilemma shows evidence that not only did the apartheid system cause segregation amongst the different races, but it also initiated tension and division within the races.

Langa (2020) identifies the first type of township masculinity as the comrade masculinity that was discovered, constructed and adopted by the Black men who took a stand against the oppressive apartheid system, initiating and organising *imbizos* (gatherings) and participating at the forefront of marches. Such men became activists for not just Black male empowerment but Black empowerment in general. Langa (2020, p. 34) notes that "as part of constructing this form of [comrade] masculinity, these young men were expected to be strong, brave, tough, fearless, aggressive and violent". Thus, it can be said that this masculinity took on a violating form because it sought to directly confront the oppressors and demolish anything that stood in the way of their fight for freedom. On the other hand, those Black men in the townships who lacked political awareness or agency yearned to regain their manhood and power that they had been denied by the apartheid system, and they did so through the establishment of gangs that terrorised community members (Langa, 2020). These activities of terrorism gave them power and a superior position in their township, even though they still maintained an inferior racial position within South Africa. Dlamini (2015, p. 19) states that

> while the politically charged youths, men and women struggled to overthrow White minority rule, the apolitical youths engaged in wayward activities such as sitting in the street corners, menacing children, the elderly and women.

Therefore, the rise of gangs increased the tension between Black people residing in townships because it perpetuated Black-on-Black violence within communities, since Black men were desperate to escape the oppressive chains of apartheid and experience power themselves.

Men who displayed the kind of violence within Black communities described above are seen as embodying what Dlamini (2015) and Langa (2020) have categorised as a Tsotsi masculinity. In townships, Tsotsis "held a powerful identity since they were feared for their potential to be extremely violent" (Langa, 2020, p. 35). Due to this power status, most of these men were then idolised by other younger men in the community who aspired to reach their stature because they were perceived to be 'real men' who were able to acquire their own power, unlike those men who practised comrade masculinities and were seen to be fighting a losing battle (Langa, 2020).

Power seemed to be the phenomenon that most young men focused on, and they did not care that these very Tsotsi masculine identities that they admired acquired their power by terrorising their own people, i.e., their fellow brothers and sisters (Langa, 2020). Langa (2020, p. 17) explains that this "celebration of criminalised masculinity among young male South Africans in some sectors of the population directly contributes to the incidents of violent crimes that were reported daily". Thus, it can be said that these Tsotsi masculinities not only went hand-in-hand with power acquisition, but were also linked to both violence and violating performances such as rape.

The two types of township masculinities presented here emerged as a result of Black men's interaction with and experience of the oppressive apartheid system. These township masculinities perpetuated both violent and violating performances to put across their point of view in the hope of acquiring power. This chapter chooses to focus on South African masculinity separately for multiple reasons. Firstly, Magona's novel has its roots in South Africa and, most importantly, apartheid South Africa. Secondly, Magona's novel differs gravely from Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story* and Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* because Magona makes a conscious effort to address the masculinities that were bred by the colonial apartheid regime in South Africa. She not only addresses these masculinities, but she also attempts to theorise them. The violent and violating masculinities discussed in the next two sections of this chapter are presented as Magona's theorisations of masculinity in *Mother to Mother.* Magona uses her protagonist, Mandisa, as a voice for Mxolisi, not to excuse or justify his problematic masculinity, but rather to explain Black masculinities and give context to why they are constructed and, more importantly, performed in the manner in which they are.

7.5 Violent masculinities

Violence is a central theme that persists throughout Magona's novel, *Mother to Mother*. This violence is candidly yet satirically narrated by the female protagonist, Mandisa, whose son, together with a community mob, has killed a white young woman in the township of Gugulethu. Mandisa opens the novel with the words: "My son killed your daughter" (p. 1). The confession of the son's extreme violent act is alarming to the reader, but not so much to Mandisa who continues: "I am not surprised that my

son killed your daughter" (p. 2). Upon first glance, Mandisa's statement may seem to be laced with nonchalance. However, upon further analysis it can be viewed as an understanding of why her son is violent, considering that she is his mother. Mandisa's statement also shows her understanding of the normalisation of violence in society and how it is not always regarded as a taboo in South African townships. It also reinforces the expectation of violent responses from men. Graaff and Heinecken (2017, p. 623) point out that "men are expected to display physical strength or toughness, which can include using violence". In this case, violence is a factor that is used to not only define but also to measure manhood in society. Such behaviour is an expected response from men. Violent acts are not only used to gain leverage over women, but they are also used to prove manliness in relation to other men as well. Mandisa goes on to explain the expected violence from not only her first son, Mxolisi, but her second son, Lunga, as well:

> I have known for a long time now that he might kill someone one day. I am surprised however that it wasn't one of his friends or even one of my other children he killed. Mind you, with his younger brother, he was wise not to try. That one would have killed him with his bare hands first. If it happened, your child would still be alive today. (p. 2)

These words of Mandisa suggest that in the township a man who does not resort to violence is seen as a 'ticking time bomb' set to explode soon because his manhood depends on his performance of violence. Graaf and Heinecken (2017) argue that the acts of violence and aggression that are expected from men contribute to and foster hypermasculinity. Mandisa narrates a similar violent incident that took place, in which Black men brutally attacked White women who came to Gugulethu:

> A group of African men, bearing sticks and God knows what else, came upon them. And beat them. Three defenceless, unarmed women. Beaten by a troop of men. One suffered a broken jaw. Another, several deep cuts at the back of her head. The third, a sprinter, a twisted ankle. As soon as those poor women were discharged from the hospital, they left the country. Back to Belgium. (p. 88)

This attack further equates masculinity with violence against supposedly inferior others.

Furthermore, not only is violence an expected response from men, but it has been normalised and accepted as a way of life. Violence is understood as a gender role that men are meant to embody while women are expected to come to terms with this normalised violence. The above statement is validated in Magona's novel, when Mandisa challenges Amy Biehl's mother regarding her daughter's ignorance:

> There is a possibility that she might have gotten herself killed by another of these monsters, our children… what was she doing, vagabonding all over Gugulethu, of all places, taking her foot where she had no business. (p. 2)

Here, Mandisa's argument can be interpreted as her being critical of her son and the other young men, as she refers to them as 'monsters', meaning that their behaviour and acts of violence are inexcusable and lack humanity. Furthermore, Mandisa continues to expose the normalisation of male violence and more specifically **B**lack male violence in South Africa, when she questions her son's behaviour:

> … did he [Mxolisi] not know that they would surely crucify him for killing a white person…white people live in their own areas and mind their own business – period. We [Black people] are here, fight and kill each other. (pp. 3-4)

Mandisa's statement exposes the brutal aftermath of the Group Areas Act of 1950 that was enforced by the National Party and how it perpetuated Black-on-Black violence in townships and ultimately normalised violent masculinities. It has been argued that "the enormous deprivation caused by the apartheid system [was] at the root of most violence in South Africa" (Hamber et al., 2009 as cited in Graaff & Heinecken, 2017, p. 625). Mandisa further reiterates the normalisation of Black-on-Black violence and explains that

> Gugulethu is a violent place. Every day one hears of someone who was killed or nearly killed. Often more than one. Every day. Guns are as common as

> marbles where we were growing up. But a white woman? To kill a white woman? Where would we sleep? What would the police do to us? (p. 56)

The above comment shows that by valuing people's lives based on race, the apartheid system influenced Black men's construction of violent masculinities, because they understood violent performances amongst Black people as the only way to gain power within their race. Graaf and Heinecken (2017, p. 624) reinforce the point above and Mandisa's fear for the consequences of Black-on-White violence when they state the following:

> The creation of a hierarchy of races entailed a purposeful dehumanisation of those not classified as White, with racist propaganda and legislation becoming the standard. Violence and brutality were normalised during this period, with the South African Police (SAP) and the South African Defence Force (SADF) increasingly using violence against those who opposed the government.

Thus, the law enforcers who worked under the apartheid government can also be largely grouped as having hegemonic masculine identities because they used violence to control the 'inferior' races and sanction the ideals of the regime. Gqola (2015, p. 60) extends on this point by stating that "apartheid capitalised on physical violence of contestation through the militaristic control as well as structural violence". Apartheid, thus, created a society that became accustomed to violence. In the novel, when the Police Officers barge into Mandisa's home in the middle of the night, she narrates the following traumatic exchange:

> 'We said open up an hour ago!' The voice booms as though coming through a loudspeaker, my heart stops; the walls of the house shiver. There is no answer from Dwadwa.
> 'Why did you take such a long time? What' ah you trying to hide?' Thunk! The sound of a boot connecting, but quickly followed by the scraping of the floor as a chair or some heavy object overturns.
> 'Where is he?' Donkey Voice glares at me.
> 'I don't know' I reply, truthfully.

> Quick as a wink, I feel the sting of his beefy hand. My face is on fire … When they were quite satisfied Mxolisi was not in the house, not in the tin shack, not in the garden, they beat up Lunga although we told them over and over again that he was not Mxolisi… not the boy they were looking for. They beat up Lunga even though we told them his name was Lunga not Mxolisi. They beat him up because they said he should have known his brother's whereabouts. (pp.104-109)

The White male Police Officers here represent systematic authority and, thus, authoritative masculinity. They resort to extreme forms of violence as a way of inflicting fear into subordinate bodies. Magona's use of onomatopoeia in the quotation above, in the word "Thunk!", further highlights acts of excessive violence unleashed on the bodies of these Black men and woman. Although men are assumed to hold a superior position in society, the White Police Officers remind Dwadwa through beating him and intimidating him and his family with riffles that as a Black man he maintains an inferior position in the regime's hierarchy. Gqola (2007, p.113) points out that

> Apartheid capitalized on the physical violence of contestation through the militaristic control as well as the structural violence of the economy. Systematically brutalizing Black people through various forms of impoverishment, displacement, disenfranchisement and military occupation, apartheid also ensured that White South Africans were heavily armed through the enforced conscription that helped prop-up apartheid South Africa.

Gqola's assessment of apartheid brutality here is vividly demonstrated in the scene that Mandisa recounts about the visit of the Police Officers to their shack in search of Mxolisi. The fact that the White male Police Officers beat Lunga even though he is not the person they are looking for illustrates how apartheid influenced the construction of violent masculinities, because it brewed extreme anger and aggression through the punishing of young Black men for unknown sins – a practice that ultimately led to their having misplaced anger that they released by attacking women and men who were viewed as weaker. Therefore, Magona consciously uses this incident not to condone violence, but to rather show the role that apartheid played in constructing these violent masculinities.

Additionally, through Mandisa's recollection, Magona uses another event to reiterate the cause of violent masculinities in South Africa. Mandisa narrates an incident from Mxolisi's childhood that left him traumatised and mute for years when he innocently informed the police officers about his best friends' whereabouts, not knowing what would happen to them.

> 'Here they are! Here they are, in the wardrobe!' screamed Mxolisi, pointing to the wardrobe. A clever little smile all over his chubby face. He said those terrible words and, swift as a wink, witnessed their outcome. The boys jumped out and made for the window. But when they hit the back garden the police were waiting, and shot them then and there. He was struck mute by what he saw the police do to the two boys. His beloved friends. After that, he zipped his mouth and would not say one word. Not one word more – for the next two years. (p. 185)

Mandisa uses this incident to explain the brewing anger fostered by apartheid and how it contributed to the performance of violent masculinities that were eventually released on other groups who were regarded as inferior.

Furthermore, Mxolisi's early interaction and experience with violence shaped his own adult violent masculine identity, as Mandisa recalls:

> Mxolisi, now four years old, could already tell the difference between the bang of a gun firing and the *gooph*! of a burning skull cracking, the brain exploding [from necklacing]. (p. 184)

Moreover, Mxolisi joining the mob in the killing of Amy Biehl is evidence of his taking on a hegemonic masculine identity that is said to be "equated with extreme violence and risk taking" (Morrell et al., 2013, p. 13). In this context, the violent performances embodied by Mxolisi and the mob reiterate how masculinities can be easily influenced, because, at the end of the novel, when Mandisa secretly meets up with Mxolisi, she asks Mxolisi whether he was the one who stabbed Biehl and he answers by informing his mother that there were a lot of people present at the scene and that he was not the only one who attacked her. This response shows that, to some degree,

hypermasculine performances often come to the fore when surrounded by other masculinities.

7.6 Violating masculinities

Violating masculinities often seek to display their masculine identity by abusing the superior position that they hold in society to overpower and take advantage of subordinate females or males. One of the ways in which African men acquire this superior position that grants them dominance over others is through cultural initiation and circumcision. The purpose of both initiation and circumcision in South African cultures, such as the Xhosa culture, is said to "transform boys into men" (Magodyo et al., 2017, p. 344). In Magona's novel, Mandisa explains that this transformation did not work out for Mxolisi after his return from initiation:

> As for Mxolisi, I'm not sure we didn't make a mistake sending him to the bush [initiation], last December. But, he was of age. Was old enough. However, since coming back, instead of showing improvement, he has grown lazier than ever. (p. 13)

Mxolisi's masculine identity has changed and he constructs it in relation to how he views 'real' manhood. Magodyo et al. (2017, p. 345) note that initiation "gives circumcised men power associated with greater rights, responsibilities, a higher standing in society". Thus, Mxolisi no longer sees himself as a child in his mother's house, who is expected to help with household chores. Since acquiring this new manhood status, he now views himself as a man and understands that things such as household duties are roles preserved for women and he, therefore, expects to be served. Magodyo et al. (2017, p. 349) further point out that initiation "creates gender hierarchies in which men position themselves in relation to one another and in relation to hegemonic standards of gender". Therefore, Mxolisi's lack of participation in household duties can also be understood as his asserting dominance as a 'new' man in the house, thus, violating those he lives with (his mother and younger siblings), whom he believes to be inferior to him.

One of the most common ways in which men who embody violating masculinities take advantage of women is through sexual activities, whether it is coercion, rape or sexual violation in general. In Magona's novel, Mandisa highlights on numerous occasions how frequently rape or attempted rape occurs in a place like Gugulethu:

> The safety of our girl children has become a burning issue in Gugulethu and all places like Gugulethu. Every day, one hears of rapes. Rapes not rape. Rapes. Which means that each day more than one woman or girl or child is accosted. (p. 48)

Magona here deploys satire to critique the pandemic proportions of women's sexual violation in Black South African townships. Implicitly, the object of her satiric attack is not just the state that has failed to empower young men to be responsible citizens but also the young men themselves who have chosen to adopt the rape of girls and women as a preoccupation or 'full-time job'. Men who rape can be understood as performing both violent and violating masculinities, because the act itself inflicts physical violence over a woman's body and also "violates the right to bodily integrity" (Jewkes et al., 2011, p. 1). Additionally, this masculine performance can also be classified as entitled masculinity because it denies women the right to express their sexual choices and forcefully accept sexual intercourse without consent. Jewkes et al. (2011, p. 2) point out that men use rape as a way of empowering themselves in a society in which they are constantly struggling for power as a means of survival:

> Among men who rape, the relevance of poverty and other factors are complex. The way men understand themselves is affected by their life circumstances and there is a dialogical relationship between their subject positions and social circumstances which are reflected in their actions.

In the light of the above quotation, it can be argued that because of the racial hierarchies enforced by apartheid and its labour legislations, Black people – and more specifically Black men – were at an economic disadvantage, earning very low wages that could barely sustain them, if they did find work. Thus, the frustrations of poverty in a township such as Gugulethu, and the overall lack of power within the apartheid system, shaped their masculinities and contributed to their desperate need for power and control through violating women in their rape performances.

Magona makes a conscious choice of exposing the violent and violating masculinities in South African townships and uses her female narrator, Mandisa, to explain and give context to these masculinities. This practice gives the reader a better understanding of the complexity of these masculinities. Mxolisi's violent masculine performance is not excused, but it is rather used by Magona to highlight the deep impact that a regime such as apartheid had on Black men's developing masculinities in South Africa. Magona theorises Black South African masculinities as violent and violating and demonstrates the link that exists between the apartheid regime, as a violent system, and masculine constructions in townships. Yet, one could also argue that by not going beyond this, Magona fails to account for how individual men's choices play a role in the perpetuation of gendered violence.

7.7 Implications of findings for teaching *Mother to Mother*

In Chapter 1 of this study Simango's (2020) findings regarding the perception of literature in South African schools were discussed. Simango (2020) found that one of the widely held perceptions about the current prescribed literature canon for English FET was that the literature texts were not contextually relevant. This fact, however, cannot be true for Sindiwe Magona's novel *Mother to Mother* that has a South African context. Although set during the apartheid era, this South African novel contains themes that are still very relevant to post-apartheid South Africa. One of these is violence, an issue that South Africa is still battling with as an aftermath of apartheid. This situation, therefore, makes Magona's novel contextually relevant because its themes of violence, gender-based violence, rape and youthful masculinities are not foreign to the lived experiences of learners who reside in South African townships.

In terms of pedagogy, Magona's *Mother to Mother* needs to be approached in a critical manner through which the teacher actually highlights what Magona is trying to achieve in her satirical writing style. A critical pedagogy will also help the learners to reach an understanding of how the current state of the violent and violating masculine performances embodied by South African men can be viewed as the result of apartheid. This critical pedagogy will equip the teacher to assist learners with an understanding of how masculinities as a whole are influenced by the social structures

and contexts in which they are constructed. Beyond this, the teacher can also engage students in debating the extent to which violent men should be blamed for their actions, since apartheid cannot be solely responsible for producing violent masculinities.

If the violent and violating masculinities presented by Magona in her novel are not questioned in the literature classroom through a critical pedagogy, then the novel might be taken to naively excuse these masculine performances. Its representation of masculinity will then feed into the long cycle of normalised violence, and even more importantly, will eventually contribute to the perpetuation of gender-based violence in South Africa, a practice that is currently at an all-time high in this country. Furthermore, the FET phase is the perfect phase to help learners retheorise these masculine identities presented by Magona, because many of these learners are in their adolescent age during which constructions of masculinity are developing. A critical pedagogy that centres on engaging with Magona's writing style of explaining the violent and violating masculinities without excusing them would greatly assist FET learners – both boys and girls – to understand the significance of South Africa's history in shaping Black township masculinities as well as the importance of Black men's own choices when it comes to masculine behaviour.

7.8 Chapter summary

Chapter 7 compiled a critical analysis on the representations of masculinity in Magona's *Mother to Mother*. This chapter began with a synopsis of the novel, followed by a review on the existing literary research conducted on the novel. It explained how the study's analysis seeks to adopt a different approach to the already existing literature. This chapter next analysed the emergence of township masculinities, because this task was fitting for the context of the novel being analysed. The chapter then went on to analyse how Magona presents violent and violating masculinities in her novel as a criticism of the apartheid legacy in South Africa. In ending the analysis, it raises questions about Magona's omission of men's individual accountability for their violent actions. This idea is elaborated on in the last section that looks at the various implications that the representations of masculinity in the novel can have for the teaching of this novel at the FET phase.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

8.1 Summary of the research

The dissertation has performed an investigation on the various masculinities represented in the prescribed African women's literature, namely, Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother*. The investigation sought to show the implications that these representations could have for English FET education, with the focus of these implications being learner empowerment, pedagogy and teacher agency. To set the premise of the study, the dissertation first looked at South Africa's literary canon over the years to discover the type of literary transformation that has taken place. However, this background study revealed that the literary canon included very few works by African men writers and even fewer works by African women writers, in comparison to Western texts. The study then uncovered a research problem in the way literature is taught in South African schools, because literature is not used for its intended purpose of reflecting on social phenomena through literary criticism nor is it taught critically, but is rather taught in a rudimentary manner and mainly as a tool for teaching language. This study showed that it is because of this approach which lacks critical thought or critical discussion that problematic masculinities are not interrogated in literary texts studied in schools, thus contributing to gender injustice.

The dissertation was guided by four research questions that it sought to answer through critical analysis of selected prescribed literary texts: 1) What are the various forms of masculinities that are represented in the three novels by African women writers?; (2) In what ways are the representations of masculinities in the novels problematic?; (3) How do the social and cultural views of masculinities in the novels contribute to the readers' understanding of gender justice or injustice?; and (4) What implications can the representations of masculinities in the literary texts possibly have on English FET education?

Furthermore, the study performed a literature review on the history of African women's literature that revealed that African women writers have had to fight continuously to have their works published and to be included in literary discussions. This review showed how there were many odds against African women writers that contributed to their marginalisation and/or exclusion in the literary space, one of which was lack of publishing opportunities. Although African male writers also struggled to have their works published, the reviewed literature exposed how they had an advantage over African women writers, because of their past access to education and, more specifically, missionary education. The literature review revealed how it was only during the latter part of the 1960s that this marginalisation began to change for African women writers, with prominent writers such as Flora Nwapa opening the doors for other women writers to have their work published, through the birth of her own publishing company, Tana Press, that was established in 1970. The literature review also examined the literary traditions of African women writers and revealed that the first generation of African women writers were solely focused on writing back to African male writers through representing new perspectives on the African female body, which had previously just been objectified by African male writers. However, the literature review revealed that the 'new age' or contemporary African women writers are different from the first generation African women writers and do not focus on writing back to African male writers but rather take on a fierce feminist approach to writing that represents liberal African women.

The study used African feminism as a theoretical lens and African masculinity as a conceptual framework. It applied conceptualisations of masculinities in African feminist scholarship in analysing the three texts. Moreover, the study applied the methodology of feminist literary criticism which deploys feminist theory to make meaning of themes and narrative styles in literary texts. Through the analysis of Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story*, Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Magona's *Mother to Mother*, the study set out to answer the four research questions listed above, upon which the dissertation was grounded. The next section shows how the study's findings answer the research questions.

8.2 Summary of key findings

In the first analysis conducted on Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story*, it is clear that Aidoo solely focuses on rewriting the conditions for her central character, Esi, and empowering her, while neglecting to rewrite or re-theorise the problematic and patriarchy-laced masculinities of her male characters. In her approach, Aidoo highlights the need for gender justice through focusing on changing the circumstances for her central female character, but by failing to rewrite the masculinities of her male characters she, ironically, creates gender injustice. In addition, the other female characters in her novel, Opokuya and Fusena, do not ever experience the same empowerment or emancipation that Esi is endowed with. This positions Aidoo's novel as falling short of achieving an African feminist agenda. Aidoo's writing assumes that gender justice is only suitable for certain women, rather than all women, which also has a negative impact on the understanding of the concept of gender justice. In the second analysis conducted on Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus,* it is clear that unlike Aidoo, Adichie can be given some credit for representing varied forms of masculinity and not only showing us un-transforming masculinities. Her novel, while presenting hegemonic masculinity, also offers an alternative inspirational masculine representation that displays transformation. This writing approach sheds light on positive and inspirational masculinities, which are embracing of women's empowerment and overall gender justice ideals. However, through the analysis, Adichie is still faulted on her choice to centralise the problematic masculinity in her novel instead of the transformational version, which is then a regression on the initial progress towards gender justice. In the dissertation's analysis of Magona's *Mother to Mother*, it is evident that Magona takes on a very different approach from Aidoo and Adichie and theorises violent and violating masculinities in South Africa against the backdrop of apartheid. She shows in her novel that masculinities are context-bound and cannot be understood outside of the contexts that produce them. Magona's insights on black South African masculinities open the floor to having thought-provoking conversations that will provide a better understanding of these masculinities and their practices, rather than excusing them and further contributing to gender injustice. Through a satirical style of writing, she offers a most profound criticism of Black masculinities in South African townships, while equally showing that these masculinities were bred into being by the violent apartheid system. Nevertheless, Magona, like Aidoo and Adichie, also fails to

push the boundaries of fictional writing by not raising questions around men's individual accountability for violence. The discussions on the implications of the various masculine representations identified in each of these novels focused on learner empowerment, pedagogy and teacher development. These discussions revealed that the critical interrogation of the masculinities represented in the novels can better equip teachers to teach the texts in ways that raise their learners' critical consciousness about gender injustice in society and empower them to find their own ways of promoting gender justice.

The first research question that this study asked was: What are the various forms of masculinities that are represented in the three novels by African women writers? In Aidoo's novel, problematic masculinities such as polyamorous and polygamous masculinities, entitled and powerful masculinities as well as providing masculinities are embodied by most of the male characters in the novel. Additionally, Adichie represents un-transforming masculinity in the form of dominant and violent masculinities and transforming masculinities in the form of inspirational and gentle masculinities as well as newfound constructions of masculinity. Lastly, in Magona's novel, township masculinities are represented in the form of violent and violating masculinities.

The second research question asks why the representations of masculinity found in each text can be understood as problematic. Firstly, in Aidoo's novel, the masculinities such as polyamorous and polygamous masculinities that are demonstrated by the male characters equate heterosexuality with promiscuity. In addition, the entitled and powerful masculinities embodied by the male characters in Aidoo's novel are performed over what are considered to be inferior bodies, which are mostly the bodies of women. This said entitlement and power is exercised over women in the form of control and rape. Providing masculinities also emerged as problematic in Aidoo's texts, because they equated money with 'real' manhood. In Adichie's novel, un-transforming dominant forms of masculinity performed by Eugene Achike can be understood as problematic, because they are intertwined with both power and violence. The transforming masculinity embodied by Father Amadi can be interpreted as an inspirational form of masculinity since it exudes care and gentleness and does not seek to abuse inferior bodies, but rather uplifts them and gives them a voice. The

newfound constructions of masculinity that are represented by Jaja can also be understood as non-problematic, but rather transformational, because they seek to not over-rule or dominate female bodies, but rather to lovingly support and protect them. Lastly, although the violent and violating masculinities represented in Magona's novel are problematic because of the power struggles they are involved in, which leads them to overpower inferior others, we need to give Magona some credit for making a brave attempt at theorising and explaining these problematic masculinities, even though a theorisation that looked at choice could have been far more nuanced.

The third research question asks: How do the social and cultural views of masculinities in the novels contribute to the understanding of gender justice or injustice? The social and cultural views of masculinity in the novels represent a dominant and hegemonic idea of what masculinity is. This practice, unfortunately, promotes the idea of masculinity having a superior complex over femininity, thereby negatively impacting gender justice. The problematic masculinities in the novels contribute to gender injustice because they excuse hypermasculine performances that thrive on the oppression of women and other inferior bodies.

The last research question was centred around the implications that the various masculinities identified in the analysis may have for the teaching of each novel in the English FET class. To assess both positive and negative implications and answer the research question, the implications focused on pedagogy and learner empowerment. In Aidoo's novel, a positive implication which presents itself is the sisterhood portrayed by the central female characters – Esi and Opokuya – that can be used to empower girl learners in an English FET classroom in South Africa and promote the African feminist importance of sisterhood. However, the hypermasculine performances which are represented in Aidoo's novel can have a negative impact on English FET education if these are not approached critically to interrogate why these masculinities are problematic. In Adichie's novel, the un-transforming masculinities that present themselves in the text can have negative implications in the sense that they can contribute to learners understanding masculinity as both hegemonic and rigid. On the other hand, the transforming masculinities in *Purple Hibiscus* can have a positive impact on the understanding of masculinity as a daily construction with multiple influences. Lastly, the implications of teaching Magona's novel revealed that a critical

approach to the teaching of the text can bring a context to the masculinities in the novel. It will help and better equip the teacher to not excuse or normalise the violent and violating masculinities, but rather facilitate learners' understanding of the reasons for the way in which these masculinities are embodied and what influenced their constructions.

8.3 The study's contribution to knowledge

This study contributes to African feminist knowledge through its interrogation and critique of the problematic masculinities that are represented by African women writers. It contributes to the objective of African feminism which strives for gender justice in society, by highlighting how the problematic representations of masculinities in these novels impede the drive towards gender justice. It also contributes to African feminism by using Magona's novel as a handbook for understanding Black masculinities in South Africa.

This study also enhances understandings of English education in South Africa because it highlights the shortcomings of literature teaching in many South African English classrooms. In addition, the study highlights the power that lies in critiquing literary texts and shows how critical literary analysis can help to produce not just critical beings in the English FET classroom but critical beings who will also contribute effectively to gender justice in society through interrogating everyday injustices. This knowledge can be used by other researchers or South Africa's Department of Basic Education to revise or improve current rudimentary literature teaching approaches and develop a more critical literary pedagogy that will help both teachers and learners to challenge their own thinking and meaning making practices in the classroom.

8.4 Limitations of the study

The dissertation's use of conceptual research presented limitations in terms of formulating generalised claims, since the study relied only on literary texts for its data and did not engage in any interviews with teachers or lesson observations. This sole reliance on a literature review significantly reduced the data volume. The study also depended mainly on using secondary sources that were freely accessible on academic

sites and the Wits University library catalogue. Moreover, finding recent literature that entirely fitted the objectives of this dissertation proved to be difficult, which is why the timeline of the reviewed literature in the dissertation ranges from very old literature to very recent literature.

8.5 Suggestions for further research

There are gaps in the information provided in this dissertation that could be addressed in further research on African women's literature. This study focused on representations of masculinity in Aidoo, Adichie and Magona's novels, but further research can extend on this exploration by also focusing on the representations of femininity simultaneously with masculinity so that it can become more evident how African women writers are re-writing or re-stereotyping gender representation. This focus on both femininity and masculinity could provide a broader perspective on how both these representations contribute to gender justice or injustice. Such a larger study, possibly at PhD level, would not only broaden the research field by interrogating both of these gender constructions but would also highlight how they influence each other.

Further research could also perform an investigation on a number of South African schools and engage in interviews with teachers and learners doing English FAL or English HL at FET level. These interviews could focus on how the masculine representations in Aidoo, Adichie and Magona's texts, and other similar prescribed works, influence both teachers and learners' perceptions of gender construction and overall gender justice and injustice in society. An understanding of how such perceptions are formed from these masculine representations could help to broaden the discussion on the implications that the problematic representations in the prescribed novels might have on English FET education. An empirical study would be very useful in initiating the process of getting FET learners to think about transforming masculinities.

8.6 Recommendations for English FET education

The main recommendation that this study presents is a pedagogical one. While acknowledging the debates which have been put forward regarding the English FET literature canon and some of the calls that have been made for a literature reform, I argue that literature reform cannot take place overnight. Thus, it is essential to investigate how the teaching of the literature prescribed in the current English literary cannon for South African schools can be approached differently and, more specifically, how literary texts can be examined more critically. Based on the findings of this study, I recommend the adoption of an African critical masculinity pedagogy when teaching the three texts by Aidoo, Adichie and Magona discussed in this dissertation. This pedagogy will assist teachers to unpack the nuanced understandings of the concept of masculinity and to interrogate and re-theorise masculinity in its complexity. This critical pedagogy, when used correctly in the FET English classroom, can raise learners' awareness of gender injustice and, thus, contribute to the broader understanding of society from a wide ranging perspective.

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Appendix 1: Ethics waiver letter

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

Registration number: REC-101114-044

05 October 2022

Re: Miss Morufane Mohlala (1668059)

Waiver letter number: HRECNMW22/10/07

To whom it may concern,

Miss Mohlala is a registered Masters student at the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. This letter is to confirm that, at the time of writing, Miss Mohlala does not need ethical clearance for her Masters study entitled *'Representations of masculinity in African women's literature and their implications for English FET education: A feminist study of Ama Ata Aidoo's Changes: A love story, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus and Sindiwe Magona's Mother to Mother'*. This decision has been reached based upon a description of the project supplied by Miss Mohlala to the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), which has been evaluated by the Chairs and Deputy Chairs. If, however, if Miss Mohlala changes the methods of data collection and analysis for this study, this decision may no longer be valid. If such changes take place, this should be communicated to the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) as soon as possible. This waiver letter is valid until 04 October 2025.

Please feel free to contact me should you require any further information.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,
S Schoeman

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