

**CHALLENGES OF MASCULINITY IN CHIGOZIE OBIOMA'S AN
ORCHESTRA OF MINORITIES AND ELNATHAN JOHN'S *BORN ON A
TUESDAY***

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BENIN CITY**

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**AN ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND
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CERTIFICATION

I certify that this study was carried out by **Nancy Ifunanya OSIDE** (Miss) in the Department of English and Literature under the supervision of Prof. (Mrs) A. O. Eruaga at the University of Benin, Benin City, Edo state, Nigeria.

Prof. (Mrs) A.O. ERUAGA
(Project Supervisor)

Date._____

DEDICATION

With humility and gratitude, this work is dedicated to Almighty God, the beginning and the end of everything; to my parents, for their unwavering love and prayers and my dear sister, Mrs. Emmanuella Ohiro, for seeing me through school.

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ABSTRACT

This research reveals the complex nature of manhood in the context of contemporary Nigerian society by examining the challenges of masculinity in Chigozie Obioma's *An Orchestra of Minorities* and Elnathan John's *Born on a Tuesday*. Through a detailed analysis of the texts and with insights from masculinity studies and gender performativity, the project delves into how the characters struggle against, the rigid and traditional expectations of masculinity that emphasise strength, emotional restraint, and financial provision. The project emphasises that masculinity is a dynamic social construct that experiences crises when control, financial stability, and external validation are endangered by analysing the challenging pathways of Chinonso and Dantala. The study challenges the conventional belief that equates male strength with physical dominance or emotional suppression, shedding light on the vulnerabilities and futility inherent in a masculine identity built on violence and superficial measures of success. In the end, the research advocates for a deeper and more compassionate understanding of manhood, the one that recognises the emotional complexities, psychological demands, and significant influence of socio-political circumstances on men's lives.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the challenges of masculinity in Chigozie Obioma's *An Orchestra of Minorities* and Elnathan John's *Born on a Tuesday*, focusing on how factors like poverty, emotional pain, religion, violence and societal expectations affect the male protagonists in finding their identity. The research aims to unveil how these novels present the challenges of being a man in African society.

1.2 Scope of Study

This study examines Chigozie Obioma's *An Orchestra of Minorities* and Elnathan John's *Born on a Tuesday*. It focuses on Chinonso and Dantala, the protagonists and analyses how their personal experiences reflect the challenges men face in different parts of Nigeria. The study examines themes such as poverty, family absence, emotional pain, religion, and social pressure. By comparing the two texts, it shows the challenges African men face.

1.3 Methodology

The data of this research are in written and textual forms. The primary data will be collected through detailed and close readings of the two novels: Chigozie Obioma's

An Orchestra of Minorities and Elnathan John's *Born on a Tuesday*. These texts will be examined for their portrayal of male characters experiencing social and cultural challenges such as poverty, racism, identity crisis, religious extremism, and masculine expectations. Secondary data will be gathered from other literary masterpieces and scholarly reviews. This study will employ a qualitative research method, which means, it will focus on meanings and ideas rather than numerical data. It makes use of thematic analysis to identify and interpret themes related to emotional pain, marginalisation and masculine struggles.

The Masculinity Studies which is the theoretical framework of this research will serve as a guide to develop a better understanding that portrays masculine struggles. Finally, a close reading of the primary texts will be done in order to get detailed analysis of specific passages and characters which will be essential for highlighting the challenges of men.

1.4 Theoretical Background

This study draws from the expanding field of masculinity studies, a field of study that analyses the creation and expression of masculine identities through the influence of cultural forces and societal norms. One central idea to this study is Raewyn Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity, which she defines in *Masculinities* as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy" (Connell 77).

Hegemonic masculinity refers to the dominant socially acceptable way of being a man, one that supports male power while subordinating women and other forms of masculinity. This concept is particularly effective in the analysis of African literary texts, where male characters deal with the struggles of postcolonial life and the clash between old gender roles and new social changes.

Judith Butler's theory of *gender performativity*, articulated in *Gender Trouble*, further expands this understanding of masculinity. She argues that gender is not something one is born with, but is continually produced through repeated actions. According to Butler, masculinity is "performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler 25). This concept is especially important when analyzing moments in our primary texts where male characters experience identity struggles or find it difficult to meet societal expectations of masculinity.

Furthermore, in his essay *Masculinity as Homophobia*, Micheal Kimmel explains that traditional masculinity often comes from a fear of being seen as weak or feminine (Kimmel 131). His concept of the "culture of silence" surrounding male vulnerability adds a psychological dimension to the discussion. Within the African context, scholars such as Robert Morrell, Lahoucine Ouzgane, and Kopano Ratele have reviewed how masculinities have been shaped by socio-economic shifts, religious ideologies, colonial history, and cultural traditions.

Lisa Lindsay and Stephen Miescher in *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa*, argue that African masculinities are not static but are constantly being redefined in response to political and social pressures (Lindsay and Miescher 5). Ratele further emphasises the fragility of hegemonic masculinity in African postcolonial contexts, where the pressures of modernisation, migration, poverty, and globalisation often render traditional masculine roles unstable and unattainable (Ratele 213)

In *An Orchestra of Minorities* by Chigozie Obioma, these theories help to see how the main character, Chinonso, experiences what Robert Morrell describes as “crisis masculinity”. He uses this concept to the breakdown of traditional male roles in times of transition (Morrell 84). It also shows the portrayal of manhood. Chinonso represents a type of masculinity that challenges traditional norms. Instead of proving himself through power, wealth, or control, he seeks emotional connection and education. Despite the social stigma, he chooses to sell his property just to pursue education, a decision that shows inner strength and emotional inner strength. His actions counter the hegemonic masculinity which opens up space for emotional depth and empathy. Similarly in Elnathan John’s *Born on a Tuesday*, the protagonist, Dantala struggles with experiences of religious extremism, political violence, and the absence of stable male role models expressing masculinity that both shapes his identity in a context of socio-political instability. Ouzgane’s concept of *Islamic masculinities* helps construe this tension, revealing how religious beliefs

influence gender roles in Muslim communities (Ouzgane 56). Dantala's changing loyalties, inner conflicts, and emotional struggles reflect what James Messerschmidt describes as protest masculinities which refer to heightened displays of manhood that arise as a reaction to marginalisation and a lack of power (Messerschmidt 103).

According to Joseph Pleck's theory of *gender role strain*, men suffer under the weight of unrealistic expectations imposed by patriarchal norms (Pleck 42). Both primary texts portray male characters who endure mental anguish, isolation, and despair as they attempt to reconcile personal desires with societal pressures yet also suggesting the possibility of reimagining masculinity. As Obioma Nnaemeka has argued, African literature provides a critical space to resist and rewrite gender scripts, presenting masculinities that are contextually grounded and socially progressive (Nnaemeka 178).

This study therefore builds on the insights of scholars like Connell, Butler, and others, while advancing a nuanced literary analysis of masculinity in African fiction. Masculinity Studies as the theoretical approach for this research aims to unfold the nuanced ways in which African men navigate societal expectations, personal aspirations, and structural constraints. It seeks to contribute to broader discussions on gender by highlighting the vulnerabilities and complexities of male identities in African literature.

1.5 Review of Scholarship and Justification of Study

Chigozie Obioma and Elnathan John are renowned Nigerian authors whose works have attracted both literary praise and academic engagement. Chigozie Obioma gained international recognition with his debut novel *The Fishermen*, which was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2015. Elnathan John, on the other hand is recognised for his widely praised satire and sharp critiques of political systems. His debut novel, *Born on a Tuesday*, explores the complex realities of northern Nigeria through the eyes of a young boy navigating faith, extremism, and identity.

A major scholarly work on Obioma's novel is Kharbouche Adem's thesis titled *Rethinking African Masculinity in Chigozie Obioma's An Orchestra of Minorities*. Adem explains that Obioma breaks the stereotype of men being thought of as strong and in control. Instead, Chinonso is shown as someone who is emotional, confused, and trapped by what society expects from men. Adem writes that masculinity is not something that is fixed; it changes depending on culture and personal experience. For instance, Chinonso says, "I wondered if it was possible to win the admiration of others and also attain personal happiness" (Obioma, 122). This shows how hard it is for him to balance society's approval with his own happiness. Another part of the novel says, "Chinonso found himself torn between his own ambitions and the weight of societal expectations... demanding conformity to prescribed roles and behaviors" (Obioma, 102). These examples show how culture and tradition put pressure on men to act a certain way, even if it makes them unhappy.

Christiana Chinedu and Onyebuchi Ile in their article, *Violence and the Oppression of Male Characters in Elnathan John's Born on a Tuesday*, argue that Dantala's journey represents a cycle of masculine formation under siege from the mosque to the street, from politics to prison. As they write: "Dantala's journey reflects the cyclical nature of violence that traps young men between religious extremism and state brutality" (Chinedu & Ile 7). Their analysis helps us see how political and religious systems shape, influence, and often harm ideas about the conception of masculinity subjecting him to a victim of these systems and making his story crucial to any exploration of masculinity as constructed under constraint and control. This is clear when Dantala feels ashamed of his past with the Kuka tree boys: "I am feeling sorry, for the first time, for all I have done...for smoking wee-wee. For breaking into shops with the Kuka tree boys. I wonder where I will go if Sheikh Jamal throws me out of this mosque" (*Born on a Tuesday*, 29, 35). His fear of being rejected shows how young boys are forced to hide their feelings to be accepted as "real men."

Furthermore, Ogechukwu Martha Ezeani's article, *Psychosexual and Psychosocial Development of Male Protagonist: A Bildungsroman Analysis of Born On a Tuesday*, adds a psychological layer to this discourse. Using Freudian and Eriksonian developmental theory, Ezeani argues that "the novel's fragmented narrative mirrors Dantala's incomplete masculine formation" (Ezeani 12). This perspective helps us understand how emotional trauma, ideological manipulation,

and disrupted guidance hinder a boy's journey to maturity as she says that the story shows how Dantala's growth into manhood is incomplete because of the violence and trauma he faces. She uses psychological theories to explain how Dantala's emotions and identity are damaged by everything he goes through. Her work helps us understand how masculinity can be shaped by both outside forces and inner struggles.

In addition, Tennakoon's (2021) article, *Men's Tears Also Matter: A Study on the Patriarchal Oppression of Men in Literature*, challenges the idea that men always benefit from patriarchy and argues that "certain men" who deviate from the patriarchal ideal also become its victims, particularly those who manifest "womanly" traits such as emotional openness, empathy, or sensitivity. In the case of Chinonso and Dantala, both protagonists struggle with inner qualities that make them vulnerable: Chinonso with his deep emotions and loyalty, and Dantala with his desire for connection and spiritual guidance. Though none of them is weak, their openness and tenderness put them in a weird position with a society that expects men to be tough, silent, and in control. This struggle is expressed in Simon and Preger-Simon's view that boys are taught from a young age to suppress their feelings: "When boys show their vulnerability and tenderness, they are regularly teased and humiliated and often beaten up or ostracized." Dantala's shame about his past and fear of being rejected highlight how damaging these expectations can be.

The studies reviewed have examined masculinity in *An Orchestra of Minorities* and *Born on a Tuesday*. However, none has offered a direct comparison of the two. Most existing research focuses on either cultural or psychological issues alone and ignores how different pressures such as class, religion, tradition, and emotion combine to shape male experience. This study fills that gap by concentrating on the specific challenges men face across both texts.

1.6 Thesis Statement

Challenges of masculinity in Chigozie Obioma's *An Orchestra of Minorities* and Elnathan John's *Born on a Tuesday* are seen through man's emotional vulnerability, identity crisis, unrealistic societal expectations and the language devices deployed in the novels.

CHAPTER TWO

CHALLENGES OF MASCULINITY IN THE NOVELS

2.0 Introduction

Challenges of masculinity encompass a wide range of issues, from societal expectations and identity struggles to the impact of changing gender roles. Therefore, this chapter examines the various challenges encountered by the male protagonists in the texts. The challenges of masculinity include emotional vulnerability, identity struggles, and unrealistic societal expectations, as presented in Chigozie Obioma's *An Orchestra of Minorities* and Elnathan John's *Born on a Tuesday*.

By analysing the experiences of Chinonso Solomon Olisa and Dantala, this discussion will investigate how these factors interconnect to influence masculine

identity in a Nigerian context, often resulting in significant internal and external conflicts.

The novels employ first- person narration, immersing readers into the inner struggles of their main characters. Obioma's use of Igbo cosmology (through the chi narrator) frames Chinonso's suffering as a metaphysical battle against fate whereas John's unflinching realism underscores Dantala's limited control in systemic violence. Set against Nigeria's postcolonial troubles and religious conflicts, the chapter explores the challenges faced by the male protagonists in both novels.

Chigozie Obioma's *An Orchestra of Minorities* and Elnathan John's *Born on a Tuesday* respectively make readers believe that Chinonso's spiral into violence and obsession illustrates the harmful effects of repressed emotions (Obioma 147), while Dantala's struggle between faith and ethics highlights the vulnerability of masculine identity in a fractured society (John 89).

2.1 Emotional Vulnerability

In many patriarchal societies, emotional expression among men is often perceived as a weakness as it contrasts with societal expectations of strength and self-control. The pressure to conform to the ideals of masculinity significantly impacts men's behaviours, especially regarding their capacity to reveal vulnerability. These novels illuminate how societal pressures to adhere to masculine ideals of strength often drive characters to suppress their emotions, resulting in considerable internal and external discord. In both Chigozie Obioma's *An Orchestra of Minorities* and

Elnathan John's *Born on a Tuesday*, the exploration of characters' emotional vulnerability and the subsequent consequences are thoroughly examined through their internal struggles and interactions with their environments.

In the narrative of Obioma's *An Orchestra of Minorities*, these societal expectations are illustrated through the character Chinonso's experiences. Following his father's death, Chinonso is consumed by profound sorrow that isolates him from social connections. His chi observes this deep despair:

At night, he'd feel the presence of his father so intensely he'd sometimes become convinced that his father was there. 'Papa! Papa!' he'd call into the darkness, turning about in frantic steps. But all he'd get back would be silence, a silence so strong it would often restore his confidence in reality. He walked through the world vertiginously, as if on a tightrope. His vision became one from which he could see nothing. Nothing gave him comfort, not even the music of Oliver De Coque, which he'd play on his big cassette player most evenings or while working at the yard. Even his fowls were not spared his grief.
(Obioma 24)

This does not only capture Chinonso's personal pain but also highlights the harmful effects of unresolved emotional distress. The text explicitly depicts his withdrawal from his sole friend, Elochukwu, and his refusal to heed his uncle's appeal to return

to Aba, further highlighting his incapacity to seek comfort regarding his emotional distress:

Not even Elochukwu, the only friend he kept after he left school, could comfort him. He stayed away from Elochukwu, and once Elochukwu rode his motorcycle up to the front of the compound, knocked on the door and shouted my host's name to see if he was in. But he pretended he was not in the house. (Obioma 25)

An instance of his emotional repression emerges when his uncle suggests that he marry. Instead of working through his sorrow, Chinonso's desire for connection drives him to seek the company of a prostitute which illustrates an unhealthy way to cope resulting in his sexual dysfunction, as described by his chi, "He was seized by a sudden acute self-awareness of himself as a novice, unskilled in the art of sex" (Obioma 27). This draws a direct connection between his emotional vulnerability and a state of physical and psychological impotence.

In John's *Born on a Tuesday*, the character Dantala often presents an emotionless façade. However, he reveals significant emotional vulnerability through his internal reflections. After he experiences a traumatic lorry accident, he specifically expresses his anguish by stating that: "Now that I think of it, I wish I didn't hear his name, because when I close my eyes, I hear his name and his swollen head and all the blood. It makes me want to scream" (John 22).

This open recognition of his trauma sheds light on the deep emotional effects he carries, even though he does not express these feelings to others in his vicinity. In addition, his future experiences with upsetting nightmares and his bodily reactions associated with the memories of abuse that births the statement, "I woke up with my penis erect and sweat all over my body," (John 53) highlights a deeper mental pain that is suppressed but shows itself physically. Dantala's hesitation to talk to Sheikh about his experiences because he fears being judged highlights the social forces that force people to prevent their vulnerabilities. He is unable to get the emotional assistance he needs because of this fear of possible misunderstanding and the resulting prospect of additional deprivation of qualities associated with man. This is evident in the excerpts below:

“I cannot tell Sheikh about these dreams because I will have to tell him what happened. What if he thinks that I also like it because I am having dreams? What makes it worse is the way everything makes my penis hard these days. Yesterday I cried” (John 54)

Both Obioma's *An Orchestra of Minorities* and John's *Born on a Tuesday* illustrate the detrimental effects of suppressing emotional vulnerability, which is often influenced by societal expectations of masculine strength, resulting in significant internal turmoil and ineffective coping strategies. In other words, the narratives in the texts highlight the societal pressures that force characters to appear strong and unemotional, preventing them from getting the support they need.

Chinonso, the main character in Obioma's *An Orchestra of Minorities*, struggles with the heavy emotional burden brought on by his experiences of pain and humiliation that illustrate the issue of psychological and societal strain. Among the humiliation was the experience at a party hosted by Ndali's father where he is forced by her brother to take off his new clothes and put on a gateman's uniform to usher the big personalities in. These challenges are expressed by his chi, who notes that after a particularly humiliating incident, Chinonso experiences numbness and passivity as if he has been caused to be very calm or go to sleep by giving them a drug: "For such is the state a man enters when he has been disgraced: inaction, numbness – as if he has been tranquillised" (Obioma 114).

This condition does not indicate peace; instead, it represents a mental shutdown caused by the long-term impacts of trauma. The repression of emotions such as guilt and despair results in significant internal chaos. His chi points out that Chinonso was unable to articulate these thoughts, even as he frequently reflects on his traumatic experiences, which underscore the deep suffering caused by unexpressed emotions. The excerpt below emphasises the intense inner conflict and pain he endures due to a sequence of traumatic occurrences, particularly the accusation of rape by Mr. Aydinoglu in court that his wife is raped on the floor near the dining table:

"My wife, yani, was on the floor, near to the dining table, and this man was on top of her, and his hand was holdingk her on the neck,

one hand. Pardon — the other hand. One, he was tryingk to force himself into her. It was very disgustingk, my lord. Very disgustingk."

(Obioma 353)

Chinonso struggles to verbally convey his anguish, but communicated through his chi's storytelling to the supreme Igbo deity, Chukwu. "Yet even though my host could not speak of these things, he constantly thought about them (Obioma 346)

This action serves as a heartfelt request for compassion and comprehension. Internal suppression pushes him on the verge of a mental collapse. The rejection from Ndali during their encounter at the gate of her house further reveals Chinonso's emotional vulnerability. This emotional vulnerability is revealed in the touching unproductive conversation they have thus:

"...I don't want to ever see you ever again. What is this? Why are you following—'

Ndali, listen,' he said, and stepped forward.

'Stop! Stop there!'...

'Don't you come near me at all. Listen, I beg you in the name of God, leave me alone. I am married now okay? Go and find another woman, and leave me alone". (Obioma 450-451).

Consumed by these words, he goes into isolation, eating little, talking to himself, laughing and crying. "He lay in beds for days, surrounded by the ghostlike, embodied voice of the encounter. He ate little; he spoke to himself. He laughed. He

cried. He stepped out wearily at night and ran back into his room again, drinking the rainwater that washed down his face.” His Chi feared “he was descending into madness.” (Obioma 452)

John's *Born on a Tuesday*, on the other hand also has the theme of suppression as a coping mechanism, and this is evident in the protagonist Dantala's navigation that is marred by violence and neglect, that he resorted to emotional suppression as a strategy for survival. Following the news of his father's death, Dantala chooses to suppress his grief, remarking that he did not care much:

“When I finished, Malam said I could go back to my village in Sokoto. Then Alfa, whose father lives near my father's house in Sokoto, had just arrived at the school and told me my father had died months earlier. I did not ask him what killed him because, Allah forgive me, I did not care much. It had been very long since I saw my father and he had not asked after me.” (John 11).

In order to protect himself from the unpleasant reality of his father's abandonment, he maintains this separation. This emotional repression has subtle consequences that show themselves in brief times of vulnerability. The narrative suggests that the relentless necessity to suppress feelings that lead to a sense of numbness is illustrated by his unsettling enjoyment of violence. He expresses a disturbing appreciation for "the way the blood spurts when you punch" (John 10) and recounts using a nail to harm a thief. Such actions, arising from a lack of emotional support, highlight how repressed sensitivity can turn into a tendency for

harshness. Concealing such burdens from his friend only intensifies his emotional distress, illustrating the profound effects that emotional battles can have on an individual.

Dantala's vulnerability turns out to be the foundation of his most meaningful relationships. In a moment of emotional distress, he bonds for the first time with Banda. Witnessing Dantala's tears, Banda extends an offer of drugs and takes him under his wing, calling himself Dantala's best friend: "I am the smallest in the gang of big boys in Bayan Layi and Banda is the biggest. But he is my best friend." (John 9-10)

This kind gesture which stems directly from Dantala's emotional upheaval demonstrates how a moment that seems like weakness can actually pave the way for a deep connection. As the story unfolds, this vulnerability helps him find a sense of belonging with his new family and Sheikh Jamal. Upon meeting his aunt and cousin, he is overcome with emotion that he feels more scared than he had ever been. His cousin, Khadija envelops him in an emotional embrace in response to his fragility, welcoming him into the family even before his mother fully accepts him. Likewise, when Dantala confesses his past to Sheikh Jamal, who can see the weight of his eyes, it leads the Sheikh to take him in, guiding him toward a new direction. The narrative conveys that emotional vulnerability is not a permanent state but rather a transformative stage that fosters self-awareness and personal growth.

By the conclusion of the first part of the book, Dantala's pain serves as a catalyst for change. His moments of vulnerability, made evident through his guilt and regret, enable him to break free from the destructive lifestyle of the kuka tree boys. This newfound insight emerges directly from his experiences, compelling him to confront both his emotional and physical weaknesses. Through Dantala's journey, the author illustrates that true resilience lies not in the absence of feeling, but in the bravery to embrace vulnerability, to experience pain, and to harness those feelings to forge a better future.

2.2 Identity Crisis

Erik Erikson describes identity crisis as a period of intense self-exploration and uncertainty regarding one's role in society. This crisis manifests with unique complexities for men, and this is shaped by societal expectations of masculinity (Erikson 165). Judging by the narration in the novels, masculine identity, particularly in a rapidly changing society, is often fluid and susceptible to crisis when traditional markers of success or self-worth are challenged. As Obioma paints it in *An Orchestra of Minorities*, Chinonso's life is a series of such crises, beginning with the loss of his father, which strips him of a foundational element of his identity as a dutiful son and heir. His subsequent neglect of his poultry farm and a business

inherited from his father, signifies a loss of purpose and a struggle to maintain the identity his father had envisioned for him:

The corn his father had planted he let wilt and die, and he allowed a collection of insects to foment the resultant decay as long as they did not also trample on the other crops. When what was left of the farm could not meet his needs, he shopped at the market near the big roundabout, using as few words as necessary. And in time he became a man of silence who went days without speaking – not even to his flock, whom he often addressed as comrades. (Obioma 24)

His relationship with Motu further intensifies this crisis. Her sudden disappearance leaves him ‘empty, alone and stunned: "He had found himself telling her so much about his life that he became aware, as if by epiphany, how heavy his history had become. By sundown, he knew she would not come. He lay all day, empty, alone and stunned, listening to the raindrop fall into the bucket and hit the ground like drumbeats." (Obioma 47)

This experience, coupled with the prostitute’s mocking laughter, creates a profound sense of inadequacy and a questioning of his own desirability and worth. The realisation that a man can find a woman who accepts and loves him, and that one day, she could vanish without cause breaks apart his building grasp of romantic relationships and sets him off course. Ndali’s father’s relentless questioning about

his education and profession directly attacks his self-worth, reducing him to a 'Church Rat' and a 'man who raised domestic fowls for a living. Ndali's father ask:

'So, gentleman, shepherd of birds, what education do you have?'
 'But I have to ask this question.' – 'Yes, sir.' – 'Have you considered that my daughter here is a soon-to-be pharmacist?' – 'Yes, sir.' –
 'Have you considered that she is now completing her bachelor's in pharmacy and will so proceed to do her MPhil in the UK?' – 'Yes, sir.' – 'Have you considered, young man, what kind of future you, an unschooled farmer, will have with her?' (Obioma 112)

Chinonso felt defeated, and his self-esteem was impacted by the interrogation as he is questioned about his education. He finds it difficult to express his thoughts, he stammers due to his anxiety. His chi recognises the immediate impact of this moment that "the confidence he'd arrived with, like an egg in a calabash, was already broken by the time he sat at the table with the family". (Obioma 110) The father's characterisation of him as a "shepherd of birds" highlighted his low social status and lack of formal education. After the encounter, Chinonso was left feeling "useless with shame" and "humiliated," which rendered him emotionless and inactive. His sense of helplessness and embarrassment intensified with the realisation that he could only be the one receiving blows and not retaliate, particularly from Ndali's family.

His subsequent ordeal in Cyprus, where he is swindled by Jamike, further dismantles his identity. The realisation that he has been ‘duped’ and has lost everything he possessed leaves him ‘deplumed’ and ‘bare before the world’. This experience strips him of his financial security, his hope for a better future, and his belief in his own judgment, culminating in a profound identity crisis where he is reduced to ‘a mass of weak clay and was now unrecognisable even to himself’ (Obioma 260). The public humiliations include the time he has conversation with the White man where his rural background and lack of formal education are revealed with emblem of gullibility:

At first he spoke in the language of the White Man, but midway through the story, he asked the man if he spoke Igbo, which the latter affirmed, as if annoyed by the question. Now, given a softer bed to sit on, he spoke in excruciating detail, and by the time he was done, the man told him he was certain he’d been duped. (Obioma 214)

This experience forces him to confront his perceived inadequacy and fuels a desperate desire to redefine himself through education and financial success, leading him down a perilous path.

In *Born on a Tuesday*, Dantala struggles with a fractured and disoriented sense of self. Placed in a Quranic school, he finds himself in a space where he feels disconnected from family and community. His identity as an almajiri comes under scrutiny when he becomes involved with Banda’s gang, engaging in actions that

clash with his religious upbringing. He frequently contemplates the moral complexities of their actions, justifying the decisions they make: “When we fight, it is because we have to. When we break into small shops in Sabon Gari, it is because we are hungry, and when someone dies, well, that is Allah’s will” (John 16).

This division is further emphasised by the narrator's simultaneous desire for a more righteous past and his acceptance of the brutal present. He acknowledges that he has "barely prayed" since departing from his Quranic teacher but finds solace in the belief that "Allah evaluates the intentions of the heart." This perspective allows him to see himself as essentially "not terrible" despite his deeds. This uncovers a deep divide between his moral education and the harsh truths of his current circumstances, where his identity is shaped not by his decisions, but by external influences: necessity and Allah's will. He is trapped between a past that instilled moral integrity and a present dictated by the need for survival, leading to a disjointed identity where he can be both an active participant in violence and a passive witness to its repercussions. Dantala's very name, "Dantala," which translates to “Born on a Tuesday,” is devoid of true significance as is noted by Malam Abdul-Nur:

‘But Dantala . . . Dantala is not a name. To say someone was born on a Tuesday, is that a name? A name should have meaning. Like Ahmad, the name of the Prophet, sallallahu alaihi wasallam. You should stop using that Dantala.’ I keep nodding. ‘Where is your

home, the home of your father?’ Sheikh continues. ‘My father died, but he lived in Dogon Icce with my mother.’ (John 33).

The conversation between Dantala and Malam Abdul-Nur reinforces Dantala’s lack of a rooted identity, but his efforts to define himself through his associations with Banda and Sheikh Jamal, as well as his pursuit of English language learning, reflect a desperate quest for a stable identity amid chaos. The shifting nature of his allegiances and the ethical dilemmas he faces reveal a deep identity struggle, as he attempts to understand himself amidst various conflicting influences and a lack of conventional stability. The point at which he starts to learn English encapsulates his vulnerable state. This anxiety emphasises the constant strain and uncertainty he endures while working to create a new sense of self.

2.3 Unrealistic Societal Expectations

The novels powerfully critique the unrealistic societal expectations placed upon men, particularly regarding financial success, educational attainment, and the ability to provide. Ndali’s family, representing a segment of Nigerian society, embodies these expectations in *An Orchestra of Minorities*. Her father’s disdain for Chinonso’s poultry business and his lack of a university degree highlights the premium placed on white-collar professions and academic qualifications (Obioma 111-112). The father’s statement, ‘And you think it is the right decision to marry such a woman who is so high above you, who wants to be her husband?’ (Obioma

113) clearly articulates the hierarchical nature of their societal values and the pressure on men to marry up.

This pressure forces Chinonso into a desperate attempt to meet these expectations, leading him to sell his compound and pursue an education in Cyprus, a decision driven more by external validation than genuine desire:

Surprised by her switch to Igbo, he did not speak.

'How can you sell everything, Nonso?'

'I did it because I don't want them to separate us.'

'Yes, but you sold everything you have, Nonso,' she said again and turned to him, and he saw now that she had again begun to cry. 'For me, why, Nonso?' (Obioma 173).

His chi observes that his actions are 'shaped by shame and his will by desperation as the tragic consequences of this decision, including falling victim to deceit and confinement, underscore the destructive nature of striving to meet unattainable or misaligned societal ideals. The expectation of male forbearance prevents Chinonso from openly expressing his fears and anxieties to Ndali. He resolves to only tell her after he had solved his problems, believing that revealing his struggles would diminish him in her eyes.

'Ah, Nonso! What about your friend Jamike? Is he happy there?'

Ezeuwa, at the mention of this name, he felt his heart sink. He paused to gather himself, for he did not want Ndali to know what

he'd been passing through. He'd resolved within himself that he would only tell after he had solved his problems." (Obioma 286)

This self-imposed burden, a direct consequence of societal expectations of masculine strength, isolates him and contributes to his downfall. The novel suggests that such expectations create a facade that men must maintain, often at great personal cost.

Dantala's journey with these expectations is a crucial aspect of his character development. He openly admits to deriving a disturbing pleasure from violence and he shares it thus:

"I like chasing thieves especially when I know they are not from Bayan Layi. I am the fastest runner here even though I broke my leg once when I fell from a motorcycle in Sabon Gari. Anyway, the groundnut oil thief, we caught him and gave him the beating of his life. I like using sharp objects when beating a thief. I like the way the blood spurts when you punch." (John 10)

Later, amidst the chaos of the riots, he likens the experience to a high, feeling an almost spiritual rush that makes him feel invincible, like electricity coursing through his body, but the harsh reality of this path is that it leads to deep trauma and regret. He remains tormented by the visage of the man he killed during the riots, pondering if the man's family even remembers him. In *Born on a Tuesday*, Dantala also faces immense societal pressures. As an almajiri, he is expected to adhere to

strict religious principles, yet he is thrust into a world of violence and crime with Banda's gang. The expectation to be a 'man' in this environment means participating in violent acts and showing no weakness, as seen in the gang's boasting about killings: "The boys who sleep under the kuka tree in Bayan Layi like to boast about the people they have killed." (John 8)

The pressure to conform to the gang's brutal code, even when it conflicts with his internal morality, is a significant burden. Later, his pursuit of English education and his desire to build a road to Dogon Ice and a hospital are driven by a desire to uplift his community and gain respect, demonstrate how societal expectations for male provision and leadership shape his aspirations: "If, insha Allah, I ever have the money, I will build a road to Dogon Ice and a hospital. And a nice mosque with a rug, like the new one at the motor park in Sokoto, but bigger." (John 39)

Both Chinonso and Dantala are victims of a system that demands a specific, often unattainable, version of masculinity, leading them to make choices with dire consequences. The expectations of masculinity within the Bayan Layi gang is heavily intertwined with theme of violence. Boys feel immense pressure to portray themselves as tough and unyielding in order to earn respect and enhance their social status. This demand to embody a violent persona burdens them unrealistically and results in harmful behaviour. The character Gobedanisa, for instance; he fabricates a story about having killed a man to maintain an aura of dominance and instill fear in

the younger members. His willingness to create a false, violent identity underscores the extremes to which these boys will go to meet the toxic expectations placed upon them. This is evident in the excerpt below:

"I don't care that Gobedanisa lies about it but sometimes I just want to ask him to shut up. The way he talks about killing, you would think he would get aljanna for it, that Allah would reserve the best spot for him. I know why he talks like that. He tells it to keep the smaller boys in awe of him. And to make them fear him." (John 8)

Unrealistic societal expectations pose a formidable challenge to masculinity as illustrated in Chigozie Obioma's *An Orchestra of Minorities* and Elnathan John's *Born on a Tuesday*. The protagonists in these novels experience significant pressure from the roles prescribed for them as men. In *An Orchestra of Minorities*, Chinonso confronts the societal demand to attain education and wealth to establish his worthiness of love. Both narratives demonstrate the detrimental effects of these constricting definitions of masculinity, which can lead to feelings of despair, heartache and a profound sense of disappointment.

Obioma's *An Orchestra of Minorities* and John's *Born on a Tuesday* offer sad explorations of the challenges faced by men in contemporary Nigerian society. The protagonists, Chinonso and Dantala, navigate worlds where emotional vulnerability is suppressed, identity is constantly in continuous change, and unrealistic societal expectations weigh heavily. Through their distress journeys,

both authors highlight the detrimental effects of these pressures, demonstrating how they can lead to internal suffering, destructive choices, and ultimately, tragic outcomes. These narratives serve as powerful commentaries on the complex and often unforgiving landscape of masculine identity in a society grappling with tradition, modernity, and the enduring quest for self-worth.

CHAPTER THREE

LANGUAGE DEVICES IN THE NOVELS

3.0 Introduction

This chapter offers a fundamental insight into language devices, also referred to as literary devices, and their essential functions in both literature and everyday communication. Language devices are strategies used by writers to produce particular effects, evoke feelings, and express deeper meanings that go beyond the literal interpretation of the text. They serve as the instruments that elevate ordinary language into impactful, expressive, and unforgettable prose.

Obioma and John deploy different language devices in the novels to examine the challenges of masculinity, especially through the characters' emotional vulnerability, identity struggles and the unrealistic societal expectations. They deploy language devices such as: symbolism, metaphor, simile, allusion, imagery and characterisation.

3.1 Languages Devices in Obioma's *An Orchestra of Minorities*

3.1.1 Symbolism

The term symbolism refers to anything that suggests an additional meaning, often relating to an abstract concept like an idea or belief. In literature, a symbol can be an object, individual, scenario, or action that possesses a straightforward interpretation within a narrative but also implies or signifies deeper meanings. The symbol could be general (universal in its meaning) specific (not universal in its meaning).

In the novel, the depiction of domestic fowls, particularly chickens, serves as a significant symbol of Chinonso's emotional vulnerability and his identity

challenges. He finds comfort in their fragility, which reflects his feelings of inadequacy and it mirrors his own emotions. As his chi narrates, “domestic fowls were the weakest animals among all creatures” (Obioma 30) and chickens which are parts of domestic fowls, are seen as defenseless creatures with the inability to defend or save themselves from dangers. The domestic fowls unexpectedly become a source of solace and companionship for him because “He found solace instead among feathery creatures” (Obioma 38)

The bridge over the Amatu River marks a pivotal moment in Chinonso’s journey. When he attempts to save the woman (Ndali) who is contemplating suicide by throwing some of his fowls into the river, he is portrayed as an ‘emasculated’ man who has endured great suffering, “he watched the birds struggle against the thermal, whipping their wings violently against the wind as they battled desperately for their lives but failed.” (Obioma 21) He points towards the river, saying “That is what will happen if somebody falls inside there.” (Obioma 22) In this moment, where he steps in to protect another from the river's destructive force, he directly challenges his perceived lack of masculine authority. The river symbolises the abyss of despair that both he and the woman confront, and his act of intervention is an endeavour to reclaim his masculine role as a guardian.

The “wool-white rooster,” symbolises the erosion of his pride, self-identity, and a conventional masculine role. Following the rooster's death, Chinonso experiences deep sorrow that transcends the loss of an animal. When he discovers

that the "wool-white rooster," was one of the chickens he had thrown off the bridge, "he screamed again, 'Chukwu, oh! Chukwu!' For he'd found that one of the chickens he'd thrown over the bridge was the wool-white rooster." (Obioma 29). He shouts this in distress "and searches water for it", but finds no trace of bird. The rooster's passing marks a critical blow to his already shattered sense of masculinity that plunged him into an even more profound state of weakening. The narrative portrays this loss as a crucial moment in his regression. The passing of the wool-white rooster was the tipping point.

The river signifies an irretrievable loss when Chinonso realises that the "wool-white rooster" he cast off the bridge is not recovered from the water. The failure to retrieve the rooster from the river represents the loss of his pride and sense of self. This moment embodies profound defeat, as the river takes away something he valued, which was a representation of his own strength, further sinking him into despair and a feeling of emasculation. The narrative characterises him as a "man of much sorrow," and this loss in the river represents another blow to his already fractured identity.

The log of wood represents Chinonso's emotional detachment and lack of action when faced with emasculating situations. When his masculinity is put to the test, he becomes lifeless and unable to react. This is first illustrated when he meets the two women who wish to touch his hair: "My host cursed inwardly, for he did not want to speak to anyone; he did not want to be stirred out of the wet log. But he

knew it was too late. The women had assumed he would speak with them, and had come towards him, and stood in the aisle between the empty seats. One of them, waving her painted fingers, said something to him in Turkish" (Obioma 221). Subsequently, at a gathering, following a humiliating interaction with Ndali's family, his self-worth is so diminished that he is depicted as being entirely inert: "...he sat as lifeless as a log of wood." (Obioma 132)

3.1.2 Metaphor

A metaphor, as defined by the *Cambridge Dictionary*, is a phrase that is commonly found in literature. It characterises a person or object by referencing something with comparable attributes to that person or object. In other words, a metaphor serves as a figure of speech that facilitates a comparison, yet differs from a simile. It presents the comparison as though it is literally accurate.

In Obioma's *An Orchestra of Minorities*, metaphor serves as a vital literary tool to delve into the significant challenges to masculinity encountered by the main character, Chinonso. The story, narrated from the viewpoint of Chinonso's chi or guardian spirit, frequently utilises impactful and often non-western metaphors to redefine masculinity beyond standard ideas of strength, authority, and resilience.

A prominent metaphor that questions conventional masculinity arises when Ndali refers to Chinonso as a "shepherd of birds" (Obioma 96). This metaphor shifts Chinonso's image from that of a commanding and dominant figure (similar to a shepherd of sheep) to that of a protector of "the weakest animals among all

beings." This reflects Chinonso's own fragility and "emasculated" condition following his father's passing. It depicts a masculinity characterised by nurturing and safeguarding the vulnerable, rather than by might and control.

The narrative depicts loneliness as "the violent dog that barks interminably through the long night of grief" (Obioma 26). This metaphor captures the aggressive and relentless essence of the protagonist's emotional strife. Chinonso's battle with loneliness and sorrow after his father's death represents a fundamental challenge to his masculine identity, as he withdraws and avoids support from friends and family. This metaphor demonstrates how emotional suffering can feel like a concrete, antagonistic force assaulting a man's well-being.

When Ndali's family humiliates Chinonso publicly, his *chi* characterises the state of a shamed individual as one marked by "inaction, numbness—as if he has been tranquillised" (Obioma 114). This metaphor equates shame to a paralysing drug, emphasising how the loss of a man's social position and dignity can leave him powerless and stagnant. It illustrates that threats to masculinity can create a sensation of being subdued and incapable of taking action.

The narrative employs the metaphor of revenge as a "debris field," (Obioma 378) a landscape where a beaten man returns to "revive a dead fight" (Obioma 378) by gathering "rusty weapons" (Obioma 378). This metaphor highlights the pointlessness and self-destructive nature of Chinonso's pursuit of vengeance. It

illustrates how the trials he endures, particularly humiliation and treachery, drive him toward a futile and harmful undertaking.

The text elevates fear beyond a mere feeling to that of a "subaltern god, the silent controller of the universe of mankind" (Obioma 453) This metaphor implies that fear is a fundamental, and arguably the most potent, force influencing human actions. This challenges the traditional masculine ideal of being fearless by portraying fear as an unavoidable and divine presence that governs Chinonso's decisions, and indeed the choices of all men.

Man's existence is like an "anchored swivel." There is a belief that "life of a man is anchored on a swivel" (Obioma 124). This analogy implies that a person's life can shift dramatically in an instant, rotating in one direction or another. This, in other words, means "a world that has stood can lie prostrate, and that which was flat on the ground just a moment before can suddenly stand erect" (Obioma 124) This demonstrates the vulnerability of a man's situation and how a single incident can entirely change his path, leading him to either triumph or disaster. This illustrates the unpredictable nature of Chinonso's destiny. His existence is stable until his significant encounter with Ndali, which shifts his life onto a new path. The initial positive change, discovering love and optimism, is soon overshadowed by the troubles that emerge. His experience consists of abrupt alterations, where instances of hope and success are swiftly succeeded by pain and hopelessness, showcasing how his life is perpetually turning on this "swivel" of destiny.

3.1.3 Imagery

Obioma's *An Orchestra of Minorities* is narrated from the perspective of Chinonso's chi (guardian spirit) and delves into the complexities of fate, free will, and the very essence of manhood. Through a vibrant blend of imagery rooted in Igbo cosmology, nature, and the human form, the novel offers a strong critique of traditional masculinity, illustrating that a man's value is often determined not by his might or influence, but by his vulnerability and ability to empathise. The repeated motifs of birds, darkness, and bodily decay emphasise the emotional and spiritual hurdles that Chinonso encounters, implying that genuine masculinity is found in resilience instead of strict adherence to societal norms.

The symbolism of birds, especially the gosling, acts as a recurring representation of Chinonso's emotional sensitivity and his association with a softer, nurturing form of masculinity. The gosling he used to have "would change his life" (Obioma 26), and his affection for his poultry becomes integral to his sense of self. This stands in stark opposition to the conventional masculine roles frequently depicted in literature. As the narrative progresses, his passion for birds is so deeply rooted that his chi attempts to soothe him by reminding him: "I simply put the thought in his mind that he was a lover of birds, one whose life has been transformed by his relationship with winged things" (Obioma 21).

Chinonso's bond with these fragile beings indicates that his masculinity is not found on aggression or control, but rather on a quiet, protective care.

Nonetheless, this tenderness is put to the test when his affection for Ndali brings him shame and humiliation. For instance, he feels embarrassed when she discovers a feather on him before meeting her family, and he experiences a sense of powerlessness and is "rendered inutile by shame" (Obioma 114) after facing disrespect from her father. The imagery of the feather, being a fragile and airy item, contrasts sharply with the intense feelings of shame, a substantial weight that undermines his masculinity and renders him voiceless.

The novel further employs the imagery of darkness and physical failure to depict Chinonso's emotional and spiritual decline. After his father's passing, he is engulfed in deep sorrow. He "walked through the world vertiginously, as if on a tightrope" (Obioma 24), with his vision clouded by a "thick, silky veil of yellow" (Obioma 128). This descriptive imagery of obscured vision and unsteady movement illustrates his incapacity to navigate life in the absence of his father. The tangible world around him appears to deteriorate alongside his spirit, as illustrated by the "mass of dirt, feathers and dust" (Obioma 65) settling on his face in the chicken shed.

These images of filth and desolation symbolise his inner turmoil and demonstrate how his grief has "physically damaged" and "inwardly broken" him (Obioma 350). The most striking instance of this physical and emotional violation is the depiction of being "penetrated from behind by another man, violated beyond

redemption, flogged out of his body" (Obioma 350), which signifies the utmost emasculation and the erosion of his identity.

The depiction of the world mocking him serves as a potent personification of his feelings of public shame and humiliation, and this directly undermines his masculine pride. When a woman laughs at his expression of love, the narrator observes that "...her laughter echoed through his being in many hollow places, as if it were the world itself that had laughed at him, a small, lonely man whose only sin had been that he was hungry for companionship" (Obioma 35). This imagery emphasises how his emotional vulnerability and needs are viewed as objects of scorn, challenging the resilient ideals typically linked with masculinity.

In conclusion, Obioma employs a compelling range of imagery in *An Orchestra of Minorities* to investigate the nuances of masculinity. By illustrating Chinonso's identity through his interactions with birds, his encounters with shame and humiliation, and his physical and spiritual decline, Obioma invites the reader to rethink the concept of manhood. His narrative conveys that a man's strength lies not in his prowess to dominate, but in his ability to withstand, to feel, and to love, even amidst significant challenges.

3.1.4 Allusion

In *An Orchestra of Minorities*, references to Igbo cosmology are utilised to delve into the protagonist Chinonso's struggles with masculinity. The novel is narrated by the voice of Chinonso's chi (a spiritual double or guardian spirit according to Igbo belief), recounting his life to the supreme deity, Chukwu. This narrative framework implies that Chinonso's challenges extend beyond mere personal failings and are intertwined with a larger spiritual destiny, calling into question traditional masculine ideals of agency and self-determination.

Chinonso's chi serves as a pivotal aspect of the allusion to Igbo cosmology. Its constant presence highlights the notion that a man's life is not fully his own. While Chinonso's chi observes and occasionally influences his decisions, ultimately his fate is a spiritual issue that lies beyond his total control. This perspective directly counters the Western ideal of the self-made man, as Chinonso's existence is depicted as a preordained path.

Chinonso's sorrow following his father's passing is described as "emasculating." This display of emotional vulnerability starkly contrasts with the anticipated stoicism associated with masculinity, posing a significant challenge to his identity as a man. The text conveys how he becomes solitary and withdrawn, incapable of finding solace even in the music that once brought him joy. His grief robs him of his traditional masculine functions and drives him to a state of "desolation" where he "resisted all help" (Obioma 25).

A touching difficulty to Chinonso's masculinity arises during his initial sexual experience. He finds himself unable to perform due to an "acute self-awareness of himself as a novice, unskilled in the art of sex" (Obioma 27) His humiliation peaks when the woman laughs at him, and he is unable to assert his masculine identity. This incident serves as a strong illustration of his impotence, as his masculinity is questioned both publicly and spiritually. The title itself refers to Chinonso's father's description of the sound made by mournful fowls. His father noted that the birds were putting on an "okestra" (Obioma 97) for the one that had departed. The term "minorities" is a direct translation of the Igbo phrase umu-obere-ihé, meaning "little things" (Obioma 97). This expression signifies a "burial song for the one that has gone," highlighting the spiritual and communal essence of grief and loss, which are central to Chinonso's development throughout the story.

3.2 Language Devices in Elnathan John's *Born on a Tuesday*

3.2.1 Symbolism

In the realm of Bayan Layi, a man's identity is primarily defined by his physical strength and capacity for violence. The boys gathered beneath the kuka tree continuously to brag about their brutality. Banda, the gang's leader, is held in high regard due to his might and fighting reputation, which is further emphasised by the amulets he puts on. A notable instance of this is the confrontation between Banda and Gobedanisa:

Whoever could break Banda would be feared by the rest of us. We would follow that one. He picked a second plank and aimed for Banda's head but Banda turned quickly and blocked the blow with his right arm. The plank broke in two. Gobedanisa lunged with his bloodied hands and hit Banda on the jaw. Banda didn't flinch. (John 9)

Machetes and other sharp implements also represent authority. Dantala expresses the pleasure he derives from wielding them to assert dominance. However, his hesitation to use a machete for cutting flesh, opting instead for fire, reveals his internal struggle and mixed feelings about this violent form of masculinity.

For the boys, masculinity is closely linked to material affluence and the capability to provide. The income they generate from political thuggery impacts them with a sense of purpose and influence. Dantala's aspiration for a white caftan and the ability to acquire tap water reflects a longing for a different, more esteemed life, one associated with the virtue and cleanliness of his previous Quranic instructor, Malam Junaidu.

Dantala's great pride in receiving a fresh one hundred naira note from Banda highlights how these minor possessions signify an elevation in social status and a connection to a formidable figure: "I have not seen crisp notes like these in a long time" (John 14). "I am glad and suddenly the sleep has cleared from my eyes. This is why I like Banda: he fights for me. He is a good person" (John 17).

The kuka tree stands as a significant emblem for the Bayan Layi community and the boys who exist outside traditional society. It symbolises their improvised "home," a space for gathering, friendship, and retreat from the external environment. For the boys, who lack a permanent residence, the kuka tree offers a haven of safety and belonging:

“He gave me one of his flat cartons and took me to where they slept. They slept on cartons under the kuka tree and when it rained they moved to the cement floor in front of Alhaji Mohammed’s rice store, which had an extended zinc roof. I cannot say when I decided to join the boys under the kuka tree. At first I still wanted to go back home, but as each day passed, I lost the desire to do so.” (John 12)

The kuka tree symbolises a "home" that is formed not on traditional foundations but as a result of their shared struggles. For Dantala, discovering his place beneath this tree signifies a break from the usual route and a reconsideration of what defines a man's strength, emphasising not merely physical might, but the capacity to create connections and seek security within a community.

The term "Dantala" serves as a significant representation of the protagonist's struggle with his identity and social position. It is a Hausa term for an individual born on a Tuesday, which means "without a name." This reflects his early existence as a nameless, confused boy. His path toward self-realisation and change is marked by letting go of this name and embracing a different one. This name is assigned to

him by the men in the Small Party, and Dantala has become familiar with it. The narrator recounts: "My name is Dantala, I add" (John 14). Upon joining the mosque and discovering a new sense of purpose, his mentor bestows upon him the name Ahmad, symbolising his new identity and his transition toward a more devout and meaningful life.

3.2.2 Simile

In *Born on a Tuesday*, John deploys simile to delve into the intricate and often unstable essence of masculinity, particularly among the homeless youth in Bayan Layi. Through Dantala, the narrator's viewpoint, these comparisons illuminate how the characters construct and contest notions of strength, power, and identity. The narrative often uses similes to link weakness with femininity, emphasising the harsh and unforgiving code of masculinity that the characters adhere to. Dantala, the narrator, depicts a man escaping a fire as running "like a woman, like a disgusting 'dan daudu" (John 19). The term "dan daudu" refers to a man who behaves in feminine ways. By likening the man's fear and desperation to a woman's actions, the simile reinforces the perception that true masculinity is characterised by the absence of fear and an assertive, forceful reaction to conflict. This vividly illustrates the toxic masculinity that pervades the boys' lives, where fear is not merely a personal flaw but a blatant and repulsive indicator of weakness.

Simile exposes the internal battles faced by the male characters and their self-perception. When Banda critiques Dantala's storytelling, he remarks that

Dantala speaks aimlessly, "like the harmattan wind that just blows and blows, scattering dust." This comparison implies that Dantala's communication lacks the decisiveness and intent expected of a man. The "harmattan wind" (John 9) simile signifies how his perceived absence of control and substance challenges his identity and standing within the group, where gaining respect and having a clear direction are crucial.

Banda's story, the most formidable and feared boy in the gang, is marked by a simile that hints at and underscores the vulnerability of his power. After being shot, Banda collapses "flat on his face like someone hit him from behind" (John 20). This simile holds significance because it diminishes Banda's intimidating presence and exposes his mortality. The sudden and undignified manner of his death, depicted as though he were simply toppled over, dismantles the illusion of his invulnerability, which is a key component of his masculinity. The portrayal of a powerful figure so easily brought down by an unseen force highlights that even the mightiest men in their world are susceptible and subject to fate.

The white caftan signifies Dantala's longing for a life that is clean, pure, and held in high regard. Aware of his impoverished condition, he understands that maintaining such a garment would be a challenge, as white is difficult to keep clean—soap costs a lot, and the river water will turn it brown even after washing: "I will acquire a cap like that whenever I have the money, perhaps even a white

caftan." He is optimistic that if the Small Party comes out on top, "Things will improve if the Small Party wins. Insha Allah" (John 11).

The difficulty of preserving the caftan's whiteness reflects the fight to stay innocent and unaffected by the harsh conditions surrounding him. His yearning for the white caftan embodies his hopes for a brighter future, which he believes will follow the victory of the Small Party.

3.2.3 Imagery

In the novel, vivid description plays an essential role in portraying the intricate and often perilous aspects of masculinity. Through the perspective of Dantala, the story illustrates masculinity as a performance closely linked to violence, authority, and physical appearance amid the harsh realities of Bayan Layi.

The text utilises gendered imagery to establish masculinity by contrasting it with its opposite. A clear example arises when the boys are rioting, and a "fat man runs out of the burning building, towards me, covered in soot, coughing and stumbling over things (John 19). Dantala depicts the man as fleeing "with his hands in the air like a woman, like a revolting 'dan daudu'" (John 19). This analogy reinforces a rigid binary: "manly" behaviour is marked by strength and aggression, while "womanly" actions are seen as weak and cowardly. The term "'dan daudu," a derogatory reference to an effeminate man, is employed to convey utmost disdain, highlighting the severe societal repercussions of deviating from their masculine standards.

The “empty room” in the mosque serves as an image of the spiritual and emotional void that Dantala experiences. “In the empty room behind the mosque, six of us stand around the body” (John 183). After distancing himself from the gang, he is given a space in the mosque, which he refers to as “empty”. This emptiness exceeds mere physicality; it embodies his current state of mind and spirit. In this chapter of his life, he escapes the grip of violence and power struggles that once defined him. The empty room signals a fresh start, a sanctuary free from the pressures to conform to violent notions of masculinity. Yet, this emptiness also presents a formidable challenge he must navigate the task of redefining himself and discovering a purpose that transcends his past experiences.

The imagery of “bones” vividly illustrates the profound physical and psychological impact of a dehumanising environment: “My bones hurt so bad—my back, my knees, my neck, my arms—it feels like someone has beaten me with iron rods” (John 29). Dantala shares his experience of feeling as though his body has been reduced to mere “bones” symbolising not just his physical condition but also the erosion of his humanity. In terms of masculinity, strength is often tied to one’s physical presence. By expressing the pain in his bones, Dantala conveys the vulnerability of his body alongside the deep suffering he endures. This imagery underscores how the oppressive environment and the omnipresent threat of violence have weakened both his physical and emotional resilience, challenging the notion of masculine invincibility and revealing the disintegration of his identity.

3.2.4 Metaphor

In *Born on a Tuesday*, the narrator's journey into adulthood is closely linked with the complexities of masculinity, which the author examines through compelling metaphors. The story employs comparisons to highlight the characters' battles with their identities, vulnerabilities, and tendencies toward violence.

The narrator, Dantala, along with his friend Banda, primarily defines masculinity through physical strength and the ability to inflict harm. This is evident within their gang, where the boys brag about committing murder and engaging in violent confrontations. Banda's power takes on a near-mythical quality, safeguarded by a talisman and amulets claimed to render him immune to metal. This physical invulnerability acts as a metaphor for the emotional shielding the boys feel they must wear. Nevertheless, this metaphor is challenged as the narrative unfolds. Despite his protective amulets, Banda proves to be susceptible to sickness; he is depicted coughing and coughing up blood, serving as a bodily representation of his hidden fragility. His last moments, when he collapses "flat on his face," powerfully depicts the delicate nature of the masculinity he represents.

Dantala's understanding of himself and his role in society is linked to his membership in the gang. His aspiration for a white caftan and a red cap, similar to the politician's attire, symbolises his yearning for a different form of manhood, one

that signifies respect, authority, and affluence. The voter card featuring his "big head" exemplifies this fleeting experience of significance and inflated masculinity.

Violence emerges as a persistent theme and metaphor. The machete wielded by the boys is characterised as "sharp... and light," which highlights how easily and accessibly violence can become. The fire they ignite at the Big Party office metaphorically represents their explosive rage and serves as a means for them to exert dominance and control over their surroundings, if only for a brief moment.

The internal struggles regarding masculinity are also delved into through metaphor. Dantala's post-traumatic stress and an emerging awareness of his own sexuality directly confront the masculine identity he has assumed. His sensation of observing himself as though in a movie while packing illustrates his psychological detachment and his difficulty in connecting with his own choices. His struggle to manage his thoughts and physical reactions is likened to a tumultuous river or conflicting thoughts "chasing each other until I felt dizzy" (John 55). He expresses a desire to "cut off the whole damn thing," which powerfully conveys his wish to eliminate the part of himself he deems shameful and a core challenge to the masculinity instilled in him.

The metaphorical expression: "His face is a map of scars" (John 8) describes Gobedanisa's face and it reflects his violent past and relentless pursuit of power. Within the boys' gang, toughness and a readiness to engage in fights are essential to a man's standing. These scars represent more than just injuries; they are his

confrontations, providing concrete evidence of his strength and solidifying his fearsome reputation. Therefore, these scars in the expressions show the form of social currency within the gang, providing his toughness and serving as a testament to his masculine strength.

A powerful metaphor is employed to convey the demeaning reality of begging: “Working on a farm during planting and harvest season is better than standing by the road, chasing after cars and having people turn away from you like you are a huge mound of shit. It is better than fighting over food and money at the Friday mosque” (John 54). This act strips a person of their dignity and autonomy, which are fundamental aspects of masculinity. Through this, Dantala underscores the profound shame and dehumanisation tied to begging, revealing the emotional and psychological toll it inflicts on one’s self-esteem and sense of manhood.

In conclusion, both Obioma and John employ language devices to analyse and redefine masculinity, transcending conventional ideas of strength and invincibility. Obioma's work uses these devices to demonstrate that genuine strength is rooted in emotional resilience and vulnerability, while John's novel uses them to reveal the fragility, toxicity, and futility of masculinity identity that is built on violence and external validation. Instead of a static concept of strength and forbearance, they portray masculinity as vulnerable, fragile, and often in conflict with societal expectations. The authors use symbolism, metaphor, simile, and imagery to explore the emotional and physical toll of adhering to these norms.

CHAPTER FOUR

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

4.1 Summary

This research explores the challenges of masculinity encountered by the main characters in Chigozie Obioma's *An Orchestra of Minorities* and Elnathan John's *Born on a Tuesday*. As it is highlighted in the first chapter, the project aims at uncovering how elements such as poverty, emotional distress, religion, violence, and societal expectations shape the identities of the male protagonists. A detailed reading of both novels reveals that the experiences of Chinonso and Dantala offer profound insights into the complexities of masculinity within a Nigerian context.

Chapter two explores major challenges of masculinity such as emotional vulnerability, identity crisis, and unrealistic societal expectations faced by the protagonists and men in Africa. The analysis of chapter three focuses on specific language devices, unveiling how the authors utilise literary devices like symbolism, metaphor, allusion, and imagery to critique conventional ideas of manhood. The results indicate that both protagonists are not static but rather dynamic beings whose identities are continually shaped by the harsh realities they encounter.

4.2 Findings

The analysis unveils several important insights into the challenges of masculinity as portrayed in Obioma's *An Orchestra of Minorities* and Elnathan John's *Born on a Tuesday*. This research highlights that masculinity is not a rigid idea but rather a dynamic construct that is continuously influenced by challenging socio-political conditions. The traditional notion that equates male strength solely with physical dominance or emotional suppression is not only called into question but is also revealed to be harmful.

The findings show that emotional suppression can lead to serious psychological and behavioural issues. The narratives offer a stark illustration of the adverse effects of keeping emotions bottled up. For Chinonso, his unresolved grief and deep emotional needs, worsened by feelings of shame, spiral into violence, obsession, and ultimately a tragic fate. In Dantala's case, hiding his feelings initially serves as a coping tool, yet it grows into an act of violence. Only when he allows himself to be vulnerable does he find the ability to forge connections and pursue personal growth.

Moreover, both texts depict how unrealistic societal pressures can reduce one's sense of self-worth. The protagonists face a system that imposes a narrow definition of masculinity, particularly regarding financial success, academic achievement, and the expectation to be a provider. Chinonso's misguided choices stem from an urgent desire for external validation to prove his worth to Ndali's family, illustrating the fragility that often lies beneath the mask of toughness men put on. Similarly,

Dantala's longing for acceptance is distorted by the violent norms of his gang, demonstrating how poverty and instability push him into a destructive version of "protest masculinity."

Significantly, the findings reveal that vulnerability can be a vital force for authentic connection. They suggest that being vulnerable is not simply a weakness but rather a transformative process. Dantala's moments of emotional upheaval, such as his tears and the honesty that follows, enable him to bond with Banda and earn the guidance and support from Sheikh Jamal. This illustrates that embracing vulnerability can foster a sense of community and open pathways to a brighter future.

4.3 Recommendations

Based on the insights gained from this research, the following recommendations are proposed: advocating for refined masculinity education, addressing socio-economic root causes, promoting literature that explores vulnerability, and encouraging future research on comparative masculinities.

4.3.1 Refined Masculinity Education

Educational institutions and media should take the initiative to challenge the confines of traditional masculinity. By fostering emotional literacy among men, we

can work to encourage emotional expression and break away from the “culture of silence” that often leads to emotional distress and harmful behaviours.

4.3.2 Addressing Socio-Economic Root Causes

Policymakers need to focus on socio-economic strategies that ensure accessible educational opportunities and economic stability for marginalised young men. Given that the characters’ challenges are closely tied to poverty and the pressure to provide, these strategies are vital in steering young men away from seeking validation through violence or extremism.

4.3.3 Promoting Literature that Explores Gender Narratives

Literary critics and educators should continue to champion African literature that questions and reshapes traditional gender narratives. Advocating for works such as *An Orchestra of Minorities* and *Born on a Tuesday* can stimulate critical literary discussions vital for driving social change by highlighting the vulnerabilities and complexities of male identities.

4.3.4 Encouraging Future Comparative Research

Future studies should broaden this comparative framework by examining how masculinity intersects with various factors such as disability, sexuality, and migration in African literature. This expansion will enrich the ongoing dialogue around gender.

This research successfully delved into the challenges surrounding masculinity in Chigozie Obioma's *An Orchestra of Minorities* and Elnathan John's *Born on a Tuesday*. The findings indicate that African masculinity is confronted with significant challenges, shaped by the realities of postcolonial life, economic strains, and a traditional value system that often feels outdated. The contrasting experiences of Chinonso and Dantala serve as powerful literary mirrors reflecting the psychological weights and emotional complexities faced by men who deviate from established masculine norms.

4.4 Conclusion

This study suggests that true strength lies not in the denial of one's emotions or the pursuit of societal accolades, but in the courage to embrace vulnerability and the resilience to redefine one's self-worth outside of confining cultural expectations. Both novels contribute meaningfully to African literature, offering sober yet deeply human insights into the nature of manhood, fostering a more subtle and compassionate understanding of men's lived experiences.

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