

**TITLE: FIGURING THE HEROINE IN THE ANKARA ROMANCE SERIES  
AGAINST THE ARCHETYPE OF FLORA NWAPA'S *EFURU*: MARRIAGE,  
PROCREATION, LOVE, SEX, AND WORK,**

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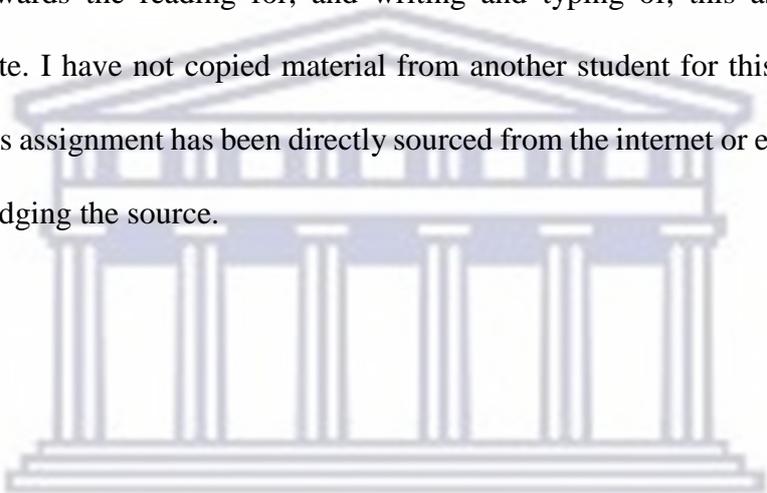
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## ABSTRACT

Romantic love has been neglected in the study of African literature and culture. It has been misconstrued and overlooked in canonical African literature, and the scholarship of that literature. Only recently has some attention been directed to African popular romance writing. The main focus of African literature and its scholarship fell on questions of history, colonial resistance, and, later, in the work of women writers, on gender oppression. This neglect is gradually being addressed. Romantic love is slowly getting more recognition than before in the study of African literature, and as evidenced in popular culture by recent African imprints like the South African-based Sapphire imprint, and Nollybooks and Okada Books in Nigeria, among others. The Ankara popular romances under study in this thesis focus on the concerns of contemporary African women and suggest resolutions to their problems. Although they are in some ways similar to Anglo-American romance fiction like Mills and Boon and Harlequin, they present some concerns specific to their context. Among these are questions of childbearing, locally relevant questions related to work and career, and contextually shaped issues around desire and the erotic. The contemporary Ankara novellas have been read against the backdrop of Flora Nwapa's novel *Efuru*, a first-generation African novel written by the first published African woman writer. We see that the dilemmas encountered by the Ankara heroines represent the concerns of *Efuru*, Nwapa's heroine, with some variation in some cases. Of the Ankara novellas published to date, the following titles will be studied, namely, *A Tailor-Made Romance* by Oyindamola Affinih, *Love Me Unconditionally* by Ola Awonubi, *A Taste of Love* by Sifa Asani Gowon, *The Elevator Kiss* by Amina Thula, *Finding Love Again* by Chioma Iwunze-Ibiam and *Love's Persuasion* also by Ola Awonubi. The thesis establishes that the resolution of the Ankara novellas is different from the ending of *Efuru*. Nwapa leaves *Efuru*'s dilemmas unresolved, whereas the Ankara novellas, because they are romances, present idealised resolutions in which model heroes, who manifest transformations coming to being in society more generally, constitute the wished-for happy-ever-after ending.

**KEYWORDS:** romantic love, the heroine, African literature, Flora Nwapa, *Efuru*, The Ankara Romance Series, marriage, childbearing, career, and sexuality.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE:INTRODUCTION: ROMANTIC LOVE, POPULAR ROMANCES, AND THE ANKARA IMPRINT .....	1
An Overview .....	1
Romantic Love .....	2
The Potentiality of Romantic Love .....	5
Romantic Love in Africa: Misconstrued and Overlooked .....	6
Popular Romances in Africa.....	9
The Ankara Imprint.....	11
Anglo-American Romance Novels and Transformations of the Figure of the Heroine ...	15
The Novellas .....	20
CHAPTER TWO: FLORA NWAPA’S <i>EFURU</i> AND ITS LITERARY INFLUENCES .....	25
Flora Nwapa.....	25
Efuru .....	27
The Themes: Marriage and Procreation, Love, Sex, and Work.....	31
CHAPTER THREE: MARRIAGE AND PROCREATION: CONTINUITIES AND TRANSFORMATIONS IN A <i>TAILOR-MADE ROMANCE AND LOVE ME UNCONDITIONALLY</i> .....	34
"Marriage must be fruitful": The Importance of Marriage and Childbearing in African Societies	35
Marriage and Procreation: The Pattern Set by the Literary "Foremother" in <i>Efuru</i> .....	37
The Ankara Heroine: Marriage and Motherhood on "Her" Terms in <i>A Tailor-Made Romance and Love Me Unconditionally</i> .....	40
Conclusion .....	50

CHAPTER FOUR: LOVE AND THE EROTIC: THE SEXUALLY ASSERTIVE HEROINE IN <i>A TASTE OF LOVE AND THE ELEVATOR KISS</i> .....	51
Attitudes to Sex in African Cultures and Literature .....	52
Intimacy in <i>Efuru</i> .....	59
“New Kind of Romance”: Bringing Sex into the Light in the Ankara Novellas - <i>The Elevator Kiss</i> and <i>A Taste of Love</i> .....	61
A Taste of Love .....	65
Conclusion .....	69
CHAPTER FIVE.....	70
SELF-FULFILMENT AND INDEPENDENCE THROUGH WORK: METAMORPHOSIS OF THE “CAREER GIRL” IN ... <i>FINDING LOVE AGAIN AND LOVE’S PERSUASION</i> .....	70
Formidable Traders: The Economic Independence of Women in <i>Efuru</i> .....	72
Love and Career – A Balancing Act in <i>Finding Love Again</i> .....	76
Uncovering Abuse at the Workplace in <i>Love’s Persuasion</i> .....	79
Conclusion .....	86
CHAPTER SIX.....	87
CONCLUSION.....	87
Works Cited.....	90



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## CHAPTER ONE:

## INTRODUCTION: ROMANTIC LOVE, POPULAR ROMANCES, AND THE ANKARA IMPRINT

**An Overview**

Emily Davies, an English feminist and writer of *Rethinking the Romance Genre*, proclaims that the romance genre “capture[s] the most intense hopes and fears of a particular historical moment”, making it a “logical place for feminist critics to seek critiques of social inequality and representation of alternative social representations” (Davies 7-8). Furthermore, Pamela Regis, a major scholar of the romance novel, proposes that “romance puts the heroine at the center of the book” (Regis 29). For these reasons, this thesis studies the figure of the heroine through a popular romance series, namely, the Nigerian Ankara Romance Series. Its novellas interpret romance in particular ways relative to the contemporary African setting in which the narratives play out. The Ankara romance novellas are modern, urban, trendy, and sophisticated and do not gesture towards the “traditional” past. The authors of these novellas locate themselves within the international romance writing scene and not within the context of canonical African literature. Despite this, I have found that connecting the novellas with “classical” twentieth-century novels by African women writers, especially the earliest published texts, is very revealing and productive. Thus, even though the Ankara novella authors may not refer to Flora Nwapa’s first novel *Efuru* (1966), the first novel published by an African woman writer, they seem to explore similar general topics to the ones considered by Nwapa. To realise a deeper understanding of these novellas, it is vital to view them in relation to this first novel by Flora Nwapa. Nwapa is an African writer who writes about personal relationships, particularly love, childbearing, and marriage. Special attention is paid to how marriage, childbearing, work, and the erotic shape the heroine since these are the

topics that invite exploration based on Nwapa's novel. Thus, the thesis compares a contemporary romance series written by Nigerian women writers with the first novel published by a Nigerian (and African) woman writer. It compares the different approaches to the themes under consideration, namely, marriage, procreation, love, sex, and work.

The first section of this introductory chapter focuses on romantic love in general. It traces its development, briefly exploring Anglo-American romances, concentrating on romances in Africa, and, finally, giving detailed attention to the Ankara Imprint. Emphasis is also given to how the figure of the heroine has developed in African fiction over the period since Nwapa published her first novel. The heroine and the heroine's transformation over time are the primary focus of the thesis. This question is examined against the backdrop of how romantic love in Africa has not received much attention in African literature scholarship. Worldwide, in fact, romance has been misconstrued and denigrated. In the African context, romance has been even more effaced since it has not even been considered in scholarship even though a focus on love is prevalent in most African popular genres, like songs, film, popular romance novels and magazine stories. A noteworthy exception to the neglect of romance in Africa is the Ankara Romance imprint, some of the novels of which are studied in this thesis.

### **Romantic Love**

“Love is merely a madness” is a famous quote from Shakespeare's character-Rosalind, in the play *As You Like It* (Shakespeare 17). In *Captain Correlli's Mandolin*, Louis de Bernieres also concurs that love is a state of temporary madness. However, love is not just madness. There are many definitions and understandings of love, such as friendship (Greek *philia*) or love as fellow feeling for other human beings (Greek *agape*). In this thesis, we are looking at love as romantic love or eros. In Simon May's *Love: A New Understanding of an*

*Ancient Emotion*, romantic love is described as the “[i]dealis[ation] of those we sexually desire” (May 27). In *Erotic Love in Sociology, Philosophy and Literature*, Finn Bowring calls it the “eros domain” involving “cherishing of and yearning to bond with the other person”, associated with sexual love (Bowring 2). Love in this form is often linked with the term “romance” to distinguish it from other types of love. This subsection briefly discusses the origin and meaning of “romance,” tracing its significance to the novel’s development and its various contemporary connotations.

The term “romance”, like love, has many connotations. It originates from the Old French word “*romanz*,” which evolved from referring to a group of languages to a term used to describe a literary form (Barron 2). The term is “confusingly inclusive” since it has different meanings in different settings (Regis 19). “Romance” is associated with the Romance languages; languages like French, Spanish, and Italian developed from Latin. The narratives that resulted from these Romance languages, chronicling tales of knights and their quests, adventures, and pursuits of courtly love – are also called romances. They date back to the Medieval period (Regis 12). Before Medieval romances, there were also long Greek narratives dating as far back as the fourth century BC. These long narratives tell stories of passionate love, separation, and triumph. Medieval prose and verse narratives depict heroes, namely, knights and heroines, gentlewomen, and damsels, who adhered to that period's courtly social codes. These narratives are referred to as chivalric romances because they show chivalric ideals. These narratives reflect the courtly love ideals of the times, which have strongly influenced European understandings of women and the relationship between women and men.

However, most laypeople with some literary knowledge associate “romance” with the Romantics, those poets, like William Wordsworth and William Blake, of the late eighteenth century. The Romantic poets foregrounded the natural environment and social concerns, and

new ways of thinking about the self. Their ideas “continue to resonate strongly in the contemporary world” (Bennett 117). The Romantics’ approach elevated the emotions over the rational and individualism over collectivism. Their arts, music, and philosophy were inspired by passion, spiritual reality or mysticism, and nature (Prickett 13). Why then are the Romantics crucial? It is because they reflect the philosophy and culture that birthed present-day romance literature. For example, a characteristic of Romanticism - the explicit or implicit idealization of the world – is still evident in contemporary romance literature. Furthermore, the word “romanticize” means to be idealistic, dreamy, or to fantasize.

Why is the history of the term “romance” significant? It is crucial since the history and the romances referred to are “ancestors” to the contemporary romance novel with some similarities in the tropes; for example, the element of fantasy or idealization is common to all the forms referred to as “romance.” The novel, whose primary focus or plot centres on and around a love relationship between two people, is a romance novel: “A romance novel is a work of prose fiction that tells the story of the courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines” (Regis 19). The romance novel embraces both realism and wish-fulfilment since it needs to describe a world that is a realistic possibility. However, it needs also to embody the heroine’s and the reader’s fantasy of idealized union with a desirable other. Regis’ definition looks at the romance novel as a love story originating in the eighteenth century in Europe. The plots of the eighteenth-century romance novels, especially the novels of Jane Austen, continue to influence contemporary Anglo-American romance novels. In this thesis, the term “romance” refers specifically to fiction that ends triumphantly with lovers declaring their love.

Anglo-American romance novels have influenced African romance novels, as this thesis shows. Still, African romance novels, mainly the Ankara Romance imprint considered here, also take the romance novel in new directions. Like Mills and Boon and Harlequin

romances, the Ankara Romance novels describe women's encounters with highly desirable men. They track the obstacles to their relationships and their eventual triumph in marriage, or otherwise happy, healthy love relationships, which may not always be formalized by marriage. However, the Ankara Romances, set in African cities, featuring upwardly mobile young African women, allude specifically to social and political questions more overtly than the socio-political is addressed in Anglo-American romance novels.

### **The Potentiality of Romantic Love**

In the above sense, romance refers to love or eros, and love is a fundamental human emotion. Although there is some debate about various forms of love, most sociologists agree that love is a universal social construct (Jankowiak and Fischer 149). Other emotions studied by sociologists and psychologists include anger, joy, fear, anxiety, and shame. Love as an emotion has often been neglected as a focus of study (Jackson 201). Romantic love is just one form of love. Other forms of love include love for family and kin, the love of God, and the affections that inform friendship. Romantic love, however, is unique among affections since it always includes an erotic element.

Renata Grossi and David West also acknowledge its uniqueness in their introduction to a volume of critical perspectives, *The Radicalism of Romantic Love*. They suggest it is “a tool to achieve serious political goals and a means of overcoming the divisions of capitalist society [and] achieving the collective solidarity of the commons” (1). Thus, love has the potential to transform society. In an essay, “Falling for the Collective,” from the same volume, Nagore Fernandez thwarts the belief of some feminist scholars that romantic love is a constraining force oppressing women. Instead, Fernandez suggests that “it is a political force that can transform ... lives and reverse subjectivity” (172). In the contemporary west, love has become a prerequisite for marriage. It was not always the case in earlier European

histories, such as in the Middle Ages, where marriage among the aristocracy cemented political alliances. Here parties to marriage did not have to declare undying love for each other to justify the marriage. Formalities of courtly love also allowed marriage partners to flirt with adulterous love relationships outside of marriage. Romantic love was also not a prime motivation for marriage in African cultures but has increasingly become one because of the cultural influences of global modernity. Physical intimacy and sexual attraction in romantic relationships are prerequisites for procreation, essential for human existence. The African romance novels explore marriage, childbearing, sex, romance, career, and the possible violence women face in all these spheres, as seen in the Ankara series. To see what shifts have occurred on these questions, these contemporary novels have been contrasted with Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*, one of the first and most important stories about romantic love.

### **Romantic Love in Africa: Misconstrued and Overlooked**

Even though romantic love is one of the most potent and fascinating emotions, it has not been considered in much now-canonical African literature. Looking at contemporary African literary works by first-generation writers like Chinua Achebe, Ayi Kwei Armah, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, their writings seem mainly concerned about African politics and social challenges because of how history has influenced the continent's experience. The slave trade and colonization, among other factors, altered and affected African societies, culture, economy, and other aspects of people's lives (Ojaide 21). For this reason, the focus of African novels fell on questions of history, colonial resistance, and, later, in the work of women writers, on gender oppression. However, African literature could not wholly erase love relationships in its plots.

The love subplot remains central to the canonical writers' main plot that focuses on imperialism, colonization, and culture clashes. For example, in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall*

*Apart*, the hero's second wife, Ekwefi, walks out on her first marriage to marry Okonkwo because of her passionate and undying love for him. We now see these latent romance elements of twentieth-century canonical African literature explored further on online platforms like brittlepaper.com. An article, "African Fictional Characters in Bed – Okonkwo is Less Talk, More Action" by Aineni Egoro, explores Okonkwo as "a figure of erotic fantasies" ([African Fictional Characters In Bed — Okonkwo Is Less Talk, More Action \(brittlepaper.com\)](http://brittlepaper.com) np). On the same platform, in a different article titled, "Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* from Fiction Erotica/ Thighs Fell Apart by Kiru Taye/ Brittle Paper Exclusive", Ainehi Egoro takes the subject further. She interviews and asks Kiru Taye, the queen of Nigerian erotica, to replay Okonkwo's "bedroom" scene, which is elided from Achebe's novel (<https://brittlepaper.com/2014/02/thighs-fell-kiru-taye-fall-fan-fiction-erotica/>). In Ngugi's *The River Between*, another example of the focus on romantic love in novels that have been interpreted as being mainly about politics, the love relationship between Waiyaki and Nyambura cannot be ignored as it also propels the main political plot about nation-building. This is what is argued by Felicia Annin in a PhD dissertation that considers the inclusion of love plots in virtually all Ngũgĩ's novels, but where in the early fiction, in particular, eros is seen as a potential force "bridging divides in the modern nation-state" (Annin 36).

The romantic love elements of the "classic" novels demand study, but this has not been forthcoming since love has not been considered seriously. Romance has the strange distinction of being the most popular yet least respected literary genre, not only in Africa but the world over. Pamela Regis acknowledges that romance novels are rarely reviewed, and people feel shy to read romance novels in public (Regis xi). The genre is significantly underappreciated and is even worse in the African context where very little attention has been given to it. Historically, academics have avoided the subject of romance. Perhaps, as noted by

Catherine Muhoma, love seems so personal and apolitical that scholars or critics “do not engage with it seriously” (Muhoma 26). Groundbreaking Ghanaian writer Ama Ata Aidoo keenly observes in the introduction to *African Love Stories*, an anthology edited by herself, the neglect of romantic love in African literature. Thus, despite the incidental inclusion of representations of romantic relationships in the novels of the twentieth century, scholars of African fiction, according to Ama Ata Aidoo, have, for the most part, neglected to consider these relationships openly because the love stories were not always laid bare, but absorbed and overridden by pressing political and social themes that dominated and continue to dominate the African continent. However, Aidoo says African love narratives are interesting since they show how intimacies make social and political interventions (Aidoo xi). In general, romance in African literature has not been accorded the attention it deserves.

In the twenty-first century, however, things are changing. Contemporary African authors are writing novels and stories that focus specifically on love and sexuality in African contexts, depicting African heroines and heroes. Anthologies like *African Love Stories*, referred to above, depict complex love stories from different countries. Its twenty-one authors include Leila Aboulela, Tomi Adeaga, Sindiwe Magona, and Blessing Musariri. They portray African romantic love in various contexts - in heterosexual, interracial, adulterous, and lesbian relationships. Another novelist who has put romantic love on the agenda is Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. She is the Nigerian-born diaspora writer of the novel *Americanah*, which won the 2013 National Book Critics' Circle Fiction award. The novel is about identity, race, feminism, and migration, but a love story forms the main plot. In her previous novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), Adichie presents the complexities of love against the backdrop of the Biafran war. These works are just a few of the examples of romance novels in twenty-first-century African fiction.

## Popular Romances in Africa

Despite the repression of a focus on love in canonical African literature and the scholarship of African literature, love has been a dominant theme in other cultural forms of expression, for example, oratures, popular romances, songs, television, and film. African oral culture presents love strongly in love songs, poetry, proverbs, and folk tales about love and romance. Traditional Igbo love proverbs like “*Uta ka na iko*” (sweetness is deepest among lovers) show that love relationships have always been important in Africa (Smith, “Romance, Parenthood and Gender in Modern African Society” 130). Romance, flirting, infatuation, and love have always been common in African societies (Bell 154). Love themes are also evident in African folktales, for example, the tale of “Achire’s Heart” narrated by Aidoo in the introduction to *African Love Stories*. “Achire’s Heart” is an ancient folktale of a romantic love relationship between a king’s daughter, Achire, and her lover. The folktale counters the perception that romantic love was non-existent in Africa before the twenty-first century and proves love’s dominance and importance in society. Onitsha market literature from Onitsha in Nigeria also significantly contributed to the growth of African popular romance. Most of the pamphlets and novellas, cheaply produced, and widely consumed by the public, focused on love in the Nigerian context. Onitsha market literature presents moralistic and didactic themes about romantic love (Solanke 278).

African publishing houses have also played their part by identifying markets for romance novels. By the mid-twentieth century, the subject of romantic love had been popularized in Africa through songs, films, magazines, and various print media, in addition to its prevalence in oral cultures (Mutongi 56). Imprints like Nollybooks, Africana Romance, and Ankara Press helped shift the African audience’s focus to home-bred romance fiction. Kwela Publishers in South Africa launched the Sapphire imprint, which published Mills-and-Boon-styled stories but set in South Africa. Moky Makura also established Nollybooks,

which was inspired by the Nigerian film industry, Nollywood. The entertainment industry has significantly developed romantic love as a form of cultural expression in an African context through film. They generally portray the many challenges that exist in African love relationships. The films are transmitted through the mass production of cheap compact disks making the movies easily accessible. Like *Drum* magazine's "Ask Sis Dolly", African magazines have also had love relationship advisory columns. They are now digitalized and easily accessed on Twitter and Facebook platforms.

Similarly, relationship blogs like *The Nigerian Doll* also give insights into love and romance issues ([thenigeriandoll.blogpost.com](http://thenigeriandoll.blogpost.com) np). Love songs are the most popular on the charts. The history of the Hot 100 ranking of hit songs, dating back from 1958, shows that romantic tunes consistently rank in the top positions ([www.billboard.com](http://www.billboard.com) np). There is also the example of "Soyyayah literature"- Hausa popular romances that have significantly impacted Hausa society. Similarly, events like St Valentine's Day celebrations, and dating services, which have commercialized romance, also point at the importance of romantic love in contemporary African societies.

What then is the status of the romance novel genre generally? In a speech at a Public Library Association conference, Jayne Ann Krentz, a renowned romance writer and author of a string of *New York Times* bestsellers, remarked that "Romance Has Arrived!" meaning the genre has successfully progressed through the years (Ramsdell 3). Her sentiment is justified, mindful that romances are now "sexier and hotter" than ever before. The Inspirational romance market has grown, and even the number of sub-genres has increased, among other developments. (3). This is the Anglo-American view. Has the African Romance genre also "arrived"? Indications suggest it is slowly getting more recognition than before, as evident from the recent African imprints like the Ankara Press imprint, the South African based-

Sapphire imprint, Nollybooks, and Okada Books. There is still a lot to be explored about the genre, making it a potentially exciting topic of study.

### **The Ankara Imprint**

Cassava Republic Press publishes the Ankara romance imprint. Cassava has had a broader interest in promoting romance, as shown by its online *Valentine's Day Anthology*. In 2015, the Ankara Press imprint commissioned prominent African men and women writers, translators, and readers from all over the continent to write (and translate) romantic love stories as a Valentine's Day "treat" for its readers. The collaborative effort produced a free online Valentine's Day Anthology, which showcases African talent and celebrates African writers' diversity and unity. The writers present the stories through an African lens; the setting, characters, and storylines are African. Much work was put into translating it and producing audio versions in various African languages, thus widening the audience and readership. These stories of the heart confirm the presence of both same-sex and heterosexual romantic relationships in Africa. They draw attention to the transformation of roles and how gender roles are negotiated and complicated in contemporary African romance fiction. This romance fiction aims to entertain and empower both heroines and heroes, which, according to the editor, Bibi Bakare-Yusuf, is the motivation behind publishing the anthology ([ankarapress.com](http://ankarapress.com)). It proves that African life is not only about strife and grief but that it also celebrates love. Romance fictions are "rewrit[ing] romance for Africans" (Morrow np).

This thesis focuses on the Ankara Romance Series, Anglophone publications of the Ankara imprint of Cassava Republic Press. The series attempts to capture the contemporary moment as far as intimate relationships are concerned. Initially based in Abuja, Nigeria, Cassava Republic Press aims to "change the way the world thinks about African writing" such that in 2016 it spread its operations by launching another branch in London. (qt. in

Onwuemezi np). The birth of an African romance imprint with a continental and international readership, according to its publisher Bibi Bakare-Yusuf, is a significant achievement. The Ankara imprint complements these goals, not only internationally but also locally, to the African audience. According to the Ankara website, it is “[a] new kind of romance [on the African scene and the world stage] to challenge romance stereotypes and empower women to love themselves in their search for love, romance, and wholesome sex.” (qt. in Carpenter np). It was founded on 15 December 2014. According to its website, [ankarapress.com](http://ankarapress.com), the imprint’s mission is to project a confident, stylish, ambitious, and cosmopolitan African woman who finds self-realization through a fulfilling personal relationship with an African man. Overall, the Ankara romances break a lot of traditional stereotypes. Their heroines and heroes are distinctive. They are given an “exotic” African identity and sophistication by emphasizing their skin color, stylish dress, and desirable lifestyles, thwarting notions of an impoverished, “backward” Africa.

The authors of the Ankara series are all women. This distinction has created a platform for the woman to shape the desired heroine and hero who project the love, sex, and desire she wants in a romantic relationship. This notion is also echoed by one of the authors, Amina Thula, who acknowledges that writing empowers and excites her to dictate to the world how it should view love. (Asmal-Lee np). As much as these romance novels serve to configure gender relations, they are, most importantly, mouthpieces, giving African heroines a voice against a backdrop of often patriarchal societies. In an interview with Amina Thula, a contributor to the series, and author of *The Elevator Kiss*, in line with the imprint’s intentions, the author says she thwarts the traditional “damsel in distress” trope, challenging romance stereotypes (Pitamber np). She disagrees with portraying heroines as helpless beings needing saving.

An interview with the publisher, Bibi Bakare-Yousuf, in the same article projects a similar view. She suggests that the novels contribute to the criticism of dangerous notions of male dominance, control, and manipulation that can be harmful to women. Instead, the novels project more positive masculinities through projecting romance heroes who embody the desired qualities. Furthermore, the heroines are shown not to tolerate abusive relationships. Contrasted with the mainly subservient stereotypical woman portrayed in other popular romances, for example, in the Onitsha market literature of the 1950s and 1960s, the Ankara heroines are independent and sexually assertive. Bakare emphasizes that the Ankara titles seek to portray “healthy, balanced and passionate relationships,” allowing women to “create the contours of their sexual universe” [Ankara Press: Q&A with Publisher Bibi Bakare-Yusuf \(africainwords.com\)](#) np). However, the intention is also to erase the generally racially uniformed masculinity and femininity constructions presented by, for example, Mills and Boons. So, as much as the texts speak to everyone, the primary target is the black African woman whose African identity is captured in the name “Ankara.” “Ankara” refers to African print fabric. This African cultural marker is also emphasized in the novels’ cover designs, which show black African women proudly dressed in stylish Ankara clothing. The heroes and heroines in the novellas are dark-skinned, have African names, and the storylines and settings are African. The common element is the love theme, where both the heroine and the hero challenge popular romance stereotypes. The heroines are not meek and passive, and the heroes are not always hyper-masculine, muscled gods. According to Bakare-Yousuf, the above aspects make the Ankara series distinct from other African romances, for example, the Pacesetter crime-romance series of the 70s and 80s or the Kano Soyayyah romance novels. Pacesetter linked romance exclusively with crime, and the Soyayya romances in Hausa enjoy a limited readership since they are very culture-specific and have generally not been translated into more widely accessible languages.

Ankara's digital publishing strategy also makes it distinct from other imprints. African publishers face many challenges financially from the high cost of print paper, distribution of books, and even customs clearance processes. (Shercliff "*The Valentine's Anthology: A Snapshot of the possibilities and challenges of African Publishing*"). The Ankara publisher argues that digital formatting and distribution are the only cost-effective and hassle-free solutions in these circumstances. Despite the challenges of internet access, the publications quickly reach a wider audience regionally and globally. They are easily translated into different languages or audio versions. (For example, *The Valentine's Day Anthology* was translated into Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, Pidgin, Kiswahili, Kpelle French.) The pdfs and audio tracks can be easily downloaded for free via Ankarapress.com.

Similarly, the Ankara series is also distributed digitally. The ten romance books of the series were initially published as electronic books before publication as hard copies. The digital versions may be relatively cheaply bought and downloaded on various mobile devices like mobile phones or Kindles, making it convenient because they can be read anytime, anywhere. Reading applications can be used to switch to audio mode allowing one to listen while doing other chores. Of the ten books published to date, six are hard copies with lengths between 147 to 200 pages, in line with the publisher's guidelines of 35 000 – 45 000 words divided into ten to fifteen chapters. In her article in *Book Life Business Day*, Madeline Morrow describes these hard copy books as "purse-sized" and convenient to carry in a handbag. They are "purse novellas" (Ankarapress.com). Thus, both through digital modes of sale and through attention to convenience in printing print copies, the Ankara imprint aims to be as widely accessible and widely read as possible.

Ankara novels could be considered part of the chick-lit subgenre of contemporary popular romance. These heroine-centered narratives focus on the social life and love relationships of young professional women. They follow a trajectory that starts from the

heroine's frustration or humiliation, through a series of bad matches, to the heroine's realization of the need to self-reflect and finds "the self" before finding a successful love match and, thereafter, a happy ever after ending. The protagonist – the stereotypical 'chick', according to Heike Mibler's description in her introductory notes in *The Cultural Politics of Chick Lit*, is "single, lives and works in an urban center, is surrounded by a network of friends, and is struggling to find a fulfilling job and a meaningful relationship" (Mibler 1). One of the most well-known examples of chick-lit is the *Bridget Jones* series by Helen Fielding. Bridget is a single woman in her thirties living in London. She is trying to understand love and life as a young woman.

Referring to Mibler's description above, we see more similarities than differences between the Ankara Romances and Chick-Lit. The setting is modern and urban. The narratives are heroine-centered – focused on the trials and tribulations of womanhood. The young women work outside of the home or are in business, and they are looking for fulfilling romantic relationships. However, despite the similarities between the Ankara novellas and Chick-Lit, I still find the comparison of the novellas with *Efuru*, Flora Nwapa's "ur-text" about love and marriage to be more interesting. The comparison with *Efuru* reflects interesting continuities and transformations in understanding love in relation to the figure of the heroine in the African context. Different understanding of love have developed over the roughly five decades, which separate Nwapa's novel from the Ankara novellas.

### **Anglo-American Romance Novels and Transformations of the Figure of the Heroine**

This section overviews the figure of the heroine in romance novels going back to the eighteenth century. The primary scholarship of the heroine's portrayal dates to the English novelists Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding, followed by scholarship, most prominently,

of Jane Austen's novels. What was the heroine of the earliest romances like? In this section, I discuss the three models presented by Richardson, Fielding, and Jane Austen, with the discussion of Austen being the most detailed since Austen, more than any other writer, is acknowledged as influencing the romance novel, especially her second published novel, *Pride and Prejudice*: "Her importance to the English novel tradition is emphasized in literature and language classrooms worldwide" (Wells 4-5). (A few of the Ankara authors acknowledge Austen as a key inspiration for their writing.) Jane Austen could be seen as developing further or transforming the romance novel, especially the heroine's representation, begun by prominent writers like Richardson and Fielding. We see these "ancestor" novels pioneering themes on the predicaments and dilemmas of the heroine figure of their time. These include questions of social class, moral codes, love relationships and sexuality.

In *Pamela* (1740), Richardson's eponymous heroine is a virtuous, modest servant girl who manages to set a value on herself by refusing to be violated by her master – Mr B. The heroine Pamela is a fifteen-year-old maidservant persevering against the artful seductions of her master and seemingly is rewarded by marriage at the end. As noted by Catherine Rogers in her critique, we see the heroine Pamela depicted as a sex object (256). The society in which the character lives hold the cultural belief that sexual violation meant moral ruin to a woman. Heroines are portrayed as helpless victims of male chauvinism. Through Pamela, we hear the heroine's distant voice - her emotions, thoughts, and feelings about what is happening to her. Pamela displays the attributes of passivity, vulnerability and modesty, and she is a victim preyed upon by a male figure. Richardson also wrote other novels, notably *Clarissa* (1748). As acknowledged by William Bradley Otis and Morriss H. Needleman, these works set the tone for English writers who follow like Jane Austen (388) but who also transformed Richardson's approach.

Henry Fielding's parody of *Pamela*, titled *Shamela* (1741), shams and taints Pamela's martyrship to virtue through his heroine, Shamela. His heroine is a caricature - Shamela is portrayed as a prostitute and disreputable woman, contrasted with the meek Pamela. She preys on men to get what she wants. Shamela may be viewed as a stereotypical anti-heroine figure. Interestingly, these two novels are focalized through men's gazes, namely, Fielding and Richardson. Both caricature the heroine figure in different ways – Pamela as the extreme of the vulnerable, meek, and helpless heroines. Shamela is the other extreme, but of vice and moral corruption.

These representations were taken up and transformed by Jane Austen, whose work, the figure of the heroine, becomes a lot more rounded and complex, especially through her use of irony, as is highlighted by Lloyd Brown (Brown 336). Her work is probably the most influential to the development of romance in general and contemporary popular romances. The romance plots she developed dominate literary and popular ideas about romance (Shashkevich np). Austen reflected her heroines' everyday lives, especially the pressure to marry well and enjoy economic security in a world where middle-class women were free only to play the piano, attend balls, do needlework, paint, and read romances. Jane Austen's relevance to contemporary ideas about romance can be seen through a series of modern adaptations, sequels, prequels, and re-imaginings of her works. They include love advice books like *Jane Austen's Guide to Dating*, *Dear Jane Austen: A Heroine's Guide to Love and Life*, *The Jane Austen Guide to Happily Ever After*, and many others.

Austen's notable works include the novel *Pride and Prejudice* – a classic of English literature. It centres on a tempestuous relationship between Elizabeth Bennett and the proud, wealthy, aristocratic Fitzwilliam Darcy. Elizabeth is delightful, admirable, and confident but prejudiced against Darcy since she assumes his wealth and social standing make him arrogant and selfish. She is sufficiently independent to stand up to Darcy's hero, who eventually learns

not to use his pride as a shield. It is Elizabeth's rebukes that trigger Mr Darcy's self-reflection and transformation. Elizabeth also overcomes her prejudice – another barrier to their romantic love. Witfully and confidently, she questions and comments on matters about gender, marriage, and inequality. Austen's heroine is an independent thinker. The hero, Mr Darcy, confirms that he admired her for the "liveliness of [her] mind" (Austen 381).

Unlike heroines in Richardson's *Pamela* and Fielding's *Shamela*, Elizabeth's intelligence and ability to openly express her opinions make her attractive to the hero. In Elizabeth Bennett, Austen created a heroine figure with a voice to probe into matters that affect women in male-dominated settings – settings filled with many barriers to love. We see the beginnings of redefining conventional gender roles. As acknowledged by Cheryl Wilson, in *Jane Austen and the Victorian Heroine*, Austen influenced the genre and shifted the gender question to the surface (Wilson 30). A close reading of Austen's work portrays how she transformed the constrained, passive heroine of the earlier works, for example, those of Richardson. Her heroine Elizabeth Bennett and others like Elinor and Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility* seek physical and emotional independence. Elizabeth, for instance, is pro-active, well-read, intelligent, and independent in spirit, unlike Richardson's Pamela and Clarissa, who resembles "wounded birds".

The heroine in *Pride and Prejudice* continues to influence romance novels and even the Ankara romances studied in this thesis. In an interview, "Romancing the Globe: Nigeria's Ankara Press," done by Alyssa Cole, some Ankara authors, like Amara Okolo, writer of *Black Sparkle*, acknowledge Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice* as being formative to their writing (Cole 18). Ankara novella titles like Ola Awonubi's *Love's Persuasion* also echo Jane Austen's novel – *Persuasion* (1818).

Elizabeth's attributes are noticeable in some of the heroine figures in the contemporary Ankara romance series under study. We see Austen's efforts in reclaiming the

heroine's independence and self-sufficiency through Elizabeth questioning marriage and inheritance matters. Her heroines are like the Ankara heroine models – heroines like Deola in one of the novellas, *Love Me Unconditionally*. They are intelligent and can fully express themselves in all matters – they speak out and question ideas about love, gender relations, childbearing, and marriage. Although one cannot claim that the assertive heroines we see in the Ankara series are all influenced by Austen's heroines, Austen is one of the foremost literary precursors of the Ankara authors.

A general overview of the heroine in popular western romances points to debates about whether heroines are liberated or oppressed. Although scholars like Pamela Regis vigorously contest the notion that romance plots oppress heroines, some scholars believe romances prop up patriarchy through stereotypes of the heroine's nature, the plot, and the effect of romance novels on readers. Cultural critics like Simone de Beauvoir and literary scholars like Janice Radway and Tania Modleski see romance as a patriarchal genre since the heroine is contained at the end in the hierarchical relationship with the hero. Susan Ostrov Weisser refers to what she terms the “coveted prize,” where the hero is greatly envied and desired, elevating him above the heroine (Weisser 5). Critics like Kay Mussel argue that the romance formula should be condemned for reinforcing traditional feminine roles that lead to passivity, for example, in the fairy-tale “Sleeping Beauty”, where the heroine is sleeping and needs the kiss of the hero to awaken her (Regis 5). It is also a trope in Mills and Boon romances, where heroes rescue heroines in distress. Often, the heroine is presented as being weak and needing to be rescued. It may be a consequence of how popular romance has been influenced by tales of chivalry where the knight must slay the dragon and save the princess. Critics claim the romance novel confines the heroine to the “love and marriage” quest and “extinguishes” her at the end (Regis 10).

There is an assumption that feminism has been radically undermining the power of romance and hoping to erase it eventually (Pearce and Stacey 11). This wave is believed to have started in the 60s, with critics like Germaine Greer, who maintained that the romance novel is an “enslaver of women” (Regis 4). So romance is seen as bait for the marriage trap, a means of brainwashing women into subservience, and a divergence of the heroines’ energies from more “worthwhile pursuits” (Pearce and Stacey 50).

Nevertheless, Pamela Regis, among other scholars, argues that the romance novel is not inherently patriarchal, and rather than trapping the heroine, offers hope and liberates her. Instead of being “extinguished” and confined as suggested by the critics above, the heroine has opportunities to free herself from constraint – the heroine’s choice to marry the hero is, on this analysis, a manifestation of her freedom. Among others, Linda Barlow and Jayne Ann Krentz interpret the heroine’s attainment of her quest for a happy-ever-after union with the hero as a victory. The heroine has managed to overcome all barriers and even the virtual death element, which stood in the way of her quest (Regis 11). This shows an empowered and active figure, countering any notions of encumbrance or docility. In turn, the reader equally rejoices in the heroine’s overcoming of obstacles and the achievement of self-fulfilment.

The heroines and plots of the Ankara novellas are open to the same debates about whether they might be oppressive or liberating. However, this thesis does not explicitly address whether the genre is patriarchal or not. Instead, it considers the novels through a few salient themes, contrasted with how they are explored in *Efuru*. The analysis of the themes will shed further light on the impact of romance on the agency and freedom of the heroine.

### **The Novellas**

The plots of the Ankara romances are very similar to the plots of romance narratives generally. We will use the plot structure outlined by Pamela Regis in *A Natural History of the*

*Romance Novel* to analyze the Ankara novellas. It presents the essential elements of the romance plot in the clearest outline.

Pamela Regis suggests eight essential elements in the romance novel take the heroine from encumbered to free (Regis 30). These are society defined, the meeting, the barrier, the attraction, the declaration, the point of ritual death, the recognition, and the betrothal.

“Society defined” refers to the kind of setting in which the courtship takes place. It sets the scene or establishes the “status quo” for the heroine and hero. For example, it can be flawed by prejudices that might present obstacles to the romantic relationship. Another element is “the meeting”, which may be presented at the beginning of the narrative or later as a flashback. It usually hints at the potential conflict, often taking the form of the meeting of two people of different social classes or beliefs or very different personalities. The third element is the barrier that drives the plot of the romance novel, and which, when removed, signifies victory and success. Barriers may be internal – or external. Internal, meaning circumstances within a person, for example, values, temperament, beliefs, and attitudes that may be due to the heroine or hero's psychological or subjective state. External barriers are usually forces beyond the control of the couple. These include the setting, the economics, and other coincidental obstacles – examples might be physical separation, the hero's income, or a breakout of war or a pandemic.

By contrast, the next element, “attraction”, sustains the romantic relationship till the barriers are overcome. Attraction can be due to sexual chemistry, friendship, or shared goals and feelings. This is followed by the declaration, which, like all the other elements, can occur at any stage in the narrative. It will be love at first sight if declared at the beginning or made at the end when the barriers have fallen, and transformation is complete.

The fifth element is the point of “ritual death” when the quest or happy ending is in jeopardy, and there seems to be no other way out. The recognition element saves the day -this is when the heroine or hero figures out the solution or when new information is revealed, which helps remove the barriers to allow “betrothal” to occur. Examples of recognition include the revelation of new information, which removes the main obstacle or a confession that absolves or brings out the truth.

Finally, the “betrothal” is when the hero proposes and asks the heroine to marry him. Regis comments that marriage is not necessarily the “happy ending” in novels written from the last quarter of the twentieth century – the heroine and hero in these novels may decide to be together without marrying. This is an ending that occurs in some of the Ankara novellas also.

Regis points out that the key in understanding what is at stake in any romance novel is “looking at the embodiment of any given element in any given romance novel” (Regis 31). She implies that each of these essential elements is employed when writing a romance novel but that the nature of the elements and their position in the plot may vary. Every element is like a building block with a role to play in developing the narrative. For example, the barriers propel the plots, whilst the attraction guarantees continuity. These essential elements help fulfil the requirements of the basic definition of a romance novel - “a work of prose fiction that tells the story of the courtship of one or more heroines” (Regis 27). Regis’s eight plot elements have been outlined in detail since they will be used as a template through which the Ankara novellas will be approached.

Ten novellas have been published in the Ankara Romance Series. Four have been published in digital form only. This thesis will focus on six of these narratives. These are *Love Me Unconditionally* (2017), and *Love’s Persuasion* (2014), by Ola Awonubi, Amina

Thula's *The Elevator Kiss* (2014), Chioma Iwunze-Ibiam's *Finding Love Again* (2014), Oyindamola Affinnih's *A Tailor-Made Romance* (2014), and Sifa Asani Gowon's *A Taste of Love* (2014). These novellas were selected because they have interesting heroine figures and address specific themes in-depth. They pick up on similar themes in *Efuru*, the "ur" text against which the novellas will be read. *Efuru* is studied in Chapter Two of the thesis. The Ankara novellas are then studied in pairs in the subsequent chapters of the thesis. Chapter Three studies *A Tailor-Made Romance* and *Love Me Unconditionally*, which look at the significance of childbearing in the lives and relationships of the heroines. Here we are presented with intelligent, hardworking heroines pursuing successful careers but who are unsatisfied – they seek independence in matters of marriage and love. Having children is important to them, but they want love marriages not premised primarily on childbearing. Chapter Four considers *A Taste of Love* and *The Elevator Kiss*. In these two novels, the question of eroticism is highlighted more than in the other novels. This chapter interrogates love and the erotic, focusing on the sexually assertive heroine – her desires and fears as she establishes a connection with the hero. The sexually assertive heroine, the chapter argues, is has been unusual in the landscape of African literature until fairly recently. In Chapter Five, I look at self-fulfillment and independence through work in the novellas *Finding Love Again* and *Love's Persuasion*, where the heroine's career and work environment are foregrounded. The issues foregrounded in each chapter represent the main tension or the obstacles to a romantic union. These are the internal and external barriers confronting the heroine, which are recurring in the novellas. They have to do with questions of marriage and procreation, love and sex, and career/work, approached in particular ways. Most of these themes and the specific ways they are treated may be traced back to the major novels by African women writers of the twentieth century, which themselves were influenced by Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*,

the first novel published by an African woman writer. The next chapter will look at Flora Nwapa and her novel *Efuru*.



## CHAPTER TWO

FLORA NWAPA'S *EFURU* AND ITS LITERARY INFLUENCES**Flora Nwapa**

This section establishes the “canonical” background against which the thesis will consider specific questions concerning the Ankara novellas. The background includes the work of the foremost twentieth-century African women writers, with a particular focus on Flora Nwapa. In my view, the questions addressed in contemporary African popular romance are very similar to the questions addressed by many African women writers of the twentieth century. Although these canonical novels are not popular romances, they incorporate love stories and address critical questions concerning the heroine. They are centered on gender relations that mostly revolve around marriage and motherhood, love and sex, and work/career, which are recurring questions in the contemporary Ankara romance series under study also.

Critics acknowledge that the canon of African women writers is significant since female writers have attempted to “redefine and focalize on the one-sided presentation of the African women in African Literature” (Forchingong 142). Notable female writers of the first generation include Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Mariama Bá and Ama Ata Aidoo. As suggested by Eldred Jones and Eustace Palmer, these writers give voice to women’s experiences: “[I]t is in the pages of the African woman writer that we first find an objective treatment of womanhood and the problems of womanhood” (Jones and Palmer 2). One of the main problems of womanhood in an African context revolves around the question of childbearing. Research shows that bearing children is central to the sociality of many African cultures (Ogunyemi, 9). This is evident in Buchi Emecheta’s classic novel of motherhood, *The Joys of Motherhood*, which traces the tragic journey of the heroine, Nnu Ego, whose obsession with fulfilling the obligation for childbearing causes her significant pain and

despair. Still, motherhood is at the core of many women's aspirations, as reflected in much African literature. Marital challenges like infidelity and inequality between the sexes in an African setting are also a concern, as made apparent in Mariama Bâ's semi-autobiographical epistolary novel, *So Long a Letter*, which is about the widowed heroine Ramatoulaye writing a long letter to her childhood- friend Aissatou, narrating events of her life, and the painful episodes in a polygamous marriage. Other aspects of these themes like love, work, intimacy, and betrayal are also addressed in other novels by African women writers, for example, Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story*, and others.

However, the novelist I would like to turn to for more focused attention is Flora Nwapa. Her first novel, *Efuru*, was also the first novel published by an African woman writer, influencing the women writers who followed. Nwapa's full name is Florence Nwanzuruanu Nkira Nwapa (1931-1993). She was a Nigerian Oru-Igbo woman, born and raised in Oguta, in Imo State. She wrote African fiction, poetry, short stories, plays, and children's literature. Her notable works include *Efuru* (1966), *Never Again* (1975), *One is Enough* (1981), and *Women are Different* (1986), among others. Many scholars acknowledge Flora Nwapa as the mother of African literature – the progenitor (Umer 34), (Jell- Bahlsen 253). Marie Umeh concedes that "[Nwapa's] books explore frustrations associated with love and sexuality; they emphasize the simultaneously individual and collective nature of personal relationships... [t]hemes of female empowerment, male-female relationships, sexual abandonment, culture conflict, as well as expression of female desire and sexuality" (343).

Nwapa's work has shaped and influenced the women writers who have followed her. For instance, novels like Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) directly alludes in its title to the closing lines of Nwapa's *Efuru*. But Emecheta has not been the only writer to explore further the connections between love, marriage, and procreation in personal relationships. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie acknowledges a debt to Chinua Achebe in her

writing formation, but she has also recognized Nwapa. Her novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), represents in some ways a continuation of Nwapa's concerns about the question of childbearing introduced in *Efuru*, since the central character Olanna, like Efuru, is an Igbo woman who yearns for children but cannot have them in a marriage that, in the case of this heroine, was founded upon individual choice and love. Nwapa also presents hardworking heroines like Efuru, who can work successfully in their trade and fend for themselves. This pattern is taken further in some other woman writers like Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta. Nwapa's theme of love is also continued in these later works where heroines like Ba's heroine in *So Long a Letter*, like Efuru, also marries for love, but the marriage nonetheless fails. Although we see more sexuality than what Maria Olausson calls "superficial sexual pleasure" in later works like Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story*, there is some focus in *Efuru* on sexuality (71), although it is only implied.

The focus in the thesis is on the heroine in the Ankara series against the background of the archetype of Nwapa's Efuru, with a particular focus on questions of marriage and childbearing, love and sex, and work or career. It is interesting to read the Ankara novellas against *Efuru* on the identified themes because the differences in the setting and period reveal similarities and transformations. *Efuru* presents a traditional, rural setting in colonial times versus the contemporary Ankara novellas' setting in cities in the independent postcolonial nation. There are also interesting generational differences between the twentieth-century canonical African women writers and the young, contemporary Ankara authors.

### **Efuru**

*Efuru* is set in Oguta, rural Nigeria, around the 1940s, in a patrilineal society rooted in traditional customs and practices. The economy presented is agri-based with much trading. Male children are preferred for guaranteeing the continuity of the family. Polygamy is also an accepted part of the social structure since both wives and children are labour sources to work

in the fields. Flora Nwapa's heroine, Efuru, enters a love marriage with Adizua, a poor farmer's son. She elopes and pays her dowry because her husband is poor. Efuru, the daughter of a highly respected community leader, is intelligent, industrious, successful, beautiful, kind, self-sufficient, generous, and diplomatic. She is a strong-minded and independent Igbo woman in colonial Nigeria. She is a generous breadwinner loved by her in-laws and highly respected by her community. Efuru is a representation of beauty and goodness. She is tactful and diplomatic in handling any social or cultural issues she disagrees with. Initially, she enjoys marital happiness despite not being able to bear a child. Later, she bears a daughter, Ogonim, whose birth does not stop Efuru's neglect by her husband. The daughter dies tragically at the age of two.

Adizua, Efuru's husband, is lazy and deemed unworthy of Efuru. He takes after his father, who also failed to achieve anything except dishonor. Later, Adizua becomes uninterested in his wife. Efuru's effort to try to revive the relationship fails. Despite her love, Adizua abandons her and elopes with another woman to Ndoni. He fails to turn up even for his daughter's funeral. After searching for him, Efuru gives up waiting and returns to her father's house. She meets and marries her second husband, Gilbert/ Eneberi – a childhood friend. She again fails to conceive and encourages her husband to enter a polygamous marriage so that the family can have children. However, Gilbert also lets her down by abandoning her. Efuru's father dies, and Gilbert fails to attend his funeral – an act of dishonor. On his return, he finds her sick and accuses her of adultery. Ajanupu, a supportive and practical woman, sister to Adizua's mother, consoles Efuru and takes her to the hospital, where she is cured. On her return, she goes back to her father's house. She dedicates her life to serving the water goddess Uhamiri, also known as Mammy Water, believed to bless her followers with prosperity, beauty and fertility.

There are diverging scholarly debates about the novel, *Efuru*. Some critics like Eustace Palmer and Solomon Ogbede Iyasere “savagely” castigate Nwapa for the amateurism of the fiction. However, most critics, especially feminist scholars like Christine N. Ohale, Naana Banyiwé-Horne, Christine Loflin, among others, applaud Nwapa’s work (Adewale Maja-Pearce 10). Grace Ogot comments that *Efuru* “portrays the woman’s world vividly” (Stratton 80). Rose Acholoni commends Nwapa as a “pathfinder who broke the seals of silence and invisibility of the female protagonist” (Ohale 12). *Efuru* is classed as a feminist text, rich in Igbo culture, but no one has considered it a romance novel, even though it also challenges some of the conventions of the romance novel. *Efuru* may also be analyzed as a romance novel since it fits Pamela Regis’s description of “a work of prose fiction that tells the story of the courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines” requiring the following essential narrative elements: society defined, the meeting, the barrier, the attraction, the declaration, point of ritual death, the recognition, and the betrothal (Regis 27). *Efuru* has these romance elements, but it is about a failed romance between the hero and heroine. It does not have the fantasy and wish-fulfillment aspect of the romance proper, but the romance elements are strongly present, as will be established below. In *Efuru*, we see Pamela Regis’s essential romance novel elements at play, but at the same time, they are unsettled. Most notably, while the romance narrative ends with the union of the heroine and hero, in *Efuru*, the narrative presents the element of romantic attraction as a “foreword” to the union presented by marriage, with significant obstructions to romance presented after that.

The love-at-first-sight meeting of Efuru and Adizua is presented in flashback, as are the declaration and betrothal which happens one night at a festival: “Adizua asked her to marry him, and she agreed” (Nwapa 7). *Efuru* thus begins with a marriage, the inverse of what we see in the Ankara narratives. Nonetheless, what is Flora Nwapa saying about the heroine, Efuru? In a society where marriage serves social and economic purposes, Efuru

marries Adizua for love, eloping and following her desire. At this meeting of the heroine and hero, there is already a hint of conflict or disharmony – Adizua had no money for the dowry, which Efurū then pays herself. Efurū came from a “distinguished family”, yet “[h]er husband was not known, and people wondered why she married him” (7). What was the attraction? The attraction in Efurū’s relationship with the Adizua is based on sexual chemistry. Adizua is handsome like his father, and we are told Efurū “tolerated [his deficiencies] because she loved him” (78). However, the central part of the narrative focuses on the obstructions to Efurū’s and Adizua’s love within the union of marriage. The most significant obstacle is Efurū’s failure to conceive and then, later, to bear a male child. This difficulty brings out the worst in Adizua, who begins unreasonably to blame Efurū, leading him to abandon her so that she has to support herself completely. Eventually, he betrays their relationship by entering a relationship with another woman. Regis’s plot element of the romance, the element of “society defined”, seems most prominent since the social context that rolls obstacles in the path of Efurū and Adizua’s relationship receive the most attention in the narrative. Even strong-minded heroines like Efurū are at the mercy of the patriarchal regimes of their time. We see the nature of patriarchal society and what the issues are for the heroine. Patriarchal attitudes oppress the heroine. For instance, a “good wife” means a submissive one that “still loves the imbecile husband” (97, 107). It implies that the heroine does not have the power to express her desires or a basis to complain. Her destiny is a gamble that is not in her hands. These are the principles of Efurū’s society. Efurū confirms this when she says, “Marriage is like picking a parcel from numerous parcels; if you are lucky, you pick a valuable one” (119). Metaphorically, it is stripping the heroine of any power of choice or control of the marriage relationship.

Almost everything is defined for the heroine. Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi in *Africa Wo/Man Palava* observes that first-generation African woman writers like Nwapa portray

heroines as victims in a larger sexist society (4-6). Women are nurtured to be submissive to men. Ironically, in *Efuru*, as we shall see in the Ankara series, women instil and enforce these practices onto their daughters. In *Efuru*, *Efuru*'s mother-in-law Amede screams at the young maid Ogea for failing to do the laundry and cautions that Ogea will not be able to please a husband in future (Nwapa 181). Failure to conceive is blamed on the heroine, which portrays gender inequality. These intrusions suggest that love relationships are not private affairs because society and family are involved and have expectations the heroine should fulfil. These are external barriers that keep the heroine encumbered. Overall, the novel *Efuru* has romance elements, but, finally, it is not a romance since it is about the failed romance between the hero and heroine. We do not have the fantasy, wish-fulfillment aspect of the romance proper, but the romance elements are firmly present.

Despite being shaped by the conventions of Jane Austen and other western influencers, Nwapa's *Efuru* is a good background text for the Ankara romance novellas because we see strong similarities. Most notably, the relationship between the romantic partners is never wholly individual. There is a strong "communal aspect" to the relationships presented in both *Efuru* and the Ankara novellas, with much participation of the extended family – not just parents, but also aunts and cousins who are crucial to the negotiation of the love relationship. More important is the emphasis in *Efuru* and many of the Ankara novellas on fertility and motherhood. Nwapa's *Efuru* proves to be a most revealing comparative text, even though none of the Ankara authors acknowledges its significance.

### **The Themes: Marriage and Procreation, Love, Sex, and Work**

In exploring the heroine figure, both the "classic" *Efuru* and the contemporary Ankara series foreground marriage, procreation, love, sex, and work as the critical concepts of focus in their presentation of the heroine.

In some African contexts, marriage is synonymous with childbearing or motherhood, although African marriage is not only about bearing children. Love and economics may play a role in marriage. Still, based on *Efuru* and other novels by women writers, there is a disproportionate focus on the inability to bear a child. This is the consequence of the premium placed on childbirth which in many African cultures “consummates” the marriage. In these settings, procreation guarantees the continuity of the lineage. The number of children produced becomes the yardstick to measure the success of a marriage. Society views the ability to give birth as emblematic of womanhood and sterility as a marker of "sub-humanization" (Krishnan 3). Marriage fulfils family and societal expectations of successful procreation. Having been nurtured, the heroines get fulfilled, not directly from motherhood itself, but from achieving or satisfying this "milestone" of proving their fertility. Childbearing is presented as an essential role. Children are frequently regarded as central to many African cultures (Ogunyemi 9).

*Efuru* begins with a marriage, where some of the Ankara novels end, but the heroines still confront similar predicaments. As we shall see, the women move on and find new relationships. For instance, they search for "unconditional love" - not premised on procreation only. Overall, *Efuru*'s love marriage is not different from the love marriages sought by the Ankara heroines, except that the Ankara heroines are less bound by tradition. We do not hear any talk of dowry, polygamy, or circumcision. However, both societies still present “seemingly” patriarchal attitudes where society pressures their daughters to marry and bear children. As we shall see, the Ankara heroines refuse to be bound to men they do not love even though they feel the pressure from the society of "the ticking biological clock." Using their past failed relationships as yardsticks, they do not want to repeat the mistakes of getting into relationships with people they are unsure of. Some of their successful relationships do not necessarily end in marriages because the new Ankara generation of heroines does not

choose marriage as the culmination of romance. They enter partnerships that they define for themselves because they precisely avoid marriage problems tied to traditional and religious expectations. As discussed in the introductory chapter, the Ankara female narratives aspire to achieve independence – "a new kind of romance". Ankara heroines enter partnerships that they define for themselves. They engage questions of marriage and procreation, and the heroines can challenge these scripts for their lives, but in *Efuru*, marriage and procreation are not negotiable.

Contrary to *Efuru*, where sexuality is only very vaguely alluded to, we shall see that the Ankara romances show sexually assertive heroines proudly exploring their sexuality. Thus, we see a clear contrast in the Ankara romances. However, while *Efuru* is not sexually assertive, she is socially assertive, which is the similarity I see in the "ur"-heroine and the contemporary heroines. In negotiating her marriage and paying her dowry, *Efuru* takes the traditional role of patriarchs in the same way that the Ankara heroines are sexually assertive, adopting stereotypically male patterns of explicit desire.

The concept of work or career is also important in both settings. Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* highlights how African women have always worked and are productive, not just with the cultivation of crops but also as traders, especially in the West African setting. Women like *Efuru* acquire significant independence and power through successful work. We see them commanding a certain kind of respect in their society as breadwinners. Successful women like *Efuru* can afford to fend for themselves financially. We see this economic independence continued in the Ankara heroines. Thus, even though the Ankara romances more overtly draw on the Anglo-American popular romance tradition, they in important ways are grounded by the issues and concerns of *Efuru* while also transforming conceptions of the heroine outlined by *Efuru*

## CHAPTER THREE

MARRIAGE AND PROCREATION: CONTINUITIES AND TRANSFORMATIONS IN A *TAILOR-MADE**ROMANCE AND LOVE ME UNCONDITIONALLY*

A close analysis of *Efuru* as a love story and the contemporary Ankara romance series shows that marriage and childbearing remain critical topics in modern narratives. According to Pamela Regis' template, "society defined" establishes the status quo which the heroine and hero must confront. In the novellas, we see heroines getting into romantic relationships and early marriages, which turn out flawed because of society's urgency or expectation that they should marry and procreate. Heroines endure hurt and disappointments like being jilted, infidelity, and deception in their romantic relationships. However, without exception, these heroines move on better informed to find new unconditional romantic relationships premised on love. In thinking about the heroine in romance fiction, it is not usual to think of the heroine in terms of motherhood. In the Anglo-American romance tradition, the classic convention is for the heroine to be unmarried and childless, as we see in Jane Austen's heroines and in the romance novels which continue Austen's tradition. But, in the Ankara series, we see some more unconventional heroines taking centre stage, for example, single mothers and divorced women. This follows a new popular international romance novel trend which the [harlequinjunkie.com](http://harlequinjunkie.com) blog refers to as the "Single Parent Romance" ([harlequinjunkie.com/trope-it-up-single-parent-romances/](http://harlequinjunkie.com/trope-it-up-single-parent-romances/)). Often, however, the Ankara heroine's happiness hinges upon the question of marriage and childbearing, as we shall see in the discussion which follows, which is different from the focus on single and divorced mothers in international romance fiction.

After presenting a brief survey of the significance of procreation in marriage, the chapter will consider how the canonical background novel *Efuru* approaches the question of

marriage and motherhood. It will then explore what the Ankara romances are portraying, highlighting differences and similarities with the “classic” novel as far as the question of marriage and childbearing is treated. Although many novels in the Ankara series address similar questions, this chapter focuses on two texts: *A Tailor-Made Romance* and *Love Me Unconditionally*. These novels have been selected because they present questions of marriage and motherhood in great detail. We see mothers pressurizing their daughters to marry and bear children. These pressures result in a series of errors of judgment and disappointments in first relationships. Ankara heroines experience bitter relationships in pursuit of marriage and motherhood, like the heroine figure in *Efuru*, who is iterated in this respect in Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood* and many other novels which have followed these early texts. We shall see that the elements of “the barrier” are both external and internal, but mainly the barrier or obstacle is the failure to bear children.

### **"Marriage must be fruitful": The Importance of Marriage and Childbearing in African Societies**

What does literary and anthropological scholarship say about marriage and procreation? Early and contemporary African texts by African women writers portray marriage and procreation as a topical concern (Sankar and Rajeshkannan 194). But there have been massive transformations in ideas over the past century. Traditionally, in most parts of Africa, marriage is/was predominantly not for personal or mutual pleasure. It fulfilled social and economic roles, and, most importantly, it served as the kinship context for begetting children (Kofon 52). Marriage in many African cultures has been regarded primarily as an institution for the procreation of children. Marriage is fully “consummated” not by payment of the dowry or intercourse but by the birth of a child (Phillips 3). Although there are many contemporary permutations, an overview of the general position shows that reproduction is at

the heart of a society that guarantees a lineage's continuity through successful childbearing by married couples. Procreation is a kind of "medicine against death" (Mbiti 105). More children translate into more labour for the fields and "a possibility of wealth and defence against enemies" (Phillips 1).

What is the implication for the woman of this pressure to procreate? Culturally, marriage is regarded as a status symbol that elevates a woman (Ogude et al. 104). Her marriage must be productive through producing children; otherwise, failure to conceive is seen as a curse (Phiri 25). Marriage and procreation have a profound bearing on the heroine. Some women value "the identity and experience of being a married woman, a mother" (Smith, "Promiscuous Girls, Good Wives, and Cheating Husbands" 126). It is a marker of femininity. So, marriage is perceived as a fundamental rite serving to produce descendants. Male children are most desired because they guarantee that the lineage will continue (Nhlapo 143).

Furthermore, polygyny is encouraged, often by a wife herself, in cases where a marriage proves infertile. Women are nurtured into believing that "[o]nly a bad woman would like to be married alone by her husband" (Nwapa 57). But polygyny is decried by the United Nations Human Rights Committee and women's organizations as discriminatory to women since it is believed to negatively affect women emotionally and financially (Davis np).

In the settings described, there are clearly defined roles for everyone; for instance, puberty rites focus on defining the sex and marital duties of both boys and girls before and after marriage. Young girls are prepared physically and socially for marital roles. In *Efuru*, we see some of these practices, including the "painful" clitoridectomy performed by the older women on young women (Nwapa 14). Paradoxically, "[w]omen are perpetrators of traditions

that harm them" (Curry 55). This paradox is explored in depth by Ginnete Curry in her book *Awakening African Women: The Dynamics of Change*. She acknowledges that women as upholders and guardians of traditional values reinforce traditions and customs and sometimes through subjugating proverbs that they teach children. In *Efuru*, we learn of Igbo sayings that make women inferior, like "*Di bu mmm ogori*", which means "a husband makes a woman beautiful" (Nwapa 97). Heroines are nurtured to fulfil multiple roles, like daughters to parents, friends to peers, daughters-in-law to in-laws, most importantly, wifedom to future husbands and motherhood.

### **Marriage and Procreation: The Pattern Set by the Literary "Foremother" in *Efuru***

Before exploring the contemporary Ankara series, it is crucial to look at how marriage and childbearing are presented in Nwapa's first novel *Efuru*, for comparison and contrast. As already suggested, her classic novel *Efuru* is a crucial yardstick for what the Ankara novels present on these essential questions. In *Efuru*, problems with childbearing are the main obstacles to the further growth of love in the romantic union represented by the marriage of the heroine, Efuru, and her husband, Adizua.

Nwapa's first novel traces the fated life of the heroine Efuru, her courtship, elopement, marriage, and divorce. Though a distinguished person in her village for her good deeds and hard work, Efuru has difficulty bearing children and, for that reason, finds that both her marriages fail – the love-marriage to Adizua and the more "pragmatic" marriage to the second husband, Gilbert. Efuru falls in love and elopes with Adizua, a pauper, in relation to her father's elevated social status and wealth and her high social standing as his daughter. Efuru is dearly loved by her in-laws and the community but has difficulties conceiving. She

encourages Adizua to enter a second marriage when she does not conceive, even though she later bears a child.

Contrary to custom, Adizua secretly betrays her and abandons her for another woman outside the marriage. Efurú returns to her father's home, where she meets and marries Gilbert, who, in turn, mistreats her when she fails to bear more children. Again, she leaves the marriage. Procreative failure is both an internal and external “barrier”. Efurú goes through many difficulties and much anguish, and she laments to herself, “surely God cannot deny me the joy of motherhood” (24). This is because she wants a child, apart from social pressure, conveyed in the narrative through neighbours’ talk about her infertility. Even her fully supportive mother-in-law becomes anxious because of the cultural belief that procreation is the foundation of marriage and the guarantee of the continuation of the family line. So desperate is Efurú for there to be a child in the family that she encourages a second marriage for Adizua.

We are presented with a setting where motherhood is a crucial part of marriage, and, for this reason, marriage is regarded as a rite every young woman should fulfil. Nwapa brings to the fore women's predicaments in settings defined by tradition and culture that serve patriarchal interests. Heroines are nurtured from a very young age by older women tasked to ensure they are ready for the role. Elders like Ajanupu in *Efurú* make this clear. She rebukes Efurú for not fully training her young maid; her words are, “[r]emember she is a girl, and she will marry one day. If you do not bring her up well, nobody will marry her” (Nwapa 5). Pressure is exerted on the young girl that marriage and motherhood are essential rites to be fulfilled. Infertility is regarded as a social failure in many African societies (Jones 19). Infertility undermines one of the most important goals of society, namely, procreation, to continue the family line and ensure the community's continued existence. Concerns about infertility are highlighted in Nwapa's text because the purpose of marriage in this particular

African setting is successful procreation. It is depicted as "a thorny, unbearable issue for a Nigerian woman" (Berrian 98). The heroine is only respected insofar as she successfully executes her maternal role. Even money is worthless compared with the value of a child, as emphasized by one of the women in *Efuru*; "Can a bag of money mourn you when you are dead? A child is more valuable than money. So, our fathers said" (Nwapa 37). Considering this setting, Efuru's marriages to Adizua and Gilbert are bound to fail mainly because the obstruction of infertility prevents the ideal flourishing of the union of the lovers.

Efuru's marriage to Adizua is a love marriage, "the betrothal" occurs in the "pre-story", but, in the context of this culture, the complete union can only happen with the birth of a child. Intriguingly, Adizua never openly complains about Efuru's failure to conceive. Instead, he is supportive, telling her, "[P]lease don't think that it makes any difference to me whether you have a baby or not" (26). It is quite puzzling that their marital problems, and Adizua's betrayal, starts only after the birth of Ogonim, their only daughter. So, unlike what we see in her second marriage to Gilbert, where the obstruction of infertility prevents a love relationship from developing after marriage, this first marriage fails because the hero falls out of love with the heroine. Efuru resolves that her husband's indifference was not due to anything but a "lack of love" (53). Before their daughter's death, the signs of a failed romance are evident. Efuru complains to Ajanupu: "For months, Ajanupu, my husband came home late every night. Some nights he did not come home at all. He did not eat my food and when I stopped cooking for him, he did not notice" (57). This development contrasts with the earlier times of their marriage where Adizua was so much in love that he would even abandon his farming to be close to Efuru, where "the least thing sent him home" (10). A close analysis shows that Adizua is not very excited by children and is more excited by money. We see him suggesting that his wife returns to trading, leaving the baby in a maid's care. (36).

Moreover, even though they have a child, Adizua still abandons Efuru. He refuses to come back even for his daughter's funeral.

Nwapa has mismatched her heroine with weak men: Adizua and Gilbert are both foolish and irresponsible, yet Efuru is humble, respectful, and faithful but does not allow herself to be mistreated. Unlike her mother-in-law, who endures and waits for a deserting husband, Efuru is a strong, assertive, and decisive woman who cannot stand being in an "empty" marriage. Self-imposed suffering does not appeal to her; she says, "I know I am capable of suffering for greater things. But to suffer for a truant husband, an irresponsible husband like Adizua is to debase suffering. My suffering will be noble" (62). She surpasses the hero in every aspect. As we shall see, in addition to the focus on childbearing, the exceptional strength of the heroine is another element that the Ankara novels share with *Efuru*. But unlike *Efuru*, the Ankara novellas also seek to portray heroes that embrace and complement successful, independent women. In this respect, they are true "romances" since they portray a wished-for ideal.

**The Ankara Heroine: Marriage and Motherhood on "Her" Terms in *A Tailor-Made Romance* and *Love Me Unconditionally***

As established above, marriage and motherhood are among the many pressures that impact the heroine in *Efuru* and continue to reflect in contemporary texts like the Ankara romance series under study. This chapter focuses on two novellas, namely, *A Tailor-Made Romance* and *Love Me Unconditionally*, which vividly present the question of marriage and motherhood.

Like Nwapa's heroine, Efuru, the Ankara novellas present strong women whose lives are unfulfilled. As observed by Marie Umeh, the heroines of Nwapa's novels generally, like

Efuru in her first novel, "do not have it all"; they may be gifted financially and intelligent but pay the price for these distinctions" (Umeh 350). Something is missing or unsatisfactory in their lives. In the "classic" novel, we have seen that Efuru cannot have children or keep a husband, an almost similar pattern to what we see in the Ankara series. The Ankara heroine is intelligent and has a thriving career but is unsatisfied. She is racing against the "biological clock", needing a worthy hero who is the object of attraction to satisfy her passion, bear children, have a happy family and a fulfilled life. Ankara heroines want to define the kind of relationships they want, bear children on their terms, and not be dictated to or forced. Like Nwapa's Efuru, their quest is for a love marriage, not arranged by families or forced unions, where marriage is not the culmination of romance and is entirely premised on childbearing. The heroine seeks independence in matters of marriage and love.

Despite disappointments, hurt from past relationships, and the pressures from their mothers, Ankara heroines themselves desire to be married and have children, but on their terms. It is about personal fulfillment, as depicted in *A Tailor-Made Romance*. Set in Lagos, Nigeria, the novella is about Tishe, a young woman set for success in an advertising agency. She meets a handsome, dashing Adnan who sweeps her off her feet. Like most of these heroines' past relationships, Tishe's has been disappointing too. Her former boyfriend, Fife, cheated on her with other women, and Leke was not fully committed. Adnan is the man of her dreams – till she learns that he is just a tailor from Mushin, a poor suburb in Lagos. What would society say and think of her dating a man of such a background? If we consider the plot of this novel through the eight plot elements Regis identifies as constituting the romance, we see social class as the main "barrier" threatening this relationship.

Nevertheless, Adnan, the hero, is unshakeable in his quest to win the heroine's heart. He is attentive to the heroine's needs. He takes her to romantic getaways and pampers her with love, which further arouses desire in Tishe. She continues to switch on and off until

successful “betrothal”. She finally accepts him completely, realizing that her happiness lies in Adnan. They marry, and their union becomes a resolution that heals the rifts between rich and poor. Love bridges the class divide, but the hero’s accommodation of a less patriarchal attitude to childbearing also is crucially important in the final union of the couple.

In *A Tailor-Made Romance*, the question of childbearing remains central in the lives of the heroine and the secondary characters who surround her. Society, through mothers, continues to emphasize the importance of childbearing, nagging daughters like Tishe who wish to escape the pressure. We learn that,

Once more she [Tishe] blessed her job for taking her away from home. She couldn’t possibly cope with her mum’s not so innocent ways of asking her for a son-in-law so that she could start having children. One would think her mum didn’t have any grandchildren. Fikiwa her sister already had two children. What difference would hers make? (6).

As expected, Tishe’s mother is always asking her for a son-in-law for the main reason that Tishe can start having children. This is because childbearing is the central concern, a marker of feminine fulfilment in this social context, as already observed in the discussion of *Efuru*, which appears not to have changed much despite the intervening decades.

Mothers play an active and encouraging role in their daughters’ romantic relationships. Tishe’s mother seeks for her daughter to marry, suggesting that it is a form of achievement. Mothers are fully portrayed in most African novels, such as in Elechi Amadi’s village novel *The Concubine*, Buchi Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood*, and Flora Nwapa’s *Idu*. They advise “dutiful daughters” on how to succeed in matters of intimate relations so that they can bear children in wedlock. In *The Concubine*, the heroine, Ihuoma, and a secondary character, Ahurole, are encouraged by their mothers to get married to have

children to the extent of suggesting that they use love charms to secure attention of the partner or potions to fall pregnant. Maternal encouragement to marry is not dissimilar to what is seen in the early European romance novels like Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Mothers like Mrs. Bennett also encourage their daughters to marry. However, what is different in the Ankara romances, following the pattern established by *Efuru*, is that the focus in this encouragement to marry is on bearing children.

But it is also evident the heroine's wish for a family is personal despite being imposed by society while growing up. The heroine, Tishe, dreams of a future with a perfect family of her own. Here we see fantasy or the wish-fulfillment of the romance proper. She wants a husband and children, a well-off family like her Managing Director's, which is portrayed in the framed family photo on his office desk where "[h]e and his son in their well-cut suits and his wife and daughter are dressed beautifully. This [i]s her dream" (Affinnih 5). Besides rising in her career, Tishe desires a husband; she appreciates that she needs to "date" first to identify "the right man" (6). She wants children and is very specific – a son and a daughter. The two sexes are symbols of life and continuity, which align with traditional and, to a certain extent, modern society's reproduction expectations.

Like marriage, childbearing is not only a social obligation, but the heroine of the Ankara romances also desires it herself. This idea distracts the heroine even at work. Tishe is having an important business meeting with her Managing Director

She sat there for ten minutes while he talked about the new account and how the M.D. of Celion was his childhood friend. All the while, her mind was on the framed family photo on his [the M.D] desk. He and his son in their well-cut suits and his wife and daughter dressed beautifully. This was her dream, to have a picture-perfect family: husband, son, and daughter. This was how she saw herself in future. Only she didn't

even have a date right now, let alone a man. She was all set for the right man, but he was taking his sweet time showing up (Affinnih 5-6).

The idea of "a picture-perfect family" like the Managing Director's is fundamental to the heroine (5). It is quite significant that the author focuses on ideas of love and family during Tishe's business meetings, suggesting the tension between two possibly contradictory desires. She deliberates on these thoughts of marriage and family in her Managing Director's office in the middle of an important discussion of a new business account. Instead of following the meeting, her mind unconsciously wanders to thoughts about family and career, symbolically highlighting the importance of marriage and family as everything else ceases to matter. She admits that although she loves her job, the "lack of romance" makes her life dull." (7). These thoughts about marriage and family are repeatedly emphasized in all the Ankara novellas, signifying their importance in a significant number of contemporary African romances more generally.

The Ankara novellas are more broadly noteworthy in the landscape of romance novels since the imperative to have a child also shapes how the hero is presented. It influences the characteristics heroines look for in prospective husbands. In *A Tailor-Made Romance*, a successful career woman like Tishe also values financial security in a future husband "so that they will be comfortably off" (7). Thus, wealth is a marker of desirable masculinity, unlike in *Efuru*, where heroines like Efuru do not mind marrying paupers like Adizua. Still, Tishe is looking primarily for a man who can be a father – she wants a fertile man to bear "beautiful" children and a man who can provide for the family (6, 7). The heroine thus needs security for herself and her offspring, which is what is sought for in the ideal hero.

In some ways, this is different from what we see in *Efuru*. As noted above, Efuru could marry Adizua for love even though he was somewhat feckless and unsuccessful. Efuru

the heroine, and most women in that context do not choose between “career” and children. They managed farming and trade together with bearing and raising children since they had a support system in co-wives and mothers-in-law like Ajanupu, who actively supported the heroine/mother. In a sense, as represented in the Ankara novellas, the modern heroine has lost some independence since her desire for children is dependent on securing a hero who is willing to take on the supportive role previously played by other women.

Adnan fulfils the role of a perfect hero from the childbearing perspective – he is patient and loving. Despite his humble demeanor, he will be successful in his business and a good provider. He reveals his background:

“This is my life. I didn’t set out to be a tailor. I hold a degree”.

She [Tishe] widened her eyes in shock.

“I studied chemistry. But I lost my dad, and everything went crazy. I already had this passion, so when I didn’t get a job quickly, I needed to move on to do something. I had Mum and Adeelah [his sister] looking up to me. I had to pay the mortgage on the house in Abuja. And so, I started. Really small and very discouraging until I built this space for my business. So, in case you are wondering: this thing I do, I love it very much. I love the smiles on clients’ faces when I show them the finished work. I like the trust they put in me and my designs. But most importantly, I can’t get over the smiles on the faces of my students when I impart knowledge and help them hone their skills” (159-160).

Adnan displays the characteristics of a good husband and father. He is confident, hardworking, and resilient in whatever he sets out to do. If he finds joy in teaching his students, then he has the patience to be a good father to his children. Although he wants

children, his devotion and love to Tishe show that he does not mind if perhaps they cannot have them. He is the ideal hero capable of loving unconditionally. (loc 1619)

Ankara heroines want to be loved unconditionally, as highlighted in Ola Awonubi's, *Love Me Unconditionally*. The title itself draws attention to the centrality of childbearing since it underlines the heroine's desire to be loved for herself apart from her ability to conceive and bear a child – she wants to be loved “unconditionally”. In *Love Me Unconditionally*, the heroine Deola's relationship and intention to marry are shattered because she fails to conceive within the five years of her relationship with Kunle. The hero leaves her for a younger, fertile woman. Reference to Regis's plot elements shows “society defined” again foregrounded the most in this novel. It highlights the unfairness of the pressure on women to bear children. Deola moves on, and her family continues to arrange suitors, pressurizing her into marriage. However, she is not interested in their matchmaking. Eventually, Deola finds happiness in "unconditional love" from a worthy hero – Femi Da Silva.

“Society defined” is expressed in the form of pressure to marry and bear children exerted on the heroine from society and mothers. Again, we see mothers' urgency to marry off their daughters. Heroines are groomed for marriage from an early age, instilling manners, and values to please future in-laws. For instance, at ten years old, Deola was taught dipping the knee – a sign of respect to elders and in-laws. (Awonubi Loc 376). Marriage safeguards status in society. “[I]f you had the usual status symbols – money, marriage, and children – you could get higher up the pecking order than a sibling who hadn't attained these emblems of success” (loc 421). Failure to get married is taken as a curse to the extent that Deola's mother suggests they consult their pastor for intervention in the form of prayers. When their daughters marry well, mothers boast among other women. Then the pressure to marry and conceive comes not only from mothers but mothers-in-law also who dictate who their sons

should marry, determined importantly by whether the potential bride is fertile or not. *Love Me Unconditionally* suggests that "the Royal Mum's seal of approval" is needed before the hero and heroine marry (Loc 187). "The betrothal" also cannot take place before proof of fertility. We are told, "[t]he lack of this child – the proverbial specter at the dining table – was the impediment to putting a ring on it [Deola's finger]. Kunle was never going to do that unless she got pregnant first" (Loc 58). We see a situation where mothers-in-law go out of their way, insisting heroines conceive first before marriage proposals to satisfy societal expectations of procreation. The sons, in turn, put pressure on the heroines to please their mothers.

Heroines themselves also want children, and some are prepared to go to extremes by risking their health to bear a child. In *Love Me Unconditionally*, we are presented with two types of heroines. Both want children. There is Deola, who accepts her circumstances and limits of infertility, and then the shadow heroine Funmi, the protagonist's friend, whom she tries to dissuade from risking her life to save her womb. Funmi suffers from fibroids but goes to the extreme, choosing to sacrifice her life by refusing surgery because her womb might be removed, and she will not be able to get pregnant. Funmi's desperation recalls Buchi Emecheta's heroine Nnu Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood*, who almost drowned herself after losing her only child, proof that she was not barren because society believes a childless woman is a failed woman (Emecheta 62). But in the Ankara romances, Deola represents a "new kind" of heroine. She wants to bear children, but only to complement her love marriage, not at the expense of "her sense of identity" or personhood (Awonubi Loc 123).

Deola becomes the epitome of the twenty-first-century heroine. She probes and questions with ardour the nature of marriage and childbearing, referring to it as "some archaic ideal".

Why were women victims of a way of thinking that told them that success in life was measured by marital status and whether you could procreate? And to think she had judged herself using this criteri[on] for years, trying to live up to some archaic ideal. That wasn't just a Nigerian thing- it was a belief of many other cultures. And then, if you could procreate, you had better make it a boy. It was as if a woman was some kind of drive-in where you placed your order, and nine months later, she handed you a boy with chips, burger and a coke on the side (Loc 875).

Deola wants mutual respect. Although she would be happy to conceive, she does not believe her fulfillment will only be complete with a child. Her doctor even presents child adoption as an option in infertility cases, but mothers-in-law want their sons' blood heirs. A psychology study in Eastern Nigeria, West Africa, reveals that the adoption concept is still “a stigma” because of socio-cultural challenges (Agbo 86-7). Unlike Nwapa's heroines, Deola would not allow a second marriage to have a child in the family. She resolves that “society and culture would no longer dictate her life” (Loc 882).

The novel title itself is a protest statement – the twenty-first-century heroine projected through Deola says, “love me, unconditionally”, capable or incapable of childbearing. Whilst having a child is important to her, she believes her fulfillment will be complete without children. She wants a man who can continuously celebrate her and her “accomplishments” without conditions (Loc 1619). She eventually finds this man in Femi. Deola's relationship with Femi represents the ideal relationship, the wish-fulfilment in respect of childbearing for the heroine. Femi becomes the ideal hero figure. His speech indicates a tolerant attitude towards childless marriages and his willingness to adopt rather than take a second wife if needed. He says: “I realize now that for love to be the kind that endures, it [must] come without conditions. If it does, it is not loving. It is just a business arrangement where a woman gives a man her body when he wants it, food for the belly, and children because

society expects it. In turn, he gives her his name and his credit card and lets her live in his big house, along with the rest of his material goods” (Loc 1978). Femi’s observation aligns with the heroine’s quest – disqualifying marriages dependent solely on the woman's ability to conceive because it translates to commodification, reducing women to property while suggesting the husband is the only provider. The idea of the completely dependent woman conflicts with the independent, career-oriented, and proud Ankara heroine. The narrator comments: "It wasn't that Deola didn't believe in marriage – she did, with all her heart, but she wanted it based on mutual respect. On the understanding that she was not someone's chattel, but her own person" (Awonubi Loc 898). Like Nwapa's *Efuru*, who raises her own dowry, symbolically “marrying herself”, Deola refuses to be a personal possession. She wants to bear children, but only to complement love marriage, not at the expense of “her sense of identity” or personhood (Loc 123). We learn from her office colleagues that “Naija” men, referring to Nigerian men, fear independent, intellectual women; for this reason, the Ankara romance series presents an alternative hero figure like Femi to complement contemporary heroine figures in marital relationships – men who fit the heroines' desired model.

So, what would society look like based on the romance presented in this Ankara novella? In the contemporary African scenario, Femi’s mother, Mrs Da Silva, portrays an alternative view of childbearing involving the shifting of rigid mindsets: "[Mrs. Da Silva] was very unlike the typical Naija mother for whom having children was an absolute necessity. Instead, she was so understanding and supportive, pointing out that having children was not the only contributor to establishing strong marriages” (Awonubi Loc 1848). Her empathy towards Deola is a result of having experienced the same trauma herself. Mrs Da Silva got married at 22 and only had her first child after ten years. She suffered accusations of witchcraft from her in-laws and society because she could not conceive. Like Deola, she

believes ideal love is unconditional, and anything other than that is not loving but a transaction.

## Conclusion

This chapter explored the heroine figure and the question of childbearing and marriage. It is clear childbearing is a topical societal issue and is expected to be fulfilled in marital contexts. Heroines themselves also want to marry and bear children, but in love marriages, which contrasts with the “ur-text” *Efuru*, where the pressure to bear children trumps and destabilises the love marriage. While *A Tailor-Made Romance* and *Love Me Unconditionally* portray some women going to extremes, risking their health to bear children, they also present alternative perspectives of model heroes and mothers-in-laws supportive of childless heroines. These are not social possibilities in the context represented by *Efuru*. The Ankara novellas suggest that the wished-for happy-ever-after status can still be realised in these romantic unions, even if the heroine cannot bear children. The next chapter delves into love and the erotic – how the Ankara heroine negotiates her sexual desires in romantic relationships in relation to the more discreet representation of sexual desire in *Efuru*.

## CHAPTER FOUR

LOVE AND THE EROTIC: THE SEXUALLY ASSERTIVE HEROINE IN *A TASTE OF LOVE AND THE ELEVATOR KISS*.

In terms of the definition of romantic love (or eros), romantic love is always intersected with sexual desire. It is what makes romantic love different from *agape*, friendship, and other types of love. However, romantic love is about more than just sex or sexuality. Romantic love always creates interdependence. It establishes a connection with one other, or, in the case of polyamory, multiple individual others. It may be positive or negative. It could be positive, where the beloved is regarded selflessly and with care. But it could also be negative, where the beloved must be possessed. Often in these cases, romantic love is an obsession or an addiction. In both instances, love is about finding unity with the other and achieving self-realization or self-actualization. In the case of romance novels, it is “the attraction” which, according to Pamela Regis, “keeps the heroine and hero involved long enough to surmount the barrier” (Regis 33). Love and sex are intimately connected to the human condition, phenomena which have an enormous bearing on the heroine, as we shall see.

This chapter explores the interconnected questions of love and sex. The focus is on their relevance to the heroine in the Ankara romance series novellas, particularly *A Taste of Love* and *The Elevator Kiss*. After a general consideration of representations of sex in international romance novels and an overview of attitudes to sex in African cultures and literature, I will explore the focus on sex in *Efuru*, mainly to show how little concern there is with sex in this narrative set in the early part of the twentieth century. By contrast with *Efuru*, the Ankara novellas display significant attention to sexual desire with vivid representations of sexual intimacy. As will be explored further, this change may be driven by rapid globalization, especially the globalization of culture through literature and the media.

My point of departure is to consider how sex has been treated in international romance novels. A general look at representations of sexual desire and sex in, for example, Mills and Boon, and Harlequin, among other romance publications, show sex scenes have evolved over the years, from being relatively “tame” to being quite raunchy. In a Reuters article, Peter Graff traces how through the years Mills and Boon have been experimenting with “more overtly erotic styles” in its dedicated imprints like the Blaze and Black Lace series. These now showcase six to seven pages each of explicit sex scenes, narrating the formerly “unimaginable” like oral sex, with props like whipped cream and handcuffs. But there is still discontent among other critics pointing out that amidst this simmering and explosive sex, there is still the imbalance of “female submission to dominant heroes” (Cummins and Bindel np). For example, sexual submission can be seen in Anne Weale’s *Antigua Kiss*, where the hero initiates oral sex. Although shocked, the heroine still “surrenders to the waves of ecstasy” (Graaf np). This is different from what we see in the Ankara series. Though not as explicitly erotic as in the Blaze series, the Ankara heroines are more assertive. They are seen to initiate sex, thus presenting more openly what was often elided in the canonical novels by African women writers.

### **Attitudes to Sex in African Cultures and Literature**

Canonical African literature has generally not focused on sex. African writers seem to shy away from writing about “raw” sex. In a review of the anthology *Unveiling Sex in African Literature: A Review of Erotic Africa The Sex Anthology*, Earnest C. Ogùnyemì suggests that: “We write it [sex] with our mouths closed, or we put a cloth over it, like the church in Rome put a baroque metal veil on Angelo’s [Michaelangelo’s] *The Risen Christ* (Ogùnyemì np). Ogùnyemì’s statement implies some hesitancy and an element of shame associated with writing about sex among African writers, which may be due to cultural constraints. The

avoidance of representations of sexual desire in African culture is also overlaid onto the avoidance of presenting sexual desire in women. Maria Nilson concedes this notion in her review of *Women and Erotic Fiction*. She points out that culture not only trivialises but also “hides women’s desire” (1).

A brief overview of the main African male and female writers’ works shows how love plots are a common part of their stories, but the sex element is blurred. For example, in *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe casts more light on other themes like Igbo custom and misunderstanding gender roles but keeps eros in the shadows even though the intense desire is hinted at between some of the characters, for example, the hero Okonkwo and his second wife, Ekwefi, so much so that Ekwefi runs away from her first husband to be with Okonkwo. But Achebe does not write about desire, he leaves it unsaid. Chapter Eleven ends with the following brief hint at Ekwefi’s desires:

Two years after her marriage to Anene she could bear it no longer and she ran away to Okonkwo. It had been in the morning. ... she was going to the stream to fetch water. Okonkwo’s house was on the way to the stream. She went in and knocked at his door and he came out. Even in those days, he was not a man of many words. He just carried her into his bed and in the darkness began to feel around her waist for the loose end of her cloth (Achebe 80)

In the above extract, Achebe leaves it to the reader’s imagination. A look at Kiru Taye’s short fiction “Thighs Fall Apart”, which elaborates on the implied eroticism of this scene in Achebe’s archetypal novel, shows how female sexual desire could have been treated in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. In the following scene, the Nigerian “Queen of Erotica” re-narrates Okonkwo and Ekwefi’s love-making scene:

He [Okonkwo] replaced his hand with his lips. They feathered kisses all over her [Ekwefi] back, setting her body off with tingles. Sensations flashed through her core weeping with overflowing juices. As if he sensed it, his fingers breached her lower lips, dipping in and out as his other hand played with the button at her centre.

“You are so warm, so slippery.”

Parting her leg, he delved in with his mouth. His tongue stroked her in a long sweep before tunnelling into her wet folds.

Mindless sensations overtook her body. She writhed, unable to control her body’s response as he took her higher and higher toward her peak. As she coasted the wave, he pulled back.

“Please,” she whimpered. She didn’t mind begging for release. His effect on her was powerful and exhilarating, a potent elixir she needed.

“Please what?” He stood up and flipped her over once more, so she lay on her back.

“Please...let me have my release.” She licked her lips as she watched him, her hunger for him clouding her eyes.

“Not until I’m deep inside you.”

He took off his clothes a piece at a time. She stared at his body in awe. (Edoro np)

The above piece sizzles with sensual tension compared to Achebe’s narration of avoidance in the original text. Kiru Taye writes “the unsaid” and elaborates, depicting the desire shared between Achebe’s characters, Okonkwo and Ekwefi. The reader also vicariously partakes in the erotic experience enjoying a sexual gratification.

Another example of the avoidance of the representation of eroticism may be observed in the work of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o also writes about love in virtually all his novels – an observation extensively addressed in Felicia Annin’s doctoral thesis *Eros and politics: Love and its discontents in the fiction of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o*. But, like Achebe, Ngũgĩ does not present sexual desire overtly; instead, he obliquely suggests desire without explicit “erotica” in the narrative. *In The River Between*, there is a romantic relationship between the protagonist Waiyaki and Nyambura, but the sexual connotations can only be read through suggestive hints, imagery, and symbols. Annin notes that Waiyaki and Nyambura are brought together by love and attempt to unite the division between their communities with their love (47). In that sense, they become symbols of eros. The tension of the two opposing camps metaphorically manifests in the love and sexual passion shared by Nyambura and Waiyaki, on which Ngũgĩ does not elaborate.

We see the same oblique treatment of sex in the work of the main female African writers like Flora Nwapa, Grace Ogot and others. This may be contrasted with Ama Ata Aidoo, who begins explicitly to present and interrogate love and intimate relations when she writes *Changes: A Love Story*. She consciously writes about sexual desire and specifically explores female sexuality through her female character Esi Sekyi. Esi is an independent-minded, working woman capable of crying out “marital rape!” and divorcing her husband. Iniobong I. Uko’s assessment of Esi in “Exploring Female Sexuality in Contemporary African Literature” supports the idea that Aidoo’s character “vehemently resists sexism” (118). Through Esi, Aidoo presents a woman bold and comfortable with her sexuality - she can walk stark naked after sex and has the confidence to refuse being defined by procreation. Aidoo depicts sex scenes more openly than the writers before her, although not too overtly as may be seen in her representation of the heroine with Ali, the man for whom she leaves her husband:

Esi and Ali reserved their lovemaking for the comfort of Esi's bed.... They would immediately fall into each other's arms and hold her welcoming kiss from the front door through the length of the sitting-room, through her bedroom and on to her bed. Then for the next hour or so it was just grunts and groans until quite exhausted, they fell quiet. (Aidoo 74)

However, twenty-first-century female writers have become a lot less "shy" in presenting the erotic. For example, writers like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie are foregrounding more sex and sexuality in their works. For example, the sex scene of Olanna and Richard in *Half of a Yellow Sun* is much more explicit, compared to the first-generation African writer's novels alluded to above. In her novels, especially the award-winning *Americanah*, through heroines like Ifemelu, Adichie interrogates both positive and negative sexual intimacies, and more importantly, the significance of sex other than the procreative function. Unlike what we see in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and other early African novels, Adichie explores various sexual experiences through numerous characters, making sex a big part of the plot and character development.

The representation of the sexuality of African women in literature needs to be considered against the wider backdrop of attitudes to sex in African cultures and how the sexuality of African women has been considered in colonial discourses. In the reader, *African Sexualities*, Desiree Lewis's chapter on "Representing African Sexualities" discusses how myths about sexuality have been linked to the African female body. Lewis suggests that the African female body has been linked to physical labour, domestic work, and sex work without attention to the sexual desire of African women (Lewis 205). For these reasons, it has been concluded that female sexuality was never rooted firmly in African societies (Caldwell et al. 194). In colonial discourse, by contrast, there is an emphasis on the "objectification of women and exoticizing sexuality" (Ahlberg 220). This is apparent in the representation of the

“barbarian” woman in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Overall, these representations have also influenced how African writers write about female sexual desire or, in fact, avoid presenting female desire.

But the view is quite complex, since, as Buchi Emecheta suggests, female sexual desire exists and is acknowledged in African cultures but has not been given the primacy it was accorded in western cultures since the twentieth century, following the repression of sexuality noticeable in the nineteenth century, captured in the British concept of the prim Victorian. She asserts that sex is not heavily foregrounded in African culture as it is in Western culture from the early twentieth century on, where sex was/is thought of as part of personal liberation and self-actualization. At the Second African Writers Conference in Stockholm 1986, Emecheta presented a paper, "Feminism with a small 'f'" in which she discusses the subject of sex in the life of an African woman. She suggests that sex may be valued differently in an African context. Emecheta says:

I know this is a situation which our Western sisters will find difficult to understand. Sex is important to us. But we do not make it the centre of our being, as women do here. In fact, most of the Nigerian women who are promiscuous are so because of economic reasons. The Yoruba’s have a saying that a woman must never allow a man to sleep with her if, at the end of the day she is going to be in debt. Few of our women go after *sex per se*. If they are with their husbands they feel they are giving something out of duty, love, or in order to have children. A young woman might dream of romantic love, but as soon as they start having children their loyalty is very much to them [children] and will do everything in their power to make life easier for them (Emecheta 176).

She acknowledges that sex is vital to African women but is not the most important thing in their lives. Sex sometimes is converted to a commodity by women to make a living in

desperate economic circumstances - “most of the Nigerian women who are promiscuous are so because of economic reasons” (176). Emecheta further suggests that the lack of attention to sex may be due to the differing roles of women in the wider social fabric of African societies: “A mother with a family is an economist, a nurse, a painter, a diplomat and more” (180). She points out that African women live busy lives - from tending to family needs to participating in women's groups, such that sex is pushed to the periphery. Also, older women found polygamy liberating since responsibilities could be shared with co-wives. She continues to assert that successful women who love their work derive the same kind of enjoyment from it as from sex:

[W]omen who are lucky to find the work which they love and which they are good at derive the same kind of enjoyment from it as from sex. Many female writers, many English female writers I have spoken to, claimed that they find their work not only sexually satisfactory but sometimes masturbatory. I certainly find my work satisfying. Sex is part of our life-it shouldn't be THE life (179).

Emecheta also highlights that the younger women may be obsessed with romance and sex, but once they start childbearing at age twenty-five, they become too busy for it. She observes that Western romantic illusions are only illusions to African women who are instead more pragmatic. Her sentiments suggest that female sexual desire and gratification, whether by choice or design, are at the periphery of an African woman's life.

What Emecheta says is very relevant when we look at *Efuru*, where the focus does not fall on sexual desire, except implied, but instead falls on the woman's insertion in a wider context of work and relationships with other women, co-wives, mothers in law, and aunts.

### **Intimacy in *Efuru***

In *Efuru*, the heroine Efuru lives through two unsuccessful marriages, the first to Adizua, the love of her life, and the second to Gilbert, whom she married for more practical reasons. Since eros is central to the first marriage, I shall focus on Efuru's relationship with Adizua rather than Gilbert. The attraction between the couple is evident right from the start of the narrative:

One moonlit night, they [Efuru and Adizua] went out. They talked of a number of things, their life and their happiness. Efuru told him that she would drown herself in the lake if he did not marry her. Adizua told her he loved her very much and that even the dust she trod on meant something to him (Nwapa 7).

The fact that Efuru threatens to “drown herself in the lake” if she cannot be united with Adizua suggests her passion for Adizua such that without him, her life is not worth living. Her desire for Adizua is so strong that she cannot wait for him to acquire the wealth needed to pay her dowry. To speed up their union, Efuru elopes with Adizua and pays her own dowry. Desire seems to be mutual, felt as much by Adizua as by Efuru. Adizua says that even the “dust” on which Efuru walks becomes charged for him. Later, when they are married, and their farming and trade force them to stay apart, Adizua cannot subdue his longing, and he goes to visit his wife more frequently than needed: “[h]e did not tell her that he thought of her so much that he no longer wished to be away from her” (20). Mutual desire may lead the reader to expect explosive, sexually explicit encounters. However, beyond suggesting desire, Nwapa never goes on actually to present highly erotic scenes.

The avoidance of representations of female sexual desire which we see in the early novels like *Efuru*, is transformed in contemporary writing by African women writers. It is

presented most clearly in romance novellas like the Ankara series. The Ankara heroines are independent and assertive in matters of love. They want passionate love and sizzling sex on their terms. The transformation that may be observed regarding the representation of sexual desire in contemporary African fiction and the Ankara novellas, in particular, may be the result of the globalization of ideas about the importance of sexual fulfilment to personal fulfilment.

In general, the heroines of the Ankara romances are presented as sexual beings. They are sexually assertive and openly portray their sexuality. They are presented as women searching for love, romance, and (safe) sex, whose horizons or possibilities are less restricted than for heroines in the canonical novels of the twentieth century. In some cases, where sexual desire was represented in canonical works of twentieth-century male writers, the female partners were presented as “good-time-girls”. This is acknowledged in Florence Stratton’s critique of the prostitute motif in African writing by male authors. Urban, “modern” independent female characters are labelled “prostitutes” and portrayed negatively, whilst the rural, traditional woman is depicted positively as a good wife and mother (Bentahar 2). By contrast with how sexually assertive women are presented as “prostitutes” or fallen women in twentieth-century novels by male writers, the Ankara heroines show positive sexuality that allows self-realization and strengthens the bond between the hero and the heroine. This is especially clear in the two novellas selected for study in this chapter, namely, *The Elevator Kiss* and *A Taste of Love*, but can generally be seen in the other novellas also.

**“New Kind of Romance”: Bringing Sex into the Light in the Ankara Novellas - *The Elevator Kiss* and *A Taste of Love***

*The Elevator Kiss*, written by Amina Thula, foregrounds the erotic more explicitly than the other Ankara novellas. In an interview with Juwairiyya Asmal-Lee, Thula says her targeted reader is a modern woman or man with an open mind, who is independent, confident, and as comfortable with themselves and their gender, as they are with their strengths and weaknesses: “They love romance and read for leisure as well as to draw new ideas. They also have an active and fulfilling life.” (Thula np)

*The Elevator Kiss* explores the romance shared between Sindi and Edward. Through the Christmas mistletoe tradition, they share a kiss in an elevator. This “declaration” coincides with “the meeting”, and it is love at first sight. But Sindi comes from a previous disastrous break-up and is not prepared for another relationship. The mutual, real “attraction” here is clearly sexual desire; it is not the hero’s wealth, intelligence, or sense of humour. It is raw sexual attraction. Sindi cannot resist overcoming the powerful romantic attraction that is ignited between herself and the successful, handsome Edward. She has sexual needs, just like the other heroines in the Ankara romance novellas. As much as Sindi might try to deny or suppress this fact, she needs romance in her life. The “internal barrier” within the heroine is that she is afraid to love again because of the hurt and disappointment she suffered in her previous relationships. But the sexual chemistry sustains this new relationship, allowing self-realization of both the heroine and hero. “The recognition” stage is reached when Sindi convinces herself to bury the past; she is completed by the good sex she shares with Edward, releasing herself to loving again. We see eros deepening and sustaining their relationship, not just physically but emotionally too. She is free to act on her love for the hero, resulting in the “betrothal,” and Sindi accepts Edward’s marriage proposal.

Affection, romance, fervent kisses, and sex significantly impact relationships. Unlike heroines depicted in *Efuru*, Sindi may not necessarily need a man to make babies, but she needs him for sexual pleasure and romantic gratification. Eros propels the developing relationship. The novel creates sexual desire both for the heroine and the reader who vicariously experience desire and gratification through the heroine.

The hero is presented as handsome, well-built, and virile. The heroine is attracted by Edward's body and baritone voice – she likens him to a “black Adonis” – from Greek mythology, an extremely handsome man. The physicality of the hero creates sexual desire. “Sindi admired his physique. He reminded her of an ancient African warrior” (97). A warrior is symbolic of strength and manliness, coupled with good looks; Sindi cannot resist the desire aroused by the hero. Moreover, Edward is romantic and a very good sexual partner.

Fear of her past disappointments and the presence of another woman in the relationship holds Sindi back from converting her desire into pleasure. But Edward delays the pleasure (sex) so that he can establish the emotional part of their relationship. Through good communication and transparency, he manages to dispel her worries. He acknowledges her past hurtful experiences but understands that they must move on and not be deterred by previous disappointments. He also uses music as a way of communicating, and Sindi is amused. “He always managed to surprise her” (83). The heroine loves that in a man, so do all the other women at her office. In the process, these assurances also translate to the reader, who also regains confidence and trust in the hero, in turn enjoying vicarious sexual gratification with the heroine.

Amina Thula's sex scenes are sensuously intense, long and explicit. Although there are erotic scenes throughout the text, a close analysis of Chapter ten is interesting. It presents the lovemaking between Sindi and Edward:

Edward lifted her astride him. She went willingly. Edward's mouth went to her neck. Sindi extended her neck, giving him greater access. Edward found her spot. A deep sigh escaped her. Her nipples tightened and heat gathered between her legs. Sindi's back arched and she rocked back and forth on top of him. She felt his shaft grow, underneath her, heightening her arousal. Edward grabbed her buttocks and kneaded them as he sucked her nipples. Sindi's fingernails lightly roamed his back, causing him to flex his back muscles. Sindi lifted his face. She ran her tongue across his lips, coaxing him to part them and when he did, she captured his sweet tongue and sucked it. Edward let out a groan. He lifted Sindi and set her down. He got up and retrieved a condom from the bathroom cabinet and slipped it on. He sat on the floor and leaned against the wall. He bent his knees so that his pelvis could tilt to an angle that would allow him to accommodate her comfortably. Sindi bit her lower lip and lowered herself onto him. She giggled. "Now I can see us in the shower door." Edward pushed and pushed her back so that her back rested on his bent knees.

"I want to watch your breasts bounce", he said as he ran a hand over them. Slowly Sindi began moving up and down him, growing more passionate as her climax approached. From his position Edward had a good view of her breasts bouncing up and down, mimicking her movement. Recognizing she was near climax Edward lifted her off him and moved her in front of the bathroom basin. He turned her around so that she was facing the mirror." Look at your eyes," Edward whispered into her ear. Sindi looked. The passion in her clouded eyes surprised her. She couldn't believe that the sensual, sexy woman staring back at her was her. "Now I want you to watch yourself as you come," Edward said as he entered her from behind. Sindi swallowed hard as she felt him enter, her eyes fluttered closed. She pulled his head to hers over her shoulder and kissed him hard. "No, open your eyes," Edward whispered to her

again when they broke their kiss. She opened her eyes. “Look at yourself.” Again, she obeyed. Edward pumped into her faster. Sindi gasped and felt around the marble basin for something to grab on. Her body tensed as the wave drew closer. She looked at her eyes: her irises had changed to a very deep brown and her eyes looked cloudy. She combusted as liquid heat slid inside her. Her body went limp. Edward’s grip around her waist prevented her from collapsing to the floor.” Hold on baby, I’m about to come too.” Edward let out a deep growl as he came. He guided them both on the floor. The cool tiles felt good against Sindi’s hot skin. They lay on the floor for a while, regaining energy (120-122).

The above scene is highly charged - a sexually explicit encounter between Sindi and Edward. We see good sex where both are “in sync”. The heroine is not forced or hesitant but “willingly” engages and initiates sex (120). She is not shy or driven back to her past fears because she is complemented by the sensitive hero. Edward is not just patient but is very attentive - he can recognize when Sindi is about to reach orgasm and spices it further by lifting her to the mirror so that they can see each other climaxing. He wants Sindi to celebrate her sexuality, displaying their confidence in each other. Good sex entails entrusting one’s body to the other, like Edward, who is cautious, caring, considerate, and practices safe sex using a condom. He prepares the heroine and does not want to rush the sex, making it special for both. Sindi gets pampered in a way that suggests the hero worships her body, making her feel special. There is the arousal of sexual desire and excitement; it is not just sex but sexual love.

During sex, they reach climax about the same time signifying total successful consummation of their relationship, signifying unique compatibility. We learn that Sindi was feeling uncertain and insecure, but after her lovemaking session with Edward, “she felt as if she was floating on air. Edward was turning out to be an adventurous lover, but she liked it;

she had liked it when he had made her look at herself as she was climaxing. It had been so...erotic” (Thula 126). Good sex means satisfying the heroine too; the “climaxing” or orgasm is symbolic of completeness or fulfilment on the part of the heroine. It also confirms sexual well-being, making the heroine more confident of herself and the relationship. We learn that Sindi yearns and craves for the erotic moments they shared before whenever the couple fights and separates. The passion is kept alive.

The sexual chemistry sustains the relationships' development as the hero and heroine journey to discover more about each other and get past any insecurities. Sindi continues to fight for the relationship to work, and the sexual attraction deepens to love. The heroine is presented as desperate for love. She still needs a man to be fulfilled. The hero needs to provide intimacy, love, and sex. Eros tramples over all obstacles. Romance leads to sex, and the assertive heroine is fulfilled. In *The Elevator Kiss*, the heroine Sindi is quick to indulge, and the sex scenes are overtly presented compared to what we shall see in the second novel, *A Taste of Love* by Sifa Asani Gowon. Here, sexual desire for the heroine is constructed slightly differently from the previous novel. Still, again the heroine's relationship needs to be founded on love, trust, mutual respect, fulfilling sex and romance.

### **A Taste of Love**

*A Taste of Love* is about Adoo, a single mother running a cake-making business. She falls in love with a good-looking, confident, thirty-four-year-old club manager, Toby. Their pasts threaten their developing relationship. Toby's former girlfriend, Hannani, resurfaces when they meet again by coincidence. Hannani shows interest in Toby, telling him she regrets having left him for Bala. It is a “point of ritual death” because Adoo and Toby's relationship is in jeopardy due to the return of an old lover, Hannani –the “other woman”.

However, prompt “recognition” by the hero saves the new relationship. He quickly resolves his past romantic feelings towards his ex-girlfriend, Hannani. Later, a case of mistaken identity further threatens Adoo and Toby’s romantic relationship when Adoo sees Toby cuddling his sister and thinks she is another lover. At this stage, the narrative presents another near “ritual death”. Then “recognition” follows where this time the heroine confronts her insecurities, especially about having sex as she fears being used as a sex object as she had previously experienced. Since this is a romance, conflicts get resolved, paving the way for “the betrothal” when the heroine and hero openly confess their love for each other. We see the heroine’s and hero's psychological states as “internal barriers” to the new relationship – the unresolved past feelings and disappointments.

While sexual chemistry draws Adoo and Toby together, flexible or positive masculinity is essential in nurturing love. Adoo’s “attraction” is intensified because the hero's interests do not change despite disclosing that she has a son. The child is a potential “barrier” to a romantic relationship since “[m]ost men avoided women with offspring, running as fast as possible in the opposite direction,” especially in this semi-conservative Nigerian society (Gowon 2). Learning about Adoo’s son could have been a point of “ritual death”. But the hero’s display of positive masculinity impresses the heroine, intensifying the attraction. Adoo is happy and attracted more to Toby, who is interested in her son, Zander, unlike most men who shun other men's offspring. Traditionally, in most African cultures, one needs to perpetuate one's bloodline, so the pressure is to have a child of one's own. Here clearly, the traditional norms do not apply- contrasting with Nwapa's presentation, where family means having a child of one's own. The hero's masculinity in this respect is flexible. Adoo already has a child from a previous relationship, so she needs the hero, not necessarily for procreation. She wants romance and fulfilling sex.

Another significant observation is how cautious Adoo is in not quickly giving in to touching or sex. The past affronts are blocks to consummating desire, as evident in the following scene when Tunde, one of the revellers at the Bar-Rage, tries his luck:

“I really like you, Adoo, he said, licking his lips and scanning her from head to toe. She felt uncomfortable at his perusal and wondered how to change the subject. Then he leaned towards her, too close for comfort. “I think you are my type of woman”.

She kept a diplomatic smile on her face while calculating the best way to put some distance between them without seeming prudish or rude (Gowon 86).

Her reaction is the complete opposite of what we see with Sindi, who is not afraid to share a kiss with a stranger she has just met in an elevator. The past has a strong negative bearing on Adoo’s sex life. So as much as intimacy or lovemaking can indicate the development of a romantic relationship, it is also potentially dangerous and can be abused, as in Adoo’s past relationship with Teremun, her former boyfriend. Adoo tells her friend Aduke that she does not want to become “anyone’s sexual therapy, no matter how charming or fine the man is” (68). Adoo agrees with Aduke’s advice that “the best way to make a decision in a romantic relationship is to get to know the other person better” (69). In this case, it means delaying sleeping together to avoid getting hurt or feeling used and only indulging when both parties are ready. This is what Toby is trying to guard against. So, it takes an attentive and patient hero like Toby to make Sindi comfortable again about her sexuality. Toby may badly want to have sex with Adoo but is not prepared for what he terms “the whole messy business of love” (Gowon 66). This confirms that he is also aware of the negative side of sex in relationships, how it can be abused, and how it can mar a relationship. He understands Adoo’s worries. It is only after sharing emotional and personal space that the channel into lovemaking is opened.

These reservations explain the slow sensual rhythm of the text compared to the fast, steamy sensuality depicted in *The Elevator Kiss*. But it does not mean Adoo is not sexually assertive - the attractive hero ignites desire, which she tries to resist. So, when they try to make love, she is distracted, together with the reader, and both fail to get sensual gratification. The narrative also interrupts and delays consummation, resulting in “arrested” sex scenes as below:

She [Aadoo] reached out to touch his arm and he grasped her hand and pulled her close in an embrace. She felt so right in his arms, her warmth spreading all over him as she held him. They stood there for some seconds until he tipped her chin up and looked at her. Her eyes gave him all the indication he needed, and he slowly lowered his head.

Their lips met in a kiss that set him on fire. She clung on to him, returning the kiss with fervour. He almost lost all his sense of restraint as he held her, and he could have sworn he saw fireworks behind his closed lids. His hands began to wonder and Adoo made no move to stop him. Images began to whirl around his head of him and Adoo and he tries to think of the best way to get her upstairs to.....

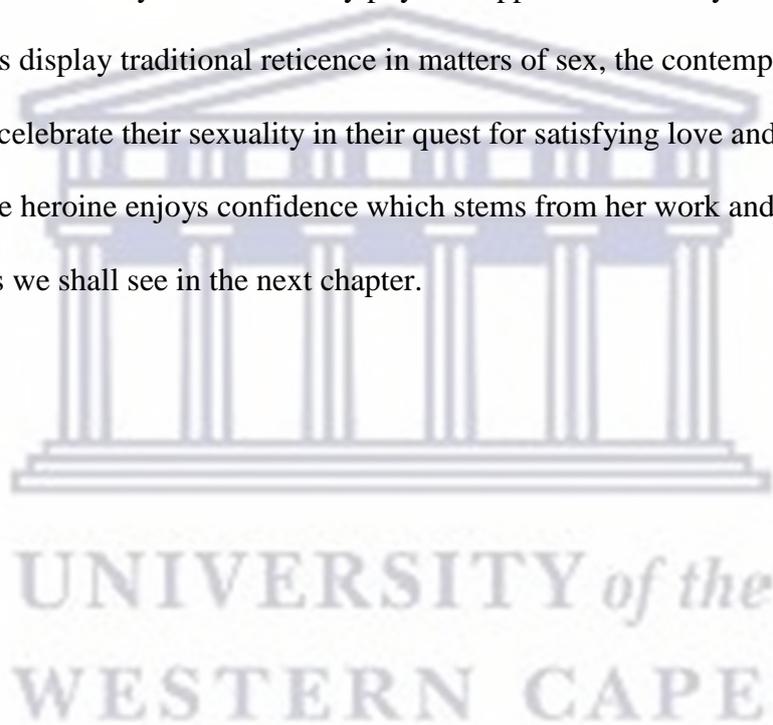
“Mummy?” [ The writer interrupts]

That one word said with a mixture of curiosity and panic coming from the living room made Adoo open her eyes in shock and push Toby away abruptly. She puts her hand on her cheeks looking mortified (65).

Despite the interruption, we see that it is the heroine who has initiated the lovemaking, eager to convert her desire into pleasure – “Her eyes gave him all the indication he needed”. This time Adoo is not repelling, but “she clung[s] on to him, returning the kiss with fervor” (65). Like all the other Ankara heroines, she is not shy of her sexuality but is only drawn back by her past.

## Conclusion

In comparison to Nwapa's presentation in the village novel, Ankara texts generally depict more erotic, sensual scenes. The heroines are not shy to explore their sexuality. While young women may use sexuality as a resource due to economic and social pressure, that is not what the Ankara heroines are doing; instead, they are confidently celebrating their sexuality, deriving pleasure to fulfill their romantic needs, and hoping that the satisfaction is mutual. As already highlighted, Ankara heroines are in search of attractive men to satisfy their romantic passion. They are attracted by physical appearance and stylish attire. While Nwapa's heroines display traditional reticence in matters of sex, the contemporary Ankara heroines openly celebrate their sexuality in their quest for satisfying love and sex. In part, the sexually assertive heroine enjoys confidence which stems from her work and financial independence, as we shall see in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER FIVE

SELF-FULFILMENT AND INDEPENDENCE THROUGH WORK: METAMORPHOSIS OF THE  
“CAREER GIRL” IN *FINDING LOVE AGAIN* AND *LOVE’S PERSUASION*

Middle-class women and girls in the Anglo-American culture of the long nineteenth century were largely confined to the domestic realm. Educationally they were not prepared for formal occupations but for marriage and family service: “marriage was the only career available for women” (Smelser 18). Women were divorced from the working world. Instead, Victorian culture in Britain in the nineteenth century especially lauded womanly virtues like devotion to husband and home that would help sustain happy families. This idea of the “angel in the home” is a middle-class Victorian ideal that gets exported to other parts of the world through British colonialism and gets challenged in various ways both in Britain and its colonies. But women, in particular, working-class women in England, were also an important part of the growth of the capitalist economy in Britain from the end of the eighteenth century. The industrial revolution saw an increase in labor demand, and women were hired in textile industries and factories, tending machines, and doing ancillary tasks. Their labor was preferred because it was cheaper (Smelser 20). Also, later advances in technology meant business expansion and new work categories, which created more opportunities for women in the world of work (Rabine 43). The more widespread entry of women into the paid workforce in Anglo-American society is one of the most significant social changes of the twentieth century (Kaplan 839). Generally, women worked outside of the home until they got married, whereafter their labour was diverted to the family sphere. Later in the century, due to economic downswings, increasing numbers of married women were forced to work to complement their husbands' incomes. The challenge has been around expectations that

working women also continue playing their traditional roles in the household from this point on.

In popular romances, the working woman has generally been represented as the “career girl”. Early representations of the “career girl” are heroines in feminine jobs like nursing and secretarial work (Rabine 44). Later, in the 70s, the images changed to showing fully economically independent heroines with high-status jobs outside of nurturing and supportive careers. For example, Kay Thorpe’s *The Dividing Line* presents Kerry, a young woman holding a position on the board of directors of a very successful departmental store. There are also heroines like Frankie in Leigh Robert’s *Love Circuit*, who are PhD holders and computer scientists. Then came the *Harlequin Temptations* series, which introduced an element of dilemma where the working heroine must choose between her career and the hero.

Contrasted with Anglo-American conceptions where women have been linked with the domestic – especially the Victorian “angel in the home,” African women have always worked and been productive. In rural areas, women have largely been responsible for planting and harvesting crops. Women have also been formidable traders in the West African context, giving them significant independence and power. This observation fits the image of the heroine depicted in Nwapa’s *Efuru*. Whereas the Anglo-American middle-class woman had to stop working to care for her children, African working women like Efuru had strong support systems of mothers-in-law, aunts, and “maids” from among indigent extended families to help them look after their children whilst they were away working in their fields or trade. Comparison with the Ankara romances shows how diverse and demanding women’s positions in the workplace have become. Urbanization has divorced the African heroine from her support system, leaving her to balance family and career.

This chapter will first explore the concept of work in *Efuru* before exploring the contemporary Ankara texts. *Efuru*, as suggested by Gay Wilentz, is "an early classic of African literature since it explores a world close to its pre-colonial roots and women's important roles in that world" (Wilentz 180). Wilentz's observation underlines how significant women's work was to the society represented by Nwapa's novel. While the Ankara novels present heroines who work, in some ways, their work has lost the centrality that women's work occupied in Nwapa's world. While a heroine like *Efuru* did not need her husband to work and care for her home and family, the Ankara heroines need an ideal hero to balance work and domestic life.

Furthermore, while *Efuru* as a heroine was not in any way threatened by men in the context of her work, in the Ankara romances, we see the heroine being challenged by sexual harassment in the workplace. These threatening men are the secondary anti-heroes, rivals for the attention of the heroine, who are contrasted in their conduct by the primary hero. This chapter will focus first on women and work in Africa and then analyze the representation of work in two Ankara novellas. *Finding Love Again* by Chioma Iwunze-Ibiam depicts a heroine who negotiates her way through the pressures of career and romantic love. Then Ola Awonubi's *Love's Persuasion* will be studied, which draws attention to the sexual abuse heroines face in the workplace.

### **Formidable Traders: The Economic Independence of Women in *Efuru***

In the introductory note to the volume *Writing African Women: Gender Popular Culture and Literature in West Africa*, Stephanie Newell comments that gender constructions are fluid. Some scholarship shows that historically, the socio-economic order makes women dependent on men and marriage in patriarchal societies. The assumption is that "the only

economic security they can ever have is a man” (Spencer 105). The gendered division of labour positions the man as the provider and protector, making him authoritative and assertive. Simultaneously, “the woman is the nurturer and caregiver who becomes restricted to the domestic space “(Ogude et al. 100). This is challenged in *Efuru* and the world represented by this novel.

Esther Boserup, in her classic study *Women's Role in Economic Development*, acknowledges the immense participation of women in economies, despite the role accorded to men as the main providers. She points out the prevalence of stereotyped sex roles, especially where women are viewed as providing only domestic labour. In non-modern contexts, African women have been the backbone of agriculture and trade, providing sustenance for families and accumulating significant personal wealth. Ifi Amadiume's ethnography *Male Daughters and Female Husbands* traces women's institutional and ideological power in pre-colonial times among the Yoruba and its colonial erosion to the present marginalization of women's economic and political lives. She argues that in pre-colonial Africa, men and women held equal status despite the disparities of masculinization and feminization. Women's participation and work are generally underrated and unacknowledged (Boserup et al. np). A United Nations study, for example, reveals that women do two-thirds of the work both within and outside the home (Jones et al. 35).

The “classic” early novels by African women writers extensively present working women and the importance of their work. Apart from Flora Nwapa, whom I will consider in more detail, writers like Buchi Emecheta, Ama Ata Aidoo and Mariama Bâ portray hardworking heroines in rural and urban contexts, who often single-handedly support their families. The characters shown are not dependent on their husbands economically. Instead, they are the breadwinners, successfully farming and trading their wares in local markets. In urban contexts, women are shown working in professional jobs.

Flora Nwapa's heroine Efuru, at the point of origin of published representations of working women by African women writers, is the classic example of a formidable working woman. Efuru is a successful, industrious and financially independent woman. She can marry for love since she can pay her bride price. Efuru is not dependent on her husband. She trades and is far more successful than her first husband, Adizua. These strengths and capabilities make work very significant. But she does not need to work to liberate herself and be independent because, in Oguta, women are allowed to work outside of the home. Both her husbands do not discourage and stop her from working "outside of the home" since work is part of the woman's social role. The "issue" in this novel does not revolve around the dilemmas and difficulties of the working woman. Instead, the problem exists because Mammy Water, the goddess of wealth and fertility, has made Efuru rich at the expense of giving her a child. The lake goddess has "[given Efuru] beauty and wealth, but she had no child. She had never experienced the joy of motherhood" (221). The novel suggests Efuru is wealthy because of Mammy Water – compensation for not giving her children. The relationship with Mammy Water is complex; she gives beauty and wealth but denies the joy of motherhood to Efuru. The issue may be taken as Efuru's complex and contradictory fate as the chosen one of Mammy Water. But perhaps it also foreshadows the kinds of choices women will later have to make in the fully urban, twenty-first-century context, where heroines desire work or career as a dimension of their self-fulfillment. Still, work makes childbearing and child-rearing difficult. The main dilemma for the Ankara "career girl" is the love/family-career balance, and secondarily, the threats she is exposed to in a largely patriarchal work environment. The Ankara novella implies that the working woman cannot have it all but may need to sacrifice her career for family life. The "romance" creates an ideal hero, which allows the heroine to enjoy the best of both worlds. It is very revealing that an

ideal hero was not needed in Efuru's world and that women like Efuru did not need to choose between family life or love and work as the Ankara heroines seem to need to make.

It is important to briefly outline the significance of work for the "career girl" before exploring the challenges in balancing love and career. The Ankara heroines have some aspirations which can only be realized through careers: "It is through work that women receive recognition" (Gichure np), which in the social context of the novels, often comes from the families of the heroes to whom they become attached. Instead of being critical of women who work, as has been the case until recently in western societies, influenced mainly by Victorian norms, the African expectation is that women should work, and independent wealth is admired. This trend can be seen in Nwapa's *Efuru*, where the hero Adizua is encouraged by his friends to marry Efuru, praising her since she is a hardworking, industrious woman who will ensure wealth for the family. In like manner, in *Love's Persuasion*, we see the heroine's prospective in-laws, the Okolis, proclaiming outright that they want an accomplished daughter-in-law, a graduate and a professional, like a lawyer, not a mere "receptionist earning peanuts" (Awonubi 140). Success in work or career becomes part of "the attraction" element in romantic relationships in the social context of the Ankara novellas.

Furthermore, we see that a career gives the heroines the independence to decide what they want for their lives since their successful careers and businesses build their confidence and self-esteem. Ankara heroines thus are ambitiously pursuing careers or expanding businesses as an important quest of their lives. Their careers not only guarantee financial independence; they also boost self-confidence, especially for the otherwise marginalised heroine. However, the dual pursuit of love and career may result in conflicting demands and pressure on the Ankara heroine, which can be an obstacle to love and vice versa. The "career girl" should not only balance her time to meet deadlines or targets in the corporate world of

work; she has romantic needs and must also make time for love relationships. But can the romantic relationship not inspire and complement the heroine's career?

### **Love and Career – A Balancing Act in *Finding Love Again***

This is the dilemma Chioma Iwunze-Ibiam portrays in *Finding love Again*. Kambi is a twenty-four-year-old poet and radio broadcaster coming from heartbreak, having been jilted by her fiancé, Victor, who ran away with her maid of honor. Even when Victor later dumps her maid of “dishonor.”, as she is referred to by Kambi, Kambi has her pride and cannot take him back, not even for “all the oil wells in Niger Delta, she vows” (Ibiam 7). Her focus is now on her career - completing her poetry collection and establishing herself as a published author. Kambi decides to set out to a mountain resort to escape from everything to a new beginning. She goes to Obudu Mountain Resort to write her poetry- it is “her temporary place of refuge” (7). She uses work as an escape, a distraction from the pains and disappointments. But it does not mean that work is insignificant to her because “[c]ompleting the manuscript would bring her one step closer to her ultimate goal - to be a published author, not just a performance poet” (8). So, work remains a dimension of self-actualization and fulfilment. Then an attractive hero, Beba, comes into the picture, and Kambi must balance meeting her poetry submission deadline and accommodating the irresistible, olive-skinned hero. Love and career become a balancing act. Kambi admits that romantic relationships negatively affect her budding writing career, “she just couldn't handle another distraction” (13). In addition to the present distraction embodied by Beba, the past continues to haunt her. She fears her ex-boyfriend Victor will continue “stalking” her. This is an additional pressure because she has to work to a deadline for the poetry she is writing – racing against time. Romantic relationships add to her challenges. In terms of Regis' essential elements, we see that work or career becomes part of the external “barrier” in the romance plot in this novella. We learn

that Kambi had resisted Beba's love proposal when she was still at university because "she wanted to concentrate on her studies and wouldn't compromise... she did not want to mix her priorities" (43). She wanted to entirely focus on passing her degree, which channeled her to a career as a writer and broadcaster. Kambi's writing career is very important to her, it is not only a catharsis, but it also fulfils her. Completing the manuscript would also be proof that she was not a failure: "Her family would be proud and happy. Everyone would forget about the botched wedding and focus on the new book" (100). She tells Beba's stepmother that writing cures her depression, fear and sadness. She says, "I write not for the fortune or the fame but because I find fulfilment in it" (108).

When Kambi meets Beba again at Obudu Mountain Resort, where she is writing her poetry and love is ignited, she is plunged into a dilemma. The following extract shows how Kambi is divided between work and romance. While at the resort restaurant, she daydreams about making love to Beba and quizzes herself:

The jazz music led her to imagine her waltz with Beba to the smooth melody. While they waltz, she pictured Beba supporting her chin and kissing her. *How fatal will such an adventure be?* What if Beba kissed her, with his pink, sensuous lips? It would be sweet, warm, and so... *Don't even dream about doing something so silly.* Kambi smiled and shook her head and snapped out of her daydreaming.

No room for love until the poetry collection has been completed. She had to get her priorities right. Fulfilling her book contract was more important to her. Only a handful of poets would be remembered after they passed on and she wanted to be one of them. Again, the text from her agent had informed her of the \$100,000 NLNG literary awards coming up next year for the poetry category. The deadline was in just a few weeks' time. Much as she would have liked a brief romance in this haven, she

reminded herself - as she'd taken to doing lately- of how much her dreams and hard work might be jeopardised.

Again, she shook her head. Pride wouldn't let her throw herself at a man whose advances she'd once turned down. But now, she felt a stronger attraction to him. They could remain close friends, but how close was too close for comfort?

*He might be a distraction, but I can balance work and love, she thought. And who is talking about love? Good, God!*

The voice in her head won the argument. She could not handle a dalliance! (28)

We see in the extract a classic division between the heroine's heart symbolised by the kiss, which will make her forget everything else that is important to her, and her head represented by her desire to further her writing career. In the past, she had turned down Beba's advances because of her studies. Now, there is also the added fear of being hurt again, "she hadn't forgotten how much it hurt to open up oneself to a rush of pleasurable emotions" (39). Her bitter experience with Victor marred her dignity, and she concluded that "men are predators" (93). Kambi's resolve is not to get involved with any man yet – there is no room for love. She believes love will only destruct her from her work.

But eventually, we see her giving in to her "heart". The irony is in how her developing love relationship with Beba turns out to inspire her romantic poetry writing. One time they were kissing and "[s]he felt her creative muse rejuvenate" and thought, [a] poem could be born from this kiss" (37). Kambi acknowledges that Beba is "the man who made her poetry a little different" (78). We learn that she wrote many love poems about Beba. The question would be why is his effect positive and different from Victor's? It's because Beba is the ideal hero, he fits Kambi's taste – "She found that she was drawn to men who encouraged her openness: men who allowed her to express herself. Talking to Beba was even

more exciting because he was a good listener” (98). Kambi successfully completes her manuscript and acknowledges Beba’s role saying, “[C]ould I have done it without him? Beba had made the trip more exciting for her” (123). The passionate love they shared at the resort helped to inspire her romantic poetry writing. The hero, in this case, complements the heroine who eventually succeeds in her career aspiration. The text ends with a reconciliatory kiss suggestive of a marriage proposal ahead. Kambi does not comment much about marriage and children except when she complains about her mother constantly nagging her about it. We see the joy and fulfilment she gets from balancing both a successful career and a happy ever after romance. The assumption is marriage and children remain in the future because what’s ideal for the couple, according to Beba, is to celebrate their love, “[m]aking the most of their time together was more important than anything else” (163). Thus, we see in this novella that what makes the romantic hero ideal in the context of the work-romance dilemma is that the hero becomes the inspiration for work. The difficulty is resolved through the romance represented by the ideal hero.

### **Uncovering Abuse at the Workplace in *Love’s Persuasion***

A brief overview of the canonical 20<sup>th</sup>-century African novelists alluded to throughout the thesis shows that none seem to consider the challenges faced in the work context. Instead, they compare women’s work with women’s other roles and the kinds of trade-offs, ironies and contradictions that exist. An example is Buchi Emecheta, who writes about motherhood and the independence of women through education but does not probe deeper into the obstacles and difficulties awaiting women in their work environments, which may include the fields where they sow crops or the streets and marketplaces where they trade. In, for example, *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta presents an almost similar patriarchal context to *Efuru*, but her protagonist, Nnu, unlike Efuru, who always seems to enjoy wealth,

struggles to fend for herself and her children after being abandoned by her husband and relatives. The context is the same as for *Efuru*, where work is part of the heroine's social role. Nnu Ego contends with the strictures of patriarchy and Western capitalism – she is forced to work in the fields by her first husband, Amatokwu. In her second marriage, she does it all - the housework, looking after the children and working as a street-side peddler. The focus in *The Joys of Motherhood* falls mainly on how hard the woman has to work, and her work is not valued at all by her husband and her many children. In the end, she is disillusioned and tragically dies, unfulfilled.

Ama Ata Aidoo's novel *Changes: A Love Story* presents the difficulties of the contemporary working woman. She interrogates the modern African woman and her paradoxical situation where she still faces patriarchy and discrimination despite other positive changes. Aidoo showcases this challenge through three female characters, but we mainly focus on her career-oriented heroine, Esi. Esi holds a master's degree and is a government employee in the Department of Urban Statistics. At work, we feel her anger and frustration over the patriarchal attitudes of her male colleagues, who assume that she should take up secretarial duties like booking travel arrangements for them whenever the office secretary is absent because she is a woman.

Conflicts also arise in the home when she fails to fulfil the "expected roles" because of her career demands. Esi prioritises her career more than home. It unsettles her husband, who feels emasculated – his wife's success threatens his position in the patriarchal sense as the head of the household. Esi's work takes her away from the domestic space; according to Oko, it affects their conjugal life. This leads to the marital rape where Oko tries to subdue her. Through her heroine, Aidoo foregrounds some of the difficulties faced by working women.

The Ankara novella *Love's Persuasion* is different from these other novels since it takes gender questions right into the workplace, focusing on sexual harassment. *Love's Persuasion* identifies a critical concern, not only in the African context but also globally. According to Human Rights Watch, millions of women globally fall victims to gender violence, including sexual harassment and assaults at the workplace. It comes in the form of rape, inappropriate comments, insinuations or jokes, and anything that creates a hostile, intimidating, or humiliating atmosphere for the woman at work (<https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>). The latest statistics and figures posted on the United Nations website show that "almost two out of five women (39 per cent) aged 15 and older who have been in the workforce in the last five years have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace" (<https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures> np). Violence at the workplace deters and destroys women's career aspirations. It is a challenge for heroines to achieve their career goals without compromising their femininity or love life. Mostly, men inflict workplace abuses, as depicted by Ola Awonubi in *Love's Persuasion*.

In *Love's Persuasion*, the heroine Ada, a trainee accountant, is harassed and almost raped by Mr Ignatious Obi, one of the City Finance managers. The text suggests workplace abuse is common because Ada could not get a promotion at her previous job since "she had refused to sleep with her manager" (Awonubi 21-22). In *Love's Persuasion*, Mr Obi persists with his unwanted advances on Ada till a British-trained new assistant director Tony Okoli, who also falls in love with Ada, witnesses the abuse himself. He convinces and helps Ada report the abuse, uncovering the rot, and Mr Obi is asked to resign. Putting this narrative through Regis's romance plot elements, we see workplace harassment as a barrier to the heroine's self-fulfilment, but, paradoxically, it is also linked to the attraction since it allows

the heroine to see what is admirable in the hero. The harassment stifles the heroine's career, generally adding negative pressure into her life, which is relieved by the hero.

Predators like Mr Obi are cunning; they prey on the most junior, vulnerable women employees. An overview of violence in the lives of Black women carried out by Carolyn West established that "young, black single women especially those who work in low-status jobs report the greatest frequency of sexual harassment at work" (West 15). When Obi is caught in the act by Tony Okoli, he dares to lie that it was a consensual relationship and insists on threatening and shattering the heroine's reputation. He remains unshaken and unremorseful, showing that he is a serial abuser. He has been preying on other female employees for many years. The victim Ada is reluctant to report her perpetrator when the harassment starts because she fears Mr Obi will twist the story and "she could not afford to lose this job" (Awonubi 42). She is intimidated by the higher position held by Mr Obi, for she is just a junior employee.

Another deterrent is the bureaucracy the victimized heroine must go through if she decides to report to the police. We are told they would "leer at her and ask stupid questions" (60). She will get comments like- "Na, your fault, now! You must have done something to make that man jump on you like that" (60) (No, it's your fault. You must have led that man on). We see sexist attitudes towards the victim. In *Love's Persuasion*, we learn that on her own, Ada's sexual abuse case stands no chance of succeeding:

Nothing would come out of it. Just more visits to the police station would require bribing one of the officers or the DPO to get Mr Obi charged. Her [Ada] case would probably never get to court- and, even if it did, it would be her word against his. Her name will be in the papers, and the shame of it would reach her hometown. Her reputation would be in ruins (Awonubi 61).

The voice of the victimised heroine is suppressed by the state institutions supposed to protect her. It leaves her with no refuge; even her people in her "hometown" will see her claim as a "shame" since patriarchal attitudes prevail throughout the society.

The "hero", however, moves to protect the heroine, making it possible for her to continue working and achieve self-fulfillment through work. He recognises the challenges faced by women and wishes to be part of the change in attitudes. We learn that he loves Buchi Emecheta's writing, he says, because "[s]he has a way of getting inside what women really face in our [African] culture" (80). That is why we see him rescuing and taking Ada's side during the attempted rape by Mr Obi at the office. In this patriarchal context, one would expect him to dismiss her accusations and silence her; instead, Tony encourages the hesitant Ada to report the incident, promising to help her throughout. In Chapter Six, he says,

"I understand you do not want the publicity, but a lot of times, men like him [Mr Obi] go free because women don't want to make a fuss. I know it's all raw and fresh right now, but why don't you go home and think it over? You might feel differently tomorrow. I 'll- I mean the company will support you all the way."

"You have no idea what you are asking me to do," she [Ada] said, sighing. "If I press charges, all of my business will be out on the road for people to use as a toothpick. Do you really think that having that fool taken to court is worth the damage it will do to me- and my reputation in this company? People will be pointing at me and saying, "Look at her, she must have done something- encouraged him somehow- for him to try and rape her." I won't ever be able to shake it."

She felt tears welling up and, suddenly, she just wanted to be as far away from the office as possible. "I just want to get out of here."

“Of course.” He took off his jacket and handed it to her, taking care not to look at her torn clothes. “It wouldn’t do for anybody to see you like this.”

She put it on gratefully.

"How do you normally get home?"

“I take a bus.”

He looked at his watch. "It's 8 pm. Can't you take a taxi?"

She stared at him as if he was from another planet.

“This is Lagos. It's not safe to take a taxi at this time of night.” There were more passengers in buses and less chance of ending up in some bush, robbed, beaten up or worse. Besides she could not afford a taxi, but she wasn't going to tell him that. "I can take a molue."

"I couldn't possibly let you do that. I can take you home.”

"Look, thanks for your help, but I'm OK. I probably know more about keeping myself safe in this city than you do."

"I really must insist, Ada."

She wanted to protest, but she saw his face and realised that he was not going to take no for an answer. Besides, her head felt as if someone was using it for football practice and she couldn't stop trembling. She nodded and got up- and almost collapsed- but his firm arm around her waist kept her upright (62-63).

The above extract shows the physical effect of sexual harassment and the victim's deeply emotional and psychological trauma. She self-blames, loses confidence, and resents the workplace- “suddenly, she just wanted to be as far away from the office as possible” (62).

The emotional turmoil can only result in resignation or poor work performance. The heroine is at her lowest point, and the ideal hero is there to help her.

The last sentence in the extract above- “but his firm arm around her waist kept her upright” is not just metaphoric. It sums it all up – with the hero’s support, the heroine can overcome her challenges at the workplace. Tony does not judge or distance himself from Ada’s situation; instead, he makes himself part of the solution, pledging his support all the way. Ada is hopeless, but the hero fuels hope in her. He protects the vulnerable young woman, first ensuring that she gets home safely. The gesture of taking off his jacket and handing it to her, taking care not to look at her torn clothes, is very symbolic – he is restoring Ada’s dignity stripped by Mr Obi. Later on, Ada deeply appreciates it acknowledging that “Tony had been such a gentleman – turning away for her to put on his jacket to cover her modesty” (70).

The hero is not only caring, but he is also very attentive and observant. The following day he checks on Ada at the office and can see that “her red eyes spoke of a sleepless night filled with nightmares” (66). She looked tired and drawn because of the incident. Tony is also compassionate and strategic in how he helps Ada recover from her ordeal. He also maintains a formal relationship with her at the workplace, which helped refute the scandalous allegations from Mr Obi. Although well deserved, Ada’s promotion into the management trainee program must have been accelerated by Tony because he was heading the company's restructuring. It worked as a consolation, restoring Ada’s confidence and motivation in her career.

Finally, Ada and Tony confess their love for each other and plan to become engaged and marry. It is implied that ideal heroes like Tony will also encourage heroines to work after marriage. He is supportive of Ada and all working women. Beba tells Ada that “[w]omen

need to be recognized for the work they do. I mean, my mother used to work when we were younger, and my father was all for it” (45). Unlike Oko in Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Changes: a Love Story*, Beba is not threatened by thriving career women; instead, he complements them.

## Conclusion

What can be deduced from this chapter is that the Ankara heroines in the context in which they find themselves face far more enormous challenges than Efuru. “Women aspire to achieve financial independence as a personal goal that makes them feel validated”, so through work, they get self-fulfilment and independence (Ogude et al. 102). But some patriarchal societies interpret it as a threat to their power, control, and masculinity. These “Career girls” need idealised heroes to help them cope with the challenges around work that they face, ironically making the hero indispensable. They need dependable, trustworthy, and flexible men who are not threatened by successful women, men like Beba identified in *Finding Love Again* or Tony in *Love’s Persuasion*. They are not superficial heroes but portray healthier masculinity that supports working women to conquer the barriers. The Ankara novellas thus present a flexible model of masculinity in the hero, which complements the desire for self-realisation of the “career girl” heroine.

## CHAPTER SIX

## CONCLUSION

Today we celebrate not only Flora Nwapa the author and *Efuru* the book, but we celebrate an occasion larger than the two. *Efuru* is not just a novel, and a character in a novel, *Efuru* stands for the values of African womanhood [...] The creation of the woman *Efuru* is immortal, and the message for women defies time. (Zaynab Alkali, keynote at *Efuru@50* in Maiduguri, 1 December 2016)

Zaynab Alkali, the author of the novel *Stillborn*, makes the point which is being implied in this thesis, namely that in *Efuru*, we see the figure emerging of the heroine who will come, with variation, to populate the pages of many novels by African women writers. In Alkali's sense, the Ankara heroines come to make *Efuru* immortal. As is evident in the thesis, concerns interrogated in "ur" text *Efuru* continue to be highlighted and explored in the contemporary Ankara novellas. In its analysis of the figuration of the heroine, the thesis establishes a distinct pattern emerging from the novel *Efuru*. In her first novel, the female character *Efuru* created by Flora Nwapa embodies positive womanhood - intelligence, beauty, strength, resilience, and strong will. The narrative fails, however, to find fulfilment for the heroine, *Efuru*. *Efuru* grapples with cheating, deserting husbands, and fertility issues, and both her marriages fail. The Ankara novellas take up where Nwapa leaves things off – they represent disillusioned heroines coming from failed love relationships, in this way re-living the challenges faced by the primary character *Efuru*. The thesis shows that the central themes of femininity brought to light in *Efuru* resurface in the Ankara texts. They revolve around questions of marriage, childbearing, work, and the presence or absence of eros.

In both settings, procreation is at the heart of society, and heroines are pressured into marriages where they are expected to bear many children. Failure to conceive takes a toll on the heroine's happiness. In Efuru's context, it unsettles her marriage, eventually resulting in infidelity and desertion by her husband. Ankara heroines like Deola in *Love Me Unconditionally* suffer the same treatment – they fail to conceive, and their fiancées leave them for other women. The heroines themselves also want children, but not to the extent of sometimes compromising or risking their health, which is what we see in the secondary heroines with whom the primary heroine is implicitly compared. This may be contrasted with Efuru, who opts for a polygamous marriage where she herself looks for a wife to bear children for her husband. But both Efuru and the Ankara heroine want “unconditional love” and love marriages. Since the Ankara novellas are romances, their heroines do not face the dilemmas and the ambivalent resolution faced by Efuru. Instead, they encounter heroes who have the potential to be perfect fathers, but who also indicate a willingness to accept childlessness, or alternative forms of having a child. In some cases, through the understanding and flexibility of the family, especially the mothers of heroes, a more general societal shift on the question of childbearing is part of the romance.

The Ankara heroines also seek personhood through economic and social independence, and this effort is evident in their pursuit of careers. The feminine strength and indomitable will displayed by Efuru, the “progenitor”, is perpetuated – Efuru is a successful, talented trader and the Ankara “career girls” embrace the same ambitious spirit, equally motivated to pursue different careers and businesses. Like Efuru, they are determined and quest to be the best in their careers. This further broadens the work spectrum for heroines making them more independent financially, socially, and sexually. There is a subtle questioning and challenge of the traditional structures and their patriarchal strictures. We see the effort in redefining womanhood in both settings – Efuru defies tradition by eloping and

paying her own dowry; similarly, Ankara heroines reverse the gender dynamics by proposing love to heroes, and initiating sex. But like Efurū, they are not antagonistic towards the male figure or after undermining him. Instead, they want the “idealized” hero to complement every sphere of their lives.

Heroines want confidently, in addition, to celebrate their sexuality, deriving pleasure to fulfill their romantic needs, and hoping that the satisfaction is mutual. They need dependable, trustworthy, and flexible men who are not threatened by successful women, and who enjoy a sexually initiating and responsive woman.

Like Efurū, the Ankara heroines have experienced bitterness in their past in relationships, but they progressively gain the determination to heal emotionally and embark on new destinations of self-actualization. Nwapa leaves Efurū immersed in her fate and the complexities of dedication to the deity, Mammy Water. The Ankara novellas pursue these challenges further by presenting imagined alternative endings in which model heroes and mothers supportive of heroines, constitute the wished-for happy-ever-after ending.

Therefore, Nwapa’s fiction *Efurū* is foundational and defines the values and dilemmas of women in Africa. The female character Efurū is immortal, for we see her reflected in contemporary Ankara texts where recurring questions on marriage, motherhood, eros and work impact heroines.

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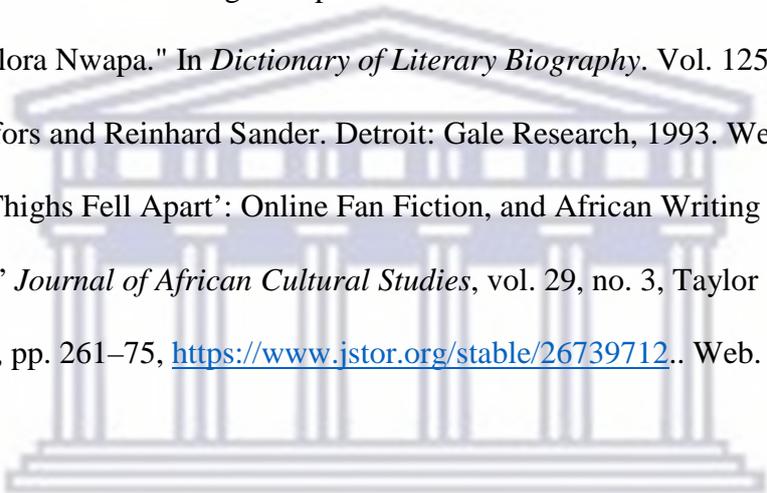
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