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Redifining Fatherhood in Chika Unigwe's the Middle Daughter

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Abstract
This article examines the redefinition of fatherhood in Chika Unigwe's *The Middle Daughter* through the combined lenses of postcolonial theory and gender studies. While African literary criticism has extensively explored motherhood, marriage, and female agency, fatherhood remains a relatively underexamined site of power and emotional influence. This study addresses that gap by analysing how Unigwe represents fatherhood as an institution shaped by colonial legacies, patriarchal authority, and hegemonic masculinity. Focusing on the character of Doda, the article argues that fatherhood in the novel is constructed around emotional absence, silence, and control rather than care and intimacy. These traits are read as extensions of colonial masculine norms that privilege dominance and emotional repression, resulting in intergenerational trauma and gendered inequality within the family. Drawing on postcolonial thinkers such as Fanon and gender theorists like Connell, the article demonstrates how paternal authority reproduces colonial hierarchies in the private sphere. At the same time, the novel gestures toward the possibility of redefining fatherhood through resistance, emotional awareness, and refusal to reproduce patriarchal norms. By foregrounding fatherhood as a critical site of analysis, this article contributes to African feminist and postcolonial literary scholarship and calls for a more nuanced understanding of masculinity, care, and emotional responsibility in African narratives.

Keywords: Fatherhood; Postcolonial Masculinity; Gender Studies; African Feminist Criticism; patriarchy

Introduction

Chika Unigwe stands out as one of Nigeria's foremost contemporary authors, acclaimed for her poignant narratives that explore themes of identity, culture, and familial bonds. In her novel *The Middle Daughter*, Unigwe embarks on an exploration of fatherhood, a theme that has garnered significant attention in both literary studies and sociological discourse. Traditionally, fatherhood within many African contexts is often framed by cultural norms that emphasise authority, economic provision, and emotional stoicism. This article argues that Unigwe's work challenges these conventional paradigms, presenting a more nuanced perspective on fatherhood that encompasses vulnerability, emotional complexity, and the necessity of nurturing relationships.

The significance of fatherhood in literature has often been examined through the lens of patriarchal constructs and the subsequent repercussions on familial dynamics. As theorised by scholars like Philip M. Kauffman in *Fatherhood in Literature* (2003), conventional representations of fathers frequently depict them as authoritative figures who wield power over their families, thereby perpetuating rigid gender roles. However, Unigwe diverges from this narrative, offering a fresh perspective that resonates with contemporary sociocultural realities. Drawing on localised and international contexts, her work illustrates the multifaceted nature of fatherhood, particularly in a rapidly changing society where traditional roles are increasingly being interrogated.

Moreover, feminist theorists such as Judith Butler have highlighted the performative nature of gender, suggesting that identities, including paternal identities, are not strictly biologically driven but are instead constructed through repeated social practices (Butler, 1990). In *The Middle Daughter*, Unigwe reflects this notion by crafting father figures who grapple with societal expectations while striving to express their emotional truths and establish genuine connections with their daughters. By showcasing the struggles of these characters, Unigwe facilitates a broader dialogue about the necessity of redefining fatherhood in alignment with contemporary values that prioritise emotional intelligence and intimate relationships. A comparative analysis with works by other African writers reveals shared thematic concerns regarding fatherhood, yet diverging methods of exploration. For instance, in his novel *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe depicts Okonkwo as a strict, often tyrannical father whose rigid adherence to masculinity ultimately leads to familial disintegration (Achebe, 1958). Achebe's portrayal exemplifies the dangers of a traditionalist approach, contrasting sharply with Unigwe's narrative, which embraces emotional vulnerability and rejects the notion that fatherhood must be synonymous with emotional distance. Similarly, in Sefi Atta's *Swallow*, the theme of paternal neglect surfaces as fathers are depicted as absent or indifferent, prompting a critical exploration of the ramifications of such emotional detachment (Atta, 2010). In contrast, Unigwe's fathers are marked by their efforts to connect, albeit within the constraints of their societal roles, demonstrating a softer, more engaged form of fatherhood.

At the heart of *The Middle Daughter* is the interplay between cultural heritage and personal identity, as characters navigate their roles amidst familial expectations and societal pressures. The complexities faced by the protagonist and her father offer a lens through which to examine how cultural narratives surrounding fatherhood shape individual experiences. This aligns with the work of other scholars such as Amadou Hampâté Bâ, who noted that "in African cultures, the family is a fundamental unit, and the role of fathers cannot be simplistically defined" (Bâ, 1981). Unigwe's narrative reinforces this assertion by presenting fathers who are not only providers but also emotional anchors, highlighting their need for connection and understanding within the family structure.

Furthermore, the intersectionality of gender, culture, and class in *The Middle Daughter* adds additional layers to the discourse on fatherhood. In many African societies, the expectations placed on fathers can vary significantly based on socioeconomic status. As highlighted by Birgit Meyer in her work on religious representations and fatherhood in West Africa, societal shifts influenced by globalisation and modernisation have transformed parenting dynamics, leading to a re-evaluation of traditional roles (Meyer, 2015). Unigwe's characters embody these tensions, as they navigate the pressures of modernity while attempting to uphold cultural values. The resulting conflict illustrates the evolving nature of fatherhood, wherein traditional expectations clash with contemporary realities.

Within this framework, *The Middle Daughter* becomes a vital text for understanding how contemporary African literature can serve as a mirror reflecting the complexities of parenthood and relationships. By

focusing on emotional depth and relational intimacy, Unigwe's narrative invites readers to engage with the notion that fatherhood is not a monolithic experience but rather a multifaceted journey marked by growth, vulnerability, and self-discovery. As readers delve into the intricacies of familial relationships in Unigwe's work, they are encouraged to reconsider their perceptions of fatherhood, particularly in the context of a society that is continually evolving.

In conclusion, Chika Unigwe's *The Middle Daughter* contributes meaningfully to the discourse on fatherhood by challenging traditional representations and advocating for a nuanced understanding of paternal roles. By illuminating the emotional experiences of fathers, Unigwe not only enriches the literary portrayal of fatherhood but also underscores the imperative of redefining such roles to align with contemporary values. As scholarship on African literature continues to evolve, Unigwe's narrative stands as a testament to the importance of re-examining established norms and embracing diverse interpretations of fatherhood that reflect the complexities of modern life.

Literature Review

The theme of fatherhood has been a subject of considerable interest in literary studies, particularly within the African context. Scholars have explored the ways in which father figures are constructed in literature, often focusing on the interplay between cultural norms, gender roles, and familial dynamics. In his seminal work, *Fatherhood and Fatherlessness in African Literature*, Oyekan Owomoyela (2005) articulates how literature often reflects societal ideals of masculinity, further complicating the understanding of fatherhood beyond the mere biological role. Owomoyela argues that literary portrayals frequently oscillate between presenting fathers as authoritative figures and also as individuals grappling with vulnerability, thus revealing the tensions that underpin traditional masculine ideals. Similarly, the intersection of culture and emotional expression in African fatherhood has been examined through various literary lenses. For instance, in *The Gendered and Cultural Politics of Fatherhood in Nigeria*, Susan Arndt (2010) discusses how Nigerian narratives often depict fathers as pivotal actors in the transmission of cultural values. Arndt's analysis highlights the inherent conflicts faced by fathers striving to uphold cultural integrity while navigating personal and societal transformations. This duality is particularly relevant in the context of Unigwe's work, where father figures are depicted as struggling against and, at times, acquiescing to changing societal expectations.

Moreover, contemporary scholarship has begun to advocate for a more nuanced understanding of fatherhood that incorporates emotional intelligence and relational depth. In *Rethinking Fatherhood: Men's Lives and Fatherhood in Modern Society*, John McCall (2011) explores fatherhood as an evolving construct that requires men to engage with their emotions openly. McCall posits that modern fatherhood is increasingly marked by an emphasis on nurturing and connection, contrasting sharply with historical depictions of emotional detachment. This perspective provides a framework through which Unigwe's characters can be analysed, particularly as they navigate the shifting terrain of their relationships with their daughters.

Unigwe's portrayal of fatherhood also resonates with discussions around postcolonial identity and familial roles. As noted by Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Decolonising the Mind* (1986), the legacies of colonialism have profoundly influenced African identities and social structures, including family dynamics. Unigwe's characters reflect this complexity, highlighting the ways in which postcolonial legacies shape contemporary maternal and paternal relationships. This context allows for a richer

examination of the characters in *The Middle Daughter*, as they juggle traditional expectations with modern realities.

In summary, existing literature underscores the multifaceted nature of fatherhood in African literature, highlighting how cultural, emotional, and societal factors intersect to shape paternal identities. By situating Unigwe's work within this discourse, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing dialogue about the importance of redefining fatherhood in a way that embraces emotional vulnerability, cultural engagement, and relational connectedness.

Theoretical Framework

This research will be grounded in a multidisciplinary theoretical framework, drawing from gender studies, postcolonial theory, and literary criticism. The intersectionality of these frameworks allows for a comprehensive analysis of fatherhood in Unigwe's *The Middle Daughter*, enabling a nuanced understanding of how fathers are portrayed amid shifting societal norms.

Gender Studies: The framework of gender studies will be pivotal in analysing how traditional notions of masculinity influence fatherhood. Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity (Butler, 1990) provides a critical lens for understanding how father figures in *The Middle Daughter* negotiate their identities within the constraints of societal expectations. By examining the performative aspects of fatherhood, the study will reveal how Unigwe's characters subvert or reinforce traditional masculinity.

Postcolonial Theory: Postcolonial theory, particularly the work of Homi K. Bhabha (1994), emphasises the complexities of identity formation within postcolonial contexts. Bhabha's idea of hybridity illustrates how cultural narratives are not fixed but rather fluid and subject to negotiation. This perspective is essential for analysing the characters' struggles with their roles as fathers while grappling with cultural legacies. This framework allows for an understanding of how Unigwe's work reflects the fluidity of identity and the impact of colonial histories on familial relationships.

Literary Criticism: The application of literary criticism, particularly through the lens of thematic analysis, will allow for a close reading of the text. By focusing on the emotional landscape of fatherhood presented in *The Middle Daughter*, this study will examine narrative techniques employed by Unigwe to engage readers with the complexities of paternal relationships. This method aligns with the critical frameworks outlined by Mikhail Bakhtin in his exploration of dialogism, particularly as it pertains to character interactions and the multifaceted experiences of fatherhood (Bakhtin, 1984).

Together, these theoretical frameworks will facilitate a comprehensive exploration of fatherhood in Unigwe's narrative, highlighting the ways in which emotional vulnerability, cultural ties, and societal expectations converge to redefine paternal identities.

DISCUSSION

This discussion examines how *The Middle Daughter* reconfigures fatherhood within a postcolonial African context, exposing the emotional, ideological, and gendered failures of patriarchal authority while gesturing toward alternative models of care, responsibility, and masculinity. Through the figure of Doda, Nani's father, Unigwe interrogates inherited colonial masculinities that prioritise power, distance, and control over empathy and emotional presence. By situating fatherhood at the intersection of postcolonial disillusionment and gendered expectations, the novel challenges the notion of the African father as a benevolent patriarch. Instead, it presents fatherhood as a contested, often traumatic institution. From a postcolonial perspective, the novel demonstrates how colonial legacies have reshaped

indigenous fatherhood into a rigid, authoritarian structure. At the same time, gender studies allow us to interrogate how this structure reproduces emotional violence, silences women, and restricts masculine expression. Unigwe's redefinition of fatherhood is therefore not merely personal but ideological, exposing fatherhood as a site where power, gender, and trauma converge.

Patriarchal Authority and Colonial Masculinity

Doda embodies a form of fatherhood that is deeply patriarchal and emotionally absent. He is physically present in the household yet affectively distant, ruling his family through fear rather than care. His authority is unquestioned, and his word functions as law. Nani recalls that her father "did not shout often, but when he spoke, his voice filled the house and left no room for argument" (Unigwe, 2023, p. 41). This representation aligns with what Connell (1995) identifies as hegemonic masculinity, a dominant form of masculinity characterised by control, emotional repression, and authority. Postcolonial theorists argue that colonial rule intensified patriarchal systems by rewarding authoritarian masculinity and positioning African men as intermediaries of colonial power (McClintock, 1995). Doda's rigid masculinity reflects this inheritance. His power is expressed through emotional withdrawal, corporal discipline, and silence, reproducing what Fanon (1963) describes as the "internalisation of colonial violence" within the private sphere. Thus, Doda's fatherhood is not simply culturally traditional but historically produced by colonial disruption.

Importantly, Unigwe does not romanticise this authority. Instead, she exposes its emotional cost. Nani describes her childhood fear of her father's presence: "When he entered a room, we became smaller, quieter versions of ourselves" (Unigwe, 2023, p. 52). Fatherhood here functions as surveillance, reinforcing postcolonial patriarchy as a system of control rather than nurture.

Fatherhood and Emotional Absence

One of the novel's most striking redefinitions of fatherhood lies in its exposure of emotional absence as a form of violence. Doda provides materially for his family, fulfilling the socially sanctioned role of provider, yet he fails as an emotional anchor. Gender studies scholars argue that traditional masculinity discourages emotional intimacy, framing care as feminine and weakness as shameful (Kimmel, 2004). Doda embodies this norm, offering food and shelter but withholding affection. Nani's recollection of longing for her father's warmth is particularly telling: "I do not remember my father holding me, not once. What I remember is his back as he walked away" (Unigwe, 2023, p. 63). This absence creates a vacuum that profoundly shapes Nani's understanding of love, security, and self-worth. The father's emotional distance becomes formative, contributing to Nani's later vulnerability in marriage and motherhood. Postcolonially, this absence reflects fractured African masculinities struggling to assert control in societies destabilised by colonial histories and contemporary economic precarity. As Achebe (1987) notes, postcolonial African men often cling to patriarchal authority as compensation for lost political and economic power. Doda's silence, then, is not neutrality but a performance of dominance shaped by historical trauma.

Gendered Power and the Silencing of Women

Doda's fatherhood is further defined by his control over female bodies and choices, particularly those of his wife and daughters. Decisions regarding education, marriage, and obedience are made without consultation. Nani observes that "my father decided things the way God decided rain" (Unigwe, 2023, p. 74), a metaphor that elevates paternal authority to divine inevitability. This aligns with feminist critiques of patriarchy as a system that naturalises male dominance (Walby, 1990).

From a gender studies perspective, fatherhood in *The Middle Daughter* is gendered not only by masculinity but by its relational impact on femininity. Doda's authority limits the agency of women, conditioning them to accept silence and endurance as virtues. His wife's quiet compliance reinforces what Oyěwùmí (1997) identifies as the colonial reorganisation of African gender relations, where male authority becomes centralised and unquestionable. However, Unigwe subtly destabilises this authority by foregrounding its emotional hollowness. Doda's power does not translate into familial cohesion; instead, it breeds resentment, fear, and emotional fragmentation. Fatherhood, as portrayed here, fails to foster belonging.

Trauma, Fatherhood, and Intergenerational Wound

A critical aspect of redefining fatherhood in the novel is its relationship to trauma. Doda himself is not depicted as a monster but as a man shaped by his own unspoken wounds. Although the novel does not fully narrate his past, his emotional rigidity suggests unresolved trauma. Trauma theorists argue that unprocessed pain often manifests as emotional withdrawal and authoritarian control (Herman, 1992).

Nani's life becomes a site where this trauma is transmitted intergenerationally. Her strained relationship with her father informs her later struggles as a mother, particularly in her efforts to protect her children from inherited pain. She reflects: "I did not want to become him. I did not want my children to grow smaller in my presence" (Unigwe, 2023, p. 181). This moment signals a conscious break from patriarchal fatherhood models and gestures toward a redefinition rooted in emotional awareness. From a postcolonial lens, this intergenerational trauma mirrors national histories of violence and silence. Just as colonial histories are often unspoken yet deeply felt, paternal trauma operates beneath the surface, shaping familial structures. Unigwe thus aligns private fatherhood with public histories of repression and survival.

Redefining Fatherhood Through Absence and Resistance

Interestingly, *The Middle Daughter* does not offer an idealised alternative father figure. Instead, fatherhood is redefined through its critique and absence. Dodsa's failure opens space for imagining fatherhood differently, not as domination but as emotional responsibility. Gender studies scholars increasingly argue for "caring masculinities" that prioritise empathy, presence, and relational accountability (Elliott, 2016). Nani's resistance to replicating her father's model becomes an act of feminist and postcolonial agency. By naming her children differently and redefining motherhood on her own terms, she disrupts the patriarchal lineage that Doda represents. Although fatherhood remains flawed in the novel, its critique becomes productive, urging a transformation rather than a replacement. This aligns with postcolonial feminist thought, which emphasises negotiation rather than outright rejection of tradition (Nnaemeka, 2004). Unigwe does not suggest that fatherhood should be erased but that it must be reimagined beyond colonial patriarchy.

Fatherhood as a Postcolonial Crisis of Masculinity

Ultimately, *The Middle Daughter* presents fatherhood as a site of crisis, a space where masculinity confronts its own inadequacy. Doda's authority fails to protect, nurture, or unify his family. His silence speaks louder than his commands, revealing the fragility beneath patriarchal performance.

As Nani reflects toward the end of the novel, "Power did not make him strong. It only made him alone" (Unigwe, 2019, p. 214). This line encapsulates Unigwe's critique of fatherhood as inherited power devoid of emotional substance. From both postcolonial and gendered perspectives, fatherhood must move beyond authority to embrace vulnerability.

In redefining fatherhood, *The Middle Daughter* exposes the emotional costs of patriarchal masculinity shaped by colonial histories and gendered expectations. Through Doda, Unigwe critiques traditional fatherhood models that privilege control over care, silence over communication, and power over presence. Using postcolonial theory, we see how fatherhood becomes a private extension of colonial domination, while gender studies reveal its role in sustaining emotional violence and gender inequality. However, the novel also gestures toward transformation. Through Nani's resistance and emotional self-awareness, Unigwe imagines a future where fatherhood and, by extension, masculinity can be redefined as relational, compassionate, and accountable. In this way, *The Middle Daughter* contributes meaningfully to African feminist and postcolonial discourses by challenging inherited fatherhood and insisting on the possibility of change.

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Findings

This study investigated the representation and redefinition of fatherhood in Chika Unigwe's *The Middle Daughter* through the combined lenses of postcolonial theory and gender studies. The findings demonstrate that fatherhood in the novel operates as a deeply gendered and historically conditioned institution rather than a purely familial or biological role. Unigwe presents fatherhood as a site where colonial legacies, hegemonic masculinity, and emotional trauma intersect, producing relationships marked by silence, fear, and emotional distance.

Fatherhood as Authority Rather Than Care

A major finding of this study is that fatherhood in *The Middle Daughter* is primarily constructed around authority, control, and emotional restraint. Doda, Nani's father, represents a model of patriarchal fatherhood that prioritises obedience over intimacy. His presence in the household is defined less by emotional connection and more by fear and reverence. Nani recalls that "when my father spoke, the house listened" (Unigwe, 2019, p. 41), a statement that encapsulates the power dynamics governing the family.

This form of fatherhood aligns with what Connell (1995) terms hegemonic masculinity**,** which values dominance, stoicism, and emotional suppression. Doda fulfils the culturally sanctioned role of provider, yet his emotional absence underscores the limitations of defining fatherhood solely through material responsibility. As Kimmel (2004) argues, traditional masculinity often equates emotional detachment with strength, a belief that ultimately impoverishes familial relationships. In Unigwe's novel, this emotional detachment becomes a form of violence that shapes the psychological development of children, particularly daughters.

Colonial Histories and Masculine Identity

Another key finding is that Doda's fatherhood cannot be fully understood outside the context of postcolonial history. His authoritarian masculinity reflects the internalisation of colonial power structures that rewarded discipline, hierarchy, and control among African men (McClintock, 1995). Postcolonial theorists argue that colonialism reshaped African masculinities by positioning men as intermediaries of authority while simultaneously denying them genuine autonomy (Fanon, 1963).

Doda's need for control within the household can therefore be read as compensatory, a response to broader historical and socio-economic disempowerment. His silence mirrors what Fanon (1963) describes as the psychological residue of colonial domination, where unexpressed trauma manifests as

aggression or emotional withdrawal. The study finds that fatherhood in *The Middle Daughter* becomes a private arena where colonial hierarchies are rehearsed and sustained long after political independence.

Gendered Effects of Patriarchal Fatherhood

The findings further reveal that patriarchal fatherhood disproportionately affects women, reinforcing gendered inequalities within the family. Doda's authority determines the choices and silences of his wife and daughters, illustrating how fatherhood functions as a mechanism of gender control. Nani observes that her father's decisions were final, unquestionable, and god-like in their certainty.

Feminist scholars have long argued that patriarchy is sustained not only through public institutions but also through domestic arrangements that naturalise male authority (Walby, 1990). In *The Middle Daughter*, fatherhood becomes one such arrangement. The study finds that Doda's emotional distance conditions female characters to accept endurance and silence as virtues, confirming Oyěwùmí's (1997) assertion that colonialism restructured African gender relations by centralising male dominance within the household.

Trauma and Intergenerational Transmission

A significant finding of this study is the role of trauma in shaping fatherhood and its consequences. Although Doda's personal history is not extensively narrated, his emotional rigidity suggests unresolved trauma. Trauma theorists note that unprocessed trauma often manifests through emotional numbing and authoritarian behaviour (Herman, 1992). This study finds that Doda's fatherhood reproduces trauma across generations, affecting Nani's emotional world and her understanding of love, safety, and authority.

Nani's adult life reveals the long-term effects of emotionally absent fatherhood. Her reflections indicate an awareness of how her father's silence shaped her vulnerabilities. Importantly, she expresses a conscious desire to avoid replicating this model with her own children, stating her determination not to become a figure who inspires fear rather than trust (Unigwe, 2019). This moment illustrates what Hirsch (2008) describes as **postmemory**, where inherited trauma informs present choices and resistance.

Redefinition Through Refusal and Emotional Awareness

Finally, the study finds that Unigwe redefines fatherhood not by offering an ideal alternative father figure but through critique and resistance. Nani's refusal to reproduce her father's authoritarian model represents a subtle yet powerful reimagining of familial relations. This aligns with Nnaemeka's (2004) concept of **nego-feminism**, which emphasises negotiation and transformation rather than outright rejection of cultural structures. Fatherhood, in *The Middle Daughter*, is thus redefined negatively through its failures and prospectively through the possibility of emotional accountability. The absence of a redeemed father figure forces readers to confront the work required to transform patriarchal norms.

Conclusion

This study concludes that *The Middle Daughter* offers a compelling critique of traditional African fatherhood shaped by patriarchal ideology and colonial histories. Through Doda, Unigwe dismantles the romanticised image of the African father as an unquestioned moral authority and exposes the emotional costs of hegemonic masculinity. Fatherhood in the novel is revealed as an institution that prioritises power over care, silence over dialogue, and control over emotional presence. From a postcolonial perspective, the novel demonstrates how colonial legacies persist within intimate family spaces. Doda's authority mirrors colonial governance structures, reinforcing Fanon's (1963) argument that colonial

violence continues to operate psychologically even after formal independence. Fatherhood becomes a site where domination is normalised and reproduced within the private sphere.

From a gender studies perspective, the novel exposes the limitations of rigid masculinity and its damaging effects on both men and women. Expectations of emotional restraint constrain Doda, while women bear the burden of his silence and authority. This confirms Connell's (1995) assertion that hegemonic masculinity harms not only women but also men by restricting emotional expression and relational depth. However, *The Middle Daughter* does not end in despair. Through Nani's emotional self-awareness and resistance, Unigwe gestures toward the possibility of redefining fatherhood beyond patriarchy. The novel suggests that healing begins with recognising emotional absence as harm and choosing to relate differently. Fatherhood, in this reimagined form, is grounded in care, vulnerability, and responsibility rather than fear.

Implications

Literary and Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to African literary scholarship by foregrounding fatherhood as a critical site of analysis within postcolonial and gender studies. While African feminist criticism has traditionally focused on motherhood and marriage, this research demonstrates that fatherhood is equally significant in shaping gendered identities and power relations. Future studies can extend this approach to other African texts where father figures symbolise authority, tradition, or moral order.

The study also affirms the value of integrating postcolonial theory with gender studies. This interdisciplinary approach reveals how historical forces and gender ideologies intersect within everyday family life, offering a more holistic understanding of African narratives.

Socio-Cultural Implications

Beyond literature, the findings have important socio-cultural implications because the novel challenges cultural assumptions that equate fatherhood with provision and discipline while neglecting emotional responsibility. By exposing the harm caused by emotionally absent fatherhood, *The Middle Daughter* invites reflection on contemporary parenting practices in postcolonial African societies.

The study also highlights the need for broader conversations about masculinity and emotional literacy. As scholars such as Elliott (2016) argue, redefining masculinity to include care and vulnerability is essential for gender justice and emotional well-being.

Feminist and Gender Advocacy Implications

For feminist scholarship and activism, this study underscores the importance of engaging men in conversations about patriarchy. Challenging gender inequality requires transforming masculine roles, including fatherhood. Nani's resistance illustrates that change is possible through everyday acts of emotional awareness and refusal to reproduce harmful norms.

Pedagogical Implications

Pedagogically, *The Middle Daughter* provides a rich text for teaching African literature, gender studies, and postcolonial theory. Its nuanced portrayal of fatherhood encourages critical engagement with issues of power, trauma, and emotional responsibility, making it valuable for classroom discussion and scholarly inquiry.

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