

The Onitsha Market Literature: Reimagined

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HIS 469 Work, Gender, & Policy in Africa

Final Research Paper

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May 8, 2024

On the banks of the River Niger, the city of Onitsha houses one of the oldest and longest-standing markets in Nigeria and arguably all of Western Africa. In the 17th century, the first inhabitants arrived from the Bini Kingdom, settling in Onitsha, whose geographic location enabled the growth of trade relations with nearby hinterland towns.¹ In the 18th century, The British landed in Onitsha and capitalized off their trading port. However, it was not until the early 1900s that the colonial administration deemed Onitsha as a commercial center for education, culture, and commercial trade, around the same time the Anglican and Catholic missions also set up their headquarters in Onitsha.² Despite the relocation of the British colonial administration from Enugu to Nsukka, Onitsha remained a commercial trading center, which was reinforced by the opening of the Main Market in 1955.³ Larger foreign companies were permitted from the Main Market trading space, and goods were based on what local Igbo traders believed to be essential for market-goers.⁴ One of the primary goods in circulation was literature, sold in several different book stalls until the original Main Market was destroyed during the Biafran War (1968).

Over time, a fascination with these market writings as cultural artifacts has arisen, and a substantial body of scholarship has come to fruition. The literature has come to be known as "The Onitsha Market Literature,"⁵ despite the emergence of this literature predating the official

¹ Ochia, Krys. "Onitsha: The Largest Market in Nigeria—One of the Largest in West Africa." In *Marketplace Trade and West African Urban Development*. The Palgrave Macmillan, (2022): https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-87556-5_3, 50.

² Obi-Ani, Ngozika Anthonia & Isiani, Mathias Chukwudi. "Urbanization in Nigeria: The Onitsha experience." *Cities* 105(2020):<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0264275119309503?via%3Dihub>

³ Ochia, " Onitsha: The Largest Market in Nigeria—One of the Largest in West Africa," 53

⁴ Ochia, " Onitsha: The Largest Market in Nigeria—One of the Largest in West Africa," 53

⁵ Nwoga, Donatus I. "Onitsha Market Literature." *Transition*, no. 19 (1965): 26-33. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2934655>

opening of the Main Market with the establishment of Tabansi, a local bookshop, in 1947.⁶ With the call for an independent Nigeria underway and an increased literacy rate due to Onitsha's history as an academic hub, mainly because of its proximity to a nearby higher education institution, a desire to spread the democratic spirit to pages emerged.⁷ Printing presses grew rapidly in numbers, and by the time the Main Market opened, many short novels, plays, poetry books, self-help guides, and essays began to be sold at bookstalls in the form of small booklets. Written in both English and Igbo, I have chosen to select two separate booklets: *Beware of Women: "Why Women Are Not Trusted,"*⁸ and these booklets provide *Miss Cordelia In The Romance of Destiny; the Most Sensational Love Intricacy That Has Ever Happened in West Africa*⁹ from the market writings circa 1960s which reflect modern democratic life. These booklets offer insight into the minds of young Nigerians who produce them and their relationship with a broader market-going audience. The writings reflect a historical project to vilify women, a theme that persists in the booklets despite the attempts to reframe Nigeria as embodying a new democratic spirit. This tension is evident through my review of scholarship on the Onitsha Market Literature and my later analysis of *Beware of Women* and *Miss Cordelia* in conversation with historians.

Beware of Women: "Why Women Are Not Trusted" (e.g., see fig. 1), authored and published by Nathan Njoku and Njoku & Sons Bookstore, respectively, and edited by Okenwa

⁶ Obiechina, Emmanuel. *An African Popular Literature: A study of Onitsha Market Pamphlets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1973.

⁷ Ochia, " Onitsha: The Largest Market in Nigeria—One of the Largest in West Africa," 53

⁸ Njoku, Nathan. *Beware of Women: "Why Women are Not Trusted."* Onitsha: Njoku & Sons Bookshop, 196?. <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00004591/00001/images/0>

⁹ Nwosu, Cletus Gibson. *Miss Cordelia in the Romance of Destiny, the Most Sensational Love Intricacy That Has Ever Happened in West Africa*. Port Harcourt: Okeanu and Unity Bookshop, 196?. <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00004295/00001/images>

Olisah, is a short self-help guide. The 40-page pamphlet focuses on how African women have become disgraceful—"liars, frauds, and cheats."¹⁰ This notion becomes evident in the author's cautionary tone in the title with the word "Beware" and further emphasized in the "editor's note" section, which pleads with men to take caution.¹¹ This plea is reinforced by the content consisting of fictitious letters written by men deceived by women, Q&A-style vignettes, and short stories about women poisoning their husbands. The intended audience is clearly stated in the "Forward" section as "men"; however, the editor recommends that everyone read this book.¹² The price indicated on the cover (two shillings and sixpence),¹³ paired with the short 40-page length and simple word choice, suggest the audience required a cheap, quick, and easy read. Taxi drivers, police, students, and other market traders fit these criteria. The editor reveals the author to be a "young writer,"¹⁴ and the frequent grammatical errors and the structure of the introduction following a template corroborate that the writer is new to the scene. Moreover, this stylistic evidence suggests an eagerness to produce literature fast to keep up with the rapid influx of market writings, revealing the democratic spirit that allowed young writers to be widely accessible and created competition amongst the cohort. The omission of a publication date is worthy to note and seen in many of the market writings, including the other selected work in question, *Miss Cordelia In The Romance of Destiny; the Most Sensational Love Intricacy That Has Ever Happened in West Africa* (e.g., see fig. 2).

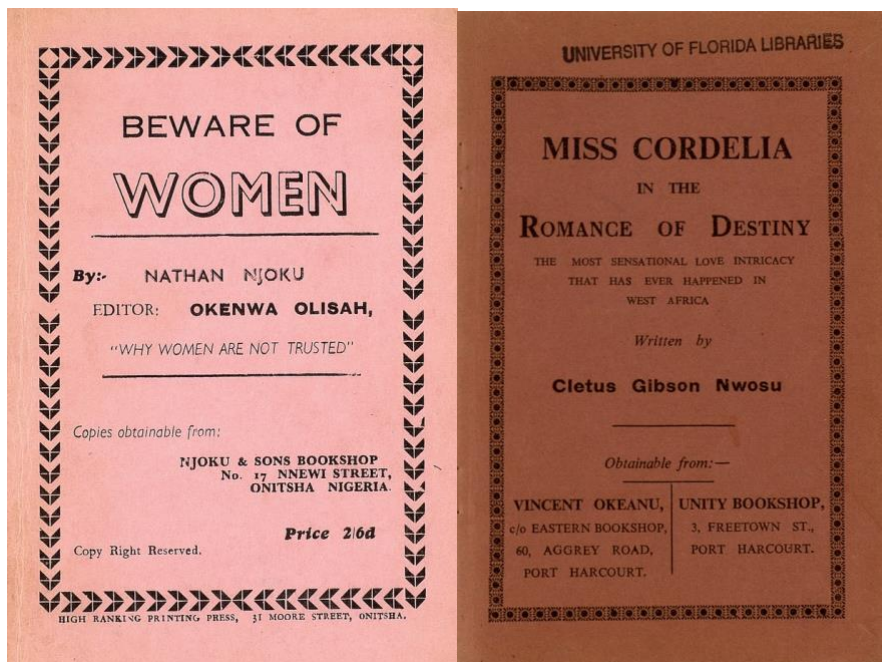
¹⁰ Njoku, Nathan. *Beware of Women: "Why Women are Not Trusted,"* 4

¹¹ Njoku, Nathan. *Beware of Women: "Why Women are Not Trusted,"* 5

¹² Njoku, Nathan. *Beware of Women: "Why Women are Not Trusted,"* 5

¹³ Njoku, Nathan. *Beware of Women: "Why Women are Not Trusted,"* 1

¹⁴ Njoku, Nathan. *Beware of Women: "Why Women are Not Trusted,"* 5

Figure 1¹⁵Figure 2¹⁶

Published in the nearby town of Port Harcourt, the short fictional novel follows the story of Cordelia and her tragic, dramatic romance. Told through first-person narration, Cletus Gibson Nwosu, cited as another "young" writer and student,¹⁷ tells the story of her sad childhood, where her Mother was killed in a fight with her father's second wife. The story then traces her days as a student, her struggle to find a boyfriend, and her defiance to accept no one below her standards. Cordelia meets the love of her life, Joseph; they exchange love letters and arrange to get married. In a shocking turn of events, the pagans of the town reveal, to the couple's dismay, that they are indeed cousins. Cordelia's shame nearly brings her to death; however, with the best doctor in

¹⁵ Njoku, Nathan. *Beware of Women: "Why Women are Not Trusted,"* 1

¹⁶ Nwosu, Cletus Gibson. *Miss Cordelia in the Romance of Destiny, the Most Sensational Love Intricacy That Has Ever Happened in West Africa*, 1

¹⁷ Nwosu, Cletus Gibson. *Miss Cordelia in the Romance of Destiny, the Most Sensational Love Intricacy That Has Ever Happened in West Africa*, 6

town and her father's support, she eventually finds an older man to marry by the name of Ronald. She hates his ignorant nature and leaves the readers to ask what moral they can draw from her story. Following a similar structure to *Beware of Women*, with the Nwosu using a template in the foreword, the audience is also stated in this section as "Nigerian students," like in the other booklet, and the editor recommends this book for "all book lovers."¹⁸ The price is not displayed, but the novel's short 40-page length and the easy-to-follow narrative are enough to suggest the audience to be those of the market-goers mentioned above. Similarly, with the authorship in *Beware of Women*, the author's youthfulness is evident in grammatical errors and following a template in the foreword. Additionally, as stated in the forward, a desire to "add his name to the list of Nigeria Authors"¹⁹ alludes to the author's democratic spirit embodied by the eagerness and hope for stardom. While *Beware of Women* and *Miss Cordelia* differ in genre, both use similar stylistic techniques reflecting the young authorship, which, despite a new era of Independence for Nigerians, reinforce historical misogynistic portrayals of Nigerian womanhood.

Donatus Ibe Nwoga originally coined the term "Onitsha Market Literature" in a 1965 article.²⁰ Nwoga analyzes several pieces from the Onitsha Market Literature, revealing the "derogatory" way the literature imagines a "new type of African girl."²¹ Contrary to the booklet's hyper fixation on women and womanhood, which Nwoga makes apparent through his analysis of *My Seven Daughters Are After Young Boys*, *Why Maria Killed Her Husband* and *Miss Appolonia's Pride Leads Her To Be Unmarried*, etc., the author argues the Onitsha Market

¹⁸ Nwosu, Cletus Gibson. *Miss Cordelia in the Romance of Destiny, the Most Sensational Love Intricacy That Has Ever Happened in West Africa*, 6

¹⁹ Nwosu, Cletus Gibson. *Miss Cordelia in the Romance of Destiny, the Most Sensational Love Intricacy That Has Ever Happened in West Africa*, 6

²⁰ Donatus, "Onitsha Market Literature," 26-33

²¹ Donatus, "Onitsha Market Literature," 27

Literature is a male-dominated space due to the authorship being masculine and readers being predominantly male.²² Nwoga's analysis of a young Nigerian male authorship aligns with my close readings of *Beware of Women* and *Miss Cordelia*. Although *Beware of Women* and *Miss Cordelia* explicitly address their audiences in the forwards as "everyone"²³ and "Nigerian Students,"²⁴ respectively, the content reveals a deeper connection with Nwoga's reading of *My Seven Daughters Are After Young Boys*, *Why Maria Killed Her Husband* and *Miss Appolonia's Pride Leads Her To Be Unmarried*, etc., as a male audience. The shared themes of women as evil and manipulators of men in the Onitsha Market Literature lend themselves to a collective male fear and anxiety of women.

Echoing much of Nwoga's historiography of the literature, newer scholarships trace similar arguments, adding a layer of colonial influence. In their chapter, "*Onitsha Market Literature: Narrating Identity and Survival in Colonial African City*," featured in *Narrative Identity, and Academic Community in Higher Education*, Raphael Chijoke Njoku and Yik King analyze Onitsha market literature through an intersectional lens of economics and history. The authors argue, "beneath the narration of women in the Onitsha writings is a muted economic discourse centered on power, survival, and control."²⁵ This quote implicitly references the larger socioeconomic context in Onitsha, which was one of male dominance over women propagated by colonial rule. This larger colonial project influenced the Onitsha Market literature until Nigeria's independence. While the above scholarship does the critical work in addressing the

²² Donatus, "Onitsha Market Literature," 27

²³ Njoku, Nathan. *Beware of Women: "Why Women are Not Trusted,"* 5

²⁴ Nwosu, Cletus Gibson. *Miss Cordelia in the Romance of Destiny, the Most Sensational Love Intricacy That Has Ever Happened in West Africa*, 6

²⁵ Njoku, Raphael Chijioke, and King Yik. "Onitsha Market Literature: Narrating Identity and Survival in a Colonial African City." In *Narrative, Identity, and Academic Community in Higher Education*. Routledge, 2017. <https://illiad.davidson.edu/pdf/452831.pdf>, 34

"derogatory" view of women in the literature as a reflection of male dominance, a lack of examination of how the people behind said literature invoke this male dominance is yet to be dissected.

Who these authors are and how they subsequently invoke male dominance is prevalent when reading Emmanuel Obiechina's 1973 book, *An African Popular Literature: A Study of Onitsha Market Pamphlets*. Obiechina provides the first extensive review and discussion of the literature by analyzing a large body of pamphlets. Themes such as familial dynamics, love, romance, religion, morals, and happiness are the primary focal points of the literature. Contrary to Donatus' suggestion of the audience, Obiechina argues young men and women in modern democratic Nigeria are the primary readership, using specific evidence from *Miss Cordelia* to support his claim. Obiechina references the text forward, explaining that "for all" is evidence of this book being for the masses and a microcosm of the lives of young Nigerian men and women during the 1960s.²⁶ Donatus' arguments about the Onitsha Market Literature being a male space are contingent on "the author's closeness to the subjects and audience."²⁷ This "closeness"²⁸ in subjects is apparent in both *Beware of Women* and *Miss Cordelia*. In *Beware of Women*, Njoku writes as a young Nigerian man about young Nigerian men who fear young women. Nwosu, as a young Nigerian student, writes about the experience of another young student, Cordelia. However, Donatus's argument about the author's closeness to the audience is mere speculation, and later scholarship challenges his assumptions.

²⁶ Obiechina, *An African Popular Literature: A study of Onitsha Market Pamphlets*

²⁷ Donatus, "Onitsha Market Literature," 19

²⁸ Donatus, "Onitsha Market Literature," 19

For example, Don Dodson, in his 1973 journal article entitled "The Role of the Publisher in Onitsha Market Literature," counters Donatus's claims about the "closeness" of authors to their audience, writing the relationship "is not as close as research suggests."²⁹ Dodson backs his claims with results from a questionnaire on readership and the market writings' authorship. His study revealed that most of the readership had less schooling than the authors who produced market literature and that they came from various occupations (i.e., students, traders, soldiers, police, fishermen).³⁰ While the scholarship displays discrepancies in authorship and the audience, Donatus and Dodson come to similar conclusions that men dominated the production of the market literature. I position the young Nigerian male authorship as a blend of Donatus's and Dodson's arguments. This authorship emerges as a unique subsection of Onitsha history—separate from the lived experiences of many market goers, yet seeping connected to market activity through disseminating their writings. Furthermore, the authorship reflects a shared misogynistic view of Nigerian womanhood shared by its male audience.

Dodson argues that understanding the relationship between the publishers and authors provides insight into the operations of this male-dominated space. Using interviews with authors and publishers of the literature, Dodson describes the relations as "strained."³¹ Specifically, he quotes a writer's frustrations with a publisher who "is a cheat. Why? He pays a few pounds for your labor and becomes rich off it."³² Dodson further explains how many publishers, after purchasing the author's work, would take credit and write their names as authors on the market

²⁹ Dodson, Don. "The Role of the Publisher in Onitsha Market Literature." *Research in African Literatures* 4, no. 2 (1973): 17-88 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3818894>, 172

³⁰ Dodson, "The Role of the Publisher in Onitsha Market Literature." *Research in African Literatures*, 172

³¹ Dodson, "The Role of the Publisher in Onitsha Market Literature." *Research in African Literatures*, 180

³² Dodson, "The Role of the Publisher in Onitsha Market Literature." *Research in African Literatures*, 180

literature.³³ In *Beware of Women*, Njoku claims authorship, but the evidence provided by Dodson above suggests this is highly unlikely. Although Dodson's interviews are taken roughly a decade after the publications of *Beware of Women* and *Miss Cordelia*, his work provides critical context to the, at times, hostile environment behind the scenes of these market writings.

The significance of this space being gendered male by the majority of the secondary scholarship is best understood through the work of historian Ndubueze L. Mbah. In his 2019 book, *Emergent Masculinities: Gendered Power and Social Change in the Biafran Atlantic Age*, Mbah argues how the politics and economics of the Atlantic world channeled into local institutions, reconstructing gender identities for Igbo peoples of southeastern Nigeria.³⁴ Mbah explains the most prominent emerging masculinity was *ufiem*. *Ufiem*, Mbah writes, was a "hegemonic masculinity" that was "extractive" and "violent."³⁵ The power dynamic of the publishers and authors behind the writings reflects *ufiem*, particularly the publisher's extraction of writers' work as their own. Moreover, the hierarchical component of *ufiem* is also reflected in this dynamic where the publishers not only take but trick writers out of their work for what Mbah cites as "self-advancement."³⁶ Many of the characteristics of *ufiem* are not only reflected in the actors behind the market writings but also in the content matter.

Thus, the actors behind the market literature offer a unique lens to view how a democratic spirit allowed young Nigerian men to get involved in producing literature for a large urban audience. Applying Paulla A. Ebron's theory of gender performance, which shows gender as a

³³ Dodson, "The Role of the Publisher in Onitsha Market Literature." *Research in African Literatures*, 180

³⁴ Mbah L., Ndubueze. *Emergent Masculinities: Gendered and Social Change in the Biafran Atlantic Age*. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2019), 1

³⁵ Mbah, *Emergent Masculinities: Gendered and Social Change in the Biafran Atlantic Age*, 1

³⁶ Mbah, *Emergent Masculinities: Gendered and Social Change in the Biafran Atlantic Age*, 4

site where gender identities are constructed, an applied rather than a conceptual framework, to the writers behind the Onitsha Literature displays how cultural practices reinforce "derogatory" views of African womanhood. Ebron argues that, in the African context, this performance is "locally understood to be a pedagogical category, rather than a natural one."³⁷ Examining the specific historical categories and techniques invoked by this male-dominated literature is critical and needs to be remembered by existing scholars.

In *Beware of Women*, Njoku classifies the new African women as "mongerish." This classification of women can be better understood as a more extensive historical construction of womanhood in Nigeria when looking at Absode A. George's 2014 novel *Making Modern Girls: A History of Girlhood, Labor, and Social Development in Colonial Lagos*, specifically Chapter 7, where the author argues a new construction of "problem girls," a category of girls which was of high concern and closely tied to sex work.³⁸ George details nationalist debates in elite circles concerned with the growing number of arrests of girls due to underage prostitution, which led to George's notion of these "problem girls." George uses evidence from newspapers that cite various types of these problem girls: "hotel girls," "club addicts," and "glamor girls," arguing the public was educated about these concerning figures, which emerged from the focus on modernity and urbanization of Lagos in the 1940s-1950s.³⁹ While *Beware of Women* was published circa 1960s, the continuation of many of George's "problem girls" is reflected in the

³⁷ Paulla A. Ebron, "Constituting Subjects through Performative Acts," in *Africa After Gender?* Catherine Cole M., et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 174-177. muse.jhu.edu/book/9043, 176

³⁸ George, Abosede A. "For Women, Girls, and the Nation? The Politics of Girl Saving In the Era Of AntiColonial Nationalism." In *Making Modern Girls: A History of Girlhood, Labor, and Social Development in Colonial Lagos*, edited by Jean Allman et al., 229-254. Athens Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2014. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy048.nclive.org/lib/davidson/reader.action?docID=1813361>, 246

³⁹ George, "For Women, Girls, and the Nation? The Politics of Girl Saving In the Era Of AntiColonial Nationalism," 246

construction of modern womanhood. George characterizes problem girls as "seen as runaways"⁴⁰ which is an apparent theme in Njoku's subsections entitled "My Wife Ran Away From Me"⁴¹ and "A Run Away Wife."⁴² Additionally, George cites problem girls as "those who sought to get rich quick,"⁴³ which is evident in Njoku's many references to women "liquating men,"⁴⁴ "after money,"⁴⁵ and "taking all my money."⁴⁶ George argues the problem girls symbolize a "deterioration of authentic Africa."⁴⁷ Thus, women became gendered as "authentic" at a time when urbanization was inevitable. This notion is echoed in *Beware of Women*, a section entitled "Questions for Every Body,"⁴⁸ where the author explains that women are not like they used to be. The fact that this is of a concern of "Every Body" suggests a similar fear of the decades before in Lagos about problem girls percolated into the Onista Market Literature. The author's answer to the question "Every Body" asks is "because of their wickedness[...]they do not care to respect their parents as the girls of the olden days."⁴⁹ This view hints at the new democracy and urbanization causing generational conflicts that are gendered, framing women as problem girls who essentially bear the double standard of living in a new socio-political context of an independent nation while being under scrutiny for not representing "authentic" Africa.

⁴⁰ George, "For Women, Girls, and the Nation? The Politics of Girl Saving In the Era Of AntiColonial Nationalism," 246

⁴¹ Njoku, Nathan. *Beware of Women: "Why Women are Not Trusted,"* 11

⁴² Njoku, Nathan. *Beware of Women: "Why Women are Not Trusted,"* 14

⁴³ George, "For Women, Girls, and the Nation? The Politics of Girl Saving In the Era Of AntiColonial Nationalism," 247

⁴⁴ Njoku, Nathan. *Beware of Women: "Why Women are Not Trusted,"* 1

⁴⁵ Njoku, Nathan. *Beware of Women: "Why Women are Not Trusted,"* 8

⁴⁶ Njoku, Nathan. *Beware of Women: "Why Women are Not Trusted,"* 15

⁴⁷ George, "For Women, Girls, and the Nation? The Politics of Girl Saving In the Era Of AntiColonial Nationalism," 247

⁴⁸ Njoku, Nathan. *Beware of Women: "Why Women are Not Trusted,"* 15

⁴⁹ Njoku, Nathan. *Beware of Women: "Why Women are Not Trusted,"* 21

George's analysis continues focusing on "schoolgirls"⁵⁰ as a subgroup that invokes notions of problem girls. Cordelia embodies the schoolgirl category to a T. George explains how, during the late 1940s, the stereotype in popular novels of schoolgirls was "a common trope[...] was educated, aspirational, modern, and the pride of a father who has invested heavily in her education— who defies her family and devalues herself by falling in love with a young pauper."⁵¹ Cordelia fits this description as she outwardly defies her father when she wants to marry Joseph, only to bear the shame of her actions when it is revealed that Joseph is her cousin. Through George and Ebron, it becomes apparent that these authors had a sense of past categories of womanhood in Nigeria and used them to continue projects perpetuating a democratic spirit that upheld male hierarchical control.

A clear example of a specific historical technique in which song is used to shame women arises when examining *Miss Cordelia* with historian Nwando Achebe's 2011 *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria: Ahebi Ugiagbe*. Achebe's historical biographical focus on Ahebi's rise to power under the British colonial system of Warrant Chiefs in Nigeria circa the late 19th century, relying on oral histories from the Enugu-Eziki people.⁵² Song becomes a central player in understanding the rise and fall to power of Ahebi. In chapter five, "Mastering Masculinity: Ekpe Ahebi Masquerade— the Final Insult, ca. 1931-1948," Ahebi's attempt at masquerade to obtain full status as a male defies elder gender rules, leading to her shunning from her community. Subsequently, she loses the support of British officials, who used her to garner the trust of her

⁵⁰ George, "For Women, Girls, and the Nation? The Politics of Girl Saving In the Era Of AntiColonial Nationalism," 248

⁵¹ George, "For Women, Girls, and the Nation? The Politics of Girl Saving In the Era Of AntiColonial Nationalism," 248

⁵² Achebe Nwando, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria: Ahebi Ugbabe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011)

community, and now, with that trust and her no longer in good graces with her community, she is disposed of.⁵³ Achebe explains how a song becomes a tool to detail Ahebi's history and, in this case, her misfortune. Similarly, in *Miss Cordelia*, she defies her father's wishes to marry and chooses her own lover, Joseph, to find out he is her cousin.

Both Ahebi and Cordelia defy male elder authority and thus gendered power structures, and they must bear the shame. Achebe explains how this shame Ahebi bears is apparent in the song entitled "Ahebi akpogo ifu mma woo ogbodu,"⁵⁴ which asks, "Is she not the one called Ahebi Ugbabe?"⁵⁵ illuminating her great past, only to tear her down with the lyrics, "Ahebi got initiated and turned into a moron,"⁵⁶ revealing the humiliation she now carries from her actions. Similarly, in the case of Cordelia, her shame is explicitly referenced in the lyrics, "Oh! what a shame. She would die because she wouldn't marry her cousin./ Oh! what a shame and how abominable."⁵⁷ Here, the shame lies not only in her unknowing that she was going to marry her cousin but also in the fact that this scandal is causing her physical illness, which almost leads to her death. Both songs also display a public shaming element as their communities sing both. The songs work to spread their shame amongst the community and carry on long after the women's initial demise as they outlive them, making their shame an everlasting torment. Using Achebe's biography illustrates how the influence of song-shaming women was not a new idea particular to Onitsha Market Literature but instead rooted in historical projects of shaming women.

⁵³ Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria: Ahebi Ugbabe*, 185

⁵⁴ Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria: Ahebi Ugbabe*, 185

⁵⁵ Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria: Ahebi Ugbabe*, 186

⁵⁶ Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria: Ahebi Ugbabe*, 186

⁵⁷ Nwosu, Cletus Gibson. *Miss Cordelia in the Romance of Destiny, the Most Sensational Love Intricacy That Has Ever Happened in West Africa*, 40

The scholarship on Onitsha Market Literature provides valuable insights into the writers and publishers of these works and their shared misogynistic attitudes toward women, which resonated with their audiences. However, it often overlooks how these attitudes emerged through a historical process of categorizing women, which persisted even in this era of democratic ideals. By analyzing *Beware of Women* and *Miss Cordelia* through the lens of historians and gender scholars, a clearer understanding of the pervasiveness of the historical categories of women is illuminated, reflecting an Independent Nigeria was one that still promoted male anxieties about women in the form of controlling images of Nigerian womanhood. However, opening up this discussion on the "derogatory" view of women in the market writings, Ebron can be used again to reinterpret the market writings as perhaps not only reinforcing male hierarchical control but blurring natural categories gender tends to fall into. In *Miss Cordelia*, while her romance with Joseph ends in tragedy and a husband she despises, she performs her gender, disrupting the "derogatory" view of women. Nwosu writes, "Whenever we went out driving together in his car, I never sat side by side with him."⁵⁸ Her refusal to partake in her prescribed performance of sitting next to her husband essentially works to reshape societal gendered expectations. This blurring, which Ebron alludes to,⁵⁹ can be applied to Cordelia as she creates a new dynamic in which her performance changes her social gender from wife to passenger.

⁵⁸ Nwosu, Cletus Gibson. *Miss Cordelia in the Romance of Destiny, the Most Sensational Love Intricacy That Has Ever Happened in West Africa*, 42

⁵⁹ Ebron, "Constituting Subjects through Performative Acts," 176

Acknowledgments

I discussed ideas for my paper during class with my peers as well as during office hours with Dr. Wiemers.