

**PHALLIC POWER AND THE POLITICS OF INFERTILITY IN THE  
AFRICAN LITERARY IMAGINATION: READING AYÒBÁMI ADÉBÁYÒ'S  
*STAY WITH ME* AND FLORA NWAPA'S *ONE IS ENOUGH***

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**Abstract**

Male infertility remains a largely invisible yet significant reproductive health challenge in many African societies especially in Nigeria, where patriarchal norms equate masculinity with virility and disproportionately assign the burden of childlessness to women. While existing scholarship has largely emphasized the feminization of infertility, less attention has been paid to how male infertility destabilizes dominant constructions of masculinity and exposes the fragility of phallic power. Addressing this gap, this study examines the representation of male infertility and its socio-cultural implications in Adébáyò's *Stay with Me* and Nwapa's *One is Enough* within the broader African literary imagination. Adopting a qualitative interpretive methodology grounded in close textual reading and thematic analysis, the study draws on spatial theory, particularly the works of Lefebvre (1991) and Soja (1996), to analyse how domestic, ritual, and communal spaces function as sites of patriarchal surveillance and control. These spaces render women's reproductive bodies hyper-visible while simultaneously concealing male infertility within zones of silence and denial. Complementing this spatial framework, African feminist perspectives—especially Kolawole's (1997) African womanism and Nnaemeka's (2004) nego-feminism—provide critical tools for examining negotiation, dialogic engagement, and the reconfiguration of shared reproductive responsibility. The analysis reveals that Akin's concealed impotence and the erasure of Obiora's reproductive accountability exemplify how patriarchal ideologies sustain male privilege while displacing the social and psychological burden of infertility onto women. By interrogating the narrative strategies through which male infertility is masked, displaced, and silenced, this study argues that phallic power operates not merely as a symbol of virility but as a structural and spatialized mechanism of authority. The study also demonstrates that African literature offers a critical discursive space for exposing the contradictions of patriarchal masculinity and for reimagining infertility as a shared, dialogic, and socially accountable experience.

**Keywords:** Phallic Power; Male Infertility; African Literary Imagination; Patriarchy; Masculinity

**Introduction**

Male infertility constitutes a serious yet often concealed reproductive health challenge in many African societies, particularly in Nigeria, where cultural constructions of masculinity are closely tied to virility and lineage continuity (Pakpahan et al., 2023) Within such patriarchal contexts, sterility is rarely attributed to men because childbearing is predominantly constructed as a woman's socio-cultural responsibility (Abianji-Menang, 2024, 277). As Oyèwùmí (1997) observes, reproductive discourse in many African societies systematically marginalizes male accountability, rendering men's infertility socially invisible. Consequently, male reproductive failure is frequently denied, concealed, or displaced onto women, who bear the social, psychological, and emotional burden of childlessness, even in cases where the male partner is biologically infertile.

This gendered misattribution reflects a broader epistemological problem in which reproductive health challenges are interpreted through socio-cultural assumptions rather than biomedical realities. Such assumptions are rarely interrogated, resulting in entrenched patterns of stigma, emotional trauma, and social exclusion for affected couples (Dyer, 2007; Inhorn, 2012). More significantly, this framework sustains unequal power relations within marriage and reinforces what may be described as the politics of infertility—a system in which reproductive responsibility is unevenly distributed along gendered lines.

Central to this politics is the cultural construction of motherhood as both mandatory and constitutive of womanhood in Nigerian society. In many Nigerian communities, marriage is expected to be immediately followed by childbearing, positioning motherhood as a marker of social legitimacy and feminine fulfillment. El Arbaoui (2018) describes motherhood as a sacred and spiritual dimension of a woman's life (pp. 66–67), while Boyce (1986, p. 243) underscores its defining role in womanhood. Similarly, Yacob-Haliso & Falola (2021) argue that motherhood is widely constructed as a biological and social obligation. As a result, a woman's social worth, marital stability, and respectability are often contingent upon her reproductive success. Within this framework, women are positioned as primary reproductive agents, while men are cast as breadwinners or passive participants. This division not only intensifies pressure on women but also contributes to the neglect of men's reproductive health and limits their engagement in fertility-related care (Pakpahan et al., 2023).

However, these gendered expectations do not only disadvantage women; they also constrain men by binding masculinity to reproductive performance. Procreation, as a central component of reproductive health, is deeply shaped by rigid gender roles that equate masculinity with virility while simultaneously excluding men from reproductive discourse. This produces a paradox in which men's reproductive identities are symbolically central yet practically unexamined. As Kimmel (2006) notes, men are often “trapped” or “caged” by socially imposed definitions of masculinity (Kimmel, 2006, p. 225), which impose unrealistic expectations and discourage vulnerability. In a similar vein, Morrell (2001) argues that dominant masculine socialization limits men's engagement in reproductive and health-related discourse. These rigid norms produce what Pakpahan et al. (2023) identify as toxic masculinity, a framework that equates male worth with reproductive success while stigmatizing infertility as weakness or failure.

Within this ideological structure, male infertility becomes a deeply destabilizing condition. A man who is unable to father children is often perceived as possessing an “inferior masculinity” or as failing to meet the cultural criteria of manhood (Pakpahan et al., 2023). Fertility is thus conflated with social authority, moral legitimacy, and lineage continuity. When infertility occurs, men occupy a precarious and often invisible social position marked by silence, stigma, and denial. This invisibility not only reinforces patriarchal norms but also perpetuates the displacement of blame onto women, thereby sustaining gender inequality within reproductive discourse.

## Literature Review

Existing scholarship on *Stay with Me* has foregrounded the pressures of gendered expectations and the ways patriarchy structures women's reproductive experiences. Critics such as Amao (2026) demonstrate how Yejide's body becomes a contested site upon which cultural anxieties about fertility, lineage, and womanhood are inscribed. Through an African feminist lens, these readings highlight forms of

narrative resistance, showing how female characters negotiate and, at times, subvert oppressive reproductive norms.

Emerging work on male infertility, such as Fwangyil (2024), begins to acknowledge male subjectivity but often treats it as secondary. Even where male infertility is recognized, it is typically framed in relation to its effects on women rather than as an autonomous site of inquiry. This tendency persists in studies like Abianji-Menang (2024), where the burden of infertility continues to fall disproportionately on women, thereby sustaining their social blame despite contrary biological realities.

More broadly, scholarship on infertility in African literature—particularly in *One is Enough*—has focused predominantly on female infertility and its socio-cultural consequences. Studies such as EI Arbaoui (2018), which examines barrenness as a mechanism of women’s oppression, and Sene (2022), which explores female self-affirmation and fulfilment, reinforce the centrality of women’s experiences in readings of the text. Studies such as EI Arbaoui (2018), which examines barrenness as a mechanism of women’s oppression, and Sene (2022), which explores female self-affirmation and fulfilment, reinforce the centrality of women’s experiences in readings of the text. Feminist critics have thus demonstrated how childlessness leads to stigma, marginalisation, and the regulation of women’s bodies within patriarchal systems. While these interventions remain crucial, they often privilege female victimhood without sufficiently interrogating the construction—and crisis—of masculinity. As a result, male infertility is frequently reduced to a narrative device that intensifies women’s suffering, leaving phallogentric assumptions about virility, power, and social legitimacy largely unexamined.

Furthermore, much of the existing analysis remains text-specific, and rarely adopts a comparative framework that could illuminate broader patterns across African literary traditions. Consequently, infertility as a site of phallic power, spatial control, and ideological negotiation remains underexplored. It is within this critical gap that this study is situated. Titled “Phallic Power and the Politics of Infertility in the African Literary Imagination: A Reading of Ayobami Adébáyò’s (2017) *Stay with Me* and Flora Nwapa’s (1981) *One is Enough*,” the study departs from a strictly female-centred paradigm by foregrounding masculinity as a site of crisis. It examines how infertility disrupts hegemonic masculinity and exposes the fragility of patriarchal authority. By placing Adébáyò’s (2017) contemporary narrative in dialogue with Nwapa’s (1981) earlier work, the study adopts a comparative, transgenerational approach that traces both continuity and transformation in the literary representation of infertility.

Through the lens of phallic power, this study reconceptualises infertility as a contested terrain where gender, power, and identity are continuously negotiated. In doing so, it repositions masculinity not as a stable locus of authority, but as a site of vulnerability, contradiction, and redefinition.

### **Methodology and Theoretical Framework**

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive approach grounded in close textual and thematic analysis. It integrates spatial theory, as developed by Lefebvre (1991) and Soja (1996), to examine how domestic, ritual, and communal spaces function as sites of patriarchal control, structuring visibility in ways that expose women’s reproductive bodies while concealing male infertility. In addition, the study draws on African feminist dialogic frameworks, particularly Kolawole’s (1997) African womanism and Nnaemeka’s (2004) nego-feminism, to analyse how female characters negotiate patriarchal constraints and articulate alternative forms of shared reproductive responsibility.

By triangulating spatial analysis, feminist theory, and literary interpretation, this study demonstrates that African literary texts not only expose the cultural silencing of male infertility but also challenge phallogocentric definitions of power. In doing so, it repositions infertility as a contested and politically charged domain through which the limits of patriarchal masculinity are revealed and reimagined.

### **Patriarchal Space, Surveillance, and the Gendered Body in *Stay with Me* and *One Is Enough***

The gendered experience of infertility in Yoruba and Igbo cultures cannot be understood apart from the spatial and cultural environments that define, discipline, and police the female body. Lefebvre (1991) contend that space is not merely a physical or geographical construct but a social product shaped and organized by power relations, while Foucault (1986) conceptualizes space as a site of surveillance and control where bodies and identities are regulated. Building on these ideas, Soja (1996) and Bhabha (1994) conceptualize third space as a realm where social realities, cultural practices, and lived experiences converge to create meaning. These perspectives underscore that domestic, social, and cultural spaces are not neutral; rather, they shape perceptions of identity and responsibility, often reinforcing unequal power dynamics. This is particularly evident in the reproductive politics of *Stay with Me* and *One is Enough*, where Nigerian patriarchal society spatially constructs and monitors women's fertility while rendering men's reproductive incapacity invisible. In both novels, domestic space functions as a mechanism of patriarchal surveillance, transforming the private home into a site of moral policing and family pressure, where women's bodies become the loci upon which anxieties about lineage and masculinity are projected, while male infertility is systematically silenced.

In Adebayo's (2017) *Stay with Me*, this spatial logic unfolds progressively through intrusion, ritual control, and eventual psychological internalization. The domestic sphere, which should ideally function as a space of intimacy and mutual support, is instead permeated by extended family members who assume authority over the couple's reproductive life. Two years after Akin marries Yejide, her mother-in-law and extended family repeatedly intrude into her personal space, demanding explanations for her childlessness: "We have important things to discuss with the two of you" [...] "A number of my in-laws had been in our home previously to discuss the same issue" (Adébáyò, 2017, p. 7). Although these visits irritate Akin, Yejide is deeply wounded because she understands that the "important things" concern her inability to conceive (Adébáyò, 2017, p. 9). What is significant here is not merely the questioning itself, but the transformation of the domestic space into a communal arena where reproductive performance is monitored. The home ceases to be private and becomes instead a site of collective intervention.

The silencing of male infertility becomes even more pronounced through Moomie's actions. Despite frequent visits to the home, she also extends surveillance into Akin's workplace, appearing every first Monday of the month with a new potential wife: "after I had been married to Yejide for two years, my mother began to show up in my office on the first Monday of every month... Each time, she brought a new woman with her... She never missed a first Monday" (Adébáyò, 2017, p. 19). This ritualized intrusion demonstrates how patriarchal surveillance is not confined to domestic space but expands into other social spheres. Crucially, at no point does Moomie question her son's medical condition. Her actions reinforce a cultural logic which fertility is exclusively feminized, effectively erasing male reproductive failure from both discourse and consciousness.

Alongside these interventions, Yejide is subjected to humiliating fertility rituals—the pilgrimage to the “Mountain of Jaw-Dropping Victory” (Adébáyò, 2017, p. 29) and ritual bathing by a priest (Adébáyò, 2017, p. 10). These practices function as coercive performances rather than voluntary acts of faith. They represent what can be understood as patriarchal technologies of the body, through which communal authority is asserted over female reproduction. Yejide’s body is not her own; it becomes a site upon which cultural anxieties are enacted and regulated.

This surveillance becomes deeply personal and psychological during Yejide’s visit to her mother-in-law’s house: “‘Are you pregnant?’ she said without looking up... ‘Are you pregnant and deaf too?’” (Adébáyò, 2017, p. 40). The insistence of this question reduces Yejide to a reproductive function, while Moomie’s refusal to look at her signals disdain and disappointment: “When I arrived at the house, she [Moomie] looked up as I approached and looked down again...” (Adébáyò, 2017, p. 40). Yejide’s reaction—“my knees trembled... my feet were shaky in her son’s house without a child” (Adébáyò, 2017, pp. 40, 45)—demonstrates how spatial scrutiny produces internalized anxiety and bodily insecurity. Emotional withdrawal becomes another form of control: where “Moomie’s words are no longer warm...” (Adébáyò, 2017, pp. 39–40).

Intrusion escalates into direct spatial reordering when Baba Lola and Iya Martha present a new wife to Akin without Yejide’s consent: “Our wife, our people say that when a man has a possession and it becomes two, he does not become angry, right? [...] Our wife, this is your new wife... Once she gets pregnant and has a child, we are sure you will have one too” (Adébáyò, 2017, p. 9). This act is not simply marital expansion but a symbolic displacement of Yejide within her own home. It reflects the assumption that infertility originates from the woman, thereby justifying the introduction of a “productive” female body into the domestic space. Here, space is reorganized according to reproductive value, and Yejide’s position becomes precarious. As a result, Yejide’s identity shifts from “favourite daughter-in-law” (Adébáyò, 2017, p. 38) to *iyale* (first wife) (Adébáyò, 2017, p. 11), a title that signifies both presence and marginalization. She is caught between Yoruba tradition by being pressurized to accept a polygamous marriage she had refused at the beginning: “I don’t do polygamy... she wanted to be an only wife” ... “I did not accept the fact that I had become a first wife, an *iyale* ... I refuse to think of myself as first wife” (Adébáyò, 2017, pp. 20, 22). Yejide’s body thus becomes a social space onto which communal anxieties are inscribed, transforming infertility into a public spectacle of shame. She resists this imposed identity—“I don’t do polygamy”—yet remains trapped within a spatial order that defines her worth through fertility.

In stark contrast, Akin’s infertility is contained within a protected, invisible space. His condition is known only to his brother Dotun, and even when he reveals that: “he [had] never had an erection” (Adébáyò, 2017, p. 239), the issue remains confined to private male interactions. His private experiences—visiting clinics, consuming herbal remedies, watching pornographic videos and enduring psychological trauma—occur outside public scrutiny: “[Dotun] paraded a series of girls... dragged me to the red-light districts... bought herbs and miracle drinks ... but did not harden my penis.... nothing worked” (Adébáyò, 2017, p. 239). Even when conflict erupts after Akin catches Dotun with Yejide: “Never imagined that I would ever in seven lifetimes have to see my brother thrusting into my wife, grunting like a pig as he came (Adébáyò, 2017, pp. 193, 196, 197), the truth is concealed from the family. This selective silence exemplifies how patriarchal spatial arrangements protect male honour while exposing female vulnerability. The woman’s body becomes hyper-

visible, while the man's reproductive failure remains hidden. Amao (2026) reveals that Akin's infertility is hidden with the veils of falsehood and family conspiracy. The silence of Akin being impotent shows the way patriarchal culture protects the vulnerabilities of men at the expense of increasing the failure of women. Akin's deception therefore is likened to social dishonesty in general. This illustrates what Adichie (2021) terms gendered hypocrisy in which society permits men to be weak but penalizes female incompetence (Qtd in Amao, 2026, p. 23).

A similar but more overtly violent spatial dynamic structures Nwapa's (1981) *One Is Enough* where Amaka's experience unfolds from hopeful expectation to marginalization and eventual expulsion. From the outset, her understanding of marriage is shaped by cultural expectations that equate womanhood with motherhood: "a woman's ambition was marriage... and children to crown the marriage" (Nwapa, 1981, p. 1). This aligns with broader cultural perspectives, as Ngcobo (2007, p. 533) asserts that marriage in African societies is primarily an institution for the control of procreation, while Mbiti (1991, p. 41) emphasizes that without children, marriage lacks stability: "a marriage is no marriage without children" (Nwapa, 1981, p. 8). Amaka internalizes these values, making her infertility not only a personal crisis but a social and existential one.

The novel opens with Amaka's vulnerability immediately evident in her plea to her mother-in-law: "Mother, forgive me... Please don't throw me away..." (Nwapa, 1981, pp. 1, 3). Although she acknowledges that her condition is "not [her] fault," the possibility of male responsibility is dismissed: "It's my son's fault then" (Nwapa, 1981, p. 3). This rhetorical dismissal reveals the systematic silencing of male infertility in Igbo society. The domestic space thus becomes a site where blame is pre-assigned, and Amaka's identity is reduced to her reproductive capacity.

This pressure intensifies over time, as her mother-in-law transforms the home into a space of surveillance and judgment: "how many times have I visited your home? ... I have waited for six years..." (Nwapa, 1981, p. 13). By declaring her "barren" (Nwapa, 1981, p. 14), she labels and fixes Amaka's identity within the domestic hierarchy. The home is no longer a space of belonging but a conditional environment where legitimacy depends on fertility. This spatial tension is further reinforced by the introduction of a second wife: "my son has two sons and tomorrow the mother of these sons will come and live in this house with her sons. We have performed all the ceremonies, and she is coming" (Nwapa, 1981, pp. 14–15). Amaka is shocked by this revelation as she begins to tremble: "she held onto the bed..." so that she does not faint. Amaka's shock signals the emotional violence of this displacement. Her fear of rejection "being thrown away" (Nwapa, 1981, p. 1) by her husband and extended family is evident by the presence of sons and a wife without taking her into consideration: "it beats me how you should do all this behind my back, be involved with a woman, have sons by her, marry her without breathing a word to your wife" (Nwapa, 1981, p. 26). Her condition has rubbished all her achievement and made her seem unfulfilled because she is barren. Obiora's attitude depicts how childlessness in Igbo culture is a traumatic experience in marriage. This resonates with Igbineweka's (1887) view that: "for the African, childlessness is the greatest traumatic experience in marriage. Childlessness in marriage can be a source of personal misery for the couple, the members of their extended families and friends and the communities at large, invariably it leads to polygamy or concubinage, or divorce, or marital infidelity or proxy sexual unions" (Ibeneweka, 1987, 7).

Obiora's actions intensify this transformation of space into a site of oppression. His insults Amaka: "you barren and senseless woman!" (Nwapa, 1981, pp. 19–20)—and physical threats—"I am going to kill you..." (Nwapa, 1981, p. 29)—reveal how patriarchal authority is enforced through both symbolic and physical violence. The domestic space becomes a psychological prison where Amaka is subjected to fear, humiliation, and coercion. Her eventual expulsion with her belongings sent to her mother: "here are your belongings sent to me in this disgraceful manner, my daughter, humiliated in this way. "You are not my daughter" (Nwapa, 1981, p. 32)—represents total spatial and social rejection, reducing her to an object of shame. This depicts how childlessness brings shame and reduces a woman to an object of humiliation. El Arbaoui (2018) corroborates this view by saying childlessness is weaponized for the persecution and rebuff of women (69).

Ironically, the narrative suggests that Amaka may not be infertile. Obiora admits that she was once pregnant but lost the child "I warned you several times when you got pregnant during our first year of marriage, but you were careless and lost the baby. It was your fault" (Nwapa, 1981, p. 19), yet instead of pursuing medical or emotional support, and communication, he resorts to blame and infidelity. This approach would have been in line with Kolawole's (1997) African feminism which emphasizes complementarity, dialogue and shared agency, suggesting that reproductive challenges should be confronted collaboratively rather than assigning unilateral blame. Amaka's willingness to preserve her marriage, even suggesting that Obiora have children elsewhere: "Amaka even asked her husband to go anywhere and have a baby... and thought she could marry a wife and push her onto her husband" (Nwapa, 1981, pp. 5, 21) suggests that Amaka is a traditional African woman who negotiates peace with her family "for one thing, when Obiora told her that he had sons, she was not happy, but she was relieved. She felt peace within her, at least her husband was happy. People now know that the fault was hers and not his. It could be painful, this realization, but it was as well, to Amaka who was loving and sweet in her own way" (Nwapa, 1981, 28). This demonstrates her negotiation within patriarchal constraints. Yet, this negotiation is not reciprocated, resulting in further marginalization. This ties with Naemeka's (1998) negro feminism which advocates for negotiation within existing social structures, Amaka and Obiora would have benefit from open communication, shared responsibility and cultural negotiation of reproductive expectations if Obiora dialogues with his wife on redistribution of responsibility and mitigate the social burden placed on Amaka.

This failure of dialogue between Obiora and Amaka "why did you never tell me you had taken another wife?... [and] have two children by her? reflects the absence of negotiation, dialogue, and shared responsibility. This show how desperate a childless woman is and the sacrifice she makes to preserve her home. The home thus becomes a place of trauma and emotional torture, where Amaka is psychologically harassed for her childlessness.

Obiora's potential infertility is completely erased by the existence of his "two sons," leaving Amaka as the visible bearer of blame. This contradiction deeply wounds her, as reflected in her words: "I am happy and sad as well. Happy because you have proof of your manhood. Sad because I cannot have a baby, and your proof is also the proof of my barrenness" (Nwapa, 1981, p. 25). Her statement captures the psychological burden imposed by patriarchy, where male virility is celebrated while female infertility is constructed as moral failure. It depicts the emotional contradiction—simultaneous happiness and sadness. This duality reflects the psychological burden placed on women in the igbo society. Her joy is not self-directed but it is tied to her

husband's affirmation of masculinity. Her sadness, on the other hand, is personal and internal, stemming from her inability to conceive. This emotional oscillation shows how women are forced to negotiate between socially imposed expectations and personal suffering. The phrase 'proof your manhood' demonstrates how fertility is socially constructed as a measure of male virility while women's inability to conceive becomes her public shame. Fertility, therefore, becomes a public performance rather than a private condition. Nwapa (1981) exposes the unequal weight of reproductive expectations by illustrating how the patriarchal framework transforms a biological issue into moral judgement. Amaka's reaction further depicts that fertility is not a private but it is public performance. Her sadness is therefore not simply biological but it is social, cultural and moral dimensions which exposes the intersection of power, space and gender expectations, and communal definitions of identity. The domestic space that is supposed to be intimate and secure, has turned into a psychological prison where Amaka internalizes the community's moral condemnation.

Amaka's desperate plea to her mother-in-law and the desire to maintain her marriage by accepting her husband have children with another woman, highlight her vulnerability and psychological trauma, revealing the intense social pressure placed on her to conceive a child in her marriage with Obiora. Although she has made her mark in business and is a woman to reckon with, her inability to produce children after six years of marriage leads to her humiliation and being treated like an outcast: "was she useless to the world because she was childless? Was she unfulfilled because she had no child? Was a woman nothing because she was unmarried or barren?" (Nwapa, 1981, p. 22). This rhetorical question shows how Igbo women are valued only in their ability to give birth and not personal achievements.

Across both novels, the interplay between private and public spaces reveals how infertility is socially produced and gendered. Women are subjected to constant surveillance, their bodies monitored and evaluated, while male infertility remains hidden within protected spaces. As Foucault (1986) suggests, visibility becomes a mechanism of control; in these texts, it is unevenly distributed, producing a gendered economy of blame. Fertility becomes a public performance that validates masculinity and condemns femininity, as captured in Amaka's reflection: "Happy because you have proof of your manhood. Sad because I cannot have a baby..." (Nwapa, 1981, p. 25). Space in both narratives functions as an ideological instrument of patriarchal power. Through surveillance, ritualization, intrusion, and exclusion, domestic and communal spaces regulate women's bodies while concealing male vulnerability. The more visible the woman becomes; the more invisible the man's failure is rendered. Yet, by exposing these dynamics, both texts also gesture toward the possibility of reimagining space—not as a site of control, but as one of dialogue, negotiation, and shared humanity.

### **Phallic Power and Symbolic Masculinity**

The ideology of patriarchy in African societies is deeply entwined with the concept of phallic power—the belief that masculinity derives its legitimacy from sexual potency and reproductive success. Melhuus (1996) opines that in many cultures, the male reproductive body has traditionally been seen as the seat of masculinity (Qtd. in Wentzell & Inhorn, 2011, p 307), where men must continually prove their manhood by performing acts that cement their status as men. To corroborate this view, Inhorn (2003) observes that Egyptian men suffering from infertility often feel they are not "real men" if their condition becomes publicly known. This suggests that masculinity is socially constructed through the public demonstration of sexual and reproductive

capacity—having a penis, the ability to penetrate sexually, and the capacity to produce offspring (Qtd in Wentzell & Inhorn, 2011, p 307).

Within this framework, the penis symbolizes far more than a biological organ; it represents power, masculinity, and social legitimacy. It signifies virility—the ability to perform sexually—and fertility—the capacity to produce offspring—while also embodying masculine identity, that is, being recognized as a “real man.” In patriarchal Yoruba and wider Nigerian contexts, it further signifies authority and social dominance. Consequently, when infertility occurs, it threatens not only biological function but also the symbolic meaning of the penis—the phallus. A man may feel that he has lost his manhood, while society may perceive him as incomplete or inadequate. This explains why male infertility is often silenced, hidden, or displaced onto women. Sigmund Freud’s (1923) psychoanalytic theorization of the phallus as a symbol of power, desire, and authority provides a useful framework for understanding the construction of male identity in *Stay with Me* and *One Is Enough*. Similarly, Jung’s (1991) archetype of the “heroic male,” whose self-worth depends on mastery and procreation, mirrors the African patriarch’s socially constructed role as both husband and father. In these novels, Adébáyò (2017) and Nwapa (1981) deconstruct the phallic myth by exposing the fragility beneath male dominance. Male virility emerges not as a stable foundation of power but as a mask that conceals insecurity, silence, and impotence.

In *Stay with Me*, Adébáyò (2017) constructs Akin as the quintessential embodiment of phallic anxiety. His infertility destabilizes his masculine identity entirely. Although he is publicly perceived as a successful banker and dutiful husband, his private confession reveals profound psychological emasculation. Akin’s admission, “I’d never had an erection” (Adébáyò, 2017, p. 239), exposes the fragile construction of masculinity under patriarchy. It directly attacks the foundation of phallic power, which in Yoruba society is assumed to be the basis of male worth, authority, and identity. Here, the penis—traditionally a symbol of virility, authority, and reproductive capacity—fails to perform its expected function, creating a rupture between cultural expectation and biological reality. Despite resorting to herbal remedies, miracle drinks, medical consultations in private clinics in Ikeja, the consumption of pornographic materials, and even the parade of women, Akin is unable to overcome his erectile dysfunction. These repeated but futile efforts underscore the desperation to conform to patriarchal expectations of masculinity. His condition reveals that masculinity is not an inherent biological certainty but a fragile construct sustained through performance and social validation.

In an attempt to preserve symbolic masculinity, Akin manipulates reproduction by involving his brother Dotun as a sperm donor. Freud’s (1923) notion of castration anxiety—the fear of losing symbolic power—is enacted through Akin’s obsessive concealment. His plea to Dotun, “I begged him to come to Ilesa and get Yejide pregnant... You need to spend just one week, she will be ovulating... I have told you my problem... Dotun, you are the only person I can come to” (Adébáyò, 2017, pp. 241, 161–162.), dramatizes the extent to which he prioritizes the preservation of virility/social identity over emotional honesty/biological truth. Akin’s decision to use Dotun as a sperm donor reflects the desperation to cling to social expectations of father. Bringing Dotun into his marriage is an attempt to “borrow” another man’s fertility while retaining the social status of fatherhood. It shows that what society values is not actual biological paternity but the appearance of virility. Akin exposes a cultural logic in which appearance matters more than biological truth. Symbolic masculinity is thus preserved even as biological masculinity collapses.

This carefully constructed illusion is violently disrupted by Funmi, Akin's second wife, when she realizes that Akin is not able to perform sexually. She exposes his real situation in this intervention:

Do you think I am a fool? Your lies and the fake nonsense you've been doing in bed, you think I don't know?"—exposes the performative nature of Akin's sexuality. Her further question—"how did Yejide get pregnant? Tell how a penis that has never been hard makes a woman pregnant?" (Adébáyò, 2017, p. 222).

Funmi's statement exposes the tension between masculinity, denial, and infertility. Through this confrontation, Funmi brings into the open what Akin has long suppressed: his inability to consummate the marriage and, by extension, his infertility. This moment is not merely an accusation; it is a rupture of illusion. It reveals denial, exposes impotence as a taboo subject, and highlights the gap between appearance and reality. When she challenges him—"do you think I am a fool? And the phrase "fake nonsense" reveals her awareness that their sexual intimacy within the marriage has been performative rather than functional, reinforcing the novel's broader theme of illusion versus truth. This is further underscored by her rhetorical question: "how did Yejide get pregnant? Tell me how a penis that has never been hard makes a woman pregnant?" (Adébáyò, 2017, p. 222). Rather than simply labelling him as "not a real man," the text problematizes how masculinity in a patriarchal context is narrowly defined through virility, sexual performance, and reproductive capacity. Akin's crisis, therefore, is not only biological but deeply social, as his failure to meet these expectations threatens his identity and authority within the marital and familial structure.

Funmi has realized that Akim is not a "real man". Akim's failure to perform his manly function destabilizes the cultural construction of masculinity. His failure to perform sexually is not only physiological but culturally interpreted as a failure of masculinity itself. This exposes the fragile construction of masculinity under patriarchy. It directly undermines the foundation of phallic power, which in many African patriarchal societies like Nigeria is assumed to be the basis of male worth, authority, and identity. Consequently, Akin's erectile dysfunction signifies not only physiological failure but a culturally interpreted collapse of masculinity itself.

Akin conceals his condition from Yejide for years, and this secrecy illustrates how masculinity depends on sustaining an illusion of control. He manipulates the situation to ensure that Yejide becomes pregnant through his brother, Dotun, while preserving the illusion that the child is biologically his. By arranging for Dotun to impregnate his wife, Akin attempts to preserve symbolic masculinity despite his inability to fulfill its biological requirements: "Besides, I already knew Dotun was the sperm donor... which is the reason I went to him when I eventually accepted the fact that I needed someone else to get my wife pregnant" (Adébáyò, 2017, p. 161). This confession encapsulates the cultural association between masculinity and reproduction. Akin's infertility therefore represents not merely a biological failure but an existential crisis.

Akin's deceit is sustained by a patriarchal ideology that equates manhood with potency. His silence is not merely personal but cultural- a product of a society that renders male infertility unthinkable. Baba Lola's remark: "Yejide, I want to appreciate your efforts to make sure that our son leaves a child behind when he dies" (Adébáyò, 2017, p. 10), exposes the asymmetry of gendered blame. While the female body is relentlessly scrutinized, the male body remains shielded from suspicion. Adébáyò's (2017) subtle irony here echoes Fanon's (1952) argument that masculinity in

postcolonial societies often functions as a performance of power, a mask designed to conceal vulnerability and fear.

Akin's masculinity depends not on truth but on appearance. When he insists, "This is not cheating on you... Trust me, it's for the best... My mother won't pressure you for children anymore" (Adébáyò, 2017, pp. 15–16), he speaks from a phallogocentric consciousness that associates authority with concealment and control. Yet his authority is hollow, sustained by deception. The phallus here ceases to function as a biological signifier/organ and becomes a symbolic construct of patriarchal power. Jung's (1991) concept of the shadow; the hidden, repressed aspect of the self-resonates strongly here. Akin's shadow is his impotence, his entire identity is structured around the denial of his impotence.

Yejide's suffering exposes the destructive reach of this phallic ideology. Her psychological torment-from ritual humiliation to the loss of her children- (pp 40; 123; 177) represents the cost women bear in sustaining male illusions of power. However, her voice transforms suffering into resistance. When she confronts Akin - "Is it true you can't... are you impotent?" (Adébáyò, 2017, pp. 231, 233), her speech symbolizes the disintegration of patriarchal silence. By naming his impotence, Yejide symbolically dismantles the myth of male omnipotence and reclaims power through truth.

Nwapa's (1981) similarly interrogates the myth of the omnipotent male and exposes the hypocrisy of phallic power in postcolonial Nigerian society. Amaka's husband, Obiora, embodies the patriarchal archetype whose identity rests on sexual authority and fatherhood. Beneath this posture, however, lies insecurity and moral failure. His cruelty toward Amaka is a projection of his inadequacy. After years of childlessness, he publicly humiliates her by calling her barren and senseless: "You barren and senseless woman! You forget that you are childless" (Nwapa, 1981, p. 19). By labeling her "barren," Obiora asserts a phallic hierarchy in which male fertility is presumed while female fertility is demanded and policed. Obiora's statement is an expression of patriarchal dominance, where masculinity derives its authority not only from biological difference but from cultural constructed ideas of male sexual and reproductive superiority. The irony, which Nwapa skillfully layers through Obiora's speech, is that the real 'senselessness belongs to him-the man who cannot father children but exploits masculine privilege to accept another man's offspring as his own: "I heard the children are not really his" (Nwapa, 1981, p. 84). A native doctor whom Amaka's mother takes her to corroborates this information: "I am glad you have left your husband. He would not have given you a child. It is not your fault" (Nwapa, 1981, p 87). The native doctor's declaration implies Obiora's infertility, shifting blame away from his wife. This statement corroborates the view that Obiora is the cause of their childlessness and exonerates Amaka. The native doctor's statement 'he would not have given you children' aligns with the narrative choice of Obiora's sons not having names.

In Igbo culture, naming is a significant act that confers identity, status and recognition. Obiora's sons and their mother not having names underscores his inability to establish a lasting legacy or identity through his family members, hinting at his infertility. The lack of naming symbolizes Obiora's failure to leave a mark or have his lineage recognized, tying into the traditional notions of masculinity and fertility. This makes Amaka regret why she had not listened to her mother in the past "mother you are great. If I had listened to you in my youthful days, I would have had children without a husband, like Ayo" (Nwapa, 1981, 85). By praising her mother and referencing having children without a husband like Ayo, suggests that Obiora's inadequacy, corroborating the notion of his infertility. This reinforces the idea that

Obiora's masculinity is questioned due to his inability to father children. Masculinity here operates not as truth but as entitlement.

Obiora's masculinity, like Akin's, operates not as biological truth but as social entitlement. His authority is sustained through domination, silence, and the policing of female identity rather than through genuine reproductive capacity. Nwapa thus exposes the hypocrisy at the heart of phallic power. In both novels, infertility functions as a mirror reflecting the fragility of masculine power. The men's silence, cruelty, and deceit stem from their inability to confront their literal and symbolic impotence. Freud's conception of the phallus intersects with Fanon's postcolonial insight that masculinity often compensates for historical and psychological wounds. Akin's and Obiora's obsession with control-over women's bodies and narratives-echoes Fanon's argument that oppressed masculinities reproduce domination to reclaim lost authority.

Nwapa (1981) dismantles this phallic mythology through acts of female self-assertion. Both Amaka and Yejide (Adebayo, 2017) reject the illusion of male potency as the sole foundation of identity and fulfillment by privileging self-definition over patriarchal subservience. Through Amaka Nwapa interrogates the cultural assumption that a woman's worth is tied exclusively to marriage and reproduction. Her rhetorical questions:

Was a woman nothing because she was unmarried or barren? Was there no fulfillment for her?" was a woman nothing because she was unmarried or barren? Was there no fulfillment for her? Could she not be happy, in the real sense of the word, just by having men friends who are not husbands? Her people had drummed it into their ears as children grow up that girls just had one ambition-to be married. So, all energy was geared towards finding her a good husband. But Amaka knew from the behaviour of her illiterate aunt and mother that they did not share in the belief of her people. Her mother brought them up to be independent, but she did not emphasis marriage. she had several children no doubt, but her emphasis was on self-determination and motherhood (Nwapa, 1981, p. 22)

Amaka destabilize the normative belief that marriage is the only legitimate pathway to happiness and social recognition. The passage further exposes how patriarchal socialization conditions young girls from childhood to internalise marriage as their "one ambition," thereby limiting their aspirations and reinforcing dependence on men. However, Amaka's consciousness is shaped by an alternative model of womanhood embodied by her mother and aunt, who prioritise children over marriage: what is important is not marriage as such, but children, being able to have children, being a mother. Have your children, be able to look after them, and you will be respected... Marriage or no marriage, have your children. Your children will take care of you in your old age. You will be very lonely then if you don't have children. As a mother, you are fulfilled" (Nwapa, 1981, pp.8,11). Influenced by their values, they recognize alternative forms of fulfillment grounded in self-determination, economic independence, and personal autonomy, over marital fulfilment. This contrast between societal expectations and her mother's example shows that even within Igbo society, there are competing ideologies of womanhood. Marriage is not rejected outright, but its dominance as the defining goal of a woman's life is questioned. Nwapa thus redefines the essence of marriage—not as a compulsory institution for female validation, but as one possible choice among many.

Amaka's declaration "I am through with men... I have said goodbye to husbands" (Nwapa, 1981, p. 85)—marks a decisive moment of resistance and symbolic de-phallicization, as she withdraws her complicity from a system that privileges male authority and sexual dominance. By renouncing marriage as a compulsory institution, she asserts autonomy and redefines fulfillment on her own terms. Her subsequent relocation from Onitsha to Lagos signifies both spatial and ideological liberation, enabling her to reconstruct her identity beyond patriarchal constraints. Her decision suggests that emotional satisfaction, stability, and identity do not have to be mediated through a husband. This leads to economic and psychological independence. Amaka's stance is not merely symbolic; it is backed by her ability to sustain herself and make decisions without reliance on men. This independence frees her from the pressures of conforming to roles such as wifhood or compulsory motherhood within marriage. She liberates herself from disappointment and patriarchal failure. Having experienced the limitations and frustrations of relationships with men, Amaka's rejection becomes a form of resistance. It allows her to reclaim control over her body, choices, and future. This decision eventually leads to Amaka's freedom because it marks a decisive break from the institution that restricts her. By choosing herself over societal expectations, she transforms from a woman defined by marriage into one defined by agency, independence, and self-fulfilment.

In Lagos, she becomes economically successful—securing contracts (Nwapa, 1981, p. 45), joining the Cash Madam Club (Nwapa, 1981, 69, 49), building her own house, purchasing a Peugeot 504 (Nwapa, 1981, pp. 45, 69, 77–78, 92), returns Obiora's dowry and starts divorce proceedings in the court (Nwapa, 1981, p. 84). Her economic independence reinforces her psychological autonomy. Significantly, her eventual motherhood outside marriage—"I am thirty-two years old and divorced. I shall carry my pregnancy with pride" (Nwapa, 1981, p. 104)—redefines reproductive fulfillment beyond patriarchal validation. Her relationship with Rev Fr Mclaid is blessed with children as Amaka give birth to twin boys (Nwapa, 1981, pp. 111-112). She finally finds happiness with Rev. Fr. And fulfills her dream of becoming a mother. Motherhood is no longer contingent on marriage or male authority but becomes an expression of personal agency.

Similarly, Yejide's eventual rejection of Akin's deception and her decision to leave the marriage and abandons Akin with their sick daughter, Rotimi, by leaving Ilesa and settling in Bauchi (Adebayo, 2017, 234) represent a reclamation of autonomy and restore subjectivity. Similarly, Yejide's eventual rejection of Akin's deception and her decision to leave the marriage represent a reclamation of agency and subjectivity. After years of failed attempts and intense pressure to get pregnant, losing her children to sickle cell anaemia contributes to her trauma in marriage: "Olamide died in my arms, his body twisted in pains...the next one died too. And the next. I waited each time for the end I had come to expect" (Adebayo, 2017, p, 210) this devastating cycle of child loss and emotional trauma leaves Yejide psychologically paralysed and physiologically depleted. Her grief intensifies with each child's loss, culminating in emotional withdrawal from her husband, Akin, sick daughter, Rotimi, and the society. Her decision to abandon Akin with their sick daughter, Rotimi and leave Ilesa to settle in Bauchi (Adebayo, 2017, 234) is intended to restore her mental health. In both texts, female resistance does not merely oppose patriarchy but transforms it. This aligns with Obioma Nnaemeka's concept of nego-feminism, which emphasizes self-realization, and relational autonomy. Womanhood is thus reimagined not as dependence on phallic authority but as the assertion of voice, agency, and self-worth. In this way, the

phallus—once a symbol of power—emerges as an unstable and hollow construct, while female subjectivity becomes the true locus of meaning and strength.

This deconstruction of phallic power aligns with African feminist thought, particularly Nnaemeka's (2004) nego-feminism, which emphasizes self-realization, and ethical relationality. Rather than simply inverting patriarchy, Yejide's and Amaka's resistance transforms it. Womanhood is reimagined not as the absence of the phallus but as the presence of agency, moral integrity, and voice. In this way, *Stay with Me* and *One Is Enough* offer a feminist reconfiguration of masculinity. The phallus, once an emblem of authority, becomes a hollow symbol of silence and failure, while women's speech and endurance emerge as the true sources of strength and truth.

### **Biological, Social, and Patriarchal Dimensions of Male Infertility in the African Literary Imagination**

Male infertility is a reality that has been undermined in the Yoruba and Igbo socio-cultural worlds represented in *Stay with Me* and *One Is Enough*, as seen above. It is not merely a biological or medical condition; rather, it is deeply intertwined with cultural constructions of masculinity, social expectations, and patriarchal power. Within the African literary imagination, Adébáyò (2017) and Nwapa (1981) explore the causes and consequences of male infertility, demonstrating how patriarchal norms shape cultural perceptions of reproductive incapacity. In doing so, these narratives participate in a broader African literary tradition that interrogates the intersections of gender, power, and corporeality.

In *Stay with Me*, Akin's infertility is first established at the biological level. His condition is explicitly linked to erectile dysfunction, which prevents him from fulfilling the basic physiological requirements of reproduction. Lizza & Rosen (1999) define erectile dysfunction (ED) as the persistent inability to achieve or maintain an erection sufficient for satisfying sexual performance (Qtd in Wentzell and Inhorn, 2011, 310). Akin confesses that: "I'd never had an erection" (Adébáyò, 2017, p. 239), indicating that he is unable to achieve or maintain an erection sufficient for penetrative sexual intercourse. Yejide's sexual encounter with Dotun underscores Akin's sexual inadequacy and exposes the embodied dimensions of his infertility. As she reflects, "there was something different about being with him, something fuller. I wanted to try it again. My first instinct was to tell Akin, but how does one tell one's husband: I want you to fuck me the way your brother did?" (Adébáyò, 2017, p. 96). The sense of "fullness" she associates with Dotun contrasts sharply with Akin's sexual weakness, which renders their marital intimacy unsatisfying and, in her perception, abnormal. Although her first instinct is to confide in Akin, she is constrained by the impossibility of articulating such a comparison, as she cannot bring herself to express a desire shaped by her experience with his brother. This tension not only intensifies Yejide's dissatisfaction but also fuels her longing for repeated encounters with Dotun, even as she lies beside her husband. Akin's inability to sustain an erection ultimately prevents him from fulfilling both the sexual and reproductive expectations of marriage. His condition not only limits his capacity to satisfy his wives but also makes conception through heterosexual intercourse biologically impossible, since fertilization requires effective ejaculation into the female reproductive system.

This revelation clarifies that Akin's infertility is not related to sperm production but rather to the inability to perform the sexual act required for reproduction. Thus, fertility is obstructed at the most fundamental physical level. Erectile dysfunction emerges as the primary cause of Akin's infertility, as his inability to engage in sexual intercourse with his wives signals a condition of sterility. In

medical terms, this aligns with what Mascurencas et al. (2012) define as primary infertility, which occurs when a couple has been unable to conceive after twelve months of regular, unprotected sexual intercourse, with no prior history of pregnancy.

However, this biological reality does not exist in isolation; it is immediately mediated by cultural and patriarchal structures. Akin's condition is concealed through social, relational, and ideological mechanisms that protect masculine identity. Patriarchal ideology prevents him from admitting weakness, as masculinity is tightly bound to virility and reproductive capability. Rather than disclose his infertility, Akin manipulates both social and spatial arrangements in order to preserve his masculine honour. In this way, the private male body is rendered invisible within public discourse, while the illusion of virility is carefully maintained.

This concealment leads to a critical turning point in the narrative, where Akin conspires with his brother Dotun to impregnate Yejide. As he explains, "I knew Sesan was my son... I already knew Dotun was the sperm donor. That was how I thought about what he did for me—sperm donation. I knew Dotun would never claim he was Sesan's father, which is the reason I went to him when I eventually accepted the fact that I needed someone else to get my wife pregnant" (Adébáyò, 2017, p. 161). This arrangement functions as a compensatory strategy that allows Akin to bypass his biological limitation while preserving his social identity as a father.

The strategy foregrounds the intersection of biological and social dimensions of infertility. Biologically, Akin remains incapable of reproduction; socially, however, patriarchal norms prohibit the open acknowledgment of male infertility. The use of Dotun as a "sperm donor" enables Akin to sustain the performance of masculinity, even in the absence of biological capacity. Fertility, in this context, becomes not a biological fact but a socially constructed and carefully managed illusion.

At the same time, the secrecy surrounding Akin's condition highlights the gendered asymmetry embedded in patriarchal systems. While his infertility is concealed, Yejide becomes the visible site of reproductive failure. She is subjected to intense social scrutiny, community gossip, and emotional distress, as society assumes that the problem lies with her body. Her experience of pseudocyesis further illustrates the psychological toll of this pressure, as her desire for motherhood and the weight of societal expectations manifest in a false pregnancy.

Thus, while male infertility remains hidden and socially excused, female bodies are rendered hyper-visible and burdened with blame. Ayòbámi Adébáyò uses this dynamic to expose how patriarchal culture silences male vulnerability while intensifying the regulation and scrutiny of women's reproductive lives. In doing so, the novel not only reveals the biological causes of infertility but also interrogates the social and ideological structures that shape its meaning and consequences. Male infertility in *One Is Enough* remains a misunderstood condition, often shrouded in myths that contribute to stigma and emotional distress for couples. A major misconception in many African societies is that a man who has previously fathered a child cannot be infertile. The question of male infertility in the novel is subtly constructed but is significant in exposing the fragility of patriarchal masculinity. Obiora is not explicitly diagnosed within a medical framework, yet the narrative provides compelling evidence that he suffers from secondary infertility—a condition in which a man who was previously fertile becomes unable to reproduce (Umezulike & Efetie, 2004, p. 178).

The narrative first introduces this issue through the miscarriage experienced by Obiora's wife, Amaka. Obiora's mother recounts: "A year or so ago, you said you had a miscarriage. My son came to tell me" (Nwapa, 1981, p. 14). Obiora himself blames Amaka for the loss: "I warned you several times when you got pregnant during

our first year of marriage, but you were careless and lost the baby. It was your fault” (Nwapa, 1981, p. 19). Additionally, we learn that Obiora has taken another wife who has already borne him two sons in secret (Nwapa, 1981, p. 14). The fact that Amaka experienced a miscarriage during their first year of marriage coupled with the fact that Obiora has had children with another woman does not negate the possibility that he may have become infertile. In many African societies, the assumption persists that past fertility guarantees future reproductive capacity. As Dyer observes, “Men who have fathered a child at any point in their lives are generally protected from being labelled infertile irrespective of their current reproductive capability” (Dyer, 2007, p. 70). Fledderjohann similarly notes that “men are often absolved from infertility blame if they have children, even if these children were conceived years earlier or with different partners” (Fledderjohann, 2012, p. 104). These cultural assumptions are reflected in Obiora’s case, highlighting the fallacy that prior fertility ensures ongoing reproductive ability.

At the outset, Obiora embodies the socially validated image of masculine potency, exercising authority and confidence within the marriage. His verbal assault on Amaka—“You barren and senseless woman! You forget that you are childless” (Nwapa, 1981, p. 19)—demonstrates both his unquestioned assumption of fertility and the patriarchal impulse to displace reproductive failure onto the female body. Yet, despite these assertions of virility, the marriage remains childless, indicating a functional inability to reproduce.

The narrative further destabilizes Obiora’s supposed fertility outside the marriage. While he claims to have children with other women, circulating rumours suggest that “the children are not really his” (Nwapa, 1981, p. 84). These doubts highlight that his reproductive identity is socially constructed rather than biologically grounded. The decisive revelation occurs through the intervention of a native doctor, who tells Amaka: “He would not have given you a child. It is not your fault. It is not his fault either. You are just not compatible, that is all” (Nwapa, 1981, p. 87). This shifts the source of infertility from Amaka to Obiora, dismantling his phallic authority and exposing the illusion upon which his masculinity rests.

This assessment is further reinforced by a subsequent event: five months after Amaka’s separation from Obiora, she becomes pregnant for Rev Fr. Mclaid without any medical intervention. The doctor remarks: “Can you believe it, that this woman was declared barren many years ago? No, I didn’t treat her, she had given up, resigned to her fate, and then became pregnant. She did not even know she was pregnant, not having had the experience before, until we did the urine test” (Nwapa, 1981, pp. 112–113). This development confirms Obiora’s incapacity to father children, solidifies the diagnosis of secondary infertility, vindicates Amaka, and validates her mother’s advice that she could seek children with other men if her husband failed to impregnate her.

Obiora’s trajectory thus moves from assumed fertility to exposed incapacity. His masculinity, initially sustained through dominance, denial, and policing of Amaka’s identity, is gradually revealed as fragile and contingent on patriarchal silence. Rather than confront his reproductive limitation, he reinforces authority through aggression and blame, illustrating how male infertility is concealed within social discourse. In this way, Nwapa (1981) exposes the gendered asymmetry of patriarchal systems: male infertility remains hidden. The narrative challenges the cultural myth of inherently fertile and sexually dominant men, revealing masculine potency as often a carefully maintained façade.

This cultural erasure transforms infertility from a biological issue into a deeply gendered phenomenon, revealing how social constructs intersect with reproductive

health. Patriarchy functions not only as a system of oppression but also as a mechanism that sustains infertility-related suffering by silencing male vulnerability and legitimizing female blame (Oyěwùmí, 1997).

In African literature, the causes and consequences of male infertility emerge at the intersection of biological reality, social construction, and patriarchal ideology. Novels such as *Stay with Me* and *One Is Enough* expose how patriarchal structures simultaneously conceal male reproductive failure and amplify female visibility, thereby imposing a dual burden on women while preserving male authority. The convergence of space, culture, and gender demonstrates that infertility operates as both a private and a social issue, emphasizing the need for dialogue, transparency, and equitable distribution of reproductive responsibility.

African literature thus performs a dual function: it exposes the mechanisms of patriarchal oppression while also creating spaces for critical reflection and resistance. In *Stay with Me*, Adébáyò portrays Akin's hidden impotence, revealing the fragility of socially constructed masculinity and demonstrating that virility is less a biological certainty than a cultural performance sustained through secrecy, deception, and manipulation. Similarly, Nwapa foregrounds the structural invisibility of male reproductive challenges in *One Is Enough*, highlighting the gendered asymmetry of accountability and the psychological toll imposed on women. In both texts, literature becomes a vehicle for interrogating how dominant narratives of fertility sustain patriarchal hierarchies.

This literary engagement with infertility operates on multiple critical levels. First, it reflects gendered social realities, showing how patriarchy enforces moral hierarchies and spatialized surveillance. Second, it exposes the psychological and relational consequences of reproductive concealment, blame, and ritualization, illustrating the lived experiences of women under these pressures. Finally, it offers imaginative space for alternatives, where dialogue, negotiation, and agency—as articulated within African feminist thought—challenge hegemonic constructions of fertility and masculinity.

The African literary imagination thus positions infertility as a site of sociocultural contestation. By exposing the invisibility of male reproductive failure and the hyper-visibility of female reproductive labor, Adébáyò (2017) and Nwapa (1981) illuminate the intersections of space, power, and gender. Their works insist that infertility cannot be addressed solely in medical or biological terms; it must also confront the cultural scripts that assign blame, regulate visibility, and enforce patriarchal control. In doing so, these narratives contribute to a broader literary and feminist project that reconfigures social space, fosters dialogic communication, and challenges the asymmetrical power relations underpinning reproductive politics in African societies.

### **Conclusion: Negotiating Fertility, Agency, and Patriarchal Power in African Literature**

The examination of male infertility in *Stay with Me* and *One Is Enough* reveals how phallic power and patriarchal politics shape both representations and lived experiences of reproduction in Nigerian societies. In these novels, infertility transcends biological explanation, emerging as a social and cultural construct deeply entangled with gendered norms, silence, and the performance of power. Patriarchy operates not only as a system of oppression but as a mechanism that sustains reproductive suffering by silencing male vulnerability and legitimizing female blame (Oyěwùmí, 1997).

Central to both narratives is the persistent stigmatization of women, who endure humiliation, rejection, and emotional violence, while male infertility remains

largely hidden, denied, or socially displaced onto the female body. This concealment highlights that masculinity is socially coded and culturally sustained, echoing Freudian (1923) and Jungian (1991) interpretations of the phallus as a symbol of dominance, as well as Fanon's (1952) critique of performative male authority. Yet, as the texts demonstrate, the phallus is unstable, dependent on secrecy, deception, and women's complicity to maintain its illusion of power.

In *Stay with Me*, Adébayò reveals the contradictions underlying male virility through Akin's impotence and psychological fragility. His refusal to disclose his infertility, coupled with his manipulation of Yejide's reproductive labor, underscores the patriarchal obsession with preserving masculine dominance even at the expense of intimacy, truth, and ethical responsibility. Yejide's suffering—manifested through pseudocyesis, the loss of children, and accusations of infidelity—demonstrates the feminization of infertility and the systematic displacement of blame from men to women, reflecting how patriarchal culture frames childbearing as the woman's exclusive duty.

In *One Is Enough*, Nwapa interrogates patriarchal structures through Obiora's secondary infertility. Although he previously fathered children, his inability to impregnate Amaka following her miscarriage exposes the fallacy that past fertility guarantees ongoing reproductive. Obiora's assumed masculinity, initially asserted through authority and aggression, gradually collapses under scrutiny, especially after a native doctor clarifies that the infertility lies with him: "He would not have given you a child. It is not your fault. It is not his fault either. You are just not compatible, that is all" (Nwapa, 1981, p. 87). Amaka's later pregnancy with Rev Fr. Mclaid (without medical intervention) further confirms Obiora's reproductive incapacity and vindicates her, highlighting both the social invisibility of male infertility and the moral policing imposed on women. Amaka's agency in bearing children outside marriage exemplifies resistance within constrained patriarchal systems, demonstrating a feminist assertion of autonomy and self-determination.

From a theoretical perspective, these novels resonate with spatial theory, which conceptualizes space as socially produced and reflective of power hierarchies. Patriarchal spatial politics restrict discussions of male infertility to private silences while exposing women's bodies and reproductive identities to public scrutiny and stigma. African feminist frameworks, particularly Obioma Nnaemeka's nego-feminism, provide alternatives grounded in dialogue, negotiation, and shared responsibility, challenging these silences and advocating for more equitable reproductive engagement.

A central finding of this analysis is that infertility—whether male or female—is weaponized within patriarchal systems to protect male honor, discipline women, and maintain hierarchical social structures. Both texts demonstrate the destructive consequences of secrecy, deception, and denial while emphasizing the importance of transparent communication and shared accountability in intimate relationships. Feminist readings reveal that women bear disproportionate emotional, social, and psychological burdens, while men are insulated from blame, reinforcing asymmetrical gender power.

Adébayò and Nwapa position infertility as a critical site of sociocultural contestation. By foregrounding the invisibility of male reproductive failure alongside the hyper-visibility of female reproductive labor, their works challenge dominant cultural scripts that equate masculinity with virility and womanhood with motherhood. These narratives insist that infertility cannot be addressed solely in medical terms; it must also confront cultural norms that assign blame, regulate visibility, and sustain

patriarchal control. In doing so, *Stay with Me* and *One Is Enough* operate not only as literary texts but as instruments of cultural critique, advocating for agency, ethical responsibility, and gender justice within African societies.

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