

Queer Crossings:

Kinship, Marriage, and Sexuality in Igboland and Carriacou

ANDREW APTER

University of California, Los Angeles

ABSTRACT In this article, I problematize the historical development of quasi-institutionalized lesbianism on the Caribbean island of Carriacou, addressing veiled references to its “Igbo” origins in popular music and culture. How do we interpret such muted intimations and the forms of historicity they suggest? I argue that a case for Igbo origins can be made if we separate gender from sexuality. Reading Ifi Amadiume and Nwando Achebe on “female husbands” in Igboland in relation to M. G. Smith’s documentation of lesbianism in Carriacou, I identify related logics of lineage organization, prostitution, and property devolution linking both cases to “queer” conjugal forms. But whereas such unions were eroticized in Carriacou, in West Africa they remained strictly jural. That an Igbo form of woman-to-woman marriage was sexualized in Carriacou shows how flexible West African gender ideologies shaped queer sexualities under radically different historical conditions than in the Americas.

RÉSUMÉ Dans cet article, je problématise le développement d’un lesbianisme quasi institutionnel sur l’île des Caraïbes Carriacou en examinant des allusions à peine voilées à ses origines « Igbo » dans la musique et la culture populaire. Comment peut-on interpréter ces indices discrets et les types d’historicité qu’ils suggèrent? Je soutiens que la thèse des origines Igbo se tient si l’ont sépare le genre de la sexualité. En analysant Ifi Amadiume et Nwando Achebe sur les « maris

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femme » en Igboland en conjonction avec les documents de M. G. Smith sur le lesbianisme à Carriacou, j'identifie similarités dans l'organisation des lignées, la prostitution, et la dévolution des biens qui relient les deux cas à des relations conjugales « queer ». Cependant, alors que ces unions étaient érotisées à Carriacou, en Afrique de l'ouest elles étaient strictement de droit. Le fait qu'une forme Igbo de mariage femme-à-femme était sexualisée à Carriacou montre comment la flexibilité des idéologies de genre d'Afrique de l'ouest a influencé les sexualités homosexuelles dans un contexte historique radicalement différent de celui des Amériques.

Few issues remain as controversial and contentious as the West African “origins” of queer sexualities in Afro-Atlantic perspective. Part of the problem stems from the culturally taboo status of homoeroticism as a topic of discussion in West Africa, one still met with opprobrium and denial, or dismissed as a colonial legacy. Other difficulties are methodological, grappling with distinctions between male, female, transsexual, and transgender; gender and sexuality as cultural categories and performative regimes; and the very criteria for distinguishing between gender and sexuality as distinct spheres of discourse and practice. Compounding these issues are the terminological debates associated with LGBT initialism and activist lexicons, as new positionalities and orientations—such as “intersex,” “polyamorous,” and “third gender”—continue to emerge, further complicating the transatlantic waters.¹ And always looming large are the politics of projection, whether the phantom Africa of the colonial imagination, Euro-American models of gender and sexuality, or their combined forces recolonizing the motherland. For example, many African scholars, including Ifi Amadiume and Oyeronke Oyewumi, have taken Western feminists to task for imposing ethnocentric models of patriarchal domination on precolonial African women without doing their cultural and historical homework.² Indeed, the challenges of writing about queer Afro-Atlantic trajectories are intrinsically political, given the colonial histories of the frameworks and lexicons through which we work and seek to destabilize, and the centrality of race, gender, and sexuality in the remaking of hegemonies. How then do we proceed? How do we explore what Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley calls “queer black Atlantic oceanographies” without forsaking African origins—the cultural and historical *roots* of particular Atlantic vectors?³

In proposing one such expository pathway, I focus on the Igbo “origins” of lesbian partnerships and institutionalized “mating patterns” on the Grenadine island of Carriacou in the Eastern Caribbean.⁴ Building on my prior reanalysis of material first collected and published by M. G. Smith, I develop a suggestion offered during an interview on the island that seemed highly unlikely to me at the time: namely, that the lesbian roles of the *madvine* and *zami* had Igbo origins in West

Africa because they were favored by women of the “Ibo nation” in Carriacou.⁵ My initial dismissal of this imputed trajectory was based on several factors: a critical awareness of ethnic stereotyping in the Americas, as generated historically by Atlantic slavery and reworked by subsequent political projects and patterns of racial stratification; a healthy skepticism toward simplistic attributions of African origins in the African diaspora; and enough exposure to the secondary literature to sense that quasi-institutionalized lesbianism was not culturally recognized in Igboland. Carriacou claims about the Igbo origins of lesbianism might be understood in terms of female economic autonomy and the penchant for business that islanders attributed to women of the Ibo nation, but *not* in relation to Igbo precedents in Nigeria.

Several years later, however, my position began to change, inspired by a new class I taught at UCLA on gender and sexuality in Africa. It was during this class that I assigned—and finally read—two path-breaking studies of Igbo gender roles and ideologies: Ifi Amadiume’s *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*, and Nwando Achebe’s *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings: Female Power and Authority in Northern Igboland, 1900–1960*.⁶ Working through the flexible gender ideologies and sociohistorical contexts of religion and ritual, kinship, marriage, inheritance, trade, and political authority that both studies explored, I experienced a shock of recognition as clear correspondences among female unions, lineage organization, prostitution, and property devolution came into focus. The local attributions in Carriacou of lesbian preferences to “Ibo” women now made a certain sense, provided they were interpreted through the appropriate historical and cultural lenses. The argument that I develop in this article is that the Igbo roots of lesbianism in Carriacou can be grasped by separating gender from sexuality, such that the gender-crossing roles of female husbands in Igboland only became sexualized and eroticized in the Americas. In other words, the Igbo “origins” are strictly sociocultural, *framing* a trajectory of sexualization under radically different historical conditions in Carriacou.⁷ The broader implications of this Igbo trajectory are not limited to Igbo origins as such, but engage a wider range of queer Atlantic crossings associated with spirit possession and Afro-Caribbean religions.⁸

“Ibo and Dem” in Carriacou

First published in 1962, it is hardly surprising that M. G. Smith’s treatment of lesbian relationships in Carriacou falls staunchly within a heteronormative framework that identifies semi-institutionalized relationships between the *madivine* and *zami* as “deviant” forms within a patriarchal social order. But it is also points

toward a social theory of sexuality, an innovative conceptual move that was in many ways ahead of its time. Indeed, as Christine Barrow has argued, Smith opened up an important space for separating female sexuality and desire from official gender roles and ideologies more focused on tradition and respectability.⁹ In brief, his argument runs as follows.

As a former French and then British plantocracy whose owners left after emancipation in 1838, Carriacou became increasingly dependent upon remittances from male out-migration during the century and a half that followed, with labor flows to Grenada, Trinidad, Venezuela, the United States, and London that created a demographically skewed sex ratio wavering between two and three adult women to each man. For marriageable men remaining on the island, a *de facto* system of polygyny developed in which official monogamy remained the preferred conjugal form, but was supplemented by extraresidential “mating” relations with outside women, colloquially called “keptresses,” giving rise to matrifocal households of kept women and their “outside” children, usually in different villages. Whereas official monogamous unions were marked by formal betrothals, elaborate weddings, and virilocal residence in “wooden” houses associated with agnatic lineages, known as “bloods,” keptresses lived with their children in less prestigious “dirt” houses made from daub and wattle. Finally, a third pattern of “keeping” emerged, in which couples cohabited *in the woman’s house*, seen as a prelude to betrothal and marriage but sometimes stalled in a tenuous holding pattern that significantly limited male autonomy. “Whereas the husband is dominant in marriage,” Smith writes, “the woman is the dominant partner in keeping” because “kept” men were barred from extraresidential mating and lost child custody when such unions dissolved.¹⁰ Statistically infrequent and structurally unstable, keeping posed a problem for patriarchy. His masculinity compromised, “the male member of such a union is accordingly mocked and teased and is not regarded as a full household head.”¹¹ As we shall see, the gendered politics of keeping highlights intimate connections among female power, residence, and property.

It is within the patriarchal framework of these mating patterns, and a high rate of male out-migration, that Smith situated his discussion of lesbianism. With a high cultural value placed on female fidelity, Smith argued, women developed lesbian relationships of the *madivine* and *zami*, remaining “faithful” to their husbands while satisfying their own sexual needs. In this manner, men working away from the island for up to ten years at a stretch could return to Carriacou with their honor and households intact. The system was reinforced by patrilineages or “bloods” that enabled resident agnates to keep an eye on such wives, referred to as “grass widows,” while their husbands were abroad. Thus, according to Smith, the dual imperatives of female sexuality and fidelity were fulfilled. As Smith explains:

Married men often remain overseas for considerable periods, and sometimes they never return. Unless they intend desertion, they remit money to their wives and families in Carriacou as regularly as they can, and in this way maintain the marriage relation, fulfill their obligations, and demonstrate their wish to return. Nonetheless the grass-widows suffer sexual deprivation. Such women know the consequence of unfaithfulness too well to risk it. They rarely live alone unless they are pregnant or have several small children. To recall their husbands they generally allege some illness, but if this fails they may establish homosexual relations with other women.

Women who practise such homosexual relations are referred to in the French patois as *madivine* or *zami*. Not all *madivines* are married by any means, but many are said to have adopted this habit during their husbands' absence overseas. Unwed girls may also enter such relations while living as wards of their senior collateral kinswomen. Once developed, these Lesbian appetites may reduce the woman's interest in men considerably and eventually lead to a breach in the marriage relation. The active partner is always the elder, and has usually been married. Senior Lesbians may have several partners who must be kept apart to avoid the disorder that their jealousy provokes. The men are well aware of these relations but dare not discuss them with the women's husbands. Men say that "women are hotter than men"—that is, they have stronger sexual appetites—and consequently only women can satisfy each other. Female homosexuality is explained thus, and its existence is taken to prove this explanation. But, in fact, men often marry women several years their junior and then depart overseas, having imposed severe prohibitions on their wives' heterosexual relations, with the result that some wives adopt Lesbianism as the only alternative open. . . . Once women cultivate this particular habit, they are unlikely to abandon it lightly.¹²

Smith emphasizes that his is a cultural argument, based first and foremost on patriarchal values of heterosexual fidelity that are threatened by high rates of male out-migration. In the end, lesbianism serves patriarchal authority. But Carriacou culture also acknowledges the imperatives of female sexuality; that women are "hotter" than men and must be erotically satisfied to remain sound in body and mind. It is this acknowledgement of a female "pleasure principle" that Barrow credits Smith for emphasizing in his study, even if he didn't know what to do with it. And it was this opening into sexualized avenues of female agency and empowerment that I developed in my reinterpretation of his material, emphasizing how formalized lesbian unions could transform and undermine patriarchal authority.

Key to such female empowerment is the link between "prostitution" and the establishment of matrifocal lineages or "bloods," modeled on Carriacou's agnatic descent groups but founded and organized by and through women. A range of anxieties surrounds such female autonomy, expressed in the language of witchcraft and sexual commodification. Recall the ambivalence and contempt associated with the unstable mating pattern of "keeping," where a man cohabits with a

woman in her domicile, in preparation for a marriage that may never take place. In such arrangements, the woman is regarded as the dominant partner because the man forfeits extraresidential mating rights as well as custody over any children he has with his “keeper.” In a revealing observation, Smith notes how men disdain such women who “keep” their men in wooden houses, the social locus of a lineage or “blood,” calling them “whores.”¹³ The term is not to be taken as literal prostitution, but connotes the “immorality” of women whose economic autonomy enables them to control their men and establish *de facto* lineages of their own, living in wooden houses to which their children belong. Their “crime” is not one of selling sex, but of rerouting male “bloods” into female lines; diverting, as it were, the blood of male lineages into matrifocal households and reproductive pathways. Such women not only “wear the pants” in these keeping arrangements, but structurally feminize their male partners, who are “mocked and teased” for their diminished authority.

It is therefore the logic of lineage appropriation by autonomous women in wooden houses that elicited the language of sexual opprobrium. Their situations resembled those of actual prostitutes less in sexual practice than in social form. Prostitutes who overtly commercialized their sexuality, Smith tells us, were relatively rare in Carriacou, but if stigmatized they were also respected. Although they severed ties with their male agnates, they also owned their own land, and set themselves up in wooden houses that gradually developed into matrifocal households. Such powerful women attracted female kinsmen and wards, abandoned women, and even lesbian lovers and “wives” who worked together in managed domestic arrangements, and whose offspring with outside lovers and clients became *de facto* members of new matrifocal “bloods.” Like female keepers in wooden houses, prostitutes subverted the patriarchal authority of agnatic descent by establishing female headed households that appropriated male bloodlines.

Not all prostitutes were lesbians and lesbians prostitutes in Carriacou, although the graded regimes of gift giving and sexual reciprocity in both queer and straight relationships recast such distinctions into matters of degree. The point I want to emphasize is that the empowerment of women as household heads, living in wooden houses as “keepers” or prostitutes, transformed them socially and structurally into “men,” much like the butch *madivine* in relation to her femme *zami* lovers. It is this gender-bending position of the *madivine* that posed an imminent threat to patriarchal authority, because the institutionalization of lesbian unions also fostered the development of uterine households. As Smith reports: “Lesbians exchange gifts, the senior receiving perfume, as becomes a male in this culture, while the junior is given earrings, underwear, and the like. The wives of prosperous men may have several junior partners since they can afford the necessary gifts. If these women reject their husbands, their marriages may break

down. . . .” What stands out in this brief account is how a husband’s domestic resources can be diverted by his wife among her junior *zami* partners, putting a strain on the heterosexual marriage, even breaking it, while reconstituting the *madivine* as a “man” over her lesbian lovers, who structurally resemble de facto wives. A strong *madivine* requires redistributive resources. Like the wood-house prostitute, she could become a household head with resident kinsmen, junior wards, and other men’s wives share-tending and sharecropping her property.¹⁴ In such uterine households of female community and solidarity, sexuality itself devolved through female bloodlines. Not only was the proclivity for lesbian love understood as inherited from mother to daughter, but sexual relations between *madivines* and their adopted junior kinswomen were accepted, without violating incest prohibitions. Lesbian love was a double-edged gift. It could sustain patriarchal households with absent husbands by preserving the marital fidelity of wives, but it could also destroy such households—by rechanneling their resources and appropriating their blood. As reflected in witchcraft idioms, a lesbian lover could absorb her *madivine*’s pregnancy into her own womb, thereby divesting it from the husband’s patrilineage and rechanneling it into her matrilineal “blood.”¹⁵

Smith’s analysis, although not wrong, was incomplete. In proposing a more feminist rereading of his material, emphasizing female autonomy over allegiance to patriarchy, I pushed a link between sexuality and empowerment that had transformative as well as reproductive implications for the social organization of agnatic “bloods” on the island. At no point, however, did it cross my mind that such lesbian politics could have West African origins until Donald Hill, an authority on Carriacou, referred to a claim by Winston Fleary (another cultural authority, as well as musician, dancer, playwright, and native son of Carriacou) that the Big Drum song called “Ibo and Dem” was “a lesbian mime with vague gossip about lesbians,” and therefore may have Igbo antecedents.¹⁶ Hill also gave me Fleary’s telephone number. The timing was propitious. Because I would soon be presenting my reanalysis of Smith’s material at the Caribbean Studies Association meetings in Grenada, I arranged a meeting with Winston Fleary and booked a seat on a flight from Grenada to Carriacou—twenty minutes by air. On June 3, 2013, Fleary granted me an interview.

We covered many topics, including lesbianism on the island, which he discussed with measured indirection: “I knew my [late] sister had ‘friends’: they were too friendly! My grandmother was married; she made my father and my aunt. But when my grandfather migrated to Caracas, Venezuela, he never came back. And others like her, they had no recourse. They didn’t want to make children from another man. They had the frame of reference. . . . The Carriacou men have always depended on migration for work. This is where the *madivine* life comes in.” Consistent with Smith’s account, Fleary described his grandmother’s experience

as a way of maintaining fidelity to a migrant husband who never returned, having no other “recourse.” The matrilineal inheritance of lesbian desire was also illustrated after further questioning revealed that his “sister” with “friends” was actually his father’s sister’s daughter, forming a direct line of transmission from grandmother to granddaughter (Figure 1). But whereas Smith remained adamant that lesbianism and even the formation of lineages or “bloods” were exclusively New World developments with no sociocultural precedents in West Africa, Fleary pushed the Igbo connection: “The Ibo ladies were the ones who boldly, boldly. They were the entrepreneurs; with a shop, a restaurant. She leads in economic activity, so money talk [he added emphasis by shaking a jar of coins]. Well, they bribe the other with them, and they sometimes become friends.” Relating Ibo lesbian tendencies to their economic clout as female entrepreneurs, Fleary went on to invoke a popular Big Drum song, performed on sacred occasions—such as “Beg Pardon” rites for the “Old Parents” and community “maroons”—as further evidence of an Igbo connection.¹⁷

Song text:

Ibo Ibo, (lead singer)

Lay lay la! (lead)

Ibo and dem (lead)

Lay lay la! (chorus)

Ibo Ibo, (lead)

Lay lay la! (chorus)

Ibo want dem oh! (lead)

Lay lay la (chorus).

Ibo warn dem . . . (chorus)

Translation:

Ibo [Nation],

Laugh, enjoy yourself!

An Ibo woman is involved with someone! (e.g., gossip about her lesbian sexual affair)

Laugh, enjoy yourself!

Ibo [Nation],

Laugh, enjoy yourself!

The Ibo woman wants them!
(lesbian lovers)

Laugh, enjoy yourself!

She warns them (“Don’t interfere with my business.”)¹⁸

Explaining how “the old people from Africa, they always speak in a hidden way” to reveal the hidden meaning of the song and protect the children from knowing too much too early, Fleary emphasized: “What the children hear is the dance and the rhythm; it’s good! But they are saying something. That’s why you have young people respecting old people.” With an economy of shifting forms and meanings characteristic of situated ritual speech, the song refers obliquely first to “Ibo and dem,” that a lesbian affair is taking place, second, that Ibo women *want* them,

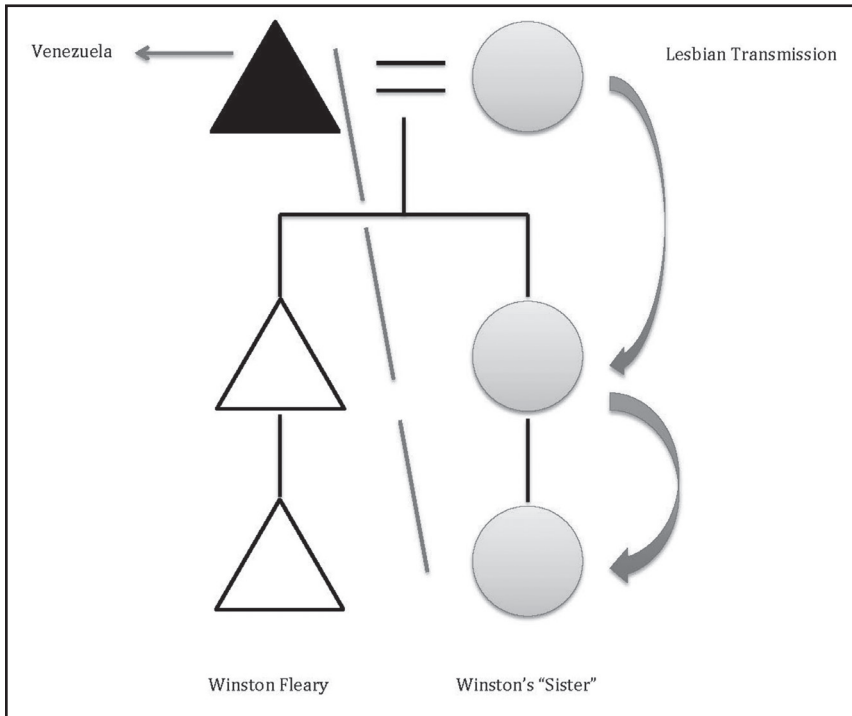


FIGURE 1.
Mother-Daughter Transmission of Lesbian Blood

where the shifter “them” refers to female lovers, and third, that Ibo women *warn* them, where the reference shifts to those in the community who might disapprove, that they mind their own business. For Fleary, the song provided prima facie evidence that lesbian proclivities were Igbo in origin.

The history invoked by Big Drum performances in Carriacou, particularly its forms of recollection and modes of explication, raises complex issues pursued most extensively by Edwina Ashie-Nikoi in her masterful dissertation, “Beating the Pen on the Drum,” and warrant greater discussion than I can currently provide.¹⁹ For my own part, I assumed that the song made sense in relation to local ideologies of Igbo nationhood and Africinity that were projected back upon the continent, but referenced no substantial connection to Igboland as such. I still maintain that as a sexual practice, lesbianism in Carriacou was a homegrown development. But after working through the complex transpositions of Igbo gender categories analyzed by Amadiume and Achebe, I have come to appreciate how

the flexibility of Igbo gender ideologies established the sociocultural “frame of reference” through which woman-to-woman relationships became sexualized in Carriacou. Shifting back to the Bight of Biafra, we will see how the appropriation of lineage bloodlines by *madivine* “husbands” is prefigured in the nearly identical devolutionary diversions generated by female husbands in Igboland.

Female Husbands in Igboland

Ifi Amadiume was not the first to identify “woman-marriage” in Igbo culture and society, but she was a pioneer in locating it within a flexible gender ideology associated with significant female autonomy and empowerment.²⁰ If her path-breaking *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* engages a broad range of sociocultural domains in the precolonial and colonial periods, including religion, politics, economics, and the emergent colonial state, it is her focus on the structural dynamics of lineage organization and property devolution—as befits a British-trained social anthropologist—that models the core principles of gender flexibility, even as these extend through the title system into extralineage ritual and political spheres. As the title of her book suggests, so-called male daughters and female husbands are structurally related. They not only represent the paradigmatic forms of Igbo gender flexibility, allowing female-sexed women to assume male gender roles, but do so to a considerable extent in relation to each other, within the agnatic lineage system characteristic of the Nnobi in Anambra State.²¹

In its basic form, the transformation of daughters into sons—known as *nhayikwa* or *nhanye*—remained an option for senior male household heads lacking male heirs who would otherwise inherit the ancestral compound (*obi*) and its associated land, and thereby perpetuate the descent group’s patriline.²² Given prevailing patterns of virilocal residence and patrilineal descent, in which daughters married “out” and wives married “in,” fathers without sons faced the termination of their patriline because their daughters perpetuated those of their husbands, and at death, the unmovable compound property (house, land, and trees) would be distributed *collaterally* among surviving patrikin. The jural fiction of the “male daughter” transformed daughters into socially male heirs who remained on the property to keep the compound intact and provide male progeny to perpetuate the line.²³ An eldest daughter (*ada*) could be so designated as a male proxy for positional succession, or a married daughter could be recalled to the father’s *obi*, after repaying the bridewealth to her husband’s kin to regain legal custody of any children born thereafter.²⁴ Because these daughters were structurally male, they could not be married to other men through bridewealth payments

that transferred rights in genetricem. but remained household heads in their own right, providing lineage offspring by taking informal lovers or by marrying wives of their own, doubling as “female husbands.” In this latter arrangement, the male daughter would marry one or more wives for the lineage by securing their reproductive resources through bridewealth payments. Whomever the actual “genitors” might be, whether outside male lovers or extralineaage kin, the female husband remained the recognized “father” (pater) of the children born through such unions, adding new life to the agnatic patriline while consolidating the *obi* as an ancestral compound (Figure 2).²⁵

Thus sketched, the gender flexibility accorded to male daughters and female husbands actually strengthened patrilineal descent and the devolution of

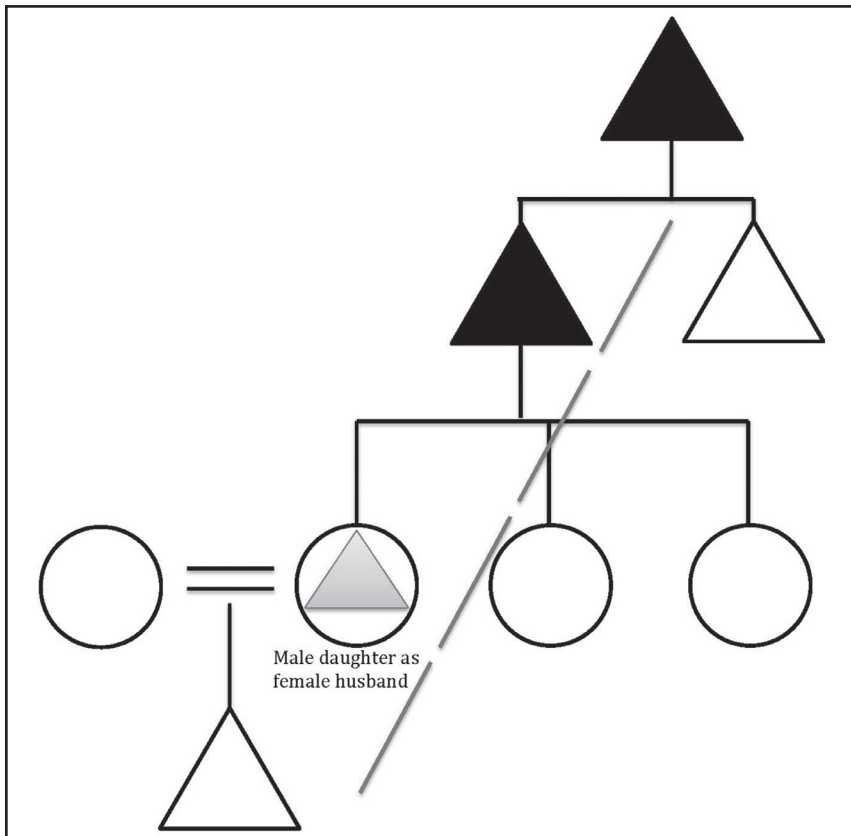


FIGURE 2.

Perpetuating the *Obi* Patriline through the “Male Daughter” as Female Husband

property through positional succession. Although particular women changing gender roles enjoyed enhanced “male” agency and lineage authority, collectively they continued to serve the corporate interests of male agnation in perpetuity. However, even within the patrilineal framework of the *obi* house-property complex, complementary lines of female succession emerged in “matricentric” subdivisions, exercising a subtle pull against the patrilineal descent group that—as we shall see—could lead to lineage fission or even the full-fledged appropriation of agnatic bloodlines. Amadiume describes how, in polygynous compounds, each cowife with her children formed matricentric subunits within her husband’s *obi*, each associated with designated access to an attached area of garden land, or a more distant area of farmland at the outskirts of lineage or village territory. Over time, a complementary pattern of matricentric devolution empowered women’s rights to land through what we might dub “affinal succession”: “On the death of a husband, a wife’s continued access to farmland depended on her having a son, or a ‘male daughter.’ On the death of a woman as wife and mother, the continuation of her matricentric household depended on the woman’s son, or a ‘male daughter,’ or respected *ada*, marrying a woman to take the place of the dead wife. In this way, the wife of a son took over farmland from the wife of the son’s father. Thus one wife replaced another as women continued to manage the land.”²⁶ Two features stand out in this remarkable passage. First is the formation of affinal female “lines” as “one wife replaced another” to sustain the matricentric compound and its “female” land within the patrilineage. Second is the role of marriageable “sons” in making such affinal succession possible, through “actual” sons, male daughters, or willing first daughters (*ada*) marrying wives (Figure 3). Here we see a form of affinal succession that perpetuated female forms of ownership—in land, palm trees, even in houses—pulling property away from the patrilineage even as it served to perpetuate it. This latter trend remains latent in Amadiume’s observation that “in many cases where there was no available land for subdivision, as the sons matured, they built their houses in their mother’s sub-compound units in the original [male] compound. . . .”²⁷ If under normal conditions, building on the mother’s land generated standard patterns of lineage segmentation and fission (between sons of the same father but different mothers), in cases where wives became wealthier than their husbands, they could absorb these new houses into female lineages of corporate ownership and influence, effectively inaugurating new lines of descent.²⁸

Evidence of these matricentric “pulls” comes from the broader contexts of woman-to-woman marriage in which female husbands accumulated significant power and wealth. One important pathway for women to take the prestigious *Ekwe* title, conferring elite status while acknowledging and further promoting economic success, was through *igba ohu*, or woman-to-woman marriage, enabling

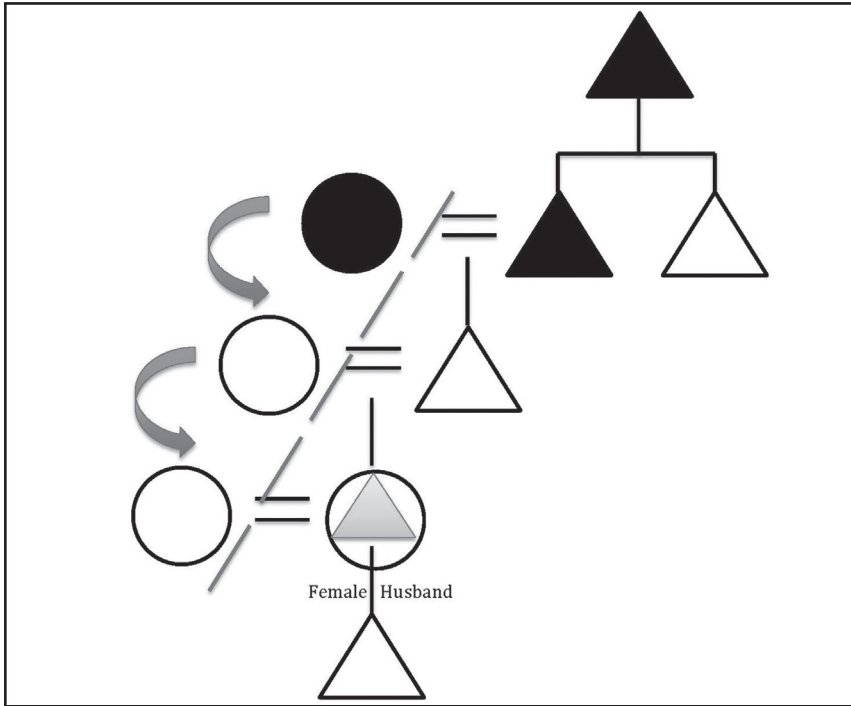


FIGURE 3.
Affinal Succession and Matricentric Devolution of *Obi* Land

the female husband to benefit from her wives' labor and their children, who took her name as their recognized "father."²⁹ The masculinization of such *Ekwe* women was marked by their string anklets, *njada ukwa*, also worn by male *ozo* title holders, and by combing their hair out to disable them from carrying loads on their heads, thereby assuming a male prerogative. As they achieved wealth and prestige, such women could overshadow their husbands, not only in terms of personal influence, as Amadiume points out, but also structurally, in terms of lineage shifts. This latter "sway" towards the female husband's lineage can be teased out of two accounts of powerful women who dominated their husbands.

The first account involves the scion of a former slave trader who accumulated great wealth and established an important *obi* that devolved to his first son, Eze Okigbo, an Nnobi Big Man in the late nineteenth century. Although the story focuses on the rivalry that developed with his "favorite" wife, Nwambata Aku, it includes telling details about an inheritance dispute that frames the drama in lineage terms. In the oral history that Amadiume collected, when his father died, Eze

Okigbo was nearly tricked out of his patrimony as first son of his father's estate by jealous brothers who conspired against him to divide the property among themselves: "When [Eze] Okigbo learned of this plot, he immediately travelled to Nnewi Ichi, to his mother's patrilineage, to report what he had heard. The members of his mother's patrilineage in turn called a meeting of members of their *obi* to discuss how to come to the rescue of their daughter's child. Consequently, as the story goes, when they came to mourn the dead, they brought Okigbo many cows, innumerable goats, etc. As John Oigbo told me, "That was how Eze Okigbo became rich and repeated his father's fame."³⁰ What stands out in this initial framing is the role of Eze Okigbo's *mother's* patrilineage in protecting his position as successor to his father's *obi*, by providing him with funeral gifts that safeguarded his "place." As his mother's only child, we are told, he was able to mobilize the support of her *obi* to redirect its resources in support of his cause. Thus, the oral history introduces a shift not of lineage affiliation *tout court*, but of structural dependency on his mother's *obi*. His positional succession within his father's *obi* rested on crucial support from his mother's patrilineage (*ikwunne*), introducing a dimension of complementary filiation—therefore a "tug" toward his mother's "side"—reiterated by the conflict with his wealthiest wife.³¹

Nwambata Aku, we are told, was inherited by Eze Okigbo from his father, and therefore came into his household with considerable wealth. An astute businesswoman with livestock and palm oil interests, she had also taken twenty-four wives of her own, adding to her wealth-in-people through their children and services. Tensions mounted with her rising influence:

A popular story, about the counting of property between Eze Okigbo and his favourite wife, Nwambata, told in the *obi* of Eze Okigbo, attests to the economic mobility of women in the 19th century, as well as rivalry between wealthy women and their husbands. Apparently, Nwambata had become so wealthy she was beginning to overshadow her husband, and wished either to show off her wealth or reduce it. According to the story, however, she said that she wished to share her wealth with Eze Okigbo, so he invited the whole of Nnobi to divide the wealth between them, and they divided the property in half. Then Eze Okigbo, being a man, was asked to take the first share, so he picked Nwambata herself, and consequently told the people of Nnobi to stop calling him Eze Okigbo Nwambata, as he now owned Nwambata and, therefore, all her property.³²

Amadiume interprets this story in dyadic terms, as a growing conflict between a husband and a wife whose wealth was literally redefining him in relation to his role as her spouse. As Amadiume explains, "Very wealthy women soon overshadowed their husbands to the extent that men were no longer known by their own names, but by reference to their role as husband."³³ Indeed, after "repossessing" his

wife in the story, he insists that people stop addressing him as Eze Okigbo *Nwambata*; that is, in relation to *her* name.

The conflict takes on larger dimensions, however, when reanalyzed as a lineage drama. Note how the popular story was related “in the *obi* of Eze Okigbo,” the very locus of patrilineal authority and descent, thereby framing the corporate dynamics of the domestic conflict in lineage terms. *Nwambata*’s wealth and influence posed a threat to the integrity of her husband’s lineage and the disposition of its property, which she threatened to overtake within her own nominal line. As an actual incident, the story doesn’t make much sense, because it is never explained why *Nwambata* “wished either to show off her wealth or reduce it,” or even why she wanted to share her wealth with him by dividing the property in half. As an allegory of incipient lineage fission and appropriation from the standpoint of Okigbo’s *obi*, however, the story highlights the dangers of wealthy wives who accrue great influence as female husbands. His *obi* prevailed and repossessed her property by transforming *her* into lineage property, a patriarchal solution that kept the lineage intact but inflated the customary terms of bridewealth payments, which “purchase” not wives but their reproductive fertility, conferring lineage membership on their children.³⁴ In other words, the discrepancy between Eze Okigbo’s “solution” and the prescriptive norms associated with bridewealth underscores the systematic character of the conflict itself, one associated with female husbands but defying systematic solutions.

A similar trend toward female appropriation in which a wealthy wife overtakes her husband’s lineage resonates in the story of Ifeyinwa “Olinke.” It is worth emphasizing that the story was recounted by the powerful woman’s maternal grandson; that is, Ifeyinwa’s son’s son—one Johnson Ume—who specified that when she died she was holding him in her arms. The detail is significant as an idiom of intimacy that repositions her grandson within a maternal line, consistent with the theme of her dominance as a wife.³⁵ Amadiume explains:

Ifeyinwa Olinke, a very wealthy woman who died in the first decade of [the twentieth] century, is an example of a wife who became so rich and popular that she completely overshadowed her husband. Her epithet referred to the fact that she was woman who had nine wives. . . . As Ifeyinwa’s praise name was Ifeyinwa di ya, Ifeyinwa who enjoys her husband’s wealth, I asked Johnson whether she became rich through her husband or whether her husband was wealthy. His reply indicates that Ifeyinwa had so much overshadowed her husband that little is remembered about him. Johnson said, “it was not really said of her husband whether he was rich or not. What I do know is that she was wealthier than her husband.” When asked why she was called “one who enjoys her husband’s wealth” if she was richer than her husband, Johnson’s reply was still that she was wealthier than her husband. In this case, it might be more accurate to translate her praise name as “one who has full control over her husband’s property.”³⁶

I would push Amadiume's interpretation further to suggest that Ifeyinwa took control over her husband's house-property complex; that is, his *obi*, including the wealth in children that it generated. Notice how within this testimony he is referred to as Ifeyinwa's husband rather than Johnson's paternal grandfather, as an affine rather than a patrilineal forbear, and that "little is remembered about him." In the structural terms of agnatic descent, he has been forgotten, not merely "overshadowed" by his dominant wife, but overtaken by her lineage.³⁷ Of further significance, as we are told, is that she also overshadowed her senior cowife within the compound, suggesting that Ifeyinwa not only displaced her husband but became the reference point of affinal seniority as well.³⁸

Additional evidence of female husbands threatening if not "appropriating" the patriline of the men they married abounds in Nwando Achebe's *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings: Female Power and Authority in Northern Igboland, 1900–1960*, and emerges with paradigmatic clarity in her case study of the first and only female warrant chief, Ahebi Ugbabe, who achieved the commanding heights of "kingship" but met her demise by exceeding the limits of Igbo gender flexibility.³⁹ Achebe locates a range of woman-to-woman marriage "types" in the multiple contexts and linked domains of religion, kinship, politics, and trade, beginning with *ohuma*, young enslaved or freeborn women married to certain deities as "cult dedicatees" in exchange for the ritual protection of their families. *Ohuma* married to deities such as Adoro, Nimu Kwome, and Efuru were allocated land, both collectively and individually, and effectively reproduced for their deity-husband's "lineage": "All Efuru dedicatees, much like Adoro dedicatees, were married to their goddess in a process known as *igo mma ogo*. The marriage, once contracted, allowed Efuru to become a *female* husband to her dedicatees. As an Efuru wife, each woman was encouraged to form meaningful and fulfilling relationships with whichever man she desired. All children born of these unions, however, belonged to Efuru, who legitimized them by giving them her surname, Nwiyi—a practice that continued until 1988."⁴⁰ Here we see in pure form how female husbands appropriated male bloodlines through their acquired wives, using men as "sperm donors" to reproduce for the religious community.⁴¹ Of course, the boundaries between spirit versus human spouses, on the one hand, and religious versus secular *obi* households and communities, on the other, are sociologically significant if not always easy to pin down.⁴² But seen as a religious modality if not a charter of female-to-female marriages on the ground, the marriage of female dedicatees to female spirit-husbands throws the logic of lineal appropriation into bold relief.

Of the many cases of woman-to-woman marriage discussed by Achebe in relation to their economic roles—primarily as farmers, traders, and artisans—those of two potters, Bridget Echina and Mary Odo, stand out for their potential impact

on their husband's patriline. At first glance, their taking of wives solidified their positions within their husband's households, because both women were barren and could not establish themselves as mothers until the wives they married bore children. Indeed, we learn that Bridget took her husband's name (Echena) and married her wife "for her husband," associating her clearly within her husband's patrilineage. And yet a chink appears in his patriarchal armor when learn that they reside in a house that she built: "I built this house that you see. This is the house that my husband and I live in. I built our house from the money that I got from selling my pots. Women potters in Nrobo use their money to take titles, build houses, take care of their families, and send their children in school."⁴³ Recall the ambivalent Carriacou man who resides in his "keptress's" house, and is therefore significantly circumscribed by her authority. Without assuming a perfect parallel, the Igbo husband in his wife's house no longer occupies the residential locus of his *obi*, *sensu stricto*, even if the house remains on his *obi* land, because it opens the path for his wife's lineal descendants.

This latter tendency toward a lineal take-over is latent if not manifest in the case of Mary Odo, who, like Ms. Echena, married a wife "for her husband," yet continued to accumulate progeny and influence of her own. For what began in the service of her husband's patrilineage appears to have shifted to her own patriline. Her oral testimony is worth reproducing in full because it includes some telling details:

I married a wife for my husband. I was the one who brought out my own money to marry her. I went through all the traditional processes that were involved in marrying a woman. I asked questions; I visited her home and inquired how much the bride price was, and then paid it. She was pampered. It was the money that I made from my pottery that I used to marry this wife for my husband.

I had two children for my husband through my wife. However, I have many children altogether. I adopted my brother's children as my own and I looked after them and sent them to school.⁴⁴

Of paramount significance is that Ms. Odo paid the bridewealth with her own rather than her husband's money, and followed all of the customary protocols that made her not only a "female husband" but also the "father" of her wife's children. That she had two children *for* her husband by her wife clearly strengthened his patrilineage, but she adds that she has "many children altogether" and adopted her brother's children as her own, taking care of their needs and education. It is not clear from her testimony if her "many" children included others born by her wife, or only those she adopted, but in either case, the implications are clear. Ms. Odo's children included many who remained within her own patrilineage, bolstering her position as a reference point for her own patrilineal descendants.

Reflections of such systemic tensions in the ritual field may well appear in the powers of a nocturnal female *Abere* masquerade, whose association with the economic roles of market women is represented in the claim that she carries “all good luck and curses in her market pan.”⁴⁵ Such a characterization not only refers to the vagaries of profit and loss linked to the market woman’s vessel of exchange, but sociologically extends to the complex consequences of female wealth for male authority, given that wealthy market women can overshadow their husbands within the domestic household and the larger *obi*.⁴⁶ The most powerful and dangerous *Abere* masquerade is called *okwa nkpokoro umudiogu*, which Achebe translates as “someone who pronounces death and takes away the property of the dead.”⁴⁷ Her appellation provides a clue to the social dimensions that motivate her retributive (and redistributive) activities, amplified by a song that she sang during her ritual outings—“*mu ogbue di okiri Abere, Kirite ogba-di nye*” (*Abere kills the husband, takes the wife captive, and also takes captive the man who marries the woman whom she has taken captive*).⁴⁸ As a guardian of moral behavior meting out misfortune to social malefactors with impunity, her message doubles as commentary on female lineage appropriation, highlighting a powerful spirit who kills husbands, seizes (marries?) their wives, and even captures the men who would marry the captive women, as if to guarantee that no property or progeny of the killed or subsequent husbands can accrue to any other than herself. Like a female spirit-husband, her captive “wife” is hers alone, together with a captive man who can inseminate her wife and perpetuate her ritual lineage. How else can we explain the perplexing detail of her capturing the man who marries the captive woman than as a strong expression of female power diverting male property into female reproductive lines?

Many of the Igbo themes discussed thus far pertaining to female husbands, lineage appropriation, and sociopolitical empowerment converge in the extraordinary career of Ahebi Ugbabe, the one and only female king and warrant chief in colonial Nigeria, explored at length by Nwando Achebe.⁴⁹ At the neglect of much rich material, I will highlight key moments in Ahebi’s remarkable story, which begins when she is offered to the goddess *Ohe* as a living sacrifice, or dedicatee (*igberema*), in atonement for an unspecified crime committed by her father. As with the deities *Efuru* and *Adoro* discussed above, here we see how the dedicated “wife” of a goddess would contribute to the reproduction of the religious community in her female husband’s name. Ahebi, however was strong-willed and independent, and at the tender age of thirteen or fourteen, ran away to *Igalaland*, where she established herself as an *adana* prostitute, a position not of abject scorn but of recognized autonomy and even relative respectability, given that such “free women” established themselves in their own houses, selling food and drinks as well as sex, often becoming successful traders. In this fashion, Ahebi became a

highly prominent entrepreneur, establishing important economic and political connections with the *Attah* of Igala, and with those British colonial officers who were subjugating Igboland under indirect rule. Ahebi collaborated with the British, helping them pacify Nsukka Division in exchange for installing her, in 1918, as warrant chief of her natal village cluster of Enugu-Ezike, governing the very community from which she had fled as a cult dedicatee. From the *Attah* of Igala she subsequently received the male *eze* title, transforming her into both man and “king.”

Ahebi's palace became an important local political center, growing not only with servants and clients, but also from the many wives she married among the women who sought sanctuary from abusive husbands. It is said that she also received wives through less altruistic means, when some of her servants—*ndi iboyi*—went marauding, “kidnapping men's wives for themselves and their master.”⁵⁰ In this manner, Ahebi served not only as warrant chief and *eze* king, but also became “father” to the children of her wives, who would carry her name as lineal descendants.⁵¹ Whether or not the allegations of servants “snatching” wives for Ahebi were literally true, or served as social allegories of her autocratic rule, Ahebi's growing power and palace posed a threat to male leadership and patrilineal authority. Indeed, the council of lineage elders in Enugu-Ezike began to agitate against her overbearing leadership. But with British backing, Ahebi was protected from customary deposition, at least up to a point. The violation of propriety that finally brought her down, representing the limits of her masculinization, occurred in the domain of ritual and religion.

In her efforts to thwart the opposition of lineage leaders, consolidate her ritual authority, and achieve the pinnacle of maleness, Ahebi attempted to create her own masquerade, which she named after herself, *Ekpe Ahebi*. Here she entered the most secret inner sanctum of male ancestral spirit possession, protected by taboos and prohibitions barring women from intimate visual and spatial access. As Achebe explains: “It is forbidden for a woman to control a masked spirit. Women are supposed to run away at the sight of a mask, for to claim knowledge of what is behind the mask would mean that a crime has been committed against the mask. Ahebi Ugbabe, therefore, in creating and controlling the *Ekpe Ahebi* masquerade, invoked an ancestral spirit, the highest secret society of men, and consequently caused the total desecration of the spirit. This was in essence the gravity of Ahebi's crime.”⁵² In the cultural terms of Igbo ontology, Ahebi's overweening ambition to achieve total maleness pushed against the limits of gender flexibility. She desecrated the ritual ground of male ancestral power because her female sex could not be completely eliminated. During the Odo masquerade outing, when Ahebi and her mask approached the chief priest (*onyishi*) for ritual recognition and blessing, he not only rejected Ahebi's *Ekpe*, but had it seized and destroyed. Not even the

British could defend her in this case, but sided with the elders “because she was a woman.” Faced with such a devastating defeat, and the resulting loss of political capital, Ahebi was brought down and her reign basically ended.

Ahebi’s ritual desecration clearly provided ammunition for her political opponents to rally against her, but I would argue that more was at stake than the violation of a gendered taboo. Male masks of the Ekpe type described not only channel lineage ancestors, but in doing so, reconstitute their patrilineal descendants into socially organized corporate groups—the brick and mortar of such relatively decentralized village groups so characteristic of Igbo government.⁵³ Ahebi’s attempt to introduce a male mask *in her name* not only violated fundamental ritual protocols, but had she been successful, would have founded a new patrilineage by establishing herself as its *male* progenitor. By becoming a man on the deepest ritual terrain, and inaugurating a dynastic house in perpetuity, she would have “given birth” to a royal patrilineage. Indeed, one of the ritual outing songs proclaimed that “Ekpe is Ahebi’s child,” transforming her “spirit” into a patrilineal blood line.

Final evidence that Ahebi was bent on inaugurating her own patrilineage comes from the closing act of her political career, when she buried herself alive. This is not to say that she suffocated beneath the earth, but that she dramatized her own funeral while still able to witness it. Her immediate reason, as Achebe explains, was in anticipation of being abandoned at death: “Ahebi did not trust that her society would accord her a fitting burial.”⁵⁴ Such burial was further necessary to transform her into an ancestor. But what kind of ancestor? Key features of the burial ceremony—the scale of expenditure, the cows and horses that were sacrificed, the use of the *ufie* instrument performed at the funerals of titled men, and Ahebi’s insistence that a man, not a woman, carry the *oba* symbol of the deceased’s property—provide incontrovertible evidence that “King Ahebi ‘died’ a gendered man, she was buried as a man, not as a woman.”⁵⁵ Following the tendency toward lineage appropriation by female husbands in Igboland, I would thus argue that even after her disastrous masquerade ordeal, Ahebi’s “living” burial represents her final attempt to inaugurate a patrilineage, by ensuring her ritual transformation into an eponymous *male* ancestor. That she was eventually deified as the *goddess* Ahebi is a cautionary reminder that there are no guarantees in the spirit world!⁵⁶

Conclusion

To return to the central question guiding this article, in what ways did Igbo gender flexibility inform the development of lesbian partnerships in the Grenadine island of Carriacou? In what sense have I argued that such lesbian relationships

are historically *rooted* in Igbo culture? It is worth reemphasizing that I am in no way suggesting that lesbian sexuality was ever semi-institutionalized in Igboland. Ifi Amadiume unequivocally states that to interpret such woman-to-woman marriages as lesbian would be “shocking and offensive to Nnobi women, since the strong bonds and support between them do not imply sexual practices.”⁵⁷ Nwando Achebe reiterates the point when she explains that “these relationships were not lesbian in nature but based on the verity that in precolonial Igboland, sex, and gender did not coincide, and therefore biological women could be categorized as social males.”⁵⁸ Indeed, the separation of sex and gender, and the mediating category of sexuality, form the starting point, or generative cultural matrix from which lesbian partnerships in Carriacou developed. Embedded in core relations of kinship and marriage—of “male daughters” and female husbands—these categories provided the *frame of reference* for relationships that became sexualized in Carriacou.

Of course, I cannot definitively “prove” that this actually happened, but a number of striking parallels support the hypothesis. In addition to Carriacou imputations of “Ibo” origins, mediated as they are by historic ideologies, both sets of practices were closely associated with nearly identical lineage dynamics: in Igboland devolving the *obi* through male lines, in Carriacou keeping the “wooden” household intact with migrant husbands in absentia for years. Moreover, similar subversive potentials empowered such women through matrilineal lineage appropriation. In Igboland, we saw how powerful women could overshadow their husbands by marrying wives of their own—building their own houses and diverting the disposition of socially reproductive resources from male into female lines (see Figure 4).⁵⁹ In Carriacou, similar appropriations occurred as powerful *madivines* channeled patriarchal property to their de facto *zami* wives and their children, effectively absorbing the bloodlines of their husbands into their own uterine “blood.” In both cases, as women “became” men, patriarchal authority was curtailed and undermined. Like the overshadowed Igbo husband living in his wife’s house, the Carriacou man held hostage in his “keeper’s” house was not only socially feminized, but also relinquished custody of his children as well. It is therefore no coincidence that when women took over as independent household heads, their real or imputed association with prostitution was less about commercialized sex than the founding of female “bloods” or lineages, a connection brought to dramatic heights by the extraordinary career of Ahebi Ugbabe.

If the Igbo material provides a compelling case of an African gender ideology that was sexualized in the Americas, it stands within a broader range of Afro-Atlantic trajectories in the ritual domain of spirit possession. Students of black Atlantic religions such as Vodou, Santería, and Candomblé have long observed queer sexualities among particular categories of priests and diviners,

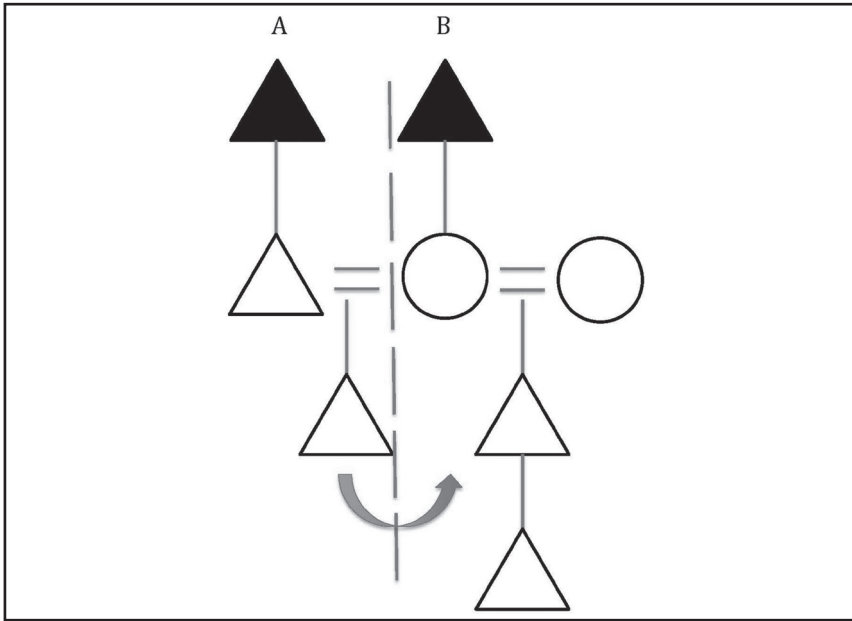


FIGURE 4.
Matrilateral Appropriation from Lineage A to B

generating animated debates about the historical semantics of getting “mounted” or “possessed” as a form of sexual penetration.⁶⁰ Although important work remains to be done in this area, it can be productively framed in similar terms, as originating in flexible gender transformations that were sexualized in the Americas. I know from my research on Yoruba *orisha* worship that the gender shifting among possession priests and practitioners is not only complex and elaborate, generating multiple lines of ritual differentiation, but is also central to the ritual renewal of historic Yoruba kingdoms and communities.⁶¹ I am also confident that such ritualized gender bending had little if anything to do with queer sexualities on the ground, although the situation may have changed in recent decades. Thus the important questions to be pursued concern the relevant historical conditions—the Middle Passage, plantation slavery, urban stratification, and colonial body politics—in which the cultural flexibility of African gender became sexualized in the Americas. If the Igbo legacies in Carriacou are any guide, West African histories of gender and sexuality are indispensable to queering the black Atlantic.

NOTES

1. Important paradigm shifts include Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993); *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004); and Evan B. Towle and Lynn Marie Morgan, "Romancing the Transgender Native: Rethinking the Use of the 'Third Gender' Concept," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 8, no. 4 (2002): 469–97.
2. Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (London: Zed Books, 1987), 3–10; Oyeronke Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 11–17.
3. See Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 14, nos. 2–3 (2008): 193.
4. The ethnic origins of enslaved Africans on Carriacou are difficult to assess because the relevant documentation refers mainly to the "parent" island of Grenada. Nonetheless, it is clear from the Grenadine figures that between 1669 and 1808, 33 percent of the imported slaves were from the Bight of Biafra, compared to 21 percent from the Gold Coast, 14 percent from the Winward Coast, 11 percent from Sierra Leone, 11 percent from West Central Africa, 5 percent from Senegambia, and 5 percent from the Bight of Benin. Of those imported from the Bight of Biafra, the majority were from Bonny and Calabar as opposed to Old Calabar, suggesting a tilt toward Igbo rather than Efik cultural flows. See Shantelle George, "Religion, Identity Formation and Memory among Liberated Africans and Their Descendants in Grenada, 1836 to the Present." PhD diss., University of London, 2016, 40–52; and Edwina Ashie-Nikoi, "'Beating the Pen on the Drum': A Socio-Cultural History of Carriacou, Grenada, 1750–1920." PhD diss., (New York University, 2007), 51–56. For an explicit inventory of African "nations" incorporated into Carriacou's Big Drum ceremony, see Andrew Pearse, "Music in Caribbean Popular Culture," *Revista Interamericana* 8, no. 4 (1978–79): 629–39, where Ibo is identified along with Cromanti, Manding, Arada, Congo, Chamba, Banda, Temne, and Moko.
5. As will become clear, the *madivine* refers to the "butch" role of a female "husband" in relation to her *zami* or "femme" sexual partner or "wife." See M. G. Smith, *Kinship and Community in Carriacou* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962); Andrew Apter, "M. G. Smith on the Isle of Lesbos: Kinship and Sexuality in Carriacou," *New West Indian Guide* 87, nos. 3–4 (2013): 273–93. I use "Ibo" and "Igbo" to distinguish between the Ibo nation in Carriacou and Igbo culture and ethnicity in southeast Nigeria.
6. Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters*; Nwando Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings: Female Power and Authority in Northern Igboland, 1900–1960* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2005). Many of the themes in Achebe's first book are deepened

- and elaborated in Nwando Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria: Ahebi Ugbabe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), on which I also draw to illuminate Igbo-Carriacou connections.
7. It is important to acknowledge that the “status quo” *denial* of sexual relations between Igbo female husbands and their wives may not always obtain in practice. For an important defense of the possibilities of lesbian sexualities in African woman to woman marriages, including Igbo marriages, see Joseph M. Carrier and Stephen O. Murray, “Woman-Woman Marriage in Africa,” in *Boy-Wives and Female Husbands: Studies in African Homosexualities* (New York: Palgrave, 1998), 262–66.
 8. Caveat lector! My expository genre is neither proper history nor proper ethnography, but a somewhat experimental desecration of both, based on the abstraction of sociocultural schemes and correspondences that suggest—but do not prove—transatlantic historical trajectories. The article is grounded in neither localized ethnographic nor archival expertise in these specific societies, but is modeled on similar dynamic trajectories of the Yoruba-Atlantic, with which I am more familiar. I would dub the present foray a kind of “historical schematics,” the value of which lies in generating historical hypotheses that subsequent scholarship might support or refute. For parallel illustrations of this method, see Andrew Apter, *Oduduwa’s Chain: Locations of Culture in the Yoruba-Atlantic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).
 9. See Christine Barrow, “Mating and Sexuality in Carriacou: Social Logic and Surplus Women,” in *M.G. Smith: Social Theory and Anthropology in the Caribbean and Beyond*, ed. Brian Meeks (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle, 2011), 150–2.
 10. Smith, *Kinship*, 217.
 11. *Ibid.*, 118.
 12. *Ibid.*, 199–200.
 13. *Ibid.*, 119.
 14. *Ibid.*, 205.
 15. The *sukuyan* and *lougarou* shape-shifting spirits of Carriacou “roam about and suck the blood from sleeping humans . . .” (Smith, *Kinship*, 89). Islanders also maintain that “two pregnant women must never sleep together since the child of one will ‘suck the blood’ of the other,” a prohibition that shows how lesbian unions can pull the child of one blood-line into another. See Smith, *Kinship*, 135; and Apter, “M. G. Smith,” 288–9.
 16. Donald R. Hill, personal communication, May 10, 2013. Winston Fleary, who directed the Folklife Institute of Grenada, worked as ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax’s research assistant in the 1960s, as well as for Donald Hill in the 1970s, and more recently, Rebecca Miller. He also directed the Big Drum Nation Dance Company during his years in Brooklyn, New York. See Donald R. Hill, *The Impact of Migration on the Metropolitan and Folk Society of Carriacou*, Grenada (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1977), and note 13 below. See also

- Rebecca S. Miller, *Carriacou String Band Serenade: Performing Identity in the Eastern Caribbean* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2007).
17. The possible relationship between the “Old Parents” representing ancestors of a person’s paternal and maternal kin, along cognatic lines in Carriacou, and the classificatory “ancient parents” of a person’s mother’s patrilineage in Igboland, is worth pursuing. See Smith, *Kinship and Community*, 298, and Amadiume, *Male Daughters*, 63, 81.
 18. Although Fleary quoted the three central lines of the song text during our interview, I have reproduced the full song text as it appears in the liner notes accompanying a record of Carriacou music that Donald Hill produced with Fleary’s assistance. See Donald R. Hill, “Notes,” 7, for *The Big Drum and Other Ritual and Social Music of Carriacou* (Ethnic Folkways Records FE 34002, Vinyl LP Album, 1980).
 19. Edwina Ashie-Nikoi, “Beating the Pen on the Drum.” For a methodological approach to ritualized forms of historical memory in the Black Atlantic, see Andrew Apter and Lauren Derby, “Introduction,” in *Activating the Past: History and Memory in the Black Atlantic World*, eds. Andrew Apter and Lauren Derby (Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), xiii–xxxiii.
 20. For earlier documentation of woman-marriage and “male daughters,” see Northcote Whitridge Thomas, *Anthropological Report on the Ibo-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria, Part IV* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1914); Charles Kingsley Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937); Percy Amaury Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, vols. 3 and 4 (London: Oxford University Press, 1926).
 21. Double-descent is found further east, such as in Afikpo and Ohafia. See Simon Ottenberg, *Double Descent in an African Society: The Afikpo Village-Group* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968); and John C. McCall, *Dancing Histories: Heuristic Ethnography with the Ohafia Igbo* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).
 22. The Igbo term for a localized patrilineage is *umunna*, although there is much regional variation in descent group terminology. See Daryll Forde and G. I. Jones, *The Ibo and Ibo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples of South-Eastern Nigeria* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 15. For competing analytical and cultural models of Igbo descent, see John McCall, “Rethinking Ancestors in Africa,” *Africa* 65, no. 2 (1995): 256–70.
 23. The term “male daughter” is a bit of a misnomer, particularly in relation to “female husband,” because in the former, gender takes priority over sex whereas in the latter, sex takes priority over gender. For this reason Achebe prefers the term “female sons.” See Achebe, *Farmers*, 15, 72, 77, 229. I retain “male daughters” in discussing Amadiume’s work to maintain consistency with her usage.
 24. Amadiume’s discussion of the male-daughter Nwajiuba illustrates this strategy of repaying bridewealth to regain her rights in *genetricem*. See Amadiume, *Male Daughters*, 32–33.

25. For the distinction between “pater” and “genitor” as social versus physiological fatherhood (to which he would add “mater” and “genetrix” for social vs. physiological motherhood) see A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, “Introduction,” in *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, ed. A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and Daryll Forde (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 4.
26. Amadiume, *Male Daughters*, 34.
27. *Ibid.*, 35.
28. For similar Yoruba patterns of the matrilateral “snatching” of male progeny from patriline, see Andrew Apter, “The Blood of Mothers: Women, Money and Markets in Yoruba-Atlantic Perspective,” *Journal of African American History* 98, no. 1 (2013): 72–98.
29. Amadiume explains that when a female husband paid the equivalent of bride-wealth for a wife, it was referred to as “buying a slave,” although the woman so bought had the status of wife of the woman who bought her, “who was referred to as her husband” (Amadiume, *Male Daughters*, 46–47).
30. *Ibid.*, 46.
31. The concept of “complementary filiation” was first developed by Meyer Fortes to specify the importance of matrilateral kinship ties, and relations with the mother’s patrilineage, in societies organized by agnatic descent. In principle, it applies to patrilateral kinship ties in matrilineal societies as well. See Meyer Fortes, *The Web of Kinship among the Tallensi* (London: Oxford University Press, 1949).
32. Amadiume, *Male Daughters*, 48.
33. *Ibid.*
34. For this reason Achebe prefers the term “child price.” See Achebe, *Female King*, 39–40.
35. For the importance of situating oral interviews and histories in their discursive and performative contexts to illuminate their meanings, see Lauren Derby, “Beyond Fugitive Speech: Rumor and Affect in Caribbean History,” *Small Axe* 44 (July 2014): 123–40.
36. Amadiume, *Male Daughters*, 48–49.
37. It is also possible that Johnson Ume’s father was born of one of his mother’s nine wives, thereby taking her name as his “pater.”
38. Johnson’s account of why Ifeyinwa outranked her senior cowife due to the latter’s “laziness” in preparing food can be seen as a kind of morality tale covering the underlying logic of lineage appropriation.
39. See Achebe, *Female King*. For an extraordinary account of how Ahebi underwent a live male burial ritual to ensure her/his transition into ancestorhood, see Achebe, *Female King*, 187–96. Ahebi’s actual death occurred several years later.
40. Achebe, *Farmers*, 76.
41. *Ibid.*, 60. Achebe uses the term “sperm donors” to describe the role of male priests (*attama*) of Adoro in impregnating her dedicatee-wives.
42. For an illuminating exploration of “marriages” to water spirits, as incarnated by Igbo *ogbaanje* children, see Misty L. Bastian, “Married in the Water: Spirit Kin

- and Other Afflictions of Modernity in Southeastern Nigeria,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 27, no. 2 (1997): 116–34.
43. Achebe, *Farmers*, 141.
 44. Ibid.
 45. D. C. Ugwu, *This is Nsukka* (Apapa, Nigeria: Nigerian National Press, 1958), 35. Quoted in Achebe, *Farmers*, 163. For the similar Oro Efe spirit of the Gelede cult in Yorubaland, see Henry Drewal and Margaret Drewal, *Gelede: Yoruba Art and Female Power* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983).
 46. For similar structural tendencies in Yorubaland, see Apter, “Atinga Revisited” and “The Blood of Mothers.”
 47. Achebe, *Farmers*, 187, n.6.
 48. Ibid., 163.
 49. In addition to Achebe’s case study, *Female King*, see her *Farmers*, 197–224.
 50. Achebe, *Farmers*, 210.
 51. In some accounts, Achebe had a husband, Eze Nwa Ezema, who “fathered” Achebe’s only child (a daughter) before she became wealthy and divorced him. Although the daughter, Oriefi Eze Nwa Ezema, took her father’s name, her children took Achebe Ugbabe’s surname. See the family tree in Achebe, *Female King*, 44.
 52. Achebe, *Farmers*, 213.
 53. As Amadiume states, “A patrilineage was said to be a little town of its own. . . .” (Amadiume, *Male Daughters*, 58). Like Igbo lineage systems, Igbo political systems reveal significant regional variations. Useful colonial accounts include Margaret M. Green, *Igbo Village Affairs* (London: Frank Cass, 1964 [1947]); C. K. Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937); Daryll Forde and G. I. Jones, *The Ibo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples of South-Eastern Nigeria* (London: Oxford University Press for The International African Institute, 1950), and P. Amaury Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, vol. 4 (London: Oxford University Press, 1926). Important subsequent studies include Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People* (London: Macmillan, 1976); Toyin Falola, ed., *Igbo History and Society: The Essays of Adiele Afigbo* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2005); Mazi Elechukwu Nnadibuagha Njaka, *Igbo Political Culture* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974), particularly 83–133; and Ikenna Nzimiro, *Studies in Ibo Political Systems: Chieftaincy and Politics in Four Niger States* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972).
 54. Achebe, *Female King*, 187.
 55. Ibid., 189.
 56. For a discussion of Achebe’s deification into a goddess, see Achebe, *Female King*, 203–6. The final irony is the remaining possibility that if Achebe as goddess were to receive dedicatee-wives, they could reproduce for her as their female husband, and therefore “pater” to their children, thereby inaugurating the privileged patri-line that she sought so relentlessly during her lifetime.
 57. Amadiume, *Male Daughters*, 7.
 58. Achebe, *Female King*, 59.

59. Such a diversion should not be seen as a form matrilineal descent, but rather a wife's appropriation of her husband's patriline into her own patriline. I would not be surprised, however, if the complex variations of both Igbo descent and Carriacou "bloods" (patrilineal, double-unilineal, even matrilineal) are generated by the gendered contradictions of matrilineal lineage appropriation, a hypothesis worth pursuing further.
60. See J. Lorand Matory, "Gendered Agendas: The Secrets Scholars Keep about Yorùbá-Atlantic Religion," *Gender and History* 15, no. 3 (2003): 409–39; *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), particularly 207–19.
61. Andrew Apter, *Black Critics and Kings: The Hermeneutics of Power in Yoruba Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), particularly 97–148. See also Drewal and Drewal, *Gelede*; and especially J. Lorand Matory, *Sex and the Empire That is No More: Gender and the Politics of Metaphor in Oyo Yoruba Religion* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005 [1994]); and "Government by Seduction: History and the Tropes of 'Mounting' in Oyo-Yoruba Religion," in *Modernity and its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa*, eds. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 58–85.

ANDREW APTER is Professor of History and Anthropology at UCLA, where he directed the African Studies Center (2007–2010). His books include *Black Critics and Kings: The Hermeneutics of Power in Yoruba Society* (1992); *The Pan-African Nation: Oil and the Spectacle of Culture in Nigeria* (2005); *Beyond Words: Discourse and Critical Agency in Africa* (2007), and *Oduduwa's Chain: Locations of Culture in the Yoruba-Atlantic* (2017), all with the University of Chicago Press. He also coedited *Activating the Past: History and Memory in the Black Atlantic World* (2010) with Lauren Derby. Working at the crossroads of history and anthropology, he is currently writing a revisionary history of Atlantic slavery from the standpoint of the ritual archive.