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When a Dream Turns into a Nightmare: Failed 'Americano' Masculinities in Unoma Nguemo Azuah's *Edible Bones* and Ike Oguine's *A Squatter's Tale*

Ronald Musanje[1]
[1] Kyambogo University, Uganda
Corresponding author: rmusanje@kyu.ac.ug

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Abstract

This article offers a close reading of Unoma Nguemo Azuah's *Edible Bones* (2012) and Ike *Oguine'sA Squatter's Tale* (2000), illustrating that male Nigerian immigrants presented in the text reconfigure and renegotiate their masculine identities in relation to the desire to achieve the American Dream. Yet, as the text highlights, their settlement in America often belies that dream. Instead, subtle race structures function to impose setbacks that undermine and curtail their efforts to achieve a successful performativity of immigrant masculinity. Conversely, they experience ruptures in their previous understanding of sexuality and masculinity. Such ruptures are undoubtedly precipitated through arduous conscious and unconscious processes of readjustment to the host culture and its socio-economic environment. In this new realignment of masculinities, pre-immigrant masculine and sexual codes coalesce with race, African culture and the American class stratum to engender a masculine identity crisis and sometimes ignominious returns to Nigeria.

1.1 Introduction

This article argues that fictive undocumented male Nigerian immigrants in America, who figure large in Nguemo Azuah's *Edible Bones* (2012) and Ike Oguine's *A Squatter's* Tale, reconfigure, and renegotiate their masculine identities in relation to the desire to achieve the American Dream. However, as this reading illuminates, their migration to America often belies those very successes that they aim to accomplish. Instead, subtle race structures function to impose setbacks that undermine or curtail their efforts to achieve a successful performance of immigrant masculinity. Conversely, undocumented Americanos[90] experience ruptures in their previous understanding of sexuality and masculinity when they settle in America. Such ruptures are undoubtedly precipitated through arduous conscious and unconscious processes of readjustment to the host culture and its socio-economic environment. In this new realignment of masculinities, pre-immigration masculine

and sexual codes coalesce with race, culture and the class stratum in the host country to engender masculine identity crises and sometimes the emigrant ignominiously returns to Africa. In articulating the masculinities of Americanos, I not only draw attention to the precarious social and economic position that they occupy, but also argue that they rank beneath liberated and economically independent American women.

[90]An Americano is a Nigerian emigrant who has been living in America.

In reading the fictionalised immigrant masculinities in these texts, I find Fongang (2018) observation that, “African migrants’ intersectional [identities], position them as outsiders, never fully belonging anywhere as they constantly struggle to assert themselves in spaces that marginalizethem” (p. 1) a useful critical lens to read masculinities in emigrant fiction. Her observation is in resonance with an earlier view expressed by Muller’s (1999) that “immigrant characters in contemporary fiction, find themselves surrounded by an acute dissonance of cultural messages, caught in the contradictions of American myths and realities” (p. 8). Even though Fongang and Muller’s observations do not directly address emigrant masculinities, they implicitly draw attentionto the bafflement immigrant protagonists experience as they renegotiate their previous understanding of manhood with those they encounter in America. Secondly, their observations also imply that African emigrants are marginalised entities in Western settings and this, in part, renders their masculinities vulnerable to emasculation. Many of these emigrants come to the final realisationthat achieving a successful immigrant masculinity through the pursuit of the seductive American Dream is more an illusion than a reality. Yet, despite its assiduous media over-popularisation, especially during the election of the first black American president, Barack Hussein Obama, in 2008[91], the American Dream remains elusive to many African immigrants in America.

1.2 Pre-emigrant and Emigrant Masculinities in Ike Oguine’s *A Squatter’s Tale*

A Squatter’s Tale is a story of emigration. It lucidly relays the life of Obi, a twenty-nine-year-old former Lagos Finance Trust executive. Obi comes from an indigent home that lives in a reasonably comfortable low middle-class quarter of Yaba in Lagos. Like many of his Nigerian contemporaries, who are frustrated with their country, emigration to America or the so-called West is seen as a means for achieving material success but also for the pursuit of a successful immigrant masculinity. Obi’s enthusiasm to pursue success is explicitly stated in his vision, “to save some money, do a good MBA and then [get] a nice job in a good corperation” (Oguine 2000, p.27). These pursuits, to Obi, are the hallmarks for a successful immigrant masculinity. He is naively driven to migrate to America by the need to achieve the American Dream. Yet, as Arthur (2012) succinctly observes, such a dream is elusive since:

> This group of African immigrants lives on the margin of the host society and a more likely than those with valid authorization and legal status to focus their energies on working multiple minimum wage jobs, living frugally, and eventually repatriating their assets home (p.6).

[91] President Hussien Barack Obama's election victory seemed to segue a false impression of a post-racial America, with a naively reductive slogan that runs 'it does not matter wherever you come from, you can make it in America'. However, Springer & Nnaemeka (2016) repudiate this slogan, when they observe that "The continuation of racial profiling; introduction of immigration laws that adversely affect disproportionately people of colour; abuse and mistreat of the 'Other,' and racial disparities refute arguments of a post-race existence." (p. xv).

By the very fact that they are undocumented and marginalised, implies that their masculine performativity is also constrained. The reading of *A Squatter's Tale* vividly illuminates that these characters' migration from Nigeria to America, often belies those very successes or dreams that they aim to accomplish. Instead, subtle race structures function to impose setbacks that undermine or curtail their efforts to achieve a successful performance of immigrant masculinity. Conversely, undocumented Americanos, as they are referred to in Nigeria, experience ruptures in their previous understanding of sexuality and masculinity when they settle in America. Such ruptures are undoubtedly precipitated through arduous conscious and unconscious processes of readjustment to the host culture and its socio-economic environment. In this new realignment of masculinities, pre-immigration masculine and sexual codes coalesce with race and class stratum in the host country to engender masculine identity crises and sometimes the emigrant ignominiously returns toAfrica. In articulating the masculinities of Americanos, I not only draw attention to the precarious social and economic position that they occupy, but also argue that they rank beneath liberated and economically independent American women and this inevitably leads to a declination in their previous masculinity.

In *A Squatter's Tale,* the declination of Obi's social and masculine status in America, can only be understood by excavating the masculine environment that characterises his teenage undergraduate days in Lagos. A background that richly shapes and informs much of his sexist and misogynistic codes of pre-immigration masculinity. Here Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus*[92] and *capital*[93] are very productive: the masculine capital and habitus that Obi inhabits as a university student in Lagos reveres violence, consumerism, excessive sexual prowess and conquests as prototypical barometers of masculinity. Consequently, any man who deviates from these hegemonic models is not only held in contempt but also marginalised. The male university students' scornful treatment of Andrew, Obi's asexual and devout Christian university hallmate, speaks volumes about the perils of enacting a masculinity that deviates from the dominant masculine codes of Lagos. As Vasquez del Aguila cogently reminds us, "sex with women is viewed as a way of demonstrating masculinity [and] that [it] can be used to command respect and confer status on some males while deriding others" (Vasquez del Aguila 2014, p. 74). True to her observation, while sexual prowess and endless sexual conquests give Obi and his sexiest hallmate Bronzo dominant status within the university's male hierarchy, non-sexiest males like Andrew are ranked below it. Despite Andrew'sexposure to the university's sexually charged habitus, he does not feel the compulsion to display the male proclivity towards sexual promiscuity.

[92]Habitus has been understood in complex ways. In this article, I understand habitus to refer to 'to ways in which individuals live out their daily lives through practices that are synchronized with the actions of others around them, functioning to produce a social collective that is not ordered by rules per se but influenced by objective structures" (Coles 2016, p. 314).
[93]My understanding of Capital is also based on Coles' (2016) interpretation of Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualization of the concept. Capital to Coles is understood as " a resource that is the object of struggle within fields and which functions as a social relation of power […] Broadly, to Coles, Bourdieu observes three types of capital that exist perennially within most fields: economic capital, which refers to financial resources; social capital, which refers to one's social networks and the status of individual's therein; and cultural capital, which broadly considers one's cultural skills, tastes, preferences, qualifications, and so forth that operate as class distinction" (p.315).

His indifference to the hall's sexual codes renders him 'unauthenticated' as a man and consequently the male students constantly question his masculinity and sexuality.

Even though the university excoriates and invalidates Andrew's masculine performance on the premise that he is unmanly, we must bear in mind Chandler's (2011) assertion that,

> Within an individual's native culture, authenticity with respect to cultural membership is determined by the perceived legitimacy of an individual's behaviour and worldview. Often, an individual is authenticated by a set of rules that are antithetical to norms of the individuals of the dominant society (p.61).

Chandler not only contextualizes masculine authenticity as premised on the degree to which a man conforms to dominant ideals of his community, he goes further to contend that society judges the display of a man's masculinity by the codes that he contravenes. Andrew's religious, studious "nervous, nerdy, [and] apologetic" character, as well as the deformity in his "square face and [the] bad right leg, which he broke the first day he [tries], as a kid to play football and which he [drags] along painfully as he [walks]" become emblematic of his dysfunctional masculinity (Oguine 2000, p. 17). The 'bad leg,' serves as a recurrent metaphor for his marginalisation precisely because it incapacitates his ability to participate in masculine games such as football. As a result, he is constantly a victim of sexist slurs from his Alpha male hallmates, especially one particular Bronzo, who derives enormous pleasure in taunting him. The narrator humorously describes one such episode this way.

> Bronzo would stop him in the corridor after a long night of studying and shake his penis at Andrew and bleat, 'Andy boy, can you lend me one of your succulent sisters in Christ just for a night; you know I'm not greedy, just for a night. I guarantee top quality of service! Andrew would smile nervously and say, "Bronzo, as soon as you accept Jesus Christ as your personal saviour, you'll find that the things of the flesh are not as important as you think,' and he would walk past to his room while Bronzo continued bleating behind, 'Just for one night, Andy my boy. Let me teach her a thing or two. And you too, you can watch. I'll give you full video rights. Your life will never be the same afterwards!" (Oguine 2000, pp.18-19).

In the excerpt above, Bronzo maps himself as the veritable essence of the hall's hegemonic

masculinity. The narrator uses the synecdoche “bleat” to capture his sexual vitality. This figure of speech cogently associates sexual lust with the animal world of a male goat. In his promise to give Andrew voyeuristic rights to his sexual performances, Bronzo not only highlights his hypersexuality but also aims at emasculating Andrew through an implicit questioning of his sexual experience. Bronzo’s sexual boasting derives from what Vasquez del Aguila (2014) terms as the cultural compulsion for men “to demonstrate not only their desire for women but also to show off their skills and knowledge of sexuality” (p. 67). Bronzo’s sexual slurs and the exaggerated screams he makes as he ejaculates during his sexual escapades are only meant to reaffirm his maleness. Musing about Bronzo’s life, years later, Obi, the mature narrator, tells us that,

> [he] realise[s] now with hindsight that Bronzo’s screams while ejaculating probably had less to do with sexual pleasure than with the need to advertise to all of [them] that he was having good sex. For among [their] bunch of teenage undergrads, the awe and envy of [one’s] friends [was a lot more important than the thundering orgasm (Oguine 2000, p.18).

Bronzo’s screams ought to be interpreted as a male sexual language that unequivocally show his virile heterosexual certitude.

While Bronzo uses consensual sexual experiences to validate his sexuality, other hallmates like Illya, legitimate rape as a means to do so. The rape of female students on campus is based on an implicit premise that it is part of its undergraduate masculine culture. This precisely explains the solidarity and camaraderie the male students extend to Illya when a female student he rapes presses charges against him with the police. It is therefore, this homosocial but misogynistic setting, which undeniably enables and provides Obi with the masculine capital to perform a promiscuous heterosexuality even long after his university days are done. His white-collar job as a finance trust executive only enhances the opportunities and monetary resources crucial for its constant reaffirmation. The narrator comments:

> [He] had quickly become used to an affluent lifestyle of the financial industry executive: [his] wardrobe was filled with designer clothes, [his] dresser at home was like a display case in a perfume shop, but [he] had no savings” (Oguine 2000, p. 91).

Obi’s display of masculinity, though not in complete parity with his boss, Philip, replicates it. Both Philip and Obi display a combination of metrosexuality, phallocentrism and misogyny, which are amplified by their obsession with international fashion designs. Obi’s clothes, car and job are masculine accoutrements that invite envy from other socially disadvantaged men but also garner him the masculine respect he feels he deserves. However, shortly before his emigration to America, they are already incipient signs that Obi is slowly falling from this echelon of masculinity. The loss of his job due to the collapse of the Nigerian financial system is not only a threat to his livelihood but also to his masculine performativity. Consequently, Obi’s unemployment effaces his self-actualization, which until then has been constitutive of his masculine self-identity.

Pessimistic that there is no future for him in his own country, Obi manages to acquire an American visa by masquerading as a member of a Nigerian performing troupe scheduled for a show in New York. The very promise of the American Dream bamboozles him to think that he has a chance to

regain some sense of masculine dignity that has been eroded by his unemployment. Ironically, in this 'God's paradise,' where he is optimistic to make a fresh start, his middle-class lifestyle that gave succour to his phallic masculinity and sexuality in Lagos is not easily guaranteed but rather truncated. While in Lagos, his employment at the finance trust and the consumerism it sustained are dependent on the lucrative corruption deals from Sawa, a Lagosian businessman with close ties to the Nigerian military junta; in America, he has no such opportunities. His status as an illegal immigrant constantly constrains the performance of his pre-immigrant masculine subjectivity and status.

In Oakland, United States, events quickly accentuate the alteration of Obi's masculinity. The very first constraint to his sexist and promiscuous masculinity arises from the difficulty of getting access to easy sexual prey. Obi comes to Oakland with a preconception that many American women are sexually loose.

He therefore mistakenly thinks that it will be easy for him to continue with his promiscuity. In his reminiscences, Obi shows that "[he] looked forward[s] to a career of debauchery in America" (Oguine 2000, p. 49). However, to his dismay, he learns that Kurubo, his former university hallmate in Lagos has falsely encouraged him to blow his sexual expectations out of proportion. Kurubo promises to hook him up with an American woman upon his arrival in America, which Obi construes a rite of passage into American society and manhood. In a phone conversation with Obi,prior to his arrival in Oakland, Kurubo gives false assurance to him that

> [he had] just moved to a new place, three massive bedrooms, lotta room, lovely beds, excellent for balling. We are going to have a swell time. You need to see da black American chicks, you need to see them. You'll lose your mind. I guarantee you, your mind will burst" (Oguine 2000, p.14).

Obi comes to the realisation that the United States is a more complex and intricate place to negotiate than he had initially imagined. While in Oakland City, Obi nostalgically recalls that whereas in Lagos, "[he had] taken advantage of women before, far more times than [he] cared to remember. [He had] snatched at every opportunity to get some sex" (Oguine 2000, p.168), in America this is unlikely to continue. His poverty, low-class status, blackness, language, and accent,all conflate to render the continuation of his Lagos sexual pageants impossible.

One such realisation is his aborted attempt to seduce an American girl he meets at the bookshop in Berkeley. For Obi, this is the first episode that brings to his awareness that his sexual promiscuity is no longer sustainable. But interestingly, the event also speaks volumes about his social exclusion as an African emigrant. His ability to seduce is rendered impossible not only by differences in culture, but also accent and race. He himself confesses to the readers, that the "seduction drowned in the gulf between [his] accent and that of the girl with long brown hair. [He] retreated embarrassed and frustrated" (Oguine 2000, pp.48-49). When he tries to initiate a flirtatious conversation with her, the situation becomes staccato as the girl constantly begs his pardon under the pretext that she does not understand his Nigerian accent. Yet, Obi tells us that he was regarded as the best at English during his school days in Nigeria. Therefore, it is derisive that the American girl keeps regurgitating his words in Standard American English in order to correct his pronunciation. Obi remarks that she was

"pronouncing each of them carefully in her American accent, rescuing them, like abused children, from the violence [his] accent had done to them" (Oguine 2000, p. 48).

The girl's constant repetition of Obi's words brings to mind Fanon's observation about the "Negro" and language in *Black Skin, White Masks* that, "A white man addressing a Negro behaves exactly like an adult with a child and starts, smirking, whispering, patronizing, cozening" (Fanon 1986, p.20). Here, the girl is not only treating Obi like a child, but she is indirectly undermining his manhood as well. Language instead of being the very means through which desire is expressed becomes the conduit in which it is thwarted. He comes to realise that some Americans have a cultural bigotry for those who do not enunciate English words exactly like they do. Obi avows that,"to many Americans ears, a foreign accent was off-putting, like a bad smell" (Oguine 2010, p. 48).Language becomes a powerful tool that mainstream Americans use to socially exclude non-Americans. Obi comes to realise the rationality behind the often-ridiculous American accents that some Nigerians immigrants fake to pass as Americans.

Oguine in A Squatter's Tale also highlights that some African male emigrants find it difficult to fulfil the patriarchal norm of marriage. For instance, Obi's uncle, Happiness, at fifty is still a bachelor simply because he has no financial means to get married. In many African cultures, a man who remains unmarried is categorised as half a man or a boy. But Happiness justifies his long bachelorhood status by telling Obi that: Your mother, my sister, she does not understand. But you are a man, you will understand. I wanted a wife, yes, I wanted a wife. But you do not bring a woman all the way from home to come here and suffer (Oguine 2010, p. 25).

Despite all the years that Happiness has spent in America, he has never really arrived or enjoyed the American Dream because of a lack of employment. The car he drives, "[is] a wide antique old with as many dents and scratches as a Lagos taxicab; the seat was so mushy it felt like sitting in a swamp" (Oguine 2010, p. 22). Happiness sees that he cannot take care of a wife and decides to opt out of marriage. In doing so he not only alienates himself from his family but also renders himself a failed man who cannot scatter his seed.

Besides the failure of some of these African male immigrants to achieve masculinity through marriage, Oguine shows that immigrant African men cope differently with the failure to achieve material and professional success. In trying to mitigate this stigma, they deceive their relatives in Africa that they have made it in America. Uncle Happiness, despite his poverty, falsely performs a successful American immigrant masculinity when he visits Nigeria. He arrives in Yaba clad in American cowboy attire and showers the young Obi and his parents with gifts. Obi remarks, "Uncle Happiness's bags and trunk brought for us the sort of fabulous riches you hear about in folk-tales" (Oguine 2010, p.3). Ironically, he tells them fabulous stories that America is a land where everybody can succeed yet he himself is not anywhere near the success he preaches. He says, the "The Man whose job is to throw the food is one of the richest men in America because he has so much food to throw away and he is very well paid because he does a difficult job" (Oguine 2000, pp. 5-6).

Even though Uncle Happiness's stories are challenged by the well informed Ademeyo, a neighbour and landlord to Obi's parents, Uncle Happiness insists on his exaggerated falsehoods about America

as a land of plenty for all. To Happiness, the newspapers that Ademeyo reads "are controlled by Jews and Russians who want to cause trouble in America. Unemployment in America? When they are begging you to come?" (Oguine 2000, p.7). It is only until Obi arrives in Oakland that he discovers for himself that Uncle Happiness's utopian stories about America are at variance with the very truths they assume to promulgate. For America is not a land for all who wish to pursue successful masculinity. Despite the many years Happiness has been living there, he has nothing to show for himself. In fact, he fails to pick Obi up from the airport, leaving him to find his way to his dilapidated apartment and turning up when he learns that Obi is settling in with Andrew, his former university hallmate at Lagos. If Andrew was not on a missionary training programme in America, Obi would have been completely stranded. Obi's description of his uncle's apartment merits detailed quoting here precisely because it does show any signs of material success.

> The Brown sofa on which I sat was a massive semi-circle; it took up more than two-thirds of the living room, but each thread on it sagged as though someone had painstakingly pulled on every one of them. The sofa faced a huge cabinet. Rusted cassette decks, amplifiers and turntables were piled on it in no particular order, like junk. In the centre was an ancient 26-inch TV which surprisingly showed bright pictures, but you couldn't hear what was being said because of a constant vicious hiss that came from the back of it. The walls of the living room, originally painted white, suffered from a spreading spotted grey eczema. On the floor was a carpet long tramped to a dusty-milk death; its farthest edges showed that, while alive, it had had green and yellow designs. A fierce smell, an oppressive compound of cigarette smoke and frying oil, sweat and damp, decay and despair ruled the room (Oguine 2000, p.10).

Here the metaphors of decay such as "rusted cassette decks," "grey eczema," "sweat and damp" become symbols of a Happiness' failure to achieve the material successes that are associated with the American Dream. Later on, after his first ride out in Oakland with Uncle Happiness, Obi again describes his uncle's apartment as "[smelling] of stale sweat and failure" (Oguine 2000, pp. 25-26). In one way or the other, the metaphors of putrefaction are associated with the failure to achieve the middle-class masculine status that many African immigrants envision for themselves in America. Oguine incorporates the sub-plot of Dr. Ezendu, the husband of Ego and a family friend of Obi's parents, to speak to the fact that professional attainment alone is not enough to affirm the masculinity of the African immigrant. On the contrary, mainstream American society needs to recognise one's exceptional professionalism. However, in a country like America that markets itself as a meritocracy where a man's worth is not judged on the colour of his skin but competence and hard work, it is a contradiction that race continues to be the significant lens through which one's professionalism is approved. The America that Dr. Ezendu describes is that which ironically sees exceptionally competent black professional people as incompetent professionals. Judging from appearances, Dr. Ezendu is a perfect example of an immigrant who exhibits successful immigrant masculinity; he is the best surgeon in Los Angeles, lives in a mansion located in a white, affluent neighbourhood and makes more money than his wife can spend. However, he remains a deeply insecure man. In the racist environment in which he works, anti-black racism undermines his professional skills and forces him to be perpetually on his guard. He tells Obi,

> You [have] to prove yourself over and over again everyday of your life, every minute. Ezendu paused; he looked like a man who had knife wounds that were forever deepening and widen. The contrast between his beautiful house, his young beautiful wife, his stash of money, all his wonderful possessions and this squalid, comprehensive bitterness was startling (Oguine 2010, p. 129).

Dr. Ezendu's bitterness and lack of self-actualization arises precisely because some white people refuse to acknowledge his professionalism despite being the best surgeon in all Los Angeles. He narrates an emergency in which a white woman is rushed into the hospital in a condition that demands instant surgery, yet, she refuses to be operated on by him because he is black.
When I was in LA, he said, 'a white woman was brought in for emergency surgery and I was checking her with a young white doctor who worked under me. This woman said, right there in front me, that she hoped they were not going to let me into the room when she was being operated on.

I was the best surgeon in that hospital by a mile. And that woman said in front of a young white doctor who worked for me (Oguine 2000, p. 128).
This deeply ingrained racism undermines his spirit and his masculinity. His treatment by the white woman reminds us of critic bell hooks' assertion that "black males are [seen as] lacking inintellectual skills. Stereotyped via racism and sexism as being body than mind" (hooks 2004, p.33).Ironically, Oguine highlights that there are incidents in which the 'new' successful and professionalAfrican immigrant ranks himself close to whiteness and refracts white racist stereotypes to his African American brother. Dr. Ezendu ostensibly draws on these racial stereotypes to caution Obi to keep away from African Americans. The narrator records, "Black Americans, he said with venom, were to be avoided completely. They [are] lazy, dishonest, dissolute, grasping; in short, they had all the vices known to mankind and apparently not a single virtue" (Oguine 2010, p.127). What is evenmore perplexing, the bigotry of the successful professional African immigrant makes him assume he is a step above the African American and in that sense, he unconsciously becomes an acolyte of white racist ideologies against African Americans. And yet, regardless of where the dark races are geographically located, they still believe in a common bond of brotherhood that is premised on a common suffering under traumatizing and dehumanizing European colonialism or white subjugation. However, Ezendu's remarks are rather harsh because they seem to ignore that white privilege and black incarceration insidiously continue to shape the collective experience of many African Americans and drives some of them to such irresponsible and dangerous masculinity.

1.3 Emigrant Masculinities in Unoma Nguemo Azuah's *Edible Bones*

Like Oguine's *A Squatter's Tale* (2000), Unoma Nguemo Azuah's *Edible Bones* (2012) is also a story of migration. Kaito, a youthful Nigerian, immigrates for 'greener pastures' in America living his family and friends Jamma, Bola, Sami and Mezi behind. He hopes to flee the economic hardships, systemic corruption, political dysfunctionality, tribalism that are endemic features of contemporary Nigerian life. He hopes that within a short period of time, he will display an ' Americano' masculinity that is based on a number of masculine status symbols such as advancement in higher education, having an affluent job, displaying conspicuous consumption, remitting money to poor relatives, building mansions in Nigeria, getting married and uplifting the financial welfare of his parents and relatives. However, to the shock of his friends, Kaito returns to Nigeria with almost nothing to show that he has achieved a successful 'Americano' masculinity. Conversely, the

friends he left in Nigeria have done well for themselves. Kaito's return turns out to be a painful experience rather than an enjoyable reunion with family and friends. To make matters worse, while in America, Kaito has involved himself with white American women who have kind of emasculated his patriarchal African masculinity.

Unlike Ike Oguine who substantially excavates the pre-immigrant masculine habitus of his protagonist, Unoma Nguemo Azuah does not do so in *Edible Bones.* Nevertheless, Edible Bones emphasises that the patriarchal masculinity of undocumented male African immigrants, is in a large measure, undermined by their American girlfriends or wives. Kaito's relationship with Beth, a Caucasian receptionist at the University of Quentin, is driven by his desperate need to find where to stay while Beth is fascinated by Kaito's muscularity and she anticipates using him as her sex machine. To ensure that he is firmly under her control, she forbids him from getting out of her apartment without her knowledge. As he later learns, Beth uses the pretext of the threat that her apartment manager will evict her if he sees Kaito roaming around to keep him a kept man.

And yet, it is clear that Beth has no intention to help Kaito find Kamalu, his Nigerian friend whom he hopes to stay with in America. Her intention is to domesticate Kaito, which to him amounts to the transgression of his Igbo phallocentric code of masculinity. A masculinity that stipulates that a man must not only be the breadwinner, but also have control over his women. Beth's determination to keep Kaito kept is demonstrated by her constant replenishing of food and condoms and, in return, she expects Kaito to satisfy her insatiable sexual appetite. Consequently, he gets frustrated with Beth and decides to look for Kamalu himself.

Kaito's termination of his relationship with Beth does not give him the leverage to perform his pre-immigrant patriarchal brand of masculinity, but rather renders him more vulnerable to the American immigration system. Beth demands that Kaito pays her for food and the use of her facilities or she will turn him in to the police. Kaito finds himself using all of his meagre wages to repay her; a situation that further compromises his financial independence. Moreover, Kaito pre-immigrant masculinity and sexuality are rendered more precarious and unsustainable when he gets entangled with Sabrina, another white woman and then later with Jemina, an independent African American woman. Although Sabrina is genuinely interested in Kaito and his African culture, she finds Kaito too sexist and she refuses to accept his codes of masculinity. Given the fact that Sabrina rents the apartment where they live, and that she is in a large measure the bread winner, Kaito fails to force Sabrina to behave as an obedient African wife. She continues to resist Kaito's patriarchal authority by refusing to cook and to clean the apartment and yet Kaito expects her to adhere to the quintessential duties and behaviours of an African wife. A situation that is absolutely ridiculous in a liberal American setting. The narrator comments.

> He could often tell her that he was not supposed to cook at all since there was a woman in the house. He would tell her not to drink, and not to smoke in public, that these were not good habits for a woman who intended to become a mother someday. Sabrina never agreed with him and found his reasons ridiculous (Azuah 2012, p. 44).

What is more frustrating to Kaito is that he cannot use his masculine violence to domesticate Sabrina. While in Africa his belief that a slap or cane will make a woman submit can be met with success this is not possible in America. Kaito is perspicacious about his illegal status and the American law which is there to protect Sabrina from his domestic violence. The day he tries to assert patriarchal authority through the threat of violence, “Sabrina [does not] forget to put him in his place” (Azuah 2012, p. 44). All these frustrate Kaito’s masculinity and his hope of settling down with her. The narrator makes it clear that Kaito’s hopes to “domesticate her, teach her how to cook even his favourite Nigerian meal” will end in nothing (Azuah 2012, p. 52). Unfortunately, the relationship breaks up due to Sabrina’s pregnancy and Kaito’s inability to meet the paternal care the baby would deserve. This is another indication that Kaito cannot perform the breadwinner code of masculinity. Azuah emphasises that the break-up is not irresponsibility on Kaito’s part, on the contrary, it is brought about by the immigration laws that limit his employment opportunities thereby disenabling him to meet the demands of responsible fatherhood in America. And yet, fatherhood is an important hallmark of phallic masculinity.

Kaito’s relationship with Jemina, a nagging African American woman older than he is, underscores that African emigrant men must change their thinking about manhood and adjust to the American gender system. The Canadian scholar Daniel Coleman reminds us that in the process of migration “values and beliefs that may be unconsciously assumed at home are disrupted in migration, and the immigrant usually 84through a process of re-evaluation and adjustment” (Coleman 1998, p. xii). In a large measure this is true for Kaito, precisely because he gets reconciled to the notion that a woman can openly control and patronise a man. Though he feels Jemina undermines his masculinity, especially when she lustfully objectifies him, he has no choice but to acclimatise to her demands if he is to survive as a destitute undocumented emigrant in America. Jemina exploits Kaito’s vulnerability, “she started ordering him around as if he were some servant. Kaito, wash thedishes! Kaito, clean out the yard! Kaito, make the bed!” (Azuah 2012, p. 62). Kaito, as aphallocentric African man, construes such duties as women’s work, and he, therefore, feels that heis deliberately being undermined and emasculated.

Presenting the relationship in this manner, Azuah demonstrates the masculine challenges that might occur when a poor man marries a financially well-off independent minded woman. Jemina’s financial situation enables her to treat Kaito like a child. The narrator comments, “He didn’t mind all the orders she gave until she started yelling and scolding him like a child” (Azuah 2012, p.63). It is a situation in which Kaito has no choice, but to endure such treatment. Much as he reconciles himself to the feminine chores he has to perform, Kaito’s phallocentric ego draws the line when it comes to sex. Sex is only space that he has to show masculine dominance and when Jemina demands that she must occupy the top during sex, Kaito refuses. In most African societies a womanis traditionally expected to play the passive role during sexual intercourse by occupying the bottom position. However, Jemina justifies her demand on the premise that being on top increases her sexual pleasure. Even though there is merit in her demand, Kaito reads it as a clear sign that she intends to dominate him in all spheres of life, an investment that she begins by allocating to him household chores. For Kaito, Jemina’s sexual ‘obsessions’ reach the highest proportions of perversity when she demands that he performs Kama Sutra and oral sex on her. Finally, he says “hewas not going to take any more humiliation” from her (Azuah 2012, p. 63).

Hegemonic masculinity demands that a man should dominate a woman in almost all spheres of life. Jemina's demand for oral sex is at odds with Kaito's cultural expression of male sexual intimacy and dominance. According to his Nigerian society, which he often uses as a chassis to foreground his performance of masculinity and sexuality, oral sex is a perversion. In such a culture to lick a woman's private part is synonymous with male degradation, to the extent that it is an erosion of African masculinity and a subversion of patriarchy itself. The narrator intrudes to explain: "With all the women [Kaito] kept while in Nigeria, he did all sorts of things with them, but never oral sex. And he didn't think women should woo men. He saw such women as loose" (Azuah 2012, p. 63). His emigrant experience, therefore, enables him to reflect on the masculine sexual scripts available in his masculinist Nigerian society and to abhor the liberal attitude towards sexuality in America. Kaito sees his masculinity as bifurcated. He remarks:

> He knew that something like this would not have happened to him in his own country. There, he had more control of his life as a man. He would be considered a weakling if he allowed a woman to direct his life or tell him what he needed to do. His father consulted his mother in some things he wanted to do, but his mother always had to seek his father's consent first before she did anything Azuah 2012, p. 66).

In his introspection, Kaito sees his emigration to America as detrimental to his masculine status. He foregrounds the quintessential view that dominant African manhood entails not only independence in all spheres of life but also the ability for a man to control a woman. In America, Kaito's undocumented status as an illegal immigrant and his financial precarity have completely undermined his capacity to perform the patriarchal script which such dominance entails. Kaito seeshimself ranking beneath the liberal and economically independent women he gets involved with inAmerica. Paradoxically, after his imprisonment for overstaying his visa, Kaito has nobody to turn toexcept Jemina. He desperately accepts her emasculating behaviour and marries her just to get permanent American citizenship. His vulnerability in America leaves him with no room but to completely change his masculinist thinking if he is to survive.

When Kaito visits Nigeria with Jemina, his new wife, Kaito's mother notices his diminished masculine status and expresses deep concern about Jemina's overbearing manner towards Kaito. His mother admonishes him for being a hen-pecked husband who has no firm control over his wife. She remarks:

> By the way, what kind of wife is that? She bosses you around even in your presence as if she has no home training. Come, is this how she is going to live here with you when you finally return? And when is she going to have a baby? (Azuah 2012, p.158).

It is clear that in the Ibo world that Kaito comes from, a woman has to be submissive to her husband while a man should never accept to be dominated by his wife. To Kaito's mother, Kaito and Jemina's relationship transgresses the dominant codes of African patriarchy.

Kaito's mother wants to see him asserting full patriarchal control over Jemina. She also expects him

to head a conventional family precisely because achieving fatherhood in Nigeria is a cherished hallmark of becoming a man. Yet, there is another side to Kaito mother's rebuke that speaks to the complicity of women in maintaining patriarchy or even their own oppression. The fact that Kaito's mother wants Jemina firmly controlled reveals the enduring power of patriarchal ideology and its ability to shape gender power relations in families and societies.

Edible Bones underscore that Kaito's masculinity as an illegal African immigrant in America is partly constrained by discriminative polices against illegal immigrants that deny them sound employment. America not only has strict immigration laws that limit the kind of jobs illegal immigrants can hold, but also subtly condones racial discrimination in its job market. Despite all the discrimination, some African immigrants succeed in getting good paying jobs. Nevertheless, the compulsion to perform a successful immigrant masculinity through remittances to relatives in Africa leads many successful African immigrants to commit white-collar crime.

A case in point is Zulkibulu, Kaito's homosexual cell mate in prison, though a successful accountant, the demands to uplift his family and to build mansions in Nigeria lead Zulkibulu into fraudulent financial transactions. His bosses eventually discover his dishonesty and he ends up in an American prison. The narrator tells us that:

> [Overwhelming] family responsibilities at home in Nigeria and his growing family in America forced him to find other ways of making money. He picked up extra job hours — but that was not enough. He needed quick money, and in large sums. He went into a credit card fraud business and was able to make millions of dollars. He couldn't stop (Azuah 2012, p. 96).

The above quote highlights that the pursuit of successful immigrant masculinity involves risk. It shows that successful immigrant masculinities set demands that sometimes compromise the moral standards of the immigrant. Much as unemployment and racial identity are to blame for the effacement of African immigrant's masculinity, Unoma Nguemo Azuah implicitly argues that the African male immigrant's inability to recede his pre-immigration masculine scripts and adapt or adjust with the new gender order in the host country leads to a failed masculinity. The case of Abuda, Kaito's elderly friend in his mid-sixties is very telling. Despite his countless qualifications, Professor Abuda remains firmly entrenched in an African masculinist, violent and patriarchal thinking which is inappropriate in an American environment. His failure to achieve success is a direct consequence of his inflexibility to change his misogynistic African brand of masculinity. Abuda physically abuses the women he dates, and because of the many assault charges they levy against him, they deplete his financial resources.

> [He] kept repeating the same cycle with women and ruined his opportunities to start a family. He would end up with multiple assault and battery charges in his record and no financial reserves. Despite his education he had acquired, he owned no real estate and had no accumulated funds: nothing. He had traversed the word — Germany, England, Austria and many parts of Asia, but he could not stand taking instruction from a female supervisor. A few days after an episode of him yelling at her, he was fired (Azuah 2012, p.33).

He gets fired from a good job because his misogyny makes it impossible to take orders from a female boss. Consequently Abuda, the Cambridge trained professor at sixty, ends up with a less paying job as a branch manager of a local MacDougal take away. He has no wife nor immediate family. Even then, his problems get worse when a deranged woman shoots him and he is sent to rehabilitation where he is likely to stay for the rest of his life. Abuda cannot return to Nigeria because he fears ostracism from his family. He has failed to achieve the successful immigrant masculinity that would enable him to face them.

While Uncle Happiness in *A Squatters Tale* and Abuda in *Edible Bones* fail to accept realty, Kaito's fantasy of the American Dream comes to an end when he pays a visit to Ugbeje, his home village, and finds that his village friends Chu-chu, Ekwutosi and Nnaji have all built mansions that are status symbols of their successful masculinity. He sees that it is his home that is doing badly. Tired and ashamed of Jemina's nagging and snobbery, Kaito breaks-up with her and decides to stay in Nigeria. Part of the reason for his desire to remain in Nigeria is the frustration he has experienced in America as an undocumented emigrant and the violence of his incarceration in an American prison. As the novel comes to an end, Kaito is almost on the brink of a nervous breakdown. However, he encounters the mad man who tells him that "The stench you perceive is from your inner being. Youthink it is from my mouth, but it is from your entrails, your rotten entrails" (Azuah 2012, p.164), andKaito recognises that he is not any better than the mad man. He, like the mad man, has nothing andhe has to start afresh. When the mad man spits on him and scream "purge, purge, purge, purge!" (Azuah 2012, p.164), it is a symbolic rite that restores Kaito back to sanity. It becomes a moment ofhealing from his masculine frustration. In the last sentence of the novel, the wind blows away Kaito's return ticket to America, which, like the spitting from the mad man is intended to show thatKaito has finally come to the end of his fantasy with the American Dream.

1.4 Conclusion

This article underscores how emigration to Western countries presents challenges for African men and African masculinities. African men experience ruptures in their understanding of manhood and have to renegotiate their place at the margins of American society. In *A Squatter's Tale,* Oguine demonstrates how one can occupy a dominant masculine position in one context, only to have one's status diminished in another cultural setting. Illegal African men in America find it difficult to perform their pre-migrant codes of masculinity when in relationships with White and African-American women. In Azuah's *Edible Bones,* Kaito's relationship with Jemina and Sabrina underscores the fact that American women dominate illegal male African immigrants.

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[90]Chunguaji ni tafsiri ya neno la kiingereza *assumption*