

DOCTORAL THESIS

The ubiquity of terror: reading family, violence and gender in selected African Anglophone novels

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ABSTRACT

Terror in the African Anglophone novels of Chinua Achebe, Doris Lessing, J.M. Coetzee and Laila Lalami originated as a consequence of a breakdown in the family structure. Traditionally, conventional patriarchy, in addition to securing the psychological and material needs of the family, has served as one of the building blocks of tribes and nations. Since the father figure within narrative is allegorized as a metonym of the state, the absence of patriarchal authority represents the disintegration of the link between individuals and national institutions. Consequently, characters may also turn to committing acts of terror as a rejection of the dominant national ideology. This dissertation aims to demonstrate how the breakdown of the family and the conventional gendering of roles may give rise to terrorist violence in the African setting.

To recontextualize the persistence of the Conradian definition of terror as an Anglo-European phenomenon brought to Africa, I contrast the ways in which the breakdown of the family affects both indigenous and Anglo-European households in Africa across generations. I suggest that, under the reinvention of older gender norms, the unfulfilling Anglo-European patriarchy exposes Anglo-European women to indigenous violence. Moreover, I theorize that the absence of patriarchal authority leads indigenous families to seek substitutions in the form of alternative family

institutions, such as religious and political organizations, that conflict with the national ideology. Furthermore, against the backdrop of globalized capitalism, commodity fetishism emerges as a substitute to compensate for the absent father figure. Therefore, this project demonstrates the indisputable relationship between the breakdown of the family structure and individual acts of terror that aim at the fulfillment of capitalist fetish or individual desire, and at the expense of national security. Finally, the rhetorical dimension of terror against family and women in Africa will be proven to be the allegorized norm of globalized terror in the twenty-first century.

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