

“Postcolonial Triangles”: An Analysis of Masculinity and Homosocial Desire in Achebe’s *A Man of the People* and Greene’s *The Quiet American*

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The triangle is useful as a figure by which the “commonsense” of our intellectual tradition schematizes erotic relations, and because it allows us to condense in a juxtaposition with that folk-perception several somewhat different streams of recent thought.

—Eve Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985)

The love triangle, as Eve Sedgwick notes in the above epigraph, is an excellent literary vehicle to represent the complexity of human desire. Graham Greene’s *The Quiet American* (1955) and Chinua Achebe’s *A Man of the People* (1966) convey different views of the colonial and postcolonial situation using the very model of triangulated desire that is the focus of Sedgwick’s work. Like Sedgwick, Greene and Achebe recognize the love triangle’s ability to “schematize” and “juxtapose” theoretical relationships—a perfect device to both reinforce and displace colonial structures. In the following analysis, I will intersect Sedgwick’s queer theory with postcolonial theory to make legible the reality of the power struggles that underlie both Greene and Achebe’s texts. I will examine whether queer theory mapped onto postcolonial theory can allow the love triangle, an age-old literary device central to the European novel, to in fact be decolonized.

Mapping Desire: The Postcolonial Possibilities of the Love Triangle Sedgwick’s theory of triangulated desire builds upon Rene Girard’s argument in *Deceit, Desire, & the Novel* (1976). In his classic text, Girard explains that a plot involving a “literary love triangle” situates a mediator between a subject’s desire for an object, so that the reader is always confronted with two competing desires. Girard’s insightful argument is that the subject’s “impulse toward the object is ultimately an impulse toward the mediator” (10). Girard reveals that triangular desire disfigures the object, and confuses same-sex desire between rivals for heterosexual yearning (17). In *Between Men*, Sedgwick uses Girard’s notion of triangulated desire to focus more deeply on what she terms the “homosocial” bonds between the subject and the mediator. Sedgwick makes the following claim:

The bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved . . . the bonds of 'rivalry' and 'love,' differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent. (21)

While Sedgwick fundamentally agrees with Girard, she criticizes him for reading a symmetry in a literary love triangle that is undisturbed by gender differences. She does not believe that a rivalry between women over a male object would hold the same play of identification as a construction of two men over a female object (21). To argue for this alternate view, Sedgwick presents literary examples of triangulated desire that portray female characters who serve as the conduits facilitating male homosocial relations. Her work poses a direct confrontation to Girard's symmetrical conception of the love triangle; she stresses the unique power structures that emerge when two men become competitors over the female object.

There has been minimal work, however, integrating Sedgwick's view of triangulated desire into studies of postcolonial representation. For instance, in *The Caribbean Postcolonial*, Shalini Puri finds Sedgwick's work on nationalism and sexuality helpful in capturing the voice of "nationalism's Others"; however, she does not employ Sedgwick's triangulated model of desire to further explore this area of inquiry (10). I use the term "postcolonial" to refer loosely to the period in which England and other European imperialist nations lost control over numerous colonies at the turn of the twentieth century. Many scholars only address the similarities between imperial oppression and masculine domination of women, while ignoring the homosocial bonds that exist to preserve these structures. For instance, *In Masculinity and Power* (1989), Arthur Brittan focuses on the male-female binary in his discussion of patriarchy. He supports the idea that in male discourse and pornography, "sexual objectification is reminiscent of the relationship between the slave and the master" (66). Brittan explains that making a woman an object of desire places her in a physically and politically subordinate position, like that of an exploited colony in the hands of its colonizer. Yet, Brittan does not address the presence of intermale bonds which might heighten or preserve this oppression. Michael Kaufman, in "The Construction of Masculinity and The Triad of Men's Violence" (1987), notes a "triad of desire" in which violence of "men against men" or violence of "men against themselves" reinforce each other but cannot be understood until confronted by "violence against women" (2). Nevertheless, Kaufman overlooks the ways in which this homosocial violence might speak to larger systems of nation formation.

Sedgwick's theory provides a strong model for understanding the political hierarchies *and* gender hierarchies that are embedded in postcolonial representation. Sedgwick suggests that "in any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial (*including* homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining patriarchal power" (25). Her work highlights specific ways in

which the suppression of a woman in a homosocial context correlates with power structures of governmental or national control.

For example, Sedgwick links triangulated desire with the traffic of women by highlighting how this process politically and economically oppresses women through a strengthening of male bonds.¹ She also speaks to how homophobia can be used as a state-wielded tool to control the entire spectrum of male homosocial organization; she locates the way in which homosocial bonds work to set standards of heterosexuality and reinforce institutionalized social relations (35). Sedgwick construes a model for “delineating relationships of power and meaning, and for making graphically intelligible the play of desire and identification by which individuals negotiate with their societies for empowerment” (27). Her theory consequently makes discrete, hence legible, the gendered conflict that is inherent in postcolonial conflict.

Other triangular models can help us to connect Sedgwick’s theory with postcolonial discourse as well. Starting as early as the seventeenth century, “triangular trade” or the slave trade worked through an asymmetrical mechanism: England and America exploited African resources and peoples to stimulate their own economic growth.² By understanding the connection between the two colonizing nations, England and America, as homosocial bonds gaining power by exploiting the oppressed body of Africa, this notion of triangular trade can be read as a political version of Sedgwick’s gendered triangle. Another political triangle that can be envisioned is what I call a “postcolonial” triangle. This asymmetrical relationship emerged in twentieth century nations between the former colonizer, the emerging nationalist elite of developing nations, and the former colonized body or indigenous people. We can imagine a homosocial triangle, in which the former colonizer and new nationalist elite mutually gain strength at the expense of the continued oppression of the former colonized body. These models offers insight into how the construction of asymmetrical triangulated desire can portray homosocial bonds in terms of a country or nation’s “desire.”

But how does this tie in to my analysis of two texts that represent such different aspects of colonial and postcolonial situations? I will argue that Greene and Achebe’s texts use gendered models of desire to confront the weakening imperialist image of the British Empire in the twentieth century. The relationship of British national power to gendered images has been studied to a large extent. In *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (1995), Anne McClintock states that “all nations depend on powerful constructions of gender” in their declaration of nationhood (353). Lee Horsely, in *Fictions of Power in English*

¹ Sedgwick bases her argument on readings of Levi-Strauss, Engels, Irigaray, Freud and Lacan. She also uses Gayle Rubin’s essay on Lacan to argue that patriarchal heterosexuality can best be discussed in terms of the traffic in women by men.

² Kent explains the mechanism of slave trade as the transport of slaves to North America in exchange for the raw materials of spices, tobacco and rum, which were exported to Britain for manufactured goods.

Literature: 1900-1950 (1996), gives further evidence to McClintock's claim by stressing that, before the First World War, "the whole notion of heroic adventure was most closely bound up with the excitement of empire-building" (20). This historian equates the British imperialist enterprise with male heroic action, and notes that tales of adventure kept alive the idea that battles, man-to-man combat, and fierce struggles were vital to the national image.

The mighty British imperial image also gained strength through another gendered tactic, namely by associating colonized lands with the oppressed feminine body. In *Gender Power in Britain, 1640-1990* (1999), Susan Kingsley Kent explains that in the era of colonization, non-white peoples became increasingly depicted as feminine until "representations of empire took on the image of masterly, manly Britons exercising control over irrational, impulsive, weak-willed, effeminate colonial peoples" (203). Kent reinforces the notion that the ideologies of similarity and difference between British and non-British peoples depended upon a notion of gender difference; she claims that a common justification for the practice of imperialism was that the non-British were inherently incapable of exercising the self-control necessary for governing themselves, and required the strong arm of British might to keep order (203). McClintock also studies representations of Victorian advertising that featured a "vista of Africa conquered by domestic commodities" and as a result presented "colonized men . . . feminized by their association with domestic servitude" (McClintock 219). Hence, gender hierarchies were deeply embedded in the practice of imperialism and in the public justification for that practice.

Nevertheless, in the era of decolonization in which Achebe and Greene were writing, this British image reliant on masculinity was under threat from a variety of sources. In the first half of the twentieth century, Horsely writes, Britain "witnessed the collapse of old empires, the failure of parliamentary governments, the rise of totalitarian dictatorships, violent revolutions and the devastation of two world wars" (1). Horsely speaks to the widespread loss of confidence in the notion of heroism, and of how this was overcompensated for by the fictions of power which emerged throughout Europe.³ This loss of power served to feminize the imperial island itself; Kent notes that it was thought that British colonies failed "because Britain's political institutions were in the hands of a corrupt, weak and even effeminate ruling class" (80).⁴

Finally, Franz Fanon addresses how patriarchal and gendered imagery could be utilized by an emerging nation state to emasculate a former colonizer. Fanon speaks to the fantasy of substitution in which "[t]he

³ Horsley posits these fictions of power as the "cult" of masculinity.

⁴ In addition, the growing presence of women in societal power positions posed a threat to the masculine image of empire. See Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain*. Sinfield notes that women's roles in servicing the workforce during the Second World War were viewed as "undermin[ing] male control of public affairs and the household" (206).

native is an oppressed person whose permanent dream is to become the persecutor” and recycle the imperial structure under new leadership (53). Thus, gendered images of masculine power may be viewed in both the colonizer’s propaganda and in the burgeoning rhetoric of newly independent nations at the start of the twentieth century. In what follows, I will interpret Greene and Achebe’s novels in light of the conceptual and contextual frame that I have just outlined.

Homosocial Bonds in *The Quiet American*

Published in 1955, Greene’s *The Quiet American* centers on an unstable British national image. In *Understanding Graham Greene* (1990), R.H. Miller claims that: “in large measure [Greene] is a product of England between the wars, of the period of diminution of the Empire” (98). Set in Indochina as the French are struggling to maintain control of Vietnam, the novel presents a British man who must confront a situation in which a colonized nation is under threat from both an outside communist enemy and from the native population seeking independence. The novel’s action occurs in a transitory historical period, after Britain’s imperial presence has begun to fade and right before the neo-imperialist moment, or the coming of the U.S. and other second-generation nations that will emerge as the new world leaders. Greene incorporates into his novel the feeling of weakening empire, which began much earlier in the century. I agree with Maria Couto’s assessment that Greene’s novel, with its introspective first-person narrator, offers “representations of the endless Cold War on people’s lives” (169). Although the novel takes place outside the British Empire, the text portrays the changing imperial dynamics of an increasingly global world.

A fictional love triangle in the text allegorizes larger political and cultural relationships in Greene’s own world. Thomas Fowler, Greene’s aging British protagonist, is the lover of the native woman Phuong at the start of the novel. Phuong, however, becomes the simultaneous love interest of Alden Pyle, the young and “innocent” American who arrives in Vietnam. With this introduction of competing male rivalry for the female object, Sedgwick’s model is realized in Greene’s text. The scene in which Phuong dances with Pyle exemplifies the woman’s placement as object between the two men. The reader glimpses the burgeoning rivalry that will develop between the two as Fowler claims, “I thought how much she missed in her relation to me” as he watches Pyle and Phuong move across the dance floor (41). Fowler experiences envy and jealousy immediately when he sees his American rival approach his possession. When Pyle returns Phuong after the dance, the objectification of the woman is made even clearer as Fowler states, “One always spoke of her [Phuong] like that in the third person as though she were not there. Sometimes she seemed invisible like peace” (44). This statement implies that Phuong serves as the place of conduit between the two powerful forces in this novel, between old and new imperialisms.

Yet, the novel does not only describe these men as enemies; the two rivals also enjoy bonds of esteem and friendship. Although Fowler senses a threat from Pyle, he feels a simultaneous need to shelter and accommodate the innocent, young American. "I like that fellow Pyle," he tells Phuong, "I had better look after Pyle" (37). In return, Pyle feels a connection with Fowler based on respect, esteem and admiration; his words, "I feel in a way this has brought us together. Loving the same woman," convey his intense bond with Fowler (58). Girard's notion of the rival as "mediator" also emerges in the love triangle between Fowler, Pyle and Phuong. When Pyle finally tells Phuong of his feelings, Fowler offers to "act as interpreter" and translate Pyle's competitive intentions to his lover. Fowler even jokes that they should call off the battle and "dice for her" (76, 78). This is not the only time when the notion of traffic in women is alluded to; Fowler makes comments that reference trade throughout the text, such as "I can't outbid Pyle" (120). Greene structures desire so that the bonds between men become filled with an intense, passionate emotion that often outweighs heterosexual passion.

At times, this tension borders on the homoerotic. When Pyle has the audacity to propose to Fowler's lover, he asks his friend: "You won't let this come between us, will you?" (79). Sedgwick closely examines the dynamic of homoeroticism between men in her theoretical text. By looking at the cuckolding relationship in restoration comedy, she locates a hierarchy in which men who seek mastery and domination over each other through a woman cement the larger social bonds and its compulsory heterosexuality. Whereas Sedgwick recognizes how homoeroticism has the potential to emasculate both men, she ultimately reveals how the attachments between men are not detrimental to masculinity "but definitive of it" (50). Greene creates a plot which mobilizes this structure, allowing the struggles as well as affinities between men to define and control the heterosexual desire towards the woman.

Asymmetrical Triangulated Desire in *A Man of the People*

Chinua Achebe addresses the same weakening British imperial image in *A Man of the People*, but now from the perspective of the emerging leadership of the colonized nation. Unlike Greene's narrator, who is a reflection of fading Britain, Achebe's hero is the product of a newly independent nation state. Simon Gikandi, in *Reading Chinua Achebe* (1991), stresses that Achebe faced great challenges in capturing contemporary Nigerian politics in this novel, and that the author "struggled to find an appropriate form to represent the contradictory impulses of the postcolonial situation" (101).

The novel is set at a time when Nigeria is struggling to assert its independence despite the remnants of patriarchal and imperial power that remain embedded in the culture. The plot dynamics in Achebe's text echo those of Greene's novel. *A Man of the People* presents the rivalry between Odili, the university educated teacher, and Chief Nanga, the government

minister and politician, over female “objects.” This triangulated relationship between men mirrors the rivalry between Fowler and Pyle, yet the violence and passion between them is heightened to a degree. The extreme emotional tension within the love triangle in *A Man of the People* brings greater attention to the presence and manipulation of desire in this text—and proves a key factor in the novel’s ability to both preserve and shatter colonial structures.

The tension between Chief Nanga and Odili is realized immediately in the novel when Odili expresses his concerns that the Chief uses “his [political] position to enrich himself” (2). Although Odili softens his harsh criticism of Nanga when the Chief invites him to share in his prosperity, tension reemerges when a woman comes between them. Elsie, Odili’s former lover, is positioned as Odili’s prize possession, as the narrator claims that he “feel[s] a little jealous anytime [he] found her reading and re-reading a blue British air-letter” (25). Subsequently, a battle emerges over Elsie when Nanga makes a move to sleep with her right under Odili’s nose. The rivalry is ironic, however, because Odili has no true regard for the woman. Once the affair takes place, Odili calls Elsie a “common harlot” despite the years of friendship that they shared (72). Yet, he feels betrayed by the man that he was beginning to trust; he attributes all pain, jealousy and envy that he feels to Nanga, and suddenly claims that he “no longer cared for anything but the revenge” (78). Hence, Achebe sets up the same model of desire as Greene, one in which the bonds between rivals become a stronger presence than any feelings toward the female object.

Achebe designs a plot that moves from one triangulated structure to another. Odili seeks his revenge by desiring Nanga’s “property,” and hence he plots to steal Nanga’s future second wife, Edna. The narrator characterizes the intensity of his passion for Edna as part of his overall need to bring down the Chief, both politically and emotionally (110). Even when Odili becomes more familiar with Edna, he realizes that a part of him still wanted her “very remotely as a general part of revenge”; he tells the reader explicitly that “things seemed so mixed up; my revenge, my new political ambition, and the girl” (109-110).

In addition, Nanga’s lack of true love for this woman is revealed. The narrator implies that Nanga prefers a younger wife because “his missus is too ‘bush’ for his present position so he wants a bright new ‘parlour-wife’ to play hostess at his parties” (23). This derogatory treatment of women is further emphasized by the reference to the practice of traffic in women to facilitate male homosocial relations. This becomes evident as Odili and his father journey to Edna’s male relatives to make the marriage exchange. Odili’s decision to pay the full bride price is not based on heterosexual love, but on the notion that he “did not want to go through life thinking that [he] owed Chief Nanga money” (148). Like *A Quiet American*, *A Man of the People* portrays women as objects needed to facilitate the emotions that flow, as Sedgwick’s title suggests, “between men.”

Masculinity and the Love Triangle

I argue that one can use Sedgwick's view of state-controlled forms of desire to uncover the complex framework behind both of these texts. In *Between Men*, Sedgwick makes a direct connection between masculine domination and political control; she claims that promoting masculinity and spreading the fear of feminization becomes a way for governments to promote heterosexuality. Her theory links patriarchal power to the promotion of a powerful, masculine image, one in which homosexuality becomes linked with feminization and weakness. Alan Sinfield, in *The Wilde Century* (1994), further connects national policy and cultural trends with gendered imagery and propaganda. He explains that "the function of effeminacy, as a concept, is to police sexual categories . . . it is a way of stigmatizing deviation from proper manly and womanly stereotypes" (62). Publicly feminizing homosexuality is a way for a nation to "demasculinize" the homosexual man and promote a dominant image of heterosexuality associated with masculinity and strength.

In *The Quiet American*, there are many instances when the competition between Pyle and Fowler emerges as a struggle to own a masculine image. Part of the reason that Fowler is so obsessed with Pyle is that the American's young, vibrant image is a threat to his own waning youth and sexuality. Fowler puts this into words when he claims, "I saw myself as he [Pyle] saw me, a man of middle age, with eyes a little bloodshot, beginning to put on weight, ungraceful in love . . . less innocent" (40). Ultimately, Fowler's narration presents the reader with a view of one man's internal struggle to defeat a masculine competitor. William Bonney, in "Politics, Perception, and Gender in Conrad's *Lord Jim* and Greene's *The Quiet American*" (1991), highlights how Fowler "generates narratives" in a way that is "masculine . . . and obsessional" (114). Bonney recognizes the clearly gendered aspects of Fowler's first person retelling of events.

Although Fowler tries to convince the reader that his destruction of Pyle is ethically motivated, he cannot hide the feelings of envy, jealousy and fading masculinity that drive his actions. The following passage constitutes a moment when Fowler's objectives are unmasked:

I've reached the age when sex isn't the problem so much as old age and death. I wake up with these in mind and not a woman's body. I don't want to be alone in my last decade . . . if Phuong left me, would I have the energy to find another?
(104-105)

Fowler's competitive obsession over Phuong is about proving his masculinity and preserving his status rather than a real desire for the woman. Masculinity is a large component, if not the defining component, of the rivalry between the two men in this novel.

The scene in which Pyle saves Fowler's life brings this homosocial struggle to the very surface of the text. "Who the hell asked you to save my life," screams the journalist to the young man trying to help him, displaying how he prefers death to a life that he will always owe to the

stronger man (111). Fowler's feelings of inadequacy build after this encounter; when Phuong asks him why he will not open the letter from his wife he replies, "I'm afraid of the loneliness, of the Press club and the bed sitting room, I'm afraid of Pyle" (117). Once Pyle convinces Phuong to leave the journalist, Fowler projects himself as increasingly impotent to the reader. He narrates his unsuccessful attempt at violence towards Pyle that leaves him weeping in the bathroom. He also describes how he cannot perform sexually with the prostitute as he becomes "frozen" with memory (147, 153). By looking past his facade of being the "ethical journalist," even Fowler's rage at Pyle's political involvement with the bombings can be read as part of his overall competitive rage over Phuong.⁵ *The Quiet American* is a narrative of a man whose sense of rivalry over the female object is inseparable from his obsession with his own masculine self-worth.

In addition, Fowler's narration also captures Pyle's struggle with his masculinity. The reader comes to view Pyle as a man desperate to preserve a noble, aboveboard image of gentlemanly conduct. For instance, Pyle tells Fowler that he will not marry Phuong until he brings her home to meet his mother and gives her a "proper" ceremony (155). Pyle's constant attention to formality and to the process of "saving" the needy woman imply a desire to bolster his own masculine ego. "You have such an awful lot of experience, Thomas," claims Pyle, "I've never had a girl. Not properly. Not what you'd call a real experience" (102). While this statement does grant Fowler some of the masculine respect he desires, it also implies that Pyle's quest for Phuong is an attempt to make up for lack of sexual experience. Pyle even admits to Fowler that he saved Fowler's life because if he left him to die, "[he] couldn't have faced Phuong . . . when you are in love you want to play the game" (112). Pyle is explicit that his desire for the female object revolves on his need to "play" the male part against Fowler.

Thus, the homosocial bonds between men reflect a battle to own a masculine image that is rooted in patriarchal control. The masculine tension and opposition of the love triangle over the native woman recalls the structure of triangular trade as superimposed on Sedgwick's asymmetrical love triangle. In this sense, the love triangle can be read in allegorical terms: Fowler represents fading masculinity *and* a fading British Empire, Pyle stands for an emerging American Empire equally fighting for a masculine image, and finally, Phuong symbolizes the native state *and* the feminized, oppressed body at the behest of both.⁶ The ensuing triangulated battle symbolizes world powers that are struggling for a masculine right to control decolonized lands. Sedgwick's theory,

⁵ Gorra claims that Fowler recognizes the confusion of his own motives, which explains why Fowler feels emptiness rather than happiness when Pyle's death returns Phuong to him (143).

⁶ Miller supports this argument by explaining that the struggle for control over Phuong can function as a representation or metonymy for a larger struggle: "Phuong is the East, the Third World; Fowler the Old, and Pyle the New" (109).

intersected with postcolonial theory makes legible the political dynamics embedded in this structure of desire.

A Man of the People similarly characterizes the competition between Odili and Nanga as a struggle for masculinity and power. The desire of the two rivals to prove their masculinity to each other is evident even before Elsie comes between them. Odili informs the reader: "Chief Nanga and I [had] already swapped many tales of conquest and I felt somehow compelled to speak in derogatory terms about women in general" (60). The "somehow" in Nanga's choice of language is crucial: it captures the way in which Sedgwick's notion of the hierarchy in male domination necessarily requires or is heightened by misogyny. "To women" writes Sedgwick, "male homosocial desire is potentially damaging regardless of whether it succeeds" (50). Thus, she explains that the status of women is always demeaning in a triangulated situation, which in a sense forces women to figure both objectively and symbolically as contested property.

The men of Achebe's novel convey to the reader that earning male respect involves the ability to conquer the female. After the episode with Nanga and Elsie, Odili actually becomes obsessed with his threatened masculinity. The ability of Nanga to make him feel like an emasculated, colonized object is evident when Odili claims:

A man had treated me as no man had a right to treat another—not even if he was master and the other slave; and my *manhood* required that I make him pay for his insult in full measure. In flesh and blood terms I realized that I must go back, seek out Nanga's intended parlour wife and give her the works, good and proper. (77; emphasis added)

Odili's reaction to betrayal is to reverse his emasculation by assuming his rival's political position and his rival's lover. Yet, the reader comes to see that Odili's struggle for masculinity is not one-sided, and that Nanga is just as insecure. For instance, in the scene where Nanga tries to convince Odili to drop out of the race, he enters sarcastically calling "Odili, my great enemy" (116). Nanga tries to emasculate Odili by stressing his "youth" and claims, "I [Nanga] am not afraid of you . . . Every goat and every fowl in this country knows that you will fail woefully" (116, 119).

Yet, Nanga's desire to pay Odili for dropping out as a political competitor shows that Nanga is in fact threatened by the younger man. In tandem with this, the violence that erupts between the two men in the scene of the political rally speaks to the violence which becomes a mask for feelings of inadequacy. During this scene of physical struggle, Odili describes how "Edna rushed forward crying and tried to get between us but he pushed her aside so violently that she landed on her buttocks on the wooden platform" (141). Edna serves as the reflector of male brutality; in this sense, this scene reinforces Sedgwick's construction of triangulated desire in which the female presence heightens the emasculating effects of male violence. "To be feminized or suffer gender confusion within a framework that includes a woman is, however, dire" explains Sedgwick; she describes how the acknowledgement of the woman's gaze on this

emasculatation has a direct feminizing effect that is absent when the struggle is just between two men (36).

Consequently, the overwhelming examples of degradation of women in *A Man of the People* reinforce the notion that political power feeds off the continued domination of women. Mapping Sedgwick's theory onto postcolonial theory reveals how Achebe's text recreates a symbolic battle between the former colonizer, the emerging nationalist elite of developing nations, and the colonized body or indigenous people—positioning Nanga, Odili and Edna in these respective sites. The homosocial bonds between these two men serve as evidence for a reincorporation of masculinity in the new leadership of the nation at the expense of the continued oppression of the indigenous native people, represented by the violence and degradation of Edna.

The Double Nature of the Love Triangle

The treatment of the woman in the love triangle is therefore ultimately the central connection as well as a crucial difference between these two texts. Phuong, as a woman and a former colonized individual, is the perfect figure to represent the oppressed colonized body in an asymmetrical political world. Throughout *The Quiet American*, Phuong is associated with a native land that lacks action, power and intelligence. Fowler constantly speaks of his mistress as an empty and passive object, and he looks to her body rather than to her mind to satisfy his desires. The following passage is representative of Fowler's characterization of Phuong:

It isn't in their nature [to love] . . . It's a cliché to call them children—but there's one thing which is childish. They love you in return for kindness, security, the presents you give them—they hate you for a blow or an injustice. (104)

By using the general terms “they” and “them” when referring to Phuong and the Vietnamese people, Fowler indirectly reflects a strong British image in comparison to a collectively weak, native population. And although Pyle represents the emerging power in this novel, Fowler implies that his rival's treatment of the feminine object is really no better. Without even being able to communicate with the woman, Pyle hopes to come in and “rescue” Phuong from her chaotic native land. “I want to give her a decent life—this place smells” (133), suggests Pyle. The men compete in a gendered rivalry over a woman in a way that reinforces her passivity and objectification.

In *A Man of the People*, Edna is presented as a woman who is unable to utilize her education and who is “sold” by her male relatives to her husband. Chioma Opara, in her article “From Stereotype to Individuality: Womanhood in Chinua Achebe's Novels” (1998) agrees with this reading, and suggests that Edna's engagement to the Chief “allows her selfhood to be bought by Nanga” (117). But perhaps this argument, which only connects Edna and Phuong through their inaction and passivity, is

oversimplified. Greene's Phuong embodies a paradoxical woman: idealized and worshipped at the same time that she appears passive and ineffectual. Her character represents the center of objectification, yet also a power source to disrupt and ultimately control the men who fight over her. In this sense, Phuong shares similarities with the women in Achebe's text who yield control and power despite the violent treatment they often receive. Odili's idealistic approach to politics is intertwined with the notion of female presence: he tells the reader that he has "twin hopes of a beautiful life with Edna and of a new era of cleanliness in the politics of our country" (131). The extreme violence that Edna receives, in contrast to Phuong, emphasizes her degradation yet also creates a heightened sympathy and anger in the reader against the structures that wield power against her. Thus, the love triangle enforces patriarchal bonds through the suppression of women, while at the same time displacing and confusing these powerful connections.

Reading these two novels against each other provides a further insight, allowing for an examination of the potential to break patriarchal structures through their literary representation. The love triangle becomes useful because of its double nature. As Sedgwick conceived it in the epigraph, it is an ideological structure that has a theoretical, critical potential. By applying her understanding of triangulated desire to these readings, one can witness how the love triangle emerges as a colonial and postcolonial depiction at the same time as it reinforces structures while showing their weaknesses. Both novels in this analysis tie the well-being of the state to masculine domination and female oppression. The placement of Phuong into Fowler's care and Edna into Odili's shows little romance. The conquering of the rival power and the superiority of the narrator over the rival is the last image in both texts. Yet, the incredible violence and degradation that Achebe's men ultimately wield against each other conveys a sense of weakening from within at the same time that it reflects national strength; in a similar way, Fowler and Pyle are both left either destroyed or weakened at the end of Greene's text.

Nevertheless, an extremity of passion is glaringly absent from Greene's text, in which a passive Fowler chooses to destroy Pyle through inaction. By remaining silent to Pyle about the imminent threat to his life, Fowler kills his friend by simply doing nothing. On the other hand, the more active violence and animosity wielded between the men in Achebe's novel may embody a larger national frustration and the yearning to break down forces of patriarchal control. Hence, the intensity of the gendered relationships of *A Man of the People* can be viewed to accord a heightened sense of urgency to the very existence of triangulated structures.

Therefore, we are left with the question: why is the love triangle so crucial to both of these texts? In light of my analysis, I argue that the postwar, postcolonial novel may have been forced to employ desire along the triangulated model because it captures both the power structures of colonization and the threat of revolution to these structures. While each text uses triangulated desire to explore the contradictions in colonialism

and imperialism—through Pyle’s politics and Nanga’s ethics—the two novels ultimately reinforce that gendered control is intertwined with political structures. Although Pyle is destroyed in *The Quiet American*, the presence he leaves behind haunts Fowler’s imagination; in the same way, the political revolution in *A Man of the People* implies Nanga’s downfall, but the reader is left doubtful that the same methods of patriarchy will not reassert themselves under new leadership.

Most importantly, these works conclude by reinforcing the weak condition of the female body and highlighting the great strides that would need to be taken to reverse a dominant male ideology. Graham Greene and Chinua Achebe’s texts ultimately colonize the love triangle, albeit in different ways; despite showing the potential for its decolonization, they promote the inevitable tie between gender and political power. By recognizing the “double” nature of the love triangle to both preserve and to critique national power structures, critics can more easily locate subversive aspects of texts that attempt to illuminate the complexity of the colonial and postcolonial situation. Perhaps then we can begin to address the larger challenge, and discover whether the love triangle is so imbedded in European, masculine tradition, that it cannot be decolonized at all.

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