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Re-Conceptualising Gold-Digging as Gender-Neutral in Obinna Udenwe's *Years of Shame*

Davidson Chimezie Iwunze
Department of English Language and Literature
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria
dc.iwunze@unizik.edu.ng https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6263-8312

&

Chiamaka Geraldine Anyaeche
English Language and Literature Department
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria
anyaehechiamakageraldine@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper interrogates not only the representation of Gold-Digging in Nigeria's contemporary socio-cultural and economic narrative, but also contends that the depiction of male characters as gold diggers delineates shifting constructions of masculinity. Moreover, it also explores how masculinity is performed, negotiated, and challenged in Obinna Udenwe's *Years of Shame* (2025) with a focus on the male characters. The article seeks to re-conceptualise the idea of gold-digging as a gender-neutral phenomenon. Given the inevitability of rising socio-economic challenges, and the changing gender dynamics, the struggle for survival has become a sordid reality that has contested many misconceptions. In Nigeria's social discourse on women, gold digging has, over the years, become increasingly associated with men. Recently, writers like Udenwe in his work *Years of Shame* (2025) substantiates that gold digging is not gendered stereotyped. However, in seeking to extend this notion, the novel seeks to expose gold digging as a societal disorder not limited to the female folk but also to the male folk, which the critics of the work have paid little attention to. Hence, relying on the theories of Bourdieu's capital theory, Butler's gender performativity, and Homo

Economicus through which this article is analysed, the paper concludes that the issue of gold digging transcends the purview of female folk, but also thrives within the sphere of male folk.
Keywords: Gold-digging, masculinity, gender-neutral, Obinna Udenwe, Homo Economicus

Introduction

Known for handling contemporary socio-political and economic entanglements that challenged societal status quo, Udenwe in his work, *Years of Shame* (2025) extends that vision by deconstructing the parochial opinion regarding "gold-digging" as stereotyped to the female gender. Traditionally, "Gold-digging" has always been tagged feminine, a cliché that illustrates women using love, beauty, and loyalty to seek financial security through relationships with wealthier men, an idea affirmed by Udenwe in his work, *Years of Shame* (2025). Women have received this tag because society punishes women more harshly for seeking financial benefit through relationships, while ignoring men in similar positions (Ghani, 2011). However, gold-digging is a gender-neutral survival strategy shaped by capitalist and patriarchal pressures. In different cultural settings, men's social worth is measured by wealth and status, and it creates pressure on men to *prove* their manhood through economic success (Ezeugwu and Ojedokun, 2020; Mogano, Letsoalo, and Oduaran, 2025). As a result, many men resort to gold-digging, using transactional relationships with wealthier individuals to reach the economic capital needed to maintain masculine status.

Remarkably, early African fiction shows that this script is rooted in different cultural settings, where socio-economic and capital parameters define masculine worth. In *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Okonkwo pursues wealth and masculine honour to escape the shame of his father's poverty, a trait equated with weakness and failure. Similarly, such a theme is explored in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966), where economic masculinity is a measure of worth, as seen

in how Efuru loses value for her first husband due to his financial irresponsibility. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o also reinforces this thematic preoccupation in *Petals of Blood* (1977). The male characters, Munira, Abdulla, and Karega, could not find purpose in a corrupt post-colonial Kenya. They experienced all sorts of challenges because of their inability to achieve economic stability or social recognition in a system that favors the powerful and the corrupt. Their aspirations are defeated by their lack of social capital. Each narrative pushed by these fictions, from different cultural backgrounds, emphasises the notion that male visibility and respect in society are bound to wealth and economic performance, thereby creating conditions where men engage in gold-digging to survive and attain societal status. The theme extends to a more contemporary fiction, such as *Years of Shame* (2025) by Udenwe: a narrative that focuses on masculinity, capital, and performativity and how these issues shape male identity.

Situated in Ogada village and Abakaliki town in Ebonyi State, South-eastern Nigeria, *Years of Shame* (2025) takes us through power struggles shaped by history and spiritual beliefs through male characters such as Patrice Ikebe, Sir Douglas Akidi, and Methuselah Enigwe. The novel builds on the Arochukwu and Abakaliki revolts, a resistance movement in the early 20th century where Igbo communities opposed British colonial domination and exploitative policies, while also showing the aftereffects of colonialism in post-colonial Nigeria. Patrice Ikebe holds the spotlight in *Years of Shame* (2025). He is a proud man who served as a personal manager in Douglas's household. In Douglas's home, he is a mere servant, but in the village, he is a demi-god; rich, envied, and respected. However, his money went missing, and he accused Methuselah Enigwe, a fellow villager and peer, who happened to be in his room the night the money went missing. Patrice was furious to find his money or his symbol of manhood missing. It drove him to request and insist on taking the Ukpa ji-ukpa-nwa oath of loss of wealth and children despite pleas from

elders and other relatives. After taking the oath, Patrice's life went from one level of shame to another, which disrupted his family, his life, and also led to the death of his son and a series of events that altered his life forever, which undoubtedly drove the story's plot.

In this light, this article re-conceptualises *gold-digging* as a practice that men engage in as a rational response to social structures that equate manhood with money, using the main male characters in *Years of Shame* (2025) for exemplification. The novelist painted a relatable picture of how masculinity is performed and negotiated through powerful relationships and economic dependence. It also explores how male characters employ calculated patronage, strategic submission, and transactional loyalty to climb social ladders, thereby redefining "gold-digging" in gender-inclusive terms.

Definitely, the thematic preoccupation of gold digging as a gender-neutral in Udenwe's *Years of Shame (2025) has* not received sufficient critical attention. Chika (2025), in his review of the novel, considers its tragic vision. He contends that "*Years of Shame* can best be described as a Nigerian reinterpretation of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, an ancient story whose central oedipal calamity is almost deviously exploited here by the author. On that note, Udenwe's novel is, in a circuitous way, an old-fashioned tragedy, wherein all the tragic steps and archetypes are staged and fully played out. As old-fashioned tragedies go, it has that profound aura of the inevitable, of fate marrying with destiny". This review, however, does not align with the subject of masculinity or gold digging as discussed in this paper. Again, Odusote (2025) imagines that "*Years of Shame* (2025) promises to be a compelling read, particularly for those drawn to African mythology and folklore" Odusote merely identifies the novel from its mythological consideration, and this does not resonate with echoes of gold digging in the narrative.

Considering the above analyses of the novel, which depict its tragi-mythological aspects, *the* attention to how men within African literary settings commit to economically strategic relationships commonly dismissed as 'feminine' issues is not discussed at all. This paper addresses this gap by re-conceptualising gold-digging as a gender-neutral economic strategy rather than a feminised stereotype. While existing literature focuses on female dependency or hyper masculine dominance, few interrogate how men themselves adopt strategic submission to find their way in capitalist and patriarchal systems. It also brings attention to how male gold-digging operates within mentorship, patronage, and power structures.

Masculinity and its Multiple Theories

Given the changing socio-economic and political equations in the society with its resultant constraints, the identity of the male folk has continued to be shaped, negotiated and structured by the dominance of patriarchy and the quest for power. Arrogating the dynamic implications of masculinities in literary appreciation, diverse theories will be employed in interrogating the novel understudy. In other words, this study applies not only Bourdieu's capital theory, and Butler's gender performativity, but also Homo Economicus to analyse male identity beyond binary tropes of dominance and weakness to explore male behavior in *Years of Shame* (2025).

Pierre Bourdieu: Capital, Habitus, and Masculine Worth

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social practice dissects how men accumulate and deploy different forms of capital: economic, cultural, and social capital to assert masculinity (Roger, 2020). A man earns legitimacy, respect, and influence in family and community life automatically when he has acquired economic capital. Pellandini-Simányi (2014) corroborates Bourdieu's idea of economic command being a principal component of power and agency within capitalist society, where class division exists

between those who own and control resources (the capitalists) and those who must sell their labor to survive (the workers). It is evident in *Years of Shame* (2025) where wealth makes a man an alpha patriarch (the capitalists) whom other men (the workers) worship and serve. The author shows how men tolerate abuse because the wealthy man controls the purse strings. The novel also identifies economic capital, like money, property, and assets, as indispensable. Therefore, economic capital is what the wealthy adopt to buy subservience and loyalty from poorer men.

According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1979), cited in Jæger and Møllegaard (2017), cultural capital in Bourdieu's formulation requires education, language, style, and tastes, which reveal one's class or sophistication. Achebe, through *No Longer at Ease* (1960), affirms that cultural capital is fluency in English or urban etiquette, a degree or professional title, or even the way one dresses and carries one self. These features can be used to access elite circles. In *Years of Shame* (2025), younger men who are not yet wealthy try to mimic the lifestyle of the rich, even before they are rich, such as Patrice. This performance of taste enables them to accumulate status and honour that can be converted into opportunities. This sequence is also evident in different related narratives. In *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Gatsby had expensive parties and gloats of wealth to impress others, even though the source of his wealth and background are dubious, and he pretends to have a status he never truly had.

Social capital is the network of relationships and connections that an individual can tap for advantage (Jæger and Møllegaard, 2017). In a patron–client society, who you know often matters as much as what you have (Weingrod, 1968). In Igbo culture, it is manifested in the *"boy-boy"* apprenticeship systems and patronage where young men attach themselves to wealthy patrons to learn a trade and receive settlement capital at the end of the agreed years (Ogayi and Onwe, 2024). However, Cole *et al*. (2020) remarked that

social capital is a double-edged sword: it empowers those *inside* the network but marginalises outsiders, as seen in the life of Patrice Ikebe, an outsider, a *"Wawa man"*. No matter how faithful or loyal he was to Douglas, he was still not in his network. It reaffirms Bourdieu's view that social capital is never evenly distributed (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979).

Habitus underlies these forms of capital. According to Bourdieu (1977) as cited by Sharlamanov, Jovanoski, and Kostovska (2024), habitus is an ingrained system of dispositions that shapes individual perceptions and actions. Habitus is the way society shapes people's habits, how they think, feel, and behave over time (Powercube, 2011). In *Years of Shame* (2025), the habitus of masculinity is forged by patriarchal norms and capitalist values. From a young age, men internalise the idea that to be a "real man", he must *acquire wealth, command others, and never appear weak*. It leads to what one of the male characters voices: *"No matter the circumstance, never fail to prove yourself a man"* (p. 20). Such doctrine sinks into the male psyche and creates a habitus where actions that might seem humiliating, such as kneeling, weeping before another man, etc., are reframed as temporary sacrifices for eventual masculine validation through wealth. Patrice's willingness to commit crimes for Douglas, arranging younger girls and even performing secret abortions, knowing it is wrong, reflects a habitus that normalises unethical acts under the guise of being loyal till they make it. The capitalist society habitus makes men think that they have no choice, but to hustle, submit, and even become monsters if that is what it takes to be rich, respected, and gain favour in the eyes of the rich. This internalised pressure cooker drives the conflicts in Udenwe's narrative.

Judith Butler: Masculinity as Performance

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity is an additional tool in understanding how the male characters perform masculinity. Butler argues that gender is "not something one is, but something

one does", and she narrated it as a series of acts, gestures, and behaviours that are repeated to construct the illusion of a stable identity (Butler, 1988). In *Years of Shame* (2025), masculinity is shown to be staged: the men act out scripts of toughness, dominance, or, in some cases, strategic submissiveness. Each man is doing manhood in response to social expectations and incentives. One act of performativity is the display of wealth. Sir Douglas Akidi loves to show off his status, having multiple wives in a grand mansion, brags about dining with British dignitaries, and insists on being addressed by his title. These displays are part of his gender performance. Similarly, younger men perform deference, using servile language, and running errands at the snap of a finger to affirm the patron's superior masculine role and position themselves as worthy protégés. These are performances learned from a patriarchal culture that equates manhood with dominance. Butler also opines that masculinity is highly theatrical and conditional (Brickell, 2005). For instance, when a male figure who was once celebrated experiences an economic setback, the same community that revered him withdraws respect and exposes the fragile foundation of his performed identity. It is also evident in *Years of Shame* (2025) when Patrice returns to the village impoverished, the same men who once respected him, also scorned him.

Homo Economicus: Men as Rational, Calculating Survivors

While Bourdieu and Butler focus on social structure and performance, Homo economicus frames the agency of masculinity in economic terms. Homo economicus, the economic man, is a model of a human who rationally maximises his self-interest in the face of available barriers and opportunities (Urbina and Ruiz-Villaverde, 2019). In *Years of Shame* (2025), the male characters behave as homo economicus: they make calculated social and emotional investments, treat relationships, and even their own pride as tradable commodities in pursuit of progressive mobility. Homo economicus helps remove moral judgment and analyse

choices as survival strategies. Patrice's life decisions can be seen as a series of cost–benefit analyses. Over 11 years, he endures abuses, called *"Wawa"* pejoratively and treated as inferior, which is the price he paid for economic gain. When he suspects Methuselah stole his money, he irrationally insists on the deadly oath, which can also be interpreted through homo economicus logic. His reputation capital in the village was at stake, and to maximise that, he placed everything on the oath to appear strong.

Also, Patrice made the most shocking decision to accept a cash payoff and abandon his violated daughter, Susanne. This means the decision is a cold economic calculus: faced with the horror of his daughter's pregnancy, he chooses monetary compensation over justice and honour. Morally abhorrent as it is, this act reinforces the homo economicus pattern of maximizing personal material gain (Lahuri and Labolo, 2023). *Years of Shame* (2025), therefore, displays capitalist rationality undermining ethical boundaries. Men become almost self-entrepreneurs, marketing their loyalty, strength, or even family members in transactional terms. However, when they are seen as individuals making choices based on their economic situation, then, their actions could be understood differently. Chasing wealth through relationships, therefore, is something men and women do when they are in need. It becomes a way to survive, not just a moral failure. It shows that men are using the available tools to them in a difficult system. It is additionally a coping strategy in a world with limited opportunities.

Re-conceptualising Gold-Digging as Gender-Neutral

In exploring the theme of gold digging in *Years of Shame* (2025) as gender neutral, Udenwe conspicuously cites the character of Patrice to navigate the socio-economic and cultural imperatives inherent in the society with the intent of uncovering the fragile boundaries between survival and masculinity. Patrice functions as the "Everyman" of *Years of Shame* (2025). His performance of masculinity is, however, complicated: on the outside, he allows himself to be infantilised, being called boy, without open protest.

Douglas calls him "boy" more than thirty times in the story. Douglas asks: "How old are you now, boy?" (p.11). Patrice also kneels as Douglas calls him "boy" at the age of forty-one (p. 11). On p.71, Douglas called him boy several times: "Patrice, my boy… Your people, Patrice boy…Oh! Shut up, boy… Shut up, boy!" In p. 115, Douglas calls him boy: "Patrice, my boy? Where are you off to?" "And these errands have no name, Boy". Patrice's wife also called him "Wawa": "Shut your trap, you smelly Wawa man picked from the gutters!" (p. 7-8).

In private, however, Patrice's pride blossoms like a flower. He is a "big man" when he visits Ogada. This dual identity is the crux of his character. He performs submissiveness to gain economic capital, but he also performs dominance among his poor villagers. It corresponds to Bourdieu's habitus: Patrice internalised that he must act humbly in Douglas's world, but can be brash in Ogada village, where he has a comparative advantage: wealth. The author further shows Patrice's male performance after a costly business mistake caused partly by his village troubles. In his village, he performs dominance and flaunts his modest wealth as a marker of status, and in the city, he becomes a subordinate "boy." This dual identity shows the fractured nature of masculinity when tied to unstable access to capital and recognition. Bourdieu's (1986) concept of habitus helps explain this adaptability as the internalisation of social expectations. Patrice understands when to show deference and when to assert power. Still, his behaviour is not merely reactive; it is strategic. He kneels before Douglas for survival, which is a calculated performance to keep his job and maintain his status back home in Ogada.

In the village, Patrice took the deadly "Ukpa ji-ukpa nwa" oath after accusing Methuselah Enigwe wrongly. This oath-taking delayed him and made him lose a business deal he was supposed to close for Douglas, who ransacks Patrice's quarters and takes all his savings in retaliation. When Patrice returns to this, he crawls and

cries before Douglas, pleading for mercy. Society agrees that a grown man should not cry or kneel to another, yet Patrice did that to accomplish his hidden motive:

> Patrice began to cry like a child. He did not mind the insults. He was used to being called "Wawa". It did not bother him anymore. What mattered was keeping his job and saving face, especially before his people in the village (p. 10).

This act, while a genuine emotion, is a calculated submission. His tears worked temporarily, and Douglas spared him only to jail him later. Patrice feels it is temporal. His homo economicus mind-set wins over his ego; he endures shame now for later rewards. The narrative reveals how Patrice hated Douglas even while playing "boy" through his discussions with Susanne:

> He would tell her that Sir Douglas Akidi was a killer and a murderer, a sinner who already had a room reserved for him in hellfire. Once he told her that he wished he could put a dagger into Sir Douglas Akidi's protruding tummy and watch water and blood gush out. (p.109).

Now, the reader is left wondering if this hatred had been inherent right from when he started serving Douglas, or after he was discarded and thrown in jail. As the story advances, Patrice's limits are tested. His acts of procuring girls and performing abortions for Douglas indicated a readiness to negate moral boundaries for favor. But the real test comes when Douglas preys on his 14-year-old daughter. In that moment, his two identities collide: the father and the dependent. At first, he reacts with a rage consistent with performativity:

> …Patrice Ikebe hurried to the market where he bought a long matchet. If Sir Douglas Akidi was going to shame him any further, he would make sure he proved himself a man. And what better way to do it than to chop off Sir Douglas Akidi's head and dangle it for everyone to see (p. 147).

Also, Patrice retorted when faced with Douglas brimming furiously; remembering that he had "served" him for several years only for him to be treated disdainfully. He screams:

> You will not leave your office alive today. I assure you….I gave you years of my life. I gave you my all, yet you treated me like a piece of trash.... What did the Abakaliki man do to you? What? You live in our land. You cultivate our land. You use our labour. What did we do to you? …You exploit our kindness…Patrice spat at him. The spittle missed Sir Douglas' face and landed on the breast pocket of his suit. But this morning... this morning, I end you. (p. 155-156).

Yet, in a wicked, ironic scene, Sir Douglas buys Patrice's loyalty on the spot by offering him a bag of money to drop the weapon. Patrice, eyeing the cash, makes a split-second calculation and takes the money. Through this act, he chooses capital over being a father. It is the novel's most devastating indictment of capitalist logic. The reader is left to Judge Patrice harshly, but this shows the extremes of habitus and economic desperation. Patrice's identity as a man has been so defined by money that he literally equates money with salvation, and any other principle, such as fatherhood and moral duty, becomes secondary. This form of performativity submission finds Patrice accepting money from Douglas after discovering he impregnated his daughter. Rather than exacting vengeance, he prioritises capital. The act is not a moral failing, but a triumph of neoliberal rationality over human emotion. His act also reveals the reach of the rational economic man who calculates value and benefit even in intimate matters (Obregón, 2018).

His next step was returning to the village with the money to start rebuilding himself and becoming rich again. The author expresses:

> He had enough money to make himself a new block house and start up any business he fancied. He could marry a new wife. Everything was now

> possible. Those who laughed at him after the oath would see that his God was not blind. (pp. 152-153).

However, Patrice's plans did not work out. He had an accident on his way back from a business trip, which took everything from him again, and eventually caused him physical disability. His block house in progress also collapsed. In the end, he stubbornly refuses to break the oath despite evidence of his error. In the last scenes, villagers regard him with disgust, a far cry from the admiration he once enjoyed. Society's treatment of Patrice comes full circle: when rich, he was celebrated; when destitute and disgraced by his own cursed actions, he was ostracised. It shows society's respect for men is fickle and reliant on success. This synchronises with Butler's submission (Brickell, 2005) "that masculinity is highly theatrical and conditional"

As stated previously, *Years of Shame* (2025) destabilises conventional assumptions about masculinity and dependency, especially on the idea that "gold-digging" is a female vice. The author explored men's pursuit of wealth through dependence or "digging" for capital by placing Patrice at the centre of economic dependence. The male characters show the fragility, fragmentation, and performativity of masculinity under the pressures of capitalism, postcolonial hierarchy, and patriarchal expectations. The story's main focus is Patrice, whose identity is split between humiliation and pride, performance and reality. His outward submission is evident in how Douglas constantly called "boy" is a gendered survival tactic. It reflects how men from lower classes or regions are belittled, drawing from colonial-era power structures (Ikenna, 2021). Patrice's silence, despite being 41 years old, showcases a masculinity rendered voiceless by class and ethnic subjugation. Yet, Patrice's masculinity is not monolithic. It is contextually adaptive.

Sir Douglas Akidi embodies the institutionalised peak of patriarchal capitalism. As a business mogul and chieftain, he performs hyper masculinity through accumulation: of wealth, wives, sexual conquests, and mythic ancestry. He reduces other men, such as Patrice, to tools to assert dominance. Even his friendships with other elite men are transactional, indicating the fragile and competitive nature of homo social relations among hegemonic males (Hammarén and Johansson, 2014). However, Douglas has vulnerabilities. His acceptance of Kosarachi as his heir shows that even dominant masculinity is driven by usefulness. Kosarachi's ambition and intelligence matter more than his ethnic background. It supports Butler's (1988) view that gender is shaped by performance and context.

Apparently, *Years of Shame* (2025) contributes to the evolving discourse on postcolonial and African masculinities. Pasura and Christou (2017) argued that African masculinity is historically constructed, flexible, and reliant on the setting/situation. Patrice exemplifies this plasticity. His masculinity is shaped by cultural pressure and economic hardship. Unlike Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, whose identity is rooted in tradition, Patrice lives in a harsher, modern reality. His kneeling, crying, and trading dignity for survival demonstrates the masculinity crisis in postcolonial societies, where men lose old roles without gaining stable new ones (Uchendu, 2007). Moreover, Patrice's homo economicus nature engages with criticism of neoliberalism. As Alami et al. (2024) noted, neoliberal rationality affects all aspects of life and reduces people to economic agents motivated by economic logic. Patrice embodies this logic. Every gesture, emotion, and decision is tied to economic survival. Even his hatred for Douglas is masked by obedience. It reflects what Grandey, Rupp, and Brice (2015) call "emotional labour", suppressing emotions to achieve an objective.

In contrast, therefore, Methuselah Enigwe's success through integrity and self-development relieves models of masculinity recognised in earlier African novels, such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Weep not, Child* (1964), where education and personal virtue are paths to masculine fulfilment. Methuselah's rise is based on self-worth, not sycophancy. However, *Years of Shame* (2025) complicates this ideal by attributing part of his success to supernatural justice through the *Ukpa ji-ukpa nwa* oath. Hence, it raises the question of whether ethical masculinity is possible without divine intervention in a corrupt society. Furthermore, Okon's character reflects how marginalised men can support patriarchy. As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) noted, complicity helps sustain hegemonic masculinity. Okon enables Susanne's abuse and chooses silence not out of fear, but to protect his job and status in Douglas's household.

In addition, the adoption of Bourdieu's capital theory, Butler's gender performativity, and the homo economicus model helped in understanding masculinity in *Years of Shame* (2025) better. Bourdieu's idea of economic, social, and symbolic capital explains Patrice's changing status. Butler's idea of gender as performance explained the roles of men in the story: Patrice as both "boy" and father, Douglas as patron and predator, Ideato as manipulator and lover. Each man puts up a performance to gain power or approval. However, Butler's theory has limits in the African spiritual discourse. For instance, the Ukpa ji-ukpa nwa oath is not an act of performativity; it is sacred and cosmically binding. It shows a more intense, spiritual layer of masculinity that Western theory mostly neglects. Likewise, the homo economicus model explained how economic logic shapes male behaviour, especially in Patrice's choices. Notwithstanding, the models do not take the psychological trauma, cultural values, and spiritual consequences that shape the characters' downfall into consideration.

Furthermore, the narrative has few implications. The author criticises a system where being a man means having money, and where men who do not meet that standard are shamed. Patrice's fall from respect, once admired, now looked down on; ironically shows how male status depends on wealth and success. The narrative suggests that masculinity is not a natural dignity, but something earned through performance and possession. It supports the assumptions of Ekeke and John (2025) that African masculinities commonly rely on outside approval, such as money, marriage, or power, instead of inner strength. Patrice's quick loss of respect shows how unstable that kind of identity can be. Besides, *Years of Shame* (2025) shows that patriarchy does not only affect women, but also damages men. Patrice, Okon, and Ideato become abusers or betrayers, not because they are naturally cruel, but because the system teaches them to value money over morals. In this way, the novel criticises not just patriarchy, but also capitalism, colonial influence, and the moral decay that comes with them.

Conclusion

Udenwe's *Years of Shame* (2025) proves that gold-digging is also a survival performance engaged by men under capitalist pressure and, it is not limited to the female folk only. The novel demonstrates how men also trade loyalty, submission, and bodies for wealth and power through the main character. The narrative warns that masculinity tied only to money is fragile and self-destructive. Additionally, by employing the theories of Bourdieu's capital, Butler's gender performativity, and Homo Economicus, the article captured how literature and sociology coalesced to probe the survival of the menfolk in relation to masculinity. It shows how such narratives identify and question expectations of men in real life. Besides, this novel seems to be questioning: What if we stopped measuring men by their social and economic capitals? What if we measure them through integrity, empathy, moral courage, accountability, emotional maturity, contribution to

community, respect for others, commitment to growth, and relational strength? *Years of Shame* (2025) is not just an account of downfall, it is a warning. If we keep judging men by how much they own, we will keep breeding shame, cruelty, and moral compromise. The time has come to imagine masculinity free from the weight of gold.

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