

## CONCEPTUALIZING THE FEMALE IMAGE IN AFRICAN NOVEL

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**ABSTRACT**

*The traditional African society is patriarchal in nature. Thus, women are often relegated to the background wherein they have no say in the decision making exercise of their various societies. Even more worrisome is that even on issues that directly affect them; their thoughts are not being considered. They are therefore perceived as objects to be seen and not to be heard. This paper, therefore, sets out to create a paradigm shift by accessing the woman's role differently that is a movement from docility to activity, an active participant in the affairs of their different societies. In justifying this assertion, this work employs the Feminist (radical) and Womanist literary theories in the assessment of Ayi Kwei Armah's: *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *Fragments*, *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Why Are we So Blest?* as well as Ngugi wa Thiong'o's: *A Grain of Wheat*, *Devil on the Cross* and *Wizard of the Crow*. This paper presents women as harbingers of change, resistance and assertion of authority. Consequently, they are seen as valuable agents of change aimed at achieving an egalitarian society.*

**Keywords:** Woman, docility, activity, resistance, change.

**INTRODUCTION**

In most traditional African societies, the female conception leaves more to be desired. It is often assumed in most them that a woman's primary responsibility in the society as she assumes puberty is not just to be admired for her beauty by her numerous suitors but to get married, warm her husband's bed and produce children. Specifically, she is expected to produce a male child as heir to her husband. Aside from the great challenges of marriage and child bearing, the woman is expected to attend to her physiological make up. Issues such as her monthly menstrual cycle, pregnancy, child labour as well as the overbearing effect of menopause are all of great concern to the woman. Not minding all of these challenges confronting the woman, and the sacrifices that she had to bear, some of these biological peculiarities expose her to some level of discrimination in the society. She is barred from attending or featuring at some occasions of

rituals and sacrifices because she is tagged as “unclean”. Though despised at some instances, she is sought after at another. The virgin woman is the sacrificial object or carrier of the sacrifice. Such was and it is still the fate of the woman.

Although it is generally believed in the traditional society that women are to be confined or relegated to the background, this assertion has been discountenanced as some women have broken the barriers of limitation imposed on them through the instrumentality of tradition, custom or culture to perform or make giant strides which have placed them on a high pedestal. The above postulations tend to have also affirmed the hidden prowess of the woman.

From different African backgrounds, women have towered where men falter. In the traditional Yoruba royal setting, women were seriously maligned. Thus, the only woman in the king’s cabinet is the Iyalode. She is highly respected and revered because she is believed to possess some spiritual or mystical power and in most cases, she is considered a man.

In recognition of her might, the king ‘oba’ ensures a cordial relationship with her so that his reign would be peaceful and reign long. Apart from the Iyalode in the traditional setting, some women have also achieved heroic and giant strides that have not and cannot be matched by men. Though considered negative but it is still heroic, the exploit of Efunsetan Aniwura, the Iyalode of Ibadan land could not be matched by the men of her time and age.

Moremi in Ile-Ife laid down her life to save an entire race from being exterminated by a ravaging external aggressor. She allowed herself to be taken into captivity in order to know and expose the secret that brought to an end the infiltration of the Igbo plunderers.

The exploits of Queen Amina of Zaria are also acknowledged. As the Magajiya in the royal cabinet, she came up with the military and war ploy that earned the Zauzau Empire several war victories. Like Moremi and Princess Inikpi of the Igala race, she achieved a great feat by volunteering herself to be buried alive as a placatory tool for her race to defeat the invincible Junkun warriors.

The contributions of these women have more or less shown that women have been the major sustainers of most societies but their efforts have been mostly unacknowledged because of subjugation. According to Lorena Aguilar et al (2007), 90% of the world’s staple crops are produced by women. The justification of polygamy is premised on the belief that multiple wives result in volumes of produce. Thus, women contribute immensely to the economy but unfortunately, they are more prone to disasters.

The sufferings of the women under the traditional culture were further compounded with the incursion of colonial administration. Right from the inception of colonial administration, there has been the surreptitious move not

to empower or employ women in the colonial administration. This is effectively done by barring women from going to school, and whenever and wherever the women were allowed access to education, they were often separated from the boys. This is because; the kind of education given the female children was to make them responsible wives and rearing mothers. Although it served as a disservice to the women, it also prepares for them a good opportunity for prowess. The denial of women access to education by the colonizers placed the men at vantage position and enabled them to have the early advantage of writing and dominance of the literary scene and managerial affairs.

### **THEORETICAL APPROACH**

The Post Civil War experience was a turning point in Nigeria's literary history. Writers began to emphasize on violence against women. The emphasis was now more on the plight of women instead of the earlier celebration of black culture and tradition. This era challenged the male dominated literary milieu. Women began to contend with their male counterparts in intellectual and literary prowess. This was made possible owing to the emergence of the gender movement called Feminism.

Feminism is the movement for the social, political and economic equality of men and women. It posits that men and women should not be treated differently in the society. It goes further to assert that women have frequently and systematically been barred from participating fully in all the available social arena and institution. Feminism, therefore, seeks a social change in the woman's status and the ways they are viewed in the society.

According to Helen Chukwuma, "Feminism means ... a rejection of inferiority and a striving for recognition. It seeks to give the woman a sense of self as a worthy effectual and contributing human being (...) Woman conditioning in Africa is the greatest barrier toward a fulfillment of self (p.ix) due to the fact that men use "the ideology of patriarchy which emphasizes male importance, dominance and superiority".

Womanism can be described as a black woman's liberation movement that seeks to support the enhancement of black backgrounds and the ideals of African life. It seeks to support all females and to expose all violations and atrocities committed against them. Against this background, Okonjo Ogunyemi posits: "Womanism is black centered; it is accommodationist. It believes in the freedom and independence of women like feminism, unlike radical feminism, it wants meaningful union between black women and black men" (60).

Feminism started in Western Europe in the 1840's and its tentacles spread into Nigeria after the Nigerian Civil War. Though with numerous strands, two main pre occupations of the movement were aimed at a reversal of the abnormality

of women being considered as a weaker sex as well as their oppression owing to cultural reasons.

Despite the ideology having different shades, yet it has a single philosophy of gender equity and equality. There are the liberal, radical, socialist, cultural etc brands of feminism. The radical feminist goes around with the strong philosophy of biological equality between men and women. The extreme belief and actions of radical feminism further resulted in the emergence of a milder form of feminism which results in the coinage of names commensurate to their own philosophy.

Two main theories that emerged as a result of this fallout are: Womanism and Motherism. These theories did not completely abhor any relationship with their male counterparts, brothers, uncles, sons, family heads etc. Rather, they insist that women as free born should be free to develop themselves freely without any form of hindrance, obstacles or molestation. The strong advocates of these strands of feminism are Buchi Emecheta, Catherine Acholonu, Molar Lesley Ogundipe, Okonjo Ogunyemi, etc.

Unlike Western Feminism, African Feminism does not work against or reject men, rather it accommodates them. This is so because most African women are strongly committed to the institution of marriage and family. Thus, they do not want to do without their men. They are against all forms of patriarchal domination which dehumanizes the woman and portray her as inferior or a second class citizen. Rather, it suggests a complementarily relationship between male and female.

An interesting development that arose as a result of the feminist movement is the rise in female writings. Some of their writings are so radical in outlook that they can best be described as retaliatory writings. The emergence and blossoming of female writing alludes to the fact that society develops in stages. The effect of the long years of neglect experienced by women before the post-civil war era resulted in the over conscious effort of the women to assert and enforce a deserving representation of the female gender as the years unfold. Affirming this assertion from a sociological point of view, Kenneth Harrow opines: "The degree to which works are penned by women, manner in which these texts are critically received and the roles women occupy within the general body of African Literature are all reflective of societal attitudes towards women" (170).

The evolution of feminism and feminist tendencies in African Literature and Criticism led to a condemnation of early African writers over their poor representation of women in their writings. This thought still absolves some notable African male writers like Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Sembene Ousmane, Ayi Kwei Armah etc were branded as African feminist writers.

In Armah's works, women are accorded prominent roles and significant space in his narratives. Their roles can be categorized differently as exploiters, rescuers, sympathizers, sexual partners, demanders or heroines. The women in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments* share semblance in their presentation as demanders. The women believe that any man who cannot sacrifice or corrupt himself to take care of his family is a failure and he is as good as dead. To the Man's mother-in-law, Koomson is the real man because he can provide for the entire need of his family and because the Man could not provide for the family, she sees her grandchildren as fatherless.

Not just the mother-in-law, the man's wife, Oyo also sees the man as a failure. She constantly compares herself to Estella, Koomson's wife. She was unsparing in her condemnation of her husband. She calls him an onward Christian soldier "chichidodo", a bird that feeds on maggot but hates faeces. Though an adversary to the Man, she later comes to accept his stance after seeing the fate that befell Koomson. Though it seems to be a negative portrayal of the woman, Armah's novels also present women as "saviours" and "destroyers". In *Fragments*, Juana is presented as a succor, while the likes of Aimee and Mrs. Jefferson in *Why Are We So Blest?* are profiled as predators who were all out to destroy Modin. To them, Modin was nothing but a sex machine meant to satisfy their sexual urge not minding whatever is takes or is involved. Like a wolf, sex is all that Aimee remembers and thinks about.

In his later novels, Armah presents and eulogises African woman's intellect and leadership qualities. He demonstrates and displays the physical resilience and moral superiority of the traditional African woman. In an attempt to showcase the sensitivity, courage and defiant nature of the woman, Armah in *Two Thousand Seasons* presents Yaniba as defiant and courageous. With the support of other women, Yaniba established a welfare system with the aim of equitable distribution of welfare resources. She introduced measures aimed at addressing the issue of water scarcity. To address this, she stopped the brewing of hey drinks until it is convenient to resume brewing. She is reportedly known for her inability to tolerate the dryness outside and indolence of mind.

Apart from Yaniba, both Ndole and Akole are women of uncommon courage. As an eloquent woman, Ndola castigates the king at public functions which resulted in her being banished by Tutu who prefers to hear pleasant songs of deceit. As a person endowed with the gift of truth, when the king's praise singer falsified the truth about the real aim of the white man's coming and creates the impression that their coming was to the peoples' advantage. Responding to the falsification, Akole counters:

... white men from the sea were homeless brigands and soulless ...

Monsters they were, and even if we did not have in us the courage of

truth to execute them outright as punishment for their crimes against all people of the way we should at least have the wisdom not to welcome them among ourselves (78-79).

Akole's speech was all that the people needed to bring them back to their senses, thus silencing King Koranche and his hangers on who all pretend to be thinking. Another woman of substance which Armah projected is Idawa. She is a woman of beauty and moral valuation who possesses the ability to attend to every situation or circumstance. She fought vehemently against forced or forceful betrothal, a cultural norm targeted at ladies and women. She turned down the overtures of all her suitors including that of King Koranche. She turned down the king's proposal of marriage on a moral ground that; she will have nothing to do with one who is greedy and tyrannical like King Koranche. Instead of waiting to be proposed to by a man, Idawa woos the young and hardworking Ngabune. This demonstrates her right to self-determination.

Abena is another formidable, courageous, credible and morally fortified woman who acts as the moral voice of her people. Not minding being betrayed by fellow initiates and risk of harm from the royals, she musters the courage of spitting on the face of the king when she and others were held down as captives.

In all, Armah presents and endows these women with one form of talent or the other which enables them to display acts of prowess. He further affirms to us that it is not only men who are endowed with acts of bravery, courage and power, women also possess such. And that the survival and development of any society depends on the active collaboration of both the male and the female.

## CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK

Like most African societies, the Kenyan society is essentially patriarchal. Thus, men are often considered to be more superior to the women.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'O always champion for the promotion of African women and other marginalized groups in the African society. He is one notable male African authors' who has clearly made a paradigm shift of portraying African women as "subjects" instead of the earlier presentation of women as "objects". In Africa, women have been suppressed and subjected to negative stereotypes. Their efforts, roles and contributions to the development of the society have often been omitted if not neglected. They are, therefore, often sidelined from being involved in important decision making processes within their immediate families and the entire community or communities.

Applauding Ngugi's assigning of responsibility role to women in his literary oeuvre, Ebele Eko opines: "Ngugi is a ground breaking example of the modern African male author's shift from portraying women as objects to that of subjects" (212). He projects the African woman as a survivor of the harshest

conditions. Eko's submission was further corroborated by James Ogude thus: "women serve as allegorical tropes (and) primary sites for testing the reconciliation of ethnicity and hope and, the possibility of a rebirth" (109).

Ngugi's women believe that education brings life to the life of the oppressed and equips them with the power and understanding to fight oppression. Acknowledging the invaluable role of the woman and the mother in every home and society, Ngugi asserts:

... my mother was the one who took care of us; that is, we three brothers and three sisters. She virtually shouldered every responsibility of our struggle for food, shelter, clothing and education. It was my mother who initially suggested that I go to school. I remember those nights when I would come back home from school, and not knowing that she could not read or write, I would tell her everything that I learnt in school or read to her something, and she would listen very keenly and give me a word of advice here and there (18).

Ngugi's women are given due attention. They are presented as groomers, nurturers and sustainers of societal norms and values. They played a vital role in bringing about radical changes in the society by socializing and sending their children to school to learn and acquire knowledge which they later used to fight against the oppressive system. Unlike the men who are much more obsessed with the idea of revenge. Applauding the liberational and inspirational role of women in Ngugi's works, Jennifer Evans posits: "Ngugi's female characters" are all in their own ways "resistance heroines and the strongest symbols of cultural identity, community and continuity" (131).

During the Mau Mau revolutionary or resistance struggle, the women played a vital role in the struggle. Many of the women went to the forest with the men while some stayed back in the villages and fully supported the struggle by secretly transporting food and weapons to the fighters in the forest. Although during the Mau Mau struggle, women were barred from engaging in prostitution, they were however allowed to flirt with the enemies for the purposes of gathering vital information.

In many of his novels, Ngugi applauds and showers encomiums on the women for their many sacrifices and contributions to the struggle for the liberation and freedom of their nation. In *A Grain of Wheat*, women are described as the invisible backbone of the movement. The women were able to conduct Mau Mau's business effectively without being noticed. They served as the link between the forest fighters and the people back at home. Like Sembene Ousmane's Ramatoulaye in *God's Bits of Wood*, Wambui, one of the major characters in *A Grain of Wheat* is an epitome of a resistant and revolutionary

woman. During the emergency, she transports and disseminates sensitive information from the villages to the forest and from the forest to the villages. During one of her exploits with a pistol tied to her thighs, she was suddenly stopped at one of the police check points. When it was her turn to be searched, she pretends to be an old woman. The policeman commenced the search from her chest, rummaged under her armpits, gradually working his way down towards her vital spot. Confounded by the policeman's action and as a way of escape from being caught red handed, Wambui screams:

'The children of these days' ... 'Have you lost all your shame? Just because the whiteman tells you so, you would eventually touch your mother's ... the woman who gave you birth? All right, I'll lift the clothes and you can have a look at your mother. It is so aged, and see what gain it'll bring you for the rest of your life. She actually made as if to lift her clothes and expose her nakedness. The man involuntarily turned his eyes away (19-20).

Wambui's courage and act of bravery shows the significance and value of women in the African society. Her escape can be linked or connected to the ingenious nature of women in the traditional African society. Her action shows that the women are the invisible and unsuspected fighters in the fight for freedom. It can, therefore, be concluded that if the women had not formed such a formidable secret force, Kenya's struggle against colonial dominance might be an effort in futility.

Assessing Ngugi's works, Charles A. Nama says: Ngugi's heroines occupy a special place in his fiction, especially with respect to their function as "custodians and defenders of traditional Gikuyu culture" (142). An affirmation of this assertion can be sited when Karanja, Kihika, Gitogo and one other man met Mumbi at Gikonyo's workshop, a place where young men gather for gossip. Karanja respectfully calls out Wangari: "Mother of men, we have come. Make us tea" (80). The tribute to Wangari is an explication of her vital role in the novel. The importance of female identity is symbolically bound to motherhood and the nation. In affirming this, Kihika, the Mau Mau hero refers to the homeland as a mother and he says proudly: "with us, Kenya is our mother" (53). With this, one can submit that Ngugi imbues strong women with psychic mind, inspirational and intellectual abilities that often lead to sound judgment.

In *Devil on the Cross*, Wariinga, one of the novels lead characters is a betrayed woman. She is a representative of the Kenyan working class woman in a post colonial Kenyan nation. She went through a lot of misfortunes and harassments in the hands of some uncouth men in the society. She was dismissed from her



job for rejecting the sexual advances of her employer, Boss Kihara. She was thrown out of her one room apartment because of her inability to pay her rent because of the sudden increase by her landlord and was also abandoned by her fiancé.

She was traded, abused, deflowered, impregnated and later abandoned by the Rich Old Man from Ngorika. Because she was neglected and abandoned by her relatives, she attempted suicide on more than one occasion. Apart from being a sexual and social victim, Wariinga is also a victim of her traditional culture which presents her as a person with no self-worth. As a woman, in order to retain your job, you must succumb to the demands of the libidinous and wanton employers. According to Wariinga, the office women are their bosses' real wives, but not the legal ones. She draws a contrast between a "goat for slaughter and one for grazing" (206). Wariinga's thought was corroborated by Boss Kihara when he says:

"Ah, Kareendi, jobs are very hard to come by these days. But a girl like you ... it shouldn't be too difficult to find something for you to do. But, Kareendi, a matter like this can't be finalized in the office. Let's go across to the Modern Love Bar and Lodging to discuss the question more fully" (19).

Like every other woman in the society, Wariinga finally comes to the realization that in the Post Colonial Kenyan society, the emergent leaders (capitalists) do nothing but compound the woes of the down trodden. This inhuman experience inspires her desire to move ahead and desire for a change. She trains as a secretary and also obtains a degree in Mechanical Engineering from the Polytechnic University. A field that was more like an exclusive preserve of the men. As a representative of the working class women in her society, Wariinga experienced frustrations in her community under both the Colonial and Post Colonial leadership. This experience prompted her to begin to question the position of women and most especially, the workers in her society. Reacting to this experience, she laments: We who work as clerks, copy typists and secretaries, which side are we on?

We who type and take dictation from Boss Kihara and his kind, whose side are we on in this dance? Are on the side of the workers, or on the side of the rich? Who are we? Who are we? Many a time I've heard women say: "our firm does this or that", "In our firm we employ so many workers, who earn this much", "Our company made this much profit", and as they speak, they do not have a cent for their bus fare in the evening. Yes, I've often heard girls bragging about their bosses, and when you check carefully to see what they're bragging about,

you can't find a thing. A few hundred shillings a month for a woman with children to feed, and we proudly call that a salary? And in exchange for little we have sacrificed four things (206).

Despite her transformation from an abused, frustrated and suicidal young girl into a mature, beautiful independent woman, she ends up in a miserable manner as she shoots her prospective father-in-law to be, the Rich Old Man from Ngorika. In shooting the man, Wariinga says: "I'm not going to save you. But I shall save many other people" (253). Wariinga's act of sacrificing her freedom and comfort for the generality of the people exemplifies her belief in the community rather than the self or individual. The liberation of the community from the shackles, evils and devils of neocolonialism is of paramount concern. Justifying Wariinga's action, Ngugi says: "Violence in order to change an intolerable, unjust social order is not savagery. It purifies man. Violence to protect and present an unjust, oppressive social order is criminal and diminishes man (28) *Homecoming*.

Wariinga's revolt is indicative of the evolution of a new energy, the force and spirit of resistance. In her latter days, she has gone through a lot of transformation with a number of experiences that have brought about astounding changes in her life. In asserting this she says:

No, this Wariinga is not that other Wariinga. This Wariinga has decided that she'll never again allow herself to be a mere flower, whose purpose is to decorate the doors and windows and tables of other people's lives, waiting to be thrown on to a rubbish heap the moment the splendor of her body withers. The Wariinga of today has decided has decided to be self-reliant all the time, to plunge into the middle of the arena of life's struggles in order to discover her real strength and to realize her true humanity (216).

According to Eustace Palmer, "Wariinga belongs to that remarkable breed of Ngugi's women – all of them brave, resilient, resourceful and determined" (6). She successfully saved herself, other women and the generality of the people from the colonial and post colonial oppression and suppression. Her experience scales through most of the assessment of the (a) transformed African woman. Thus, it can be emphasized that Wariinga's role in the narrative emphasizes on the fact that a woman's role is more than that of a sexual role and thus requires that women should be placed on equal basis with the men. She projects that the woman is not a man's flower, an inanimate object, that ornament to be worn to decorate the man, or the scented perfume that the man wears when going to dance and discard it once it loses its scent.

In *Wizard of the Crow*, there is a serious unearthing and advancement of the suppressed or hidden potentials and capabilities of the woman. In this novel, women were able to display their full potentials as well as the ability to surmount whatever obstacle that comes their way. It showcases the coming together of women with a united voice to oppose whatever obstacle or impediment that have been put on their way by men and the society. It shows womanhood for their collective good and that of the larger society.

The novel chronicles series of wrong doings being meted out to women. In the state of Aburiria, Rachel, the first lady is humiliated by her husband, the Ruler, for her effrontery in daring to question him on his sexual escapades, most especially his sexual violations of school girls who are like his children. For daring to question him, an act which he considers “a crime”, she is “banished to a mansion built on seven acres of land where the Ruler attempts to freeze her life in time and space” (10).

Another good example of female suppression in the novel is the narrative of Vinjinia, whose husband; Tajirika is one of the prominent men in the society. Like Rachel, she is imprisoned in the post colonial machinery of the political elite. As a traditional woman, she believes in the sanctity of marriage. At the domestic level, she is presented as a dutiful, wise and articulate woman who manages the home front very well. Her expertise was further put to play through her skillful handling and management of the business when her spouse was sick. As a reward for her support in his moment of need, she is rewarded with blow(s) every now and then. Describing Vinjinia’s experience, Waita Njogu says: “Although living in the modern age, her husband views her as a lesser being rather than an equal partner” (48).

Nyawira, the heroine of the novel is undoubtedly the most developed female character in Ngugi’s novels. An intelligent organizer of not only a women group but a larger group named Movement for the Voice of the People. Though born into the middle class of the society, her consciousness develops as the novel progresses and her involvement in a car accident further raised her consciousness. She rejects her father’s attempt to influence and control her life. Against her father’s wish, she marries Kaniuru, a poor artist. Upon her realization that Kaniuru did not marry her for love, but because of her father’s wealth, she divorced him immediately.

She is presented as a new woman capable of providing a formidable and committed political leadership in a collective manner to free the women of Aburiria in their fights against patriarchal oppression in order to save the homeland. As a character who is at the fore front of charting a new course, and determined to create a new identity for the African woman, Nyawira questions the African woman’s position as being terribly oppressed “on account of her

color like all black people in the world (...) on account of her gender like all women the world; (...) on account of her class like all workers and peasants in the world” (428).

This triple oppression of the female deepened her belief in consciousness raising as a means of sharing experiences and expression of hidden fears as a result of the oppression and suppression of women in post colonial African society. Describing this act, Acker and Barry submits: “Consciousness raising is a technique for revealing experience that has been denied by the dominant ideology” (179). As a pioneer provider of social, political and moral education of the women and other characters in the novel, Nyawira’s tutoring and mentoring of members of the revolutionary Movement for the Voice of the People led to a committed and harmonious interaction among the members which gave the Ruler and his army of bootlicking and sycophantic ministers a serious worry. This female bonding came to the fore during the dedication of the Marching to Heaven project when the female protesters shamed the Ruler by exposing his evil practices to the whole world by shouting, “Set Rachel free!” (250), they kept on repeating: “You imprison a woman and you have imprisoned a nation” (253). As the organizer and brain behind the movement, Nyawira insists on the intensification of the “struggle against all gender-based inequalities, and therefore fight for the rights of women in the home, the family, the nation, and the world” (428). As a corroboration of this assertion, Tajirika, the chairman of Marching to Heaven received beating from members of the people’s court for daring to beat his wife. An offence that is situated within the precinct of: “what happens in a home is the business of the nation and the other way round” (435).

Vinjinia’s reporting of her husband, his beating and constantly keeping the movement in touch with the latest news is an attestation to a strong bond of sisterhood. It also goes to show her strong commitment to the women’s cause than to her husband or marriage.

In order to sustain the movement and continue to be relevant in their struggle, the group realized the need for constant re-strategization and creativity so as to be many steps ahead of their tormentors. As a way of showing their dexterity, the movement led by Nyawira came up with an ancient and obscene dance as a means of protest against the Marching to Heaven project. Through this dance, they were able to shame the Ruler and his ilk before the Global Bank messengers.

To cover up for this shameful and disgraceful act, Machokali had to cook up a lie before the Global Bank representatives by saying that the dance at Eldares represents “a sacred Aburirian dance performed only before most honored guests” (242). To further show that they are always steps ahead of the

leadership class, the Movement often disguise in different forms, shapes and identities. Sometimes they act as beggars, garbage collectors, limping witch or wizards, dancers among others. Sometimes, Nyawira escaped arrest and death by the whiskers. Her escapes go to affirm the belief and hope of a brighter future.

The novel can be described as Ngugi's grandiose acknowledgement and celebration of female emancipation. It asserts female authority and also applauds the need for male-female relationship. It touches on the issue of "sex" that is considered an exclusive preserve of the men. It also establishes the fact that the woman also has the right to determine, when, where, how and who to have sex with. In the novel, Nyawira refused to have sex with Kamiti despite being in a compromising and amorous situation with him. In turning him down she says:

If a person refuses to wear a condom in these days of the deadly virus and he still wants to go the distance, he is my enemy, not my lovemate, and I should not let him touch me. That is why I threw you off, because I thought you were one of these men who think it unmanly to wear condom (93).

With this, one can therefore submit that sex and marriage which in traditional African milieu is an exclusive preserve of men has lost its steam as the women now have a say on what affects them, what to say and what to do.

In appraising the combination of Kamiti and Nyawira as a formidable union and a force to reckon with, Waita opines: "the pair is the symbol of indomitable human spirit-a spirit that can never die-a spirit that can consistently resist the constant cycles of repression and exploitation in post colonial Africa" (49).

In conclusion, one therefore submits that in Ngugi's novels, women have been assigned new roles and identities. The women have moved from being an object to a subject, docility to activity, ignorance to awareness, dependent to independent. His female characters are highly resourceful and proactive. They have moved from being ordinary women to superwomen who are capable of sponsoring and masterminding resistance and revolutionary movements with the aim of not only liberating the women from the shackles of oppression and suppression but the emancipation of the entire populace.

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