

**A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF GENDER ISSUES IN TWO SELECT KENYAN  
NOVELS: *THE RIVER BETWEEN* AND *THE RIVER AND THE SOURCE***

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## DECLARATION AND APPROVAL

### Declaration by Candidate

This research project is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university for any award.

Sign.... *C.K.E.* Date .....3/11/2024

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### Approval by Supervisor

I confirm that the work reported in this project was carried out by the candidate under my supervision

Sign..... *[Signature]* ..... Date .....3/11/2024.....

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## DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

**Novel:** According to the Oxford English Dictionary a novel is ‘a fictitious prose narrative or tale of considerable length (now usually one long enough to fill one or more volumes) in which characters and actions representative of the real life of past or present times are portrayed in a plot of more or less complexity’. (Thawtorn 2001:4)

**Constructionist:** *Constructionist* learning is when learners construct mental models to understand the world around them. *Constructionism* advocates student-centered, discovery learning where students use information they already know to acquire more knowledge.

**Image:** This is the the forming of mental pictures to express an idea about a conception of a social construct from mainly cultural contexts. In this study the term will be used to stand for the poetic pictorial conceptions relating to pieces and/or compositions that are created from listening to a music-inclined language.

**Gendered language:** This refers to the language used by both men and women which shows their positions on societal issues. The language use might spell out gender sensitive or gender-insensitive conceptions of individuals or group dynamics. In this study the term is applied to refer to aspects of musical compositions from select popular Gikuyu artists relating to cultural and contemporary practices reflected among members of the Agikuyu community.

**Social constructionism:** Also known as the social construction of reality (also social concept), it is a theory of knowledge in sociology and communication that examines the development of jointly constructed understandings of the world that form the basis for shared assumptions about reality. The theory centers on the notions that human beings rationalize their experience by creating models of the social world and share and reify these models through language.

**Character development :** the different progress that a person makes in a plot of a story, because of the struggles that the person faces (Sefton, 2011). The main idea in a story, can be realized from character development.

**Gender** : denotes to the listing of the social, cultural and psychological differences between men and women (Giddens, 2001). This is what defines the male and females. The way in which authors represent the male and females in their works raises research areas for further studies.

**Gender inequality** : relates to people's unfair treatment or understanding of their gender (Wood, 2005). This is evident when undertaking gender studies, and it is still a contemporary issue as seen in this study.



## **Abstract**

The study focuses on two novels that were written one by a premiere first generation writer and another authored by a third generation one. The study examines aspects feminism and gender as well as thematic concerns that reveal the images of women in Kenyan literature. The study involves the analysis of language used by characters and the writers view on gendered societal paradigms that embody characterization as a backdrop for the analysis of the said texts more so on the position of women in Kenyan society through the two writers' eyes. The study will be guided by the following objectives. (i)Interrogate the stylistic features that embody the crafting of characters who reveal gender issues in *The River Between* and *The River and the Source*(ii) Explore the thematic concerns addressed by the authors that reveal the gender issues in *The River Between* and *The River and the Source*(iii)To examine the influence of oral traditions in entrenching gender issues as depicted in *The River Between* and *The River and the Source*. The study will adopt liberal feminism. The methodology will be confined to contextual approach that will be conducted in the library search modalities. As such, no field instruments will be used.



## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.1 Introduction

Globally, the novel has emerged as a force to reckon with as a means of reflecting societal issues as regards the social, political, economic, and religious among others. Every society of the world is governed by its traditional and cultural values that members have been observing from time immemorial.

The novel emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century in the European continent. This implies that the first examples of literary writers who were interested in prose fiction date back to the era of Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, D.H.Lawrence, Leo Tolstoy among others.

"The novel" as a category may be hazy around the edges, and may be in a state of constant development and self-reconstruction, but this new literary genre emerged in Europe in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and was obviously different from earlier forms such as that of romance," writes Jeremy Hawthorn in his critical work, *The Novel* (2001:15), while discussing "History, Genre and Culture."

In Kenya the most famous novelist is Ngugi wa Thiong'o who wrote *Weep Not Child* in 1964. This marked the beginning of the Kenya-African novel in English that set the pace for other up and coming writers of the day. It is important to note that Ngugi's endeavor as captured in *Weep Not, Child* opened the space not only in Kenya but also in the rest of the East African region.

When Ngugi started writing, the premiere African writers did not consider the question of gender balance in their creative works. More often than not, they crafted central characters who were male while their female characters tended to play a supplementary role. Nevertheless, it is notable that the writers then were focusing their works based on the patriarchal hegemonies of the day. In the pre-colonial and and post-independent

times within the postcolonial era the place of a woman was relegated to that of an outsider who was mostly seen but rarely heard.

As Mwangi (2008:vii)

“Ngugi wa Thiong’o is no doubt Kenya’s most famous author and *The River Between* is one of the earliest works. The novel was published in 1965, but it was drafted much earlier, before his first novel, *Weep Not, Child* (1964). An accomplished novelist, dramatist and essayist, Ngugi occupies an important place in African literature among authors such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Nadine Gordimer, Ousamane Sembene and Mongo Beti.”

In Africa writing of novels started in Western and Southern Africa.

According to Larson 1972 in *Emergence of African Fiction*, Written African literature began in West Africa when Caseley Hayford wrote prose fiction as a pioneer African writer.

Later Thomas Mafolo from South Africa wrote novels that tended to be apologists of African culture and they reflected how Africans were inferior to Whites. His novels did not reflect the Africans traditions and cultural practices but rather disparaged Africa’s sense of nationhood.

David Cook in his critical work “African Literature: A Critical Review” addresses the literary role played by African premiere writers like Amos Tutuola who wrote *The Palm Wine Drinkard* and Chinua Achebe who wrote, *Things Fall Apart* for introducing aspects of African oral traditions and cultural practices. The writers wrote their works basing them on the Igbo of Nigeria’s oral traditions. Later, Wole Soyinka wrote fiction and plays of Nigeria using the Yoruba people oral traditions.

In Eastern Africa, James Ngugi who later changed his name to Ngugi wa Thiong'o emerged as a leading light in writing of African novels. Later the likes of Okot p'Bitek from Uganda joined the premiere writer when he wrote poetry and plays.

The position of women in Eastern Africa was no better treated in the novel as compared to the rest of Africa. Among the Agikuyu of Kenya whom Ngugi writes about the woman who is referred to as *mundu-muka*, which literally means a person who is an outsider, who has simply come from another clan to serve as a caretaker and simply to bear children. Right from the onset one perceives a picture of the woman's role in a family of the ancient times as simply a complimentary one, that of playing the second fiddle.

Mwangi Evan (2008:vi) in a guide on African writing observes:

*The River Between* is a novel about the cultural conflicts that arose after Europeans introduced Christianity and colonial administration in Kenya. Particularly sensitive is the female circumcision, banned by the church in late 1920s. The novel is set around this time and it captures the conflict between Christianity and African customs, older and younger generations, and the conflict between individual and community.

The current study delves into exploring the position of women characters in the two select Kenyan novels. *The River Between*, by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and *The River and he Source* by Margaret Ogola. In Kenyan literary epochs Wa Thiong'o belongs to the First generation of Kenyan writers who started writing articles and journal works in their respective universities in the late 1950s and the early 1960s.

The Second generation started writing in the late 1960s and the mid-1970s. The third generation are the Millenials who started writing in the late 1990s. The Fourth group are the Generation Z who started writing in the 2000s to the present times. Margaret Ogola

belongs to the third generation as she started writing in 1994. She wrote *The River and the Source* and *I swear by Apollo*. In this era the third wave of feminism had gained root in Africa.

The project that the researcher has engaged in does not ignore the fact that there were premiere White-Kenyan pro fiction writer like Karen Blixen, who wrote, *Out of Africa*, Elspeth Huxley who wrote, *The Flames Trees of Thika* among others. It appears these White-Kenyan writers wrote for a target audience in the West and so their works did not bring out the spirit of Kenyan-ness that would capture the nationhood that illuminates the African psyche in African literature written by Africans for Africans.

### **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The study explores the influence of feminist critical thought and gender perspectives emergent in *The River between* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and *The River And Then Source* by Margaret Ogola. The former is by a male author while the latter is by a female author, a significant choice in setting of an equilibrium between men and women writers not only in Kenya but also in the rest of Eastern Africa region. Further, Investigations of culture often focus on material culture and tradition. When written narratives are treated as defining the culture of a people, attention usually is on traditional materials. However, the present study shows how popular novels may have become a current and critical expressive tools for raising the gender question and also reinforcing a people's cultural values in contemporary times. Studies on culture show that each community has distinct cultural values. This study seeks to explore in a comparative nature the influence of feminist critical orientations in the selected novels.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The study focuses on “A Critical Analysis of Gender Issues in Two Select Kenyan Novels:

*The River Between* by Ngugi wa Thiongo and *The River And The Source*, by Margaret

Ogola. These are works of Kenya-African literature from different generation(s).

### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

(i) Interrogate the stylistic features that embody the crafting of characters who reveal gender

issues in *The River Between* and *The River and the Source*

(ii) Explore the thematic concerns addressed by the authors that reveal the gender issues in

*The River Between* and *The River and the Source*

(iii) To examine the influence of oral traditions in entrenching gender issues as depicted in

*The River Between* and *The River and the Source*.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

(i) Are there features of style used to craft characters who embody gender issues in *The River Between* and *The River and the Source* ?

(ii) Are there thematic concerns applied by the authors that portray gender issues in *The River Between* and *The River and the Source* ?

(iii) Is there influence of tradition embedded in oral tradition that depicts gender issues in *The River Between* and *The River and the Source* ?

### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

This study enables readers and generally the scholars of Kenya literature in English to understand from the researcher perspective the feminism and gender issues in the Kenyan novel. The study carries a central role in motivating our upcoming authors as they will be able to know the importance of narratology as a form expressing a work of art. They will be

able to conduct a research before embarking on any novel writing. They will then be able to choose the novels they use wisely according to the needs of the readership that is entailed. The Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) will also find it invaluable in its endeavor to select prescribed texts for Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) programmes. Equally, tertiary colleges and Universities that teach literature in English will also find them relevant fields of units taught at the High education levels.

### **1.7 Justification of the Study**

This study focuses on the two selected East African novels that are written by well-renown authors one from the premiere generation and the other from the third and/or contemporary generation of Kenyan writers. The work seeks to examine the gender question in written works through critical analysis of the selected African Feminists writings. In using two texts, one by a male author and the other by a female author the researcher captures the imagination of potential readers in embarking carrying out a critical analysis of how the authors have voiced out the issue of female and male identity in their texts. At this level the aspect of comparativeness drives the case of women writers a notch higher in Kenyan literature. From this end, The two texts that selected works, depict representative sample of other African feminist writing.

### **1.8 Scope and Limitation**

This work is purely on Kenyan Literature. It has not engages other African works from the rest of Africa or more than two Kenyan writers but rather it has focused on two select works by two authors: Ngugi wa Thiongo's *The River Between* and Margaret Ogola's *The River and the Source*. Equally, it focuses mainly on the treatment of women by a male writer vis-à-vis a female one. This researcher study focuses on the two selected novels to make an inquiry on the gendered feminine and masculine tone of writers of opposite sex. One a

premiere category and the later a contemporary author who has written this novel during the waves of feminism of the 1980s and 1990s using the Kenyan experience.

### **1.9 Theoretical Framework**

Both deconstruction literary tendencies and feminism theory were used in this study. Originally coined by gender theorists as feminist literary criticism, the phrase feminist literary theory was first used in the 1980s. The term "critique" was used to refer to a method or style of literature research. These days, the terms theory and criticism are used interchangeably in feminist studies, and feminist literary theory is a combination of theoretical and realistic approaches to literature (Code, 2000). Class, gender, race, and sexuality distinctions may be encouraged or discouraged by literary criticism and theory, as well as by applications and methodologies, according to Code (Salah et al., 2016). Gender issues have been the subject of debate in the chosen feminist books through the application of feminism theory.

The feminist movement is a revolution against the gender roles that are assigned to or connected with men and women in society. Males have been portrayed in society as normal, powerful, considerate, and important due to certain tendencies. This scenario identifies specific gender roles for professions including pilots, engineers, and doctors. Feminist ideologists claim that these gender norms hinder women's empowerment and deny them equitable access to managerial and decision-making responsibilities. As a result, the women have been persuaded that they lack the qualifications for well-paying professions like mathematicians and scientists. Feminism as a movement aims to advance gender equality for the benefit of both sexes. It is therefore a form of "activism" against male dominance.

When a literary piece is criticized using deconstructionism, it leads to the emergence of alternative interpretations that are not straightforward but rather contradict the text's widely held meaning. Every historical book is dissected to provide alternative self-interpretations. This implies that there are several meanings in the text and that readers are prone to misinterpreting it while doing so. Concerns regarding existence and absence, truth and appearance, are reflected in deconstructionism, which emerged in Paris. It developed from structuralism and placed a strong emphasis on symbols and semantics. Bradbury (1991). In order to perform a research study based on how both male and female authors have depicted the notion of masculinity, deconstruction theory helped to answer the research questions.

By closely examining how the writers have handled male identity and how this has shaped the image of masculinity, the ideas contained in the chosen texts were dismantled. The researcher's focus was on examining the connection between male characters' self-identity and societal expectations. Instead of expressing their identities in accordance with social norms, the male characters in the chosen texts were shown to have the freedom to express who they are based on their distinctive personalities. Last but not least, the theory also focused on determining how male characters are portrayed in feminist literature and whether or not these works include indications of masculine identity.

This study used feminism theory in conjunction with deconstruction theory as a means of critiquing the chosen texts. According to the research aims, the study aimed to dissect the thematic issues expressed in the texts. The study analysis was conducted using the two hypotheses. The goals of the study were determined by the research questions. The theories should have aided in the development of a thorough research analysis.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter highlights the literature of the previous studies covered related to the researcher's area of study. It presents empirical literature, state of African literature, the gender question in written African literature, women writers in written African literature, styles in African written literature among others.

#### **2.2 Empirical literature**

This chapter further explores the state of African literature as regards the following components: the state of African literature across generations, the gender question in written African literature, African women writer, the gender question in written African literature, women writers in written African literature, styles in African written literature

In *'The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet born'* by Ayi Kwei Armah, he notes that the character is important for what he or she symbolizes and/or represents. (Palmer, 1972). Armah's sensuality style has no aesthetic value in itself; rather its values lie in the subtleness which sensual details become the symbols. A network is provided for by the symbols, which simultaneously provide the writer and reader a refined moral insight by evaluation. (Ogungbesan cited in Lazarus, 1990)

#### **2.2 State of African literature**

The First generation of African writers was mainly educated in the premiere mission schools. They were taught by Missionary teachers, and those teachers co-opted in the colonial system through the emergent Christianity religion. They experienced and read works by early missionary writers, anthropologists, linguists, ethnographers, ethnologists and colonial administrators among others.

Jomo Kenyatta (1938) wrote *Facing Mount Kenya: A Traditional Life of the Agikuyu People*. Before him, a white Missionary scholar, Father V. Cagnolo had written: *The Akikuyu: Their Traditions and Folklore*. These books that emerged as premiere works in cultural and literary studies that are still, a crucial reference point when debates on African written literature and oral literature are addressed.

Jacqueline Bardolf in Killam (2001:36) opines:

Paradoxically, literature in English can be said to start with *Facing Mount Kenya* (1938), by Jomo Kenyatta rather than with biographical or political writings like P.G. Mackerie's *An African Speaks for his People* (1934), or Mbiyu Koinange's *The People of Kenya Speak for Themselves* (1955). The major work by the future president of Kenya is a piece of social anthropology on the Kikuyu, started under the guidance of Prof Malinovsky; it can also be said to have the demonstrative clarity, the passionate tone and the vision of the future of a political manifesto.

Larson (1972) presents similar views to those of Killam but appears to be the pace setter in the emergence of African fiction literary concerns.

Gikandi(1998) also belongs to the same school of thought like Larson and writes mainly from the diaspora location in the West.

Killam, G.D.(1984:36) Jackline Bardolf in Killam notes:

Vitality and diversity are the terms that came to mind when one tries to qualify the literature of Kenya to date. Vitality, when in less than two decades a great number of authors and titles, and much exciting work has kept appearing, well-known writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Meja Mwangi do not stand isolated like lone tree on the planes, they emerge from a thriving forest

Further, she opines:

Diversity when in such a short span the variety of genres and subjects covered has been as great as if not greater than anywhere else in Africa. If we examine how the literature of Kenya has emerged ,developed and, it can be said, come to maturity, it will be possible to relate the major talents to their fertile milieu, to bring out the common themes and approaches and a certain tone of voice which, beyond the diversity or the uneven literary merit of individual works, can be said to be the mark of a national literature.(1984:36)

Mwangi, Evan (2008)

“Written at the crisp of Kenya’s independence in 1963, *The River Between* seems to be pursuing the tenets of African traditional art. Ngugi uses this expertise as a story teller to inform the society about the dilemma it faces as it tries to synthesise traditional customs and modern ways of life. Employing devices borrowed from traditional folklore. Ngugi is interested in offering lessons to the society to the society on how to resolve the conflicts facing the newly independent African nations.”

### **2.3 The Gender Question in Written African Literature**

A majority of the premiere African writers were more often than not Male.

As stated by Ngoh (2016), In order to help people comprehend masculinities and the position(s) of men in various social, cultural, and historical contexts, the relatively new interdisciplinary field of "masculinity studies" or "critical masculinity studies" aims to expose and challenge gender constructions and dynamics. The issues of privilege and control are central to current masculinity studies, as they are to feminism. Scholars from a wide range of disciplines, theoretical backgrounds, and goals have studied masculinity studies. Nonetheless, the majority of modern research on masculinities can be characterized as follows. First, research on masculinities acknowledges the intentional gendering of males and masculinity. The word "gender" has evolved to mean "woman," especially in the west.

### **2.4 Women Writers in Written African Literature**

"A literary device holding up human vices and follies to ridicule or scorn" is how the Merriam Webster dictionary defines satire. It is further defined as the use of sarcasm, irony, or trenchant wit to expose and criticize sin or foolishness. In literature, satire is a kind of societal criticism. In order to make fun of a certain leader, a social habit or practice, or perhaps even any prominent institutions or social personalities, writers typically use literary methods such as exaggeration, irony, sarcasm, understatements, and others.

The African feminist caucus also sought to provide a platform for works that would specifically focus on African women, such as fiction and literary criticism. The African women had to do this in the literary sphere, which had hitherto been reserved for male representation. The study aims to determine if African feminists, who have made significant progress in African literary and critical development, value and promote female writers' works in an effort to change masculine biases and prejudices that were previously held against women. African feminist literature aims to critically examine societal shifts from traditional to contemporary methods, rather than focusing solely on the discrimination and oppression of women in male-dominated communities. As a writer from Africa and feminist.

### **2.5 Styles in African Written Literature**

Jackline Bardolf in Killam (2001:38) observes that “The intellectual control and the unadorned, clear style....one very personal vision.”

The question of mythology and ethnicity in written African literature is significant in raising feminist and gender issues in the contemporary African societies.

Eldred Jones in *Myth and Modernity* observes that ethnic base is usually very rich and can be exploited for ideas, themes and other linguistic influences” (1). Literature from ethnic groups is worth studying as it is expressive both in form and in content. It is “ethnic base” that masses appreciate literature of their community. In *The River Between*, by Ngugi Wa thiongo, there is talk of Waiyaki’s name being symbolic. Waiyaki is told to be careful since people look up to him. He is seen as the symbol of the tribe. He is born again with purity of the tribe and the people adore him. The people worship him and since he has been busy while people were taking the oath, they have taken it in his name due to how symbolic his

name is in the land. The people see the teacher as the purity aspect of their tribe in post-colonial Kenyan society. (River between, 207)

Many scholars over the years have agreed that there is a message that the author is trying to pass with various names used in his or her work. They assert that mostly the names reflect the author's societies and carry his culture. Most believe that the author is driven by the happenings in his childhood or his life in general

Masculinity studies are frequently noted for their intersectional approach, acknowledging that the exploration of men and masculinities inherently involves examining their intersections with other social categories. This approach implies that while the focus remains on men and masculinities, they are understood as distinctly gendered but shaped by more than biological sex. Masculinities are influenced by various social factors, including age, class, race, and racialization. The formation of masculine identities is a complex process that exists only at the intersections of these social distinctions and inequalities. Similarly, comprehending class, race, or global inequity requires an engagement with gender. Masculinity is multifaceted and context-dependent, with its meanings evolving over time and across cultures, often allowing for the fusion of external influences with local ideals to create new expressions. Consequently, masculinity studies frequently incorporate perspectives and knowledge from other disciplines, particularly critical gender and sexuality theories. In fact, early studies on masculinity were informed by disciplines such as psychology, anthropology, sociology, and biology. Second-wave feminism, which emphasized that women and womanhood warranted critical analysis, played a critical role in asserting the importance of focusing analytically on men and masculinities (Ngoh, 2016).

Mariama Bâ's fiction in *So Long a Letter*, as is the case to so many African authors, is profoundly rooted in Senegalese traditions and conventional artistic devices. A solo

important feature of her literary work, for example, is her fusion of oral and written traditions. In complementary association with the oral 'Wolof' practices of her own cultural heritage, she applies traditional French literary patterns and techniques, thereby recognizing a remarkable cultural fusion and original artistic styles in both novels. She articulates her position to make the language and culture of 'Wolof' central components of her work (Mutunda, 2009).

Mariama Bâ's novel *\*So Long a Letter\** serves as a therapeutic outlet for its protagonist, Ramatoulaye, who confides in her lifelong friend, Aïssatou, revealing her deepest emotions and thoughts. The novel opens with the death of Ramatoulaye's husband, Modou Fall, who suffers a fatal heart attack. Years before his death, after twenty-five years of marriage, Modou had married a younger woman, Binetou, who was close in age to his own daughter's friend, Daba. Despite contemplating divorce, Ramatoulaye ultimately decides to stay, choosing to adhere—though reluctantly—to the equal-sharing ideals expected within Islamic polygamous marriage. However, Modou abandons her emotionally and financially, devoting his attention and resources to his new wife, Binetou, with whom he resides in a lavish villa. Modou's actions leave Ramatoulaye and their children with financial hardship, as he squandered his savings on Binetou and her mother, leaving only debts behind. Ramatoulaye reflects on this predicament: "Dead without a penny saved. Acknowledgement of debts? A pile of them: cloth and gold traders, home-delivery grocers and butchers, car-purchase instalments" (Bâ, 1989, p. 9).

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology and procedures to be utilized for data collection. It is organized into several subsections, including the research design, target population, data collection instruments, data collection methods, sampling techniques, reliability and validity of the research, and the data analysis procedure. Each subsection provides a detailed framework to ensure that data is systematically and accurately gathered, analyzed, and interpreted to support the study's objectives.

#### 3.1 Research Design

Creswell & Poth, (2017) defined research design as procedure of attaining desired information relationship pattern between the variables and the problem pattern and the procedure used in obtaining the evidence of the relationships.

This study adopted a descriptive research design, using qualitative insights to interpretation of literary texts. It also incorporated a contextual approach to investigate the feminism and gender issues as depicted in *The River Between* by Ngugi wa Thiongo and *The River and*

*the Source* by Margaret Ogola. (Creswell, 2013). This was done by conducting library research in order to answer particular questions that relate to the area under study. For instance, the experiences the reader has had with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013) Narratives a traced form the past to the present and the future but majors on the present become pertinent in creative writing. Therefore, the researcher to applied descriptive research design to explore how character and characterization have been charted out in the selected texts of study.

### **3.2 Locale of the Study**

The study was carried out in Kenyan University and research centres. The Researcher visit Mount Kenya University libraries in Nkubu and Main Campus, Thika respectively. She also visited other libraries in Meru and Embu towns especially at Chuka and Embu universities.

### **3.3 Target Population**

A research population as argued by Conway and Powell (2010), is a well-defined group of individuals or objects with similar characteristics and usually have a common, binding characteristic or trait. The research study was based on literature books by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Margaret Ogola. Ultimately, the researcher narrowed down to two selected texts. *The River Between* by Ngugi wa Thiongo and *The River and the Source* by Margaret Ogola.

### **3.4 Sampling Procedure and Sample Size**

Mills et al (1970) stated that in Qualitative sampling, smaller group of people or objects are selected to give important information that helped the researcher understand a particular occurrence. Sample size should be selected according to what one wants to know, the reason of the inquiry, available time and resources and what will be useful for the research. (patton 2002)

The study employed purposive sampling. Purposive sampling according to Cohen et al (2007) is the handpicking of individuals that satisfy the needs of the research. Creswell (2013) continue to say that purposive sampling is the intentional selection of individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon. The study further used a homogeneous sample. A homogeneous sample is where a group with particular similar characteristics is identified by the researcher. In this study, homogeneous samples of African writers both female and male was used on their years of stay in scholarship and their knowledge on African literature. The two scholars were be selected according to regional representation in the Kenyan nation-state.

### **3.5 Description of Research Instruments**

Data generation refer to a set of procedures or techniques for generating and analyzing qualitative data. Creswell (2009) defines research methods as the tools used to gather data. The study relied mainly on creative works, critical works as well as theoretical works. This is stipulated in the reference section where we have addressed primary texts and secondary texts as well.

#### **3.5.2 Document Analysis**

Bowen, (2009) argued that document analysis involves placing contents into groups in the same way interview data is analyzed.

Data was collected from public records in libraries such as organization's activities and annual reports. Personal documents such as journal and newspaper report were also analyzed; the readership and physical evidence (artifacts) in libraries were also be looked into. This was important to the researcher as she reviewed various literatures of the written African literature by different authors. Information obtained fostered new knowledge in the study of African literature.

### **3.7 Testing For Validity and Reliability**

#### **3.7.1 Validity of the study instrument**

(Patton 2002) validity is measured according to the degree in which propositions conform to what is termed as the truth. The extent to which it measures what it is supposed to measure. In this study, validity of the instrument was determined by discussing the items in the instrument with the supervisor to determine validity of data collected for the study.

#### **3.7.2 Reliability of the Instruments**

Reliability of the instrument refers to the degree to which data obtained using a particular research instrument remains consistent. (Mugenda et.al) test – retest method was used to measure reliability of the instrument. No Interview schedules were carried out as the study was purely contextual.

### **3.8 Description of Data Collection Procedures**

The procedure for collection of contextual data was carried out by the researcher. The data obtained was segregated according to their appropriateness to the research objectives. The researcher read selected prescribed texts looking for thematic presence stylistic standpoints that form central ideas on gendered language under study.

### **3.9 Data Analysis and Presentation Technique**

Collected raw data is analyzed for the purpose of finding connection with the text. Miles et al, (2013). Cohen et al, (2006) on the other hand posit that in order to bring meaning from obtained data, the data is organized and numbered in order analyze them according to the order of to the text.

### **3.10 Ethical Considerations**

The staff or individuals in libraries and education institutions were consulted in gathering of information about the research, both risks and benefits, allowed to make decisions for themselves if they did participate in the exercise of research. (Creswell, 2007). The study participants were fully given information on the topic to be covered, the benefits and the risks involved in participation. This informed the participants who were of sound mind to make informed decision over participation.

First, the researcher got an introductory letter from the Mount Kenya University arm of postgraduate studies. Secondly, the researcher obtained a research permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology & Innovation (NACOSTI) which enabled her move ahead to the libraries for data collection. Primary data was collected using reading creative and critical as well as theoretical works.



Mount Kenya University

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 4.0 Introduction

This study analyzed emergent gender issues in two selected texts:

- i. *The River Between* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o (A post-colonial African novel).
- ii. *The River and the Source* by Margaret Ogola (A contemporary African novel).

The data was collected through the use of the descriptive research design; contextual method was used to analyze the selected texts. Documentary analysis technique was then used to obtain information from the two selected novels. The study critically analyzed reversal of gender roles in *The River between* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and *The River and the Source* by Margaret Ogola.

#### 4.1 The roles assigned to women in liberating their men from bondage of colonialism and neocolonialism.

In this section, the women's roles are presented in three phases;

The first phase, defines the roles of a traditional woman. Her roles are dictated by culture. The culture defines who a good woman is and what is expected of her. She is portrayed as a weaker vessel and therefore given simple roles of home chores and child bearing and rearing.

In the second phase, the women are given more complex roles. They not only do home chores but also participate actively in promoting equality and social balance.

In the third phase the authors give their female characters the masculine roles. The roles that were once performed by males are now performed by females with support of their male counterparts.

#### **4.1.1 Tradition as catalyst to Female struggles**

To a patriarchal society the female has no major role culturally as compared to the male counterpart. Traditions dictate who a good woman is, she is one who must put up with adverse societal practices and live up to acceptable cultural expectations in the society. Women perform their traditional roles very well; they are dutiful wives and mothers, they conform to the expectations of traditions in the society. At home and in the work places, they are expected to remain socially and economically subordinate to their husbands. In A patriarchal society expects a woman to get married and be subordinate to her husband, she is expected to accept her fate and suffer silently and patiently In *The River Between* Nyambura has accepted her status in the society she does not question her husband. "...Miriam was a perfect wife: docile, submissive and hardworking, she never spoke one word louder than another. She knew nothing whatever of her husband's activities, or, if she did, she gave no appearance of knowing."(Ngugi, pg. 106). Again according to traditions women hold inferior positions such as domestic setup while men hold superior positions and they head the families. The above statement is evidenced in *The River Between* where Miriam manages the home when the husband is away while her doting husband leads the striking men.

Girls' education is not valued as compared to boys' education, that why in *The River Between*. Waiyaki's mother presented as a traditional woman who is bound by traditions is

so critical about formal language; she does not see the need to learn Whiteman's language, to her a good mother need not learn Whiteman's language.

".....Why must you spend all your time with men?"

'Kabonyi always used to take me with him, besides I am learning'.

'Learning- learning what?'

'If I call you I am told not to disturb you – and why? Because you are learning the white man's language. What use is the white man's language to a woman? To be a good mother you have no need of that'. (Ngugi, pg. 4).

In *The River and the Source* likewise girls' education is not a priority, when a girl dropped out of school, the parents didn't go looking for her, they didn't take her back to school either. Instead of going back to school to continue with her education, she went to town to look for a job unfortunately she couldn't get a good job, the only available job is being a bar maid.. Gogni who is responsible for girls' reason to drop out of school, is equally unfeeling, he does not care what happens to her. It is ironical that the people responsible of ensuring the security and prosperity of young girls in the society never cares about their welfare instead they are in the front line of violating their rights.

Due to the inferior position the society places a woman, some women in *The River and the Source* are not concerned when it comes to fighting for change. They do not see the need to pursue freedom and fight for social justice. They seem to be comfortable with their position in the society as in the case of Miriam "Her own lot as a woman was to accept things as they were and to remain silent, as she had been taught to do" (Ngugi, pg. 107). Similarly the old woman is bound by traditions, she believes that women should not poke their noses in men's affairs or men's gathering during their discussion on the strike. To her this is a very complex role belonging to men. She tells Akoko "It is not a place for a woman and even less for a

child your age. Why must you spend all of your time with men?" (Ogola, pg. 4). This is a portrayal that the old woman is so conservative and therefore she does not see the need for change.

During the pre-colonial time, the African societies' livelihood mainly depended on agriculture, women working on the land was so important for the production; the more they worked, the more production they would get. For this reason, women had an important place in the society because of their active participation for they played an integral role as far as food production is concerned.

Tradition expects a woman to be motherly. Ngugi presents his female characters as motherly. Miriam for instance is portrayed as motherly; she is quite disturbed by Joseph's sickness. She volunteers to seek help in the next house. For the second time she meets Njoroge who demands sexual satisfaction from her in exchange of helping the poor boy. Out of her motherly love towards the boy, she gives in to his demands.

#### **4.1.2 Female-dom and Colonial Experience**

The place of women in the society during colonial time was unrecognized. Women suffered double colonialism, firstly from their domineering men and secondly from colonial powers. Women were politically, socially and economically disabled unlike during the pre-colonial period where they were allowed to participate in social, political and economic activities. Colonialism diminished women their rights. However, the authors in the two selected texts have put a lot of effort to recreate the revolutionary consciousness through female characters; their effort is praiseworthy.

The colonial powers took away the land belonging to the natives forcefully and denied them their independence. Ogola in *The River and the Source* present a scenario where male characters were exploited by French colony by forcing them to work in the railway stations

yet they underpaid them. When men were exploited women were equally exploited because they took up the responsibility of family provision. Ngugi in *The River Between* present a scenario where the white men confiscated the African land, forced the natives to work for them and also forced them to pay taxes. Africans responded by fighting back: the women were actively involved in the struggle for equality and liberation, they formed resistant movements, they succeeded because of their team work spirit and collective action. In the two selected texts, women have been used in the front line to promote equality and create a balanced society. In *The River Between* the men responded by forming *Kiama*, they would not go back to work until their grievances were addressed, they were backed up by their women who took over the role of family provision and also volunteered to march all the way to Kiamatawa to help them. On the same beath in *The River Between* there were revolutions and uprisings for instance the Mau Mau uprising. Men formed guerrilla warfare, they would attack the white men and then hide in the forest. Women on the other hand participated in feeding their men and their children back at home and bringing the arms to their men for instance Muthoni's aunt used to carry guns and bullets to the forest hidden in baskets full of unga. Nyambura's role as a freedom fighter is very significant as far as liberation struggle is concerned; she took arms and food to Mau Mau in the forest.

Women ensure that their men pursue the strike to the end without turning back, no matter how hard the situation is. This is a clear indication that women also support their striking men for instance Akoko confirms that she warned her husband to never think of going back to work or else she would cut off his manhood. "I told ours the other night, 'if you go back to work before the others, I will cut off the only thing that makes you a man' (Ogola, pg. 48).

The women offer moral support and strength to their striking men. When the going gets tough, women step in to the shoes of their striking men and they march all the way to Dakar

under the leadership of Wanja to hear what the elders have to say. They sing songs on their way to Ilmorog, the songs are used symbolically to act as sources of strength to the striking women and men. They sang a song of praise to their patriotic women and men:

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of October, fateful day,

We swore before the world

To support you to the end.

You have lit the torch of hope,

And victory is near. (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, pg. 174).

While at Kiamatawa during the meeting women portray their aggression by shouting loudly in protest of the company's manager when he denied the striking men a chance to speak. The women's march to Kiamatawa is very fruitful because shortly after, their demands are accepted and the strike is terminated.

From the above illustrations it is quite clear that Ngugi and Ogola in the two selected texts have put a lot of effort to recreate the progressive consciousness through female characters. Women's support to their men is praiseworthy as a new paradigm shift in African literature.

#### **4.1.3 Family Roles and Conjugal Rights**

Traditionally, men were tasked with providing for and safeguarding their families, but when women assume these roles, they effectively reverse established gender roles. In *The River and the Source*, the author highlights female characters who take on the role of providers when men go on strike, demanding increased salaries and family allowances. For example,

one woman resolutely declares, “Today I will bring back something to eat” (Ogola, p. 34). In *The River Between*, colonialism disrupts the traditional male role, as men are conscripted by colonial powers, leaving women to manage household responsibilities. Female characters thus assume the responsibility of providing for their families, remaining home to care for children, work the land, and even deceive tax collectors to protect their men (Ngugi, p. 86). In these texts, women’s roles expand to include educational and advisory functions, typically reserved for men. Female characters in both novels demonstrate wisdom and leadership, as seen with Nyambura, who uplifts and unites others with stories and advice, guiding her community during challenging times: “Nyambura was the spirit that guided and held them together” (Ngugi, p. 125). This depiction aligns with the broader shifts in gender dynamics, where educated women like Muthoni and Kamau’s mother adopt roles traditionally occupied by men, managing businesses, educating children, and displaying resilience.

Women in *The River and the Source* and *The River Between* also support men on strike, symbolizing the collective strength of female characters. Muthoni, for instance, serves as a moral support system to her father, even reading his letters, which reflects her intelligence and courage (Ngugi, p. 100). Educated women become vital in communication, with Gachungua, for example, writing letters for village women. Wanja exemplifies leadership within a male-dominated society, proving that educated women can contribute significantly beyond domestic spheres.

In times of crisis, women demonstrate remarkable resolve. When soldiers attack in *The River Between*, market women unite, using household items as weapons to defend their men. Led by Wanja, they transform into warriors: “like a band of Amazons, they came to the rescue, armed with clubs, with iron bars and bottles” (wa Thiong’o, p. 22). Women’s roles

extend further as they care for the wounded, with Nyakinyua converting her home into a makeshift infirmary to tend to the injured (wa Thiong'o, p. 27).

The changing gender roles are acknowledged by men in the novels, reflecting an evolving recognition of women's capacities: "if the times were bringing forth a new breed of men, they were also bringing forth a new breed of women" (wa Thiong'o, p. 34). In *Petals of Blood*, women take on public roles in decision-making processes, indicating a significant shift from traditional limitations. These narratives collectively underscore the reversal of gender roles, portraying women as adaptable, resilient figures who rise to meet societal changes.

Before the coming of the colonial masters the genders roles were clearly defined: there were roles for men and those of women. During this time men did not recognise women's roles in family provision. When colonial masters arrived in Africa things changed. In *Petals of Blood*, the exploited men went on strike and hunger set in, that's when men recognize importance of women in their lives and in the family since they take up men's roles to search for food. Women consciousness reawakened and they saw the need for a change (wa Thiong'o, pg. 33). Women unite and walk for long distances to search for food. In *Petals of Blood*, likewise men revolted dictatorial rule and formed guerilla wars where they used to hide in the forests. When men hide in the forest, it is women who take up the roles of family provision and protection and that's when men start recognizing the complex roles of women.

Teamwork spirit and unity are the two tools used by the female characters in the two selected texts to conquer the challenges facing them. The authors of the two selected texts depict united women's world; it is the unity that female characters have that enable them to scale to higher heights. In *Petals of Blood* the women led by Nyakinyua confronts the two messengers who come to bring the M.P's message about going to Gatundu to sing and drink

tea. They make threatening loud cries to show disapproval, the two men take to their heels never to come back (Ngugi, pg. 87). The village women in *God's Bits of Wood* search for water, this is the time when all the water sources are closed down by the whites and everybody is hungry and thirsty, meanwhile Abdulaya brings them rice, some earthnut cakes and a can of milk. With that effort the women portray the reversal of gender roles in that they come in to search for food and water for the family which is men's roles. When the men searched for answers from the books, the wives of strikers roamed the country side in search of food (wa Thiong'o, pg. 103). Both women and children are strengthened and empowered by the author and each has a role to play. The energetic women are united, this enables them to work together and also walk for long distances to search for food while the young Wanjiru left at home to cook for the grandparents. The old women are left at home to take care of the children, while the children unite to fetch water and catch fish

In the works of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Grace Ogot, women are depicted as pillars of resilience, unity, and encouragement, embodying a strength that sustains their communities. In *Petals of Blood*, women's unwavering endurance and collaborative spirit are evident when Wanja leads a group to the market to procure food. Although the journey to Kamakwa is long and challenging, they remain resolute, ensuring their households' survival (wa Thiong'o, p. 8). When Kabonyi grants her grandchildren permission to fetch water and fish, this teamwork highlights the communal reliance and cooperation required for survival, emphasizing the vital role of women's guidance and collective efforts (wa Thiong'o, p. 99).

Throughout these narratives, women encourage both men and one another, showcasing their collective resilience. For instance, Penda, a leading figure, motivates her fellow women, ensuring even the weak and feeble are supported and cared for during the march. She organizes provisions, appoints men to bring water, and instructs them on carrying those unable to continue on their own: "Owang Sino, some of the men will have to carry women

who are sick," she directs, pointing out Awa's condition (Ogot, p. 201). Her commitment underscores women's integral role in promoting solidarity, both as a source of encouragement for their striking men and in the care and logistics that sustain their group.

This stoic endurance is also embodied by Elizabeth Sigu, a blind but capable woman whose resourcefulness and heightened senses allow her to contribute meaningfully. Despite her disability, she treats a woman suffering from convulsions during the march, her composure and skill earning her respect among her peers. Her resilience inspires Muthoni to rally others, proclaiming, "What a blind woman can do, the rest of you should be able to do" (Ngugi, p. 202). Elizabeth's example demonstrates the capacity of women to overcome obstacles, becoming symbols of strength and fortitude within their communities.

Additionally, Miriam's actions as she administers care to an unconscious woman—kneading balls of humid earth to revive her—showcase the practical knowledge and quick thinking of women in times of crisis (Ogot, p. 200). Together, these narratives celebrate the endurance, resourcefulness, and crucial social roles of women, who serve not only as caregivers and nurturers but as the very backbone of their communities. Through solidarity and stoicism, they transcend traditional gender expectations, becoming agents of change and support amidst adversity.

From the findings of the two texts, it is observed that females have been given masculine roles which deliver their oppressed men and the workers from oppression. The roles of female characters in the two selected novels have not only undergone a revolution but also a reformation throughout the texts. The authors liberate them from being predominantly symbols of oppression to being symbols of liberation, from inferior characters to equal partners, from naïve and stupid characters to being strong and aggressive characters, from domestic helpers to professional workers and lastly from subordination to decision makers.

The authors present the plight of their female characters by giving them powers and abilities to shield and liberate their male counterparts from oppression and redeem the image of female characters.

From the findings it can be epitomized that education is a powerful tool used by the two authors to empower the women; they go extra mile of educating their children and the educated women use their intelligence when confronted by emergencies. Similarly they are responsible in sustaining the family's basic needs, therefore their influence in the family is well noted. Moreover their social influence is praise worthy: the two authors raise them to a higher realm where they have an influence not only at family level but also at societal level.

#### **4.2 Women Society and Change in Kenya**

The two authors Ngugi and Ogot use female characters to emancipate the masses whose dreams of freedom have been betrayed by colonial and neocolonial elites.

##### **4.2.1 Women Empowerment in the Novelist's Perspective**

The authors of the two selected texts depict the importance of empowering women for society gain. Ngugi gives his female characters courage to stand firm in their decision of supporting their men. Not only does he strengthen mature female characters but also empower the young girl Muthoni, in her dialogue with her grandmother, she tells her that she is not afraid of attack by soldiers in the men's meeting. She boldly tells her grandmother that she has thoughts in her head in case of an attack she will use her intelligence to escape. (Ngugi, pg. 5) Ogot on the other hand, empowers his female characters by hardening them so that they are able to confront the situations as they arise thus restoring their dignity, so the men stop exploiting them and start respecting them thus promoting a balanced society. The author uses old Mariamu to portray the weakness of brother Ezekiel who wanted to

have an illicit affair with her but she refused. From the above illustrations it is clear that in a patriarchal society a man is superior and he can easily exploit a woman who is in turn expected to remain silent. But this woman rebels such ideologies and fights for freedom and her own personal dignity and dignity of other women who might fall victims.

As the events in *The River and the Source* unfolds, the author empowers not only men but also women. There arise a new breed of women who are not just relying on their men for provision but who also take part in search for food. “One morning a woman rose and wrapped her cloth firmly around her waist and said, ‘today I will bring back something to eat.’ (Ogola, pg. 34).

.Out of the empowerment accorded to female characters by the authors, the women are determined to do anything to put food on the table. Verah a female character in *God’s The River and the Source* cannot go home empty handed, she has to do anything possible to bring food home even if it means setting the shop on fire (Ogola, pg. 45). In another instance the ram belonging to the Otieno, the chief goes to their home and eats their food, she angrily attacks the ram. She ends up getting her clothes torn to pieces revealing her nakedness. It is through her determination that she is able to kill the ram all by herself. The author makes known to the reader that it was neither pride nor arrogance in her attitude but just a kind of satisfaction. Being the eldest in the family she had to sacrifice her life and her spirit for the sake of others. From Akoko’s determination the author embraces women’s spirit of fighting (Ogola, pg. 69).

Ngugi in *The River Between* also present women who are economically empowered for instance Muthoni. She succeeds in different avenues like working in the farm, in the shop, in her brothel, in overpowering men and is able to forge her own identity. Muthoni succeeds during a critical time when the society is being scrambled over by the capitalists: she

redeems the land belonging to her grandmother by sacrificing her shares in the building she co-owns with Abdulla, an act of heroism. Though her sacrifice costs her everything she owns, she is able to conquer exploitation. She compares labour exploitation and sexual exploitation and concludes that there is no difference between the two. Her heroism is praise worthy for she turns out to be a very powerful woman who competes with big men.

Ngugi in *The River and the Source* proves that disability is not inability, he empowers even the disabled human characters, an instance, Elizabeth Sigu; she is very bright and intelligent she never gives up though she lost one of her twins she still presses on, she treats 'Wandia' during the march to Kisumu. "What a blind woman can do the rest of you should be able to do" Penda said (Ogola, 1995 pg.202).

The two authors prove the capability of women, they present them in a more complex manner that better accommodate their dimensions. With the help accorded to them by their male counterparts, the female characters succeed in various fields. The kind acts of the few males' characters are highly appreciated while selfish and greedy imperialists are highly condemned by the authors. In *The River and the Source* Miriamu the old woman convinces the masses to go to police station and demand release of the three men who were arrested. Muthoni on the other hand accompanies the men that go to meet their M.P. in his office. The lawyer embraces the masses efforts in their fight for social change; firstly he hosts them in his house when they are stranded in town (Ngugi, pg.177). Secondly he encourages them to continue fighting for democracy (Ngugi, pg.178). Thirdly, he saves the three men i.e. Kabonyi, Kamau and Karanja from being remanded in custody instead he advocates for their release on bond. Fourthly he manages to have the donkey and the cart released from custody. Other male characters who play a major role as far as liberation of masses is concerned are: The Asian, who was murdered in broad day light for fighting for redemption of the masses from claws of colonizers and imperialists (Ngugi, pg. 80) and Miriamu's husband, who had

the audacity to point a gun at a white man (Ngugi, pg. 83). The above exemplified male characters give the female characters renewed strength in their mission of liberating the masses. In *The River and the Source* men empower women by entrusting them with leading roles. Muthoni succeed in fulfilling the promises of uniting all women and marching to Nairobi as a means of fighting for liberation. During the march, men accord these women help by bringing them water and carrying the weak ones as well as providing security.

“Is there water to drink?”

“No, the water is all gone. The men have gone to look for some.” (Ngugi, pg 196).

“Kamau, some of the men will have to carry the women who are sick”, she said pointing at Awa. The men lifted her from the ground and installed her on the seat of a bicycle where they could support her as they pushed it along. (Ogola, pg. 201). Had there been disunity between the two genders their mission would not have been accomplished.

Ngugi and Ogola in the two selected texts empower their female characters by showering them with the leadership qualities in a male dominated society.

In *The River Between* the males give women the role of distributing food to other women, Penda is made a member of the strike committee, she even go to help men in the union office. an example is when women march all the way to Dakar in search of racial equality. Akoko is another significant character as far as the maintenance for social justice is concerned; she is ready to fight no matter the cost, not only does she use her physical strength she also uses her intelligence and power of words. Similarly Ngugi in *The River Between* appreciates his female characters by placing them at the helm of delegation. Muthoni is described as the spirit that guided and held them together. Nyambura, mother of men.... (Ngugi, pg. 125). Nyakinyua urges the villagers to go to the police station to demand the release of the three men. ‘Let us follow them and demand their release’ she said firmly.

‘They have done no wrong no, wrong.’ (Ngugi, pg 186). Wanja equally participate actively in the delegation of men. She works together with men in planning and preparing for the journey. She accompanies Kabonyi and Kinuthia to seek help in the next house when Muthoni’s condition worsens. She comes face to face with Kamau who once ruined her life and once again he demands sex from her. A good leader never gives up and even after facing humiliation from Kamau, her strong willed nature is also felt when she accompanies the men who go to talk the M.P. The above illustrations are a clear prove that the two authors have the interests of women at heart and embraces them in their spirit of promoting social change.

Ngugi wa Thiongo is in favor of giving his female characters the fighting spirit so that they can unify and liberate themselves, their men and children from oppressors. Through liberation they will be free socially, economically and culturally. In *The River Between* Ngugi embraces the women by giving them a chance to exploit their intelligence and courage thus creating a conducive environment: for instance Nyambura is the source of encouragement and is accorded respect by all, she uses that position to convince everyone on the need to walk to town to air their grievances to their leader, she does this with the help of Kabonyi who initiated the idea. ‘I think we should go. ....We must surround the city and demand back our share.’ (Ngugi, pg.118). During the epic journey she keeps their spirits arrive with past stories and inculcates traditional values to the youth. She is presented as a potential and intelligent character. She narrates to the youth the Gikuyu history when women ruled the land thus bringing people together. Her guidance and unique quality of uniting the Community.

#### **4.2.2 The Two Texts Portrayal of Women Characters**

The authors of the two texts present their female characters positively thus enabling the women to accomplish their task of promoting social balance and justice for all. The main

female characters are Muthoni and Nyambura in *The River Between* and Akoko and Wandia in *The River and the Source* are good examples. There are other female characters in the two texts who also play major roles of promoting social justice.

In *The River and the Source* Beaky is portrayed as a hard woman. When beaten by her parents for having an affair with a boy she plans vengeance, she has to do it no matter the duration of time she will take. She gets into a relationship with her boyfriend and the result of her vengeance is becoming pregnant. Since her boyfriend refuses the responsibility she gets troubled and lives a tortured life full of guilt and humiliation (Ogola, pg. 40). Beaky puts a spirited fight to overpower the men but she keeps on remembering the original wound. Beaky carries the revenge mission all along. She accomplishes her mission by killing her man at the end of the text.

On the other hand in *The River and the Source* Akoko's determination and strong will brings fulfillment to the hungry. She kills a ram by herself and everybody gets something to eat. She is not cowed by policemen's threats. She uses her strength, courage and wisdom to confront the policeman while at the station. She is also defiant since she does not submit to the demands of the policemen, even while at the police station she defies the orders. ".....Akoko refused to be seated and remained standing defiantly in the middle of the room." (Ogola, pg.120). She gets irritated when her niece requests her to apologize to Otieno as she has been ordered, out of anger she slaps her niece across the face (Ogola, pg. 126). Citation done wrongly. She is depicted as rebellious who cannot be cowed by the demands of policemen.

The authors of the two selected texts present their female characters as strong willed and tough. In *The River Between* Muthoni is an inspiring freedom fighter during colonialism and even after colonialism her courage is felt. She openly criticizes the capitalists and deceitful

politicians without fear of intimidation. She encourages both men and women to stand firm and confront the two men who come to tell them of the new Cultural Organization) and that everyone is expected to go to Rutumo to sing and have tea. The author celebrates these women who stand firm and refuse to participate in an oath of national betrayal. When it is announced that they have to pay twelve shillings and fifty cent, women cannot stomach that kind of exploitation: led by courageous Miriamu they stand firm that they are not going anywhere what they need is development in terms of good roads, food, security and good hospital. These females use their wisdom and intelligence to confront the emergency. They even threaten to pull out their penises to see if they're really men. The women manage to chase away the two men. (Ngugi, pg. 88). Citation done wrongly. In *The River Between* on the other hand, women employ many strategies to fight the policemen. The author embraces women's spirit of fighting for they fight the policemen who come to arrest Kamau. They light fire to scare away the horses that carried policemen. (Ngugi, pg. 112). The women are united; they protect their own. When the police come to take Miriamu to a police station for the second time they find them having gathered together everything they could find in the area that might serve as a weapon. (Ngugi, pg. 119). Group of women follow them and surround the station.

From the critical analysis of the two selected texts, it is quite obvious that the majority of female characters are more refined and developed, they are therefore able to accomplish the role of liberating their men from bondage of oppression. Though not educated Nyambura and Akoko in the two texts possess exceptional intellectual abilities and highly sensitive minds that compel them to fight oppression.

### 4.2.3 Thematic Concerns on Gender Equality

In the two selected texts, the authors present both genders equally in that when confronted by emergencies both men and women come up with plans to solve their problems thus promoting justice for all.

The role of fighting is given to both men and women in the two texts. In *God's Bits Wood* the striking men stand firm in their decision to continue with the strike, women likewise swear never to give in. In *The River Between* on the other hand, both genders participate in warfare to redeem their country from claws of colonial powers and are aware of their common exploitation by the elites, they rise against such exploitation through revolutions; through these collective struggles they are able to bring down the male domination. Ngugi proves that what men can do, women can equally do it as observed by Muthoni when she asks, 'and was it not a man and a woman who fought to redeem this country?' (Ngugi, pg. 163). This is an implication that both of them are equally important.

Ogola depicts a group of female characters who have fought hard to overcome the gender barriers and have achieved powerful positions in the society. Verah for instance has opened the gate for participation of women on equal capacity with men. For instance for the first time women are allowed to speak in public 'Our gallant women have something to say to us, they have the right to be heard.' (Ogola, pg.187). Men have faith in their women who sacrifice to march to Dakar in support of their striking men. 'If women have decided to go, we must help them and prepare an escort for them.' (Ogola, pg 189). Men offering the women security during the march, is an implication that the author promotes gender equality which is a vital tool in embracing change. Muthoni in *The River Between* and Elizabeth's in *The River and the Source* are major female characters in the two selected texts whose stoic endurance infuse strength and purpose to the other characters and especially females. In *The River Between* Nyambura received the news about the killing of a ram, he comes to

Miriam's home accompanied by police only to find women ready to receive them. They have new courage and strength that they use to liberate themselves from oppressors and when the police want to take Nyambura away, the women gang up to protect their own. They use everything at their disposal to act as weapons. United are they that they protect one of their own from the police arrest. (Ngugi, pg.74/75). Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *The River Between* portrays characters who are determined to seek help from their leaders and bring about change and when Nyambura proposes the idea they all act in unison. Nyakinyua decides that the time has come for them to make things happen. She is source of inspiration to societal members: she offers emotional support to the villagers. She asserts that they should all team up, go to the city and demand back their shares. She is able to convince the elders on the need for all to go to the city and meet their leader and air their grievances. (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, pg. 118). Nyambura empowers the elders with determination of pursuing their stolen hearts. She plays every major role of advocating for social changes. Spearheaded by Muthoni the women play a major role as far as the success of the journey to the city is concerned, both genders team up, forge a community spirit and make prior preparations to ensure the success of the journey to the city. (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, pg. 119).

The two authors gives women, masculine characteristics in that they take up the roles commonly considered as men's roles. For example the young girl Wandia is given boyish characters, she is physically active and even attends men's meetings. (Ngugi pg.6). She courageously and confidently tells her grandfather that she attends meetings to learn the ways of men and that she would like to become a driver of a train when she grows up just like her father Joshua. Her father has played a major role in promoting gender equality. In her dialogue with the grandfather she confirms that (Ngugi, pg.97). She is also depicted as intelligent, she reads the letters sent to her by her father (Ngugi, pg.100). Ngugi proves that women can survive on their own because they are the primary people responsible for their

families. Old Mariamu, a zealous female character, in *Petals of Blood* is a good example who has survived on her own and is able to raise her children through working on Kamau's father's farm and European's farms. Wandia possess traits that are masculine, she brings forth glory to a forgotten village '.....she turned a bedbug of a village into a town, Theng'eta town. (Ngugi, pg. 263). She does magnify Abdulla's shop into an industry. Through the song, Nyakinyua showers her with masculine traits, 'who said that only in a home with a male child, will the head of a he-goat be roasted in feast? (Ngugi, pg. 263). This implies that a female child is equally important and that the author embraces his female characters to fight for social justice.

Women stand their ground and refuse to lick the boots of their superiors (male counterparts) so as to bring change and promote social balance. The two authors give their female characters, traits that were previously given to male counterparts. Women are depicted as being assertive; they are ready to fight for recognition and dignity. In *The River and the Source*, old Mariamu is a female character who has been portrayed as courageous, assertive and rebellious, she has triple duties: she is a mother to Ndungu, a wife and an employee in a European's farm. Her drunkard husband beats her and takes away her salary. She rebels that violence and oppression by running away to Limuru where she goes to work for Brother Ezekiel who in turn wants to abuse her sexually. She assertively refuses him. Her plight in marriage and outside marriage is well revealed. The author reawakens female consciousness and that's why Mariamu rebels such exploitation not only from her husband but also from her European landlord. Young Beaky in *The River and the Source* portrays her assertiveness when she confronts a man who had tried to assault her sexually. 'She kept women in line, and she forced even the men to respect her. She came to the union office frequently to help with the work, and one day, when one of the workmen had stupidly patted her on the behind, she gave him a resounding smack. A woman slapping a man in public was something no

one had ever seen before.’ (Ogola, page 143). She is ready to fight for recognition and dignity; she demands respect even from the male counterparts.

The unity and spirit of collaboration between the two genders enable them to scale to higher heights in the fight against social injustices. A case study is Wanja’s aunt in *The River between* She used to carry guns and bullets to the forest hidden in baskets full of unga. She took them to the fighting men who relied on her support for survival. In *The River Between* some strikers who secretly went back to work are dealt with. They go through trial where there are men and women present to give the verdict. For the first time women attended meetings, the author embraces women by giving them a chance to attend such important meetings to determine the fate of the strike breakers. Penda is an example who has used her voice to protest against racial exploitation. The two authors in the selected texts depict their female characters as heroines. Even after the death of Wanja in *The River and the Source* and Muthoni in *The river Between* their heroic deeds are still remembered by many.

In a patriarchal society it is only men who are elevated in terms of performance i.e. they are the only ones who make major decisions and are the only ones who can save people from problems they are facing while women are given minor roles such as home chores. The two authors of the selected texts tend to defy this ideology in the way they represent their female characters as observed in the above findings.

From the critical analysis of the two selected texts it is observed that the authors demonstrate that women are authentic partners in the struggle for social justice; they do this by supporting the roles played by the women in the struggle against the exploitation of masses by the colonialists and neo colonialists. The authors embraces women in their spirit of welcoming change by promoting gender equality and proving that women’s opinions also count in political, social and economic arenas. In both texts the authors empowers the villagers

regardless of sex and age with new strength and endurance for they are determined to seek help and bring about change and promote social justice for all.

In the two selected texts, the authors empower their female characters with the tool of rebellion which is a proof that they understand their rights and entitlement accompanied by fruits of labor in a male dominated society. They demand respect even from their male counterparts; they have undergone a transformation from a state of subservience to a state of emancipation. They intend to break the traditional ideologies where men are viewed as superior and women are viewed as inferior and are easily manipulated.

Gender proves to be performative in that is not fixed on women or men's body but rather articulated by individual performance. When the male characters are far away, the females portray their zeal and capability of fulfilling life necessities by themselves.

The authors depict the importance of togetherness and collective action as the best way of fighting oppression. They prove that solidarity is vital for human survival, this is true because the villagers are accorded great help after their encounter with the public eye. They are therefore liberated from hunger.

From the above findings and interpretations it can be argued that the authors of the two selected texts choose their female characters wisely and therefore they succeed in liberating their men from oppression.

### **4.3 Interrogating the Situations That Reveal Gender Issues in the Selected Novels**

#### **4.3.1 Women in Liberation Struggle**

The female characters in the two selected texts suffer tremendously in the process of fighting for change.

There was no difference between the ruling systems during the two eras i.e. colonial and postcolonial eras: the two authors portray the issue of political instability and racism due to lack of proper governance and democracy. Ngugi wa Thiongo in *The River Between* present greedy and cruel European employers who exploit their black workers, they overwork them and pay them very little amount. Similarly Ngugi wa Thiongo in the *River Between* present the African employers who are also greedy and cruel, the politicians and the capitalists exploit the masses by abandoning them and taxing them heavily. The church leaders who ought to have been merciful are full of hypocrisy for example, the author satirizes hypocrisy of Kabonyi (Kamau's father) for he believed "...God and prayers and the workers were not adding any value even after working for many years."(Ngugi, pg. 14).

Effects of colonialism are still felt at present; during colonial time, the colonial powers took away the young men to go and fight for them, they also cut down the trees to feed and construct the railway they took away everything (Ngugi, pg. 84); no wonder there are no young and productive people in the village. After colonialism the masses are still terrorized by the capitalists and leaders for instance they are forced to pay taxes, the tax collector comes once in a year to collect tax.

The masses feel betrayed by their leaders, as a result they become disillusioned and very hostile towards the visitors, and Miriam the old woman shat a mountain in the school compound (Ngugi, pg. 5). Even the children don't want to go to school, Njoroge has a hard time at first trying to run after them and persuade them to go to school. The teachers come and run away they become tired of hostile community. Muthoni's critics' the middle class intellectuals who think they can use their intelligence to underrate the low class citizens for instance she confronts Kabonyi when she ask him "what have you really come to fetch from our village, is it the remaining children?" (Ngugi, pg. 7).

The most essential needs for human survival are water and food, and when they are insufficient, the result is human suffering. The masses struggle very hard to liberate themselves from poverty. In *The River Between* there is extreme food shortage in the village due to insufficient rainfall. Moreover, the energetic young people have deserted the village and gone to town to look for jobs leaving desperate old men and women to till the lands. The worst thing is that young men come to impregnate their wives and then disappear quickly while the young women, who come back from town, come to deposit their babies to their ageing mothers and grandmothers (Ngugi, pg. 83). In *The River between* the author presents the theme of suffering to women because they have no access to essential needs. The colonial power authorizes closure of all water sources. No shopkeeper to offer foodstuffs on credit. Women have to walk for long distances in search for water. They are forced to do unthinkable trickeries to acquire water and food for instance Nyambura tricks the water carrier to sell her the water, after pouring all the water into her jars, she reveals that it was on credit basis since she doesn't have any cash, out of anger the water carrier curses not only her and the entire family but also her generations to come.

The masses both men and women are the majority whereas the rich few take the advantage of the latter. The elites in *Petals of Blood* force the masses into doing things for their own benefit for instance the KCO aims at protecting their own property. They force the villagers to go to Gatundu and drink the tea of unity and the ones who fail to go there are pursued to their homes: Wanja's house burned down reason being she did not go for tea. The masses are only remembered when need arises but any other time they are forgotten. That's why the condition at the community is a harsh one yet no leader comes to their rescue.

The masses face betrayal from their leaders: they lack teachers to teach their children; for instance Njoroge teaches all alone, for the last two years he has been in his village and before him the school remained closed because no teacher had the patience of staying due to the

poor conditions of the area: no good roads, harsh weather condition and disillusioned villagers who welcome the teachers harshly.

In *The River and the Source* poignant memories keep on crisscrossing their minds for instance Akoko at the meeting recalls what the natives had gone through during the first strike: the epidemics of the famine and loss of land by the company and loss of lives. (Ogola, pg. 8). (Ogola pg.122/123).. Old Akoko remembers how she lost her husband and son during the first strike in her youthful stage. This left her with great sorrow and sad memories. The results being hopelessness and disillusionment as a result she fears for the men who go on strike because she knows after all they will be losers. She wonders why she is never consulted of the same because she once experienced the effect of the first strike when she lost her husband and son. Similarly in *The River Between* the characters who fought hard for independence are disillusioned because they did not get what they hoped for. The rich few took away everything leaving economy at its worst. In addition the parents are alienated from their energetic sons and daughters who have migrated to town in search of jobs. The business sectors have equally been affected. The businesses have declined economically which has resulted to desperation and disillusionment. The disillusioned masses come up with ways of making money at the expense of the poor. Due to desperation and disillusionment, Wanja suggest that they turn the shop to a church so that those thirsty can wash that soul with beer .....They should start brewing chang'aa to get rich quickly at the expense of the poor. The greedy leaders have extensively been satirized by the author.

In *The River and the Source* the strike has resulted to more suffering: foodstuffs are gone, meager savings are eaten up and there is no money in the house. This result to great hunger for there is nothing to eat. When men suffer, women suffer too. Women take up the burden of food provision from their husbands' shoulders and they carry them on their shoulders which is not an easy task, they even risk their lives while searching for food for instance

Nyambura goes to buy rice on credit from Ndungu (a shopkeeper) without much success, out of anger she thinks of burning the entire shop. Her traitorous brother and a chief for that matter fails to help her and she puts a curse on him to never attend her funeral. (Ngugi, pg. 45).

In *The River Between* the working conditions are too exploitative with very little wages.

The bar maids are sexually exploited by their bosses and when they refuse to meet the demands they are sacked. 'We bar maids never settle in one place. Sometimes you are dismissed because you refused to sleep with your boss.' (Ngugi, pg 130). Nyambura is forced by Kabonyi to sleep with him to reciprocate him for the help he offers them especially to the sick boy. The white men exploit the African women and young girls sexually when they come to Africa.

The weather condition is equally not favorable, the marching women in *The River Between* and the trekking masses in *The River and the Source* are faced with the challenge of fatigue, too much heat and lack of water and food. Penda has a hard time convincing the women who kept on groaning and complaining of fatigue and thirst. This possess a great challenge to the revolutionaries.

From the critical analysis it is evident that female characters in the two texts struggle hard to liberate themselves from: inequality of opportunities, sexual harassment, intolerable injustices and betrayal from their closest relatives. The masters will do anything including violating women's rights and harassing them to satisfy their sexual needs. The females struggle hard to free themselves from male domination and especially the capitalists: from the findings it is evidence that males control the females and they dominate their bodies, they expect the females to avail themselves any time they need sexual satisfaction. These

men use several tactics such as violence, humiliation, beatings and insults to get what they want.

The characters in the two selected texts remember how much they suffered in the process of seeking liberation yet the fruits of their labor are snatched from them. No matter how hard they try to fight for social change and a balanced society, their political leaders and capitalists always pull them down.

From the above findings and interpretations, it is evidence that liberation struggle is not an easy task, it requires a lot of endurance, determination and perseverance for female characters to succeed in promoting social justice

#### **4.3.2 Women given a Blackout in Kenyan Literature**

In *The River Between*, female characters experience exploitation and abuse, primarily due to societal views that cast them as inferior. Their contributions are disregarded, and they often endure harsh conditions within their marriages, where their voices remain unheard, and their roles undervalued. The suffering of Wanja's cousin exemplifies this mistreatment: she is trapped in a marriage where her husband subjects her to relentless physical abuse, finding any pretext to beat her, including unfounded accusations of infidelity. Her earnings from agricultural labor are forcibly taken by him and squandered on alcohol, only to return and continue the abuse. Driven to despair, she ultimately flees to the city, seeking liberation from her oppressor (Thiong'o, p. 65).

This narrative underlines the systematic exploitation of women in a patriarchal context, where men's actions—often unchecked and violent—lead to familial and societal disarray. By highlighting such characters, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o exposes the deep-seated inequalities that perpetuate women's suffering, calling attention to the need for recognition, respect, and protection of women's rights within their families and communities.

o). She ran away because she could not stand the brutal husband. In a patriarchal society a man owns a woman body and soul and therefore a woman has no right to refuse a man. This is clearly seen when the brutal husband burns the house thinking that his town wife was inside simply because she refused to forgive him. Likewise Miriam;s's mother is beaten by the father because she does not approve of him supporting the Whiteman. 'Wooman...Her father shouts and hits her mother once, twice, then he loses his head and beats her, hits her, claws her, foams with bitter rage and...and mother is crying helplessly and she, Wanja, is speechless with terror....' (Ngugi, pg. 234). Here the author present the African men as heartless and merciless even to their dear ones.

Females are economically exploited. Ngugi in *The River Between* highlights the predicament of women who face double colonialism e.g. old Mariamu is exploited by her husband and her European landlord. The masses live in abject poverty due to economic exploitation by the elites. After the village gains publicity, the capitalists land in the village with an aim of developing it, they lure the villagers into taking loans and when the masses are unable to repay the loan they are denied ownership and the elites become the new owners of the land leaving the villagers helpless and disillusioned. In reference to new development in the village, women are left landless, for the sake of survival they are forced to work for the elites yet the working conditions are very poor. Thought of losing her land, leaves Nyambura depressed which eventually leads to her death. In this scenario Ngugi acts as an eye opener to the reader about injustices engineered to the masses by the elites.

In Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's portrayal, female characters face severe exploitation within workplaces, reflecting broader gendered and economic injustices. Women are subjected to harsh working conditions with minimal pay, receiving lower wages than their male counterparts despite performing equally demanding labor. This disparity not only highlights the systemic economic exploitation but also reinforces male workers' perception of female

inferiority. Male colleagues, emboldened by receiving marginally better pay and preferential treatment in certain roles, openly belittle women. They dismissively argue that women deserve lower wages and heavier work, further reducing women's identities to a stereotypical and demeaning role in male pleasure: “Men too seemed to think they were better off than women because they got a little bit more pay and preference in certain jobs. They seemed to think that women deserved low pay and heavy work: women’s real job, they argued amidst noise and laughter was to lie on their backs and open their legs to man’s passage to the kingdoms of pleasure” (Ngũgĩ, p. 304).

Ngũgĩ also illustrates how oppressive economic structures sustain the exploitation of both men and women. Describing the masses as endlessly overworked for mere "peanuts," he exposes a system that allows those in power—whom he compares to "parasites" such as lice and bedbugs—to thrive while laborers suffer: “But how come that parasite – lice, bedbugs and jiggers – who did no useful work lived in comfort and those that worked for twenty-four hours went hungry and without clothes” (Ngũgĩ, p. 199). This observation reveals a capitalist hierarchy that values profit over human dignity.

In Grace Ogot's *The River and the Source*, similar themes emerge as female characters face economic obstacles when attempting to sell valuable possessions, yet are thwarted by a lack of buyers (Ogola, p. 137). This further underscores the economic vulnerability and exploitation of women, whose efforts to secure financial independence are hindered by systemic barriers. Both authors, through these portrayals, underscore the compounded economic and gendered exploitation faced by women in a male-dominated, capitalist society.

The greedy masters exploit the masses economical whereby they overwork them and pay them peanuts. This is because they despise them. ‘But how come that parasite – lice, bedbugs

and jiggers – who did no useful work lived in comfort and those that worked for twenty-four hours went hungry and without clothes.’(Ngugi, pg. 199). Similarly in *The River and the Source* women’s effort to sell valuable items they owned turned futile because they lacked buyers (Ogola, pg.137).

The female characters are sexually exploited. The two authors present their two main female characters as prostitutes. Muthoni in *The River Between* and Akoko in *The River and the Source* are forced by circumstances to use sex to earn a living. Akoko has suffered a series of misfortunes at the hands of Otieno and other irresponsible men in the society. As a school girl in her flowering stage, she encounters Otieno who after deflowering and impregnating her he abandons her. Forced by circumstances, she throws her baby in the latrine an action that haunts her for the rest of her life and which leads to her barrenness.

Women as enemies of themselves: instead of supporting each other, some strike arguments which lead to disunity and near fights. For instance in *The River Between* Kabonyi spreads hate speech against Muthoni who has been appointed to distribute food to other women. She is always striking an argument with Wandia, while marching to Nairobi she disagrees with Nyambura and sits down to rest. They have an argument that leads them almost fighting. The group is divided. Another crisis occurs this time it is very serious that the whole enterprise seems to fail. The march to Dakar is very tiresome. There arose a heated argument among women. Some want to separate themselves from the rest and continue with the journey the following day, yet Penda the leader want them to march in unison and arrive at Nairobi the same day (Ogola, pg.195).

Some men don’t support the idea of women marching to Nairobi they think that women are being political and they feel that men can handle the striking matter alone. “If you ask me, the strike is a matter for men to settle themselves.” “You are right there, brother – this is

nothing but politics. These women are all communists” (Ngugi, pg. 212). Other men feel that women are trouble makers and therefore they should not attend the meeting. “You wait and see; there’s going to be trouble at the meeting” (Ogola pg. 212). In addition not all men support women’s roles as far as strike is concerned. For instance women start fire and troops in the street, this act is highly condemned by Gogni and he feels that women should remain in the city to search for food and water and take care of the children. “. . . . .but I don’t think it is anything for women to try. Besides, there is no water there; when I left, Owang Sino and all other men were scouring the city for a cask or even a bottle of water- which is what women should be doing. Instead of that, they have been battling troops in the street and starting fire. ” (Ogola, pg.188), to him such women are rebellious.

From the critical analysis it is evidence that the females suffer double exploitation from their domineering men and from colonial powers. The females are sexually, physically and economically exploited either by their close relatives or from their masters. The authors of the two selected texts condemn the masters for such evil acts.

In a patriarchal society, gender roles are clearly defined and women must conform to cultural dictates; they are supposed to submit to their husbands and conform to the social convection and cultural expectations. Those who rebel and rise above cultural norms face rejection and condemnation from some male counterparts. The domineering men have the mentality that these women are challenging traditional gender roles. Consequently male domination greatly affects women’s participation in any political affair.. It is quite clear that women who rise against exploitation are viewed as rebellious and are doomed to destruction. From the above findings it is evidence that those women who defy the dictates of the society are never recognized; in the two texts there are a number of men and women who do not recognise the roles of women in the fight for change.

From the critical analysis of the two selected texts it is clear that the masters will do anything including violating women's rights and harassing them to satisfy their sexual needs: this is because they despise them. The males control the females and they think they have the right over their bodies and that the women should be readily available to satisfy them. In a male dominated society, women are seen as objects and subaltern creatures. For instance in *The River between Muthoni* thinks that if you are a woman your fate is to marry someone or be a struggler.

Marxist ideology of equality of people of different social classes coincides with ideology of women as equal to men subservient to them. Ngugi and Ogola apply Feminist and Marxist ideologies whereby they present the greedy masters who economically exploit the masses, the masses do all the work yet they are reduced to beggars. .

No matter how hard the African woman tries to fight for change, she is always ranked the second class citizen: this is because patriarchal ideologies view men as superior and women as inferior and are therefore barred from participating fully in important social activities. The African woman is subjected to stereotype and her contributions are either neglected or omitted.

From the study findings and above interpretations it is evidence that the masters exploit women because they despise them. They fail to recognise their importance and therefore they misuse them

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

A critical analysis of the research findings highlights significant evidence of gender issues within the two selected texts. Each objective of the study is thoroughly examined and illustrated within these Kenyan literary works. Contrary to the frequent tendency in male-authored literature to portray female characters negatively, both authors in these texts

deviate from this norm by offering a positive portrayal of women. This deviation is evident in their empowering depictions of female characters who actively pursue social change and challenge oppressive structures.

Both authors endow their female characters with natural abilities and qualities that not only enable them to strive for their own emancipation but also to aid in liberating their male counterparts from oppression. The findings reveal that male and female characters face interconnected forms of exploitation, implying that women's liberation efforts are inherently linked to the broader struggle against colonial and neo-colonial oppression within imperial British East Africa, specifically Kenya. This shared oppression necessitates that women take on the formidable task of fighting for their communities' freedom, yet their journey is fraught with challenges. These obstacles underscore the complexity of navigating social, political, and economic constraints as women work alongside men to dismantle the lingering impact of colonial subjugation and assert a path toward autonomy.

This analysis not only reveals gendered struggles within the texts but also illustrates the nuanced ways in which female characters defy traditional roles, positioning themselves as critical agents of liberation in a postcolonial Kenyan society.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents a summary of the research findings, a conclusion based on comparative study of critical analysis on reversal of gender roles in *The River Between* by Ngugi wa Thiongo and *The River and the Source* by Margaret which are post-colonial Kenyan novels respectively. It indicates areas of further research and recommendations in

order to embrace the complex roles of women with an aim of liberating their males from bondage of oppression.

## **5.2 Summary of the Study**

The findings of this project reveal that the authors of the two selected texts assign traditionally masculine roles to their female characters, empowering them to actively resist colonial and neo-colonial oppression, and ultimately aiding in the liberation of their male counterparts. In contrast to historical portrayals where complex and challenging roles were predominantly male-dominated, the authors—particularly Margaret Ogola—challenge and dismantle these limited gender norms by elevating women to positions of agency and resilience. Through this, they effectively question the assumption that women's roles are inherently simple or passive, instead presenting them as powerful figures capable of significant social impact.

This shift in portrayal underscores that those who are traditionally marginalized or seen as "the other" are fully capable of striving to improve their circumstances and advocate for a more balanced society. Despite the efforts of exploitative forces that seek to diminish their worth, these characters embody the strength and resilience needed to rise above adversity. This approach not only enhances the depth of the female characters but also emphasizes a broader, socially inclusive message—that underprivileged groups possess both the determination and the capacity to challenge oppressive systems, ultimately working toward equity and empowerment for all.

One of the research objectives, was to examine the roles assigned to women in liberating their men from bondage of colonialism and neocolonialism in the two selected texts. Traditional gender roles are well portrayed in the two novels. In both novels women are

presented as motherly and obedient in that they are always present when their children and their husbands need them. They engage themselves with domestic chores such as cooking and taking care of their children. These roles are very vital because they prove that women are responsible as far as the smallest unit of the society is concerned.

Not only do women perform traditional roles they also participate in the liberation struggle during colonial times. The two authors add impetus to this study for their continued support to their female characters. During colonial era the female characters in the two texts acquire new energy to resist any form of oppression and they realize their social purpose of promoting change. They support their fighting men both physically and morally. In *The River between* for instance women volunteer to march all the way to Nairobi to in search of a solution to their oppressed men. Likewise in *The River Between* there are women who risked their lives while taking weapons to their fighting men in the forests. Moreover it is women who took over the role of family provision when men were away fighting the white man. The two selected novels therefore witness the glory of female characters from male dependency to self-independent and self-reliance.

The authors of the two selected texts prove that togetherness and teamwork are two vital tools that promote victory. Ogola acknowledges and approves of the bonding that exist among women in his text *The River Between* when they decide to act to free Nyambura from police station and even their men from claws of their oppressors, like wise it is the same bonding that exist among the masses in *The River Between* and when they decide to act they do it in unison and the end result is the triumphant success.

The authors of the two selected texts deconstruct the patriarchal ideology of 'othering' the females from giving them simple roles to giving the complex / masculine roles that promote their fighting spirit of liberating their men from oppression.

The named objective aimed at examining the essence of embracing African woman's spirit of welcoming change. The part played by women in the two selected texts of liberating their men from bondage of oppression in a colonial and a post-colonial era is very vital as far as social balance and justice for all are concerned. The women are able to play this vital role through empowerment, gender equality and through positive portrayal. Those who fight without giving up promote social change for both men and women. Their positive portrayal such as bravely, resilience, resourcefulness and determination enable them to fight against colonialism and neo colonialism thus liberating their men from oppression. The two selected novels highlight the plight of women by promoting a positive image of women and projecting a kind of feminist consciousness. That's why women use their voices to fight oppression; in *The River Between* for instance women's loud cries and threats chase away the two messengers, likewise women in *The River and the Source* severally use their voices to sing for their men songs of encouragement and they make loud noises to protest the evil acts of policemen.

The two authors accord support to their revolutionary women, this is a symbol of their acceptance to work with women in the fight for social change for instance in *The River Between* Muthoni's 's encounter with the lawyer for the first time is very essential. He not only offer her help at personal level but also later in the novel he advocates for justice in favor of the masses. Likewise in *The River and the Source* the villagers accord the marching women with food and water. The two authors prove that problem shared is problem half solved especially when it is brought to the limelight of the public. This is evident in *The River Between* because the publicity of the trekking villagers in the city saves their mission and they receive donations from all quarters.

As the two novels progress the female characters become increasingly resourceful and powerful: they lead the resistance movements that aim at liberating their men from

oppression. In *The River Between* for instance Muthoni mobilizes the masses to trek to the city to search for a solution to the famine that has struck the village, in another instance she mobilizes the masses to go to police station and demand the release of the three men who have been arrested after the allegations that they wanted to cause a breach of peace in the city. Akoko in *The River and the Source* likewise mobilizes women to march all the way to Dakar to fight for the rights of their men.

Ngugi and Ogola's equal representation of their female characters regardless of their age and ability in the two selected texts is a clear indication that all women are equally important. In *The River and the Source* young Verah act as a courage to the striking men while Beaky the free woman proves that disability is not inability, both the middle aged and old the women in the two texts play a vital role of liberating the society from oppression.

The fighting women in the two novels use several strategies thereby sustaining a powerful resistance and successful results. In *The River Between* for instance the women sing songs of praises to their men to equip them with courage and bravely, they fight the horses with fire to scare them and they use every weapon at their disposal to fight policemen. On the other hand in *The River Between* women chase the two messengers with loud cries and threats of pulling their penises.

The third objective sought to critically assess the challenges faced by women in liberating their men from bondage of colonialism and neo-colonialism in the two selected texts. Women face discrimination at family level and at societal level. At home a woman is denied the role of decision making, all the decision belong to the man of the house and a woman has to follow her husband without questioning. Muthoni in *The River Between* is a case study; she is portrayed as powerless, submissive and obedient to her husband. In a patriarchal society a woman is seen as a second class citizen who cannot participate in any

political arena. For instance in *The River and the Source* a woman is not supposed to attend or participate in an important men's meeting because her place is in the kitchen. In *The River Between* all the high class citizens are men and even the middle class citizens are represented by Kabonyi. The female gender are in the bracket of the low class citizens and therefore their voices rarely counts. The female gender is disadvantaged and suppressed by both colonial masters and their domineering male counterparts. For instance education is not meant for girls, it is meant for boys that's why old Miriamu in *The River Between* wonders why Nyambura should learn the Whiteman's language. On the other hand in *The River Between*, Nyambura's education is ruined by Kamau after impregnating her, she drops out of school never to go back. Wandia observes that a woman is destined to get married or to become a whore. And those who get married suffer in abusive marriages because their husbands humiliate them by battering them, they are sexual objects who should satisfy their men desires. Even the unmarried women face sexual exploitation from their bosses or else they are dismissed.

From the research findings it is clear that women struggle hard to liberate their men from exploitative and parasitic masters. In the process of liberation struggle they end up losing their property and their lives or lives of their beloved ones. In *The River and the Source* for instance, the death of the great leaders and Sino who were always marching behind women for security purposes is a big blow. The death of Kembo brought great discouragement to the male leader (Kabonyi) and was almost losing confidence. (Ogola, pg.213). The elderly women lost their husbands and their sons during the first and the second wars, they were given medals in return which was of no value at that time. The problems faced by the female characters in the two selected texts can be attributed to colonialism. During pre-colonial period African lived peacefully, but when colonial masters arrived in Africa they changed the whole system of government and heavily exploited them. When men are exploited

women are equally exploited. In *The River Between* instance women struggle hard to search for food since their men have gone on strike to fight for pay rise. Even after colonialism those who took over continue to exploit the female gender. For instance Wandia in *The River and the Source* is bitter about the peasants suffering from drought and economic neglect. Similarly the trek to the city and the air crash generate much publicity that encourage the capitalists to plan exploitative developments in the village. The masters aim at garnering more power and wealth and in the process they impoverish the masses and impose misery and suffering to the majority.

In summary, the research findings demonstrate that the authors of the two selected texts empower their female characters with traditionally masculine roles, enabling them to actively participate in the liberation of their male counterparts from the oppressive forces of colonial and neo-colonial rule. However, these portrayals also serve as a mirror reflecting the broader experiences of African women, whose lives are shaped by multifaceted forms of exploitation and oppression. Their hardships arise not solely from the legacy of colonialism but are compounded by the pervasive influences of patriarchy and gender discrimination. Consequently, these texts present a layered view of African women's struggles, illustrating that the fight for freedom and equality is as much against systemic gender biases as it is against external forms of domination. Through this lens, the study underscores the resilience of African women in the face of intersecting social injustices, advancing a more nuanced understanding of their roles in the fight for collective emancipation.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

The study was a comparative study that critically analyzed reversal of gender roles in a colonial and a post-colonial African novel i.e. *The River and the Source* by Margaret Ogola and *The River between* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o respectively. The project found out that

gender roles reversal is evidence in the two selected texts because female characters are given masculine roles that enable them to liberate their men from oppression. The way in which the two authors portray their female characters positively influence their abilities to perform complex roles. For instance they are presented as courageous, resilient and resourceful thus enabling them to be reliable.

Ultimately, this project found out that when the men aren't in a position of providing for the family it is women who take up the burden from their shoulders. This include tilling the land to search for food and school fees for the children, searching for jobs in towns and cities, searching for food and water from all sources among others. Their stoic endurance and determination are highly praised by their male counterparts.

Secondly, the study found out that the two authors embrace their female characters by empowering them with tools such as education, strong voices, bravely among others that enable to accomplish their mission. It is through education that they are able to communicate in foreign language. In other instances women used language and their strong voices as tools of empowerment. They would participate in men's meetings and in delegations, they would sing songs of praises and encouragement to their heroes and heroines and they would even shout with loud noises and cries to protest the evils acts of their enemies. Their bravely is also well noted because in many instances it is their bravely that rescues them from their oppressors. For instance, Muthoni in *The River Between* and Akoko in *The River and the Source* are two courageous women who become the symbols of resistance in the novels. They have a protest attitude against the colonizers and neo-colonizers and they organize women to fight against their oppressors. The fact that they are backed up by their male counterparts is a clear indication that the two authors have their interests at heart. The two authors embrace togetherness and collective action in the fight for social justice. Collective action is evident in the two texts; the march to Dakar in *The River and the Source* and the

trek to the city in *The River Between* are two journeys that triumphant in the end because both genders are witnessed working together for the welfare of each other.

Thirdly, the study found out that the role of liberation is not an easy one because there are challenges associated with it. The female characters suffer in the hands of their dear ones who never approve of their good work and they also suffer in the hands of the colonial masters. The themes of betrayal, female exploitation, lack of recognition and gender inequality among others are rampant in the two texts. They end up losing their property or even their lives. The two major female characters in the two texts i.e Nyambura in *The River Between* and Akoko in *The River and the Source* lose their lives as the texts are coming to an end.

In spite of their struggle, we see the plight of women during the colonial and post- colonial eras. They experienced many bad things during the resistance movement, including rape. Several women were killed cruelly by their oppressors. By mentioning these facts, Ogola and Ngugi aim showing the devilish face of the post-colonial and neo-colonial actors in the Kenyan society.

#### **5.4 Recommendations**

In addressing gender roles within literary texts, the researcher recommends that the Ministry of Education prioritize literature set books that effectively portray gender equality in both secondary schools and colleges. Based on the findings of this study, it is advised that emerging literary writers actively challenge gender biases by depicting both genders positively. Such representations will foster a societal appreciation for the diverse strengths and contributions of all individuals, irrespective of gender (Esther, 2018).

The study's findings underscore the strategic inclusion of female characters within the narratives of their male counterparts, revealing their shared experiences of exploitation by

both colonial authorities and patriarchal structures. Consequently, the researcher urges African men to support women in their quest for identity and empowerment, enabling them to advocate for justice and equity for all. It is essential for authors and publishers to present a balanced portrayal of both genders, emphasizing their natural abilities and qualities. This approach will help readers recognize the full potential of women beyond the limiting stereotypes often perpetuated by patriarchal societies. Additionally, authors are encouraged to avoid depicting female characters in derogatory ways that may corrupt young readers' perceptions.

Moreover, the researcher emphasizes the need for authors to raise awareness among their audiences regarding pressing gender issues. They should depict both genders as possessing the capabilities necessary to navigate life's challenges, with a particular focus on positively representing women to enhance their societal image. To this end, authors should consider three key areas: promoting the importance of education for the girl child, advocating for equal opportunities for all genders, and liberating women from traditional constraints that limit their choices.

Furthermore, the researcher recommends that both teachers and parents actively promote gender equality among children. They should encourage girls to engage in activities typically categorized as "masculine," as this will help them realize their potential and empower them in their pursuit of social justice. By fostering such empowerment, girls will be better equipped to stand independently in the face of life's challenges and devise innovative solutions for societal issues. Teachers should strive to avoid assigning specific roles to either gender, thus preventing the entrenchment of stereotypes. Ultimately, both genders should be depicted as capable of fulfilling a diverse range of roles within society, contributing to a more equitable and inclusive environment for all.

### **5.5 Areas for Further Research**

The researcher suggested some of the areas for further research;

Since this study has concentrated on gender issues of women in empowering themselves and their families from patriarchal hegemony and also from oppression, there is need for further studies on portrayal of male gender in literary texts. Not only novels but in drama and poetry There is need for further studies on finding out ways of presenting literary texts that are gender neutral and finding out the representation of male and female characters in literary texts. The researcher calls for further research of comparative study on portrayal of female characters in both female and male literary texts.



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# Mount Kenya University



REF: MKU/ISERC/3367  
TO: IRAKU CAROLINE

Date: 05 December 2023

REG: MELIT/2014/72253

Dear Sir/Madam,

**RE: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF GENDER ISSUES IN TWO SELECT KENYAN NOVELS: THE RIVER BETWEEN AND THE RIVER AND THE SOURCE**

This is to inform you that **Mount Kenya University** has reviewed and approved your above research proposal. Your application approval number is **2411**. The approval period is **05/12/2023 - 04/12/2024**.

This approval is subject to compliance with the following requirements;

- i. Only approved documents including informed consents, study instruments, MTA will be used
- ii. All changes including amendments, deviations and violations are submitted for review and approval by **Mount Kenya University**
- iii. Death and life threatening problems and serious adverse events or unexpected adverse events whether related or unrelated to the study must be reported to **Mount Kenya University** within 72 hours of notification
- iv. Any changes, anticipated or otherwise that may increase the risks or affect the safety or welfare of study participants and others or affect the integrity of the research must be reported to **Mount Kenya University** within 72 hours
- v. Clearance for export of biological specimens must be obtained from relevant institutions
- vi. Submission of a request for renewal of approval at least 60 days prior to expiry of the approval period. Attach a comprehensive progress report to support the renewal
- vii. Submission of an executive summary report within 90 days upon completion of the study to **Mount Kenya University**

Yours sincerely,

**Dr. Alfred Owino, PhD**  
Chairman, Mount Kenya University ISERC

The Chairman  
Mount Kenya University  
Ethics Review Committee  
P. O. Box 342 - 0100, Thika



REPUBLIC OF KENYA



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RESEARCH LICENSE

This is to Certify that Ms.. CAROLINE KAGWIRIA IRAKU of Mount Kenya University, has been licensed to conduct research as per the provision of the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 (Rev.2014) in Meru on the topic: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF GENDER ISSUES IN TWO SELECT KENYAN NOVELS: THE RIVER BETWEEN AND THE RIVER AND

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*Walter Kimani*

834105

Applicant Identification



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