

2

African Male Writers' Presentation of Women in African Literature

-Monica N. W. Mweseli*

Abstract

This article analyses the presentation of women characters by male writers such as Okot p'Bitek, Ngugi wa Thiongo and Francis Imbuga. It will look at the woman question both as a historical and a cultural phenomenon. Various women characters will be looked into so as to investigate how they were shaped by the colonial and imperialistic struggle. It is worth noting that except for Francis Imbuga's Aminata at that point male writers were not presenting women characters of high status. For example, Lawino is not educated, Malaya is a prostitute, Wanja begins out as a young girl who is raped and who ends up to be a prostitute. Imbuga has used a female character who, contrary to those other female characters, is educated and who is a lawyer. I will analyse the characters in the order in which the respective works were published.

Song of Lawino by Okot p'Bitek

Song of Lawino written by Okot p'Bitek, (1931-1982) a significant African poet, was published in 1966. In *Song of Lawino* Okot portrays real African people undergoing and reacting to European influence. The female character Lawino thinks about and questions the validity of hating her own culture and blindly emulating western culture. *Song of Lawino* is a long narrative poem. Some critics classify it as a *poetic novel*, or a *lament*, or a *long dramatic poem*. Each of these terms is partially correct. Okot wrote it originally in Luo, his mother tongue, under the title *Wer Pa Lawino*, which he translated into English in 1966 as *Song of Lawino*. The poem presents the effects of colonization and westernization on the African ways of life. It contrasts the opposing approaches to cultural life taken by the African elite and the ordinary folk.

To support his case Okot uses as his mouthpiece, Lawino, a female protagonist; a rural, unwesternized traditional woman married to Ocol, an African who has received western education. Influenced by his western education Ocol abandons his rural wife, Lawino. Consequently, Lawino addresses her husband in an attempt to reason out with him. Ocol's central reason for abandoning Lawino is that she has not received western education. According to Ocol she is primitive and her behaviour is both primitive and backwards. In the course of reasoning out with Ocol, Lawino unfolds many things about their past and present relationship. Consequently, the readers find out that Ocol is in love with a mistress, Clementine, who is of the *new world*. She behaves in Western ways. She uses lipstick on her lips. She puts powder on her face. She bleaches her skin, she pads her breasts, and behaves in other Western ways, which Ocol considers as the ideal of what beautiful is.

As Lawino says:

Ocol rejects the old type.

* Associate Professor of Literature, University of Nairobi, Nairobi | Kenya

He is in love with a modern woman.
He is in love with a beautiful girl
Who speaks English.
Ocol is no longer in love with the old type
He is in love with a modern girl
The name of the beautiful one is
Clementine. (41)

Consequently, Lawino laments her husband's abandoning her simply because she does not imitate western values. As Lawino's account unfolds, we learn that traditional ways of life are valid and positive. She also demonstrates that the African ways of life not only contribute to the inherent strength and structure of African society, but also enhance the African's capacity to express themselves fully and freely. To portray this, Lawino comments on many aspects of life in East Africa such as the aesthetics (in dances, human beauty, the practical crafts, and food), religion, politics, and education. We discover Ocol thinks that in all the above mentioned matters, the African values are primitive and must be destroyed and replaced by western values. Lawino thinks otherwise. In fact, Lawino demonstrates that the so-called superior Christian religion is hypocritical and that the Western ways in general can be dirty, stupid, and inappropriate to African people. As Ngugi wa Thiong'o puts it:

Lawino is not rejecting the validity of western culture. To her every culture is valid for the community and the condition that created it. What gnaws at her is that self-hatred that makes the Ocols totally reject and even consciously repudiate their roots in the African peasant world: they even go further and uncritically accept the half-digested mannerisms of European bourgeois.

Song of Lawino is based on a real social problem, experienced in many rural places in East Africa initially, in East Africa, men received education up to higher levels than women. Some even went abroad for further studies, leaving their wives in rural villages. The result was that there was often trouble when a husband with all his western ideals returned to live with his wife who remained entrenched in her African values. Such marriages sometimes dissolved, especially if the husband behaved like Ocol and had contempt for all the African ways of life held by his wife and family. Okot utilizes the dramatic impact of such a common domestic problem to express his points about the future of Africa. (Heron, 6)

Through Lawino, Okot reasserts the values that existed before the coming of Europeans in East Africa. On the other hand, he reveals the falsity of Western society's claim to be better or more genuine than African society, especially the claims of Christianity. Through Ocol, Okot portrays the harmful effects of Western values, specifically in East Africa, but generally in Africa as a whole. One of the harmful effects of Western education and values is alienation and self-hatred. Ocol denies his Africanness. He hates his continent, his community and even in a sense, himself. He is ashamed of his colour, blackness. He therefore, thinks that all Acoli ways of dress, dance, religion, and medicine are nasty and backward and must be replaced. On the contrary, Lawino expresses the healthiness of Acoli culture, and she exposes the immorality and hypocrisy of Western ways of life, especially, Christianity.

With an extensive comment on Christ's representatives, Lawino reaches her climactic defence of Acoli culture and attacks Western influence. The song as a whole portrays the aesthetic and moral strength of Lawino's own tradition and contrasts it with the hollow falsity of the western beliefs and values as they are presented in her homeland. Above all, the song undermines any western claim to cultural, aesthetic, or moral superiority. The expansive range of topics and the dramatic realism with which they are treated account for the work's unique popularity. Although Lawino is a rural unwesternized woman, the writer has given her positive qualities so that she stands out stronger than her westernized husband. Even though some critics would have wished her to be an educated woman, a lawyer or a professor, I strongly feel the way she has been presented is above this

Song of Malaya by Okot p'Bitek

Song of Malaya is another poem by Okot p'Bitek, first published in 1971. In *Song of Malaya*, Okot centres the discussion around promiscuity generally and prostitution specifically. In doing so, he portrays a prostitute as a productive healthy person in a society. He indicates that people who deny the value of sex outside marriage or the value of prostitution are usually hypocritical and unwilling to admit the facts about human nature and human history. *Song of Malaya* is divided into seven sections, each of which treats a separate facet of the issue.

In section one, entitled *Karibu (Welcome)*, the prostitute welcomes the vast variety of men who enjoy her company. Many of those she welcomes come from afar. Not only have they been frustrated for a long time, but some have been isolated from female companionship for years. She first welcomes the most frustrated: the sailor, the soldier, and the prisoner detainee about to be released; others she welcomes include: *miners and engineers on rural projects, teachers from bush schools, bus drivers, taxi men, business executives and shop assistants*, even *political leaders of the people* (129-130) who after organizing rallies are tired; their place of rest is with the prostitute. The common thing among these men is that all of them have been busy doing some kind of work and they are thirsty for sex and female companionship. The best description the prostitute gives of them is that they are *the hungry lions/of the world* (133) who compete with each other as they hunt for the Malaya. The Malaya who sings this song establishes a warm, tender welcome to all of them. She is so generous and sentimental that she doesn't charge the innocent novice.

All my thanks
To you
School boy love,
I charge you
No fee...

That shy smile
On your face,
And
Oh!
I feel ten years
Younger. (129-130)

But the prostitute is clearly portrayed as offering more than sex. She establishes an empathic and generous personality, and incidentally establishes that her wares are essentially companionship. This is evidenced in her treatment of the tired politicians whose *voices are hoarse* as a result of making speeches. She is considerate to them.

After the prostitute's welcome, she addresses the issue of extramarital sex generally. The title of section two, *Rich Harvest* refers to venereal diseases, which are one harvest of sex. The prostitute declares that such diseases should not necessarily be associated particularly with prostitution, for they come from all types of promiscuity. The dramatic situation here is the prostitute's defence against a *Big Chief's* (135) charge that the prostitute has infected him with a venereal disease. She denies guilt first by reminding him of another potential source.

The prostitute goes on to say that no one can seriously pretend or hope to eradicate promiscuity. The solution to the problem of disease is medical and should have a high priority as one of the goals of liberation. Consequently, the prostitute appeals to all those with influence, including *mayors, clerks, headmistresses and headmasters, Presidents, Ministers* and in general *Liberators of Africa'* (140) to utilize all their resources and their revolutionary energy in the eradication of venereal diseases in Africa, that is, through medicine rather than through vain attempts at an impossible and improper morality.

The prostitute's services as a psychological aid to all types of men make her of significant value to the society as a whole. This argument has been presented mainly in section three, entitled *Part Time* to refer to the prostitute's occasional service. For example, it shows how men with a variety of marital difficulties get comfort from the prostitute and hence their marriages are actually fostered and saved by the prostitutes.

The African tradition considers polygamy healthy, but prostitution is not accepted in any typical African community. Therefore, as George Heron puts it, "*The poem, Song of Malaya, is a song in praise of sexual pleasure. And sexual pleasure is a good thing in African tradition.*" (82)

In section five, entitled *Pearls of Crying*, Okot attacks the concept of illegitimacy and its effects on children born out of wedlock who are the ones who get hurt. Okot skilfully portrays this by creating a vignette or a dramatic picture of the prostitute waiting for her child to return from school. The child comes home crying because somebody called him a bastard. In the final analysis, the prostitute displays herself as a responsible, capable mother and good provider for her children.

In the final section, entitled *Flaming Eternity* the prostitute declares the permanent inevitability of prostitution, regardless of the strong legal measures and physical abuse applied by those who express contempt for it. Moralists who use the excuse of doing their duty to prosecute the immorality of prostitution are hypocritical:

In conclusion, *Song of Malaya* thus reveals that extramarital sexual indulgence and prostitution do exist in society and are inevitable. It also reveals the hypocrisy of the so-called modern moralists in African society in particular, and in the world at large. Okot succeeds in portraying these themes by showing how indefensible is the society's moral vision that condemns the prostitute and prostitution. He then defends the prostitute without specifically defending prostitution. He defends the prostitute firstly by giving her an admirable personality: she is warm, tender, kind, generous, and responsible. She

takes good care of her children (180), she is rational, intelligent, and knowledgeable. She is aware of ways and movements of hypocritical people such as the Big Chief, Bush teacher and her brother. They all condemn her, but they also engage in promiscuous sex. *The prostitute is bold, unashamed, and strong. She is also deadly lonely* (171) and this arouses our sympathy for her.

Secondly, Okot defends the prostitute with arguments. One of the arguments is the inevitability of widespread promiscuity and prostitution. Both are as old as the history of man. Therefore, some people, from man's origin to the present find promiscuity and prostitution beneficial. This is evidenced in section one, comprising a long list of the various types of men who use and enjoy the services of the prostitute and in section four with its catalogue of prostitutes who became famous throughout history. Another argument is exposing the hypocrisy surrounding the issue of prostitution. Okot shows, for example, that the bush teacher is bold enough to call the prostitute's child a bastard, yet he himself has bastards (173). Another argument is the irony of Christianity, which condemns prostitutes and promiscuity when its founder, Jesus, was a *bastard* and tolerant of prostitutes.

Finally, Okot defends the prostitute by defending sexual pleasure and by showing that polygamy is more responsible than either hypocritical monogamy or even genuine celibacy. For example, the unnamed married man in the poem has three children with the prostitute. Why should he pretend to be monogamous when he is in fact *polygamous*? This same episode also shows us that the prostitute is a healthy person in society. All these themes dealt with in *Song of Malaya* add up to a genuine challenge to the commonly accepted concepts of morality and sex in society.

Okot has given his historical and cultural sense full play in the *Malaya's song*, which explodes all our notions of good and bad. The composition is one of the most daring challenges to society from the Malaya's own mouth: to see if we can stand to her rigorous scrutiny of ourselves. The prudes, the puritans, and the respectable have always frowned upon the street-walker, the adulteress, the courtesan, the Malaya. But the history of sexual deviation, of perversion, and temptation, is as old as man himself, embracing, according to the poet, the great names in world history.

***Petals of Blood* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o**

Petals of Blood by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o was published in 1977. In this novel, through the lives of Wanja and others, the author depicts the transformation of peasants into workers. Thus we see that Wanja is not an isolated, unique peculiar individual, but rather the product of colonial and neo-colonial Kenya and a representative of both the workers and the peasants. Her character brings to the fore two crucial issues of our contemporary neo-colonial society:

- The issue of the genuine liberation of women; and
- The relationship of the liberation of women to the struggle of the workers and peasants against their exploitation and oppression.

Wanja is both a product and a victim of an ideology externally imposed on her country and which emanates from the iron tentacles of Euro-American capital. This is the ideology of colonialism and imperialism that is the whole issue of capitalism.

We follow Wanja on her journeys through the various social classes of Kenya and are able to see class contradictions manifest in colonial and neo-colonial Kenya. She journeys through the worlds of the peasantry, the landless, the lumpenproletariat, the proletariat, the comprador bourgeoisie and the foreigners.

The school girl Wanja gets seduced while still at school, conceives a child and makes her way through the novel by her wits and resourcefulness. We meet her as a barmaid, helper to her peasant grandmother, prostitute, barmaid-proprietor and finally, as the high class call-girl for the pleasure of the three directors of Thong'eta Brewery. Then, as her capital multiplies, she herself turns into an employer of barmaids and prostitutes and the owner of a string of houses and a thriving transport business. Through these various roles we follow Wanja as she develops and strives to stay afloat and retain some dignity while engaged in one of the most dehumanizing and crudest forms of exploitation-prostitution.

Throughout these many phases of her life, there is a powerful resistance against the forces of exploitation and oppression. At times we see this resistance in Wanja's own individual life; at times we see it embodied in her family line through her grandfather, grandmother and aunt. At other times we see this resistance in a collective form as the workers and peasants of Ilmorog organize and struggle against *the twin cruelties of unprepared-for vagaries of nature and the uncontrolled actions of man* (111).

The author focuses our attention on this woman, Wanja, whose predicament speaks the lives of the majority of the women of Kenya: school girls lured by lecherous sugar daddies, barmaids whose lives are characterized by meagre wages and sexual exploitation; the peasant woman as she toils, scratching a subsistence living at the mercy of rain and sun, flood and drought; the lone woman, unemployed, pulling herself from the drudgery of subsistence farming and setting up a business on her own, choosing an individualistic way out of her problems to compete in a predominantly male, bourgeois world to reap the *matunda ya uhuru* and become one of the token few women who achieves equality with men in the petty-bourgeois and bourgeois echelons of Kenya.

In her many roles Wanja provides fertile ground for the study of the woman question in Kenya while the class contradictions are revealed clearly through her life. Wanja's life is symptomatic of the social relations in the Kenyan society examined in *Petals of Blood*. Karega, a worker and trade unionist, gives an impassioned exposition of the situation at hand and enlightens us on what prostitution means in the neo-colony.

Karega gives a vivid picture of the conditions under which sexual prostitution takes place. Wanja, like all workers and peasants, is a product and victim of this set-up and reflects the effects of capitalist exploitation. It is important that Karega brings into the open the full nature of a decadent society, for it brings Wanja's life-and, therefore, the question of the genuine liberation of women-into proper perspective: that is, as part of the struggle against the Euro-American network of exploitation and oppression in which our bodies and labour are bought and sold as commodities.

A close look at the development of Wanja's character reveals that there are actually two Wanjas. On the one hand, there is Wanja, schoolgirl, unwed mother, barmaid, destitute prostitute and poor peasant who has our sympathy in her efforts to survive in the cruel capitalist system. On the other hand, one third of the way through *Petals of Blood*, we see Wanja change into a woman who is determined to acquire riches, never marry and is

prepared to sell her body to wealthy men and tourists so as to acquire her own business—thus joining the comfortable propertied class. The earlier Wanja reflects the material conditions under which the unemployed and semi-employed women and men live; the latter Wanja shows the upward climb of a select few to the top levels of the economic and social pyramid.

As Wanja undergoes these changes, she reflects on the sexual level of various types of prostitution: nascent, covert, overt and perverse. The various types of prostitution are stages in Wanja's development which, as we shall discuss further, also reflect the particularity of Kenyan history as it passes from a colony to a neo-colony. Furthermore, the sexual exploitation which Wanja is subjected to is symbolic of all capitalist exploitations, whose main feature is to turn both women and men into commodities.

The portrayal of Wanja in *Petals of Blood*, in fact, refutes the historical definition of prostitution and clearly shows the economic and social forces and class contradictions behind the emergence and existence of prostitution.

As a schoolgirl Wanja is seduced by Kimeria, the wealthy 'sugar-daddy' and homeguard and is lured into nascent prostitution. Kimeria uses as bait a gift of a floral dress, trips to the city and the cinema—the usual material payment due to a prostitute in exchange for her body as sexual commodity. Wanja is too young and naïve to know that she is actually being bought: to Kimeria she is only a commodity and a plaything to be toyed with and discarded when she is no longer useful and pleasurable for his lust. The lack of any human feeling and relationship between Kimeria and herself hits her when she becomes pregnant.

Clearly, this is a case of a human being who has been bought and basely used, and, unknown to her, she has been initiated into a world where her body is a commodity for the gratuitous sexual exploitation for those who can buy her sexual labour for a few minutes, an hour or a day. Wanja's cousin, who is herself already a prostitute, serves as a parallel that throws light on the situation that Wanja finds herself in. Wanja's destitution and desperation rings loudly.

The choices before young Wanja are truly bleak: the lamb's voice to suicide, her cousin's call to street (overt) prostitution or work in bars— which, we find out later on in the novel, is merely a cover for prostitution (covert) with the bar owners as the pimp.

Yet Wanja knows that these are not her choices; that becoming a prostitute, bartering her body for a few shillings a day was never her intention or inclination. Earlier on, the author has shown us Wanja's school days and her ability to excel and shine in school. This points out that her intention and choice was to pass her examinations and continue in school.

Her aspirations, however, do not materialize. The environment in which she lives is so hostile and ruthless that she finds herself a mere woman-child overwhelmed by Kimeria's seduction, the Maths teacher's lechery, her father's longing for a wealthy son-in-law and thus a large bride price in exchange for her. She finds herself on the doorstep of polygamy when pregnancy catches up with her. However, the responsibility of motherhood and being the sole parent of her child proves too heavy for this woman-child and she is forced by Kimeria's misanthropy to commit infanticide while she herself is

tempted to commit suicide. Finally, she is forced into covert prostitution and the sale of her hands as barmaid.

The violence which is perpetrated on this woman-child follows her at all turns. Wanja's lone life bespeaks volumes about the violence that the '*sugar daddy culture*' perpetrates on our young women. The pathos with which Ngugi narrates this crucial turning point in Wanja's life, this violent *fall* of Wanja from a human being to becoming a commodity, is truly a sign of his sincere and deep concern regarding the plight of the exploited and oppressed women of Kenya.

From this description we see that Kimeria derives his powers, his ability to buy Wanja, from being wealthy and not from being merely a man. It is from his position of wealth that he exploits Wanja. This also applies, to a lesser degree, to the Maths teacher who uses his position of power to seduce and blackmail Wanja.

The sexist stand of *all men exploit women and, therefore, all men should be hated* is rejected. The class stand is clearly stated here: the wealthy Kimeria exploits the poor Wanja. Ironically Wanja's dream of marriage to this wealthy man plummets her deeper into poverty, thus widening the class gap between them and proving further that in any interaction between the wealthy class and the poor, the latter are always worse off materially.

As Kimeria is able to buy many workers to do work for him at his home and businesses to replace the necessity of many wives as a source of labour, so he is able to buy many Wanjas for his gratuitous sexual exploits to replace the many wives he would have had in a polygamous marriage. He can buy many Wanjas for the gratification of his lust without committing himself to marriage.

For Wanja, polygamous marriage as we have seen described by Kimeria is clearly slavery. Kimeria, in his cynicism, reveals the true nature of polygamy: *if you don't mind being a second wife, and my first wife is so harsh she will make you 'her slave.'* (82) It is, in fact, a chain reaction of slavery: Kimeria owns his first wife and in turn Wanja would be owned by Kimeria's first wife.

Wanja endures this humiliating scene with Kimeria for her need in a patriarchal society is to move from being her father's property and, in exchange for bride price, become her husband's property. Her needs are basic; food, shelter and clothing. In a patriarchal society, she cannot provide this herself, since, as a woman, she cannot own land on which she can grow food, erect a house and with the surplus of food buy clothing. In a polygamous marriage she would endure a lifetime of humiliation and slave labour just to fulfil these basic needs.

Polygamy, a hangover of pre-capitalist labour and social relations, is not acceptable to Wanja. Social relations have changed drastically and a façade of monogamy reigns for Kimeria. What Wanja is unwittingly caught up in is the decadence which exudes out of social relations under capitalism and particularly in marriage. Wanja does not by-pass this domestic slavery of a polygamous marriage because it is her own choice, or because Kimeria rejects her but because the forward movement of history will not allow her to be involved in this specific form of domestic slavery. The particular historical period in which Kimeria and Wanja find themselves shapes them both: Kimeria rejects polygamy because it is not materially beneficial to him as an owner of property and capital who can

buy labour at will while Wanja finds herself rendered useless as a domestic slave and is thrust by capitalist social trends into selling herself on the public market. She is catapulted into a situation where she is bought not just once as a wife (bride price) but many times over as a prostitute; she is not just one man's second wife, but the second 'wife' of many men.

The escape from domestic slavery is no freedom at all. Wanja becomes more openly a commodity. She escapes polygamous marriage, the camouflaged exploitation of her labour, only to enter a more blatantly exploitative life in the city. Prostitution, thus, co-exists alongside monogamy: those with money can buy women, who, as we have seen in Wanja's case, are poor and, at the same time, enforce monogamy on their wives.

Other aspects of Wanja's life also bring to the fore the predicament of women in countries which are subjugated by imperialism. Wanja's seduction by Kimeria is a rampant practice which is enjoyed with gusto and total lack of conscience by men whose wealth gives them power to buy young women for their lust. The prevailing relationship is that which is determined by money. Whether the young women are lured unwittingly, as in the case of Wanja, or whether they make a deliberate move out of the desperation of poverty, the sugar-daddy is never mistaken about his intention and power position--to satiate his lust with the bodies of young women.

Infanticide is a specific result of the rampant exploits of the sugar-daddy. As we see in Wanja's case, she is left with no means to bring up her baby. Though she is haunted throughout the novel by her guilty conscience, she is really a victim. Her haunted conscience and persistent longing for a child are, in fact, manifestations of her humanism. It shows clearly that her child is also a victim of one enemy: Kimeria's wealth and her poverty enemy.

It is often said by liberals that all these problems can be avoided if adequate measures are taken to prevent Wanja, the woman-child, from becoming pregnant, that is, through contraceptive methods including the right to abortion. Yet it is quite clear that the issue of whether or not Wanja becomes pregnant is not as important as how this happens and why. In *Petals of Blood* we are shown how and why this woman-child becomes pregnant. It is clear that what happens to Wanja is not due to biology, or lack of adequate means of contraception, or lack of morals on her part. On the contrary, Wanja is a victim of property relations in capitalism. She is easy prey for the wealthy Kimeria.

In all this Wanja is totally unprepared to deal with the hostile environment in which she finds herself. The bourgeois education in which we see her excelling does not teach her anything about her position in a society which has been subjugated by imperialism; a society in which in fact *you eat or you are eaten*. Whereas Wanja deserves sympathy for the termination of her schooling, she deserves even greater sympathy and defence for not being equipped to analyse and understand that she is a victim. Bourgeois education only provides her with those skills, literacy skills, which are meant to propagate its reign of terror. What Wanja needs desperately is political education that will help her in realizing that Kimeria is her enemy and not her lover; that the façade of philanthropy is, in fact, deep-rooted misanthropy; and that she is a victim and prey to the wealthy Kimeria in innumerable ways.

All that happens to Wanja is because she is born in Kenya under imperialism and her life reflects the particularity of Kenyan history under imperialism. Wanja's youth coincides

with the early years of the national struggle for independence. We see the formation of classes under capitalism and also the political alliances. Kimeria who gathers wealth and, therefore, power becomes a homeguard.

Aminata by Francis Imbuga

Next I discuss the character of Aminata as presented by Francis Imbuga in his play *Aminata*. Professor Francis Imbuga was born in the Western Province of Kenya and was both a playwright and an actor on the stage. He published several other plays namely, *The Burning of Rags*, *Game of Silence*, *The Successor*, *Betrayal in the City*, and *Man of Kafira*. Professor Imbuga taught for a very long time at university level before his demise in 2013.

The main character in the play is a young woman called Aminata. She is the embodiment of an intense struggle in a society which is in the process of changing from a purely traditional setting, where men are dominant, to a modern one where roles and property are shared between the sexes. As a woman, many prejudices and obstacles block Aminata's path to progress but being brilliant and determined to succeed she seems to go over most, if not all of them. Her successes make her become a local celebrity though this also attracts intense animosity against her. The play therefore, sets before us the dilemma that societal change can pose and urges us to be innovative, resourceful and patient so as to manage change smoothly.

The two major characters in the play, Jumba and Aminata, embody the conflict between traditional and modern values.

The most important conflict in the play is about the inheritance of part of the late Pastor Ngoya's land. Traditionally, women are not supposed to inherit their father's ancestral land as they get married out of their community. However, in this play, we find that the late Pastor Ngoya, having been heavily influenced by modern Christian values, decides that all his children, regardless of sex, have equal entitlement to his property and so bequeaths part of his land to his daughter, Aminata. His brother, Jumba and his eldest son Ababio, are fiercely opposed to this. They abide by the traditional values that bar daughters from inheriting their father's ancestral lands. This conflict forms the subject matter of the play.

In the struggle, Aminata produces her late father's will to prove her claim but Ababio and Jumba dismiss this insisting on verbal evidence. They want human witnesses, not documents. The land inheritance conflict leads to a leadership succession conflict. Traditionally, the Membe stool of rule has always been occupied by men. Some elders express loud doubts about a female person ascending the stool of rule. Ndururu, for instance, quips, *You know I still don't believe all this. Jumba of all our men, handing over the headmanship to a woman!* (57) In fact, very few people in Membe are ready to see a woman as the village head.

One of the issues that brought about conflict between the late Pastor Ngoya and his brother Jumba was the chicken soup episode where women were, for the first time ever, allowed to eat chicken. This annoyed men like Jumba as chicken was traditionally the preserve of men alone. This change constituted a challenge to Membe's established values as contrary to traditional practices; religion also preaches equality between people

(both men and women) and also family planning. This was opposed by those who valued the traditional values

Related to the theme of conflict between traditional and modern values is also the theme of gender equality clearly discernible in the play. This is equality between the sexes: men and women. In the traditional society, there is no equality between men and women. Men are thought to be superior and make all key decisions for the family and society. Women are strictly obligated to man, the kitchen and related chores. However, in this play, two major features, religion and education, have brought about a sharp challenge to the traditional set up.

Religion preaches equality between all people (men and women) and so women are equally entitled to the privileges the men enjoyed such as land and property inheritance, leadership roles, education, food and nutrition and so on. This is why the late Pastor Ngoya led women in a chicken eating spree thus challenging the traditional set up where it was taboo for women to eat chicken.

Pastor Ngoya also preached about family planning, and his married daughter practices it. But her husband's aunt, Kezia, heavily condemns it when she visits the family. Her views, being traditional, sharply clash with Dr Mulemi/Aminata's which are modern. In Mulemi's household, the couple sits together and talk on an equal basis, none is superior to the other. However, she doesn't dictate her views to her husband.

The decision to have Mama Rosina sit on the Membe stool of rule is also an indication that gender equality is an accepted concept. In fact most elders support the issue of Aminata inheriting her father's land and the decision to have Mama Rosina sit on the Membe stool and in effect oversee the land handover to Aminata.

Aminata is a key embodiment of the concept of gender equality. She is a hardworking, brave, determined, industrious and friendly lawyer. Although she remains alienated, there is strong evidence that the people of Membe are starting to value women. Aminata initiates a number of progressive activities such as the water project, the tailoring business as well as hiring a choreographer for the village dance troupe. These activities enhance her reputation in the village and make her liked as a glowing example of a successful female person. Aminata fights to get her share of her father's land, which he left for her as a gift and despite all the threats from her uncle Jumba and her brother Ababio she still presses on.

Conclusion

The male writers discussed here have presented female characters through whom very important and serious issues have been raised. The earlier published writers have used female characters who are uneducated prostitutes, while Imbuga has used a modern woman, Aminata, who is educated and a lawyer. Some critics have said that in using a prostitute or an uneducated woman, the male writers have not done the African woman justice. However, others have applauded the fact that whether the female character in question is a prostitute or educated, those female characters have been used to pass on very important didactic ideas. These writers present the dilemma that society poses to women. I strongly feel that Francis Imbuga has succeeded to sensitize the society about the process of changing from a purely traditional setting, where men are dominant, to a modern one where roles and property are shared between the sexes. As a woman, many

prejudices and obstacles block Aminata's path to progress but being brilliant and determined she seems to go over most if not all of them. Her successes make her become a local celebrity though this also attracts intense animosity against her.

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