DECONSTRUCTING THE PERCEPTION OF FEMINISM AS A WESTERN CONCEPT THROUGH THE VOICES OF EAST AFRICAN WOMEN WRITERS

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DECLARATION

I, MERCY JACKLINE NYOKABI, declare that this is my original work, where referred, sources have been declared, and has neither been submitted nor is it currently being submitted for a Degree in any University.

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This research project has been presented for examination with our approval as the University Supervisors.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this Research to two great women in my life, my grandmother Esther Nyokabi Maara and my mother, the late Elizabeth Wanjiru Maara who are representative of millions of African women who stretch themselves beyond their limit to provide for their families. You two taught me to believe in who I am as a woman.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following concepts are to be used throughout the research as they relate to the topic under study. Their definition in the context of this study is as shown.

**Feminism**

This is a social movement and ideology aimed at empowering women and enable them to overcome barriers that have brought about discrimination towards women over time. Feminism seeks to understand gender relations and power dynamics within society.

**African feminism**

African feminism is a combination of all the various struggles against social, cultural, political and economic marginalization that have dogged African women. It is the struggle for African women to find their authentic selves, to declare ‘I am’ and ‘we are’ and to demand for a new world that is created by experiences, skills and knowledge of both men and women as argued by Kabira & Burkeywo, (2016)

**Patriarchy**

Patriarchy is a system of attitudes, structures and institutions in which men hold power over women. This subsequently create structures that prevent women from accessing power and resources. Patriarchy thus privilege men and allot them various forms of power in all societies. This system becomes so entrenched that to escape from it becomes almost impossible (Walby, 1990).

**Deconstruction**

It is unlayering blocks to reveal a new meaning. Deconstruction is a literary ideology which according to Turner (2016), by its very nature defies institutionalization in an authoritative definition. Rather, it is something that happens. It does not require deliberation or consciousness, but rather its potential exists within our structures of meaning. Meaning is therefore derived from social experiences.
ABSTRACT

There has been an enduring debate about the place of feminism in Africa. Is feminism a purely western concept? Is it “unafrican” to be a feminist? Does it go against the culture and tradition of an African woman to want anything more than a submissive position in the home and society? Semantics have come into play with a number of African women choosing not to be labeled as feminists even as they engage in “feminist work”. This study seeks to give voice to women writers through their literary works on the place of feminism in Africa and specifically in the East African region. Using a close reading of Margaret Ogola’s *The River and the Source* (1994), and Elieshi Lema’s *Parched Earth: A Love Story* (2001), this work set out to analyse feminist thought through characterization, language and form. How the authors use their characters to give voice to feminist issues and reveal power relations. It also analyses the presentation of feminist thought through social cultural institutions, structures and norms such as marriage, polygamy, dowry, and motherhood as an institution. The research seeks to understand how women negotiate around these institutions to establish their position in society. Lastly the research seeks to provide a definition of “feminism” in the East African region according to the two authors in a backdrop of numerous definitions of what African feminism is. African feminism and feminist literary analysis theories are key in providing a reading into the feminist issues raised through the characters in the novels as well as the language and imagery used. Textual analysis has been used as a methodology to bring out the feminist issues in the texts. In addition to this, the ABC of gender analysis is a tool that guides in language and power analysis. By so doing this study adds to the body of literature on feminism from the East African region and deconstructs the notion of feminism as a western concept. Until now African women have been spoken for and people thought that the East African region lacks enough literature to support feminism as an African concept experienced by African women. Women writers provide a voice to African women and give their characters life to speak about their strength and how they negotiate the patriarchal institutions that operate to undermine them. East African women do not seek to overturn power but rather seek ways to negotiate set traditional institutions and appropriate power for themselves through hard work and developing a sense of independence. Feminism ideology is a lived experience by African women. The study recommends future research focusing on describing “East African feminisms” versus other areas in the continent like “West African feminisms” and “South African feminisms”
CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND AND CONTENT

1.1 Introduction

Feminism is an ideology that most people in Africa still find foreign and associate it with the west. Chege (2012) argues that this has resulted from the perception that feminism threatens the African cultural and traditional norms that govern social relations. However, the struggle for women in Africa and most specific East African women have come from far and definitely yielded fruits. The women movements from the East to the West, North to the South of Africa have been actively involved in the fight for the struggles in their specific countries be it colonialism, democracy or even provision of basic needs such as food security, adequate housing and good healthcare. Aside from this, women have fought for their own space and recognition, to be involved at the leadership table and have their agenda addressed. They have also had to overcome many barriers and continue to do so. It would therefore be a mistake to think that feminism does not belong to Africa.

This research project undertakes a study on the description of feminist ideology through literary works of two women writers in East Africa, Margaret Ogola and Elieshi Lema. Thus, deconstructing the notion that feminism is a western concept and locating feminism as an African ideology as well. This is done through thematic concerns represented through the characters in their novels, *The River and The Source* (1994) and *Parched Earth: A love Story* (2001) respectively the later henceforth referred to as *Parched Earth*. In addition, the language use and rich imagery is used to locate African feminism in contrast to other western feminisms. The unique situation of the African history, culture, multi-ethnicity among others combine to make it necessary to study the context of universal concepts and how they can be redefined in the African context. This study aspires to conceptualize feminism ideology as a lived experience by African women through generations from the pre-colonial period to the present day.

The feminist movement began with the need for women to have a voice in electing their leaders, the suffragettes fought for their voting rights first in Europe and the United States of America. After achieving their voting rights they then fought to influence decision by being included in the decision making process as well as eliminating discriminations against women which further hindered their progress. However recognition and acceptance of the feminist ideology in Africa is still taken with a pinch of salt, differing perspectives cloud the true meaning of feminism while
many view it as a western concept. The general perception is that feminism contrasts African culture and traditions that define social relations. Critics have argued that most of the renowned literature in Africa comes from the West and Southern parts of Africa (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009; Ngunjiri, 2010; Lanoi, 2016) Nkomo & Ngambi (2009) argue on the need to increase literature based on theory building in relation to African women. They found a gap in the amount of literature that relates to women and leadership more so in the East African region as compared to the West and South African regions. There exists a gap in this area especially in relation to works of fiction that relate to feminism ideology. Critical works done on Ogola’s *The River and the Source* as well as Elieshi Lema’s *Parched Earth* have not dealt with them primarily as feminist texts. This research therefore seeks to build on theory relating to feminism and African women. This is a multidisciplinary research that draws from literature as well as women studies.

It also becomes necessary to learn from the African experiences through the voices of Africans themselves. It took a while for the African woman to penetrate the literary world. Many of the initial works were by male authors and when the women eventually got a voice it was mostly through the novel genre where they were able to tell their stories to the world. This is in line with traditional African culture where culture and traditions were passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth. This time though women decided to document their experiences through writing. The women writers also took this opportunity to refute the negative portrayal of women by men in their works of fiction. (Tripp, 2002)

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a Nigerian author warns about *the Danger of a Single Story* (2009). She argues that a story told repeatedly in only one perspective will give the wrong impression and a generalized stereotypical view. It is therefore important for a story to be told and listened to in different viewpoints especially by the person who experiences the story itself. She says that stories are defined by “How they are told, who tells them, when they're told, how many stories are told, (that) are really dependent on power” (Adichie, 2009). This research seeks to give the perspective of women in East Africa in relation to feminist ideology though giving voice to the characters in the two novels.

An analysis of the two texts seek to deconstruct the meaning of feminism as an ideology that is not foreign to Africa. Meaning, according to Jacques Derrida the founder of deconstruction, cannot be regarded as fixed but is constantly evolving (Turner, 2016). Through the study of the
two authors’ work, feminism finds a place in the lives of East African women. They give voice to strong women characters who seek to re-position their lives in a world that is full of obstructions, gaining strength in the very structures that undermine their womanhood such as patriarchy and tradition.

**Margaret Ogola and Elieshi Lema’s biographical information**

Ogola whose other works include, *Cardinal Otunga: A Gift of Grace* (1999), *Place of Destiny* (2005) and *I Swear by Apollo* (2002) has sought to portray women’s realities in fiction work to counteract the ‘negative portrayal of women by male authors.’ (Ebila, 2002) Ogola was born on June 12, 1958 and died on September 21, 2011. She was a medical doctor specializing in Pediatrics at Kenyatta National Hospital having graduated with a Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery in 1984 followed by a Masters of Medicine in Pediatrics in 1990 both from the University of Nairobi. In 2004 she did a Post-Graduate Diploma in Planning and Management of Development Projects at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa. She headed the Family Life Counselling Association of Kenya and Family Life Programme at the Kenya Episcopal Conference. She was also an advisor to Kenya Catholic Bishops on issues of family and health and a member of Opus Dei. She was married to George Ogola and had four children and two foster children.

Parched Earth (2001) is Tanzanian Elieshi Lema’s first novel having begun her writing with poems and children books. She was born and raised in a village on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro. Her novel, *Parched Earth- a Love Story* (2001) has been translated into Swedish and French and received honourable mention for the Noma Award for Publishing in Africa in 2002. It is also used as part of the curriculum at various universities Lema is co-owner of a publishing house which also operates a book café aimed at promoting the reading culture in Tanzania. She actively promotes reading through various projects initiated to support readership in indigenous languages. Lema’s writing has an explicit gender perspective where she addresses topics such as patriarchy, gender and children’s rights as well as HIV/Aids (“Elieshi Lema”, 2013).

Lema was a founding director for the Tanzania Cultural Trust Fund and has served on the board for the African Publishers Network, HAKI ELIMU, the Tanzania Gender Networking
Programme and the Tanzania Media Fund as well as the executive for the Publishers Association of Tanzania. She studied librarianship and worked in the national library before returning to school for her degree in Literature in English at the University of Dar es Salaam and later a Master’s in Creating Writing at San Francisco State University in the States. In the Belly of Dar es Salaam (2011) is another of her book for young adults which has been shortlisted for the Burt Award for African Literature, jointly run by the Children’s Book Project for Tanzania, CODE and sponsored by Canadian Bill Burt (ibid).

1.2 Statement of the research problem
A lot of debate cloud the conceptualization of “feminism” in the African continent with most of voices coming from the west and south of Africa. There exists a gap in the East African region in the contribution to the feminist discourse, yet women writers from the region have produced works that have championed for the positon and rights of women. Ogola and Lema are among the women writers who have questioned the social cultural structures and institutions that operate to undermine the progress of women. Their analysis however goes beyond understanding these institutions but revealing how women negotiate them to establish their positions in a mostly patriarchal society.

Critical works on the two texts have not primarily dealt with them as feminist texts. This research therefore seeks to analyse feminist thought as reflected in the characterization as well as thematic concerns raised by the two authors, eventually providing a definition of “feminism” in the East African region. This is while locating the feminist ideology in a continent that has perceived it as a western concept. Buchi Emecheta an African author is among many African women who do not like to be referred to as a feminist, she says, “I work toward the liberation of women, but I’m not feminist. I'm just a woman. In all my novels, I deal with the many problems and prejudices which exist for women today. I speak for the marginalized woman” (Quadri, 2016). This is a view that is shared by many African women who though in practice support feminist ideals, they are however against being labeled feminists. It becomes necessary to provide clarity on the involvement of African women in feminist work, the labeling notwithstanding. It is also important to relate feminism in the East African region in the context of culture and tradition and reveal how women negotiate their social cultural environment.
This research therefore endeavours to redefine feminism in the words of East African women as it contributes to the body of knowledge on Women literature in Africa with a specific interest in the East African region. It seeks to qualify women in East Africa as having been involved in the feminist ideology across generations. Therefore a branch of feminism that supports African ideals has been suggested by scholars like Philomena Steady, Molara Ogundipe-Leslie among others which would be closer home to the African women school of thought. The texts reveal how feminism becomes inborn as a response to the women’s social cultural environment. This study therefore seeks to fill a gap in contextualizing African feminism in the East African region.

1.3 Objectives of the study

i. To analyse the presentation of feminist thought through characterization, language and form in *The River and the Source* (1994) and *Parched Earth* (2001).

ii. To analyse the authors’ presentation of feminist thought through their analysis of social cultural structures, institutions and norms.

iii. To provide a definition of “feminism” based on the two novels by Margaret Ogola and Elieshi Lema.

1.4 Research Questions

How is feminist thought presented through characterization in the two novels?
Which social cultural structures, institutions and norms are analysed by the two authors as part of feminist thought?
How is “feminism” defined according to Margaret Ogola and Elieshi Lema?

1.5 Research Hypothesis

The two authors adequately address feminist issues through their characters as represented in the two novels. Placed in a patriarchal society and faced with obstacles that threaten to undermine their capabilities, the women represented in the two texts are a representation of women in Africa who according to Molara Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) are faced with six mountains which they have to overcome in order to enjoy their womanhood. The mountains, namely; foreign intrusion, the heritage of tradition, backwardness, race and class, man and finally the woman herself provide obstacles but which African women are aggressive and persistent enough to overcome.
Feminism is not foreign to Africa, it is not a taught ideology but rather a state of becoming as a response to the social cultural environment that seeks to undermine women. It is therefore not a western concept. In an effort to attain a voice and fight for their rights, African women become involved in feminist work. However, due to respect of tradition and culture, even when the said culture and tradition undermines them, as well as an opposition to radical western feminist ideologies, African women choose not to be referred to as feminists. Terminologies such as womanism, sisterhood as well as stiwanism suffice to represent feminist ideology in Africa (Ogandipe-Leslie, 1994; Quadri, 2016). Karibi-White (2016) correctly argues that while it may not be possible to accurately date feminism because most African countries were not literate before the advent of colonialism, the concept of feminism is however not alien to the continent.

1.6 Justification of the Study

One of the reasons why the feminist movement keeps evolving and developing new forms is the inability of one form of feminism to address the issues that are experienced by all women across the globe. New perceptions and challenges also keep coming up. For instance the African American women felt that the radical feminism did not address their issues because it treated women as one homogenous group. Hence black feminism emerged which addressed the specific issues of black women such as racism and slavery. African American women and African women in Africa also have differing experiences in terms of race and colonialism. The interest of this study is bring to the fore, feminist issues of East African women through the voices of two women writers in this region. Women who write out of their lived experiences and aspirations. The study seeks to deconstruct feminism as a western concept and to analyse ways in which it is manifested within the context of the women in East Africa through the two texts. The voices of the East African woman resonates with Mariama Ba’s Ramatoulaye who says,

“I am not indifferent to the irreversible currents of women liberation that are lashing the world. This commotion that is shaking up every aspect of our lives reveals and illustrate our abilities. My heart rejoices each time a woman emerges from the shadows. I know that the field of our gains is unstable, the retention of conquests difficult, social constraints are ever-present, and the male egoism resists.” (Ba, 1980, p.93)
The study aims to add to the body of knowledge on African feminism particularly from the East African region. Through the study of literary works of two women in the region, it hopes to open up a discourse on the involvement of African women in feminist ideals that include self-awareness as well as negotiating with the social cultural institutions in their environment to overcome obstacles to women liberation.

According to Kabira (2012), one of the reasons the knowledge and experiences of women remain outside public knowledge and policy formulation is that this has not been documented and not because women have not spoken. She argues that it is because our institutions and our world view, have been the prerogative of male scholars and male policy makers. That more often than not, the institutions that are responsible for knowledge development and dissemination as well as policy formulation have not considered women’s knowledge, views, perspectives and interests. This study therefore seeks to change that narrative by bringing to the fore women’s worldview that has been expressed in a key tool that women have used across generations—that of storytelling.

1.7 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The scope of this study was limited to two authors, Margaret Ogola and Elieshi Lema. The focus was on one of each of their texts namely, *The River and the Source* (1994) and *Parched Earth* (2001) respectively which relate to the topic under study. Other works in the region or beyond that are relevant will be mentioned.

This research was based mostly on the review of the two primary sources and other secondary sources such as journals, books and published articles. The study did not conclusively review all the published works related to African women writers and feminism but only what was available to the researcher.

The study was mainly a desk study that involves a lot of literary analysis. In analyzing the two primary texts, this study was limited to characters who bring out the thematic concerns. The style applied by the authors in the primary texts was analysed in as much as it is used to bring out feminist issues clearly. The primary texts under study, *The River and The Source* (1994) and *Parched Earth* (2001) are both set in the East African region i.e., Kenya and Tanzania respectively. The study is therefore limited to social cultural issues related to feminism as
experienced by women in the East African region. The mitigation to this limitation was met through the application of African feminism and feminist literary theory which are applicable to women across the continent and the globe. Other literature cited are from writers across the globe, both male and female writers. The language used by the two authors was also under focus mainly the depth of symbolism and imagery as well as the flowing dialogue that is key in revealing the underlying issues through the characters.

The application of feminist research methodology was aimed at focusing primarily on female perspectives in order to give voice to women perspective in women writing in East Africa. The male characters in the texts however provided a contrast in feminist ideology where there exists male characters that are supportive of women interests and those who are tools of the subjugation of women.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

The overarching theoretical framework in this study was African feminism. Women in Africa have unique needs and are based on unique social cultural contexts as opposed to their western counterparts. It therefore becomes necessary to apply a framework that addresses the specific needs and contexts of the people under study. Chukwuma (2007) asserts that as much as feminism is an English word, it is inextricably bound to the culture and peculiar backgrounds and experiences of the women.

Although women in Africa latterly joined women in other nations in their quest for rights, for opportunity, relevance and recognition, this feminist quest is not imported, it cannot be. Chukwuma (2007) continues to argue that nobody knows the latent volcano of the soul of woman nor indeed of man which can erupt suddenly and determinably. She perceives feminism as a reaction of women with guts and steam where nobody tells the other to remove her head from the yoke. Karibi-Whyte (2016) posits that women in Africa took a lead as can be traced through oral traditions of many African societies which characterise many women as initiators and practitioners of verbal arts, successful practitioners in business and as well as inventors of food technology. Women have also dominated the economic, social and political spheres of life in many African countries. It thus becomes worthwhile to show the coping strategies of some women in cultures in Africa to maintain some measure of autonomy in their roles as daughters,
wives, and mothers. This is an important prelude to women’s emancipation and quest for rights and status today (Chukwuma 2007).

The evolution and growth of African feminism peaked in the 1990s. According to Karibi (2016), one of the reasons for the emergence was the exclusion from the second wave of feminism. It made further demands on feminism to expand its horizon by incorporating other considerations such as culture, colonialism, ethnicity and imperialism and examine the ways in which these considerations “intersect to construct and (re)produce gender” (ibid). The first wave of feminism has been traced from the Seneca Falls Women Rights convention of 1848 to the ratification of the United States nineteenth amendment of 1920 that gave women voting rights. Though it only did so for white women. The 1960s and 1970s has been categorised as the second wave of feminism that sought to address issues of gender equality, women’s power over their bodies such as birth control as well as representing the rights of coloured women. The 1980s, through the 1990s into the new millennium represent the third wave of feminism under which African feminism falls (Hewitt, 2010).

However, Ruvimbo Goredema in *African feminism: the African woman’s struggle for identity* (2010) contests the classification of African feminism into the three waves which seems more distinct in western feminism. She argues that African feminism is dependent more on temporal scales shaped by political eras namely, pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial. She however insists correctly that these eras are dissimilar across the continent because of the differences in the histories and liberation struggles in the African countries. Therefore the definitions and experiences of feminism differ from region to region in Africa. This is a thought process that resonates with the analysis in this study that focuses on the East African region. Goredema’s paper raises the argument that feminism has always existed in Africa but linguistic challenges explain the lack of a name for the ideology. That “some writers and theoreticians who study gender relations in Africa have argued that traditional African societies have always thought and lived in a feminist way long before the colonial invasion” p.37. This issue brings to the fore the hesitancy of some African women to be referred to as feminists.
African feminism is tied to the culture of the people. It recognizes the agency of women at the grassroots towards their liberation and does not entirely exclude men from the process. That is why Akoko needed the support of some of the male characters in her life to strengthen her position and get empowered. African feminism recognizes patriarchy as a key attribute of entrapment of women. African feminism therefore recognizes the inherent multiple roles of women and men in reproduction, production, as well as the distribution of wealth, power and the responsibility of sustaining human life. It also embraces femininity, beauty, serenity power and inner harmony (Badejo, 1998). African feminism as represented by the two texts focuses on the patriarchal structures and social institutions that undermine women but also how women negotiate these structures and institution to establish a position for themselves. Focusing on women agency as well as the benefit of pro-women males, African feminism establishes itself as a useful framework for African women. This study gives legitimacy to feminism as an ideology born from the experienced lives of African women. African feminism as a theory is intersectional in that it combines the dimensions of race, class, and culture that views women as human beings and not sexual beings making it is a,

“Movement of ideas and practical demonstration of gendered consciousness to concepts and situations that impacts the lives of African women. African feminism stands on the pivot of African philosophy of life with its emphasis on marriage as a social institution. It engages with patriarchy that dehumanises women and portray her as a second class citizen. African is also rooted in African cultural and historical experiences” (Karibi, 2016).

Molara Ogundipe’s seminal work, “Re-creating ourselves: African women & critical transformation” (1994), she raises pertinent issues about the involvement of African women in re-creating themselves, re-writing history. Changing the narrative where Africans have been spoken for generations and lacked a voice and a platform to talk about their issues. She talks about the need for Africans to be re-introduced into the discourses of world affairs, history and culture. Her emphasis is that “through theory and practice, we tried to re-discover African women in the academy as speaker and spoken about, as critic and creator.” That through leading and organizing women it is possible to “uncover and learn from how we know what we know and how we create what we do create socially and ideationally” p. 3. Ogundipe theorizes that African women have six mountains that hinder their progress. Those of foreign intrusion, the
heritage of tradition, backwardness, race and class, man and herself as a woman. She also questions the rationale that a woman in Europe often refers to a middle class, educated white woman while in Africa it refers to an illiterate, peasant, working class or poor women. Therefore she raises an issue as to whether African women are voiceless or is it that we fail to look for their voices where we might find them. This paper hence seeks to find this African woman’s voice in the literary texts under study.

This being a literary study as well applied feminist literary criticism in the texts analysis in an attempt to deconstruct the meaning of feminism according to two East African women writers. Feminist literary criticism provides a feminist perspective to texts, giving voice to women writers as they reveal how gender relations operate in the society to affect women realities. It also seeks to correct the dominant male perspective on issues represented in texts. This theoretical framework was best suited in the analysis of the texts since the focused on women writings.

Showalter (1988) provides an argument that categorises feminist criticism into two broad areas, feminist reader or critique and feminist writer. She refers the first mode as ideological and one that provides a feminist reading of texts, considering the images and stereotypes of women in literature as well as misconceptions and omissions about women. The second mode of feminist criticism in the same work is concerned with the study of women as writers. The subject being the history, styles, themes, genres and structures of women writings. My study of Ogola and Lema focused mainly on the second area of women as writers and how their voices articulate feminism ideology in the African context as they tell their stories. On women writing and women language, Showalter (1988) questions whether in linguistic and textual theories of women writing there exist a difference in how men and women use language, “whether sex differences in language use can be theorized in terms of biology, socialization, or culture; whether women can create new languages of their own; and whether speaking, reading, and writing are all gender marked”?P.194. The deep imagery used in the two texts as well as the African way of life in the background of the stories reveal the usage of language by women writers can be used to bring out their issues clearly.
Joan W. Scott in her paper “Deconstructing Equality-versus-Difference: Or, the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism” (1988) draws links between feminism and the literary theory of post-structuralism. Her paper talks of an analysis of constructed concepts that question meaning and power relationships common in both theories, traditional concepts such as man vs woman, equality vs justice. The paper mentions some useful terms such as language, discourse, difference, and deconstruction that are among those feminists have appropriated from post-structuralism. An analysis of language, according to this paper can be used by feminists as a starting point for understanding how social relations are constructed and bring about meaning. African feminism as a theoretical framework combine with feminist literary criticism to give strength to the African women voices in the texts under study. They reveal the African women agency in changing her position as revealed through the women characters in the two texts. Literary theories help to analyse the imagery and language used in the texts to bring out meaning and highlight feminist ideology under play. Using the African feminism lens it becomes clear that feminism is not a western ideology but that women in Africa have been involved in positioning themselves and voicing against forces that tend to undermine them, that speaking out comes naturally to women and it does not necessarily have to be a learned process. This study being a literary analysis then it makes sense to apply literary critique such as feminist literary criticism.

1.9 Methodology

This study applied a literary analysis approach which involved the critical study of the two primary texts, The River and the Source (1994) and Parched Earth (2001), as well as the secondary sources. The main focus in the primary texts was on the characters and how they bring out the thematic concerns in this study. Style and language was also used to reveal the feminist issues in the texts. The study applied both African feminism as well as a feminist literary critique to do a close reading on the texts which are aimed at revealing the feminist issues raised by the authors such as how social cultural institutions operate to undermine women but also how these women negotiate for their position and recognition. It analysed both male and female characters with a bias on the female characters. This is because it is a feminist research which is motivated by outcomes and impacts of power relations between women and men that disempower women (Chege, 2012).
Feminist research refers to an approach in research that has a gender perspective and is aimed at focusing on the inequalities that exist between men and women with a view to cause transformation. Beetham & Demetriades (2007) argue that from a gender perspective, researchers noted that traditional methodologies, epistemologies, and methods are not scientifically objective but that they generally ignore women’s knowledge by showing bias towards the male perspective. In response to this, methodologies used for research on women in development have been developed from critiques of particular sex, class, and race biases found in ‘traditional’ research methodologies as well as dominant perspectives of development. According to Chege (2012), feminist research should be understood as the scientific and scholarly exploration or investigation of social relations seeking to generate knowledge that draws distinctly on women's experience of living in a world in which women are subordinate to men. Feminist research as applied in this study is best suited in highlighting the feminist issues as portrayed by the characters and reveal how the authors shape feminist issues in East Africa.

The secondary texts such as books, published articles and journals under review explain the situation of East African women writers as presented by the two authors. It also focuses on feminist research and how such research aims to influence discourse on women empowerment particularly in the African continent. The two texts form the basis of the discussions into issues that reflect feminist ideology in the East African region. Further, the study focused on language used in deriving meanings as well as imagery that relates to feminist issues. The areas under review in the study included three broad areas namely; Analysis of patriarchal systems and women oppression, the question of motherhood and oppression and, women liberation. These areas focus on the social cultural institutions and how they inform feminist ideology.

The ABC of gender analysis is an education based tool aimed at revealing how language used and power relations between male and female characters are revealed in the texts. An analysis by the Forum for African Women Educationists (FAWE) revealed that the education sector perpetuates and legitimizes gender discrimination. This gender analysis tool prepared by Kabira & Masinjila (1997) is key to teachers, researchers, artists and illustrators and can easily use to analyse the texts they read, write and illustrate. The writers posit that textbooks tell a story about women and girls, as well as about men and boys that can be determined through a process of
textual analysis. Both *The River and the Source* (1994) and *Parched Earth* (2001) have been used as study texts books in Kenya and Tanzania respectively. This tool was therefore essential as a gender analysis tool in this study as it relates to how words formed create images in the minds of readers and can influence perceptions in societal relations between men and women.

In relation to power, the ABC tool raises power related questions such as;

a) Who has power?

b) What is the source of this power?

c) Who receives power?

d) What is the nature of this power?

e) How is power exercised?

f) How is power maintained and perpetuated?

g) How is power distributed?

An analysis of the texts then seeks to answer these questions in understanding how power is held and perpetuated between men and women in society. Language use is also analysed particularly though characterization to reveal how the authors have dealt with gender issues. The tool questions;

a) Which characters are named?

b) Which characters are not named?

c) Why name?

d) Why not name?

e) What advantages does naming have in our attitude towards a character?

By focusing on any unnamed characters the tool helped in questioning, a) How naming or not naming contribute to the reader’s general impression of the persons in the text and b) What is the percentage (by gender) of the named and unnamed characters? The ABC tool of gender analysis is useful in analysing the author’s perspectives in relation to gender as well as the choices they make in giving voice and power to their characters. The texts under analysis are both authored by women writers who seek to analyse the gender dynamics in society and reveal the perspectives of their women characters.
The choice of a literary analysis in the study of African feminism in this work was informed by a need to listen to the voices of women in East Africa as they tell their stories as exemplified by Ogola and Lema. The study focused on social cultural institutions as represented in the texts and analyse the feminist ideology that is represented in the struggle to rise against women discrimination and enable women to be in a position of decision making in their different spheres of influence. The research focused on three broad areas namely; feminist ideology through characterization, language and form, feminist ideology though social cultural structures, institutions and norms, and finally the reflections of feminism in East Africa as reflected in *The River and the Source* (1994) and *Parched Earth* (2001). While Lema sets her book in Post-colonial Tanzania, Ogola places her story across generations in Luo Nyanza Kenya beginning with the pre-colonial period to the post-colonial period

1.10 Conclusion

This study aimed primarily to add to the body of knowledge in the area of feminist ideology specifically from the East African region. It drew data from two primary literary works in Kenya and Tanzania, one from each. The work seeks to fill a gap in the contribution of East Africa literature to feminist ideology based on the voice of characters in Margaret Ogola’s, *The River and the Source* (1994) and Elieshi Lema’s *Parched Earth: A Love Story* (2001). At the end of the study, feminism was seen as an accepted African concept as well as a western ideology. The next chapter provides an in-depth literature review on the two primary texts, focusing on journals, book chapters and articles that relate to feminist issues raised in the two books. The literature review also focused on other secondary works that relate to feminisms in Africa and how it relates with western feminisms.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction
Literature review on this study was from two broad areas; first on literary criticisms on the two primary sources, *The River and the Source* (1994) and *Parched Earth* (2001), and second is on the perceptions of feminism in Africa. Among Margaret Ogola’s works, *The River and the Source* is the most read and criticized based on the available literature. Of the two authors, Ogola’s text has been written about in various contexts while little available criticism has been done on Lema’s text clearly revealing a gap in this area.

2.2 Review on *The River and the Source*
Frowda (2014) did a study on three of Margaret Ogola’s novels including *The River and the Source*. Her focus was however on the male characters who she argues that Ogola uses either to reinforce social cultural subjugation against women or those who stand against the expected traditional maleness and actually support women. She argues that in analyzing Ogola’s works the male characters have been ignored with an emphasis on the female characters. Her point of departure is that gender encompasses both male and female and not females alone. While Ogola’s characterization of both male and female characters represent her argument of empowering the women in Africa across four generations, Frowda’s (2014) argument of ignored male characters sounds synonymous with the current rhetoric in Kenya of the ignored “boy child”. A visible success of a few women and girls especially in the 2017 KCSE results was associated with a neglect of boy schools and the male gender. This is however not the case since a breakdown of the statistics revealed that boys had indeed outperformed the girls. My study takes a feminist based approach and thus in the analysis of both male and female characters the point of focus will be on how the authors use these characters to use the women agency as a means of liberation and overcoming obstacles.

Cherop (2015) does a study on liberating the potential of women studies as portrayed in three of Margaret Ogola’s books that include *The River and the Source*. Her work is a broad analysis of the characterization of Ogola’s work using her female characters. Cherop (2015) bases her work on the social cultural realities in Kenya focusing on the downtrodden nature of the women in Kenya especially in the marginalized rural communities. Her work attempts to look at the potential of the Kenyan woman but more on a futuristic sense. Cherop’s (2015) research does not
however focus on the cross generational efforts of African women to change their situation but rather on the existing challenges in the social cultural realities.

While this study also looks at the situation of women in *The River and The Source* in the context of the East African region, it appreciates the fact that women like those presented by the character of Akoko have existed for years and that Ogola contributes in highlighting their struggles and victories. This study focuses on the power of the women agency in the quest for liberation as embodied by the philosophy of African feminism.

Daisy Chebet Mutai in her 2017 thesis, “Mechanics of Walking the Path of Women’s Liberation: An Analysis of Margaret Ogola’s Contribution to African Feminism” celebrates the involvement of women in knowledge creation through literature. This, in her argument allows women’s voices to be articulated as they seek to contribute towards the emancipation of women. She reads patriarchy and cultural institutions as the main deterrents of women liberation as espoused in *The River and the Source*.

According to her, Ogola’s book becomes “*relevant today given the patriarchal challenges that woman have to transcend every time that they want to participate within the public space*” (Mutai, 2017: p6). Her work identifies traditional institutions such as the political institution, property ownership, the institution of marriage which entails polygamy, decision on the marriage of a girl, the payment of dowry, having children and wife battery as contributors to discrimination against women. Her work also focuses on strategies to overcome patriarchal institutions such as the support of fellow women and women acquiring property.

Mutai’s paper goes further to look at African regional organizations that have taken an initiative towards women liberation such as the African Union which proposed a gender policy as well as a Protocol to the African Charter on human and people’s rights on the rights of women in Africa-the Maputo Protocol (Mutai, 2017: p.32). The protocol focused on areas such as health, sexual violence, marriage, education and women representation in a view to protect the rights of women.

Mutai (2017) attests how through strong female characters such as Akoko Ogola has succeeded in showing that though patriarchal institutions and culture are discriminative towards women, the same women are able to overcome these challenges. Though my paper focuses on most of the
issues brought forward by Mutai (2017), I go a step further and tie this issues with the feminist ideology as espoused in African feminism which Mutai’s paper did not major on. In addition, my paper will add another voice of a Tanzanian writer, Elieshi Lima with the view to extend my views to a wider audience in East Africa.

In her Master’s thesis, “Postulations on Motherhood in Africa by Margaret Ogola’s The River and The Source and Buchi Emecheta’s The Joys of Motherhood”, Jane Wangari Waweru (2014) focuses on the motherhood aspect in the two books. She analyses the opposing perceptions of motherhood in Africa, a celebration and a challenge. According to her work motherhood defines womanhood in Africa with women who are not able to have children living in shame and dissatisfaction. Her reading of the River and The Source (1994) by Ogola is that the author emphasizes the importance of motherhood in African societies. Motherhood gives identity to women as exemplified by Nyabera who was not contented with one child and sought other children with her husband’s brother who inherits her after she is widowed. Waweru (2014) connects motherhood with dowry and polygamy and shows how African communities accepted polygamy as a guarantee of more children. Dowry was also a guarantee that the woman would bring forth many children as reflected in Akoko’s dowry of thirty head of cattle. This made her mother-in-law and brother-in-law Otieno Kembo to expect her bring forth many children.

Waweru (ibid) correctly reads Ogola’s alternative view on motherhood, where she introduces us to Vera’s decision to avoid motherhood not because she is barren, but because of a personal choice made due to her work and religion. She also builds the character of Awiti as a successful child who excels in education which is contrast to African tradition that valued boy children over girls. The challenges that motherhood causes women when they lose their children or have difficult birth processes like in the case of Akoiko are also highlighted in her work. While Waweru’s (2014) work and views are in line with this research, she does not focus on Ogola as a feminist writer but on one area of women issues.

Magu (2014) in her thesis, “Development of the Female self and national Identity in Selected Kenyan Women’s Writings” focuses on the formation of identity in women and the connection with nationhood. Among the texts under her study is The River and the Source. Her work interrogates certain female identities such as patriarchy, ethnicity, and diseases among others.
Her argument is that these identities are similar to problems that ail the nation of Kenya. She connects the main women characters in the text, Akoko, Nyabera, Awiti, Vera and Wandia as being representative of different women in Kenya from the 20th and 21st centuries. Magu’s view is that Akoko’s identity was negated at the point of birth because her father expected a son but received a girl who she went on to accept. She argues that Ogola (re)conceptualizes the existence of women in the text by making them visible as part of the nation’s history. She notes that Ogola does not subscribe to gender roles but makes Akoko contest tradition that subjects women to oppression. For instance her refusal to be inherited after her husband’s death. Her paper “conceptualizes Akoko as a model of the female self and a foundation of the progressive development in the postcolonial nation” (Magu, 2014; 45). It also perceives Ogola as assuming the responsibility of assigning agency to the female self by conferring a prestigious status to the women characters in the face of patriarchy. Akoko is an embodiment of this agency, she is not afraid to speak out and go against the expected norms lie going back to her brother’s house after being widowed.

In contrast to weak female characters as represented in androcentric literary works, this study appreciates unapologetically the presentation of strong female characters by African women writers in East Africa. It also represents the self-awareness of women as a stage of liberating themselves as represented by Elieshi Lema in Parched Earth (2001). The imagery of ‘a river and its source’ and ‘a parched earth’ serve to represent women and their efforts to be better, to overcome challenges despite “parched” moments and obstacles along the river’s path.

2.3 Review on Parched Earth

Kabira & Burkeywo’s 2016 paper, “Creating Women’s Knowledge: A Case Study of Three African Women Writers” appreciates the grounded female protagonists in African women writer’s works, a view that is supported by this study. Their study perceive Akoko as an inspiration, a woman who could not lie down and wait to be oppressed. One who displays a determined and courageous personality willing to go against all odds to fight for her rights and thus becomes a surety for other women that they can win the struggle. This study pays special attention to the fact that women are involved in creating knowledge as experienced in their worldview, effectively making women visible in patriarchal world that has for many years made
women invisible. This study seeks to build on this ideology. Their analysis of *Parched Earth* in the same work reveal how patriarchy works to entrap women through the three main female characters in the book. But Lema (2001) also reveals how these women negotiate around this trap to give their lives meaning. This study also focuses on the intergenerational relationships of the women in these primary texts. The entrapment of women by the system of patriarchy becomes my focus in analysing feminist thought in Lema’s text.

Kabira & Burkeywo (2016) emphasize on the importance of women creating knowledge about themselves therefore speaking about their realities and lived experiences and avoiding exclusion. Through the study of three texts that include *The River and the Source* and *Parched Earth*, they use the stories told by women writers to validate their realities. The study builds on this thought process by focusing on the texts thinking on feminism, reading the two novels as feminist texts and filling a gap on African women writers theorizing feminism from the East African region.

Despite the fact that this research considers *Parched Earth* to be monumental book based on the lives of Tanzanian women, not much has been written about it critically. One critic, Aaron. L. Rosenberg (2011) in “Form and Theme as Unifying Principles in Tanzanian Verbal Art” who focuses on the style of the art and not the thematic concerns writes that “one of the focal points of the novel is the plethora of ways in which women subvert their own desires to cling to a respectable position in society” (Rosenburg, 2011:p.43). This is the view of a Eurocentric male perspective that does not recognize the entrapments of the patriarchal system in which these women deal with. He compares the thematic concerns of this text to those of a popular song in Tanzania which does a great injustice to the book. His paper attempts to show the interrelations between Lema’s *Parched Earth* (2001) and a popular song “Mionyeshe njia ya kwetu” (1984) by Orchestra DDC Milimani Park. He argues that the two works convey to their respective audiences the institutionalization of gender and power relations in Tanzanian communities. The writer gives prominence to the popular song which narrates a story about a women who loses her husband and later his family takes over his property leaving the wife helpless. While this story represents sympathy to the woman it does not compare to Lema’s work which focuses on the deeper society’s intricacies that operate to entrap women. Further, Rosenberg (2011) uses a tone
that is judgmental to the main protagonist’s Doreen’s moral choices. My research seeks to give voice to Lema as a feminist text.

Contrary to the presentation of East Africa as lacking women writers, Lennox Odiamo-Munara (2008) in “Women Engagement with Power and Authority in Writing East Africa”, celebrates the voices of East African women through oral or written art specifically the novel genre. He aptly argues that,

“Women writers have continuously been setting for themselves goals of representing the woman experience in East Africa in unique ways. Women voices of the late twentieth century to the present dynamically confront the intricate questions of patriarchy, politics, history, culture/tradition production and formulation, among others. They aim at (re)defining the East African woman in the exercising of power and authority in the society, and in the process see to her active participation in the public sphere” (Munara, 2008: p. 1).

These are some of the issues at the center of this study. His study focuses on three East African texts which include Parched Earth. He argues that the women in the texts are not passive victims of oppression, but are involved in re-working power and subverting dehumanising centers of authority. That women writers in East Africa interrogate practices and institutions that are patriarchally instituted. Munara praises the three main women characters in the novel, Foibe, Doreen and Aunt Mai for rediscovering ways in which to survive in a patriarchal society. How they “reconstruct the meaning of womanhood, marriage, sexuality, and masculine/feminine binary” (ibid, p.15). He however focuses on women negotiating their public and private spaces which is not a preoccupation in my study. This research seeks to highlight ways in which the characters in Lema’s Parched Earth (2001) give voice to factors that seek to subvert their situation as women and contribute to feminist issues. My research builds on works like this to add to the body of literature in East Africa on feminist texts. In addition, not a lot of criticism has been done on Parched Earth (2001) and this work hopes to create more awareness on the text by giving it importance through an analysis of the text.

This study seeks to fill a gap identified by Nkomo & Ngambi (2009). They argue that there is a great need for further research to understand the status, experiences and possibilities of African women in leadership. That the “extant body of knowledge is at best incomplete and relies heavily
on western based understandings of gender and gender relations. African feminism and postcolonial theories offer a means to fully interrogate the cultural, historical, political, and, economic content influencing the study of African women in management and leadership” (ibid). This work therefore seeks to use the voices of African women writers in East Africa to raise the consciousness of feminist issues that include the opportunity for women to be involved in decision making which becomes a prelude for women in leadership.

2.4 African Perceptions on feminism

The “Charter of feminist Principles for African Feminists” (2006) came up with a firm declaration by confessed feminists across the continent who felt they needed to affirm their commitment to feminist principles to guide in analysis and practice. The over 100 feminist declared to reaffirm their commitment in to “dismantling patriarchy in all its manifestations in Africa.” As well as be reminded of their duty to defend and respect the rights of all women. In so doing they were committing to protect “the legacy of our feminist ancestors who made numerous sacrifices, in order that we can exercise greater autonomy.” P.2. This declaration affirms the thesis of this research that feminism is not an imported concept in Africa. That the earlier generations recognized the limiting factors and tasked coming generations to stand for their rights. This paper creates the need for scholars in Africa to research more in this area. By declaring themselves publicly as feminists the women made a statement that,

“We define and name ourselves publicly as Feminists because we celebrate our feminist identities and politics. We recognize that the work of fighting for women’s rights is deeply political, and the process of naming is political too. Choosing to name ourselves Feminist places us in a clear ideological position. By naming ourselves as Feminists we politicise the struggle for women’s rights, we question the legitimacy of the structures that keep women subjugated, and we develop tools for transformatory analysis and action. We have multiple and varied identities as African Feminists. We are African women when we live here in Africa and even when we live elsewhere, our focus is on the lives of African women on the continent. Our feminist identity is not qualified with ‘Ifs’, ‘Buts’, or ‘However’. We are Feminists.” (Charter of feminist Principles for African Feminists, 2006:P.3)
However the labeling of feminists by African women is still a thorny issue with questions arising on what defines an African feminist. Gatwiri & McLaren’s 2016 paper, “Discovering my Own African Feminism: Embarking on a Journey to Explore Kenyan Women’s Oppression” explains an African woman’s journey to discover her identity as a feminist. It talks about the intersections that she had to deal with as an African women immigrating to Australia, dealing with the identity of gender and race. She says that she identifies with African feminism but also recognizes the groundbreaking efforts of black feminism arising from the civil rights movement in America. How important it was for black women to realize that “western feminisms” did not cater for he needs of black women. In the same way African women had to theorize an ideology that dealt with specific needs of African women. The process is described as “an ongoing personal journey of discovering and interpreting how the experiences of Black women are informed and shaped, through my own observations of how race, class and gender intersect” (Gatwiri & McLaren, 2016: p.264). African women residing primarily in the African continent rarely have to deal with the question of race. However seeking an identity is a continuous process, an area that this research focuses on. The issue of labeling as feminists if further discussed in this paper where African women are hesitant to declare themselves as feminists for fear of being labeled as copying western ideologies.

Naomi N. Nkealah (2006) in her paper, “Conceptualizing feminism(s) in Africa: The Challenges Facing African Women Writers and Critics” brings forth the argument that causes contradictions when relating to African women writing and feminism perceptions. She argues that a lot of time critics and literature study classify any women writing as feminist work which could be problematic because a lot of African women writers are not comfortable being classified as feminists. Her feeling is that this generalization may undermine the very foundations of feminism concepts which could be an imposition of feminism on unwilling novelists. Nkealah posits that the term “feminism” to most people create mental images of “anti-men, anti-culture and anti-religion” (ibid, p.134) which is a huge misconception of what feminism is all about in particular African feminism. However the three areas of culture, religion and tradition also form the background of women marginalization in Africa which becomes a concern of African feminists. She argues that although feminism in Africa has been attacked as a western ideology it has however as a movement contributed largely to “African women’s struggle to rise above the
murky waters of patriarchal dominance” (ibid). Her research cites a number of African women writers who have shifted positions over being identified with feminists, women like Ama Ata Aidoo of Ghana, Nigerian writer Buchi Emecheta, Tsitsi Dangarembga of Zimbabwe as well as South African writer Miriam Tlali.

Nkealah(2006) explains that feminism as a movement deconstructs gender based theories on feminism and femininity therefore, because reconstructing the mind is not a simple process, “for African women writers advocating women’s emancipation as a springboard to socio-economic development, it demands a combination of personal experience of the injustices directed towards their sex and an innovative, creative mind that speaks directly to the reader’s mind, while involving his/her emotions in a reactive way” (p.135) which explains why patriarchy takes center stage in majority of African women writing. Nkealah cautions critics and students of literature that not any writing that demonstrates the disadvantaged position of women in comparison to that of men can be regarded as a feminist text. That while the writers may sympathize with feminist ideologies, they shouldn’t lack the political and moral commitment to the plight of women right’s and activism. She argues that African women critics should be feminists in theory and practice, in action and deed. That both need to show “heart” in their feminist work.

In “(West) African Feminisms and Their Challenges”, Naomi Nkealah (2016) writes about the challenges facing feminists in Africa, more so as far as labeling is concerned. She highlights the various terminologies that women in Africa particularly the West African region have come up with to describe their fight for women’s rights. Influenced by their resistance to cultural imperialism and the need to resist influence from western ideologies, these West African women critics seeks ways to retain African values favourable to social cohesion while problematizing cultural aspects that undermine women. Nkealah (2016) argues that African feminists resist philosophies of western feminisms for instance the perception that men are the enemy and hence expunged from feminist spaces. She posits that West African feminists have therefore theorized feminism that speak from three areas namely; (a) an African cultural perspective, (b) an African geopolitical location, and (c) an African ideological viewpoint.
Womanism by Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, she says, is the most widely applied theory in literary criticism and also the most controversial situates the feminist vision within black women’s confrontation with culture, colonialism and other forms of domination in African women’s lives. It focuses on black women located in any place in the world. However Molara Ogundipe- Leslie’s Stiwanism positions itself as feminism in an African context, that it is firmly rooted in the experiences and realities of women in Africa excluding those in the diaspora. Catherine Acholonu’s Motherism on the other hand expands the focus on women in Africa by entrusting the rural women with the task of nurturing society, while Chima Opara’s femalism has its central concept of transcendence stressing on the female body in the raw. Projecting the freedom of the African woman with the African nation. There are also nego-feminism by Obioma Nnaemeka and Snail- sense feminism by Akachi Ezeigbo which are hinged firmly on gender inclusion, complementarity and collaboration expanding the tenets of womanism. Nego-feminism draws on African proverbs like “when something stands, something stands beside it” to reflect that feminism includes negotiation, give and take, and balance. That it resonates with the South African concept of Ubuntu. Snail-sense feminism on the other hand is packaged specifically for Nigerian and West African women borrowing its traits that enables it to transverse harsh terrain with caution, alertness, flexibility and sensibility to bypass obstacles. That a woman is therefore able to negotiate around patriarchy while knowing how to deal with sexist and non-sexist men.

Nkaelah (2016) argues that these feminisms generally oppose the western definition of feminism and draw from their histories and cultural dispositions tools that are useful for women empowerment and enlightening men. Among the challenges of these “West African Feminisms” according to Nkaelah (ibid) is that they experience exclusion where “each brand is conceptualized for a particular segment of gender-sensitive human population to the exclusion of other segments” (p.64). For instance motherism elevates the position of the rural woman as a “savior” in her role as farm worker and food producer. Another challenge raised by Nkaelah (ibid) is the question of whether these “feminisms” are conceptualized for African women located in Africa or those in the diaspora. This extensive research undertaken by Nkaelah (2016) on West African feminism reveal a gap on East African feminism. While her work mentioned
some links with South African feminism, no mention was made of East African feminism or any writer or critic on the conceptualization of feminism in the East African region.

Lanoi Maloiy’s (2016) PhD thesis, “The impact of Crucible Events on the Development of Female Political Leaders in Kenya” studies the development of female political leaders in Kenya by examining the experiences of these leaders. Her study mentions that there is scarcity of literature on women leadership in east Africa as compared to West and Southern regions of Africa. She attributes this to factors like the fact that West Africa has a different social political heritage from East Africa, for instance Ghana achieved her independence much earlier than East African countries. In addition, it also had a large pre-colonial monarchy, the Asante Kingdom which had the experience of Queen Mothers though she argues that East Africa could suffer due to lack of documentation. Maloiy (ibid) therefore argues on the need for more studies on African feminism to be carried out in East Africa, further documenting gender relations in this region. This research therefore seeks to contribute in filling this gap.

Ngunjiri (2010) also argues on the limitation of sources of literature on women and leadership on the East African region. Citing Nkomo & Ngambi’s (2009) research which found not a single resource on the matter from the time period of 1990-2008. She however mitigates this by saying that they missed some available published sources. However, in comparison to West and South of Africa the East of African region arguably needs more research in this area. In addition Ngunjiri (ibid) argues that African feminism is best suited to analyse the situation of women leaders in contrast to western feminism which “dichotmisezes human relations placing males against females, as well as the individualism and competitiveness inherent in the first wave conceptualizations of feminism (p.75)

Adichie’s (2012), We Should All Be Feminists challenges society’s conceptions and misconceptions about gender issues, femininity and masculinity. It is a deep personal conversation on how she perceives herself as a woman. She criticizes herself on some decisions she has had to make in order to fit a particular image. For instance wearing an ugly suit to teach so that her students may take her seriously as a teacher and not a weak woman if she was to wear lipstick and high heels. But she says that she eventually made a decision not to be apologetic of
Adichie continues with the argument that many Africans, both male and female have about feminism, a misconception that is “unAfrican” and a corruption of “western ideals”. That feminism is a negation of African culture. She declares that she is a feminist because she believes in the social, political and economic equality of the sexes. She however adds that her grandmother was a feminist though she did not know the meaning of the text. This she argues is true because she ran away from the house of a man she didn’t want to marry and got married to someone that she wanted. That this woman could protest and speak up whenever she felt that she was oppressed.

Adichie (2012) argues that life is harder for a woman than it is for a man. That while the world have changed and leadership does not necessarily have to be for the physically stronger males, it is still difficult of women with higher intelligence than men to hold positions of power. She questions why a conversation on gender is usually difficult and suggests that it is possibly because people would want to maintain the status quo in terms of gender relations. That people have a problem with the term “feminist” and wonder why they shouldn’t just refer to human rights. But her response is that while feminism is part of human rights, to deny that women have not been excluded for centuries. That the problem is not about being human but being specifically female human. Adichie argues that concepts lie masculinity hurt buys because society puts undue pressure and expectations on them. That by teaching them to be afraid of fear, weakness and vulnerability we are teaching them to mask their true selves. Girls are also taught to shrink themselves and have only limited ambition which is wrong.

Adichie’s discussion on gender roles, femininity and masculinity as well as sexism and unfairness for women bring to light issues that feminists are concerned with. It brings to the fore the need to be truthful about these issues as they arise and recognize the many forms that feminist conversations can take. My study on Ogola and Lema’s texts seek to contribute to these conversations. Her believe is that a feminist is a man or woman who realizes that there is a problem with gender and fixes it.

While women writers may not directly pinpoint feminist ideologies in their work, the argument in this study is that an analysis of their works speaks about the issues that they hold close to their
hearts. Through the characterization and the themes addressed in their work. Both Ogola and Lema portray the progression of their female characters as they negotiate with the patriarchal structures in their environment that seek to oppress them. The two authors reveal the capacity of the women to rise above the situations they are placed in and seek a meaningful way to improve their lives. This to me shows the writers desire to transform the lives of women not just in their texts but in the larger society which qualify them as feminist texts. Whether or not Ogola and Lema would have preferred to be identified as feminists is another issue, but to the reader their work qualifies as feminist work in support of feminist ideology.

Brenda Nyandiko Sanya & Anne Namatsi Lutomia’s (2016) paper, “Feminism Unfinished: Towards Gender Justice and Women’s Rights in Kenya” reviews the journey of the feminist movement in Kenya through various sectors. It looks at the victories and drawbacks that women have experienced focusing on various players towards achieving gender justice and the fight for women rights in Kenya. It looks at feminism as an unfinished story. Sanya & Lutomia bring to light the fact that feminism is often equated with man hating. Embedded in these discourses are claims that the improved status of women means oppression of men. This problematic assumption arises from a lack of knowledge of what feminism is, and what it seeks to do, which these authors say seeks to end sexism and its destructive consequences. Sanya & Lutomia (2016) perceive feminism serving “as a site to advocate for the eradication of social injustice order to facilitate the socio-economic and political emancipation of African women.” (p.232). They also consider feminism as a project aimed at challenging the subordination of women and a structural framework in opposition to patriarchy and misogyny. They continue to highlight Ama Ata Aidoo’s argument that every woman and man should be a feminist and that African women must have the best that the environment can offer. In order to understand feminism, they argue that one must resist patriarchy where which in their argument is “tethered to social, political, and economic systems that secure women’s subordination regardless of race, class, culture, and ethnicity” (ibid,p.232)

Using Kenya as a basis for their study, Sanya & Lutomia (2016) celebrate the new constitution enacted in 2013 that has enshrined fundamental human rights including those of women. Among the numerous reasons to celebrate are changes such as increased rights for women, sadly though as with most change comes contradictions, resistance, and backlash. One of the major victories
of the constitutional reforms is the inclusion of *Succession Act Cap. 160* of the Laws of Kenya. This legislation stipulates that widows and their female children are now legally permitted and required to inherit the property of a deceased husband, unless otherwise stipulated. The writers celebrate the fact that the seeds of this victory were sown in Forum 85’ whose goals, ambitions, and victories remained stunted for a long time as women lobbied for inclusion in legislation and access to land. That Kenyan women now have more representation and improved access to land and inheritance and that although women are not very visible in social and political spheres, they have not remained stagnant. Their paper record that in July 1985, Nairobi hosted the Third Women’s Conference to review and appraise the achievements of the United Nations (UN) decade for women (1975–85), and Nairobi Forum 85, a parallel meeting organized by local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), under the leadership of Barbadian Dame Nita Barrow, Kenyan government representatives, and women’s rights activists and feminists. Nairobi was host to over 14,000 women in a meeting that was, at the time, “the largest gathering of women in history” (p.234)

Sanya & Lutomia (2016) record some women who have been instrumental in the success of women empowerment over the years. These are women who have performed acts that have interrupted the status quo and paved the way for men and women to advance other cultural work. Among them is Wangari Maathai who was the first African woman to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, she was also the first female professor, having been the first female scholar from East and Central Africa to earn a doctorate. Through the Green Belt Movement, she raised women’s consciousness to fight for their land rights and sustain their environment through tree planting by training them to engage and negotiate with their husbands and leaders. Mary Okello became the first female banker to break the status quo, when she became a branch manager in 1977 before rising to chair the board of the Kenya Commercial Bank in 2003.

Sanya & Lutomia decry the fact that Kenyan women are absent in history though they were not passive in the liberation struggle. They were involved in the Mau Mau struggle and Mekatilili wa Menza led the Giriama in resisting the colonialists. The exclusion of Kenyan women on multiple fronts, completely denies the role of an entire section of the population from the resistance movements, and in so doing creating the perception that colonized African women had no desire
for independence and self-governance. Although the pre-independent government carefully worked to represent various national ethnic groups and regions, there were no women in the first government. Only one woman, Priscillah Abwao, attended the Lancaster House Conference that paved the way for Kenya’s independence in 1963. Grace Onyango was in 1965 elected as the nation’s first woman mayor in Kisumu and then as Member of Parliament in 1969. As mayor she appointed Phidelia Wasgany’ as deputy mayor thus she not only resisted the absence of women in the council but also empowered another woman qualifying the reasoning that empowered women take a role in empowering other women.

Ultimately, Sanya & Lutomia’s paper focus on the system of patriarchy as a great contribution to the oppression of women. They tell the story of the African woman continuously seeking to find her place and establish her position of power and authority which is ever elusive hence the ‘unfinished feminism.’ The fact that the Forum 85’ happened in 1985 and it wasn’t until 2013 that a law was enacted to legalise land inheritance for women exemplifies how long a journey it is for women empowerment. It also looks at the agency of the African woman through forming groups that empower her. Among those mentioned are the greenbelt movement, chamas, and the role played by the Nairobi Forum 85, Maendeleo ya Wanawake and NCWK. Mention of feminist and women rights activism working simultaneously to improve the lives of women are also components of African feminism. The journey of women movements and feminist activism in Kenya is key in understanding the misconceptions of the feminist ideology. Though Sanya & Lutomia chronicle this journey adequately and mention the achievements of women in Kenya, the fail to focus the contribution of women writers particularly the novel genre to this journey. My paper contributes to chronicling this journey by filling this gap through the analysis of Ogola’s and Lema’s texts.

Molara Ogundipe-Leslie in her book, Recreating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformation (1994) decries the fact that African women who have declared themselves feminists have been accused of being “angry feminists” and or “frustrated women” for concerning themselves with negative conditions for African women and social justice. Therefore as a good African women she is expected to be loyal to her culture and acted her role as a submissive wife who accepts servitude and emotional abuse. Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) wonders
about the conflict in discourse where some “opponents” hold that feminism is foreign to Africa while others believe that the study of women is too important to be left to women. She questions where these opposing voices who have now discovered the cause of women were when the “bodies and careers of feminist women were being splattered on the walls of the academy and corporate world since the sixties” (p.12). Women in Africa continue to struggle against the “mountains” that hold them back.
3.1 Introduction
This chapter introduces the two primary texts, giving an in-depth analysis into the key concerns, characterization and style used by the authors to present feminist thought. A synopsis of The River and the Source as well as Parched Earth provided invites us to see through the feminist issues raised by the authors. Scott (1988) argues that according to post-structuralists, words and texts have no fixed meanings therefore the question becomes how and when, in particular communities are meanings conceived. The concept of “difference” also becomes key to feminists. It relates to the notion that meaning is made through explicit or implicit contrasts. Scott connects this to a concept like patriarchy where sexual difference, a contrast between masculine and feminine serve to establish meaning that is unrelated to gender or the body. Thus the meaning of gender gets tied to different cultural constructions which establish terms in which men and women relations are known and understood. Scott further provides a definition of deconstruction which she says goes beyond dismantling an idea but focuses on the difference in constructed meaning. That it involves an analysis of the operations of difference in texts and the way in which meanings are made to work.

The chapter is guided by the feminism literary criticism which gives the writers voice through their characters to speak on areas that reveal the position of women in society. This ties to the methodology which studies the characterization and style through a close reading of the texts. Key thematic concerns are also raised. The ABC of gender analysis also applies as a tool that analyses the language used and power relations between male and female characters as presented by the authors.

The authors create characters that are representative of real African women who face real challenges in a patriarchal society. Through their narratives they tell stories of women seeking an identity. Doreen Seko in Parched Earth is fighting a “daemon”. She seeks to find a path different from the women in her lineage while still learning from their mistakes and borrowing from their
strength. Nyabera in *The River and the Source* move out of her strong mother’s shadow to seek her path in religion after facing misfortunes in her family. There has been a belief that women writers have largely been ignored while prolific male African writers like Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Okot P’Bitek and Ngugi Wa Thiong’o have claimed the spotlight. As a result women are urged to use their writing to refute the negative portrayal of women by the male authors. (Tripp & Kwesiga, 2002) This narrative is slowly changing as more women get to publish and build characters in their stories based on their own experienced truth. This chapter is essential in allowing the stories speak for themselves to reveal feminist ideology but also look at how language and style are used to paint a picture of feminism in East Africa.

### 3.2 Synopsis of the River and the Source

*The River and the Source* (1994) is set in pre-colonial and post-colonial Kenya and moves across four generations telling the story of extraordinary women enumerating their challenges and victories in a male dominated society. It is the story of Akoko Obanda daughter of Great Chief Odero Gogni of Yimbo and how her indomitable spirit inspires the women that come generations later in her lineage. At her birth as the first daughter after seven sons her father declares that ‘a home without daughters is like a spring without a source.’ (Ogola, 1994:11)

When she comes of age Akoko is married to Chief Owuor Kembo who accepts to pay the inflated dowry of 30 heads of cattle. She becomes such an asset in her new home contributing greatly to wealth creation and is unafraid of her husband that he refuses to take a second wife as is the custom. This causes conflict with her mother-in-law and Otieno Kembo her brother in law who think she is stopping her husband from getting a second wife.

Akoko’s lack of many sons causes her mother in law to insinuate that she has bewitched her son. This leads to Akoko leaving her matrimonial home and going back to her father’s house. She however leaves her son Oburu and daughter Nyabera and after her husband’s family gets her back she gives birth to another son. Sadly though, Akoko loses her first son Oburu when he goes to fight in the First World War. Soon afterwards she loses her husband who never quite recovered from the loss of his son. Not too long after that she loses her second son who is now Chief and married with a son when he chokes on a fish bone.
Otieno Kembo her brother-in-law who was jealous of her tries to take away her wealth and take over power from her grandson Owuor. Akoko confides in her daughter Nyabera that she will seek help from the colonial government in Kisuma later known as Kisumu. We see Akoko opening up her people to the outside world. Accompanied by two of her nephews Opiyo and Odongo. She treks many miles to Kisumu to present her case to the D.O. the case is eventually ruled in her favour. Askaris are sent to investigate and later the D.C calls Akoko back to Kisumu for another hearing. He rules that ‘a council of elders shall forthwith rule the village until such a time as the rightful heir comes of age. The council may elect one man to be the custodian of the chief’s stool and their spokesman’ (92)

Akoko now at the age of 50 leaves her husband’s clan and returns to her people in Yimbo with her property where she is housed by her brother Oloo. It is not a comfortable situation but she does not allow herself to descend to bitterness, holding to the hope that, ‘each day rises fresh from the hands of “Were” and brings with itself whatever it will.’ (94)

Focus is now shifted to Nyabera who got married aged 18 and has lost a number of sons at infancy. She has a surviving daughter Awiti later christened Elizabeth but still she is miserable. Her misery comes from the fact that she does not have sons as per the expectation of society and hence feels incomplete. Her discontentment leads her to seek the new religion (Christianity) from a recent convert Pilipo who tells her that the new teachings are too hard for a woman. She is determined and leaves her daughter with her mother then moves to the mission station to learn all she can from the catechist. She’s encouraged by the fact that God’s son is born of a woman. Having already lost a husband and too many children, even those she got after being inherited, Nyabera decides to stay at the church mission together with other widows and orphans. Later she asks her mother Akoko to join her and she readily accepts.

These two women are seen working together to raise and provide for Awiti and Owang Sino’s son, Peter Obura. Awiti is enrolled in school and excels in her studies in the midst of many boys. Obura on the other hand is attracted by religion and decides to join priesthood while Akoko goes ahead to join a teacher training collage. In college she concentrates on her studies avoiding the overtures of men towards her until she meets a soldier, Mark Sigu who courts her until he wins her heart. Awiti is proud of her heritage and the two women who brought her up and she confides to Mark Sigu,
“My grandmother is a real character, but she has been sickly of late. I am very worried about her. I owe her so much. My mother is very kind hearted and quite strong though she has always been in the shadow of her mother who is a woman of iron. I like to think that am like my grandmother but I know that if any of the things that have happened to her were to happen to me, I would die.” (141)

Akoko dies in her sleep in the night of Awiti’s betrothal to Mark Sigu. She dies content that her granddaughter is getting married to a good man. Awiti’s marriage however faces challenges when she takes malaria tablets not knowing that she is expectant. Her mother-in-law has an issue with the fact that she is taking too long to conceive but her husband stands by her. Three years later she gives birth to twins Vera and Becky followed by Aoro, Tony and another set of twins Odongo and Opiyo. Finally Mary.

It is Vera who takes after her great grandmother Akoko, being a hard worker and very intelligent. She ends up being an engineer and a non-marrying member of the Opus-Dei a branch of the Catholic Church that worship God through their work. We also get to meet Wandia Mugo who studies medicine with Aoro. She is his toughest competitor, beating him in anatomy. Aoro falls in love with her and relentlessly courts her. Eventually they get married and raise a big family which includes two children adapted after their mother Becky, Awiti’s daughter dies of AIDS. Wandia gets along so well with her mother-in-law and is likened to Akoko due to her determination, hard work and pioneering spirit. As the book comes to a close she is introduced as the head of department of pathology in the University of Nairobi’s School of Medicine, a professor who attains the highest accolade possible in the medical academics.

3.2.1 Ogola’s presentation of feminist thought through characterization

The interest in this section is to show how Ogola in the River and the Source builds her characters to bring out feminist thought. Ogola builds both her female and male characters to speak about her key concerns. The main protagonist, Akoko is represented as a strong, resilient, fearless, hardworking woman who shows the way to the women in her lineage. She represents African women who have for generations led the way. Male based literature has not focused on the strength of women characters, something that African women writers sought to correct.
Sudarkasa’s (1986) research in West Africa revealed that indeed women occupied high positions in pre-colonial societies. They were queens, queen-mothers, queen sisters, chiefs and holders of other offices in towns and villages. In Kenya there is recorded the powerful colonial chief Wangu wa Makeri and the powerful Giriama leader Mekatilili wa Menza. These serve as examples that women held positions of authority in African societies. Though Ogola does not build her female characters in high positions, she however equips them with strong characters to support the idea that women are not the weak, negative, shadowy characters revealed in mostly male works. For instance Akoko is presented as a wise woman who acts as an adviser to her husband the chief. So much that the chief found that “her advice on most matters was sound and he formed the habit of going to her hut after the evening meal just to hear her talk” (Ogola, 1994: 30). This can be related to what Sudarkasa (1986) argues that African women have rights and responsibilities within their lineages which are independent of males. She protests the description of the status of women in Africa as being defined by gender. This is however debatable because gender roles and gender relations take a central position in who women and men are in the African societies.

Tradition and culture define these gender roles to a great extent and those who sway from the expected norms are labeled rebellious. Akoko’s refusal to be inherited by Otieno Kembo her brother-in-law after her husband’s death is such an example. She is expected to accept the dictates of culture and it takes a decision by the colonial D.C to overturn this expectation. Her ambition that results from her hard work is also a hard pill to swallow for his brother-in-law who earnestly tries to take over her wealth. Ogola brings out the fact that wife inheritance is unfair to the woman if she is expected to follow blindly, however she counters this with Akoko’s refusal to be inherited. Akoko’s fighting spirit is representative of many African women who know how to protest when they feel oppressed. She understands that by accepting to be inherited she would be relinquishing her rights over her hard earned wealth. Therefore the author gives voice to African women and their right to own property. She presents Akoko as a woman who does not beg for power but takes for herself.

Akoko does not seek to overturn power but decides to manage her own life. She uses tools like hard work to establish her position. When she is accused of preventing her husband from marrying other wives she protests and says that she has no problem with other wives. She
however has a problem with being pressured to have many children because as she argues, she cannot give herself children. Her argument that even madwomen are given children is used by the author to defend the position of women who are not able to give birth. The expectation for her to give birth to many children because the dowry paid for her deserves it is absurd according to Akoko. She qualifies her position in her husband’s household by saying that she has since multiplied their wealth through her hard work. That she can leave them the thirty head of cattle and leave with the rest back to her father’s house. Ogola presents her as an independent woman whose husband values highly and does not see the need of acquiring another wife, contrary to the practice at the time. Akoko accepts her position as a wife and the responsibilities that come with being the first wife (mikai) but she is against any form of injustice to her and her children. She considers the crime of being insulted a witch worse than being childless. She seeks justice from the colonial government to protect her grandson’s right to the chief’s stool.

The character of Akoko as presented by Ogola is ultimately representative of the pre-colonial woman in East Africa and crosses over to the colonial and post-colonial period. This transformation is presented to us through the successive women in Akoko’s lineage. The other women learn a lot from her beginning with her daughter Nyabera who really struggles to be as strong as her mother. But Nyabera’s daughter Awiti, Akoko’s grand-daughter is more like her grandmother. Wandia Aoro, Awiti’s daughter in law also depicts the character of Akoko though the two have never met as does Vera, Awiti’s daughter. These four generations of women follow the pioneering, fearless spirit of Akoko. Ogola uses them to reveal the capabilities of women to charter their own paths, to seek solutions where none seem to be forthcoming. Akoko treks many miles to the colonial town for five days to seek intervention from the authorities and protect her wealth and her grandson’s birthright as chief. Nyabera moves to the Mission Centre to seek answers and a new way of life after losing a husband and a number of children, eventually convincing her mother to follow her. Awiti excels in education, topping her class and going on to join a teacher training college. Vera rejects marriage as is expected culturally and joins a catholic order of Opus Dei. Wandia goes against the norm when she proposes marriage to Aoro. She also tops her class in medical school and ends up achieving the highest accolades in medicine academia.
Ogola however contrasts these strong women with a few women considered of weak character. There is Owang’ Sino’s wife, Alando nyar Uyoma who Akoko “leaned over backwards to accommodate her weakness some of which she found very irritating like her tendency to idleness” p. 70. Then there is Becky, Vera’s twin whose physical beauty made her vain. She gets married to a Canadian, who divorces her after discovering that she was promiscuous. Eventually she dies to HIV/AIDS related complications which at the time of publishing *The River and the Source*, was still a relatively new but scary disease.

Ogola presents male characters who either support or oppose the advancement of women. Involvement of men in feminism is one of the tenets of African feminism. The first male character presented in the text is Chief Odero Gogni, Akoko’s father. Though he expects the birth of Akoko to be another son, on learning that it’s a girl, he wisely quips that “a home without daughters is like a river without a source” (Ogola, 1994:11). Though men generally treat their daughters better than other women we see Odero Gogni as a supportive father. His son Oloo is also supportive of his sister that when she is widowed he accepts her back into his house which was unheard of (15). Her husband Owuor Kembo is so supportive of his wife that he does not see the need to marry a second wife though it is expected in the dictates of culture. The even speaks boldly to his mother and the council of elders about the same. When Akoko has her third and last child she has such a difficult labour that he does not desire that she goes through the same again. In as much as children are valued in this community, Owuor Kembo is seen to value his wife so much more. Aoro, Wandia’s husband and Akoko’s great-grandson is supportive of his wife. Initially they are competitive while in medical college and when she beats him in their first oral exam with one point she graciously accepts and shows great respect for her. Aoro is a supportive husband supporting his wife in taking care of the household so that she can further her studies.

Ogola presents one main character who is not supportive of women, Otieno Kembo, Akoko’s brother in law. During Akoko’s marriage negotiations he protests the high amount of dowry claiming that thirty heads of cattle is “enough to marry three wives” and that “all women are the same” (22). His sentiments demean the value of a woman as an individual, not just in relation to dowry but her respect as a person. Further the text reveals that he treated his wives as sluts (47).
He did not understand how his brother could be content with only one wife. After his brother’s death he appropriates Akoko’s wealth forcing Akoko to seek intervention from the D.C.

Ogola’s mostly strong female characters are presented as capable of overcoming the challenges facing them. These challenges are represented by patriarchal institutions and culture rather than specific characters. Some characters like Otieno however embody these challenges which will be focused on later in this work. Ogola portrays strong women characters that symbolize feminist ideology as a lived experience by these women and how they negotiate patriarchal institutions that attempt to put them down. She uses her characters to reveal that feminist ideology cannot be imported and is not a new phenomenon, but since the pre-colonial days of Akoko, women spoke out and fought for what was theirs. These women charter their own paths without dislocating power but acquiring it with the tools available to them as exemplified by Akoko.

3.2.2 Feminist ideology through language and form in the river and the source
This section help in seeing how women writers use style such as language use and imagery to reveal feminist thought. The choice of words, phrases and sayings reveal the author’s position on matters under discussion. Ogola applies the third person perspective in a flowing narrative accompanied by rich infusion from the Luo language and culture. The use of local language in some words is essential in localizing the story. The third person narrative enables the author to narrate the story from the perspective of any character including their thoughts. She is also able to tell the story across timelines in different generations allowing us to see the growth of the characters and the society’s dynamics. We can therefore tell the woman’s position from the pre-colonial to the colonial and post-colonial times. Her awareness of who she is and her capability to change her situation or accept the status quo. Ogola uses strong female characters to reveal where power lies and the contrasts it create in society. While women writers in the novel genre may not outrightly use words common in feminism like oppression, gender inequality, femininity and masculinity, or even sexism, they can infer to these issues though the subject matter.

Sunderland (2006) argues that language was a particular subject of the western women movement. She cites American feminist, Robin Morgan who felt that the semantics of language reflect women’s conditions where they even go by their father’s names and after marriage take up their husband’s names. The term “elders” as used in The River and the Source does not just refer to age but men who are the power holders in the society. Jadongo, the council of elders is
comprised exclusively of males. They make the key decisions during cultural ceremonies. However, the involvement of Akoko during Awiti’s betrothal reflects the author allocating power to women. The term “elder” therefore changes meaning in this context from male leader to leader in either gender, confirming post-structuralists view that meaning is never fixed and that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered (Sunderland, 2006).

Through the character of Wandia we can draw parallels with the author’s life who was also a medical doctor, supported family life, and had a number of children including adopting some. Ogola was also a staunch catholic and she allows the theme of religion and Catholicism to have roots in the story. This autobiographical writing allows her narrate a beautiful story by drawing from her own life experience, including the culture in which she grew up in. it supports Adichie’s (2009) perspective of allowing women to tell a story in their perspective.

The rich imagery opens us to the culture of the Luo people and by extension the East African people. The title of the book, “The River and the Source” is borrowed from the Luo proverb, ‘aora morwenyo chakne biro two’ (the river that forgets its source will dry up). The words of Chief Odero Gogni that a home without daughters is like river without a source qualifies a woman as a source of a community. Akoko is presented as the source of life in her home, which as Ogola tells us at one point had trickled to a mere rivulet in danger of petering out (Ogola, 1994: 204). The birth of children is connected to the continuation of the river, and contrary to African tradition that favoured sons over daughters, Ogola choses to use daughters as the source and contributing force to the continuation of generations.

The Luo of Kenya, among whom this story is set, are said to have had a high level of political organization and superiority of social systems coupled with high levels of confidence referred to as Nyadhi or style (Ojijo, 2012). Ogola describes Akoko’s husband as a man of Nyadhi signifying great admiration and respect from his wife and community. On the day he goes to ask for Akoko’s hand in marriage Ogola describes him thus,

“He was obviously a man of nyadhi that is a man of great style for he had a spear in one hand, a shield in the other and splashes of white war paint across his body. His face was ritually tattooed, his head set proudly on his shoulders and he wore only a tiny piece of leopard skin which barely reached his mid-thigh, from under which two powerful legs protruded” (Ogola, 1994:18).
This elaborate physical description introduces us to a man who was supportive of the women agenda, related to how he treated his wife. The word “nyadhi” is used to emphasize his character and stature which the English language is inadequate to explain. Other local languages used are Jodongo which refers to the council of elders. Though women were excluded from this institution, Ojijo (2012) records that there existed the institution of the queen mother, the chief’s mother and played a vital role in the politics and administration of the chiefdom, acting as the protector of law and customs of the people. In relating the naming of Akoko, Ogola speaks of the child’s grandmother who was summoned after the child experienced a pro-longed period of colic and crying. She prays to Were (God) and at one point asks, “Did not my upright son, Odero, rule in his father’s stead and have I not always guided him to listen to the counsel of the council of jodongo, our elders?” (12). She is able to pinpoint what the problem is when the baby stops crying and names the child Akelo, after her younger sister who had died without children. It is clear then that the “queen mother” had a role to play in the administration of the chiefdom. The use of local language are used to give a background to the culture of the people and to show the power that women held, which was not much but it was also not non-existence.

Other local words used are chik (the way or culture of the people), mikai (the first wife) which was supposed to be an honorary title, kong’o (traditional bear), maro (mother in law) among many others. One that stands out in relation to the focus of this project is Akoko’s first words dwaro mara (want mine). It foreshadows her entire life of a woman who knew what she wanted, recognized it and went for it. She represents African women who stand against insurmountable obstacles to achieve what they desire. She however represents women with a network of support from family and society in spite of challenges.

Ogola uses a vivid description to her narrative which makes it authentic and understandable. She welcomes the reader along the journey of discovering her characters, to witness their growth and transformation and be part of the story. The description of Owuor Kembo as a man of nyadhi appeals to the reader. When we later discover how supportive he is to his wife we are not surprised. The betrothal ceremonies of Akoko and Awiti are also clearly described that we know who holds what opinion and the stand that each party takes. We know that Otieno Kembo was highly against the high dowry and during Akoko’s marriage did not stop referring to this incident. We also know that men made the decisions during betrothal ceremonies and women
only had a minor role of presenting the girl to be married. During Awiti’s betrothal we however see a change where Akoko is the one who decides the amount of dowry requires, which in this case is a token of appreciation which does not sit well with the elders present.

The text is also rich in the use of imagery in the form of proverbs and sayings. These are borrowed mostly from the local dialect and give authenticity to the story. Going back to the title of the text, “The River and the Source”, it becomes essential that society does not forget its “source” lest it dries up or becomes forgotten. In this case women are represented as the source of life and hence the importance of “remembering” them and preserving their dignity. Ogola succeeds in using Akoko as a source who is not forgotten by the women and men generations after she has died. Akoko’s father commenting on her birth that a “home without daughters is like a river without a source” is a contrast to his earlier thought “another rock for my sling”(11) on supposing that he is getting another son. One more “rock” or son is considered great wealth but a “source” or daughter is a consolation prize. Ogola uses these sayings to let us into the psychology of the society which values sons over daughters but right from the beginning of the book counters this thinking by showing through Akoko the importance of daughters.

“Even the heaviest rain eventually ceases” is a saying used to explain the situation Nyabera went through after her brother went missing. That after crying for days she “ran out of tears and looked around her to discover with amazement that life went on as if nothing had happened”(64). This is symbolic to the young Nyabera that though difficulties abound in life eventually everything comes to an end. It foreshadows the many difficulties she was to go through including losing her husband and children, the only surviving child being Awiti who carries on her grandmother’s legacy.

3.3 Parched Earth

3.3.1 Synopsis of Parched Earth
This is a love story with Doreen Seko as the main protagonist. It is the story of a woman searching for the meaning of life amidst disappointments. Set in Tanzania, the author takes us through the struggles that the women go through fighting the patriarchal systems to find a place for themselves. It’s about Doreen’s love for her brother Godbless whose ego is hurt when Doreen achieves the dreams he had as a man and the desire she has of seeing him succeed. It’s about
Doreen’s love for her mother, a mother who chooses to bring up four children singlehandedly in denying herself so that they can have plenty. Her love for her great Aunt Mai who took in her mother when she got pregnant before wedlock and also serves as a second mother to Doreen and her siblings, offering straight forward advice when her mother is not too open. Ultimately this is the love story of Doreen and Martin.

Martin is a man she meets in a geography conference and they develop a strong attachment to each other making Martin come to seek her in the school she teaches. So great is their love that they elope and get married away from home not involving their families. However we sadly witness this love collapse due to the expectations of a patriarchal society. They have a daughter Milika whom they both love deeply but she is not enough for Martin whom society dictates that in order to be complete they must have a son, an unborn son that they have already named Freedom. It is the elusive search for this baby boy that cause conflict in this once inseparable union leading to infidelity in their marriage. Doreen says of Martin, “he does not love me anymore because I cannot bear him a boy. Milika, our daughter, was okay for us at the beginning, before we became normal…” p.179.

Through Doreen the author reveals the great love that Foibe, her mother had with Sebastian who was married at the time. But their love is forbidden and secret although it results to the birth of two children. Sebastian choses to support only his legitimate family and this disappointment makes Foibe decide to live her life alone with her children shielding them from poverty and becoming their mother and father. This abandonment however causes Godbless to have a low self-esteem and it’s not until much later when he confronts his father and knows the truth that he realizes that he never needed him in the first place.

Great Aunt Mai is presented as a capable woman who took responsibility over Foibe when her parents throw her out because of conceiving out of wedlock. Though she follows the dictates of society she is strong enough to adopt to situations. She claims Foibe as her own when her parents are ready to receive her back. She is also a pillar to Doreen when her husband does not give her peace for not conceiving a son. Even going as far as advising her to secretly ‘look around’ and get a son for her husband implying infidelity.

It is this state of helplessness that lead Doreen to a friendship with Joseph, an older wealthy man whose wife left him for a younger man. Both are searching for something to bring meaning to
their lives and in a way they find it in each other. It is through Joseph that we relate with the title of this book. He is a painter and he says that when his wife left the only thing she accepted from him is a painting named ‘Parched earth needing water’. This he relates to how he treated his wife, taking her presence and support for granted, never being interested in what was going on in her life or even what hurt her. For instance he talks about how attracted he was to his painting teacher in the presence of his wife. He even goes to the extent of sexually abusing her when he discovers that she has taken a lover.

Lema in Parched earth opens us to the struggles of women in a patriarchal society but also reveals that given enough motivation and support they can rebel and find a space for themselves. Through the character of Joseph, the author defines for us what patriarchy is;

“It is a social system that has defined how men and women will relate in all spheres of life, including private life, right down to the way we love and have sex. It has determined how a father, brother, husband, uncle will treat the woman- the wife, sister, mother, and daughter related to them. It is an ideology that has given the man the authority to decide, to act, to give or to withhold, to access or retain anything, really, almost everything. It is complex. It is a web in which, ultimately, even those privileged can become victims…” p.182.

This definition of patriarchy is used by the author to be a defining moment for Doreen. She finally understands what has been ailing society and explains the entrapment she experienced throughout her life. Lema shows us that like many gendered concepts, patriarchy is a construction of society and determines the relations between men and women. She places feminism in East Africa right in the middle of dealing with patriarchy. Becoming a constant struggle for women emancipation, to negotiate with patriarchal relationships and institutions. Ironically it takes another man for her to realize this. Though she is at the moment in a position of being oppressed by another man, Martin, it takes Joseph, a man who has been an instrument of oppressing another woman to give name to her woes.

3.3.2 Feminist Ideology through Characterization in Parched Earth

In contrast to Ogola, Lema does not present an iconic character like Akoko in Parched Earth but rather uses ordinary characters, women and men to speak about the intricacies and inequalities as
well as social justice in the society. She uses her characters to question ordinary, daily expectations. She reveals growth and maturity in her characters over time as they understand things better especially Doreen Seko the main protagonist. The story keep going back and forth as we interact with Doreen’s thought process. She allows us into what she thinks is important at any given time relating issues with the past and the future, she says, “my mind is used to travelling, everywhere, places I have been and have not been, crossing past times and future times, spinning webs like a spider, trying to weave a life which is not a death trap lie the spider’s” (Lema, 2001:5)

Doreen is presented as a woman in search of her identity. She is philosophical in her thinking and tries to make sense out of any situation. She loves her family and speaks a lot about her mother Foibe, Aunt Mai and her brother Godless. She admits that growing up she did not have a big dream about what she wanted for her life. Godbless on the other hand, “had the dreams of becoming a big person in some office doing important jobs and wearing suits and neckties and talking in a foreign language” (6). Instead he fails in school while Doreen passes and becomes a teacher seemingly living his dream. Doreen feels like her brother resents this especially being a man who is overshadowed by the success of his sister. Doreen says she could not fashion a dream from her mind, that all she could imagine was “cooking, washing and taking care of my brothers” (8). This points to socialization as a contributing factor in how women are expected to function in society. Feminist ideology seeks to give alternative expectations for women in their lives. Doreen grows into new expectations as she matures.

In essence as a young girl she was unambitious, being content with the way things are and adopting to society’s expectations. As she matures though she begins to question things. She remembers the happiness she felt during her wedding with Martin and wonders how having or not having a child came to be ingrained in the vows that he made to her (68). She appreciates the fact that age and maturity makes her see things differently, she no longer agitate, getting worked up by issues that are outside her power to change(23).

It is through Doreen that we learn about the other characters. We learn about Godbless’ restlessness which he expressed as a longing for an absent father which was “an urge that threatened to suffocate all the happiness in his life (21)”.  

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Doreen’s mother worked hard as a single parent to provide for her four children. She inspired the hard work in her daughter who came to value gardening even as an employed teacher. She also valued education asking Doreen, “If I had enough education, you think I would be here?” (49). She says that girls should work hard, that the hard work is their salvation. This mirrors Akoko who was a great proponent of hard work and did not tolerate laziness. It goes to show that society expects a woman to work extra hard in order to “make it” in life, over and above what men are expected to do. Doreen is zealous in her career, going over and above the call of duty. She earns praise from the head teacher who says that she is the most hardworking teacher the school has ever had. She pushes the other teacher to apply what she learnt in the geography conference, inspiring the women teachers to make use to teaching aids and they eventually form the River Pebbles Club which become an avenue for the women to share their lives though Doreen is hesitant to open up about herself. Hard work becomes a tool for women to negotiate for their power and position in society.

Foibe, Doreen’s mother represent many African women who face restrictions in a patriarchal society to live their lives as they would want to. She falls in love with a married man, gets a child out of wedlock but faces the consequences alone. She has to keep the relationship a secret so that the man does not lose his position in society. Still she is “entrapped” and has another child with him under the same circumstances. When later Godbless seeks this man out in order to have a father-son relationship, he faces rejection. We sense some strength in Foibe because she works extremely hard, even working in other people’s farms to provide for her children. She desires that they may have a better life than she did. In her ignorance, Doreen admires her mother’s life but as she knows better she desires a better life for herself and her daughter Milika. Through Foibe, Lema shows us that even outside marriage there is a way for women to raise families and stand strong. Though she had desired to be with Sebastian, he rejected her but she chose to be strong and fight for the sake of her children.

Aunt Mai acts as a mother to Doreen. A strong woman who was able to shield Foibe from the ridicules of society when she becomes pregnant outside marriage. She is a source of information and it is to her that Doreen goes to for answers about life, about her father, about her husband. When Doreen tells her of her husband’s desire to have a son which was not forthcoming, she
advises he to go out and get a son. Implying that women have always sought children out of marriage without their husband’s knowledge. She says,

“Now if a woman is not barren, if the spirit that gives children does not feel like cold ash in her body, it will still be her who looks for a child, not a man. Never. It is the woman who looks around her, carefully. She looks around her man, and being guided by the spirit that gives a woman the ability to keep life inside her until it is a person, she chooses the man who will give her children.” (Lema, 2001; 164)

She however maintains that though this is an accepted tradition it must always remain a secret and not her nor the man should ever utter a word about it. That this ensured that all families had children. This contrasts with Ogola’s view who through Akoko lets us know that it is not the responsibility of the woman to look for children. That it is beyond her power because it is God who gives children, even to the lazy and mentally ill. When Doreen gets a job Aunt Mai tells her, “you got a husband now. That job of yours is the real husband. Hold on to it like life” (6). Implying that a husband may disappoint her but a job will enable her to take good care of herself. She uses society’s importance for a husband to point at something that is more valuable than a husband. Feminism therefore involves women acquiring positions to uplift their lives. A job enables a woman to earn a living and not have to depend on a man.

Lema presents to us to contrasting male characters. One who holds to the patriarchal ideals that expect too much from women while another one experiences transformation, from living in the patriarchal ideals to understanding them to desiring to treat women better. Martin transforms Doreen with his love. Feeding the “daemon” that lived inside her. He sweeps her off her feet making her throw caution to the wind with his passionate love, eventually eloping to get married away from her family. But when the passion wanes he starts to treat her differently. His desire for a son makes him pressure his wife so much and eventually leads him to another woman’s hands. The contrast in him is that he discovers he is turning out exactly like his father, who left them when he was fifteen and their mother had to raise him and his sisters by herself.

Joseph is a contrast to Martin. He learns from his mistake. It is from him that we get the title of the book, from a painting he made named “Parched Earth”. He also defines patriarchy and gives Doreen the revelation about it, making her realize that is an ideology created by men. He did not appreciate his wife fully assuming that expensive gifts and provisions were enough, until she was
gone. Eventually she falls for a younger man and this leads to a divorce. Now he regrets his mistakes. When he meets Doreen they are both at a disappointed place in their lives seeking to something to make meaning out of the disappointments in life. They become a source of strength for each other. He tells her, “Doreen, you are not alone. Many of us seem to be wandering in this bewildering emotional forest, seeking for direction, a way into the open clearing” (179). Their comfort for each other leads to an affair. He does not make many demands from her and understands that she must maintain the pretenses of her marriage.

Sebastian, Foibe’s lover and father of two children is not mentioned much but we learn that he is a coward who cannot stand by the woman he claims to love. He chooses to abide by the dictates of society and does not provide for his children.

3.3.3 Feminist ideology as reflected through language, form and style in parched earth

Lema uses the first person point of view to narrate the story. We learn about Doreen the main character and the other characters through her thought processes, memory and narration. At times she recreates the dialogue between her and some other characters which gives us a real feeling of what transpired. The story is not chronological and keeps going back and forth to foreshadow what is to come as well as relate the past to the present. This makes it a captivating story which gives credit to the role of women in relating oral traditions in African societies. Her language is descriptive and rich in imagery and symbolism.

The language in Parched Earth introduces to an interesting aspect where women are in charge of the household. As the only parent, Foibe is the head of her family and makes all the important decisions. Aunt Mai is also presented as an independent strong woman though she respects culture. She however negotiates the same culture to establish a woman’s position. Martin’s mother, having divorced by Martin’s father is the head of her household. She takes charge in welcoming Doreen to her family after her marriage to Martin. Doreen keeps questioning the way things are and wonder what alternatives exist symbolizing the aspirations of feminism to question the status quo.

In describing the situation in Martin’s home with a new younger wife in the picture, Lema questions what power they held over one man, Martin’s father. While Martin’s mother is a strong, determined and independent woman, the younger wife who is not named but called
“Mama Joni” is presented as a meek shy girl. Her description arouses sympathy because although she ended up living with Martin’s father, her position does not seem secure. Lema uses her to reveal the situation of “the other woman” who interferes in a marital relationship. Though the man is usually a willing participant, society is quicker to forgive him than the woman. We are told of the lack of laughter and celebrations in the father’s house as compared to the mother’s house.

Lema uses letters to allow us into the mind of the character. Doreen talks of Martin’s letter to her while teaching at Sokoni Juu Primary. How that letter made her dream about Martin because of his professions, “...I am not going to tell you that I know what love is, Doreen, but I know for sure, that I will forever seek for your love until you offer it to me...” (35). this makes his passion clear and it makes the reader wonder together with Doreen why, if her love was so important, why it wasn’t enough. Why the need for a son overshadowed the love for his wife and their daughter. Though Godbless’ letter to Doreen we learn about his confrontation with their father and how he had kept them a secret all those years making him realize that he does not need a father anymore. This points to an end of a search and an acceptance on the part of Godbless. Him realizing that he has an identity on his own and does not need a father to be complete. Through this incidence, Lema confirms what Joseph believed, that men are also victims of patriarchy. The letter of Justine, Joseph’s ex-wife from her a lover are a constant reminder of the pain in watching one’s loved one taken away from them.

Poetic language is also used to emphasize the deep thoughts and beliefs in characters. When Doreen suffers deep heartache from how Martin is treating her she wonders how to emerge from the pain and finally comes to a realization, from deep inside herself she decides how to go about it. Tumbling on a decision as she out it:

   When he is away, feel nothing
   When you see him, feel nothing
   When you hear his voice, feel nothing
   When he is near you, feel nothing
   When you feel nothing, you are free (Lema, 2001:152)

Through this Lema reveals how women discover strategies of survival in the face of oppression. Critics of feminism have often called feminists bitter women who hate men. However what is
clear is that feminism makes one to close their hearts to pain and channel their energies in other important matters. Doreen says that Aunt Mai advised how on how to go around a hurt, not to step too long on it if you must (162). Women negotiate situations that are hurtful in order to overcome their pain.

In relating the great love a mother has for her children and the desire to protect them, Doreen tells of a song she once heard on the radio;

‘My heart is the weight of love in my chest

My heart is burdened with love yoked

   With the twin sides of desire.
   It cries from want of freedom
   From such delicate bonds…’ (100)

Joseph’s son Fe, reveals his maturity of thought in a poem he names “Grandmother and I”. It is a painful poem of a woman’s loss and lack of appreciation. The first stanza begins thus;

   “Once, grandmother said
   It is in the nature of woman to bleed...
   To groan with pain
   Grind her teeth...
   She said, the source of the river dried up
   When they starved her center
   Now, the riverbed is scorched and parched
   The stones burn like her own ache
   Where her bones meet... (200/201)

Again the woman as a source of life like in Ogola’s novel is echoed by Lema. These words lament how society has failed to appreciate women and how this leads to a “scorched” and “parched” society. This character who is also a man realizes the danger in ignoring women in the society. He is also a man who is supportive of the uplifting of women, an aspect that is in line with the philosophy of African feminism. Feminist ideology according to Lema therefore involves protecting womanhood as the source of life.
Lema uses the image if a spider to show how it causes death in what is essential, “it spins its web from the very inside of its stomach, for itself, and for trapping others in its power and into death, which is life for itself.” (4). This becomes the image of patriarchy in the text. She relates the problems in society to this web. One that traps women and prevents them from realizing their full potential.

3.4 Summary

Through a textual analysis of the two texts, this chapter reveals how language, form and style is used by African women to speak about feminist ideology. It shows that the growth and transformation of characters relate to the awareness of women about their position in society and how to fight for a space to express their lives. Focusing on the two texts in the same chapter reveal the similarity in the imagery and thought process of the authors towards feminism.

The language used by the two authors reveal their ability to capture essential aspects of social life that affect women. They focus on the female perspective to highlight the issues that women go through without ignoring male characters who are supportive to the female agenda and also those who provide contrast to this support. The voices of the main characters reflect the philosophy of African feminism that represent the author’s view. The next chapter analyses feminist thought through social cultural structures, institutions and norms in the two texts.
CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF FEMINIST THOUGHT AND CULTURAL STRUCTURES, INSTITUTIONS AND NORMS IN THE TWO TEXTS

4.1 Introduction
This chapter addresses the key thematic concerns of the two texts in the form of an analysis of the social cultural structures, institutions and norms in the two texts. Feminist ideology in this sense looks at the patriarchal social cultural institutions that are oppressive to women as presented in the texts such as marriage, dowry, and polygamy. It also raises the question of motherhood and oppression and finally looks at some reflections of feminist ideology as presented by the two authors. The chapter builds on the information in chapter three especially textual analyses. The methodology applied is textual analysis from the main texts while relating it to other published books, articles and journals by both women and men from across the globe. The chapter does not look at one text at a time but rather focuses on the issues raised and gives textual evidence from either text. In accordance with the main thesis in this project, this chapter seeks to deconstruct feminism as a western concept and locate it within the lives of East African women as evidenced by Margaret Ogola and Elieshi Lema in their texts. It looks at the feminist ideology in the form of oppressive social cultural institutions, how they affect women’s lives and how women negotiate a space for themselves within “East African feminism”. It looks at the thought process of the characters and growth from being oppressed to gaining a voice. Ultimately the chapter gives voice to East African women to define their lives through the two primary texts. Ogola and Lema therefore exemplify East African women writers who contribute to the definition of African feminism adding to the knowledge existing from the region.

4.2 Analysis of Patriarchal System and Women Oppression as Represented in *the River and the source and parched earth*

The two authors present a number of patriarchal institutions that contribute to women oppression in the East African region. Walby (1990) defines patriarchy as a system of attitudes and structures which men hold power over women. This subsequently create structures that prevent women from accessing power and resources. Patriarchy thus privilege men and allot them various forms of power in all societies. This system becomes so entrenched that to escape from it becomes almost impossible. Sanya & Lutomia (2016) perceive patriarchy as “tethered to social,
political, and economic systems that secure women’s subordination regardless of race, class, culture, and ethnicity.”

Lema in *Parched Earth*, through Doreen Seko the main character puts it candidly,

‘We were just floating in its powerful current, in a force we could not tame. Is that why we try to put form to it, shape some kind of order to tame the life force too big for us to contain? The laws, the conditions and customs, the systems. Patriarchy! Now, look how we fret as we struggle to outwit the very conditions we set for ourselves! How we strive to release ourselves from our own trap!’ (Lema, 2001:197)

Patriarchy here is seen as a trap. Therefore to escape ‘oppressive, otherising societal processes’ defined by Lema as a ‘spider’s web’ women have to continuously evolve strategies of avoiding being trapped. (Odiemo-Munara, 2008) In this context of being trapped, Lema relates the dichotomy of women harbouring a natural desire to nurture their children and the fact that they cannot abandon this responsibility and the men know this as well. (Lema, 2001)

Joseph, a male character in *Parched Earth* define patriarchy as “a social system which has defined how men and women relate in all spheres of life…” (Lema, 2001:182). He however claims that both men and women are entrapped by the system but that it is being weakened because situations that encouraged it are changing. He cites girls going to school and discovering that they have rights, women wielding power in the job industry and women owning property.

4.3. The institutions of marriage, polygamy and dowry
Marriage and polygamy go hand in hand in traditional African society because a man was expected to have many wives. Dowry also becomes a key component in the marriage institution where women have little or no say about it. As society progresses and changes occur, then men have tended to acquire mistresses or reject the first wife for a younger wife. Ogola represents marriage in the traditional setup as more polygamous while Lema portrays marriage as an unequal relationship where men abscond their responsibilities over their wives and children and acquire other families. In as much marriage defines a woman because girls are brought up and are prepared to get married someday, the two authors enable their characters to negotiate the marriage institution and have some power.
Akoko refuses to be a timid, voiceless woman in her marriage right from her betrothal, when she walked in holding her head high and her eyes focused right on Owuor Kembo (Ogola, 1994;24). She wanted him to know her worth right from the beginning and their marriage is presented as one based on respect and equality. Her husband even consults her on important matters of leadership. Ogola shows that though marriage could be oppressive in the African setup, women can charter their own path and make the relationship fulfilling. Of course it is not without challenges from outside forces especially in-laws.

Lema presents marriage as a helpless situation, one where women suffer. She says;

“Marriage is like walking in the rain, in the cold, wet season, without an umbrella. You get soaked through to the skin before you know what’s happened…then you are imprisoned in that state, that of the rain falling on you and the clothes possessing your body like a territory” (Lema, 2001;141)

She talks about the hard choices that women have to make in marriage, to cling to the wet clothes or keep walking. Doreen says she decided to keep walking. In the midst of many responsibilities, expectations, interferences from in-laws, she decides to persevere. Lema reveals how marriage exposes women to all sorts of situation but that it’s up to the woman to decide how to deal with the situation. Doreen questions the complacency women experience during marriage. She asks why her teachers on marriage told her that she no longer needs to make decisions. That the men are the head of households and should therefore make all the decisions. They told her that women who make decisions want to domineer their husbands and that a good woman must hide her doubts and distrusts in her heart (ibid, 157). Feminist ideology as espoused by Lema here questions the unequal relationship in the marriage institution. By presenting women like Martin’s mother and Foibe as head of their households, Lema reveals the capability of women to take charge of their lives.

Polygamy is a part of the patriarchy system that devalues a woman. Ogola tells us that ‘a monogamous man was an unknown animal and every man worth his salt tried to marry at least two wives.’ (31) In this case Owuor Kembo has a good relationship with his wife and does not see the need of marrying another wife. ‘He did not know how to tell them that since he married his wife he had lost interest in all other women.’(30) This troubled his mother pushing her to call for an elder’s council meeting to discuss this matter. She even accuses Akoko of bewitching her son.
in order to prevent him from marrying other women. This accusation angers Akoko so much that she decides to leave her matrimonial home which is unheard of among her people. Ogola brings Akoko’s rebellion against the cultural norms to the fore, and in this her attempt to release herself from the ‘entrapment’ of patriarchy. She values the marriage institution as a cultural norm but is against being disrespected and insulted. The accusation of being a witch is too much for her and she speaks out.

“Didn’t a man own a woman’s body and soul? Marriage was sacred and Chik saw to it that it that way by a series of taboos that made it almost impossible to sever the union. However the insult had been great. To accuse someone of juok, witchcraft, even in jest was an unforgivable crime.” (Ogola, 1994: 36)

Tradition makes marriage an important event but it disadvantages the woman because she loses the bond with her biological parents. Godbless’ statement about this in Parched Earth is evidence of this, he says, “A girl emigrates from the home when she gets married” (133). Doreen tries to argue that she is not leaving home for good but realizes the truth she is denying. That once married a girl acquires other parents, her in-laws. It is assumed that her parents will get other daughters though their sons’ marriages. So a married girl should not sleep in her parents house (Lema, 2001:133). Lema presents marriage as a loss of identity for a woman because she has to acquire a new identity as wife.

Though the times are changing Ogola reveals to us that some things remain the same. Such as the expectation of children soon after marriage. This we see in Awiti’s marriage to Mark Sigu when she has a miscarriage after taking malaria tablets not knowing that she is pregnant. Her mother-in-law demands an explanation when three years pass without a baby. Mark her husband though stands by Awiti demanding that his mother stops meddling, to which his mother responds, “but-but she’s only a wife and I am your mother!”(161) Ogola reveals the elevated status of a mother over that of a wife in the African culture. By making Mark Sigu take a position in support of his wife, Ogola is redefining an important position in this society where though women’s position are below that of men, a mother’s position is still higher. Even when children become adults, a mother’s role does not change.

Losing her husband devastated her and ‘she mourned him with solemn dignity’. (69) She sung dirges in his honour, of his famous courtship of her, the great honour he had accorded her during
their life together and their shared friendship. Their relationship is a contrast to marital relationships at the time. Owuor Kembo had been a man who stood by his wife in a society that a woman’s role was to be seen rather than to be heard. He had consulted her on matters of leadership and valued her opinion.

“She was unafraid of him, and spoke candidly on almost any subject. She also had an acerbic but witty tongue, which unless she was angry with him, rarely ever failed to make him laugh. Besides her advice on most matters was sound and he formed a habit of going over to her hut after the evening meal just to hear her talk.” (30)

The songs she sings reveal the kind of relationship they shared. Owuor Kembo is clearly an exception and represents men who value women.

“Men live with their wives, like cats and dogs, ravens and chicken
But not the son of Kembo, My friend, my husband” (69)

Ogola has used Otieno Kembo to personify patriarchy at its worst. Ogola depicts him as a man who does not respect the value and position of a woman, beginning in Akoko’s betrothal. On hearing the amount of dowry expected he exclaimed, “Thirty head! That is enough to marry three wives. Women are all the same…” (22) By saying that women are all the same he negates the woman as an individual with unique characteristics, personality and needs. He antagonizes Akoko not only when her husband is alive but also after she has been widowed desiring to inherit her for the sole purpose of acquiring her wealth and the power that comes with the chieftainship. Together with Akoko’s mother-in-law he insists that Akoko is to blame for not giving many sons to her husband and for his refusal to marry a second wife. Akoko says,

“Much has been said by the daughter of the people of Asembo (nyar Asembo) and her son Otieno about the thirty head of cattle that were paid to my father as a bride price. It causes them much bitterness that I have not borne thirty children in exchange of those cattle.”(36)

Otieno thought it scandalous that his brother could not lay his hand on his wife revealing that to him a woman is to be dominated and subjugated by any means necessary. He is also angered by the fact that Owuor Kembo does not acquire another wife yet dowry is not an issue considering
the wealth that his brother has. Though being the younger son he had four wives and eighteen children. ‘He was a weak man who had the knack of marrying one shiftless wife after another....he treated his wives like sluts and they did not fail him.’: (47) This is in contrast to Owuor who treated his wife as a queen and she did not fail him either. (47) Lema on the other hand uses the character of Joseph to show that some men understand patriarchy and how it entraps them. He however views it as a system that traps both men and women making them all victims. His son Fe’s poem on “Grandmother and I” is also a tribute to the importance of women but also a lamentation of the lack of recognition of women as the source of life.

In the institution of marriage, Ogola shows us how dowry and polygamy are used in power relations where the men make the decision pertaining these issues and women comply. While it is the norm, it is also imperative that we acknowledge the exceptions that existed. Men like Owuor Kembo who is content with his one wife and treats her as an equal. However the ‘web’ that ‘traps’ women in these societies are too strong for the exceptions. Once dowry has been paid and the traditional ceremonies are performed, the woman is expected to leave her home and join her husband’s home where she is now in the care of her mother-in law or senior wife/wives. She is then expected to conform to all expectations and must excel in her duties to gain community approval. To be proud of her existence she must be proud of her subordination as well. (Kisija, 1994)

With the death of her husband Akoko becomes head of her household and when her other son dies as well she is finds herself almost alone but being the strong woman she is she is not swayed. In a change of tune we find her during Awiti’s betrothal deciding to take a ‘token bull, two cows and six goats with which to furnish the requirements of Chik’ (148). This comes as a shock to the aspiring suitors who had ready twenty four head of cattle which was double the normal bride price. They expected this much because Awiti was an educated woman and hence should have ‘cost’ more. To be given such a girl for free was unbelievable and they thought that possibly something was hidden from them. The spokesman on behalf of Akoko had also felt it such a waste for a beautiful educated girl to be offered for free in marriage.

The case is no different for Aoro and Wandia when Wandia’s mother decides that on the issue of bride price she only wanted Aoro to live in peace with her daughter.( 273) Akoko and Wandia’s mother live generations apart yet their thinking is similar in the matter of dowry. They realize
that they don’t need to receive property or money in exchange of marrying of their children. Both women are widowed and as such their decisions are not informed by the men in their lives.

Al-Barwani (1994), views dowry as a tool of ownership. ‘When she gets married dowry must be paid, implying that she is being bought and hence owned by the husband. If her new owner, the husband, so decides he may ask her to move out so that he can get another woman.’

The issue of dowry has continued to be an emotive issue with some women holding the above belief that it equates women to objects being bought while others view it as an important cultural practice that bonds two family together. Others still see it as a means to enrich themselves. In So Long a Letter (1980) we see Binetou’s mother benefitting from her daughter’s marriage to an older man where she gets a villa, jewelry and a tour to Mecca which elevates her standing in society. In addition her daughter is to get a monthly allowance being compensation for being pulled out of school. This woman ‘...wants so much to escape from mediocrity and who regrets so much her past beauty, faded in the smoke from the wooden fires, that she looks enviously at everything I wear’ (Ba, 1980)

Ogola redefines the institution of dowry through the character of Akoko and Wandia’s mother. Their actions negate patriarchy and reveal to us that a woman can have a say in an important cultural event such as dowry and marriage. Through the betrothal ceremonies of Awiti and later Wandia, the cultural expectations are not met, instead a new tradition is set where marriage parties get to an understanding without huge exchange of cattle or money.

Lema does not speak much on polygamy but on men who abscond the duty of their first family and acquire other families. This neglect affect the children of the first family as exemplified by Martin and Godbless. Godbless spent a lot of time seeking the acknowledgement and acceptance by his father and when he finally meets him he closes that chapter and realizes that he never needed him. That his mother struggled to raise them on her own and she should be enough. Martin on the other hand was hurt by his father’s neglect but still sympathizes with him. His desire for a son and mistreatment of his wife can be linked to the wounds he experienced from having an absent father.

Marriage in Lema’s Parched Earth does not hold much value because we are presented to families that exist after a broken marriage or a non-existent one. Foibe represents women who
raise families on their own becoming both mother and father. She has children with a man who does not support her but chooses to support his other family. She becomes a “secret” in his life. It is not until much later that her children come to learn of his existence. The second father to her children is not introduced to us. Lema creates a way out for a family to exist without a marriage. Joseph’s marriage gets broken when his wife runs off with a younger man. He however admits not to have treated her as she deserves.

4.4 The question of motherhood and oppression in the two novels

Both Ogola and Lema focus on the institution of motherhood as an avenue for women to experience either fulfillment or oppression. The society loads women with so much expectations with regards to motherhood which is contrary to what is expected of men. The burden of producing children is placed on women’s shoulders and with it comes extra responsibilities. Radical feminists viewed motherhood as a tool used by patriarchy to put women down by loading them with reproductive roles as necessitated by their mothering roles. This is a western perspective can be contrasted with Afro-centric feminist perspectives of motherhood that often see motherhood as a joyous fulfillment of the African woman (Ebila, 2002). The question therefore becomes whether motherhood is an instrument of oppression. While motherhood is highly thought of in the African culture it is used to propagate the restriction of a woman in the private space and diminish the value of a woman who is not able to have children.

Both of these perspectives load the woman with the responsibility of fulfilling the reproductive duties which do not end with giving birth but with it comes the extra responsibilities of nurturing and caring. According to Kabira (2013), the African culture defines motherhood in the sense that a good woman is a mother and that motherhood becomes the most important contribution that a woman can make in society. Motherhood therefore defines a woman in that she is a woman only when she becomes a mother. ‘Maternity is the biological, psychological and social fact that marks and determines a woman’s personality’ (Leshabari, 1994) this view continue to explain that while on one hand motherhood is seen as a glorious thing to be proud for, it however creates even more work for the woman and that her work is neither recognized nor rewarded. (ibid)

Motherhood in the African tradition is an expectation for every woman. Those who are not able to have children are shamed. Boys are valued more than girls and a women is made to feel incomplete until she can have a son. The two authors illustrate this in their texts. At Akoko’s
birth we see her father expecting another son, an addition to seven other sons, ‘...another rock for my sling’ (Ogola, 1994:11) signaling the importance of a boy child where an addition to his sons increases his status and power. In a departure from the norm the chief on realizing that it is a girl child who has been born to him quips that ‘a home without daughters is like a spring without a source’ (p.11)

This is a society that values the boy child over and above the girl child. Lack of or fewer sons is a reason to be scorned as is evident in Akoko’s marriage when her brother in law Otieno Kembo and mother in law torment her for this reason. ‘At this point the chief was under great pressure to marry another wife, especially from his mother who felt that the rate at which he was reproducing himself was too slow.’(30)The high dowry price of 30 heads of cattle paid for her is supposed to guarantee an equal number of children she is to give birth to. It is important to note that Akoko did not have an easy time during childbirth. Her birth to Obura is described as a nightmare. ‘The baby had lain badly and was trapped. She lay there gripped in agony as the midwives tried to turn the baby. After an eternity, they succeeded and the baby arrived blue and puffy with the cord around his neck’ (32)

Doreen’s relationship with her husband Martin suffer from this same predicament. Blessed with a girl Milika, whom they both love deeply, she suddenly stops being enough as Martin desires a son. They even name the yet to be conceived son “Freedom” who as Doreen says would break free from the social traps they set for themselves (Lema, 2001:144), freedom from societal expectations. Doreen claims that patriarchy as a system is created by men, “men must be the spider who spins the web from the secretions of its own stomach in order to capture others for it to eat.” (ibid, 183)

A woman’s worth in this society is equated to the number of children she is able to bear. The more sons the better it is for her. Akoko is quick to tell all that ‘children are a gift from Were both the deserving and undeserving. Do not even murderers, witches and sluggards who cannot even feed themselves have children?’ She informs the people that Were creates a child in its mother's womb in secret, in his own time and at his own volition (35). Kabira & Burkewywo (2016) record some African sayings that reveal the worth of a mother in African culture. Some of them include, ‘a mother is God number two’ among the Chewa of Malawi, “a mother lying down sees further than a child on a tree”, among the Krio of Sierra Leone and “a mother cannot die”
among the Mongo of Democratic Republic of Congo. Among the Agikuyu community the birth of a boy child deserves five ululations while a girl deserves four ululations. The saying ‘ngemi ititinagio’ translated to ‘ululations give accolade to a winner’ (Kariuki, 2015) making a boy a winner in society and depicting that a girl cannot take victory destined for a boy.

A son is so important in this society that when Owang Sino’s wife has a son, ’the first baby in over 20 years’ (70) all her ills are forgotten. Sadly though the boy’s father dies while he is still a toddler leading to Otieno Kembo taking up the Chief’s place. Akoko realizes that as a ‘woman, a widow and a sonless mother, the only male in her direct line being a little baby, she was greatly disadvantaged.’ (73) Akoko not only loses one son, Obura to the fight in the first world war but the second son Owang’ Sino to a choking incident. Obura’s death devastates her so much that she almost forgets that she has other children. But it is his father who suffers so much in losing his first born ‘...a boy to gladden any father’s heart.’ (29”) he never quite recovers from losing him and he too dies leaving Akoko a widow.

Nyabera, Akoko’s daughter follows her mother’s ‘curse’ by her lack of sons having experienced the death of three of her children in infancy. When her husband died leaving her to care for her daughter Awiti aged four at the time. ‘..her entire life seemed one big disaster. She was twenty-six, a widow and sonless.’(99) She is constantly restless and discontent about this. Despite the fact that she is raised by such a strong woman as Akoko she is not able to escape from the entrapments of patriarchy. Wives in this culture are equated with property where the more property one has, the higher the expectation to acquire more wives. And her value increases with the number of sons she has.

After being widowed and inherited she leaves to seek a better life in the Mission Centre but still when she hears word that her husband’s cousin who had inherited her had lost his wife she goes back hoping to have a son. She did get a son but he too died and the man started looking for a new bride. Her story is like that of many women who remain trapped in unhappy and unfulfilling relationships “knowing that it is not right for her to remain in such a relationship yet unable to get out due to considerations of social security”.( Mumba, 2000)
Ogola attempts to answer this question through her presentation of her women characters. We encounter women who according to the edicts of the society are not complete without bearing children and more so sons. After being accused of bewitching her husband not to marry another woman, Akoko in her defense asks, “I have been accused of having wasted their wealth because I have only two children. Now who in this assembly can tell me how to create a child within my womb?”(42) In this case marrying another wife would be compensation for her diminishing ‘motherhood’ which raises the question of whether one can be half a mother or double a mother. Akoko informs her audience,

‘Children are a gift from Were both to the deserving and undeserving. Do not even murderers, witches and sluggards who cannot feed themselves have children? Were creates a child in its mother’s womb in secret, in his own time and at his own volition…’ (35-36)

Ogola through Akoko argues that motherhood is not a measure of a woman’s worth and should not be used to discriminate against those who are not able to have children. She is also telling us that motherhood is a natural process that does not require much effort on the part of a woman, as even women who are not able to take care of themselves have become mothers. A good example in this text is Owuor Sino’s mother who neglected her baby leaving Akoko to take care of her grandson.

In this era when women are not supposed to have a voice Akoko speaks out and informs us an important point that women don’t hold the power to give themselves children and that any woman can be a mother irrespective of who or what she is. As much as her mother-in- law feels that she is less of a woman she is confident in her position not allowing herself to be oppressed in this regard.

Mothering comes with extra responsibilities when those being taken care of expect only the best. Ogola relates of an instance when Akoko is delivering her second child yet her first born aged three and a half years demands for her attention. Obura comes from his grandmother’s hut hungry and sleepy and demands that he wants his mother and no one seems to hear him in the commotion going on so he screams, “Hey! Where’s my mother? I want my mother! I am hungry!”(31) He refuses to be quieted by his aunts when they attempt to give him food and it is
until his grandmother tells him that he has a sister that he settles down. Akoko decides to name the child after her recently deceased father much to the consternation of her mother-in-law who expected to perform the naming duty.

Leshabari (1994) explains how among the Chagga community of Tanzania all women are called mothers since they act as care providers of everyone and everything from the healthy, the sick, the old, animals and farms. And that because motherhood has all along been considered as glorious, women have come to enjoy this role without questioning it’s oppressive side. Ogola agrees with this view where the oppressive side of motherhood supersedes the glorious side. Society’s goal for girls therefore is a ‘prosperous motherhood’ while education is a priority for boys. To get a husband within society she must be recommended by people who will judge her according to her ability to do gender typed chores. Girls are also taught about the joys of marriage and motherhood and how to keep their husbands happy and as a result they remain passive where anyone who tries to fight for her rights is deemed ‘rebellious, unladylike and aggressive’ (Leshabari, 1994)

In Parched Earth, Lema choses to highlight the importance of women who raise their children singlehandedly without the support of the fathers. They work hard to ensure that their children have a better life than they did. Foibe loved a man who could not be with her yet had two children with her. She also has two other children with men that are not introduced to her. Doreen and her siblings question who their father is, how comes they are different from other families who have present fathers. It is not until later that they discover that their father chose not to support them. Martin’s mother is presented as a woman who raised her children successfully, Doreen tells us that there was so much laughter and happiness in Martin’s mother’s house which was absent in his father’s house. His father seem to be struggling, evidently he did not find fulfillment in his younger wife.

Through Doreen, Lema tells us that a woman’s life especially after marriage and motherhood dissolves into that of others, “when my life dissolved into Martin’s family, so easily, like sugar dissolves in water, I realized with a pang that I will always live out my struggles in relation to other women, women’s lives and their perceptions of it, their society their niche in it, in relation with men.” (50) Motherhood also represents sacrifice according to Lema. Foibe sacrifices her dignity to work in other people’s farms so that she can provide for her children. It comes as a
shock to Doreen that they are actually poor because though they didn’t have plenty, they were always provided for.

Akoko in her protest Akoko tells her listeners, “I was taught that the way to keep a man was by the work of my hands and the words of my mouth.” (Ogola, 1994:35) This signifies that the woman has a responsibility of not just capturing a man’s attention but retaining it as well. It is therefore not important to bear children for a man but you have to keep him interested in you as well.

The expectation of a good mother in the African culture thus becomes one who is “passive, tolerant, obedient to what is required, quiet, not questioning, a hard worker and faithful.” (Besha, 1994) a woman is expected to live in accordance to the dictates of the society without rebelling. Nyabera, Akoko’s daughter tries too hard to be this ‘exemplary’ mother and wife. She is consumed by this thought and it is such a hard thing for her when she keeps losing her children after birth. Though Okumu her husband feels that she is superior to him because of her heritage she has insecurities resulting from not being a ‘successful mother’

Berlz, 2016 explains the philosophy of Betty Friedan, a modern liberal feminist of the twentieth century who said that women could both be mothers and career women. That society over values motherhood and marriage for women and career women which as a result makes it difficult for women to reach their potential in the public sphere. She was later to write that expecting women to become ‘superwomen’ who can effortless balance motherhood and their careers had created a new form of oppression. According to her in order to overcome this form of subjugation women must partner with men in order to escape both the feminine and masculine qualities. Then men and women will parent children equitably and women will no longer be oppressed. This viewpoint resonates to a certain extent to how Ogola represents in the character of Wandia a medical doctor who manages to work and raise six children and foster two others. When Daniel develops symptoms of leukemia it is Wandia who notices first despite that her husband Aoro is also a medical doctor. We see her relating more with the children individually and discovering their personalities and strengths. Her foster son Johnny in particular gets close to her and while talking about his father’s abandonment she brings this closeness out.
“I can’t see myself abandoning my children just because I disagree with my wife. They would just be the innocent victims. You may not realize this, but before I came to live with you I felt completely unlovable and unwanted. I thought it was because I was neither black nor white—but some horrible mixture; and now, Auntie, since we are talking heart to heart I would like to tell you that I want to change my name from Courtney to Sigu.” (303)

Ogola presents the idea of a mother as one who nurtures even those she hasn’t given birth to. Johnny, now in his teens had been abandoned by both parents, his mother by death and his father, a Canadian leaving the country on discovering that his wife was cheating on him. Yet he found acceptance in a woman who is a busy and accomplished doctor. This she does not do alone but has a house help at one point even considering getting an extra one when she gets the chance to go and study abroad. Wandia qualifies as a liberated woman but the question comes on how she is oppressed, whether the balancing of motherhood and career is oppressive as posited by Friedan. To her, an African woman she sees it as an accomplishment. She also enjoys the support of her husband and mother-in-law who are there to take care of the children when she goes to further her studies abroad for one year. Lema’s Aunt Mai is also a mother to Doreen though she did not give birth to her, offering support and advice to her and her mother before her.

Akoko and her daughter Nyabera make sure that Awiti enrolls in school at the Mission Centre being one of the only two girls among thirty two boys. By the end of the second year the other girl drops out to get married. It is interesting to note that while the boys would drop out mostly for economic reasons—to earn money sooner rather than wait for eight years, the girls would drop out primarily to get married. Later she goes to a teacher training collage and on completion she gets a teaching job at her former school where she becomes “an object of curiosity, a woman who worked at anything apart from tilling the land and rearing children was a hitherto unknown phenomenon.” (141)

Vera’s decision to be a professional and unmarried member of the Opus Dei is a statement that Ogola makes to counter society’s idea that motherhood is the main goal for a woman as soon as she is of marriageable age. Throughout the book she presents the importance of family as a means of propagating the continuity of society. However she presents alternatives like in the case
of Vera. Akoko also allows Peter to join priesthood despite the fact that he is heir to the chiefdom and marriage and bearing children would be a more natural path to follow.

4.5 Reflections of East African feminism according to Ogola and Lema

In the two texts, Ogola and Lema attempt to place feminism in the East African region through their characters and the issues they address. They see women not as passive participants in a social cultural environment that seeks to undermine them, but active in negotiating the situations they find themselves in and liberate their lives where possible. Whether deliberately otherwise, the issue of women liberation is at the core of ‘The River and The source’ as well as ‘Parched Earth’. The symbolic titles of the two texts represents women’s situation and efforts to understand and make life more meaningful for themselves. Akoko, the main protagonist in Ogola’s text exemplifies a woman who keeps working at liberating herself in this patriarchal African society. As the times change with the coming of the colonialists and with it education and a new religion, she and the other women in her lineage adapt the new tools to further liberate themselves.

Akoko’s first words as a baby were not ‘mama’ or ‘baba’ but ‘dwaro mara’- want mine. which becomes symbolic of a woman who comes into a society knowing that it is her responsibility to cry out for her position, her right and standing in the society. Through her Ogola reveals to us that even in the traditional African society there were women who were strong and could not be easily subjugated. Women like Akoko Obanda, Wangu Wa Makeri, Mekatilili Wa Menza, Mary Nyanjiru of the Harry Thuku protests fame, the Anlu of Cameroon, Nehanda of Zimbabwe among many others. She supports the idea that women use tools in their environment and what is within their disposal to fight for their rights. This process of liberation is however a continuing process.

Women liberation can be defined as movement directed towards the removal of attitudes and practices that preserve inequalities based upon the assumption that men are superior to women. (Collins Dictionary) In the context of this paper it refers to the efforts of the woman to overcome the social cultural restrictions of her environment to subjugate her. Women liberation thus becomes the process of acquiring power and a voice in the opposing forces of patriarchy.
The picture of Akoko that is painted is one of someone who is sure of herself. During her betrothal she meets her guests confidently, not shy at all;

‘Traditionally the girl at this point should have been the picture of demure shyness, her eyes fixed firmly on the floor, her hands held together in front of her mouth. Not Akoko. She walked in, steps measured, head held high, hands at her sides her head swiveled around a bit and then her gaze rested on Owuor. Let him see what she was getting.’ (24)

This confidence possibly set the stage for how her relationship with her husband would be. It was in her favour that her husband was a fair man. He had already decided that he wanted her for a wife so much that he was not swayed by the high bride price.

“My father, my brothers, I think you are greatly mistaken. Not all women are the same. This woman is going to be my mikai not just my wife. Besides, I have set my heart on marrying her.” (23)

A mikai or first wife was supposed to have an elevated position in a polygamous marriage. However later Owuor decides that he does not need another wife to the chagrin of his mother and younger brother. He did not know how tell the elders that since he married her he had lost interest in all other women. He loved the fact that she was not afraid of him and candidly spoke her mind on almost any subject and she gave sound advice on matters that they shared not to mention the fact that she was humorous. (30)

Akoko is a woman who also knew how to protest when treated unfairly. This she does when her mother-in-law accuses her of bewitching her husband so as not to marry another wife. Early in the morning she raises an alarm and then when a good sized crowd gathers she addresses them reminding them that she is well raised and a hard worker. She is not a gossiper and does not know anything about witchcraft. She informs them that she has no problem with her husband taking another wife and that it is Were who gives children to whom he chooses to. She lets them know that the wealth that she has created is more than the dowry that was paid for her. Saying that if the thirty head of cattle has made them bitter for not producing thirty children then she would go back to her father’s house. She threatens to begin the proceedings for a separation leading to a return of the dowry while they, her husband’s family would return her cattle. (35-26)
Feminism according to east African women writers requires women to use tools within their disposal to liberate themselves. Tools like hard work which are praised by both Ogola and Lema. While women and more so African women do a lot of chores and hard work on their farms which is often seen as a form of oppression, in this context it liberates them. This is because they become self-sufficient in their provision without having to rely on men. When Akoko’s husband dies Otieno Kembo “appropriated his brother’s wealth and tried to grab his widow’s personal wealth as well.” (73). This prompted her to seek assistance from the colonial government a case that she eventually wins. Accompanied by two of her nephews, Opiyo and Odongo she walks to the administrative town of Kisuma, later Kisumu this act in itself revealing her pioneering spirit and determination by opening up her people to a new world.

Hard work is also praised in Parched Earth. Doreen’s mother tells her, “Girls should learn to work hard, always. Hard work will be their salvation” (Lema, 2001; 49) she tells her that the world has nothing to offer girls for free and that she must never allow anyone to walk all over her head. Though the image of Foibe in the text is a struggling rural woman, it is clear that she has a wealth of information about how the world works to share with her daughter. Lema captures the cry for women all over the world who know that they have to work harder than men to achieve what they desire in life.

Akoko breaks many barriers that have traditionally prevented women from forging ahead. Her determination leads her to seek the intervention of the colonial government. Her fearlessness enables her to face her accusers and defend herself before the elders. At the time of the accusation Ogola tells us that being a relentless worker, Akoko had been out in the field the entire day and only got wind of the matter in the evening. (34) In her defense she wonders, “Do I not rise early to till my lands? Have I ever begged for food from you my mother-in-law as all your daughters-in-laws? Do I not always have enough to eat and more left over to barter in exchange for cattle, goats and sheep?” (35)

Akoko had a philosophy that a young woman had to be ‘intelligent, fast on her feet and hardworking’. According to her “stupidity in a woman was sin only greater than stupidity in a man, for a man can always find an astute wife to cover his folly, but there is no man who can cover a gaping hole left by a foolish woman” (65) She thus raises her daughter Nyabera in the same principles and Awiti follows the same enabling her to perform excellently in school.
Wandia is also said to greatly resemble Akoko in character though the two women never met. When Nyabera moves to the Mission Centre and take her mother, daughter and nephew with her, the principle of hard work enabled them to support themselves and not become dependent on others.

In a society that the value of a woman increase with her ‘marriageability’ Vera decides not to get married but use her work to serve God. She is intelligent and successful professionally but choses a path that gives her fulfillment. Wandia decides to propose to Aoro on realizing that he is not keen on doing so himself. This reveals a woman who is willing to go against the dictates of society about what is acceptable or not. At the close of the book we see her attaining ‘the highest accolade possible in medical academics- a Doctorate in Medicine which was the medicine equivalent of a PhD’ and becomes the first woman to achieve such a feat in Kenya (300). Her youngest daughter Kipusa shouts ‘that’s my mummy’ speaking of the pride her family has in her but also her equally important role of a mother.

Lema’s ideology on women liberation is represented in the form of a search for identity more so for Doreen who at the start of the story has more questions than answers. She says that she didn’t have big dreams as a child and accepts whatever lives brings her path. She gets involved in a passionate relationship which eventually turns toxic but remains in it. But over time she matures and understands her worth. Though she remains in the relationship with her husband, she gets involved with another man, and older wise man who understands much about society and is also going through a search for acceptance in much the same way as Doreen is. Doreen says that her relationship with Joseph makes her a more perceptive person, a better mother, teacher and is able to bear with her relationship with Martin whom she says a part of her will always love.

Aunt Mai draws from her inner strength and her understanding of tradition to be a liberated woman. She informs Doreen that if Martin cannot give her a son then as a women she is allowed by tradition to look around discreetly and find a man with whom she can have a son. Foibe on the other hand hides herself in working hard and inspiring hard work for her children to ensure that they have a better life than she did. She tries so much to provide for them that it is only accidentally while playing in school that Doreen learns that they are poor, that she earns a livelihood by working at other people’s farms.
4.6 Feminism According To Margaret Ogola

My analysis found out that Ogola based her philosophy on the main characters especially Akoko who is seen as a matriarch in this story. She was equipped with a strong personality and was not afraid of moving into uncharted waters. Ogola therefore theorizes that feminism in East Africa is the ability of women to negotiate around their social cultural environment and charter their own paths in the face of opposition and obstacles. It is understanding that some structures are too entrenched to be changed but that women can draw from their inner strength to overcome any obstacles. Similar to African feminism, “East African feminism” relies on the support system of other like-minded women and accepts support from supportive men. It is also about social justice and the rights of women.

4.7 Feminism according to Elieshi Lema

Using the first person’s perspective as the narrator, Lema qualifies feminism in East Africa as beginning with self-identity. That a woman has to understand her worth and position first in order for her to extricate herself from oppressing forces of patriarchy. It also involves bargaining with the entrenched social system and discovering means of survival. Lema emphasizes on the importance of a strong network of supportive women who are crucial to help a woman establish herself. This is similar to the sisterhood solidarity of African feminism. Lema also gives weight to “enlightened” men who are sympathetic to the plight of women and this process begins with the men experiencing how women suffer when they experience oppression.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter succeeds in interrogating the social cultural structures and institutions that inhibit women’s growth but also reveal how women negotiate around these institutions and charter their own paths. They are thus able to liberate themselves and contribute to the progress of their lives. The authors contribute to the locating feminism in the East African region through their texts. The next chapter deals with summary, conclusions and recommendations from the research
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction
This chapter gives an overview of the study while providing a summary, conclusion and recommendations for further studies. It shows how the set objectives were met through the findings that followed. The study set out to illustrate through the two novels by Margaret Ogola and Elieshi Lema that feminism is an African concept as much as a western one. That feminism is not a taught ideology but one that is experienced by women through their lived experiences. The study established that the self-awareness of women, who they are, what their position is and what their rights are dictate how they move forward in claiming and reclaiming what is theirs.

Through the two main primary texts, the research sought to deconstruct the perception that feminism is a foreign ideology and through the characterization, style and themes in the novels reveal the thought process that brings out feminist ideals. Akoko and Doreen represent African women who have to negotiate the intricacies of tradition and patriarchy to find a footing in their emancipation. According to the two women writers, patriarchy becomes a trap that entangles the women’s lives and consequently they have to persistently work extra hard to extricate themselves. Lema in *Parched Earth*, through Doreen Seko the main character puts it candidly,

‘We were just floating in its powerful current, in a force we could not tame. Is that why we try to put form to it, shape some kind of order to tame the life force too big for us to contain? The laws, the conditions and customs, the systems. Patriarchy! Now, look how we fret as we struggle to outwit the very conditions we set for ourselves! How we strive to release ourselves from our own trap!’ (Lema, 2001:197)

5.2 Summary
The objectives of this study were to analyse the presentation of feminist thought through characterization, language and form in the two novels, to analyse the authors’ presentation of feminist thought through their analysis of social cultural structures, institutions and norms and lastly to provide a definition of “feminism” based on the two novels by Margaret Ogola and Elieshi Lema. These were handled in the findings in chapter three and four. The problem statement problematized the perception that feminism is a western concept that is against the culture and traditions of Africans. It also sought to fill a gap in the contribution of East African
women writers to the body of knowledge in the subject matter of feminism. Literature review on
the same revealed that much of the information on feminism is from West and South of Africa. *Parched Earth* as a text also lacked adequate criticism in the material available. The study sought
to analyse Ogola and Lema’s conceptualization of feminism from the East African region
through their texts. My hypothesis was that feminism is not a taught ideology but rather an
experience from women’s lived experiences. That the two authors adequately addressed feminist
thought through the characterization, style and themes in the texts which included social cultural
structures, institutions and norms that are oppressive to women. This hypothesis was proved and
it was clear that women charter their own path in the face of obstacles. African feminism and
feminist literary criticism are the theories that were deemed adequate to analyse the feminist
issues in this texts. They provided the lenses to focus the issues under study.

The findings in chapter three and four showed that in contributing to the feminist discourse in the
East African region, Ogola and Lema through the two texts, *The River and the Source* and
*Parched Earth* respectively used strong women characters to give voice to the issues that African
women go through on a day to day basis. The women characters were used to provide a
definition of African feminism as an enduring struggle for women to establish their position in
society by negotiating the social cultural structures and institutions that seek to undermine them.
These social cultural structures and institutions being patriarchal in nature. These women used
tools in their environment to liberate themselves like hard work and a sense of independence.
Akoko’s journey to Kisumu to seek justice from the colonial government after her brother-in-law
takes over the chief’s stool and her wealth demonstrates that she is not afraid to approach a
perceived enemy for help. Her efforts pay off and justice is served.

The study revealed how characters like Akoko in *The River and the Source* learn early in life
how to claim what was theirs. With Akoko’s first words being “daro mara” it proves that
African women born in Akoko’s era, pre-colonial Africa understood what belonged to them.
Akoko goes on to defend herself when her mother-in-law accuses her of bewitching her son,
refusing to be downtrodden in the marriage institution that fates a woman on one hand and her
husband’s clan on the other. Akoko also gains support from her family with her brother
supporting her and housing her when she is widowed which is against the dictates of society.
Akoko’s epic journey to Kisumu to seek assistance from the colonial administration reveals a woman who is not ready to lose her hard earned wealth and taken advantage of by cultural practices like wife inheritance. Ogola shows us a woman who becomes a pioneer in her generation and teaches her children to follow in her footsteps.

Lema’s Aunt Mai mirrors Akoko, a brave woman who understands how unfair society is to women and goes ahead to defy societal expectations. She shields Doreen’s mother Foibe when she gets pregnant out of wedlock, when her parents want nothing to do with her. Aunt Mai is a source of wisdom who uses her understanding of culture and patriarchy to navigate a way for survival as women. Lema uses Doreen’s voice to tell us that Aunt Mai “long adapted to living in a social web” and says that “a woman is a social orphan” (Lema, 2001: P.5). She lets us know that society doesn’t care much about a woman. She informs Doreen that a job is a real husband (p.6), implying that though society puts much emphasis in a marriage institution, a husband can reject you but a job will prove useful in a woman’s life to ensure that she is well provided for. Doreen comes to know this truth when her one beloved husband loses interest in her and acquires another woman because she is not able to give birth to a son.

Doreen’s continuous search for her identity, fighting with the “daemon” is Lema’s way of telling us that a woman has to know her place in order to learn how to fight. This resonates with Molara Ogandipe-Leslie’s sixth mountain of self that women have to overcome in order to establish themselves. In this case it becomes the first obstacle for Doreen to overcome as a woman. From early on she realizes that as a woman she is trapped in a “spider’s web” (p.4) and it’s not until she meets Joseph that she identifies patriarchy as this entrapment. Understanding that there are forces working against her as a woman makes her realize that it’s up to herself find a way out. Like considering Aunt Mai’s advice to “look around” and provide a son for her husband. Doreen tries to rationalize that society’s expectations cannot exempt Martin from achieving his identity as a man no matter how much love they share (p.57)

Akoko’s daughter Nyabera is not as strong as she is but works hard to emulate her mother. Her lack of children and more so sons is a painful sore in her heart. Ogola shows us how Nyabera like Doreen struggles to get an identity. One that is not attached to motherhood or marriage but it is not easy. Eventually she discovers a new religion and goes to the mission center to study about it, eventually asking her mother to join her. It takes time for Nyabera to discover that she is a
complete woman without sons and realize how much a treasure she has in her daughter Awiti. It is through Vera that Ogola reveals to us that a woman is really complete without children or marriage. She voluntarily joins the Opus Dei, a Catholic branch that serves God through work and can choose to remain unmarried.

At the core of both texts is the value of a boy child over a girl child in African societies. Set in two East African countries, the two texts reveal that a marriage is not considered successful without producing a son. The two authors counter this belief through introducing us to strong women characters that are successful in their lives and society. Even Doreen who did not have dreams as a young girl but chose to attach herself to her brother’s dreams becomes more successful than her brother Godbless. Awiti performs better than the boys in her class while Wandia becomes first in anatomy and goes on to get high accolades in medical academics.

In line with African feminism which involves men in supporting women in fighting for their rights. The two authors use some male characters in their texts to support the female characters. Akoko has the support of her father, brother as well as her husband who is content with one wife contrary to his family’s expectations. Wandia also has the support of her husband Aoro when she goes abroad to study for two years. Lema also uses the character of Joseph to explain what patriarchy is. He believes that men are also victims of society’s patriarchal systems. His experiences with his ex-wife teach him to value women.

Marriage forms the backdrop of social cultural institutions in which women are mostly subjugated. The two texts reveal the unequal relationship in marriage that most characters are involved in with the exception of a few. Doreen’s marriage to Martin which is initially full of passion the sharing of two souls eventually experience this inequality when the societal expectation of a son is not met. It is not clear why the burden is placed on a woman’s shoulders to provide sons but the two authors share the view that it is not fair on the woman. A marriage that is built on trust and oneness however enjoy peace for both parties but is not immune from external interference as exemplified by Akoko and Owuor Kembo’s marriage. Dowry which begins the marriage institution also seeks to represent unequal relationships. For instance the expectation of Owuor Kembo’s family that Akoko should have thirty children equal to the bride wealth paid for her is laughable. Akoko responds to this claim by insisting that she goes back to her home with the wealth she has helped create which is more than the thirty cows.
Lema deals with the inequality of marriage institutions by presenting women who have been treated unfairly in marriage and chose to raise their children on their own. Foibe is treated unfairly by Sebastian who already had another family, gets disowned by her family but gets shielded by Aunt Mai and ends up bringing up her children on her own. All four children who have different sets of fathers but is not concerned with that. Martin’s mother also raises her children on her own and Doreen tells us that her house experienced more laughter than her ex-husband’s house. This becomes a way for these women to negotiate a patriarchally structured institution. These women’s hard work counter the effects of being left on their own. Hard work therefore becomes a tool for African women to rise above the chances of being downtrodden.

Language use in both texts reveal an inclusivity for women and use of rich cultural language that further relate to position of women and what they can do to liberate themselves. The social cultural institutions reveal that power is held by men and women can only appropriate the power themselves by making that choice. Decisions that affect both men and women are made through structures held by men but the two authors tell an alternate narrative where women make decisions like in female headed households. The marriage betrothals of Awiti and Wandia see a change in dowry negotiations directed by two strong women, Akoko and Wandis’s mother.

5.3 Conclusion
Both Ogola and Lema succeed in locating African feminism in the East African region though their writing. They give voice to their characters about an ideology that affects their lives and that of other African women. They question the dictates of culture, tradition and societal expectations. They reveal that feminism is not a taught ideology but one that is experienced firsthand by women lives. Though African languages may not have a terminology for feminism, this does not negate the fact that African women interact with feminism in their daily lives.

The hesitancy of some African scholars and writers to be referred to as feminism has a lot to do with fear of being labelled as followers of western ideology and resisting their culture than with doing feminist work. At the risk of joining the category of students and critics accused by Nkealah (2006) of classifying and women writing as feminist writing, I can consider The River and the Source (1994) and Parced Earth (2001) as feminist texts. My reasons being that they advocate for women’s emancipation through characterization and portrayal of these strong women characters negotiating social cultural institutions that undermine women.
The two authors define feminism differently but with similar underlying backgrounds. To Ogola, feminism is about taking power for yourself as a woman, charting your own path and negotiating the social cultural institutions that seek to undermine women. It is about having the courage to challenge these structures and institutions and to have an understanding for women who are not as strong as you. Similar to how Akoko was patient with Nyabera. Her brand of feminism also appreciates men who are supportive to women’s cause. It is a deliberate and decisive choice for women to use tools available to them and establish themselves such as hard work. Feminism is about fighting for social justice and rights of women.

Lema on the other hand theorizes feminism through her text as beginning with a woman’s discovering her identity and self-worth, overcoming fears in one’s esteem and having a clear perspective about what she wants, similar to Molara Ogundipe’s sixth mountain of self that hinders women’s progress. Then from there a woman is able to fight the patriarchal structures and institutions that hinder her progress. Similar to Ogola, women need to use tools at their disposal to negotiate around these structures and institutions. Her brand of feminism is also appreciative of men who are sympathetic to the women’s rights. Men who have been transformed after experiencing the pain that women go through in the face of oppression.

**5.4 Recommendations**

I would propose further studies on East African feminism in comparison to other areas like West African feminism and South African feminism which have had a lot of writing on them. I would also acknowledge that East African women have contributed to the feminism discourse in Africa especially through the novel genre.

I would also suggest that future researchers consider Parched Earth as a text to be studies further. It being a rich text and not much studies done on it.

Another recommendation is that Ogola’s text The River and the Source be studied in the perspective of a study text in the education curriculum in Kenya. It was a text study for the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) twice from 1999 to 2002 and then from 2012-2016. The interest of the study would be to find out whether it aroused the interests of feminism among the students who studied and were examined for the same.
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APPENDIX I: TURNITIN REPORT

DECONSTRUCTING THE PERCEPTION OF FEMINISM AS A WESTERN CONCEPT THROUGH THE VOICES OF EAST AFRICAN WOMEN WRITERS by Mercy Jackline Nyokabi

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