THE PORTRAYAL OF MASCULINITIES IN WAMBUI GITHIORA'S

WANJIRA* AND REBEKA NJAU'S *THE SACRED SEED

PURITY WANJA

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DECLARATION

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

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DEDICATION

To the three wonderful men in my life: My father, Silas Murerwa, for the love and lessons

that created the scholar in me; My brother, Misheck Kithinji, for consistently believing in

others; My love and partner, Godfrey Kimathi, for always being true.

To my mother, Mary Kanyua; you taught me to never give up.

 My daughter, Angel Makena,   who gave me the reason to do it all.

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT

This study examines how two female novelists, Wambui Githiora and Rebeka Njau have portrayed masculine identities as problematic in post colonial Kenya in *Wanjira* and *The Sacred Seed* respectively. The study explores their presentations of modernity, colonialism, and stereotyping, and how these affect how men perform masculinities. The study analyzes the anxieties created in men by the various, sometimes conflicting, definitions of qualities and characteristics considered typical or appropriate to a man. The male characters portrayed in *Wanjira* by Wambui Githiora and *The Sacred Seed* by Rebeka Njau appear either in a sort of identity crisis or are so warped that sober relationships with themselves or other characters seem impossible. The underlying assumption for this study is that the writers engage with the Kenyan male identity as an entry point into the possibility of negotiating healthy gender relations. In the endeavor to discuss the portrayal of the men by the two writers we have paid attention to the characterization and stylistic devices used by the writers in presenting masculinity in the selected texts.

The male characters in the two novels are presented as unfulfilled and unhappy in one way or another. Unlike the female protagonists they fail to rise above the social constraints to portray positive traits. These characters seek to assert themselves in the only ways they know how within the public and private spaces, but most fail tragically. Although Githiora and Njau are writing within different time frames and their linguistic choices differ, they seem to suggest that better spaces are needed for Kenyan men to negotiate their identities.

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Rebeka Njau, the elder of the two writers is a teacher, painter, mother, wife and writer. Born in Kiambu, Kenya, she was educated at Alliance Girls and later Makerere University. Njau taught at Alliance Girls in 1964 and was headmistress of Nairobi Girls Secondary school until 1968 when she quit and went into textile designing. Her works include *The Scar, Ripples in the Pool,* and *The Sacred Seed*. This study examines *The Sacred Seed* as a subtle commentary on the crises of Kenyan masculinities in the aftermath of colonialism.

Wambui Githiora grew up in Mang'u and holds an honours degree in Literature from University of Nairobi and a doctorate in Education from Teachers College Columbia University. She has worked as a sub editor for a Kenyan news magazine and on school radio programmes in Malawi and Uganda. She currently teaches English at Cambridge Ridge and Latin school in Cambridge Massachusetts where she lives with her husband and son. Her novel, *Wanjira*, is set in the University of Nairobi in the mid 1970s. She dramatizes a parallel between the country's coming-of-age and the emerging gendered identities of the children of ''uhuru''.

This thesis explored the masculinities in the selected novels of these two Kenyan writers by analyzing the presentation of male characters in various roles. I investigate how these characters

navigate their identities in the given spaces in relating with one another and with the female characters. The works which are analyzed are *Wanjira* by Wambui Githiora and *The Sacred Seed* by Rebeka Njau. The study draws on the two novels to problematize ideas on masculinities as gendered engagements with historical and cultural discourses played out in contemporary Kenya. This is because the male identity is a major concern in contemporary Kenya.

A simple definition of masculinity is that aspect of possessing qualities and characteristics considered typical or appropriate to a man. This study uses the term masculinities deliberately as an acknowledgement that there are what Robert Connell calls multiple masculinities. In *Masculinities* he argues that "masculinities are configurations of practice structured by gender relations" and that the term encapsulates both the diversity and potential fluidity of the processes involved in men being men (45). To carry out this research, Connell's perspective of masculinity as a social construct and not a biological state was adopted. However, when discussing a specific ideal of manliness, the singular term, masculinity, was adopted.

The study approached the idea of defining the term "masculinity" as a complex one. Unlike maleness which is a biological state, masculinity is a gender identity category constructed socially and interpreted from a cultural perspective. It has multiple and ambiguous meanings according to contexts and changes over time. Notions of masculinities vary among cultures and belief systems, educational backgrounds, age and gender groups. In *Gender and Power* Connell discusses various discourses of masculinity such as hegemonic, marginalized, and stigmatized

masculinities (120). He argues that power and domination are not shared equally among men. In what he terms "the gender order", he describes the hierarchies present between and among discourses of masculinity and femininity. I use the concept "hegemonic masculinities'' in my investigation of the characterization in the novels. According to Connell, it is "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the subordination of women" (124). In essence hegemonic masculinity refers to that view of masculinity which has established dominance in society. It creates cultural images of what it means to be a real man. This reveals the crisis of masculinity as seen in explicit statements of what is expected of men and implicit suggestions about masculinity as seen in the texts.

Constructs of masculinity vary across historical and cultural contexts. I approach masculinities as products of socialization. I have argued that they are culturally constructed and as such not restricted to men and in fact can be female as women frequently display behaviour considered "masculine" in given historical and social contexts. Ifi Amadiume in Male Daughters Female Husbands contends that the power wielded by some women among the Gnobi in Nigeria is more than or equal to that of men. In Bodies, Choices, Globalizing Neo Colonial Enchantments: African Matriarchs and Mammy Water, Amadiume revisits her thesis that the traditional African woman was not marginalized, and points an accusing finger at colonialism for creating power structures and hierarchies between the sexes.

This study used the term "gender" to refer to the accomplishment of managing the social activities one does to proclaim membership in a discourse of masculinity or femininity. Gender stereotypes will then be read as simplistic generalizations about gender attributes, difference and roles of individuals and/or groups According to Laura kray et al in *Battle of the Sexes: Gender stereotypes confirmation and reactance in negotiations*, "stereotypes can be positive or negative, but they rarely communicate accurate information about others (34). When people automatically apply gender assumptions to others regardless of evidence to the contrary, they are perpetuating gender stereotyping.

In most pre colonial African societies, traditionally, the female stereotypical role was to marry and have children. She was to put her family's welfare before hers, be loving, compassionate, nurturing and sympathetic. On the other hand the male role was to be the provider. He was also expected to be assertive, competitive, independent, courageous, focused and able to hold to his emotions in check. However, with most of the African men going to fight in the Second World War, the struggle for independence, and consequently the absence of men due to death or imprisonment, women had to take over the masculine roles. With the continuously changing social-economic trends in Kenya these roles have been reversed and challenged, but at the same time men are expected to maintain the traditional codes.

Statement of the Problem
This study examined the presentation of masculinities in Kenya as a consequence of stereotypes and colonial and patriarchal legacies. It explored the creation and presentation of male characters

in Rebeka Njau's *The Sacred Seed* and Wambui Githiora's *Wanjira* and argues that male identity

is a social cultural construct.

It examined the contexts within which men construct their identities, how these contexts shape

these identities and how this affects the relationships the male characters are in. The research

investigated the place of men in contemporary Kenya using the portrayals of masculinities in the

two novels as representational. The study also explored the possibilities of better spaces for

masculinities to be played out.

Objectives
1. To examine the presentation of masculinity in the selected texts

2. To examine the roles social, cultural, economic and political contexts play in construction

   of gendered identities in the two novels

 3. To explore the literary techniques that the selected writers employ to reveal the

    construction of male identity

Hypotheses
1. The two novels narrate the construction of masculinity

2. Construction of gender identities cannot be detached from specific social cultural, economic

   and political contexts.

3. The writers have made deliberate stylistic choices in presenting the male identity

and political contexts.

Justification

Different periods of history and different cultures construct practices of masculinity differently. The two authors have a wide age gap and geographic difference in terms of residence. Githiora is a Diaspora writer while Njau is a resident of Kenya. Although both draw from a similar post colonial context, their approaches to masculinities are affected by these disparities. However, a close reading of the texts reveals that both Njau and Githiora eschew a cosmopolitan sensibility in the two novels. As such, the study considers them as representative of the whole of Kenya, and appropriate for a case study in post colonial Kenyan masculine identities.

The choice of female writers was motivated by a curiosity to investigate a female point of view on male identity. African male writers have been accused of condoning patriarchy, being deeply entrenched in macho conviviality and a one dimensional and minimalised presentation of women, who are demoted to assume peripheral roles. Gloria Chukwukere is among feminist critics who accuse male writers and critics of misrepresenting women. In an article "Gender voices and choices: Redefining Women in Contemporary African Fiction" she argues for a need to redefine women with much more complexity than has been done by male writers (2). It was of interest to this study to investigate whether female writers are also tempted to mis-represent men in their characterization. We investigated masculinities as presented through the eyes of the ''other'', What Sylvester Mutunda calls "through a female lens" (1).

The relevance of the two novels to the contemporary Kenyan gender situation informed my choice. Written in 2003 and 2007 respectively, I consider *The Sacred Seed* and *Wanjira* contemporary texts. In addition the thematic concerns of the novels portray a contemporary consciousness. Moreover, although *Wanjira* is very rich in form and content, it has not received adequate critical attention. This study focused on her portrayal of masculinities within the post colonial Kenyan context. *The Sacred Seed* on the other hand though studied a lot has mostly been discussed from a feminist point of view. This study is a contribution to the already existing scholarship on the texts.

The title "masculinities" was inspired by a concern shared with critics in gender discourses that the term gender must mean more than a code for women's studies. The term gender is often used as a synonym for women or a euphemism for feminism or feminist, with men not even discussed. According to Bourdieu, in *The Logic of Practice* "rarely, if ever, is the construction of masculinity discussed let alone questioned" (12). I agree with Lahouzine Ouzgane *in Men in African film and Fiction* that "a study in masculinity fills a gap in literature, in gender, especially since gender has often come to mean women, leaving men as the unmarked and unexamined category" (1). This thesis examined masculinities in Kenya as a questioned construct and a site in which social and political relations can be represented, negotiated and manipulated either deliberately of subconsciously, by detouring through a discussion of the images of men and masculinities in *Wanjira* and *The sacred Seed*.

Literature Review

The literature review involved a close intensive reading of the primary texts, *The Sacred Seed* and *Wanjira*. I also carried out critical analyses of the secondary sources on studies that illuminate African masculinities and specific Kenyan masculinities, with an attempt to identify the gap the study hopes to fill. Elizabeth Mukutu in, "A Critique of Friendship Across Race and Tribe in Two Kenyan Novels'', examines how Githiora has presented inter-ethnic tensions in love relationships, and the challenges faced by those characters who choose to go against the grain in loving those considered unacceptable to their friends and relatives. Mukutu critiques the political and social contexts within which these relationships are played out and suggests the possibility of diffusing ethnic tensions through intermarriages. Her thesis compares Githiora's *Wanjira* and Gitaa Moraa's *Crucible for silver and Furnace for Gold.* Her study is relevant to our work as her portrayal of ethnicity will inform this study as one of the causes of complicated subordinate masculinities. However, Mukutu does not analyze the place of men in the novel as an independent category. The current study helps to raise consciousness on the Kenyan masculinities as seen in *Wanjira.*

Most of the critical works on Rebeka Njau's *The Sacred Seed* have focused on her narrative tools or discuss Njau's vision as a feminist/womanist. Evan Mwangi in "Two New Novels Seen to Enhance Gender's Agenda'' sees Njau as a female writer who articulates women's concerns. He argues that in *The Sacred Seed*, Njau thematises art in its treatment of identity. According to Mwangi, the novel textualises women's experiences of the world through art, thus restor(y)ing women's innermost feelings in a world dominated by men(3). The term gender, as used in the title of his article, is assumed to mean women. In his view, then, *The Sacred Seed* is a feminist

work. He critically analyzes Njau's two novels: *Ripples in the Pool* and *The Sacred Seed.* The current study discusses the anxieties and ambiguities of being a man in *The Sacred Seed.*

Alex Wanjala discusses the stylistic quality of the novel. In "Orality in Rebeka Njau's *The Sacred Seed''* he focuses on the narrative tools used by Njau to empower women. He argues that in the novel Njau presents the origin of the malaise in contemporary Kenyan society as coming from the creation of patriarchy in traditional society. He sees this same patriarchal order as inherent in the systems that the Kenyan society has inherited such as the justice system and the political system. Wanjala's view is that the unjust patriarchal order affects the citizenry in general and women in particular (4). In his argument it is the women who are presented as victims of men in such an order. This study concurs with him on the effects of patriarchal domination on the general citizenry. However I argue that patriarchy is not necessarily beneficial to men as opposed to women. As Dennis Altman argues in *Global sex,* structural inequalities suggested by terms like patriarchy are created through human action, and impinge very differently on different individuals (6). I demonstrate, through a study of *The Scared Seed,* that masculinity may shift and indeed certain women find ways to benefit from patriarchal structures while many men are severally punished or disadvantaged for their failure to uphold the premises of hegemonic masculinity.

John Mugubi in "Rebeka Njau's Social Vision" discusses the vision of Njau for the society within the framework of the tragic form. He uses *Ripples in the Pool,* and *The Scar* to present Njau as a writer who has something to tell the society through symbolism. Mugubi argues that Njau demonstrates immense antipathy towards conservatism and inflexibility with regard to the

role and position of a woman in the society. He also looks at the iconoclastic characters used by the author in her quest for social justice. The plight of women, in his view, has been aggravated by male machismo and chauvinism (5). I concur with Mugubi that exaggerated displays of masculinity negatively affect women. However, my argument is that men too are affected by patriarchal domination and displaced constructions of male identities and are not just perpetrators of gender violence. The present study illuminates the crises of masculinity as presented in *The Sacred Seed* and will not compare the novel to Njau's other works.

Lucy Muthoni examines the role of myths and traditional beliefs in Njau's prose works. In "The Role of Myths and Traditional Beliefs in Rebeka Njau's *Ripples in the Pool* and *The Sacred Seed"*, Muthoni focuses on the narrative tool used by Njau in voicing her concerns. According to her myths are not mere stories but the story of humankind. In Muthoni's view Njau utilizes mythology to communicate to her readers. She argues that Njau's two novels are social commentaries. I draw on Muthoni's insights on Kikuyu myths in my assessment of the cultural contexts within which masculinities are enacted. In "Myths as Tools of Social Commentary" she incorporates *The Hypocrite* and *The Scar* in addition to Njau's prose fiction. Her study is on how the author employs mythology to examine the plight of women in a society that inferiorizes and brutalizes them. She argues that the author uses myths to emancipate, empower and liberate not only women but also the oppressed in the society. My study shifts attention from the plight of women to the portrayal of men and narrows down to one of Njau's novels, *The Sacred Seed.*

Some of the emerging scholars on African masculinities include Robert Morrel. His *Changing Men in Southern Africa* is an analysis of different forms of masculinity in categories such as

class and race during the years of political changes from apartheid to democracy in South Africa. His work will be relevant to this study because of its post colonial orientation. However, as Bob Pease argues in *Men and Gender Relations,* "masculinity studies must be grounded in historical, cultural and geographical contexts" (58). I acknowledge the unique colonial experiences of Kenya as a different context from what happened in South Africa. Racism operated in the Kenyan context but it was not institutionally advocated for in overt terms. Morrel's work guided the study in investigating the effects of the colonial legacy in the construction of masculinities.

Sylvester N. Mutunda's "Through a Female Lens: Aspects of Masculinity in Francophone African Women's writing'' is a study that analyzes the different masculinities in Africa. His work deals with definitions and approaches to masculinity in general and in specific African contexts. He discusses the emergence of African Francophone women writers examining the reasons for their late entry into the literary world and how they represent their experiences. Mutunda's study explores how hegemonic masculinity is enacted in African women's literary texts. It is relevant to this study in its suggestion of tools of masculinity scholarship within an African situation. We will also benefit from his assessment of the female view of masculinity.

The present study concurs with Mutunda that a woman's perspective on masculinity is necessary as it offers a different vision of men. His emphasis, however, is on francophone Africa whose colonial experience under French assimilation differs from that in the Kenyan context under the British. Mutunda's study is on eight novels by six women writers from Senegal and Cameroon.

My study narrows down to two novels by two female Kenyan writers with the intention of giving adequate attention to the Kenyan reality.

March Epprecht in *Heterosexual Africa?: The History of an idea from the age of exploration to the age of Aids* explores and exposes the various processes in academia and in public policy circles that have helped to construct a singular heterosexual identity for the entire continent. His attention is on the whole of sub-Saharan Africa and does not offer an in-depth analysis of Kenyan masculinities. This study acknowledges that there is no single form of masculinity in Kenya and will use the two novels to demonstrate this.

African Masculinities: Men in Africa, From the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present co-edited by Robert Morrell and Lahouzine Ouzgane addresses issues such as AIDs and globalization. Their study explores what it means for an African to be masculine and how male identity is shaped by cultural forces. They discuss how vulnerability and marginalization produce complex forms of male identity. The scope of their discussion is on the whole of Africa, and is not limited to a particular cultural context. It will assist me in establishing the social economic contexts affecting masculine identities but my focus narrows down to the post colonial Kenyan context. This is because Africa is not culturally homogeneous, and each community's experiences are unique. My study acknowledges the fact that even within a given community individuals navigate their identities differently.

Tom Odhiambo's "Wild Men and Emergent Masculinities in Post Colonial Popular Fiction" traces the different processes through which post colonial popular fiction grapples with the social dynamics of the post colonial times by narrating some of the sexual anxieties and tensions in the Kenyan male urban population in the 1960s and 1970s. Maleness, or being a man, according to Odhiambo, is thus related in an intensely sexualized manner in the stories found in the popular fiction of the time. His focus, however, is only on male authors and he limits himself to the popular fiction genre. This study benefits from his analysis in the discussion of modernity as affecting masculinities. I concur with his suggestion for a fashioning of new masculinities as one response to a social and cultural environment where personal identities have to be re-invented. His optimistic vision inspires this thesis in the investigation of modalities of addressing the crises of masculinity in post colonial Kenya.

The interest of the current study however, is on the female point of view on Kenyan masculinities. As such it is focused on two female Kenyan novelists. From this literature review it is clear that a knowledge gap exists on the place and identity of men as presented in literary works. The current critical works on *The Sacred Seed* are mostly on the plight of women as opposed to men. Moreover the literature available on the novel *Wanjira* is little and there is need for scholarship on the rich stylistic and thematic concerns in the text. This study is a contribution to such scholarship.

Theoretical Framework
This research is guided by the sociological and post colonial theories as critical approaches to evaluate the texts. The sociological theory follows the objective of examining the roles that

social cultural economic and political contexts play in the construction of masculinities. There are many strands of the sociological theory but the main tenet is the relationship between literature and the society. According to this theory literature does not grow in a vacuum. It is created by and consumed within a specific social context. It is based on the idea that art is a way of making a political statement and that examination of a text will reveal some of the social, economic and political structures of a particular culture. This theory helped to identify the contexts within which Kenyan male identities are constructed and contested.

Okot P. Bitek in *Africa's Cultural Revolution,* talks of literature as ''a living social art'' (23). According to him "the best literature never fails to make a profound effect on the mores of a community". Ngugi wa Thiong'o echoes this sentiment in *Writers in Politics* when he posits. "art has a function"(54). He further argues that the very act of writing is a social act. Literature is certainly socially defined, though a work of art can only in part be considered as sociologically revealing. Sociological criticism is an analysis based on the idea that art is a way of making a political statement, and that examination of a text will reveal some of the social, economic and political structures of a particular culture.

Kenneth Burke in *Literature as Equipment for Living: Critical Theory since Plato* argues that works of art, including literature are "strategic naming situations" that allow the reader to better understand and "gain a sort of control" over societal happenings through a work of art (942). He considers pieces of art and literature as systematic reflections of society and societal behaviour. This theory guided this study in examining how masculinities are socially constructed. It also helped to critique the causes and effects of social ills such as rape and domestic violence in the texts, illuminating the conditions, possibilities and social structures that affect gender identities.

As Austin Harrington argues in *Art and Social Theory,* pieces of art can serve as normative sources of social understanding. He observes that considering the sociological element is essential because art is inevitably full of references and commentaries on the present day society (207).Our study considers *The Sacred Seed* and *Wanjira* as systematic reflections of the Kenyan society. This is because writers do not create from a vacuum. They draw materials from, and are influenced by their societies. The theory helped us examine the social factors that surround the characters and the events in the literary texts analyzed.

The study also draws from the post colonial literary theory. This theoretical framework addresses the complexities in construction of identities for men in formerly colonized communities. This theory concerns itself with power imbalances based on one culture subverting or dominating another. The theorists examine a text to reveal themes of culture clash, political power and cultural stereotypes. In analyzing the two novels this theory helped me to discuss the impact of colonial legacies in construction of male identities in post colonial Kenya. It helped me interpret historical impact from social cultural and psychological points of view in analyzing ways both subtle and obvious in which colonization affected the colonized. Notwithstanding different time periods, different events and different effects that they consider, post colonial theorists admit that colonialism affected and continues to affect the former colonies after political independence.

The post colonial literary theory captures the effects of colonial power on the colonized. Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin White Masks* argues that colonialism turned the African into a white, such

that he struggles to see the world from a western point of view. All that is black is the skin, hence Fanons title, *Black Skin White Masks*. Fanon's analysis of the psychological effects of colonial subjugation upon black people aided our discussion on colonial legacies. Although the chosen texts are written after the colonial era, there are indications that colonial ideologies imbibed by some of the characters have affected their ideals of masculinities. This theory helped discuss how colonialism created monsters among the people. I examine how the authors address the ambiguities that a history of colonialism imposed on the male identity in Kenya, and how colonialism created social categories and fragmented male identities.

In adopting this theory, I proceed with caution since I acknowledge the possible danger of the post colonial perspective in the temptation to look no further to explain the social and personal turmoil in postcolonial nations. Other problematic, oppressive structures may be overlooked and responsibility wrongly assigned. However we cannot ignore the fact that in these texts, in the character portrayals, the authors make a conscious effort to suggest that impact with the west affected identity formulations in Kenya.

This theory also informed the study in its recognition of difference. Post colonial literature according to Neil Lazarus, is self consciously a literature of "other ness". It pays special attention to vocabulary like "periphery", '' others", "subordinate" and "minority" in explaining relationships. We adopted these ideas to interpret gender relations. This theory guided us in investigating the tensions in construction of masculine identities within a post colonial context.

Research Methodology

The study utilizes textual evidence, which takes precedence over mere speculation. A close textual reading of the primary texts was conducted, and when extra-textual evidence is used, it is only to complement the evidence in the primary texts. I analyzed relevant books, e-journals, newspaper articles and magazines that informed on masculinities.

The study explores the authors' utilization of characterization as a tool of presenting masculinities in the novel. The research involved extensive reading on masculinity globally, within the African context and in the specific context of contemporary Kenya.

Scope and Limitations

This research is on the representations of masculinities in literary texts with particular attention to the works of two female Kenyan writers. I limited myself to Wambui Githiora's *Wanjira* and Rebeka Njau's *The Sacred Seed*. Although Njau has written several books, I limited myself to *The Sacred Seed* due to its contemporary approach. I interrogated the presentation of male characters in the selected novels to determine how the writers process masculinities through the characters, and what their reactions towards these masculinities are. The study acknowledges that masculinities may not always be positive or pleasant. I used this limited corpus to allow a close analysis of the selected texts and an in-depth look at the idea[s] of masculinity. We also acknowledge the impossibility of exhausting the theme of Kenyan masculinities by exploring only two novels. However it is a contribution to scholarship on the subject.

Chapter Outline

In chapter one, I include the introduction to the research report, the statement of the problem, the objectives, hypotheses, justification, literature review, the theoretical framework and the methodology.

Chapter two considers how masculine identities are constructed in Wambui Githiora's *Wanjira* through highlighting the roles played by language, modernity and globalization in the creation of spaces of identity by men. I suggest that despite the various constraints that impinge on men's search for identity, flexibility in perceptions can be achieved giving agency to negotiate healthy masculinities.

Chapter three is a discussion on how Rebeka Njau's *The Sacred Seed* can be read as an exploration of identity crises so severe that the struggle to attain ideals of masculinities results in alienation from self and others. The writer portrays characters who are in constant conflict and are unable to form stable relationships with women or other men. I argue that social structures such as religion, and colonial socializations as well as individual histories hinder construction of healthy masculinities causing tensions in gender relations.

The conclusion is a summary of how the authors have portrayed troubled masculinities but have at the same time suggested that tensions that arise from the entanglement of different cultural and social attitudes and practices surrounding sexuality and gender can be diffused.

CHAPTER TWO

PRESENTATION OF MASCULINE IDENTITIES IN WAMBUI GITHIORA'S
***WANJIRA*.**

This chapter considers how masculine identities are constructed in Wambui Githiora's *Wanjira*

through highlighting the role played by language, modernity and globalization in the creation of

spaces of identity by men. I suggest that, despite the social cultural constraints that impinge on

the search for identity, flexibility in perceptions about manhood can be achieved, giving agency

to men to negotiate healthy masculinities.

In this chapter I discuss how Wambui Githiora in *Wanjira* has engaged with the

complications that go into the making of the varied post colonial Kenyan masculinities.

The writer makes a conscious effort to highlight gender identities as questioned

constructs, in exploring how various institutions and social economic contexts impinge

on male female relationships. Within these relationships, the masculinities of the male

characters are foregrounded and interrogated. I argue that Githiora exploits various

literary strategies to represent the crises of masculinity in contemporary Kenya. This

study acknowledges that writers create within given social contexts and their works

reflect or are informed by the social realities.

John mc lnnes in *The End of Masculinity* argues that "masculinity has always been in

one crises or another'' (76) and suggests that the crises arise from the fundamental

incompatibility between the core principle of modernity that all human beings are equal

regardless of their sex, and the contexts of patriarchy that men are naturally superior to women and thus destined to rule over them" (22). His argument reflects part of Githiora's concern in *Wanjira*. She challenges and redefines traditional and emerging stereotypic male roles and categorizations by examining their impact on men themselves as well as those they relate with. The story revolves around a couple: Luka, a Luo and Wanjira , a Kikuyu in an inter ethnic love relationship, but to a greater extent it is an exploration of all the other minor gender relationships within which men are highlighted in the roles of spouses ,professionals, brothers, fathers and rivals of all sorts. Through these male characters, Githiora presents her vision for productive masculinities that make it possible to experience healthy gender relations.

The novel is set in 1976 in a then newly independent Kenya in which individuals are grappling with identity issues after a long period of colonial rule. Each society in the world has had a conceptualization of men that has influenced it and left a legacy for others to examine. Odhiambo commenting on the masculine identity in post colonial Kenya In "Wild Men and Emergent Masculinities in Post Colonial Kenya Popular Fiction" argues that "the attainment of freedoms – political, economic, social and cultural –resulted into great anticipation and anxiety in the "freed subjects" (42). According to him, personal freedom created new identities and new subjectivities especially in the liberated Africa men. Odhiambo reads sexuality and gender as implicated and inscribed in the historic moment of the end of colonialism and the liberation of the native African population.

In *Wanjira*, Githiora dramatizes these anxieties through a generation that has "come of age" intellectually. Wanjira and her friends represent the cream of the society that is being groomed to take over professions initially held by the whites. However, the world created by the writer revolves around more than just books. The young people negotiate their identities in interactions that face seemingly insurmountable challenges that threaten to blow off the weak and test the mettle of those who survive.

Works of art confront us openly with the issue of the meaning and value of our historical and social conditions. According to E.M. Forster in *Aspects of the Novel,* the novel is an instrument of understanding the individual at a social – cultural level. It is a vehicle for analyzing and commenting on contemporary life in societies. As such, the novel is a representation of reality that artists strive to describe in their fictional works. This reality is objective since it is a representation of reality mediated by the imaginary constructed by writers who use literature not only as an art form but also for the purpose of calling attention to important issues in the society.

This study recognizes Githiora's *Wanjir*a as a tool through which the writer's social vision emerges. I examine *Wanjira* as a representation of masculine anxieties in eligibility as marriage partners, belonging within the dominant group, individual worth, and acceptability within the ethnic discourses. Through the conversation along the

university corridors, in the hostels of residence, and within the privacy of homes; the inner confusion, desires and choices that men face with regard to who they are and how they should relate emerge. Githiora engages with the question of "who really is a real man?"

Ethnic Masculinity as a Marker of Difference

Homi K. Bhaba's question **"Are you a man or a mouse?"**(1), informs this study in approaching hierarchical inequalities among men. The term mouse creates mental images of a cat and mouse relationship in which one is the hunter and the other the hunted. Connell uses the term marginalized masculinity to highlight a variety of masculinity that is viewed as inferior by the hegemonic group. For him marginalized masculinity is the authorization of the hegemonic masculinity and the men who fall in this category benefit less from the hegemonic ideal because of traits other than their gender, or behaviour. He further argues that hegemonic masculinities tend to occupy a ruling position in a society or group while other masculinities occupy a complicit or subordinate position. These masculinities, in Morrel's words,"develop outside the corridors of power" (61).

Things that one society refers to as masculinity are not the same things that another refers to and, indeed if they are, might be valued differently by various social groupings. In *Wanjira* it is clear that even within a single society there exists clashing ideas from one group to another about what it means to be a man. An individual's ethnic background acts as a marker of difference that warrants exclusion in the social

22

space. The term ethnicity, according to Sinisa Malesevic, has its roots in the Greek term "ethnos/ ethnikos" which was used to descried pagans and later non Jews (Gentiles) or non Christians. In this study the term is viewed as referring to a sense of belonging where one is included or excluded – a labeling of people depending on the tribes they come from. I examine how ethnicity affects the construction of masculine identity in *Wanjira.*

The love relationship between Luka and Wanjira faces a lot of opposition on account of their Luo and Kikuyu ethnic backgrounds. For Wanjira's Agikuyu friends and relatives, marriage to a Luo is unthinkable and idiotic due to cultural differences that have created a false sense of superiority in Kikuyu men. Githiora presents Wanjira as a beautiful, educated, and all round pleasant woman who can have any man she wants, choosing to love an individual considered unworthy by a majority her associates because of his tribe, to castigate the labeling of people on the basis of ethnicity. The outcome against her choice acts as a pointer to the forces of power that demean certain categories of masculinity as inferior and worthy of exclusion in social intercourse. In the resilience of the couple to uphold their love despite the challenges, the writer voices the need to challenge confining categorization that hinder the realization of healthy

masculine identities and interactions .

In *Matunda ya Uhuru* Atieno Odhiambo attributes the tension between the Luo and Kikuyu to belief that it is the Agikuyu people more than any other tribe, who fought for

independence and as such have the right to rule. Githiora portrays the political arena as a site for aggressive competitiveness and construction of categories of difference. Masculinity is presented as an intolerant need to enforce the legitimacy and "honour" of a given group, to the exclusion of others through whatever means. The father trope used in reference to the first Kenya president who happens to have been a Kikuyu is misconstrued to signify the power wielded by men in the said tribe. Too much leaning on group identity results in anxious attempts to maintain the status quo that manifest itself in violence. The assassination of Tom Mboya alluded to in the novel as well as the oath taking ritual baptized "Chai" highlight the extents to which this group of people go to entrench their rule in a sort of a militarized realization of masculinity that justifies autocracy. In a journal entry Wanjira recalls the indoctrination during an oath taking ceremony she and other members of the Agikuyu community are forced to take part in ''we are right. We are the rulers. No one else has the right to rule. The house of Mumbi, we will protect it from harm. We will take up arms if called to do so."(103)

The writer however contests such separatist ideologies by creating Kenyan masculinities in an increasing cosmopolitan context. By creating a progressive protagonist as a victim of ethnic marginalization, the writer deconstructs the legitimacy of marginal masculine identities and seeks to re insert them in the masculine discourse. For Githiora it is not fair that one's ethnicity disqualifies one from inclusion. The ridiculous nature of such a policy is represented in Wanjira's journal entry as she reminisces on the traumatic oath taking in her childhood in which she and other

members of the kikuyu community were coerced to pledge allegiance to the tribe and view the Luo as an enemy tribe. "So dear journal, I should not love Luka .His people eat fish" (105).To the character, the idea of discrimination on the basis of simple cultural differences is illogical. Through her the writer explores how ethnic tensions impinge on construction of masculine identities and personal relationships with women of different ethnic groupings.

Derogatory terms such as "munjaluo" fellow (89), referring to Luka, are used by members of Wanjira's social circle to portray the peripheral space assigned to Luo men by the Agikuyu. The circumcision rite of passage practiced by the kikuyu community is presented as a ritual of proving that one is a man. They feel superior to the Luo who do not traditionally circumcise their males. This acts as a further point of reference in the definition of real masculinity. A simple biological and cultural difference is used to make Luka appear repulsive and unfit in comparison to the circumcised men. When Wanjira is taunted as "muka wa kihii" (100) [wife of a uncircumcised boy], the insult is aimed at portraying her lover as inferior and unworthy aimed at influencing her feelings negatively.

In creating the boy- man, binary opposition, based on cultural differences, the writer's disdain for bloated egos that assign themselves positions of power and judgment is clear. As   Elizabeth Mukutu notes " through the cultural importance attached to

circumcision , Kikuyu men appear automatically superior and potent and seemingly presented as having better potential for husbands "(76).This process of ''othering'' is geared towards directing women's thinking and choice of love partners towards a hegemonic group discouraging them from dating from different masculinities, thereby emasculating these men. In portraying circumcision as a gender signifier and symbol, Githiora seems to be satirizing tribal jingoists who demean others with arguments based on unfounded myths of authority and cultural superiority. If we adopt Connell's view of hegemonic group as "the ruling class" (76) then power in this context can be read as that ability to influence the decision of those who are closely related to an individual, or whose opinions one values.

The wielding of this power and its misuse to punish are dramatized through Octopus whose hatred for Luka is not based on political intolerance in itself but also emanates from Luka's ''audacity'' to cross the ethnic dating boundaries. This multiple interpretation of the motives behind Octopus vengeance meted out on Luka is a satirical say on unfair victimization of "deviant" masculinities by those in power. As bright, kind and loving as Luka is, he is still othered on the basis of his ethnic affiliation. His "unpardonable sin" of loving out of his league costs him his career. To punish Luka, Octopus interferes with his dreams of joining Law School when his application forms as well as those of two others mysteriously go missing. As far as the corrupt politician is concerned, it is a befitting Karma for the "brazen munjaluo fellow and his proud Kikuyu girlfriend'' (163).The victory of a love relationship between a Kikuyu girl and a

Luo man would upset the ethnic equilibrium and has to be stamped out at whatever cost so that the marginalized male can remain within the imposed status quo. The writer's vision however, avails a safe space within which inter-racial relationships can thrive. The love between Wanjira and Luka surpasses geographical and cultural boundaries because they maintain their romance across oceans; symbolizing the futility of attempting to challenge love through belittling and intimidating tactics. For Githiora, tactics may delay but not destroy the realization of fulfilling relationships.

Fredric Jameson suggests that texts have the ability to imaginatively address, resolve or complicate social contradictions and tensions irreconcilable in the social realm from which texts emerge. He argues that "all cultural products are ultimately political'' (20). From Jameson's point of view, *Wanjira* can be read as a study in relations of dominance and difference. In student politics, Githiora creates a contradictory space that is "no longer at ease" to echo Achebe's novel of the same title. She points at divisive individualistic masculinities that sacrifice policy and comradeship to better themselves. When Octopus refers to the fall out, Murema, as "a trustworthy and good young man" (163), the irony acts as a statement on the plight of the truly trustworthy leaders such as Luka. Githiora condemns a society that celebrates and breeds "nyoka" (snake) an apt image that describes the destructive nature of such individuals. Generally, a snake is associated with poison that harms and at times causes death to human beings. In using this metaphoric language to portray the venomous nature of corrupt individuals and their political offspring, Githiora condemns abuse of power, opportunism and greed as

markers of masculinity. Because of his social class, Octopus is in a position to break any upstarts and reward conformists such as Murema. This is a symptom of a decaying society.

In *Wanjira* masculinities are constructed not only in relation to women but also to men of lower social economic status. Bakhtin's notion of dialogism guides our demonstration that men's interactions are not just structured by social contexts but shape and are shaped by the power relations within the local context. Ethnic power relations shape such interactions in *Wanjira*. Danow David in *The Thoughts of Mikhail Bakhtin* presents dialogism as an acknowledgment that people are not mere puppets of institutional and larger societal contexts by taking into account the power relation and confusions of everyday life. In other words, such contexts affect individual lives and complicate relations. The hierarchical relationships among men in *Wanjira* are produced and reproduced as gender interacts with social class and ethnicity. According to Wanjira's liberal mother, there is no guarantee that a man from a specific ethnic background is any better than another from a different background. Her allusion to a previous happy marriage between a Luo man and a Kikuyu woman is a powerful take on the viability of such a union. She argues that an accommodative masculinity exhibited by the man in the story who was willing to change his religion for the sake of the relationship is rare within the hegemonic Kikuyu masculinity. The writer seems to suggest that stigmatized masculinity may serve as an antithesis to the hegemonic figure. She examines and questions the loopholes in some of practices of hegemonic

28

masculinities. This equality motif is further highlighted through Njahira's condemnation of domestic violence by ethnically legible husbands ''.Some of these Kikuyu men may even be eager to beat a well educated woman 'eti' to teach her a lesson'' (154) .The Kiswahili term "eti" brings out the scorn the writer holds for the self appointed disciplinarians who violate women bodies to physically subjugate them. Moreover Kiswahili being an official language in Kenya is a unifying symbol placing all men from whichever ethnic background at par. The lexical deviation at this point foregrounds the idea that othering of men should not be based on ethnicity.

In Githiora's view a real man is one who loves enough to sacrifice for and be tolerant of others and is at the same time honorable, respectable and intelligent. The definition of Luka's masculinity changes from time to time as members of Wanjira's social circle confront their biases. It then appears that it is other people who define masculine identities depending on the prevailing social expectations and realities. Though apprehensive of her daughter's fate in a inter-ethnic marriage, Wanjira's mother finally acknowledges that Luka is "a real man". His ability to face life's challenges head on proves to her that her daughter will be in good hands. She goes beyond simplistic generalizations to an appreciation of his qualities of resilience, bravery, innovation and ambition. Though unable to join Law School due to political machinations, he is determined to acquire a career and make the ultimate sacrifice of parting with the woman he loves for a while.

Andermahr in *A Concise Glossary of Feminist Theory* argue that,

the gendering of people , action and things within cultures is always

implicated in differences other than those of sex .There is a powerful case

that masculinity and femininity are not constructed alongside race and

class; ethnicity and nationality; but in and through these and other

distinctions, and the social construction of masculinity and femininity(51).

Masculinities need to be conceptualized in relation to their class, sexual and ethnic locations. These create the condition for relations of power and differential effects of power. Githiora for instance positions brotherhood as a centre of power that, in the anxiety to control the progeny and honor of their families, tends to dictate the social choices of the woman in the family. Kairu's masculinity is portrayed as conflicting with Luka's whom Kairu perceives as having a negative influence on Wanjira .The writer presents the power wielded by a brother as trans-generational as Wanjira's mother remembers how her own brothers had tried to stop her from marrying Kamau because of his poverty. The masculinity of a brother is presented as being in conflict with that of an aspiring suitor. The immensity of the power wielded by a brother goes beyond the intimate spaces to the political sensibilities .The picture of student activism that Kairu presents to Wanjira even before she joins university is one of a threatening dangerous space that she should avoid at all cost. In this sense then, his indoctrination can be read as an attempt to maintain patriarchal dominance in the political arena

Githiora presents the concept of manhood as unsettled and continuously interrogated. Through Luka - Wanjira's opposition to Murema- Octopus dealings, Githiora suggests that no single tribe can claim prominence in the political arena. For her, it appears heroic masculinities that are patriotic and anti-imperialist should replace retrogressive claims to past achievements as a marker of identity. Luka is contrasted with Murema to contest the hierarchies of men on the basis of tribe. The fact that the law students victimized by the end of the narrative are of mixed ethnicity can also be read as the writer's suggestion that all of Kenya has patriots and tribe is not a credible yardstick for measuring manhood.

In *Wanjira* it appears that, in Julie Oyegun's words, "manhood is won and defended rather than given" (11).The writer seems to suggest that dominance and power are not assured and isolated but are in fact constantly negotiated and threatened .There are choices open to men to take active responsibility even within tense settings in which patriarchal contact has created competition between males of different class group with each jostling for power of one sort or another. The changing contexts in which these rivalries are played out is illustrated through the words of Wanjira's father who argues that " in the olden days young men and women came of age in publicly witnessed and much celebrated circumcision ceremonies, but all that was gone , and the completion of secondary school was the modern exit point for the young" (5). This shift in initiation modalities underscores the irrelevance of insisting on defining people on the basis of

their ethnic backgrounds .Githiora explores the possibility for alternative, progressive masculinities through male characters who do not thrive on dominating others.

Modernity and Identity Formation
This study looks at modernity in its broadest sense, meaning the social assumption and institutions connected with individual capitalism, as changing the life experiences of people .In a globalizing world with the technologies quite different from those of traditional epochs, time and space take on different meaning and no aspect of life remains untouched by global forces. In this section I argue that gender identities, particularly masculinities in post colonial Kenya, have not escaped the impact of modernity. Using Wambui Githiora's *Wanjira* I discuss how, despite these changes, the African society still operates within particular local ideological spaces hence creating constant tension in negotiation of masculine identities. The term "global village'', a term first coined by Marshall Mc Luhan in the early 1960 s, suggests that we are all linked to particular places, even if we may also feel part of communities which are not primarily defined by a shared space. In *Wanjira* Githiora creates a cosmopolitan context that incorporates individuals from all parts of the country, ranging from Samuel Baraza from the coast to the Kenyan Indian from whom Wanjira's mother purchases her monthly shopping. The writer suggests that it is a narrative of inclusion that necessitates accommodation of diverse social and cultural definitions.

The British empire introduced new ideas and thought systems through western education creating a binary opposition between the old and the new. When Njahira

cautions her daughter of the possibility of Luka's people pressing him into marrying a "proper wife', Wanjira argues that "those are old ideas. People have changed; after all we are the future generation, mami. Many of us don't think like that these days" (152).The cultural class is being replaced by new cosmopolitans, the new privileged who are in search of possibilities and whose experiences are separated from those of the common man. The city of Nairobi where most of the action in the novel takes place has, according to Odhiambo, assumed the characteristics of the symbol of Kenya's own modernity and progress and connection to the rest of the continent and the world. Githiora highlights and suggests the modalities of confronting the tension in gender relations that emerge from the encounter of different cultural and social altitudes and practices surrounding gender and sexuality.

During moments of transition identities may be altered and new ones assumed. Identity, according to Jeffrey Weeks, is a term used to suggest a socially constructed myth about shared characteristics cultural and historical which comes to have real meaning for those who espouse it (56). In *Wanjira* there is a confusion caused by the continued presence of, or reliance on traditional African modes of perceiving manhood on one hand and the never constant, expectations of modernity which are moulded on western cultures on the other hand. Even the most seemingly pristine and unchanged cultural practices are affected by history, globalization and social struggles all of which impact in many varied and unexpected ways on men's understandings and manifestations of their identities.

Western modernity and rights discourses often reinforce conservation and damaging representations. Ifi Amadiume (1987) argues that many cultural meanings attached to gender, sexuality and material bodies-prior to colonialism transcended the binaries, hierarchies and power relations that characterize the present (67). Sylvia Tamale in *Researching and Theorizing Sexualities in Africa* concurs that, "the explosion of transgressive representation of sexual identities and meanings today is part of a long tradition influenced by but neither determined nor initiated by western modernity or struggles for and over meaning associated with bodies and sexuality in Africa (78). In this section I discuss how new technologies threaten to destroy the traditional definitions of masculinities in Kenya. Githiora dramatizes how the social, cultural and economic changes brought by globalization have fundamentally changed the norms around sexual behaviour and dissolved the divide between private and public thus introducing new issues and tensions in everyday social life. Wanjira talks of the fact that most of her female colleagues were actively "husband hunting" whereas the men are "girlfriend hunting". The changing dating scene in which women became the hunters and not the hunted contradicts the traditional modes of courtship and wooing. Men are portrayed as an endangered group that women are anxious to land. These anxieties in the dating game suggests a crisis in masculinity with women in contemporary Kenya scheming and shrewdly calculating to trap unsuspecting men sometimes motivated by factors beyond love. Judy addressing a group of girlfriends

during a discussion on viable male partners says "watch me girls, and see me hook one of these guys! just watch-I'll find myself a lecturer"(8).

According to Denis Altman in *Global Sex*, we are constantly struggling to make sense of shifting global order, in which it is gradually becoming apparent that international capitalism is capable of unsetting almost all areas of life" (59). Githiora depicts a social – economic setting in which women are oriented towards economically promising men. Wangu argues that, for her, the college boys were too young and too poor. A preference for rich men highlights a veneration of money over humane qualities in approaching the masculine idea. This material emphasis excludes the struggling low income men who then feel under pressure to amass wealth and be counted as "men" .It is possible to suggest that the Muremas of Kenya who accept monetary compensation to betray their philosophies are created by the need to assert their identities as men.

In Wangu's allusion to a contemporary preference by modern women of older men to the young, the writer explores "the father figure" as a threat to youthful masculinities. In a subtle way the writer satirizes these old men who sexually exploit younger women in the guise of providing mature companionship and stability in relationships. By foregrounding the extreme age gap between Octopus and his female companion, who is described as "a young woman who could have passed for a high school student" (81), Githiora condemns misuse of power to corrupt the morals of unsuspecting women

whose thirst for wealth and popularity blinds them to the reality of their condition; as victims of exploitation.

The culture of materialism in contemporary Kenya can partly be blamed for the ''sugar daddy'' phenomenon that is castigated in *Wanjira*. This is a scenario in which rich men require young girls to offer them sexual favours in exchange for money or material possessions. Their positions of wealth place such men in a context within which they negatively influence the young women they are in sexual relationships with. Wanjira remembers how some of her high school classmates were suspended from school because of sneaking into school beer and bottles of expensive whisky that one of them had been bought by a sugar daddy. The irresponsible actions of sugar daddies in Githiora's view have long term repercussions as implied in the retardation of the intellectual progress of these girls. The writer's attitude of contempt for such masculinities explodes in repulsive images of the men as "big belled smelly things that are willing to sleep with girls their teenage daughters' age" (98). By virtue of their tender ages, the girls are not in bargaining positions and they become objects that the sugar daddies use. This kind of masculinity is irresponsible since the girls are not mature enough to make informed decisions.

The writer also presents a shift from the traditional gender roles. Her male characters can and do participate in the duties originally associated with women .The demands of

urban life and white collar jobs are such that men are forced to adjust to practices that would have before then been a source of their being scoffed at as unmanly. For instance, on her first day at the university, Wanjira takes breakfast prepared by her single brother, a young professional with a house in Harambee estate. Luka also takes upon himself the duty of carrying snacks and fruit drinks whenever the couple goes out (136). Intelligence and flexibility are therefore presented as the real markers of manhood. The urban space has no room for gender categories that may impinge on individual development of the masculinities in cotemporary times. In *Wanjira* Githiora

seems to suggest that the rapidity of social and economic change has a tangible impact on behavioral patterns and definitions of the self in post colonial Kenya.

Redefining Womanhood and the Implications on Masculinity
In *Wanjira* Githiora dramatizes the decline of grand narratives due to the rise of genuinely different perspectives which cannot be accommodated simply by modifying existing ways of thinking. Some of these emerging schools of thought subvert the foundation of the received modes of thinking. At one level, the writer in *Wanjira* challenges patriarchy through creation of women who are complete, complex undiminished human beings who insist on self representation. According to sixteen year old Rakeli, a woman can marry anyone from whatever part of the world as long as she loves him or even choose not to marry. Here the writer exploits the innocent comments of a child narrator to satirize and question rigid social cultural restrictions on gender relations. The purity, naivety and innocence of a child foreground the impunity of adult ''wisdom'', handed down to unsuspecting victims. The shock with which her opinions

are reacted to by the other girls reveals the social intolerance of unorthodox gender definitions and constructions.

The relevance of modernity to the social political concerns of contemporary Kenya is explored in the portrayal of the anxieties surrounding masculinity in the face of the threat of femininity. Burgeoning women movements and women's changing places in society, as well as what can be considered as men's loosening grip on patriarchal power relationships contribute to the ambiguity in negotiating a masculine identity in post colonial Kenya; as represented in *Wanjira.*

The emergence of feminism in the 1960s shaped the ideologies and practices in gender relations that the writer dramatizes. Set in 1976 the novel is influenced by the contemporary schools of criticism on gender relations that can be read as a response to the previous years of domestic confinement and contradictions. Vivienne Elizabeth argues that "doing difference" is an important way in which individual engage in micro politics of every day (130). Differences in the context of developing post modernist accounts of agency can be likened to useful tools. As tools differences are worked and re- worked in power –laden sites to produce shifting lines of inclusion and exclusion, often with contradictory and sometimes unpredictable consequences; yet it is the placement of lines of demarcation that is important. Also at stake are the various meanings attached to socially constructed differences. In other words it is by deviating

from the popular, commonly accepted patterns that new ways of being and doing become introduced and established in the society.

Rakeli's resistance to marriage may be read as one informed by gender politics that challenge conventional female identities. John Mc Innes posits that: "socially, femaleness means femininity, which means attractiveness to men, which means sexual attractiveness, which means sexual availability in male terms" (515). For him, then, if what defines women is what turns men on, there is need to challenge such a notion. Githiora seems to advocate for a claim since the 70s of the right of women to control their own bodies that challenges male power domination. Michael Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* articulates the use of the body as a medium of social control and socialization of reproduction in constructing and perpetuating social power relations. Women like Rakeli who cannot be subjected to men's social power are dangerous to patriarchal power and traditional masculinity. Their preference is indicative of "lack of control of men over women's bodies and lives" (80).

Githiora is conscious of the role that family and educations systems play in entrenching the dominance of heterosexual masculinities. She presents a contradiction in the political space in which the same behaviour that receives active and tacit support when expressed by boys and men is almost always vehemently discouraged or at least frowned upon when engaged in by girls and women. When Wanjira and her female

colleagues address the Kamukunji,a student rally, to castigate violation of women through rape, the students who boo them represent a traditional mindset in which the political space is a male preserve and politics becomes gendered. The gender differentiated development of males and females forms a certain type of dominant masculinity, deliberately or unconsciously encouraged by society and its constituent parts encouraged in forms of cultivation of boys' experiences. As far as sexuality is concerned, aggressive heterosexual masculine practices tend to occupy the dominant position in many societies. It is this dominance that Githiora is challenging by giving voice to the victims of the excesses of such masculinity.

Discussing same sex relationships Tamale argues that " the aim of denunciations, assaults and vilification of same sex female desire is part of societal forces aimed at controlling all female sexuality and at subordinating female bodies and desire to men's command"(404). Rape, from her perspective, can be read as a desire to stamp masculine omnipotence over women's bodies and choices. Githiora highlights this through an educated woman who had naively trusted a friend they had just shared a social space with. Lucy explains to her rescuers how she had met George, the man who later attacked her, at a nightclub. They had spent a good evening together and she had agreed to accompany him to the halls of residence. In her view, they were ''getting to know one another'' (120). To the man in question however, she is a loose woman to be violated by any man who feels like it. This is why he labels her malaya -prostitute- and gives the signal for a gang rape. Through her proactive characters, Githiora condemns

patriarchal brutality epitomized in gang rapes that are euphemistically baptized ''collections."

Rape, an aggressive male heterosexual behavior may, according to Kopano Ratele , be defined as the legitimate heterosexual response of "normal" African men(45). He sees the control of young women's bodies as central to the construction of what he calls "masculinist citizenship and nationhood as well as masculinized ethnicity''. For him, rape is racist. The pro and anti rape classes of male characters Githiora creates represent this racist nature of rape. In other words sex is used to construct a particular form of manliness. In *Wanjira*, the meaning a man gives to a woman's body, his sexual behaviour and feelings are decisive elements in the construction of masculinity. The men who advocate for gang rapes in the university feel that they are real men as opposed to the sympathizers, who on the other hand are ashamed of the actions of their colleagues. Githiora presents "a conspiracy of silence" over violation of women's bodies as a contributing factor in the entrenching of what Agnes Muriungi refers to as "manhood characterized by bullish behaviours or the desire to perform one's virility to the maximum and attain the status of a total man" (67).In giving women agency, the writer challenges this form of violent and destructive masculinity.

As Tom Odhiambo argues in another context, the anti colonial and post colonial national rhetoric was partly instrumental in defining the Kenyan state in gender terms

with men claiming state power and authority for themselves and women granted token leadership by association with men. In the student rallies it is the men who articulate "serious'' issues while the women watch from the peripheries. The character Wangu voices the author's concern for the monopoly of men in politics. When discussing the need for women to fight rape in the campus she argues ''why should guys fight this one out for us? Maybe they don't want to ruffle any feathers with their mates. And besides, they do all the work at the kamukunjis. See how little women do on this campus? as if we have no minds or mouths for that matter''(125).

Odhiambo perceives the marginal position that women occupied in the decolonization process as having dictated their future in post colonial Kenya.He notes that "although women were in the ranks of the main anti- colonial movement, Mau Mau , and were also involved in the non armed struggles they suddenly recede into the shadows of Kenyan public life after independence''(45). In *Wanjira*, Wambui Githiora seeks to re insert women into the political narrative and in doing so challenge the oppressive patriarchal policies and practices that demean women and exclude them from visibility in the public spaces. Luka's initial reluctance to voice the women's concerns in the ''Kamukunji,'' and his description of the agenda as not weighty hence not a priority can

be read as a signifier to inherent patriarchal tendencies even among "emancipated'' masculinities that have an appearance of being pro –women. It is a kind of subtle pointer to how deeply socialized men are into cultures of gender oppression that only an

honest in-depth assessment of individual actions can truly liberate men from exhibiting hegemonic masculinities.

Githiora presents the active assertiveness of women as leading to a loss of "self'' in man in an increasingly modernized life. The women insist on being heard. Initially, only men are visible in the political arena. Kairu alludes to a one time female "loser" whose "big mouth" had led her to compete with men in vying for positions of students leadership and had ended up disastrously .This disparaging allusion is geared at warning Wanjira against the temptation to get herself into "trouble'' .The writer is contesting the dominance of patterns of gender socialization that privilege men.

The impact of modernization of gender identities is not limited to physical adjustments only. The writer highlights a contemporary psychological phenomena in which individuals seek to assert themselves by exploring "prohibited'' spaces , in day to day rituals. She examines the taking of alcohol by women as an instance of subverting masculine authority and autonomy. During Jessie's wedding both old and young women sip beer before they give the final send off to the bride. Perhaps a more revealing portrayal of the centrality of this practice in contesting gender identities is that of Wangu who enjoys the challenge of partaking in a habit generally assumed to be out of bounds for women. As seen in the horrified reaction of Wanji to her friend's confession, beer serves as a trope of challenging traditional masculinities through women who say

''here I am, here's my Tusker. I like it. If you don't, you know where to go"(57).These individuals break free from the set boundaries to affirm their own identity as equal to men in all aspects validating the common feminist sentiment that women are as good as men.

In *Wanjira*, post colonial Kenyan masculinities are presented as under threat from the burgeoning of women empowerment bodies and ideologies; that have emerged as a result of modernization. In one instance Githiora presents what Homi Bhaba calls an instance when "the performative interrupts the pedagogical'' (140). The women subvert the ritual of ululations to suggest a shift in emphasis from the boy child to the girl child. Initially a boy child received five ululations while girls were given four (26). In insisting on giving six ululations for the girls the women are implying through the one ululation over and above the number assigned to the boys that they subscribe to a common slogan by some strands of feminism that "what a man can do, a woman can do better". In this portrayal then, the position of men is presented as fragile and uncertain.

Marriage as a Site of Power Negotiation
In this section I discuss how masculinities emerge out of changing material conditions. Using *Wanjira* I examine the place of men within the contemporary marriage institution. Women's efforts to secure livelihoods in harsh social – economic circumstances serve to produce dominant masculinities that are not simply defended by

men and challenged by women. The writer presents education in post colonial Kenya as being at the heart of the post colonial quest for upward social mobility; anything that hinders this pursuit, even marriage, is treated suspiciously.

Women seeking education and other opportunities have, for long, been scorned by traditional masculinity as "loose''. The disciplining of "rebellious" women by patriarchal traditions served to bolster male power. In arguing that such a woman will not get a marriage partner, Githiora's character Charity symbolizes women who are content to perceive themselves through the eyes of patriarchal confinement which feels threatened by female competitiveness. Self empowerment is treated by patriarchal structures as limiting in as far as eligibility of women for marriage is concerned. This kind of mindset contributes to gender imbalance in professional circles.The writer's efforts to enumerate the teaching staff in the university, reveals her concern over such destructive myths. According to Wanjira, there are only two female lecturers in the whole Faculty of Arts. In addition she is pleasantly surprised to discover that the two are not only intelligent but also beautiful and stylish. This is contrary to the myths she had heard in her childhood to the effect that highly educated women were aloof and strict or ugly. In re-naming one of them "beauty with brains" shortened to "beauty", the students express this reversal of the expectations they had imbibed. In this nickname, Githiora domesticates the western myth of the dumb blonde in which beautiful women are assumed to lack mental depth. She satirizes the structures erected by patriarchy to limit women by discouraging their motivation towards self empowerment. In defining

highly educated women as ugly and unmarriageable; such social structures suggest that an ambitious woman is making a mistake in prioritizing what can only breed loneliness.

Another myth that the writer deconstructs is that which upholds traditional heterosexual masculinity by presenting marriage as the ultimate destiny of every woman. The idea that having a husband and family is all that gives a woman a purpose is contested. Through direct speech, the writer explores the controversial views on marriage held by contemporary women. Through the varying passionate views expressed by the girls during a discussion on the subject, she seems to suggest that any attempts to assign a single reading to the institution of marriage are outdated and rather outrageous.

Githiora is also concerned with the de emphasis on virginity before marriage as one of the effects of modernization on post colonial Kenyan sexual practices. Almost all societies establish very clearly gendered rules and expectations around sexuality. The writer suggests that the demand to earn money and the impact of youth culture which increasingly validates a "surrender to love", are partly responsible for pregnant brides. Jessie's love for Munyua leads her to abandon her room in the premises of the campus and spend most of her time at Munyua's. Consequently she is pregnant on her wedding day just as was her cousin Nyathira who has a three month old baby at Jessie's wedding through married only three months before the wedding date (23).

Githiora presents the domestic role of the father as the head of the intact patriarchal family as being in jeopardy. Over the decades, women have risen to high political and professional positions. This shift has caused an increase in women becoming the primary income earners. The writer dramatizes the concern and anxieties that surround the notion of family and changing gender roles in contemporary Kenya. It is possible to perceive hers as a counter ideology that challenges women's so- called domestic roles in society. This ideology seems to be backed by the portrayal of profession – oriented female characters and the fact that all the characters regardless of gender advocate for attaining of an education before settling in marriage.

In *Wanjira* to be a husband has been rendered problematic. The writer tackles the changes to the allocation of household chores and financial resources; to advocate for building of egalitarian relationships. According to feminist critics, marriage can be read as one of the key institutional sites for production and reproduction of hierarchical gender relations. She seems to suggest that colonial rule, and capitalist penetration significantly altered paths to manhood, and aspiring to these manhoods placed men in ambiguous positions. Conditioning perceptions of obligation, appropriateness, expectations and responsibilities –all conspire to constrain choice and identity in men. Many men are no longer the sole providers and some are even dependent on their wives. This is the context within which marriage becomes not only undesirable but un necessary from the perspective of a woman. It is viewed as a limiting space in which personal freedoms are compromised. The "othering" of men, then emerges as the

inevitable outcome of women's attempts to strategize on how to relate with them. During Jessie's wedding, the girls are socialized to attain financial independence through education. They are also advised to be shrewd in financial management to the extent of shunning transparency to their husbands in financial matters. The most important thing for a wife becomes "to take care of your money" (56).The possessive pronoun "your" clearly demarcates the financial boundaries in which a man is not expected to be privy to the wife's financial secrets. In questioning the lack of openness within marriage, Githiora foregrounds the precarious position of a man within a marriage whose foundations are from the onset based on inequality and suspicion. Marriage is presented as an oppressive site characterized by conflicts.

The writer's concern for masculinities spills over to domestic violence against men within marriage. Wahu's husband, a failure by all standards in the eyes of his wife's female relatives, is assaulted by not even his spouse but by a self appointed avenger of the scorned wife from the extended family. When Tata Mugure is said to have given him "two hard slaps to teach him a lesson" (26) Githiora presents the overbearing power of the women as undermining the self esteem of husbands who are disrespected, humiliated and emasculated. The irresponsible behaviour of the said man can be read in two ways; with one possible understanding being a critique of the suffering women married to philandering husbands but also, and to a greater extent, as a take on male domination by women within marriage.

In *Wanjira* money takes a very central position in marriage. As Tata Mugure argues "it is not life but it is very important in life" (26).The relational decisions that the characters make are inherently motivated by money or lack of it. In the words of Don Zimmerman in "Doing Gender" the distinction between masculinity and femininity organizes the social world and is created as humans do gender (92). A person is not just socialized into the social world, but rather is being shaped by the discourse. Through repeated philosophical arguments of individuals whose opinion one values, it is possible to imbibe similar ideologies without any suspicion of having been indoctrinated. In other words, as individuals learn to act and speak within a discourse, they come to see the knowledge , beliefs, values and assumptions of the discourse as stemming from their own desire and choices ,rather than from coercive forces in every social interaction and informed by social contexts .

Githiora portrays a social context within which transgender behaviours or displays of affection outside permissible spaces are unsettling. For instance the girls' discussion on the eve of Jessie's wedding reveals the stigma associated with intermarriages or singlehood by choice. Failure to adhere to the imposed restrictions and faithfully subscribe to the instructed codes is regarded as a display of folly; and naivety. Jessie's hesitation during the girls' initiation is countered with "are you telling us that up to now you have not seen what happens to women in this country? Where are your eyes? And you a university woman with all this education don't know this?'' (27).The writer

uses rhetorical questions to foreground the role of education in purging women of financial naivety in marriage.

Githiora presents Amadiume's "matriarchs'' as instrumental in subverting the hitherto held presuppositions that entrench patriarchal subjugation of women. The stereotype that " women love with their heart while men love with their minds'' is countered through a raising of consciousness by women empowerment bodies that advocate for women's financial independence in marriage as a metaphor for their liberations from hegemonic masculinities. In alluding to the collective plight of Kenya women, the writer widens the scope of the narrative to a feminist critique of the indignities experienced by women under failed, devious, irresponsible and callous masculinities. On the other hand, the role of the father as the bread winner and head of the family is presented as diminishing, thus necessitating a reassessment of gender roles within marriage. The "othering'' of men appears an inevitable survival tactic for married women, creating anxiety in masculinity which is no longer the ultimate figure of authority. There is a kind of what Ngugi calls in another context a "moving of the centre". (3)

Masculinity within marriage is presented as oppressive and inhibiting to the women. For both the old and young generation of women it is an enslaving institution .Various characters advocate for the need to finish school, spend one's money, help parents and

then marry later. There is a subtle allusion to the impossibility of accomplishing these goals once a woman is married. Even male characters such as Maina advise the girls to not to "rush into marriage" before they are sure that they are in "a position to support themselves" (32). Economic stability is generally viewed as a vital concern as far as the welfare of the women is concerned. The writer seems to suggest a need to draw from other people's experiences to acquire tactics with which to navigate the marital storm. There is a suggestion that the bitter experiences of the older women shaped their ideologies hence the anxiety to warn and advise the inexperienced girls. Their high pitched laughter is portrayed as a defense mechanism to camouflage the pain and bitterness of their lives. "But now she felt that something about the laughter in the room was not quite right. She looked from face to face and could no longer be sure the tears in the women's eyes were all from their laughter. A chill went through her body'' (28).

The words of Wangu's mother "show me a home where a woman is not sitting on thorns" (98), are used by the author to create a mental picture of pain, trouble and intense suffering through the image of sitting on thorns. Thorns are sharp and they bring pain and discomfort when sat on. In like manner the characters perceive marriage as a relationship of ownership by men of women, who feel tied down. Education then becomes a tool for the emancipation of women from the oppressive and demeaning masculinities. The position of a husband is problematized in its portrayal as a force of domination rather than partnership. He is demonized as a hard task master with who controls the decisions and finances of the wife with no regard for her personal initiative

and happiness. Wahu's husband for instance is said to be a lover of liquor and women at the expense of his wife who cannot afford two pairs of shoes although she is a teacher (26). This anecdote is aimed at discouraging the girls from opening joint bank accounts or being financially transparent with the men they marry. The writer seems to suggest when marriage begins with the woman having an attitude of suspicion towards her husband there is a constant struggle and anxiety in the man to prove otherwise.

Financial control is portrayed as a contested frame of reference within the marital space in contemporary Kenya. Money is presented as a core component in negotiating conflicts in gender relations .Mukutu argues that "economic development in a modern capitalistic world, where both men and women are earners, dictate that there is a shift in thinking about relationships (66). Githiora's female characters are encouraged to challenge the traditional expectations that they should be subordinate to men. They "feel the need to bargain for a position that gives them more freedom to control their lives". (Mukutu 71)

The writer also presents a concern with the effect of unrealistic expectations in negotiating masculine identities. The characters are presented as raising the stakes of masculinity too high for some of the men. To be regarded as a successful masculine subject, what Kopano Retele calls "a man's man," (45), the men are expected to be well employed, smart, and a leader of other men. Munyua is considered appropriate for Jessie on account of his intellectual and economic endowments. This open approval implies the possibility of an outright rejection of any man who falls short of such an

ideal. Men are presented as under pressure to fit within the acceptable definition of real masculinity which is defined by career and wealth. Acquisition of a profession thus becomes a kind of initiation into manhood.

According to Dennis Altman, social economic changes produce new ways of understanding ourselves and our place in the world. The growth of affluence and the shifting emphasis from production to consumption has meant a steady shrinking in households and even the nuclear family is replaced by a larger number of unmarried couples, single parent families, and people living part of their lives as divorced, single, unmarried or sole parents (103). Luka assumes a different identity of a single man once he leaves the country and his girlfriend, Wanjira, to pursue his career dreams in America. He experiences what Odhiambo calls ''enforced bachelorhood" (42), and serves as the writer's tool in highlighting the sexual anxieties and tensions that arise from the demands of social attitudes, practices and expectations that come with modernization.

The changing value systems are dramatized through a portrayal of motherhood as a suspicious identity. Pregnancy, for Wanjira, is a marker of lack of freedom defined through the Swahili word taabu, trouble, suggesting a modern trend that is characterized by an aversion to motherhood. Unlike in traditional epochs where child bearing defined a woman, education seems to have taken over in the hierarchy of priorities. The modern scenario then leaves room for demarcations of autonomous feminine and masculine domains since all are aiming at material and intellectual independence. The family

institution is presented as under threat and so is the identity of masculinity that depends on affiliation to a family a man can call his own. Women like Wanjira feel that a child would curtail their freedom to pursue careers if not well planned for. Her roommate's pregnancy creates a sense of unease in her as she considers it untimely and a nightmare. She herself had sworn to avoid pregnancy and marriage until finishing university (18).

Sexist Language, Gender Stereotypes and Violent Masculinity

Feminist scholars have condemned violence as a means by which men can demonstrate a masculine identity. For Dennis Altman, violence is the quintessential testosteronic expression of male entitlement. In *Wanjira*, it is ironical that university students, educated men, who are expected to be aware of human rights and the need for diplomacy, are perpetrators of rape. It is possible to argue that these men are playing out their confusion at the sudden confrontation with the demands of a dynamic modernity soon after the country had attained independence. The struggle to maintain male dominance despite the changing value systems and relationships of power is evident. The terms "collection," used to describe the women who are gang raped, is a derogatory label that is meant to justify the violation of such women since they belong to no specific man. Commenting on rape, Altman argues that "when men act out their sexual fears, they are likely to be distorted into violence" (7). The college boys, it could be argued, feel powerless and marginalized in a world of rapid change and turn to violence and rape as a way of symbolically re asserting their masculine identity. Such a phenomenon is an example of "the unintended consequences of modernization'' (Altman 37). It is the writer's suggestion that new ideas, policies and gender structures

54

alien to the traditional categories have created a troubled masculinity that expresses itself through violence and nostalgia for the familiar models of gender relations; and they need to be adjusted.

According to Homi Bhabha, a stereotype is "a complex, ambivalent, contradicting mode"; as anxious as it is assertive, and demands that we not only extend our critical and political objectives but that we change the object of analysis itself. For him, a stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality (107). Stereotypes are undesirable because they are factually incorrect and are products of faulty, illogical thought processes. They can manifest themselves through name calling. Githiora presents sexist language as derogatory and demeaning to the masculinities she presents. When Wanjira's Kikuyu friends use the term "Kihii"- small uncircumcised boy- to refer to Luka, for instance they automatically assume that just because he is a Luo, Luka is uncircumcised and as such not a real man.

Language is social practice that shapes and is shaped by gender. B. Kamler argues that "relations of gender, power and difference operate in and through language practices and affects how gender "gets done". He presents discourse as ways of being in the world. Each discourse , according to him, "has a tacit theory as to what counts as a normal person within the discourse and defines what the right way is for each person so to speak , listen ,act value , think , read, write ,dress and gesture. A discourse is like a club with rules about how members of the club are supposed to behave." (viii). This study explores the social cultural group thinking and how it

affects construction of gendered identities. In *Wanjira* Githiora shows how unfair generalizations can mar relationships even before they start. During Jessie's bridal shower, Tata Mugure uses on isolated case of an irresponsible husband to warn not just the bride but all the girls present against transparency in financial matters in marriage. This kind of initiation portrays the men as the "other" who should not be trusted; and is a sure recipe for marital conflicts. It creates masculine and feminine clubs, each wary of the other. The writer questions this belonging to the masculine "club' when she portrays the unwillingness of the male students to address women issues as a show of male solidarity. In Wangu's words "they didn't want to ruffle any feathers with mates" (125). The writer highlights the destructive effect of male solidarity in entrenching patriarchy when she vividly describes the attempted rape of Lucy as just one instance among many others that were ignored.

James Gee in *Personal Communication* argues that "we are all members of different discourses and represent our multiple identities or ways of being within social institutions such as family, school and church. They shape and are shaped by the power relations within such institutions and society as a whole (78). Githiora portrays the practices of discourse as social and products of history and therefore not fixed or stable but constantly negotiated and changing within social contexts. It takes Wanjira's persistent defense of her love and Luka's consistency to change Kairu's opinion of his sister's choice of a marriage partner. Although he has not openly declared his acceptance of Luka, the implied softening of his stance highlights the writer's suggestion that it is possible to outgrow rigid identities. Githiora engages with the role of language and gendered stereotypes in shifting the nature of masculine discourse. She explores the constructedness of

language practices; the sets of social conventions in which they have been drawn and cultural set of meanings through which they are read.

According to Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*, masculine identities are constructed, defined and sustained in and through the language of texts. These practices become common sense and naturalized as they are constantly repeated within social contexts (79). The language of social transaction at the ''Kamukunji'' in which women voice their concerns, defines the women's place as being at home as indicated by the constant shouts by a group of men of "go home"(128). Githiora contests the public sphere in post colonial Kenya as a male domain inscribed with the wishes and demands of men. A discourse that places men in the political spaces to the exclusion of women is a hegemonic one, and this kind of masculinity is undesirable in its opposition to transformed gender relations.

Men's interest in patriarchy is condensed in hegemonic masculinity defended by all the cultural machinery that exalts hegemonic masculinity. Robert Connell argues that such a masculinity ''is institutionalized in the state, enforced by violence intimidation and ridicule in the lives of women and other men'' (195). Githiora presents men who have no immediate strategic interest in

dismantling the patriarchy from which they obviously benefit. For her however, society should encourage subordinate but complementary masculinities that value male and female contributions to society, reject gender stereotypes and support cooperative modes of behaviour, social justice, and gender equality. She celebrates masculinities such as those of Siundu and

Mugo, who come to the aid of women to fight rape. They feel ashamed of what their fellow men have done and definitely have no wish to be identified with the debased masculinities exhibited by the would be rapists. Their physical strength that saves the women from humiliation is a celebration of biological physical endowment which the writer suggests can be put into profitable use in contesting evil and destruction.

Githiora demonstrates that there is a need for men and women to unite in challenging hegemonic masculinities. She highlights the danger of isolating women by excluding men from involvement in the struggle against gender violence and social justice. The female characters would have been raped were it not for timely intervention of anti- rape men. The writer appears to contest common stereotypical labeling of all men as beasts that unfairly lumps all masculinities in a condemned heap of disruptive elements. In creating male characters who have a sense of morality, Githiora advocates for a balanced healthy view of masculinity.

This study demonstrates that gender issues are not just about women. In addressing gender stereotypes, this limiting categorization is a point of concern that should be contested. Gender includes men's varied experiences and expressions because women and men do not live in isolation from one another. In *Wanjira* the need to strike a balance in addressing the needs of both men and women is suggested. The writer takes time to interrogate the causes of behavioral patterns that impinge negatively on other individuals that the characters relate with. She deviates from a common practice in literary works by women to loosely use the term gender which has become a politically correct term to refer to issues concerning women.

The writer engages in an examination of practices of masculinity and suggests strategies through which men can destabilize hegemonic masculine practices that define men in opposition to women and "weak" males such as "weenies" and "wimps". D. Eder in *School Talk: Gender and Adolescent Culture* defines the term weenie as one used disparagingly to describe somebody, a boy or a girl who is weak, cowardly, and frail or unathletic (88). According to him weenies are not strong, brave or tough. Such terms serve to make visible a hierarchical relationship between men who are wimps or weenies and those who are strong. In *Wanjira* it is mostly women who are portrayed as weenies in their failure to participate in student activism. The fear of police brutality, a common feature in most post colonial African nation states, inhibits free expression and voluntary contribution in the university student politics. However, there are also men who admit to not being "brave enough to join these demonstrations" (65).The writer creates a binary opposition between bravery in Luka and cowardice in Samuel and makes the two discuss their involvement in politics in the presence of woman who is a common point of attraction for both. Although Samuel also has a secret admiration for Wanjira it is Luka who ends up with the girl. It is possible to argue that Githiora presents bravery and a desire to achieve social justice through active involvement in challenging forces of evil as markers of admirable masculinities. Another binary opposition that exploits the weenie trope is that between Luka and Wanjira's previous admirers. Whereas he is decent, intelligent, and straight to the point, they are described as brash and cocky, characteristics that always put her off. In these circumstances the term weenie, then describes the awkwardness before a woman and deficiency in dating skills. It is a term that lowers the status of some masculinities creating hierarchies in relationships with women

Another masculine stereotypical behaviour contested in *Wanjira* is male stoicism. This is a belief that real men do not emotions or cry. The portrayal of male characters by the writer contests the demonstration of masculinity through repression of emotion and violent behaviour . Wanjira's father, an ex-soldier in the Second World War, is unable to come to terms with his traumatic experiences during the war. This memory plays a huge role in the violent masculinity that he presents.

The culturally defined image of a true man as one who does not cry or appear emotional inhibits an achievement of closure that would have been instrumental in enabling such men face their fears. The verbal aggression expressed by Kamau whenever he drinks are a window to a troubled identity. His tendency to belittle his wife is an attempt to prove to himself that he is a man despite the degradation he experienced in the battle fields; and thereafter, under the colonial oppression .Though these eruptions negatively affect other members of his family, they are just a symptom of a deeper malady. Wanjira says her mother would admonish the father for creating tension in the other members of the family through the outbursts he exhibited whenever drunk (62). Kamau's experiences while fighting for the British in India and Burma have made him bitter man. His repressed emotions erupt in jerks and starts that strain his relationship with the entire family, especially Kairu who feels torn between the obligation to assert his own masculinity and defend the family and his traditional duty to honour the father. Kamau is locked in and lost in his own world of memory, pain and despair and his alcoholism can be read as an escape from reality and an attempt to come to terms with his betrayal and anger. His inner

turmoil is expressed in Wanjira's observation that "he seemed ready to grab something and hold it in a tight grip …his face tortured by memory of a hard and terrible war" (15).

Githiora seems to suggest that stereotypical definitions of manhood limit an individual's exploration of totality of life. Rather than appear weak, men choose to keep their experiences to themselves as seen in Kamau who gives little "dozes" of his reminisces without fully divulging the feelings behind the emasculating and dehumanizing oppression of war and British colonialism. Luka on the other hand subverts the stoicism stereotype in his ability to freely express his emotions. Through him Githiora contests the idea that real men do not cry. During his proposal to Wanjira, she is shocked to see tears run down his face. However, rather than despise him as a weakling she is moved by his sincerity and reciprocates his depth of passion. Later, when he has to leave for studies in America once his hopes of joining law school are frustrated by political interference, he expresses the pain of her absence through tears. He rises over and above the stereotypical masculine belief that demands suppression of outward emotion. The writer appears to question the validity of such rigid definitions of masculinity by presenting a man who cries but is the epitome of positive masculinity.

Religion and Identity Formation
In *Wanjira,* religion is presented as a site for construction of healthy masculinities as well as a platform from which hegemonic masculinities can be denounced. The catholic church, where Luka and Wanjira fellowship, is opposed to masculine tendencies which demean others. The priest denounces the savage actions of those advocating for and taking part in "collecting". When the priest acknowledges the contributions of the women in fighting rape, the church is portrayed

61

as an institutional site that gives agency to women. The church raises political consciousness in oppressed gender groups thus contributing to healthy gender relationships.

Moreover, the writer seems to suggest that identification with and subscribing to religious mores creates positive masculinities. Luka's involvement in church activities as a member of the Young Christian Movement, and later at St. Paul's Catholic Church could be viewed as instrumental in molding a sensitive, God- fearing gentleman who believes in and advocates for gender equality. Religion is portrayed as serving the role of nurturing healthy gender relations in influencing the worldview of the faithful.

Through the priest, the writer examines the subordinate yet nurturing masculinities. Due to the religious requirement that priests live celibate lives, they are often taunted as unmanly by virile masculinities. However, for Githiora, the fight for social justice is a better marker of masculinity. Christianity is portrayed as a religion directly opposed to gender violence and all manner of hegemonic practices that seek to subjugate women and men. Perhaps it is this quality that leads to an embracing of men who are treated suspiciously at first once their religious allegiance is established. Wanjira's mother though reluctant to embrace Luka at first, is excited to learn that he is a catholic. For the writer, the church can diffuse gender tensions by acting as a centre of empowerment and mobilization for gender equality in post colonial Kenya.

In this chapter I have discussed how some men are treated as subordinate and are stigmatized on the basis of their ethnic backgrounds. Drawing illustrations from Wambui Githiora's *Wanjira* I have argued that this kind of discrimination affects how these men construct their identities. I have also looked at how modernity and negative stereotypes affect the idea of who a man is. In this chapter I have also examined religious teachings and affiliations affect construction of masculine identities. In the next chapter I will discuss how gender tensions are negotiated in Rebeka Njau's *The Sacred Seed*. This is because, since a discussion on male identity must involve women, gender tension is inevitable in the process of constructing masculinity.

CHAPTER THREE

NEGOTIATING GENDER TENSIONS IN *THE SACRED SEED*

In this chapter I discuss how Rebeka Njau's *The Sacred Seed* explores identity crises so severe

that the struggle to attain masculinity results in alienation from self and others. The writer

presents characters who are in conflict and unable to form stable relationships with the opposite

sex. I argue that social structures such as religion, individual histories, and colonial socializations

hinder construction of healthy masculinities causing tensions in gender relations.

I examine how Rebeka Njau in *The Sacred Seed* represents gender relations and the challenges

involved as individuals attempt to assert gender identities. Kate Cooper, writing about ancient

understandings of femininity, suggests that wherever a woman is mentioned, a man's character is

being judged and along with it what it stands for (8). In this study, I critically look at the way

men are restricted by their socialization and gendering in the negotiation of their identities

creating gender conflicts. I also explore the roles played by women in the forming of these

masculine identities as well as in the gender conflicts. The study acknowledges that men and

women do not live in isolation from one another.

The Sacred Seed revolves around a talented no-nonsense music teacher, Tesa Koki Kenga, and

her reactions to destructive masculinities that threaten her tranquil world as well as those of the

people she interacts with. The writer engages with institutionalized hegemonic masculinities that

adversely affect men of lower social ranks and the women in the society. In religious and political spaces, Njau highlights and condemns corrupt displays of manliness.

The morality of the post colonial African politician has been a concern of many literary minds such as Arthur Gakwandi in *Kosiya Kifefe* and Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People*. In *The Sacred Seed*, Njau presents a totalitarian leadership under a despot, Chinusi, in which she focuses on the intimate interactions of the ''chattered libertine'', as Alex Wanjala calls the character in another context, to expose the sexual fantasies, fears and exploits of an out-and-out destructive masculinity. The writer also suggests that the church can be manipulated to serve as a site of exploitation by portraying Pastor Jonah's hypocritical quest for power through the exclusive control of the material world under the cloak of religiosity.

It is a story about the effects of hegemonic masculinities and related patriarchal bodies and systems that demean women and destroy even the men who support and exercise them. In the previous chapter, we engaged in a discussion of the representation of the various post colonial Kenyan masculinities in Wambui Githiora's *Wanjira*. In this chapter, our focus narrows down to one form of masculinity, the hegemonic, to examine how it impacts on gender relations in contemporary Kenya. This is because gender tension is a contemporary concern in post colonial Kenya. Connell describes hegemonic masculinities as "things that males (but females also) do that support the subjugation of girls and women as a group" (65). He also views masculinity and

femininity as relational concepts which have meaning in relation to one another. It is on this basis that I analyze gender tensions in the novel as representation of the Kenyan context.

Hegemonic masculinities expressed within and across cultures oppress women and endanger and victimize other men as well as the aggressors themselves. In Njau's portrayal, the term can be approached as one that refers to an ideal of male behaviour which men are strongly encouraged to aim for, which is calculated to guarantee the dominant position of some men. Jonah wishes that Muturi be like him_ an oppressive, insensitive opportunist who thrives on the exploitation of others. For instance he wants his son to use his artistic talents corruptly to gain the favour of wealthy but morally bankrupt people (81). The estrangement of Jonah and Muturi is partly caused by conflicting masculinities between father and son. Muturi wants to have nothing to do with corruption and aspires for a humble, independent and accommodative masculinity. When Jonah and Chinusi die by the end of the narrative, the writer seems to suggest that hegemonic masculinities are self destructive and should be avoided.

According to biological theories, gender behaviour can be linked to biological differences between males and females which program different social behaviours. Steven Goldenberg advances the idea that women's subordinate position is due, for most part, to innate differences between males and females. In *The Inevitability of Patriarchy*, Goldenberg claims that the subordination of women is the inevitable outcome of hormonal effects. Such a view assumes that masculinity is fixed, common in all men, and so natural that it can be measured in terms of

physical attributes (65). According to such theorists, men are born with masculinity as part of their genetic make-up. This kind of thinking tends to justify the display of manliness through oppression of others since for them it is a reflex action that men cannot help but actualize.

Kimmel and Messner in *In Mens Lives* have challenged such a view in the argument that biological differences between men and women seem to have their influences but they do not determine our behaviour as men and women. Men, for instance, are physically muscular and in most cases, stronger than women. However, what they choose to do with this natural endowment is what distinguishes their masculine identities. Njau seems to suggest that those who choose not to exercise control over others through physical brutality are no less men than those who do. In fact the writer makes a conscious effort to castigate a show of violence and domination as assertion of one's identity. She presents the psychological and social differences as more the result of the way cultures interpret, shape and modify what goes into making men masculine.

Njau examines how factors defining hegemonic masculinities such as toughness, control, sexuality, money, power and leadership in public spaces create a false sense of superiority in men, causing them to demean others. She also assesses how women may serve patriarchal causes in acting as conscious and unconscious collaborators with andocentric centres in perpetuating gender injustices and maintaining a "status quo" of oppression. In her view not all women are anxious to challenge patriarchal machinations that propagate the subjugation of those outside the hegemonic narrative. The character Sabina, for instance, supports and participates in the

oppression of other women. She is so powerful and devious that the tyrannical president, Chinusi, makes her his confidant. Her male colleagues are in awe of her and some like Maiko do her bidding. (16)

Gender conflicts are dramatized in various settings within the public and private contexts. In marriage, patriarchal oppression is presented through emasculation that tragically ends in loss of lives. Mariamu, a hitherto submissive pastor's wife turned evangelist, is perceived to be such an immense threat to Pastor Jonah that he continually belittles her and her Christian service. His machismo creates conflicts within the family that leads to its disintegration with the daughter and wife leaving him. This, however, is not enough for Jonah's ego, whose desperate attempts to cover up his inadequacies and corruption leads to Mariamu's death. One day when she was preaching on top of a cliff and denouncing pastor Jonah's hypocrisy, he is so incensed that he pushes her over the cliff and she dies(152).The crime is, however, covered up since Jonah is a personal friend of the president. The author hints at gender unrest even within the confines of the church in which biblical teachings on justice, love and compassion are expected to prevail. She satirizes masculinities that hide in the cloak of holiness while incarcerating others. Religious hypocrisy is further condemned through a portrayal of Lina, Nini's daughter, who dies of AIDS having been infected by her ''born again'' husband. Her tragedy acts as an allegory of the modern marital context in post colonial Kenya in which displays of virile masculinities has endangered lives within marriages.

Aggressive Configuration of Masculine Heterosexuality

Rebeka Njau has made a deliberate choice to highlight violent displays of masculinity as a destructive construct that should be contested for attainment of healthy gender relations in post colonial Kenya. According to Plummer, "for men who ardently subscribe to the aggressive configuration of masculine heterosexuality, the point in relating to women is to 'fuck them.' It is not about making love (56). In Chinusi, Njau presents a monster who defines himself through the conquest of women. He uses sex to humiliate and subdue women in public as well as in private leaving them 'broken and pathetic individuals.'(12)

Tom Odhiambo's description of wild sexualities as "aggressive individualists" and "sexually wild" (12), adequately defines the extravagant brutality with which Chinusi approaches his victims. The writer in *The Sacred Seed* foregrounds the bestial nature of violent sexual manipulation when Tesa calls Chinusi "a beast who put his teeth into my skin like a wild dog" (14). For such masculinity, a woman has no right to enjoy sex, but should be there to serve the man's indulgencies. Njau condemns the disconnect in contemporary sexual relations in which women cease to be fellow human beings with dignity and translate into objects of masculine sexual exploitation. The image of a beast can be seen as the writer's way of pointing out the fact that such inhumane masculinities have no right to exist in a civilized society.

In alluding to the many women that Chinusi has "gone through" (15), the writer condemns a characteristic of virile masculinity that prides itself in the number of women subdued, and the

extent of the beauty of such women. For Njau, aggressive masculinities are predatory to intelligent womanhoods relegating them to victim status. Heterosexual masculinity requires the male characters to publicly acknowledge a sexual interest in attractive females. It is possible to read this masculine anxiety as part of what motivates men in high public positions to seek extra marital affairs with beautiful women who accompany them on official trips. In Achebe's *A Man of the People*, Edna was meant to be a parlour wife suited for the glamorous public life of Chief Nanga. The stereotypical belief that the more beautiful a man's woman is the more virile he is creates this anxiety to attract and maintain only those women who will boost one's identity as a real man. The writer however condemns such masculinity in its approaching of women as mere status symbols. In the words of Ben Jelloum in *The Sand Child,* for these women "to be a woman is natural infirmity that every woman gets used to. To be a man is an illusion, an act of violence that requires no justification"(70). His view of gender relations presents a condition of helplessness for the demeaned women. By employing the image of "going through" women, Njau condemns a practice that dehumanizes others and discards them once deemed unattractive. The shameless manner in which Jonah throws out and terrorizes Ellen once she outgrows her usefulness portrays the fate of those who no longer serve the purposes of the dominant masculinities. All her support in the development of Kiambatu Church comes to naught when her consciousness is raised and she attempts to upset the equilibrium.

The writer examines how conflicts among women have in various levels been caused by the competitiveness to outdo each other in the eyes of men. Woman-to-woman jealousies are portrayed as determined by and controlled by masculine sexual preferences. When Sabina's

beauty fades, she is horribly humiliated and discarded by her "partner". Her vindictiveness against Tesa and the other young and beautiful women who catch Chinusi's fancy is driven by the feelings of envy at their sexual appeal. The writer uses the metaphor of a slave to address the plight of those women who find themselves entangled in the inextricable webs of such masculinities. Sabina tells Tesa

> I trapped myself when I accepted to work for Chinusi. He has given me money and
>
> property. I am a rich woman but I am a slave. I have accepted my fate. He abused my
>
> body to make submit to him. Now, he no longer uses me that way. After all, I don't have
>
> your brains. You are talented (13-4).

These words reveal a tinge of envy in Sabina that Mzee Petro confirms later to Tesa when he tells her "Chinusi likes beautiful women and I'm sure Sabina is jealous of you" (16).

The writer also explores the role of money in the entrenchment of virile masculinities. Before Tesa, all the women violated by Chinusi are portrayed as not minding the abuse as long as they get financial compensation for it. Sabina herself is said to be very wealthy on account of how she carried out Chinusi's dirty work. Offering women money is aimed at justifying their violation since they too benefit from these encounters. However, the reality is that they are mere puppets in the hands of aggressive masculinities; in what Monica Miller terms as "the sponsorship of women by patriarchs in their contests with other men" (87). Their advances then are mere

products of men's conflicts, and men's histories. In other words such women are mere tools for men in their masculinity rivalries.

Njau uses female characters to tell stories of male harassment and exploitation. Each of the women at Mumbi's sanctuary has a past that involves victimization by patriarchal structures. These women are used by the writer to highlight the plight of women in the face of hegemonic masculinities sanctioned by the highest levels of authority. The whole strategy of female representation becomes a forum to question the brazen ugly masculinities. It is a step by step contesting of tranquility in gender relations. The writer reveals the callous irresponsibility of the great and powerful men who are downright demonic in their wickedness. As a politician, for instance, Chinusi implicitly contradicts notions of good leadership and his reign is a symptom of neo-colonial capitalism in Kenya. He fails to conform to what John Mac Innes calls "the social obligation to develop a particular form of identity" (ix) and becomes the writer's tool in the critique of the dangers and shortcomings of hegemonic practices of masculinity within leadership positions on the common citizenry.

Central to Chinusi's paternal power is the demonstration of control over other people's bodies. Such responses, according to Ratele, could also include forms of verbal abuse as a theatrical display of patriarchal authoritarianism. In a final humiliation of his hostage, Chinusi tries to assert his omnipotence and control over Tesa.

Last time you ran away from me. Didn't you? Now I will not let you go. You are a

beautiful woman but you are arrogant. You turned down my present and assaulted my

guard. How dare you snub a wealthy and powerful man like me? You are the woman for

me. You can turn down my gifts but I will not allow you to turn me down (13-14).

In this excerpt, Njau contests the exalting of wealth and power as markers of masculinity that obviate the subordination of and acquiesce of women to the same. The women are positioned in such a space that even when their rights are being violated, they are still expected to portray stereotypical feminine docility and submission. Njau examines a Kenyan masculinity that understands a woman to mean "yes" even when she says "no". It is a destructive masculinity that brutally humiliates any individual attempts at self assertion. In the view of such men, the world revolves around them hindering their ability to form emotionally stable relationships, because their search for self gratification overshadows the needs and priorities of any other person.

 By virtue of his position in the society, Chinusi can transact in women's bodies and evoke social, cultural, and economic strategies that readily put female bodies at his disposal. Wanjala highlights the use of the term "seduction" to sanction rape. The soothing music he plays before forcing himself on Tesa as well as the money he keeps on leaving behind despite her disdain for it are, in Chinusi's mindset, gestures of love which he expects his hostage to appreciate.Through Tesa, a proactive character, who is cast as an isomorph of the exploited land and womanhood, the writer engages with the modalities of challenging these demeaning patriarchal centres of domination. Tesa cannot be bought with money and neither can she be silenced through intimidation. Her unorthodox assertiveness can be read as the writer's symbolic giving of agency

to victims of machismo who deviate from the societal constraints to map their identities. She resists the sexual violence that is motivated by brutish desires to annihilate anyone who appears strong.

The warrant of arrest issued against Tesa can be read as a metaphor for the male attempts to contain assertive elements through intimidation. The writer, however, presents a woman who will not be cowed to suggest the need to rise above the threats of hegemonic masculinities for the victims to attain a new lease of life. Tesa is in a quest for justice. Through the letter form, she is categorical both to her boss at Kakira Road High School and her sister Sakia that someday, Chinusi would pay for the humiliation she suffered at his hands. Through the privacy of a letter the character expresses her unedited feelings. The communication is personalized as commented on by Sakia who understands the sister's suppressed feelings in the brief letter (26). Though wounded, she asserts her humanity in the readiness to challenge social ills. Rather than take the coward's route of suicide like her high school classmate and friend, Waema, Tesa goes on a journey of self discovery and empowerment at Mumbis's sanctuary, where she comes to terms with her abuse and gets sufficient inspiration to confront the forces of evil. The resistance motif is further alluded to in her refusal to run away to America with Ellen to evade violent masculinities. The writer appears to be of the opinion that although some discourses of masculinity allow men privilege, individuals can and should challenge them and not to dwell in physical and spiritual degradation.

Through flashback, Njau condemns law enforcers who let molesters of women go unpunished. Tesa remembers how a friend and classmate of hers, Waema, had committed suicide after a rape incident, yet the rapist was never arrested (22). This social condemnation of excessive masculine empowerment is epitomized in the satirical portrayal of institutions of justice as the propagators of sexual violence. These institutions not only undermine any efforts at gender equity but they render irrelevant the purpose for which they are instituted in the first place. The leaders set the wrong example and cannot be looked upon to protect vulnerable citizens from rapists of all sorts. The efforts of ordinary citizens such as the warrior who attempts to apprehend Waema's defiler are frustrated by a code of silence that translates into a lack of backing from relevant institutions. Institutionalized masculinity is castigated through the portrayal of a rapist posing as a forest guard who threatens the girls with handcuffs to lure them into his trap. The symbolic presentation of handcuff, normally used on and not by criminals, foregrounds a reality in which the moral codes are reversed, presenting a scathing attack on institutional sanctioning of oppression in the society. The police, who are meant to protect and serve as custodians of law and order are portrayed as agents of destruction and death. The writer examines police brutality as a post colonial malaise that is instrumental in stamping of hegemonic masculinities.

Njau presents the society as silently sanctioning the maltreatment of women through social conventions that limit them. The social space appears stifling in the community's enthusiasm in labeling as whores any women perceived to digress from the instituted codes of behaviour. The acceptable domestic role of a woman is presented as that of a mother and wife. Jonah argues that Mumbi is an adulterer who cannot inspire the society with family values since she has no stable

marriage. Through rumours, the reputations of credible women may be ruined to fit the designs of hegemonic masculinities. The precarious nature of a woman's reputation creates a fertile ground for women who feel threatened by others to catalyze conflicts between dominant masculinities and the victimized women. Meni, for instance, exploits the fragile nature of a woman's identity in the society to create an atmosphere that allows Jonah to cast aspersions on Mumbi's person and character.

According to Ratele,

it is when a man has multiple sexual partners with women but does not allow the same

freedom to a woman that he moves into the zone in which he actively participates in the

heterosexual domination of women. For him, such a form of masculinity

usually denounces women who have many sexual partners (413).

In *The Sacred Seed,* Jonah falsely accuses others of adultery yet he is the real adulterer since he seduces and has sex with a woman who is not his wife. His son witnesses his sexual immorality, but rather than be remorseful, Jonah reacts in a fit of self righteous anger. The writer views this application of double standards as a masculine tactic that ensures their continued dominance. For her, to survive as a woman calls for a need to see sexuality, male power domination, and her traditional gender role as all meaning the same thing that she should learn to manipulate.

Aggression, in the form of rape,is presented as being used by men both in the name of preserving tradition and in making a revolution. The government and society at large induce a tradition of silence over the violation of women's bodies. The term ''tradition'' in this context refers to what is accepted and unquestioned as the norm within a given society. Mzee Petro appears to be the only one among his colleagues bothered by the display of sexual violence by the abusive masculinities. The rest "no longer care about morality" (17).

On the other hand, rape, especially in displays of ethnicized masculinities, plays out as the making of revolution. The women raped during the tribal clashes are marginalized both as women and as an "other" based on their ethnic background. They are doubly oppressed. The rapists seek to get at the men from the "enemy'' camp as a form of extreme humiliation. The main marker of manhood in African societies has been the ability to defend one's family and especially one's woman. An inability to do so creates intense humiliation and feelings of negated manliness.

In times of war, men are expected to prove their manliness in the combat field. The greatest insult to traditional masculinity would be for a woman to challenge a man. In many oral traditions, men have been challenged to confront enemy forces when women threaten to ''put on trousers'' and fight. In a recent field work in Kisii County, I collected a legend about a woman named Moraa who fired up the courage of the men folk to defend the community against an enemy tribe when she threatened to Marshall the women to fight. The male egos could not stand

the challenge hence the men rose to the occasion. In *Shreds of Tenderness*, John Ruganda dramatizes the feelings of worthlessness in male refugees who are taunted by the indigenous citizens due to their inability to defend their wives and children. In this text, the Mr. 'No-Fear-No-Favour'' peels items of clothing from a woman and demands that the male refugee puts them on to symbolize a total stripping of manhood in the recipient of such humiliation. In *The Sacred Seed*, Njau portrays women as victims of men's rivalries. The extreme brutality with which Lina and her female colleagues face at the hands of their tormentors acts as the writer's outcry against violent masculinities that debase others by relegating them to the status of weapons of competitive ventures. In other words, such men treat women as a means of proving their superiority over other men.

The image of "wild dog" (127) used by the writer in reference to these masculinities portrays the inhuman nature of violence as a means of asserting one's identity. The animal imagery brings out the dehumanizing nature of violence both to the victims and the perpetrators. She also employs the first person narration to foreground the pain and humiliation the victims go through as well as the maniacal nature of these masculinities. Lina gives a first person narration of her ordeal bringing out the extreme dehumanization she had been subjected to. She tells Tesa

> One day I was kidnapped with about fifteen other women and taken to the killer's camp in the forest. Our job during the day was to cook, fetch water some three kilometers away and serve food for those killers. At night, we were turned into sex objects; raped night after night. I remember one night I was raped by five men in turns. I was hurt and in great

pain but I dared not show it because if they had discovered that I was unfit to fulfill their desires, they would have killed me (126).

The pain, anguish, and helplessness of these women who have been reduced into sex objects and beasts of burden is tangible. Their worth as human beings does not count for the perpetrators. Those who no longer serve the perverted whims of these monsters are killed. The writer user uses terms such as "primitive men" and "sex maniacs" (127) to castigate this destructive and alienating masculinity. She condemns a cultural construct in which rape embodies the violence of a social structure that has established virility as the essence of manhood. In her view, it impoverishes the scope of masculinity by reducing it into that one attribute of heterosexuality.

According to Tom Odhiambo, virility and rampant sexuality dominate the social lives of many men in post colonial Africa, especially those who have access to money; because such men have freedom to choose with whom to associate. Such hedonistic indulgencies of these men, he argues, strip women of agency and dehumanizes them(49). Njau exposes sexual violence and exploitation as mechanisms of domination that should be subverted. The loss of potency in Chinusi is the writer's strategy of contesting the validity of such masculinities in the suggestion of the redundancy of the tyrannical leader as a sexually dominant male an aggressive individualist and a political predator.

Bourdieu argues that men are also prisoners and insidious victims of the dominant gender regime. According to him

Male privilege is also a trap, and it has its negative side in the permanent tension and

attention sometimes, verging on the absurd, imposed on every man by the duty to assert

his manliness in all circumstances… manliness understood as sexual or social reproductive

capacity but also as the capacity to fight and exercise violence… is first and foremost a

duty (71).

Njau's male characters are all vulnerable at one level or another. Muturi's life, for instance, is plagued by a failure to prove himself a man in the eyes of a father who has never inspired courage in him. He is comfortable avoiding confrontations and is tense when others close to him seek to assert themselves. His hesitation to encourage Tesa's initiative to keep the sanctuary alive in Mumbi's absence stems from this instinctive aversion to controversial situations. He is too concerned about people's assessment and reactions to his identity and actions.

Through Muturi, the writer explores what Bourdieu calls "symbolic violence" (132). This according to him is "a gentle violence imperceptible and invisible even to its victims; a violence often exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity." In other words, symbolic violence occurs when human beings- male or female- are subjected to various forms of violence: being denied resources, treated as inferior, or simply ignored but because the dominated apply

categories from the point of view of the dominant, the symbolic violence of dominance is thus "misrecognized'' as natural(133).

Njau portrays gender relations that are strained and an unchallenged "status quo" in which characters are victims of violence. She seems to advocate for the need to raise the consciousness of victims of aggressive masculinities as a starting point in the struggle for healthy gender relations. Ellen and Jonah re-assess their positions and extricate themselves from the destructive web. Muturi leaves the suffocating environment at home and seeks refuge with the women at the sanctuary. Ellen on the other hand realizes that Jonah had misled her and seeks the forgiveness of the community. She even contributes to their development by teaching them a new craft. These two characters rise above the social and spiritual restrictions, and egocentric demands of allegiance to actualize themselves. The writer suggests that the treating of this gentle and invisible violence as natural enforces dominant hegemonic masculinities. She advocates for individual and collective challenging of the violence.

Njau, however, does not just point at the malaise of patriarchal violence. She is also intent on interrogating the circumstances that go into construction of destructive masculine identities. The novel can thus be judged as feminist, but a lot of detail goes into the discourse of male marginality. She delves into the childhood experiences of the main antagonists, Jonah and Chinusi, as a way of examining the cause of their distorted masculinities. A psychological reading of *The Sacred Seed* reveals that appearances are deceiving. The men who seem in

control, aggressive and incessantly arrogant are in reality weak, insecure and lonely. The writer seems to call for a re assessment of contemporary masculinities to establish a cause-effect relationship that would be instrumental in diffusing tensions in gender relations.

The writer presents men as subjects to numerous and generally unrecognized injustices of a social and psychological nature. All that people see is a destructive, all domineering politician, yet Chinusi is a victim of parental abandonment and abuse. His father loses his mind and the family is forced to seek refuge among distant relatives. Out of marital frustrations Chinusi's mother assaults him and then flees, leaving the young boy sort of orphaned and full of bitterness. The novel reveals a need to understand and evaluate individuals before engaging in condemnation of all men, some of whom are only acting out their feelings of inadequacy in a society that appears oblivious of these injustices.

Colonial and Missionary Legacies

A psychoanalytic reading of the problems of and by men in contemporary Kenya reveals a need to contest colonial myths and their undergirding symbols and all the questionable foundations of their imperial epistemologies. This is because the basic tenets governing the function and actual essence of man/woman relationships need to be examined in the quest for healthy gender relations. Rebeka Njau attributes some of the destructive masculinities in Kenya to missionary influence. Jonah for instance is a man without traditional roots. His son tells Tesa

The missionaries who brought him up taught him only tit bits of Western civilization, bits

and pieces of the white man's ways. He had no opportunity to learn about the religious

and cultural beliefs of his people. His foster parents directed him away from a traditional

way of life to a Christianity, which was based on the cultural values of the West (112).

As such Jonah's life is full of contradictions and he rarely practices what he preaches. In this portrayal, Njau is deconstructing the myth of the colonialists' civilization mission in Africa. She views the African encounter with the West as alienating. Jonah is a parody of assimilado who is neither fully western nor African. Ironically, he is uncomfortable within the traditional community that he purports to serve. This kind of masculinity is in Frantz Fanon's words a "black skin white mask" (1)

Like his mentors, Jonah is intolerant of individual independence. He seeks to colonize all under his thumb be they relatives, associates, or members of his congregation, who he is expected to inspire. Those unfortunate enough to fall under his influence are treated as though they have no thought of their own. His subtle manipulations are shrouded in deeds of kindness and love which act as a device to get people to submit to him fully and do his bidding. It is ironical that his actions are in opposition with the teachings of Christianity, such as selflessness, humility and compassion. As a pastor he is expected to be a role model in the community as well as in his own family but he instead creates pain and confusion in all he relates with.

Western stereotypes of the identity and place of women, together with indigenous patriarchies, create males that are incapable of having lasting and productive relationships with women. One such stereotype is discussed by Naomi Woof, who argues that Victorian women were expected to mute their voices and be sexually frigid. Their dress, behaviour and mores were geared to erasing any hint of sexuality (56). Barbara Rees further contributes to the debate on the stereotyped portrayal of meek womanhoods in positing that "women who acted otherwise would immediately be branded prostitutes or courtesans'' (44). Having said this it could be argued that there is a possibility that post colonial Kenyan men who were closely inspired by the views of their masters have been influenced to relate with women in similar fashion.

Amadiume also lays blame on the colonial experience for the categorization of women and men in binary oppositions of weak/strong or inferior/superior. She argues that women in Africa made and had space for themselves. According to her, "mission Christianity and colonialism imported women's inferiority in body and status". (80) She contests the sexist policies of the patriarchal colonial status which gave boys a head start in education in terms of number and professional subjects geared to work in government, trade, industry, church ministry and education services. In *The Sacred Seed* the writer presents high profile professions as being held by men. Women are artists, teachers, or assistants who are expected to give sexual favours to their all powerful male bosses. Decision making revolves around the conventional notions of masculine and feminine authority and women's positions as institutional heads do not correspond with actual social and psychological power. Tesa's headmistress has no say over Chinusi's exploitation of the members of staff, and she is cowed into giving him the note Tesa had sent her.

The missionary representative in the community, Jonah, is used by the writer to highlight the impact of colonial biases in gender relations. He is well educated and religious but ironically, he is also a ruthless opportunist and a murderer who undermines the women in his life. His distorted view of masculinity is no different from those of other colonial protégés, carefully orchestrated by the ascendant political- religious elite of the colonial period. Jonah is a male anti hero who the writer assigns a shameful death, caused by ugly incurable boils, a befitting punishment for his immorality. His death symbolizes the defeat of masculine forces that demean others. At another level however, death is too final. The female characters, no matter how evil, are given a chance to redeem themselves. Ellen, for instance, seeks the forgiveness of the women for stealing their guard and she gets cured. Perhaps Njau is suggesting as Monica Miller does that "having dominated the society for so long, men are basically morally bankrupt and spiritually tired…and have taken humanity to the brink of cataclysmic disaster, and may be they need to languish in the margins for a while" (283).

The African missionaries are presented as paralleling the colonial masters' self imposed duty of "civilizing" a people they never understood. The greed and obsession with power, expressed in ambitions such as that of Chinusi of being president for life, are a symptom of a post colonial masculinity that aspires to invent itself in the image of the deported oppressor.

This study suggests that these colonial legacies are not necessarily beneficial to men. Through Chinusi and Jonah, Njau portrays the perverted mentalities created by the socialization of these "mission boys" and how these identities degrade others, the environment, and finally result in self destruction. In ridiculing these masculinities, Njau gives women's issues increased

visibility, in the de-legitimization of violence against them, once thought to be a natural prerogative of men and canonized in various social structures.

The writer also examines the impossibility of stable families in the face of hegemonic masculinities. The concept of ''matrifocality'' emerges in *The Sacred Seed* as the men drop out of the narrative chiefly because they die but also because they leave the group to go and live alone. Whether they leave or not, the focus of authority and control gradually shifts to the wife-mother, so that whether there is a husband- father present, the house hold group at this stage can be referred to as matrifocal   Most of the characters are either brought up by or influenced by the women in their lives. From Ellen who learns the art she teaches the women from her mother, to Tesa who inherits her grandmother's mystical power, all the way to Chinusi's mother who estranges him from the father, Njau creates a world held together by women.

 Bourdieu argues that, "a man may do his best to care for his children under this form of family organization, but the insecurity of his position in the family make it very difficult for him to discharge the obligations of parenthood which are accepted without questions" (39). Mulefu, rejected even before the marriage, is allowed no control over the son by the boy's overbearing mother and grandmother. The narration changes the notion of a male dominated form of family and the notion of men's only and primary role being that of bread winner, in the presentation of matrilineal traditions of the family.

The effect of hegemonic masculinities as destructive to the institution of family is brought to the fore through those households headed by self seeking, non accommodative patriarchs. The cancerous nature of exploitation of the imported colonial attitudes of master servant relationships is portrayed through characters who place no individual value on people's lives beyond their ability to serve their purposes. Pastor Jonah is a failure as a father in his inability to inspire courage in Muturi. The role of a father in the construction of the identity of a male child is presented as paramount. The writer highlights a challenged masculinity that falls short of its obligation to mould the background upon which the young can model their masculine identities.

As an artist, Muturi is intimidated and emasculated until he seeks asylum with the women at the sanctuary. The family atmosphere is so oppressive that he cannot identify with Jonah as a father figure. Throughout his childhood his father's authoritarianism has so traumatized the young man that he develops a timid personality. In portraying hierarchies in men to men relationships created by and propagated by hegemonic masculinities within the family, the writer appears to suggest that some fatherhoods are more undesirable than absentee fathers. Muturi is happier away from the influence of an insensitive father. However, the effects of their relationship are long lasting as his feelings of inadequacy plague him even after the death of the tyrannical father figure. He loses virility on the first attempt at sexual intercourse when he imagines his father standing in front of him and reprimanding him. This imagined condemnation makes him weak in body and mind and he becomes impotent. Njau condemns overbearing and psychologically abusive masculinities that deny other men a chance to navigate healthy identities, impacting on their relationships.

The religious hypocrisy portrayed by Jonah is reminiscent of the betrayal, by missionaries, of the African faithful, in duping them into docility while their land was being alienated. Scholars have engaged with the phenomena of missionary deception in encouraging the colonized not to resist colonial invasion since governance was instituted by God. Literary critics have apportioned blame on the Christian missionary interference in Kenya for land problems that plague the nation to date. According to Walter Rodney for instance ''religion is an aspect of the superstructure of a society, deriving ultimately from the degree of control and understanding of the material world, which often conflicts with the scientific materialistic outlook and with the development of society"(32). In the novel religious heads are presented as agents of destruction who facilitate a continuation of imperialism through neo-colonial oppression. For instance Jonah collaborates with the corrupt president to deny the community its natural heritage, in the guise of church development. Spiritual development for them means the ability to guard the independence of the social group and indeed to infringe on the freedom of others irrespective of the will of the persons involved. Jonah also sidelines the deserving poor members of his congregation to help a corrupt rich associate of his to buy a piece of land from a departing settler at a personal profit. The writer satirizes the church as an institution plagued by corruption to the extent that those meant to uphold the fatherhood of God through exemplary benevolence are conniving self seekers who exploit the poor in an effort to establish a club of owners who lord it over the servants. It is a nihilistic masculinity that is incapable of honouring the centre of morality with which they are ostensibly associated. All that directs them is a hunger for more and more material acquisitions.

The writer dramatizes an anxious spiritual masculinity in the spiritual intolerance exhibited by Jonah against Mumbi's teachings. His vitriolic attacks of Mumbi in his sermons are a mask to camouflage his inner anxiety that people would prefer a woman to him. The aggression with which he attacks her is similar to that expressed in his unease at his wife's charismatic spiritual leadership. His is a masculinity that is anxious and feels threatened by forces he had been socialized to treat with disdain by his colonial upbringing. When he calls Mumbi a witch, he is voicing a missionary-like intolerance to African traditional modes of worship which they understood little about. Through the character of Jonah, Njau presents an intolerant masculinity that thrives on violent intimidation of real or imagined threats.

Like all dictatorships, this kind of masculinity is supported by the servile flattery of individuals who benefit from their perpetuation. The president surrounds himself with sycophants who sing his praises and bloat his ego. The Sunday school teacher, Musa, also serves the same purpose in the life of Pastor Jonah. These masculinities fear any advocacy for freedom and justice. Dr. Mwela says, ''Jonah finds it bitter that Christians could reject him and abandon his magnificent church to follow a woman'' (180). The real worry, however, lies in the fact that the teachings at the sanctuary are likely to empower those he has duped to stand up, fight and defend what they believe in.

Njau presents a masculine dislike for situations out of their control and the fear of embarrassment as creating a health risk for men. Men's health problems and behaviours can be

linked to their socialized gender role. Traditional masculinity does not bow to a woman, especially one who is a declared rival. Jonah upholds this ideal image of manhood to his own detriment; he would rather die than seek help from a woman he despises. In endowing a woman with the life saving ability to control a man's life, Njau subverts the myth of male dominance thus destabilizing the male identity and deconstructing myths of masculine infallibility. She portrays a Kenyan masculinity which is a cocktail of colonial legacies on gender relations and the traditional definitions of gender identities.

According Gaitskell and Marks, African men and the colonial state looked towards customary law to solidify patriarchal traditions. The control of women and women's sexuality was especially paramount given the expansion of opportunities for women in towns. They point at the role of Christian Africans in the re-assessing traditions that could stem women's revolt (97). In this sense, then, Christianity becomes engendered in its support of patriarchal dominance. Missionary Christianity sanctioned a single monogamous moral code. Church morality placed enormous pressure on women's purity and submission a code quoted even by perverted men like Chinusi with impunity. In his view ''women were created to serve men and must obey their husbands without any question' (17). This according to Mzee Petro is why Chinusi has remained a bachelor since the kind of women he would like to marry would never stand his arrogant and domineering nature"(17). The writer condemns exercising of double standards supported by religious distortions in which men feel they are entitled to multiple sexual partners despite the monogamous expectations of mission Christianity, whose duty to uphold heavily lies on the women.

According to Altman, "structural inequalities suggested by terms like patriarchy are created through human action and impinge very differently on different individuals"(6). His view is that, the primary social function of religion is to control sexuality and gender in the interests of hegemonic masculinity. Njau presents Christianity as a questionable institution in which contrary to expectation, humanity is undermined and nature corrupted by self-righteous individuals. Such hypocrisy is presented as detrimental to constructions of individual identities, gender relations and national development. By narrating the victimization of Ellen, an African American, the writer positions her narrative within a global context to point out the fact that hegemonic masculinities are injurious to women of whatever nationality and cultural background.

Through Chinusi, Njau explores the effect of colonial mentalities and ideologies in the shaping of post colonial Kenyan masculinities. The character appears to have internalized the crude western stereotypical portrayals of the African man as a virile heterosexual as captured in the colonial writing of the ethnographic studies of the early 1900s.Yaba Badoe's documentary, *Without Walls: I want Your sex* examines the projection of the male body as a signifier of extra-ordinary sexual potency. Drawing connections between power, desire, and fantasy, Badoe shows how images of black men's bodies loom large in western imagining. In this study, I suggest that colonial myth making and social practices affected male identities and coloured their ways of perceiving women. Beliefs such as the idea that black men's penises are very large, that black men are more driven by sexual desire than white men, and that black men are especially prone to promiscuity contribute to gender based violence. As Michael Foucault argues "Sexuality then, is not so much a fact or biological given, as it is a social practice and product of discourses" (153).

Chinusi's mentor and benefactor, Peter Grant, was a former colonialist through whose patronage as well as the influence of his missionary friends and associates Chinusi becomes president. Once in this position of privilege, the impact of mentorship is evident as he aspires to be like his mentors. With time he changes from being a humble and timid human being who had many times felt threatened by others to an arrogant and shrewd manipulator. As Paul Freire argues in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, ``for the oppressed, to be a man is to be an oppressor'' (4). Njau presents how the neo-colonial struggle to attain the colonial model and ideology of male identity has led to oppression of other men and women. Her characters portray the colonial stereotype images of a specific African sexuality - insatiable, alien and deviant- to suggest how colonial mentorship has impacted on post colonial ideas of masculinity.

According to Magubane Zine, colonial narratives equated black sexuality with primitiveness. Not only were Africans depicted as primitive, exotic and bordering on nymphomania, but they were also perceived as immoral, bestial and lascivious. Africans were caricatured as having lustful dispositions. Their sexualities were read directly into their physical attributes; these attributes were believed to reflect the immorality of Africans (80). Chinusi is portrayed as influenced by western discourses that posit women as an "other" of man, reducing them to a symbolic space where men's rivalries are played out. His idea of masculinity is based on politically informed discourses and certain hegemonic paradigms inherited from colonial representations. He symbolizes neo-colonial patriarchal authoritarianism that Njau rejects for its inability to forge progressive gender relations.

Effects of Childhood Experiences on Identity Formation

Rebeka Njau presents a scenario in which experiences of abuse and neglect create fractured self esteems that generate aggressive defensiveness hence perpetuating alienation. Chinusi's abusive mother and a demented and later absent father predetermine his future perception of people. His inability to form lasting relationships can be read as a psychological consequence of a traumatic childhood. His wish to conquer and terrorize women stems from an unconscious desire to avenge himself on those represented by his mother. Njau's view is that the effects of poor parenting may distort the construction of gender identities from healthy relational ones to beastly defensive and alienating definitions as portrayed by Chinusi's violent masculinity.

The writer presents identification as difficult for boys when they must psychologically separate from their mothers and model themselves after a parent who is mostly absent from home, the father. As a result, such boys become emotionally detached and repressed. She dramatizes how this vulnerability in boys may plunge them into a world of violence in a bid to utilize visible signs of masculinity. The search for a sense of manliness can be linked to a thirst for domination. The absence of a secure family background in his formative years create in Chinusi a suspicious mentality that makes him view everyone as intent on sabotaging his happiness.

Njau alludes to the biblical miracle in which God parted the waters of the red sea for the children of Israel to escape slavery, to suggest desperation to defy all odds to assert a threatened manhood. Once Chinusi loses virility and fails to win the acceptance of Tesa, he positions

himself above all humanity in an unrealistic attempt to boost his wounded ego. In one instance he tells his guard "You will not drown when I'm around. I shall order the waters to make way for us…". "But you are not God", Kimasia said full of fear (227). At another level still, this allusion would serve as a condemnation of arrogant individualism that denies the power of divinity over its actions but ends up destroyed by the very forces that it undermined.

Human beings are social beings that thrive on companionship and relationships. Psychologists have proven that rejection especially during the early years of life has the effect of maladjustments that manifest themselves later in life through deviant mannerism that act as defense mechanisms. Puberty is a period when adolescent boys and girls experience social pressures to conform to traditional masculine and feminine practices. Chinusi is portrayed as a nerd who is derided by his school mates for his mysterious background and hideous appearance. The social setup does not offer him a safe space to negotiate a healthy identity. He feels small, unacceptable and incompetent especially since he faces an additional infirmity in his struggle to comprehend school work.

Most nerds may not fit within the social circle due, perhaps, to excessive shyness or physical unattractiveness, but they prove themselves in one way or another. Chinusi's passion for mountain climbing and his later average academic performance in school are his points of breakthrough but they do not seem enough to pacify his wounded ego. When he finally becomes president, he sees this as the opportunity to pay back all his tormentors and their representatives.

The writer suggests that power, money, and control may not assuage tormented personalities when she presents the most powerful man in the county as plagued by a sense of incompleteness all through his life. This void factors in deconstructing the masculine identity presented to the world.

Debra Umberson supports the idea that demonstration of masculinity through repression of emotion and violent behaviour may be linked. Umberson argues that non violent men are more emotionally reactive to stress and relationship dynamics than are violent men (50). Among men with a history of domestic violence it is as if the link between personal circumstances and emotion state has been disconnected. Njau suggests an alternative reading of violent masculinities through an exploration of childhood experiences as one way of diffusing gender tensions in contemporary Kenya. She lays bare the psychological make up of her male antagonists to establish one possible way of looking at why men behave as they do. The novel provides descriptions of the intricate workings of the characters' psyche. In a flashback, Chinusi wonders what could have happened to his maniacal father and his equally demented mother who brutally assaulted and abandoned him. These reminisces are the author's suggestions that individuals cannot totally escape their past.

Indigenous Patriarchies
In *The Sacred Seed*, Njau highlights the conflicts arising from domestic practices within the confining spaces of the indigenous patriarchal ideologies. She acknowledges that patriarchy is still in place in Kenya. Men still, by and large, elect to exercise what Connel calls the "patriarchal dividend" (76) chiefly at the expense of women .The writer condemns patriarchal

structures that encourage gender violence and inequality. She examines the effects on gender relations of "masculinism, an ideology which according to Brittan, justifies and naturalizes male domination and power, accepts heterosexuality and the existing sexual division of labour as normal and is resistant to change and not subject to fluctuation over time"(481). The social justification of domestic violence is presented through a society that blames the victims rather than the perpetrators of this violence. When Nasia is assaulted by her husband, Mulefu, the community declines to support her because, in their view, she is to blame for defying the social norms that prohibit marriage to a stranger. These social codes are presented as oppressive in their bias against the rights of women to choose life partners.

In presenting a confrontation between familiar and unfamiliar masculinities, the narrative engages with the interrelations of masculinity, ethnicity and identity. These relations in post colonial multi-ethnic societies are often expressed as a contest among men where control for political power and the state serve to legitimize claims of citizenship and become a symbol of manhood. In another context, Njau lays an emphasis on the role of political wrangles between masculinities in inter-ethnic violence. She creates oppositional political ideologies between Jonah and his cohorts and the political activists led by Dr. Mwela. The doctor upholds the rights and visions of the community.

At another level, however, citizenship can be read as the legibility to belong in an exclusive community based on laid down qualifying traits. In the marital scene, the writer presents

96

ethnicity as a term that can be exploited to exclude the alien; in this context, a strange man. According to Miller patriarchs have always treated alien men as potential if not active enemies. This antagonistic relationship with alien men can be neutralized through patronage, clientship or vassalage of conquest and subordination (164). Perhaps it is this rejection that creates in Mulefu nostalgia that pushes him to madness. Although at first he tries to prove himself worthy by working hard to provide for the wife and her mother, he is soon disillusioned and becomes frigid and abusive. Such a strategy of exclusion, in Miller's view, is to punish the male challenger by keeping them in their place by dividing the challenging group at the most fundamental level of social organization-the family (166).The portrayal of a broken marriage that creates a bitter, disillusioned and abusive single mother can be read as condemnation of suffocating patriarchal structures that deny individuals the right to make independent choices and live with the consequences. Nasia's defiant refusal to regret her decision and apologize to the patriarchal lords among distant relatives where she takes refuge, highlights the prerogative to make gender related choices that one is comfortable with.

This study reveals that patriarchal ideologies are oppressive not just to women but also in men whose gender choices are dictated by unreasonable codes. I also argue that these codes can create vicious circles, with children becoming the innocent casualties of the entanglements in the parents' identity crises. Chinusi's destructive masculinity can be partly attributed to the nightmarish home atmosphere created by patriarchal limitations on the parents.

The "marginality thesis" in relation to alien men resurfaces in the narrative as a pointer to the dynamism of masculinity within patriarchy. In *The Sacred Seed* the writer castigates a new breed

of men who are content to idle around and let the women provide for them. In some parts of contemporary Kenya, it is not uncommon, both within urban and rural settings, to encounter more women in the labour force than men. Local brews, for instance, have been pointed out as one of the killers of masculinity not only turning men impotent but also leaving the task of providing for the families to the women. Njau presents men who are lazy and indulgent at the expense of women. When Nasia is questioned by her mother on her choice of a stranger for a husband she complains "Men here are lazy. They make their wives toil for them from sunrise to sunset while they sit idly gossiping and taking snuff'' (115).This portrayal highlights a post colonial Kenyan masculinity that thrives on exploiting women economically. Nasia's desire for a different man, in this case a hardworking one, albeit a stranger can be seen as the writer's take on the gap in the society for hardworking and nurturing masculinities that would uphold the traditional role of men to provide for their families. Ironically, it is those who upset this oppressive status quo that patriarchy marginalizes. Through Nasia's iconoclasm evident in this argument with her mother, the writer also contests the validity of gender stereotypes that confine individuals to prescribed behavior codes. In presenting men as busy bodies she subverts the stereotype that women talk more than men and are thus prone to idle gossip. She in a subtle way alludes to the tendency of patriarchal structures to limit women through stereotypes.

This study acknowledges that men and women may collude in perpetuating patriarchal practices and strengthening its structures. Njau presents a twist in creating female characters combating each other. In *The Sacred Seed* Njau presents a social concern for lack of solidarity in forces opposing hegemonic masculinities through women who sabotage such a cause. The character

Sabina is in the words of Lucy Muthoni "the village ogress that destroys all those in the way, especially the beautiful in society" (56).According to Muthoni, as an agent of Chinusi, Sabina is by analogy an agent of evil. I argue that these women are themselves victims of the patriarchal structures that they support ignorantly miscalculating the gains of doing so. As Chinusi's personal secretary, Sabina holds a position of power and dominance over men and other women. She approves and participates in endorsing police brutality against Chinusi's victims and even exploits them on the side in the guise of offering assistance. Despite the great wealth she has amassed, Sabina's greed motivates her manoeuvres to benefit financially from the money Chinusi leaves for Tesa to pacify his conscience. Njau presents greed for money as the root of divisions in forces challenging patriarchy. Materialism becomes a stumbling block to the much needed solidarity among women that would enable them emancipate themselves from oppressive masculinities. The adage that ''women are their own enemies" is dramatized through women like Sabina. However, these women are mere puppets in the hands of hegemonic masculinities. When they are no longer useful, they are humiliated and abused just like those others whose exploitation they aided. Sabina for instance is imprisoned by Chinusi and all the wealth she had amassed is confiscated. Occasionally he summons her to gloat over her humiliation for his own amusement (90). Sabina realizes too late that she is not indispensable and laments:

You have treated me like a common criminal. You have humiliated and tormented me.

I have carried out your dirty scheming but you have forgotten it all. I have protected you

against your enemies and you have treated me like a dog(91).

The troubled waters that the contemporary Kenya gender relations have become can be as a result of a capitalistic culture in which morality is sacrificed at the altar of self aggrandizement. Competitive struggle for power and dominance is a major divisive element in the efforts of those forces challenging patriarchy. Talent and individual initiative are viewed suspiciously by the conservative schools that feel comfortable with the stable and proven leaderships. Discomfort with change contributes to Meni's attack on Tesa's attempts to keep the sanctuary alive. Meni's idea of totalitarian leadership is no different from that of the patriarchal forces as Mumbi notes in her response to the alleged usurpation of her power by Tesa. The suggestion here is that a lot of attention given to petty disruptive jealousies may hinder or slow resistance to patriarchy as it weakens group militancy. A close reading of *The Sacred Seed* reveals that contemporary Kenyan women are not a homogenous group of innocent victims of patriarchal oppression. They too are exploiters who strive to support a "status quo" of subordination of women as long as it serves their individual interests.

Exploring the place of spirituality and the practice of female circumcision Chimalum Nwanko also addresses the "women as their own enemies", adage. According to her, the killing of twins in Africa and the practice of circumcision are rooted in a terrible ignorance that convolutes itself in primordial psycho cultural circumstances that must be detangled and taken care of delicately. She argues that, "It is not simply patriarchy at work. It is patriarchy in collusion with the fears of a maternity that is bizarrely wedded to the spirituality of the women involved'' (1). In *The Sacred Seed*, men and women collude to perpetuate customary laws and practices that entrench hegemonic discourses of masculinity. Mzee Kigo's insistence that Kanoni gets circumcised

although she is past the age when such a rite should have been performed is actualized by women who forcefully circumcise her, leading to her death. Sylvia Tamale argues that in practices such as female circumcision, the older women enact dominance even under patriarchy. According to him, "older women are the ones who police young women's bodies'' (130). Customary law confers on them power and authority to control the youth. Njau challenges this destructive power when the old woman circumciser who defiles an innocent young girl dies. The author appears to condemn the women in the society who insist on enforcing outdated and unhealthy cultural practices that were in the first place initiated by patriarchal structures, in the name of conformity. Kanoni's defiance presents the possibility of women making and having spaces for themselves by challenging the confining familiar spaces, group identities, and patriarchal ideologies.

Literary Strategies of Challenging Hegemonic Masculinities

Rebeka Njau has employed various literary strategies to present the effects of domineering masculine identities on gender relations and show how such masculinities can be challenged. She has made deliberate and distinct choices of style as a way of representing the social cultural realities in the construction of gendered identities. Some of the strategies she has used include mythology, in which she presents a superstructure that challenges male dominance; and characterization, where she satirizes gender identities that hinder peaceful co-existence of men and women.

Mythology

Human beings use myths as a way of representing themselves and their experiences symbolically. Myths as used by Njau reveal human desires, fears, and expectations. The novel can be read as a lens through which to interpret how contemporary Kenyans, especially men, view themselves and their place. Bad men are seen in the context of a specific frame so that men and women function on equal terms against the prevailing presumptions of the nature of good and evil from the divine point of view. When the gods abandon the sacred grove because of the injustices committed against a woman through forceful circumcision, Njau arrests the conflict between the rising new consciousness trying to adapt to the changing social relations in new times, and a ruling old ontology.

Mythology serves as the writer's tool of challenging retrogressive cultural practices that hinder development of healthy gender relations. In *The Sacred Seed* divinity assumes the author's vision of gender equity. The ancestral spirits are actively involved in the rectification of inequality. The great imaginary steps in when no other imaginary will work to question masculine impunity. The incurable boils that assail all who unfairly dominate and oppress others enhance a form of poetic justice. Mystical objects such as the fetish guard that Ellen steals from the women becomes a point of contact for divine retribution; against all who perpetuate moral rot. For instance, the president to whom the guard is presented by Jonah develops paranoia and even his guards are afraid to throw away the cursed gourd (199).The writer does not directly engage in the nature of the gender of deities, but she uses mythology to stultify male power and superiority. The women are endowed with enough agency to topple the baseless ideologies of patriarchal structures.

The myth of Kanoni, an allegory of contemporary feminist resistance to female genital mutilation, acts as a symbol of a changing spiritual cartography that accommodates independence in construction of gender identities. Njau's gods are portrayed as accommodative of contemporary policies and cultural revolutions that challenge patriarchy. She positions her narrative in a controversial space in which the spiritual centre is not andocentric. Ngugi, in *The River Between,* portrays a sacred grove that serves patriarchal ends. It is only the brave and daring like Waiyaki who can access it. On the way to the grove, his father uses an etiological tale to socialize him into the social structure held together by the gods in which women own nothing. (14-15) *The River Between* is not part of our primary reading but it is significant to highlight the manner in which Njau subverts patriarchal benevolence to portray the realities of gender oppression. In Ngugi's narrative, the sacred grove is a site where traditional masculinity and patriarchal domination are represented. All the legendary heroes mentioned are male and no female role models are given. In the etiological tale the women are presented as cowards. Male stoicism is also emphasized when Chege insists on the need for his son to exhibit courage. He tells him ''I see you fear. You must learn to fight fear'' (19). This sacred grove, then, symbolizes traditional masculine domination. In Njau's view, hope lies in replacing centres of violence with new spaces within which victims of masculine violence can have agency. She transforms the sacred grove from being an abode of snakes and evil spirits to "a safe and holy place where women will pour out their thoughts, cares and joys" (42).

Njau presents the sacred grove as a level ground for men and women. The Kanoni statue becomes a symbol of courage, strength, defiance and self renewal in times of turmoil. Faced with

103

a warrant of arrest over trumped up charges Kanoni appears to Tesa to instill in her the strength to hold on in the fight for social justice. Muturi too is accepted in this space which is accommodative of all regardless of gender. Unlike in his father's house; here there is joy and unity. Mythology then becomes a weapon of resistance that endows the victimized with the inner strength to rise above the humiliating conditions created by hegemonic masculinities.

Using myths, the writer explores the feelings of insecurity and "smallness" in male characters, who go to any lengths to define themselves regardless of whether they hurt other people or not. Chinusi's mission of conquering and destroying the self esteem of intelligent, strong and talented women is motivated by a crazy belief that "if he goes to bed with such women, their talent will be absorbed into his blood stream, making him the strongest man in the land" (12).Such distorted belief systems are similar to those in contemporary society where children, or very aged women are raped in the belief that the perpetrators would be cured of AIDS, or the distorted view of Tanzanian witches that Albinos are a crucial ingredient in making of potent charms. Such distorted views jeopardize the lives of the victims who are reduced to the status of objects that can fulfill the depraved cravings of the perpetrators of such injustices. Chinusi's obsession with out shining all the men reveals an insecure masculinity behind the destructive sexual largesse.

Rebeka Njau uses mythical characters to challenge manhood. Women are portrayed as toppling the male order. The character Mumbi defies the elders' expectations in uprooting the ugly old "sacred" grove to pave way for a sanctuary where the oppressed can have agency. She is,

however, limited at some level and has to solicit for male intervention. "The following day Mumbi visited one of the respected elders and requested him to assist her to conduct a religious ritual at the site and hand over the holy ground to her on behalf the women of the land. She knew that as woman she could not carry out the ritual of cleansing the holy ground and turning it into something new" (46).I have quoted this extract to suggest that even when roles change, there is always a space for men which cannot be ''usurped'' by women, This being a spiritual context, Njau seems to suggest that the grand design is one in which there is co-existence, with mutual respect and understanding between men and women. We argue that, despite unstable social economic contexts, there are hegemonic qualities that are generally expected in men.

Lucy Muthoni argues that Njau creates mythical characters who are endowed with supernatural qualities which she exploits to condemn evil while she exalts virtue in the society. According to her, Njau conceives her characters and how they relate with each other within the context of mythology. However, the adventurous nature of the novel makes it border on the surreal. The portrayal of supernatural realm makes it hard to communicate to the ordinary women struggling with patriarchal oppression. Most of the men are at best marginally intelligent. They are mostly ugly and irrational, their evil bordering on the mythical. The grotesque and bestial images utilized in their portrayals foregrounding their reckless brutality.

The writer assigns the witch trope to the "subordinate" gender,   making deliberate statement against the oppressive nature of high handed hegemonic masculinities that are usually associated

with power. The sexuality of witches, according to Dennis Altman, is a common concern of the escape of the female reproductive power from male-dominated communal norms to the open nocturnal realms of self-contained female power(61). This, he argues, is because historically most societies and religions have sought to limit women's sexuality by defining it in terms of their reproductive role, placing very severe sanctions on sexual expressions that might threaten male control of reproduction. The women deny the accusation by Jonah that Mumbi is a witch, but by all appearances she is, to say the least, mystical. She is described as half -human, half-spirit. Nini says of her "Mumbi is half-spirit. Sometimes she is around sometimes she disappears" (33). Her ability to communicate with birds and insects is also a mythical endowment that sets her apart from the ordinary woman. Mumbi is fearless and progressive. She openly confronts male dominance and the excesses of patriarchy, and is perceived by the violent, corrupt male characters as a rival and threat.

To challenge the primacy of the reproductive roles assigned by patriarchy to women, Njau creates mythical characters who are destined to be celibate. Any man who has sex with such a woman dies. She also has a supernatural ability to cast deadly curses such as the one Tesa casts on Chinusi. In many African societies the super woman phenomena is familiar and in most cases men who marry or have sexual relations with such women die. Elechi Amadi in *The Concubine* portrays this kind of woman in the character Ihuoma. This untouchable superwoman then becomes a threat to lustful masculinities. Perhaps it is Chinusi's violation of Tesa's body that leads to his downfall. All through his illness and horrible death he is obsessed with her. The trick in this vengeance lies in the fact that it is not easy to identify those women who are

dangerous to virile manhood. Before interaction with Mumbi, Tesa is not even aware of such a phenomenon. In this sense then, marriage becomes risky for men, even the innocent ones who have good intentions on the women. Through Muturi's dilemma, the writer presents a challenged love scenario where masculinity is tested in the willingness to defy death for the sake of a loved one.

Marriage is further mythologized as a social construct within which manliness is placed in an ambiguous position. In the myth of Kibwara, it is clear that a man who lacks a mate is treated as subordinate and is ostracized. Kibwara laments that no girl will marry him although he is not a thief or a swindler. When the cause of his rejection is finally revealed the masculine prerogative to compete, at times through violence, for a woman is contested. Kibwara's father and Mzee Kigo had fallen in love with similar girl whose father was a well known blacksmith and had the ability to cast deadly curses. When they exchange blows over who should marry the girl, the father curses them and none is able to attract a lover or sustain a lasting marriage. Kibwara's father, gets married but loses all his children except Kibwara, and dies very poor. The curse continues in the son's life and he leads a dejected life. Even the little happiness he gets with Kanoni is short-lived and, it appears, he is destined to live a life of solitude. This situation creates ambiguity for manliness in the author's suggestion that an unmarried man is unfulfilled, disrespected, and socially excluded by the community. This is because African societies value marriage and children and those who cannot build families are viewed suspiciously or shunned. Such a man is like "a rat trapped in a gourd" (69).

The writer also draws on myths such as the Biblical myth of David and Goliath to suggest the possibility of toppling oppressive masculinities. Through spiritual empowerment individuals can resist agents of greed and evil despite the seemingly insurmountable odds facing them. The writer dramatizes the tremendous power women can wrest from the oppressive agents operating against them. She challenges male dominance and masculinist discourse. Through myths, she portrays the diminishing of the myth of masculine infallibility. The character Mumbi compares Chinusi with his powerful machines to the biblical goliath while the women and the villagers are only armed with faith and determination just like David (218). Chinusi's insanity by the end of the novel epitomizes poetic justice. His death symbolically presents the effeminate fate of violent masculinities. It is in a way a site of emancipation of women; with the fetish gourd being associated with feminist incursions into the male body.

According to Bourdieu in "the problem with exalting manliness, besides the tactic encouragement of violence, lies in its dark side, what he calls "the fears and anxiety aroused by femininity" (47). This in turn engenders symbolic violence especially in men searching for a sense of masculine identity. Certain traditions establish the status quo that threatens masculine control in Kenya. Jomo Kenyatta in *Facing Mount Kenya,* describes the original Gikuyu system as being matriarchal under "Rorere rwa mbari ya moombi". The men later revolted and overthrew their women leaders forming a patriarchal systems under "Rorere rwa mbari ya Gikuyu" (3). According to Kenyatta, the Kikuyu believe that Gikuyu is the founder of the tribe, while Moombi, which means creator or moulder, is the mother of the Kikuyu tribe. He explains that Mogai, the mythical creator gave the couple nine daughters who formed the nine tribes

108

under a matriarchal system. Njau employs this myth of origin to contest the dominance of oppressive patriarchal order. The Kanoni sanctuary can be read as a yearning for that natural state of affairs as they were at the beginning of time. She presents a formidable force that men have to reckon with. In giving her female character, Mumbi, a name that resonates with that of the mother of the tribe, Njau subverts male dominance in positions of leadership and control.

Characterization

Through characterization the writer takes dominant masculinities to task for assuming that gender violence and inequality are a given in post colonial Kenya. The images and functions of heterosexual masculinity are portrayed as subject to feminine subversion. Njau creates strong female characters who are portrayed as equal to if not better than the male characters. Njau gives them very strong and independent roles.

In leadership circles a binary opposition exists between a progressive democratic leadership by women and a corrupt autocratic one under men. The writer ridicules dictatorial machismos represented by Jonah and Chinusi through Mumbi. Mumbi raises the consciousness of not just the women, but the whole community to resist hegemonic destructiveness. The author's vision of social equity arises through this character who educates the others that "women are as valuable as men on this earth. The light of the sun shines for all alike"(103).

The male characters are more allegorical than real. Some like Chinusi and Mulefu are at some level not real people at all but simply caricatures who represent a collage of deviant masculinities. The portrayals in both the physical and spiritual planes appear more of

categorization than actual identities. According to Lina, the killers who had tried to evict her people and take their land were heard to say they had been directed by an evil spirit called Chinusi to act the way they did. Beyond being a tyrannical ruler whose sadistic antics oppress others, Njau associates him with demon spirits that corrupt other members of the community to further perpetuation of evil. The demonized portrayal of Chinusi is further evidenced in the description of his eyes as similar to those of an owl -a symbol of evil - earning him the childhood nickname "ndundu" (116).In school his classmates made fun of his malformed ears and all this taunting gave him a nerd identity that results in feelings of low self esteem and a loss of assertive male identity which he has seeks to re-affirm all through his life. The implication here is that proper gender is taught and performed rather than intuited or biological. Boys, like men in patriarchal societies are continuously mindful of preserving their manly image.

Njau points to the way constructs of acceptable masculine appearance and behavior circumscribe possibilities for young boys. She examines the reality of homophobia which according to Kimmel is not just a fear of homosexual men but a reflection of the male terror of ''not being a real man" (120). Homophobia therefore acts as a policing force monitoring and guiding boys and men's behavior. Power is usually associated with hegemonic discourses of masculinity but the writer presents a need to subvert this power for peaceful gender relations. She portrays women as redemptive forces, challenging physical prowess and bravery as a uniquely male characteristic. The women characters are enigmatic and socially active. Even within patriarchal systems that exclude them, they make marks that endure long after they are gone.

Tesa's grandmother Mucheri Magina is said to have resisted colonialism through her mystical powers. Her dedicated services to the society make the elders name the village after her. The elders are also said to have listened to Mumbi's mother in times of crises .Mumbi draws strength from this knowledge in challenging the patriarchal system that, according to her uncle, may not permit her to renovate the old sanctuary because she is a woman. Under the leadership of women, social transformations are achieved without the sort of patriarchal violence exhibited by the male characters. Njau challenges discourses that situate men in crevices of power in public institutions and re-inserts women into the patriotism narrative by celebrating their nationalist contributions

A close reading of *The Sacred Seed* reveals that the writer does not necessarily present feminism as the antithesis to hegemonic oppression .The narrative avoids the temptation to lump all men together as a class of oppressors. Njau creates hierarchical relationships and binary oppositions among men to suggest that unfair generalizations and categorizations are not realistic approaches in the struggle for healthy gender relations. It is only those configurations of masculinity that demean others that she condemns.

According to Nwanko Chimalum, some feminist subversions against the masculine status quo are produced and restrained through the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought and are therefore just as likely to perpetuate the social relations of domination between the sexes. In her characterization, Njau is conscious of this temptation which she avoids by

presenting contradictory manifestations within the discourse of masculinity. She distinguishes between productive and destructive masculinities. Through desirable masculine identities presented by Dr. Kim Mwela, Muturi, and some of the elders, the writer finds a way to undermine the performative constructions and patterns that produce and reproduce domination. She challenges the hierarchisation between the dominant hegemonic masculinities and the subordinate manhood. A confrontation between the two is played out in the communal resistance to Chinusi-Jonah machinations to deny the community its natural heritage. Despite the obvious power imbalance in terms of political backing and technology of domination, symbolized by the bulldozers, the writer's sympathies are for the underdogs who she gives agency to destabilize the status quo. This study reveals that hegemonic displays of violence can and should be challenged. The collective activism can be read as a symbol of societal subversion of the underlying structures and mechanisms of masculine and political impunity. The gender angle in the conflict is difficult to ignore with the writer equating the raping of the natural heritage to the violation of the bodies of many innocent women like Tesa. During a peaceful demonstration against the destruction of Kimina forest she tells the crowd

> I stand before you as a living testimony of women whose bodies have been violated; I
>
> stand before you with men, women and children who have been abused, maimed or
>
> crippled; I stand before you with orphaned children and widowed mothers who live
>
> wretched and miserable lives; I stand before you because I have refused to be Chinusi's
>
> victim (218).

In using the first person narration the author enables Tesa to express the pain of oppression and violation that not only she, but the entire community has gone through. This narration personalizes the experiences of victimization. Moreover, the parallelism appeals to the sympathy of the readers and compels them to join the entire community in denouncing whatever is represented by Chinusi's exploitative masculinity. When Tesa repeatedly uses the words ''I stand before you'', in her speech the listeners attention is focused on her as a symbol of exploited womanhood.

Njau rejects the archetypal male images and interrogates the rupture of traditional masculinities. She condemns the archetypal political womanizer, and his pharisaical religious cohort in favour of well rounded, humanized, sensitive, and progressive men like Muturi and Doctor Mwela. In assigning the running of Kiambatu church to the two young men, the writer is toppling the old, corrupt dominant expressions of masculinity to pave way for the promotion of social justice which involves gender equity. It appears that the stigmatized male can, to some extent, be the antithesis of the hegemonic figure which equates the ideal man to one who orders people around and dominates others.

All these portrayals contribute to the writer's vision for an equal place for men and women. The women's struggle is just a phase in the human struggle for social equality. Hers is a different take on the men as villains thesis a position adopted by many feminist writers. While not excusing the violence of the characters, she represents, in the extreme, the post colonial Kenyan man's need to

be acknowledged as a man. In highlighting the great extent of hurt caused by endeavors of men to prove their manhoods, the writer reveals the fear, shame and silence that exist in the construction of masculinities that erupts in violence, abuse, and exploitation of others.

In Chimalum's view, "the cosmetic strategy of creating a super woman who is stronger than men and the power structure with which she deals is a dangerously illusory and tokenistic palliative'' (8). However this study views the superwoman as a symbol of Njau's optimistic vision which highlights the possibility overcoming the challenges involved in the cultivation of gender identities in Kenya for amicable gender relations.

Through these literary strategies Njau has highlighted the contexts within which men construct their identities. Through mythology the author articulates her vision for healthy gender relations. She suggests the possibility of opposing patriarchy and raising structures that encourage men to build healthy identities. By creating characters who suffer immensely for their machismo the writer satirizes such displays of masculinity.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion summarizes how the selected authors have portrayed troubled masculinities, but have at the same time suggested that tensions that arise from the entanglement of different cultural and social attitudes and practices surrounding sexuality and gender can be diffused. To fully understand the challenges and realities of contemporary Kenyan masculinities, this study considered it necessary to study Rebeka Njau's *The Sacred Seed* and Wambui Githiora's *Wanjira.* This is because men are entitled to a safe place to begin to come to terms with their gender and the tensions within masculine character and its vicissitudes through the course of life. Such a space is necessary to allow men identify room for maneuver which new knowledge and agency gives them to begin to dismantle their gendering and to consider different behavior choices, so that different ways of doing and being can be suggested.

Njau wishes for transformation in gender relations. A close reading of *The Sacred Seed* reveals her dissatisfaction with enslaving ideals of masculinity. She views oppressive traditions and male chauvinism as obnoxious. The writer contests the establishment of institutions and structures that promote violent masculinities by portraying them satirically. The church for instance is ridiculed for stifling individual initiative. Through the excesses of the character Jonah religious hypocrisy is condemned. She is not merely interested in representing male and female relations but in influencing certain emotions so as to transform gender relations and construction of healthy gendered identities.

Njau's title *The Sacred Seed* reveals her optimistic vision. Just as a seed rots in the soil and then germinates and grows to produce more than was planted, the protagonist Tesa symbolizes new

hope and continuity. In her vision quest she leaves her familiar world within which she is victimized and goes in search of new hope and healing. She later emerges whole and inspired to offer hope not just to women but also men. In this title Njau offers hope to victims of the ravages of patriarchy and suggests the possibility of opposing violent displays of masculinity. In her view deviant male identities should be resisted.

In the two novels masculinities and their social context are depicted as fragmented, insecure, anxious, and never stable. The authors seem to suggest an identification of spaces for re interpreting masculinity. According to Njau, there is need to draw strength and inspiration from nature and tradition and not imbibe foreign concepts and biases blindly. The character Muturi dramatizes the possibility of negotiating healthy masculinities through art. The writer presents art and creativity as providing a shared space within which individuals can recover from the ravages of patriarchy. She provides a deep exploration of the role of sexuality, culture and art in the reconstruction of individuals in the society; in an environment ravaged to its very core by corruption, immorality, selfishness, greed and lack of integrity. Through art an open forum in which inner healing can be actualized is made available providing a catharsis for victims of hegemonic masculinities. It is in such a space that Tesa and Muturi are able to give voice to their dehumanization under the tyrannical masculinities. The therapeutic power of narrative as vindicated when Tesa tells her story to relevant people, to demonstrate to need for people to unlock the life-threatening hurts bolted in their hearts. It is not just women who find rejuvenation in this space as Muturi also comes to terms with his tormented manhood and asserts his identity as his own man.

116

Male artists are in the view of hegemonic masculinities weaklings, who in the words of Monica M. Miller, are perceived as lady men because they are primarily artists, ''loving life for its own sake'' (86). Muturi's father despises him for being, in Jonah's view, weak and sensitive in places where he should not have been. The lack of aggression in acquisition of wealth and a preference for a lowly position as an artist rather than compromise his ideals is despicable to Jonah. In killing Muturi's bird, the father violently attempts to cure him of a sensitive nature and make a man of him. Njau, however, insists in the positivity and necessity of masculinity defined by innate artistic ability and a sensuous nature held together by a sense of integrity. She portrays art as offering an opportunity to challenges limiting cultural spaces in which fulfilling sexual relations are inhibited and men's lives threatened. In the face of the "impossibility" of their love ending in a natural climax of consummation and marriage, Tesa and Muturi are faced with a challenge greater than any presented by the forces they have faced before. The couple draws strength from a story by Mumbi of a man who triumphed in a similar situation due to his mystical powers. Tesa hopes her faith will be as potent, to protect the man she loves. She carves a bird she names "imani" meaning faith, through which she hopes to defy her destined celibacy and challenge the confining traditional space.

Through art Njau suggests the need for soul strength in both men and women to overcome the difficulties involved in marriage. When Muturi holds the sculpture that symbolizes faith that their marriage will work, it cracks after falling accidentally. This could be read as a pointer to the inevitability of destiny and the futility of challenging the supernatural. However it is also

possible to read Muturi's fear and anxiety as a symbol of a challenged masculinity incapable of facing the contemporary challenges of marriage.

In the novel, art is a forum for collective resistance to destructive forces. Njau proposes a didactic ideological art in the service of the cultural and political rights of the community. She portrays art that tells the truth, blending the aesthetic with the didactic. Njau portrays spirituality, art and culture as having a critical role in the process of transformation of the individual and society and especially in fostering understanding, ethical values, and social cohesion through education. The writer's condemnation of ethnic cleansing is also created through Mumbi's collection of effigies made with reeds and stalks of dry banana plants to express her disgust "at the callousness of the human mind" (51). Chants, songs, storytelling and sculpture are presented by the writer as avenues within which the collective consciousness of victims of patriarchy can be raised for their empowerment

According to Githiora the day to day tensions of modernity impinge on the construction of male identities in Kenya. She suggests a need to establish awareness bodies that would not just point out deviant displays of masculinity but also offer a space to reason out and provide men with a

healing space within which they can re construct their identities. The church, in her view, is one such forum where healthy identities can thrive. The priest in *Wanjira* is not just interested in imparting biblical knowledge. He addresses the social realities and struggles of the faithful, condemning deviant practices such as rape.

In her choice of the title Githiora examines the role of cultural ignorance in entrenching destructive masculinity. However she offers a way out through her iconoclastic character, Wanjira, whose name the novel bears. The Kikuyu word Wanjira means she of the way. It is derived from the circumstances of the birth of the character. Walking home her mother had gone into labour unexpectedly and Wanjira is born by the roadside. The journey motif brings out the character's cosmopolitanship. She is of the world and is not tied down to conservative restrictions in gender relations and definitions. Since the mother was journeying when she was born the name suggests that she would always embrace other travelers. It symbolizes faith in positivism that would diffuse cultural tensions by charting a new path. As a small girl the character befriends Hassan, a boy from Garissa, and is disappointed when they part. Later as a grown up she falls in love with a Luo man, Luka, despite the opposition of her Kikuyu friends. By using her name in the title the author is calling for raising of individual and public consciousness through a cosmopalitanship that involves embracing all men and giving them equal treatment regardless of their ethnic backgrounds so as to ensure construction and adapting of healthy masculine identities.

Formal education should, in Githiora's view, offer a space of renegotiation and re-definition of the traditional and contemporary mix that the male identity in post colonial Kenya has become. According to her, however, real education is that which frees individuals from retrogressive definitions of themselves. In creating contrasts among the male characters within the university

setting Githiora not only highlights the factors that go into the construction of the various masculinities portrayed, but also suggests models of constructive manhood.

Both writers raise empowerment bodies that challenge andocentric structures of oppression. In *Wanjira* the institution of marriage offers the social space within which girls are socialized into the gender realities and challenges they are likely to encounter in marriage and are also empowered with strategies of negotiating these challenges. Njau on her part creates a symbolic sanctuary that acts as reconstructive centre not just for women but for all that are victims of ravages of patriarchy. For the two authors, it appears, there is need to provide well laid our policies and bodies that can challenge hegemonic masculinities and build healthy gender identities.

Njau and Githiora introduce men to the fact of their gendering in order for them to contribute to and work towards and understanding of gender relations; to advance male responsibility, dignity and gender equality. They actively engage with the gender of men as a possible means of changing hegemonic expressions and oppressive symbols of masculinity. They seek to promote an understanding in both men and women that hegemonic forms of masculinity can be resisted and alternatives accomplished to transform gender relations. The novels can then be read as contribution to a re-composition of gender relations in Kenya for social transformation.

Their vision appears to be one of a gender approach that makes men and women visible, challenging the assumptions inherent both in tradition and modernization so as to contribute to understanding, identifying and eradicating the power imbalances that generate and sustain gender injustice. They seem to share the view of that not all men are enemies and that gender can unite in the struggle. According to the two writers it is clear that alliances of women working with men are a plausible response to the dynamics of opportunity to discover new interests and identities. Men, as much as women, must become the subjects of change. The female protagonists in both novels are not isolated from the men, but rather work together against destructive masculinities that are harmful to both men and women. In *Wanjira* Luka, Mugo and Siundu are examples of such men who do not advocate for social injustices. In *The Sacred Seed* Muturi and doctor Mwela support social cohesion and healthy gender relations.

Githiora and Njau point to the need to understand Kenyan femininities even as we seek to Understand Kenyan masculinities. For them, masculinity affects everyone. Both men and women can benefit from or be oppressed by the expectations of masculinity that are meant to be lived up to in society.

This study concludes that there is need to reassess the idea of male identity in Kenya. From the two novels we discover that the society imposes un realistic expectations on men and this affects how they view themselves and relate to each other and to women. Moreover the current social economic situations as well as historical legacies impact on Kenyan masculinity. There is need to

121

incorporate men's issues in gender studies so as to give more visibility to modes of navigating healthy male identities. Scholars can further expand this research by paying attention to a comparative analysis of male characters in contemporary texts by both male and female writers. Such a study would go a long way in providing a balanced view of negotiation of gender identities and conflicts in a constantly changing Kenya.

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