# A GENDERED SOCIALIST VISION OF MICERE MUGO'S POETRY.



BY

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A PROJECT PAPER SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN LITERATURE THE UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI.



2005

## DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my late beloved mother, Julia Nyandiko, who loved and nurtured me on hope and optimism and taught me the need to embrace humanity.

# DECLARATION

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

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have come to fruition without the support and encouragement of several people. I acknowledge the support accorded to me by my two supervisors, Prof. Helen Mwanzi and Prof. Henry Indangasi. Their incisive and learned comments kept me on the path of focus and clarity.

I owe a big debt of gratitude to the University of Nairobi for granting me a full university scholarship. The gesture has made it possible for me to achieve my long cherished dream of obtaining postgraduate education.

I thank the following lecturers who taught me at the postgraduate level: Prof. Ciarunji Chesaina, Dr. Peter Wasamba, Dr. D.H. Kiiru, Prof. Henry Indangasi, Prof. Helen Mwanzi, and Dr. Alina Rinkanya. Their intellectual insights were stimulating and their moral support, priceless.

I acknowledge the support provided by Larry Ndivo, Mugo Mote, Peter Onyancha and Jennifer Muchiri in offering useful comments on the first draft of the proposal for this project. The constant encouragement of Peter Mbugua as the work progressed is appreciated.

The sense of community and camaraderie provided by members of both MAI and MAII classes have made the going bearable and worthwhile. These members are: Mwairumba Mukoya, Phyllis Omufila, Velma Muyela, Rose Komu, Esther Mwanzia, Mwai Karekiya, Lydia Angogo, Mrs..Maitho, Oscar Maina, Kiura Kariuki, Michelle Nthumba, Leah Ouko, Agnes Magu, and Ruth Atsango.I particularly appreciate Mwairumba Mukoya for his friendship and moral support.

My uncle Apollo Okoko and my cousin Athony Akech have stood by me during the period I pursued my studies. The friendship of Jairus Omuteche,Beatrice Masibo, and Anne Baraza, is appreciated. I appreciate the patience and expertise of Esther Mwangi in typing this project.

Last but not least, I acknowledge the moral and emotional support and succour provided by my siblings Moses Auchi, Nathan Munai, Gershom Odinga, Lucy Ateka and Leonidah Ochengwa. They have always loved and stood by me throughout my life.

# ABSTRACT

This study examines how the concepts of gender and class are deployed in Micere Mugo's two poetry collections, Daughter of My People Sing! (1976) and My Mother's Poem and Other Songs (1994); how the two concepts are fused to generate a gendered socialist vision; and how the poetry's form contributes to the above vision. The vision is explicated within the thematic rubric of TRADITION AND VALUES, LOVE AND MARRIAGE, ANTI-COLONIAL STRUGGLES AND THE STATE OF THE NEO-COLONY, and FEMINISM.

The study is guided by the hypotheses that, Micere Mugo's poetry highlights the cultural, political, economic and social issues defining Africa; that the poetry has been influenced by African oral forms; and that women's issues are an integral component of the poetry. The study proceeds from the Marxist, Postcolonial and Feminist theoretical frameworks. These theories pay close attention to both the form and content of works of art.

The study reveals that Micere Mugo simultaneously deploys gender and class to evolve a vision for the African society; that she conceives men and women as equal human entities whose unity is required to extirpate the African patriarchy and social problems engendered by the advent of capitalism in Africa; that she utilizes African oral forms to articulate egalitarian imperatives; and that a socialist order is best placed to re-humanize a world de-humanized by the voracious acquisitive appetites of capitalism. In other words, Micere Mugo's poetic vision vouches for the construction of a gender sensitive socialist order.

The study is based on library and internet research, and interviews conducted with Micere.These interviews have formed an integral part of Mango's literary biography in the introduction to this project. A close reading of the primary texts has been undertaken and it is on that basis that connections have been made between the texts and the concrete world.

# CHAPTER ONE

# INTRODUCTION

Writers do not grow and develop in a vacuum. They are products of history whose artifacts are influenced by their experiences in the various historical junctures they inhabit and have inhabited. Micere Mugo is not an exception to this rule. Her engagement with issues of gender and class in her poetry, from an Afro-centric perspective, can be located in her biographical trajectory.

On the Syracuse University web page detailing Mugo's biography, we are told that her parents brought her and her siblings up on a gender sensitive pedagogy:

> they (parents) treated "boys" and "girls" in the family the same, socializing them to transcend all socially constructed barriers that smacked of gender discrimination. (My parenthesis)

This early socialization in gender relations played a major role in her evolution as a writer and scholar who places women's experiences at the nodal space of her creative and critical projects. Her achievements as a woman scholar and writer can also be traced to these beginnings because the emphasis at this stage was on the value that she possessed talents and abilities similar to those of boys.

While growing up, she was surrounded by African orature and creativity (telephone interview). Her grandmother, mother, and aunts used to infuse her with African values, norms, ethics and philosophy through oral poetry and oral narratives.

The latter emphasized the imperatives of solidarity, community, equality and egalitarianism. Moreover, the fact that these mentors were women fore grounded the fact that women were creative and talented, contrary to the phallocentric claims of the African patriarchy.

But the above cultural pedagogy was to come increasingly under enormous attack when she joined the Kenyan colonial education system. The latter was modeled on that of the "mother country", that is, Britain. Its impetus was to produce ideal colonials, that is, people who have lost confidence in their culture, history and philosophy; individuals who view the colonial enterprise as a necessary historic mercy mission; and a group of people who will forever be enamoured of, and awed by, European civilization, by viewing it as the apogee of civilizational progress. In other words, this was a pedagogy which aimed at alienating African students from their environments and true needs.

Micere Mugo, in a chapter entitled "Written Literature and the Black Image", in the book Teaching of African Literature in Schools, edited by Eddah Gachukia and S. Kichamu Akivaga, tells us of the protracted and painful struggles she has had to undergo in the noble effort of recuperating her submerged African subjectivity from colonial pedagogy. She recounts as follows:

> I can never forget King Solomon's Mines, nor the weird portrait of Gagool which for a long time epitomized in my childish mind the figure of an African woman in old age. It is only recently that I have got over my dread and fear of old black women. (34)

Her decision to plumb African culture and art for progressive values had been rekindled initially by the publication of Okot P'Bitek's Song of Lawino. The narrative

poem was a paradigmatic landmark in African poetry, because it demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that African poetry need not be anchored necessarily in European poetic forms; instead, African poetry could also be inspired by the vitalizing and creative juices of African oral forms.

By going to the African past, Micere Mugo is therefore trying to locate her bearing to the present and the future. She is attempting to re-integrate herself into the African social mainstream, where colonial education had dissociated her from; she is trying to make herself relevant in the African context. To borrow Ngugi wa Thiong'o's terminology, Micere Mugo, by renewing her interest in African art and culture, is attempting to re-member her own and Africa's dis-membered psyche and identity(15).

The poetry collection Daughter of My People Sing! (1976), mainly composed when Micere Mugo was pursuing postgraduate and doctoral studies in Canada at The University of New Brunswick between 1969-1973; the drama collection The Long Illness of Ex-Chief Kiti (1976), written as part of Mugo's postgraduate course work; and her published PhD thesis-completed in 1973-Visions of Africa (1978), are testament to this awakening in Micere Mugo.

In Visions of Africa, she argues that Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Margaret Laurence, present a rigorously balanced and respectful view of the African continent and its people, unlike Elspeth Huxley who engages in ventures of stereotyping and denigrating African people and their lives.

In the play, "The Long Illness of Ex-Chief Kiti", Micere Mugo talks about gender issues, the Mau Mau liberation struggle as having played a decisive role in the emancipation of Kenya from colonialism, but whose members have been neglected by

the government and the need for people to come to terms with their pasts in order to construct a healthy egalitarian society.

In the play, "Disillusioned", Mugo focuses her attention on the role of the church in a newly independent African country. Her message is that, all institutions which were formerly established to serve imperial and colonial interests should be restructured to contribute to the construction of an egalitarian nation which places African interests at the core of its agenda. The main character in the play is Sister Immaculate, an African nun. This underscores the fact that African women have the ability and potential to navigate their own lives and contribute to the building of an equal and just African society.

Micere Mugo converted to Marxism in the late 1970s and in the forward to, Visions of Africa (1978), she regrets not having encountered meaningfully Marxism much earlier, because it would have enriched her doctoral dissertation with fruitful theoretical dimensions like the concepts of class, historical and dialectical materialism, and revolutionary consciousness. The influence of Marxist aesthetics is profound in her second poetry collection, My Mother's Poem and Other Songs (1994), which is also under study in this critical project. In this collection, the problems confronting Africa, like, war, unemployment, poverty, political repression and dictatorship, are viewed within a class and materialist epistemology.

In 1976, Micere Mugo collaborated with Ngugi wa Thiong'o in authoring The Trial of Dedan Kimathi. The play talks about the important roles played by both men and women in the Mau Mau liberation struggle. In one of the telephone interviews conducted by this researcher with Micere Mugo, she argues that for a long time, the pivotal role

women have historically played in the advancement and development of Africa has always been elided by the African patriarchy. In another context, she calls this patriarchal manoeuvre, the "silencing, erasure and manipulation of female… texts." (a subtitle to her book. Muthoni wa Kirima-Mau Mau woman Field Marshall).She also sees her role as a writer as one of articulating women's experiences, what she calls, herstory.

I can say, in conclusion, that, issues of gender and class occupy a prominent niche in the creative *oeuvre* of Micere Mugo, including her poetry, which is under study in this critical project. In this regard, this project examines the concepts of gender and class, and how they have been fused in the articulation of a gendered socialist vision in Micere Mugo's poetry.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Micere Githae Mugo is a prominent African woman writer with a sizeable literary *oeuvre.* She has authored the play, The Long Illness of Ex-Chief Kiti (1976), the poetry collections, Daughter of My People, Sing! (1976) and My Mother's Poem and Other Songs (1994). She has also co-authored, with Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the play, the Trial of Dedan Kimathi (1976).

Her poetry has however received little critical attention from critics of African literature, whose concentration has been more on prose and drama. But as it is well known, poetry has the most intensely emotional and private voice in literature through which poets articulate their deeply felt ideas about existence.

Therefore, through her poetry, Micere Mugo is articulating a special vision for Kenya, Africa and the world. This vision has feminine sensibilities which require systematic explication.

This project therefore attempts to study, systematically, how Micere Mugo fuses the concepts of gender and class in the generation of a gendered socialist vision, in her poetry.

## OBJECTIVES

i. The study aims at identifying how the concepts of gender and class have been deployed in Micere Mugo's poetry.

ii. The study aims at examining how the concepts of gender and class have been fused to generate a gendered socialist vision of Micere Mugo's poetry.

iii. The study further explores the form of Micere Mugo's poetry and how it contributes to the realization of the poetry's gendered socialist vision.

## HYPOTHESES

The study is guided by the following assumptions:

(i) Micere Mugo's poetry highlights the social, cultural, political and economic issues defining the African and global social orders.

(ii) Women's experiences are an integral component of Micere Mugo's poetry.

(iii) Micere Mugo's poetry has been influenced by African oral forms.

## SCOPE AND LIMITATION

The study is limited to Micere Mugo's two poetry collections, Daughter of My people, sing! (1976), and My Mother's Poem and Other Songs (1994) because being poetry, the two collections provide us with Micere Mugo's deeply felt private perspective on the issues of gender and class in society. The study therefore examines how she fuses the concepts of gender and class in the articulation of a gendered socialist vision.

## DEFINITION OF TERMS

**(i) Gender**

The term is deployed to designate maleness and femaleness and the subjectivities and histories that accompany each category.

**(ii) Class**

The term is employed to designate the structuration of a society predicated on how its members relate to the society's economic structures and institutions.

**(iii) Socialist**

The term is employed to designate the discourse that articulates social and egalitarian imperatives as opposed to individual and sectarian interests.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

Njuguna Mugo, in the introduction to Micere Mugo's first poetry collection, Daughter of My people, Sing! (1976, traces Micere Mugo's poetic career. He informs us that she was a product of colonial pedagogy. The latter aimed at converting African students into perfect colonials, that is, people who were oblivious of their genuine objective and subjective interests. Therefore, this pedagogy necessarily esteemed and privileged European epistemologies at the expense of African modes of being. As a result, Micere Mugo began viewing Europe as the paradigm of artistic and civilizational progress. Accordingly, her first serious poem was modeled on Elizabethan prosody. It was recited at the house party of Burns House in Alliance Girls' High School in 1959. Her inhibitions against African poetic forms began vaporizing when Okot P'Bitek's narrative poem, Song of Lawino, was published in 1966. P'Bitek, through this work, had proved that African oral forms could be utilized to vitalize African poetry.

Njuguna Mugo therefore argues that, Daughter of My People, Sing! is a tribute to the African oral poetic tradition because, among other things, it utilizes African idioms, rhythms and styles to address issues pertinent to Kenya, Africa and the world. The collection, he says, is also characterized by simplicity which makes it accessible to the general reader.

Njuguna Mugo's insights are useful because they provide us with the historico-cultural context within which to read Micere Mugo's poetry, but due to their introductory nature, they are not concretized using any poems from Daughter of My People, Sing!. This study will therefore build on Njuguna Mugo's introduction by examining how

Micere Mugo fuses the concepts of gender and class in her poetry, in the articulation of a gendered socialist vision.

Amandina Lihamba, in her introduction to Micere Mugo's second poetry collection, My Mother's Poem and Other Songs (1994), re-echoes some of Njuguna Mugo's arguments. For example, she argues that Micere Mugo's decision to appropriate African oral forms for her poetry is part of her struggle of liberating herself from European poetic practices and knowledges which she sees as inhibiting; that she wants her poems to be recited, sung and performed; that with this second poetry collection, Micere Mugo marks her political and ideological maturity; that Daughter of My People, Sing! touches on social relationships, human emotions, personal and communal experiences with nature, alienation, conflict; that My Mother's Poem and Other Songs talks about gender and matters pertaining to the total liberation of Africa from the forces of colonial, neo-colonial and imperial exploitation.

Lihamba's arguments, like Njuguna Mugo's, are useful because they give a general historical context within which to read Micere Mugo's poetry. But due to their introductory nature, Lihamba's arguments are general. That is why she does not demonstrate how the various elements of form she identifies in My Mother's Poem and Other Songs (1994), like repetition, rhyme, imagery, are connected to the themes she identifies in it and how they enhance the poems' performativity. Lihamba does not also identify gender and class as entwined imperatives that run through Micere Mugo's poetry thereby generating a gendered socialist vision. This study will therefore advance Lihamba's introduction by examining how the various elements of form like repetition,

rhyme, imagery , are dialectically connected to the concepts of gender and class in the generation of a gendered socialist vision.

Molara Ogundipe- Leslie, in her article entitled "The Female Writer and Her commitment", appearing in the African Literature Today of 1987-the issue was dedicated exclusively to African women writers-argues that according to Feminism, women writers have the two important functions of articulating women's points of view and describing reality from their perspective .She further argues that, for an African woman writer to be effective, she has to simultaneously address issues of womanhood and the social, political, cultural, economic challenges facing the modern African society. Ogundipe-Leslie does identify Ama Ata Aidoo and Micere Mugo as one of the prominent African women writers who meet the above stricture.

But she does not demonstrate, using any of Micere Mugo's poems, how she has arrived at that conclusion. She also identifies several African women writers whom she says have expressed "formal ingenuity" in their works of art .Micere Mugo is pinpointed for her formal inventiveness in poetry, but again, Ogundipe- Leslie does not show us how she arrives at this position. In other words, she does not concretize her observations with real analyses of Micere Mugo's poetry.

This study will therefore attempt to examine how Micere Mugo's poetry utilizes form, gender and class to articulate the critical dimensions of African existence Ogundipe-Leslie has identified.

Douglass Killam and Ruth Howe, in an online article posted at http://people.africadatabase,org/en/n/cat.033/, offer a profile of Micere Mugo.They inform us about the year and place of her birth, the schools she attended, and the

influences that shaped her.They argue that Daughter of My people, Sing! is simultaneously geared towards questioning our received ideas about personal and cultural identities, and taking us back to African values like singing which they view as deployed in Micere Mugo's poetry to fortify Africans as they face their existential challenges. They further argue that My Mother's Poem and Other Songs is replete with the vitality of African oral forms.

Killam's and Howe's arguments are useful in the sense that they provide a brief general introduction into Micere Mugo's poetry and person. But due to the introductory nature of their profile, they do not illustrate their contentions using any concrete analyses of Micere Mugo's poetry. The study will therefore endeavour, through a systematic analysis of Micere Mugo's poetry, to examine how African oral forms and other elements of form have been employed to fuse gender and class and in the process, articulate a gendered socialist vision.

Tanure Ojaide, in a review of Micere Mugo's My Mother's Poem and Other Songs, appearing in World Literature Today of the summer of 1995, observes that Micere Mugo is a committed African writer whose concerns are for black people, the underprivileged class and women, and that the poems in the above collection are moving. But he goes on to argue that Mugo's collection is "generally too talkative without description, narration, or strong images" (631);that the poems' poetic power is weakened "by the direct political and feminist ideologies and the embracing of abstractions such as "liberating knowledge", "probing dialogue", "neo-colonial treachery'', and "imperialist history''(631);and that there is minimal orature in the collection which is not even utilized properly by the poet.

Ojaide's claims are general. He claims the poems are moving but he does not show why and how they move him. He identifies Mugo's collection as secreting a vision which covers the poor, women and black people but again, he does not demonstrate how this vision is achieved. He does not give us a solid basis for his claim that the collection contains minimal orature. Though, his claim that the poetry contains abstractions is valid.

This study will therefore aim to demonstrate the ways to read Micere Mugo's poetry by systematically examining the form of Micere Mugo's My Mother's Poem and Other Songs (1994) and the earlier collection Daughter of My People, Sing! (1976) and how the form has been utilized to fuse issues of gender and class in the generation of a gendered socialist vision.

Adeleke Adeeko, in a review of My Mother's Poem and Other Songs, appearing in the summer 1999 issue of Research in African Literatures, argues that the above poetry collection attempts to put into practice Mugo's theoretical insights about African oral literature contained in her work ,African Orature and Human Rights. The latter was the result of a field study Micere Mugo carried out among her Ndia community in the Kirinyaga district of the Central Province of Kenya.

Adeeko argues that the collection is structured on the African oral poetic model, and this makes the poems amenable to dramatic enactment. She informs us that her favourite poem in the collection is "My Mother's Poem" which she argues radiates with tender pathos. She concludes her review by arguing that Micere Mugo, through My Mother's Poem and Other Songs, challenges African writers to anchor their works in African oral forms which engender participatory and egalitarian social modes.

But due to the fact that Adeeko's critique is a review, she does not delve deeper into systematically demonstrating her arguments. She does not, for example, suggest the possible ways in which the poems in the collection can be performed. She also fails to identify gender and class as imperatives that run throughout the collection.

The study will pick up from her review by attempting to examine whether My Mother's Poem and Other Songs and the earlier collection Daughter of My People, Sing! (1976) have been influenced by the African oral tradition and whether the latter- if present in the two collections-does contribute to the generation of the gendered socialist vision of the poetry.

The Literature review therefore reveals that there is a lacuna in the study of Micere Mugo's poetry with regard to how she utilizes gender and class in the adumbration of a gendered socialist vision, which the present study aims to fill.

# THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is guided by the Marxist, Postcolonial and Feminist literary theories. In the Marxist theory, the concepts of "history", "ideology" "dialectics'' "structure'', and "superstructure" are imperative. History is conceived as human made, in the sense that it is propelled by interactions of people based on how they relate to the means of production and distribution in a given society. The higher classes are those in control of the means of production and distribution. This economic dimension of history is the so called structure or base, which determines –in complex ways- the discourses of society like art, law and politics (superstructure). Louis Althusser defines ideology as "... a system (with its own logic and rigour) of representation (images, myths, ideas or concepts, depending on the case)endowed with a historical existence and role within a given society'' (5). It operates through what he calls "interpellation '', that is, "the assent of subjects is sought to the propositions of ideology" (8). Althusser's definitions create space for the existence of both dominant and oppositional ideologies. In this study, attempts are made to manifest the various configurations of ideolog(y) /ies embedded in the poetry of Micere Githae Mugo.

Marxist criticism takes works of art as products of historical processes-which are class in nature- at work in a given society. Literature is taken as simultaneously reflecting reality and attempting to influence our view of that reality. Marxist criticism therefore studies the socio-economic and historical circumstances within which a work of art is composed; it probes into the crevices of literary artifacts in order to unfold the configuration of class forces embedded in them; it tries to elucidate the nature of the

ideological visions- whether progressive, conformist or reactionary –emanating from works of art.

The movement between the literary and socio-economic and historical in Marxist criticism is predicated on the imperative that literature ought to be anchored in the concrete. Frederic Jameson puts it in the following terms:

> For Marxism, the passage from the literary to the socio-economic or to the historical is not the passage from one specialized discipline to another, but rather the movement from specialization to the concrete itself. (377)

The analysis of the form of works of art is part and parcel of the Marxist critical enterprise. Karl Marx points out that "... form is itself but the working out of content in the realm of the superstructure'' (329),while Emmanuel Ngara restates a similar view when he argues that, "form is social experience artistically recreated" (8).

The Postcolonial literary theory, which was given impetus by the publication of Edward Said's Orientalism, attempts to understand the nature of the relationship between colonizing and colonized societies. Specifically, it focuses on the relationship between the West and the societies she has historically dominated through the imperial and colonial process in African, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America.

In order to exploit these territories, the West constructs a Manichaean discourse which denigrates their denizens. In this discourse, the West is figured as cultured, rational, masculine and therefore, superior, while the non-Western sectors are portrayed as primitive, emotional, feminine and therefore, inferior. All the negative elements of Western society are fobbed on to the non- Western societies. The latter become what Edward Said calls the West's "Surrogate Other."

On the other hand, the non-Western societies always attempt to resist Western hegemony and the discourses that under gird it through the appropriation of elements from both the Western and indigenous cultural heritages. This is what Bill Ashcroft et al. call, "The Empire Writes Back". This dialectic spawns cultural hybridity, that is, the cultures of the two categories interpenetrate, thus undermining claims of cultural purity and superiority on both sides. But this fact is often denied by Eurocentric discourse which continues to understand this relationship along jaundiced lines.

Feminist criticism takes literature to be a social institution which consciously or unconsciously inscribes within its structure gender configurations which socialize members of society into particular world views about gender relations.

Feminist criticism aims at devising new conceptual and hermeneutical tools with which to evaluate women's and men's writing. The theory argues for the evaluation of women writers on their own terms rather than on androcentric standards. This study will attempt to put this stricture into practice.

Elaine Showalter identifies two types of feminist criticisms: Gynocriticism and the Feminist critique. The Feminist Critique focuses on the reader and audience. The aim is to devise ways of reading as a woman. Gynocriticism on the other hand focuses on the female writer. Says Elaine Showalter:

> The study of women as writers, and its subjects are the history, styles, themes, genres, and structures of writing by women; the psychodynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career; and the evolution and laws of a female literary tradition. (310)

Patrocinio P. Schweickart argues that the feminist literary theory has the task " of recovering, articulating and elaborating positive expressions of women's point of view, of celebrating the survival of the point of view in spite of the formidable forces that have been ranged against it" (438). This study will take cognizance of both Schweickart's and Showalter's formulations.

Hélène Cixous identifies the following hierarchized gender schema as defining human societies: "Activity / Passivity; Sun/Moon; Culture /Nature; Day/Night; Father /Mother; Logos/Pathos; Man/Woman." The feminist literary theory therefore strives to puncture the above binaristic conception of men and women by providing an alternative field of vision which views men and women as categories with equal humanity. In this connection, Hélène Cixous provides the following warning:

> Phallocentrism is the enemy of everyone. Men stand to lose by it, differently but as seriously as women. And it is time to transform. To invent the other history. (268)

This study will be inspired by the imperative to de-essentialize gender and place it within its proper socio-cultural and historical contexts.

In this regard, the study will also take cognizance of the postulates of Black Feminism. The latter, apart from sharing in the general feminist principles highlighted above, does focus on experiences specific to Black women. For example, Afro-American women suffer from racism and sexism; Afro-Caribbean women suffer from racism, sexism and neo-colonialism; African women's experiences are touched by racism, sexism, neo-colonialism and polygamy. The study will therefore attempt to explicate black women's, and especially, African women's histories and subjectivities.

# JUSTIFICATION

Micere Mugo is a prominent African women writer. There is a vision which she articulates through her creative *oeuvre* for the African and global social orders. Her largest creative output has been in poetry where she has published the two collections, Daughter of My People, Sing! (1976) and My Mother's Poem and Other Songs (1994). In relation to poetry, Eldred D. Jones observes that it is the most private genre of literature. Isidore Okpewho, in, The Heritage of African Poetry, explains why this is so by arguing that poetry touches people deeply emotionally such that they experience pain or pleasure, and that it provokes our minds to think deeply about human phenomena. The study is therefore justified in focusing on Micere Mugo's poetry on the grounds that it is through her poetry that she does offer us her most heartfelt private view about the various issues that define Africa and the world. Through this poetry, she aims to influence us to participate in her universe.

This universe is a totality made up of various strands which have been historically determined. This study is therefore justified in focusing on the two poetry collections because they will enable us examine, in detail, the constituent units of Micere Mugo's poetic universe, and specifically, her gendered socialist vision. The two collections will also enable us to keep track of the career of the above vision.

Despite poetry being the most private genre of literature, Molara Ogundipe-Leslie observes that in Africa, "one is struck by the paucity of female poets" (10). She does not offer reasons why this is so but my argument is that this paucity is to some extent caused by patriarchal publishing, and androcentric critical, institutions, which consider women

writers to be inferior to their male counterparts. This study is therefore justified on the grounds that it aims to contribute to the task of correcting the androcentric bias of African criticism by undertaking the first full study in Kenya of Micere Mugo's poetry through examining the gendered socialist vision of the poetry.

## METHODOLOGY

This study is based on library research. Use has been made of resources from the internet. Telephone and e-mail interviews have been conducted with Micere Mugo. Other texts by, and about, Micere Mugo have also been read. The latter texts and the interviews have formed the basis of the literary biography in the introduction to this chapter. A careful reading of the primary texts has been undertaken and the stylistic and thematic issues emerging thereof have been linked to the concrete world in order to evolve a comprehensive gendered socialist vision of the poems.

## CHAPTER BREAKDOWN

All the components comprising this section constitute chapter one. Chapter two contains a study of the theme TRADITION AND VALUES and its contribution to the gendered socialist vision of Mugo's poetry. Chapter three contains an examination of the theme LOVE AND MARRIAGE and its contribution to the gendered socialist vision of Mugo's poetry. Chapter four constitutes a study of the theme ANTI-COLONIAL STRUGGLES AND THE STATE OF THE NEO-COLONY and its place within the gendered socialist framework of Mugo's poetry. Chapter five contains a study of the

theme FEMINISM and its place within the gendered socialist framework of Mugo's poetry. The last section of the study constitutes the conclusion.

# CHAPTER TWO

# TRADITION AND VALUES

Each civilization has bedrock of tradition which is often plumbed for values by its members to vitalize their histories. Micere Mugo, being African, has the African tradition at her disposal which she accordingly utilizes for her poetry, to articulate a gendered socialist vision. It is true that her poetic *oeuvre* is influenced by the African tradition. But it is only in the poems identified under the rubric of TRADITION AND VALUES that this tradition is rigorously thematised. Our interest in this chapter, therefore, is propelled by the impetus to know the place of the African tradition within the gendered socialist framework of Mugo's poetry.

In the poem entitled, "Daughter of My People, Sing!", which is also the title poem of Mugo's first poetry collection; we are introduced to the vitalizing and creative aspects of the African tradition. The allusions to singing and dancing transport us to African oral forms and their niche in the African society. They also evoke panoply of the variegated social aspects of this society. This return to tradition is not romanticist; rather, it is an attempt to plumb and excavate progressive elements from the African tradition and integrate them into an African modernity.

African orature is necessarily participatory. The oral text is only realized fully in a performance, as Ruth Finnegan, Isidore Okpewho, and Kimani Njogu remind us. The oral text, in other words, is a communal product. For it to emerge there must be a collaborative interaction between a composer, performer, and audience. This does not

negate the individual creative energy of the artist nor the fact that each performance is always new.

African oral forms serve both aesthetic and ethical functions; that is, they entertain and delight, while simultaneously imparting values to the members of society in their negotiation of the contours of existence. In this orature, social trends which are deemed inimical to the health of the community are discouraged. For example, individualism, laziness, skullduggery, usury, social parasitism, and selfishness are de-emphasized. On the other hand, solidarity, egalitarianism, fraternity and general sociality are esteemed. The most vulnerable members of society like children, the sick, the elderly and disable, are well cared for. An individual *is*, because other members of the social collective *are*. These are, in other words, some of the tenets of traditional African Socialism.

Therefore, by alluding to this tradition, and more so, in a neo-colonial context-the poem "Daughter of My people, Sing!" was written in 1968, five years after Kenya's constitutional independence-the poet-persona is attempting to demonstrate that Africa is not the epistemological *tabula rasa* of Euro-American ethnocentric discourse.

The title of the poem itself alludes to the above "verities," with the added dimension that it introduces the matrix of gender by employing the lexical item "daughter." The phrase "my people" and the verb "sing" conjure up the socialistic picture of the African society reconstructed in the preceding paragraphs. "My People," further demonstrates the deep love and empathy for, and solidarity with the African society the poet-persona has. She finds her being in aligning her aspirations with those of her community. In other words, African people are not identity-less; they have a rich cultural

fountain to draw from. The exclamation mark (!) in the title after the word sing suggests the desire of the poet-persona to witness the re-integration of her and the younger generation into progressive African cultural and artistic modes.

By foregrounding females in the poem-the title has "daughter"; the first lines mention various categories of the female gender like, "girl" and "sister", while the second last line refers to "daughter"-the poet-persona is involved in the act of creating articulatory spaces for women in the modern African society which has traditionally been patriarchal in nature. She wants their voices to be heard; most fundamentally though, both genders are conceived as being equal and therefore important in the social process. Through diction characterized by simplicity and lyrical intensity-which is a feature of African oral poetry-the poet-persona exhorts both men and women to draw inspiration from African orature and the values it engenders, as a means of confronting the challenges of contemporary African society.

For example, the exhortation to females is as follows:

Sing girl sing

daughter of my people sing

sing

rise sister

rise and dance

be soulful

be whole (1-7)

There is a clear sense in the poem that, unless the addressees in it sing-this is symbolic of immersing oneself in African orature and its social values-then their alienation in the modern world will persist.

The admonition to males is identical in spirit to the one pertaining to the females:

Sing man sing
Sing and dance
brother rise
rise and dance
laugh brother
be soulful son
and let the sun
shine (8-15)

A trans-gender solidarity is alluded to through the use of the word "brother" and "sister" in this poem. The two genders, in other words, should not be antagonistic towards each other but co-operative. The verbs "sing" and "dance" belong to the same hermeneutic field, and their repetition severally in the poem points to the vibrant and participatory nature of African oral poetry; more profoundly, they call for a re-integration into the socialist ethos propagated through African oral poetry and orature.The implication is that the addressees' true individuality will only emerge, paradoxically, from the *social being* of the community.

The lexical items "rise", "laugh", and "be", buttress the robust, optimistic and defiant tone of the poem. They suggest the determination of the poet-persona to

conscientize the addressees to the importance of drawing on their rich cultural genealogy for the process of life.

This existential process is replete with numerous challenges, and in the poem, they are figured through powerful images of nature: "mountains", "storms", and "hurricanes":

Shake the mountains

man the storms

command the hurricanes

peace

stand

on both feet (16-21)

These three images have interesting ontologies. Mountains and storms are universal phenomena, while hurricanes occur mostly in regions bordering the Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea. Mountains on their part, as symbols, are ambivalent. For example, according to the Gikuyu community, which Micere Mugo belongs to, mountains are sacred sites associated with divinities. Their supreme deity, *Ngai*, for example, is believed to live on Mount Kirinyaga, which is in the Central Province of Kenya.

The hermeneutical dimension of mountains which Micere Mugo utilizes in the poem-that of mountains as obstacles- can be seen in the Bible. The New Testament reports, for example, that Jesus Christ figures existential challenges as mountains whose surmounting requires faith. Storms and hurricanes are images which symbolize the immense threats to a particular order, whether personal or social.

By deploying these three images in the ways suggested above, Micere Mugo is manifesting her debt to both the Western and African traditions. In relation to the former, it is a case of appropriation, that is, the colonized selectively borrow from the colonizer's culture in order to undermine the colonial project and its effect.

The above lines also manifest the influence of the African-American oratorical tradition on Micere Mugo. For example, their declamatory robustness reminds us of the rhetorical flourish of the speeches of civil rights activists like Angela Davis, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, jr.

The poet-persona is convinced that the addressees have the ability and potential to transcend obstacles thrust their way, their enormity notwithstanding. The verb "man" is deployed in a generic sense, and it is my suggestion that at this time, that is, 1968, Micere Mugo had not yet developed a feminist linguistics.

The place of African oral poetry and the socialistic values it engenders is further elaborated in the poem, "where are those songs?". The latter rhetorical question and others in the poem like, "what song was it?", "what do you remember?", "vast span of life", "how did the wedding song go?", "(swallowed in parts by choking smoke)?", are a pointer to the fact that the poet-persona has previously been alienated from the African cultural background, and that now, she is undertaking the mission of re- discovering the essence of African orature in order to fuse its insights within African modernity.

The poet-persona evokes a rich traditional African setting and atmosphere through the use of powerful and vivid images. For example, there is mention of African food crops like maize and millet; forests; woods; *shambas*; weeding; "hoeing our fields";

"trudging gaily"; "long file"; "row of bending women"; "stirring the pot"; and "choking smoke."

Clearly, the community portrayed is a peasant African community. It depends on agriculture for its economic sustenance. Social stratification as an impulse is suppressed in this society. Its members collaborate with each other in their daily endeavours. Women perform certain chores together like, collecting wood for cooking:

Trudging gaily
as they carried
piles of wood
through those forests
miles from home (20-24)

They also help each other to till their lands: "And the row of bending women /hoeing our fields" (26-27). This co-operation helps to lighten and speed up work. In other words, the people see it as their obligation to help each other. Through this unity, obstacles are overcome: "to what beat/did they /break the stubborn ground" (28-30). "Stubborn ground" is symbolic of the challenges which often confront this community but which are surmounted through human solidarity.

The cycles which define life, for example, birth, naming, initiation, marriage and death are seen by the poet-persona as occasions for the renewal and strengthening of the *social body*. The whole society is implicated in the marking of these existential junctures; and as the poem amply demonstrates, songs are at the nerve centre of this social process. They accompany the main social activities the people engage in like cooking, hoeing, fetching firewood, weddings, funerals, and ceremonies of birth, naming

and initiation. These songs impart to the members of the society values aimed at maintaining its stability and health.

Songs are symbolic of the rich cultural heritage that Africa has. In this regard, the poet-persona also presents us with an epistemology of the classification of songs in the African society. The following categories can be identified: work songs, lullabies, dirges, wedding songs, rites of passage songs and military songs. Through this nomenclature, the poet-persona is suggesting that the African society is a complex whole, contrary to the misrepresentations of Eurocentric discourse. Moreover, the above classification unfolds African art as profound, nuanced and functional. It grapples with the concrete experiences of the people, that is, it is relevant to their needs and aspirations as a collectivity.

The poet-persona has been alienated from this African cultural fountain through Western education, but nevertheless, she has not entirely lost everything: she still recalls some very perceptive insights she imbibed from her mother:

Mother always said

sing child sing

make a song

and sing

beat out your own rhythms

the rhythms of your life

but make the song soulful

and make life

sing

Sing daughter sing

around you are

uncountable tunes

some sung

others unsung (51-65)

Like in the previous poem "Daughter of my People, Sing!" the emphasis here is on the richness of African oral poetry and the importance of the values it engenders for contemporary African society. Singing empowers people; it gives them the courage and confidence to face up their existential challenges; it bequeaths to them an identity which enables them to confidently negotiate the contours of existence.

Through this poem, the poet-persona also presents a theory of literature. Literature should be anchored in the concrete experiences of the members of society; it should reflect and express their most fundamental needs and aspirations; it ought to be defined by simple diction, just like African orature, so that all the people can understand its aesthetic as well as ethical dimensions. This latter aspect will also prompt wholehearted participation by the members of society in the literary artifacts created thereof.

The above conception of art is what actually informs the traditional African society, and the poet-persona is trying to draw inspiration from it. Her mother, who gave her these insights, is symbolic of the traditional African cultural order. In this order, in other words, art has a socialist outlook.

This theory, infact, informs the poem under discussion and the other poems written by Micere G. Mugo as we shall see later. This is therefore a clear instance of self-

reflexivity. The diction of this poem is simple and accessible; its images are powerful and vivid but drawn from the African environment for easy identification with. For example, the existential continuum is figured as a stream and bathing in it is similar to the total identification with the aspirations of the majority of the members of society.

Soak yourself
bath
in the stream of life
and then sing
Sing
simple songs
for the people
for all to hear
and learn
and sing
with you (71-81)

Matters of gender are part and parcel of the socialistic milieu of this poem. The poem does foreground the pivotal role women play in society. In fact, it celebrates these roles. Contrary to the ideology of patriarchy, society cannot function without the input of women's talents, ingenuity and labour. Their role in the construction of a socialist society, in other words, cannot be gainsaid. Women, in the poem, are portrayed as people with creativity, and this inventiveness sustains the health of the community. They are at the centre of the food production and storage processes of the traditional African society:

What was it again

they sang

harvesting maize, threshing millet, storing the grain…

---

hoeing our fields

to what beat

did they

break the stubborn ground

as they weeded

our shambas? (7-9; 27-32)

Women nurture and socialize children into the ways of the society. The poet-persona recalls with delightful nostalgia all of these experiences:

What did they sing

bathing us, rocking us to sleep…

and the one they sang

stirring the pot

(swallowed in parts by choking smoke)? (10-14)

The above last line (line 14), vividly and dramatically captures the atmosphere in the poet-persona's and addressee's homes when their mothers were cooking. The line has been "swallowed" by the parenthesis *ala* their mothers when engulfed in smoke while cooking.

In the traditional African society, women played integral roles in ceremonies like initiation, child-naming, child-birth, weddings and funerals. Invariably, they provided the

songs that accompanied the above junctures. These existential "milestones" were marked as moments for the renewal and strengthening of society.

Through the depiction of women's solidarity in the traditional African society, the poet-persona is calling for the unity of women in contemporary society in order to articulate their experiences as women as well as the aspirations of the whole society. The allusion to women's solidarity is for example seen in lines like, "my mother and yours" (2); "my mother and yours and all the women on our ridge" (18); and "and the row of bending women" (26).

The position and role of men in this society is implied rather than explicitly enunciated. For example, through reference to chores and activities women engage in the traditional African society, we are able to infer that men too have their roles. We are in a position to also deduce that this society is regulated through a division of labour between the two genders. Men, for instance, serve as the defenders of the society from external enemies; and there are songs specifically aimed at strengthening this security function. Women, in fact, play central roles in composing and singing what are called "warriors" songs: "how did they (women) trill the *ngemi* / what was / the warriors' song (39-41;my parenthesis)

This labour nomenclature was ultimately geared towards ensuring a "seamless" functioning of the society. The presence of men and their roles in the community are also subsumed under the category of "people." The poet-persona, it should be understood, is not trying to discriminate against men; on the contrary, she is attempting to re-surface and recuperate women's subjectivities which have traditionally been silenced, erased and elided by patriarchy.

Micere Mugo demonstrates awareness that, as much as men and women carry out various responsibilities in society, the heaviest burden falls on women; and this is the doing of the patriarchy. This is for example manifest in the poem, "Wife of the Husband." Its setting is traditional African and this is seen through the vivid images it deploys, for example, "sleeping hut," "pen", "hearth", and "red charcoals". Therefore, the values which animate this social entity are socialistic as we have been demonstrating with regard to the two poems studied so far.

The poet-persona critiques the division of labour in the African society. It is viewed as skewed in favour of men. Despite women contributing tremendously to the development of society, ultimate power and authority are still vested by tradition in the hands of men. The poem is therefore calling for an even distribution of labour and power in society so as to lessen the burden women have to carry for the rest of society.

In this poem, the unfair advantage men enjoy over women in terms of labour and power is shown through the image of snoring. In fact, throughout the poem, the husband's snoring is the only constant against a dramatic background of the many chores the wife has to perform:

> His snores
>
> Protect the sleeping hut
>
> ---
>
> His snores
>
> Welcome her to bed
>
> four hours to sunrise
>
> His snore raise her from bed (1-2;15-18)

Women are overworked because tradition, which is patriarchal, says so. When women marry, tradition says they belong to their husbands. This is evidenced through the use of the possessive "of" in the title, which is itself ironic. The many chores women do are seen by the post-persona in terms of loads and burdens. Their effect on women is deleterious:

but the day's
load
and the morrow's
burden
weigh heavily over
the stooping mother... (3-8)

As if the work she does in the field is not enough, the wife has to ensure that everything in the house is in good order. To underscore this, the poem uses dramatic images:

---------- as she
sweeps the hut
bolts the pen
tidies the hearth
buries the red charcoals
and finally seeks
her restless bed (8-14)

The wife is the last to go to bed and the first to rise up. Her sleep is not even sound and calm but edgy and nervous as exemplified in the line, "her restless bed". The

last two lines of the poem utilize irony to show the sympathy and empathy that the poet-persona has for the wife:

His snores rouse her from bed

six sharp

arise

o, wife of the husband! (18-21)

In this poem, therefore, the poet-persona is calling for the equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women in the process of constructing an egalitarian society. The poem sympathizes with the experiences of women because, traditionally, women's narratives have been smothered by the patriarchy.

This process of narrating women's stories in the context of tradition, is continued in the poem, "Will the mugumo ever sprout?". The poet-persona's grandmother died, and she was, incidentally, their last reservoir of traditional African wisdom:

When grandmother died

we buried in tears

our last

ancestral guide (1-4)

The grandmother is placed on the same pedestal of sapience as the grandfather, whose earlier death is implied rather than explicitly stated. Therefore, the dictates of the patriarchy notwithstanding, women are also wise and they do disseminate wisdom *ala* their male counterparts. There is in the poem a palpable sense of change from the traditional order to a modern one. The former order is symbolized by the grandmother, while the latter dispensation is figured in the poet-persona and her other living relatives.

She is searching for ways of maintaining continuity between the two orders. In other words, she is probing for viable avenues of fusing the two in order to evolve a relevant African modernity.

Lines 1-4 are addressed to us as readers. They provide the background and context to the entire poem. Their pace is casual, and tone, matter of factly, because they are describing the past. This past, however, is not irrelevant since the poet-persona is looking for ways of plumbing it for positive values to integrate into contemporary society.

It is true that poems are addressed to an audience; but it is equally true that in poetry, just like in other genres of literature, there is a presence of voices which interact and the role of the reader is to aggregate these voices so as to get the poems' relevance for him/her. Therefore, from lines 5-15, the poet-persona, through assuming the collective voice of the progeny of the dead grandmother, is communicating with the grandmother. She wants to bridge the chasm between tradition and modernity.

These lines, that is, 5-15, are full of energy and intensity because they are describing the present. It is in this present where "all the action is". The offspring of the grandmother –this again exemplifies the important role women play as the nurturers of life- are in the throes of the forces of change. These forces are tremendous as evidenced through their symbolic depiction: "Entangled in a mess"; confounded by confusion"; "wrung / by the whirlwind of change" (7-8); and "parching drought." These images are simple and easily decipherable. They, moreover, emanate from the African background.

The above changes are not indefinite but will eventually come to an end. The poet-persona and her relatives therefore want to know whether there will be light at the

end of this process. This is the light of positive values of the African tradition. The latter is symbolized by the mugumo tree.

The nouns "mugumo" and "ancestral guide" allude strongly to the nature of the traditional African society described so far in this chapter. "Mugumo" transports us back to the myth of origin of the Agikuyu community, which in the context of this poem can be read as symbolic of the African society. The word "mugumo" conjures up the origin of the cosmology of the Agikuyu people. For example, they believe that *Ngai*, the supreme deity, who lives on Mount Kenya, created the first two ancestors of the tribe, Gikuyu and Mumbi. He gave them stewardship over land in the present day Central Province of Kenya, which, incidentally, boasts the highest concentration of the members of the community. He also gave them instructions on how to communicate and commune with him. This was to be done, for instance, through the offering of sacrifices under a mugumo tree which the deity had designated as his sacred tree.

With time, this tree became associated with patriarchal trappings. Henceforth, priests, who were invariably male, were the only ones allowed to offer sacrifices under it. Therefore, by equating the dead grandmother with the mugumo tree, the poet-persona is executing a subversive manoeuvre. This tree is a source of stabilizing values, just like the grandmother is, to the poet-persona and her relatives. Her death (grandmother's) is analogous to the cutting down of a mugumo tree, an unheard of occurrence! But all is not lost because there is the possibility of a cut down tree sprouting again, similar to the prospect of the values of the African tradition, symbolized by the grandmother, emerging to vitalize their contemporary existence.

In other words, by associating the grandmother with the mugumo tree, the poet-person is striving to en-gender, and therefore, democratize the religious and cultural symbols of the society. She is attempting to situate women at the heart of the vitals of the community. This is supposed to lead to the emergence of a society anchored in the values of gender equality and egalitarianism.

The traditional African society, like any other society, had to contend with natural calamities. These could, for example, be in the form of famine and floods, as we see in the poem, "Is judgement come?" These disasters, invariably, serve as entry points into the articulation of universal questions viz. what is the meaning and value of life and, why do calamities characterize the human experience? By the end of this poem, these questions remain unresolved. The last line of the poem, for example, is still probing and attempting to decipher the conundrum posed by the famine and floods: "Is judgement come, O our Maker?" (56).

The poem portrays a traditional African society in the grip of two forces, that is, famine and floods. It vacillates between these two extremes which precipitate profound pain, suffering and death. Contrast and powerful imagery are employed to infuse the poem with a poignant dramatic authenticity. Through these images, we are able to identify totally with the tribulations the society experiences.

Lines 1-13 represent the first dramatic movement of the poem. In this movement, a general background and context of heart rendering pain and suffering is introduced. All the entities in this space are affected by a terrible famine. This society is an agriculture based economy and inevitably, the lack of rain is bound to affect its livelihood and cosmological balance. The images deployed in these lines evoke a grim and grotesque

canvas of helplessness. For example, there is:" unpitied cries", "creation wailed", "destruction descended", "The cracked earth gaped helplessly", "pitiless sun", "mothers wept", "children starved", and "for barns were empty."

The religious figures of this community, that is, priests and old wise men, alike the rest of the affected entities, respond to this calamity. Their role in society is an intermediary one. They act as a link between the people and the Maker. In case of disasters, like the current one, they are supposed to divine their cause(s) and come up with remedies for their solution. In this instance, they undertake to offer prayers and sacrifices to the Maker. The aim is to appease the creator to bring rain: "Priests raised fervent prayers at the altar / while fathers of old in appeasing ceremony / offered their fattest under the shrines" (11-13).

But their efforts, together with cries of the other people, do not bring rain. This is dramatically underscored by the use of contrast. The poet-persona, from the beginning of the poem, has been accumulating images of utter helplessness and despair, and therefore, we expect this condition to be ameliorated as the poem progresses but this notion is powerfully disabused by the line, "But no rain came" (14).

Still, in lines 1-13, pertinent issues of gender are introduced. For example, in this community, the religious authorities, as pointed out earlier, are male. This state of affairs speaks of the division of responsibilities along gender lines in this society. Obviously, this gendered division favours men more that it does women, but the main focus of the poem is to present the effects of, and the response to, famine and floods within a traditional African community. The gendered dimension of the poem should be seen within the above context because, in the poems analysed so far, Micere Mugo has

demonstrated her awareness of the patriarchal nature of the African society and has, accordingly, challenged it.

The only point of gender insensitivity in the poems analyzed so far, is in using the generic noun "man" in referring to human beings. This shortcoming was seen in the poem "Daughter of My People, Sing!" and in the poem under study, that is, "Is Judgement Come?" This tends to subsume women's subjectivities under the umbrella of men's experiences. Though, it can be argued that, during the period the poem was written, that is, the 1960s, the lessons of the feminist movement had not yet been deeply entrenched in discourse, and therefore, as much as Micere Mugo was aware of the patriarchal nature of the African society, she had not yet come to a full consciousness of feminist linguistics, which we see in her second poetry collection, My Mother's Poem and Other Songs (1994).

The above weakness notwithstanding, the poet-persona manages to inscribe the experiences of women in the context of the disasters of famine and floods. Lines 9 and 10 depict the despair and helplessness of women under the famine. Traditionally, women play crucial roles in the community; for example, in food production and the upbringing of children. The bond between mothers and their children, as a result, is stronger than the one between fathers and their children. Inevitably, if an event precipitates the suffering and demise of children, it is women who are enormously pained. In the context of the poem, the famine has rendered the mothers helpless, and the only thing they can do is to weep as their children are starved to death before their eyes: "Mothers wept / for barns were empty and children starved" (9-10).

Words and phrases like, "The land", "maker", "barn", "altar", "fathers of old", and "their fattest under the shrines", have been used to give the poem an authentic traditional African ambience and setting.

Lines 15-24 continue to pile up powerful images of destruction and desolation. All the entities of nature are personified to show the extent of the damage wrought by the famine. This highlights the fact that all entities in this cosmos form a unified whole. If a unit is displaced, then all the others will be profoundly affected:

Man despaired
nature revolted
in disgust
the wind whirled useless dust back at heaven
a protest-moisture was her accustomed load
Deranged, herds of cattle
furiously raced in aimless circles
as if demanding death
if no rain would come
from the Maker (15-24)

The second dramatic movement of the poem is inaugurated from line 25 with the dramatic word, "suddenly." What follows is a markedly different scenario from the preceding one. Under this "dispensation," floods compound the previous famine disaster. The two are now fused. At first, people thought that their prayers for rain had been answered and in fact, they were joyful:

At first rejoicing and laughter

replaced past cries

in harmonious voice

songs of joy and praise

thanksgiving and love

were raised

to the Maker (25-36)

But the people's hopes are dashed when the rain continues to pour out. Floods form and sweep away their agricultural fields and homes. The community is now in utter destitution.

Powerful images related to rain and flooding have been used to reinforce the enormity of the destruction under this second movement of the poem. For example, there is: "roars of thunder..", "fiery flushes", "torrents of hail", "sweeping rain", "bombarding thunderbolts like bomb-shell blastings", "... gulleys of ruinous water", "lowly dwelling a blaze." The people, understandably so, think that this is punishment from the Maker for sins which they have committed:

and as the drowning in angry water

or the famine stricken

gasped their last,

the cry was the same:

Is judgment come, O our Maker? (52-56)

The conundrum remains unresolved.

In terms of gender, lines 43-45, of the second movement, are rich with hermeneutic possibilities. For example, to underpin the widespread desecration of the

community and its environment, the swept away agricultural fields are compared to a violated pregnant woman. Women perpetuate society by giving it new members, like the sustenance of the community derives from farming. Expectant women are in a precarious state and therefore require specialized care; the land also, being the producer of the products that perpetuate the community, ought to be well looked after. The floods, therefore, *ala* the violators of pregnant women, destroy an important component of the foundation of the community. It is true that both genders suffer under these two disasters, but by making references to "mothers", "the pregnant fields" and the wind (it is depicted as female), the poet-persona is attempting to give the female gender visibility *vis-â-vis* the male gender. She seems to be saying that even under the patriarchal traditional African society, women's voices could not be completely erased and muted. This society, as the study has been arguing and demonstrating all along, is egalitarian in outlook, and this perspective forms an important background to this poem, "Is Judgment Come?"

Despite the seemingly overwhelming challenges people face in the traditional African society, they never give up on life. Hope and optimism ultimately re-assert themselves. Good and bad moments are often taken as two sides of the same existential continuum, and therefore, to live is to partake of both sides. The process of living must go on in spite of occasional setbacks like droughts, famine and floods. This point of view is well captured in the poem, "Locusts are Retreating", which appropriately concludes the poetry collection, Daughter of My People,Sing!, on an optimistic note. This hopeful end is also a commentary on the outlook of Micere Mugo as a poet. She is aware that life is characterized by challenges, but she is equally cognizant of the fact that human beings have the ability to transcend these existential obstacles.

The very title of the poem, "Locusts are Retreating," introduces a hopeful outlook. This image takes us back to the invasion of a traditional African society by locusts. The latter always leave destruction in their wake. Their retreat, therefore, is a moment of respite and optimism that vegetation will sprout again. The locusts, clearly, are symbolic of the occasional disasters and challenges that visit the African society.

Note should be taken of the fact that it is the smile of the child which is read by the poet-persona as indicating that locusts are retreating. In other words, the analogy of locusts is just a reading by the poet-persona; the main focus is on the child as a symbol of hope and optimism. The smile of the child, which is out of innocence, is seen as rich in hermeneutic possibilities. It acts as a challenge to adults, for example, to cease worrying about the hardships of life, and instead, focus on how to construct a viable future: "You smile / a smile eternally indicting / making children of us" (2-4).

The child's smile acts as a repository of the knowledge of the way to better organize the society. This society is characterized by socialist ethos as can be inferred from the deployment of the word "us" and the phrase "your generation shall laugh." The poet-persona clearly espouses a collective consciousness. The fortunes of the society are conceived as being tied to the unity of its members. The child, who is symbolic of the promise the young in the community portend, is seen by the poet-persona as the one who will inspire the evolution of a healthy egalitarian society. Members will no longer be cowed by challenges, but that, armed with confidence and a militant spirit, they will always look beyond the present and focus their attention on constructing a polity defined by egalitarian values. There is in the poem an implied sense that, for it to be healthy, the

needs of all its members must be taken care of well. In other words, there is no room given for a society stratified along class lines.

All these insights are relayed through the consciousness of a mother figure. This is evident from the tender and sensitive tone adopted by the poet-persona towards her subject. The addressee is endearingly referred to as "child." This close bond is a main characteristic of mother-child relationships. The fact that the poet-persona is a woman makes it possible for her to sensitively articulate the society's experiences. For example, the poet-persona paints an empathetic picture of the pain people go through in a bereaved family. We are told that the symbolism of the child (of a bright future), is the only ray of hope and optimism in an otherwise dark tunnel of bereavement. Traditionally, it is women who weep the most when a death occurs, because, unlike men, they acutely feel the pain of loss, since it is through them that new members are added to the community. Women, therefore, are integral planks in the social process. They not only serve a biological function, that is, giving birth; they also humanize society through the values they impart to their children and the sensitive ways they respond to the challenges which confront society.

In conclusion, the chapter has argued for the presence of a gendered socialist vision within the theme of tradition and values in Micere Mugo's poetry. It has further demonstrated that the socialistic ethics under this theme derive from the socialistic nature of the traditional African society where social stratification is kept to a minimum. The needs and aspirations of the collective supercede those of the individual members. The return to these values is therefore a contestatory act against Eurocentric discourse which

portrays Africa as a cultural void; and the narrative of capitalism, which undermines human solidarity and equality by atomizing people on the basis of the profit imperative.

The chapter has also highlighted the influence of African oral forms in the poems. Their images are simple, concrete, powerful and full of evocative detail. They conjure up refreshing pictures of the traditional African society. Their diction is simple also and easily understood *ala* African orature, where communication and the participatory role of the audience are highly prized. In this society, the artistic moment is a time for communal interaction and renewal, unlike the Western artistic tradition which mainly esteems obscurity, privatist and individualist imperatives in artistic production.

In the next chapter I will study the gendered socialist vision of Mugo's poetry within the context of the theme of LOVE AND MARRIAGE.

# CHAPTER THREE

# LOVE AND MARRIAGE

Love and marriage are sites rich with numerous hermeneutical possibilities. Consequently, this chapter attempts to situate the theme of love and marriage within the gendered socialist framework of Micere Mugo's poetry. It also inspects the forms employed to articulate the above concerns.

Love and marriage, in this section, are conceived as important personal and social imperatives. They do affect, negatively or positively, the sectors participating in them, depending on how they respond and rise to the challenges posed by them. Poems under this thematic rubric, clearly, view the two as incarnated in heterosexual "provenance", that is, love and marriage as fulfilling only if conducted between a man and a woman. The bonds entered into, should, ideally, be sacred and therefore, before plunging into one, rational, calm and patient contemplation is a *sine qua non.*

Love and marriage are not merely and simply agreements involving two atomistic individuals; they are also symbolic of the solidary possibilities inherent in people congregating under the banner of disinterestedness in order to construct an egalitarian *polis.*

For the longevity and stability of these unions to be guaranteed, an attitude and spirit of *quid pro quo* is important between the partners involved. Both partners are equal but they do have distinct roles and responsibilities to perform in these relationships. Values like materialism, opportunism and commercialism, are seen as inimical to love

and marriage and therefore, the latter can only flourish if couples actualize socialist principles in their lives.

In, "Gambling with life," a woman signs away her happiness and future by marrying a man for the wrong reasons. First of all, she does not really love the man; she is only infatuated with him. For example, in relation to infatuation, there is: "constipated by passion / ballooned with emotion" (10-12. "Ballooned" suggests ephemerality and fickleness (a balloon can easily be deflated by coming into contact with a sharp object),while "constipated" suggests bloatedness(constipation is caused by the lack of proper digestion). Secondly, she is taken in by the man's wealth: "under the power / of "guineas for power" (16-17).

Clearly, here, there is collaboration between masculinity and capitalism. This suggests the patriarchal nature of capitalism. The latter pries on the psychological vulnerabilities of people so as to incorporate them into its exploitative orbit. Once "captured", people become oblivious to their real interests. The poet-persona calls what the woman did, "Gambling with life."

In this phrase, the poet-persona does summarize the values under girding capitalist society. These include opportunism, commercialism and materialism. In this society, the overarching narratives, therefore, are owned and enunciated by the rich, symbolized in the poem by the man. Social relationships are not powered and animated by Kant's categorical imperative; rather, people prey on each other, *ala* the woman, who has been ensnared by the man in this poem.

The poet-persona caricatures and scorns the above capitalist logic. It is seen as shallow, hollow, jejune and de-humanising. In the beautiful phrase of Noam Chomsky, it

is an "insane rationality." (4) The poem seems to be suggesting, therefore, that genuine and authentic planning-that which takes cognisance of people's true interests-cannot occur in a framework pervaded by emotionalism and capitalist rationality. That is why the following lines are ironical:

She designed
Phase three
Of her life-development plan
on Sunday
the seventh of July (1-5)

The design is fickle, in the sense that it is not premissed on solid and enduring values of mutual love and commitment. Instead, it is predicated on "passion", "emotion" and "guineas for power''. In this matrix, the infatuation component and its counterpart, that is, the monetary element, are viewed by the poet-persona as undesirable, and that is why they are figured through vivid but negative images: "constipated by passion / ballooned with emotion" (10-11). The combination, constipated / ballooned , and the rhymes, passion / emotion, and sobbed /throbbed, underline the iron-tight grip of infatuation the woman was under.Ironically though, she sees this as love while the poet-persona clearly indicates to us that it is not.

The poet-persona further provides a mathematical approximation of the forces working on the woman to robber her of the proper use of her mental faculties. Infatuation, we are told, contributed to a third of the fraction of her present predicament while the influence of money underpins two thirds: "one third infatuated / two thirds intoxicated" (18-19).

The poem's sympathies definitely lie with the woman. The poet-persona empathizes with her condition, and in fact, to some extent, she is seen as a victim. But ultimately, as the tenor of the poem demonstrates, the woman is ascribed full responsibility in relation to the quandary she is in. The poet-persona, in other words, does a way with the linkage between womanhood and victimhood. She subverts patriarchal discourse by crediting women with rationality. She calls it," the thread of reason." This discourse (patriarchal), as Helene Cixous reminds us, thrives on constructing and policing Manichaean boundaries between men and women. The two genders, in other words, are always seen as anti-thetical. For example, men are portrayed as overwhelmingly rational while women are shown to be sentimental and mawkish. As much as the woman in the context of this poem married under the influence of money and infatuation, this lapse is not seen as congenital and pathological, because women, it is implied in the poem, have the potential and capacity to rationally order their lives. The poem therefore calls on women to own and possess their destines. They should not forfeit them to the jurisdiction of emotions and self-interested men. For example, before they marry, they ought to consider calmly and rationally, all the factors related to the institution of marriage, because, love and marriage, ideally, ought to mutually benefit both genders contracted to it. They should, also, guard against, and jettison, capitalist values like, materialism, the so called "guineas for power."

Since love and marriage, as argued at the beginning of this chapter, are symbolic of the way social relations ought to be organized in the society, the above injunctions can therefore be extrapolated *vis-á-vis* this macrocosmic arena. Consequently, social

stratification along class lines ought to be dismantled. Social intercourse should be predicated on the principle of the equal humanity of all people rather than the wealth they possess. Ingenuity, furthermore, needs to be exercised to ensure that the interests of all the members of society are taken into account in social policy formulation processes. People should not exploit each other, that is, they ought not to sacrifice one another on the altar of their own interests. Obviously, society ought also to demolish all forms and residues of gender discrimination because men and women are equal.

The questioning of materialistic ethics is also manifest in the subjection of the phrase "guineas for power" to quotation marks. These further suggest that the ideology which secretes this phrase, that is, capitalism, is not a healthy foundation on which to construct a humane society. Its antithesis, that is, socialism, is a more viable option. The phrase also brims with other hermeneutical possibilities. For example, The Longman Dictionary of the English Language defines a guinea as "1. a former British gold coin worth 21 shillings. 2. a monetary unit worth one pound and five pence" (654). It further adds that the gold used to make the coins was believed to come from the West African region known as Guinea.

I therefore want to suggest that the phrase "guineas for power" also alludes to the imperial and neo-imperial relationship that characterized and continues to characterize the relations between Africa and the West. Furthermore, the supposition that the gold used to mint these guineas was obtained by Britain from Guinea, can be read as a metaphor of the African space which the West has traditionally plundered and exploited in order to build and fortify its own civilization. To paraphrase Philip Ochieng', this connection of Britain with Guinea can be read as being symbolic of the proboscis by

which Europe has sucked the blood of Africa for about 500 years (9). But this nefarious mission is always couched in high flying rhetoric, like, "the spread of civilization, democracy and freedom." In this regard, Edward Said tells us in Orientalism that, the West sees itself as the center of the universe and therefore, superior to other geographical sectors of the world. As a corollary, the latter are conceived as the West's "Surrogate Other," that is, their *raison d' etre* is to serve Western interests.

V.I Lenin in, Imperialism as the Highest Stage of Capitalism, argues that the imperial project is impelled by the voracious appetites of capitalism. Therefore, having exhausted its potential for growth in the West, capitalism searched for other spaces to "chew" so as to maintain its dynamic nature. Its main goal is simply to grow and accumulate capital. The owners of this system are the bourgeoisie, and not all the social strata of Western Society, even though all of them benefit in one way or another from this imperialist thrust of capitalism. It follows that the misrepresentation and denigration of Africa and other regions by the West, has a materialist basis. The logic of this imperialist stratagem is as follows: before you exploit an entity, it must be demonized so as to circumvent the moral issues attendant on this deleterious process.

The formative encounters between the rest of the world and Europe, which were necessarily asymmetrical, laid the foundation for the current lopsided international politico-economic order. For instance, in relation to Africa, the flow of resources and communication with Europe has preponderantly been one-sided, that is, Europe is the perennial beneficiary of this "relationship." Therefore, by deploying the word "guinea" in the second half of the twentieth century( 1969),despite its super cession as a monetary unit in Britain, the poem warns us that Western imperialism did not end with the

independence of African countries because it mutated into new forms, one of which Kwame Nkrumah calls, "neo-colonialism."

Understood within the above framework, the word also destabilitizes, subverts and mocks the Western notion of its civilisational purity. The truth is that Africa has contributed and continues to contribute to the progress of the West.Consequently; Eurocentric discourse is judged to be delusory and fantastic.

The word "guineas" also calls to mind the lexical item "Guinness." The latter is a beer brand with origins in Ireland. The phonetic relationship between the two words, that is. "guineas" and "Guinness," therefore, does invite interesting readings not radically dissimilar to the ones I have been undertaking in the preceding paragraphs.This association is supported in the poem by the deployment of the word "intoxicated'' in line 19. As a result, connecting "Guinness" with "intoxication" yields viable meanings in the context of the poem.

I can, therefore, suggest, that the Guinness beer brand may be read as being symbolic of the toxicity of some of the products which Western Multinational Companies sell to Africa with the express aim of accruing profits from the continent. Ultimately, these goods are not in the long term development interest of the African continent, the propagandist marketing mantra of "Guinness for power" notwithstanding. In other words, the poem is warning us against consuming any products from the capitalist West-material as well as epistemic-without inspecting them to certify whether they conform to our fundamental needs, because, in most cases, these products are inimical to the aspirations of the African people. The poem seems to be suggesting further that, if the above injunctions are not taken into account by Africans, then the continent will regress

and atrophy, *ala* the woman in the poem, who signed away her livelihood by marrying a man for the wrong reasons: "she signed / her life and death / warrant." (27-29).

The theme of love and marriage, and the components required to strengthen and sustain them is further developed in the poem, "At a Friend's wedding." Their symbolic social value is also implied within the poem's structure. The addressee of the poem, who is wedding, is a young friend of the poet-persona. This age difference is exemplified through the tender reference to the addressee as "child" and "little one": "Black child" (1); "smile on dear little one / smile child smile" (52-53). The poet-persona, who is a woman, adopts a motherly posture towards the addressee, almost analogous to the one in Langston Hughes' poem, "Mother to Child." She takes the addressee as her own child and therefore, accordingly, assumes the responsibility of tutoring him/her-there is no clear indication in the poem of the gender of the addressee-on the exigencies of marriage. Through this gesture, the poet-persona is underscoring the important nurturing role women play in society. In other words, their contribution to the socialization and upbringing of the young members of society is immense and hence, cannot be gainsaid.

Lines 1-6 introduce the source of the foundational values on which the addressee is advised to predicate his/her marriage:

> Black child
>
> ancestral wisdom
>
> was never despised
>
> ancient wisdom
>
> was only trodden upon
>
> by the fool (1-6)

By referring to the addressee as "black child," the poet-persona is drawing attention to his/her descent. The latter is characterized by a rich cultural legacy-contrary to Eurocentric discursive postulates which gaze at it through jaundiced lenses-which the addressee is advised to prowl in order to obtain sustaining values for his/her marriage in this age animated by the de-humanizing ethos of capitalism. The poet-persona wants to establish a progressive continuity between the African past and present. According to her, in other words, the two junctures need not be necessarily mutually exclusive because, the successful negotiation of the terrain of contemporary existence requires rootedness in solid values which, in our context, can be derived from the African cultural heritage: ancient wisdom / was only trodden upon / by the fool" (4-6). This cultural genealogy is deep and time-tested because it is the result of the distillation by the African society of the lessons it has imbibed through its interaction with the African milieu.

African wisdom is believed to be reposited mainly in the ancestors of the society-the so called "old ones" and "wise ones," by virtue of the depth of their experience in dealing with the crises, enigmas, conundrums and paradoxes of existence. From a gender perspective, it is fruitful to note that the gender of the "wise ones" is not indicated. Only generic terminology is utilized to refer to them. This is significant, because the poet-persona seems to be suggesting that both men and women, since the beginning of the African society, have equally contributed to the intellectual and philosophical storehouse of the society. In other words, sagacity is not the exclusive domain of men only.

The first batch of these ancestral insights is introduced in lines 7-11:

The old ones said
a rotten seed
bears naught
that nothing good
issued from a void (7-11)

The images of a rotten seed and void are apt and accessible. The contrast, good/void, does emphasize the idea of the impossibility of something good issuing from nothing. Therefore, to reap benefits from a venture, it is incumbent upon one to expertly, wisely and astutely cultivate and invest in it. The above observations highlight an interesting aspect of proverbs, and in this context, African proverbs: they are pithy and succinct embodiments of universal human experiences. In other words, their relevance is timeless because they can comfortably integrate within the existential structures of any epoch.

After the delivery of this "homily" on African wisdom, the poet-persona urges the addressee to think over the issues raised: "pause and ponder / bless this social re-birth" (12-13). In the age of capitalism, where humanity is embroiled in frenetic rat races to acquire material goods, the addressee is advised to think over every step he/she takes. More specifically, he/she is encouraged to reflect on the deep significance of the institution of marriage. This is underscored through the alliteration between the verbs "ponder" and "pause". The line "bless this social re-birth" alludes to the socio- symbolic value of marriage. Consequently, it is not an arrangement only between a man and a woman but also a metaphor of the way social relations should be structured. The latter, for example, ought to be defined by the values of solidarity, equality, mutual love, respect

and devotion. These ethos, definitely, subvert the ones engendered by capitalism like materialism, commercialism and opportunism.

In lines 14-25, vivid and delightful images drawn from gardening and farming, are deployed to emphasize the sensitivity, delicacy, and seriousness with which marriage is to be approached and cultivated. For example, marriage is compared to delicate flowers, tender shoots, and reeds, which need expert care and attention to mature:

Marriage is like
a reed and tender shoots
thirst first
Unwatered, delicate flowers
shrivel (14-18)

Both partners have an equal responsibility to nurture it to maturity and solidity.

The second batch of ancient wisdom is added in lines 28-34:

The wise ones
often said
two hands are
stronger than one
Brought together,
two heads puzzle out
send forth multiple wisdom (28-34)

The fundamental idea embedded here is that cooperation and unity are vital for the meaningful execution of a project, be it inter-personal or social. From lines 35-53, the poet-persona concretizes the above insights within the context of marriage and society.

Fore example, it is implied, that, for marriage to endure and fulfill both partners, love and devotion to each other are a *sine qua non.* Each has a specific role to play in the union to ensure its happiness:

a man is not the
home
a woman is not father of her child
love and devotion
are the balm
for anointing genuine unions (35-42)

Love and marriage have rewards and benefits, despite the labour and effort needed to nurture and sustain them. This is shown in the poem through the analogy of an industrious "husbandman": "The industrious husbandman / tastes the finest wine / at harvest time" (23-25).

The use of the noun "husbandman" suggests that the poet-persona has not totally transcended some of the postulates of patriarchal discourse, because, in the poem, the word is deployed as an analogy applying to both men and women in a marriage situation. It therefore necessarily subsumes women's experiences under the umbrella of patriarchal ontology. This weakness was seen, for example, in some of the poems analysed in chapter three under the theme of "Tradition and values." This is a case of insensitivity to the gender dimension of language, even though, it needs to be added, that, generally, the poems exemplify an acute awareness of women's subjectivities.

Unlike the addressee in the poem "Gambling with life," the one in this poem seems to have entered into marriage for the right reasons and therefore, he/she is being warned of the danger of succumbing to the materialistic values of capitalism which define the society they are living in. Simultaneously, the poet-persona is calling on the members of this society and us as readers, that is, both men and women, to construct a *civitas* premissed on humane and egalitarian values which draw inspiration from the ideal marriage, as archetype. These injunctions are timely in the context of the disfiguration wrought on the African landscape by the forces of "commercialism / calculated opportunism / cut-throat materialism" (44-46). In other words, it is the rich, that is, the higher classes, who control, direct and enunciate the jejune capitalistic narratives and discourses the rest of the society are expected to live by. The counter to the above scenario lies in re-discovering the values of solidarity, sociality, equality and respect, and that is why, in the last lines of the poem, there is an appeal to the collective and social sense of the people through the use of the collective possessive "us": "Let us celebrate" (47); "let us bless" (50).

Some of the forms utilized to articulate these issues in the poem are rich with African oral artistic modes. First of all, the tone of the poem is admonitionary. This aspect does mimic the traditional African way of relaying advice from the old to the young. The former utilize the lessons they have learned from existence to guide the latter, whose experience of life is minimal. The poem does also contain African flavoured idioms. African proverbs belong to this category. Furthermore, lines like "Black child" (7), "The wise ones" (28), "ancient wisdom" (4), "The old ones'', "smile child smile" (53), give the poem an authentic African ambience; but more fundamentally, they allude

to the importance of grafting progressive traditional African values into the contemporary African space. In other words, tradition and modernity need not be necessarily antithetical. The diction of the poem is simple while its images are accessible because the latter are drawn from the African environment. We, as readers, can easily identify with them as a result. Therefore, we can say that, stylistically, the poem has been significantly influenced by African oral forms.

The sacrosanctity of marriage and its socio-symbolic value are entrenched further in the poem, "At an Age-Mate's Wedding." But the main difference between it and "At a Friend's Wedding" lies in the relationship the poet-personas share with the wedding addressees.

The title, "At an Age-Mate's Wedding," powerfully alludes to the age-set system in the Gĩkũyũ community which, importantly, Micere Mugo belongs to.The allusive nature of the title, therefore, forces us to take cognisance of the entire social and cultural machinery of this society which can be meaningfully read as a symbol of the African society.

Jomo Kenyatta, in, Facing Mount Kenya, reports that the age-group system among the Agikuyu, otherwise known as *riika,* binds together people of a particular age bracket. These people undergo initiation ceremonies and processes collectively, and as a result, the sense of loyalty, solidarity and commitment among them is robust. The poet-persona, clearly, appropriates this concept of togetherness to express closeness with a friend –who belongs to the same age bracket as her-who is wedding. At a symbolic level, she is inscribing the construction of a society based on the values of loyalty, solidarity

and commitment. In this *polis*, in other words, people ought to care for each other. Exploitation, de-humanization and greed ought to as a matter of principle be extirpated.

Marriage is a sacred institution. It should not therefore be trivialized. It is, ideally, a purposeful fusion of two disparate histories aimed at forging synergies to confront and face existence with:

*To-day is*

*not Saturday*

---

To-day is

*Creation day*

*man and woman*

*becoming one*

East and west

Have come together

---

to-day is

Celebration day

Communion day (1-2; 6-10; 18-19)

As demonstrated with the other poems, marriage has a symbolic social value. This dimension is entrenched in the poem through its contextualization of a wedding ceremony. In the latter, people drum, sing and dance:

drumming and dancing

singing and feasting

blessing this

birth (20-23)

This clearly alludes to African orature and the values it engenders. For example, this orature is naturally participatory and therefore reinforces the imperatives of community and sociality.

Secondly, the coming together of the bride and groom under conditions of equal humanity, can be read as a call by the poem for people to suture and bridge the socio-politico-economic chasms characterizing the African and global orders. The "haves and have-nots", symbolized in the poem through geographical and spatial images of East /West, North /South, depths / heights, are reminded of the their common humanity and therefore, of the need to construct a society that takes care of the needs of its members equally. This is, in other words, a call to set up a socialist society: "Come friends / come all /come join hands" (52-55).

Stylistically, there is the ubiquitous utilization of repetition as a technique. This device not only gives the poem a "sing-song" quality; it also acts as an emphasis on the importance of marriage and its attendant socio- symbolic value. For example, the lines, "today is / not just another day" and the words "birth," "our", "come"- which are repeated severally in the poem-fall within the above interpretive framework.

The poems, "Look how rich we are together" and "I want you to know," reiterate the issues related to love and marriage identified in the three earlier poems classified under the category, LOVE AND MARRIAGE, with the difference between them being that. in the above two poems, the poet-personae are relaying their own love experiences, which fact makes the poems emit beautiful rays of poignant and touching emotional

intensity and immediacy, unlike the previous three which only transmit their poet-personae's descriptions and reflections on other people's love and marriage encounters. Furthermore, the main focus in these two poems is on the benefits which the two poet-personae, who are female, accrue from their love associations with their male partners.

The very title of the poem, "Look how rich we are together", re-emphasises the point made continuously in this chapter, that, love and marriage are equal joint projects between men and women. In this poem, it is the woman giving us her narrative of the relationship with respect to what the man has done for her. This man is referred to using the second person singular "you". Getting the man's story *vis-â-vis* the relationship would have been interesting, but from what we gather, from the woman, the man seems a serious, loving, self-sacrificing, considerate and sensitive person.

She tells us that, before she encountered the man, she was incomplete. Her sense of self and being were unstable; in fact, there is an implied sense in the poem that she was experiencing a personal and identity crisis during this period. But the encounter transformed her fundamentally. She now feels appreciated, loved and cherished. The man cares for her expertly:

> You…….. nursed
> and nourished me
> to a fresh wholesomeness
> you taught me
> how to laugh
> even as tears scorched
> my burning throat

You gave me everything

a fortune

---

telling me how I truly belong. (2-11;26)

In this poem, an ideal commitment to a love relationship is compared to operating a joint bank account. Consequently, a right balance ought to be struck between the rates of deposit and withdrawal. In other words, a love relationship ought to be symbiotic. This insight can also be read as a symbolic commentary on the need to establish a socialist society, which is uniquely placed to take equal care of the needs of its members.

In, "I want you to know," the poet-persona also thanks her male partner for unreservedly and wholeheartedly loving her. The poem's tone effuses a celebratory robustness unlike the tone of "Look how rich we are together" which is melancholic. Further, the imagery of "I want you to know" is decidedly drawn from the traditional African background. This does focalize the importance of African values for contemporary existence. It also a reminder that the poet-persona and her lover are part of an African universe and collectivity which prizes the imperatives of sociality and solidarity. The poet-persona is elated that she and her lover played equally important roles in the strengthening of their relationship. The role performed by the man is analogized to planting, while the woman's is related to watering: "I watered the tender shoots / you planted". (3-4). "Tender shoots" symbolises the delicate beginning of their love; "... my little garden" represents the being of the poet-persona; "the fruits are ripe" bespeaks of the maturation of their love"; "the finest palm wine" and "we must feast and wine" transport us to the traditional African modes of celebration. In the context of the

poem, these two lines symbolize the full-hearted appreciation of the joys of the maturation of love. This love is not only structured at the inter-personal level; more significantly, it is located within the larger African social universe which esteems the values of equality and solidarity. Therefore, it also serves as a symbol for the organization of social relations along egalitarian lines.

In conclusion, I have demonstrated that Micere Mugo thematises love and marriage as sites where important existential lessons can be drawn from. Firstly, marriage ought to be a sacred union between a man and woman. These two are equal and are therefore expected to contribute equally to the stability and health of the union. The latter, for example, should be animated by love, respect, devotion, loyalty and solidarity. On the other hand, vices engendered by capitalism like, materialism, opportunism, and commercialism, ought to be eschewed because they are a danger to the existence of fulfilling marriages and love.

Secondly, love and marriage serve as archetypal exemplifications of the way social relations should be structured in society. For example, the latter, that is, society, ought to be powered by the same values required of love and marriage, viz. equality, loyalty, solidarity, devotion and respect. .Moreover, these values necessarily undermine capitalistic vices and lay the foundation for an egalitarian community.

I have also shown Micere Mugo's debt to the African oral tradition. The images, symbols and diction-admittedly, not all-owe their "provenance" to this tradition. These stylistic aspects, fundamentally, speak of the need to vitalize contemporary African existence with progressive mores from the African past.

In the next chapter, I will study the place of the theme ANTI-COLONIAL STRUGGLES AND THE STATE OF THE NEO-COLONY within the gendered socialist framework of Micere Mugo's poetry.

# CHAPTER FOUR

# ANTI-COLONIAL STRUGGLES AND THE STATE OF THE NEO-COLONY

*The problem of "freeing man [sic] from the curse of economic exploitation and political and social enslavement remains the problem of our time ..."* (5) - Noam Chomsky.

The impact of European imperialism on Africa's social, political, economic, cultural and psychological spaces was immense, to the extent that it continues to define, in variegated ways, the continent's contemporaneity.

This imperial project was under girded, epistemologically, by racist and Eurocentric discourses which considered Europe and the white race as the superior and most advanced sectors of civilization. Accordingly, European imperialism saw its historical mandate as one of "civilizing" and "modernizing" the non-European parts of the world. Conveniently, the materialist basis of the project was elided. But this basis will be provided through the course of the analysis of the poems falling under the thematic rubric of ANTI-COLONIAL STRUGGLES AND THE STATE OF THE NEO-COLONY.

The poems attempt to grapple with the issues emerging out of the imperial encounter between Africa and the West. The over-all message emanating from the poems seems to be that, grappling with historical processes is imperative to the quest of constructing egalitarian social orders and identities. Moreover, due to the acute

problematic nature of the imperial process and its epiphanies like the slave trade, colonialism, and neo-colonialism, the poems exhibit an overt contestatory outlook. The latter can, for example, be discerned in the poems' tones and forms. In them, the poet-personae are attempting to sculpture a universe of personal and social justice out of the rocks of imperialism and neo-imperialism.

This mission, of combating neo-imperialism and neo-colonialism, is not the prerogative of one gender but of both. Since both men and women are affected by these processes, they are called upon to unite under conditions of gender parity to tackle them. These poems also inscribe the important roles women have historically played in the liberation struggles of Africa and its Diaspora but which have traditionally been erased, silenced and elided by the African patriarchy.

In, "From a Zulu Mother's Diary", the poet-persona is struggling to come to terms with the colonial encroachment on Zulu land. The title itself raises expectations that the poet-persona will relate an experience close to her heart because diaries are by nature intensely personal. The poem's addressees are simultaneously the poet-persona's husband and young son. But since the latter will only comprehend its message when he comes of age, the immediate addressee becomes, therefore, the husband.

The poet-persona is mocking her husband for acquiescing to colonial dispossession. Even after the fact, he still refuses to reclaim his land. He seems to be intimidated by the imperial violence machine:

Now my man is

'a good boy'

he simply sits

sits and waits

no need to stir (31-34)

The above lines also underscore the idea of the emasculation of the man, who is symbolic of African men, by the colonial process. He has been incapacitated by Eurocentric colonial discourses and violence such that he is unable to rise up to the defence and articulation of the true objective and subjective interests of his family and society.

The man's dispossession, like that of most people in colonial Africa, was carried out through coercion and outright deception. For example, the husband was tricked and forced into submitting to European legal discourses he knew nothing about. But after acceding to them, the colonial machinery was marshaled to enforce them:

My man's master

son of the *bwana*

composed and dictated the pact

they signed

-your father and he -

signed and sealed

at a secret one hour meeting (12-18)

This clearly negates the supposedly altruistic motives of the imperial project. The latter's aim is simply to cost effectively exploit its target, which in the context of this poem are the Zulu and their resources. The above lines also underscore the idea that it is African men who betrayed the continent to imperial machinations. The imperialists have no regard and respect for the Africans they exploit. In their view, they are merely factors of production: "to him / my man is just another / black dot!" (54-56). In order to exploit

them, Eurocentric discourse, which underpins European imperialism, also figures Africans as less intelligent than white people. The intelligence of African adults, for example, is often equated to that of white children. This is the mindset that takes African men, inspite of their advanced age, to be merely boys: "Now my man is / 'a good boy" (31-32). Accordingly, the colonial mission is seen as an imperative to tutor the African to maturity. The white race, in other words, is viewed as the older sibling of the African race. In the process, the exploitative nature of this "tutelage" is muted.

In the poem, Africans, symbolized by the poet-persona, her husband and son, are under the "full spectrum domination of colonialism'':

my man's master

controls each and all

we owe our lives

to him

---

the lad is our keeper

who dishes daily

our day's bread (37-40; 45-47)

Unlike the man, the woman is incensed by this state of affairs. In fact, the derisory tone she directs against her husband is aimed at provoking him to rise to his historical responsibility of fighting for the liberation of his family. Being a mother, she cannot entertain the prospect of seeing her son in bondage when he comes of age. This underscores the profound concern and sensitivity women have for the fundamental problems and issues confronting society.

The poet-persona also suggests that the processes which led to the colonial dispossession of Africa were essentially patriarchal. For example, the pact that precipitated the dispossession of the poet-persona's family was signed by her husband, who was African, and the white man, who was European. This development derives from European imperialism's endeavour-always-to identify points of entry into non-European societies. Because the African society was mainly patriarchal, men therefore became the entities imperialism utilized to entrench itself in Africa. It needs to be emphasized though, that this patriarchal "alliance" between African men and white men was undoubtedly in the absolute favour of the white men:

Our master
who has bought
double-bought and still buys
our men
accurately recording it all
in his bursting record books (48-53)

Furthermore, it needs to be noted that, by signing away his property, the African man has put his family's and posterity's well being in jeopardy, while by acquiring the same property, the white man's family and posterity have received a structural economic advantage over their African counterparts.

This is the implication that riles and irks the African woman. She cannot believe that her husband has declined to reclaim his property:

Undone
dispossessed

your father accepted

to be a servant

unmanned

he submitted

to be *boy*

---

And my man is not

ashamed

to lick his boots

to be *boy* to a lad (24-30; 41-44)

She wants her husband to robustly and aggressively fight for the family's rights. She desires him to negate and subvert Eurocentric definitions of him, like, 'a good boy.'

Significantly, the latter has been put in quotation marks while the word "boy" has been italicized to show the poet-persona's vehement disapproval of the phrase and term. She is aware that they are racist and derogatory linguistic specimens whose ultimate aim is to buttress European privilege in Zululand.

What is most intriguing in the poem, from a gender perspective, is the declaration the woman makes that, if the husband declines to reclaim his property, then she is ready to do it for the sake of their son's future. She does not want the son to live a dispossessed future life. In other words, the son-who is symbolic of posterity-ought to live in freedom and truth. He is supposed to freely actualize his human potential when he comes of age, rather than being stymied by the racist structures of his society:

(In the name of motherhood

answer me.

when my son is grown

will he too

be another dot?

If he should

-god for bid-

I will fold up

this my *wrapper*

I will rise

and be

a man!)" (57-68)

To underline the depth and seriousness of the concern in the vow she makes, she refers to the son-whom she has all along been referring to using the collective possessive "our"-using the singular possessive "my". Through this shift, the poet-persona is indicating the extreme importance of her son's future wellbeing to her. This, again, exemplifies the sensitive ways women respond to the critical dimensions of African existence.

By threatening to become a man, the poet-persona is suggesting that gender is fundamentally a socio-cultural construct rather than a biological one. The fluidity of gender is symbolized by the *wrapper,* whose discardment is analogous to assuming trans-gender responsibilities:

I will fold up

this my *wrapper*

I will rise

and be

a man!)" (64-68)

In the African society there is division of labour between the two genders whose ultimate aim is to ensure the health and stability of the society. Therefore, through the threat made by the poet-persona to her husband, she is warning African men against assuming that they have power over African women. What they have together with the women, are responsibilities to ensure that the African society functions well. Consequently, if men fail in their social duties, women will take them over because they have the potential to execute tasks designated for men in society. For example, if men fail to rise up against colonial exploitation, women will totally assume this responsibility.

The poem further warns the African patriarchy that its manoeuvres, stratagems and subterfuges are transparent to African women:

-your father and he-

signed and sealed

at a secret one hour meeting

He thought your mother

knew nothing of it

---

so I wrote it down

for your sake. (16-32)

In fact, the implication throughout the poem is that, had the man consulted his wife over the deal he signed with the white man, its deleterious nature would have been pointed to

him But because the patriarchy considers women to be inferior to men, the man ignored the woman and in the process, mortgaged the family's future. Therefore, the poem calls for trans-gender collaboration in order to confront the challenges of African history.

For a man to be called a woman in the African society is considered a grave insult because women are associated with inferiority. But in this poem, as I argued earlier, the poet-persona de-essentializes the term by deploying it only as a metaphor of the person- whether male or female- who is reluctant to rise up to the challenges of existence. It is therefore in this sense that the poem implies that, despite being male, the husband is actually a woman because he is unwilling to confront colonialism.

The poem is flavoured with African speech patterns like, "In the name of motherhood", "my man", "He thought your mother / knew nothing of it", "-your father and he-". These confer on the poem an authentic African aura and remind us that the African tradition can integrate well with modernity.

The themes of "From a Zulu Mother's Diary" are further explored in the poem "Rhodesia". The context this time is in Zimbabwe, which is symbolic of the African continent.

British imperialism, in pursuit of financial and economic interests in Africa, began colonizing the country in the nineteenth century. Initially, it was known as Zimbabwe to its indigenous people, but after its colonization commenced, the colonialists re-named it Rhodesia. This renaming process disempowered this African people because it undermined the unique universe which they had painstakingly constructed through their language. Simultaneously, through this move, the colonialists were enunciating the

supposed superiority of European civilization. This European Manichaen classificatory mania I designate, the Crusoe-Prospero Complex.

Therefore, in order to recuperate their submerged African subjectivities, the Africans are forced to subvert Eurocentric discourses through reclaiming their articulatory powers and rights. That is why the title of the poem is subjected to quotation marks. The poet-persona, through this manoeuvre, undermines the imperialist narrative by doubting the Eurocentric epistemologies undergirding it. To the poet-persona, the country is Zimbabwe. This is clearly indicated by the parentheses under the title of the poem: "(for Zimbabwe's Freedom Fighters)". Furthermore, the poet-persona conceives all the people fighting for the liberation of Zimbabwe as freedom fighters. This also includes her in this category, even though her contribution is ideological rather than military. By designating these people "Freedom Fighters", the poem is deconstructing their Eurocentric definition as "savage warriors".

The poem warns Zimbabwe freedom fighters –of all genders, since the terminology employed to designate them is generic-to be wary of the long racist and brutal history of imperialism in their country. For example, the poet-persona says that his/her-the poet-persona's gender is not indicated-great grandfather was brutally killed by British imperialists when they were laying the foundations of colonial hegemony in Zimbabwe, one hundred and fifty years ago:

Father's father's father
Perished 'a savage warrior'
one hundred and fifty years ago
the 'discoverers's' cannon

blasted him so (1-5)

The poet-persona clearly demonstrates, in the above lines, that, the imperial project in Africa was not benign but malign. He/she further subverts the racist discourse used to under gird imperialism by subjecting specimens of this discourse, like, 'a savage warrior' and 'discoverer', to quotation marks. In other words, Zimbabweans are admonished to re-assert their Africanity through resisting Eurocentric definitions of them. They are urged to be proud of their history of resistance exemplified through the great grandfather, in spite of the powerful imperial machinery ranged against them. This machinery is both epistemological and military, and it is my suggestion that this dual aspect can be teased from the word cannon. For example, the word can be written as can(n)on, thereby yielding the nouns, "canon" (epistemology) and "cannon" (military weapon) which more or less characterizes the *modus operandi* of the imperial project, that is, it moves between Eurocentric discourse and imperial physical violence. In other words, the imperial process moves between *canon* and *cannon.*

The poet-persona's grandfather and father suffered the same racist fate as the great grandfather. For example, the grandfather was sold like merchandise to a hostile geographical space. Before this could happen, the Eurocentric canon had to be utilized to clear the way for it. Accordingly, this discourse designated him "primitive". He was now seen as a baggage rather than a human being whose value was priceless. The poet-persona underscores this imperial dehumanization by revealing the price the grandfather was sold for: three cents!

His son-warrior's son-

they discovered "primitive"

so him they sold for

one two three cents

and the baggage was bound

for enemy land (6-11)

The father is also pejoratively and derogatorily defined. He is said to be "too young" and "immature" to direct his life, despite his being sixty years old. Therefore, according to this Eurocentric logic, colonialism is justified because it aims to nurture Africans to political and cultural maturity:

At sixty

father is labeled

"too young"

"immature"

to direct-determine-his life

his life is Ian Smith (12-17)

The lexical items "primitive", "immature" and "too young" are verbatim quotations from the Eurocentric canon and their deployment is intended to give us a direct feel of the vacuity and inanity of this canon.

The poet-persona, who is symbolic of the younger generation, vows to resolutely resist colonialism in Zimbabwe. His/her impatience with the colonial set up is manifest in the following lines, which brim with the irreverent exuberance of youth:

I am thirty

and that or less, goddamit!

I will not be

ian smith. (18-21)

This is the same attitude that the poet-persona in, "From a Zulu Mother's Diary" predicted African youth would have *vis-ā-vis* imperialism in Africa: "if in scorn he should grab you / by the throat / demanding to know" (6-7).

Ian Smith, who was once the colonial ruler of Zimbabwe, and who, in the context of this poem, can be read as a symbol of the patriarchal colonial project in Zimbabwe, is deconstructed through the subjection of his names to the "power" of grammatical anarchy, that is, his names are written without regard to grammatical rules. For example, the first letters of both his names begin with small rather than capital letters, as is the rule. Through this strategy, the poet-persona is suggesting the uselessness of the colonial project to the true aspirations of Zimbabweans. The latter are therefore being called upon to wrest the control of their country from the hands of the colonialists. This call applies to both genders, that is, men and women. This is seen in the reference to the people fighting for the liberation of the country using the generic noun "Freedom Fighters." This trans-gender collaboration can also be inferred from the indeterminacy of the gender of the poet-persona. In this connection, the tracing of the genealogy of colonialism and the resistance to it is meant to only highlight the obdurate nature of imperialism. For example, there is a non-existent distinction between the past Eurocentric discourse which designated the great grandfather and grandfather of the poet-persona 'a savage warrior' and "primitive", respectively, and the present discourse which labels his/her father "too young" and "immature". Admittedly, this dialectic of oppression and resistance was under patriarchal "provenance", but in the last stanza of the poem, this structure is

challenged through the call for both men and women to rise up to the historic responsibility of confronting colonialism.

In the poem "Digging Our Grave", Micere Mugo is attempting to highlight the indelible scars seared on the psyches of the colonized, by the colonial project.

My subconscious

leaks out

a past

I have long buried (1-4)

The noun "subconscious" does emphasise the depth of the deleterious effect of colonialism on the colonized. This is because the subconscious is the storehouse of one's innermost desires, impulses and experiences, which play out without his/her conscious knowledge. When it intrudes into the conscious, it is through an involuntary process and hence the phrasal verb, "leaks out" (2). During the moments the poet-persona is reminded of the colonial past, she re-lives its pain and depradations. But she is also aware that life must go on, what happened in the past notwithstanding. She does not want to be immobilized by this past and therefore, she has decided to forgive but not forget-it is impossible to forget experiences that have shaped one's personal and social identity-what British imperialism did to the country:

Under the sweat of

today's labour

we forgive a past

impossible to forget (68-71)

In the poem, the people are forced, by the colonialists and their African agents, to dig up a trench on the slope of Mount Kirinyaga: "an unbroken file of men and women, boys and girls / heading north / to Kirinyaga Forest Trench. The latter is meant to cut the communication links between the MauMau fighters-most used to hide on the mountain- and the rest of the people in the villages whom the fighters depended on for their supplies. The trench is symbolic of the gigantic fissures drilled into the social and psychological orders of this community by colonialism in furtherance of its economic and financial interests. The only Africans who "benefit" from this project are those who abandon their people by siding with this project. That is why the poem's title analogizes the act of digging the trench, to the people digging their own graves. In other words, colonial terror coerces them to work for their own demise.

The pain of this historical juncture is underlined in the poem by its use of powerful, vivid and graphic images. It is these images that make the poem ooze with gloom and melancholy.

Colonialism, for example, is portrayed as systematized terror and tyranny:

his children bend

low

slaving

hungry

weather beaten

crushed with blows

digging day-long

a grave

a trap (5-8; 32-40)

On the other hand, the African agents of colonialism have been brainwashed to work against their own and their people's interests. This Eurocentric pedagogical process has therefore dehumanized these agents just like the colonialists have been dehumanized by their own Eurocentric discourse. That is why these agents, for example, are figured in the poem as canines and reptiles:

fenced in on every side
by howling vicious guards
---
white-washed
in colonial propaganda
loyalised
venomed
against blood-brothers
a raving guard
slashes at Mumbi (9-10; 16-22)

In other words, the two categories are blinded by Eurocentric logic to the extent that they cannot concede the full humanity of the victimized Africans.

In the poem, the colonial process affects both genders as indicated: "an unbroken file of men and women, boys and girls" (13). But the pain experienced by women in this context is seen as being more acute than that undergone by men because, apart from digging the trench, they are required, when they get home, to cook for their children, who

stay hungry throughout the day at the Kirinyaga Forest Trench with them: "Journeying back in the dark / cries of hungry children / tear mothers' hearts" (54-56).

Women, who are strongly attached to their children-this is not unexpected since they are their mothers-are traumatized when the children undergo the same collective punishment with them during social crises. In this poem, for example, Mumbi aggressively attempts to protect her child-who is strapped on her back-from getting the whips she is subjected to by a cruel guard. Her maternal instincts come to full view through the implication of her rejoinder to the guard: "In the name of *Ngai* / I beg you *bwana*/ spare my child!" she cries". (26-28)

The implication of Mumbi's words is that she is ready to sacrifice everything, including her life, to protect her child. This underscores the crucial protective and nurturing roles women play in the African society. These roles, unfortunately, have traditionally been muted by the African patriarchy and that is why the poet-persona assumes the responsibility of re-articulating them.

The name Mumbi, in this context, is immensely significant. According to Gikuyu mythology, this was the name given by *Ngai* to the first female ancestor of the community, whose male counterpart was given the name Gikuyu. *Ngai's* original plan was for them to live and superintend the world under conditions of gender equality. It was only much later that the community's patriarchy reserved this role exclusively for men. Therefore, through the deployment of the name "Mumbi", the poem is calling on African men and women to dismantle patriarchy by going back to the original "divine" blue print, which is trans-gender in outlook. Mumbi's invocation of *Ngai's* name when appealing to the guard to stop whipping her child together with her is also significant.

Here, she is appealing to the concept of the just nature of *Ngai* to dissuade the guard from assaulting her and her child. I suggest that this concept of divine justice does cover all the social sectors of the society. Therefore, injustices, on grounds like class and gender, have no place in this society because they were not part of *Ngai's* blueprint when creating the universe. In other words, they are human constructs which ought to be dismantled.

The men in this society have been emasculated by the colonial process:

while fathers

-castrated-

tamely listen

and gaze at their toes (57-60)

This is the same fate that befell the Zulu father in the poem "From a Zulu Mother's Diary". The colonial process, in other words, has terrorized and brutalized them into submission and immobility. They are now not in a position to re-assert and re-claim their rights. The poem, therefore, wants men to arise and fulfill their liberatory obligations. The women are at least doing their bit within the bleak parameters set by the colonial project. This is symbolised in Mumbi's confrontation with the guard. The two genders, in other words, are being called upon to unite in order to heal the social structures and personal relationships broken by colonialism.

From a gender perspective, the poem displays linguistic insensitivity to the category of gender. For example, the word "brother' is utilised twice in the poem in a generic sense. This is a weakness we noted in some of the poems studied under the themes TRADITON AND VALUES and LOVE AND MARRIAGE. This has the danger of silencing women's voices and experiences under patriarchal ontology.

The forms of the poems, as we have been demonstrating in our analysis, are grounded in the African setting. They serve the function of giving the poem an authentic African aura which makes us identify with the histories and processes that have shaped and continue to shape the African continent. In other words, they mobilize us to commit ourselves to advancing Africa's interests.

The poem entitled "Vistas of Violent History" attempts to narrate, holistically, the career of black people under European imperialism. This wholistic and panoramic aspect is introduced by the lexical item "Vistas" in the poem's title.The imperial project is seen as murderous: " I see murderous empire builders" (127).

On the other hand, some of the exploited black people have resisted and in fact, continue to resist this imperial project. They are propelled by the desire to see the re-establishment of justice, equality and prosperity in their locales which imperialism has torpedoed in pursuit of its interests. This dialectic, of oppression and resistance, is what gives the poem its dramatic quality. The commencement of the narration of this dialectic is located in the presence of the poet-persona in England –one of the loci of capitalism in the West-and the experiences she undergoes while there.

The initial indication that European capitalism and imperialism are not to Africa's advantage, is given by the poem's first stanza's association of England with negative images. We are told, for example, that the country's temperature is below zero. This definitely affects the poet-persona-who is symbolic of Africa-because she is not used to such climatic conditions: "My hands and feet are numb" (2). The suggestion here is that capitalism and imperialism can incapacitate Africa to the extent that she may not be able to articulate, co-ordinate and actualize her aspirations and goals.

London, the seat of British capitalism and imperialism, has stale air which makes the poet-persona's head foggy: "head foggy with stale / Industrial London air" (3-4). This suggests that the emanations of capitalism are jejune and therefore, inimical to the true aspirations of African and the world. For example, they de-personalize and de-humanize personal and social relationships: "Over and around me the city / buzzes with indifferent taunting /metropolitan cacophony" (9-11). The lexical item "buzzes", definitely invites comparisons of capitalistic society with a beehive. In other words, the latter is a microcosm of the former. This is a society stratified along class lines. Its workers-who belong to the nether classes-produce wealth for the ultimate benefit of the higher classes-who own the means of production and distribution. This state of affairs is analogous to workers bees which make honey for the "fattening" of the queen bee. The unfortunate thing, though, is the fact that the human workers are oblivious of this exploitative structure because capitalist ideology has blinded them with regard to their true interests, just like nature has programmed the worker bees to perform their "servile" function.

By going abroad, capitalism aims to strengthen and entrench, further, the economic privileges and advantages of the European higher classes. But this imperialist thrust is often shrouded by Eurocentric discourses which enunciate it as a civilizing mission. This manoeuvre has the twin advantage of enlisting the support of the exploited lower classes of European society-most do not appreciate the linkage between their exploitation at home and that of non-European people. In Africa, for example, colonial pedagogy tried to produce the ideal colonials. The poet-persona informs us that she underwent such a process:

Sitting in as gentlemanly

a fashion

as I was taught how

in Africa's colonial classrooms (24-27)

This educational process necessarily split the psyches of African people. They were hence forth torn in-between allegiance to their cultural heritage and that of Europe. These two psychological orientations are symbolized in the poem by the nouns "rebel" and "homeguard", respectively. The poem suggests that the panacea to the psycho-cultural split occasioned by colonialism lies in Africans returning, resolutely, to progressive elements of their cultural heritage: "suddenly the rebel in me / strangles the home guard" (34-35).

The poem also shows that European civilization has benefited, immensely, from the resources it has extracted from the non-European regions of the world like Africa and Asia, through the imperial process. This idea is initially introduced by the descriptions given by the poet-persona about the origin and nature of the paraphernalia used by the English landlady in the serving of tea. We are told that the tray has ancient Egyptian designs; the table is made of African mahogany; the teapot is Japanese, while the cups and milk jug are from China:

Proudly, the landlady places

a tray before me

It has ancient Egyptian designs

It sits on old shining

African mahogany

A Japanese tea pot holds

Our English tea

and a tiny matching milk-jug

Completes the row of antiques (31-39)

Consequently, the tea, the paraphernalia and their origins can be read as symbolic of the territories Europe has historically plundered so as to construct its civilization. The poem, therefore, views claims of European purity and superiority *vis-ā-vis* other geographical spaces as deeply ironical because Europe's identity and wealth,to a great extent,derive from her historic asymetrical encounters, interactions and "relationships" with the non-European sectors of the world.

Being an African, the poet-persona concentrates on giving us the historical nature of Europe's imperial relationship with Africa and her diaspora. It is demonstrated, in the poem, that, this relationship has been characterized by the dialectic of European exploitation and African resistance to this exploitation. The latter is impelled by the voracious acquisitive impulses of capitalism, while the resistance is spurred by black peoples' desire to be in total control of their lives.

The terror, brutality and tyranny of this exploitative process are traced right from the slave period to the neo-colonial present. Powerful and heart-rending images are especially reserved for the slave period as a way of showing the inhuman methods employed by Europe to lay the foundations of her imperial relationship with Africa. For example, the poet-persona shows us a canvas of heavily chained Yoruba slaves who are being mercilessly whipped by their enslavers as they row the boats they are in across the Atlantic Ocean on their way to slave labour in the "New World":

I see slaves from Yorubaland

rowing heavy boats

across the middle passage

under grinding chain

and lashing hippo whips (62-66)

When African slaves arrived in the "New World", their living conditions worsened. Their role became one of producing wealth for the satiety of white people:

I see starving

field niggers

In America's white

cotton fields

I see blacks all shades

on the Indies

cane plantations (67-74)

The black people who remained on the African continent were subjected to the same exploitative imperial process as the blacks in the Diaspora. To underline this linkage, the tribulations of these two broad categories of black people are referred to through the same historical continuum and frame of reference. For example, the lands of back people on the African continent were fraudulently acquired for European settler agriculture. Ironically, the same dispossessed blacks were forced by the settlers to work for them for free or for ridiculously low wages.These erstwhile black lands were henceforth designated "white farmlands." This phrase underscores the racist and

Eurocentric notion that white people are superior to people of other races and hence, have the first right of access to the resources of the latter:

I see black natives

clearing bushland

free of charge

making white farmlands (74-77)

The poet-persona does also inscribe, within the general canvas of oppression and exploitation she gives, the suffering African women undergo in the imperial process. This is timely because African History, which is mainly patriarchal, has the tendency of silencing African women's experiences under European imperialism. Therefore, by re-surfacing women's histories under the narrative of imperialism, the poet-persona is pointing out that African women suffered under this imperial onslaught and that, just like their male counterparts, their labour contributed to the development of European civilization. This is underscored in the poem through a depiction of the kinds of jobs these African women did on European settlers' farms. For example, they used to cultivate the farms and harvest the produce thereof. But the poet-persona is constantly aware that the resources acquired by Europeans from Africa were procured through fraudulent means. She shows this by using the small letter 'e' instead of the grammatical, capital letter 'E' for the word "English" when describing the supposed ownership of African resources by England. Through this linguistic manoeuvre, the poet-persona deconstructs the imperial project by revealing it for what it is: an exploitative process:

I see native women

cultivating

english farms

picking

english tea

english coffee

english apples

harvesting

english potatoes

english peas

english maize (78-88)

This imperial process is powered by what Philip Ochieng calls "the flaming greed" of European capitalists who believe that they have a sacrosanct right over the resources of non-European people. In the lines quoted above, for example, the idea of imperial greed is suggested by the repetitive appellation of the lexical item "english" to resources originating from Africa, like tea, coffee and maize. Metaphorically speaking, it is as if European capitalists want to gorge themselves on any African resource they come across. In fact, reading the above lines, we get a feeling that this greed and the discourse that props it are of maniacal proportions. This is due to the nauseating repetition of the word "english".

The poet-persona, on the other hand, juxtaposes the vista of European imperial violence, terror and exploitation, with the heroic acts of resistance by the exploited black people. This confrontation is violent and that is why the poet-persona entitles the poem,

"Vistas of Violent History". This dialectical movement is dramatic and vivid because the poet-persona presents it from the perspective of the present. It is as if what she is relating is happening at the moment. This is seen, for example, in the use of the phrase "I see…" before the narration of the experiences the poet-persona wants to relate. The dramatic immediacy evoked thereof, can be read as the poet-persona's way of underscoring the importance of Africans' resistance to European exploitation which continues to define their contemporaneity.

In presenting historical instances of black peoples' resistance to European imperialism, the poet-persona calls these resistors, "warriors". In resisting imperial exploitation, black people want to take full charge of their lives, imperial violence not withstanding. In fact, throughout this vista of resistance, black people face a foe with superior military weapons. But what stands out is the black people's dogged determination to resist subjugation in spite of these imperial military weapons. Some black people die in the process but the poem indicates that their heroic courage, which emanates from the just nature of their cause, is far more superior to the imperial machine. This resistance does incorporate all the geographical spaces inhabited by black people. Accordingly, the poem makes geographical shifts between the various locales where the resistance occurred:

I see warriors

Mwangeka wa Mwanda

lead a small

Taita army

To ambush

invading thieves

I see warriors

Giriama youth

throw off

*bwana's* haversack

and revolt

under gunfire

---

I see warriors

maroons

on Jamaica hillocks

setting imperialist

plantations on fire (89-100; 122-126; 132-136)

From a gender perspective, the poet-persona makes an interesting manoeuvre by including women historical figures in this category of warriors. This is a clear undermining of the patriarchal structures of the African society and African historiography .In the traditional African society, warriorship was the province of men. Therefore, by placing women within this institution, the poet-persona is calling for the dismantling of all patriarchal institutions and structures in the African society and African History. In other words, men and women are equal and have contributed equally to the emancipatory projects of black people. The examples of the women warriors given are: Me Katilili, Mary Muthoni Nyanjiru, Rosa parks and Angela Davies. The first two are Kenyan while the last two are American.

Me Katilili led the resistance of the Giriama people of Kenya against British colonialism; Muthoni Nyanjiru was a Mau Mau freedom fighter; Rosa Parks is the African-American woman who gave impetus to the civil rights movement in America in the 1950s by her decision to decline to cede her bus seat to a white passenger who was standing, in the State of Alabama; Angela Davies is the African-American woman scholar who was persecuted and prosecuted by the American government in the 1960s for allegedly engaging in "subversive communist activities" which were "detrimental to the security" of the country. From Davies' perspective-which the poet-persona backs –she was engaged in work aimed at dismantling racism, sexism and classism in American society.

The poet-persona shows awareness that there were black people who sided with the imperial project. These are symbolized in the poem by the people who betrayed the Mau Mau freedom fighter Dedan Kimathi:

I see betrayal
a living symbol
---
Dedan Kimathi hunted
forever sold (144-145; 152-153)

The post-independent African leaders who have looted and mismanaged their countries are seen as the rightful heirs of the people who betrayed Dedan Kimathi. That is why their celebrations of Independence Days are ironical. This is because the policies they have enacted are only meant to benefit the higher classes of Africa and Europe. That is

why poverty among the lower classes-of all genders-is on the ascendancy. This poverty is for example symbolized in the poem by the Mathare valley slums of Kenya:

Mathare valley stretches

limitless

across miles on miles

of arid land (155-158)

After the consideration of these "Vistas of Violent History", the poet-persona becomes angry at the landlady and European imperialism. She is now able to see clearly that the tea she has been served is not English, in the sense that it has been acquired abroad through exploitative imperial processes. Her antagonism towards the end of the poem against the land lady suggests that there must necessarily exist a White Feminism and a Black Feminism because these two categories of women have gone through different historical experiences, even though they share the common experience of occupying subordinate positions *vis-â-vis* their men in their respective societies. Therefore, for an enriching Feminist narrative to emerge, these women must acknowledge the histories of each other.

At the end of the poem, the poet-persona does pose a fundamental question which encapsulates the "Vistas of Violent History" she has been relating. The importance of the question is underlined by the contemplative carefulness she takes to formulate it:

I pick up

a diminished cigarette butt

I light it

slowly, methodically

slowly, methodically

I open

at a blank page

in my Economics note book (177-184)

The question, definitely, is a profound one in African Political Economy: "shall we ever drink / Kenyan tea?" (187-188). In other words, she is asking whether Africans will ever take total control of their histories and resources such that thy benefit them instead of Europeans. There is an implied sense in the poem that this will be possible only if Africans emulate the heroic paradigms established by warriors like Dedan Kimathi and Rosa Parks.

This vision is far from fulfillment though, because, the post-independent African leaders decided to align themselves with the erstwhile colonialists, rather than the long suffering people of Africa. The poem entitled, "I took my Son by the Hand", does serve as a good introduction into this state of the neo-colony. The poet-persona, who is a woman, has gone, with her son, to attend their country's Independence Day celebrations some five miles from their home. The initial sign that the country's citizens are disappointed by the neo-colonial turn of the nation, is indicated by the poet-persona's statement that her heart is cold. The latter is at least ameliorated by the warmth of her young son's hand which she holds as they walk to the venue of the celebrations:

I took my son

by the hand

felt the warm flow

of young blood

comfort my cold

heart (1-6)

The poet-persona is symbolic of the disenchanted majority of the country and therefore, her reactions and feelings can be read as the responses of the country's citizenry to the parlous state of the nation. The son symbolises promise and hope, which the new African political elite destroyed by their decision to side with international capitatalist ideals rather than their people. By touching her son's hand and feeling its warmth, the poet-persona is attempting to reconnect herself to what was once a luminous dream of African unity, development and prosperity. That is why, despite the betrayal by their leaders, people still attend Independence Day celebrations as a way of trying to re-kindle the euphoria of the days of the nationalist struggles.

To cover up the neo-colonial status of the African society, African leaders inaugurate the narrative of patriotism and national development. Henceforth , any attempts to challenge neo-colonial exploitation are transmuted into threats against the "security" and "development" of the nation which all citizens are admonished, accordingly, to resist. Samples of these neo-colonial narra-themes are, for example, evident in the following lines:

It was

the season of peace

Away with agitators

Division and hatred *chini!*

Love and brotherhood *juu*

We heard of

selfless sacrifice

condemned

selfishness

Damned

Laziness

Extolled

industry

celebrated

freedom (10-24)

When Africans fought for independence, they expected to reap specific benefits, like, political freedom and economic prosperity. In Swahili, the benefits of independence are referred to as "matunda ya uhuru" with "uhuru' meaning independence and "matunda", that is, fruits, symbolizing benefits. After independence, however, "matunda ya uhuru" were mainly restricted among the African elite. But on national occasions, like the one the poet-persona and her son have attended, these elites proudly display some of the "matunda ya uhuru" for the people to see so that they get the impression that all the social sectors of the country are benefiting form the "fruits". The display of these fruits at the national celebrations can be read as symbolic of the adumbration by African political leaders, during national occasions, of the "achievements" of the post-colonial state. These "accomplishments", invariably, are enunciated as being of equal benefit to the citizens, who are therefore admonished to take pride in them: " carried bursting fruit baskets / high high high / on elevated haughty heads"(25-27).

The people, though, are aware that the neo-colonial African state mainly benefits the African elite. Their participations in national rituals are only attempts at re-membering their shattered, immediate post- independence dreams of African prosperity and development. The despondency, melancholy, gloom and fear displayed by the poet-persona throughout the poem is meant to highlight the deep wound inflicted in her by the betrayal of the nation's aspirations by its leaders. This wound has made her unable to come up with strategies of reversing the neo-colonial direction the country has assumed. This direction is symbolized in the last two lines of the poem by the darkness, which we are told, is quickly engulfing the poet-persona and her son: "move on son / darkness is looming fast / around us" (47-49).

The exchange between the mother and son, apart from giving the poem dramatic immediacy, also underscore the important nurturing and pedagogical roles women play in society, and the fact that changes in the latter do, invariably, affect these roles. For example, if a notion's citizenry is despondent-as is the case in the poem under study-then this mood is bound to be transmitted to the nation's youth. This is unfortunate because the youth are symbolic of the limitless possibilities inherent in the future and should therefore be nurtured on a diet of robust optimism and hope.

The poem's diction is simple, while the lexical items "hut", "fruit baskets", "sunset", and "trekked", anchor the poem within a rural African setting. On the other hand, the words "*chini!*", "*juu*", and the phrase "matunda ya uhuru", being of Swahili "provenance", their integration into the structure of the poem-which is mainly written in English-is symbolic of the process of suturing the disparate geographical and social sectors of the country into a coherent national whole. This process is problematic because

the African elite who control it, are mainly interested in their own welfare rather than that of the people. That is why the poet-persona, at the end of the national celebrations, leaves a disappointed person because she realizes that the national project is manipulated by the elite for their selfish interests only.

The poem has a weakness in relation to the gender dimension of language. This is seen in the deployment of the word "brotherhood" in line 14, in a generic sense. This decision has the danger of subsuming women's experiences under the umbrella of men's ontologies as we have seen in some of the poems with this weakness so far.

In "up here, down there", the poet-persona gives us an indepth portrayal of the progressive entrenchment of the Manichaen dichotomy between the rich and the poor in the African neo-colony. This is succinctly captured by the powerful imagery of the poem's title, that is, "up here, down there" In other words, the rich are those who are "up" –their economic power is immense and continues to increase-while the poor are those who are "down," that is, they are economically disempowered and their condition continues to regress.

The poet-persona is part of the privileged classes and she does acknowledge it. But unlike other privileged people in society who view the poor through lenses of snobbish nonchalance, the poet-persona gets touched by their plight:

Looking down from the lofty
Mabenzi mansions
my eyes rest on a sight
that stamps on my mind
an everlasting, nagging impression:

---

These slums

speak to me in a voice

frightful to hear

impossible to escape

a voice that fills me with sorrow and terror

I am haunted

by an aura of deep tragedy

---

for Mabenzi residents are untouched

by this voice

that taunts me. (1-5; 9-16; 18-20)

The rich, as a strategy of de-sensitizing themselves against the vast squalor dominating the country, appropriate a discourse which rationalizes the Grand Canyon separating them from the poor. The poet-persona necessarily ridicules and mocks this attitude of arrogant indifference:

Unemotional, normal and practical

citizens, they know

'these things must exist in all "developing countries"'

and they also realise

'all men cannot be equal?' (21-25)

This discourse which denigrates the poor does emanate from the West. It is meant to elide the fact that Africa's underdevelopment is to a large extent a result of the European

exploitation of Africa. The rich in Africa, therefore, appropriate this language of European political economy to justify their privilege *vis-à-vis* the African poor. But the poem subverts this discursive power of Western capitalism, in collaboration with "African capitalism", by subjecting the phrase "developing countries" to quotation marks. Through this manoeuvre, the poem is trying to re-claim the articulatory powers of genuine African ontology. In other words, the poem wants to give the priority of narrating the continent to the African people who have her true interests at heart. By drawing on Eurocentric discourse for support, the poem is suggesting that the African higher classes are unoriginal and artificial. The latter suffer from what Okot P' Bitek calls "apemanship", that is, being in total awe of the West such that they uncritically mimic its ideas, trends and products.

The academy is also implicated in the class scheme of society. Instead of scholars, academics and researchers dedicating themselves to the solution of the fundamental problems of the African society, like, poverty, they align themselves with the rich-who have immense resources to fund research-to rationalize the economic *status quo*. The poet persona, accordingly, ridicules the supposed objective findings of their researches which are often presented in abstruse academic *gobbledygook:*

Sociological research shows
the wananchi down there
are allergic to citizens up here:
'unfortunate environmental factors
have injected into their system
violent animalistic passions'

further research declares:

'poverty and frustration

are the source of crime

in Kunguni Tele Valley' (119-128)

The genesis of the society's social inequalities in the structural machinations of the colonial process is a result, elided.

The sectors where the rich live are symbolized by the Mabenzi mansions: "Mabenzi could pass / for a spot in… / you know, the rare residences" (63-65).The name " Mabenzi" alludes to the luxurious and cosy lives lived by the rich. The word is a swahilized plural for the luxurious Mercedes Benz cars whose origin is Germany.

Vivid images of nature, which symbolize well-being, have been deployed to buttress the idea that the rich enjoy obscene economic and financial advantages over the poor. For example, in Mabenzi, the trees, flowers, bushes and general vegetation are luxuriantly green; its air is fresh:

A sharp wind

cuts across what was once

" the white highlands"

whistling through the tall cedars and

jacarandas of Mabenzi

The trees, bushes and flowers

in the extensive private gardens

flap up and down in response

to the fresh mountain air (28-36)

The mansions are built of stone and brick: "Mabenzi mansions / are built of stone and brick" (56-57). These building blocks symbolize the deep entrenchment and solidity of the lives of the rich as well as their hardness of heart and callousness. This is unlike the lives of the poor which are precarious. The latter is mirrored by the decrepit and dilapidated houses of Kunguni: "the shabby, rotting, congested shelters / of Kunguni Tele location" (6-7).

Kunguni Tele is the complete existential anti-thesis of Mabenzi. Its very name announces its parlous state. Kunguni Tele is Swahili for, "lots of bed-bugs". Poverty-which can be traced to the structural economic machinations of colonialism and neo-colonialism-can be read as the numerous bed-bugs which suck the blood of the denizens of Kunguni Tele on a daily basis. Its environment which is depicted through powerful heart-rending and gory images mirrors the indigent existence the people are under:

the shabby, rotting, congested shelters
of Kunguni Tele location
form an unforgettable view

---

There, there are no gardens
only red dust many inches thick
and the polluted wind
from Mabenzi

---

Kabongi river is another
There, on it's lowest course

It acquires a different colour:

a deep brownish shade

that matches the mud-plastered shacks

of Kunguni Tele

It is hot and stuffy

---

down in Kunguni valley (6-8; 40-43; 46-51; 81-82)

The genesis of Kunguni Tele location is anchored in the concrete historical moment of colonialism: "Kunguni was a squatter village" (70). During the colonial era in Kenya, fertile land in the present day Central and some parts of Rift Valley provinces was fraudulently acquired by the colonialists for settler agriculture. The Africans who had lived on it became displaced and henceforth, began living on poor and anaemic lands in the region. This situation was not redressed meaningfully by the post-colonial Kenyan state and the result has been the proliferation of numerous landless people (squatters) in the region. But the cruel cynicism of the post independent leaders knows no bounds. For example, they have re-named Kunguni tele location "Wananchi location" ("Wananchi" is Swahili for "citizen"). Therefore, by using the word Kunguni Tele numerously, instead of "Wananchi Location", the poet-persona is trying to underscore the continued exploitation of the African majority. In the past, it was under colonialism, while in the present it is under neo-colonialism.

In order to survive, therefore, the people of Kunguni Tele are forced to engage in criminal and dehumanizing activities. For example, some brew and sell illegal beer;

other smoke bhang; the old are beggars in the city; the young are looters; and the beautiful women are prostitutes:

brewing illegal native beer
smoking bhang…
the old are beggars
in the big city
the young looters
the attractive women, harlots.
Cold crimes are committed daily
by the youngest of youth
for, born sucking withered breasts
the young are old in the struggle
for survival
crushing under heavy blows
they kill
to live. (91-104)

The poet-persona, clearly, strives to understand empathetically, sympathetically and profoundly, the condition of the poor of Kunguni Tele –who are symbolic of the downtrodden in the African neo-colonial state-unlike the members of her class who view them as simply researchable items.

From a gender perspective, we see that the poet-persona wants us, for example, to view prostitution from a structural perspective rather than from the usual hostile psycho-moral angle. The implication seems to be that, if the economic structures of society are

radically re-engineered to engender economic equality, then phenomena like prostitution will vaporize because most women turn to prostitution.due to poverty. The poet-persona also inscribes, through a heart-rending image, the dehumanizing effects of poverty on mothers. We are told that poverty emaciates their bodies and withers their breasts such that they are unable to nurture their small children to normal growth and health. As a result of this formative deprivation, the children become hardened and turn to crime as a survival strategy:

> for, born sucking withered breasts
> the young are old in the struggle
> for survival
> ---
> they kill
> to live. (99-101; 103-104)

Poverty, in other words, forces the youth to live a painfully paradoxical existence. This pains their mothers who are unable to prevent it due to the ravages of poverty on them. Breast-feeding can also be read symbolically as the spiritural and social sustenance transmitted by mothers to their children.

The poem suggests that the colonial project was patriarchal in nature. For example, we are informed that the residences in Mabenzi are mostly owned by male British aristocrats-who are symbolized in line 67 as "... Lords and Sirs" –and ex-colonial officials, who we know from history were preponderantly male. Therefore, as much as white women were subsumed under the racist categories of, "for whites only" and "the white highlands", ultimate power resided with white male colonisers.

In relation to Kunguni Tele, all genders are equally affected by the poverty defining their existence. Moreso, it continues to deepen while the wealth of the rich continues to burgeon:

Daily they sink
lower and lower
while buildings in the city soar
higher and higher (105-108)

The rhyme lower/soar, and the repetitions "lower and lower" and "higher and higher", apart from giving the lines a musical and rhythmical quality, also emphasize the totally anti-podal economic fortunes and careers of the rich and poor in the African society. The tall buildings mentioned in the above lines-probably skyscrapers-symbolise the robust arrogance of capitalism which does not care about its victims, who are symbolized as inexorably sinking under the ground.

But the poet-persona warns the privileged that the poor still have a sense of self-worth left in them and therefore, will aggressively protect it against the depradations of capitalist discourse:

Kunguni Tele people
spite theoreticicans
---
They resent
being turned into guinea pigs
being treated as museum pieces
and will crush into powder

a tourist's camera

or if need be

his very bones. (129-130; 136-142)

Furthermore, in the last stanza, the poet-persona seems to be suggesting that, if the rich do not take decisive measures to re-structure the asymetric economic base of the society, then a revolution will ensue from the poor –out of the necessity to forestall their total economic annihilation-to re-order the country economically. The rich will be the net losers-the poor have no wealth-because the largest proportion of the nation's wealth belongs to them. The poet-persona, in other words, is appealing to the self-preservation interests of the higher classes. This revolution is symbolized by a fire, which we are told, has been ignited in Kunguni Tele:

…I see a fire ignite

away in the distance

spreading

as the air gets drier and drier…. (155-158)

It is my suggestion that this is the final outcome that the poet-persona has been dreading all along in the poem. This is the prospect-expressed in stanza two-that filled her with terror when she saw the Kunguni slums:

These slums

speak to me in a voice

---

a voice that fills me

with sorrow and terror (9-10; 13-14)

This terror is transformed into immense dread when the poet-persona senses the coming realization of her fears with the igniting of a fire in the distance in Kunguni Tele location: "Looking down at Kunguni / from the Mabenzi mansions / a shudder runs down my spine" (147-149). The poem's diction is simple, as we have been demonstrating, while its forms are grounded in concrete historical African moments which facilitate an empathetic identification with its themes.

Resistance to the neo-colonial present, which is hinted at in "up here, down there", finds robust flourish in the poem, "We will Rise and Build a Nation", which belongs to Micere Mugo's second poetry collection My Mother's Poem and Other Songs (1994). The poems in this collection were composed when Micere Mugo was an avowed Marxist and the influence of Marxist aesthetics can, in fact, be clearly seen in the poems. By composing these poems, she is consciously advocating for the dismantling of capitalism in Africa and its replacement with Marxist Socialism. The poems are defined by a juxtaposition of gory images of neo-colonalism's desecration of Africa, with imagery radiating defiant and aggressive optimism that this neocolonial state of affairs in Africa will be dismantled by a community of dedicated conscious African people. The poems are declamatory in nature. This is evidenced by their rhetorical and emotional intensity. This rhetorical aspect and the presence of repetition and refrains in most of the poems render them amenable to dramatic enactment just like in African oral poetry. In the latter, the poet, text and audience interact dynamically to evolve a communal poetic artifact. By drawing on this African poetic model, Micere Mugo is calling on all conscientious Africans-of both genders-to join her in the performance of the eventual

triumph of justice, liberty and equality over neo-colonial tyranny, violence and exploitation, in Africa and the world. Furthermore, this interactive aspect of the poems does deconstruct the solitarian, privatist and individualist ethos of bourgeois society and art.

The other aspect of the collection My Mother's Poem and other songs. is the powerful and robust imagery it marshals and deploys to enunciate its themes. The images do decisively draw our attention and empathy to the issues being raised in the poems. The poems, however, lack the compactness, narrative power and rich allusive suggestiveness of the poems in the collection Daughter of My people Sing 1976), which we have been studying so far.

In, "We will Rise and Build a Nation", the poet-persona traces the trajectory of the Kenyan nation-which is symbolic of the African nation –state-from its colonial past up to its neo-colonial present. This manoeuvre is meant to place the present neo-colonial status of the country in historical perspective.This strategy achieves the goal of highlighting the stark betrayal of the nationalist dreams and hopes of the Kenyan people by the country's political and economic elite.

For example, there is profound irony in the fact that during the nationalist struggles and the immediate post independent era, the people totally trusted their political leaders and the nationalist rhetoric they enunciated, without knowing that their main aim was to use them as stepping stones to the realization of their selfish interests :

At independence

we garlanded our leaders

with embracing hearts

hearts

whose unbending

veins

had survived

the burning heat

of colonialism

and the blazing hell of dehumanization

(1-11)

The poet-persona is incensed by this new realization. She is seethes with righteous indignation. This is seen through the emotionally loaded words she deploys to describe these leaders and their actions. For example, she calls them "colonial collaborators" and "anti-nationalists". She calls what they did, "hijacking our independence / with cunning serpentine imposture" (47-48), "strangulating our hopes", "mutilated our national identity", "massacred our national symbols" (55).

She sees the new political, social and economic dispensation as one of "neo-colonial barrenness". It is my argument that the lexical item "barrenness" is gender insensitive, in the sense that, it stigmatizes women who do not have the ability to conceive biologically. This attitude emanates from the African patriarchy which sees women's importance as necessarily connected to their reproductive functions. It is therefore unfortunate, for a woman writer, through her work, to perpetuate such an idea as Micere Mugo does in this poem.

Under this neo-colonial present, tribalism is used by the elite to further their own interests. But the poet- persona disapproves this by calling it "primitive": "under the

primitive arithmetic / of ethnic subtraction and division" (57-58). The poet-persona shows, through heart-rendering images, the immense mental agony the citizens experience, at the news and sight of the tortures the "anti-neo-colonialists" are subjected to by the state's agents: "Our nerves are wrenched / by persisting rending screams / from abused human rights victims." (64-66).

In spite of the darkness of the neo-colony, the poet-persona does not give up her dream and hope of a future prosperous and just social order. She decides to harness the people's anger against the neo-colonial state and its leaders, for revolutionary imperatives. Just like she used the collective possessive "our" as a strategy of identifying with the neo-colonial depradations the people undergo, the poet-persona uses the collective "we" as a tool for mobilizing the same people for revolutionary action. The poet-persona, in other words, wants to locate her purpose only within the collective political career of the underprivileged. The synergies released thereof are so immense that the poet-persona figures them as akin to intense dust storms: "we swirl / with the sweeping fury / of a dust storm" (84-86).

The poet-persona views the mismanaged state of the country as analogous to a graveyard where the political leaders have buried the national aspirations of the people. The collective political power emanating from the mobilization of the people is meant-metaphorically speaking-therefore to excavate and resurrect the national symbols and metaphors which the leaders killed and buried:

We exhume

the graveyards

of our collective

conscience

levelling the tombs

of our destroyed nationhood

Our assaulted peoplehood

We swirl

With the sweeping fury

of a dust storm

turning the graves

inside out

moulding from the remains

new women

new men

new youth. (87-102)

The poet-persona, as lines 100-102 clearly indicate, envisages the equal participation of men, women and the youth, in the revolutionary programme she enunciates. She is also aware that any revolutionary struggle takes time and that is why it has to be undertaken in phases. This is indicated by the lines:

To-morrow

we will rise

with the sweeping fury

of a dust storm (103-106)

Under the second phase of the struggle, she says, for example, they will bring back from exile, all the country's citizens. The poet-persona, in this regard, deconstructs patriarchy by coining a neologism for the female exiles, that is, matriots. She is aware that the historical narrative has traditionally silenced and elided the important roles women have played in political struggles in Africa. She is here also aware of the danger of women's political narratives being subsumed under such patriarchal linguistic and discoursal constructions as "patriotism". That is why she also foresees the construction of a future airport in the country named after the Giriama woman freedom fighter Me Katilili. This is the same airport that the returning political exiles will land at. This is immensely symbolic. It symbolizes the anchoring of the liberation struggle of Kenyan men and women in the heroic paradigm enacted by Me Katilili in early twentieth century colonial Kenya:

We will fly home

exiled matriots

banished patriots

landing them home on a newly built

Me Katilili Airport (120-125)

The poem's last stanza-which falls under the second phase of the revolutionary struggle-foresees the ultimate triumph of the "anti-neo-colonialists." This is the group that will rebuild the country on the basis of justice and hope:

We will rise

and build a nation

moulding from the pieces

of an oppressive history

an unassailable monument

grafted with justice for all

enshrined with limitless hope. (133-139)

But this triumph will come after relentless and concerted struggle, as I have been demonstrating, on the part of the "anti-neo-colonialists". This idea of struggle is suggested, for example, by the poem's graphology-it is varied numerous times-which indicates dramatic intensity rather than calmness.

The poem-together with the others in the collection My Mothers Poem and Other Songs- as argued earlier, is amenable to performance. This is due to the repetitions –for rhythmical and emphasis purposes *ala* African poetry-in, and the graphology of, the poem. For example, the first lines introducing the various stanzas-the words are repeated several times-like, " we swirl" and "we will…", can conceivably be sung or declaimed by a soloist while the subsequent lines-which, graphologically speaking, are differentiated from the first lines-can be sung or declaimed as rejoinders by a backup crew in "alliance" with the audience. Through this enactment, the poems' full potential will be realized, just like in oral poetry where a text's complete being is realized only in performance.

Micere Mugo's poetry under the rubric of ANTI-COLONIAL STRUGGLES AND THE STATE OF THE NEO-COLONY also, therefore, "owe a debt of gratitude" to the African oral tradition.

In conclusion, I have established in the chapter that, Micere Mugo's poetry grapples, meaningfully, with the imperial and neo-imperial processes that have shaped and continue to shape Africa's history. I have demonstrated that Mugo's poetry dealing

with the above issues ought to be read within the context of European capitalism's desire to maintain its dynamic nature through exploiting other non-European spaces and the resolve of the denizens of the latter geographical spaces to resist these capitalistic manoeuvres. This dialectic has in fact spilled over into the "post-colonial" era where African political leaders, in alliance with international capital, are exploiting and repressing their own people, some of whom are drawing inspiration from the heroic resistance paradigms established by Africans in the slave and colonial periods, to challenge this neo-colonial set-up.

I have argued that Micere Mugo's poetry attempts to recuperate and re-surface women's liberation and revolution narratives which have traditionally been submerged and silenced by a patriarchal African historiography. The poems establish that women have played important political and revolutionary roles in both colonial and neo-colonial Africa. Ultimately, the poems see both men and women as important components in the quest to construct an African dispensation predicated on justice, equality, hope and peace.

I have also argued in this chapter that the poems' forms have been influenced by the African oral tradition. For example, their diction is simple while their images are concretely anchored in the African setting. The last poem studied in this chapter, that is "We will Rise and Build a nation", apart form possessing the above stylistic features of the African oral tradition, has qualities which make it amenable to performance. In the next chapter, I will study the theme FEMINISM within the gendered socialist vision of Micere Mugo's poetry.

# CHAPTER FIVE

*The female writer must tell us about being*

*a woman in the real complex sense of the*

*term* (5) - Molara Ogundipe-Leslie.

## FEMINISM

Women are integral components of the social process but their memories, subjectivities and narratives have often been erased and silenced by patriarchy. In the poems I have studied so far, I have demonstrated the various manoeuvres executed by Micere Mugo in the effort to bring to prominence and visibility, women's narratives and experiences. But it is only under the thematic rubric of FEMINISM that women's issues are given concentrated rigorous attention. Here, furthermore, is where the greatest poetic and narrative space is given to concrete women characters.

All the poems identified for the category of FEMINISM, come from Micere Mugo's second poetry collection My Mother's Poem and Other Songs (1994). Therefore, all the background stylistic issues I have raised *vis-à-vis* the poem "We Will Rise and Build a Nation," apply to these poems also. For example, the poems' declamatory nature does imbue them with rhetorical and emotional intensity. The addition of refrains and repetition to the above nature of the poems make them amenable to dramatic enactment. This performance element derives from the African oral tradition where an oral text receives full realization only in its enactment. The poems are also characterized by simple diction, coupled with robust and militant images. These images are concrete in the sense that they issue out of Micere Mugo's reservoir of experiences.

In other words, the images are influenced by Mugo's challenging experiences in a world order defined by capitalistic depradations. Therefore, to fully decipher and appreciate them, some background knowledge of Mugo's literary biography is needed. Over-all, the images give the poems a tone of defiant optimism.

In these poems, women's nemeses are singled out as: patriarchy, colonialism and neo-colonialism. Challenging, confronting and dismantling them require solidarity between women themselves, coupled with the partnership of men. There is no implication in the poems that what Micere Mugo is interested in is the replacement of patriarchy with matriarchy. Rather, what she is interested in is the overthrow of patriarchy and its subsequent replacement with a social model that equally respects, enunciates and honours the narratives and experiences of both men and women. It is this trans-gender alliance that is supposed to be eventually deployed to surmount the hurdles engendered by neo-colonialism on the African continent.

The poems also place a strong accent on what to be a woman really means. Women are exhorted to be proud of their female gender. They are encouraged to re-claim their articulatory powers which are in the tight grip of patriarchal discourse. They are reminded that they have a rich and chequered history of women's achievements to draw from, and ultimately, they are assured of victory over patriarchy and neo-colonialism if they only commit themselves totally to the struggle.

The poem "Mother Afrika's Matriots'' paints a vast canvas of pan –African women's struggles against patriarchy, imperialism and neo-imperialism. Its title is significant. By calling the African continent "Mother Afrika," the poet-persona is alluding to the important role women play as "bringers" and nurturers of life in society. The phrase

further seems to be calling on all black people-of both genders –on the African continent and in the Diaspora, to tenaciously fight for the well-being of Africa just like a mother's children will fight to protect her, out of the deep attachment they have to her. Through the neologism "matriot" in the title, the poet-persona is pointing out that Africa has historically produced women who have defended her true interests, contrary to the pronouncements of patriarchal historical discourse. "Matriots" is supposed to be a complementor of "patriots". Previously, only patriarchal narratives have proliferated and dominated African historical memories, but now is the time, the poet-persona seems to be suggesting, for the silenced voices of women's narratives to be heard. In other words, the poet-persona wants to effect narrative parity and balance between the two genders. Through the neologisms, "matriots" and "herstory", the poet-persona demonstrates her awareness of the linguistic terrain as a site of power struggle between the two genders.

The struggle for gender parity commenced many years ago and despite the advancements made so far, ultimate victory is yet to be achieved. That is why the poet-persona calls it "...the unfinished / business / of historical stock-taking" (4-6). She says they-that is, the community of conscious women-will resume the contemporary phase of the struggle by first re-claiming their self-articulatory powers which patriarchal discourse has put in limbo. To accentuate the disempowering force of this limbo, the poet-persona compares it to a freezing quiet terrain, which has numbing and paralyzing effects on those who step on it. To de-frost such a territory does require intense heat, which the poet-persona, symbolically speaking, says will emanate from the collective mobilization of black women in Africa and the Diaspora:

We shall begin

with dynamizing

freezing silences

now paralyzing

Our womanful lives. (7-11)

The poet-persona and other women will then celebrate and honour the achievements and struggles of black women in the past and in the present. These achievements are variegated and that is why the poet-persona deploys the vivid image of the rainbow when symbolically saying that they will illustrate them " with rainbow colours" (16). This act is conceived as part of the process of healing and regaining their subjectivities and historical moments. In this imminent dispensation of "women's power", they will be in total command of their histories:

We will map

The A and the Z

of our unfolding

epic journey

of womanful living

we will compose

immortal verse (29-35)

The poet-persona traces the epicality of the black women's feminist journey from Pharaonic Egypt, to North America and the Caribbean in slavery, up to colonial and neo-colonial Africa. All the women who performed and continue to perform, heroic and

revolutionary acts within this historical trajectory, are the so called "Mother Afrika's Matriots".

During Pharaonic Egypt, there was, for example, the woman ruler Nefertiti. The poet-persona praises her reign as having been immensely successful because it led to the national prosperity and development of Egypt.

This is underscored through the deployment of the powerful and beautiful image of stars raining from the sky, in line 41: "whose stunning reign rained sparkling stars." (41) The alliteration in "reign" and "rained" and "sparkling" and "stars", is meant to emphasise, through musical evocation, the idea of the distinguished rule of Nefertiti. The poet-persona also tells us that Nefertiti was famous for her beauty. She calls it "legendary beauty." She was graceful, calm and collected. This is underscored through the deployment of the delightful image of the well poised gazelle: "Nefertiti, the ever poised gazelle" (34). She was immensely cultured and sophisticated. This is suggested by the poet-persona's designation of her as a "... granary of culture" (40). The symbol of the granary subverts the patriarchal notion that only men are cultured and rational. In other words, it torpedoes the patriarchal Manichaen categories of Culture /Nature and Logic/Emotion.

Another ancient Egyptian woman whose achievements the poet-persona celebrates is Cleopatra. Her leadership, the poet-persona claims, was resolute, firm, shrewd and decisive. This is indicated by the poet-persona's reference to her as "commanderess" and "strategist". These two nouns also clearly show that women have historically undertaken, together with men, military responsibilities for the defence and protection of Africa's interests, contrary to the claims of the patriarchal African

Historiography and the patriarchal Eurocentric discourse. In this stanza on Cleopatra, the symbol of the patriarchal Eurocentric discourse is William Shakespeare. The latter wrote a play-Antony and Cleopatra-about the reign of Cleopatra, which the poet-persona sees as jaundiced, from a gender and "race" perspective: "whose Stature not even William can Shake or Spear" (49). By punning the name Shakespear through dismantling it into two verbs, that is, "Shake" and "Spear", the poet persona is subverting the patriarchal Eurocentric canon which is often marshalled to justify and under pin European imperial projects. Interestingly, the African and the European patriarchies are seen as similar, in the sense that both have historically aimed at erasing the historical achievements of African women. By subverting Shakespeares's text on Cleopatra, the poet-persona is therefore attempting to reconstruct what she sees as the true heroic story of Cleopatra.

In the Slave Period, there were black women who distinguished themselves in the anti-slavery struggles in Africa, North America and the Caribbean. The inhumanity of the slave period extremely incenses the poet-persona such that the images and diction she deploys *vis-à-vis* the anti-slave activities of the above black women, are militant and hyperbolic. The hyperbole is meant to highlight the courage and bravery of these women in challenging the then enormous slave machine.

From Africa, she gives the example of Anne Nzinga, who was the queen of the Matamba tribe of Angola. In the style of African oral praise poetry, the poet-persona begins this sequence by praising the distinguished genealogy of Anne Nzinga: "Anne Nzinga, proud, Stately daughter of the Matamba" (51). Through this move, she is underscoring-contrary to Eurocentric discourse –that Africa has a rich cultural legacy which has perennially powered Africans in the negotiation of the existential contours of

Africa. This legacy prizes sociality and community, and that is why members of the African society-like Anne Nzinga-are taken as daughters and sons of the society. In other words, the members find their being in the *body sociale.*

Anne Nzinga, according to the poet-persona, was a resolute and intrepid leader. This is shown through the use of the hyperbolic word "unconquered" when referring to her: "Unconquered queen of Ndongo..." (52).She was a great abolitionist who courageously mobilized her people against the slave trade in Angola: "... abolitionst supreme / who etched liberation anthems across Angola's valleys and / hills." (52-54)
In North America, the poet-persona glowingly recounts the achievements of, for example, Harriet Tubman. She is introduced as, "... Orature artist from Afrika's health" (55). This does still empasise the idea of the rich cultural legacy of Africa. By calling Tubman an "orature artist", the poet-persona is also pointing out that women are creative members of the society whose contributions should not be under-rated.

Harriet Tubman was a courageous black American woman who tirelessly but clan destinely worked for the passage of numerous black slaves from the extremely racist American South-where they worked as slaves on plantations owned by White Americans-to the relatively accommodating North. This historical moment, and the others alluded to throughout the poems, are evoked simply by the poet-persona's mention of the particular black women's names and the extremely condensed descriptions of the activities they were engaged in.

Due to the overwhelmingly powerful slave machine, Tubman was forced to resort to ingenious surreptitious stratagems of rescuing slaves from the South. The poet-persona sees these tactics as guerilla tactics. This may explain why she was never captured: "the

uncaptured guerilla of the underground railroad" (56). Tubman was spurred in her quest by a deep desire to see the total liberation of black people in America. Even though she did not witness this ultimate goal in her lifetime, what she did laid a foundation for the eventual demise of slavery in America: "whose untiring feet carved corridors of freedom South to North." (57).

Some of the other black women who contributed, in various ways, to the anti-slavery struggle in America are given by the poet-persona as: Sojourner Truth, Mary C. Terrell, Ida B. Wells, Frances Harper, Lucy Parson, Fannie IOU Hamer, Audrey Jeffers, Mary McLeod Bethune, Clara McBride and Jane Lewis.

During the Slave Period in the Caribbean, there were women freedom fighters like, Mary Prince, Mary Seacole and Gertrude Gomez de Avellanda. Prince's contribution to the anti-slavery struggle was as a writer. The poet-person suggests that Prince's work was militantly against slavery and the blacks who feared, held in awe, and therefore, sided and collaborated with, the white Caribbean enslavers: "who spat on the virulent crumbeating housenigger cult / burning with each stroke of her pen Caribbea's slave-ridden fields." (65-68).

In the era of colonialism in Africa ,some African women rose up and led the struggle for African decolonization.The poet-persona robustly hails them, in the manner of African oral praise poetry already hinted at earlier. For example, Me Katilili wa Menza is called "... orator, mobilizer / unsurpassed." (117-118). Muthoni wa Kirima, who was a leader in the MauMau movement,is feted as the "... last field marshall of the MauMau / land freedom army-" (124-125).

At the height of the anti-colonial struggles on the African continent, the civil rights movement had also gathered momentum in America. The movement, as pointed out earlier, was given fresh impetus by the refusal of the black American woman Rosa Parks to vacate her seat for a standing white passenger in a bus in Alabama. The poet-persona celebrates this act of resistance as issuing from the robust self-dignity of Rosa Parks: "whose enthroned dignity no racist bigot could unseat-" (120-121).

All the black women inhabiting the various historical moments studied so far in this chapter, are united by the poet-persona with the contemporary struggles of African women, in a vast pan-Africanist feminist collectivity. Through this historico-geographic manoeuvre, the poet-persona is drawing attention to the dynamic nature of the Black Feminist Narrative. This means that Africa will never lack women who are willing to defend her true interests.

Lines 162-200, which conclude the poem, are a repetition of lines 2-37:

When we surmount

an attack

On the unfinished

business

Of historical stock-taking

---

We shall recount

herstory

dramatizing it

and illustrating it

with rainbow colours

We will pour lavish

libation

honouring

---

Mother Afrika's matriots.

We will map

the A and the Z

of our unfolding

epic journey

of womanful struggles(160-165; 169-176; 180; 191-195)

They serve the function of re-emphasising the optimism of the poet-persona that all contemporary black women will unite, under the inspiration of the heroic acts of black women of "yore", to fight patriarchy and the exploitation of black people by neo-imperialism.

The poem's refrains suggest the amenability of the poem to performance. For example, the refrains can be sang or chanted by a back up crew while the other lines can be sang or declaimed by a soloist or lead actor. The audience's participation in this case may lie in singing or chanting the refrain with the backup crew. In addition, the refrains help to underscore the idea that, all the women mentioned in the poem fall under the highly esteemed category of "Mother Afrika's Matriots".

The poem entitled "To be a feminist is", does systematize the feminist narrative and programme given in snapshots in the poem "Mother Afrika's Matriots" and poems

falling generally under the rubric of FEMINISM. In other words, it attempts to lay down the principles of feminism according to black women.

These principles are transmitted through the consciousness of the poet-persona-who is symbolic of black women-as evidenced by the formula introducing each stanza, that is, "For me / to be a feminists is".

According to the poet-persona, being a feminist means performing certain acts. It means being proud of one's female gender and experiences as a woman. It means aligning oneself with, and appreciating the experiences of, other women.

Being a feminist requires one to decisively challenge patriarchy which has historically limited women's spheres of operation. This effect of patriarchy on women is powerfully compared to their caging.A feminist is supposed to transcend the effects of the colonial experience-what the poet-persona calls "colonial hangovers" –and fight its neo-colonial epiphany, which is seen by the poet-persona as a "pestilence":

For me
to be a feminist is
to denounce patriarchy
and the caging of women
it is
to wipe the fuzziness
of colonial hangovers
to uproot the weeds
of neo-colonial pestilence (23-31)

The neo-colonial moment is characterized by the ruthless economic exploitation and political repression of African people by their leaders.

To be a feminist means to experience righteous indignation at the sight of the depredations of capitalism and imperialism on the lives of the underprivileged of society. To showcase her "righteous fury" (39), the poet-persona calls capitalism a "cannibal", which ought to be extirpated; and imperialism she calls, "ogre". The latter transports us to African oral narratives where ogres are figured as malevolent beings whose main interest is to devour human beings. Therefore, imperialism, it is implied, only aims at mercilessly exploiting non-European people:

For me
to be a feminist is
to hurl
through the canon
of my exploding fury
the cannibal
named capitalism
It is
to pronounce
a death sentence
on the ogre
named imperialism. (34-46)

Through the deployment of militant verbs, the poet-persona argues that commitment to feminism requires one to expose racism for the evil that it is, to denounce

Zionism, to fight apartheid, tribalism, homophobia, fanaticism, classism, and ethnic cleansing:

For me

to be a feminist is

to unhood racism

to decry Zionism

to detonate apartheid

to obliterate "tribalism"

it is

to necklace homophobia

to drown fanaticism

to strangulate classism

to fumigate ethnic cleansing. (48-58).

In other words, feminists should immerse themselves in the task of confronting the social problems defining modern existence.

To be a feminist, one needs to tenderly raise her children-if she has any-on the values of hope, optimism, persistence, resistance and solidarity:

For me

to be a feminist is

to curdle my children's hope

to infuse their veins with the spirit

of-never-say-die

it is

to fan the wind

of resistance

to stroke them

with optimism

it is

to give them

to humanity. (97-110)

Contrary to the distortions of the African patriarchy, Black Feminism does not seek the replacement of patriarchy with matriarchy. What it aims at is to construct a gender sensitive socialist polity. To achieve this goal, the partnership of men is imperative. In other words, the two genders are not mutually exclusive and should therefore desist from viewing each other through adversarial lenses.

For me

To be a feminist is

to have dialogue

with my father

and my brother

to invite their partnership

as fellow guerillas

It is

to march with them

to the war-tone zone

of Afrikana survival

it is

to jointly raise with them

the victory salute. (112-125)

The poem is amenable to performance. The refrain at the beginning of each stanza, for example, can be chanted or declaimed by a back up cast, while the stanzas themselves can be declaimed by a lead woman actor or performer. The poem though, does not have the emotional and rhetorical power of the poems "Mother Afrika's Matriots" and "We will Rise and Build a Nation", which we analyzed earlier. At some moments, the poem sounds "prosy" and the only identification mark it has as a poem is its graphology. There is also a sense created by the poem that it is unnecessarily repetitive at some moments. For example, after suggesting in stanza four and five that to be a feminist means to fight capitalism, imperialism and classism, I feel it is superfluous for the poet-persona to again say in stanza 11 that to be a feminist means: " to part ways / with the bulging haves / to merge paths / with the stricken have-nots"(129-132).

The poem, "My Mother's Poem", delves deeper into the intricacies of the salient feminist themes of inter-women support and solidarity. The poet-persona's mother is the one who comforts, supports and encourages her not to despair after the death of her father. The fact that it is the death of the poet-persona's father that precipitates the emotional crisis in her, suggests that the poem does not see the relations of men and women in Manichean terms but in a complementary perspective.

The title of the poem derives from the important accent the poet-persona puts on the advice her mother gave her on the eve of her father's burial. The title is like a

memento to the nourishing words she was given by her mother. The words were grounded in African orature wisdom and therefore, their allusive foregrounding in the title is a suggestion that the African oral tradition is dynamic and can therefore be utilized to articulate the critical dimensions of black people's lives.

The first part of the poem is characterized by powerful but melancholic images depicting the sad, gloomy and despondent emotional state of the poet-persona after the death of her father. The death occurred when she was in political exile.

The second part gives, through vivid, refreshing and delightful images, the mother's wise advise to her daughter. All the lines in this section are italicized to underscore their immense importance to the poet-persona and as a way of distinguishing the mother's words from the daughter's. The third part, through robustly optimistic images, sums up the reaction of the poet-persona after receiving the vitalizing and uplifting words of wisdom from her mother. The latter aspect is important from a gender perspective. It underscores the point that sagacity and sapience are not the excusive possession of men only. It suggests that men and women ought to utilize the African oral tradition to construct a gender sensitive socialist society.

The exilic experience is painful because one is necessarily physically separated from a geographic space he/she has grown to intimately identify with. It means separation from close friends and relatives. Therefore, cultivating another intimate association with a new environment is often a gigantic task and that is why living in exile engenders in the exile a feeling of rootless ness, what Edward Said calls being "out of

place." Often, the only way of maintaining contact with one's home country is through telephony and other communication media

The pain of the exilic experience, for example, is compounded for the poet-persona by the death of her father. She could not be there to pay her final respects to him because if she went back to her country, she would be politically persecuted and even, physically tortured. To therefore underscore the psychological turmoil this state of affairs had engendered in her, she piles up, in part one of the poem, images of despair, gloom, melancholy and despondency:

The day after

my father

was buried

tormenting images

---

piled up

on my breaking neck

breathing

heaviness and sorrow

---

my space

in life

was saturated

with mourning

unspoken

torturous thoughts

jettisoned pain

---

I hurled out

courage

turning it

into a heap

of despair. (1-4; 7-10; 19-25; 39-43)

Throughout this first part, the poet-person repeats, several times, that, what pains her is the death of her father and the fact that exile had made it impossible for her to have any physical contact with him for many years. The repeated lines to this affect are, "The day after / my father / was buried", while the repeated idea of the lack of physical contact is contained in the lines, "...uncaptured time / between him and me " (5-6), "... lost moments / of escaped contact"(14-15), "the warring zone / of antagonistic / lost contact''.(27-29)

In the midst of this turmoil, the poet-persona decided to turn to her mother, through telephone communication, for emotional succour and support:

My heart could

no longer

find a home

in exile

so it reached out

through the telephone line

to try and touch

---

my mother(63-68;70)

At a general gender level, this telephone contact underscores the important nurturing and support roles women play in society; at a specific level, the contact speaks of the necessity of women creating strong bonds of sisterhood which will support them during crises.

The advice she received from her mother completely transformed her. It lifted the gloom and despair out of her life and re-energized her stated mission of fighting for the realization of a gender sensitive socialist society. To buttress the importance of these words, she tenderly and sensitively calls them:

… healing words

words embalmed

with motherly love

words weighted

with orature wisdom(73-77)

Unlike the first and third parts of the poem, where the poet-persona has been narrating her exilic experience and the impact on it of the death of her father, in the second part, she gives direct narrative space to her mother. The poet-persona, it seems, gives us the privilege of overhearing the direct words her mother spoke to her. This strategy imbues the poem with dramatic authenticity.

Her mother tells her not to "romanticize home" because the people who are home are not having it easy as she may imagine. The poet-persona's mother executes a

dexterous deconstructive manoeuvre by de-linking the concept of home from the idea of one's place of birth. Consequently, the mother sees home as any geographical space one finds himself/herself in, and more importantly, the monuments of humanness, justice, equality and solidarity one sets up in these locales:

*Daughter, do not*
*romanticize home*
*Do not, daughter*
*You who have*
*chosen the path*
*of peoples struggles*
*must find the courage*
*to build new homes*
*to start new lives*
*wherever*
*you are*

---

*create new life*
*create human beings* (101-111; 120-121)

In addition, the mother conceives home as a psychological state of contentedness engendered by egalitarian social structures. For example, she tells her daughter that the numerous people she left back home are crying for a radical overhaul of the politico-economic order of the country because they are repressing, oppressing and exploiting them mercilessly. What the people want in its stead is a just and egalitarian order:

*Millions who are home*

*are crying*

*for home*

*the whole land*

*is crying*

*for home* (91-96)

The mother, therefore, tells her daughter not to bemoan her exile status but to recollect herself and boldly, resolutely and decisively re-dedicate her life to the goal of establishing a global socialist order:

*walk well*

*step solidly.*

---

*walk well*

*along the path*

*you have chosen*

*to take.* (128-129; 132-135)

The advice, as pointed out earlier, re-energized the poet-persona. This is indicated through the tender and optimistic images deployed in this last part of the poem. She, for example, compares this advice to sunshine, which lifted her gloomy-the latter is symbolized by the image of the mist-and melancholic state (this is symbolized by tears):

The sun shone through

the telephone line

its warmth

and brightness

lifted the mist

that bogged down

my vision

---

wiping tears

warming my heart. (136-142; 145-146)

In the poem, "The Woman's Poem", the poet-persona has composed an all-encompassing feminist anthem. It is meant to firm women's resolve to fight for their rights-and those of other submerged social categories.

This is done through projecting the feminist agenda to a future accomplished state. This is indicated by the English and Gikuyu hybrid phrase, "Ta imagini", that is, "just imagine", at the beginning of every stanza; and by the past tense of the verbs in the poem.

Part of the feminist agenda touched on this poem has also been highlighted in the previous poems in this section, that is, "My Mother's Poem," "Mother Afrika's Matriots", and "To be a Feminist is". The agenda includes: the forging of solidarity links between women, the unity of women in fighting racism, imperialism, neo-colonialism, classism and patriarchy, and, women's celebration of their female humanity.

The main difference between "The Woman's Poem" and the three previous ones is in the fact that the latter almost exclusively anchor themselves in Black Feminism while the former embraces all women, irrespective of colour, who are ready to commit themselves to the actualization of the above feminist agenda:

*Ta imagini* that

you and I

and all the women

of this world

stood hand in hand

marched side by side

crossing

dividing borders

constructing

connecting bridges

across the nations

across the continents! (2-11; 16-17)

In other words, the poet-persona wants to unify the *feminisms* in the world into one grand feminist narrative which is committed to dismantling patriarchy and addressing the major social problems of modern existence like, poverty, racism and imperialism.

This unity and solidarity the poet-persona is mobilizing women all over the world for, is strong, deep and profound. This is indicated by the verbs "merged" and "fused" in the following lines:

*Ta imagini* that

our hearts

were merged

and that

our minds

were fused (47-52)

The ultimate aim of the mobilization should be to create dynamic, self-propelling and self-sustaining achievements of women in the various social sectors we have identified:

… enacting

one non-ending

feminist drama!

---

piloting

our own

history

forward

forward

forward

advancing

advancing

advancing

(55-57;

121-129)

The graphology of the lines in fact do mimic the dynamic and sustainable aspects of the feminist narrative the poet-persona is calling on women to engender.

The poem is amenable to performance and this is suggested by the presence of refrains in it. Each of the poem's stanzas commences with the refrain, which has an exclamation mark at its end suggesting the feeling of elation, satisfaction, and jubilation

women will experience when the feminist movement achieves all its goals. As I argued in relation to the other poems under the rubric of Feminism, the refrain can be chanted or declaimed by a back up crew in unison with an audience, while the stanzas can be declaimed by a lead actor.

The creation of the refrain " *Ta imaaaagini*!, out of the fusion of Gikuyu and English words, is symbolic of the dynamism and creative force of the African oral tradition. The latter, it is suggested, integrates itself within contemporary existence by absorbing elements of contemporaneity on its own terms. What results is an Africanized modernity.

In conclusion, I have demonstrated in this chapter that Micere Mugo does dedicate some of her poetry to the rigorous thematization of feminism. According to her poetry, feminism first of all means celebrating the fact that one is a woman, and in the context of the poems, an African woman. For inspiration, this African woman should draw on the rich historical legacy established by black women of the past. African women ought to create bonds of sisterhood in order to help each other face the challenges of womanhood, the challenges of contemporary African existence like racism, poverty, neo-colonialism, and to dismantle the African patriarchy. In other words, women should unite to construct a gender sensitive socialist order.

I have demonstrated that Micre Mugo's feminist vision is not only pan-African but global. Some of the poems under this section want women all over the world to unite, irrespective of race, to challenge patriarchy and to champion the interests of other submerged social categories.

I have also shown that her poetry's feminist vision does not exclude men but views them as partners whose friendship and cooperation ought to be enlisted in the struggle of dismantling patriarchy and capitalism.

Finally, I have shown that these poems have been influenced by the African oral tradition. For example, their symbols, images and allusions are robustly anchored in the African setting while some of the poems' aspects, like, the presence of refrains and repetition make them amenable to dramatic enactment.

Therefore, according to Micere Mugo's poetry, the goal of feminism ought to be the striving to establish a global gender sensitive socialist order.

# CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how the concepts of gender and class are deployed in the poetry of Micere Mugo; how they are fused to generate a gendered socialist vision in the poetry; and the forms the poetry utilizes to achieve the above vision.

The study was guided by the assumptions that Micere Mugo's poetry highlights the social, cultural, political and economic issues defining the African continent; that women's issues are integral components of the poetry; and that the poetry has been influenced by African oral forms.

Consequently, the study has demonstrated that indeed, there is a gendered socialist vision within Micere Mugo's poetry. The vision is the result of the fusion of the concepts of gender and class in the poetry, within the thematic framework of what I have identified as: TRADITION AND VALUES, LOVE AND MARRIAGE, ANTI-COLONIAL STRUGGLES AND THE STATE OF THE NEO-COLONY,and FEMINISM.

The study has shown that the socialist imperatives running in Mugo's poetry draw their inspiration from traditional African socialism and Marxist Socialism. The two socialisms espouse the equality of all people and, therefore, the need for unity to construct a classless society, that is, a social order devoid of social stratification. This task is important in view of the stratified social order introduced by the advent of capitalism in Africa.

The study has demonstrated that the gender dimension of the poetry is structured within an Afro-centric background because Micere Mugo is an African writer. Accordingly, her concern is in challenging the African patriarchy with the intent of

dismantling its historical privileges vis-à-vis African women. She does this through the institution of specific artistic manoeuvres which subvert the patriarchal basis of the African society. The poetry, in this regard, suggests that both men and women are equal; that both have contributed to the development of the African society; that women, due to their multiple responsibilities in the African society, are deeply affected by social and natural cataclysms.

The study has shown that the concepts of gender and class are not deployed separately in Micere Mugo's poetry but simultaneously. This is because both imperatives are part and parcel of the forces that have shaped her as a writer.

The preceding paragraphs therefore prove true our hypotheses that Micere Mugo's poetry does engage with the social, cultural, economic and political issues defining the African continent, and that women's issues are integral components of the poetry.

The study has demonstrated that the form of the poetry is dialectically related to its content, that is, the orchestration of the totality of the stylistic devices employed in the poetry relates to the poems' themes. In addition, the study has shown that Micere Mugo's poetry is influenced by African oral forms. For example, their diction is simple; most of their images and metaphors are grounded within concrete contexts of traditional and contemporary Africa; their idioms and expressions are flavoured with African speech patterns; and that the poems in the second poetry collection My Mother's Poem and Other Songs, are amenable to dramatic enactment *ala* African oral poems. This proves true our third hypothesis which assumed that Micere Mugo's poetry was under the "provenance" of African orature.

The study recommends that African critics pay more attention to African women poets because, poetry being the most intensely emotional and private genre of literature, these women poets utilize it to raise fundamental issues defining African existence. Attention needs to be paid especially to the social visions emanating from their works because literature, at the end of the day, is a social institution which ought to vitalize the African social process.

In this regard, Micere Mugo's socialist vision is still relevant, despite the demise of Marxist Socialism in the world in the early 1990$^{s}$, because it is an important contribution to the timeless debate geared towards identifying viable sustainable models of social organization. This task has become more poignant in the context of capitalism's continued engenderment of socio-economic Grand Canyons around the world.

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