



**A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE THEMATIC CONCERNS
ADDRESSED BY THE AUTHORS THAT REVEAL THE GENDER ISSUES
IN *THE RIVER BETWEEN* AND *THE RIVER AND THE SOURCE***

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Abstract:

The study focuses on two novels that were written by a premier first-generation writer and another authored by a third-generation one. The study examines thematic concerns that reveal the images of women in Kenyan literature. The study involves the analysis of the language used by characters and the writers' view on gendered societal paradigms that embody characterization as a backdrop for the analysis of the said texts, more so on the position of women in Kenyan society through the two writers' eyes. The study objective is to explore the thematic concerns addressed by the authors that reveal the gender issues in *The River Between* and *The River and The Source*. The study adopted liberal feminism. The methodology was confined to a contextual approach that was conducted in the library search modalities. As such, no field instruments were used.

Keywords: gender, liberal feminism, thematic concerns

1. Introduction

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

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

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According to Jeremy Hawthorn, in his critical work, *The Novel*. (2001:15) while addressing "*History, Genre and Culture*," observes that "*although "the novel" as category might be fuzzy round the edges, and might be in a state of permanent development and self-reconstruction, nevertheless this new literary genre emerged in the Europe of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and was clearly different from earlier forms such as that of romance.*"

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

When Ngugi started writing, the premiere African writers did not consider the question of gender balance in their creative works. More often than not, they crafted central characters who were male, while their female characters tended to play a supplementary role. Nevertheless, it is notable that the writers then were focusing their works based on the patriarchal hegemonies of the day. In the pre-colonial and post-independent times within the postcolonial era, the place of a woman was relegated to that of an outsider who was mostly seen but rarely heard.

As Mwangi (2008: vii) affirms:

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

In Africa, the writing of novels started in Western and Southern Africa. According to Larson 1972 in *Emergence of African Fiction*,

"Written African literature began in West Africa. Caseley Hayford wrote prose fiction. Later Thomas Mafolo from South Africa wrote novels that tended to apologists of African culture, and they reflected how Africans were inferior to Whites. His novels did not reflect the Africans' traditions and cultural practices but rather disparaged Africa's sense of nationhood."

David Cook in *African Literature: A Critical Review* addresses the literary role played by African premiere writers like Amos Tutuola, who wrote *The Palm Wine Drinkard*, and Chinua Achebe, who wrote *Things Fall Apart*, for introducing aspects of African oral traditions and cultural practices. The writers wrote their works based on the Igbo of Nigeria's oral traditions. Later, Wole Soyinka wrote fiction and plays of Nigeria using the Yoruba people's oral traditions. In Eastern Africa, James Ngugi, who later changed his name to Ngugi wa Thiong'o was a leading light in the writing of African novels. Later, the likes of Okot p'Bitek joined the premiere writer when he wrote poetry and plays.

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

“The River Between is a novel about the cultural conflicts that arose after Europeans introduced Christianity and colonial administration in Kenya. Particularly sensitive is the female circumcision, banned by the church in the late 1920s. The novel is set around this time, and it captures the conflict between Christianity and African customs, older and younger generations, and the conflict between individual and community.” (Mwangi Evan, 2008: vi)

The current study will explore the position of women characters in the two selected Kenyan novels. *The River Between* by Ngugi wa Thiong’o and *The River and The Source* by Margaret Ogola. Wa Thiong’o belongs to the First generation of Kenyan writers who started writing articles and journal works in their respective universities in the late 1950s and the early 1960s.

The Second generation started writing in the late 1960s and the mid-1970s. The third generation started writing in the late 1990s. The fourth generation consists of millennials who started writing in the 2000s and continue to the present. Margaret Ogola belongs to the third generation as she started writing in 1994. She wrote *The River and The Source*, and *I swear by Apollo*. In this era, the third wave of feminism had gained root in Africa.

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

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

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Literature

This research study applied both feminism theory and deconstruction literary orientations. Feminist literary theory is a term introduced during the 1980s; gender theorists had previously used the word feminist literary criticism. The word critique was used to mean a literature research style or method. Presently, in feminist studies, the terms criticism and theory appear closely together, and feminist literary theory applies to both realistic and theoretical methods of literature (Code, 2000). According to Code, the purpose of feminist literary theory is to apply and approach together how literary criticism and theory develop or discourage divisions in class, gender, race, and sexuality (Salah *et al.*, 2016). Feminism theory will be applied to create discussion based on gender issues in the selected feminist texts.

Feminism is a revolution against specific gender roles that are given or associated with males and females in the community. There are trends in which people in society have been made to take males as typical, strong, caring and significant. This scenario gives particular gender roles in careers such as engineers, doctors, and pilots. According to feminist ideologists, these gender roles prevent women's empowerment and exclude them from accessing equal opportunities in management and decision-making job positions. Therefore, the women have been convinced that they are not qualified for good-paying job opportunities such as science and mathematics. As a movement, feminism seeks to promote gender equality in order for both genders to benefit. Hence, it is a type of 'activism' against the control of men. Feminism theory's main idea is to promote gender equality by bringing change into the world (Tyson, 2006).

Deconstructionism, when used to criticize a literary text, is used to initiate other new interpretations that are not direct but opposite representations of the popular meaning of a particular text. Even all past texts have been deconstructed to create other self-interpretations. This means that the text does not contain only one meaning, and when readers make interpretations, they are likely to misinterpret the text. Deconstructionism arose in Paris, and it is a representation of concerns about existence, absenteeism, truth, and appearance. It advanced through structuralism and stressed semantics and symbolism (Bradbury, 1991). Deconstruction theory assisted in answering the research questions, with the aim of conducting a research study based on how both male and female authors have portrayed the concept of masculinity, their presentation of societal expectations and underrepresentation of the male characters.

The ideologies evident in the selected texts were deconstructed by closely examining how the authors addressed the male identity and how this constructed the representation of masculinity. The researcher was concerned with analyzing the relationship between societal expectations and the self-identity of male characters in society. The male characters in the selected texts were represented with free will to express their self-identity depending on the individual's personality instead of expressing their identity according to societal expectations. Finally, the theory also concerned itself with establishing the representation of male characters in feminist writings and whether there is evidence of male identity in these texts.

Deconstruction theory will be applied in this study as an approach to criticizing the selected texts, while feminism theory will be used. The research will seek to deconstruct the

thematic concerns voiced in the texts according to the research objectives. The two theories will be used to analyze the research. The research questions will set the pace for the research objectives. Hopefully, the theories will help in forming an in-depth research analysis.

2.2 State of African Literature

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

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

Jacqueline Bardolf in Killam (2001:36) opines:

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

Larson (1972) presents similar views to those of Killam but appears to be the pacesetter in the emergence of African fiction literary concerns. Gikandi (1998) also belongs to the same school of thought as Larson and writes mainly from the diaspora location in the West.

Jackline Bardolf in Killam notes:

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

Further, she opines:

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

“Witten at the crisp of Kenya’s independence in 1963, The River Between seems to be pursuing the tenets of African traditional art. Ngugi uses this expertise as a storyteller to inform society about the dilemma it faces as it tries to synthesize traditional customs and modern ways of life. Employing devices borrowed from traditional folklore. Ngugi is interested in offering lessons to the society to the society on how to resolve the conflicts facing the newly independent African nations.” (Mwangi, Evan, 2008)

2.3 The Gender Question in Written African Literature

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

According to Ngoh (2016), The word "*masculinity studies*" or "*critical masculinity studies*" refers to "*the relatively recent interdisciplinary area of exposing and challenging gender constructions and dynamics to allow individuals to understand masculinities and the position(s) of men in different social, cultural, and historical contexts.*" Like feminism, contemporary masculinity studies are concerned with addressing the problems of privilege and control, and academics have conducted the study of masculinity studies from a broad variety of fields, a number of theoretical backgrounds, and to various ends. However, contemporary studies of masculinities can mostly be described in the following ways. First, studies on masculinities recognize men and masculinity as being explicitly gendered. In particular, in the West, the term "*gender*" has become a synonym for "*woman*" or "*women.*" It is believed that courses on "*female studies*" are mostly about women and that gender studies are almost entirely about "*women in society.*" Masculinity studies consider men as gendered beings whose views of and involvement in the world are profoundly influenced by their perception of what it means to be a male. They aim to reveal what this may tell us about the creation and preservation of gender roles and power relations.

2.4 Women Writers in Written African Literature

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, satire is defined as, "*a literary device holding up human vices and follies to ridicule or scorn.*" The definition is further given as the trenchant wit, irony or sarcasm used to expose and discredit vice or folly. Satire in literature is a type of social commentary. Writers normally employ some stylistic devices like exaggeration, irony, sarcasm, understatements, and other devices to poke fun at a particular leader, a social custom or tradition and sometimes indeed any prevalent institutions or social figures.

The caucus of African feminists also aimed to create a forum for literary criticism and fiction, as well as writings and production that would be explicitly about African women. In the realm of literature, which had previously been intended solely for male representation, the African females needed to make such a move. The study seeks whether having gained ground in African literary and critical development, the African feminist gives importance to and spreads the literary works of females in order to shift the male prejudices and biases previously fixed towards females. African feminist literature does not concentrate on the oppression and discrimination of women in male-dominated societies but also intends to make a critical review of social changes from traditional ways to modernity.

2.5 Styles in African Written Literature

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

The question of mythology and ethnicity in written African literature is significant in raising feminist and gender issues in contemporary African societies. Eldred Jones, in *Myth and Modernity*, observes that *"ethnic base is usually very rich and can be exploited for ideas, themes and other linguistic influences"*. Literature from ethnic groups is worth studying as it is expressive both in form and in content. It is an *"ethnic base"* in the masses appreciate the literature of their community. In *The River Between*, by Ngugi Wa Thiongo, Waiyaki's name is talked about as symbolic. Waiyaki is told to be careful since people look up to him. He is seen as the symbol of the tribe. He is born again with the purity of the tribe, and the people adore him. The people worship him, and since he has been busy while people were taking the oath, they have taken it in his name due to how symbolic his name is in the land. The people see the teacher as the purity aspect of their tribe in post-colonial Kenyan society (*The River Between*, 207)

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

Studies on masculinities are often distinguished by their intersectional approach. That is to say, the discipline recognizes that the study of men and masculinities involves a questioning of their intersections with other social divisions:

"While men and masculinities are the primary focus and are understood as clearly gendered, men and masculinities are not created by sex alone. Men and masculinities are influenced by age gaps, class conditions, race and racialization, etc. Men's gendering occurs only at the intersections of other social distinctions and racial inequality. Likewise, without moving constantly towards gender, we cannot grasp class, race or global inequality." (Ngoh, 2016)

Masculinity has multiple, ambiguous meanings which change by context and over time. Masculinity meanings also vary across cultures and allow for cultural borrowing; masculinities imported from elsewhere are combined with local ideals to create new configurations. Studies of masculinity, then, recognize, often frame itself in and use the knowledge found in other disciplines, especially in the theories of critical gender and sexualities. For example, early masculinity studies came from a number of disciplines, including psychology, anthropology, sociology and biology. The insistence that men and masculinities be the specific focus of critical analysis was a key feature of second-wave feminism, which understood women and womanhood to be worthy of critical analysis (Ngoh, 2016).

Mariama Bâ's fiction *So Long a Letter*, as so many African authors do, is profoundly rooted in Senegalese traditions and conventional artistic devices. One important feature of her literary work, for example, is her fusion of oral and written traditions. In complementary association with the oral 'Wolof' practices of her own cultural heritage, she uses traditional French literary patterns and techniques, thus recognizing a remarkable cultural fusion and original artistic

styles in both novels. She managed to make the language and culture of 'Wolof' central components of her work (Mutunda, 2009).

Bâ's first book, *So Long a Letter*, serves as a therapeutic mechanism in which the narrator, Ramatoulaye, can share with her lifelong friend and confidante, Aïssatou, her innermost thoughts and feelings. At the start of this novel, we discover that the husband of Ramatoulaye, Modou Fall, has died of a heart attack. A few years before his death, and after twenty-five years of marriage with Ramatoulaye, Modou Fell married Binetou, a Daba friend of his daughter. Ramatoulaye thought for a while to walk out of her marriage but chose to remain, embracing – though reluctantly – equal sharing of Modou 's attention as prescribed by Islamic precepts on polygamous marriages. Nevertheless, Modou left her and spent all his time in a luxurious villa with his younger wife Binetou. He also spent all of his savings on Binetou and her mum. Therefore, he had little to pass on to his children at the time of his death but debts and poverty, as Ramatoulaye reveals: “*Dead without a penny saved. Acknowledgement of debts? A pile of them: cloth and gold traders, home-delivery grocers and butchers, car-purchase instalments*” (Mariama Ba, 1989, p.9).

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 The Materials

This study adopted a descriptive research design, using qualitative insights into the interpretation of literary texts. It incorporated a contextual approach to investigate the feminism and gender issues as depicted in *The River Between* by Ngugi wa Thiongo and *The River and The Source* by Margaret Ogola. This was done by conducting library research in order to answer particular questions that relate to the area under study. For instance, the experiences the reader has had with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Narratives are also traced from the past to the present and the future but majors on the present. Therefore, the researcher chooses to adopt a descriptive research design to explore how character and characterization have been charted out in the selected texts.

3.2 Methods

There was a procedure for the collection of data. First, the researcher got an introductory letter from Mount Kenya University. Secondly, the researcher obtained a research permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology & Innovation (NACOSTI), which enabled the researcher to move ahead to the field for data collection. Primary data was collected using reading creative and critical as well as theoretical works. The data obtained was segregated according to their appropriateness to the research objectives.

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

4. Discussion

4.1 Thematic Concerns on Gender Equality

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

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

Ogola depicts a group of female characters who have fought hard to overcome gender barriers and have achieved powerful positions in society. Verah, for instance, has opened the gate for women to participate in equal capacity with men. For instance, for the first time, women are allowed to speak in public "*Our gallant women have something to say to us. They have the right to be heard.*" (Ogola, pg. 187). Men have faith in their women who sacrifice to march to Dakar in support of their striking men. "*If women have decided to go, we must help them and prepare an escort for them.*" (Ogola, pg. 189). Men offering women security during the march implies that the author promotes gender equality, which is a vital tool in embracing change. Muthoni in *The River Between* and Elizabeth's in *The River and The Source* are major female characters in the two selected texts whose stoic endurance infuse strength and purpose into the other characters, especially females. In *The River Between*, Nyambura receives the news about the killing of a ram. He comes to Miriam's home accompanied by police only to find women ready to receive them. They have new courage and strength that they use to liberate themselves from oppressors, and when the police want to take Nyambura away, the women gang up to protect their own. They use everything at their disposal to act as weapons. United are they that they protect one of their own from the police arrest. (Ngugi, pg. 74/75).

Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *The River Between* portrays characters who are determined to seek help from their leaders and bring about change and when Nyambura proposes the idea, they all act in unison. Nyakinyua decides that the time has come for them to make things happen. She is a source of inspiration to societal members: she offers emotional support to the villagers. She asserts that they should all team up, go to the city and demand back their shares. She is able to convince the elders of the need for all to go to the city, meet their leader and air their grievances. (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, pg. 118). Nyambura empowers the elders with the determination to pursue their stolen hearts. She plays a major role in advocating for social changes. Spearheaded by Muthoni, the women play a major role as far as the success of the journey to the city is concerned; both genders team up, forge a community spirit and make prior preparations to ensure the success of the journey to the city (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, pg. 119).

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

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

Women stand their ground and refuse to lick the boots of their superiors (male counterparts) so as to bring change and promote social balance. The two authors give their female characters traits that were previously given to their male counterparts. Women are depicted as being assertive; they are ready to fight for recognition and dignity. In *The River and The Source*, old Mariamu is a female character who has been portrayed as courageous, assertive and rebellious. She has triple duties: she is a mother to Ndungu, a wife, and an employee on a European farm. Her drunkard husband beats her and takes away her salary. She rebels against violence and oppression by running away to Limuru, where she goes to work for Brother Ezekiel, who, in turn, wants to abuse her sexually. She assertively refuses him. Her plight in marriage and outside marriage is well revealed. The author reawakens female consciousness, and that's why Mariamu rebels such exploitation not only from her husband but also from her European landlord. Young Beaky in *The River and The Source* portrays her assertiveness when she confronts a man who has tried to assault her sexually. "She kept women in line, and she forced even the men to respect her. She came to the union office frequently to help with the work, and one day, when one of the workmen had stupidly patted her on the behind, she gave him a resounding smack. A woman slapping a man in public was something no one had ever seen before." (Ogola, page 143). She is ready to fight for recognition and dignity; she demands respect even from her male counterparts.

The unity and spirit of collaboration between the two genders enable them to scale to higher heights in the fight against social injustices. A case study is Wanja's aunt in *The River Between*. She used to carry guns and bullets to the forest hidden in baskets full of unga. She took them to the fighting men who relied on her support for survival. In *The River Between*, some strikers who secretly went back to work are dealt with. They go through a trial where there are men and women present to give the verdict. For the first time, women attended meetings, and the author embraced women by giving them a chance to attend such important meetings to

determine the fate of the strikebreakers. Penda is an example who has used her voice to protest against racial exploitation. The two authors in the selected texts depict their female characters as heroines. Even after the death of Wanja in *The River and The Source* and Muthoni in *The River Between* their heroic deeds are still remembered by many.

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

From the critical analysis of the two selected texts, it is observed that the authors demonstrate that women are authentic partners in the struggle for social justice; they do this by supporting the roles played by the women in the struggle against the exploitation of the masses by the colonialists and neo-colonialists. The authors embrace women in their spirit of welcoming change by promoting gender equality and proving that women's opinions also count in political, social and economic arenas. In both texts, the authors empower the villagers, regardless of sex and age, with new strength and endurance, for they are determined to seek help to bring about change and promote social justice for all.

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

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

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

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

5. Conclusion

The study found out that the two authors embrace their female characters by empowering them with tools such as education, strong voices, and bravely, among others, that enable them to accomplish their mission. It is through education that they are able to communicate in a foreign language. In other instances, women used language and their strong voices as tools of empowerment. They would participate in men's meetings and delegations, they would sing songs of praise and encouragement to their heroes and heroines, and they would even shout

with loud noises and cries to protest the evil acts of their enemies. Their bravery is also well noted because, in many instances, it is their bravery that rescues them from their oppressors. For instance, Muthoni in *The River Between* and Akoko in *The River and The Source* are two courageous women who become the symbols of resistance in the novels. They have a protest attitude against the colonizers and neo-colonizers, and they organize women to fight against their oppressors. The fact that they are backed up by their male counterparts is a clear indication that the two authors have their interests at heart. The two authors embrace togetherness and collective action in the fight for social justice. Collective action is evident in the two texts; the march to Dakar in *The River and The Source* and the trek to the city in *The River Between* are two journeys that are triumphant in the end because both genders are witnessed working together for the welfare of each other.

6. Recommendations

By addressing gender roles in literary texts, the researcher recommends that the Ministry of Education only recommend the literature set books that portray gender equality in both secondary schools and colleges. Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommends that upcoming literary writers root out gender bias by portraying both genders positively. This way, people will come to appreciate both genders (Esther, 2018).

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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