

**DRAMATURGIES OF FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN SELECTED KENYAN  
DRAMA**

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**A Thesis Submitted to the Institute of Postgraduate Studies of Kabarak University  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Award of Doctor of Philosophy in  
Literature.**

**KABARAK UNIVERSITY**

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## **DEDICATION**

I wish to dedicate this thesis to the people who have shaped my life meaningfully. To my lecturers who guided my studies over the years; my husband, Godfrey, who has supported my labours and shared in my dreams, and my mother, Josephine Namayi, whose vision and labours are also reflected in this thesis. Lastly, I dedicate this work to my children Precious, Prince, and Princely. This is all for you!

## ABSTRACT

This study examines the dramaturgies used in the representation of the female gender in Kenyan drama. The study examines Kyalo's *The Hunter is Back* (2010), Imbuga's *The Return of Mgofu* (2011) and *The Green Cross of Kafira* (2013), and Gitumbi's *A New Dawn* (2012). The study sought to illustrate the representation of women in the selected plays and examine the ideological persuasions used by the playwrights in the selected plays. This thesis, therefore, interrogated the artistic strategies employed by the playwrights in the representation of female characters in the selected texts. The researcher adopted a qualitative research design. The four primary texts were purposively sampled. A textual exegesis was conducted from close reading and content analysis as the method of data collection and analysis. Primary texts were subjected to close reading to provide data for analysis. The researcher also referred to secondary sources to support her arguments. The study used a theoretical framework that combined post-colonialism in general and gender theories in particular. This study finds that the representation of women Kenyan drama still casts them as victims of cultural burdens of traditional gender roles and constrained options in behaviour. The study shows that dramaturgies can be effectively employed to imagine and redefine new visions of women in Kenya today. The study recommends further research on dramaturgy and its implication on women's representation to enhance understanding women's experiences in contemporary Kenyan drama.

**Keywords:** *Dramaturgies, female gender, female representation, ideological persuasions.*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>DECLARATION</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>RECOMMENDATION</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>COPYRIGHT</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b> .....	<b>v</b>
<b>DEDICATION</b> .....	<b>vi</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>vii</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b> .....	<b>viii</b>
<b>CONCEPTUAL AND OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS</b> .....	<b>xi</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1 Background to the Study.....	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem.....	11
1.3 Justification and Significance of the Study.....	11
1.4 Objectives of the Study .....	14
1.5 Research Assumptions .....	14
1.6 Scope and Limitations.....	14
<b>CHAPTER TWO</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	<b>16</b>
2.1 Introduction.....	16
2.2 Women, Literature, and the Nation.....	16
2.2.1 Women, Drama and History in Contemporary Kenya .....	25
2.3 Gaps Identified from the Review of Literature .....	31
2.4 Theoretical Framework .....	32
<b>CHAPTER THREE</b> .....	<b>41</b>
<b>RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY</b> .....	<b>41</b>
3.1 Introduction.....	41
3.2 Research Design.....	41
3.3 Sample Size and Selection Technique .....	42
3.4 Data Collection .....	43
3.4.1 Primary Data.....	43
3.4.2 Secondary Data.....	44
3.5 Data Analysis .....	44



<b>CHAPTER FOUR .....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>45</b>
4.1 Introduction.....	45
4.2 Representation of Women in Kenyan Drama .....	47
4.2.1 Aspects of Gender Representation .....	47
4.2.2 Images Women in Drama and Society .....	49
4.2.3 Women as Domestic Workers.....	49
4.2.4 Women as Objects of Sexual Gratification for Men .....	56
4.2.5 Women and Perceived Weaknesses .....	60
4.2.6 Women as Victims of Male Tormentors .....	66
4.2.7 Women’s Quest for Cultural Freedoms.....	69
4.2.8 Shifts in Gender Status and Character Identities of Women.....	75
4.3 History, Ideology and Feminist Dramaturgies .....	95
4.3.1 Introduction .....	95
4.3.2 Women and the Making of History.....	95
4.3.3 Committed Socialist Ideology .....	98
4.3.4 Women, Culture and Alienation.....	109
4.3.5 Dramaturgies of Traditional Folk Theater and Enhanced Freedom for Women.....	112
4.3.6 Orality and Gender .....	115
4.3.7 Conclusion.....	120
4.4 Style and Feminist Dramaturgies .....	121
4.4.1 Aesthetics of the Traditional Folk Performance.....	121
4.4.2 Use of Narratological Strategies.....	121
4.4.3 Mgofu and Cultural Identities .....	124
4.4.4 Norah and Taabu as Embodiments of the Past and Present .....	125
4.4.5 Symbolism in Postcolonial Kenyan Drama.....	126
4.4.6 The Symbolism of Characters and Events .....	129
4.4.7 The Use of Soliloquy in Voicing Women .....	132
4.4.8 Use of Choral Elements.....	134
4.4.9 Monologue.....	137
4.4.10 Play Within a Play .....	139
4.4.11 The Use of Humour in Constructing Gender Identities .....	141
4.4.12 Use of Asides.....	142
4.4.13 Use of Dream Motif .....	143

4.4.14 Conclusion.....	146
<b>CHAPTER FIVE .....</b>	<b>149</b>
<b>SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>149</b>
5.1 Introduction.....	149
5.2 Summary .....	149
5.3 Conclusion .....	153
5.4 Recommendations .....	153
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>155</b>
<b>APPENDICES.....</b>	<b>159</b>
<b>Appendix I: Nacosti Research License .....</b>	<b>159</b>
<b>Appendix II: Research Conference Presentation .....</b>	<b>160</b>
<b>Appendix III: Thesis Proofreading Form.....</b>	<b>161</b>

## CONCEPTUAL AND OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

This section offers the conceptual and operational definitions of terms as used in the study.

**African feminism:** It is a type of feminism innovated by African women to address the conditions and needs of continental African women. It is a feminism that advocates for complementarity between men and women, as opposed to the radical feminism associated with scholars in Europe and North America, who lack an appreciation of the socio-cultural, economic, and political dynamics that render a more radical variant of feminism untenable because it is indifferent to the realities that frame gender relations in Africa.

**Construction:** This is a form of social or ideological engineering that creates ideas, opinions, and knowledge about other people, distinguished by race, gender, class, religion, demographic or geographical differences. It is the way a group or the society comes up with meanings and depictions of people. It is from this point of view that we learn the portrayal of women.

**Context:** Refers to the awareness of, and response to the different immediate environments in which a work is situated; social, cultural, political, and intellectual. Given that literature does not work and spawn from a vacuum, it is those influencers of critical / literary imagination and the societal realities that it speaks to that constitute literature's context.

**Dramaturgies:** These refer to all the artistic strategies that a playwright uses in the passing of and dealing with the representation of the Kenyan female story in their texts.

**Experience:** Things or events that happen to someone that influence the way one thinks or behaves. This thesis presumes that many critical experiences within the public and domestic domains are gendered; that men generally experience certain phenomena differently from women, something that accounts for differences in interpretation of the meanings associated with those experiences.

**Feminism:** Is the arrangement of ideologies and social movements that share a common goal in order to establish and achieve economic, personal, and social equality of sexes. It seeks to define established educational and professional opportunities for women that are equal to those of men. This is also the belief that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men.

**Gender:** This refers to socially determined differences – cultural, social and even psychological – between men and women, with corresponding divisions of labour, powers and privileges, within domestic and public spaces, sometimes relying on stereotypical ascription of character behaviour, sometimes using biological differences as the logic of social constructedness of gender roles.

**Ideology:** This is a collection of beliefs and values that an individual or a group holds. It is the set of reasons, opinions, ideas that characterize a particular culture in a society.

**Patriarchy:** This is a tenacious system in society in which men dominate, in terms of possession and use of instruments of power and domination across the spectrum of socio-cultural, economic, and political planes of human engagements. This study uses the term patriarchy to refer to the logics of interpretation of experiences and decision making that draws on and extends – the men transfer this possession and power to the next available men, including their relatives or colleagues – the men-centred ways of doing things, the same ways that make it impossible to attain the dream of gender equity in all the critical spaces of human engagement.

**Post-colonial:** Also referred to as post-independence in this study, the conceptual meaning of post-colonial relates to the historical and experiential changes that former colonies experienced because of, and sometimes despite, colonialism.

**Redefining:** It is making people to think about something in a new or different way. There is a description of things differently from the original or dominant meaning.

**Representation:** This refers to the subjective but methodical and strategic, instrumental process of using one's voice to cast a group of people in a particular, discursive way in order to communicate the desired message.

**Sex:** Refers to biological male or female division of a species; is usually determined based on biology. In the human family, sexual differences of men and women have traditionally been burdened by connotations that serve patriarchal and other systemic ideological interests, where biological referents of 'man' and 'woman' are loaded with culturally loaded meanings that often emphasise manhood and its significance in society, while simultaneously diminishing and even stigmatizing the meanings of 'womanhood' in the same society.

**Stereotypes:** These are generic misconceptions about an individual, or communities. While stereotypes are generally deployed to exaggerate certain negativities for ulterior political or economic motives, their longevity derives from elements of factual truths associated with the target communities of those stereotypes. In studying stereotypes, the critical focus is on how they can or are used to extend false authority to some existing narratives, usually disadvantageous to the target ethnic, racial, or gender community. Here, the concern of the study concern is how gender stereotypes serve to mute or diminish women in Kenyan drama.

**Subaltern:** This word remains a critical conceptual tool and analytical category in the realm of postcolonial discourse across the world. Initially used by Gayatri Spivak in the essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1983) to refer to Indian women trapped between patriarchal and neo-liberal strictures in postcolonial India, the concept of subaltern has since been appropriated by many scholars across the globe to refer to population groups of either gender who are disadvantaged by systemic marginalization from dominant discursive practices.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The chapter gives a brief background to study. The Chapter also captures conventional elements of academic research, notably the statement of the research problem, purpose of the study, study questions, objectives of the study, significance of the study, justification of the study, scope and limitations and theoretical framework. Other elements contained in this chapter include a critical review of literature related to the key variables of our study, methodology, conceptual and operational definitions terms, and chapter conclusion. In the next section of this chapter, I contextualize the study by focusing on the background.

#### **1.1 Background to the Study**

Although drama has attracted extensive critical attention from Kenya, a lot of such scholarship has tended to focus on political issues broadly. Studies such as Outa (2001) and Ruganda (1992), for example, focus on the problems of post-colonial dictatorship in Kenya. Even when such scholars focus on character and characterization, there is a tendency to reify protagonists – most of whom are male – over the peripheral characters that are mostly female.

These studies (Outa 2001; Ruganda, 1992), among others, have also accorded significant attention to dramaturgy as employed by different playwrights. Dramaturgy denotes all the artistic strategies that a playwright relies on, especially in the passing of and dealing with the representation of theme and characterization. Dramaturgy is a comprehensive exploration of the context in which the plays are located, including the physical, social, political, and economic milieus in which the plays' action takes place. In this study, context signifies the long tradition of marginalization of women from mainstream literary and socio-political discourses captured in literature.

Since around 2000, there has been a steady shift in scholarship, with important placement of gender concerns in what were otherwise bigger themes, including power, and knowledge. Such studies have shown various ways in which women contribute to or challenge power, representation, and traditional ethnic identities that almost always freeze women in unfair positions within existing cultural structures. Such efforts have led to greater nuancing of what was previously considered settled, and subsequently given more voice and prominence to women in literary imagination. For example, while previously a homogenized notion of “women” was taken as given, feminist scholarship has reconfigured the meanings of the word ‘woman’ to cast it as an analytical tool, besides its traditional mandate as a signifier of a demographic collective. By so doing, it is now possible to understand the place of women in other debates, such as how gender relates to issues of race, class, sexuality, ability, ethnicity, and nationality, among others.

In feminist and gender studies, it is now clearly understood that theorizing women’s experiences from these multiple perspectives generate new questions, issues, and interpretations (Collins, 2000; Hooks, 1988; Mohanty, 1991, 2003). This broadens analysis of the historical, political, economic, and cultural forces that shape women’s lives and enhance their agency. This trend has benefited immensely from scholarship on representation of women in literature generally, and post-colonial writings in particular (Mohanty, 2000).

Broadly, clear patterns indicate changes in how women have been cast as characters in literature across time. First, authors in early writings depicted women who were oppressed, discriminated against in the society, and who lacked the voice to challenge the status quo because they were mostly confined in the domestic spaces of homes. Such women merely appealed for change in the society. These women were disadvantaged

because there was no monetary reward in this private sphere. These women, whom Abraham (2001) defines them as traditional women; saw the home as their only place in society. They also considered domesticity and motherhood as the ultimate emotional fulfilment for them. As Campbell (1989) puts it, “[n]o true woman” could be a public persuader.”

The second discernible pattern refers to representations of women who challenged the norms associated with domesticity. This kind of literature advocated for women empowerment and searched for their freedom. It sought to encourage sisterhood to achieve their new roles and addressed issues of poverty, oppression, health, and need for women to be independent. Later, with this enlightenment on women’s rights, women started growing. Moreover, writings started depicting what we call now modern women. These ideas have helped this study understand deeper the representation of Kenyan women. A greater sweep of feminist writing and criticism has put women’s experiences at the centre of creative and critical literary projects. According to Nkealah (2016), feminism addresses cultural issues that pertain to the complex experiences faced by all women of all cultures on the African continent. This implies that women face challenges from male-centred societies, where the women continue to struggle for equal opportunities.

Madipe (2011) highlight what female representation entails, thus focusing on women’s needs, empowerment, and the commonality to the struggles women face, including male chauvinism. The new crop of feminist writers are concerned with women’s freedom. In this regard, Mama (1995) observes that the early African feminist women’s movement documented women's mobilisation by military and civilian dictatorship. To Ayesha et al. (1992), African movements had been organized around kinship grouping and around



religious, cultural and political duties. These organizations defended women's rights and occurred before independence.

On his part, Hansen (1992) focuses on African women movement after independence. Accordingly, after colonialism, some early women's associations and groups redirected by missionaries were designed to civilize and "uplift" African women by instilling Western European ideologies of domesticity and offering training in related skills. This helped them to get skills in innovative ways that empowered and laid the ground for future innovation. The groups that came together as larger bodies were: Mothers' Union, Catholic Women's Clubs of Uganda, The Federation of Nigeria, Women Societies and National Council of Women in Kenya. Tramberge Hansen's ideas depict liberal movement, where a group of women believe that solidarity through sisterhood could bring emancipation.

Closer to Kenya, Tamale (1999) notes that this movement has challenged the patriarchal biases of political establishment. The issues addressed in this movement are women's need, and empowerment. Madipe (2011) concurs with Tamale by noting that the specific organizations have also addressed matters that cover domestic violence, legal rights, education, health and sexual reproductive rights, peace building, housing and land, cultural and religious practices and female genital mutilation.

Overall, this study holds that recent writers are also employing information and communication technologies in highly innovative and radical ways to capture and problematize women's experiences. These changes are felt in creative and critical writings, most of which have emerged from universities in Africa. This is partly because, as Mama (1995) also noted, there is a general increase in overall numbers of women

attaining higher education. Accordingly, their scholarly output in gender studies has increased in universities, much of which bears the influence of feminist thinking.

The third pattern relates to recent writers of post-colonialism. These feminists direct their demands for legal and policy reforms at the government. Ayesha et al. (1992) argue that there is a movement of female public figures with huge influence, such as first ladies of many countries, who mobilise women to higher levels of freedoms against male-centred political oppression. With more democracy in many African countries, women have continued to mobilize, demanding greater participation in political life, a concern reflected in Beijing 1995. There is also a trend towards greater specialization in organizations as women have taken jobs that once belonged to men.

In literature, these changes continue to be manifested in how post-colonial writers keep repainting women as characters, authors, and critics. Further, some African writers – male and female – artists have challenged the outdated myths and repugnant socio-cultural practices that marginalise sections of their own people. This progressive writing cuts across the genres. For example, Chinua Achebe's early novels *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *Arrow of God* (1964) problematize the cultural practices of aggressive masculinity, the exclusion of women from central positions in society, and even backward beliefs such as abandonment of twins and human sacrifice. In drama, Wole Soyinka's *The Swamp Dwellers* (1958) and *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), as well as Bole Butake's *Family Saga* (2004) extend drama's discursive engagement with oppressive cultures, whether these are from within or without Africa, as well as whether they are historical or contemporary forms.

In Kenya, specifically, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Mirii's *I Will Marry When I Want* (1982) use a class-based condemnation of socio-economic exploitation that poor

workers suffer at the hands of multinational corporations overseen by an emerging, postcolonial black *petit bourgeoisie*. The Ngugi and Ngugi's criticism of exploitation, as dramatized in *I Will Marry When I Want*, reflects both a theoretical and epistemic gesture of placing women at the centre of literary thought. The point is that although women began appearing in literature as fringe characters, the passage of time has correspondingly witnessed their shifts from these fringes to central places in literature.

Through the literary enterprises spearheaded by intellectuals of Ngugi's standing across Africa, the idea of a single metropolitan locus in which all power is located is de-centred; instead, a demonstration of multiple centres and perspectives is rendered, often using race and class as operational variables. Gender, in all these, appears to be a subordinate variable. Despite this trend, many African writers – including canonical ones such as Ngugi and Achebe cited above – have nonetheless been bothered by struggles for equity and taken up the challenge of recasting gender issues with compassion to female characters.

However, this study acknowledges some of the challenges of recasting, especially the risk of generalization similar to that of representation as theorised by Spivak (1983). According to Spivak, representations assume that mostly women are the persons being represented lack both political and linguistic capacity to present or express themselves. In this sense, representation is both expressive and potentially silencing; it can vocalize while essentialising, all for objective-oriented, strategic reasons.

In the current study, representation is considered as the ways that the playwrights studied choose to cast women to relay the artists' social visions. In this regard, the study appreciates the enormity of the task of 'speaking for' women in general, while relying on, or referencing, historical and cultural strictures that have previously muted women's

voices in public spheres, or elided them completely from public visibility. Representation relies on careful artistic choices, in this case, effective use of dramaturgies.

In Kenyan drama, some recent playwrights such as Dennis Kyalo and Njoki Gitumbi have recently begun mainstreaming re-presentation of gender in ways that both disturb but also rectify earlier portrayals of women that was seen in the works such as Francis Imbuga's *Betrayal in the City* (1976) or Ngugi wa Thiong'o's and Micere Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976). In these texts, female characters were generally cast as support for the more important and well-developed male counterparts. This study suggests that if women were traditionally silenced and their gendered experiences trivialized, contemporary playwrights revisit these presentations with a view to according the women greater autonomy and regard by using strategies of juxtaposition and symbolism, as exemplified in Dennis Kyalo's *The Hunter is Back* and Njoki Gitumbi's *A New Dawn*.

Butler (1990), while commending on gender and female representation, explains that much as the unproblematic unity of "women" is often invoked to construct solidarity of identity, a split is introduced in the feminist subject by distinctions between sex and gender. Originally intended to dispute the biology-is-destiny formulation, the distinction between sex and gender suggests that whatever biological intractability that sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed. This means neither that it is a result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex. In this regard, Butler (1990) provokes discourse by using some rhetorical questions whose ultimate aim is to provoke introspective questions from the reader:

Is there any gender that a person is said to have or is it an essential attribute that a person is said to be as implied in the question “what gender are you?” When feminist theorists claim that gender is cultural interpretation of sex or that gender is culturally constructed, what is the manner or mechanism of this construction? If gender is constructed, could it be constructed differently, or does its contradiction imply some form of social determinism foreclosing the possibility of agency and transformation? Does construction suggest that certain laws generate gender differences along universal axes of sexual difference? How and where does the construction of gender take place? (Butler, 1990: 8).

This study observes that gender is a social construct that depends on culture and sociology of different groups. Because of change in society, some roles assigned to men or women depending on their biology and social responsibilities keep changing. This means that essentially, gender is a fluid category that keeps changing depending on time and place. This study appreciates that the concept of female representation is based on socially defined differences between men and women.

According to Butler (1990), gender is a factor or dimension of an analysis because the term ‘gender’ is can embody persons as a “mark” of biological, linguistic and cultural differences. Butler’s argument is more potent when read alongside related arguments by Simone de Beauvoir (1949) and Friedan (1963). While de Beauvoir wrote about the experiences of women in France, Friedman focused similar experiences in America. Both critics lamented the seeming domination of men at the centre of public lives, often at the expense of women. At the same time, many men are accustomed to seeing women as peripheral figures who exist in antagonistic opposition to the more central and agentic men.

On her part, Friednan disagrees with the extent to which diverse institutions – political, economic, and even social – promote distorted images of women. Accordingly, women

are presented as people who only derive a sense of fulfilment when they fit in the social roles ascribed by society. Placing women in such fixed roles amounts to a subconscious subordination of women's agency to the capricious whims of a patriarchal notion of social order. By pushing these arguments, both de Beauvoir and Friedan reject the distortions of women's images in much of the male created literature.

Besides Butler, de Beauvoir, and Friedan, other feminist critics such as bell hooks' *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984) and Crenshaw (1994) argue that gender is a "relation" or a set of relations but not an individual attribute. This study aligns itself with these sets of ideas, because of the relational terms in which women and men exist and operate in a society with other variables such as class, race, and ethnicity. All these variables shape the possibilities and extent to which individuals may live out their aspirations, or repress them as they seek to 'fit' in their societies.

Therefore, the current study concurs with Crenshaw's (1994) notion of intersectionality in its argument that women's experiences are also altered by other variables, such as socio-economic class, racial belonging, and geographical location. This means that while the gendered experiences generally work against women, the realities of these experiences influence individual women differently depending on their race, class, and their places of residence. While the situation in America informed Crenshaw's (1994) ideas, these ideas are also relevant in Kenya because of their usefulness in delineating the problem of discursive generalization.

Against this background, the current study, therefore, sought to examine the dramaturgy of female representation in Kenyan drama. The main aim was to interrogate how some Kenyan playwrights grapple with socio-cultural heritages of their people in portraying their female characters. Dramaturgy of female representation is an important element in

plays. This is because unlike other genres of literature, the performative aspects of drama call upon the playwright to invest their thoughts in formal aspects of their texts in far deeper ways, considering the setting and extra-textual forms of communication. Non-verbal cues, the setting, the use of stage directions, and other genre-specific elements of drama mean that it is not adequate to examine style in the generic sense.

Therefore, although related to style in some senses, dramaturgies transcend style in terms of the linguistic and other textually predetermined choices; they entail the possibility of style as a means to an end but also as an aesthetic in and of itself that is inclusive of its extra-literary dimensions when it is being experienced in drama. The notion of dramaturgy was conceptualized in the study to denote all the artistic strategies that a playwright relies on, especially in the passing of and dealing with the representation of the Kenyan female in drama.

Dramaturgy is a comprehensive exploration of the context in which the plays are located, including the physical, social, political, and economic milieus in which the plays' action takes place. In this study, context signifies the long tradition of marginalization of women from mainstream literary and socio-political discourses captured in literature, and the tendency by men writers to uncritically reproduce gender stereotypes in literary works that ostensibly address 'big' themes of nationalism, social crises, and so on. Other elements germane to context include the psychological underpinnings of the female characters, the various metaphorical expressions in the plays, the plays' thematic concerns, and the technical considerations of the play as a piece of writing, thus structure, rhythm, flow, even individual character and lexical choices.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

There is a strong connection between how women live in society and how they are portrayed in drama, something that calls for scholarly attention. In order to better understand the experiences of women in society, there is need to examine their portrayal in literary works from particular societies. In addition, although Kenya has recently witnessed remarkable changes where women have made remarkable gains in public life of the country, the nature and extent of this change remains largely unexplored in literature.

Therefore, this study sought to analyse the dramaturgy of female representation in selected drama, focusing on Dennis Kyalo's *The Hunter is Back* (2010), Francis Imbuga's *The Return of Mgofu* (2011), Njoki Gitumbi's *A New Dawn* (2012), and Francis Imbuga's *The Green Cross of Kafira* (2013). The study focused on dramaturgies to evaluate the relationship between style and portrayal of female characters in the created literary worlds. In all, the study sought to answer two critical questions: how do the selected playwrights portray female characters? What is the relationship between dramaturgies and portrayal of female characters?

## **1.3 Justification and Significance of the Study**

First, the current study selected Dennis Kyalo's *The Hunter is Back* (2010), Francis Imbuga's *The Return of Mgofu* (2011) and *The Green Cross of Kafira* (2013), and Njoki Gitumbi's *A New Dawn* (2012), because they address themes related to gender and other identities, while highlighting variables that affect women's representation in literary texts. The representation of the female characters is an important index in the process of identity formation. This is because it raises questions on how society shapes and influences gender roles in contemporary Kenya today.



Secondly, the playwrights were selected because they are relatively recent and their works have not attracted extensive scholarly attention compared to more established playwrights such as Imbuga, Ngugi, and Mugo. Therefore, focusing on these recent playwrights and their works may unearth emerging trends in the portrayal of female characters.

The playwrights selected for this study project an implicit relationship between the dramatization of the female self and the nation. They question the representation of women in the gamut of postcolonial Kenya, and situate their portrayal of women in relation to the dynamics of gender and civic nationalism. Conceiving the nation through contemporary drama in Kenya aims at projecting national construction of selfhood and the representation of women as a dialectic process, one always in the process of incomplete formation. Therefore, there was need to investigate the implications of this ideological relationship to gain insights into contemporary women's struggles for representation alongside performing nationhood. To this end, the representation of women was read as a process through which a sense of interdependence of the female self and the nation was realised. Thus, the effect of the postcolonial nation on the development and representation of female self and national identity was interrogated.

Issues of women and women representation have been a concern in African literature and research for decades. The upsurge of studies on women representation has been occasioned by the realization that even at the textual level, which reflects on the goings on in society; women have been exploited, overlooked, and belittled for a long period. As this researcher suggests earlier in this thesis, there was a tendency by the earlier generation to uncritically draw on patriarchal logics and modes of representation of women, thereby entrenching gender inequalities that are traceable to the patriarchal stranglehold on society. Even in situations where women appear to be favourably

presented, for instance in the romanticised images of motherhood that were the staple of Senghorian Negritude poetry, such presentation is at its core is problematic because it idealises womanhood in a manner not unlike the patriarchal parameters of a ‘true African woman’. Such a portrayal is itself a code-phrase for the long-suffering compliant woman who soaks in the pressures of gender inequalities without lamenting.

Women continue to suffer in this way due to various factors. These include years of socialization of women to subscribe to certain roles such as moral gatekeepers of human society, and therefore expected to behave in prescribed manner. This is evident in not only African societies, but also its literature. Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) captures this interconnection and goes ahead to pose the question: “Are African women voiceless or do we fail to look for voices where we may find them, in the sites and forms which these voices are uttered?” (p.139). The current study was anchored on Ogundipe-Leslie’s critical question and framed as a response to the question as it interrogates the dramaturgies of female representation in Kenyan drama.

Therefore, recognising this, the current study is a significant contribution to the body of knowledge on gender, society, and representation in Kenyan drama. Given that the selected playwrights emerge from a changing society, it is logical to presume that their works equally reflect the changes in society. This, therefore, creates opportunities for this study to infer current trends and patterns in representation of gender in contemporary Kenya.

## **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

The current study was guided by the following objectives, which sought to:

- i. Interrogate representation(s) of women in the selected Kenyan drama.
- ii. Examine how some of the ideological persuasions employed by the playwrights in the selected texts dramatize and (re)define female (hi) story (ies) in Kenya today.
- iii. Examine artistic strategies employed by playwrights in the representation of female characters in the selected Kenyan drama.

## **1.5 Research Assumptions**

The study was founded on the following assumptions:

- i. The representation(s) of women in the selected drama take different forms.
- ii. Playwrights are influenced by different ideological standpoints in dramatizing and (re)defining female (hi) stories in the selected Kenyan drama.
- iii. There are various artistic strategies employed by playwrights in the representation of female characters in the selected drama.

## **1.6 Scope and Limitations**

Firstly, this study delimited itself to the analysis of the portrayal of female characters in the selected texts to unpack the representation of women in Kenya. It was a comparative analysis of dramaturgies' of female representation in Denis Kyalo's *The Hunter is Back* (2010), Francis Imbuga's *The Return of Mgofu* (2011) and *The Green Cross of Kafira* (2013), and Njoki Gitumbi's *A New Dawn* (2012). The main aim was to show how women are represented. Given that Imbuga was, until the time of his death, arguably the most accomplished and prolific playwright with a notable focus on themes of gender equality and equity, this study opted to include two of his most recent works for study.

Feminism, particularly gynocriticism, African feminism and postcolonial theoretical approaches were used in the analysis of dramaturgies of female representation in Kenyan drama. The study also focused only on the analysis of the artistic strategies employed by the playwrights in order to bring out their representation of female characters. In this regard, the analysis of female representation only focused on drama that was published between 2010 and 2014, which, according to the study, reflects the latest thought patterns on the old question of gender equality and representation of woman in Kenyan literature.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This section reviews literature of other critics on dramaturgies, female representation and gender statuses, and commentary as they manifest in the selected texts for the study. The literature is divided into two sections: representation of women in Kenyan drama and women, literature, and the nation.

#### **2.2 Women, Literature, and the Nation**

Writing about women and their place in the society is relevant in understanding identities in general. Therefore, a study examining the representation of female characters in literature such as Kenyan drama helps deepen scholars' understanding of how dynamics of gender and representation illuminate the range of knowledge on the relationship between gender, literature, and the Kenyan society.

There have been rising levels of gender consciousness seen in in the works of some feminist authors such as Rebecca Njau and Marjorie Oludhe-Macgoye. In their early writings, even gynandrists such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Meja Mwangi and Henry Ole Kulet depicted women who were oppressed and discriminated against in society. Such women had no voice to speak but just appealed for change in the society. As portrayed in the early literature, such women were disadvantaged because there was no monetary reward in this private sphere. But this has changed remarkably with the rise in women's rights and feminist discourses where women's role in nation building is shown to go beyond the traditional childbearing, rearing, and home keeping, instead including quantifiable economic contributions as well.

In discussing the question of nationhood, there is a need to understand the concept of the nation since its ideological construct is variously conceived. Renan (2016), for instance, views the nation as “a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present [...] consent, the desire to live together. The will to perpetuate the value of the heritage one has received in an undivided form. Renan’s ideas hint at the intangible aspects of nationhood, particularly aspects of the affect that make one attached to a particular country or among certain people and not others. Thus, the imagination of the nation is bound with the imagination of the past, the memorisation and the remembrances of the nation’s origins that can be excavated from myths of origin, and histories of the struggle for independence. In all these, however, there is always a tendency to author and propagate broad-based metanarratives that exclude minority voices such as those of women and offer cynical justifications for such exclusions.

According to Hobsbawm, the nation “belongs exclusively to a particular and historically recent period. It is a social entity only in so far as it relates to a certain kind of modern territorial states, the ‘nation-state’ (1983: 9). Hobsbawm notes further that “[t]he ‘national question’...is situated at the point of intersection of politics, technology and social transformation” (1983: 10). This view points at the dialectic relationship between a nation and the various functions performed by the people within it. This study, however, argues that Hobsbawm’s variables of “intersection of politics, technology and social transformation” obscure the role of gender in nation formation, and even in conceptualisation of the idea of a nation.

Significantly, this study holds that while Hobsbawm’s underlying logic may be general enough to be applicable universally, the processes of nation formation tend to be unique to specific locales. In Kenya, for instance, the idea of an all-inclusive nation that

coincides with the nation-state boundaries remains a mirage largely because of a history of exclusionary politics and marginalisation of certain groups of Kenyans along the lines of ethnicity, religion, and gender. As indicated by Atieno-Odhiambo (2002), for instance, the politics and processes of crafting the nation in Kenya tend to rely on ethnicity for mobilising national sentiments.

This study argues that the preeminent focus on ethnicity as the key variable in forming nations obscures the role of gender. At the same time, this study also recognises that some creative writers have illuminated gender issues in society to boost recognition of and respect for women's role in nation formation. Apart from the playwrights under study, other writers including Likimani in *Passbook Number F.47927* (1985) and Macgoye in *Coming to Birth* (1986) have engaged with and problematized the nature of gendered experiences in Kenya's project of nation-formation. While Likimani highlights the role of women during the Mau period, their acts of bravery and their contribution to the armed struggle for Kenya's political independence, Macgoye narrates how women emerge strongly despite experiencing the violence caused by some incidents in post-independence political histories. In other words, both Likimani and Macgoye highlight gendered perspectives on different eras of Kenya's histories in their respective works.

While identifying hindrances to women's engagement in nationalism, it is essential to consider women's experiences in nation formation. In this regard, Elleke notes "women's life-narratives have been regarded as subsidiary to defining national myths" (2005: 255). The implication is that women as a category have been marginalised in national issues, despite the notion that women's writings "explore the intricate interconnection of personal lives with the nation's official history. They demonstrate how women occupy intersecting spaces" (Boehmer, *ibid.*). Such spaces include the domestic and the public, the cultural and the socio-political, all of which have implications on how women view

themselves or are viewed by society in the nation. Nationalism has been a predominantly male project all over the world, although some women writers have begun imagining how women can also change the space. For example, Muthoni Likimani's *Passbook Number F.47927* highlights female participation in Kenya's liberation struggle and hence distinguishes women freedom fighters as civic nationalists.

Furthermore, both men and women's literary writers and critics continue to expose the injustices of systemic obstructions to women's ambitions and dreams that happen when women are confined in domestic spaces. Some writers portray a future society of gender equity. Therefore, this study explores the ways in which recent playwrights have summoned appropriate dramaturgies with a feminist slant to imagine and recast a Kenya of gender equity.

This study also recognises that earlier critics (Outa, 2001; Ruganda, 1992) have engaged with the question of gender-sensitive representation in creative literature. Some critical works have also emerged taking cognizance of these changes. Other scholars (Wanjala, 1994) focus on Marjorie Macgoye's *Coming to Birth*, to show women experienced the adverse experiences of political history in post-independence Kenya. Additionally, Wanjala's study interrogates how women's writings provide a flexible environment within which women can be accommodated within imaginaries of the nation. While Wanjala's critique resonates with this study, he locates his intervention in the domain of fiction and evaluates the contribution of a pioneer novelist whose creative outputs coincided with mid post-independence period.

Wanjala's study borrows the concept of the subaltern, a term that was popularized by Gayatri Spivak in her essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1983). The term subaltern foundationally means a lower status member of a community. Spivak's usage meant to



decry the then popular assumption that the male voices that emerged from India also represented the sentiments of women. Ever since Spivak used the term to refer to women, it has become a widely used to demand that rather than being represented, women should rather speak for themselves. Therefore, this study uses 'subaltern' as a signifier of oppression, a referent of the voiceless and marginalized in society, including the postcolonial Kenyan woman whose representation in literary imaginaries remains as problematic as their everyday lives themselves. The current study shifts attention to more recent drama, a genre that tracks the attitudinal and discursive changes that have emerged in recent times. Like Wanjala, the current study also borrows Spivak's idea of subaltern to interrogate the extent to which women are given voice in the texts under study.

However, while acknowledging the conceptual value of the word subaltern, this study uses it with caution in order to explore women's self-identity and representation from the standpoint of Kenyan drama, specifically how the (re)presentation of women as a group set apart from male dominated power structures in society is manifested in the selected plays.

Other critics with a gender slant include Kruger (2004) who observes that:

Feminist and cultural studies [...] postcolonial, and postmodern theories have become increasingly concerned with narrative and the formation of individual and cultural identities [...] the growing interest in the study of narrative, in particular the individual lives, [that] proceeds from the premise that the self-[...] is essentially constructed by or through the narrative (2004 :11).

Kruger's views are relevant here because conscientious male and female writers tend to assign agency to women's identities as they negotiate their positions within the nation spaces. Kruger highlights the need to prioritise issues that affect women in

Kenya. He also implies that positive literary representations of women empowers them because such progressive portrayals negate the adverse presumptions about women. Kruger's view that this study finds especially useful is the idea that literatures allow for collective expressions of shared plight. At the same time, they allow space for individual self-positioning that reflects women's personal autonomy and its corresponding dignity. This study's concern is how this is achieved in recent drama, which also extends similar and comparable projects earlier on.

In terms of creative ascription of such autonomous, agentic voice to individual female characters, Ogola's *The River and the Source* (1994) follows earlier generations of Kenya in a rapidly changing world. Ogola articulates a kind of womanhood in contemporary Kenya that projects its own social agency and identity. In the process, her characters rewrite what has been allocated to women in a postcolonial Kenya's national story. In *The River and the Source*, Ogola (1994) depicts Kenyan women as capable of telling their own stories and claiming their rightful places, identities, and roles in public leadership. This is shown in the strong female characters that tend to excel in domains previously considered the preserve of men. The current study was concerned with selfhood and female identities and women's representation in post-independence Kenya. The study premised itself on the notion that the nation is deemed to have an influence on not only the writers' perception of women, but also the development of women's identities. Therefore, the dramatization of women's selfhood and identity plays a central role in defining women's national identities with regard to the interconnection of women's personal lives with the nation's history. For this reason, the study views women as significant in the definition of the Kenyan nation, and argue that the interconnectedness between women and national histories is critical.

Chesaina (1984) argues that Imbuga's *Betrayal in the City* gives women little chance to inspire change in their society's challenges. Chesaina further argues that Imbuga fails by depicting female characters as sketched rather than rounded. Her study successfully exposes some of the gender issues in post – independent Kenya inherent in Imbuga's early plays, something that he changed in his later plays such as *Aminata*. Chesaina's study is relevant to the current one because it focuses on the greater concern of gender representation in the context of national politics as represented in drama. According to Chesaina, there is a failure or inability of earlier male writers to acknowledge the fullness of women's humanity. The current study, therefore, focuses on contemporary drama to evaluate the portrayal of women.

The idea of general misrepresentation of women also concerns Makini (1985), whose study dwells on thematic concerns and stylistic techniques of some plays by Imbuga. Makini's study does not explore the link between dramaturgies and gender representation. Therefore, there is a scholarly gap that the current study filled by focusing on the effectiveness of dramaturgies selected by some playwrights, and the appropriateness of gender representation.

On a related note, Wamitilla's "A Comparative Study of the Drama of Francis Imbuga and John Ruganda" reads the drama of Francis Imbuga and that of John Ruganda in the context of the prevailing social and political conditions in the post-independence period. Wamitilla observes that Imbuga is sensitive to the plight of the common man. Wamitilla's study takes class as the analytical position, which is different from the current study that focuses on gender. Thus, Wamitilla's study does not address gender or the effectiveness of dramaturgies in the plays. In a way, Wamitilla's study coincided with a similar, but more expansive, comparison undertaken by Ruganda (1992) for his doctorate project entitled "Alienation and Leadership Figures in the Plays of Francis

Imbuga". Ruganda's thesis interrogates the significance of humour in Imbuga's drama, and concludes that Imbuga uses humour as a shield that enables him to address serious state issues without being subjected to harassment by state agents. While such issues may relate mainly to national politics, they do not touch on characterization and portrayal of women as the current study does.

Ndonji's (2010) study examines Francis Imbuga's use of fictional prose as an educative and conscientization tool. He argues that Imbuga has been at the forefront in the struggle for social change in his society. The presentation of men in his fictional works has made it possible to understand the position of men in the society. For that reason, Ndonji (2010) uses Imbuga's *Shrine of Tears* (1993) and *Miracle of Remera* (2004) to interrogate the presentation of male characters, to the exclusion of women, which is a gap that the current study fills. Furthermore, Ndonji pays rather little attention to the study of the significance of the aspects of style in the two novels.

Another critic who focuses on Imbuga's drama is Musyoki (2018), who uses Imbuga's *Betrayal in the City* (1976), *The Return of Mgofu* (2011) and *The Green Cross of Kafira* (2013) to demonstrate that drama, can play a role in the construction of a national identity. His study dwells so much on a diachronic assessment of Kenyan politics as depicted in the three plays. The study however, does not engage with the issue of female representation in the plays can perform with regard to the portrayal of the Kenyan situation.

Like the earlier studies, this study recognises feminism as an important movement that can help to place women at the centre of national debates and visibility. The study establishes that the participation and representation of women in national matters is a progressive engagement in nation building, which somewhat explains the changing

perceptions towards women in society today. Thus, while the critics reviewed here focus on various aspects of Imbuga's drama, none has attempted a focused analysis on the dramaturgies of female representation in Kenyan drama, as the current study does.

Yet, if literature on Imbuga appears somewhat limited in focusing on the political themes at the expense of gendered perspectives, other playwrights have suffered similar or worse fate. For instance, there is very little critical works on the respective plays of Kyalo and Njoki. Regarding Kyalo, perhaps the only available scholarly work is Namayi and Mugubi (2018), who argue that Kyalo's *The Hunter is Back* dramatizes the suffering of women in a patriarchal society. Accordingly, women are left to merely lament against this suffering in a world "characterized by male chauvinism, patriarchy, and gender imbalance" (Namayi & Mugubi, 2018: 30). This view may well be correct, but the study focused more on themes, without showing the relationship between these and the dramaturgies deployed by the playwright. Thus, the genre related aspects of literary communication, for instance the musicals and other elements of drama, were left out. Therefore, the current study focuses on the relationship between dramaturgy and portrayal of women in selected drama.

Another study on Kyalo's *The Hunter is Back* was conducted by Namayi and Orina (2016). Namayi and Orina's study was on the how playwrights use language and style in their works, and used close textual reading to show instances of dramatic irony, symbolism, and some of the motifs present in the play. While this approach was useful as a practice of practical criticism, it did not quite demonstrate how the thematic concerns in the play and the dramaturgies used reflected the general conditions of women in the society. As such, the current study augments the earlier one by Namayi and Orina by showing how the aspects of style help us to appreciate the worlds and experiences of women.

Similarly, little by way of critical responses exist in respect of Gitumbi's play, *A New Dawn*. This is because Njoki Gitumbi is an upcoming writer and not much has been done about her. However, the dimension of gender, character, and characterization is explored in the literature so far reviewed. Therefore, the current study extends the conversations by the above writers showing the interfaces between dramaturgies and the portrayal of women in Kenyan drama. That is why the next section of this study reviews literature on the role of drama in reconfiguring images of women in contemporary drama.

### **2.2.1 Women, Drama and History in Contemporary Kenya**

Macgoye (2005) in *The Present Moment* metaphorically depicts female characters in an institution that she calls The Refuge – a missionary-run home for the elderly. In doing this, Macgoye creates a form of an imagined community, which stands for the Kenyan nation. In reading Macgoye's oeuvre, Kurtz underscores this when he notes that "[nationhood and national identity are central to the novel]" (2005: 148). By presenting the lived experiences as stories, narrative style helps both the reader and the critic understand the different life experiences. For this reason, this study partly endeavoured to interrogate how various dramatic strategies are used to represent contemporary Kenyan women, and to ascertain whether the anxieties of post-colonialism have been manifested in the dramatization and (re)definition of female representations in Kenya's drama.

Another study was by Atsango (2006), who notes that Ogola creates awareness about the injustices and oppression that affects women. Atsango adds that Ogola champions the development of women's redefinition and reconstruction in the social order. Atsango emphasizes Ogola's identity as a woman writing self in an ambivalent relation to the nation. While Atsango's focus is thematically related to the current studies, her focus on

the novel genre departs from this study's intervention that focuses, instead, on dramatic representation of the same concerns in the selected texts.

Differences in form impact on the way any theme can be presented. While the fact that a playwright is a man or a woman also tends to determine how they deal with gendered issues. This explains why some of the critical interventions are in different genres from drama, leading to differences in style of presentation. For example, Mbaya's *A Journey Within* (2008) narrates a love story centred on a young woman, Monika, who redeems a man, Mulandi, by making him understand the implications of irresponsible sexual exploits with a younger woman, Helen. By assigning agency to young women, Mbaya envisions a future of women at the centre of a postcolonial nation, and therefore figuratively commissions them to exercise selfhood and nationhood responsibly.

Similarly, Gitaa's *Crucible for Silver and Furnace for Gold* (2008) presents the challenges facing women as victims of moral dilemmas in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Kenya. Gitaa places the protagonist in this narrative on a pedestal as she constructs an imaginary AIDS-free state with a woman playing agentic role. This characterisation is Gitaa's way of articulating a future founded on the dialectical relationship between the female self and Kenyan nation. This study holds that what Mbaya and Gitaa respectively achieve is commendable because they recognise the problems of gender representation in national imaginaries and debates. At the same time, the present study extends the frontiers of Mbaya and Gitaa by situating its own intervention within the domain of drama, thereby demonstrating the multi-perspectival nature of the issue of gender (re)presentation.

In capturing the general depiction of women, Kathryn (2014) posits that women are defined physically and intellectually as the 'weaker sex'. While acknowledging that Kathryn's views are general, the present study restricts itself to the Kenyan context,

where generally women are also marginalized culturally, socially, and economically as well. Obbe (1990) argues that women are weak and unpopular, dependent, and disrespectful. This study departs from the above ideas since they are constructed by patriarchal ideas that ultimately justify the oppression of women by normalizing the idea of gender inequality. Instead, the study focuses on how different playwrights employ dramatic techniques to highlight the predicament of women in contemporary and changing Kenyan society. Since women seek new identities with changing times, there is need for this woman to change.

Jan (2014) argues that from history, women were constant victims of societal ideals. Traditionally, women were subordinate to male authority and there were certain rules imposed and standards imposed on women to adhere to. Women were expected to comply with these societal ideals and, as a result, opportunities for women were limited and their importance in the society was abbreviated. Jan also captures the role of the society in imposing standards on women. Acknowledging Jan's work, the current study interrogates the different ways in which contemporary playwrights construct images of women in their works, with a view to detect any shifting patterns vis-à-vis patriarchal dominance as the pervasive social ideology in Kenya today.

Obbe (1990) offers what this study considers a negative projection of African women in the domain of education. He states that women's participation in education was biased in Africa, because there was lack of genuine political will to ensure that girls were given equal access to education. Subsequently, they were not expected to aspire as high levels of achievement as men, especially in what is considered to be male-dominated academic fields (engineering, computing, architecture and medicine). Furthermore, Obbe gives a reason that families preferred to invest in boys' education than women who would eventually get married. He brings out illiterate women and explains why they are



discriminated against. Obbe's view, therefore, critiques the seeming normalization of gender discrimination in education. Taking its cue from the contemporary times, the present study examines the depiction of women in selected drama, where imagined gender restriction is minimal. This study is also concerned with the issue of education of women as a way of empowering women – in some of the plays that this study focuses on, only women with high education are shown to acquire a voice to express themselves.

Education plays a big role in empowering a previously disempowered people. It is arguable that African women depicted in early writings such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Mirii's *I Will Marry When I Want* were vulnerable to greater oppression because they were uneducated. The current shows the complexity of education as a variable that tilts the gender scales in society, as reflected in the plays under study. The current study concurs with Julien's (1992) argument that education is a means of escape from socio-economic and cultural hindrances in Africa. This is so true with regard to empowerment of women; education plays a significant role in empowering women. Although Julien made her point in regard to Africans generally, thus researcher finds it especially applicable to women because of their general vulnerability to cultural and other challenges. For women, education gives them a voice to speak out against repugnant cultural or other practices, thus influencing their lives.

Harvey (2012) observes that the contribution of women in the society is limited and solely controlled under patriarchal authority. Harvey goes further to highlight more roles for women in traditional Africa. Accordingly, women are constrained to undertake traditional roles, such as mothering and nurturing. These chores restrict women in private sphere. From Harvey's argument, it is clear that women in earlier literature were portrayed largely as submissive characters who upheld the image of women as envisioned by patriarchy. This thesis holds that while there are some women who have

managed to overcome traditional expectations and occupied public responsibilities, most women remain stuck in the old ways. Therefore, this study examines the extent to which such societal roles are replicated or debunked in contemporary drama by analysing the relationship between dramaturgies and characterization in the selected plays.

On his part, Lynn (2014) identifies the place of women in the society. She argues that women belong to domestic spheres. Their fashion and domestic furnishing, social engagements and religious devotion, as well as charitable activities all serve to delineate a universe within which women express their power. Lynn's ideas are very helpful when analysing the depiction of women in Gitumbi's play *A New Dawn* (2012), which is one of the plays this study focuses on. This is because the above study gives insight in understanding the place of women in this text. The present study also focuses on the dramaturgies employed by the playwrights under study in order to examine the depiction of women in the Kenyan society and it partly focuses on the place of women in the society as reflected in the four texts under study.

Diop (1998) argues that some male writers tend to reproduce commonly held views of women presented as idyllic (mother), beautiful, enduring, humble, self-sacrificing, witch, cunning, scheming – who live on exploitation of men. Such stereotypical presentations do not help in revealing the actual relationships of gender in changing times; instead they actually obscure the agentic choices that individuals make regardless of gender. Although there may have been progressive changes as creative writers move towards egalitarian representation of gender in society, the extent in which such progress has been made remains unclear, hence the need for this study which analyses how different playwrights deploy dramaturgies in their representation of gender. The underlying question that guides this study is whether the tradition of casting women in the supernatural realms – whether as mild mannered angels or wicked monsters – persists in

contemporary times or not, and what this actually reveals to readers regarding the nature of gender relations in the current world that the plays under study reflect.

The need to identify these modern depictions in writings (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000). They argue that “[t]he character of a woman as an angel in the house (obedient) and monster (fallen sexually) must be uncovered, examined, debunked and transcended if women are to achieve new roles in literature.” The current study takes this position in order to investigate depictions of women in the society using an earlier and later generation plays. The study achieves this objective by situating the primary texts in contemporary debates about gender equity and equality, ideas that have been theorised in postcolonial and subaltern studies. Therefore, the present study is relevant as it examines the character development of women in the four plays and determines the role of ideologies in these identities. The present study also looks at the influence of the society in representing women and therefore constructing women’s identities.

Merge (2011) captures the cultural and societal expectations of a woman, stating that the society has a hold on woman’s life on how she should dress and present herself, among others. Merge further argues that even when a woman was normal, society did not accept her as such, so she apologised for her being. This study partly concurs with Merge (2011) given that currently, the society still has a hold on the behaviour of women especially in public domains, where even women in leadership are held to higher moral standards compared to their male counterparts. Even in other domains of public and social lives, gender seems to scorn certain forms of self-fashioning and expressions in society – for instance in commercials and fashion-shows, which are seen as reinforcing of sexual-related gender stereotypes. Such ventures have been shown to uplift women from lower to higher socio-economic positions, besides giving them voice and visibility in national discourses.

Debates on how women are perceived in society are presented in fiction. They are also dominant subjects of discursive engagement by scholars of various theoretical positions, notably feminist critics who take different, sometimes polemical standpoints. Roja (1990), for instance, observes that African women were the most powerful spiritual figures; she argues that religion emphasized social importance of women by stressing the place of female gods of fertility and social peace. Roja also depicts women who have power, and those who are important and equal to men. She also examines women who are undergoing some changes with the influence of religion, noting that some are associated with witchcraft – which symbolizes potential social danger of women who exercise power that is uncontrolled by men. This depiction demonstrates how some men fear any challenge from empowered women, who the men then consider to be evil.

Women ultimately show that women are seeking equality by acquiring new identities that disavow the traditional expectations set by men. This is in spite of the fact that male-centred ideology generally tends to dominate human relations and is reflected in the literature that every society gifts itself. While acknowledging the variety of thoughts expressed by scholars such as Rojas regarding the place of women in literature, this study acknowledges the variety of thoughts expressed by scholars. However, the study focuses on what such positions reveal about the relationships between men and women in contemporary society. These relationships indicate the existing gaps in creativity and criticism, gaps that the current study attempts to fill.

### **2.3 Gaps Identified from the Review of Literature**

The literature reviewed in this section reveals that although some research has been conducted on the representation of women in the Kenyan novel, there is a gap regarding studies on how women's issues represented in Kenyan drama. The study, therefore, sought to fill this gap in knowledge by presenting a comparative analysis of the

representation of women in the selected Kenyan drama, using four plays for illustrative purposes. The plays are Imbuga's *The Return of Mgofu* and *The Green Cross of Kafira*, Gitumbi's *A New Dawn*, and Kyalo's *The Hunter is Back*. The playwrights selected for this study assign women prominent places in their drama. This mode of characterisation appears to reflect the reality of progress in women's empowerment. However, the scale of such progress the effectiveness of their portrayal remain unclear.

The foregoing literature review shows that depending on the position and experience of literary artists, women are accorded or denied voices, especially regarding issues in the public sphere. Specifically, the study notes that some playwrights capture how the nation limits or allows female self-expression and fulfilment to varying degrees. The main gap then that the current study filled relates to how contemporary playwrights effectively use dramaturgies to reflect and possibly analyse the place of women in contemporary Kenya.

#### **2.4 Theoretical Framework**

The study engaged feminist and postcolonial literary theories in analysing the dramaturgies of female representation in Kenyan drama. The study began by recasting the question of representation of women in contemporary drama. This was necessary in understanding feminist and postcolonial literature practices concerning the construction of the female's selfhood and nationhood in Kenyan drama.

Regarding feminist theory, the study employed Elaine Showalter's notion of gynocriticism. In *Towards a Feminist Poetics* (1979), Showalter argues that writing about women's experiences is critical to privileging gender as a discursive and analytical category. Showalter further argues that such an approach transforms women from objects and consumers of literature to producers and influencers of textual meaning. Over time, Showalter's concept of gynocriticism has become a significant strand of feminist thought.

Thus, this study employed gynocriticism to analyse women's agency and acknowledge traditional feminine social contributions. The use of gynocriticism further served to provide accounts of how women's representation construct meaningful identities in the postcolonial context. The term 'gynocriticism' is used to define the process of analysing women's representation with regard to female experiences. In this regard, gynocriticism interrogates experiences of women in the society. In "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness", Showalter observes that:

...the intellectual trajectory of feminist criticism [...] analysis of the construction and representation of gender within literary discourse. As it has evolved, then, feminist criticism has demanded not just the recognition of women's writings, but a radical rethinking of the conceptual literary study (1981: 179-180).

This means that, apart from focusing only on how gender is represented in creative literature, feminist theory ought to go further and reconfigure the practice of literary criticism to understand the literature from a feminist standpoint. This is what Showalter means by "a radical rethinking of the conceptual literary study." This point is helpful to this study because it suggests a revisionist standpoint that this study adopts.

This study recognises the discursive distortions that characterised the portrayal of women in earlier literature such as Imbuga's *Betrayal in the City*, which put women on the fringes. The study also acknowledges the seeming endorsements of such distortions by critics who paid little heed to such and instead focused on other issues, such as theme. Ultimately, this study concurs with Showalter's argument that "analysis of the construction and representation of gender within literary discourse" is both a necessary and an ongoing endeavour.

Therefore, this study advocates for rethinking the representation of women in

literature. This shall lead to reconfiguring the word ‘woman’ and evaluating her role in the construction of the nation. This is partly what gynocriticism suggests. Gynocritics allow critical appreciation of works that boost the role of women in literature and society. It is in view of this that Schweickart observes that:

...the shift from ‘feminist critique’ to ‘gynocritics’ – from emphasis on woman as a reader to emphasis on woman as a writer – [which] has put us in the position of developing a feminist criticism that is ‘genuinely’ women-centred, independent, and intellectually coherent (1989: 123-124).

This study concurs with Schweickart’s position. This is because the study was concerned with how women’s representation enables women to redefine their own representation in literature. Gynocriticism, therefore, became relevant in this study because it underscores the writers’ commitment to the portrayal of women. According to Ogundipe- Leslie, “to describe reality from a woman’s perspective” (1994: 5) should then be the core business in literary writing and criticism. Gynocriticism views all writings touching on women as marked by gender. Such writings articulate gendered experiences even as they project selfhood and nationhood. Ultimately, gynocriticism locates writing on women inevitably in feminist criticism.

The representation of women in creative writing serves both the female self and national identities. Therefore, the use of gynocriticism in our study reflects the consequences of the construction of the female selfhood and nationhood. Gynocriticism highlights what makes a literary discourse part of a distinct literary convention for women representation. The rationale for this usage is that women have distinct experiences from those of men, and that women’s experiences require different analytical tools. The approach is preoccupied with understanding how writers express and shape women’s experiences. Ultimately, gynocriticism asserts women’s self-expression and

reinvigorates a sense of a fulfilled female self in contemporary Kenya.

Gynocriticism also sought to uncover and expose underlying patriarchal tensions in the representations of women in the texts under study. Despite its strength in hailing the works of women and raising their visibility as characters in male created texts, Gynocriticism is limited as an analytical tool in texts that operate in transcendental contexts. In such cases, for example in neoliberal Kenyan society, issues of history, class, and geography still play significant roles in one's access to agentic freedom. As such, focusing on women's gendered experiences at the expense of collective ethno-communal ones, for instance, makes Gynocriticism inadequate in unravelling meanings in some texts, especially male-created ones such as Kyalo's.

To overcome this weakness, therefore, the current study also employed strands of post-colonial literary theory. This theory addresses issues of identity, gender, and representation as challenges of developing post-colonial national identities. While the surface meaning of post-colonial refers to the time after colonialism, conceptually postcolonial is also an analytical concept that helps to understand experiences former colonized communities underwent during colonialism and after. In Kenya, for instance, colonialism and its violent implementation became dominant themes in literature for many years. This inadvertently contributed to the neglect of gender and other themes in the same literature. In essence, therefore, post-colonialism means 'after colonialism' and 'because of colonialism'. In this study, both meanings have been used as demanded by contexts of usage, which contexts are thus used to distinguish the two senses of 'post-colonialism'. Specifically, the 'after colonialism' conditions that the drama that this study refers to include the societal reorientation of gender roles, the struggle by women to equitable agency in everyday lives.



The current study used post colonialism in the sense of “because of colonialism” in a manner that was theorised by Said (2006). According to Said (2006), postcolonial theory is built around the concept of “Otherness”. The Western imperial ideology of the Orient sees the world as divided into mutually excluding opposites: if the West is ordered, rational, masculine, good, then the Orient is chaotic, irrational, feminine, and evil (Said, 2006 in Hamadi, 2014). Typically, proponents of postcolonial criticism examine how writers from formerly colonized countries articulate and even celebrate their cultural identities, reclaiming them from the colonizers.

The place of women in society and in literature is also a subject of post-colonial theory. This is because although women have for long been de-centred in many societies that view men as more central players, the men’s supposed superiority is only tenable where women recognise it and, inadvertently, admit to their own alleged inferiority. In other words, patriarchy as a system of social hierarchy of genders cannot survive in situations where women do not recognise it as a natural or even necessary reality.

A postcolonial feminist perspective in this study defined the position of women in the postcolonial nation, alternately as the self and the other. Postcolonial theory was used to reflect on the female experiences and consequences of re-negotiating new identities. This becomes a project of postcolonial feminists and gynandrists to indicate representation of women in Kenyan drama and attempt to answer a range of questions posed by postcolonial feminist critic, Bahri (2004, p. 203), including who speaks for (or in the voice of) the post-colonial feminist? Who listens and why? What is the content of postcolonial feminist work? When and where does postcolonial feminist work take place? And, what are the likely future directions of feminist work within postcolonial literary studies? While these questions were voiced in a different socio-cultural context, they nonetheless resonate with our Kenyan situation, and indeed invited sensible answers

from analyses of the primary texts under study.

Indeed, postcolonial representation of women acquired significance in this study as a theoretical ground from which to articulate nationhood without objectifying the woman and hopefully help women to find meaning in their own experiences. In other words, as a postcolonial feminist scholar, this researcher in this study prioritised the analysis of women in order to understand their representation in selected postcolonial Kenyan drama.

The feminist has, according to Lewis and Sarah (2005) to exert

[...] pressure on mainstream postcolonial theory in its constant reiteration of the necessity to consider gender studies [...]. The current concern with colonial masculinity and indeed post-colonial masculinities for example is a direct result of feminist interventions in mainstream postcolonial theory. (p. 2)

This means that the strides made in the study of gender dynamics – even in terms of how they are manifested from a man’s point of view – is courtesy of the insistence by feminism that there is need for a revisionist scholarly enterprise that highlights the gaps in other theoretical tools while simultaneously enhancing the scope and efficacy of feminist readings of literary and cultural texts, and of the everyday lives in society generally. In a way, therefore, the current study was inspired by the tremendous work rendered by feminist scholars earlier,

Subsequently, the study interrogated the representation of women in Kenyan drama in a bid to present a postcolonial feminist view of the development of the female self and the national identities as captured in the selected plays, and to provide a critique on the female self-participation in the creation and operation of the postcolonial nation. According to Bahri (2004), the power of representation as an ideological tool has

traditionally rendered it a contested “terrain” (p. 206). The aim of the postcolonial feminist project is therefore to find a voice for the ‘other’, to enable the feminist to (re)examine, (re)assess, (re)define, and (re) assert that which concerns women as a sexual category. Bahri (2004), further argues that female selfhood and nationhood, therefore, need to be understood through drama in postcolonial Kenya since “in [the] postcolonial phase [...] the condition of women has become a more urgent issue than ever. Gender issues are thus inseparable from the project of postcolonial criticism (p. 201). Hooking its intervention on Bahri’s observation, this study interrogates the portrayal of women in contemporary Kenyan drama in the context of nation-formation processes that are also post-colonial in orientation.

Similarly, in using feminist and postcolonial literary theories to read the selected plays, this study demonstrated a troubled relationship between female subjects and the postcolonial nation because gendered perceptions of wider issues in society limit the scope of appreciation of those issues and how they shape relations in society. Feminist postcolonial approaches, therefore, were relevant in this study to insert a feminist prism in the analysis of the texts. Feminist literary theories support feminist scholarly practices as they are inscribed in gender and power relations, which the postcolonial feminist critic encounters, resists or supports. This study, therefore, used postcolonial theory in the analysis of Kenyan drama. Playwrights selected for the study form part of contemporary Kenya’s literary tradition, and have contributed to contemporary consciousness of selfhood and nationhood. The current study used these theories to complement each other in the analysis of dramaturgies of female representation in Kenya.

Postcolonial feminism assumed a central stage in the postcolonial state to contest the narratives of the ‘other’ in order to constitute the discourse of the self and the nation.

This study used the selected texts to encompass the theorisation of female representation in the nation, thereby marking an opening of the new spaces for creative and critical discourses that respond to precise female circumstances in Kenya. The analysis of the dramaturgies of female representation in Kenya, therefore, becomes a response to contemporary postcolonial feminist approach to the female self and nationhood, and points toward multiple perspectives that distinguish women's literature.

Relatedly, Stratton (1994) observes that both postcolonial and feminist writings engage from "a marginalised position with dominant culture" (p. 9). An investigation of the postcolonial identity formation of Kenyan women therefore needs to be done in the post-colonial context and the subsequent image of the woman as the 'other.' The primary postcolonial feminist concern, therefore, is to examine the long lasting effects of colonialism in the postcolonial setting, which is inextricably bound up, with gendered realities of the Kenyan woman. By so doing, the postcolonial feminist will create "room for women" (Stratton, 1994, p.57) in African literature by subverting perspectives that marginalise women. The space that Stratton envisages for women is allocated through literary representations of female characters, which representation can then be analysed from a critical perspective through academic projects similar to this one. Further, Stratton's views acknowledge the possibility of gender (mis)representation which may occur for ideological reasons, and which it is the work of observant critics to expose.

Elsewhere, Foucault (1980) in Marome (2005) postulates that most cultures have their system of norms and beliefs based on gender and this has not changed much in the recent past. The philosopher asserts that as sexual objects, humans are the objects of power which is not an institution or structure. On the contrary, it is rather a signifier or a name attributed to complex strategic situation, and further contends that because of this, and 'power' is what determines individual attributes and behaviors. Marome's findings are

that people are part of ontologically and epistemologically constructed set of names and labels, such that being female characterizes one as a woman and being a woman signifies weak, emotional, irrational, and thus is incapable of actions attributed to a man (p. 119). Besides all else, such observations tend to coincide with dominant women-biased stereotypes and reinforce phallogentric gender hierarchy that is variously reproduced or challenged in literature, including some of the plays under study. This study acknowledges that society has for long categorized women as weak but women have come out strongly to subvert this type of reasoning. This is seen in varying degrees in the selected dramas for study.

Therefore, postcolonial theory is relevant in the literary appreciation of the plays under study, because some of the lingering gender ideas are traceable to the impact of colonialism on the social fabric of the nation. The plays studied here raise issues that are central to the postcolonial Kenyan nation, especially the continued marginalisation of women and their experiences in social interactions.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This section focuses on the methodology the study used in carrying out its investigation. This chapter provides the research design and strategy adopted to address the research questions. Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) explain that the methodology sub-section gives details regarding the methods used in conducting the study. These include the research design and approach.

#### **3.2 Research Design**

The study was based on a comparative research design as advanced by Wagemann et al. (2010). Comparative research design aims at gathering information that illuminates relationships, patterns and links between variables and then the researcher reports the findings. As such, comparative research design involves the analysis and interpretation of data. This research design is important when collecting information on social issues affecting society. Hence, it fitted the current study, which sought to comparatively investigate the dramaturgies of female representations in some of the recent plays authored in Kenya. The comparison was governed by two main paradigms: first, it identified and analysed the representation of female characters in Kenyan drama and, second, it examined how the selected playwrights used drama to represent women. Further, in the analyses and interpretation of the findings, a simultaneous analytical approach was used to allow a comparison of issues in the selected plays for the study at the same time.

The comparative design further emphasised parallels between, and differences among, the selected playwrights' approaches to representation of women in their individual texts. Literary aspects of analysis included the nature of characterisation, themes, setting, and

style. The study focused on characterisation insofar as it addresses the dialogic analysis of ideological impulses between selfhood and nationhood among women, while themes, setting and style were analysed where they touched on and illuminated the representation of female characters in the selected texts.

### **3.3 Sample Size and Selection Technique**

Purposive sampling was used in the selection of the texts for the study. It is notable that the study limited to purposively select both male and female Kenyan playwrights for interrogation. The selected texts were Denis Kyalo's *The Hunter is Back* (2010), Francis Imbuga's *The Return of Mgofu* (2011) and *The Green Cross of Kafira* (2013), and Njoki Gitumbi's *A New Dawn* (2012). The population of the study is Kenyan written and published plays, which allude to the themes of female representation. Purposive sampling was used to select the four works of art, because the four artists have other published works of art. For example, Francis Imbuga has eleven titles to his name; Gitumbi and Kyalo have fewer, although the latter are still upcoming writers.

The study purposively chose the plays because they are relatively recent, and may therefore reflect the contemporary gender relations in society. Furthermore, because they are recent, they are yet to attract a lot of critical attention. Bui (2009) defines purposive sampling as the researcher's choice for example, in people who are representative due to meeting specific requirements for the study, in this case the themes of interest. On his part, Biggam (2008) explains that purposive sampling has three important uses, thus: i) representation, ii) uniformity, and iii) establishment of particular comparisons to explain the differences between settings or individuals. This uniformity is what this study was looking for, given that the selected four plays almost address similar concerns and are all contemporary works addressing female representation.

Further, these texts were deliberately selected because, as Cixous (1988) points out:

Great care must be taken in working on feminine writing not to get trapped by names: to be signed with a woman's name doesn't necessarily make a piece of writing feminine. It could quite well be masculine writing, and conversely the fact that a piece of writing is signed with a man's name does not in itself exclude femininity. It's rare, but you can sometimes find femininity in writings signed by men: It does happen (1988: 32).

The implication of the foregoing observations is that any creative writing is not considered feminine merely because the author is female, but by the fact that the authors have explored women's experiences. That is why this researcher selected the texts regardless of the sex of the playwrights, because a feminist inclination in a play is more important than the sex of the playwright. Significantly, the feminist agenda in the works under study was underscored by the portrayal of thematic concerns that described issues that touch on women.

The overarching contextual setting for the texts under study and this study itself relates to the clamour for the representation of women in different spheres in the post 2010 Kenya when the country promulgated its current national constitution (Constitution of Kenya, 2010). Therefore, the study purposively sampled both period and the texts in order to establish the extent to which the selected playwrights dramatize the constitutional gains spelt out in the post-2010 political dispensation.

### **3.4 Data Collection**

#### **3.4.1 Primary Data**

The primary data for this study was collected from a close reading of the selected plays. The study also conducted secondary textual reading to offer a critical appreciation of the



primary texts, and to interrogate the connotations of the language used explicitly and implicitly in the selected texts.

### **3.4.2 Secondary Data**

Library research involving reading of secondary texts was undertaken. Texts and scholarly works related to the area of study were consulted – notably literature on nationhood and nation-formation, on women and changing gender roles in patriarchal societies, and on drama as a literary genre whose form differs radically from other genres, affecting how themes are (re)presented. Relevant materials focusing on character and characterization, style, and social concerns were also consulted.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

In order to present a comparative textual analysis of the study, the primary and secondary data collected was analysed using thematic content analysis. Guided by the objectives of this study, emerging patterns from the plays were divided into themes and sub-themes for easier interpretation and analysis. A comprehensive simultaneous synthesis and interpretation of data gathered from the reading of the primary texts, together with the secondary sources, was undertaken. This enabled the study to come up with a coherent final study. For easier analysis and interpretation, this study was structured into chapters with each chapter addressing a single specific objective and the particular issues generated by the objectives.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter has three sections: Representation of women in space, History, ideology and feminist dramaturgies and style and feminist dramaturgies. The first section discusses how women are represented in the selected texts. The second section, explores how the playwrights under study locate women in the dynamics of national histories and the ideological implications of the dramaturgies used. The section eventually argues that the playwrights selected for this study carefully employ specific dramaturgies to challenge the mainstream institutions of politics and power to make women more likely to access public sphere. At the same time, the section also indicates that, while women have been marginalized for long, they use creative strategies to deflate the powers of patriarchy and move close to the metaphorical centres of power. This is why; women become more audible and articulate as the plays tend to the end.

In the third section presents the significance of the peculiar aesthetic strategies used by playwrights in their bid to address gender issues in the selected texts. The focus therefore is on the aesthetics of creating feminist themes in the Kenyan drama. Olufemi defines aesthetics as “a branch of philosophy concerned with the essence of perception of beauty and ugliness.” Accordingly, it “deals with the question of whether such qualities are objectively present in the things they appear to qualify, or whether they exist only in the mind of the individual” (2017: 1). Olufemi adds that aesthetic choices are critical because “if people do not get to hear a thing the way it will make a lasting impression on them, then they may not even hear it at all”. The purpose, therefore, is to examine how such technical aspects such as plot development, language use, characterization and even

setting, whether personal or communal, are uniquely intertwined to the playwrights' feminist themes.

There are two strands of thought that underlie artistic approaches in Africa; which then join to result in a system that is hybrid: traditional worldview and the modern worldview. While commenting on the ideological and artistic landscape in postcolonial Nigeria, Ganyi states that:

Fortunately or unfortunately, Nigerian society is built on two contradictory social structures: the traditional society and its elite and the western and the western educated elite whose visions are perpetually seemingly opposed to each other.... In this kind of socio-political arrangement, the question that arises is, to whom does the artist address his work? Or whose aesthetic ideology does the artist sustain? Or does he prescribe an individual aesthetic or ideology personal and private to him in accordance with his personal convictions and cosmic predilection? (2014: 44-45).

Ohmann defines style as “[w]ays of saying something, just as style in tennis has to do with ways of hitting a ball” (1964: 190). On the significance of style in critical analysis, Ohmann adds that style “is part of what we ordinarily call meaning that is peripheral meaning, or subterranean meaning, or connotative meaning” (1964: 191).

Another scholar, Onwukwe (2007) notes that “[s]tylistics has to do with the modern study of different styles” (p. 22). In other words, style is a technique of writing by which a literary writer distinguishes himself and expresses his view on the subject of his writing while stylistics is the art of studying the author's style and the meaning they express. This study agrees with this definition.

This study intended to interrogate the dramatic techniques used in the selected Kenyan drama. In close reading for style, the critic has to consider the speaker or narrator of the

text, the characters being described, the passage's circumstances, the types of artwork, and the intended audience, among other elements that are relevant to the details of the text. In this context, the study attempts to unpack the meanings embedded within the dramaturgies deployed by the playwrights in the selected plays under study to relay their intended meanings.

Much as playwrights selected for the present study seem quite aware of western literary traditions and methods, their resolve to speak to intricate contradictions that define the lives of “their” people on matters gender, may not be second guessed. There are two discernible methods of revealing the said contradictions. These are aesthetics of the traditional folk performance and the western social realism approach, which we discuss in the following sections.

## **4.2 Representation of Women in Kenyan Drama**

This section analyses representation of women in Kenyan drama from three entry points: first, the depiction of women in Kenyan drama, second, their experiences as they search for new identities and, third, discernible shifts in gender status and character identities.

### **4.2.1 Aspects of Gender Representation**

This study sought to analyse the representation of women in selected plays, to interrogate the efficacy of the dramatic techniques employed in such representation. The study also sought to analyse the ideological underpinnings the representations of women in the selected drama. These objectives were informed that some earlier literary studies have highlighted different, sometimes contradictory, patterns of how women are portrayed in various waves of what may be considered feminist modes. For instance, while some studies project women as resilient actors in their varied contexts, others, such as Obbe

(1990), tend to reproduce dominant gender stereotypes that perceive African women as weak.

This study departs from such notions since they are constructed by patriarchal logics to oppress women; they place women at lower socio-cultural rungs in the society, thus reinforcing the injustice of gender inequality. Since women seek new identities with changing times, there is a need to re-examine outdated gender views to capture dominant trends, which is partly why the current study was conducted.

Outa (2001) points out that “[t]heatre is not just a mirror-like reality” but a form of communication that calls for uttermost attention and keen interpretation. For this reason, it becomes important to re-examine the re-enactment of the women’s lives, expressions, and experiences to set up a basis for explaining what playwrights achieve through various representations of characters and situations, especially those involving women.

Therefore, the main argument here is that playwrights’ works may be reduced to certain salient structural and aesthetic patterns that may be associated with the fundamental messages highlighted in dramatic constructions. Outa (2001) refers to these patterns as “constitutive elements in the "dramaturgy"; the aesthetic and conceptual choices employed by playwrights, that can more meaningfully – or additionally explain – the different responses.” Playwrights use such aesthetic elements in order to communicate specific messages to their audiences and readers. On the other hand, Rutere (2010), in *Women and Patriarchal Power in the Selected Works of Ngugi wa Thiong’o* observes that women’s battles against patriarchal power is historical and cuts across all cultures.

In order to fully appreciate characters and their qualities, Bachrach (2014), in his dissertation titled *The Mirror up to Nature: A Theatrical Experiment in the Dramaturgy of Gender* fronts three key elements of representation to be examined keenly, namely:

the actions of the characters, their motivations and their relationships with other characters on the stage (p. 5). These three elements are critical in analysing the roles that different characters play in drama. Further, Bachrach seems to agree with Proehl (1997) (quoted in Austin (1998: 2) and Leigh (2012) who identifies attributes, role and function of a character as the three most important aspects of dramaturgy. The other two are. It may indeed not be difficult to relate the three aspects with characterization, ideology, and aesthetics. In keeping within the purview of the present chapter, however, which is to examine the impact of the various character attributes playwrights have underscored, this discussion carries on under three archetypical character types that keep surfacing in the four texts under consideration.

#### **4.2.2 Images Women in Drama and Society**

Whether seemingly sympathetic of women or not, a common practice among writers has been to portray women as actors within different spatial contexts. As this study shows in the Literature Review section, such portrayals have tended to be embedded within certain ideological and cultural nuances that communicate what individual artists or their communities think about the relevance or value of women in those communities. One common projection is of women as home keepers who derive some authority and power while acting within their homes. Here, they act as wives, mothers, daughters, or sisters. The question of how exactly these gendered relationships ultimately appear in literature, and the implications of such appearances, is the task that the following section of this thesis attempts to answer.

#### **4.2.3 Women as Domestic Workers**

One of the most compelling analyses of gender roles and expectations of women in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Europe and North America relates to the concept widely understood as the cult of domesticity. Accordingly, the cult of domesticity required that women be paragons of

sexual virtue and purity, pious, submissive to their husbands and respectful to God, and only active in domestic spaces (Lisa & Southgate, 2011). The idea is that societies generally ascribe specific spaces to women in the home spaces where they may not be seen by the public and may not access the available opportunities to men.

The plays under study adopt show both the rampant associations of women with homes, and the impact of such limitations on the women's socio-economic disadvantages. For example, the significance of this gendered differences in representation is shown in Kyalo's *The Hunter is Back*. In this play, even the stage directions signal domestic work as the plight of economically and culturally marginalized women – who constitute the majority. Through elaborate stage directions, Kyalo in *The Hunter is Back* presents Naomi as a symbol of women who are confined in their homes:

Naomi emerges from the bigger hut with a basinful of unwashed calabashes, plates, spoons, etc. She places her load atop the wooden rack, disappears into the hut and brings out more kitchen paraphernalia. Her sulky facial expression exaggerates her middle age. She wears a loose-fitting flowery blouse and a flowing skirt that was once black but is now faded. Her badly cracked feet are clearly visible in the mismatched pair of sandals that she is wearing. Presently, she occupies herself with cleaning dishes. To compensate for her loneliness, her loud thoughts float into the air (2010: 1-2).

The excerpt above shows that Naomi is a woman who has been wretched by poverty and neglect, and one whose emotional state is undermined by a well of regrets. She is also slowed down by domestic chores in a household of poverty, and appears to be psychologically disturbed by her experiences. In this one excerpt, the playwright sums up different sets of realities that limit the woman's enjoyment of her full potential. As such, issues of culture in terms of gender roles, economics as seen in her poverty, and even psychological disturbance are all dramatized in the play. This close association of

women with domesticity, with household chores, and with absent and improvident men, is a common motif in the plays under study. The play therefore shows the extent to which women's marginalisation.

*A New Dawn* reveals that Kenyan women operate in the domestic sphere. In the play, the society has given women roles associated with reproduction, which is a stereotypical casting of women. The issue of gender stereotypes regarding social roles is brought out in *A New Dawn*. Veronica – Jeremiah's partner – is expected to conform to gendered roles of a home keeper, prepare and serve food promptly, and when there is a slight delay, it causes a complaint from her partner Nehemiah. Such gender expectations are widespread because even Jeremiah – Nehemia's friend – complains about the delay. However, this expectation is part of the larger impositions on women as home keepers, and sometimes working with little help from their male counterparts. The domestic tension between Veronica and Nehemia revolves around the latter's expectations that his partner would take up her roles without question.

*A New Dawn* also re-enacts the societal tendency to re-create and extend these stereotypes by masculinizing achievements. Nehemia is shown to take a lot of pride in the fact that his child, Numa, has excelled in his secondary school examinations, and that Numa has been admitted to university to study the prestigious degree in medicine. While celebrating Numa's good performance, Nehemia is somewhat indifferent to the unfair gender roles within the home, where his daughter Serah has to do all the house chores while her brother – Johnny–studies. The play dramatizes gender inequalities even within the domestic spaces, which is perhaps the playwright's way of arguing that despite the changes in time, the girl-child and the female gender generally continues to encounter barriers to their mobility right from the home spaces.



In the play under study, few women access opportunities of achieving leadership positions. This is because traditional socialization that does not prepare women for such roles. This is possibly why voters decline to support Mama Nuru, a character in *A New Dawn* despite her efforts to demonstrate great leadership skills. Yet, the playwright uses the symbolic name of Nuru – Kiswahili for light – and the image of dawn in the title of the play. Both of them symbolize light. Although Mama Nuru articulates her campaign manifesto clearly and even rhetorically, the voters are unconvinced because they are not socialized to view women as leaders. Therefore, the long standing gender inequality make it difficult for the voters to see the leadership potential in a woman, for no other reason except her biological difference that apparently render her incapable of leadership.

That perception that women cannot make good leaders is rampant is seen in the fact that Imbuga, an established Kenyan playwright, similarly grapples with the question of gender stereotypes and their impact on societal dynamics. Imbuga's *The Green Cross of Kafira* also shows that leadership belongs to men. Mama Mgei forms the Gender Party of Kafira, which brings about the revolution that is needed in Kafira. The revolution she brings is so real and everyone is excited about the new party. However, Mama Mgei faces a lot of opposition, she is even detained, but when the party succeeds, the husband takes over leadership. Mama Mgei's initiative to form the party shows emerging agency among women. The women are now willing to reach out and create their own opportunities instead of waiting for handouts. Although her husband takes over the party, Mama Mgei has demolished the notion that women should be confined in the domestic sphere. In doing this, Imbuga has created strong women in Mama Mgei, women can speak and not be spoken for.

That is why when Rita manages to get the people out of the problems they were facing in Chamaland, the same people attribute Rita's achievement to what is a supposedly masculine brain in a female head. This means that it is not just a matter of leadership in mainstream political domains that women should be excluded from for this community. Even within the spaces traditionally ascribed to women, their performance of leadership roles should ideally be within traditionally acceptable limits, or else credit is given to an invisible male influence.

Yet, what these texts capture is a widespread phenomenon, not limited to Kenya alone. For instance, Millett argues that gender differences are "essentially cultural, rather than biological bases" (1971: 28-9). For Millet, these differences result from differential treatment, thereby introducing the variable of cultural differences in the manifestation and interpretation of gender inequalities. The inequalities manifest themselves in daily interactions and symbolic discursive representations. Millet further argues that "the sum total of the parents', the peers', and the culture's notions of what is appropriate to each gender by way of temperament, character, interests, status, worth, gesture, and expression" (1971: 31) are important in positively changing gender perceptions.

Gender-norms, however, are problematic because they reinforce gender stereotypes. Since gender roles are simply learned, they can still be reconfigured to create societies that are equal by 'unlearning' social roles. That is, feminists should aim to diminish the influence of socialisation.

In Kyalo's *The Hunter is Back*, the scene opens with Naomi, Rita's aunt, washing dishes and doing other household chores. Rita, Naomi's niece, is also seen bringing water and she has to walk for ten kilometers to get the water (Kyalo, 2010: 9). Rita also takes care of their sick mother, Taabu, from a very young age. Naomi says their mother's work was

just to look for food and cook while the father was busy looking for traditional brew. As Naomi says, “[t]hat’s triviality. Remember our father spent three quarters of his life crisscrossing the village in his endless search for traditional brew. He would then return in the dead of night and demand for food from mama” (2010: 4). This excerpt demonstrates two things. One is the relative freedoms accorded to men and women: while men can occupy and dominate domestic and public spaces at will, women are restricted to domestic spaces alone. Yet, such spatial allocations also have economic implications because admission to public spaces also mean access to opportunities for economic accumulation or, in the case of some men, impoverishment through reckless consumption of alcohol. Kyalo’s play demonstrates the complexities surrounding gender, spatial access and domination and their overall intertwinement with economic dynamics of the day. Secondly, the excerpt also implies how women are overworked and oppressed in a society that generally views them as natural domestic workers.

It is also evident in the plays under study that women in domestic spheres sometimes are depicted as victims of retrogressive cultural practices such as early marriages. Such practices deprive girls of opportunities for self-advancement. In Kyalo’s *The Hunter is Back*, Naomi tells Maneno: “Papa married both of us off when we were barely fifteen” (2010: 5). Naomi’s statement here can also be found in other literature from Kenya, especially that which addresses the concern with the experiences of the girl-child. For example, the problem of early marriages is addressed by Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Ngugi wa Mirii in *I Will Marry When I Want*, and in Marjorie Macgoye’s *Coming to Birth*. Hence, Naomi’s statement in *The Hunter is Back* demonstrates a common view of women as vessels for economic advancement for men (fathers) who biologically ‘own’ them, and as sexual objects for pleasure and procreation for other men (husbands) who

acquire them in marriage. Whichever way one looks at it, the agency of women is compromised whether in domestic or public spheres.

This is also a critical point because all the plays studied here portray this cultural domestication with disapproval rather than endorsement. Imbuga's *The Green Cross of Kafira* also demonstrates that women neither need to be confined in domestic spaces, nor should they be perceived in sexual terms alone. This Imbuga achieves by creating strong women who transcend the limitations in the domestic spheres. Therefore, this study argues that while there is a tendency to view women as beings whose functionality should be limited to domestic spaces, women can also achieve greater success in public spheres as leaders and change mobilisers.

This is the case in Kyalo's play where Rita, a previously disadvantaged girl, overcomes many challenges to prosper in social and material terms and eventually becomes the Chief in her village. What is critical also is that even as she takes over leadership in her village, Rita demonstrates a social conscientiousness that places her on the same plane as anyone, man or woman:

**Rita:** Thank you very much. I feel honoured that my people unanimously agree to make me their Chief. [...] I will lead from the front in the war against bribery, as it is a major roadblock to service delivery and economic stability. I assure you that I shall champion the battle against disease, against drug abuse and also against demeaning practices such as wife inheritance and child labour (Kyalo, 2010: 66).

Yet, it is crucial that Kyalo ensures that the liberation of women characters from domestic confinements comes via an initial excursion into, and conquest of the outer space. Rita has to break free of chains of domesticity and flee to the city. That is where she fashions her life according to her own plans and without the strictures of culture or masculine whims. She later returns when her personal achievements have placed her

beyond the reach of patriarchal cultural injunctions. Thus, the city proves to be a conducive place for women to grow and develop in personal ways. This is impossible in the villages where strong cultural practices subordinate women's wishes to men's expectations. In this regard, she somewhat compares with Mama Mgei in Imbuga's *The Green Cross of Kafira*. Both women demonstrate that womanhood need not be a reason for their otherwise inexplicable confinement in the domestic space and socio-economic limitations. The plays also show that these spaces can accommodate different forms of ideological positions as far as gender socialization goes. Nevertheless, what about biological differences and how they affect portrayal of women; the next section of this thesis attempts to answer this question.

#### **4.2.4 Women as Objects of Sexual Gratification for Men**

One of the most disturbing portrayals of a 'good woman' in some African societies is that of one who is submissive to the husband's whims. Accordingly, such a woman should be available for her husband's sexual needs, regardless of the prevailing circumstances. In fact, the whole preoccupation with marriage as an honourable feat for women is premised on the presumption that it is within marriage that women can perform their sexual duties to men in a proper and acceptable manner. Some postcolonial feminist critics, such as Stoler (2002; 1995), interrogate how preoccupations with racial purity entailed controlling men's sexual access to women.

In Africa, some recent scholars (Mugambi & Allan, 2010) focusing on masculinities have shown that many men retain a sense of sexual entitlement to women. Thus, some men think that women must concede to such men's sexual desires just because the men are men while the women are women. It is this presumption that we see some of the playwrights under study engaging with in the representation of men and women. In Kyalo's *The Hunter is Back*, this preconception is captured in the playwright's use of

zoological and botanical metaphors to refer to Rita as a child-bride who has “been auctioned for marriage to Mzee Tumbo” (2010: 30) and who is equated to a wild animal that should be hunted and brought home for a man’s consumption. In the play, Tumbo’s explanation to Chief Sivu is also packaged in these metaphors: “as he [the hunter] walked home, he saw a fresh fleshy fruit dangling on a tree by the wayside. His heart throbbed with life, for he had at last seen something with which to quench his thirst” (2010: 28).

This sexually suggestive language acquires its effect based on a cognitive resonance between Chief Sivu and Tumbo, who are cast in the play as gatekeepers of political-administrative and cultural-patriarchal power, respectively. The two feel threatened by the rise of feminine vocal expressiveness, which they reduce to women's stupidity and disrespect. This is why when Chief Sivu tells Tumbo his encounter with the articulate Rita, the chief says of Rita: “She is just but another stupid girl. [...] I will ensure that she doesn’t get away with treating me with such disrespect” (2010: 31). This comment reflects the sense of entitlement that Tumbo has nurtured over time by virtue of living in a patriarchal setting. The same statement reflects Tumbo’s view of women as stupid and intellectually incapable of thinking critically. This is a pointer to the strong patriarchal structures that define women.

In this episode, the playwright dramatizes a self-reflexive irony since the men behave in a relatively silly and ill-mannered way. They fail to see that the young women whose bodies they think they are entitled to are young, the age of the men’s daughters, and who are determined to forge into a future of opportunities. Yet, because of a biological make-up and patriarchy, the men do not see this point, even when such men occupy positions of influence such as leadership. This is the case in Gitumbi’s *A New Dawn*, where the

political activist Nehemiah tries to seduce a school girl and in the process actually ends up molesting her through indecent touches as shown below:

**Nehemiah:** (*Disappointed by the girl's failure to recognize his intentions*) Aah! You must stop the formalities! An intelligent and beautiful girl like you is allowed to get a little cosy with Mheshimiwa, right?

**School Girl:** (*Confused, lost for what to say*) I ... ah, eh ... yes ... no ...

**Nehemiah:** (*Walks up to her, runs his finger over her face, then holds her face delicately by the chin, looks at her lustfully*) Come on, dear, relax. You know you are a beautiful woman?

**School Girl:** (*Taken aback, holding seat stiffly by both hands*) I, eh, ah ... came to see you about my school fees, Sir.”

**Nehemiah:** (*Impatiently*) I know, I know, and I can give you that and much more if you prove to be a really nice girl, eh ... (*winks at her, at the same time, he is stroking her face*) (p. 85)

Although the playwright uses some dramatic strategies to distance himself from and critique such ideas, he also captures the rampant animalization and commodification of the woman. Women as portrayed as animals to be hunted down or as fruits to be plucked by men and eaten. In this regard, commodification portrays the woman's body as a cultural text on which masculine desires and anxieties are inscribed. It is perhaps for this reason that feminist critics such as MacKinnon (1989) consider the theory of gender as a theory of sexuality involving unequal engagements and entanglements of femininity and masculinity. Masculinity is defined as sexual dominance, femininity as sexual submissiveness: genders are “created through the eroticization of dominance and submission. The man/woman difference and the dominance / submission dynamic define each other.”

Using different strategies, drama sometimes convey different, and sometimes contradictory, narratives. On the one hand, playwrights such as Kyalo exploit the tropes of troubled masculinities to demonstrate women's rampant animalization and commodification through the imagery of birds and fruits. Other playwrights such as Gitumbi show that even respectable men in society tend to have unquenchable sexual desire. Some indulge in the sexual use and abuse female bodies. On the other hand, Imbuga's *The Green Cross of Kafira* demonstrates that even when women somehow manage to grow to maturity and therefore escape the groping figures of men such as Gitumbi's Nehemiah, the women are still perceived as better off in the domestic spheres. When such women occupy the public spheres, they are viewed as a threat to the prevailing pro-patriarchy power structures. In other words, the playwrights suggest that although the outright sexualisation of women's bodies somewhat changes when the women grow older, the common perception of women as dispensers of sex for the men remains all across.

This is the reason that the current thesis earlier acknowledged that men-women relationships in most societies and their reflections in literature are troublesome and complicated. On the one hand, men dominate the public sphere and use socio-cultural institutions such as patriarchy to ensure that women do not threaten male dominance in political and economic power. On the other hand, the same men need women and their bodies for their own socio-cultural validation. This is seen in subscription to societal notions of normalcy or achievement when measured by metrics such as heteronormative marriage and fatherhood. It this background that provides a basis for many instances of sexual transgressions for men who go to great lengths to dominate women through numerous sexual liaisons, sometimes in total disregard for social norms.



#### 4.2.5 Women and Perceived Weaknesses

This section focuses on the portrayal of women as the weaker sex. The plays under study also problematize this notion of women-as-weaker sex where multiple meanings of strength and weakness are captured, sometimes with approval, and on other occasions with scorn. In Kyalo's *The Hunter is Back*, the notion of women as the weaker sex does not take a linear portrayal, even though most women are socialized to take the light roles in the society. But, as this thesis suggests above, this insistence on according women lighter chores is not necessarily because the women are weak, but because they are compelled to do so by an insecure patriarchal and masculine order. In Chamaland, an imaginary community in *The Hunter is Back*, Kyalo presents a society that is characterized by patriarchy, gender imbalance, and male chauvinism. Women in this society are shown as weak subjects, oppressed by their men and therefore disadvantaged in the society. This can be seen through the character of Rita, who is shown to be very vulnerable in the hands of Mzee Tumbo, a wealthy village man in Chamaland. Rita gets emotional as she tries to resist the overtures of Mzee Tumbo to whom she has been betrothed against her will. In her dialogue with Chief Sivu to whom she has gone for help, Rita's weakness emerges:

**Sivu:** (*Aside*) The paradox of the chick exposing her breasts to the kite.  
(*He pulls Rita to an upright position by her shoulders. Then, loudly*) My daughter, what brings you here?

**Rita:** (*Amid sobs*) My lord, they are after my life.

**Sivu:** They? Who are they? And what do they want? And why?

**Rita:** It is them. Ngumi and Tumbo.

**Sivu:** What do they want?

**Rita:** The two of them are beasts! Let God deal with them the way he dealt with the filthy Sodom and Gomorrah.....

**Rita:** I have been auctioned for marriage to Mzee Tumbo (2010: 30).

Although the section portrays an emotional Rita pleading for assistance from the Chief, the weakness in Rita derives from political and administrative authority of Chief Sivu rather than his masculine power. It is Rita's recognition of the state authority vested in Chief Sivu, rather than the Chief's patriarchal or masculine power, that she cares for. This means that what may on the surface appear to be deference to masculine or cultural power is actually respect for state administrative structures, which do not translate to an emotional weakness on the part of Rita. It also means that the notion of male authority over women appears to gain currency only when it is embedded in administrative fronts.

Similarly, Gitumbi's play shows how power inequalities between men and women can be misconstrued to mean women are emotionally weak, where such weakness actually points at unfair distribution and outright abuse of power. In the scene cited above where the politician lusts after a school girl who has come to request financial assistance towards her school fees, financial poverty exposes the young girl to emotional and sexual harassment because the girl operates from point of economic rather than emotional – weakness.

The perception of weakness extends to the cultural socialization that casts women in a position of 'incapacity' as far as discharging public responsibilities is concerned. In *The Green Cross of Kafira*, women are either excluded or displaced from leadership positions because of a prevalent notion that they are so weak that they cannot offer the required or expected political leadership. This is despite the fact that some women still brave the patriarchal barriers to offer themselves for elective positions, even though they are aware that they have to overcome the gender stereotypes pitted against them to realize and win electoral victory. This is the situation that Mama Mgei in Imbuga's play deals with and, although she does not win the position that she seeks, she nonetheless demonstrates a strength in character. This point is critical considering that Mama Mgei's husband rides

on her back to acquire leadership, yet it was the lady who had organised the political party as the vehicle for her ambition to serve the public. This is a pointer to beliefs in some communities that women are not supposed to own anything. Any material acquired by a woman belongs to the husband. Imbuga recreates this scenario through Mama Mgei.

The above dynamics demonstrate that while the biological fact of womanhood has been used to construct unfavourable gender roles for women, women's strength of character is in their consistent rejection of the patriarchal views of them. The rejection, as seen in Mama Mgei's political mobilisation skills in Imbuga's play, and Rita in Kyalo's, suggest that while weakness may be a human trait, it is not necessarily specific to women. This emerges from the playwrights' strategic use of distancing irony – where the playwrights go back to the gender stereotypes that capture women as weak only to demonstrate their strength. In addition, the playwrights show that both can be either strong or weak depending on the strength of their respective value systems rather than on gender.

This point also emerges in the works under study, especially in all the playwrights' refusal to romanticize women. Instead, the artists demonstrate the reality that some women indeed have human frailties that coincide with and tend to affirm some of the gender stereotypes against women. For instance, in *The Hunter is Back*, the character of Maneno is juxtaposed with that of Naomi, the protagonist. In addition, while both are women, Maneno is shown to embrace and even dramatize some of the abhorrent behaviour associated with women, including petty jealousy.

When Maneno is “inherited” after the death of her husband, her co-wife plots to assault Maneno out of jealousy, vowing that “I will teach the witch a lesson” (2010: 6) The unnamed co-wife's declaration is important for two reasons, both related to the question of gender stereotypes. First, the woman is unable to see that both Maneno and herself are

victims of patriarchal socialization. This reinforces the stereotype of women as querulous, petty enemies of themselves. Second, the co-wife's reference to Maneno as a 'witch' also buttresses the traditional anti-women stereotype that casts women as malicious believers in, and practitioners of negative powers. In this regard, the playwright demonstrates that while it is not entirely correct to view women as weak, some of them do have weaknesses that derive from selfishness and an inability to understand the real issues that account for their marginalization. This scenario also reproduces an old controversial argument that women are their own worst enemies.

This raises the question of what role tradition plays in women's experiences in the contexts of perceived and real gender-weaknesses. The institutions of culture, and more specifically patriarchy, prevail upon women to live by socially acceptable standards, which in many cases mean upholding the privileges of patriarchy. Women's submission to men reinforces tradition, as seen in the example of Maneno in Kyalo's play. Maneno naively presumes that what her father does is right because it is sanctioned by tradition when she points out that "I thought that is what tradition prescribes: That fathers should get husbands for their daughters" (2010: 5).

In addition, a little later, in answer to Naomi's question regarding why Maneno remains in a sham marriage, Maneno says:

**Maneno:** Yes and no. (Shifting her stare to the ground) You know when my husband died, I had little choice other than to be inherited by his younger brother. Since then the tigress in his other wife has given me no peace at all. For the last one month, she has been threatening to beat me up. Yesterday she announced to all and sundry that I was behind her deteriorating relationship with her husband. "I will teach the witch a lesson," so she told everybody. I now know not where to go" (2010: 6).

The excerpt above captures the animosity between Maneno and her co-wife. Another critical point here is that owing to the structures of patriarchal socialization, women feel they “have little choice”, and that they “know not where to go”. These twin feelings of lack of choice and entrapment show that women are oppressed. Even on the occasions when they can commiserate with each other on their shared predicament, they do so in the context of culture.

All the above point to how women are socialized to embrace patriarchy. Women recreate the logics of patriarchy and thus repress their own wishes due to their desire to conform to societal norms. However, the playwrights under study seem to be aware of this dynamic. They thus devise strategies that both acknowledge the prevalence and normalization of women’s silence and silencing mechanisms. They also create discursive and symbolic spaces in which exemplary women can emerge, acquire a voice, and thrive as independent-minded communal and opinion leaders in society. For instance, we have Taabu, Rita’s mother in Kyalo’s play, who represents the older generation of women who would acquiesce to every whim and caprice of their husbands. The name Taabu – Kiswahili for ‘trouble’ – is also important because it captured the way women are made to embody trouble and suffering in society. The woman then is cast a silent being in society. On this, Mwangi (2013) points out that;

The usual gloss of ‘mutumia’ is that Gikuyu womanhood is a reserved dignity and composed serenity. This gloss is unsurprisingly the one enforced and circulated by patriarchal and misogynist cultural interpreters. The natural condition of a woman is to dwell in silence, to persevere mutely, and to communicate speechlessly. Silence becomes a woman. Silence is what a woman, in becoming a woman, becomes. Silence is becoming in a woman because silence is the be-coming of a woman. A woman is silent. The presence of a woman is the presence of silence. Silence is a woman.

The silencing of women in society, as Mwangi theorises, is what makes it hard for women's perspectives to be heard and acted upon. Eventually, women are stuck with patriarchal narrative strands. It is noteworthy that in the plays under study, the image of the woman as silence is problematized when the playwrights contrast the less-achieving silent women – such as Taabu in Kyalo's play and Veronica in Gitumbi's – and the high-achieving vocal women, such as Rita in Kyalo's *The Hunter*. In this sense, Rita is cast as a symbol of both the younger generation of women that interrogates issues and demand answers.

What is clear and critical for us is that regardless of whether the women speak up or keep quiet, there is the necessary and inescapable call for endurance that all women embody. On this, Diop (1998) argues that early male writers represent women as tenacious. I argue that women's endurance is not a feature of early writings only; even in modern societies, women's endurance is seen in marriage and places of work. For example Kadesa, a character in Imbuga's *The Return of Mgofu*, is shown to be a resilient character who does not give up in life despite her repeated bouts of mental illness that afflicts the wider society. During the first bout, many people leave their places and when they come back, most of them are so disillusioned. However, Kadesa (2011) does not show similar signs of disillusionment, instead she demonstrates a sense of hope when she establishes a shrine known as 'Farewell to Ogres' (p. 11).

However, in *In the Green Cross of Kafira* by the same playwright, women are not allowed to celebrate any achievements. After the women manage to form the Gender Party of Kafira, everyone becomes excited. The media carries various stories about the registration of a new political party. Following the revelations, there were spontaneous street celebrations throughout Kafira. The following day the Registrar of Political Parties, Arasa, is summoned and summarily dismissed from her job for registering the

Gender Party of Kafira (2013:40). This demonstrates the lack of support from government, or even its own anxieties about the prospects of an empowered womenfolk.

#### **4.2.6 Women as Victims of Male Tormentors**

In this section, this thesis shows how playwrights use strong women who successfully resist their male and female tormentors to advance the theme of female empowerment. The playwrights under study set leading women characters up against antagonistic forces, whether male or female, that are determined to curtail and derail women's freedoms. By showing women as tenacious, the playwrights ironically foreground the power of women. Women's power lies in their apparent weakness. As Foucault (1994) argues,

[p]ower is dispersed across complicated and heterogeneous social networks marked by ongoing struggle. Power is not something present at specific locations within those networks, but is instead always an issue in ongoing attempts to (re) produce effective social alignments, and conversely to avoid or erode their effects, often by producing various counter-alignments (Foucault 1994: 109-110).

This means that although the men may demonstrate overt power, they do not completely deprive women of a share of power because power is fluid and everywhere. Even when they are weak, women somehow enjoy some power that is either overt or latent. However, the question of how exactly, in the plays selected for the present study, the seeming weakness translates to power and, ultimately, liberation is the task that the following section of this thesis seeks to answer.

One major implication of the apparent confusion and meaninglessness that reigns supreme among female characters is the overwhelming force of patriarchy. The effects of deranged chauvinism are evident in the portrayal of women as frustrated and not in charge of their own affairs and emotions. In Kyalo's *The Hunter is Back*, for instance,

the central female character exist in a state of perpetual confusion and misery, an intricate pattern that uncovers the alienating power of male chauvinism. The playwright paints the dehumanizing situation in which Naomi exists by pointing out that:

...Human activity in this hut is witnessed through the clattering of pans, cutlery, etc. An old wooden dish rack, whose one of the four supporting poles is broken, stands lamely by the entrance of the bigger hut. A withering hedge encloses the homestead. The stillness in the environment is overemphasized by the sing-song noises of birds nesting in the nearby bushes. Naomi emerges from the bigger hut with a basinful of unwashed calabashes, plates, spoons, etc. She puts her load atop the wooden rack and, disappears into the hut and brings out more kitchen paraphernalia. Her sulky facial expression exaggerates her middle age. She is wearing a loose-fitting flowery blouse and a flowing skirt that was once black but is now faded. Her badly cracked feet are clearly visible in the mismatched pair of sandals that she is wearing (2010: 1-2).

Naomi's grim picture is that of an overwhelmed hopeless woman to whom life has lost almost all its colour and glory. In her ensuing conversation with her equally tormented sister Maneno, who is introduced to the audience as "a rumour-monger and singer", Naomi's frustration manifests in the verbal fights she picks with her sister and niece. Her anger is clearly misdirected to equally hapless victims:

**Naomi:** (*Swinging around to face Maneno, who stands arms akimbo. Maneno's tired look coupled with her scanty dressing clearly indicates that she has had a nasty night*). Maneno what brings you to your sister's house at such an unlikely hour? Don't tell me that they have chased you out again. Not now...

**Maneno:** (*Taking two steps towards Naomi*). Perhaps I am far better off. I would rather be running at seven in the morning than talking to myself like a mad person (2010: 2-3).



It is indeed revealed later that Maneno may have actually been running away from her co-wife. She reports:

**Maneno:** Yes and no. (Shifting her stare to the ground) You know when my husband died I had little choice other than to be inherited by his younger brother. Since then the tigress in his other wife has given me no peace at all. For the last one month, she has been threatening to beat me up. Yesterday she announced to all and sundry that I was behind her deteriorating relationship with her husband. “I will teach that witch a lesson,” so she told everybody, “I now know not where to go” (2010: 7).

As they quarrel and chase each other around, they create a controversial impression that patriarchy has cast a spell on women, and made them spinning and helpless. Even such women such as Rita’s mother who seem to have escaped the shackles of patriarchy still suffer. She narrates her fate to her daughter:

**Taabu:** When I bore you...there was nothing I could give. I had no husband; I had no food to feed you. I was forced to go to the streets to look for money. At first, I thought luck was on my side, but little did I know I was digging my own grave. ....then I met him. He pretended to be nice to me.... It was during one of these visits that he introduced me to drugs. Then, one day he did it...he took advantage of my drunkenness and raped me (2010: 52).

The above quotation depicts the problems that women face in society, problems that are inherent in their gender more than in any other aspect of their being human.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the playwrights under study employ dramaturgies that capture a society in which men are determined to keep women in inferior positions. It then becomes apparent why patriarchal systems need to be transformed. Rutere advocates for “women initiatives to have gender awareness in order to enable them live meaningful lives and indicts patriarchy because it frustrates women’s efforts to work and

live abundantly in post-colonial Kenya (2010: 22). That will help women forge new identities that are in line with the current spirit of ensuring gender equality.

#### **4.2.7 Women's Quest for Cultural Freedoms**

The present section partly focuses on women's unique experiences as they search for new identities. It can also be referred to as the dramaturgies of female activism against patriarchy. It focuses on the unique experiences in the periods preceding their acquisition of new identities and or liberation. The focus is on pivotal constitutive elements in the "dramaturgy" as well as conceptual choices that enable the playwrights construct a dramatic impression of how those new identities/liberation are to be effectively obtained both for the women who are treated as victims and also gain the audiences' support in overturning the status quo. Given the nature of patriarchy, it then follows that women would only secure their rights through some form of activism as opposed to through some benevolent acts born of the very oppressive patriarchal system. In the plays selected for analysis, playwrights have dramatized and represented many scenarios to which readers and members of the audience are invited to express their opposition or rejection.

Activism is defined in *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* as a deed(s) aimed at occasioning political or social change especially through organized groups or ideologies. On the relationship between literature and activism, Chesaina (1987: 2) argues, "theatre is a very powerful tool for influencing attitudes and social change. As a written as well as a performed art, drama presents the picture of a situation more clearly than prose fiction and poetry, and by the same token it provokes people more sensitively."

Clearly then, drama does not just communicate issues but also seek to influence and change through modelling given the direct experience the audience gets. This study

focuses on recent plays to explore areas in the women's life that Kenyan theatre dramatizes, mostly by use of strategies of subversion through activism. The playwrights under study have especially focused on the challenge of negative socialization of women. Due to societal upbringing, many women grow up believing that they are irreversibly inferior to men. In all of the four texts, women are at the call and beg of men despite the fact that women are not in any way lesser human than men. These realities have precipitated mild to moderate shifts in gender status and struggles in society, as I demonstrate in the following section.

When looking at the experiences women go through, Lusungu (2004) notes that patriarchy in African communities ensures that some women find themselves in positions of service to men as sexual objects with limited decision making since they are powerless over their own bodies. This study observes that this action is an indication that men control women, discriminate against and oppress them. In the present society, this oppression still exists a sign that men still have this character.

Elsewhere, Marie (1980) identifies more of such experiences and argues that women are expected to endure abusive marriages, sacrifice for their families, and remain respectful to their senior wives. These are some of the negative experiences, which this study argues negates the progress that society has thus far made in reaching the ideal of gender equality. Yet, the challenges seem to survive the positive changes in society. Many women continue to struggle for equal opportunities in life. In view of the foregoing observations, this study examines the plays under study in order to analyse the representation of some of the negative experiences that women encounter as they search for new identities that match with the current global trends.

In some of the plays studied, marriage promises women freedoms from cultural impediments. Some women as depicted in the selected plays end up getting married with the hope that things will change for the better, only for them to be mistreated by their husbands. Naomi in Kyalo's play is such one person who ends up oppressed and frustrated within her marriage:

**Naomi:** (Bitterly) I have been through hell! Yes, through hell. What was the use of being married to a fox? I remember with nostalgia when I first set my eyes upon him. (She imitates Ngumi's words, "I will buy you the best house that there is, I will arrange for a gala wedding for you." And now, the prophet has turned a liar. The many times that I have carried the drunkard home! It has become a miserable bore; the many beatings that I have undergone! It is disheartening. And yet, I try my best to take care of him, and what reward do I get? Beatings, abuses, hungry and sleepless nights; dirty beddings, tattered clothes; and tattered all! I am sick and tired (2010: 2).

The above quotation from Kyalo's play shows that traditional assumptions regarding marriage and the role of women in it can confine and oppress women. These assumptions then deprive women of options in life. The excerpt also shows that many women in Kenya suffer the double burden of class and gender oppression because poorer women tend to suffer from material deprivations while also exposed to harsh forms of patriarchal dominance.

These forms of subjugation can relate to one another in different ways. For instance, some women may be oppressed on the grounds of their gender and family background and others because of their gender and class. From the excerpt, some aspects of tradition are oppressive to women. Consequently, many African women have to "learn to carry [their] burdens with strength" in order not to succumb to the pressures of the Kenyan society. Naomi's words quoted above also indicate that women suffer from failed

expectations once they get married; they get into marriage expecting happiness but end up suffering both physically and psychologically at the hands of their spouses. Apart from Naomi in Kyalo's play, there is also Veronicah in Gitumbi's *A New Dawn*, who is also trapped in an unhappy marriage with an almost-always absentee husband. Therefore, the playwrights seem to suggest that the institution of marriage is a significant source of lack of fulfilment for women who join it.

Fulfilling cultural expectations also form part of the experiences that women go through in search of new identities. In a somewhat related context, Foucault (1980) views culture as systems of norms and beliefs based on gender. Most women in the texts studied are expected to be strong as they face patriarchy. Men control women's emotions and make important decisions in the society. Thus, Foucault's ideas bring out the role of culture in changing the status of women in the society. Rita one of the characters in *The Hunter is Back*, remembers through soliloquy how her uncle Ngumi wanted to marry her off to old Tumbo.

She tried to escape using a three legged stool, but then miscalculated her steps and fell on the ground. Her uncle came immediately and taunted, taking the stool with him and locking her up (Kyalo, 2010). This episode shows us how, culturally, women were to be married off without their consent. Later on, it is Naomi a fellow woman, who saves Rita and takes her to an organization that champions the causes of the disadvantaged girl child, which is the playwright's way of saying that women can save other women from cultural practices that oppress them.

Women in the plays under study are also relegated to secondary roles in the society, as they search for new identities. Veronica in *A New Dawn* represents such women. She stays at home where her husband uses her to run errands. It is during such errands that

one day the husband sends her to buy a scratch card, which is used to load credit for cell phones. This scratch card ends up changing their lives completely. There was a promotion with one on one of the phone companies. Nehemiah wins 10 million shillings after scratching that card. He is now a millionaire. He is thinking of employing a financial advisor to help him use his money. He is also planning to change the schools for his children and he now loves the wife more. Yet, just because Veronica is a woman, her counsel to her husband is ignored and considered a source of confusion, as the quotation below demonstrates:

**Nehemiah:** (Nods head, pensive) Veronica, you are a wise woman. What you have said makes sense; yes, many people who plan harm always sugar coat their motives. But the CEO looked genuinely concerned, Veronica...oh! It is all so confusing! We must tread with care. Indeed, the cat never thinks of the rat's children when it catches mother rat. This money must benefit us, our children and those we cherish, not fatten the already fattened cats (2010: 23).

This study further notes that women struggle to acquire education. This is reflected in the plays studied here. Rita in *The Hunter is Back*, for instance, struggles to get educated. Yet, education is enables social mobility associated with sophistication, lateral mobility from rural to urban, domestic to public spaces, as well as vertical economic rise. All these shifts bequeath the individuals with more respectable or prestigious standing in society, so much so that one can argue that the quest for education is a symbolic shedding of old undesirable identities in favour of new, desirable ones.

Yet, the search for new identities is not always taken positively. For instance, Obbe (1990) identifies some of the consequences of women's fight for changed roles. Obbe argues that elite women who wish to improve their legal and economic status sometimes lose respect and honour in society, as Taabu in *The Hunter is Back* does in the foregoing

excerpt. Similarly, in Imbuga's *The Return of Mgofu*, Norah Ulivaho, one of the most educated women in this village, has earned postgraduate qualifications from University of Southampton. She is a highly respected young lady, but she ends up marrying Mgofu Ngoda, an old man. Although Mgofu Ngoda is a respected seer in society, her village mates do not expect such a young beautiful educated woman to get married to the old man. Thus, her decision to get married to an old man is viewed as a case of a mistaken decision, rather than as a conscientious autonomy by Norah.

In this regard, though spatially removed from the Kenyan situation, Beauvoir's (1949) assertion that men define what it means to be human, including what it means to be feminine, is relevant because Norah Ulivaho's personal academic achievements are overshadowed by a patriarchal logic. This is why the current study notes that female is not male, female is looked at as an object whose existence depends on man, she is also secondary in any social development; de Beauvoir's implied point is that there is no gender equality.

Another scholar, Charlotte (2011), observes the painful experiences that women go through as they try to acquire new roles. Charlotte notes that a creative woman supposedly recovering from what her husband called temporal nervous depression – a slight hysterical tendency – her husband depressed in order to keep her within the society, which eventually drove her to mental destruction. From the foregoing, this study learns that a man is more concerned with the cultural norms in society than his wife and for the woman to be free, she needs to confront her fears of what the society and husband would think of her.

Women are threatened by men in the process of pursuing new identities. For example, Bensa, a character in *The Green Cross of Kafira*, says that Mama Mgei – the lady who

starts the revolutionary gender movement in Kafira – should be advised to be careful because she is vulnerable. Besides, the school girl who pursues a scholarship so as to secure her education for self-empowerment, is sexually defiled by a top politician, Mheshimiwa Baptisa, in order to be able to get her scholarship. Rita on the other hand is threatened by chief Ngumi because she has refused to sleep with the chief.

All these misfortunes that women endure as they search for new socio-economic identities are shown to be gender specific. This is because although men also encounter and overcome challenges as they seek to acquire new social identities, their challenges are not of the same magnitude as those of women. Women are doubly vulnerable – on the one hand constrained by widespread material poverty and the deprivations that it engenders and, on the other hand, silenced and otherwise disadvantaged by the dominant social-cultural ideology of patriarchy

#### **4.2.8 Shifts in Gender Status and Character Identities of Women**

This section focuses on the representation of women and their new roles as represented in the plays under study, showing how new social and cultural roles engender new identities. Women these days seem to be driven by a desire to change and acquire new identities in life. This desire makes her to continue growing with changing times, these changes are then reflected in emerging literatures. It is important to examine the effectiveness and influence of the diverse approaches espoused by the four playwrights studied as they portray emerging shifts in gender status and character identities.

In view of the foregoing argument, the present section examines the changing status of women and how they acquire new identities in the selected plays for this study. In so doing, the foregoing ideas help us to gain deeper understand of the effects these ideologies have in women's identities. The section also captures the influence of



patriarchal societies in the representation of women in the society, at least as captured in the texts under study.

Gilbert and Gubar (2000) state that the character of a woman as an angel in the house and a monster must be uncovered and debunked if a woman is to achieve the new roles. These critics advocate for the need to view women differently and not just associate them with traditionally sanctioned roles, such as being a good wives. This will be a critical step towards achieving the ideals of gender equality. This shall be achieved by debunking patriarchal myths that shape the dominant perception of women – some of who are dehumanized by being labelled monsters or witches. Imbuga clearly brings out this through characters such as Mama Mgei as shown below:

*(This is the swearing in ceremony. Several traditional troops can be heard approaching from different directions. The atmosphere is electric as the venue for the swearing in ceremony is prepared....)*

**Mgei:** So help me God. *(Bishop Ben'sa takes the Bible from Mgei and hands him another Bible. Raising the second Bible Mgei says, So help me God. Tremendous and sustained applause for the president elect. Mgei steps forward to address the nation.)* My fellow countrymen, after consultations with our advisers and our intended partners in development, we have decided that this swearing-in ceremony should be different from what Kafirans are used to. Because the word protocol has no equivalent in each of our ten national languages, we shall ignore it henceforth. But since you do not ignore something you are used to without replacing it with something else, we have decided to replace the term protocol with the term common sense (2013: 55).

This excerpt shows how women can ascend to public leadership, in spite of the dominant stereotypes against women's leadership capacities. At the core of the excerpt is the point that leadership is not about sex, but about an individual's own capacity. So the common

perceptions against women in leadership are merely because of society's own social constructions and not about the biology of men or women.

Millet (1969) pioneered the discursive challenges to the ideological perceptions of men and women, arguing that while female person is born, a woman is created through different forms of socio-cultural engineering. In other words, while sex is biologically determined at birth, society creates roles that it ascribes to different genders. Millet calls this prescribed sexual roles by society as sexual politics. Other scholars, notably Jefferson and Robey (1991: 209) have tended to agree with Millet, arguing that femininity and masculinity are patterns of sexuality and behaviour that are imposed upon society by culture.

Drakuli (1997), on his part, argues that our sense of who we are as women and men is not likely to remain the same over the span of our lives, thus questioning how identities are formed or contested. He wonders how our gendered identities change as they feed into other identities as members of religious groups, nations or social movements. He observes that identities are fluid rather than primordial, socially constructed rather than inherited, and they shift with changing social contexts. As the world grows more complex and interconnected, our identities, or self-definitions, respond to diverse, and sometimes competing, pulls and tugs (Drakuli, 1997: 233). This is why there are possibilities of women transcending the old identities and acquiring new, ones that are more rewarding. In *A New Dawn*, the hope for a new start is more evident than ever:

**Mama Nuru:** ...Can we roll back the cloud of negative ethnicity and together, bask under the sun that is our common heritage? These are the questions that are begging for answers, weighty questions that have been left unanswered for decades! Ultimately, I dare say, the answer lies with us – with you and me – and the decisions we make! (Curtains). (Gitumbi, 2012)

This excerpt clearly depicts the new roles that women are taking, thus fighting ethnic stereotypes' that contribute to their own double or multiple marginalisation.

From the texts studied, one way in which the status of women changes is when they deliberately and strategically become rebellious. Such acts of rebellion can be seen as symbolic acts of resistance against societally sanctioned modes and expectations of women's behaviour. Thus, Thori in *The Return of Mgofu* for instance, expects Thoriwa to address him as her husband after their return from the first madness. Imbuga asserts that because Thoriwa knows her standing, she refuses and instead addresses him as a comrade in arms (2011: 3).

**Thoriwa:** No, they can't. (*Addressing the audience*) I smell some educated thief here... Silently training your eyes on my breasts! (*Touching breasts*) He used to own them. Thori and I were man and wife. But that was before our people lost their heads. Before they began spitting on the village well. So that no one could have water. (Thoriwa and Thori get into a mock struggle. My land..... My cat.....My maize....can be heard in the struggle.) (Imbuga, 2011: 3).

By so doing, Thoriwa seems to relay Imbuga's message regarding the refusal by women to be taken casually by their male counterparts and their demand to be treated equally. It seems that after the madness, Thoriwa discovers that she must rebel the subordinate position that her husband has placed on her before he can respect and listen to her.

Mama Nuru, another character in *A New Dawn*, refuses to be subordinated and looked down upon. She is against the oppressive leadership, greed and abusive habits of John Baptist, who torments his subjects and anyone who tries to oppose him. As a rejection of this oppression and a statement of her ideological sophistication and awareness of her gender equality, Mama Nuhu forms another political party – Movement for Change and Democracy – to compete against that by John Baptist. But as she makes these decisions,

she faces some resistance and intimidation, including when arsonists set her house on fire. But she does not give up, and instead she continues to go against societal expectations to conduct political campaigns in different places. When threats and intimidation fail, her adversaries try persuasion and bribery, which she still rejects.

Mama Nuhu speaks with a lot of confidence and authority. Using proverbs and wise sayings that leave the crowds bewildered.

**Crowd:** Tell us!

**Mama Nuru:** Slowly but surely, the beast grew into a huge and uncontrollable creature. It ate the hunter's chickens, goats and cattle. The hunter became poorer and more desolate as the beast grew more vicious and greedy. Soon, it started eating the neighbours' chickens, then it turned to their children. When all the neighbours had was over, the beast turned on the hunters children. When the hunter saw this, he was extremely shaken, and he cut up the beast into pieces, but alas! It was too late for him. The beast had already gobbled down the most precious gift: his own children! My people, do I still have your ears?

**Crowd:** Yaaa! (*Murmuring expressions of shock*) (Gitumbi, 2013: 54).

The same individuals try to weaken her resolve by offering her a cabinet position in the subsequent government, but she turns down the offer while insisting that her only interest is in inaugurating a culture of change in Kafira (Imbuga 2013: 32).

In the same play, Norah Ulivaho rejects the tradition of early marriage for women; she spends more of her youthful time at school, and eventually qualifies to go to university, which is the beginning both of gender transformation in a patriarchal society, and socio-economic advancement of women in particular.

Another female character, Naomi in Kyalo's *The Hunter is Back*, extends the same subversive rebellion by rejecting the tradition of forced marriages. She rescues Rita, who had been forcefully married to Ngumi, and takes her to a holding organisation that then

takes her back to school; she excels and qualifies for university entry, where she studies Computer Engineering. Meanwhile, the women then pursue the legal route of ensuring that Ngumi is punished for his offence; the women go to court and sue Ngumi, who is tried and found guilty. He is then sentenced to five years of community service, and ordered to repay the bride price that he had paid to Tumbo.

On the other hand, Tumbo is given a stern warning for his complicit behaviour (Kyalo, 2010: 49). Yet another character, Serah daughter of Nehemia, also rebels against the traditional order that had earlier forbidden young women from participating in public communal and political meetings. Serah, in her act of rebellion, accompanies Mama Nuru and Nehemia to the meeting at which the new political party – which is conceived to resist the despotic leadership of Mheshimiwa Baptisa – is launched. It is noteworthy that this was the first public rally among the many that the women took part in. The women were concerned with the overall objective of educating the common people on the power of the ballot, which was in their hands.

By ascribing this responsibility to Serah, Gitumbi in *A New Dawn*, seems to suggest that the future of this society rests in the hands of youth and women. This further implies that the age of old patrilineal and patriarchal institutions is changing and will soon be over. These illustrations demonstrate two crucial points. One is that while all playwrights under study recognise the unique socio-cultural and political circumstances that weigh down women in society and militates against their progressive aspirations. The playwrights also show that a combination of subversive rebellion against societal structures and tenacious will to grow among women can lead to gender equality through access transformational enablers such as education and political power.

In the next section, this study grapples with the question of education and how it intersects with gender and culture in the plays under study. The study argues that education is a critical factor for those who are either compelled by circumstances to acquire it, or those who are somewhat in constant proximity to their highly educated kith and kin. Education as a symbol of enlightenment is also a means by which its beneficiaries may acquire new forms of identities and identifications.

Elsewhere, Julien (1992) equates education to an escape route that many disadvantaged Africans follow to flee from poverty and many cultural barriers to self-advancement. Similarly, a World Bank Report (1988) captures a positive involvement of African women in education. The World Bank Report notes that although African female's education was rare, 28 per cent of women were in vocational and technical education in 1983. This is a clear sign that at this stage some societies had accepted women to join formal education. The study observes that this could be the second wave of feminism as it is concerned with equality. World Bank further notes that there were a few African women who had reached the level of analyst, managers or consultant in IT profession. From this, the study analyses discrimination as experience women went through in earlier times but reduced later.

From the early colonial period to mid-post-independence era most women were unable to access formal schooling, due to many reasons, not least of them patriarchy which saw some rural and or poor families prioritising boys' education over that of girls. Traditional perceptions of the future of boys and girls also contributed to widespread exclusion of girls from schools. For instance, the rampant view that girls would be married off anyway, and that all the benefits of a girl's education would accrue to her marital home and not her natal one; that education would hinder girls' marriage prospects, or that advanced formal education makes girls 'headstrong' and liable to divorce and

prostitution, among others, were modern day myths that were used to perpetuate male privilege. While this was the state for long, the recent times have witnessed changes where access to formal education is recognised by many as a human right, and girls generally have the same rights of access to education.

The four plays under study generally reflect this change towards gender equity, and reveal a new shift in status where women are educated. In *The Return of Mgofu*, for instance, Mgofu's daughter, Nora, has studied International Relations at the University of Southampton, which is an elite institution in England:

**Mhando:** And his wife? Is Mugofu's wife alive?

**Scout 2:** He lost his wife four years ago.

**Mhando:** Children?

**Scout 2:** Only two, the personal assistant and a girl. The girl is at the University of Southampton, studying International relations.

**Mhando:** The University of Southampton (Imbuga 2012: 33).

Imbuga shows that contemporary women can overcome challenges and achieve their aspirations. Thus, in Imbuga's imagination in drama, education is a tool for women liberation and empowerment, and Nora Ulivaho studied at The University of Southampton and has a Master's degree. Ulivaho can now speak without any fear. Similarly, Rita in *The Hunter is Back* is also educated to university level, where she studies Computer Engineering, itself a discipline widely considered the preserve of men. Rita's study of an engineering course subverts the myth of women's suitability only for domestic or feminine chores.

Secondly, it demonstrates that women's intellect is as good as the men's, and that anyone with an interest can study a course in engineering. Education liberates Rita at a personal level because she sees the need to come up with several development projects in her village – including schools, dispensaries, and wells. She also earns her income, part of

which she uses to construct a brick house for Naomi and Rita's mother. It is noteworthy that by village standards, the brick house is a status symbol of achievement, and provokes negative reactions from some of the cultural and political impediments in the village, as the quote below shows:

**Maneno:** Your escalating popularity has made the chief an angry man. He feels that you are a threat to his reign. He has toured all parts of Chama labelling you a devil. "Don't allow a selfish and an unmarried woman to tear you apart," so he tells the masses.

These examples show that once a woman is educated, she can precipitate positive change in her the society. The liberatory force of education is buttressed in the plays selected for this study, which collectively show that when education is made available to many people, it can enable them overcome some of the challenges that are inherent in their cultural set-ups.

Another institution that may be changed to facilitate gender empowerment is marriage. Although marriage as an institution has been criticised as potentially disabling women, marriage can also empower women. Roja (1990), for instance, while studying women positively from what one can describe as a feminist standpoint, argues that African women could get power through marriage, even where such power is not prominently displayed or performed in public. Rojas focuses on new women who acquire new identities with the help of their husbands, even though some of the women still face challenges of other forms of oppression.

In a somewhat convoluted argument, Rojas posits that although men rule the world, it is women who rule the men at home. Therefore, women have an indirect role in development processes. The general claim that women exercise unacknowledged power, at least on the domestic fronts, can be sustained for discursive purposes, both from



anecdotal evidence, but also from the rich repertoire of oral literary narratives. Here, what passes for unquestioning submission by women to men's will is nothing more than strategic acquiescence to dominant, if transient, forces but with an eye to the ultimate women's domination over the men. The seeming submission to the dominant ideas of patriarchy is a manifestation of strategic collaboration that Mutuma discusses in his reading of Ngugi's works.

Although Rojas' argument sounds too ideal, it is very helpful in this study since it helps readers in imagining the possibility of women's political leadership. In the Kenyan context, the argument is also useful because it reminds readers of histories of matriarchal world order similar to that captured in the Gikuyu myth of origins. In the plays under study, Imbuga's character Mama Mgei in *The Green Cross of Kafira*, somehow embodies this ideal woman. Mama Mgei starts the gender movement that is used to liberate the people of Kafira. She is married to Pastor Mgei, and although she does not become the leader of the party, she is the one who formed it. Her husband only assists her in carrying out the mandate of the party, thus that of liberating the people of Kafira.

Another character, Norah Ulivaho, rides on the visibility of her husband to make her own point. She is educated and very intelligent and the society looks up to her to bring the change that is needed in the society. Men in the selected texts also seem to agree in this equity as seen in the following dialogue:

**Mtange:** A profound thought, indeed.

**Ngoda:** (Contemplating) I've been thinking deeply about what we discussed last night. If your youthful leader is thinking of bringing women closer to the seat of rule, you should support him. That is surely the future. Nderema took that path several years ago. Now see where they are (Imbuga, 2014: 57).

The excerpt shows that some men like Ngoda have started appreciating women. Mude a man in the same play also seems to embrace this equity when addressing Kadesa:

**Kadesa:** Welcome to the shrine of Katigali.

**Mude:** Thank you Priestess and mother of many. Just what does it mean?

The name I mean (Imbuga, 2014: 12).

This excerpt is important because it shows women gaining access to politically and spiritual spheres that were traditionally a preserve of men. Lusungu (2004) highlights how women are represented and acquire new identities. He states that traditionally, religion, cultural and Christian institutions provided opportunities where older women socialized girls and young women towards being ‘acceptable’ women in their community. Inherent in this is the belief that women are custodians of acceptable beliefs and behaviour. Lusungu brings out women who experience newness through religion. Lusungu’s view influences this study when examining the experiences women go through as they search for new identities, and helps us when looking at conservatism as a way these women use to get the new identities.

Conservatism is clearly seen in the *Return of Mgofu* where mama Enos, though she accepts change, still sticks to some of the traditions that her society expect of her. She advises her husband to marry another wife if he has to win the elections. Ironically, Norah Ulivaho an educated woman in that play is also conservative because she gets married to Mgofu Ngoda, an old seer, in order to conform to what she thinks society expects of her. In other words, one can argue that Norah Ulivaho and other characters who appear to succumb to the wishes of patriarchal world order, often in spite of their enlightened exposure to contemporary ideals of gender equality, practice a kind of strategic feminism that is unique to many African societies. This kind of feminism at

once acknowledges the need for gender equality, while eschewing forms of feministic radicalism that is commonly associated with women from Europe and North America.

In a critical reading of strands of strategic feminisms that are more common in Africa, Madipe (2011) highlights what such strands entail. These include advocacy for women's needs, empowerment and the commonality to the struggles women face in the wake of rampant male chauvinism. Historically, these feminists were concerned with women's freedom, which they sought to achieve by mobilizing fraternal organisation, as Amina Mama (1995: 37) observes. Accordingly, early African feminist women's movement documented the mobilization of women by both military and civilian dictatorships. Thus, according to some critics including Mama, Imam, and Said (1992), African feminist and other liberation movements were generally organized around kinship groups, religious affiliations, cultural and political duties. Such mobilizations occurred before independence and served a critical role in defending women's rights.

Elsewhere, Hansen (1992) focuses on African women's feminist mobilisation in the post-independence period. He argues that after colonialism, some early women's associations and groups redirected by missionaries were designed to civilize and "uplift" African women by instilling Western European ideologies of domesticity and offering training in related skills. This helped the women to acquire skills in innovative ways that empowered and laid the ground for future innovations.

Unique gender and biological experiences became focal points around which women organised themselves, leading to politically conscious outfits such as: Mothers' Union, Catholic Women's Clubs of Uganda, The Federation of Nigeria, Women Societies, and National Council of Women in Kenya. Hansen's ideas depict the historical emergence

and spread of gendered liberal movements, where groups of women believed that solidarity through sisterhood could bring emancipation.

Nearer Kenya and closer in historical times, Ugandan legal feminist Tamale (1999) has argued that such movements succeeded in challenging patriarchal biases, which had found their way in the dominant political establishments. Madipe (2011), on their part, argues that some gender conscious organizations have addressed matters that cover domestic violence, legal rights, education, health and sexual reproductive rights; peace building, housing and land, cultural and religious practices, and female genital mutilation. These recent feminists are also using information and communication technologies in highly innovative and radical ways to ensure a broad-based campaign of creating awareness that includes both women and men. This thinking has also permeated universities in Africa, as reflected in the increased number of women's enrolment and exponential growth in research and publications in the wider field of gender studies (Mama, 1995: 37).

The upsurge in numbers of students who undertake courses in gender studies suggest both a rising awareness of gender matters, while pointing at the bigger problem of gender inequalities that make such studies necessary. These critical responses and feminist ideologies are the stuff that the texts under study dramatize. The female characters in these plays appear keen to mounting a total rebellion, search for equality and radicalism. This is clearly seen through the ideas of the gender movement initiated by Mama Mgei in *The Green Cross of Kafira*.

But Imbuga is careful to show that Mama Mgei does not achieve all these by mere aggression. Rather, she combines a number of tactics, including negotiating with progressive male leaders in the society. Ironically, thus, Mama Mgei wins by first

appearing to conform to society's image of the ideal woman. Nkealah (2016) traces historical patterns of what constituted the 'ideal' African woman – widely defined by male-centred metrics – as she navigates alternative identities in a changing society. Such a woman, here seen in the character of Mama Mgei, alternately practices stiwanism, which portrays a woman deeply, entrenched in experiences and realities in Africa. She also engages in motherism, which is about a rural woman performing the necessary tasks of nurturing society while committed to the survival and maintenance of mother earth. Thirdly, she practices femalism, which puts a woman's body at the center of feminist conversations that raise questions about the need for equality. Lastly, she practices nego-feminism and snail-sense feminism, which argue that the inclusion of men is necessary to achieve the ultimate freedom of women.

This study also observes that female characters are unified by their search for liberation; they demonstrate traits associated with women of second wave of feminism, the women liberation movement, which is a means of emphasizing continuity with earlier feminist activities. In this regard, Bailey (1997) argues that the women's liberation movement has been a resounding success. The achievements of this movement are also linked to some radical voices of women's empowerment and to the widespread concern with freedom for women as an essential part of deepening a global human rights culture. This cultural shift seeks to empower women collectively or individually through sharing experiences and contesting presumptive injustices. Lastly, this shift has a strong affiliation with education and is responsible for teaching women about some of the issues that affect their advancement in society. All these views provide rich information for the second objective of this study as it also looks at the experiences and strategies women use to get new identities.

Feminist scholars who are concerned with empowerment of women in a capital dominated market include the pioneer Beauvoir (1949), who argued that gender is a male dominated culture that represents women as ‘the other’ in sexual relations to man. De Beauvoir also emphasizes that women must transcend their natural positions and choose economic, personal, and social freedoms. Beauvoir’s perspectives influenced this study in understanding that women develop a sense of purpose and have voice when they are independent. The present study also addresses the issue of socialism as a way of empowering women and helping them to get new identities. This is seen in Dennis Kyalo’s play, *The Hunter is Back*, where Taabu becomes a prostitute in order to empower herself financially. Several other women in the other texts under study devise ways of empowering themselves financially as well. Serah in *A New Dawn* is a businesswoman who progresses in her enterprise in spite of her numerous challenges (Gitumbi, 2012: 35).

A contextual theorization of such existential choices that disempowered women make is in the work of Mama (1995), who argues that man has been the subject and female the object in public discourse in Africa. Mama declares that feminists want to correct this erroneous way of thinking about and subordination of women, because women are people in their own right. Mama (1995) argues that literature should be free from biases because of race, class or gender – the latter being this study’s key concern in the plays under study. Another scholar, Betty (2001), shows that in their quest to reclaim and revive their human agency, women should be enabled ‘to say’ rather than ‘to feel’, and that such a shift should not be misconstrued to mean that women feel selfish and neurotic just because they want to achieve their goals. Betty’s (2001) ideas guided this study to understand that there is need for women to reclaim their voices and speak their minds freely if they are to acquire new identities. Betty (2001) also advocates for a kind of

radicalism when necessary to fight for equality because such processes entail subverting unjust power structures that render women secondary to men in human hierarchy.

Foucault (1980) writes about work in relation to power, knowledge and socialism and how power is used to control the other variables. Foucault argues that power is used to form public discourse, noting arguably that those who are in power control discourse and language of sex. This is helpful when looking at the issue of sexism in the plays as an experience women go through. The selected texts present such women who have a voice. In the process of speaking, these women show their wisdom – itself a reflection of the perfect balance between intellectual depth and moral consciousness. Mama Nuru's speech in *A New Dawn* by Njoki Gitumbi shows such wisdom, as seen below:

**Mama Nuru:** We cannot forget. The things we saw were foreign to our land. A word of discord here, a statement loaded with hatred there, and soon mischief bloomed in our hearts. The prattle of our politicians became swords thrust at our neighbours. Suspicion, hatred and revenge blurred our vision, quelled our conscience. What took place across this nation left even the devil himself shocked- only yesterday the two borrowed salt and tinder from each other (Gitumbi, 2012).

From this quotation, Mama Nuru in Gitumbi's *A New Dawn* clearly explains what happened during the historical post-election violence in Kenya during 2007-2008 period, and how she was a victim because she was seeking an elective post in the highly contested elections. Norah Ulivaho in Imbuga's (2011) *The Return of Mgofu* is another character who shows wisdom in her speech. She advises the people on the importance of unity so as to overcome the problems of the people of Kafira. Similarly, Rita's speech in *The Hunter is Back* also portrays women's economic and cultural empowerment. Rita advises the youth against drug abuse and demeaning practices such as wife inheritance and child labour. It is important to note, however, that the changes in the play are

symbolic and may not necessarily reflect the whole complexity of the matter in society today.

To understand the new roles for modern women in the society calls for understanding what the third wave of feminism (also called lipstick feminism, girlie, or cyber feminism), which seeks to question, reclaim, explore, redefine ideas and address inclusiveness. The movement is born of what the first and second waves of feminism fought for, and they see themselves as capable, strong and assertive social agents. Women in this movement seek to overcome the theoretical questions of equity or differences, and the political questions of evolution and revolution. They do not only embrace ambiguity, diversity and multiplicity, but also confront stereotypes against women, particularly what is considered ‘proper female talk and behaviour.’

Women have confidence of having more opportunities and less sexism (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000). It is in this wave that young feminists use the term ‘girl’ to attract another generation, while involving it in a more assertive, aggressive but playful pompous language of feminism. In this movement, women exaggerate the stereotypes used against them and make them sound funny; the women are motivated by the need to honour contradictory experiences and deconstruct phallogocentric thinking.

Moreover, women challenge the notion of womanhood and fight violence against women. This generation is disengaged from patriarchy fully. This feminism stubbornly ventures into male dominated space to claim position of power, and Natasha (1998), in this regard, says that “we – new feminists embrace power.’ The ideologies above provide the vision for which the four playwrights of the selected plays envisage to be the roles for the modern woman. The current study tends to be preoccupied by this role, which this



study seeks to address in the second objective of this study because it describes who and what modern women are.

This study, which is inclined towards feminist ideological standpoints, is concerned with empowerment of women. Shugart et al. (2001) define empowerment as feeling good about oneself and having the power to make choices regardless of what those choices are. They add that 'in- your-face' confrontation attitude is the hallmark of this wave. Shugart et al.'s ideas define modern women who are independent in making radical decisions and do not care about others feelings but their own identities. This then makes some of them leaders in the patriarchal society, as this study demonstrates shortly. In this study, practices of empowerment are seen in the transformations of characters including Rita in Kyalo's play, and Mama Mgei in Imbuga's *The Green Cross of Kafira*. All these women emerge as leaders in their own domains, and thus allow readers to appreciate the achievements of women in leadership.

In the plays under study, the playwrights tend to spearhead the creation of central roles for women leadership. In Imbuga's *The Return of Mgofu*, Kadesa is given leadership of the exiles from Mandika after the first madness. Kadesa establishes a popular shrine for exile in the northern part of Nderema, where she now serves as a priest. At the same time, Benza is also a woman priest who is consulted by both Bishop Yuda and Modi, a government leader. Sarika, yet another prominent woman, also works as a hostess and usher at Mhando's residence and, during the public meeting, Mizra, the mistress, is the master of ceremonies, a position previously preserved for the men (Imbuga, 2012). Other symbolic acts of women's empowerment – and sense of equality – include gestures such as Arasa swearing in the president-elect, and Mama Mgei leading the revolution and forming a new political party to compete for national leadership.

In Kyalo's *The Hunter is Back*, Rita also shows leadership when she is entrusted with the chieftom of Chamaland. She overcomes the patriarchal anxieties in society and leads the people of Chamaland into overthrowing bad leaders. It is critical to note that what Rita achieves has a harder persuasion in the world outside the text. Perhaps because of the time and space constraints in the plays, the playwrights provide symbolic solutions to gender related problems especially of women in leadership, but the challenges remain profound in the outside world.

However, the playwrights also recognise the complexity of human nature. Some of the women that they present, thus, reflect common human weaknesses that militate against broader mobilization of consensus building. Some of the women with behavioural aberrations include the selfish ones in Kyalo's *The Hunter is Back* and Imbuga's *The Return of Mgofu*; they are egocentric women who make personal choices that simply reinforce the institutional and cultural structures that inhibit some of the disadvantaged women's progress. That the playwrights reject the temptation to romanticize women purely for ideological reasons render the texts more credible and go some way in answering questions on how, despite many efforts by feminists and other influencers, patriarchy continues to undermine the quest for gender equality. The same strategy of not romanticizing women also signals the diversity of identities that may be contained within a single individual: the point is that while women generally suffer from systemic disadvantages, at a personal level, they negotiate more identities than mere womanhood, a fact that pushes some of them to behave in a manner that appears to contradict the larger objective of gender-based mobilisation for equality between men and women.

The above ideas capture differences between some women who are aggressive and ready to venture in males sphere, co-existing with those who are content to comply, or those who deploy survivalist strategies such as strategic acquiescence to patriarchal caprices

while creating pockets of freedom and agency within traditionally women-centred spaces, including domestic ones. Ultimately, these diverse approaches create different fronts on which women and feminists can launch their onslaughts against patriarchy and its gender biases. We note that these multiple perspectives on the question of gender equality helps subalterns like women to have temporal solidarity for enabling them act coherently, an arrangement that makes these women to dialogue and engage in different negotiations that bring them to a common ground.

This section sought to analyse the representation of women in the plays under study. The chapter was inspired by the truism that ‘woman’ and ‘gender’ both as markers of identity and as analytical categories in discursive engagements are social constructs. They do not occur naturally, but are created consciously or unconsciously by cultural norms. In the constructions, women and men are expected, coerced, or persuaded to conform to the societal expectations of their corresponding gender.

In some of the plays studied, this study shows that society stereotypically labels human females as woman, emotional, irrational, weak, stupid, and powerless and submissive. Specifically, Gitumbi’s *A New Dawn* portrays some women as evil and others as angels in the house, while other plays selected for this study dramatize a prejudicial economy of wickedness associated with women. Such portrayals, we argue, often provide dubious justification for the continued systemic and individual marginalization, oppression, or muting of women in a patriarchal societal order. While acknowledging this, the playwrights, notably Imbuga and Gitumbi, carry the message that these inequalities need to change.

The playwrights thus create female characters who disrupt male dominance in the domains of political and religious leadership, academia and judicial institutions. The

exemplary women do not accept how the society views them; they rebel against the tradition and start to challenge men. These women believe they are assertive, daring, strong and capable. They venture in male's worlds and believe that their destined places are not only at home, but also beyond. The women are radical and believe that they are equally important to men; they redefine themselves as they go through their biological, socio-cultural, political and other experiences, some of which we discussed in the next chapter.

### **4.3 History, Ideology and Feminist Dramaturgies**

#### **4.3.1 Introduction**

Having analysed the portrayal of women in the previous chapter, the current chapter explores how the playwrights under study locate women in the dynamics of national histories as well as the ideological connotations of the dramaturgies used. The aim of the chapter, therefore, is to examine the extent to which playwrights' handling of contexts and histories not only point to underlying ideologies, but also resulted in specific dramaturgies to challenge the mainstream institutions of politics and power to make women more likely to access public sphere. At the same time, the chapter also argues that, while women have for long been marginalized, they use creative strategies to deflate the powers of patriarchy, and to move close to the metaphorical centres of power. This is why, as the chapter further argues, women become more audible and articulate as the plays tend to the end.

#### **4.3.2 Women and the Making of History**

The main purpose of the present study is to examine dramaturgies, in both content and form, of feminist drama in Kenya together with their ideological basis. In the present chapter, though, investigation shifts to modern-day Kenya's socio-historical landscape and its impression on both the selected playwrights' feminist ideological standpoints and

the resulting dramaturgies. While the present chapter deals with ideologies relating to the subject matter of the selected texts, aspects of formal and language-based dramaturgies come in the next chapter.

The intersection of history and literature emerges in how literature recreates the past and the present. Literature also envisages the future so that a people's history is treated as an "ongoing spectacle in which units of experience can be isolated" (Ganyi, 2014: 47). Therefore, it is important to examine the extent to which Kenya's national histories have been reflected on both the playwrights' feminist ideologies and the thrust of their resulting dramaturgies in Kenya today. Brandy (1993) views history as a 'real' past, a belief or a set of beliefs about that past, and claims to report the 'truth' about that real past.

Burkeywo in making sense of Brandy's explication of history in literature surmises: "history is a construction based on real and collective experiences of the past as understood in the present. Its nature is that it captures what happened in the past according to sources, explains why it happened and attempts to give a rational and realistic interpretation of that occurrence" (2015: 1). It may then be argued that history is never self-explanatory. It is experienced at an individual level and reproduced in a manner consistent with the individual's perspective.

The four plays selected for analysis in the present study, all published between 2010 and 2013, represent Kenya's recent socio-historical experiences, only sparingly peering into a more distant past. The focus is, of course, on historical gender injustices in Kenya but with alternating forays into other related matters such as Kenya's years of experimentation with democracy; corrupt tendencies like tribalism, nepotism and cronyism not to forget deep tribal animosities that mainly come to the surface disguised

as election-related violence. Given that women are more the objects rather than the subjects of most atrocities perpetuated in society, it should be of interest to examine how contemporary Kenyan theatre deals with the situation of women with Kenya's history as the backdrop. This is useful in showing what ideologies inform their dramaturgy, both in terms of subject matter and stylistic choices.

According to Ngaira (1990), ideology refers to that particular aspect of human condition under which people operate as conscious actors. Ngaira contends that ideology is the medium through which human consciousness works. In other words, what is seen or believed or even represented largely depends on one's ideology. Authorial ideology is what determines the writer's perception of reality and how they propagate it. Whatever stand the writer takes partly constitutes their authorial ideology. It is then probable that from the playwrights' representations and constructions, one may come up with an indication of the underlying motivations.

Ngaira further describes aesthetic ideology as also comprising the literary conventions and stylistic stances adopted by the writer. He, for instance, acknowledges Chinua Achebe as one of the writers who recognized and made Igbo cultural elements an integral principle and part of his artistic creation. The aesthetic ideology informing most of Achebe's works may then be one of hybridity and appropriation (Yohannes, 2012). In terms of ideology, texts selected for the present study fit into two broad categories. The ideologies become increasingly apparent in the manner in which the playwrights seek to deal with the affairs of women within the circumstances of present-day Kenya. The study identifies the said ideologies as, first, the committed socialist ideology and, second, the ideology inspired by the traditions of folk performance.

### **4.3.3 Committed Socialist Ideology**

Ganyi (2014), in his elucidation of the nature and function of committed art, posits that it is a kind of “protest art” created by those who believe in presenting society as it is, and who use exaggeration only when it is the only available means of achieving the desired effect of their art. Ganyi further avers, while agreeing with Richards (1987: 47): “[they are] more concerned with specific social issues than with universalized themes ...and in combining a radical perspective with recognition of the importance of cultural traditions.” Ganyi further quotes Adeseke who avows that the producers of such literature are most likely “new breed” of younger Marxist writers “whose aesthetic standpoints evince the alienation between the haves and the have not’s in society” (2012: 47). Like Garuba (1984) Ganyi believes that “a concern with socio-historical phenomenon is virtually mandatory for any artist who does not intend to blunt his moral conscience and reduce his art to levity and banality. It may then be fitting to view this kind of art as a tool for sensitization; a form of activism and a means to an end rather than an end in itself. In a number of ways, and particularly in the manner in which the playwrights in question prioritise the sensitisation of both women and men, the texts under study meet the foregoing description.

It is important to further note, in line with the concerns of the present study, that the committed socialist ideology replicates itself in two main variants that also form the subtopics of discussion herein. They include a fidelity to socio-historical Milieu and then an ideology of cultural hybridity. As concerns the second broad category of ideology inspired by the traditions of folk performance, two major ideological variants emerge, namely: first, a didactic retributive ideology and, second, an ideology modelled on the universal myth poesy. The study discerns each of the mentioned sub ideologies, about

the playwrights' treatment of matters touching on the treatment women and their welfare in the society, as follows.

#### **4.3.3.1 Fidelity to Gender Realities within Specific Socio-Historical Milieus**

The texts selected for the present study, by virtue of the social themes qualify as political theatre. Political theatre is by nature committed and always aimed at championing the cause of the proletariat in its battle against the bourgeoisie, or better still, the exploited/oppressed against the exploiter/oppressor. A political tool may fundamentally be regarded as social propaganda because no political agenda may be pursued without the deployment of some form of propaganda. Tengya describes political theatre as that which “is appropriated as a weapon to fight against all sorts of social imbalances and exploitation of the weak” (2016: 46). It is the nature of political art to want to remain true to the social and historical contexts they depict. This may also be termed as realism or verisimilitude theatre. As demonstrated in the ensuing discussion, the texts under study not only seek to uplift women from their disadvantaged positions but also depict them as closely as possible to their historical circumstances.

Similarly, Watt (1957) describes realism as a desire by artists to “convey the impression of fidelity to human experience as opposed to general human types” (Haricharan 2004, 1). Gitumbi, Imbuga and Kyalo may be described as using the socialist realist ideology to drive their feminist programs. They all use characters that are exquisitely drawn from an environment with which a contemporary reader can relate. Kadesa, in *The Return of Mgofu*, for example, is the leader of the exiles from Mindika who are now settled in Nderema after the first madness, and her circumstances are drawn from the environment of politically instigated conflicts and displacements which a reader from East Africa may well be aware of.



**Kadesa:** That one has a heart of stone. Same as our kinsmen back in Mndika. His father was an exceptional human being. *(Pause)* Always had a kind word for everyone he met. *(Bursts into a ponderous rendition)* Ah, even as he lay dying next to the ashes of what used to be our place of worship, he turned to me and said, “If they can burn a place of worship, they are beyond redemption.” (17)

The do or die political power duels come out vividly in the instance above. Similarly, Mwodi and Yuda, both officials in the government of Kafira in *The Green Cross of Kafira* also come from an environment not far removed from the one the target audience know. The same officials whose authentic assignment is to safeguard and guarantee public good are sustaining a corrupt system that is responsible for all manner of evil in Kafira.

Rita, the main character in *The Hunter is Back*, on the other hand, grows up in an abusive environment that forces her to mature early following her father’s elopement and her mother’s eventual pronged illness.

*[The groans in the smaller hut, which have been at the background throughout this scene, now become louder and detached. Maneno begins to pace up and down the place as Naomi resumes her washing. Rita, a young girl aged about twelve, enters. A twenty-litre jerrycan of water weighs heavily on her back. Her bare and strained feet, her wantingly clothed body and her bulging veins all over her face clearly tell her story of great suffering.]*

**Rita:** *(Noticing Maneno)* Auntie, good morning.

**Naomi:** *(Angrily)* And you lout! Where have you been? I can’t even rinse the dishes because of your clumsiness. *(She abandons the washing and walks towards the frightened girl, still breathing fire and brimstone.)* I will ensure that today is the last time that you inconvenience me, you ne’er-do-well bastard! You are just like your mother. A snake begets a snake! *(Scared)* But mama, I never... (8)

The scenario of older women pushing underage education-deprived girls into domestic servitude right across Kenya, East Africa and beyond is well documented. The fact that it is women (in the text) perpetuating this blatant cruelty is a detail of considerable import. Mirroring Rita's situation, Mama Mgei, in *The Green Cross of Kafira*, who is the wife of Pastor Mgei and, later, in charge of the Green Cross Clinic, grew in a toxic political environment similar to what most women politicians within Kenya and beyond encounter in their quest for political power and leadership. In *A New Dawn*, Mama Nuru's challenges in her quest for a new dawn in the country are even more daunting and seemingly impossible to overcome if it were not for her grit and determination. Mama Nuru paints her familiar sounding circumstances thus:

**Mama Nuru:** We cannot forget. The things we saw were foreign to our land. A word of discord here, a statement loaded with hatred there, and soon mischief bloomed in our hearts. The prattle of our politicians became swords thrust at our neighbours. Suspicion, hatred and revenge blurred our vision, quelled our conscience. What took place across this nation left even the devil himself in shock. For how can you explain it when a neighbour turns against neighbour, while only yesterday the two borrowed salt and tinder from each other? What fuelled the hands that set fire on a church, where children and mothers sought shelter? ...When I stood on this dais back then and appealed for sobriety, I was branded an outsider. For that, I was marked. My home was burnt to ashes. (*pauses, general murmuring*) My stores were set ablaze. I lost twenty years of toil in one night of pitch and toss. (*Pause*) My dear people, I have paid a hefty price for the gospel I preach, but dare give up? (*Shakes head, and so do several people in the crowd*) I have steeled my nerves and on I will fight ... (54)

By juxtaposing historical events of Kenya's 2007 post-election violence with a rather larger than life female figure, the playwright employs both social realism and make-

believe to achieve the goal of elevating women to positions of inspiring and driving change. Mama Nuru's compatriots attest to her rare acumen:

**Numa:** Well, well ... I have received a lot of text messages from my friends. A

lot of dialogue is going on on the social media. Facebook, Twitter, the lot. People are mainly amazed at the courage you people at the MCD have. One wondered how John Baptista will react to the onslaught.

**Mama Nuru:** I hope you are telling them that we are ready for any challenges thrown our way?

**Nehemiah:** (*Lightly*) Ha! Tell them Mama Nuru here is equal to ten John Baptistas, if they don't know yet!

**Jeremiah:** That's true. Mama Nuru, I wonder where you get the strength to continue despite all the opposition you have faced.

**Mama Nuru:** (*Flattered by the unexpected praise*) Oh my! I bet what I do is nothing special, really! It is what happens when you believe in something. Conviction always propels a person forward, doesn't it? And then I have a lot of support from youall. Your faith in me fuels my faith.

In all, the characters' background is fully developed and is located to a specific space and time, which is clearly post-independence Kenya. With such realistic treatment of time, place and character, one appreciates and easily chooses sides on ensuing conflicts and desirable outcomes.

It is, however, noteworthy that realism is not homogenous. Lukacs (1956: 93) identifies two variants of realism as "critical realism and socialist realism) with the fundamental difference between them being the use of collective perspective in socialist realism. According to Lukacs, "socialist perspective provides a framework both the psychological make-up of characters it portrays. Within critical realism, although a character may be

striving toward socialism, the portrayal of such a character remains no more than a superficial one” (1956: 96 in Haricharan 2004: 5). This may not be true for the characters who, much as their aesthetic import is discussed in the next chapter, are round and quite developed. Rita, the central character in Kyalo’s *The Hunter is Back*, changes a lot and grows increasingly conscious as her story unfolds. She eventually understands issues more deeply with a better-cultivated perspective:

**Rita:** Let the old man not be troubled. He who punches a wall hurts his own fist. If the people of Chama decide to confer power to somebody else, then I don’t understand what this hullabaloo is all about. Power belongs to the people. It is their right to give it to whomever they choose (54).

As they grow in conscience, women become more sophisticated, gain tremendous influence, are more daring and look unstoppable. In the excerpt below, Rita has changed to a point she is recognisable.

**Rita:** It is very simple Sivu’s problems arise from his own imaginations. They are bound to take him nowhere.

**Maneno:** I forgot something else. He has mobilised some youths to be ready to beat you up and drive you out of Chama should you set foot there.

**Rita:** an empty *debe* makes the loudest noise. Tell him that I am not afraid of him or either him or anybody else. His cries are comparable to those of croaking frogs. They don’t stop cattle from drinking water at the river. I am entitled to a portion of my motherland; with or without Sivu’s threats. As a matter of fact I will be coming home next week.

Just like Rita, Mama Nuru, in Githumbi’s *A New Dawn*, undergoes a metamorphosis that is equally astronomical and revolutionary.

**Mama Nuru:** Honourable citizens. We said at the beginning that we do not come to you to ask for your votes. No, no, this is not election time.

We came to chew words with you, and we hope that our words will mark the beginning of a new season, a new harvest. We hope that after we have left, you will ruminate over what we have shared, and that the seed we have planted will find fertile ground in you. MCD needs your support, each and every one of you. We say that many people can easily lift a mortar and that a single finger cannot kill a louse. MCD *hoiyee!*

**Crowd:** *Hoiyee*

In Imbuga's *The Green Cross of Kafira*, Mama Mgei is the archetypal matriarch whose pronouncements and actions personify wisdom, compassion and understanding:

**Mama Mgei:** very well done. At last the stone that was scoffed at and ignored shall become the cornerstone. Let me assure you now that I have the official invitation, from now you are official guests of the state. You will need to prepare quickly because your transport will be here within an hour. You will be brought back here the day after the swearing-in ceremony. That is when you will be told how each one of you will be compensated for your honesty and courage. Thank you and good luck. (*Wild cheers from the dancers*). But remember that humility is the salt that makes success a desired goal. (*Mama goes off, escorted by the Choreographer as the Rejects hug one another excitedly*) (2012: 52).

From the excerpts, female characters concerned are hardly recognizable, given the naivety and powerlessness that defined them earlier. Given their experiences, though, their change is believable and not in any way out of worldly or magical. As Brecht argues, socialist realism reveals itself more perfectly when “a work is made intelligible for the time in which they are written. Fischer clarifies this to mean the presence of “an essential truth” (1959: 110). Lukacs further posits that socialist literature starts where bourgeois literature ends because the “hero's” childhood is negligible. It is the development of the young female adult into a conscientized leader that is the focus. The positive hero starts as a rather naïve person. A “mentor” then emerges and brings her/him to enlightenment in her/his life and her/his consciousness is subsequently raised. (S)he is

someone that is meant to be emulated. This coming of age is a major theme in many socialist realist texts that champion civil justice (Haricharan, 2004). Indeed, all the four leading female characters in the texts under analysis not only metamorphose, but also assume the role of “mentors” themselves. The leading characters are presented in such a way that no one can dispute that they have indeed their current position. As the plays close, there is an unmistakable sense of coming of age and accompanying celebration. A case in point is Rita in Kyalo’s *The Hunter is Back*:

**Rita:** we need not discuss this anymore. In any case we can agree to disagree. (*Drums beat offstage in a frenzy. A moment later a group of dancers enters. Closely behind them, three men carry high the stool of power, the sheathed spear and the chieftom robes. They assemble the prices before Rita and retreat. The drumbeats stop and Maneno leads the dancers in singing and dancing*).

**Soloist:** ii aume on nee nakuu

All the men this way

Eeh this way

All the women this way

Come, see our Rita

Eeh our Rita

Eeh our child

Eeh our Rita (64).

One may then conclude that socialist literature has a very close affinity with history; a history that reveals how an individual has developed from a state of naivety and isolation to one of full growth and existence. When this characteristic of socialist literature is available in feminist writing, the product is socialist feminism. In a comprehensive article by Chicago Women’s Liberation Union titled ‘Feminism: A Strategy for the Women’s Movement, Booth et.al, describe history as an important weapon in women’s

liberation decrying that “history isn’t what happened, but a story of what happened”. A story of transformation, as it were. They explain:

Understanding our changing history helps us to avoid stereotyping our opposition or our own notions of what liberation means. The development of a strategy makes it clear that technological advances, legislative advances, legislative changes or educational developments are not good or bad in themselves. When we know the context in which any specific change occurs, we can judge the value of that change for our goals (1979: 3).

Indeed, a clear understanding of history is important if gains made are not to be taken for granted. One notable feature in the texts selected for the present study is the manner in which playwrights have situated their activism for women’s equality and equity within concrete historical contexts. In Kyalo’s *The Hunter is Back*, for instance, female characters such as Rita are increasingly relevant and gain a voice of their own in a manner that not only brings about change and better living conditions for women but everyone else in the society.

Imbuga, on his part, also promotes the socialist feminist ideology, especially in the manner he analyses historical gender inequality, discrimination, oppression, patriarchy, stereotyping, the need for equality, and a more tranquil society. His aim is largely to understand the nature of gender inequality and examines women’s social roles, experience, interests and situations that lead to gender inequalities. Diop (1998) approaches feminism as a realization that there is an unequal power relationship between men and women in the society resulting in women rebelling against traditional culture and challenging, or, even strongly hating men. This is clearly portrayed through the characters of Rita, Mama Mgei, Veronica, Mama Nuru, and Nora Ulivaho. Imbuga

creates Mama Mgei and Nora Ulivaho as strong women who resist and celebrate the circumstances in their lives.

In addition, Gitumbi creates Mama Nuru while Kyalo creates Rita. Imbuga, on his part, does not shy away from sounding feminist, sometimes in a conspicuous manner. Most of his works of art, it is feminism as a theme that dominantly runs through. In his latest output, which is the topic of discussion, *The Return of Mgofu*, almost everything weighs in favour of women while men are receiving a lot of negative publicity, especially towards the end. Kyalo also discusses feminism with a lot of passion. The choice of characters by gender and roles assigned to them, as Wasamba (2000) puts it, influences thematic concerns addressed in any creative work. The themes Kyalo discusses put women concerns at the center. Butler (1990) defines feminism as a very broad set of ideologies and movements that focuses on defining and achieving social, economic, and political equality for women.

The texts under study could be considered products of feminist playwrights. Snyder (2015) argues that “third-wavers feel entitled to interact with men as equals, claim sexual pleasure as they desire it (heterosexual or otherwise), and actively play with femininity.” Rita in *The Hunter is Back* also discards the notion of one category of ‘women’, which Butler says “for most part, feminist theory has assumed that there is some existing identity, understood through the category of women, who not only initiates feminist interest and goals within discourse but constitutes the subject for whom, political representation is pursued (Butler, 1990: 1). Her postulations and assumptions however, criticize Foucault’s again, and communicate the unknown to known theory of power, which she alleges it is in itself gendered. Marome (2005) analysed Foucault’s work on gender observing that the theorist could not reconcile the fact that bodies are perceived



in the world as occupying a space within the binary of masculinity and femininity. He only provides a masculine account of sexuality.

This study on the other hand provides a feminine account of sexuality using the major characters, while drawing on some of the ideas propounded by Butler, among other critics. For instance, Butler reasons that there are two differences that must be taken into account; women as an object of masculine desire, and that women experience their bodies in different ways. Tolman contends that as they enter adolescent, many girls may lose an ability to speak about what they know, see, feel and experience evident in childhood as they come under cultural pressure to be “nice girls” and ultimately “good women” (2000: 55).

At adolescent, the energy needed for resistance to crushing conventions of femininity often begin to be siphoned off for maintaining cultural standards that stand between women and their empowerment. Kyalo (2010) uses Rita as an excellent example of an adolescent who subverts the patriarchal order. She refuses to be auctioned for marriage to Tumbo. She abuses the chief of being a demagogue and even musters the energy and courage of pushing the chief and temporarily sending him off balance, leaving the chief seething with anger (Kyalo, 2010: 30).

Feminism has seen women resist the cultural belief that whenever they need a favour, they can easily give in sex in return. It is worthwhile to note that the school girl in Gitumbi's *A New Dawn*, is not driven to have sex by economic deprivation as expected by the patriarchal society. Her sexuality is therefore at once celebratory and rebellious victory is celebrated because she finally does not give in to the male expectation. Imbuga, a Social realist truthfully weaves a parallel story displaying the male and female experiences of Kenyan and African politics in general. Since African feminism concerns

itself with a theoretical approach that takes into consideration not only issues relating to women but also men.

In *The Green Cross of Kafira* lends credence to African feminism interpretation. Some of Imbuga's males in *The Green Cross of Kafira* are in a sorry state, suffering just as much as the females or sometimes even more. Notice how Imbuga portrays Honourable Mwodi and Yuda. Somehow, the two seem to have agreed that in order to cleanse themselves, one would have to betray the other while the other would feign shock and disappointment. As they plot their evil ways of how to get Hon Mwodi back to power the people of Kafira cannot allow them. They declare Pastor Mgei as the sole presidential candidate in the newly formed Green Party of Kafira. The writer brings out the frustrations that Hon Mwodi and Yuda face when they cannot resist the will of the people.

#### **4.3.4 Women, Culture and Alienation**

The plays under study, when examined broadly, show that women are unjustly alienated from their immediate social environments. Mostly, they are outsiders in the cultures that frame their lives (traditional colonial and postcolonial) and this is the root of their oppression. In such a scenario, they are forced to occupy an in-between space between different cultures that demand a lot from them, while yielding very little for women in return. This is unlike what existed before colonialism. In those days, women may have been deprived of political power, but they were taken care of within the then existing economic structures. Hence, there was no double alienation as is the case today, in which cultural hybridity is common.

Hybridity, according to Munashe (2014), is a key concept for debates on culture and identity formation in post-independence Africa whose origin is attributed to Homi

Bhabha's elucidation of postcolonial theory. Bhabha defines hybridity as "a problematic of colonial representation that reverses the effect of colonial disavowal, so that the other denied knowledge enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority to challenge and resist dominant cultural power" (Munashe, 2014: 1). Bhabha's argument understandably makes the point that it practically impossible to erase or ignore the consequence of a meeting of two different cultures and that, often time, people may not acknowledge the fact that they have taken up practices that hitherto belonged to a culture widely considered alien.

Ilo (2013) argues that pure indigenous aesthetics were basically decimated from the moment Africa came into contact with western value systems and literary methods. Whatever came into being after that colonial experience whether aesthetic or polemical is, in his view, "post-indiginist" aesthetics or realism, and it represents a departure from a celebrated method in which African dramatists privileged their culture or indigenous traditions in foreign language plays in the spirit of nationalism. Ilo (2013) strongly feels that "the changing context of African literature demands corresponding alteration in the current critical and literary aesthetic practices." He further says:

An alternative paradigm is desirable because it is unsuitable to continue to apply the literary standards of anticolonial literature to writings of a different era. There has now arisen a new generation of African writers who cannot apply the same aesthetics as the older generation that had closer contact with the African linguistic and oral traditions and faced an obligation to tackle colonialism (2013: 87).

The point then is that each context gives birth to its own literature and even technique or, in the case of drama, dramaturgies. Ila (2016) further quotes Ojaide (2008) who seems to agree with him in as far as the concept of context begetting technique is concerned: "[today's writers] have become part of the worldwide phenomena of migration and

globalization with the attendant physical, sociocultural, psychic, and other forms of dislocation” (2008: 88). Ilo declares:

I have coined the term ‘techno-text’ to refer to post-indiginist work of African literature arising from the aesthetic ambiance of modern urban, global, technological culture, in contrast to creative writing mirroring the animist, the agrarian environment of Africa’s past echoed in folk tales, myths, praise songs, epic poetry, riddles and chants (2013: 89).

The ‘techno-text’ may as well be referred to as the hybrid text that has deployed a number of modern dramaturgies. Much as the content in the texts under analysis is local it may be observed that a number of formal and structural considerations made are neither indigenous nor traditional in character. A predominant non-indigenous strategy used to deliver the local content is the use women agency, which is crucial in the construction of female identities. In most of the texts, women agency is gradual and incremental. They are therefore bildungsroman. In Githumbi’s *A New Dawn* women grow from strength to strength. Mama Nuru, for instance, grows from a position a supportive housewife to that of an ideologue that is at the centre of change.

In Kyalo’s *The Hunter is Back*, all the women characters from Naomi, Rita and Maneno grow from positions of disadvantage to those of great influence. Maneno seems to have finally outgrown her stereotyped characterization as the village’s idler and rumour-monger to one who actually ushers in a new era of women leadership:

**Maneno:** Behold! We have a new chief!

**Sivu:** (*Rising*). What? Did I hear right? As far as I am concerned, I am the chief of Chama, and I am not new to power.

**Maneno:** I didn’t proclaim your newness.

**Sivu:** What did you mean then “new chief”? Or do you simply want to play hide and seek?

**Maneno:** You are too senior to play such a game. (*Facing the crowd*) Rita has arrived from town. (*There is clapping and ululation. The crowd goes amok; two men grip the seat of power. Another grabs the spear and a handful more descend upon the chief. They strip him of the kingly robes and the hat. They then exit, singing and clapping*).

In *The Return of Mgofu* Nora U is presented as standing shoulder to shoulder with her great father and even poised to take over from him.

**Nora U:** People of our motherland, I greet you and greet you again. (*There is wild clapping and ululation*) Thank you for the opportunity to address you. Last night, my father and I were asked to consider coming back here for another visit in the near future. It's not difficult to see why that request was made. From our short stay here, it has become obvious that your current leaders wish to break clean from the past. (*Crowd claps*). Most of your leaders want Mandika to return to oneness and to wholeness. My father is still strong, but quite old. I cannot, therefore, guarantee his return. However, I promise that I shall return to honour the invitation on behalf of my father. (*There is wild clapping and ululation*). Thank you. Thank you very much. (*There is more clapping. Nora takes her seat as Mgofu stands to address the gathering. He surveys the audience in silence for some time before he speaks*).

It may, finally, be observed that Hybridity is mainly about conveying local concerns with the help of western literary traditions and ideologies. From the foregoing analysis, it is clear that leadership is no longer a reserve of men, but something that is available to deserving men and women. In the section that follows, focus shifts to ideologies born of traditional thought systems and their impact on the playwrights' gender polemics.

#### **4.3.5 Dramaturgies of Traditional Folk Theater and Enhanced Freedom for Women**

In this section, focus shifts to the link between traditional dramatic strategies, which have found place in the dramaturgies employed by playwrights that are at the centre of the

present study, and how they are used to elevate women's standing. The use of elements drawn from the traditional folk theatre have evidently been deployed by the playwrights to capture contemporary feminist concerns in a manner that members of their audience may already be accustomed to, whether consciously or otherwise, given the popularity and near universal appreciation of oral traditions. The two outstanding traditional organizing elements are, as already pointed out above, didactic retributive ideology and an ideology modelled on myth poesy as delineated below.

One of the most notable features of the indigenous folk traditions is the focus on values and the conspicuous desire to safeguard order and justice. Such traditions consistently sought to socialize members of the community through inculcation of didactic themes as well as through a never wavering distinction between right and wrong. Through some form of poetic justice, right is ever rewarded and evil punished. In each of the four texts, the resolution comes with a restoration of an altered social equilibrium, some serving of justice or a promise of both. In all these, women characters are shown to be vehicles that convey the society's idea of morality and other values.

In Kyalo's *The Hunter is Back*, for instance, justice is served to the oppressive Chief of Chama, Sivu, in a manner so emphatic as to leave no doubt about evil eventually coming to some punishment:

**Sivu:** Shh! Shh! Wait a minute my people... what have you done to me?  
*(His pleas are swallowed by cries of the crowd as the people jeer and mock him. There is more confusion, name-calling and disorder as Ngumi enters, staggering. Rita, Naomi and Kito watch the unfolding events as the CURTAIN slowly closes)* (2010: 68).

Such an ending can only bear didactic implications given the sense of finality with which it is delivered. The Curtain closes once the victims regain their freedom whether by way

of ascendance to power or through a stern punishment handed to the main villain, such as Sivu in the above excerpt.

Similarly, In Imbuga's *The Green Cross of Kafira*, a state of equilibrium is restored and justice served when a former detainee, Pastor Mgei, defeats his tormentor, Chief of Chiefs, in an election and thus bringing the plundering of Kafira to an end. In all these instances women are either instrumental or benefitting one way or the other from the emerging order.

*(This is the swearing in ceremony. Several traditional troops can be heard approaching from different directions. The atmosphere is electric as the venue for the swearing in ceremony is prepared)*

**Mgei:** So help me God. *(Bishop Ben'sa takes the Bible from Mgei and hands him another Bible. Raising the second Bible)* so help me God. *(Tremendous and sustained applause for the president elect. Mgei steps forward to address the nation)*. My fellow countrymen, after consultations with our advisers and our intended partners in development, we have decided that this swearing-in ceremony should be different from what Kafirans are used to. Because the word protocol has no equivalent in each of our ten national languages, we shall ignore it henceforth. But since you do not ignore something you are used to without replacing it with something else, we have decided to replace the term protocol with the term common sense.... (55).

The same type of ending is present in Imbuga's other selected text *The Return of Mgofu* and Githumbi's *A New Dawn*. In *A New Dawn*, the hope for a new start is increasingly evident.

**Mama Nuru:** ...Can we roll back the cloud of negative ethnicity and together, bask under the sun that is our common heritage? These are the questions that are begging for answers, weighty questions that have been left unanswered for decades! Ultimately, I dare say, the answer lies with us—with you and me—and the decisions we make!

From the foregoing discussion and illustrations, it is indeed clear that didacticism and retribution are some of the traditional ideological strategies that the playwrights have used. In a scenario such as this, theatre then turns out to be functional or pragmatic; improvised to attain specific preconceived ends that offer lessons to the masses. Such an ideology is indeed familiar to audiences that are already familiar with traditional folk aesthetics and are therefore highly responsive to them.

#### **4.3.6 Orality and Gender**

As already indicated in the preceding section, one of the key influences on the dramaturgies employed by some of the playwrights under study is oral traditional aesthetics. Orality predominantly dwells in storytelling, the sheer joy of sharing a good story or rhyme/song as well as the practice of myth making. Okpewho (1983) sees myth not as a tale-type or genre, but as a quality: “that quality of fancy that which informs the creative and configurative powers of the human mind in varying degrees of intensity” (5). From this definition, it is then possible to have stories, poetry, and even drama modelled on myth. According to Okpewho, a tale is most mythic when it is “unbound to time or space, where the creative imagination is least fettered by the obligation to be like life” (5). The main argument fronted by Okpewho is that the more mythic a narrative is, the more it approaches a state of free intellectual play and the more it is able to engage in abstract philosophical speculation. This half-mystical half-real attribute is what underlies indigenous forms of drama and their character of ritualism.

Asagba (1985) considers the approach that recognizes the role of indigenous forms in the development of modern African drama as being evolutionary in nature and cognizant of “the peculiar nature of contemporary African drama and theatre as a product of two cultures—African oral traditions and European dramatic forms. Asagba posits, “An



attempt to discuss modern African drama using the modern criteria would not only create stereotypes but also a superficial understanding of it” (1985: 84). Asagba adds:

The evolutionary approach postulates that drama in Africa developed from man’s need to control and dominate the natural and unforeseen forces that co-inhabit the world around him. Through ritual propitiation and sacrifices, which evoke elements of magic and spiritual possession, man dominates and empathizes with the repressive and unpredictable forces of nature.... From the argument of the evolutionary theorists, folklore, legends, myths and history become sources for dramatic and theatrical presentation (1985, 85).

The traditional methods, therefore, have special effect when appropriated in modern drama and even a sense of control. The above elements of myth poesy are indeed evident in the texts by Imbuga selected for the present study. The conflict in Imbuga’s *The Return of Mgofu* clearly unfolds in a realm above the strictly realistic. Traditional African myths are indeed replete with fantastic scenes that involve characters who shuttle between the real physical world and the spiritual world. It is also true that in African oral traditions humans that have transitioned into spirits or have become ancestors are accorded even more respect than those who are still alive. The ancestors are also believed to have known the truth and are therefore considered wise. Imbuga’s *The Return of Mgofu* exploits the traditional wisdom in many ways: Thori and Thoriwa return from the world of the spirits armed with words of wisdom on how to avoid conflict. In their conversations, it is clear that ancestors hold each other with uttermost respect regardless of their gender. Thori and Thoriwa, who are husband and wife, interact and hold each other with exemplary decorum.

**Thori:** Yes, a woman pushing a man in a wheelchair. (*Yawns loudly*). I'm dog tired.

**Thoriwa:** Tired? Thori you haven't even pushed me half the distance I have pushed you.

**Thori:** That means we have overdone it today. We need to take a break. The rabbit saved her life by resting under the pawpaw tree.

**Thoriwa:** No. We've not overdone anything. One can't overdo a good deed. As

Messengers of those who went before us, we can't overdo anything.

**Thori:** So you really think we should stop here and talk to them?

**Thoriwa:** Where we come from, we are not used to walking long distances. That is why we are taking turns to ride in this machine. Give some mechanical advantage, you know.

**Thori:** That's right (*Pause*). You could say that Thoriwa and I fused seed of the pawpaw tree...

**Thoriwa:** (*Outburst*) Were! You and I were husband and wife. Don't forget that. Now, we are not. Maybe comrades in arms. (1-2)

Clearly, above is a dialogue between two individuals who are equally endowed intellectually. The import of their assignment is what brings them together. The scene alone, and especially the return from the world of the spirits, carries its own significance that ought to be discerned; that there is a lot to be gained when people seek for the spiritual and deeper understanding. In such circumstances, mutual respect even between women and men inevitably thrives. In *The Return of Mgofu*, most acts are a metaphor by themselves and metaphor may be said to be the main ideology behind traditional African art so that, as Nganyi has said, "nothing concerning art is self-evident" (2014: 47). The *Green Cross of Kafira* is even more surreal with the conflict unfolding, in most instances, in the form of mind games. It may then be summarily argued that Imbuga's is

more of a metaphorical ideology; a witty approach of delivering preconceived messages and lessons.

In other instances, characters exchange stories that mirror the overall intent and gendered lessons of the playwright. Traditionally, the ability to relate a good story is evidence of one's wisdom, ability to grasp complex matters, and ultimately, a sign of leadership qualities. The story that Mama Nuru, in *A New Dawn*, narrates not only reflects on her wit and wisdom but also a very clear understanding of why change is necessary:

**Mama Nuru:** There once lived a hunter. He was renowned for his hunting skills and prowess. One day as he was hunting, he came across a beautiful egg. He thought to himself: "this egg is strange. It is not an ostrich egg, and not a guinea fowl egg. I will carry it and keep it, so I see it hatch." The hunter took the egg home. He covered it in warm feathers, till one day it hatched and Alas! Forth came a most shiny and interesting being. It had two heads and two mouths. The scales on the little thing's body looked like the rainbow, beautiful and smooth. "A-ha!" said the hunter. "This must be the secret to happiness! The scales look like those of a god, and who has beheld such an array of colour? This being will become my means to better days." And the hunter fed the little beast, and it grew fat and long. My people, do you want to know what happened?

**Crowd:** Tell us!

**Mama Nuru:** Slowly but surely, the beast grew into a huge and uncontrollable creature. It ate the hunter's chickens, goats and cattle. The hunter became poorer and more desolate as the beast grew more vicious and greedy.... When all that the neighbours had was over, the beast turned on the hunter's children. When the hunter saw this, he was extremely shaken, and he cut the beast into pieces, but alas! It was too late for him. The beast had already gobbled down the most precious gift: his own children! My people, do I still have your ears?

**Crowd:** Yaaa! (*Murmuring expressions of shock*) (53-4)

It is notable how Mama Nuru wins the hearts of her audience using a moving story. Having been won over, the people's support for Mama Nuru follows almost automatically. Her charisma and gift of oratory are, in a sense, her most credible asset.

It is also apparent those that are for change not only ooze with epithets of wisdom but clearly belong to a class of their own. Cases in point are Nehemiah and Mama Regina in Gitumbi's *A New Dawn*.

**Nehemiah:** that is why we are preaching unity. Every clan and every tribe needs each other in order to thrive. There is beauty in diversity. My weakness is your strength, and so together we achieve more! Or shall we stand aloof and wither?

**Crowd:** No-o-oh! (*Murmuring accompanies the reply*)

**Nehemiah:** I hear murmuring amongst us. I know some of you are wondering, Isn't this Nehemiah? Isn't he the one who told us to reject outsiders? I will answer you. When a child falls in the mud, we tell the child to rise up and go clean the dirt. We cannot continue to sulk over past mistakes. Yesterday's wisdom is folly today, and today's folly, wisdom tomorrow. Yesterday we thought we were wise, and we turned against our brothers and sisters with machetes and matchboxes. Today, our children stare blankly at us, their eyes accusing us of martyring their playmates, or displacing them for life. We burnt down granaries full of food, and laid bare hitherto productive land. What wisdom was there in that? My people we say NO! to divisive politics and ethnic chauvinism. That is the gospel we bring you today. A gospel of unity, tolerance and understanding....  
(50)

With such a conducive environment, everyone succeeds their gender, tribe or creed notwithstanding. On her part, Mama Regina delivers the harm John Baptista has been doing young girls of the village in rich and moving imagery:

**Mama Regina:** Wait a minute! Some things do not require sleeping over! I can confidently say that I now know why Juliana dropped out of school!

Poor girl, she could not allow (*sarcastically*) “our dear John Baptista” to plant his evil seed in her young garden in exchange of school fees. To think I voted for the wretched crook. (96)

With such use of oral resources, the playwrights achieve two main things: first, they manage to make clear the illustrative and metaphorical nature of their dramatized narratives. Similarly, the playwrights manage to make such attractive qualities as wisdom, leadership, wit and experience to both women and men and, thus, significantly work towards gender parity.

#### **4.3.7 Conclusion**

This chapter sought to explore how the playwrights under study locate women in the dynamics of national histories and the ideological implications of the dramaturgies used. The chapter has shown that women play a significant role in the making of national and literary histories. This is especially in subverting political and cultural structures that rely on patriarchy for sustenance. Whether one focuses on oral histories that are characterized by an aesthetic of inclusivity, or on the plain anthropological forms of culture, it is plain that women navigate across these borders as alienated subjects of a changing tradition.

The chapter eventually argues that the playwrights selected for this study carefully employ specific dramaturgies to challenge the mainstream institutions of politics and power to make women more likely to access public sphere. At the same time, the chapter also argues that, while women have for long been marginalized, they use creative strategies to deflate the powers of patriarchy, and to move close to the metaphorical centres of power. This is why, as the chapter further argues, women become more audible and articulate as the plays tend to the end and thus assert their roles in the making of history and reconfiguring dominant ideologies. Chapter Four, to which we now turn, focuses on the relationship between gender and dramaturgy in the selected plays.

## **4.4 Style and Feminist Dramaturgies**

### **4.4.1 Aesthetics of the Traditional Folk Performance**

Aesthetics of the traditional folk performance are technical aspects of drama, which have their roots in traditional African theatre practices. Playwrights selected for the present study might draw significantly from the aesthetics of the traditional folk performance. In describing traditional folk performance practices, which he refers to as folkism, Okpadah (2018) terms them “the tendency to base literary plays on the history, culture and concerns of the folk and to compose and perform them in accordance with African conventions of composing and performing the folktales.” Okpadah further describes the traditional African theatre as “a festival theatre” which “leans heavily on folklorist techniques based on the aesthetics of the storytelling theatre.

Okpadah then quotes Anigala who articulates the eight laws of “poetics of aesthetic response” (2008: 42). The law of opening, the law of joint performance, the law of creativity, free enactment and responsibility, the law of the urge to judge, the law of protest against suspense, the law of expression of emotions, the law of ego projection and the law of closing. Indeed the above elements of folk theatre practices are quite evident in all the texts under study.

### **4.4.2 Use of Narratological Strategies**

In this section, the study focuses on narratology and its impact on advancing a feminist agenda. Narration is a communicative act in which a chain of happenings is meaningfully structured and transmitted in a particular medium and from a particular point of view. Narratological approaches in drama routinely focus on choric speeches, prologues, messengers, onstage audiences, and commentators.

It also focus on instances of character narration, epic narrators, frame narratives, embedded narratives, monologues, soliloquies, asides, audience address, self-reflective, meta-dramatic comments, and on self-referential techniques such as the play-within-play. Other studies, for example Abbott (2011), also suggest a distinction between mimetic diegetic narratively, and show possibilities of combining the analysis of narration in drama with performative approaches to the study of discourse in narrative fiction (Fludernik, 2008).

In *The Green Cross of Kafira*, Imbuga uses Sikia Macho to adopt narration as a style for knitting together meaningful happenings in a sequential way. This is to help the audience/reader to appreciate the main thematic concerns fully. At the beginning of the play, Sikia Macho introduces us to who he is as a person so that we get to buy his point of view to the story, *The Green Cross of Kafira*. In his name, he treats us to humour as he gives its meaning – him being an observer of the on-goings in Kafira. Perhaps Sikia Macho intends to pass himself as an unreliable narrator, having been born in a family line of great storytellers. He wins the audience's trust as a qualified voice to tell the history of the public of Kafira.

Imbuga presents his play as one concerned with the period in time under the leadership of the Chief of Chiefs, which may be a subtle reference to postcolonial African dictators. He introduces the temporal setting of the play as a moment of rhetoric and silence. By Sikia Macho's description, the audiences' curiosity is heightened to capture the intrigues of the regime in question. In his second appearance on stage, Sikia Macho summarizes the chilling events that happened in Kafira. By explaining how the new party was formed against government's wishes, leading to the firing of the registrar, the play dramatizes the dictatorial tendencies of postcolonial African states.

At the same time, Imbuga creates a twist in his story. Having treated his audiences to politically instigated detentions of Kafira citizens, Imbuga shifts our attention to the helplessness of the government. The government loses vital proponents of the regime to resignations, and is faced with a crisis because citizens' call for the release of Pastor Mgei. The narrator's appearances at the end of Act Two, Scene One, offers a summary that help compress the time of the play. In his speech, therefore, the protagonist portrays a make-believe element of theatre in the mind of the audience.

Sikia Macho's narration at this point strengthens the thematic concerns of disillusionment and oppression that the playwright intends to express in the next scene, entitled 'Dream of Reality'. Sikia Macho takes the stage at the end of Act Two Scene Two, as an omnipresent narrator revealing the secrets that transpired between Honourable Mwadi, Honourable Yuda, and Mama Mgei. Imbuga, in this, uses Sikia macho to fill the gaps left by the enactment of the play on stage so as to sustain the plot development. In his revelation, Sikia Macho ushers in the final stage of the play, which yields to an appropriate denouement. Sikia Macho opens up a new chapter of elections to do away with the dictatorial regime of Chief of Chiefs; he counters the expressions of helplessness by the detainees in the preceding scene by offering a jubilant electorate, charged to bring forth a new leader of Kafika under the Green Party of Kafira.

Artistically, Imbuga uses Sikio Macho to heighten the plot and to communicate evidence of the resolve of Kafirans on that voting day. On this particular day, people refused to sleep because they wanted to stand up and be counted. This is because after the tallying, as the audience's anxiety grew, Sikia Macho informs the audience of the awaited outcome – The Green Party of Kafira wins. Thus, Imbuga fronts the rebirth of a nation of Kafira under new leadership with a new ray of hope. In the words of Sikia Macho, "...To tell you the truth, I can't wait for tomorrow". As the play progresses, the playwright



seals it with the narration of Sikia Macho amicably as he had used him at the start of the play.

Through the stream of consciousness technique, we are treated to the resolution of the main conflict in the play. Sikia Macho makes a summative commentary on the successful transition witnessed by Kafira people. As a voice of the citizens of Kafira, the narrator applauds the current state and projects a better tomorrow to the nation. Thus, Sikia Macho rejuvenates the hope of the once oppressed nation: “such reflections that we devise the energy to live on and on.” In all, Imbuga uses the narrator, Sikia Macho, to successfully fill any gaps that could have arisen in the process of enactments by other characters. He artistically weaves the events of Kafira by having action, dialogue, monologue and the stage directions linked up by the narrator to achieve the desired unity of the play.

#### **4.4.3 Mgofu and Cultural Identities**

This is an example of the use of African symbolic names as aspects of character symbolism used in the plays. Names that carry with them a lot of cultural weight are used to communicate the playwright’s intended meaning, especially allusion to a community’s history and ancestry that in turn point at definite cultural identities. The name Mgofu means old and wise one in Kimaragoli, a linguistic and cultural community that dominantly inhabits parts of Western Kenya.

Mgofu is the great seer in Imbuga’s play *The Return of Mgofu*. Mgofu is a symbol of change and wisdom. He is the one who predicts the first wave of madness to afflict society, and later and the one who advises people on how to avoid a similar catastrophe. The use of madness symbolizes the entrenchment of the abnormal in society. In this way,

Mgofu's counsel essentially points at the need to restore normalcy and social order in a society affected by subversion of the norms.

Mgofu represents wisdom to retain usable pasts while embracing the good in the present times, which is how he marries Norah Ulivaho, a highly educated woman of the present times. By this symbolic marriage, Imbuga implies that the past and the present are not mutually exclusive; that both can co-exist in a harmonious and regenerating union. By using the character of Mgofu, the playwright suggests that feminism and women's empowerment stand higher chances of success when they view progressive men and useful aspects of culture as allies rather than adversaries. Mgofu also symbolizes the past and the traditional, while Norah symbolizes the present and the modern. A marriage of the two therefore is critical in showing that contemporary identities and progress may be achieved combining the good, whether from men or tradition, or from women in the present times. That, according to Imbuga, is the surest way of supporting women's advancement. Such progress, by inference, need not be at the expense of men.

#### **4.4.4 Norah and Taabu as Embodiments of the Past and Present**

Ulivaho means 'the one who will be there', in Kimaragoli dialect of the Luhya community. Nora exceeds societal expectations and acquires higher education at the University of Southampton, studying international relations. She is a symbol of progressive change in society. She seems to suggest that in future good leadership will come from women.

Taabu is Rita's mother. Taabu is a Kiswahili word meaning problems. Taabu symbolizes the problems that most women face in society. She thinks that she is lucky since she is in a stable marriage, but her spouse causes her many problems. At first, she really enjoys life because the man is rich and gives her money, which has been looking for. Later the

man introduces her to drugs, rapes her and disappears after infecting her with H.I.V and Aids. Taabu, by suffering from a clinical disease that wears out her body, becomes an allegory of the erosion of women's aspirations.

#### **4.4.5 Symbolism in Postcolonial Kenyan Drama**

Symbolism is one of the stylistic devices that writers utilize in their works of art. Symbolism is used to convey information indirectly. Chadwick (1971) defines symbolism as “the art of expressing ideas and emotions not by describing them directly, nor by defining them through overt comparisons with concrete images, but by suggesting what these ideas and emotions are, by recreating them in the mind of the reader through the use of unexplainable symbols” (p. 2). In other words, a symbol stands for something whose meaning lies elsewhere. In the selected literary texts, symbolism manifests itself in two forms; first, character symbolism and, second, object and animal symbolism.

Veronica symbolizes the subaltern because she is marginalized on many accounts, including her womanhood and lack of education. She is a symbol of black female child who is suppressed by the dominant patriarchal society. She is a muted subaltern who is a victim of patriarchy. Most of the time, she does not understand concepts, especially those dealing with money. In one instance, she does not understand how money can be multiplied. As the excerpt below shows, Veronica's alienation from contemporary knowledge systems including education limit her capacity for self-expression to the extent that she uses an allusion to explain to Nehemiah how, in her view, money cannot be multiplied.

**Veronica:** Listen to what? Tell me, who can make money multiply? The only one I know who made anything multiply was Jesus remember? He had five loaves ... how many fish were they? And he fed five thousand men. But again, that was a miracle, not multiplication (Gitumbi, 2012: 19).

On her part, Rita is used in the play *The Hunter is Back* as a symbol of hope amidst despair and suffering among the women. Tumbo takes advantage of the patriarchal customs and his wealth to dominate Rita against her will. He even goes ahead to force himself on the young girl and attempts to make her his second wife. In this way, Tumbo thwarts the hopes of other people because of his greed. He also desecrates the purity of the customs and the land. However, Rita is strong-willed and bold enough to stand her ground. She completely shuns Tumbo and his lecherous ways, thus exposing his moral depravity. At the end of the play, she escapes unscathed. The rescue of Rita from being a second wife symbolizes hope for women in Chamaland. They can begin to raise their voices and resist the age-old traditions of such as polygamy.

It is also critical that Rita is also used as a symbol of resilience. Despite her mother being a prostitute who eventually gets infected with H.I.V, Rita takes care of her singlehandedly. She overcomes these challenges and even goes ahead to acquire some education in computer science. Because of her resilient character, she leads in bringing positive change in Chamaland.

In the play *The Hunter is Back*, the chief talks about how he is “serving his society without fear or favour” (p. 37) during Rita’s wedding to Mzee Tumbo. This is ironic because the chief is unfair in his leadership. He fails to help Rita when she seeks help from him; instead, he throws her out of his house. The chief’s leadership is characterised by favouritism. He accepts bribes from his cronies in order to make favourable decisions. Chamaland looks up to the chief to improve their living conditions. Ironically, he is the parasite that is stealing from the community. He demands bribes in order to grant justice. Rita, the girl who becomes chief, becomes the saviour of the community and presides over cases without taking bribes like her predecessor.

It is ironic that Kito, the chief's faithful worker, suddenly walks out on him and joins hands with Rita in condemning the chief's leadership. The chief, out of frustration, describes Kito as ungrateful. The chief used to despise Kito when there was no one to challenge his rule. Kito walks out in protest because of the chief's failure to pay his wages. The chief, a rich man, does not pay his servant his dues. Although he is a Christian, he does not follow the teachings of the Bible. He is mean, demeaning and disrespectful to people, especially women. He does not think a woman like Rita should argue with him.

Ngumi on the other hand is hell-bent on marrying off Rita because he expects to get rich from her dowry. He had even started budgeting for the money. Ngumi does not get any money. Naomi, Ngumi's wife, does not allow customs that harass women to prevail; so she decides to help Rita against her husband's wishes. This is ironical because in her society, a wife is expected to support her husband. Naomi indeed goes to the extent of mocking her husband and Mzee Tumbo as hyenas as she rescues Rita from the forced marriage. Nevertheless, she does not leave her husband, even when she discovers he is unable to sire children because of his excessive indulgence in alcoholism. She chooses to stay on in her failed marriage yet she helps Rita escape from an arranged marriage.

Nuru is a Kiswahili word meaning light, although it is a word whose extended meaning can include visionary. Mama Nuru as a woman participates in political election campaigns, encountering many challenges in the process, but ultimately succeeding because she does not give up. Her victory opens the eyes of both men and women to the possibilities of success where there is a visionary will. Mama Nuru's success brings hope to the women in her society that one day they are going to overcome patriarchal impediments that slow exclude women from central positions of political leadership.

Maneno is one of the characters in the *Hunter is Back*. Maneno is also a Kiswahili word meaning charlatantry or idle talk, and has been appropriately used to name a character with the dubious reputation of being a rumourmonger. In the play, Maneno represents the idle women in society who like spreading rumours. On the other hand, Tumbo – a name popularized in Imbuga's *Betrayal in the City* – means stomach – which is itself colloquial for greed and selfishness. In the play under study, Tumbo – like his namesake in *Betrayal in the City* – is a wealthy man in the village who acquires his wealth through unscrupulous means and who extend their capricious manners in their dealings with young girls. Tumbo takes advantage of his wealth to try to impose himself on Rita.

#### **4.4.6 The Symbolism of Characters and Events**

Symbolism is a technique that many writers use to relate a particular thing to a general idea. In the symbolism of characters and events, events, objects and animals are used as symbols of certain ideas, ideals, people and things in the real world. This is because from the tradition of orality, certain animals and plants are associated with different values and attributes that may be admirable or otherwise useful for didactic purposes. For example, the seed that Ngumi plants is symbolic of hope and of the role of women as nurturers.

In *The Hunter is Back* Ngumi is given a small seed while in a dream. Ngumi wonders what to do with the seed because while some voices advise him to him to plant it, others tell him to throw it away. He plants the seed and it grows into the largest tree in Chamaland. In a way, the small seed symbolizes Rita who began as an anonymous and vulnerable member of the society, but who later on grows and becomes the senior-most person in Chamaland. She is crowned the chief of the area and initiates various development projects in the land for the benefit of all (Kyalo, 2010: 20).

Dances have been used in the selected texts as symbols representing different but related issues. For instance when Sikio Macho in Imbuga's *The Green Cross of Kafira*, enters the stage at first, he does a jig before surveying the audience. Through the dance, he gets the attention of the audience as they contemplate on the reason behind his dancing. The dance creates a focus on him, which turns out to be apt for his self-introduction.

Act Two, Scene Three opens with the troupe rehearsing for a dance to be performed at the swearing in ceremony of Pastor Mgei, the president-elect. The wonderful performance makes Mama Mgei and the choreographer to give them a standing ovation. Imbuga creates this dance to communicate the greater desire of binding together the rejects in *The Green Cross of Kafira* by Imbuga. As a team, the steps made bind them, each step towards the attainment of a desired life, a life synchronized that all get what they long for. As they climax the dance, so does life get its meaning and sense? At last, through dance, they share the joy and happiness longed for in Kafira. Ultimately, all rejects make Mama Mgei happy as she accords them a standing ovation. They can now pace together, dancing to the same rhythm of political, social and religious life of Kafira people. When the dance ends, the people find their freedom from detention. The president elect promises to make them the state visitors, where they will be hosted probably in a high-end hotel to have a feel of the good life of Kafira.

In these ways, Imbuga uses dances to symbolize ideals of togetherness and unity that should bind Kafira people who generally reject state dictatorship, oppression and betrayal. The new dances symbolize ideological shifts that make for new values of liberty, freedom, equality and oneness. In the words of the choreographer, “[y]ou may go and prepare for departure”, meaning they need to dance to the new dawn. A time has come when the troupe should set off to a new location since a new beginning is at hand.

In all these, Imbuga has amicably used the dance to give an exciting and memorable denouement of his play.

In *The Hunter is Back*, symbolism manifests itself right from the title that carries with it some form of suspense. Using the motif of hunting, the playwright shows how women succeed despite the many challenges that they face in their lives. The women – and some men – are cast as alternately hunters and the hunted, and their survival therefore shows their ingenuity in defeating the impediments of patriarchy.

Indeed, one wonders who the hunter is and who is the hunted. As the play unfolds, it turns out that both the hunter and the hunted are human beings. The chief refers to Mzee Tumbo as a hunter who is back as revealed from the latter's story narrated to the chief. Coincidentally, both Mzee Tumbo and the chief are hunters, hunting the same 'preys', namely the chieftom as well as Rita, the beautiful girl. As such, the two represent forms of negative power.

Ironically, Rita in *The Hunter is Back*, in her own right, succeeds even though she is among the most hunted of characters. The playwright presents her a person one who has been through many unpleasant experiences in her struggles for a bright future. She becomes the hunter of men as she tries to work towards the attainment of her self-fulfilment. Ironically, she does not know that in her quest for self-fulfilment, she is playing into the hands of her hunters, the likes of Mzee Tumbo and the chief. It is, therefore, not surprising that she easily falls into the snares of Mzee Tumbo and eventually is on the verge of being married off to the old man, against her desires and wishes. The other hunters such as the chief and Ngumi turn their backs on her. The chief, who is the head of the people, would be expected to fight for her rights, but he does not use his power to rescue her from her predicament.



Similarly, Ngumi, who is supposed to take care of Rita as her benefactor, equally ignores her plight and even becomes an accomplice in her suffering. Finally, Rita's escape from the snare comes in the form of a scholarship from a care centre to facilitate her further studies. It is through her studies that she attains self-actualization after which Rita, the new hunter, returns to fight for her rights. She opens the eyes of the society and now starts to fight for the rights of the illiterate members of her community. She opposes the powers that were ruthless to her and even becomes the chief of Chamaland.

#### **4.4.7 The Use of Soliloquy in Voicing Women**

The playwrights have also used soliloquys as a way of allowing women to articulate their experiences. A soliloquy is an act of speaking one's thoughts aloud when by oneself or regardless of any hearers, especially by a character in a play. A soliloquy gives the impression of the audience overhearing a character's thoughts. Gitumbi uses soliloquy to show us the place of a woman in her play. Veronica's role is to stay at home and take care of the house, while her husband spends most of his time with friends and does not bring much on the table. At the beginning of Gitumbi's *A New Dawn*, as Veronica puts her things in order, she uses the following soliloquy:

Now, now, where does this go? Ah, this drawer here. What about this? Here...Yeah! In you go (*hesitates, looks at the mug more keenly*). These mugs are also giving way, all chipped and cracked at the edges. And they have not even served for long. When did I buy them...eh... Yeah, January? That means four months? Yes, four months. Times have changed. Every producer is busy scheming on how to take an extra coin for us, and where do we turn? Every one of them is squeezing out the last coin from the poor! Only God can save us. I tell you, that's where our hope lies (Gitumbi, 2012: 29).

Here, Veronica is shown as a thinker and a person who asks questions. This is something that is inconsistent with the traditional expectation of women as silent and compliant individuals in society.

Nehemiah also uses a soliloquy.

**Nehemia:** (*Who is now seated at a computer, scanning through a project proposal meticulously, murmurs to himself as he peruses / appraises the proposal*) Mmm...materials-iron rods, bricks, etc. Total cost, four million shillings. Labour...Eight hundred thousand... (*Thinking, simultaneously thumbing the table*) Let's see ... how did they arrive at these figures? Total project cost...ten million...Ten million? A round figure for a school toilet block, A? I...smell...a rat here...Someone getting cleverer than I am or... (*Scratches his head as he speaks*) Have they learnt to play the game smarter than me? These estimates must go down by at least a half ... This project must absorb part of the cost of (*dreamily*) my girl, Julie's new house (2012: 80).

A critical point about this excerpt is in its insinuation of women as objects to be impressed. The line "my girl, Julie's new house" shows that, despite other circumstances of the relationship between Nehemiah and Julie, the latter is soon getting a new house. This will boost her living conditions.

Rita also uses soliloquy to show her awe of what the city does to individuals who were previously in the villages. She says, "[w]hen the village comes to the city you can expect tales." This hints at the ambivalence of the space of the city. On the one hand, the city allows greater freedoms for women who had been constrained in the village set-ups, while on the other it mediates a moral degeneration that forces newcomers to embrace an alien lifestyle. Rita is excited by Maneno's stories of coming and reaching the city. It portrays how villages have been underdevelopment due to ignorance, lack of education corruption and other reasons. Maneno sarcastically wonders, "Trust the teacher to know

all!” implying that since Rita happens to be another class, she thinks she knows everything about every gadget in her house. She continues to be mesmerized by how Rita, a supposed village girl, came to know and understand city things so well. In another sarcastic remark, she thinks, “he must be the prophesied wonder worker. Anyway, the pupil will never teach the teacher!” By this Maneno feels that though Rita seems so versatile in manipulating technological gadgets, there are other aspects of life in which Maneno is more knowledgeable.

#### **4.4.8 Use of Choral Elements**

Choral elements are used to symbolise the ideal of inclusivity of diverse attributes for the common good. In the plays under study, this aspect can be seen in the idea that both men and women have something to contribute to society. It also means that together the expressions and ideas of both men and women may be more appealing as opposed to when they are separate from each other. As a dramaturgy, a chorus or music is a very vital element of a play. Lighting and sound, like scenery and costumes, are means to an end: they implement the artistic and aesthetic aspects of a production. According to Wilson, quoted in Schroeder et al. (1998), sound interacts with other elements of theatre and contributes to the overall experience.

Related to this, music is also key in the capturing of mood of the play and audience, and in enhancing the thematic concerns of the playwright. Thus, we suggest that Imbuga introduces songs by using musical instruments. Songs in this play are used to tell the story and express the different emotions of the characters. Veronica sings a song ‘What a friend we have in Jesus’ to comfort herself from the hard economic times that they are facing (Gitumbi, 2012: 1). The playwright also uses music during the meeting for the movement for change and democracy when the people sing to the leaders a song.

**Soloist:** (*Makes towards the Dias, beckoning her singers. As they sing, the guests will walk in, among them Serah and Numa, and other youth. Ululations from the crowd*)

Yote yawezekana na MCD...

**All:** Yote yawezekana na MCD, yote yawezekana na MCD....  
(*The singing is accompanied by drumming and general excitement. Singers exit stage*) (Gitumbi, 2012: 46).

As the MC tells the crowd to sing on, he prepares to thank them for their response. The ‘yote yawezekana’ (All is Possible in English) song is used to show the zeal and hope that the people have with the formation of the new party. Further, there is use of music by the youth.

### **Dark January**

Were you there that dark January  
When the New Year day was marred by anarchy  
When neighbour turned against neighbour  
And none to love or reason would labour?  
Did you watch in awe as fruit and farm were destroyed?  
Or do you resign yourself to mediocrity and cowardly compromise?  
(Gitumbi, 2012: 58- 60).

This chorus by the youth is used to bring out reconciliation among the people. It encourages both men and women to reconcile in order to bring out an all-inclusive society.

Use within song is so handy a style to Imbuga in *The Green Cross of Kafira*. As the curtains are about to open, we hear instruments playing with Sikia Macho singing. Though not clear of the lyrics of the song, but this is a style employed by folklorists purposing to pass a key message through the lyrics of the song or to create the desired mood using the song. The song Sikia Macho that sings perhaps is a signal of the

proWess, he as a character has in oratory. It is after his singing that he starts to introduce himself as a very seasoned narrator whose skill was passed naturally to him through inheritance.

At the beginning of Scene 2, Imbuga introduces to us Bishop Bensa and Sister Leah rehearsing a new song. The playwright at this point reveals the lyrics intentionally so that the audience links the message to the plot for appropriate interpretation. In the song, is a clarion call fronted by Bishop Ben'sa, a call to freedom and Karifas hope into the future. The song works well to mobilize the oppressed Kafiran's to take a step towards an ideal nation.

**Bensa:** (*Singing in a low tone*)

Welcome to the Green Cross

Where all members are free

Welcome to the Green Cross

Cradle of our future

Welcome to Green Cross

We sing and pray together (Imbuga, 2013: 8)

To heighten the impact, Bishop changes the words of the song together with Sister Leah. As though mending the Kafiran constitution, they both feel contented that the moment for action is then not in their future. According to them Cradle of the future sounds a bit flat because they consider this as their time and so they change the song to cradle of our times. Thus the new song goes:

**Bens'a:** (*Both sing*) Welcome to the Green Cross

Where all members are free

Cradle of our times

Welcome to the Green Cross

Where all members are free

Welcome to the Green Cross

We sing and pray together (Imbuga, 2013: 9).

Thus, Imbuga expressly feeds his audience with need for a people of any nation to go for their rights without any procrastination. The song acts to tell the story of Kafira. That there are a people seeking solace with the wrong partner; that the government for the people is not offering equal share of freedom to all, as captured in the phrase “welcome to the Green Cross; where all members are free.”

Through the song, Imbuga prepares his audience for the invitation accorded to all, including government officials, by the clergy to forge the way forth for Kafira. On singing, enters Muda and Mwodi, both government officials who table a discussion with Bishop Ben’sa on the detentions without trial, and several abductions being meted on Kafira people. The song is an invitation for the citizens to rise up and unite for change.

#### **4.4.9 Monologue**

A monologue is a speech given by one character who is speaking to other characters on stage. Kyalo’s commences with Naomi’s monologue she talks to herself loudly about life miseries and the scorn she has already undergone in the course of marriage. The monologue seems to explain the many challenges faced by women in society, some members of society and how some members do not seem to appreciate the immensity of women’s suffering within marriage, which they have to endure in the name of keeping traditions. Adonija also uses a monologue to show how drama and the media can be used as a tool for women empowerment:

**Adonija:** Thank you for giving me this chance Mister Chairman. As you all know, my uncle is the best blacksmith around here. With your permission I could ask him to make enough bows and arrows for the job. (*Listens to others before he speaks*) I beg your pardon, yes you are right, he will need funding. (*Pause*) Fifty thousand will not be enough for the weapons, Mister Chairman. I suggest one hundred and fifty. (*Listens to others*) Thank you very much Mister Chairman. Yes...you can’t fight

with us...come for the spoils...yes (*he is about to go back to normal sleep when he suddenly relaxes into sleep talk*). That is a very good idea, the radio would be an effective tool (Listens to other voices). No! No! No! Not national. We must go local. I mean vernacular mother tongue. Yes, mother tongue, vernacular. (*He relapses into sleep*) (Imbuga, 2013: 25).

In this monologue, Imbuga strategically reifies Adonija in order to focus on the audience on the critical moment when the dramatic world illuminates the political shenanigans of the outside world. Thus, Imbuga appeals to the audiences' historical unconscious in which politicians, to meet their own ends, ferment the national histories of ethnic and other forms of sectarian strife. In this way, therefore, the monologue expands the audience from those in the auditorium – or individual readers – to the general publics that can relate to the politics of hatred that defined national political competitions, peaking at the 2007/08 Post Elections Violence. Imbuga also uses a monologue in his other play *The Green Cross of Kafira*. The monologue is enacted by Sikia Macho and it explains how women finally became liberated in the Kafiran society.

**Sikia Macho:** The consultations that were held between the two officials from Serikali and councilor mama Mgei were not usual arm twisting games that the Kafirans had long been used to. Exactly two weeks following thus consultations something totally unexpected happened in Kafira. The media carried various stories about the registration of a new political party called the Gender party of Kafira (GPK). Following that revelation, there were spontaneous street celebrations through out Kafira. The following day the registrar of political parties was dismissed [...] By this time the only ember left in the fire place of the ruling regime was to eat humble pie and release both Madam Arasa. Arasa and pastor Mgei. This became the clarion call of most Kafirans. It was loud and clear (Imbuga, 2013: 40).

#### **4.4.10 Play Within a Play**

In Kyalo's *The Hunter is Back*, there is use of play within play when Rita remembers her mother's words while on her death bed. There is a ghostly whistling sound off stage and Maneno, together with Rita, hop about as fear grips their hearts. Suddenly the scene changes, Rita's beautiful room vanishes and Taabu, who is already dead, appears on stage, sleeping on the same raffia mat. Rita, then aged thirteen, is kneeling beside her mother. Taabu struggles to a sitting position and faces her daughter. From there, the conversation that is rehashed happened a long time ago between the two. From this play within a play, we discover various truths and facts in the entire play.

The play within a play also highlights Rita's predicament when she was almost married off. Rita says, "...that morning as you prepared your throats to dine and wine ...". We are told at the point, "wedding drums beat softly offstage and the bridal song in Scene Three is hummed to the volume level of the drumbeats." From the play within a play, we know how Rita was saved and taken to an organization that champions the causes of disadvantaged girls.

There is another play within a play when Naomi waits for Rita, because she engages in make-believe activities while waiting. For instance, she feels like drums beating from a far distance, she also dances off only to discover that the drums had stopped a while ago. The way Naomi gets to rescue Rita through the window is also a play within a play because we get a vivid picture of the scenario even though it is not on stage. Gitumbi, in his play, also uses this device to show Nehemiah and Jeremiah acting as if Nehemiah is campaigning for his preferred candidate, John Baptisa.

Similarly, to clearly capture the plot sequence, Imbuga initially employs the use of a play within a play in *The Return of Mgofu*. In the scene, the character mimes; two human



creatures with animal-like horns protruding from the neck with a rope attached to the totem on the opposite ends of the stage, also demonstrate the appropriate set for play within a play. In an effort to get them to the totem, they both miss them. One character sleeps worn out by the struggle, he sleepwalks, tries to remove its horns, remove the rope from his neck and both rush to the nearest totem and fight for it. Once each has a totem in the hand, they shake hands, embrace and dance on stage. This scene presents to the audience the premonition of the unity and peace to be borne by the land if the second madness is amicably handled. All these instances capture differently how women view themselves and are viewed by society generally. They also hint at the efforts that women make to build social relationships among themselves.

However, the dramaturgy of play within a play has also been used to show cases where women fall for patriarchal logics. For example, Gitumbi in *A New Dawn* generally uses a play within a play to illustrate how women are marginalized and considered the subaltern in some communities. However, in Gitumbi's play, women call Mheshimiwa Baptisa their 'son' and he is considered one of their own while Mama Nuhu, the woman who wants to participate in politics, is considered a stranger. Nehemiah enacts the role of the lead campaigner for John Baptisa while the family takes the roles of various citizens and they do it at one end of the room.

**Nehemia:** Hara-a-a-mbee!

**All:** Hee!

**Nehemia:** My brothers and sisters, I am here on behalf of Mheshimiwa John Baptisa, our outgoing and incoming Member of Parliament for life. Harambee!

**All:** Hee!

**Nehemia:** My fellow citizens, we are kinsmen all belonging to one house! I speak to you as a brother who has travelled far and wide! In other places they vote their own! They stand by their very

own! (In a lower tone) Are we going to give our vote to an outsider?

**All:** (*Very loudly*) No-oo (Gitumbi, 2012: 42).

This shows that gender intersects with other variables in influencing women's access to the public sphere. The play within a play also illustrates that Kenyan Women as represented in the play continue to suffer due to various factors. These include patriarchal socialization that we already discussed. This is evident not only in African societies, but also in Kenyan drama. Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) captures this interconnection and goes ahead to pose the question: "Are African women voiceless or do we fail to look for voices where we may find them, in the sites and forms which these voices are uttered?" "The above illustration clearly shows that Kenyan women such as Mama Nuhu in *A New Dawn* are not voiceless; the society has failed to give them a chance to express themselves and instead considers them strangers who should not be given an opportunity to rule.

#### **4.4.11 The Use of Humour in Constructing Gender Identities**

Humour is an aesthetic strategy that the playwrights under study embrace in their works. Humour is the quality in something that makes it funny or amusing. Humour is employed in capturing the attention of the reader and majorly to satirize the society the writers migrated to. In this regard, humour is arguably an affective foregrounding technique that artists use to introduce objects of sarcasm. This links humour to effective characterization, where some characters are used to represent ideas that are ridiculous or laughable. In Imbuga's *The Green Cross of Kafira*, for illustration, readers follow the conversation between Adema and Mgei with wry humour:

**Adema:** What is the difference? Do you know that is treasonable?

**Mgei:** (*Laughing*) Yes, I remember there was a time when the imagination of certain things was treasonable in Kafira. Yes, that imagination of mine, that one of “so help me God” with Hon. Mwodi would have sent me straight into detention (2012: 46).

The humour in this excerpt is used strategically by Imbuga to mask a more painful history in Kenya; the history of dictatorship and persecution of independent thinkers who were rounded up and incarcerated in detention without trial facilities. The particular reference to the dangers of imagination is an allusion to former Attorney General Charles Njonjo’s prohibition of discussion on the then expected death of Jomo Kenyatta. In so doing, Njonjo suggested that imagining the death of a sitting president may encourage people to plot his assassination; that was how far the freedom of conscience and expression had been constricted.

The fact that Kenyans can look back to such a history and even laugh at some of the ludicrous demands that the regime imposed on people is only possible because drama excavates these details, and then clothes them in an emotionally lighter forms. Therefore, the affective value of humour in Imbuga’s play not only bring about verbal trickery that is used to satirise Mgei, but also locates the play firmly within Kenya’s historiography.

#### **4.4.12 Use of Asides**

An aside is a theatrical device in which a character speaks to the audience. By pact the audience is to realize that the character's speech is unheard by the other characters on stage. It may be spoken to the audience specifically (in character or out) or represent an unspoken thought. An aside is usually a brief comment, rather than a speech, such as a monologue or soliloquy. Unlike a public declaration, it occurs within the framework of the play. An aside is, by convention, a true announcement of a character's thought; a

character may be mistaken in an aside, but may not be dishonest. A good example is the one used in *The Hunter is Back* by Dennis Kyalo.

The four playwrights under study use asides in their work to show how women are represented in Kenyan Drama. An Aside is used to gossip about characters or other characters without them being aware. Asides give audiences better understanding of matters and occasionally make audiences laugh. Such humour that may be generated is because the character or characters being talked about is or are not conscious of the fact they are being spoken of. This has been clearly used by the playwrights under the study, as the aside that Maneno uses when talking about Rita illustrates:

**Naomi:** (Mimicking) “Let the old man rest in peace.” I won’t. Were it not for him, I bet I would be somebody today!

**Maneno:** “Somebody today?” A president. A queen, I suppose. (*Aside*)  
“What a fine queen she will make” (Kyalo, 2010: 4).

Maneno feels it is so unrealistic for Naomi to be somebody today with the current life of misery that she lives. This is largely because Naomi’s aspirations have been hampered by patriarchal structures that become impediments to women generally.

#### **4.4.13 Use of Dream Motif**

Many motifs are employed in the narrative to enlighten various issues in the play. The most prominent of all is the dream motif. A “para-linguistic affective device,” Ngaira observes, the dream motif is used “for foreshadowing subsequent events in the play” (2012: 73). Imbuga uses dreams in propelling the interpretation and communicative intent in his thematic concerns. In order to appreciate fully the effect of Imbuga's use of dreams, one needs to borrow from the foundations laid by psychologists Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung on dreams.

According to Freud and Jung, dreams give insight into a person's unresolved problems. Dreaming provides a window to the unconscious (1990: 56). According to Corey (2009), dreams may serve as a pathway to repressed material, but they also provide an understanding of clients current functioning. Corey (2009) asserts that according to Freud, in dreams one's unconscious wishes, needs and fears are expressed. In Freud's view, the purpose of dream is to "allow us to satisfy in fantasies the institutional urges that society judges unacceptable" (Lewis, 1995: 95) A lot of material written by Freud and by Jung are readily available.

In *The Green Cross of Kafira*, Imbuga uses dreams to propel his revelations of the inner circles of Kafira. Calling the level of the plot as dreams of reality, the playwright uses Pastor Mgei, a clergy and a politician; and Mwodi who gets a nightmare after a deep conversation on their position on detainees of Kafira government. The question of their freedom had been clouded by their talk before they had a prayer and retired to sleep:

**Both:** Amen. (They both move to their respective places to rest, say goodnight to each other and lie down to sleep. After sometime, Mgei appears to have a nightmare. He jumps up violently and stares blankly at something by the door. The figure of Mwodi with a bible raised high above his head can be seen in the doorway.

**Mwodi:** (*Repeatedly as he moves towards Mgei*)

So help me Godson help me God, so help me God.... (*Sees Mgei and is immediately humbled. He puts the Bible under his left armpit and salutes with the right hand*) Your Excellency, I am sorry I am late, but that is because we had to take care of your safety first. It was quite tricky. To secure your release we needed to sacrifice and replace you with someone else. Yes, we needed a scapegoat and we being rather thin on the ground volunteered to be that scapegoat. We begged Yuda to go and report that I was leaking important information to Bishop Ben'sa and to go your wife, Counsellor Mama Mgei (Imbuga, 2013: 45).

In Mgei's dream, Mwodi, a government official, is seen with a raised bible making a prayer for God to intervene in his situation. Taking pastor as his bosses, he reveals the trick used to have him be free. It is realized by the audience that Mwodi is in jail on behalf of his boss and is waiting for the boss to work for his release. Kafira is deep in oppression, betrayal and corruption. His people are living in fear of the government's fury and are trodding their engagement with the government in a loyalty approach. Imbuga, through pastor Mgei's dream, manages to discuss the reality in this Kafira. Being at the mercies of the government, there is no way Mgei could ask Mwodi to discuss the sensitive plots by the government to hoodwink the public ambiguous. It is through Mgei's nightmare that the audience learns of the oppressed citizens' fears, the deep lying wishes by detainees to have freedom accorded to them, and unconscious need of good leadership of Kafira.

Imbuga succeeds in using this dream to tell the truth to his audience. The truth is that Pastor Mgei needs freedom to help Kafira to develop and the fact that Kafira is awaiting Pastor Mgei to be out of Cubical 22 as a detainee for there to be change. Thus, Imbuga succeeds in intruding the psyche of his characters fully via dreams to reveal the hidden fears in their subconscious. With the knowledge of Freudian psychoanalysis of dream formation, we can aptly interpret the dreams of these characters in relation to the play's plot.

Kadesa dreams of eating beef. This dream is an expression of the danger ahead. According to the community's belief systems, eating meat in a dream is taboo. Partaking of it invites cleansing, failure to which one is faced with a looming calamity. Kadesa's dream is a sign to another wave of madness that is to befall the nation. Seemingly, the citizens seem not to have learned from the previous murders that caused many people to be misplaced, maimed and even lose life, as it happened to Thori and Thoriwa.

In another dream, Mhando finds himself in a lonely path with no people or animals but only grass and trees. An old man walks towards him, going in the opposite direction, as they approach each other, the distance seem not to decrease at all. After a long time, like a big bird, he begins to fly south. He then turns to the man and begins to fly towards him, stops directly overhead, opens the mouth and says “Mndika’s salvation may be shared with Nderema”, and then off it went. The same dream occurs again in Mhando’s sleep. Borrowing Freudian tenets on dream analysis, Mhando is a representation of the people of Mndika, who are very insecure. The situation demands intervention from a missing soothsayer, the absence of the prophet who stays in Nderema. The search for solution has taken long as madness takes toll on Mndika’s. The gods, through the dream seem to intervene, revealing the source of the desired prophet in Nderema through Mhando’s dream.

#### **4.4.14 Conclusion**

This first part of this chapter sought to explore how the playwrights under study locate women in the dynamics of national histories and the ideological implications of the dramaturgies used. The chapter has shown that women play a significant role in the making of national and literary histories. This is especially in subverting political and cultural structures that rely on patriarchy for sustenance. Whether one focuses on oral histories that are characterized by an aesthetic of inclusivity, or on the plain anthropological forms of culture, it is plain that women navigate across these borders as alienated subjects of a changing tradition. The playwrights selected for this study carefully employ specific dramaturgies to challenge the mainstream institutions of politics and power to make women more likely to access public sphere. At the same time, the chapter also argues that, while women have for long been marginalized, they use creative strategies to deflate the powers of patriarchy, and to move close to the

metaphorical centres of power. This is why, as the chapter further argues, women become more audible and articulate as the plays tend to the end and thus assert their roles in the making of history and reconfiguring dominant ideologies. Chapter Four, to which we now turn, focuses on the relationship between gender and dramaturgy in the selected plays.

This second part of this chapter analysed the playwrights' use of style to advance a feminist agenda. The chapter set off from the hypothesis that playwrights deliberately manipulate certain techniques in order to portray the women's struggles in contemporary times. Some of the aspects of style discussed include aesthetics of folk performance and traditional techniques of orality, symbolism and markers of ideology. Others are soliloquy and monologue, besides choral elements and play-within-a-play. Lastly, the chapter has also interrogated the use of humour and the dream motif to advance a feminist ideal.

These techniques are not unique to the playwrights under study; they have nonetheless been carefully manipulated to make them more appropriate vehicles for advancing a feminist ideology. The chapter argues that this approach of adapting common techniques is itself symbolic of the fact that women's struggles cannot be removed from the society generally. The chapter has also shown that occasionally, there will be women whose conduct reinforces rather than challenges patriarchal logics. This is because of the many years of socialisation, and because gender identities work in concert with other identities such as ethnicity, class, and familial. That is why, for example, a woman may withhold her support of another woman who is running for an elective office, because her own brother or son is also competing. In such a case, blood relationships come before gender solidarities. Therefore, the category of woman must be understood in the context of other identitarian categories. This means, by implication, that women and feminist struggles



still need to enlist the support and understanding of progressive individuals generally, and not necessarily of women alone. The next chapter offers the conclusion to the whole study.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Introduction

The present chapter gives a summary of the findings as per the objectives set out in the introduction: to analyse the dramaturgies of women representation(s) in selected Kenyan drama; examine the link between national history and ideologies that underlie the dramatic rendition of gendered histories in selected Kenyan drama; and interrogate the effect of dramatic strategies deployed by playwrights in the representation of female characters in the selected Kenyan drama. Similarly, the conclusions of the study are presented together with recommendations to scholars and future researchers on possible areas on which to embark and make further headway in the expansive question of female representation.

#### 5.2 Summary

This chapter revisits the statement of the problem, aims and objectives, and the hypothesis of the investigation in view of the study findings and the generalizations made in the four chapters of the study.

One of the major statements adopted by the study is that current literary gender analyses do not adequately address the issue of female representation in Kenyan drama. Most of the works portray a patriarchal society where the space of the woman is limited. Most of these is brought up by the fact that the society feels culture must be preserved by all cost therefore women empowerment should not be carried out rightly. The other issue is that cultural norms have been interpreted in a skewed manner and the male gender has been given more power by this culture.

The study therefore recognizes that creative writing is a good site where woman can renegotiate and attain their identities. Some contemporary women have begun to question the relevance of old cultural norms to a society that is dynamic and ever changing. Women have been presented to be more outgoing and visible both in the political and social arena and sometimes compete better than their male counterparts. The study has proved that women face many issues of stereotypical impediments that burden them in their search for identity. The study therefore shows that the dramatist's artistic strategies (dramaturgies) such as play-within-a-play are critical in shaping and redefining female representation in Kenya today.

The study was anchored on three objectives. The first objective was to analyse representation of women in the selected texts. Towards this end, it has established that female representation has indeed undergone remarkable transformation in the way the playwrights have represented them in three phases. These include; depiction of women in Kenyan drama, experiences of women as they search for new identities, shift in gender statuses and character identities. In the depiction of women in Kenyan drama, women have been depicted as domestic workers only active in domestic spaces.

One of the most disturbing portrayals of a 'good woman' in some African societies is that of one who submissive to the husband's whims and sexually available for his needs, regardless of the prevailing circumstances. In fact, the whole preoccupation with marriage as an honourable feat for women is premised on the presumption that it is within marriage that women can perform their sexual duties to men and society in a proper and acceptable manner.

The study also sought to discuss the experiences of women as they search for new identities. This are the dramaturgies of female activism. It focusses on the unique

experiences in the periods preceding their acquisition of new identities and or liberation. Given the debauched nature of patriarchy, it then follows that women would only secure their rights through some form of activism as opposed to through some benevolent acts born of the very oppressive patriarchal system. The other area was the shift in gender statuses and character identities where the representation of women and their new roles as represented in the plays under study was presented, showing how new social and cultural roles engender new identities. Many contemporary women seem to be driven by a desire to change and acquire new identities in life. This desire makes her to continue growing with changing times; these changes are then reflected in emerging literatures.

Women have been depicted as both not only physically and emotionally weak but also unpopular, dependent and disrespectful. The women also play the role of domestic workers in the homes, tools for procreation, jealousy, slaves to tradition, not allowed to take leadership positions, quiet and oppressed, uniquely prepared for endurance and also sex objects to men. These women try to get themselves out of these labels and seek to have new experiences. The woman exhibits a resolve to assert her human worth by challenging the male dominance in the social and political arena. They also expose the weakness especially in the patriarchal society and some of the archaic cultural values that were meant to oppress women.

Women undergo several experiences in search for these new identities. These experiences include getting married, taking up subordinate roles, sometimes they lose honour and respect, some of them undergo nervous breakdown, they are threatened by men, they expect to fulfil certain cultural expectations and undergo various forms of oppression. Once women overcome some of these problems, they therefore acquire new roles that were previously perceived to be male which include women becoming political

leaders, women become educated, they become educated, they get married and marriage empowers them, they become professionals, leaders and even entrepreneurs.

The second objective was to determine the artistic strategies deployed by Kenyan playwrights in the representation of female characters in Kenyan drama. These artistic strategies are what the study referred to the dramaturgies of female representation. The study's findings were that the playwrights selected for this study have used various artistic strategies to represent the female gender. These strategies, for example symbolism, narratology, and strategic acquiescence to patriarchal caprices, are useful for bringing out the aesthetics in Kenyan drama. The study employed various strategies to bring out these dramaturgies, which included symbolism, asides, soliloquy, monologues, dramatic irony, and use of music, humour and information technology and the use of narratological approach in presenting the female gender in Kenyan drama today. The third objective was to identify the authorial ideologies and how they are used to dramatize and redefine female history in Kenya. The work found out that the ideology is the medium through which human consciousness works.

The study had three hypotheses. The first hypothesis was that representation of women takes various forms. This has been confirmed to be true. It has been observed that women have changed from the oppressive domestic sphere to more open public spheres. On the second hypothesis, the playwrights in the selected texts use various ideologies to dramatize and redefine female history or histories in Kenya today. The third hypothesis shows that there are various artistic strategies employed by the playwrights in the representation of female characters in the related texts. Such strategies include, juxtaposing symbolism and survivalist strategies such as strategic acquiescence to patriarchal caprices.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

This study borrows from, and extends existing knowledge on women and literature generally, and on drama in Kenya specifically. The study shows that the portrayal of women's struggles in contemporary drama in Kenya has two critical attributes. One, such portrayal relies on dramaturgies that have for long been used to address other themes generally, while also reinforcing gender perspectives that are incongruent with the current aspirations. However, as the shift in underpinning philosophies of gender representation take effect, playwrights use these dramaturgies with caution, manipulating them to effectively place women at the centre of their worlds. This means that although the playwrights use the same old strategies to portray women, they do with a difference.

Second, the playwrights under study seem to embrace an idea of feminism that is not radical in inclination. While these playwrights push for greater resonance of women's voices, they do so in a context that pays homage to ideals of gender equity. Hence, they see the struggle of women as twinned with those of men. They see men as allies who have also suffered from certain aspects of patriarchy. As such, the playwrights use progressive men as symbols of what the world of gender equality would look like. This way, the playwrights imagine a practical but better world, as opposed to the utopia of gender parity in public and private spheres.

### **5.4 Recommendations**

This study sought to achieve three objectives. These were: first, to analyse representation(s) of women in the selected Kenyan drama; second, to examine how some of the ideological persuasions deployed by the playwrights in the selected Kenyan drama are used to dramatize and (re)define female (hi)story or histories in Kenya today and, third, to interrogate artistic strategies deployed by playwrights in the representation of female characters in the selected Kenyan drama. The study has established that

generally, gender representation in Kenyan drama corresponds with existing ideologies of patriarchy, and relies on traditional dramaturgies that include use of play within a play and appropriate characterisation. However, considering the scope of this study vis a vis the sheer numbers of plays that have emerged out of Kenya over the years, it is not probable to apply these findings across the board. Therefore, this study recommends that further research be conducted focusing on other texts to establish the extent to which this study's findings may be applicable.

Secondly, gender a variable of social discourse interfaces with other ideological frameworks such as race and class, which in turn may complicate the findings of any study. This study reified gender over the other variables, thus leaving out plays that were scripted by racial minorities such as South Asians in Kenya. To determine whether the findings of this study are tenable even where racial (and presumably cultural) differences are distinct, this study recommends that further research be conducted with a bias for plays written by and for racial minorities such as South Asians in Kenya. Such a study may help determine some of the common realities of gender that cut across different racial backgrounds.

Lastly, the focus on dramaturgy as a critical variable necessitated a de-emphasis of the critical variables of themes and subject matter. And yet, social discourses and contests across disparate spaces quite often carry messages for observers. Thus, it may be necessary to have a study that focuses on gendered interpretations of economic and other themes that trap women and men in vicious cycles of contestations. If economic advancement and academic success, for instance, play a greater role in weakening the influence of patriarchy, how do different playwrights problematize these liberatory subjects? This study recommends that further research be conducted to tease out details of similarity or difference in how men and women playwrights confront these themes.

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# APPENDICES


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### DRAMATURGIES OF FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN SELECTED KENYAN DRAMAS

#### ABSTRACT

This study examines the dramaturgies used in the representation of the female gender in Kenyan drama. The study stemmed from the need to interrogate how Kenyan playwrights represent women in drama as one way of demonstrating women's empowerment in society. Thus, the study examined Denis Kyalo's *The Hunter is Back* (2010), Francis Imbuga's *The Return of Mgoju* (2011) and *The Green Cross of Kafir* (2013), and Njoki Gitumbi's *A New Dawn* (2012). The study sought to not only illustrate the representation of women in the selected plays, but also examine the ideological persuasions deployed by the playwrights in the selected plays. This thesis thus interrogated the artistic strategies deployed by the playwrights in the representation of female characters in the selected texts. In regards to methodology, the researcher adopted a qualitative research design. The four primary texts were purposively sampled. Since the study is textual in nature, a textual exegesis was conducted from a close-reading and content analysis as the methods of data collection and analysis, respectively. Primary texts were subjected to close reading to provide data for analysis, which was then done by discursive reference to secondary and critical sources. To aid in this analysis, the study leaned on feminist literary theories, particularly gynocriticism and Gayatri Spivak's views on subalternity. The study drew on Spivak's theorisation of how subaltern experiences diminish the position of women in society by muting them through patronizing representation, where women's individual views are essentialised and then re-presented in ways that presume their own inability to do so and thus extend their silencing in society. To augment these theoretical standpoints, the thus study also borrowed pertinent tenets of Postcolonial theories, particularly those articulated by Edward Said and Homi K. Bhabha to explore issues and challenges of female re-presentation.

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