

AN EVALUATION OF THE CONCEPT OF MASCULINITY IN AFRICAN FEMINIST LITERATURE BY TWO MALE AND TWO FEMALE WRITERS

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of Study: In this study, the researcher examined how male and female authors have presented societal expectations, the idea of masculinity, and the underrepresentation of male characters.

Problem Statement: The area of literature and cultural studies has continued to address gender inequality and feminist arguments. While similar studies have been done, it seems the identities of male characters have frequently been disregarded in favor of the portrayal of female characters, particularly in feminist literature.

Methodology: The study was limited to four African feminist texts, two by male authors and two by female authors. Textual analysis was applied in analyzing the thematic concerns related to the study objectives. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the four texts; Margaret A. Ogola's *The River and the Source*, Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nuruddin Farah's *From a Crooked Rib* and *Imaginings of Sand* by André Brink. The researcher was interested in analyzing the ways in which writers were inspired by different waves of feminism globally, gender, and writing style, have depicted male identity in their works.

Finding: Despite the fact that literary authors have portrayed male characters in their works, this study focused on how feminist African writers perceive masculinity, the underrepresentation of male characters in their works, and how this representation is influenced by societal expectations. The research study also planned to mobilize social agents, such as the government, educators, parents, and society, to promote gender equality in contemporary society. For the purpose of research analysis, this study combined the feminism theory and the deconstruction theory.

Conclusion: From the research findings, it is evident that; the concept of masculinity has been portrayed with less emphasis. Similarly, male characters have also been underrepresented and this is because, while the male characters remain constant, the female characters have continued to be presented with progressive characteristics. Additionally, the feminist authors have been influenced by the social ideologies, which permit male dominancy over the female characters.

Recommendation: From the conclusions made from the analysis of this research data, not only have the male characters been overlooked in these feminist texts but also, they have been negatively stereotyped. Hence, the feminist authors should address the issue of gender as a concern to both men and women in today's society.

Keywords: *Masculinity, African Feminist Literature, Gender Representation, Textual Analysis, Identity Construction*

INTRODUCTION

A focus on boys and men's subjectivities, perceptions and attitudes, and their shifting and context-specific social constructions, is crucial if we are to discuss in a substantive way gender disparity that empower men and marginalize women simultaneously. If such a focus is always conducted through a critical and progressive approach that seeks to avoid reinvesting the experiences of women, then a focus on men and masculinity will contribute to the larger political project to empower women. Understanding the dynamic societal pressures and imperatives young men face as they strive to build male identities and achieve masculinity leads to strategies aimed at encouraging young men to cultivate non-violent, non-abusive, less dangerous forms of masculinity in favor of more life-affirming masculinities and life-enhancing to the good of all. Recognizing that some recalcitrant formulations of masculinity affect both men and women thus expand the scope of political and ideological projects aimed at empowering women (Shefer *et al.*, 2010).

From criticism of literary plays, Judith Kegan Gardiner develops her gender philosophies on how the discrepancies in male and female social interactions. In her article, "On Female Identity and Writing by Women," Gardiner argues, "in profound and frequent ways, the experiences of women vary from those of men." She explains further that a man is supposed in a patriarchal society not to act like a woman.

Eventually, because of this, each gender ends up adjusting and acting in accordance with the personas that they are expected to present (Gardiner, 1981). The purpose of this research project was to investigate and evaluate the depiction of masculine identity and character development in works of African feminist literature.

In her academic thesis, titled "The Representation of Masculinities in Wambui Githiora's 'Wanjira' and 'The Sacred Seed' by Rebeka Njau," Wanja discusses the representation of masculinities in both works. She develops an analysis on masculinity in Githiora's literature; *Wanjira*, which can be found in (Wanja, 2013). Wanja asserts that Githiora is in opposition to the conventional norms and practices that are associated with the roles that are played by men. She is of the opinion that males and the other individuals with whom they interact are subject to an influence because of the conventional roles that they play as spouses, authorities, and dads. The story focuses on Luka, a Luo man, and Wanjira, a Kikuyu woman, who are involved in an inter-ethnic romantic relationship. This is a portrayal of gender dynamics in which men take on roles in accordance with what the expectations of society are. Wanja seems to acknowledge Githiora's text *Wanjira* as a piece of work that the author used to communicate the social representation of male fears, as dominating in the society. This is something that Wanjira does in *Wanjira*.

A thorough examination of most feminist works reveals that masculine characters are grossly underrepresented in such works. Yet in comparison to the female characters, the male characters in these literary works are limited in number, they are given with achievements only very seldom, and most of the time it is the female character who takes on the role of the protagonist. This continued underrepresentation of male characters in literature perpetuates gender inequality, which exists not just in society but also in literary works. So, this is an issue today that has to be addressed since it poses a problem for people. The research study examined how male identity is perceived in African feminist literature, using four selected African novels; *The River and the Source* by Margaret A. Ogola, *The Joys of Motherhood* by Buchi Emecheta, Nuruddin Farah's *From a Crooked Rib* and *Imaginations of Sand* by André Brink.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The area of literature and cultural studies has continued to address gender inequality and feminist arguments. Although comparable studies have been done, it seems the identities of male characters have often been disregarded in favor of the representation of female characters, particularly in feminist literature. The researcher thus examined how male and female writers presented social expectations, the idea of masculinity, and the underrepresentation of male characters. The research study was a critical analysis of male identity in African feminist literature, in four selected African novels; Margaret A. Ogola's *The River and the Source*,

Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nuruddin Farah's *From a Crooked Rib* and André Brink's *Imaginations of Sand*.

Representation of the Concept of Masculinity in Feminist Literature

According to Thompson (2016), men will only adhere to the standards of masculinity in accordance with their demands to achieve prestige, position, and other forms of respect in 2006. The French feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir posits that the reason males strive for masculinity is because, in doing so, they construct a notion of gender identity in which they feel they are the savior, liberator, and benefactor of females.

Concept of Masculinity in Men

Research on masculinities is often differentiated by its intersectional approach. That is to say, the field acknowledges that the study of men and masculinities entails a questioning of their intersections with other social divisions: "While men and masculinities are the primary focus and are understood as clearly gendered, men and masculinities are not created by sex alone." Age differences, socioeconomic circumstances, race and racialization, and other factors all have an impact on men and masculinities. It is only at the intersections of other social divisions and racial inequality that gendering of men may take place. In the same way, we cannot comprehend economic, racial, or global inequalities until we continually move towards gender (Ngoh, 2016).

Males and masculinities are put under the microscope in studies that are relevant to men's studies. Research in this new field recognizes that gender is a representation of the complex and hierarchical connections that exist both inside men's organizations and between men and women. These studies are conducted on both men and women. In addition to this, these kinds of research use an intersectional methodology, which places an emphasis on the cultural and historical components. There are many ways of co-constructing and mediating male subjectivities across a variety of salient subjectivities created around class, race, gender, age, and so on. Such studies focus on the identification of men and masculinities as important, both socially and politically, and highlight some of the ways in which specific forms of masculinity remain a key problem globally and locally (Shefer *et al.*, 2010).

This therefore means that, masculinity as observed in male characters, is because of the surroundings or situations that befall them. Masculinity as presented by feminist writers, appear as a way of oppressing the women. But an in-depth analysis of this situation, represent the men

as victims of negative self -identity, which is influenced by social experiences, as the root cause.

Men's Character Personality

There are certain features, that are perceived as masculine personalities among men. Men are socialized to be violent and this is one of the main contemporary social issues. Through the normal , non-gender-specific view, violent men are clearly deviant, nonconformist. (Funk, 2013). And hence literature especially feminist literature, tends to support the female characters who appear to be fragile, while the male characters are seen as aggressive characters. But it is because this is what happens in the society.

Construction of Male Identity

Many academics believe that masculinity is not a biological reality, but rather something that can be learned. (Funk, 2013). In light of the alarmingly high rates of male violence against girls and women in South Africa, there has been an abundance of research conducted to examine how masculinity plays a part in the generation of gendered violence.

In the text *Masculinity studies and feminist theory* (Gardiner, 2002), Gardiner denotes that; individuals must critically engage masculinity as an ideology, as institutionally rooted in a sphere of influence, as a collection of activities affecting groups of people. And yet, given the conflicting locations that most men encounter, people who are not privileged by gender, race, ethnicity, orientation, age, physical ability. A certain empathy must also be considered for actual embodied men as they try to create lives with some coherence and dignity in a world with conflicts and conflicting filaments of power and privilege. She says that, as feminists' question and condemn patriarchy as an ideology and institution, they are able to use feminism to empathize with men.

Although Judith Gardiner identifies the underlying challenges that the men face (class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, physical abilities), she supports feminists by acknowledging their positive way of representing the male characters. However, this is not what is reflected in feminist literature. The authors do not reflect the male identity in these texts. They become influenced by the society, by reflecting the societal expectations.

Roye (2017), in her scholarly paper titled "Masculinity in Women's Literature," discusses the book *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen. Her focus is on the text's portrayal of masculinity.

The author of *Pride and Prejudice* portrays the male protagonist, Mr. Bennett, as a less competent person than his wife, Elizabeth, who is seen as having a lot of potential throughout the whole of the work. This is done to contrast Mr. Bennett with his wife. It is his wife who is responsible for providing for their five daughters; in Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, Edgar Linton is a misrepresentation of manhood; in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*, Molly Gibson's only daughter attests to being a good child to her father rather than a son, Osborne Hamley, who deceives his parents; and George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* portrays Maggie Tulliver. According to the findings of this study, however, masculinity is portrayed as having the ability to physically attract the attention of women. The concept of masculinity has not received nearly the attention that it deserves. The men's agency is not given a substantial amount of attention, despite the fact that Jane Austen makes the male characters in her works seem attractive to a big degree in order to highlight their masculinity.

In his previous research study, Mooka (2005) investigated the portrayal of masculinities in the work of Senegalese author Ousmane Sembene titled *God's Bits of Wood*. Sembene's representations of masculinity at a moment of crisis in Senegal were the primary focus of the research. The walkout that was carried on by the railroad workers in *God's Bits of Wood* is a symbol of the many masculinities that are forced on people. The intensity that was shown by folks was a direct response to the catastrophe that is occurring at the present time.

Mooka says in *God's Bits of Wood* that some men presented a weak kind of masculinity and chose to regard their responsibility as breadwinners as more essential than their role to fight for their independence and self-identity. This information comes from the book. The ladies in the book are shown as a depiction of women's fortitude throughout the period of struggle and challenges of the strike. The ladies were first obedient to the males and were neglected monetarily and radically; nevertheless, circumstances forced them to adapt and represent feminine techniques of masculinity. Originally, the males were the ones who were the most dominant. The female characters were given characteristics of masculinity by the societal circumstances, which appeared to rob the males of their duties as the main suppliers and guardians of their families. The women rose to the position of family head, were the primary suppliers of resources, and engaged in violent conflict. Mooka embodies the masculinity features that are exhibited on female characters in Ousmane's book *God's Bits of Wood*. His examples show that the literature depicts masculine characters that are less combative and who do not preserve a feeling of individuality (Mooka, 2005). The text that was

written by Ousmane is a reflection of the underrepresentation of male characters in works written by feminist authors. Yet despite the fact that the writers could be unaware of the underrepresentation of male identity, readers and critics nonetheless think that this is the case.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Both feminist theory and deconstruction theory were used in the course of this research investigation. According to Code, the objective of feminist literary theory is to examine how literary criticism and theory either encourage or discourage divides in class, gender, race, and sexuality (Salah et al., 2016). The chosen feminist books provided the basis for a conversation that was formed using feminism theory and was centered on gender concerns.

Feminism is a revolution. People in the society have been influenced in many ways to have the perception that men are expected to be normal, powerful, compassionate, and important. This ultimately offers specialized gender roles of vocations such as pilots, physicians, and engineers to women and men respectively. In this sense, it might be seen as a kind of "activism" directed against the dominance of males. (Tyson, 2006).

The idea of deconstruction was first put into practice by a number of academics, including Derrida, Paul de Man, J. Hills Miller, and Barbara Johnson. (Duignan, 2019).

Deconstruction goes beyond just examining the structure by examining situations where texts disagree. Deconstruction aims to show how narratives of disability may be rebuilt, as well as how new aspects of disability perception can be taken into account. The researcher applied the principle of deconstruction in relation to the study's goals, to evaluate the significance of the selected texts.

METHODOLOGY

The research design for this study's interpretation of the chosen texts was textual analysis. In order to comprehend the intended meaning of a document, textual analysis entails closely examining the context inside the text (Given, 2008). The target population for this research study, consisted of four selected African novels. Two novels written by male writers and other two novels by female writers. These included: Margaret A. Ogola's *The River and the Source* (1995), Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1975), Nuruddin Farah's *From a Crooked Rib* (2003) and André Brink's *Imaginings of Sand* (1996).

These literary works focus on gender problems in African civilizations. Textual analysis, was applied, as the method for analyzing the four selected literary texts. The researcher analyzed the selected texts, in line with the research objectives. The research complemented the arguments and debates of the four major books with readings from secondary literature. This research relied on previously published literary criticism of the three books as well as literature on the theories as secondary sources. The secondary sources I read, analyzed, and chose to include in the research were chosen for their ability to shed light on the primary sources I used to create this work. As well, I've been reading up on how biographical and formalist ideas may be used to interpret and evaluate literary works. This study finally drew conclusions which carried the findings and recommendations derived from the analyzed data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Concept of Masculinity in Feminist Literature

It can be argued that the groundbreaking African male literature is a patriarchal discourse in which women are insulted, demeaned, and summarily silenced. Feminist academics and/or commentators have called for a counter discourse in African literature over the past four decades or so in order to redress the gender rifts therein (Koussouhon et al., 2015). This research critically analyzed the way in which feminist authors have portrayed the concept of masculinity, their construction of male identity and presentation of men's personality which gives them their self -identity.

Men's Character Personality

Margaret Ogola in her text *The River and The Source*, clearly brings out the concept of masculinity based on what the society perceives men as masculine. This she does, as she uplifts the female characters while giving the male characters their masculine personalities which the society expects them to display.

As seen in the text, Ogola says that;

“A son held one under much more obligation than did a daughter for he must be firmly rooted in his people from whom he would inherit land and from whom he was inextricable. You might wander the world with your son but in the end, you had to take him back to where he belonged-his father's people.” A girl on the

other hand was a wanderer who would settle anywhere and marry anywhere (Ogola, 1994, p.100).

But on the other hand, male characters like Obura, decide not to take responsibility of the family roles. Ogola seem to support this social norm, where the men's decision and plan for their future should be based entirely on their families. For Obura, he deviates from this social norm and chooses to pursue his own path.

In the text *The Joys of Motherhood*, Buchi Emecheta relates the concept of masculinity with masculine personalities. She associates the abilities customarily related with men, particularly power and fierceness. Nnu Ego a female character, disregards her second husband Nnaife, because of her physical appearances. The author gives a vivid description of Nnaife, which creates a negative imagination of the male character. He therefore becomes detached from the readers, who eventually relate with the female characters.

“In walked a man with a belly like a pregnant cow, wobbling first to this side and then to that. The belly, coupled with the fact that he was short, made him look like a barrel. His hair, unlike that of men at home in Ibuza, was not closely shaved; he left a lot of it on his head, like that of a woman mourning for her husband. His skin was pale, the skin of someone who had for a long time worked in the shade and not in the open air. His cheeks were puffy and looked as if he had pieces of hot yam inside them, and they seemed to have pushed his mouth into a smaller size above his weak jaw...” (Emecheta, 1979, p.44).

Construction of Male Identity

Right from the title of the text *The River and the Source*, the author uses the female characters to construct the meaning of the text. The 'source' of the river is actually Akoko, while the river represents her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. However, when these generations are represented, the men are removed from the scenes and those that are present their identity is vividly portrayed.

Ogola in the text *The River and The Source*, concentrates in upraising the girl child, while the representation of male identity is not of great concern. However, in contrary to the major thematic concern, we realize female desire for the representation of male identity in the text. For instance, in different challenging events when female characters like Akoko and Nyambera need advice from a man.

Akoko is faced with a challenge on the advice to give her granddaughter (Awiti), when she's offered an opportunity to learn how to be a teacher. "I see. We have heard you, my child, but this is a serious matter. Your mother and I have to think about it carefully." For the first time in many years, she felt the need of the kind of support that a good and a strong man would give" (Ogola, 1994, p.133).

The construction of male identity in Nuruddin Farah's text; *From a Crooked Rib*, is a representation of male dominancy. He stereotypes the male characters with domineering character trait. As the text begins, the grandfather to Ebla is presented as the only one who has the voice at home. He even chooses the man who was to marry Ebla. The author then represents Ebla with a brave personality, when she decides to defy her grandfather and runs away from home. Nuruddin says; "He had lost his sense of pride, even before his only son—the father of Ebla and the young boy—had passed away. He had exchanged his pride in life for silence—or reticence" (Farah, 1970, p.13).

Andre Brink's in his text *Imaginings of Sand*, basis his content on female characters in South Africa. South Africa has been a country that went through apartheid and the text reveals the struggle for power between the whites and blacks. This is also a time when there is violence, because of multiracial elections that were about to be held. Andre Brink therefore, concentrates on presenting the experiences that women went through during such a time.

However, the concept of male identity has not been presented in this text. At different instances, the male characters are withdrawn from participating in fighting against the election violence. Louw the husband to Anna, forms a group of men to search the people who had burnt Ouma's house, but their participation is overlooked by the police officers. 'We're trying to track down the commando members to send them home,' he said, wiping his soaked brow. 'And if you happen to see your husband before we do, Mrs Louw, then for God's sake tell him to stay home. Our job is hard enough as it is.' 'They're only trying to help,' she said, flaring up. 'How can anyone be safe with those murderers who attacked my grandmother still scot free to terrorise the district?'" (Brink, 1995, p.55). Thou the men are overlooked, we realize that, female characters like Kristen are in the front line in following up with the investigations. This presents the concentration on female characters, who overshadow the representation of male identity in the text.

CONCLUSIONS

Feminist authors have presented the concept of masculinity based on their perception that men should portray certain personalities such as been violent, tough and with muscular body. Male characters who appear to be non-abusive and lack strong muscular body, are regarded as not men enough. These feminist authors fail to construct male identity, by neglecting to represent the men experiences in developing societies and their own acknowledged self-identity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Ministry of Education should evaluate set books, before executing them in the curriculum. As observed in this study, most feminist novels concern themselves with female characters and tend to overlook the male characters. Gender inequality has remained to be a contemporary issue that needs to be addressed. Even before a child goes to school, s/he learns from the society the gender stereotypical views. Therefore, the issue of promoting gender equality should first be implemented in the society; because it plays a great role in fostering promoting gender inequality. For many people, it is hard to accept that much of their perception of gender is the product of the social influence. Certain cultural ideologies of masculinity, need to be deconstructed in order to make positive changes and to challenge stereotyping of men in the society.

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