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CONTENTS

	Page
Justice, Democracy and Dialogue as Intervening Concepts in the Project of Development in Africa Francis Offor	1-8
Public Morality, Democracy and Sustainable Development in Nigeria Oripeloye Hassan	9-14
Reflective Democratic Values and the Quest for Socio-Political Transformation Modestus Nnamdi Onyeaghalaji, Ph.D	15-31
Leadership and Good Governance: Civil Society Perspective Iwu Hyacinth Nnaoma	32-44
An Assessment of the Efficacy of the Federal Character Principle in the Staffing Process in the Nigerian Federal Civil Service, 1960-2000 Benson Kunle Sehinde (PhD) and Adegoroye Abayomi Adedibu ...	45-52
The Public Sphere: An Analysis of the Habermasian and Feminist Perspectives Osimiri Peter	53-62
Philosophy Interrogates An African Culture: Echoes From The Frankfurt School Isaac E. UKPOKOLO Ph.D	63-75
Employing the Principle of "Constructive" Exploitation in the Clinical Research Ethics Context: a Developing World View Peter F. Omonzejele Ph.D	76-84
The Value of Human Life and a Philosophy of National Security for Nigeria: Some Theoretical Issues Ujomu, Philip Ogo, Ph.D & Olatunji, Felix O.	85-105
A Discourse On Homosexuality From An African Culture EBUNOLUWA O. ODUWOLE Ph.D	106-114
'Eat or You are eaten': Prostitution as a Metaphor in Selected Ngugi's Literary Works Chinyere Ukpokolo	115-127
Veracity or Confidentiality: The Physician on the Horns of a Moral Dilemma Lanre-Abass, Bolatito A.,	128-143
Information Explosion And Challenges Of Packaging Information For Millennium Development Goals Kolajo, Funmilola Susa	144-155

‘Eat or You are eaten’: Prostitution as a Metaphor in Selected Ngugi’s Literary Works

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Abstract

This paper examines the phenomenon of prostitution as treated in selected literary works of a renowned East African literary scholar, Ngugi wa Thiong’O. The paper identifies two perspectives from which Ngugi presents the phenomenon of prostitution: first as a product of exploitative socio-political and economic realities of post-colonial Kenyan society, and second, as a metaphoric representation of the nature of the relationship existing between African leaders (neocolonialists) and the people they lead on one hand, and on the other, the relationship between the African elite and the Western world. Ngugi then criticizes the development processes adopted by African leaders, which continue to tie them to the dictates of the West for solution to the continent’s development challenges. Ngugi merges art and ideology and advocates alternative political and economic ideology that promotes sustainable socio-cultural and economic wellbeing of the generality of the African people. The paper therefore concludes that African literary scholars have continued to raise issues that are of anthropological concern. The phenomenon of prostitution is a social problem that bothers on human behavior as it relates to human survival. But Ngugi goes beyond this level of discourse to provide alternative way of viewing prostitution with its underpinning on the meanings behind reflected human conduct.

A Historical Overview of the Phenomenon of Prostitution

Prostitution, commonly understood as offering one’s sexual favours for money or other material gains, has drawn the attention of sociologists, anthropologists, literary scholars, health workers among others (see for instance, Ekwensi, 1979; El Saadawi, 1983; Defoe, 1922; Little, 1980; Homaifar, 2008). The prostitute depends for her livelihood “wholly or largely upon the exchange of sexual services for money or other material rewards” (Little, 1980: 76). Prostitution is a phenomenon that has been in existence since the beginning of human civilization, and is often rather humorously referred to as the world’s “oldest profession” and motherhood as only the “next oldest”. Records have it that prostitution is associated with every civilization, and that it is associated with urbanization. The quest for survival and social security in an environment characterized by weakened kinship ties in the urban centres and its depersonalization tendency makes the phenomenon of prostitution to thrive in urban societies. Citing Ringdal (2004), Homaifar argues that “prostitution seems to have flourished most in evolutionary intermediary phases of history, during periods when a country or region was marked by a rapid upsurge in population, urbanization, migration, and economic transformation” (Homaifar, 2008: 173).

In ancient times, some form of prostitution was practiced. In fact, the primitive societies of Tanni Islanders of Polynesia, natives of Caroline and Melanesian Islands, and many American Indian tribes have records of prostitution (see Chesser, 1970: 253). Apart from secular prostitution, evidence of religious prostitution abounds. For instance, in India, parents had dedicated their daughters to gods as temple prostitutes. Indeed, religious prostitution is a feature of many ancient civilizations like Persia, Babylonia, Assyria, Egypt and Phoenecia. In those societies where religious prostitution was practiced, the priests and priestesses were special class of prostitutes. According to Chesser (1970), among the Babylonians, a single act of prostitution was required of every woman as an act of worship of the god Mylitta. The common reason for the practice of religious prostitution was the belief,

in such societies where it was practised that a great benefit accrued to people that had sexual relationship with any of the god's attendants.

The ancient Greek did not see prostitution as an ignominious way of life. In fact, they patronised prostitutes openly and Solon establishes the first-licensed brothel in Athens for the collection of revenue (Chesser, 1970: 254). In Egypt, prostitution was legal until 1951 when it was prohibited by the government. In most Arab countries until recently, prostitution was illegal though it was practised secretly or openly at times. El Sadaawi (1980) noted that in these societies, a prostitute was safe and free if she was under the protection of the law enforcement agency or somebody with influence. Otherwise, she was imprisoned if she refused to comply with the wishes of the police or someone else in power (El Sadaawi, 1980: 61). However, in Europe, attempts were made to reform prostitutes and brothel keepers were punished. Laws were made to keep public order and there was occasional medical examination of the prostitutes. For instance, in France, in 1946, a law was promulgated for the closure of brothels in French territories and abolition of the registration of prostitutes. All these were attempts to show that prostitution was a phenomenon that was abhorred in most societies.

The African conception of the prostitute and the phenomenon of prostitution is that of a social malady. Most importantly, in traditional African society, it is seen as something foreign, and, as it were, regarded as an aberration, hence out-rightly frowned at. Increasingly, scholars are beginning to note that modernization contributed to the spread of prostitution in various societies, particularly in the sub-saharan Africa. This also has affected its societal definition and acceptability or rejection. Homaifar has argued that in sub-Sahara Africa, European colonization from the 1770s contributed in making prostitution take shape in the area. According to the scholar, "by the second half of the nineteenth century, prostitution spread over almost the entire continent following on the heels of competition for control and expansion of the region by European powers" (Homaifar, 2008, citing Kevane 2004: 69). Homaifar also pointed out the role of urbanization in the rise of prostitution in cities like Lagos and Kinshasha. According to him:

The dynamics of the third world urbanization in Africa, as characterised by the phenomenal growth of a few giant cities such as Lagos and Kinshasha, has served to magnify the growing disparities left behind from colonialism among the rich and the poor... in many of these areas, prostitution has flourished as an economic strategy, whether it be as an agency to a 'high life' or a means of subsist (Homaifar, 2008: 173).

Indeed, the issue of human right and individual freedom has raised the issue of the legality or otherwise of prostitution in recent times. Increasingly, those who engage in prostitution as means of full time or part time livelihood rather than view themselves as prostitutes prefer to be referred to as 'sex workers' giving legitimacy to the practice of prostitution. Today, sex workers have formed and registered organizations all over the world. For instance, in Argentina there exists AMMAR, an acronym for Argentina Union of Female Sex Workers, with over 3,800 members across Argentina (Hardy, 2008). Arguably, the feminist movements have contributed in no small measure to the societal definition of the morality or otherwise of prostitution. For most feminists, prostitutes are doing legitimate work just like other people. Nevertheless, in most societies, people continue to view prostitution as ignominious, and laws, acts and policies are made to address the phenomenon.

Economic deprivation remains the paramount causal explanations given for the existence of prostitution in many human societies. In the United States, Luna writes that economic deprivation is the major cause of the large number of street youths outside the United States. Poverty and its social consequences take their toll on the family unit, and, are important causal factors which force children out of their family and into the street (Luna, 1987:76). Arguably, a large number of street children, especially female ones, find solace in prostitution as means of survival. Luna, therefore, submits that "prostitution can provide street youths with the economic means necessary to remain independent and obtain shelter for themselves" (Luna, 1987: 78), providing them an illusion of success.

In recent decades, scholars have continued to note the contribution of human trafficking in the escalation of prostitution in both European and Asian countries. Larger percentage of prostitutes in Europe in recent times come from developing world like Africa and Asia from where a lot of young women migrate to engage in prostitution in order to generate money they remit to their home countries (see Olaniyi, 2009: 56). This modern practice has created corps of organized and complex networks to coordinate the trafficking of human cargoes.

In African fiction, the phenomenon of prostitution has received the attention of scholars who use prostitutes as protagonists in their stories. For

instance, in Sembene Ousmane's novel, *God's Bits of Wood*, one meets such a character as Penda who is a prostitute. In Wole Soyinka's *Interpreters* there is Simi. One encounters Madame Obbo in Aniebo's *The Journey Within*; Jagua Nana in Cyprian Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana*, and Dambudzo Marechera's *House of Hunger* all have characters who are prostitutes.

The idea of portraying the prostitute in fiction is not unique to African literature. For example, in eighteenth century England, Daniel Defoe wrote his novel, *Moll Flanders*, whose eponymous heroine is a prostitute. The central figure of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *The Sad and Incredible Tale of Innocent Erendira and Her Heartless Grandmother*, Erendira, is a prostitute. The implication is that the use of the prostitute as a character in fiction is not restricted to any particular society; like prostitution itself, it cuts across cultures and societies. In some of the works in which the prostitute is depicted in African fiction, she is presented as one who is highly imaginative and resourceful. And when this ability is properly utilized, they could be very productive. At other times, she could be at the forefront in the communal effort at solving certain societal problems. In such a case, one would wonder why such a genius should engage in the debased profession of prostitution. Still, at other times, the prostitute is portrayed as one who is not bothered about social norms and is, therefore, unconventional in her attitude to life generally. Of course as Ngugi pointed out:

Literature does not grow or develop in a vacuum; it is given impetus, shape, direction and even area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society (Ngugi, 1972: xv).

This is especially so since African literature is largely functional in nature. Indeed, as Little has rightly observed also, what is "scrutinized in African fiction is the extent to which the literary work itself captures or reflects the mood or spirit of the author's own social environment" (Little, 1980: 2). By using the prostitute as protagonist in their various works, African literary scholars have, in addition, looked into prostitution as an existential issue.

The Prostitute and the Victim Motif in Ngugi's Stories

The portrayal of the prostitute in African fiction is a literary reflection of the phenomenon of prostitution in African society. In Ngugi's selected works, he views the prostitute, first as a victim of the socio-political and economic reality of the post-colonial African society; and secondly as a metaphoric representation of larger socio-economic relationships in the continent. In Marxist scholarship, human society is dichotomized into the capitalists and the proletariats with the capitalists constituting the bourgeoisie class holding monopoly of means of production while the peasant masses labour under the burden of abject poverty. How has the Marxist literary scholar, Ngugi, represented the phenomenon of prostitution, and the prostitute as an individual? To give answer to this, we look at Ngugi's treatment of this phenomenon in his two fictional works, *Petals of Blood* (hereafter referred to as *Petals*) and 'Minutes of Glory' in *Secret Lives* (a collection of short stories).

Ngugi's novel, *Petals*, mirrors the neocolonial society in Kenya: its hypocrisy, corruption, exploitation, callousness and the insatiable ambition of those who control power and wealth and impoverish the underprivileged masses. Thus, the novel, set in post-independence Kenya with its mood of disillusionment, mirrors the exploitative capitalist system. The situation is such that the masses that fought relentlessly for the independence are left to wallow in the mire while the collaborators become richer at their expense. The underprivileged is pushed to the background, as it were, and the little they possess is taken from them by the bourgeoisie to enrich their already affluent lives. It is this idea of exploitation and its destructive effects on the individual and on the whole system that Ngugi reflects by juxtaposing the exploiting bourgeoisie and the exploited masses through the story of Wanja.

Wanja, the protagonist in the novel, is a drop-out from primary school, having been seduced by the rich man, Kimeria. She discovers that she is trapped as it were, as all doors seem to have closed on her. Though she excelled in the mock CPE examination, she could not sit for the actual examination due to her pregnancy. Afraid to face the wrath of her parents, she escaped to the man responsible for her situation who, unfortunately, told her he was a Christian and, therefore, could not marry two wives. Throwing her baby into the latrine, she escaped to the city. Wanja's unrewarding adventure in Nairobi and her consequent return shows her inability to find the rays of hope which she sought. The only job she could get was that of a barmaid, a job which is synonymous with prostitution. Not only was the barmaid underpaid, she was exploited, even sexually, by her employer, and could be laid off without notice. According to Wanja in *Petals*,

There is only one song sung by all barmaids. Woe. They (employers) give you seventy-five shillings a month. They expect you to work for twenty-four hours. In the day time, you give beer and smiles to customers. In the evening, you are expected to give them yourself and sigh in bed. Bar and Lodging (*Petals*, 75 - 76).

From the novel, one discovers that Wanja's constant struggle is to remain independent. Her first attempt to quit her amorous life style, by going back home was frustrated by her father who maintained that he did "not want a prostitute in the house" (*Petals*, 130). Back in the city, she went to the Nairobi clubs and hotels looking for "rays of hope". Her determination not to use sex as a commodity was defeated when she encountered Kimeria again who forced her to have sex with him, she had to succumb to this to allow the delegates to continue on their March to Nairobi. While she is ready to sacrifice her honour for

the good of her people, Kimeria, a symbol of those in power, the elite, had no consideration for the people. In fact he was ready to sabotage their efforts at self-liberation. Although Wanja possesses positive image, a woman who is very resourceful, creative, imaginative and ambitious, we see her as one who could not make a head-way in life because, apart from prostitution, which is the only alternative means of livelihood available to her, there are no other avenues. Her immense contributions to the revival and revitalization of Ilmorog from a deserted village to a modern town should not be underestimated. By her initiative, Abdulla's shop was renovated so that:

There was now a shop, a butchery, a bar, a beer-hall which was also a dance place, and five rooms where those in need could spend the night: for a fee.

Shop. Butchery. Bar. Lodgings.

Everything was happening as if working to some invisible pre-ordained plan (*Petals*, 266).

She was one of the people who went on a delegation to Nairobi to meet Nderi, their members of Parliament, concerning the drought that had hit Ilmorog. The outcome of this was the transformation of Ilmorog into a modern city with banks, industries, tarred roads, hotels and an archeological site. She identified herself with the problems of the people, suffered with them during drought and when the rains eventually came, she rejoiced with them. In the present time of the story, she resents the company of the bourgeoisie and feels at home with the common people. Little observes that Wanja,

Has an uneasy conscience over being allied with Kenya's 'nouveaux riches', with those who are using their money and their political power to exploit the workers and the peasants (Little, 1980: 86)

For this, she had to get even with Kimeria, Mzigo and Chui who represent the exploiting class. With the women of Ilmorog, she formed what they called "Ndemi Nyakinyua Group" to farm in turn on one another's farm for the improvement of farm production.

However, the development of Ilmorog attracted the capitalists from the cities. They declared the houses of the peasants unhygienic and, therefore, deserving demolition so that they would not discourage tourism. Hence, Wanja's Old Ilmorog Bar and Meat-roasting Centres, and Ilmorog Bar's own Sunshine Band were closed down by Chirl County Council without any alternative arrangement made for her. Even when the peasants' lands were taken from them with the promise of better settlement after the completion of the housing project, such promises were never kept. Nevertheless, this never materialized as the management of the venture was vested in the hands of agents who did the business on behalf of the capitalists. Nyakinyua died of heartbreak as she lost her only strip of land to the bank. Abdulla was forced to go back to street trading. Wanja sold all she had and redeemed Nyakinyua's land when the bank wanted to sell it. But, after this, Wanja was never "quite the same" (*Petals*, 277). She set up a wooden whorehouse, Sunshine Lodge, and went back to the only source of livelihood left for her: prostitution. This is a new Wanja. Here she employed young girls as harlots to cater for some customers while she took care of the high class clients. The Wanja we meet here is the one who is dancing to the music of the society she finds herself in. Her principle now is,

This world... this Kenya... this Africa knows only one law. *You eat somebody or you are eaten*. You sit on somebody or somebody sits on you (Ngugi, 1981: 291, emphasis mine).

To meet her, one has to pay as much as one hundred shillings, and for high class treatment, more. It is only Abdulla who really understands her predicament. His judgment of her prostitution could be summarized thus: "In any case, he did not blame her; she was turning the way the world was tilting" (*Petals*, 313).

In 'Minutes of Glory' in *Secret Lives* (a collection of short stories), Ngugi projects further the image of the prostitute as a victim of exploitation. Beatrice, the protagonist, is, therefore, in many respects a precursor of Wanja. The story, set in Nairobi's bars and hotels explores the adventure of an unfortunate girl whose attempt to improve her social condition in an indifferent society landed her in the hands of exploiters. Born into a poor family, Beatrice could not go further in her studies after her primary education though she was brilliant. She could not get a job as she could neither 'type nor take shorthand'. Trapped like Wanja, she stays back at home to help her parents in farm and household chores. Occasionally, she goes to town to look for a job which she never gets because of her limited education. It was during one of these outings at Nyeri that she was drinking 'Fanta' in a shop, with tears in her eyes, having searched desperately for a job without success, that a young man in suit approached her and drove her to Terrace Bar in his cream-white Peugeot. He bought her beer and they spent the night together. She was so happy that she slept happily that night. However, in the morning, she discovered that the young man had abandoned her. She wept. She like Wanja became a victim of her social circumstances. Her attempt to improve her life is frustrated by the financial constraints of the family and the society which does not cater for the less-fortunate ones. The young man who bought her beer and the employers represent the exploiting class while Beatrice and her likes represent the underdog. The young man in suit, as insensitive to her plight as he was, took advantage of her helpless condition to seduce her only for him to desert her. Beatrice's need is a decent work. For this, she detests the money men pay her for sleeping with them. This is because she hates bartering her body like bag of potatoes and when she tries to be scrupulous, men see it as "an ill-disguised attempt at innocence" ('Minutes of Glory', 92).

Nevertheless, Beatrice gets her "Minutes of Glory" when she decides to fight back a man in whom she sees a fellow-victim. This is a man whose desperate attempt to join in the jokes of the influential men in the bar was turned down because of his low social status. He had told her how he had wished to further his education but could not because his parents were poor. He had suffered much to make himself what he was. Therefore, he would make sure his children got all he had been deprived of. For sharing his sorrow and sleeping with him, he pays her twenty shillings. Then, there came a time that Beatrice took the initiative to share her own story with this man. She only stopped when she discovered that the man was snoring. "His snores were huge and unmistakable" ('Minutes of Glory', 92). This, she could not take. She took the man's money and ran away. She bought herself a new dress, stockings, bangles, earrings and all the accessories that transformed her into a city lady. A lot of admirers were attracted to her side and in the bus, men were giving up their seats for her. Back at Tree Top Bar, Lodging and Restaurant, where she was formerly a sweeper and bedmaker, the rich men were sending her notes asking if she would join their table. She ignored them, dancing seductively to the music from the jukebox. It was at the peak of her "Minutes of Glory" that the lorry driver entered the bar in the company of a policeman. At first, he could not recognize her. They later took her away.

Like Wanja in *Petals*, the image of the prostitute, which Ngugi presents in 'Minutes of Glory', is that of a young lady who is a victim of social circumstances. The poverty of her family and the subsequent deprivation and her desire to rise above this condition threw her headlong into the gripping hands of a callous society. The tragic sequence of her life arises from her poverty-stricken family and later on the indifference of the society to her welfare.

Also important is Ngugi's reflection on the attitude of prostitute to their profession. As Wanja says "A barmaid does not take herself to be a prostitute. We are girls in search of work and men" (*Petals*, 130). As a victim, the prostitute is conditioned by her society. They, therefore, become victims and scapegoats of their social circumstances. Consequently, though prostitutes are generally disreputable in real life, here their characters are sympathetically drawn as is evident in the portrayal of Wanja and Beatrice in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* and 'Minutes of Glory' respectively.

It should be noted that 'Minutes of glory' is written earlier than *Petals of Blood* hence the latter can be said to be an expansion of her earlier story. Some of these prostitutes have a distinct personality of their own, hence, they do not lack spirit. For prostitutes like Wanja of Sunshine Lodge, prostitution facilitates the acquisition of economic resources, provides economic security, and establishes and improves their social status, especially in a world in which they are discriminated against and denied 'proper and honourable' means of fulfilling themselves. To them, relationship with men is instrumental; the means to an end - self-sufficiency and parity with the men. Through prostitution, they bridge the gap between the rich and the poor at least in their individual lives.

The story of Wanja, on the one hand, and Beatrice on the other reflects the diverse ways oppression could manifest and be contended with by different category of people divided along sex and class. To her, prostitution was the only option available to navigate the difficult terrains of human existence. As she contends with forces greater than her – whether as state might or at the individual level, she devices means of coping and surviving even when such means goes against social morality of her time. In any case, which morality does one really talk about, and from whom does one expect moral conduct? An individual brutalized and victimized by the very society that ought to give her security and hope? Or, from the leaders who has demonstrated apparent lack of morality by depriving the poor of the real foundation of their existence, and independence, their land? Of course, there is no basis for morality as both the predator and the prey are caught up in the very web of entanglement that define and redefine their identity in the new and emerging African society. Ngugi has, through the character of Wanja, shown that the majority of the prostitutes in African society are neither out for sensual adventurousness or as a result of moral depravity but because they are victims of social circumstances. From Munira's mouth, we hear that "At the bottom of Wanja's story and experience was an injustice that did not make sense" (*Petals*, 296). Through the character of Wanja, Ngugi portrays one of the causes of prostitution in modern African society. The author goes on to show the movement of consciousness of an innocent girl who is just growing up, and how the intervention of an influential man, Kimeria, frustrated her career, and she became a victim of exploitation.

Prostitution as a Metaphor in *Petals* and 'Minutes of Glory'

Ngugi in *Petals* goes beyond victim-motif to reflect on the nature of the relationship between African leaders and their people in post-colonial Kenyan society and by extension African society, generally. This is conveyed through a metaphoric presentation of the phenomenon of prostitution. For Ngugi, African leaders, by nature of their interaction with the West, have acted like prostitutes, giving out their 'bodies' (their nations and the wealth therein) to the

West. Thus, the collaborative African leaders have played out the variable of the prostitute image. This dimension of Ngugi's work marks a paradigm shift from the popular view of prostitution both in literary texts and the society. The exploiting elite, the political class, who control economic and political power, are the prostitutes. It is they who have taken the little the peasants have to add to their already overfilled pockets. These prostitutes are those who have perpetuated and institutionalized injustice and inequality. They are those who have structured the society into two, so that Cape Town in *Petals* is:

The residential areas of the farm managers, country council officials, public service officers, the managers of Barclays, Standards and African Economic Banks and other servants of State and money powers (*Petals*, 280).

These exploiters who are like the lords of the former apartheid South Africa live in the place appropriately called Cape Town. The shanty town which, ironically, is called New Jerusalem is inhabited by "migrant and floating workers, the unemployed, the prostitutes and the small traders in tin and scrap metals" (*Petals*, 280 – 281). The prostituted are, therefore, the peasants and downtrodden masses that inhabit the ironic New Jerusalem. 'Jerusalem', land of hope, peace and fulfillment, in Ngugi's novel, ironically, symbolizes the place of abode of the suffering masses, a residential area reflecting their shattered lives of deprivation and denials. Yet, they inhabit the 'New Jerusalem'. They are the scapegoats of "[a] world in which one could only be saintly and moral and upright by prostituting others" (*Petals*, 303, emphasis mine).

Yet, the people are not passive victims. Their agency is reflected in such characters as Karega, Wanja and the like. For instance, Karega laments the exploitation of the peasant masses by the capitalists; the collaborators, like Chui, who have subverted the purpose of independence, the Kimerias who have ganged up to oust the peasants like Wanja, Abdulla and others out of business, the Mzigos and Nderis who have betrayed the purpose for which they were voted into offices. These are the elite of the post independence Kenya, and symbols of such leaders in other parts of Africa. In their lack of morality, they equally influence their society negatively. So, for Wanja, morality is defined by what one calls it. For survival, she, therefore, changes her approach by adopting the leaders' tactics, decides to apply her new principle of "eat or you are eaten" (*Petals*, 293) by affirming that:

I have hired young girls... It was not hard... I promised them security... and for that... they let me trade their bodies...
What's the difference whether you are sweating it out on a plantation, in a factory or lying on your back anyway? (*Petals*, 293, emphasis mine).

Here, Wanja explains how she is, in her own little way, "turning the way the world is tilting" (*Petals*, 313) by employing young girls whose bodies she is going to trade as harlots. Wanja's statement above implies that whatever the common people do to earn their living, they always end up being exploited. This idea is equally expressed by Abdulla when he says that "All the ways go the same for us poor" (*Petals*, 284). In any case, does Wanja have to sink lower to rise? Yet, by deciding to turn "the world is tilting" (*Petals*, 313), she demonstrates human's propensity to use others as stepping stone to rise. The justification for her turn around is found in the words of Marx and Engel:

Does it require deep institution to comprehend that man's ideas, views and conceptions, in one word, man's consciousness change with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relations and in his social life? (Marx and Engel, 1977: 57).

This moral tone plays out in the discussion between Karega and Munira. Munira does not see any upward progression in Wanja's lot and calls her a prostitute, "even though a Very Important Prostitute (VIP)" (*Petals*, 240). Here Karega attacked him and retorted that,

We are all prostitutes, for in a world of grab and take, in a world built on a structure of inequality and injustice, in a world where some can eat while others can only toil; some can send their children to school and others cannot; in a world where a prince, a monarch, a businessman can sit on a billion while people starve or hit their heads against church walls for divine deliverance from hunger (*Petals*, 240, emphasis mine).

He, therefore, calls Chui, Mzigos, Nderis, Kimerias, and Reverend Jerrod Brown (symbols of capitalism and exploitation), parasites,

...who had prostituted the whole land turning it over to foreigners for thorough exploitation [and who] would drink people's blood and say hypocritical prayers of devotion to skin oneness and to nationalism even as skeletons of bones walked to lonely graves (*Petals*, 344, emphasis mine).

Wanja's turn around though signifies moral corruption also give credence to human's struggle against forces on his/her environment – social, economic, political *et cetera*. This moral pollution remains an issue that Wanja and her cohort still need to resolve.

As a Marxist writer, Ngugi sees art as a tool for social redirection. Consequently, he employs art to expose the gory exploitation of the capitalist class in Kenya, the moral decadence that should be associated with their actions and denounces the oppression of the workers, and the continued marginalization of the people and rural communities. As he noted through Munira:

Our erstwhile masters had left us a very unevenly cultivated land: the centre swollen with fruit and water sucked from the rest, while the outer parts were progressively weaker and scraggier as one moved away from the centre (*Petals*, 49).

More importantly, here, Ngugi questions the developmental processes and options inherited from the colonialists and sustained in Africa after independence. This in itself has created heightened tension between the leaders and the followers, at times leading to conflict in some of these countries. This disconnect has continued over the decades that as Adesina *et al* (2006) noted:

As the twentieth century closed, not only did the development problems facing Africa become even more

compelling, the margins that previously existed for independent development paths also seemed to have become significantly narrowed under the constraints of a new imperialism (Adesina *et al* 2006: 2).

The neocolonialist paradigms that have impeded people-oriented development in Africa is the focal point Ngugi emphasizes in *Petals*, through metaphoric use of the phenomenon of prostitution, and throws blames at Bretton Woods institutions and African leaders. To Ngugi, institutions like IMF and World Bank compound African development problem and he concludes:

[I]n a world where a man who has never set foot on this land can sit in a New York or London office and determine what I shall eat, read, do, only because he sits on a heap of billions taken from the world's poor, *in such a world we are all prostituted...* (*Petals*, 240, emphasis mine).

He questions the morality of the leaders like Kimeria, Mzigo, Chui, Reverend Jerrod Brown and Nderi whom he believes are 'prostituting', not only by exploiting their people but by allowing the decisions for the governance of their people to be taken from outside, that is Europe and America. The African elite who have undermined the principles of harmonious existence in their local communities through their 'senseless' destruction of sources of livelihood of the common people, and alliances with foreigners and institutions contribute in creating crisis in their nation-states. Little wonder that Ake (2001: 6) rightly observed:

At independence the form and function of the state in Africa did not change much for most countries in Africa. State power remained essentially the same: immense, arbitrary, often violent, always threatening ... Politics remained a zero-sum game: power was sought by all means and maintained by all means. Colonial rule left most of Africa a legacy of intense and lawless political competition amidst an ideological void and a rising tide of disenchantment with the expectation of a better life (Ake, 2001: 6).

The economic crisis that erupted in developing countries in Africa in the 1980s which actually started building up throughout the period 1973 - 80 (Toye, 1994: 20, as cited in Adesina 2006: 45), portend a bleak picture for African continent and contributed in deepening crisis of development and poverty. Indeed, the 'intractable development dilemma' in Africa, to use the words of Nnadozie (2006: 215), has continued to worsen African condition. Ngugi has a holistic view of what constitutes development. To him, Okolo observes, development encompasses physical, political, cultural and psychological survival (Okolo, 2007). Ngugi's position Okolo further contends is that the Western capitalist model which African societies inherited through colonial encounter cannot work for the continent because "colonialism, with its subjective influence, was tailored to render the colonized dependent on the colonizer – politically, culturally, morally, economically, socially and physically" (Okolo, 2007: 119).

Increasingly, disconnect between the leadership and the followership continues to widen and deepen. Although Ngugi wrote his novel in the seventies, decades later, rather than improvement in the lots of the masses, the problems have taken a new dimension that in

recent times, there is massive illegal movement of funds and persons to the West, the 'promise land'. Human cargoes in the form of human trafficking for prostitution, etc have all evolved and worsened over the past decades. Ngugi has earlier cautioned on the danger of marginalization and exclusion and argued that the society as a whole suffers whenever a group is pushed to destructive tendencies: It risks the devastation of even those things contributed by the other groups while missing the positive contribution of the aggrieved group. This is evident in the misdirection of Wanja's talents and the tragic end of Kimeria and his ilk that were destroyed in the fire.

As a metaphoric representation, prostitution is more than sexual services for material gains. In this sense, prostitution means economic exploitation in all its ramifications. He took out the imagery of sexuality out of the female prostitutes, but retains its classical features to re-essentialize it as 'capitalist' or the African elite. Thus, the 'prostitutors' are those that exploit others; they are "the beasts of prey" (*Petals*, 294) who must accumulate wealth indiscriminately, caring less for their "preys" (*Petals*, 294). The prostituted are "the victims of a few people's cleanliness and health and saintliness and wealth" (*Petals*, 303).

Conclusion

The phenomenon of prostitution is a social behavior which has received the attention of anthropologists, sociologists and other social scientists. Literature as a mirror of life also mirrors the phenomenon of prostitution as a social malady. In our analysis of Ngugi's treatment of the phenomenon of prostitution in Africa fiction, it is evident that Ngugi perceives prostitution first, as a social problem and as an existential issue. Prostitution also reflects a deeper socio-political relationship in post-colonial African states. Through art, Ngugi exposes this social predicament in Africa and blames the socio-political and economic conditions prevalent in the society for the sustenance of this social malady. As a literary artist who believes in the functional nature of African literature, Ngugi in our analysis raises questions on the model of development pursued by African leaders which has continued to impoverish the people. For him, for instance:

Literature is of course primarily concerned with what any political and economic arrangement does to the spirit and values governing human relationships (Ngugi, 1972: xvi).

Merging ideology and art and going, he goes beyond the victim motif to present prostitution at a metaphoric level where the exploiting capitalists are the actual prostitutes. Unlike the prostitute-as-victim who trades with her body, the prostitute as the capitalist disposes the masses of their property. State power and instruments of coercion are employed to subjugate the people, pushing them to the marginality of the society. He exposes the challenges which the insensitive society, symbolized by bad leadership and governance, imposes on the masses and encourages to them to resist oppression by fighting back. To Wanja, who heeded this call, this is the only way through which she can make the capitalists pay back part of their indecent earnings. And their destruction in the fire that destroyed Wanja's whorehouse symbolizes the destruction of the capitalist system and all that the exploiting leaders stand for. To Ngugi, therefore, Africa as a continent will only progress when bad leadership is brought to an end through the masses' reaction against them. To therefore African people must take responsibility for their future and that of their continent. Indeed, the forces of change to Ngugi must come from within.

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