

# The Possibility of Regeneration of the African Female Character in Ngugi WA Thiongo's *Matigari*

**John Iorfa WASEGA PhD**

Department of English, Benue State University,  
Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria

**Atouoto James KERKER PhD**

Department of English,  
Benue State University, Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria

## **Abstract**

Through a Postcolonial Feminist perspective, the paper aims to investigate the possibility of regeneration of the African female character in Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Matigari*. The paper explores the tale of the novel's female protagonist called Guthera after the sudden death of her father, an elder in the church who is hanged for carrying bullets in his Bible during the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya. The objectives of the paper are to: examine how Guthera is able to handle the challenge of taking care of herself and her younger siblings; explore the effect of the unwillingness of the church to assist Guthera, the daughter of one of her members after his death and; expose how she becomes a victim of sexual harassment by males in the course of looking for sources of livelihood after the execution of her father. Qualitative analytical approach which entails the use of contextual clues to uncover important messages that are embedded in the text is used as a method of analysis. The paper finds out that it is the high level of frustration that lays the platform for Guthera to explore other available opportunities to survive, including prostitution. Guthera's willingness to do anything that could change her society as well as her deep involvement in the socio-economic, security and political issues in her society is a deliberate effort to positively project the image of the African woman. The paper concludes that the church and society should always partner to provide the necessary support

to people who are in dire need to be able to effectively manage their challenging moments.

**Keywords: Regeneration, Patriarchy, Feminism,  
Subordination, Postcolonial Literature**

### **Introduction**

Every literary work of art consciously or unconsciously portrays different aspects of human life and his/her experience at a particular time. This paper essentially centres on the possibility of regeneration of the African female character as she struggles to take advantage of the available opportunities around her while trying to enthrone her rights and privileges. The paper examines the circumstances that lead to the arrest and execution of the female protagonist's father, who is an elder in the church and a patriot. Guthera's father is arrested and hanged after been found in possession of bullets in his Bible during the Mau Mau struggle, which is considered by many Kenyans as the most glorious and heroic aspect of the mainstream struggle. Responsibility for the upkeep of his children rests squarely on the shoulders of his eldest daughter, called Guthera. The novel's artistic response to Guthera and how she is able to manage her life after her father's execution is conditioned by his concern for women as significant partners in the development and unity of any nation.

Though many people have lauded women-centred writing as providing an important platform for the ventilation of African women's experiences and viewpoints for the advancement of the black race, it is replete with heterogeneous positions that tend to pitch female writers against their male counterparts. For example, Mbaiver Nyitse encourages women writers to write and present their own personal experiences while dismissing male writers who even try to write in the feminist tradition when she maintains that; "Just as it was not until the African started presenting his own version of life, the white man's previous perception of the African was discarded as false"(27). Her comment fails to provide the kind of knowledge that can help engender a sense of commitment that will form a vital basis for our understanding of men's relationship with women. Her evaluation of the condition of women does not take into cognizance the fact that a good number of male writers like

Nuruddin Farah and Ngugi wa Thiong'o have been helping to create the consciousness required to salvage the women from the myriad of problems facing them in their society. Her comment is therefore biased, divisive and lopsided as it focuses only on women's negative experience and relationships, apparently obscuring the healthy relationship that exists between men and women as well as the roles male writers play in the development and shaping of women. It is in response to this divisive debate as canvassed by Nyitse and other feminist critics that Charles Nnolim reminds us that:

The debasement of the female image is as old as the Bible and the Koran, and has other origins in pre-historic literature and mythology. The image of Eve, [the Bible], Helen of Troy, Circe, and the wicked sirens of mythology luring men to their deaths [classical literature] – all pre-date literature produced in Africa or in the black world. (123)

Nnolim's comments above do not imply his support of negative portrayal of women in black writing. He rather makes the comments against the backdrop of divergent voices or ambivalent disposition of African female writers and critics to the feminist agency as shown in the conflictual and rebellious female characterisation in some of their works. It is the ambivalent posture displayed by most African female writers and critics that Nnolim is tempted to "predict a bleak future for the [feminist] movement" (125). By this comment, Nnolim may be construed by some feminist writers and critics as being indifferent to the cause of women, but on a closer observation, what can be discerned from his viewpoints is a wise counsel (of an elder) to his fellow African female writers and critics to "sheath their swords" and embrace their male counterparts in literary imagination and criticism that is not sexually sentimental and tilts to the concerns and glorification of a particular gender. The focus should be on the common concerns (bad governance, insecurity, gender discrimination, racism, poverty, hunger, diseases, high mortality rate) affecting black women and men all over the globe, employing universal

and best tenets of the novel genre. Dennie Nneka in his article describes the ideological standpoint of male literary works that are written in the feminist tradition as “Black Male Feminism” because of their emphasis on “the practices and ideologies that black men employ to jointly challenge racism and sexism (4) It is in toeing this view point that Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Matigari* espouses essentially a literary imagination that depicts a healthy and more robust situations that are free of stereotypes and disparaging images of women. Giovanna La Magna is right when he observes that; “women in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s novels bear the sorrow of life without being crushed by them” (93). Women are seen responding positively to the dynamism of their society. They have sufficient motivation for doing so because Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s fictional writings are successfully crafted and fully capable of representing and repositioning the beleaguered women, which is a form of inspiration to them. Ngugi wa Thiong’o himself voices out the need to position himself among women for inspiration when he reveals that; “for me, in writing a novel, I love to hear the voices of the people [...].I need the vibrant voices of beautiful women; their touch, their signs, their tears, their laughter”(Detained 6).This is an eloquent testimony of the level of importance Ngugi wa Thiong’o attaches to women in his fiction. They are assigned leading roles while trying to reshape and strengthen their society.

Reactions on female protagonist in *Matigari* is not only aimed to provoke, but also to provide impetus as well as light the stage for other females to remove themselves from where they are trapped from the traditional taboos and restrictions that only help to propel male chauvinism. These traditional taboos, in the name of which all kinds of atrocities are committed against women are viewed by Nyitse as; “a mere fiction, created by dominant man, to enforce his dominance”. According to her, “until the victim, the other is able to tell her own story, we cannot be sure that what we have been told is the truth”(27). As reasonable as Nyitse’s views regarding male writers may appear, they do not apply within the context of *Matigari*, because the novel forges a literary space which places women at the centre of its narration. The novel incorporates women’s experiences and viewpoints and tells their story without stereotypes,

prejudice or bias. It also presents the importance of women and their sustained efforts to change their destiny even from a disadvantaged position. While presenting the female character whose voices are rarely heard in other climes, except in exceptional cases, Ngugi wa Thiong'o does not fail to present a consistent revision of thought, style, content and characterization. While Ngugi wa Thiong'o, like any other writer has the power to decide whose views are heard or not in his/her fiction, passive roles are not allocated to female characters in *Matigari*, but the novel tries to reconstruct their image. The novel's female characters are able to overcome obstacles and achieve success as long as they are ready to take responsibilities for their lives.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Postcolonial Feminism**

The term "postcolonial" reflects both political and intellectual engagements by scholars and elites in the formerly colonised societies with the nature, impact and implications of domination and representation of imperialism and discourse that aids it. The theory (and practice) of postcolonialism is produced as a discourse of both affirmation of essential difference of the colonised people as well as political responses to dominant narratives of the West. The two concepts, therefore, are concerned with discourses of marginalisation and oppression. Similarly, they both contend with and critique the nature and effects of the cultural legitimisation and exclusion resulting from the unequal power relations in cultural and political contexts of race and gender. To the extent that both concepts are borne of long and varied histories of protest philosophies and de-constructive ideologies, they also draw attention to the powers of representation and resistance, contesting the space and authority of domination, and most importantly, articulating "selfhood" and "agency" in opposition

to a wide variety of repressive and restrictive practices in the colonial and post-colonial times.

Historically, Postcolonial Feminism is an offshoot of feminism. Feminism has been linked to the anti-slavery/ abolitionist movements in the United States, among other causal catalysts across Europe between 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, foregrounding its roots within black emancipation discourse. Therefore, it is no surprise that many feminists like Sojourner Truth, Maria Stewart, Ida B. Wells and Harriet Tubman were black women. The black feminist leadership, which waned after slavery had been aborted, would pick up momentum after civil rights movements in the United States.

The major thrust of Postcolonial Feminism is that feminist focus in these formerly colonised countries by virtue of the tensions between their socio-cultural realities and socio-political reorientation has to contend with in addition to gender issues only in addition to the much more dis-empowering economic and political issues. From the beginning, the woman question in the post-colony had been interlinked with imperialist culture. The connection between postcolonial and feminism is defined by the associations of tension and variance arising from primacy, priority and politics of resistance.

By definition, Postcolonial Feminism is primarily concerned with the representation of women in once colonised societies. The term is made up of the association of two intellectual positions – postcolonialism and feminism – that are connected on many levels of signification. Both post-colonialism and feminism are both theories of culture and representation; both are political and ideological in posture, and both work to dismantle preconceived structures, positions, ideologies of power and social and cultural control. Postcolonial Feminism presupposes that colonialism must be taken into consideration when discussing gender oppression of non-white women or women in societies that were formerly colonised by western power:

Fundamental to all forms of postcolonial studies is the view that the history of the West since the early modern period has in large part been a history of the exploitation by European powers of their non-white, non-Western others. Feminist post-colonial critics insist on the gendered nature of this history and look in particular at the relationship between colonialism and patriarchy. (Weedon, 284)

Postcolonial Feminism challenges the universalist tendency of western feminism which homogenises the experiences of all women across different periods and societies. Like post-colonial discourse itself, post-colonial feminism derives critical influences from the post-structuralist theory which was first propounded by French scholars from the first half of the twentieth century. It's adaptation to discussion of the non-Western feminism is often linked to feminist postcolonial critics such as Gayatri Spivak and Chandra Mohanty who have appropriated post-structuralist insights in interrogating marginalised literatures and cultures along gendered histories and colonial subjectivities and modes of accommodation and resistance (Weedon 285). Mohanty says of colonialism that: "However sophisticated and problematic its use as an explanatory construct, colonialism almost invariably implies a relation of structural domination and a suppression – often violent – of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question"(333). Postcolonial feminists believe that the colonial imagination is evident in Western feminist scholarship and practices in which the experiences of the Western women are superimposed on the women in the colonised world. Mohanty refers to this as "universal patriarchal framework" (335). These frameworks are discursive structures that inscribe hegemonies and power relations between the West and formerly colonised societies, the societies which are still in economic terms at least, linked to the colonising metropolises in unequal footing.

The combination of historical realities of colonisation and neo-imperialism legitimises the privilege to speak on everybody's behalf in western cultural imagination. While the core insight of general multicultural feminism demonstrates the fight for the recognition of women's diversity and individuality, the

postcolonial variant advances that women in formerly colonised societies have peculiar conditions bordering on complex cultural negotiation between pre-colonial traditions and colonial modernity as well as the now rampaging globalisation. In contrast to the global feminism, the presiding principles behind postcolonial feminism are the idea of difference in both normative and conceptual senses. Language, especially, has been found to be a system through which structures of power are constructed, distributed to some and restricted to others. While language creates hierarchies and legitimises agency, it is important in postcolonial discourse because it is a site for both contestations and self-retrieval.

Postcolonial Feminism is also as concerned about the role of women within the cultural frameworks of anti-colonial, indigenous practices and policies as it is in contesting the space of patriarchal implications in colonial legacy. It emphasises the role of literature in the production of cultural representation. It notes the distinction between how Western women are self-represented and how the “Third World” woman is re-presented in literary texts. While Western feminist writings present the Western woman as civilised, educated and modern and in control of their lives and bodies, women of the “Third World” are presented as uncivilised, illiterate, poor, family oriented, sexually constrained, lacking the freedom to make decisions about their lives and bodies, thus passive and voiceless. Therefore, this ‘homogenous’ image of the ‘Third World woman produced as a result of the neglect of the material and heterogeneity of the lives of women in the third world is viewed as another form of colonialism. Woman in the third world is thus defined in terms of gender only, without reference to ethnicity or social classification. Therefore, it is unfortunate when female criticism reproduces the axioms of imperialism. Postcolonial feminism seeks among other things, an identity for the women of the third world which is reflective of their diverse material and collective historical realities.

The observations of some critics of the postcolony (usually male) that feminism in post-colonial frame has continued to highlight “the degree to which women are still working against a colonial

legacy that was itself powerfully patriarchal” (Young 116). Thus, the subjugation of the female was not considered a priority during anti-colonial movements and also during the first phase of post-colonial theorisation. Further down history, women have continued to be excluded in both social and literary imaginings. Showalter talks about the female double jeopardy: “the sexism of black literary history” and “racism of feminist literary history” (214). Smith goes further in decrying “the meaning of blackness “which has profoundly shaped “the experience of gender, just as conditions of womanhood affect ineluctably the experience of race” (317). Postcolonial Feminist criticism (and postcolonial feminism) is thus constituted at once as a genre of post-colonial studies as well as its critique, challenging the oppression of discursive and non-discursive practices.

Postcolonial feminism occupies a contested space between postcolonial concerns like race, nationalism, culture, gender, the politics of literature and perpetuation of normative cultural representations of race and gender, its constitution would become a vantage point of its rallying cry. The position of hooks is that black women must recognise the vantage point their marginality gives them and make use of this perspective to criticise the dominant racist, classicist, sexist hegemony as well as to envision and create a counter-hegemony. This position is corroborated by Smith who also calls for exploring representations of black women “through technique of analysis which suspend the variables of race, class and gender in mutually interrogative relation” (318). Still this call is older. In *Reading Black Feminist*, Henry Louis Gates Jr. quotes the words of Anna Julia Cooper who calls on “voiceless Black Woman of America” to chart her own ways out of oppression and bondage since “Just as our Caucasian barristers are not to blame if they cannot quite put themselves in the dark man’s place, neither should the dark man be wholly expected fully and adequately to reproduce the exact voice of the Black Woman” (Gates Jr. 1). This call has continued to echo through decades of black and African women’s struggle to enact self-representations. This can be traced back to the practices of work songs on slave plantations which were “sifted through the cry of hard times” of complicated relationships, loss, privation in which their spirits

occasionally rising to the heights of heroism but more often tempered by the nibbling need to always be practical, through slave narratives to contemporary fiction of Africa and the African diaspora.

From views canvassed above, it is pertinent to note that Postcolonial feminism is not simply a subset of post-colonial studies or another variety of feminism. Rather, it seeks to act as an intervention that changes the assumptions of both postcolonial and feminist studies. With global debt, labour, and environmental crises on the rise, the precarious position of women (especially in the global south) has become a prevalent concern of postcolonial feminist novels.

### **Regeneration of the Female Character in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Matigari***

Relying on the fact that; “the writer is a sensitive point within his society”(Ker 83), Ngugi wa Thiong'o tries to reflect the progressive activities of his female character in *Matigari*. Like many other African societies, Kenya is a patriarchal society where women are less valued. *Matigari* is thus a written account of events of the existential and societal realities of the postcolonial Kenya woman. Resonating through this novel is an echo of the painful experience of postcolonial Kenyan woman and how she tries to free herself from the array of failures erected on her way by ridiculous men. These oppressive tendencies against women as reflected in *Matigari* and her attempts to light up her path towards self-definition are some of the efforts of the novel to expose the damaging consequences of colonialism on Kenyan women. The novel's female protagonist is however inspired to realise, recover and assert herself. For example, when Guthera, the novel's female protagonist approaches superintendent of police, Gokono to find out why her father is arrested and detained, he informs her that; “Your father was found carrying bullets in his Bible [...]. Being found in possession of bullets carried with it a death sentence” (*Matigari* 35). Having heard this, Guthera is greatly shocked and for a while remains speechless because she realises the gravity of her father's offence. After taking her father back to the

cell, the superintendent comes back to Guthera smiling slyly and says: “My superiors do not know about this yet. We can settle this matter between us here and now. Give me your purity, and I will give your parent back to you”(Matigari.35). While the young girl remains speechless, the superintendent further points to her the position of her father’s life saying that; “You are carrying your father's life between your legs”(Matigari.35). This offer appears tempting considering the gravity of her father’s offence, but Guthera refuses to exchange her purity with her father’s life. Though she is temporarily weighed down by this news, and feels completely removed from life, she refuses to give into the malevolent forces around her. She promises not to forsake her Heavenly Father in spite of the situation at hand. Consequently, her earthly father is hanged the following day. This is an attempt by the novel to depict the female character with amiable qualities of virtuousness, unusual courage and conscience.

The Mau Mau struggle, for which Guthera’s father is hanged is considered by many Kenyans as the most glorious and heroic aspects of their country’s mainstream struggle. “The basic objectives of Mau Mau revolutionaries, according to Ngugi wa Thiong’o were to drive out the Europeans, seize the government and give back to the Kenya peasants their stolen lands and property” (*Homecoming* 28). Land is considered by many Kenyans as a source of material upliftment for them in particular and humanity in general. Their fascination with land is also based on the consideration that it is the source of hope, wealth and success. The colonisers on the other hand opposed Mau Mau and their objectives with exceeding prejudices. They considered it as an expression of impotent Gikuyu tribalism and a disorganised attempt to return Kenya to a state of savagery.

The death of Guthera’s father, apart from creating a huge vacuum in the family is a devastating blow to her, because responsibility for the upkeep of her siblings rests squarely on her shoulder. While trying to fend for herself and siblings, Guthera experiences torture, humiliation and grief. For example, immediately after the death of her father, their piece of land which they so much put their lives on for survival is

confiscated from them “by the colonial government”(Matigari 36). Her younger siblings cried everyday asking for their father and what they could eat. The anguished cry of her younger ones and her inability to provide for their needs almost tear her apart while the thought that she might have perhaps saved her father’s life torments her (36). Her sibling’s “clothes got tattered and there was no food. Nothing”(Matigari 36). Confronted with these challenges, she first of all prays to her Heavenly Father for help to take care of her family, but her prayer is not answered or not heard. Secondly, the Church which she commits herself for service hoping that it will be her place of solace unfortunately becomes a place of grief, as it abandons her when she needs help the most. From this scenario we are able to appreciate that Guthera’s aim and purpose in life “... are to do no ill, aspire only to do good to others while trying to tread the paths of virtue and righteousness only” (Matigari 34). However, her abiding faith in the Bible fails to provide answers to hunger, thirst and nakedness. All that the Bible says is simply; “Thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s things; thou shalt not commit adultery”(Matigari 36). At home, the children cry every day for food and for their father. One day, the Guthera decided to walk the streets. That day, she returned home with a packet of flour. From the day that she decided to walk the streets, she was able to feed and clothe the other children. But she could not earn enough to send them to school or to a place where they could learn useful skills. (Matigari 36)

The above amply depicts the extent to which societal frustration and near absence of credible alternatives and persons to turn to for help compel women to, in spite of their moral uprightness and beauty to go into the street for survival. Also, the exposition of the unwillingness of the Church to assist her devout member and the less privileged, like Guthera and her siblings is a deliberate attempt by the novel to launch or subject the Church to mild or veiled criticism, especially in its activities during and after colonial rule in Kenya. It is also a confirmation of the view that the Church in Kenya is the greatest opponent of the people’s struggle for freedom. For example, apart from neglecting her devout member, the Church opposes Mau Mau

struggle but supports the oppressive tyranny of the people. This means Christianity, which basic doctrines are love and equality, forms an integral part of colonialism in Kenya.

In this wise, Ngugi wa Thiong'o is right when he compares the Church and colonialism in *Homecoming* thus; "In Kenya, the European settler robbed the people of their land [while] the missionary robbed people of their soul" (32). In spite of her virtuous inclination, the novel's female protagonist, Guthera is forced into prostitution as a result of social circumstances that militate against her. These are some of the distorting values of the Church in Africa. By refusing to assist Guthera to overcome her difficult moment in life is enough testimony that the Church expects the suffering poor to bear their condition as divinely given without protesting. The Church's advocacy of meekness in the face of adversity on earth, for the sake of abundance in heaven is explored by the privileged class to persuade the oppressed to bear the burden of oppression with a calmed state of mind. The Church in Kenya, and indeed Africa has refused to change its colonial stance and go back to the roots of the broken Africa and work with the less- privileged, like Guthera in creating a new society.

Through Guthera's characterisation, it could be observed that colonialism is a factor that is responsible for the mental indoctrination and personality displacement of many women in Africa. In an article in the *Daily Nation*, Ngugi wa Thiong'o repudiates colonialism when he says that; "colonialism is basically immoral" (29). The presentation of the circumstances that lead Guthera, a rare beauty into prostitution is the novel's attempt to reveal that some of the women who behave like Guthera are not totally responsible for their calamity and predicament. It is therefore, established that some women venture into prostitution, not because of the promiscuity in them but due to socio-religious circumstances. These are some of the reasons why men of integrity like Matigari and Muriuki are created in the novel to support Guthera to survive. Brendon Nicholls is right when he reveals that:

Ngugi has done than any other male African writer to revise and reconsider his female representations,

perhaps because; his politics is so deeply invested in them. Even where his fiction appears to subordinate women, it works hard to emphasize the resilience, courage, strength, sagacity, loyalty, ability and integrity of the female character.” (4)

The above passage reveals deliberate attempt towards good fictional writing in the novel. Good fictional writing explores issues of interest to women as much as men because what affects women ultimately affects men. Men also have mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, female colleagues, and comrades. Margaret Fuller corroborates this viewpoint when she notes that male and female represent the two sides of the great radical dualism (1). To Fuller, man and woman are perpetually passing into each other. Like fluid and solid; fluid hardens to solid, solid rushes to fluid, so is man and woman— there is no wholly masculine man and no purely feminine woman (1). Undoubtedly, biological and physiological sex differences do exist, but man and woman are inextricably complementary.

Extrapolating from the above, Giovanna La Magna is right when he observes that; “women in Ngugi’s novels bear the sorrows of life without being crushed by them”(93). Also, Chimalum Nwankwo’s assessment is valid when he says that although Ngugi’s “women suffer secondary roles in certain respects, in others they are somewhat compensated” (16). Nwankwo observes further that; “questions about the general ability of women [are] answered with varying degrees of satisfaction”(26).

While continuing her search for survival, Guthera comes across Matigari ma Njiruungi. She emerges from where she is hiding from the policeman who is always after her, “whistling to make her stop”(Matigari 27). Though many may consider her as a whore due to her outings in recent times, one thing she refuses to do is to have any sexual relationship with any policemen, because “cops’ money stinks of blood” (Matigari 28). Therefore, she would rather beg for beer, even from a total stranger than receive money from the police in exchange for pleasure. This is why she walks straight to Matigari ma Njiruungi in the bar

without hesitation and sits on his laps while looking penetratingly into his face as captured thus:

Why do you look at me like that dad? I usually drink lager. Go on! Don't be mean! Aren't you going to offer me anything to drink? Or how much do you want to pay for a little pleasure? Pleasures are very expensive you know; but at this time of the month, the prices are usually low. We even give favours on credit. You can pay at the end of the month. But that is only if you are employed. Are you? Or are you one of those peasants who wait for a cent from the sale of the milk from your one cow? Or perhaps from the sale of coffee picked from your single acre? Or are you the type who ambush their wives for money as they return home after selling their wares in the market place? Any way, we don't mind where you get your money from or how.(28)

The above scenario reflects reality and persuades the reader to view that reality from the same perspective. Firstly, Guthera is lonely and in desperate need of companionship because her traditional world is fragmented as a result of her people's encounter with the West. She is therefore, prompted by this bewildering circumstance to indulge in acts that are contrary to her inner nature. For example, her sexual overture to an old man whom she is meeting for the first time and her stunning revelations are quite alarming and disheartening. Secondly, Guthera expresses worry over the looming industrial action by the factory workers as this is capable of taking food away from her table. The situation is narrated thus:

But luck isn't always on our side. For instance, if the factory workers go on strike, I have no clue as to how we will get our food. We might be lucky with those who sell their little plots of land. Would you sell off your wife's plot, or indeed her house?  
(*Matigari* 28-29)

The above excerpts reveal that workers form the greater percentage of her patrons. However, her concern is not so much

about workers' welfare but the negative effect the industrial action will have on her business. This means when workers are not treated fairly, the commonest person on the street feels the negative impact. Regrettably, Guthera is not alone in this business as observed from her use of collective pronoun 'we' in her speech. While sitting on Matigari ma Njiruungi's laps, she puts her arm around his neck and looks at him with feigned love in her eyes, not minding the difference in their age and status. Even when Matigari ma Njiruungi asks her whether she realises that he is old enough to be her father, while urging her to "sit down here on the chair" (*Matigari* 29), Guthera is not completely bothered as she defends her action thus:

These days, it does not matter whether it's your father or your son. Whether it's your brother or your sister. The most important thing is money. Even if a boy like this one [Muriuki] came to me with money in his pocket, I would give him such delight as he has never dreamt of. (*Matigari* 29)

The foregoing excerpts demonstrate Guthera's approach and strategy to overcome her challenging moments in life. Her comment is quite astonishing as it reveals the seriousness of the situation she and her likes go through in the course of looking for daily bread in postcolonial Kenya. She tries to adopt strategies that would liberate her from mental and economic bondage. While doing this, she does not mind whether one is related to her, or one is old enough to be her father, or one is small enough to be her child. All she needs is money to sustain her and siblings, irrespective of where that money comes from.

In the course of her conversation with Matigari ma Njiruungi in the bar, two policemen arrive the scene, and as Guthera tries to escape, they set their dog against her. While other people in the bar stand by and watch helplessly as the police harass and threaten her, Matigari ma Njiruungi steps forward and confronts the police without fear, and the stunned policemen release her to go. This incident brings to the fore the level of dehumanisation and inequality which are some of the thematic concerns in the novel. This incident also highlights the tyranny and other forms of oppressive tendencies of postcolonial

leaders. Edward Said is therefore, right when he declares that; “domination and inequality of power and wealth are perennial facts of human society”(19). Guthera has an aversion for the police for killing her freedom-fighter father when she refused to trade her innocence for her father’s life.

Though Guthera is considered to have strayed away from the path of righteousness and turns into a hunter of men after her father’s death due to hardship, she promises not to go to bed with any policeman, insisting that; “I will never open my legs for any policeman, these traitors, no matter how much they are prepared to pay for the favours. This will be my eleventh commandment” (*Matigari* 37). Instead, she prefers to take money from strangers, thieves, even murderers. She is invested with sufficient courage to obey her eleventh commandment while the two police officers who feel aggrieved by her rejection of their sexual advances set their dog on her. At this point, she is extremely frightened to the extent that; “a gosh of urine rushes down her legs” (*Matigari* 30). Motivated by the fact that; “too much fear breeds misery in the land”( *Matigari* 31), Matigari ma Njiruungi refuses to hide behind the cloak of silence, like others and be ruled by fear, while the innocent woman is humiliated. He warns the police to let her go, while accusing them of harassing the woman because she won't open her legs for them. His intervention to save Guthera from the randy policemen is the novel’s projection of the possibility of a society based on social justice, equal access to opportunities where no identity, race, gender, and generation will confer special advantage on its bearer to the exclusion of the other. Though Guthera is not able to defend herself or fight for her rights without demonstrating any element of fear or behaving timidly, she is able to adhere tenaciously to her belief, in her vain attempt to maintain cohesion in her life.

After been saved from police brutality, Guthera returns to the bar to appreciate Matigari for his kind gesture towards her. In their interaction, Matigari ma Njiruungi advises her to live a virtuous life. Deeply touched by Matigari ma Njiruungi’s advice, she declares that:

I want to do something to change whatever it is that makes people live like animals, especially us women. What can we as women do to change our lives? Or will we continue to follow the paths carved out for us by men? Aren't we in the majority anyway? From now on I want to be among the vanguard. I shall never be left behind. (*Matigari* 140)

As a survivor of the harshest conditions in her society, Guthera has moved from self-ignorance to awareness, assurance and self-reliance. Through her interaction with Matigari ma Njiriingi, she emerges stronger and is able to perform positive roles as well as contribute to the struggle against exploitation in her society. She is also, able to rediscover herself and thus explores ways of changing her life. Unfortunately, in an attempt to facilitate Matigari's escape from prison, Guthera breaks her eleventh commandment. James Ogude gives a clearer picture of this scenario when he reveals that:

She is... a morally upright girl who refuses to yield to the sexual demands of a police superintendent to get her father released from prison... Guthera is initiated into the struggle when she breaks her vow that she would never give her body to any policeman; she sleeps with a prison guard in order to help Matigari escape [from prison]. (114)

Guthera finds a common ground with Matigari ma

Njiruungi in their background of poverty and in their common vision to liberate their society. Having been initiated into the struggle, she follows Matigari ma Njiruungi to recover his house but the house is occupied by Robert Williams and John Boy Junior. In an attempt to recover the house by force, both of them are pursued and shot by the police after a fierce battle. They drag themselves into the river with gunshot wounds and their bodies are never recovered, leading to many rumours that they somehow survived. This has been central to the plot construction and characterisation of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Matigari*.

### Conclusion

The paper reflects graphic rendering of events involving the female protagonist in *Matigari* in a detailed and vivid manner. The novel reflects on the damaging consequences of colonialism and Christianity on the female character through the events that follow after the death of Guthera's father and her attempts to light up her path towards self-definition. It portrays the Kenyan traditional world as been fragmented as a result of her encounter with the West. This fracture is heightened as members of the same society betray their own in chaotic pursuit of material things. This has prompted Guthera to indulge in acts contrary to her inner nature in order to take care of her younger siblings after her father was executed for carrying bullets in his bible during the Mau Mau struggle. Though, she promises not to trade her body for the oppressor's money, she breaks her eleventh commandment (which says, never sleep with a policeman) in order to release Matigari ma Njiruungi from prison. Apart from demonstrating its deep commitment to women and what affects them in the developing world, the novel has also demonstrated its descriptive skills through its tracing of both the contradictions and hesitations of its female protagonist and the complexities of life generally.

### Works Cited

- Akung, Jones. "The Western Voice and Feminist Criticism of the Nigerian Novel." *World Journal of English Language*. Vol.3 no.1, (2013): Pp. 24-37.
- Ker, David. *Literature and Society in Africa*. Spectrum Books Limited, 2004.
- La Magna, Giovanna. "Women in Ngugi's Novels", *Quaderni di Lingue e Letteratur*, 11, 1980.
- Mohanty, Chandra. "Under Western Eyes" Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggle" *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. 28.2, (2002): Pp 499-535.
- Nicholls, Brendon. *Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Gender, and the Ethics of Post-colonial Reading*. Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010.
- Nneka, Dennie. "Black Male Feminism and the Evolution of Du

Boisian Thought, 1903-1920". *Palimpsest: A Journal on Women, Gender, and the Blackm International*. Volume9, Issue1, (2020): Pp. 1-27.

Nnolim, Charles. *Issues in African Literature*. Malthouse Press Limited, 2010.

Nwankwo, Chimalum. *The Works of Ngugi wa Thiong'o: Towards the Kingdom of Woman and Man*. Longman, 1992.

Nyitse, Mbaiver Leticia. "A Literary History of African-American Female Writers". *Makurdi Journal of Language and Literature*. Vol.1. No.1. (2009): Pp 23-36.

Ogude, James. *Ngugi's Novels and African History*. Pluto Press, 1999.

Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. Vintage Books, 1993.

Sharma, Manisha and Garima Dubey. "Gender Dimensions in the Fiction of Ngugi wa Thiong'o". *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities*. Vol. IV Issue III, March, (2016): P150

Showalter, Ellaine. "Towards a Feminist Poetics. (editor) Mary Jacobus. *Women Writing and Writing about Women*. Groom Helm, 1979.

Wa Thiong'o, Ngugi. "As I See it: Respect Will Come When We Are Self-sufficient." *Daily Nation*. [Nairobi] 17<sup>th</sup> March, 1963.

\_\_\_ \_\_\_. *Detained: A Writer's Diary's Prison Diary*. Heinemann, 1981.

\_\_\_ \_\_\_. *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics*. Lawrence Hill and Company, 1972.

\_\_\_ \_\_\_. *Matigari*. Heinemann, 1987.

Weedon, Chris. "Postcolonial Feminist Criticism". (editors) plain, G. and Sellers. *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism*. Cambridge University Press, (2007): Pp 282-300.