

## **Ingenious Women Transformation In Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *Devil On The Cross And Petals Of Blood***

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This paper evaluates within the context of increasingly important position assigned to African literature in general; and the novel in particular, the dominant roles played by Ngugi Wa Thiongo through a focus on the significant contributions concerning the theme of women and transformation. Ngugi puts a high premium on women, showing them as champions of especially sexual and racial freedom for all women, in his novels, *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross*. This paper examines the ways in which Ngugi highlights different aspects of the discourse of female liberation, while also studying the dialogue of transformation. The study uses Feminism as the theoretical framework to evaluate the creative transformation of women against the backdrop of oppression, exploitation and male subjugation and also examines Ngugi's aesthetic approach to the discourse of women and transformation.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

African women have always shown their disapproval to the negative image given to them by the society. Women at the community level are exposed to the oppressive patriarchal activities and they surreptitiously resist their burden. Women in the literary circle are more pronounced in their disapproval of female chauvinism and patriarchal tendencies subsisting in their society. They usually point accusing fingers especially against the male authored texts of the stereotypical and prejudicial image ascribed to them. These women intellectuals detest the angelic, docile and passive portraiture of the woman in these texts where she is praised if she does not object to the oppressive, demeaning and subjugation she is given by the patriarchal society. They and those sympathetic to the course of women are also displeased with the image of the demon, ruthlessness and wickedness women that women who oppose subjugation and oppression are given. Movements in resistance against these negative behaviours against women have been formed over time. Feminism is a broad theory that aggregates the various strands of resistance of women oppression and a demand for women liberation, empowerment, transformation and so on.

The structures in the African society that support women's oppression and subjugation include patriarchy, marriage and motherhood. Understandably, these set limitation on women liberation. Women are expected to live within these structures but unfortunately, the structures have some limitations. Such limitations are showcased in novels. It has been common to have the female characterization in African writings where she is depicted as being naïve, timid, and subservient while she lives within the structures of patriarchy, marriage and motherhood. However, an alternative perspective of female characterisation in contemporary African literature has been offered. It is no longer that of "the demure, obeisant wife and mother" which is received "as a welcome diversion from the [African] canon" (Chukwuma 2). Helen Chukwuma maintains that: 'the female character has emerged from her cocoon, basking free to a mixed reception of surprise and wonder' (2). To support this position, Katherine Frank explains in 'Women Without Men: The Feminist Novel in Africa' that "the feminist novel in Africa, which, she declares, is not only 'alive and well' but is, in general, 'more radical' and 'even more militant' than its 'western counterpart', overturns the literary characterisation of the African woman from her former position as someone's daughter or wife or mother to a personality who exhibits humanity with potentials and abilities.

It is interesting to note that transformation in relation to women in the context of our discussion does not in any way preclude them from remaining in structured system. Rather, it is in the way of which Tutula Gordon describes as: "these women 'transform' their identities and 'create' their 'individual biographies in the context of social relations' (1). He declares that: "their struggle to reconstruct their lives differently, however, is

a noteworthy one as they are obliged, it seems, to 'use the same ingredients' (35). That is, while women may choose different roles, these roles (mother, wife, mistress, for example) are created by and still firmly entrenched within what Gordon delineates as 'the framework of oppression' (29). What the feminists and their supporters crave for is a holistic change in the activities and thoughts of womanhood. Feminists detest the stamp of inferiority placed on women in most societies. Beyond the protest against stereotypical garb in which women are dressed, the feminists seek for transformation, the change that the woman will experience that will lead to her liberty. Ngugi wa Thiongo's two novels; *Petals of Blood* and *Devils of Cross* appear to portray creative transformation of women which this paper evaluates.

### **The Concept of Transformation and Feminism**

Transformation is synonymously used with change. It is often used to describe adjustment or change of one's conduct/behaviour, organisational transformation, change of an individual in areas like job, better education, health, or environmental transformation and so on. In the introduction of an online book publication, titled "What is Transformation? And How it Advances Social Change", Robert Gass explains that: "transformation is profound, fundamental change, altering the very nature of something. Transformational change is both radical and sustainable. Something that is transformed can never go back to exactly what it was before." (intro) Transformation is metamorphosis from one state to a different one and an individual, people or organisation can achieve transformation. Women in Africa as individuals or a group have sought to change from what Frank calls the "one-dimensional African woman who is a 'shadowy figure who hovers on the fringes of the plot, suckling infants, cooking' and 'plaiting' hair." (14). Transformation is one of the things that Feminism yearns for.

Feminism is a literary movement that tends to bring about a change in the society especially on how women are treated; it tries to discourage discrimination and humiliation of women; it focuses its attention on emancipation of women. Lots of emphasis has been made on feminism and its stand in the African novel. Women are often relegated to the background and decisions are made by men without women's consent. Most African novels present female characters as sex objects, inferior beings, and those who must obey the rules made by men. Feminism has been described as having many faces on the fact that it varies with circumstances surrounding it which can be cultural or historical. Whichever stand one takes, it will revolve around the gap between men and women.

Feminist literary criticism is informed by feminist theory, or, more broadly, by the politics of feminism. It looks at the way women take part in socio-economic and political matters. It also deals with the education of women, their access to the economic means of survival, motherhood; women in the domestic sphere, women as part of their communities and women's role in politics. As it is identified by Lois Tyson, feminist literary criticism examines the way in which literature (and other cultural productions) reinforce or undermine the economic, political, social, psychological oppression of women. (80) To buttress this position, Guerin et al also state that in criticism and in literature, feminist critics identify sex related writing strategies including matters of subject, vocabulary, syntax, style, imagery, narrative structure and characterisation and gender preference (199).

Ingenious women transformation implies a transition of women from being viewed as slaves to becoming wholesome by attracting to themselves recognition and acceptance. It is an embodiment of what Ngugi considers ideal Kenyan Femenity. Women creatively transforming themselves will corroborate Billington's description of feminism as cited in Kramarae and Treicher, that it is: "a movement seeking the re-organisation of the world upon a basis of gender equality in all human relations; a movement which would reject every differentiation between individuals upon the grounds of gender, that would abolish all gender privileges and burdens, and would strive to set up the recognition of the common humanity of women and men as the foundation of law and custom." (158). Feminism thus seeks social change in women's status by changing the way in which society views them. It wants society to change how it perceives women's status. For Helen Chukwuma; "feminism means a rejection of inferiority and a striving for recognition" (195). Chinyere Nwagbara in *Soyinka's Feminist Aesthetics* asserts that woman now claims the right to pursue her own identity, to name herself, pursue self knowledge and to effect what Adrienne Rich calls "a change in the concept of sexual identity". Thus woman becomes the subject of knowledge." (3) This is seen in the creation of assertive female characters by feminist novelists. Contrary to the Ekwefis of Chinua Achebe's creation, Simi of Wole Soyinka's creation, Jagua of Cyprian Ekwensi's Ihuoma of Elechi Amadi's creation, we now have characters like Amaka in Flora Nwapa's *One is Enough* Debbie of Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra*, Adah in *Second Class Citizen* and others. Emilia Oko declares that "the Nigerian female writers' characterisation of women as adjunct not as selves" (71).

Using Feminism as a theory, this study will show how economic organisation or mode of production, gives rise to, or directly influences other social phenomena including social relations, political and moral codes. Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross* address social reality of female aesthetics in contemporary

African fiction. In doing this, Ngugi tries to mirror the injustices and failings of his society through female characters.

### **Ngugi's Aesthetic Approach to the Discourse of Innovative Women Transformation**

Ngugi believes in his use of writing as a means of effecting change. Although his first novel, *The River Between* (1965) reflects the beauty and orderliness of traditional Gikuyu customary life, it introduces the realities of initial changes in this African society. Ngugi's subsequent novels deal with aspects of change and colonisation. An important characteristic of Ngugi's novels, therefore, is the increasingly important role which the theme of transformation assumes in his literary career, in his novels as well as in his dramas, political treatises and short stories. He views colonialism prominently and post-colonialism partially as responsible for oppressing African women.

Ngugi portrays patriarchy as a prevalent phenomenon that exists in the society. The reader can easily understand how besides patriarchy, colonialism has cruelly deprived women of their role as active agents in the society. Ngugi in his fictional works delineates the exploitation of the Africans by the whites and the consequential effect of such exploitation on the lives of the Africans. Also, his literary works concentrate on women's issues and Gikuyu culture to reveal women's major contribution in liberating the society from male domination in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras. He shows how women are sexually, physically and mentally exploited, oppressed and ill-treated. Rape and successive pregnancies, verbal and physical violence, low payment to the domestic labourers, attribution of taboos to women, sexual oppression and abuse and objectification of women are some examples of the facets of oppression that women continuously experience in the African society which is championed by patriarchy. Ultimately, the novels of Ngugi reveal the author's sincere striving, through the freedom of postcolonial fiction, to change Africa into a freer and more unbiased continent especially in matters relating to women. In the words of Mphahlele echoes this position with his assertion that writers such as Ngugi "came in during the most exciting epoch in African life—at a time when things are taking shape" (78). Similarly, Gerard writing in *African Language Literatures: An Introduction to the Literary History of Sub-Saharan Africa* regards Ngugi as "one of the finest novelists in black Africa, as perhaps the best writer to have come from his country, Kenya, but from the whole of what used to be British East Africa" (21).

Ngugi's rejection of the new African elitist rulers who practice and even revel in their abuse of power and their exploitation of the masses particularly females as shown in *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross* so forcefully demonstrate an essential part of his increasing urge to use literature as a means of political and social protest against women subjugation in post-independent Kenya. According to Kathy Kessler; "Ngugi positions women in the narrative and in the historical context in ways that foster the renovation of identity and tradition and redefine their roles in the development of a revolutionary consciousness" (79).

T. Pelton in *Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and the Politics of Language* expresses the opinion, shared by a large number of critics and readers alike, that "the quality of Ngugi's fiction may have suffered ...having become a political figure...Ngugi has become less effective...as a creative artist" (19). We however, believe that Ngugi's concern, fundamentally, is always with concrete human relationships, exposing how they have been destroyed by the injustices of colonialism and post colonialism.

Ngugi's position is against the traditional female discourse of the African woman as being dominated, exploited, abused and merely used as a beast of burden. In that connection, he can be called an apologist of feminism who according to Cherryl Walker's definition "... is someone who perceives that women in a given society are oppressed as women, and believes that this should be changed" (xxiii). A study of female characters in the novels of Ngugi indicates a new idea of women empowerment because his female protagonists usually grow in strength and influence as each novel develops. The creative transformation of women represented by Ngugi's protagonists, Wanja and Warringa in *Petals of Blood* and *Devil of the Cross* respectively is evaluated below.

### **The Creative Transformation of Women in *Petals of Blood***

The novel deals with neo-colonialism in all its manifestations: oppression, exploitation, social abuse and injustice. The scene of most of the novel is the community of Ilmorog which grows from a traditional African village into a modern industrial complex. The plight of the masses especially women under the leadership of the neo-colonial system is one major issue that has been widely discussed in *Petals of Blood*. When life in the rural areas gets harder because of the system of imperialism, girls in particular and the peasant population in general flee their homes in search of better life in the nearby towns and cities, where they will be used as sex-slaves by the local bourgeois class and their capitalist masters. The bourgeoisie need the girls only before they conceive; once they get pregnant, they will look for other girls in substitution. This is to mean that women are considered not as creatures capable of self-determined actions, but as only objects of male gaze. So after they get pregnant, the girls will have to go back to their parents to deposit children whose fathers are not

known, and consequently heap additional burden on their parents who are already suffering from an abject poverty. In the novel, the narrative voice relates that:

Our young men and women have left us. The glittering metal has called them. They go, and the young women only return now and then to deposit the newborn with their grandmothers already aged with scratching this earth for a morsel of life. They say: there in the city there is room for only one...our employers, they don't want babies about the tiny rooms in tiny yards. (7)

So be it under the colonial regime or post-colonial, the life of women remains the same. Prostitution and sexual violence against women is still on the rise.

Ngugi demonstrates the exploitation of women and the eventual transformation in his protagonist, Wanja. She had started life as a brilliant pupil from a working-class family but this background unfortunately is her undoing since her parents, long exploited and brutalized by the power of capital, desire and long for the luxuries of life enjoyed by their propertied neighbours. It is one of these neighbours, a family friend, Hawkins Kimeria, that seduces her and terminates her educational career, before she turns into a woman of easy virtue that would roam the many bars of Kenya's tourist centres. Mr. Kimeria holds her hostage and rapes her. Wanja wants to find her identity and build her personality but it is difficult for a woman in a patriarchal society to do so. She laments how the same man benefits when Ilmorog attains a cosmopolitan developed status: "Kimeria who has ruined my life and later humiliated me by making me sleep with him during our journey to the city...this same Kimeria was one of those who would benefit from the new economic progress of Ilmorog." (96) Mala Pandurang asserts that: "Kenya's brutalized and exploited womanhood finds expression in the portrait of Wanja Kahili, the barmaid whore. And in her portrait is etched the agonies of the lumped classes of Kenyan women who are victims of Kenya's capitalist structures" (23). Wanja however transforms from the naïve, docile and passive woman that takes all the humiliations from Kimeria into an assertive and strong-willed woman. She has to act; "she had killed Kimeria... struck him dead with the panga she had been holding." (100). Wanja's act of violence in this instance is an act of personal liberation, a kind of cleansing and revitalizing Fanonist violence.

The quest to liberate women in the novel is highly emphasised. Wanja, granddaughter of Nyakinyua, wanders around Ilmorog with her grandmother, Nyakinyua. Ngugi portrays Wanja as an active woman who forms a group which is called Ndemi-Nyakinyua, to cultivate and weed the land. The purpose is to work in group and help other women to increase their efficiency in work. She also works as a barmaid. Her salary is paid to her according to the whims of her employer. Ngugi portrays her as an example of Kenyan woman's exploitation. According to him, neo-colonial and imperialistic conditions are responsible for this. Wanja tries to go beyond traditions and is caught in the clutches of the colonial capitalist society. Ngugi expresses the commodifying and subjugative situation women are put in by the portrayal of Wanja. Wanja explains how in Kenya, women are preyed on by the predators: "If you have a cunt... if you are born with this hole, instead of it being a source of pride, you are doomed to either marrying someone or else being a whore. You eat or you are eaten. How true I have founded it. I decided to act, and I quickly built this house" (97). The above comment reflects women's helplessness. Wanja however turns the table around by choosing not to remain exploited. She creatively changes her condition. Although the change of Wanja could not be said to be the most desirable one, it only shows Ngugi does not create unrealistic and fanciful female characters.

Wanja lives with a bruised and hurting soul. She is unable to forgive herself for throwing her baby into a latrine long ago in her schooldays. She therefore engages in acts of humanism; she offers to work as Abdulla's barmaid so that Joseph could start schooling. Again, she makes personal sacrifice by allowing Kimeria to possess her for only a few minutes so as to save the life of Joseph during the trip to the city. Pandurang writes: "significant in Ngugi's portraiture of Wanja is the amount of heroic energy packed into her tortured body, for in spite of the numerous violent experiences that have seared her psyche, she still emerges as an admirable character who exudes the most telling traits of selfless humanism." (198) The preceding experience of Wanja sets the background for her quest for transformation.

Wanja had made a pact with herself. She would have a completely new beginning in Ilmorog. Since she had left Ilmorog she had two humiliating and shameful experiences. She would now break with the past and make something of herself in Ilmorog. As an evidence of her cleansed spirit, she resolved that she would not again obey the power of her body over men; that any involvement was out until she had defeated the past through a new flowering of self (106 -107). Munira comments on the change in Wanja: "it was a new youthful, life-fill, luscious growth after the rains" (155).

It is instructive that in the referent society in which *Petals of Blood* is written, the people believe that women can never be equal to men. They "seemed to think that women deserved low pay and heavy work: women's real job, they argued amidst noises and laughter was to lie on their backs and open their legs to man's passage to the kingdom of pleasure." (304) This shows that women's creative ability in science and technology and their contribution to the socio-economic development of one's country has been totally neglected under the imperialist system. It is assumed that a woman deserves low pay even though she does hard work of taking care

of children, washing clothes, cooking food and so on. That is to mean, the realm of a woman, according to the thought, should be limited to the household environment. That denies women's potentials and creative power for the development of our world as a whole.

In contrast to the foregoing, Ngugi has a vision of a self-reliant woman in Kenya. The unexpected airplane crash at Ilmorog that costs the life of Abdulla's donkey becomes the cause of Wanja and Abdulla's progress in business which transforms Wanja from a barmaid to a business lady. The changing tempo of capitalist intrusion into the lives of Ilmorogians after the plane crash, gives Wanja an opportunity whereby she embarks on ingenious transformation by throwing her body and soul into capitalism and emerges as one of its few reigning queens in New Ilmorog. Upon seeing a crowd of people who flock into Ilmorog to watch the airplane, Wanja comes up with a business idea that if she and Abdallah start selling roast meat and Thenget'a, they will become rich in a very short period of time. As she expects, people continuously flock to the site of the air crash from within and outside of Ilmorog. The tourism is maximally exploited to the business advantage of Wanja and her business partner, Abdallah.

Wanja successfully turns her energy and time invested in Karega into work. She has seized the devil spirit of brewing and selling and counting and hatching out more plans for the progress of her trade/business partnership with Abdulla. In time, she employed three barmaids...she also hired a band composed entirely of women from many Kenyan nationalities, and this brought more customers flocking to see for themselves" (270). From this extract we can understand that the writer has a vision that if the system is changed, or if imperialism is eradicated from Africa, the life of the women will improve. It is the system that makes the women remain employed, and servants of men. It is a call for all to join hands to dismantle imperialism which cages women from attaining freedom. Impliedly, it is not only women that will wage this war but all those sympathetic to the course of humanity and womanhood.

### **The Innovative Transformation of Women in *Devil on the Cross***

*Devil on the Cross* depicts the plight of women under the corrupt neo-colonial leadership of Kenya. The novel begins with the story of Jacinta Warringa, a lady who suffers a series of misfortunes, maltreatment and deprivation at the hands of some irresponsible men in the society. She is used, abused and abandoned by The Rich Old Man of Ngorika whose child she is carrying. Ngugi shows that men with wealth take advantage of girls in the new born Kenya. Young girls and women who would have become doctors and engineers for their country drop out of schooling and become either barmaids or the imperialists' sex slaves. Later in the story, we learn of the transformation of Warringa who becomes an automotive engineer after attending a Polytechnic. Although there is a popular misconception in the referent country that certain jobs are restricted to men, Warringa proves her ability to work where it was considered the prerogative of men.

Warringa in particular proves that it is in the towns that women have staked their claim for equality most strongly. The novel shows that Warringa has benefited from the new freedom and educational opportunities for women, but has suffered from emotional stress which women fighting male exploitation are subjected to. Interestingly, she is transformed from a scared, suicidal young girl into a mature, self-reliant woman who radiates poise and refinement: "Warringa, the black beauty! Warringa of the mind and hands and body and heart, walking in rhythmic harmony of life's journey! Warringa, the worker!" (218). Warringa is compelled to destroy her only chance of finding true happiness when she shoots The Rich Old Man. She regards this as a sacrificial act: "I 'm not going to save you. But I shall save many other people" (*Devil* 253).

As observed by Marxist feminists, the onset of patriarchy made it possible for the woman's class to be automatically elevated by the virtue of marriage, even when married to a rich husband. Although the woman's status and lifestyle may be upgraded, she still does not have control over her rich husband's assets, earnings or estate. This is corroborated by the testimony of Nditika wa Nguuni, the eventual winner of the competition for the crown of the seven cleverest modern thieves and robbers, who narrates thus: "It was revealed to me ... that in this country we should have a factory for manufacturing human parts like mouths, bellies, hearts, and so on ... spare parts for the human body. This would mean that a rich man who could afford them could have two or three mouths, two bellies, two cocks and two hearts ..." (180) But his wife thinks women should enjoy same privileges to which her husband detests. He protests against men and women equality. In the narration, his wife "...retorted .... We must have equality of the sexes....I struck her a blow on her face....But just as I was about to strike her a third time, she surrendered. She said I could have three, or ten. She would be satisfied with just one. (181) However, this submission is changed by Waringa that takes the business world of man and turns it around to her advantage. Waringa knows better to attend a Polytechnic where she studies an engineering course, while taking up menial jobs to sustain herself and her education:

Today's Wariinga has decided that she'll never again allow herself to be a mere flower, whose purpose is to decorate the doors and windows and tables of other people's lives, waiting to be thrown on to a rubbish heap the moment the splendour of her body withers. The Wariinga of today has decided to be self-reliant all the

time, to plunge into the middle of the arena of life's struggles in order to discover her real strength and to realize her true humanity. (217)

Even when her new friend, Gatuiria offers to pay her fees and house rent, she turns him down because "... she did not want to bind herself to Gatuiria or to anyone else with strings of gratitude for charity. Self-reliance was self-reliance." (218-219) Wariinga, who struggles with identifying herself as a woman and a native, experiences a total transformation by the end of the narrative. In completing the story of Wariinga in his 2018 creative nonfiction, *Wrestling with the Devil: A Prison Memoir*, Ngugi captures the final and polished personality of Wariinga who he describes: "Waringa ngatha ya wira ... Waringa heroine of toil there she walks haughtily carrying her freedom in her hands ... There she walks knowing ... that greater struggles ..." (237)

The later part of Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross* speaks to the dependency of Ngugi's female characters as presented at the beginning of his narrative. He makes a conscious effort to redeem their defencelessness by exposing their knack and chutzpah using ineffaceable encounters. For Wangari, her unjustifiable imprisonment at Nairobi by the European shop owner, the black shop keeper, Mr. Mugwate, and the black police officers (43); and her sexual exploitation by Boss Kihara and the Rich Old Man from Ngorika, added to her lost love. These are the motivating encounters which drive her to rebellion as the last resort. Ngugi employs three significant events namely: Wangari's involvement in the demonstration and her subsequent arrest at Ilmorog; Wariinga's conversation with the 'roaming spirit'; and also, the near-marriage situation of Wariinga to Gatuiria; to refine the mentality and disposition of his female characters. The devastated Wariinga of whom the gicaandi player narrates about in the first nine pages of the novel inundates the entire story as "... an account of what I, Prophet of Justice, saw with these eyes and heard with these ears ...." (8)

The character of Wariinga transforms within a quick space of two years. She grows from the young woman who hates her 'blackness' so much that she chooses to 'disfigure her body with skin-lightening creams', who hardly laughs because she hates her teeth and is taunted by Men who call her 'the angry one' because she hardly smiles, (11), the one that attempts suicide three times, into..." "... the one who used to burn her body with Ambi and Snowfire to change the colour of her skin to please the eyes of others, to satisfy the lust for white skins; the one who used to think that there was only one way to avoiding the pitfalls of life: suicide." (216) By her determination, she embraces vocational training and ending up with the job of an auto mechanic engineer, she takes the world by surprise as they "... crowded around the lorry to watch a woman daring to storm a man's citadel." (220)

People love to denigrate the intelligence and intellectual capacity of women by saying that the only jobs a woman can do are to cook, to make beds and to spread their legs in the market of love. But "the Warringa of today has rejected all that, reasoning that because her thighs are hers, her brain is hers, her hands are hers and her body is hers..." (218). Ngugi uses the wedding ceremony of Warringa and Gatuiria and the bad coincidence that the groom happens to be the son of the rich old man of Ngorika, who had destroyed her childhood as symbolic incident to convey the fact that one day, the dominated, especially women will become dominant. This can be seen from Warringa's action of shooting Gitahi, her groom's father, an imperialist and his colleagues. So Ngugi has a vision of a liberated and self-reliant woman in the new born Kenya.

## II. CONCLUSION

In patriarchal society that *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross* are written, the people think that women are the sole properties of men, but in the story, we can see Warringa and Wanja breaking this popular misconception. The women have strong stand that their bodies will no longer be controlled by men. They feel they have got control over their faculties. Both Warringa and Wanja become revolutionary minded women with strong determination to fight against imperialism, the system that introduced misery and suffering into the peaceful people of Kenya generally, and women in particular.

Ngugi's female protagonists, Wanja and Warringa attain ingenious transformation by becoming increasingly resourceful as the novels progress. The convincing creation of these two protagonists are regenerated urban women attests to Ngugi's understanding of the predicament of females in a post-independent state. In no way does Ngugi shy away from tackling recent challenges facing women whose innocence has been abused and who in different ways overcome the crisis of an illegitimate pregnancy as well as sexual exploitation and harassment in the modern business world. Both Wanja and Warringa succeed in taking a strong stand in combating general social ills by acting for the good of their people; they courageously endeavour to eradicate what they perceive as the root of their own personal and societal ills.

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