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UFR Lettres et Sciences Humaines, Université Gaston Berger,
BP 234 Saint Louis, Sénégal
Tel +221 961 23 56 Fax +221 961 1884
E-mail : omar.sougou@ugb.edu.sn / mamadou.ba@ugb.edu.sn

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Gender Mainstreaming: A Collective Responsibility for Both African Men and Women

Abdul-Karim Kamara

(University of The Gambia)

Abstract

Both male and female writers of African descent have participated in the gender discourse to help transform dystopic societies into hospitable ones for the good of both sexes. For a fairly long period, aficionados in feminism were at logger heads as to which theory of feminism is appropriate to discuss the black woman in the once colonised space. It was not until the 80s that Filomina Steady, Molara Ogundipe-Leslie and Micere Mugo, produced the theoretical elements for an African feminism, elements that advocate for the overhauling of oppressive institutions for the sake of men and women with a view to producing a society which cherishes the idea of collective responsibility (Davies et al 1986: 11).

Adopting African feminism as a central theoretical axis, this paper shall explore the efforts deployed by both men and women to fight against the general marginalisation of women as is instantiated by Ngugi wa Thiong'O, Sony Labou-Tansi and Emmanuel B Dongala. The paper shall conclude with recommendations considered helpful in collapsing the sub-periphery within the periphery, with the ultimate aim of mitigating the inequalities between the Metropolis and the peripheral communities reviewed in this study.

Key words/phrases: African feminism, gender mainstreaming, sub-periphery, inhospitable, socio-economic ostracization.

Introduction

The gender discourse, particularly feminism, has had a long history of existence. Sheila M. Rothman traces it back to the 1870s. In her work, *Woman's Proper Place*, she narrows down the evolution of feminism into three trends: virtuous womanhood, educated motherhood and wife-companion. All the three trends confined the woman to the home (5). It was not until after the Second World War that an emancipatory fourth trend of

feminism was hatched: “woman as a person” (Rothman 5). This fourth trend is premised on the argument that women should no longer be viewed as tolerated intruders in a man’s world. In line with this fourth trend, Greer, in *The Female Eunuch,* argues in Marxist terms that it is principally through struggle that “the dignity and the reflowering of etiolated energy of women can be achieved (10).”

Today, the trending phrase, ‘gender mainstreaming’, is not simply taken to mean treating women with equity, but it also means creating the enabling environment for women to play an even more active role alongside their African men in the fight to reduce the inequalities between the core (the Metropolis) and the periphery (Africa and other subaltern communities). This is a responsibility to be shared between the men and women of Africa.

Discussing the conditions impinging on the development of Africa and the way forward in this development can hardly be considered complete if the gender question is not factored in. Today, both African men and women, particularly the intellectual among them, speak and act in tune with Mathew Vassar who believes that “[the] woman, having received from her Creator the same intellectual constitution as [the] man, has the same right as [him] to intellectual culture and development (Rothman, *Woman’s Proper Place* 13). There also seems to be a consensus on the proposition that women should no longer be viewed as tolerated intruders in a ‘man’s world’, with the further understanding that any verbal or written comment made to suggest that women are living in a ‘man’s world’ should be expunged from the cartography of good and helpful knowledge.

In *The Female Eunuch,* an earlier work by Germaine Greer (1970), she questions the confinement of women to the home and draws the feminine dialectics close to Marxism, but arguably, in metaphorical terms. The work does not only put on the limelight the negative energies deployed by a certain category of people (both men and women) to sustain male supremacy, it also sends strong signals to the womenfolk to adopt a comprehensively radical and revolutionary attitude: “withdrawal of support from the capitalist system (12)”. This, unarguably, is another way of whipping up enthusiasm in women to rise against male dominion.

Propelled by the notion that they should take centre-stage in the feminist movement, Black women writers have in no small measure contributed to knowledge production in a vast array of endeavours, particularly in literature. Wilfred Cartey's *Whispers from a Continent* is credited to be the first work to document the importance of women, not in emancipatory terms, as is understood today, but as a symbol of exemplary motherhood. This has been followed by a plethora of works produced by countless other female writers like Bessie Head, Efua Sutherland, Ama Ata Aidoo, Mariama Bâ, Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, and lately, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. It is crucial to add that intellectual efforts made by female critics, particularly Filomina Steady, Molara Ogundipe-Leslie and Micere Mugo have helped in no small measure in producing the theoretical elements for an African feminism, the totality of which aim at producing "a system where all the oppressive institutions are dismantled – politically, socially for the sake of men and women … a society which actively encourages the idea of collective responsibility (Davies et al 11)."

In this study, examining the sub-periphery created within the periphery, rather unwittingly, I will discuss the fictionalised portraitures of abuse enacted by men against their women compatriots as are evinced by three novelists in the Central and East Africa namely, Ngugi wa Thiong'O (in *Petals of Blood* and *Matigari),* Sony Labou-Tansi (in *La vie et demie* and *L'état honteux)* and Emmanuel B Dongala (in *Jazz et vin de palme*, *Les petits garçons naissent aussi des étoiles* and *Un fusil dans la main un poème dans la poche).* [1] The discussion shall be captured in two main slates: *Creating a Sub-Periphery within the Periphery*: *the Men in it*; and *Creating a Sub-Periphery within the periphery: the Women in it.* The paper shall conclude with prescriptions and proscriptions considered helpful in collapsing the sub-periphery within the periphery, with the ultimate aim of closing the gap between the Metropolis and the peripheral communities under review.

[1] Henceforward La Vie et Demie will be referred to as La Vie ; l'Etat honteux as L'Etat ; Jazz et vin de palme as Jazz ; Les petits garçons naissent aussi des étoiles as Les petits garçons ; Un fusil dans la main, un poème dans la poche as Fusil ; Matigari as Matigari and Petals of Blood as Petals.

Slate One: Creating a Sub-Periphery within the Periphery: The Men in it

It is probably reasonable to point out that Ngugi et al do not see wisdom in othering women in an already othered community, for this, in postcolonial lenses, will be tantamount to creating a sub-periphery within the periphery. Thus, what is made evident in the various works is the existence of a first locus of oppressive men and a second locus of oppressed women. It is in this optic that the discourse becomes germane to the Marxist class struggle, and which requires the feminists to be duty-bound to militate for relocation to a third space of equal opportunities for both sexes. The slate captures the efforts deployed by Ngugi et al in the fight against the general marginalisation of women.

It can be opined, with probably little risk of being mistaken, that a reading of the studied narratives will not fail to leave in the critic the impression that they constitute an adverse criticism against the unconscious promotion of an abnormality the male folk probably considers normal. That is, putting on the back burner the plans of elevating the status of women to be at par with those of men. It can be argued that *La Vie et Demie*, *L'Etat*, *Jazz*, *Les petits garçons*, *Fusil*, *Matigari* and *Petals* contain portraitures painted by feminist men to have other men understand that if the woman is treated as a person and as a development partner, as Mariama Bâ[2] suggests, there will be hope for success in the common periphery. To achieve this, questioning the humanity of the male oppressors, with a view to restoring it, assumes renewed significance.

It may be projected that an effective way of calling into question and restoring the humanity of the male Other is by exposing their inhuman deeds. It is probably with this salvation mission in mind that Ngugi et al significantly intersperse their narratives with episodes that corroborate the recurrent complaint that in the name of tradition, women have been made beasts of

[2] Cited in Japtor, Martin (editor). Postcolonial Perspectives on Women Writers from Africa, The Caribbean, and the Us. Asmara, Africa World Press Inc., 2003, p. XI.

burden by their opposite sex in a society already burdened by the empire builder and their mimic successors. The studied writers seem to promote the concept that such traditional arrangements do not bode well for spaces that intend to eradicate poverty and probably set in motion mechanisms for the valorisation of the status of the oppressed in a sustainable way.

In regard to the foregoing, it may be useful to posit that Ngugi's portrayal of women as the most oppressed and exploited section of the different facets of the working class (probably speaking too for the other writers) provides a lucid explanation as to why men should be part of the fight to eliminate the various shades of inequalities between men and women in the current Central and East African spaces, as well as the negative stereotypes that have produced and sustained them.

Thus, in *Jazz,* Dongala paints a truly disturbing picture of the plight women suffer at the hands of their male counterparts in the story titled *Une journée dans la vie d'Augustine Amaya.* Amaya is portrayed as the quintessence of the abused, molested and neglected African woman. Like Emecheta's Nnu Ego, she is encumbered with the responsibility of caring for her six children without the support of a husband. And although she is not subjected to the pangs of having to live together with a co-wife in the same marital home, she is totally abandoned with her six children by the husband for a much younger lady. It is irrefutably in an attempt to protest against the said plight that Dongala laments on behalf of the womenfolk as follows:

> La société phallocrate n'a-t-elle pas toujours été ainsi ? Les hommes prenaient les femmes et les abandonnaient à leur gré; un mari pouvait avoir plusieurs maîtresses, la société n'y trouvait rien à redire tandis qu'une femme était clouée au pilori, chassée du logis matrimonial, n'eut-elle eu qu'un amant accidentel (54).

Presenting Amaya's ordeal this way, it becomes reasonable to imagine that it is the aim of Dongala to compel the category of men to which the two husbands belong to withdraw from the apparent heartless recklessness that can only produce inhospitable spaces for both mothers and their offsprings. It can further be argued that the bone of contention for the traditionally

uneducated African woman might not be living together with a co-wife or having a husband with multiple concubines, but rather, having a responsible husband that will provide food, clothing and shelter and other forms of protection for her and the children.

It is important to note that the story of Amaya does not only aim to expose the irresponsibility of the menfolk in her society, it also aims to reveal the physical callousness of men vis-à-vis their female counterparts. This is likely to hold true for the critique upon reading the extra psycho-somatic agony to which Amaya and other businesswomen are subjected by their men. In the eyes of the modern feminist who believes that a woman should be resourceful and that the notion of relying wholly and solely on the protection of the man is outmoded (Rothman 231), Amaya is on the right track by taking up petty trading so that she can cater to her children. Ideally, it is expected of forward-looking men to give her support in this endeavour. However, it can be argued that by being denied access to her identity card - the document she has to have to enable her to cross to the other side of the Congo (Kinshasa) to procure merchandise - by a male customs official who even treats the case of her misplaced identification card with levity, the reader is left with two strong feelings: disappointment in the only-male customs establishment for hiring inhuman and lackadaisical workers; and empathy for Amaya who has six mouths to feed. Again, what can arguably be seen as the summum of female abuse is the brutality of the customs officers, who, as absolute masters of the place, will grab the these female traders, bully them, bark orders at them, and even beat them up when they do not comply quickly enough to their liking (52).

One can venture to propose that what Amaya and other enterprising women go through in post-independent Zaire, as is depicted by Dongala, can be attributed to what may be termed as Dead Conscience Syndrome. Nothing seems to have changed for these women even with the attainment of self-rule, a situation Dongala laments rather sarcastically:

> Mais ces femmes ne trouvaient rien d'anormal à ces bastonnades, a ces injures et outrages que les douaniers leur faisaient subir, car, depuis leur naissance, toutes les autorités coloniales ou post-coloniales, rénovatrices ou rédemptrices, réactionnaires ou

> révolutionnaires, adeptes du socialisme bantou ou du socialisme scientifique marxiste-léniniste, toutes les avaient traitées avec le même mépris; et se figurer un monde où des citoyens et citoyennes seraient traités avec un peu plus de dignité, de compassion et de compréhension était au-delà de leur imagination la plus folle (52-53).

The foregoing makes it legitimate to argue that the only thing that changes for the traditionally oppressed woman in any generation is the name of the oppressor.

Pursuant to his campaign for women to be treated with sympathy and respect, Dongala brings to the fore in *Petits garçons* another disturbing treatment women suffer at the hands of men. Matapari's mother is given a ruthless beating when she takes part in the general movement undertaken by the people of Ibibiti to rescue her husband and other political detainees. Although the incident is not a habitual phenomenon, and does not seem to fit in the development agenda, a show of understanding and compassion for Matapari's mother should have at least been done by the forces of order.

On a different note, Dongala portrays the apparently unethical behaviour of Tonton Boula Boula, in his characteristic desire to use every means imaginable to soar to greatness. To achieve this, Tonton Boula Boula does not only stop at providing shelter, food and wine for one of the magnates who are very close to the President, he is also seen going to the perturbing extremity of providing him a woman to spend the night with while the visit lasts. It can be argued that the use of a woman to achieve a selfish agenda can certainly be interpreted as both an abuse and a distortion of the image of women.

Like Dongala, Ngugi bemoans the lack of respect shown by men to their women in both *Petals* and *Matigari*, but especially their unreadiness to help them become sure and respectable contributors in the most important task of shrinking the frontiers of poverty in the Kenyan space. Both works bring to the limelight the negative energies deployed by men to inadvertently throw Wanja and Guthera into sex trafficking against their wish. Thus, it can be remarked that the two young ladies take to prostitution not out of their own

volition, but, as is demonstrated in the two works, it is the only thing they have to do in order to survive.

Ngugi reports that Wanja starts as a brilliant school girl but has to abandon school on account of a pregnancy authored by a man the age of her father who in the end treats her like any disposable object, going by Wanja's narration of the incident: "And I [Wanja] away from home … to him. He looked at me once and suddenly he started laughing. He told me not to be funny, he was old enough to be my father, and anyway he was a Christian (Ngugi, *Petals* 40)." She becomes the same disposable object to Chui, Kimeria and Mzigo who take turns at using and abusing her sexually. It seems reasonable to argue that by refusing to provide shelter and protection for Wanja, premising his argument on a religion he had no consideration for when he introduced her to carnal knowledge, the first abuser does not only make himself ridiculous, he also provides grounds for his humanity to be questioned. It can equally be noted that the pregnancy, but particularly its denial, sows the seed of irreparable destruction in Wanja's life. The denial propels her to abort the pregnancy and eventually makes her throw herself headlong into prostitution – a risky and unrespectable trade with an uncertain future. Wanja, in fact, narrates the inhuman treatment she is made to undergo by a European man and from which she narrowly manages to escape.

Guthera, like Wanja, embarks on sex trafficking because of a man. Unlike Wanja, however, she is offered the opportunity to choose between becoming a one-time and full-time sexual worker. It is narrated that her father, an evangelist of a cast different from Reverend Ezekiel in *Petals*, clandestinely supports the guerrilla challengers of the status quo. He is caught carrying bullets in his Bible, meant for onward delivery to those men and women in the mountains and forests who have given up their lives for the love of their fellowmen and women and the fatherland (Ngugi, *Matigari* 33). Guthera's father's crime is punishable by death but reversible only if she agrees to the terms proposed by the superintendent of police: "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. (…) You are carrying your father's life between your legs (35)." The pious and devoted Christian she is, she chooses to obey the commandments of her Father in heaven; she

refuses to barter her chastity for her biological father's life and freedom and everything material:

> The police officer told her: Say goodbye to your father, then. Her earthly father was killed. Their land was confiscated by the colonial government, and the girl was left to fend for her brothers and sisters. Problem began to heap on problem. Poverty, the clothes got tattered, and there was no food. Nothing (36).

What seems enigmatic is the inattention Guthera's plight is treated with by her Father in heaven in obedience of Whom she insists on safeguarding her innocence, coupled with the refusal by the priest and other church members to come to the aid of young Guthera who is now seen by them as the daughter of a terrorist and probably capable of becoming one too. What the novelist seems to insinuate through this episode is that, in tackling the malaises that permeate the Kenyan dystopia, religion should not take precedence over self-interest. One may submit that by accepting to bend just one of the Heavenly Father's commandments (Thou shall not commit adultery) in order to save her earthly father's life, Guthera would have prevented herself from breaking the same commandment in an abominable way later in life - becoming a prostitute.

The incident provides justification to project that Ngugi wishes to explore here the efforts the girl-child is expected to make in order to remain virtuous; it equally makes it tempting to argue that the main issue he wishes to foreground is the double trouble women are supposed to shoulder in the absence of the men: both as breadwinners and caregivers in an atmosphere of absolute indigence. Thus, apart from not being able to participate in any development endeavours, they end up jumping from one bed to another or even end in enemy bed as a spouse when bed-jumping is not considered as an attractive option anymore. The marriage of Mumbi (the wife of Gikonyo, one of the freedom fighters) to Karanja (a collaborator with the oppressors) with whom she even has a child, provides a perfect example of such scenarios in *A Grain of Wheat*.

In Labou Tansi's *L'Etat* and *La Vie*, women are presented as the seal of pleasure for a superstructure dominated by men. The two novels are over-

crammed with abuses, particularly sexual ones, against women. The individuals occupying the various levels of the superstructure, who are supposed to be seriously obsessed with the capital business of assembling the dismembered Congolese space, rather direct their whole attention to the pursuit of sexual gratification. Beautiful Chaïdana becomes the bewitching *femme fatale* or probably Apollinaire's *La Loreley*, whom every male wants to quench his sexual thirst on – from the Providential Guide down to his ministers. Her escape from the hands of the Providential Guide leads to a general sexual orgy by the forces of order for, not knowing who this Chaïdana with the mark on the thigh is, the said forces now have to examine thighs of women in observatory posts (les isoloirs) built for this purpose. In what looks like an exaggeration of the Presidential Guide's libido, Labou-Tansi expels him from the realm of animals and dumps him into the mechanical world. He transforms him into a real sex machine: in a single day he deflowers fifty virgins (147). What seems to be more disturbing is the fact that the leader, who is supposed to be the standard bearer of society, should portray himself as an inimitable figure. Labou-Tansi equally presents Martillimi Lopez in *L'Etat honteux* as an inimitable head of state, who, apart from the sexual abuses he carries out on women, has a record of sacrilegious sexual abuse against Sister Gléza Dononso when he was then a captain in the army and for which he was scolded thus by Abbey Perrionni: « *C'est honteux mon capitaine, c'est honteux que vous ne puissiez pas trouver une vraie femme où jeter votre eau de merde, vous venez chercher les filles du Seigneur alors que les rues en sont bourrées* » (16). It is probably crucial to add that in the Martillimi's world when women commit an aberration the first punishment that comes to his mind is to make his officers go to bed with them (110).

Conceivably, Labou-Tansi's womenfolk are not designed to be of any use to their society beyond being sex toys for their men. Explicitly, Labou-Tansi's narratives do not create any hope for a bright future for women. It is tempting to believe so because, as Rafika Merini would posit upon reading Driss Chraïbi and other North African writers' works, since there are no grounds yet to build a man's life on, therefore, there will be hardly be any for the women to build theirs (Carol Boyce Davis et al 54). Additionally, it seems more appropriate to speculate that it is very likely for a category of people to

see themselves as failures and resign to fate when society perpetually undermines their confidence and worth.

In view of the analysis above, one can venture to state that Wanja, Guthera, Chaïdana and generally women in the studied texts, become the excrement of the Eastern and Central African dystopias in a manner remotely analogous to Tom in Philips Reeve's *Mortal Engines*. They all live in risk societies (Bullen & Parsons 2007, 127 - 139) where their male counterparts seem to have only passion for them and not compassion and regard; they live in a society of male hunters who do not seem to have any consideration for the future of vulnerable young ladies, and by extension, for that of the society at large. What the narratives seem to crystalize, in fact, is the (un)conscious efforts made by the male inhabitants of the society to sustain the vulnerability of the female; it is in respect thereof that the narratives, in addition to capturing the shameful state of women, also seem to corroborate Molara Ogundipe-Leslie's observation that "it has always been the case that, women are firmly put back in their places; in the kitchens, in the farm fields and other subordinate places where they labour unacknowledged as beasts of burden (150)."

It is probably appropriate to seal this survey on the responsibility of men in gender mainstreaming with the following question: how tenable is the accusation that male writers have not done good enough to create a truly leftist propensity to level the playing ground for both men and women in African spaces? Abena P A Busia, for instance, argues that "Armah's women are conventionally women of the household whose role is intended to be that of supporting their men, whether or not they succeed (Davies et al 116)." To capture a second accusation, Banyiwa Horne posits that the handling of female characters by male writers is unrealistic and unsympathetic, compared with when it is to be done by a female writer (116). These accusations may be valid if considered as elements to spur the womenfolk to join the men in the pen resistance against the socio-politico-economic injustices they are made to suffer.

But in a situation where the principal preoccupation of the writer is to call the perpetrators of unprogressive traditional practices to order, it seems reasonable to propose that such accusations should not be imputed to Ngugi

et al. Their narratives seem to contain cogent material to compel the traditionalist, particularly the male, to rethink their position vis-à-vis the female occupant of the shared space. It can be projected that they have significantly demonstrated that a dominant male society that is steeped in unproductive activities is very likely to drag their women into the same foolishness as is depicted in *L'Etat.* It can further be projected that a dominant male society with a strongly petrified conscience (RC Smith 2012), impervious to reason and empty of respect for its women, may demoralize their women and ultimately clog their productivity. Thus, it is important to reiterate that the studied works constitute an animadversion against men with the express objective of having them relocate to a third space of equity for both sexes premised on the mantra that "African feminism recognizes a common struggle with African men for the removal of the yokes of foreign domination and European/American exploitation" and that "it is not antagonistic to African men but it challenges them to be aware of certain salient aspects of women's subjugation which differ from generalized oppression of all African peoples (Carol Boyce Davis et al)."

Slate Two: Women in Gender Mainstreaming

While the narratives of Ngugi et al seem to castigate the menfolk for being significantly responsible for the feeble or invisible participation of the womenfolk in the economic life of the home and society at large, it is important to point out that the same narratives, with the exception of Dongala's, equally implicate women for their degrading confinement to the sub-peripheral zone. The narratives reveal that women can do better than accept a fate they are possibly not obliged to accept. The works, in a very palpable way, reflect the thinking that should women borrow a Marxist behaviour; it is very likely that they will be able to break loose from the noose that tethers them to the home space and makes them passive actors in the economic liberation of their polities. In fact, the underlying message for both men and women is that fatalism breeds and sustains contempt; therefore, adopting a Marxist cum nihilist posture is probably the most advisable thing to do by the womenfolk in the struggle to clear the huddles strewn on their

socio-economic path. Ngugi firmly believes in it and makes no attempt to mask his proselytizing mission in what follows: “I would create a picture of a strong, determined woman with a will to resist and to struggle against the conditions of her present being (Carole Boyce Davies et al 11-12).” The rest of this section shall capture the different portraitures Ngugi, Dongala and Labou-Tansi make of the womenfolk in order to have them carry their destiny in their own hands.

Consistent with proposed desire to make women masters of their own fate, Ngugi captures in *Petals* a very important trinity that constitutes Wanja’s school-dropout life: Wanja the prostitute, Wanja the successful entrepreneur and Wanja the ruined entrepreneur. As a prostitute, Wanja can be taken to be a comprehensive failure; as an entrepreneur, she registers great success; and as a ruined entrepreneur, she subtracts herself from fatalistic ways and becomes a nihilist.

It is conceivable to propose that Wanja’s failure to make it in the sex industry is a deliberate design by the author to inject probity into the struggle. In fact, her portrayal as an unsuccessful prostitute underscores the point that in the struggle for the attainment of economic enfranchisement (particularly for the women) not all means are acceptable. She is seen migrating, with demented fury, from one club to another in Nairobi and in the other big towns of Kenya in search of customers; yet, she is not able to make any substantial savings to get herself out of the sex industry. Besides, it can be projected that to be able to compete favourably in the sex industry the prostitute has to spend most of her earnings in upgrading her looks. What this therefore means is that, prostitution is more of a significant booster to the capitalist manufacturer’s economy than it is to the prostitute herself, therefore, not the road to take.

The road to take, it can be proposed, is the one that does not dent the individual’s moral profile. Thus, through the Theng’eta business, she becomes a true force to reckon with both in terms of money and prestige in the Ilmorog community in a way that is remotely comparable to the prestige enjoyed by Signare Anna in Tita Mandeleau’s *Anna: Le voyage aux escales* (1998). This goes to show that the aggressive participation of women in business ventures is a possible way of destroying the stereotypes often

levelled against them as dependent creatures; it is also probably a sure manner of destroying their social ostracization in the society. There are both literary and real life proofs to support the foregoing. Tita Mandeleau's *Signare Anna* and Buchi Emecheta's *The Slave Girl* are two such brilliant literary works. Because of the unflinching engagement of Anna and Ma Palagada in the competition of wealth creation, they become powerful women in their society; and because of this economic power, they are even able to bring men under their control in addition to providing employment for others. In the case of Ma Palagada, the husband is in fact portrayed as an appendix to her name. The Nana Benzes of Lomé are another glaring example of successful businesswomen who have been able to destroy the sceptre of male domination in the commercial sphere (Hortense Assaga).

Then as a ruined entrepreneur by Chui, Kimeria and Mzigo, a dangerous indigenous business trio who see themselves as being above the law in the Kenyan society, Wanja neatly creates a situation to rid society of such proven bad elements. Thus, it can be argued that her return to prostitution yet again is meant to ensnare her perpetual tormentors. It is also probably pertinent to project that the Marxist spirit does not cater for fatalistic inclinations – no resignation to fate when this fate is pernicious to the well-being of a group. What this means in the issue under review is that, for women too, to save themselves from the ruthlessness of their male abusers, or perpetrators of colonialism, they should negotiate with them in the only language they seem to understand: violence. Conceivably, Wanja's recourse to violence does not only sit well with Marxist prescription, it also sits well with the strong admotion given by Fanon to those challenging intellectuals who have taken the decision to break free from colonialism. To such he recommends that they organize every form of revolt and rekindle all aborted protests or protests drowned in blood by the resisting colonial master (*Petals of Blood* 194)."

As regards Labou-Tansi, the satirist among the studied writers, he makes an unattractive portrait of women certainly not to induce laughter as his primary goal, but, as is the aim of all satirical works, to correct certain comportments that are likely to render the business of liberating the Congo space a remote possibility. It is necessary to return to the issue of Chaïdana who banks on the beauty of her body as a sure capital to become rich. Although, according to

her, her reason for plunging herself headlong into prostitution is to avenge the assassination of her father by sexually infecting the inner core magnates of the Congo political structure with terminal STDs, it is obvious that by so doing she is probably inadvertently excluding herself from the class of progressive and respectable female citizens. The idea Labou-Tansi wishes to put forward is that, women, particularly those who have the opportunity to be educated, should make good use of it in order to exclude themselves from the emotional abuse they suffer at the hands of men and at the same time render themselves imitable models of progress.

Elsewhere in *L'Etat*, the idea of the shameful state extends to what may appropriately be seen as the shameful comportment of the female folk. Why the voluntary disrespect of their bodies? Why the departure from the ways of the 'virtuous woman' of yesteryears (Rothman 5). Could they be prostituting their bodies out of vain pleasure or because of a certain irresistible desire to gain money and lead lives not cut for them? These are not unlikely questions that Labou-Tansi may want the critic to think about carefully. And the outcome of such careful thinking, it can be speculated, is expected to lead to the conclusion that women, particularly the underprivileged amongst them, will continue to be liabilities to society because of their inability to turn their attention away from life models that are not designed for them and that can only culminate in the loss of their self-worth. It is probably pertinent to shore up this thinking with the portraiture Henri Lopes makes of female school-going adolescents in *Tribaliques* in its very opening short story *La fuite de la main habile* (13). Although the story is supposed to spin around brain drain, Lopes neatly inserts in it the lack of ambition demonstrated by school girls who, instead of concentrating on their studies, rather focus their attention on fashionable things. What he seems to bemoan further is that, to purchase such things, the young school girls do not only consider it legitimate to take to prostitution, some of them even take pride in bearing illegitimate children for men that may be the age of their fathers as reports Lopes «*certaines d'entre elles se vantaient même d'avoir un enfant de tel directeur général* (15). »

In the critic's possible audit, Labou-Tansi's adolescent females need to be spoken to in crude language in order for them to understand the urgency to adopt not just the ways of the progressive virtuous woman, but also those of

the modern African woman who desires to liberate herself and the continent from the shackles of Metropolitan oppression. This explains why when questions like «*qu'est-ce que c'est que ce type plus bête qu'un derrière de femme ?* (43)» are not asked by Martillimi Lopez, he will utter comments like « *la Noire fait de son derrière un avant véritable …* (76). » It can be projected that this conscientization of womenfolk in the Congo space attains its paroxysm in the following diatribe emitted by Martillimi to the female prostitutes during the demolition of those sheds where they sell their bodies on bare mats:

> Et vous devriez m'aider dans cette tâche, au lieu de vous vendre au marché noir, vous devriez faire des efforts pour que les hommes vous accordant sur terre une place moins déshonorante que les bordels. Mais vous adorez la bêtise, à telle enseigne que nous avons tous vu ce que nous avons vu quand ma hernie avait décidé pour la première fois de fermer les maisons de ma honte où vous vendez vos derrières. Mais, de gré ou de force, je vous mettrai à la place qui doit être la vôtre sur cette terre. Non non et non : vous n'êtes pas des ustensiles de politesse, vous n'êtes pas des objets de consommation : le centre du monde est dans vos boyaux, alors, sur toute l'étendue de ma palilalie, plus question de donner à la femme le sens qu'elle donne à ses jambes (60-61).

It has been deemed necessary to cite Martillimi's diatribe in full for two strong messages it contains: women should make the necessary effort to earn the respect of their men and secondly, they should not willingly transform themselves into merchandise to be consumed recklessly. It can therefore be posited that through this portraiture of women, Labou-Tansi intends to have women understand that even where they might not see themselves as very significant contributors to wealth creation, it is important for them not to behave in a manner that validates the negative stereotypes spun against them; and that women should not participate in creating a risk society for themselves.

What this however implies is that, they should be strive for emancipatory education, respect their bodies by not offering them for sale and that, they should have the courage to venture with application and industry into every honourable wealth-generating activity. What this also implies is that, an

economically and socially successful woman that understands the necessity of being humble stands a greater chance of being regarded as 'a person' than the one who comprehensively depends on men for their survival.

In summation, it can be argued that this slate contains strong messages for the womenfolk. First, it is possible for them to be regarded in equitable terms with their male counterparts. Second, they can be mainstreamed into activities that were hitherto outside their reach, but such mainstreaming, to reiterate an earlier position, requires them to withdraw from fatalism and resort to radicalism or even nihilism as trusted tools in the destruction of the Dead Conscience Syndrome demonstrated by the narcissistic brothers. It is also made evident in this slate that their social inclusion requires them to acquire education and be engaged in business ventures so that they will not continue to be an easy prey to male predators.

Conclusion

This study, hinged on African feminism, has foregrounded the contributions made by Ngugi, Labou-Tansi and Dongala to diagnose a traditional crisis that has been experienced by countless generations: the phallocentricism or patriarchy that has culminated in the socio-politico-economic ostracization of women. It is to be noted therefore, that shrinking the dystopic space calls for the softening the heart of the traditionally-wired man for the other sex, as Teo would couch it (Slide 4) as this will enhance migration to a third locus where the men and women of the east and central spaces reviewed in this study will operate as partners in development, as partners with a common mission of improving their human condition and of raising their status in a world where they have been locked in the waiting room of history, to echo the words of Chakrabarti (2000 4). Apparently, Ngugi et al patronize the idea that treating women as development partners or as persons is not just good for the restoration of the humanity of their male counterparts, but it is also good for the urgent business of shrinking the dystopic boundaries in the East and Central African spaces.

The work equally underscores the point that women too have an even bigger responsibility in the destruction of the sub-periphery in which they have been confined over the years. Whilst men are expected, among other things, to move towards regarding the woman as a person and not as an object to heap emotional abuses upon, the woman too is expected to move towards making herself mainstreameable. That is, women should go in for emancipatory education and participate in entrepreneurship as attempted by Wanja in the Thengata business.

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