

TOWARD A MORE INTEGRATED SOCIETY: A WOMANIST READING OF MARGRET OGOLA'S THE RIVER AND THE SOURCE

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ABSTRACT

The present study examines the African womanist approach in Margret Ogola's The River and The Source. As such, the study provides an analysis of the selected novel in the light of Hudson-Weems' theory of Womanism. In this novel, the author presents a new model of African women in their struggle side by side with men. In The River and The Source, the researcher seeks to show how Ogola deviates from the traditional path of depicting women as subdued, inferior, and abused through presenting them as bold, intelligent, self-assertive and cooperative while showing a lot of mutual understanding, love and respect with men. The study will also trace the struggle of successive generations of women against all the hardships they have to experience in the context of the Kenyan society. Here, the conduct of the female characters in the novel will be examined through their interactions with their male counterparts to highlight the womanist aspect in their characters. It is the Womanist approach that challenges the conventional stereotypical image of the African women. In her portrayal of Akoko as a source mother and her female lineage, Ogola presents them as capable of demonstrating a lot of Womanist attributes in their interaction with other male characters in the novel. Akoko, Nyabera, Elizabeth and Wandia are portrayed as womanist figures in the sense of leading lives of integration and solidarity with men.

Keywords: Womanism, Rights, Equitable, Defiance, Integration, Solidarity

INTRODUCTION

The Core of the Feminist School of Thought

Feminism is a literary as well as a social movement that has emerged to defend women's rights in a world that is characterized by its male-dominance. It is generally concerned with the situation of women in any given community. It advocates women's right and calls for their equality to men. It first emerged in the western world and it was Eurocentric. Almost all female writers have taken it as their obligation to express and project the different forms of oppression and subjugation that women have been exposed to. Feminism as a movement has taken different forms namely: Radical Feminism, Black Feminism, Implicit Feminism, Explicit Feminism etc. At the African level, Black Feminism has been dominant. It is concerned with the situation of black women in the African society. In the context of the African society, to lead a life that is gender-tension-free, Feminism has failed to provide African women with a means to achieve wholeness. Feminism considers women as a separate entity from the body of the society. In the context of the African society, women suffer at many levels. At the social level, they suffer as members of an imperialized society. At the domestic level, they suffer as wives, sisters and daughters from male dominance. It is the core concern of Black Feminism to defend women against such sufferings and oppression.

The Need for a New Vision of the African Woman

Therefore, there has emerged a need for a new vision of the situation of the African woman as Feminism has failed to a great extent to see the woman as an integral and complementary part in structure of the family as well as that of the society. It has failed to provide a comprehensive picture of the situation of the African women. In other words, given the racial history of African women which is imbued with oppression and the sense of inferiority, Feminism has been found to be inadequate to present the plight of the African woman in a way that would improve her situation and give her a considerable space as an integral member at the family as well as the community levels. Feminism in its general sense has failed to fulfill the need of African women in general and the Kenyan in particular. In this regard, Even Betinna Aptheker affirms the inadequacy of the Feminism stating:

When we place women at the center of our thinking, we are going about the business of creating an historical and cultural matrix from which women may claim autonomy and independence over their own lives. For women of color, such autonomy can't be achieved in conditions of racial oppression and cultural genocide. In short, Feminism in the modern sense means the empowerment of women. For women of color, such equality and empowerment, cannot take place in the community in which they live and successfully establish their own racial and cultural integrity. (Aptheker, 1981)

The need for a new outlook of the situation of the African women has become urgent. It is an outlook that should see women in a different situation from the traditional one. It is a new vision of the totality of the status of African women in the context of the African society. Here, the term Womanism is introduced as opposed to the other feminist standpoints. The traditional norms and cultural values are challenged to introduce or construct a new outlook of the African women in general and the Kenyan women in particular.

Womanism as a New Means of Empowering the African Woman

The black female writer Alice Walker was the first to introduce the term Womanism. She used the term as a substitute to Feminism as a means of empowering African women. Yet, Walker's concept of Womanism has not been welcomed as it encourages the female-female sexual relationship that is generally known as lesbianism. It is a call to deny women's need for men. Of course, lesbianism is rejected in the context of the African society. In this due light, Mar E. Modupe remarked "To the ordinary Africans, lesbianism is a none-existent because it is a mode of self-expression that is completely strange to their world view." (Kopawole, 2000) Thus, Walker's Womanism fails to a great extent to provide a comprehensive protection to the situation of the African women.

Consequently, the need for a more comprehensive vision of the African women's situation has become urgent. Here, Chikwenye Ogunyemi, a female black writer, introduces a new vision of Womanism. She goes to define Womanism as follows:

A philosophy that celebrates Black roots, the ideals of Black life while giving a balanced presentation of black womanhood. It concerns itself as much with black womanhood. It concerns itself with the black sexual power tussle and with the world power structure that subjugates blacks. It's ideal for black unity where every black person has a modicum of power and so can be a brother, a sister, a father or a mother to the other. (Ogunyemi, 1993)

Here, Ogunyemi stresses that black women should not be defined only by their femaleness but by their humanity too. She calls for an integral unity between black men and women. She also draws a distinction between Radical Feminism and Womanism stating "If the

ultimate aim of Radical Feminism is separatist idyllic existence away from the hullabaloo of the man's world, the ultimate aim of Womanism is the unity of blacks everywhere under the enlightened control of men and women. (Ogunyemi, 1993)

Hudson-Weems as a Womanist Writer

In 1987, Hudson-Weems, an African America female writer, wanted to synthesize the concept of Womanism. She wanted to address the extraordinary condition of African women's lives. In her book *Africana Womanism and The Critical Need for Africana Theory and Thought*, Hudson-Weems introduces her concept of Womanism:

An ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture, and therefore, it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs and desires of African women. It critically addresses the dynamics of the conflicts between the mainstream Feminism, the black Feminism, the African Feminism and the African Womanism. (Hudson-Weems, 1997)

Here, Hudson-Weems denounces Black Feminism for its limited scope in solving the dilemma of the African woman and prioritizing the issue of gender over all the other obstacles that have ruined the life of African women in general.

Womanism, as a theory, includes a host of features that characterize the African woman's life and conduct. Such features expose them as sensible, strong, co-operative in their relationship with the surrounding community as well as with men. Womanism can be seen as an avenue that provides African women with means to define and name themselves within the context of their experiences. African women want to achieve self-definition which is associated with a sense of ambition that they develop for a better life. Family solidarity and togetherness are central to Womanism. Such solidarity empowers the society as a whole both at the outer society level as well as the level of the same family.

Contrary to the feminist approach which is self-centered, the womanist approach is family-centered. It gives a great priority to the family over the individual feminist needs. Women should comprise a solid holding that fortifies their cooperation while showing mutual respect, regard, understanding and trust to one another. It is in the context of Womanism that both men and women ally together in defiance of all hardships. Unlike Feminism which sees man as a foil, Womanism glorifies their roles in the well-being of the society. Womanist writers recognize the role of men in ending women's subjugation in a racist and a colonized society. Men and women ally together to defy all the shackles of colonialism and racism. Hudson-Weems expounds:

The African womanist is in concert with male in the broader struggle for harmony and the liberation of all African people. Unlike the mainstream Feminism, whose struggle is characteristically independent of and adverse to male participation, the African womanist invites her male counterpart into her struggle for liberation and parity in society as the struggle has been traditionally the glue that has hold them together and enabled them to survive in a patriarchally hostile and racist society. (Hudson-Weems, 1993)

As a keen observer of the plight of African women, Hudson-Weems rejects any term that includes the word Feminism with its different forms because of their biased limitations. She contends that any form of Feminism is problematic for the true situation of African women. Of course, this gives enough space for the emergence of Womanism as an Afrocentric literary tendency that is mainly concerned with the specific peculiarities of the African woman's unbearable life. Hudson-Weems contends:

The African woman, in realizing and properly accessing herself and her movement, must properly name herself and her movement as African womanist and African

Womanism. This is a key step which many women of African descent have failed to address. While they have taken the initiative to differentiate their struggle from the white women's struggle to some degree, they have yet to give their struggle its own name. (Hudson-Weems, 1993)

On the whole, the core distinction between African Womanism and Feminism lies in the place of man in the lives of women. While Feminism regards men as rivals that women should stand against, Womanism sees each man as an integral part of the life of each woman. It is with the emergence of Womanism that almost all forms of oppression that African women have been facing should come to an end. It plays an instrumental role in empowering women and supporting them to develop independence of some kind while regarding men as their partners. To sum up, Womanism stresses veritable sisterhood, self-definition, aspiration, male-female solidarity, female-centrality, complementarity and enthusiasm in the face of the different odds.

Margaret Ogola as an Eminent Kenyan Female Writer

Margret Ogola's contribution as a Kenyan female writer in uplifting the status of women is great. She is one of the eminent African female writers who have left a remarkable fingerprint in advocating the situation of the African woman. She was born in 1958 in Asembo, Kenya. She graduated from the University of Nairobi in 1984 with a Bachelor of Medicine. She is one of the African female writers who have revolutionized the call for a new change in the situation of women in the context of the African society in general and the Kenyan society in particular. She has a distinctive vision that is demonstrated in her adoption of Womanism as a means for improving the situation African women as a whole. Ogola seeks to create ideal female characters who can be role models for both the present and the upcoming generations of African women. Her vision of African women is clearly demonstrated in her novel *The River and The Source*. In this novel, Ogola wants to underscore that changes are necessary and that women's situation should be reviewed in terms of their freedom and the roles they can play in the society.

As a female writer, Ogola upholds women's writings as best placed to interrogate the female self. She wants to stress the need of women to be independent and self-conscious in the different social as well as cultural spheres. In *The River and The Source*, Ogola challenges the patriarchal tradition and deviates from exhibiting African women as the other while attempting to figure out her envisioned situation of African women in the context of the modern Kenyan society. Ogola's womanist vision is taken as exemplifying the general situation of women in Kenya. She adopts the Womanist approach that embraces her vision of how the relationship between men and women should be.

Ogola has written a quite good number of novels in which she reflects her vision of the situation Kenyan women. Two of her books, *The River and The Source* and *I Swear by Apollo*, have been constructed in a way that shows her endeavor to reconceptualize the situation of the Kenyan woman in a bid to underscore the role of women as distinguished members in the society. Ogola exhibits her female characters as resourceful and independent enough to make their voices heard and express their needs. The two mentioned novels revolve around African women's lives across a number of successive generations. In these novels, Ogola touches upon the most crucial aspects of the lives of the African women that best convey her womanist vision. She seeks to reconstruct a new image of the African woman through presenting her female characters as agents of change in a society which is generally characterized by its male-dominance.

The River and The Source as a Womanist Novel

The River and The Source was written in 1994. It is the story of four successive generations of women in a rapidly changing world. The book won both the Jomo Kenyanatta Literature Prize in 1995, and the Commonwealth Prize. The story spans the four generations and the incidents move progressively from one event to another while offering a variety of experiences through different cultures starting with the traditional culture of the Luo society in the pre-colonial period to the post-colonial period and modern time. Here, Akoko, the protagonist of the novel, is the source mother whose birth forebodes that changes in the social structure of the society are to take place. In her portrayal of the female characters of the book, Ogola never dissociates them from the tradition of the society; rather she places them at the center of the narrative while portraying them as capable of challenging the already existent social norms without compromising themselves. This comes in agreement with what Stephanie Newell's remark in his book *African women: Gender, Popular Culture and literature in West Africa*. He argues that "Gender images and ideologies constantly shift to account for their changing status. This has led to the emergence of new perspectives that integrate, reformulate and end inherited popular codes." (Newell, 1997)

The River and The Source revolves around the situation of African women in general and the Kenyan woman in particular. In telling the story of Akoko and her children and grandchildren, Ogola touches upon aspects of life of the Kenyan women that best convey her society. Here, women are presented as playing essential roles in the well-being of their families. Ogola womanist vision lies in reconstructing a new image that presents women as agents of change through assigns them such roles at the family level to integrate them into the society. She wants to stress the fact that any society cannot achieve social stability without considering both men and women in constructing and developing it.

Ogola portrays female characters that reflect her womanist vision in many ways. She presents them as capable of reflecting the changing role of women in a changing environment. They can be seen as agents of transition across four generations. In so doing, she gives them major roles in the novel. As Anne Jose remarks "Ogola gives women protagonists the central positions in her novels, fleets with fidelity their sensibilities and opens up their consciousness while also taking great care not to alienate their counterparts. Her presentation of female characters can therefore be seen as conciliatory rather than conformational." (Jose, 2014) In her novel, Ogola is keen on advocating African women's liberation and gender equality. She challenges the traditional conventions that deny women their dignity and hinder their success as contributors to the society.

Akoko as the Central Womanist Figure in Her Birth

In *The River and The Source*, Akoko is the central character. She is the source of three successive generations of other female characters in the novel. Such characters are able to get over a lot of problems that have been rooted in traditions while others have been brought by more new changes that have taken place in the society. From the outset of the novel, Ogola demonstrates her womanist vision by introducing the episode of Akoko's birth as a harbinger of drastic changes that are going to take place in the society. Contrary to the traditions of the Luo society, which consider that the line of a chief should only be males, Akoko's birth is welcomed by her father Chief Gogni. The Chief never disdains the birth of his female baby. Moreover, he goes to express his positive attitude saying "A house without a daughter is like a spring without a source." (Ogola, 1994) Of course, the remark made by Chief Gogni can be seen as a foretaste of change in the look of the society on the position of women. As a crawling baby Akoko produces her first words "dwara mara" (Ogola, 1994) which means "want mine". It is an expression of protest that signifies a revolt against the already established norms in terms of the acceptance of

women as an integral part of the structure of a family. Despite the fact that a lineage of males is considered a means for the perpetuation of the chieftom, Chief Gogni subverts the tradition by accepting a female baby.

In the course of the novel, Ogola underscores the possibility that the role of extending the legacy of Akoko's father by her as a female child is as strong as by male children. Here, the chief deviates from the traditions of the community. As Agnes Magu puts it "He [Chief Gogni] assigns the girl child the symbolic role of providing continuity just like the boy child. Thus, though primarily negated at her birth by her father, she receives affection from him as well as from her brothers. Here, Ogola wants to foreground a new vision of a society where both males and females are important as a means of perpetuating their father's lineage. Ogola exhibits a society where the male gender is primarily privileged and mostly wanted by tradition according to the conventions in the Luo community. Meanwhile, she wants to underscore that it is through giving equal importance to both men and women that the legacy of a certain society can be extended and developed. As Jose points out "The African women needs socio-cultural empowerment in the sense that she is given equal opportunities to succeed just like her male counterparts." (Jose, 2014)

Akoko as the Central Womanist Figure in Her Marriage

Akoko is considered by her father a precious jewel that can be only acquired by a worthy man or the highest bidder. Having grown up and become old enough to get married, Chief Gogni receives a lot of proposals by good suitors. He insists on getting the highest bride-price ever for his daughter. He asks for thirty cattle and Chief Kembo is fortunate enough to get Akoko as a wife. Akoko is the most beautiful girl in the neighborhood. She is beautiful enough to make Chief Kembo adore her. Together with chief Kembo they go to lead a life of mutual understanding, love, respect and cooperation. Akoko becomes the first wife of Chief Kembo to present a new model of the Kenyan wife in her relationship with her husband.

Chief Kembo as a Male Womanist Figure

Chief Kembo is infatuated by the beauty of Akoko. As the story tells "He had fallen deeply and irrevocably in love." (Ogola, 1994) He adores her that the first time he looks at her he "experiences an indescribable sensation." (Ogola, 1994) Chief Kembo's infatuation by his wife is not appreciated or accepted by the traditions of the Luo in terms of marriage and love. Contrary to the expectations of the community, Chief Kembo goes to express his pride in showing his undying love for his wife. He changes his entire perception of women. Together, they live in harmony. Here, the way Chief Kembo regards his wife is contradictory to the stereotypical image of African women and this is what Ogola seeks to convey about how African women should be treated by their husbands. In this due light, Anne Hawala remarks "As a character, Chief Kembo's action and feelings make Akoko a beneficiary of patriarchy and masculinity because, unlike most women of her time, she no longer fits her community's set domain designed by the male gender." (Hawala, 2019)

Generally, marriage is seen as inevitable to reinforce the perpetuation of lineage over generations. It is an important stage in a man's life. In the Luo every man has to marry to ensure the continuity of his name and lineage. Having become the wife of the chief, Akoko endeavors to be a fulfilled mother by having a lot of children, and being the first wife, she is expected to be a prolific mother in terms of the number of male children in particular. As the story tells:

Akoko was duly installed as the Mikai of Chief Kembo and people started to count the days and moons.....By the fifth month everything was obvious to even the

most unobservant dullard. People waited with breath and ten moons from the day she arrived, Akoko delivered herself of a son.....People rejoiced for the continuation of the chief's line. (Ogola, 1994)

Akoko's maternal life is not to go without hassles. In the passage of time, she if found to have a problem with the pace of birth rate. Her success as the wife of the chief is judged by the number of children she can produce. Here, Ogola wants to highlight how women are indispensable for men to ensure the perpetuation of their lineage and enhance their existence in the community. In this regard Hawala remarks "At the level of a man's life, a woman is important because she acts as a vehicle that the leader uses not only to get his male species or descendents, but by extension also ensures a continued supply of the community's future leaders through the birth of children." (Hawala, 2019)

Akoko as the Central Womanist Figure as a Wife

Being the chief and according to the tradition of the Luo, Kembo is expected to have as many children as possible. Given that Akoko has a problem in reproduction rate, Chief Kembo should go for a second wife. In the Luo, polygamy is praised as a means to increase the members of children and to ensure the perpetuation of chiefdom. Therefore, Akoko has to face some obstacles in the way to a happy life with her husband. Here, Akoko's mother-in-law is acting according to the traditions of the Luo. She goes to ask her son (Chief Kembo) to go for a second wife. Again, contrary to her expectations, Kembo refuses to be polygamous and turns down her request. Definitely, he is blamed for sticking to Akoko as the only wife and never listens to the people or to his own mother. Being infatuated by Akoko's beauty and impressed by her character, he decides to be monogamous. She is accused of bewitching her husband. Here, in this episode, Chief Kembo's stance and his sticking to monogamy turns Akoko to a bold woman. Kembo's determination to be monogamous is clear evidence that conforms to Ogola's Womanist vision. He sees Akoko as a stabilizing agent of the stability of the whole family and these results in love stability, understanding and cooperation.

Akoko as a faithful wife reacts positively to Chief Kembo's treatment and becomes fully committed to her husband as well as to her duties as a wife and a mother. On the other hand, Chief Kembo feels proud to appear as such to the whole community. It is after marriage that his perception of women changes. Moreover, he goes to give his wife a lot of concessions contrary to the societal expectations of love relationships between husbands and wives. Here, the way Chief Kembo regards Akoko presents a different image of the African woman in terms of his consideration for her in his life. This is what Ogola wants to convey about how African wives should be treated. In this due light, Anne Hawala points out:

She [Akoko] elects intelligence and she is free with her husband and even advices him on various crucial issues. It can be stated that Akoko's description is appropriated to make men realize that women are different from what the patriarchal society has envisioned and stereotyped them to be. Unlike many men, the chief notices and appreciates his wife's intelligence, gives her space and sets her free to grow in all aspects. (Hawala, 2014).

Having become a wife, Akoko goes to exhibit a unique approach in her conduct with the surrounding environment. As Anges Magu puts it "Akoko makes an effort to stand out in relation to men in a bid to transcend the subjectivity of patriarchal tradition in the community and thereby becomes the prototype in the interrogation of the development of the female self and national identity." (Magu, 2014) Akoko is able to take control of her own life and to decide the path of the same. She presents a model of the modern African women who has clarity of vision and awareness of what to do and the way of doing it. In her portrayal of Akoko, Ogola introduces her

as capable of challenging the different aspects of the traditional society of the Luo. In Akoko's relationship with her husband, Ogola stresses the complementarity between men and women. Chief Kembo is introduced as an extraordinary man who gives his wife a lot of support and encourages her to be complementary to him. He bestows confidence in her and appreciates her stance as a woman. She searches for self-fulfillment and this becomes the driving force for her wholeness. As Agnes Magu remarks "Ogola provides Akoko with a female self and gives her the chance to transcend different obstacles that used to stifle the female self of African women." (Magu, 2014).

In creating the character of Akoko, Ogola wants to personify the struggle of African women to get some access to the social sphere in a way that would bring some change in the society and make it an equitable one. She presents Akoko as a model of the African woman who can play equitable social roles. As a wife, Akoko goes to contribute greatly to increase her husband's wealth and her endeavor is highly appreciated by him. Moreover, Chief Kembo appreciates her boldness and intelligence that he goes to accept her as a good advisor who is knowledgeable enough to seek her advice and opinion on many issues. He sees her as his worthy partner. Ogola wants to underscore that she praises the kind of men like Chief Kembo while criticizing men who subjugate women.

Akoko as the Central Womanist Figure as a Mother

As a mother, Akoko shows a great sense of responsibility and commitment. She is a loving and a caring mother who bestow love and nourishment to her children. She succeeds in creating new generations of women who are able to overcome a lot of problems that have been rooted in traditions. She teaches her children the value of work and blames them for not being so active. As the story tells "She teaches them to rise early before sunrise. She gives her children freedom to make choices." (Ogola, 1994) Akoko and Kembo are blessed with three sons and a daughter. They lead a very happy successful and harmonious life. However, two of her sons die one after another and the third choke and her husband dies broken-hearted as a result. The loss of the three members of the family marks a turning point in Akoko's life. Instead of being undermined by such great losses, she goes to strengthen her character through adopting a new identity. She develops a new self-definition that challenges the already set codes in terms of her being a widow. She is not at all undermined by limitations of community life. Her mourning and sorrow over the loss of the three members of her family are not at all to continue. She is able to get over her plight and determination becomes the hallmark of the protagonist's life. She adopts a new approach to construct equitable social relations. She struggles to define herself on her own way. She rejects the traditional norms of the Luo and goes to have a set of values that is her own. As Nyongesa remarks "She has to rely on her instincts, her inner power and wisdom to forge a life of her destined future." (Nyongesa, 2020)

Akoko as the Central Womanist Figure after the Death of Her Husband

Again, after the death of her husband, Akoko rises above the oppressive limits of her environment in a tirade to make the social order less oppressive for her herself as well as the women of her community. As a dedicated mother, Akoko does her best to sustain her children. She is a hard-working woman who always seeks to engage herself in extensive farming work and cattle-keeping. She has contributed greatly to the welfare of her family and that of the surrounding community as well. As Anne Jose points out "The author creates the image of an industrious African woman relentlessly working for the welfare of her family. As a defender of

the women folk, the author feels that the time has come when women should assert themselves. Women should make-up-front struggle for their rights. (Jose, 2014)

At another level, Akoko has to suffer from the traditions of the Luo in terms of widowhood. She has to fight and resist such traditions and never to submit to them. Her brother-in-law Otieno wants to inherit her by virtue of tradition for being the next brother to Chief Kembo. He wants to have her as a wife. He wants to do this by force and violence under the umbrella of the conventions of the Luo. By virtue of tradition, he inherits all the properties of his dead brother and takes over chieftdom. As Hawala points out “Otieno is traditionally bequeathed with all rights over her (Akoko) by virtue of his gender and relationship. He practices these rights with impunity and glee.” (Hawala, 2014) Otieno is presented as a violent man. He is in the habit of being violent in treating his wives and wants to be the same with Akoko. Akoko realizes that whatever contemptuous acts she is facing is the result of the absence of a man in her life (husband or son) Akoko exhibits a unique approach in her conduct with the surrounding world. As Agnes Magu remarks “Akoko makes an effort to stand out in relation to men in a bid to transcend the subjectivity of patriarchal tradition in the community and thereby becomes prototype in the interrogation of the development of the female self and national identity.” (Magu, 2014)

Ogola’s Vision of the Kenyan Society

Generally, Akoko exhibits a high model of how a woman should be when she is a wife and when she is a widow. Again, in sketching the character of Akoko, Ogola is keen on assigning her different roles to be a model in surviving in a male-dominant society without being subjugated. Akoko refuses to be the wife of her brother-in-law in a tirade against the chauvinistic tradition of the Luo. She finds in rejecting the tradition an avenue for self-actualization outside the prevalent practices. Eventually, she is able to win her battle against Otieno by lodging a complaint against him at the District Office. She is able to restore the chieftdom chair to her grandson. As the story tells “Akoko returned to her village having won more than a victory for her infant grandson. She had opened up new vistas for her family, which showed another world and possibility of a different way.” (Ogola, 1994) Such a fight against Otieno turns her into a self-assertive woman who is able to reconstruct a new image of the African woman.

Thanks to the trouble and hardships that Akoko has been able to get over, she has become bold and assertive enough to make decision on her own regarding the life of her family both in the present and in the future. Contrary to the traditions of the Luo, Akoko decides to leave her matrimonial community for another. She leaves her husband’s clan for her brother’s house. Moreover, Oloo, the brother, shows his appreciation of her action and goes to support her. She decides to live among strangers by embracing Christianity as her new religion. There, her conduct is highly valued by the catechist that her advice is sought on matters associated with the church.

Adopting Christianity as a Means of Empowering the African Woman

Moreover, Akoko is gifted a new house by the catechism. She has become assertive that, as the story tells; she “does not allow herself to descend to bitterness for yesterday is not today and today is not tomorrow. Each day rises from the hands of *were* and brings with it whatever it will.” (Ogola, 1994) In the course of the incidents of the novel, with the third generation of women of which she has been the source, Akoko dies. She dies and is buried away from her husband’s ancestral home in the Luo. She dies and is buried at the church graveyard.

Thus, Akoko exhibits a model of defiance both in life and after death. She appears as if she rejects the confining tradition in her life and even after death.

Nyabera as a Womanist Figure

Nyabera is the fourth child of Akoko and Chief Kembo. After the death of the three brothers, Nyabera remains to extend the legacy of Akoko and Kembo and perpetuate their lineage. In Kasumu, Nyabera grows up with her mother and her nephew Aluor. Being the daughter of her mother, Nyabera inherits a lot of traits from Akoko. Having grown up and become a beautiful young woman, Nyabera attracts a lot of suitors. Yet, she agrees to marry only the young man she finds as the most suitable for her. She agrees to marry Okumu despite his poverty. After marriage, Akoko helps her daughter to settle down by providing her with a big herd of cattle and sheep. Together with Okumu, Nyabera leads a happy maternal life full of mutual respect and love. However, life is not to go without obstacles. She is blessed with a lot of male children but she loses them at the threshold of infancy. She is left with only one daughter Awiti (Elizabeth). Okumu dies young and leaves Nyabera and Elizabeth without enough resources to sustain them. Throughout her life with Okumu, Nyabera, like her mother, exhibits another model of the positive African woman that stresses the indispensability of the woman's role for a successful family life. In her life with Okumu, Nyabera presents a model of the hard-working woman who stresses the need for integration between men and women.

Okumu's death marks a turning point in the life of Nyabera. She is left not with enough resources to sustain her and her daughter. She is a widow. She is inherited by her husband's cousin Ogomo who already has a wife. Again, this marriage is to fail as Ogomo's first wife feels jealous of her and the husband has to divorce Nyabera as a result. On account of her being a widow, Nyabera has to face a lot of trouble at many levels. Like her mother, Nyabera decides to abandon the traditional life of her people. She refuses to stay at her dead husband's matrimonial house. She feels free to start a life on her own in the company of her daughter. She embarks on a journey of self-definition. She is longing to find peace for her troubled body and soul. As Odhiambo points out "She finds an alternative to her dreary existence as a widow.....She breaks free of the prescribed domesticity" (Odhiambo, 2015)

Again, Nyabera seeks to find a way to recover her troubled soul and she finds it in embracing Christianity. It is in Christianity that she finds fulfillment and hopes. Yet, she wants to satisfy her need for more children. She contends "Children are consolation, laughter and security. Children are everything." (Ogola, 1994) Given the condition that she is a widow, she decides to live the rest of her life as free and to achieve self-definition on her own. She is given a new name as Marina. In the company of her mother, together they decide to settle at Aluor mission. There she devotes her life to her daughter as well as to the new faith. Here, it is clear that one means by which Ogola empowers women is the adoption of Christianity as a belief that provides spiritual relief and consolation of the troubled soul. Christianity is a way of empowering the African woman as well as integrating the family ties. Here, Ogola envisions a society that is ordered and maintained by Roman Catholic principles. Nyabera (Maria) instils the Catholic principles in her daughter as a means of empowering her.

Though she is left emotionally and physically troubled, she finds a way-out in Christianity. Both Nyabera and her mother exhibit the same stance in the face of tradition of the society. They reject confinement through changing from what appears to be passive acceptance of their situation to one of questioning and willingness to decide for themselves in shaping their lives. As the story tells "When it comes to making decisions, she equated her mother." (Ogola, 1994) Thus, both Nyabera and her mother are introduced as assertive and capable of defying tradition that has outlived their usefulness.

Elizabeth as a Granddaughter Who Exhibits the Same Qualities of Womanism

Awiti (Elizabeth) is the only child by Nyabera and Okumu. The mother nourishes her daughter and she becomes a well-grown up beautiful young woman. While growing up, Elizabeth, like her mother and grandmother, exhibits the same qualities of determination, hard work and loyalty to the family. In portraying the character of Elizabeth, Ogola presents her as a model of the young African woman who gets herself in matters that directly impact her life. Elizabeth shows a great interest in education and her formal education and along with her Catholic faith liberates her from the shackles of the traditional life of the Luo. As a student, Elizabeth goes to compete with male student in the class and is able to beat them all by achieving the best results. In her conduct, she is guided by her education as well as by the principles of Catechism. At the training institution, Elizabeth is shunned by the other male and female students upon avoiding to mingle with them. Yet, she is not influenced by their attitude. Eventually, she falls in love with a young man called Mark Antony.

Elizabeth is much more attached to her grandmother than to her mother. As an educated woman, she is able to defy her society expectations by occupying a job and earning a good salary. She is financially empowered. In the college most of the male students are attracted by the beauty of Elizabeth while Mark Antony Sigu beats them to win the bid of her love and, consequently, he becomes her husband. Mark and Elizabeth get married shortly with the blessing of her grandmother Akoko. Here, it is worth underscoring that Akoko delays taking the final decision of the two lovers till she consults men from Okumu's family to bless the marriage. In settling the issue of bride-price, Akoko presides, yet, she does not negate the existence of men and this, of course, exhibits her as a pure womanist character in the sense of considering the importance of men without denying their roles. Akoko says:

Accept it Maria, the world is changing. All is not lost, however, we must listen to the suit according to Chik for we are Sakwa at cockcrow and fetch your brother-in-law the girl's uncle. I shall also send words to Yimbo to my nephews, the twin Opiyo and Odongo. These two rascals must be old men now. Finally, I shall get Father Thomas to send for owuor at the seminary. He is the closest thing to a brother the girl has and must be there. (Ogola, 1994)

Elizabeth and Mark Demonstrate the New Vision of Ogola's Womananist Approach

Elizabeth and Mark get married with the blessing of both families. Together they lead a happy and a harmonious life. Yet, the loss of the first baby results in some distraction at the extended family level. It takes Elizabeth three years to conceive again. Of course, this delay is received by contempt by Mark's mother. Like Chief Kembo, Mark never appreciates his mother criticism of Elizabeth and goes to ask her to leave him and his wife alone. Mark does this out of his belief that making a baby depends on both the wife as well as the husband. Here, Mark deviates from the already set-tradition regarding maternal life. On the other hand, Elizabeth shows a lot of firmness and tenacity that she has inherited from her grandmother. She appears as an independently minded person who does not conform wholly to tradition.

Ogola envisions a society where women do not get married just for the sake of conforming to traditions. Rather, they should have a firm belief that they have the right to decide either to get married or lead a life of celibacy. Elizabeth is portrayed as free of traditional confinement but she still values and honors matrimonial life. She takes her grandmother a model in conducting herself. She is presented as sensitive, tenacious, intelligent, understanding, enduring and accommodating. On the other hand, Mark appears as a very supportive husband. Together they live happily with their children a life full of stability and love. "All in all the Sigu

family was a happy one. There was money but not too much and plenty of love-simple and unpretentious.” (Ogola, 1994) As a couple, they share the burdens of the family without showing any hesitation. As a husband, Mark feels proud to do the house chores that men in his community never do. He is with the opinion that men should accept that child-care is not a shameful activity to be concealed and that men should bear responsibility for domestic work. Here, Ogola reinforces her Womanist vision that marriage is a commitment on the part of both men and women on equal basis and that no one takes advantages over the other. Here, Ogola does not support separatism between husbands and wives. As Simatai puts it “Ogola rejects separatism between men and women. She clearly recommends coexistence between the two genders as members of the same society. Ogola’s female characters do not live in isolation from their male counterparts.” (Simatai, 2001)

Repeatedly, Ogola produces a narrative that stresses the complementarity between the two genders. She underscores the importance of having equitable roles of both men and women for society to develop. As Cathryne Cherop points “Ogola’s narrative paints a picture of equality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making, at all levels.” (Cherop, 2015) She advocates women’s liberation and gender equality while calling for women’s inclusion in the society. *The River and The Source* explores such changes through presenting women as involved in the affairs of their families and as sharers of their male counterparts. The novel foregrounds a distinct female performance through providing them with opportunities that liberate them socially, culturally and economically. In this novel Ogola gives Akoko and her daughter and granddaughter the space to acquire new identities to help them actualize themselves.

In *The River and the Source* women move from self-awareness to assurance and self-confidence. Ogola accords them with bravery, endurance and capability at different levels. She empowers them through giving equal opportunities of education to enable them to be actively engaged in public life. As Jose remarks “Education makes women more aware of the discrepancy between a country’s growth rate and gender parity as reflected by the education opportunities accorded to both male and female children. (Jose, 2014) The positive impact of formal education can be clearly seen in Wandia Magu’s positive and constructive attitude toward her society and her family. Thanks to education, women can share men in reconstructing a new society based on cooperation and solidarity.

Wandia and Aoro as a Womanist Couple as Achieve Ogola’s Womanist Vision of Inyegtated Society

Wandia Magu belongs to a community that is different from the Luo. Nevertheless, she is able to adapt to the Luo and to settle in it the rest of her life. In portraying the character of Wandia, who represents the third generation of Akoko’s line, Ogola is keen on introducing her as bold and assertive as Akoko. As a student, Wandia is a member in a group of heterogeneous students. During classes she insists that the members of the group be called not by their gender but by their names. She is able to achieve a great success in studies. Moreover, she beats all the male students in academic work and comes to top her classes with distinguished performance that she is referred to as “a tough lady” (Ogola, 1994) in her conduct with others in the surrounding community, Wandia presents a duplicate model of Akoko the grandmother.

Wandia is an intelligent and a beautiful young woman who attracts many suitors. She falls in love with Aoro Sigu the son of Mark Amtony and Elizabeth. She is assertive and audacious enough to deviate from the traditional norms in terms of marriage and maternal life. She finds in Aoro her dream knight as a husband and, instead of waiting for him to propose to marry her; she goes to ask him for marriage. In doing so, Wandia behaves in a way contrary to

the traditions. She is a woman of a strong character and a pioneering spirit. She displays a lot of attributes that Ogola wants to underscore to present her as a pure womanist figure in the sense of being able to make drastic changes in the situation of women in her community as well as the entire modern Kenyan society.

Despite being different in backgrounds, both Wandia and Aoro get married and are able to get over whatever obstacles they face in their way of constructing a family whose all members constitute integral parts of the society. They live in harmony and are blessed with six kids. Aoro finds Wandia a loving wife and a caring mother shows a sense of responsibility toward both her family and her job. He expresses his happiness about having her as a wife. "I am a very lucky man. She does a wonderful job with the kids." (Ogola, 1994) She earns a salary and this gives her the ability to contribute to the economic well-being of her family as well as of the society. She demonstrates great abilities at holding responsibility for her job as a medical doctor at the professional level. At the domestic level, she is the most caring mother who shows a lot of vigilance and energy. As Agnes Magu points out "The relationship between Wandia and Sigu is likely to raise eyebrows because she is a Kikuyu while he is a Luo." (Magu, 2014)

Moreover, Wandia is able to establish very solid relationships with the Sigus despite speaking different language and coming from a different background. On the other hand, the Sigus do their best to accommodate her as one of them. She is able to transcend tribal boundaries. Aoro's mother, Elizabeth, establishes intimacy with her daughter-in-law [Wandia] and becomes very attached to her. She shows a lot of respect to Wandia's difference and they become more attached in the passage of time. Furthermore, Elizabeth -as a mother-in-law- expresses her appreciation of Wandia through telling her son that he is so fortunate to have Wandia as a wife.

Wandia and Aoro as a Model Womanist Figures

Again, at the professional level, Wandia demonstrates exceptional abilities. Though her job as a medical doctor is a tough one that is mostly occupied by males, Wandia never bothers. She has a strong character to determine for herself while showing commitments to her own choices. She is qualified and ambitious enough to pursue her study for a postgraduate degree. She earns a scholarship to pursue her study in America for one year. She is already a mother of six kids. Nevertheless, Aoro values her endeavor and her perseverance and goes to back her in a sign of showing solidarity to their family. Initially, Wandia herself is reluctant to go, but thanks to her husband's support, she is able to go. Definitely, the support that Wandia receives from her husband helps her to rise and achieve a lot of success that she becomes the chairperson of the Department of Pathology. Furthermore, Aoro's mother shares her son the support and encourages Wandia to leave the kids with him. She says "We will all chip in to give him a hand with the children." (Ogola, 1994)

Of course, Wandia appreciates her husband and his family's support. She acknowledges Aoro's support and values it greatly. It brings both solidarity and integration to the family. Both of them are aware of the indispensable role that the other plays for the well-being of the entire family. Wandia is a model of the young woman that fulfills Ogola's Womanist vision of the African woman. She introduces her as a woman who grasps "The true destiny of a woman to live life to the full and to fight to the end." (Ogola, 1994) Thus, Ogola exhibits Wandia as resourceful and gives her a voice while leading a life of harmony and integration with her husband. Aoro loves her greatly that he "is involved with her in exactly the same way a drawing man is involved with the sea inextricably... He feels very strong that his very definition of himself as a man somehow bound up with the way she perceives him." (Ogola, 1994)

CONCLUSION

In her adoption of the Womanist approach in portraying the main female characters in *The River and The Source*, Ogola hits at the head of the nail and breaks the dead lock by treading a different path in presenting her vision of the rightful situation of women in general and the African woman in particular. It is an outlook that is based on a comprehensive vision of the society; it is a vision that is all encompassing of both men and women. In *The River and The Source*, Ogola has succeeded in reinforcing her womanist vision by giving examples of men and women who have devoted their entire lives to one another starting with Akoko and Kembo and ending with Aoro and Wandia. Ogola envisions a society that is based on the involvement of both men and women. She imagines a society that can be reshaped and reordered. She imagines a world where mutual respect and understanding should be there regardless of gender. It is a world where the maximum potentials of its people can only be achieved by including all genders rather than excluding any of them. It is a world where both men and women can work hand in hand for a better change in their society. Here, Hudson-Weems' theory of Womanism has found a fertile soil in the presentation of the modern African woman. In *The River and The Source* Ogola has exhibited a clear demonstration of Hudson-Weeds' perspective by giving role-models of men and women in their understanding, respect, cooperation and respect.

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