

The Changing Image of Women in Francis Imbuga's Oeuvre

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**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor
Litterarum in the Faculty of Arts at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan
University**

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April 2014

Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work and that it has not previously been submitted for assessment or completion of any postgraduate qualification to another University or for another qualification.

Selline A. Oketch

Dedication

I gratefully dedicate this dissertation
to the memory of my parents
Joash and Consolata Oketch.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to all those who were part of this work.

I am particularly indebted to my promoter Prof. H. E. Janse van Vuuren for her invaluable support and guidance throughout the writing of this dissertation. My greatest appreciation goes to her especially for sustained commitment over time and distance.

I am also indebted to my second promoter Prof. Mary West for her critical comments that led to substantial improvement in the quality of this dissertation.

My words of gratitude go to Prof. G. Masula and Prof. C. J. Odhiambo for their honest evaluation of this work.

I most sincerely acknowledge the financial support from the Catholic University for my doctoral studies. I also appreciate the financial assistance from CUEA that enabled me to travel to Port Elizabeth, South Africa, for discussions with my promoters. I thank the Faculty of Arts and the staff of the Department of English at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University for rigorously subjecting my work to various panels to ascertain its quality.

Special thanks go to my colleagues and students in the Department of English at CUEA for their inspiring comments.

I offer fond gratitude to my husband Lawrence and my children Mercy, Eric, William and Henry for their moral and unflagging support that brought this work to its fruition.

Finally, I thank the Almighty God for the strength and abilities with which He endowed me.

Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine the changing image of women in the oeuvre of Francis Imbuga. Focusing on seven stage plays and two novels published between 1976 and 2011, the study examines the depiction of female characters within the social, cultural and political contexts of post-independence African societies.

The depiction of female characters in literature has attracted the attention of numerous scholars globally, particularly with regards to negative female stereotypes in male authored works. This study explores Imbuga's attitude towards female stereotypes and gender inequalities in literary texts.

Using an eclectic framework that includes feminist criticism, feminist stylistics, gender theory and the formal strategies of literature, the study examined gender relations in these texts through the analysis of language and discourse of characters. Further, the study uses the interpretive methods of textual analysis to categorize these works into three phases based on their portrayal of female characters. This method reveals a systematic transformation in the characterization of women from disadvantaged positions in the patriarchal society to more prominent positions in the contemporary society.

The study demonstrates that Imbuga makes a positive response to feminism and devices a unique perspective on feminism that celebrates both the domestic and public roles of female characters. In this sense, the female characters contribute to the moral content and aesthetic values of Imbuga's works. The study concludes that Imbuga views the transformation of female characters in literary texts as part of the broader social change that is desirable in the society. Ultimately, this vision involves shifting focus from the preoccupation with gender inequalities to concern for the welfare and dignity of the human person. Based on the conclusions, recommendations for further study

include investigation into the educative and social role of the performing arts as a means of raising consciousness on issues such as HIV/Aids, use of indigenous knowledge in solving contemporary issues, incorporation of African morality and traditions in contemporary literature and a comparative study of Imbuga's feministic vision with that of other writers.

Keywords: Francis Imbuga, Female characters, feminist criticism, stylistics, aesthetics, social change, strategies of literature.

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

Francis Davis Imbuga (1947-2012), a Kenyan and one of East Africa's most prolific playwrights, used his literary works to interrogate social, cultural, political and economic issues affecting post-Independent African nations. Dominant themes that Imbuga's plays and novels address include leadership and bad governance, political power struggle, the dichotomy between tradition and modernity, poverty, gender imbalances, HIV/AIDS, human rights issues, conflict and the need for peace and reconciliation among feuding communities. This context provides the background against which I examine Imbuga's depiction of female characters in his creative works. I also highlight the ways in which specific textual features enhance gender issues and reveal the writer's aesthetic ideal.

Literature, particularly with regard to its genre of performance arts in which the best part of Imbuga's literary output belongs, is a powerful tool of influencing attitude change. An important aspect of African literature is its dynamism in reflecting human experiences and transformations within the African societies. This close relationship between literature and society gives African literature a human dimension. To achieve this role, literary artists construct fictional characters to either symbolize persons in real life or provide a vision for society (Kandji 2006).

The depiction of female characters in literary works has attracted considerable attention of scholars and feminist literary critics globally. Thus for several decades, issues concerning women and gender equality have increasingly taken new dimensions in major international forums. The United Nations (UN) and its specialized global agencies, in particular, have rigorously paid special attention to these issues, seeking to create awareness on the need to discard society's age-old traditions that contribute to the discrimination against women and to recognize the equal and important roles women play in the survival and development of humankind and society.

Readings of images of women in literary texts take into consideration several basic principles about gender, gender disparities and the manifestations of social and cultural realities of our societies in the fictional worlds of writers. The traditional female stereotype is portrayed within a context of domination and subordination. These aspects contribute to the binary oppositions in the criticisms of works by either male or female writers. Bâ (1980) uses her female characters to explore instances of oppression and injustices that women experience within both Islamic and African cultural contexts. As Kabira (2005: vii) argues, Bâ's concern is basically with social forces that threaten a balanced relationship in society.

Extensive criticisms abound of the stereotyping of female characters by male writers in various ways, including: the good loving mother, the obedient, dutiful and docile wife who passively surrenders to the whims and dictates of the man, the evil wife, the witch or the victim. In the urban context, the female stereotype is the sophisticated city woman of loose morals (Zola 2010; Kandji 2006; Fonchingong 2006; Kumah 2000; Kolawole 1997; McKay in Worhol and Herndl 1997; West 1995; Ogundipe-Leslie 1994, 1987, Davies 1994; Stratton 1994; Adeola 1990; O'Barr 1987; Watchel cited in Schipper 1987; Chesaina 1987). Some critics of African literature attribute this trend to African mythology and the patriarchal system in which some African societies are deeply rooted, and which relegate women to a very low social status (Chesaina, 1987:10).

Manifestly, such African male authors have been singled out for marginalizing female characters and for depicting them from a masculine point of view, while overlooking the crucial role their women partners play in the society. Scholars and critics attribute this negative portrayal to unequal social relations prevailing within the patriarchal setting (Taiwo 1984; Okereke 1997). Within this setting, it was taken for granted that the man was at the forefront of all important activities in the society. In her study of the image of women in the Kenyan novel, Watchel (as cited in Schipper1987:48) posits that in Kenya, "the male focused lens on life" is not only an accurate reflection of society, but also consistent with a society where "men are the primary decision-makers. "Hence, in male-authored literary texts, male characters have occupied prominent positions as their female counterparts are marginalized or completely silenced.

Simone de Beauvoir (Tyson, 2006:96) makes the feminists' concern more vivid in her classic work *The Second Sex* (1949) when she argues that woman is made, not born and that she exists in a man's world where the man views her as inferior and dependent on him. In other words, Beauvoir objects to the social construction of woman as an inferior being. Ndebele (2003:3) revisits this view and observes that society is that "human entity created by men who also make the laws and prescribe conditions for breaking them." Thus, the immediate concerns of the pioneer African women writers were: to provide an objective depiction of womanhood and the female point of view, to correct the misconceptions about women and to claim their rightful position in the African literary tradition.

Fonchingong (2006) and Okereke (1997) reiterate Ogunjide-Leslie's(1987:8) call to women writers to correct the female stereotypes in African literature that include negative attributes such as passivity, instability and irrationality. Ogunjide-Leslie elaborates that the female writer must know the reality of the African woman and the truth about African women and womanhood. Indeed, women themselves had been at the forefront in championing their rights and the events leading to the United Nations Decade for Women Conference in Nairobi. More specifically, in the literary field, women writers and critics were the first to draw attention to the place and role of female characters and their stereotypic portrayal by their male counterparts who had hitherto dominated the field (Jones, Palmer and Jones 1987:1). Nonetheless, African male writers such as Wole Soyinka, Sembene Ousmane, Peter Abrahams and Ngugi wa Thiong'o have been cited as outstanding in their presentation of relatively prominent, positive and complex female characters (Jones, Palmer & Jones 1987).

As social, cultural and political conditions of African societies continue to change and women increasingly take on new roles, this research on the changing image of women in the oeuvre of Francis Imbuga, a male writer, has been prompted by the need to affirm and transcend these numerous criticisms in African literature concerning the representation of women in male authored texts. The research focuses on the contribution of male writers in redefining the status of female characters in their literary works. Thus, it recognizes Francis Imbuga as one such male

author whose depiction of female characters calls for an in-depth analysis of the writer's overall use of language and literary techniques against the general assumptions concerning female characters in texts authored by male writers.

1.2 Aim and objectives of the study

This study examines images of women in Francis Imbuga's oeuvre in terms of periodization beginning with his earlier plays and ending with his novels and last published play. It carries out a systematic in-depth analysis of the portrayal of female characters in Imbuga's oeuvre based on the discourses in the texts. In this regard, the discussion pays close attention to the characters' self-perceptions through what they say and their actions, what other characters say about them, the literary techniques used in their depiction and the overall interactions and actions in the texts. The study also explores the different roles female characters play and their symbolic significance in order to ascertain the writer's attitude towards female stereotypes and gender inequalities in literary texts, and to acknowledge the development of characterization of women in his oeuvre.

I have identified three phases in the depiction of female characters in Imbuga's works: the first phase collectively examines Imbuga's initial four political plays, simultaneously highlighting the dramatization of female stereotyping and the female characters' struggle for recognition in literary texts by male authors. The second phase examines the feminist perspective in Imbuga's writing by specifically analysing the challenges that the writer explores in his two plays, *Aminata* (1988) and *The Burning of Rags* (1989). Lastly, the third phase focuses on Imbuga's later works comprising two novels, *Shrine of Tears* (1993) and *Miracle of Remera* (2004) and his last published play before his death, *The Return of Mgofu* (2011). My main focus is on the changing images of women, paying rapt attention at the same time to the transformation of female characters, their new roles and the emphasis on equal participation of both males and females in the democratic and developmental processes of society.

Thus, I consider *Aminata* (1988) the yardstick for examining Imbuga's characterization of women in that the play is a conscious response to feminism having been written ostensibly for the United Nations Decade for Women Conference held in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1985. Based on

this premise, I therefore investigate the depiction of female characters in Imbuga's works in three distinct categories revolving around the works that were published before and after *Aminata*. The analysis pays attention to similarities and differences and social, cultural and political spheres within which these female characters are depicted. Furthermore, I examine the themes that these female characters illuminate, bearing in mind the restrictions that a patriarchal society generally imposes on African women and the conscious efforts in the contemporary society to eliminate discrimination against women.

A strategy that is particularly striking in Imbuga's works is the ambivalence regarding the depiction of characters and situations in general. Consequently, in addition to using feminist criticism as a framework, a fair analysis of Imbuga's texts must also investigate the use of techniques of literature to critically focus on what is not explicitly presented. For instance, in *Betrayal in the City* (1976), Nina, a peripheral character, represents a stereotypical traditional old woman who is not as politically conscious as her husband, Doga. She is oblivious to the fact that her son's murder is politically instigated; neither does she comprehend why her slain son's "shaving ceremony" has suddenly become politicized. Yet, it is her encounter with the two soldiers, Jere and Mulili on a State mission to cancel the ceremony "in the interest of peace" that sheds light on the repressive nature of their society and on the moral and aesthetic dimension of her portrayal. The fact that Mulili ill-treats Nina leads Jere to critically reconsider their role as State agents, and the vices that they embody. He then boldly resigns from his job, for which he is incarcerated. In prison, Jere joins the progressive forces in the society to champion the rights of the citizens. Hence, Nina's supposed weakness creates a major turning point in the play.

This illustration expresses the need for a close re-examination of the portrayal of female characters in Francis Imbuga's oeuvre in order to identify the moral, aesthetic and artistic value of their roles and to appreciate the development of characterization of women in these works. Finally, my study evaluates the changing images of women in these works with a view to ascertaining the writer's vision of a more gender inclusive society. Through this method of analysing Imbuga's works, my research serves the purpose of establishing an alternative dimension of studying the depiction of female characters in male-authored literary texts.

1.3 Context of the research

As a work of imagination, literature replicates experiences of human beings within different social, economic and political contexts. It functions as a study and record of a people's history and transformations and can serve as a major instrument of raising consciousness on critical issues in the society (Indangasi, 2008:52-53; Okereke, 1997:28; Chesaina, 1987:305). The representation of the role of women in literature has increasingly been of interest to critics of modern African literature. A significant aspect of the first phase of feminist literary criticism waste concern with female stereotypes, gender inequalities and power imbalances that characterised literary texts authored by male writers. As earlier stated, several studies have been carried out on this phenomenon with a view to correcting this misconception, thus leading to the growth of women's literary tradition characterised by a more positive and complex depiction of female characters. Feminists have also acknowledged male writers who consciously depict positive female characters or those who have transformed their attitudes towards female characters in their texts. Chesaina (1987:2) points out that if women are to be liberated from all forms of oppression, "the area to be tackled is that of attitudes." My interest in this topic stems from the fact that I can contribute to the discourse by using my research to focus attention on the role of literature as a channel for attitude and social change.

1.4 Scope of the study

Although Imbuga has written poetry, short stories, radio and television scripts, this study is limited to his seven stage plays and two novels. The plays are: *Betrayal in the City* (1976); *Game of Silence* (1977); *The Successor* (1979); *Man of Kafira* (1984), *Aminata* (1988), *The Burning of Rags* (1989) and *The Return of Mgofu* (2011) while the novels are *Shrine of Tears* (1993) and *Miracle of Remera* (2004).The first chapter consists of background to the study and explains its aims and objectives, context, literature review and its motivation and scope. The chapter also comprises methodology and theoretical framework of the study. Chapter two presents a brief biography of Francis Imbuga and an overview of his writings within the context of post-colonial Kenyan society.

The third chapter closely examines the portrayal of female characters in Imbuga's earlier plays. Through the investigation of language and literary techniques used in the plays, this chapter highlights the ambivalence in the portrayal of female characters to signify marginalization of women and their subsequent struggle for recognition in the society. Chapter four focuses on the playwright's conscious response to feminism by specifically analysing *Aminata* (1988) and *The Burning of Rags* (1989). *Aminata*, in particular, is significant to the discussion of feminism inasmuch as it was specifically written to reflect the theme of the United Nations Decade for Women Conference, held in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1985.

Chapter five pays close attention to Imbuga's later texts that reflect the changing roles of female characters and the writer's vision of equal participation of both males and females in the development of society. Finally, the sixth chapter is a general conclusion of the whole study and demonstrates the contribution of female characters to the moral content and aesthetic ideals of Imbuga's oeuvre.

1.5 Literature review

Studies that have been carried out on Francis Imbuga's texts have largely examined either single plays or certain specific themes and literary devices. The analysis of the single plays has mainly been done in order to guide secondary school students studying the texts as set books in their national examinations. These include Erapu (1979); Bukenya & Arden (1978); Mutahi (1988); Chesaina (1984), Williams (1989) and Indangasi (2002). In these works we can discover certain views on female characters that merit further studies or investigations. Among the scholars who have done in-depth studies on different aspects of Imbuga's works are Dusaidi (1981); Makini (1985); Chesaina (1987); Mbewa (1992); Ruganda (1992); Outa (2001) and Olilo (2002) and Olembo and Kebaya (2013).

Olembo and Kebaya (2013) investigate how, through drama, literary artists in Kenya interrogate the notion of power and gendered identities by re-examining the socio-cultural structures that create such positions. With special focus on Imbuga's *Aminata* (1988) and Dennis Kyalo's *The Hunter is Back* (2010), they argue that the female protagonists in both plays, *Aminata* and *Rita*

respectively, have not passively succumbed to oppression but are constantly involved in contesting, subverting and reworking oppressive power structures in society (2013:104). In particular, Olembo and Kebaya make the point that through Aminata, Imbuga foregrounds the gendered self's wish to transform society as a key element in engaging and (re)configuring herself in society (2013:99). I acknowledge the views of Olembo and Kebaya but I emphasize that a more realistic transformation of female characters is only achievable within the social transformation of the entire society as Imbuga envisions in *Shrine of Tears* (1994) and in *The Return of Mgofu* (2011).

Olilo (2002) carries out a thorough study of Imbuga's eight plays, a novella and a novel. Basing his central focus on myths and rituals in Imbuga's works, he also makes certain significant observations about customs of the Luhya people and female characters in Imbuga's works that this study takes into account as it delves deeper into the more focused study of the changing image of women in Imbuga's seven major plays and two novels.

Indangasi (2002:46–50) recognizes social change as the overall theme of *Aminata*. While he acknowledges that Imbuga presents the heroine, Aminata, as an embodiment of the best that tradition can offer, he notes that ironically, her uncle Jumba is the biggest initiator of social change. This study does not only acknowledge the significance of Indangasi's analysis but also goes further to examine the implications of the deliberate ambivalence in the writer's style. While Indangasi problematizes the writer's evasive style, I assess it with regard to the writer's response to feminism and the way in which he relates it to masculinity.

Outa (2001) carries out a comparative study of the drama of Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Francis Imbuga. His main focus is the playwrights' dramaturgy of power and politics in post-colonial Kenya. Limiting his analysis to Ngugi and Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and Imbuga's *Man of Kafira*, he investigates the formal parameters that Imbuga uses that have not only made his works to be allowed in the official school curriculum, but also enabled Imbuga himself to survive in Kenya as a university lecturer despite his stinging criticism of the political system. Outa's conclusion reiterates Ruganda's (1992) when he states that Imbuga's survival can be

attributed to his approach of thinly disguising and generalizing his setting, what Ruganda refers to as “distancing of setting” and “dialectics of transparent concealment.”

Outa also elaborates that Imbuga’s reliance on the comic characters and the exploitation of the interplay between reality and fantasy, are indications that he is practicing a kind of avoidance art, which ultimately, enables him to preserve his art. My own earlier study, Mbewa (1992) also alludes to this view in the analysis of Imbuga’s use of the mad and the comic characters. In recognizing Jusper as a ‘mad’ character in both *Betrayal in the City* (1976) and *Man of Kafira* (1979), the study ascertains that Jusper’s vacillation between sanity and madness contributes to the disguised façade of criticism (Mbewa, 1992:78).

Ruganda (1992) on his part carries out a meticulous analysis of Imbuga’s plays, highlighting the alienation of figures of social and political authority, dramatic devices employed by Imbuga in his political drama and the ideology of performance as a mode of political dominance by both artists and the ruling elite. Within this colossal study, Ruganda also makes some pertinent observations about the female characters that call for an in-depth study. For example, in his analysis of *Aminata*, Ruganda observes that while Imbuga is undoubtedly in favour of the emancipation of women, he has also raised caution on the consequences of unqualified change, and concludes that despite the sad state of affairs that Imbuga’s drama deals with, the drama is not pessimistic. He points out further that *Aminata* dichotomizes gender politics and explores the polarity of dominance.

Ruganda argues that while Imbuga has disqualified the various figures of authority for lack of positive values that would regenerate society, the ideal figures of authority seem to be a combination of gender, on the one hand, and art on another, with Jusper and Regina in *Betrayal in the City* as perfect examples. This study, while transcending this argument to uncover the ambivalence in the depiction of female characters, certainly draws a lot from Ruganda’s study.

In my earlier research, Mbewa (1992), I analysed Imbuga’s plays published between 1976 and 1989 with specific focus on the motifs of dream, madness and use of comic characters. Using the

sociological and psychological approaches, my argument was that these three devices are aspects of Imbuga's literary strategy that allow him to comment freely and intellectually on an otherwise repressive post-independence regime. Of significance in my earlier study is that all the protagonists discussed under each motif are male characters. Any new and related publication by a writer calls for a re-assessment of the views held on the earlier works. This present research on the changing image of women in Imbuga's oeuvre includes the writer's three additional texts and examines the depiction of female characters in a much broader perspective.

Harb (1989) explores the "aesthetics of Imbuga as a Kenyan playwright" by presenting an overview of the six plays published between 1976 and 1989. He recognizes the use of humour in a cunning and satirical manner to attack corruption, abuse of power, hypocrisy, and affectation, regarding it as one of the most distinctive characteristics of Imbuga's drama (1989:580). In addition, Harb highlights Imbuga's views regarding the role of art by focusing on the playwright's use of the play-within-a-play technique in *Betrayal in the City* (1976) and *Man of Kafira* is machinery for revealing the truth (1989:578). He enhances his analysis by referring to Imbuga's own sentiments that the role of the artist in the "Third World" is that of commitment to truth and improving the human condition. Concerning *The Burning of Rags* (1989), Harb significantly highlights the victory of interdependency of men and women and that of cultures (1989:575). This study examines these views further as part of the writer's broader vision of social change.

Chesaina (1987) investigates the representation and role of women in African drama. She examines the way in which African theatre portrays women and the extent to which playwrights have articulated values and exposed negative attitudes towards women. Chesaina argues that in the traditional African communities based on the patriarchal social systems, various traditional beliefs and practices helped maintain the low status of women (1987:10). Thus, she examines how selected African playwrights, including Imbuga, represent the position and role of women in the traditional social context and in the context of changing social values. She notes that in the traditional milieu, women play stereotyped roles and are often victimised (1987:11).

Asserting that African women have contributed significantly to the political advancement of their societies in both the traditional and contemporary periods, she criticises the tendency by male writers to write from a man's viewpoint (1987:303). Thus, for example, concerning Imbuga's portrayal of Mary in *The Married Bachelor* (1972), Chesaina concludes that Imbuga is cynical towards Women's Liberation Movement and skeptical about the emancipation of African women (1987:198-202).

Chesaina's point is very significant to my research that considers a later version of the same play, *The Burning of Rags* (1989) and *Aminata* (1988) Imbuga's plays that display his consciousness to the feministic agenda. In general, my research supports and builds on Chesaina's conclusion that drama is a very effective tool of communicating ideas and thought and that the liberation of African women should be taken more seriously as an integral part of the role of literature in social development (1987:304).

Makini (1985) analyses Imbuga's seven plays that were published then. His analysis also includes Imbuga's publications as an Undergraduate student, *The Married Bachelor* (later revised and titled *The Burning of Rags*, as mentioned above), *The Fourth Trial* and *Kisses of Fate*. In his study, Makini traces Imbuga's development into becoming Kenya's leading playwright. His research is a general study covering themes, stylistic devices and characterization in these plays.

Chesaina (1984) reviewed in Olilo (2002) observes that in Imbuga's plays females are presented as sketches rather than rounded characters. She argues that with the exception of *Man of Kafira* where there is an element of appraisal of the development of strength among the female characters, in other plays there is little room for female characters to change their plight in society. Chesaina's arguments need to be explored further in the context of Imbuga's later plays and the two novels.

Chesaina (1984) examines themes, characterization, language use and style in Imbuga's *Man of Kafira* and makes remarks that are very pertinent to this study. She states that themes of a work

of art “cannot be divorced from the social situation in which it is based” hence, the themes of this particular play are “closely connected to contemporary African situation” (1984:18). Chesaina examines themes such as misuse of political power, role of art in the society, value of human life and the role of women in the society. Concerning female characters, she points out that the playwright “puts them in difficult situations so that he can examine the predicaments they face in their social roles” as girl-friends, wives of ordinary people or leaders, and mothers. She concludes that, “women in *Man of Kafira* are sufferers regardless of the role they play in society” but despite that, “they do not despair” (1984:27-28).

Dusaidi (1981) on his part only examines Imbuga’s three plays as part of a broader study of East African Drama. These are: *Betrayal in the City* (1976), *Game of Silence* (1977) and *The Successor* (1979). Dusaidi’s study mainly focuses on the theme of cultural conflict and the social, economic and political issues affecting Africa, as depicted by four East African playwrights, namely, Zirimu, Ruganda, Imbuga and Ngugi. Hence, he only analyses the female characters within this broad context.

The views of these scholars concerning the roles of female characters in Imbuga’s plays are significant to the current study that focuses attention on the changing roles of female characters in Imbuga’s creative works to date, and uses their depiction to reveal both the writer’s vision as well as the aesthetic ideal of his works.

1.6 Motivation

Gender is a topical issue in various disciplines and in general global politics. Various literary scholars, including Zola 2010, Rutere 2009, Mjalefa and Mkgato 2007, Kiiru 1996, West 1995 and Chesaina 1987 have carried out studies on different aspects concerning female characters in literary texts. A survey of studies on female stereotypes in male-authored texts reveals that attention is mostly focused on thematic issues as opposed to style and language. Furthermore, the developments of the depictions of female characters in literature need to be closely examined against the background of traditionally defined roles, the socio-economic and political realities of the contemporary societies, and more significantly, using the formal strategies of literature.

Among Kenyan male writers, Francis Imbuga is a natural choice for such a timely study. He is a key figure in Kenyan literature and his oeuvre warrants critical analysis. Indeed Imbuga is acclaimed as Kenya's, if not East Africa's, leading dramatist with most of his texts studied in the secondary school curriculum and at university level in the region. Furthermore, Imbuga himself can be regarded among those African male writers who have attempted to respond to the global concerns about the situation and status of women, yet this aspect of his writing, has not been given adequate critical attention. More importantly, Imbuga maintains some level of consistency in creating ambivalent characters that invite the reader to engage in a thorough examination of their portrayal through moral-thematic and formal analysis to determine aesthetic ideals of his works, his views on power relations, the empowering forces of female characters and the new roles of women in a changing society. In this way, this study broadens the understanding of the aesthetic value of these texts as well as the writer's feministic vision.

Significantly, there has been very little scholarly interest in the depiction of female characters in the oeuvre of this prominent Kenyan male writer. As already stated, during the preparations for the 1985 UN Decade for Women Conference in Nairobi, Imbuga was commissioned by the organizing committee to produce a play that would aptly depict the aims and objectives of the Conference, hence the play, *Aminata*. It is therefore important to ascertain, through a scholarly analysis, the extent to which the play contributes to the objectives of the Conference and the status of women in the African societies. In addition, the dominant literary strategies that the dramatist utilises and his overall contribution to the gender debate through the play as well as his subsequent works deserve critical attention.

With the writing of *Aminata*, not only did the playwright foreground the plight of female characters in a rural patriarchal setting and the obstacles that such a society imposes on their progress, but he also made a marked genre shift in his subsequent works. Henceforth, with the exception of *The Burning of Rags* (1989), a revision of *The Married Bachelor* (1972), Imbuga began to produce novels that depict a clear development in his characterization of women. This new writing trend also calls for a deeper analysis of the depiction of female characters in relation

to the previous plays, the similarities and differences of contexts created and the style and language use in the texts. Interestingly, Imbuga returns to play writing with the publication of *The Return of Mgofu* (2011), albeit with renewed focus on the invaluable role of female characters in the development and progress of their societies.

Therefore, my premise in this study is that although my main focus is on the changing image of women, thematic issues, artistic choices, moral content and aesthetic value of the works enrich the study itself. By interweaving artistic aspects of Imbuga's works with some of the cultural norms and beliefs of some Kenyan communities, the study serves to communicate directly to the Kenyan women and, by extension, the African women, in their struggle for a more gender-inclusive society. Of great significance too, is that most scholars have mainly focused on Imbuga's plays, whereas this study incorporates the novels and also makes reference to the writer's one short story / novella, a scope that creates a forum to critique the status of female characters in fiction vis-à-vis the reality in the African societies. In this way, women are able to appreciate a male writer's contribution in the complementary approach to the women's liberation struggle that some African feminists advocate for. The study is therefore significant in its recognition of the place and role of female characters in fiction as an important factor that sheds light on the values of society.

1.7 Methodology and theoretical framework

This section outlines the theories and methodology used in the analysis of the literary texts studied in this research. Tyson (2006:6) points out that critical theory tries to explain the assumptions and values upon which various forms of literary criticism rest. Literary theories enhance the reading and interpretation of the meaning of the texts as well as deepen understanding of the author's intention. Given that the focus of this study is on female characters operating within social, political and historical contexts of fictional societies reflecting the real life, feminist criticism becomes an obvious point of departure. However, the study is also cognizant of the fact that as a theoretical framework, feminism has its roots in a social movement and gender politics, hence may not comprehensively cater for the aesthetic significance of the roles of these female characters as does the strategies of literature. The study therefore adopts an

eclectic approach that uses relevant aspects of feminism as well as those of the nature of literature itself.

Bakhtin (Holquist 1981) identifies in a novel, notions of dialogism, polyphony and heteroglossia that assign voices to both the narrators and characters and hence he advocates a close reading of the text while at the same time being attentive to the linguistic and socio-political context of the work itself. To this end, the study uses feminist criticism with specific reference to feminist literary criticism and feminist stylistics, and the formal literary strategies to decode meaning from artistic expressions embedded in the texts. Feminist stylistics as proposed by Mills (1995:10) is relevant to the study in that it is also a form of social critique in its attempt to discover the “underlying ideological messages in texts” with emphasis on the relationship between text and context.

By examining the position and roles of female characters in Imbuga’s texts, the study also in effect pays attention to gender relationships. Therefore, certain concepts and ideas from gender theory are applicable to the analysis. Further, since the artistic creations are products of a dynamic process of human society, the thesis argues that a meaningful study of literature should consider the truism that it is the material conditions that shape society and aesthetics. Hence, based on the premise that a literary text is produced both within a social environment and a historical period; the study pays attention to the social and political contexts of Imbuga’s texts and examines them in relation to society. This premise is enhanced by arguments advanced by prominent African scholars such as Chinua Achebe and Ngugi WA Thiong’o to the effect that as a member of society, the writer uses literature as a vehicle to express the experiences of the society.

1.7.1 Feminist criticism

Feminist literary criticism has its roots in feminist criticism that also developed from the theory of feminism. Feminist criticism began in the United States and France as an offshoot of the broader feminist movement that rejects the oppression of, and discrimination against women. Generally, feminism advocates equality between men and women in all spheres of development.

As Mills (1995:3) points out, feminists hold the view that women are treated oppressively and differently from men hence feminism “implies commitment to changing the social structures to make it less oppressive to women, and for that matter, to men.” Similarly, Weedon (1987:1) states: “Feminism is a politics [...] directed at changing existing power relations between women and men in society. These power relations structure all areas of life, the family, education and welfare, the worlds of work, politics, culture and leisure.” Thus, feminism is concerned with the rights and roles of women as it rejects organization of society in ways that benefit men but disadvantages women.

Tyson (2006:83) views feminist criticism from a broader perspective and points out that it examines the ways in which literature (and other cultural productions) reinforces or undermines the economic, political, social and psychological oppression of women. She argues that the ultimate goal of feminist criticism is to “increase our understanding of women’s experience, both in the past and present, and promote our appreciation of women’s value in the world” (2006:119).

With specific reference to literature, Peck & Coyle (1984:152) emphasize that one of the achievements of feminist criticism “has been to draw attention to the fact that gender and relationships between men and women are central themes in literature.” Baver (in Warhol & Herndl 1997:713) states that feminist criticism, in its earliest phase, addresses and redresses the exclusion and the silence of female voice. A study of the changing image of women in Imbuga’s oeuvre essentially examines the female voice in these works. Baver (in Warhol & Herndl 1997:711) further points out that characters represent social, ideological and stratified voices that “compete with and foreground the prevailing codes in the society which the author opens up as discourse.”

As stated above, my study recognizes that feminist criticism as a theory developed in the 19th century in the United States and France. However, I limit my discussion to its development in the 1970s by African-American women to relate specifically to their situation culminating into Black feminist criticism. Black feminist criticism focuses on gender inequalities emanating from

negative cultural attitudes and the enforcement of a feminist perspective in both the creation and analysis of literature. It is concerned with the specific experiences of black women. This emphasis on a feminist perspective has generated intense interest in the representation of women in literary works. Literature can either perpetrate gender stereotypes or facilitate positive attitudes towards women in society. Humm (1994: viii) states that while feminist criticism addresses social ideologies and practices, feminist literary criticism “attends to how those ideologies and practices shape literary texts.” This, too, is the emphasis of my study as it seeks to investigate the changing image of women in Imbuga’s oeuvre, by paying close attention to the artistic forms used in the texts from a feminist literary perspective.

1.7.2 Feminist literary criticism

For the purposes of this study, feminist literary criticism can be viewed as the study of literature with particular focus on the position of female characters. It seeks to investigate the position of female characters and gender relations in the literary texts. Feminist criticism dates back to the late 1960s; but it was not until 1970s that it took shape and became a subject of intense interests in literary studies in the West. Early feminist literary critics drew heavily from the views of Simone de Beauvoir in her classic *The Second Sex* (1949) and those of Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* (1970). Simone de Beauvoir initiated the process of analysing the social construction of gender thereby drawing a distinction between sex and gender. On her part, Millet focused on role stereotyping and oppression of women under patriarchal social organizations. Her perspective is that the subordination of women is rooted in patriarchy and this is deeply entrenched in the social, political and economic structures in the society. It is from this viewpoint that she analyses the negative female stereotypes in the works of D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930) and Henry Miller (1891-1980) to demonstrate that female stereotypes in society also exist in literature (as cited in Humm 1994:45).

Showalter (1977) argues that there are two branches of feminist literary criticism, namely, feminist critique and gynocritics. Feminist critique, she states, is a historically grounded enquiry into the ideological assumption of literary phenomena and is concerned with a woman as reader and audience, as consumer of male-produced literature. Its main subject, as she argues, includes

the images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions and misconceptions about women criticism and the fissures in male-constructed literary history. Gynocritics focuses on a woman as writer, producer of textual meaning with the history, themes, genres and structures of literature by women. Showalter contends that the objective of gynocritics is to construct a female framework for the analysis of women's literature to develop new models based on the study of female experience.

Despite the difference in the two approaches, they remain fundamentally similar insofar as both are concerned with the perceptions of women. In view of the fact that this study examines the portrayal of female characters and patriarchal underpinnings exposed in a male-authored texts, it falls within the feminist critique strand of feminist literary criticism that further questions the tenets of any tradition that falls short of giving due recognition to women. Rich (1995) has a similar conception when she states that the goal of feminist theoretical approach is threefold: to nurture the development of authentic female expression based on individual experience and shared understanding; to question long-standing definitions and systems of artistic value; and to create new models of artistic discourse.

An important point to note is that feminists and scholars view feminist literary criticism as a multifaceted field of research drawing on different theoretical perspectives. At its core is the investigation of female stereotypes in male literary works and the place of women's literary tradition. One of the reasons for the divergent perspectives within the feminist theoretical criticism is that, as some scholars argue, its original tenets are rooted in the early Western women's liberation movements that mainly involved the white middle class and addressed women's oppression from a sexist point of view while largely ignoring oppression based on race and class that black women experience. The argument here is that the challenges women face are not universally similar.

These scholars argue that determining the perspective of the feminist theory attends to the specificity of culture, history and the sociological disposition of the authors to be studied. Such an approach also avoids the mistake committed by earlier feminists who focused their analyses

on the images of women in literature without seeking to question the category of literature itself. Later feminists such as Moi (1985) felt that such earlier feminists often failed to offer an adequate analysis of the relationship between ideology and representation. The point being made here is that feminist criticism as a literary theory is too broad and it is only logical to use the perspectives that inform the study at hand.

In line with this argument, a number of scholars have strongly advanced the point about the re-orientation of feminist literary criticism to accommodate the African point of view, (Ogundipe-Leslie 1987, 1994, Stratton 1994). Stratton (1994) emphasises on a cautious deployment of feminist literary criticism arguing that it has failed to take cognizance of the uniqueness of the experience of black women. Thus, for example, Black feminist criticism focuses on gender inequalities emanating from negative cultural attitudes and is concerned with enforcing its own feminist perspective in both the analysis and the creation of literature. It specifically examines marginalization of women in society and in literary texts from the point of view of unique experiences of black women, such as racism and sexism affecting African-American women on the one hand, and issues related to patriarchy affecting African women, on the other.

A significant development in this regard is Walker's distinction between white and black feminism in her acclaimed text *In search of our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1984) where she coins the term "womanism" in place of feminism with specific reference to "women of colour". In order to justify the use of the term, Walker argues that feminism with regard to black women is quite distinct from that of white women due to their unique experiences based on the different social, historical and political contexts.

Ogunyemi (1988:65) elucidates the significance of womanism as a literary theory within feminist criticism in her argument that womanism "believes in the freedom and independence of woman" but unlike radical feminism "it wants meaningful union between black women and black men and black children [...]." The emphasis here is the need for men to change their sexist attitudes towards women and begin to consider them as equal partners. With regard to literary texts, womanists argue that marginalization of female characters is deeply rooted in the social,

historical and cultural structures of society (Owomoyela 1993: 311). Their concerns include: the oppression and ill-treatment of a female character, discrimination against a female character, violence against a female character and the restriction of the role of a female character to taking care of the extended family (Mujalefa and Makgato 2007:148). My study falls within this framework in the sense that it examines the manifestations of social and cultural restrictions in the roles played by female characters in Imbuga's texts and the author's literary depiction of his vision of women and men engaged in the struggle for a changed society.

However, as already stated, this study uses relevant views from feminist literary theory in general. This interest in the portrayal of both male and female characters takes us back to the broader feminist literary criticism. Moi (1985), Humm (1994) and Woolf (in Humm 1994) regard feminist criticism as a political theory in its attempt to explore gender and social reality. Thus, gender as a theory of examining literary constructions also enhances the understanding of the changing image of women in Imbuga's works that this study examines.

1.7.3 Gender as literary theory

As stated above, gender as a literary theory is concerned with gender relationships in the literary texts, particularly those texts authored by males. Tyson (2006:86) describes gender as "our cultural programming as feminine and masculine." Butler (1990:6), an ardent proponent of gender theory, argues that gender is a human construct enacted by repetition of social activities and concerned with improving the oppressive situations. She argues further that gender is shaped and informed by one's immediate environment, hence "it becomes impossible to separate out 'gender' from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained." Butler's arguments reinforce Simone de Beauvoir's (cited in Tyson, 2006: 96) views that a woman is made not born and is conditioned by strong environmental forces. Beauvoir objects to the tendency to define women with reference to men, a feature that is frequently recreated in literary texts by male writers:

A woman is not a person in her own right. She is man's other: She is less than a man; she is a kind of alien in a man's world; she is not a fully developed human being the way a man is.

Thus, gender is not understood within the biological differences between men and women but an aspect of social conditioning and linked to expectations of the roles of men and women in different cultures. Tyson (2006:85) elaborates that these traditional gender roles that cast men as strong and decisive; and women as weak and submissive, were in effect used to justify inequalities such as excluding women from equal access to leadership and decision making positions. A literary text is mimetic of the society it depicts, hence as this study focuses on the position and roles of female characters, it must investigate the interactions in the texts that depict gender relations and gender differences in order to establish the author's perspective on gender issues in the society. The analysis of contextual features that indicate differences of roles and positions is essentially an engagement in gender analysis and falls within the theoretical framework of gender.

Woolf (in Hum 1994: 3) expounds on the relationship between the text and context when she argues that the representation of men and women in literature is gendered in the same way as the social reality is shaped by gender. She thus regards feminist criticism as a political way to explore gender and social reality stating that "literature read with feminist eyes involves a double perspective." Mills (1995: 1, 8) has a similar conception of gender in her concern with the way it is "handled in texts" arguing that feminist criticism calls for "the social, political and economic equality between men and women." Tyson (2006:86) succinctly states:

Feminists observe that the belief that men are superior to women has been used to justify and maintain the male monopoly of positions of economic, political and social power [...] to keep women powerless by denying them education and occupational means of acquiring economic, political and social power.

As a consequence of male dominated literary tradition, many of the depictions of female characters in African literature are reductive – perpetuating the myths of female subordination. Female characters in most male-authored works are rarely granted primary status – their roles often trivialized in varying degrees in their depiction as silent, submissive and peripheral characters. According to Frank (in Jones, Palmer and Jones 1987:14) this situation only began to change in the last few decades but largely in the male-authored texts, females are defined in relation to male characters as daughters, wives or mothers.

However, women writers and some male writers of African literature have demonstrated that in the ever changing social and historical realities, literature is a very useful channel for projecting a complete picture of African reality (Davies 1994). Owomoyela (2002:4) proposes a more “progressive attitude” towards gender relations. Fonchingong (2006: 136) makes this claim more vivid in his view that increasing attention is being accorded to the mediation of gender relations in contemporary African literature, hence the questions that should be asked include how the battered image of the female gender is being redeemed and the kind of reading being given to gendered power structures in texts by earlier male writers.

Similarly, Plain and Sellers (2007) point out that a literary gender analysis should be concerned with the ways in which characters embody male or female traits, the extent to which they take on traits from the opposite gender and how this changes the reactions of characters towards one another. In addition, they maintain that one should investigate what the text reveals about the operations of patriarchy and the modes of resistance that female characters adopt. Ultimately, they suggest that the role the work plays in terms of women’s literary history or tradition should emerge.

My study fits within the framework of analysis suggested above in the sense that it investigates the ways in which the social, cultural and political contexts of society influence the gender relations between female and male characters in Imbuga’s literary texts under study. Furthermore, the study examines the gender stereotypical assumptions generally made in literary texts by male authors and is concerned with the changes that occur in the gender relationships in the texts. But unlike most such studies, its focus shifts from criticizing the male writers’ negative female stereotyping to recognizing the essence and aesthetics of language and contextual features in the depiction of characters. Thus, the study incorporates feminist stylistics as a useful framework of the analysis of language use in the texts within the feminist literary perspective.

1.7.4 Feminist stylistics as literary theory

Feminist stylistics as a field of feminist study is concerned with the gender implications of the language used in literary texts. In other words, feminist stylistics as a literary theory investigates the ways in which contextual features contribute to the construction of gender in the interaction between characters in the texts. Through this approach, the proponents of feminist stylistics propose the analysis of textual features from a feminist perspective with the assumption that a male hegemony exists in the attitude towards women in the society as well as in the characterization of females in the literary texts. Ultimately, feminist stylistics views the literary text as an appropriate medium for dismantling female stereotypes.

To this effect, therefore, feminist stylistics becomes a significant point of departure in this study because it permeates all the other relevant theories. Mills (1995:10), as the main proponent of feminist stylistics, emphasizes that in relating gender to the study of words and sentences in a text, feminist stylistics seeks to discover “the underlying ideological messages in texts” (Mills, 1995:10). This argument suggests that in examining the depiction of female characters in Imbuga’s oeuvre, the stylistic features must be linked to the gender ideology in order to reveal the true meaning of the texts, the study thus finds issues of language and style significant in the representation of women in Imbuga’s works.

Language and style are basically issues of stylistics and therefore the study draws on relevant concepts and ideas of prominent theoreticians of language, including Bakhtin as well as Leech and Short. Their views have also informed the arguments of Mills in *Feminist Stylistics*. For instance, Leech and Short (1981:13) also quoted in Mills (1995:5) state:

We normally study style because we want to explain something, and in general, literary stylistics has, implicitly or explicitly, the goal of explaining the relation between language and artistic function. The motivating questions are not so much, *what*, as *why* and *how* [...]. From the critic’s viewpoint, it is, ‘How is such-and-such as an aesthetic effect achieved through language?’

In other words, as Mills (1995:45) points out, stylistics is concerned with why an author expresses himself or herself in a particular way and the specific effects that are achieved through

language. This means that in the analysis of the depiction of female characters in this study, the effects created by how language is used are also established. Mills asserts that linguistic items denote textual place where “gender is foregrounded” (17) and that language shapes a character’s perception of the world (94). The features of language to be considered in this research include the discourses of female characters in relation to themselves and indicative of their self-perceptions, the dialogues involving other characters and other character’s attitudes towards the individual female characters. The important aspect about these utterances is that they construct an image of the character in question. Mills proposes a three-part model in her feminist stylistics approach to the analysis of a literary text, particularly the novel. This model is at the levels of the word, the phrase or sentence and discourse. Each of these is briefly explained in the following sections to establish their relevance to the present study.

Analysis of individual words

Mills’s model of analysis of language used in a literary text invites a reader to focus attention on individual words in the text that are indicative of gender. Mills is concerned with the way in which words are used in texts with regard to female characters. An interpretation of such words should reveal sexist language or diminutive words that lead to negative stereotyping. She argues that such situations arise in language where lexical gaps exist because a word may not have an equivalent in another language. For example, words like “chairman” and ‘spokesman’ fall under habitual language use; yet when one refers specifically to the female gender, “chairperson” or “spokesperson” are terms commonly used. She questions why the habitual language should be linked to the male gender and the neutral term to denote the female gender instead of the neutral term being in the habitual language use to refer to either gender.

In addition, Mills points out the aspect of marked and unmarked forms where reference to the female gender is always marked through opposites or affixing of words; her examples include ‘lord’ for male and its opposite ‘lady’ for female, hero for male and heroine for female, headmaster for male and headmistress for female. Mills argues that the marked forms sometimes lead to negative stereotyping. A word like lord denotes power, status and prestige but its opposite ‘lady’ has a general meaning and can also refer to any adult female. It can also be used for

building compound words that denote female discrimination. Mills also gives elaborate examples of female discrimination in language with regard to how euphemisms and taboo words are used in reference to females or by females, which she argues favours males, more than females.

Phrase or sentence level of analysis

Mills (1995:128) states that the way meaning takes place often involves the process of meaning production not being accessible at the literal level of the individual words of which the sentence is composed. What this means is that at this level the reader shifts from analysis of meanings of words in isolation to decoding the meaning of the whole phrase or sentence. A more comprehensive analysis in this case, would require applying some background knowledge instead of focusing on the literal meaning of words. This feminist stylistics theoretical framework identifies three categories of phrases or sentences to be analysed and these are: use of ready-made phrases, metaphors and ideology.

Ready-made phrases

Ready-made phrases are phrases that are generally used to connotatively mean women's presumed inferiority. These include phrases such as 'a woman's place is in the kitchen. 'Mills argues that such phrases perpetrate negative female stereotyping in literary texts and should be discouraged.

Metaphors

Mills (1995:137) also argues that background knowledge determines our interpretation of metaphors and sayings. She is critical of the fact that some sayings and interpretations of double meanings favour males yet stereotype females negatively. In my research, metaphors in the texts studied are not only analysed in relation to the portrayal of female characters but more significantly to decode their broader meanings.

Ideology

Mills (1995:149) defines ideology as "a sequence or set of statements which have certain conceptual links but which individual subjects will negotiate, affirm and/or resist. "Mills argues that these beliefs are not just imposed upon women, but women themselves actively take part in them. Precisely this means that the characterization of males and females in literary texts is based on certain set of beliefs in a particular society. In this case, certain language items may elicit

different interpretations depending on the background knowledge of the reader. Mills (1995:150) gives the example of a romance novel based on the ideological gender difference that represents women as passive 'recipients'. In this case, female characters are victims of stereotypical gender ideologies and are subordinate to males. Tyson (2006:122) has a similar conception in her argument that works of literature often reflect the ideological conflicts of their culture because authors are "influenced by the ideological tenor of the times."

Analysis of discourse

Although the preceding discussion has focused on the analysis of gender in texts on linguistic items, Mills (1995:149) points out that these items should be examined in the larger contexts within which they occur to justify the inclusion of analysis of discourse in this model. In this regard, discourse in a text is limited to interactions of characters. Mills notes that both textual and contextual elements influence interactions and contribute to the construction of the text. Thus, feminist stylistic analysis of language pays attention to how the text is constructed and how the reader decodes it (Mills, 1995: 159).

The process of interpreting the intended meaning of discourse that Mills presents entails: trying to find out the speaker's/writer's intention; applying general knowledge to understand what has been said or written and establishing the inferences that have been made. Using this process and focusing specifically on gender issues raised in a text, the expectation is that a reader shares certain background information with the writer that would be essential in interpreting the intended meaning of the interactions (Mills, 1995:131).

The two major parts analysed under discourse in this model are character and focalization. Concerning the analysis of character as my study endeavours to do, Culler (as cited in Mills, 1995:160) states: "[R]eading literature is largely a question of learning a set of conventions in order to decode texts." One of the conventions referred to here is the fact that characters in a text are actually made of words and the reader needs to pay close attention to how words are used to depict them, their word choices and the structure of their interactions and how these denote

gender (Mills, 1995:160). Mills stresses on the investigation of “who does what to whom” in order to “compare the representations of male and female characters” (1995:146).

Mills (1995:163) also makes some assertions about the stereotypical descriptions of female and male characters in male-authored texts that are relevant to this study. She states: “The female characters are concerned with emotions rather than action, relegated to the private sphere, seen as the appendages of males rather than characters in their own right.” In adopting Mills’ model of analysis in my study, the relevance of these assertions to the roles of female characters in Imbuga’s works is critically scrutinized in the context of the preponderance of the writer’s use of the techniques of ambivalence in characterization.

Mills (1995:146) notes that focalization through the male’s experience inevitably represents the female as the object of the male gaze.” Thus, focalization as an aspect of discourse in Mills’ framework refers to the narrative situation. Of significance is the voice of narration and the specific techniques used to reveal the image of the character being examined. In this sense, as Mills argues, the first person voice enhances the reader’s opportunity to identify with the heroine much as the stream of consciousness technique reveals to the reader the thoughts of the character. Significantly, therefore, the study investigates the position and role of female characters through the analysis of language. One of the most informative stylistic strategies that Imbuga uses in the texts is satire, a device through which he disguises meaning. Ruganda’s (1992) recognition that Imbuga tells “the truth laughingly” has become a basic reference point in critiques of Imbuga’s writing. Mills’ feminist stylistic framework, therefore, becomes pertinent to the analysis of the portrayal of female characters in Imbuga’s works through its emphasis on decoding meaning from artistic expressions in the text.

In the light of my study, the kind of words used in the dialogues of male and female characters and other techniques such as the dream and soliloquy, are significant in portraying the characters in the texts. What is also crucial to my study as stated earlier is the emphasis of the feminist stylistics on linking gender in the texts to the underlying patriarchal ideology. Mills (1995:38) argues that gender is “outside the text yet it is also very much part of its integral structure”

because there is a “bi-directional relationship between context and text.” Mills implies here that the author creates the text within a specific socio-historical context and this influences the text itself. A feminist stylistic analysis of gender in the text should then focus on certain gender underpinnings from the socio-historical context. Therefore, this aspect of relating the analysis of gender to the socio-political and historical context of the text essentially explains the use of the sociological theoretical framework in the examination of female characters in Francis Imbuga’s oeuvre.

1.7.5 Sociological criticism

As already outlined, art is social in nature and this can be expressed in a historical process. African literary artists often focus on the past and present social, political and economic conditions of their societies in order to envision the future of the same societies. Thus, art not only reflects reality, but also seeks to shape and transform it. In this sense, one can argue that African literature is produced within a unique social environment, historical period and cultural context; hence there is need for a feminist approach that is specific to a particular cultural context. Besides, the contention of this study is that in order to reveal the functional nature of African literature, a perspective grounded within the framework of African art and culture should be used in the analysis of the texts.

Accordingly, the views of Smith (2012) concerning decolonizing methodologies are very pertinent to this study. Smith (2012:20) emphasises that the origins of literary works of the African writers are “grounded in the landscapes, languages, cultures and imaginative worlds of peoples and nations whose own histories were interrupted and radically reformulated by European imperialism.” Consequently, she advocates a feminist criticism that is linked to social reality because “experiences of oppression do not have universal characteristics independent of history, context and agency” (Smith, 2012:188). To this end, she argues for being responsive to how the indigenous people want to tell their own stories and write their own versions (Smith, 2012:29), a view also held by Achebe (2009:54) in what he refers to as Africa speaking for itself as African writers begin to spell their “proper name.”

Ngugi (1981:6) elaborates that socio-historical forces and pressures condition literature; and the writer reflects reality and “persuades us to take a certain attitude” towards that society. He continues to state that literature “must be able to freely and correctly mirror our society in all its strengths and weaknesses. It is only through this kind of mirroring of the truth or what is actually happening in our society, that we can build unity and democracy in Kenya.” I adopt all these arguments in my research to justify the premise that literature is both a product and a force in society and hence use it to link Imbuga’s works to the African society and, more so, to the Kenyan society.

After attaining independence, the former European colonies began to redefine themselves and the literature produced and studied reflected their unique experiences. Most of the African countries achieved their independence after protracted struggles that took different dimensions. In Kenya, it was armed guerrilla warfare and revolution (Sivanandan 2004). People had high expectations of a better society as Imbuga notes when Mosese, a character in *Betrayal in the City* (1976:31) remarks using analogy of heaven to depict the optimism: “For years we waited for the Kingdom.”

Yet, as Sivandan (2004) continues to argue, little of that apparent promise of good things has materialized and the dream of what independence would bring seem misguided. He identifies increasing division and oppression on the basis of class, ethnicity, religion and gender, a lack of democratic participation by the masses in the political sphere and the continued and often increasing structural dependence economically, politically and ideologically, on Western imperial powers.

Manifestly, the desire for cultural independence became the moving force behind the literature that, in the 1960s and 1970s, sprung up in the former colonies (Bertens 2001). In Africa, the nature of these literatures was such that the writers (like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Cyprian Ekwesi, T. M. Aluko, Elechi Amadi, Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Ayi Kwei Armah) responded to and reflected their respective political and cultural environments. Their writing thus deviated from the earlier literature written by the Europeans and it became evidently clear that a

completely new literary tradition was now emerging in the former European colonies – for our purposes in Africa – that was both national and regional in content and form, much as it still used the languages of their former colonial masters.

Aschroft, Griffith and Tiffin (1989) observe that the post-colonial literatures cover all the cultures affected by the imperial process, right from the advent of colonization to the present day. They further argue that what is common in these literatures is that, having emerged from the experiences of colonization, they are concerned with place and development, myths and identity, and the similarities and differences within the various cultural traditions. Indeed Ngugi (1981) expresses the view that a writer responds to a social environment that changes all the time, and that the writer's responsibility is to creatively capture the social, political and economic realities in the society and how they affect social relationships.

This kind of reasoning explains why, in 1968, the University of Nairobi Professors Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Taban Lo Liyong and Henry Owuor Anyumba, were instrumental in the abolition of the English Department at the University and proposed a new Department of African Literature and Languages so that the students could relate literature to their own environments (Ngugi, Owuor Anyumba and Lo Liyong, 1978). Arguing that literature represents culture, Ngugi (1986:15) describes literature as a collective memory bank of a people's experience in history which also creates a whole concept of themselves as people.

Matiang'i (1999:53) observes that within the African literary context, African socio-cultural orientation is predominantly evident in the creative works. A text like *Aminata* (1988) was produced specifically for the 1985 United Nations Decade for Women Conference, held in Nairobi, Kenya. It is important to examine the male writer's perception of attitudes towards women's liberation struggle and how this has shaped his depiction of female characters. Ngugi (1981) further asserts that literature has a social character and the writer himself (or herself) is a product of an actual social process and has developed an attitude towards all activities in the environment. The point to note is that the literary artist as a member of the society uses literature as an avenue to express the society's experiences and also seeks to influence the same society.

This study recognizes the relationship between the artist and society on the one hand, and the relationship between literature and society, on the other. This dialectical relationship forms the framework upon which this study delves deeper into the reality of the issues affecting some of the female characters that are raised in the texts.

The emphasis on socio-political and cultural realities portrayed in the texts calls for a re-examination of the role of tradition and patriarchy in the portrayal of female characters in male-authored texts. Tyson (2006:85) describes patriarchy as any culture that privileges men by promoting traditional gender roles. Kolawole (1997:25) argues that patriarchy, tradition, colonialism and gender imperialism have all contributed to African women's subjugation. In essence then, although this study uses tenets of feminism to examine the roles and status of female characters in Imbuga's works, the canons of the African traditions, particularly with reference to patriarchy, customs and beliefs are integrated within the sociological approach as essential indicators for tracing the changes in the societies depicted in Imbuga's works. This framework helps in establishing a relationship between the text and the social environment, including the historical period of its production.

Different aspects of feminist literary criticism expose patriarchy as a major obstacle to women's progress. Rich (1995:57) offers an elaborate definition of patriarchy as:

[T]he power of fathers: a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men-by force, direct pressure or through ritual, tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labour, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male.

Evidently from this definition, patriarchy has been widespread and deeply rooted in societal structures to the detriment of women's progress. Coetzee (2001:300) advances the view that the norm according to which the father headed the household regulated all other man-woman relationships in society. In fact, Rutere (2009:67) establishes that patriarchy is a global phenomenon with varying intensities in different societies. Smith (2012:85-86) puts it more vividly that although anti-discriminatory laws have been passed by most societies, these laws are frequently side-stepped as patriarchal programming still continues to assert itself in channels

such as movies, television shows, books, magazines and advertisements. In my study, Kanaya, a female character in *Shrine of Tears* (1993) protests at the misuse of black female characters in foreign advertisements of beauty products.

While it is important to acknowledge that studies have shown that the patriarchal system has been invariably detrimental to both men and women, this study specifically aims to focus on the influence of patriarchal hegemonies on the depiction of female characters in Imbuga's literary texts and how this reflects gender relations in society. Coetzee (2001:304) further observes that attempts to eradicate gender discrimination in any society may not succeed without first identifying deep rooted structures of domination that serve to perpetuate the ideology of patriarchy.

In Africa particularly, patriarchy has been perpetuated by African traditions and colonial structures. Urbanisation, cash crop production and formal education that the colonial rule introduced in Africa largely privileged men at the expense of women who remained excluded and marginalized. Kabira (2005:29) states:

I feel that women of Africa have a bond that ties them together. We are tied together by our experiences of oppression, by a patriarchal system that has relegated women to second-class citizens. We are tied together by colonial and other foreign rules. We are tied together by our common experiences in marriage. Religion [...] oppresses women. Traditions also oppress women. We are tied together by subservient roles that societies have given us. We have common experiences as mothers, as wives and as daughters of Africa.

In terms of the above assertion, a sociological literary analysis of texts is concerned with the literary depictions of oppressive structures in texts and the ways in which they represent societal patriarchal hegemonies. Kabira (1994) argues that within patriarchy, men are socialized in a number of negative ways that compel them to take cruel egotistical and generally anti-social behaviours to the extent that traits such as humility, expression of emotions and the like, generally viewed as positive, are seen as vices in men. On the contrary characteristics like dictatorial attitudes, extreme competitiveness, verbal abusiveness and violence are associated with

and upheld by the men. Kabira (1994) is categorical that these are learnt behaviours in men, which the patriarchal system encourages and reinforces.

Thus, from a cultural point of view, patriarchy gives men legitimacy over women; and this then becomes the ideology of the society. It ensures perpetuation of male institutions right from courtship, marriage, rites of passage and kinship that, most specifically, has an adverse effect on women as far as inheritance is concerned. Property is owned by members of the family; and in the event of a man's death, his property is inherited either by his sons or male relatives, not his daughters. Imbuga depicts these cultural aspects in some of his works such as *The Successor* and *Aminata*. The research investigates the literary strategies used in relation to the female characters' reactions to their situations.

In a survey of the images of women in a number of novels by African women writers, Frank (in Jones, Palmer and Jones 1984:27-28) concludes that approaches to feminist criticism are varied and it may be inappropriate to rigidly apply the same standards used in the West on African literature since this literature is firmly rooted in social and political struggles of the continent and embraces a moral function. Chinweizu and Madubuike (1983) express a similar conception when they posit that African literature has its own traditions, models and norms that are different from those of European or other literatures. Understandably, these critics propose what has come to be accepted as African feminism. For the purposes of this study, African feminism can be described as a feminist approach that is rooted within the African socio-cultural and historical milieu.

Ogundipe-Leslie (1987:8-12) presents a firm case for the development of a black feminist approach from which African female writers can be studied. Elaborating on Filomena Steady's and Molaria Ogundipe – Leslie's arguments, Davies (1986) asserts that African feminism locates the condition of women in Africa within the socio-economic realities of culture and development. She also argues that it does not antagonize African men but challenges them to be conscious of certain salient aspects of women's subjugation that differ from the generalized oppression of all African peoples. Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) reinforces this view with regard to her

brand of African feminism referred to as Social Transformation Including Women of Africa (STIWA). Thus, African feminism seeks to involve both men and women in eradicating structures that perpetuate discrimination against women.

A host of articles and collections of literary essays specifically indict male authors of African literature for their preponderance to female stereotypes, patriarchal power structures, inequalities and marginalization in the depiction of female characters. But they also investigate and acknowledge positive portrayals of female characters by male authors. Prominent examples in this regard include Ousmane Sembene, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Peter Abrahams. Although Chinua Achebe's works have been widely critiqued for negative images of women, his novel *Anthills of the Savannah* (1988) has appealed to feminists as a positive attempt to redefine the roles of female characters largely due to the growing feminist consciousness.

Fonchingong (2006:146) emphasises the need for male and female African writers in the contemporary era to retrace their roots and find "a point of convergence that will provide greater meaning to the interactions of the male and female in search for a construction of an African feminist standpoint based on our cultural specificities." This argument is relevant to my study that seeks to examine the contribution of Imbuga, a male writer to the conceptualization of African feminism especially with regards to his complementarity approach to characterization of males and females in his later texts.

Another aspect the African feminists and scholars pay attention to is the corpus of women's literary works and their efforts to raise consciousness about gender issues through strong and resilient female protagonists. Schipper (1987:46-47) quotes Mariama Bâ who puts it more vividly:

The woman writer in Africa has a special task. She has to present the position of women in Africa in all its aspects. There is still so much injustice [...] in the family, in the institutions, in society, in the street, in political organisations [...].

Ogundipe-Leslie and Katherine Frank echo the same sentiments in the same text. African women writers and critics joined the literary scene much later than their male counterparts due to the retrogressive cultural practices and the colonial policies that discriminated against African women. Sarr (in Kandji 2006: 63) states:

For a long time, only men have been writing on African issues. With a few exceptions, African male writers have mostly spoken of the African experience from a masculine point-of-view, overlooking [...] the important role of their partners in social matters.

Like other feminists before her (Frank 1987, Ogundipe-Leslie 1987), Sarr foregrounds the stereotypes of the African woman as a nurturing and supportive person, a mother and a dutiful wife, in fiction by male writers. This view forms the basis of the bulk of feminist criticism of African literature to the extent that the underlying quality of women's literary works is the centrality of the female experience, character, perspective and solidarity among female characters.

Nwapa's novel, *Efuru* (1966) has been celebrated as the pioneer feminist work in Africa. One could also consider Ogot's *The Promised Land* (1966) in the same category, with a strong feminist theme, although focusing on a male protagonist. Nwapa (1966:5) brings a fresh perspective to the characterization of females in African literature when her protagonist Efuru, rejects patriarchal restrictions imposed on her life and forthrightly tells her husband: "I am not cut out for farm work. I am going to trade." In this way Nwapa demonstrates female characters' quest for independence and freedom to make decisions about their own lives. Nwapa also underscores the significance of the solidarity of female characters as a key factor in this feminist endeavour. Thus, Efuru's mother-in-law supports her decision to venture into trade reiterating that Efuru was not "meant to suffer at all. Life for her meant living it fully. She did not want merely to exist. She wanted to live and use the world to her advantage" (Nwapa, 1966:94).

Ogot (1966) integrates features of her oral tradition and the supernatural elements in her narrative set within the patriarchal Luo Nyanza society. In contemporary literary debates, Ogot's narrative strategy would fall within the realm of magical realism. But what is striking for a

feminist reading of the novel is the fact that Nyapol emerges as a more strong-willed character than her husband Ochola who, in the absence of power and economic stability, displays traits of weakness, poor judgement and emotions that by patriarchal standards, have been associated with the female gender.

The point to note is that these foundational women writers in Africa and others that followed (for example, Bâ, Emecheta, Bessie-Head, Aidoo, Mcgoye and Ogola) have created new spaces for female characters in the African literary works. For example, the female characters define their own identities by defying patriarchal power; they are resilient and demystify the private/public dichotomy that had hitherto confined them to the domestic spaces. These women writers also present both male and female characters that endeavour to attain a harmonious relations. For this reason, a sociological theoretical perspective is useful in addressing the specific socio-political, historical, cultural and sociological contexts of the works being studied.

Through the integration of these theories, this study has adopted the following categorizations that deconstruct the image of women in a text:

- Analysis of setting to determine the physical spaces in which males or females are situated.
- The issues of voice, to examine which gender speaks more, and what they speak about, in a particular context and the extent to which female characters have power in the text.
- Female stereotypes in the text and various aspects of the portrayal of the female characters.
- Themes and gender roles to analyse the moral content of the roles of the female characters in relation to the socio-political contexts of the texts.
- Language use and the general formal strategies of literature utilized in the characterization of females and in the overall gender relationships in the texts.
- Consistencies and the changes registered based on the socio-political and historical realities of the societies portrayed.

The analysis of the primary texts in this study takes a chronological approach that places the texts into three phases based on the three main objectives of the study. Thus, the first four plays form the first phase with female characters depicted within patriarchal settings. The second phase analyses two plays that deliberately set out to respond to feminism as the final phase explores the ways in which the writer reconstructs the status of female characters in his last three texts to fit in their new and more positive roles in the society.

The primary texts in this study are closely examined with a view to uncovering the writer's world-view and vision on the role and status of the female characters. Both library and internet sources are used in this study to provide the framework for the analysis of the primary texts. This eclectic framework helps in the analysis of the artistic components of the texts with emphasis on the utterances and interactions of the characters, the position and roles of female characters and relationship between the texts and the social, historical and political contexts. It lays emphasis on form and moral content of the works and embarks on investigating the artistic value of the literary strategies employed by the writer, while at the same time, being attentive to the socio-political context of the works. Thus, the study adopts the sociological approach with a view to relating Imbuga's works to society.

This chapter has basically outlined what the study is about and how it has been conducted. The next chapter introduces Francis Imbuga as a Kenyan author and presents an overview of his oeuvre within the broader context of writing in postcolonial Kenya, as well as the critical reception of his creative works.

Chapter Two

Imbuga's writing: The Context of Post-Colonial Kenya

2.1 Francis Imbuga

Francis Davis Imbuga (1947-2012), East Africa's most prolific and prominent playwright, was born on February 2, 1947 at Wenyange Village, Chavakali (renamed West Maragoli) Location of Vihiga County, Kenya. He belonged to the Membe clan of the Maragoli, a sub-tribe of the Bantu-speaking Abaluhya ethnic community of Western Kenya. The son of Samuel Govoga, an ex-serviceman of the former colonial King's African Rifles (KAR) of the Second World War, Imbuga grew up and went to school during a period of significant social and historical changes in the country, some of which I shall outline later in this chapter. Following the end of the Second World War, Imbuga's father was redeployed as a Security Guard in Nairobi; and this kept him away from their rural home where Imbuga mainly grew up under the care of his mother, Doresi Aireni, as he attended his primary and intermediate schooling in the village. But he lived with his father during the school holidays of his secondary education at the Alliance Boys High School, between 1964 and 1969.

As a primary school pupil, Imbuga was also a Sunday school leader. He developed a special and close rapport with his mother whom he also taught to read the Bible in Kimaragoli vernacular language. His mother died in 1964 when he was only 17 year old and Imbuga was henceforth taken care of by his elderly grandparents within a strong oral tradition. From his writing, it can be noted that this closeness with his grandparents in the rural area had a tremendous influence in his life. Through his characters, he demonstrates full grasp of the interactional processes between different groups of people and the general way of life in the rural contexts. Ruganda 1992: x) points out that some of the fictional old couples in his works are actually modelled on his grandparents.

Generally, Imbuga's early life in the rural area has provided some of the themes, linguistic expressions and literary techniques in his oeuvre. Notably, two of his plays, *The Burning of Rags* (1989) and *Aminata* (1988) are actually set in Membe, his own rural home. Imbuga went to primary and intermediate school at his rural home in Chavakali where he sat for and passed the

Kenya Preliminary Examination (KPE) and qualified for admission to the prestigious national school, Alliance High School, in 1964. It was at Alliance that young Imbuga's talent in drama was nurtured, starting off with playing minor roles in the School's drama society productions that culminated into a major role in his final year when the school produced Byron Grainger – Jone's *Worlds of a Difference* as their entry to the Kenya Schools Drama Festival in 1969 (Ruganda, 1992). The other entry was *Omolo*, Imbuga's own play that he directed and at the same time played the main role. Although *Omolo* only managed to reach the provincial (regional) level of the Festival, the adjudicators recognized and commended Imbuga's acting skills and awarded him the Best Actor of the Year trophy.

After completing his high school education in 1969, Imbuga proceeded to the Nairobi University College, later renamed the University of Nairobi, where he pursued both his undergraduate and graduate studies. Imbuga studied Literature with Education Option at the undergraduate level, and went further to specialize in Drama and Theatre Arts, focusing on the 'Techniques of Improvised Drama,' as his 1975 thesis attests. Upon completing his graduate studies, he taught at the University's Department of Educational Communication and Technology, then in the same Department at the Kenyatta University College (renamed Kenyatta University) from 1979. At Kenyatta University, Imbuga transferred to the Department of Literature where he also became a Senior Lecturer for Drama and Theatre Arts, later becoming Head of Department before he proceeded to the University of Iowa in the United States to pursue his doctorate studies in 1988. He wrote his dissertation on "Techniques of improvisation in John Ruganda's plays", which he completed in 1991.

Immediately upon his return to Kenyatta University in 1991, Imbuga was promoted to Associate Professor; and in 1992, he was elected Dean of the Faculty of Arts, a two-year renewable term of which he was re-elected in 1994. In 1996, Imbuga was appointed Professor of Literature at Kenyatta University. Four years later, in 2000, he went for his sabbatical leave in Rwanda and took up an appointment as a Visiting Professor of Literature at the Kigali Institute of Education, during which he also doubled up as the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. While in Kigali, Imbuga conducted several writing workshops that led to the publication of a co-

authored children's novel. In addition, he got involved in filming and wrote a number of film scripts including *From Laughter with Tears* and *The Burning of Rags*, besides taking the role of Priest in *Sometimes in April*, a film reliving the Rwandan genocide of 1994. Imbuga came back to Kenyatta University in 2005.

2.2 Literary output

Ruganda (1992) traces Imbuga's progress as a playwright, producer and actor, as an undergraduate student at the University of Nairobi between 1970 and 1973. During this period, Imbuga mainly wrote radio and television series that focused on and satirized the post-independence bureaucrats. This was the time he published his first plays *The Fourth Trial* (that also includes *Kisses of Fate*) (1972), followed by *The Married Bachelor* (1973), a play he reviewed and published under the title *The Burning of Rags* (1979). Ruganda gives an elaborate account of the makings of Imbuga as a playwright and the reception of his initial publication (Ruganda, 1992).

Like other Africans who had been exposed to the written tradition and the conventions from the West, through the formal education, Imbuga's plays in English were also subjected to criticism from the perspective of the Western literary tradition. Ruganda (1992: xiii) quotes Martin Banhan and Clive Wake who identified Imbuga's episodic structure and the fablesque two-dimensional characterizations in his first plays as dramatic flaws. Yet, according to Ruganda himself, the devices were actually a manifestation of the newly found creative freedom at the University's Department of Literature. This creative process that Ruganda refers to was actually part of the decolonization process in the University's English Department in 1968 attributed to Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Taban Lo Liyong and Henry Owuor Anyumba. The dons were instrumental in the establishment of the Department of Literature and African Languages to replace the Department of English, based on the premise that literature relates to culture and such a Department would expose students to the relationship between literature and their cultures (Ngugi, 1986:15).

Although Imbuga later turned to writing stage plays, even as a university lecturer, he continued with writing scripts for both radio and television to educate the Kenyan public on topical issues. In 1982, he wrote *Day of the Tree*, commissioned by the Kenya's Department of Forestry and sponsored by various diplomatic missions in the country. He also wrote a thirteen episode series, *Men of Office* (1983), as well as *Fear Within* and *Home with Bananas* (1986). In addition, jointly with his colleague at Kenyatta University, Chris Wang'ombe, Imbuga wrote *You and Your Health* and *Food and Nutrition*, educational radio drama. Imbuga's stage plays and novels that form the focus of this study were written between 1976 and 2004. I make reference to 1973 production, *The Married Bachelor* while simultaneously examining its revised version, *The Burning of Rags* (1989).

Notably, as Imbuga wrote stage plays, radio and television drama, his satirical mind was also felt in the print media through '*Masharubu's World*' a column in Kenya's Sunday Nation, targeting the political leaders of the country. He contributed to this weekly paper for four years between 1978 and 1982, before re-channelling his social criticism to cartoon-strip writing for the Daily Nation. In both cases, the editors were uncomfortable with his satire on the political establishment that was increasingly becoming intolerant to criticism, therefore he also later abandoned the *Nyam Nyam* cartoon-strip.

Besides his studies at the University of Nairobi, Imbuga also honed his dramatic and theatrical skills in Britain, Ghana and Nigeria. For instance, during his eight-month stay at the University College, Cardiff, in Wales, in the United Kingdom, from October 1974 to June 1975, Imbuga attended many seminars on play directing. He was not only involved with play composition and improvisation, but also participated in various activities of Drama in Education groups. Indeed, it was during this time that Imbuga completed writing his first political stage play, *Betrayal in the City* which was subsequently produced separately in Nairobi, Kenya and in Cardiff (Ruganda, 1992).

Imbuga also developed an interest in films and acted in: *The Willoby Conspiracy*, *Kollormask* and *The Burning of Rags*, all shot in Kenya. This interest in improvisation, play writing and

acting is replicated in most of the educated characters in a number of Imbuga's works. Even the uneducated characters still have the potential to improvise and dramatize certain roles within the main creative work. Thus, as a technique of plot development, his characters are constantly introducing different elements within the main plot.

2.3 The Socio-political background of Kenya

Kenya is geographically grouped with Uganda and Tanzania to form East Africa, although two distant neighbours, Rwanda and Burundi, have recently joined the envisaged East African political federation, and together the five countries are working towards a broader regional economic and political integration. With an estimated population of 39 million, Kenya, like other African countries, has undergone different phases of historical transformation and development. The British colonized Kenya for over 60 years before Kenya attained independence on December 12, 1963, with Jomo Kenyatta as Prime Minister and subsequently first President in 1964.

More than two-thirds of the population are indigenous Africans, consisting of 42 different ethnic communities of which the most dominant are the Bantu-speaking Kikuyu of Mount Kenya region, Kamba of Eastern Province, the Luhya and Kisii of Western and Nyanza provinces respectively, and the Nilotic-speaking Luo and Kalenjin people respectively of Nyanza and Rift Valley provinces. These communities were closely knit into smaller or larger chiefdoms under ethnic chiefs. Mbiti (1991:10) explains that the Kenyan traditional communities were deeply religious with religion that dominating the people's thinking, thereby shaping their cultures, social lives, political organizations and economic activities. Further, he states that like other Africans, the people of Kenya not only believed in God and thus revered the Almighty as their creator, but also had their own peculiar traditional religions. These religious practices, according to Mbiti, included praying, making sacrifices and offerings, performing ceremonies, rituals and observing various customs (11). Different communities set aside, and were identified with their own sacred places of worship such as shrines, mountains, hills and certain trees (20). They also recognized that theirs was a common religion where the people participated as a group, especially while performing ceremonies and no member of the community rejected his or her

people's religion (15). The prayers were often supplemented with sacrifices and offerings. Indeed, it was this method of worship that clashed with Christianity upon its introduction by the European missionaries in the middle of the 19th Century.

In the missions, the white missionaries encouraged Africans to discard their traditional customs and practices and follow Christianity (Ngugi 1986; Achebe 1958). Thus, in Kenya, while the Mau Mau engaged in a violent resistant struggle against the colonialists in the 1950s, there were indeed other Africans who opted to obey and collaborate with the whites either by being enlisted as catechists for the missionaries or home guards for the Colonial Government.

2.3.1 Women in pre-colonial Kenya (before 1890)

In the pre-colonial Kenyan society, governance was by a council of elders mainly consisting of men. Men were the dominant force (Odinga 1967) and participated in decision-making. Land and domestic animals were the main sources of wealth but land belonged to the tribe, with men only retaining supervisory roles and control of land allocation (House-Midamba 1990). Women gained recognition through marriage and access to land through their husbands and sons. (Hakanson and Levine 1997 and Nyangera 1999). Division of labour was based on gender roles (Odinga 1967; Kenyatta 1938) and women were mainly responsible for most aspects of subsistence crop production as well as maintaining their families and engaging in other domestic activities. Inheritance was strictly patrilineal, with the eldest or oldest son inheriting both the position erstwhile occupied by the father during his lifetime, as well as his property. In the absence of a son, the deceased's nearest male relative would be made heir to the position and property, since a daughter was not eligible to participate in inheritance. A patriarchal society is characterized by extreme male dominance in the workforce and at home; and in the same vein a patrilineal system vests the central authority in men with inheritance passed on through the male lineage while the females are not allowed to inherit property (House-Midamba, 1990:45).

Essentially, the patrilineal system and traditional need to continue or preserve one's lineage placed more importance, value and responsibility on the male rather than the female child.

Notwithstanding the fact that women did not enjoy the same social status as men, they were economically empowered as major contributors to the maintenance of the society (Wamue, 1999). Laws such as those pertaining to rights to land use, protected their role as producers and distributors of goods and services besides being appreciated as traders (House-Midamba, 1990). In addition, some older women also had important positions as midwives, chiefs and heads of extended families.

2.3.2 Women in Colonial Kenya (1890-1963)

With the declaration of Kenya as a British Colony in 1890 and the coming of the colonialists to the country, the status of women significantly changed (Hallander 1979; Midamba 1990; Kameri-Mbote and Kiai 1993). The colonial authorities devised several strategies to undermine women: firstly, vast tracts of the country's most fertile land were confiscated from indigenous Africans and turned into white settler farms and estates. Consequently, African people were evicted from their ancestral lands and forcibly resettled in crowded native reserves or protected villages on barren land. Clan based property was eroded as the colonial authorities introduced the system of titling in some areas, with land titles being issued in men's names. Whereas men could now sell land without the express clan approval, women's rights to use land did not receive legal recognition (House-Midamba 1990).

Likewise, the colonialists introduced cash crop farming to replace traditional subsistence farming in order to generate natural resources for their industries. They also systematically created urban capitalist enterprises that constantly required waged labour. These undertakings targeted Kenyan men who eventually worked either on colonial settler farms or in industries in urban areas, thereby relegating women's traditional subsistence gardens to the margins (House-Midamba 1990). In this way male farming became more predominant than that by women. Furthermore, the introduction of a monetary economy replaced the age-old barter trade hitherto practiced in the traditional society, thus further weakening the economic status of women.

Next, the colonial authority created a dichotomy between the private and the public spheres of life; and while men were drawn into the public sphere women's participation was limited to the

private sphere. With the introduction of emigrant labour where men had to move out and work far from home, women's domestic tasks intensely increased (Kameri–Mbote and Kiai 1993; Shaw & Lee 2009:163). Besides, men were recognized as the sole heads of households and breadwinners. The assumption here was that the men's wages would sufficiently cater for their families, hence education and employment opportunities were exclusively preserved for them. However, as men's wages became insufficient, women were forced to supplement household needs by performing extra work like providing casual labour on neighbouring farms in addition to their domestic responsibilities (Njiro 1993). Ultimately, women found themselves systematically excluded from public participation in the new colonial set-up (Oduol 1993). Even the education that girls received at the mission schools was tailored to impart them with skills that were essential for their domestic roles as mothers and wives (Kanago 2005).

In a nutshell, colonial laws greatly interfered with women's roles in the traditional society, thus disrupting and displacing them through the introduction of cash crops, monetary economy and formal education. Women were affected in several ways: their traditional land user rights were abolished; they were denied opportunity to participate in market farming and subsistence agriculture due to the industrialization of land during the colonial period; and their economic status was also undermined. During this period, economic status was achieved and maintained through cash crop production and formal education, from which as we have already noted, women were excluded. Also, the colonialists classified work into paid and unpaid, as well as formal and informal sectors, which further marginalized and led to subordination of women. Urbanization resulting from the cash crop economy and emigrant labour also led to male migration from rural to urban areas with rural areas increasingly being dominated by female-headed households. Women's ability to migrate and work in urban areas was limited and controlled by the Colonial State policies.

2.3.3 Women in post-colonial Kenya (1963 to present)

Until the constitutional review process began to take shape in Kenya at the dawning of the new millennium, the country's previous successive regimes had maintained that women were not discriminated against in the country (Nzomo 1993; Kameri-Mbote and Kiai 1993). Prior to the

promulgation of the new Constitution on August 27, 2010, the Kenyan authorities had previously tried, albeit with some reluctance, to legalize gender-sensitive policies particularly those that the country had ratified at international forums. However, there were indications of lack of serious commitment on the part of the Government to address the plight of women with regard to their housing, land and property rights in Kenya.

During the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Conference held in Geneva, Switzerland, in January 2011, a delegate, Maria Gomez of the Geneva-based International Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) said: "violations of women's housing, land and property rights are endemic in Kenya [...]women are consistently unable to access and control housing on equal basis with men, with devastating consequences for them" (*The Standard*, January 27, 2011).

This revelation is significant since Kenya is a signatory to all key international conventions on human rights, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Convention on Human Rights and the CEDAW (1979) (Nzomo, 1999:134-135). Nonetheless, it is worth acknowledging that Kenya has made some positive strides with regard to the struggle for gender equity and women's participation in the country's national affairs. For instance, there has been increased, albeit minimal, women's involvement in national politics. Indeed, it was not until 1969, six years after independence on December 12, 1963, that the country had its first woman elected Member of Parliament (MP) when Mrs Grace Onyango was elected MP for Kisumu Town. She was joined by Emmah Gechaga when the latter was nominated to Parliament by founding President Jomo Kenyatta, soon after the 1969 General Election. As I shall show in Chapter 5, women's representation in Parliament has insignificantly increased with each General Election. However, following the enactment of the new Constitution in 2010 and the subsequent General Election in March 2013, the number of women representation in both the Senate and Kenya National Assembly (KNA) increased to 83 women Members. Other public sectors like education and civil service also realised increased women's participation.

2.3.4 Discrimination against women in property ownership

Based on the presumption that discrimination against women in property ownership was widely prevalent in Kenya, we in a team of four (Onsongo, Owuor, Oketch & Kariuki, 2006), carried out a study to explore the factors contributing to the persistence of discrimination against women in property ownership amongst selected communities in the country. The research focused on the pastoral and agricultural communities, with the sample communities being the Borana and the Maasai as pastoralists on the one hand, and the Luo and the Abagusii as agriculturalists, on the other. Firstly, the study sought to find out the property owned by households, of which land and cattle featured prominently, followed by business. Secondly, we sought to establish the kind of property owned by women.

What was striking in our findings was that in most, if not all, households, property was understood to belong to the man even if the woman had equally contributed to the acquisition of the same property. However, we also found out that communities were gradually becoming conscious of discrimination against women in property ownership. We identified cultural beliefs and practices as the greatest mitigating factors in women's property ownership. Culturally, property was linked to wealth, which was in effect also linked to power and dominance, thus creating power imbalances between men and women.

However, with the promulgation of the new Constitution on August 27, 2010, there are indications that women's property rights should be enhanced. With regard to women's struggle for equality, Imbuga had envisaged a stumbling block in the right to own property, especially land, and focused on it in his play *Aminata*, underlining the fact that structures for women land-ownerships had not yet been put in place in the slowly modernizing patriarchal society.

2.3.5 Kenyan women and the Constitution

The Constitution of Kenya at independence (1963) that has since been replaced by the 2010 Constitution was the supreme legal document that contained all the laws which governed the country. Although the old Constitution itself asserted that it protected all Kenyans regardless of

race, religion or sex, it was evidently clear that the same constitution did discriminate against women in quite a number of ways: firstly, it did not provide for the full protection from discrimination on the basis of sex. Section 82 (4b and 4c) of that Constitution provided exemptions for discrimination in personal law, justified on the basis of customary or religious law in matters relating to adoption, marriage, divorce, burial and devolution of property upon death or on other matters of personal law. Yet, in all Kenyan ethnic communities, customary laws had precedence over national laws with regards to marriage and divorce, inheritance, property ownership, custody of children and widowhood (Nzomo 1995).

Secondly, it directly discriminated against women with regard to its provisions on citizenships. In Sections 90 and 91 of the same Constitution, women were granted a subsidiary form of citizenship. For instance, Kenyan men who married non-Kenyan wives could automatically bequeath citizenships on their children and spouses; yet this did not apply in respect of Kenyan women who opted to marry non-Kenyan husbands. Besides, it allowed discrimination in personal and customary laws: the Succession Act which was supposed to establish a uniform and equal inheritance system contained some discriminatory provisions. Whereas it stipulated that family property may be evenly divided between husband and wife upon divorce or separation, in real practice, women rarely received justice whenever they were entangled in property disputes with their spouses. Obviously, customary laws which were extremely influential in Kenya gave men greater property rights than women. To the contrary, the integration of the modern and customary laws in matters pertaining to women and marriage had greatly disadvantaged women in the society (Nzomo 1995).

In December 1991, the Kenya Government under President Daniel arap Moi repealed the controversial Section 2A Constitutional rubric which had in 1981 made Kenya a *de jure* One-Party State. Accordingly, the country gained considerable democratic space and paved way for multi-party politics, which culminated into the Republic of Kenya's first multi-party General Election in December 1992. Between 1998 and 2002, the Kenyan Government, under President Daniel arap Moi, attempted to address issues relating to women. In 1998, the Government commissioned a Task Force to review the country's laws relating to women, particularly those

laws, practices, customs and policies that were deemed to be preventing women from enjoying equal rights and opportunities alongside their male counterparts. The Task Force compiled a report and proposed drastic reform measures to be undertaken to safeguard women's property rights and family laws.

Similarly, in 1999, the same Government established a Commission of Inquiry into the Land Law system of Kenya. Under the Chairmanship of Independent Kenya's first Attorney General, Charles Mugane Njonjo, the Commission was mandated to review the country's land legislations and customary laws and make recommendations for a land policy framework. It compiled a report that it submitted to the President in November 2002 (*Human Right swatch*, 2003 Vol. 15 No. 5A).

It is instructive that around the same time the constitutional review process had already began and upon taking over the mantle of Kenyan leadership after the 2002 General Election, President Mwai Kibaki and the people of Kenya facilitated the process, referring to it as “a people-driven Constitution,” implying that the proposed new Constitution was meant to fully cater for both men and women. Interestingly for this research, as Onsongo, Owuor, Oketch & Kariuki (2006) found out, when Kenyans, rejected the proposed draft Constitution in 2005 through a referendum, one of the reasons was that some men were not comfortable with the fact that it gave women undue powers to own or inherit property, including land, from their fathers and husbands.

This notwithstanding, after a committee of leading constitutional law experts had worked on the draft, the people of Kenya overwhelmingly passed the proposed New Constitution in a national referendum on August 4, 2010. Promulgated on August 27, 2010, the Kenyan Constitution was widely accepted by Kenyans because it addressed fundamental issues affecting all citizens, particularly in its Chapter Four that outlines the Bill of Rights. Just like the 1994 South African Constitution, the Kenyan Constitution provides men and women with the same opportunities and makes a deliberate move to improve the status of women.

However, some analysts argue that the many gains for women in the Constitution can only be realized through vigilance in effecting the necessary policies and laws. The South African Government established the Commission for Gender Equality to strengthen democracy and also made legislative changes that address the subordinate position of women such that domestic violence, for instance, is now subject to new and tougher sentencing (Walker 2005: 227). Likewise, the Kenya Government has established The National Gender and Equality Commission to promote gender equality and freedom against discrimination as per article 27 of the Constitution.

The foregoing discussion has served to establish Kenya as the specific socio-cultural and historical context within which the literary works under study are interpreted. It is significant to explore to what extent the writer's environment has influenced his literary representations of gender issues. In addition, since *Aminata* was written ostensibly for the Women Conference in Nairobi, it is equally important to examine the text in the light of pertinent issues regarding the international women movement.

2.4 Writing in post- colonial Kenya

Francis Imbuga started writing in 1972, only nine years after Kenya's Independence. Since the early 1970s post-independent nations of Africa have been increasingly plagued by neo-colonial ills such as economic disorders, social malaise, government corruption and state repression (Boehmer 1995: 237). After the struggle for and attainment of Independence between 1950s and early 1960s, the African peoples had expected that their societies would drastically change for the better (Angira 1970, Ruganda 1972, 1992, Kibera 1988). Ironically, not much change was realized (Imbuga 1976, Ruganda 1992, Mukulu 1993). The values of the former colonizers remained influential and power hierarchies were maintained (Odinga 1967, Nyerere 1979, Boehmer 1995). Mazrui (2009:22) candidly asserts:

[P]ost-colonial Africa has worse examples of former democrats in opposition becoming dictators when in power. It began with Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana who was a hero of anti-colonial liberation. He then tried to be a post-colonial president for life. Nkrumah detained his adversaries without trial and invented Africa's one-party

state. Idi Amin overthrew Milton Obote in 1971 in the name of human rights and then launched a reign of terror in Uganda for almost a decade.

Many other post-independence African political leaders fall in Mazrui's analysis above, and sections of the intelligentsia and the politically conscious citizens have ended up being disenchanted with the political establishments of their nations. Writers of African literature have reflected this neo-colonial situation in their writings thereby displaying a shift in focus from nationalist idealism that characterized the 1950s and 1960s to the emerging socio-political and economic issues. In such circumstances, Okot p'Bitek's (1986:44) reference to the dichotomy between the artist as "ruler" and the political elite is significant.

The situation in Kenya was not different from that of the rest of Africa, Asia and Latin America, as far as the struggle against foreign domination in economics, politics and culture was concerned. After the brutal assassination of Kenya's most promising Independence hero and Cabinet Minister Tom Mboya in July 1969, the Kenya of the seventies was a period that also saw the assassination of J.M. Kariuki, author of *Mau Detainee*, and the detention and imprisonment of Members of Parliament, workers, writers, and patriotic intellectuals (Ngugi 1981:79).

In relation to these societal issues, Ngugi (1981:71-74) observes that literature should be relevant to life and cannot escape from the class power structures that shape everyday life. His argument is that a writer's works should reflect aspects of the intense economic, political, cultural and ideological struggles in a society, citing Chinua Achebe as a good example of such a writer. Ngugi (1981:80-89) also gives the example of national liberation movements, particularly Kenya's Mau Mau that resorted to armed struggle as the highest form of political and economic struggle to demand back land and power; in the process rejected the culture of the oppressor, thereby creating a popular oral literature embodying anti-exploitation values.

Although Imbuga aims at establishing a universal setting through distancing techniques, especially in his political texts, some of his themes still show a genuine concern for Kenya. Besides human rights, political leadership and bad governance, Imbuga's other concerns are culture, conflict between tradition and modernity, as well as the issues affecting the youth in the

contemporary society. The struggle between cultural forces is a central fact of Kenyan life (Ngugi, 1981:42).

Referring to himself and other African writers, Ngugi (1981:104) states that the progressive African writer has no choice but to align himself [or herself] with the revolutionary forces of change at every historical phase of the struggle. Africa has changed from a relatively peaceful and harmonious continent to one riddled with conflict, disease, violence, abuse of power and gross violations of human rights. In his writing, Ngugi outlines the history of Kenya, focusing explicitly on his Kikuyu community, from the coming of the missionaries and colonialists to the struggle for Independence and subsequent emergence of the African bourgeoisie. He has addressed these issues using English language initially, before resorting to writing in his vernacular, the Kikuyu language.

Although the establishment in Kenya (unlike in Idi Amin's Uganda), has been relatively tolerant to dissidence by Kenyan writers (Ruganda 1992), censorship has been imposed on works thought to be critical of the powers-that-be. For instance, in November 1977, the Government banned performances of Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Miiri's *Ngaahika Ndeenda*¹ after a month's successful performance (Ngugi, 1991: 57). The play was banned on the grounds that it was creating division among Kenyans (Ruganda 1992) and its author, Ngugi wa Thiong'o was detained while Ngugi wa Miiri fled into exile. Later in 1983, its English translation, *I will marry when I want* was also banned on allegations that it was subversive, but only after it had been played to full audiences in Nairobi (Harding in Sturrock, 1996:14).

In November 1981, the Kamiriithu theatre group regrouped and produced *Maitu Njugira*² (Mother Sing for Me). The premier performance of this musical drama scheduled to be performed at the Kenya National Theatre on February 19, 1982, was denied licence by the authorities and police sent to ensure "public peace and security" (Ngugi, 1986:59). One month later, the Government outlawed and razed to the ground Kamiriithu Community Education and Cultural Centre and banned all theatre activities in the entire area (Ngugi, 1986: 59, Outa 2001). Gikandi (2004) is categorical that between 1970s and 1980s Kenya's political scenario had

deteriorated quite markedly leading to a drastic curtailing of freedom of expression. Ngugi (1986: 61) elaborates by giving an account of intensified repression on Kenyans in 1982, through detentions without trial and imprisonment on trumped-up charges particularly of University lecturers and students. In fact, Imbuga dramatizes a similar situation in *Betrayal in the City* (1976). Thus University lecturers who were associated with Kamiriithu had to flee into exile, the same reason that made Ngugi remain in exile (Ngugi 1986).

In the same year, Al Amin Mazrui was detained for his play *Kilio Cha Haki* (The Cry of Justice), which glorifies armed resistance. Joe de Graft's play *Muntu* was banned while drama activities in schools and colleges in Kenya were highly censored (Ruganda 1992; Ngugi 1983). Ironically, all of Francis Imbuga's political plays were written during this time when the country's ruling elite seemed intolerant of voices of dissent. Imbuga's plays were performed freely without any form of censorship, with *Betrayal in the City* even becoming a set book for Kenya Secondary School curriculum, despite its criticisms against the socio-political malaise that characterized post-independent Africa. Instructively, in 1987, Imbuga won the Kenya National Academy of Sciences Distinguished Award in playwriting. Earlier, *Betrayal in the City* and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's and Micere Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* had represented Kenya at the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Cultures (FESTAC), held in Lagos, Nigeria, in January/February, 1977.

Asserting the role of art and artists in the society, Imbuga draws attention to the traditional oral artists who used their narratives to educate and correct society through persuasion and not through threats of punishment (Imbuga cited in Ruganda, 1992: xxi). Through a play- within- a-play technique in *Man of Kafira*, a character called Osman tells his fellow artists charged with the responsibility of improvising a play to entertain Boss:

This play has been specifically written for a specific audience. Now we do not want to preach to them because other people have tried elsewhere and failed. Our target is the subconscious mind, that part of our brain that refuses to be cheated. And our primary weapons are symbols and images, not swear words (Imbuga, 1984:8).

Further, the same character asserts that their responsibility as free thinking artists is to be sincere in their portrayal of what they consider to be the truth (Imbuga:10). The other artist in the play, Grabio, raises concern about the artists' role in preserving the dignity of their art (Imbuga:10).

These illustrations indicate what Imbuga considered his role as an artist and suggest how he was able to survive during the repressive period in Kenya. The literary strategies that he employs in this play, as in all his works, made him maintain an aesthetic distance between himself as a writer and his subject matter or the utterances of his characters. Thus the writer cannot be accountable for what his characters say and do in their fictional societies. He revisits the same question of the role of the artist in society in his first novel, *Shrine of Tears* (1993). In the novel, Headmaster, an accomplished artist admonishes Boge, an 'upcoming' artist not only to avoid direct confrontation with the authorities, but also to protect himself first (1993:221). Earlier, Headmaster had advised Boge to let his art speak even if only in whispers since a true artist should never rush forward on impulse (1993:177-178). Headmaster, the fictional writer argues that he dissociates himself from what his characters say and do; he only creates them and gives them an environment within which to operate:

I try hard not to interfere with or control that interaction [...] that is what has sustained me in my creative wonderings. I have strictly left politics to my political characters and to the real politicians of our time (1993:181).

In the novel, Headmaster emerges as the *dramatis personae*. Imbuga himself is cautious when dealing with political themes and prefers broader, generalized and fictionalized settings that reflect poor political leadership in post-independent African societies. Granted, some of his rural settings are explicitly his own rural home of Maragoli (*Aminata*, *The Burning of Rags* and *Kagai and her Brothers*). However, a closer scrutiny of the names of characters and things also reveals that the writer seeks to appeal to a wider audience inasmuch as he uses different names from different parts of Kenya and other African countries. In fact, with regard to *Aminata*, he writes in the preliminary pages that the action could have been anywhere in Africa. He goes on to incorporate historical aspects of the Christian Missionary incursion in Africa and also makes

reference to the civil rights movement. Hence, it is only circumstantial to positively identify locations of Imbuga's settings.

2.5 The Oeuvre of Francis Imbuga

A study of Imbuga's representation of women in his *oeuvre* is significant in exploring the status of women in literature, a medium that seeks to reflect and transform the society. Imbuga, a renowned Kenyan playwright, was one of Kenyan male writers whose literary works express sensitivity to gender issues in the society. He has fictionalized power imbalances between men and women in both rural and urban settings. Besides, in his play, *Aminata*, Imbuga poses a challenge to the contemporary African society by creating conflict over the possibility of a woman inheriting land from her deceased father.

The analysis of Imbuga's oeuvre takes a chronological approach in terms of production to gauge the development of characterization of female characters in his writing in tandem with the changing roles of women in Kenya as the socio-political context within which the fictional works are produced. Ngugi (1981:35-36) puts it more succinctly when he argues that literature should reflect the life of a people and that there should be sensitivity to the images imparted to a Kenyan child reading literature in Kenyan schools.

Betrayal in the City (1976) is set in Kafira, a fictional post-independent African State and was premiered in Kenya during the single party era. Setting the play in Kafira, an anagram of 'Afrika' provides a generalized context and also acts as a strategy to circumvent political censorship. It also sets pace for the playwright's satirical tone, projecting his perspectives on political assassinations, corrupt political leadership, demonstrations by university students and police brutality, in some post-independent African countries. Kafira is ruled by Boss, a despotic President, who relies heavily on a clique of sycophants to help him govern the country. His style of leadership involves obtaining information about the citizens from his advisers who also keenly ensure that his opponents are either killed or incarcerated. Consequently, the following characters are murdered: Adika, a university student leader, for inciting students to demonstrate against the system; his parents Doga and Nina, to demoralize their surviving son Jasper, another

university student who openly confronts the regime; and Kabito, a Government official, for questioning the corrupt methods of awarding tenders. Those incarcerated are: Mosese, a university lecturer, for defying government directives and conditions imposed at Adika's funeral, Jusper for becoming openly violent and critical of the system after his brother's death and Jere, an ex-soldier who realizes that the system under which he serves is unjustly repressive towards its citizens and rejects the orders imposed by Government to cancel Adika's shaving ceremony.

Imbuga demonstrates the ruthlessness of Boss's regime and the extent of disillusionment of Kafiran citizens through the predicament of his protagonists. Mosese and Jere who initially were well placed in the society as a university lecturer and a soldier respectively are turned into political prisoners for holding dissenting views. The following conversation in their prison cell captures the mood of the citizens:

Mosese: For years we waited for the kingdom, then they said it had come [...] but no. It was all an illusion. How many of us have set eyes on that kingdom? What colour is it?

Jere: [...] I guess it is blood red.

Mosese: It was better while we waited. Now we have nothing to look forward to. We killed our past and are busy killing the future (31-2).

The allegorical reference to heaven in this dialogue implies the betrayal of the people's hopes for a better society with the attainment of independence. The red colour symbolizes the extra-judicial killings that characterize the regime. Mosese, whose full name is explained as Mosese wa Tonga, meaning, "remember the past", dramatizes this apparent bleak future position of Kafira by "sitting with his back turned to the audience" because he has "no front" (21).

Considering all the above, Kafira can be described as a State that is characterized by vices such as betrayal, oppression, corruption, nepotism, inefficiency and bad governance, lack of transparency and accountability, lack of freedom of expression and gross violations of basic human rights. The citizens are depressed and disillusioned with the intellectuals and the rebellious members of the ruling class vested with the role of championing the rights of the oppressed masses.

In a society represented by Kafira, even the writer who exposes the atrocities of the regime is not safe and this explains Imbuga's style. The writer has avoided direct references to actual places in Africa by fictionalising the setting and the names of his characters. This style creates an aesthetic distance between the writer and his characters, and also between him and the subject that he is handling. Its advantage is that it gives the writer the leeway to comment on the repressive regime without fear of victimization. It also serves to create a universal setting and ensure that the play can adapt to different African countries without directly commenting on the country's leadership. Imbuga uses the same method in all his political works.

This style can be recognized as 'distancing' and treats it as one of the distinguishing aspects of Imbuga's oeuvre. Imbuga utilizes several distancing techniques such as use of 'mad' characters, clowns and comics, improvisations, play-within-a-play, illusions and dreams to develop the play. In this way, the writer creates memorable characters that communicate directly to the audience as his *dramatis personae* and take responsibility for their utterances and actions. For instance, Juser passes for a mad character with the leeway to criticize the regime without caution. Tumbo's inefficiency and his corruption philosophy of "eat and let eat" ironically works in Juser's favour when he is the one chosen without competition to write the play that Boss requires for the entertainment of a visiting Head of State.

The important point to note is that Juser's play-within-a-play is an improvisation - a technique that allows him room to manipulate his drama to achieve the desired effect. For example, during the dress rehearsal, one of the prisoners in the cast is unwell so Boss himself offers to save the situation by stepping in to read the lines; the props are not ready so Boss orders his staff to avail real guns to the cast. Without knowing it, Boss and his top administrators find themselves captives of armed political dissidents and in a semblance of a revenge tragedy, Juser shoots Mulili as he exposes him as the villain. Boss's bad governance is exposed but he is given another chance to correct his mistakes by providing visionary leadership in the next regime.

Game of Silence (1977) explores the social and political conditions in a society similar to Kafira. Raja the protagonist is pursuing further studies overseas; so the play is partly set in an overseas country and partly in his home country. Raja is psychologically affected by the atrocities committed by the regime to the extent that he becomes neurotic, with most of the action taking place in his mind. In this state, his mythical world serves to censor his real world and becomes the writer's dramatic technique of exposing evils similar to those in Kafira. Furthermore, Raja operates at a level where his past, present and future are all intertwined to reveal his views about his country. He is regarded by his home Government as a dangerous person; hence he is constantly under surveillance by Bango, posing as a colleague and student of psychology.

Of great importance is that the play is set within the framework of the tenets of the theatre of the absurd, sustained through a sequence of dreams that Raja experiences. It is also this device that sets Raja apart from Bango who fails to provide a clear assessment of Raja's actions and anxieties. Through the dreams, Raja exposes injustices and the class stratification that exist in his society, resulting in the helplessness of the ordinary citizens, some of them, beggars, madmen and cripples. Other important features of Raja's dreams are: the value of human life since there are quite a number of politically instigated deaths in his society, silence as a metaphor for intimidating the citizens and the urgent need for a people-driven revolution, the 'bottom-up' maxim in the play. Bango records what Raja says, compiles information about him and sends the same back home. Consequently, when Raja gets back he is arrested and locked up in a mental asylum. The ending of the play conveys the writer's ideological vision that the people have the power to change their destiny. The masses stage a revolution in which Bango and Jimmy, both belonging to the ruling class, are shot dead while political prisoners including Raja are released.

The Successor (1979) was published three years after *Betrayal in the City* and nine months after the death of Kenya's founding President Jomo Kenyatta. Prior to Kenyatta's death, debate about his succession had been rife both in Parliament and the local media, after a clique around the already aging President had become increasingly worried of his health and felt that there was an urgent need to put in place modalities for his succession. Dubbed "the Change the Constitution group," a section of some Members of Parliament agitated for the creation of a more democratic

space, so that the Vice President did not automatically become the President in the event that a sitting President either became incapacitated or ceased to hold Office.

Given that Kenya was still a one party state, it was criminal for the public to engage in such a debate as outlined in a warning issued by Charles Njonjo, the then Attorney-General of Kenya (Ruganda 1992:xviii; Karimi and Ochieng 1980). The warning was meant for everyone in Kenya, but Imbuga, it seems, went ahead to manipulate and recreate this theme in a fictitious setting of Masero Empire, ruled by Emperor Chonda, assisted by three Senior Chiefs Oriomia, Sasia and Jandi. In this way, the political theme of succession is reinvented in a traditional setting complete with its myths and rituals.

The play depicts an Emperor under pressure to name his successor since he does not have a son who would have been a natural heir. The urgency of the matter is also revealed through the apparition of the head of the Emperor's late father that keeps tormenting him. Oriomra comes off as the villain that creates conflict between the other two Chiefs as a way of eliminating them so that he (Oriomra) remains the successor. Other important characters in the play are Segasega, the Emperor's food tester, joker and Diviner See-through who interprets the Emperor's dreams and acts as the custodian of the community's shrine. Amidst evil schemes that surround the succession to the throne, the shrine presents a powerful message as a symbol of truth, peace and reconciliation. Diviner See Through offers a parallel scheme that punishes the opportunists as it identifies Jandi as the most eligible successor to the throne. In the same vein, Segasega provides more information on the problem of tribalism and also comments on democracy and power structure. The strength of this play lies on its continued relevance to Kenya's political scene in terms of aspects such as wrangles associated with the presidency, democracy, negative ethnicity, national cohesion and reconciliation.

Man of Kafira (1984) is set in two fictitious post-independent African countries, "Abiara and Kafira." Boss, the deposed President of Kafira has sought political asylum in Abiara where he deludes himself that he is still the President of Kafira. The play explores the psychological trauma of Boss, Kafira's ex-President, living in exile in Abiara. Significantly, male characters

dominate the play, with the focus on Boss, Gafi, the President of Abiara and Jere, the Chairman (President) of the new nation of Kafira.

Obviously, there is a close relationship between *Man of Kafira* and *Betrayal in the City* (1976) such that *Man of Kafira* can be considered as the sequel to *Betrayal in the City*. Despite the fictitious setting, one could still notice the anagrams of 'Africa' and 'Arabia' in the two settings. The events and characters in *Betrayal in the City* are developed further in *Man of Kafira*. After the shooting of Mulili in *Betrayal in the City*, Boss is given another chance to form a government that would also include progressive individuals that he had previously been made to intimidate. However, Boss's new regime continues to be a replica of the earlier one that was characterised by assassinations and extreme suffering by the citizens. A character called Regina describes the nation represented by Kafira as, "[o]ne great coffin in which the advocates of truth lie" (1984:41).

Through flashbacks, dream and other techniques, the play reveals the atrocities and other violations of human rights that Boss's regime commits. The fundamental question that the play raises is the value of human life that leaders like Boss seem to have ignored. The playwright also draws attention to a critical examination of the new regimes that are established on the basis of change yet tend to replicate the old ones. Boss has been overthrown through a coup d'état and he escapes with his family to Abiara. The action in Abiara depicts Boss as a replica of deposed African leaders who remain traumatized even in exile and live in delusion that what they are experiencing is only temporary and after some time they would go back home and continue ruling their countries. Since this is what Boss yearns for, as his continued presence in Abiara causes much tension for the host President, the Abiara artists make him believe that his subjects in Kafira need him back. He then leads his family back to Kafira where upon their arrival Regina, his wife whom he had abducted, kills him in revenge, thus fulfilling what she perceives as the wishes of the people of Kafira.

Aminata (1988) is set in Membe Village, a rural community of Kenya. The protagonist, Aminata, is educated and a lawyer by profession. The play was written specifically for the United Nations

Decade for Women Conference that was held in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1985. The play explores women's liberation, gender equality, family planning, property and land inheritance, and other issues affecting women. These issues are championed initially by Aminata's father, Pastor Ngoya, and propagated later by Aminata herself.

Membe is still under traditional system of leadership, with Jumba, Aminata's uncle as the Headman, assisted by a Council of Elders whose contributions are crucial in decision making. The Christian teachings threaten to erode the people's traditional way of life. Ngoya becomes one of the initial converts who break away from tradition. He demonstrates this by encouraging women to eat chicken, starting with his daughter Aminata, in defiance of the taboo that tradition had associated with women eating chicken.

Ngoya also embraces the modern practice of writing a will in which he again goes against traditional customs and bequeaths a piece of ancestral land to his daughter, Aminata. According to tradition only the male relations are heirs to one's property in the event of his death. Thus, in the wake of Pastor Ngoya's death, there arises a conflict between Aminata and her brother Ababio together with her uncle Jumba. This conflict also translates into a clash between tradition and modernity.

The Burning of Rags (1989) is centred on the discord between Agala and his son Denis, over the circumcision of Yona, his grandson. While old Agala insists on a traditional ceremony, Denis, a University Professor and acting Head of Department of Culture, prefers it to be done in a hospital. There are other sub-themes in the play: the details of the death of Matilda (Denis's wife) and the reasons why she exists in the play as a ghost; the details of the rite of passage, since circumcision is only considered complete after the completion of other ceremonies performed some weeks later that include washing of the wound and the burning of old clothes.

The other sub-theme is the dilemma of Denis. He consents to the traditional circumcision of his son under pressure but fails to be available for the burning of rags ceremony due to his work's constraints on the one hand, and his desire to break away from tradition on the other. When

Denis fails to avail himself for the ceremony, Agala embarks on a journey to Nairobi, in search of his son Denis. Accompanied by fellow old man, Babu, he takes along the newly initiated and ailing Yona, and a bundle of Yona's old clothes that were supposed to be burnt. On reaching the city, and eventually, Denis' house through the help of Denis' friend who accidentally comes across them, Agala dies while Yona is taken to Gertrude's Children's Hospital where he is treated and discharged upon recovering.

Imbuga's first novel *Shrine of Tears* (1993) revolves around the need for cultural emancipation in the African Society. Set in Kilima, a fictitious African country, the story exposes the emerging cultural trends in the contemporary African Societies, and specifically reflects the Kenyan cultural state that Ngugi decries (1981:42-48). The youth, representing a segment of the societal population that lives under a cultural cringe know neither their roots nor their cultural identities. The nation is deeply influenced by Western culture that the Ministry of Culture exists only in name; and the cultural activities in Kilima are foreign to the citizens themselves. Consequently the University, through its Literature Department, takes a leading role in exposing students to challenges such as cultural erosion and their role in the quest for cultural identity through artistic performances. *Shrine of Tears* is therefore the story of Kilima's generation of youths searching for a meaning of life in the rubble of their past and present.

Emerging from this rubble are Luta Kanaya, a female engineering student and her fiancé Jay Boge, a young lecturer who has just enrolled for his PhD in Literature. Other key characters are: Billy Kanzika, the main narrator of the story, a journalist and Boge's friend; Headmaster, a University of Kilima lecturer and an accomplished writer, much older and belonging to a different generation; Dora, also a University lecturer; and Kamonya, Kanaya's twin sister and a Law student in India. Kanaya, who has previously taken part in commercial programmes prepared by the whites, suddenly realizes that she and indeed other blacks have been culturally exploited and misused by aliens. She promptly decides to produce Boge's play, *Farewell to Ogres* that seeks to educate the people of Kilima about their identity, with herself playing the leading role. However, she dies tragically before the production of the play and her mission is accomplished by Boge and Kamonya.

The fact that the novel is a satire on the Kilima Government makes another parallel theme. Through characters like Honourable Mbagaya, The Director for Culture, the novel reveals sycophancy, extravagance, lack of transparency and accountability, unpatriotic leadership and intimidation of the intelligentsia. However, unlike his earlier plays that indict all the political leaders, Imbuga presents a glimmer of hope in the nation's leadership through his positive characterization of the Director of Education, Hon. Suja Kamande, who has good intentions for the people.

Other themes that the novel explores are tradition and rural life as well as the contact between tradition and modernity. For example, the burial of Kanaya in her rural home brings together the University fraternity and other mourners from the city, the villagers and their area political leader. This particular episode creates a context in which the writer presents some cultural practices associated with mourning and burial with regards to gender.

Kagai and Her Brothers (1995), a novella/short story is basically intended for primary and lower secondary schools children. Although it is not within the scope of this study, aspects such as circumcision of boys and gender issues that it deals with and its explicit setting in the writer's rural home are informative. The short story was initially published in *Lulogooli* (Kimaragoli) as "*Lialuka Lia Avaana va Magomere*", in 1986. Magomere and his family live in an urban area where he also works. The story focuses on the family's journey to their rural home in Maragoli for the initiation of their two sons who have already been circumcised in hospital but are taken back home for other ceremonies that complete the actual initiation. On the way the children are educated on the important physical features that they come across or see from afar.

Setting off on a journey that begins at dawn and ends in the afternoon, Magomere drives his family to their rural village where they are warmly received by Magomere's elderly parents and other villagers, all with whom his family maintains cordial relationships. On the day of initiation as many people as possible are involved to reflect the communal aspect of the ceremony that also requires that each of the two boys choose and be bonded to a friend from a different home. To

fully complete the ceremony the boys visit their aunt for gifts. Imbuga's works constantly make reference to the importance of the age group and the bond established during circumcision.

Imbuga's second and last novel, *Miracle of Remera* (2004) written during his sabbatical period in Rwanda, is also set in a fictional African society called Remera; and it blends both rural and urban lives, with the youth as the central focus. The major strength of this novel lies in how the author blends aspects of the African oral traditions with the framework that in the Western conventions is regarded as magical realism to incorporate elements of the spiritual world into the reality of the world of the novel.

Most of the action takes place in the educational institutions and traces the main characters', Maiyo's and Daisy's, schooling until they join University. The novel examines issues such as peer pressure, the girl child, HIV/AIDS, education, research and indigenous knowledge. The protagonist, Ezra Maiyo, a Law student at the University discovers that he has contracted AIDS but he does not despair. Instead, he embarks on an aggressive search for a cure for the dreaded disease. He exploits the indigenous knowledge and common instinct that he had learnt from his rural home during a short visit to his grandparents. Under the tutelage of his grandfather, Maiyo had observed a sick goat take control of its condition and identify the correct medicinal herbs in the shrubs. The image of the goat curing itself becomes a metaphor that inspires Maiyo to find a cure for himself.

Maiyo miraculously recovers after a rigorous process of boiling and concocting herbs with bitter green liquid found from the intestines of a freshly slaughtered goat, *ikizuri*, which he had observed the village elders drink. The story ends with Maiyo, his girlfriend Daisy (a medical student) and his Physician Dr. Nimrod, all resolving to embark on a joint serious medical research, which combines indigenous and modern knowledge in medical practice, in an effort to find a cure for HIV/AIDS.

This novel is significant in that Imbuga uses it to demystify HIV/AIDS and the stigma that has been associated with it. *Miracle of Remera* is also Imbuga's way of posing the question of the

efforts that African peoples themselves are making to discover a cure for the disease instead of waiting for some breakthrough from the West. Other important sub-themes in the novel include a whole range of challenges facing the youth in the contemporary African society, including effects of peer pressure on boys and the vulnerability of the girl-child to numerous forms of abuses. He regards equitable access to education as a fundamental factor of redefining the role of female characters in literature as well as of transforming the society.

Imbuga returns to drama and publishes his last play *The Return of Mgofu* (2011), one year before his death. The play is set in a fictional African country called Mndika and provides an account of past events of ethnically instigated genocide and their devastating effects. Through plot, characterization and narrative strategy, Imbuga exploits memory as a theme and technique of revisiting past injustices that have had adverse effects on the African peoples, and to envision peace and reconciliation. The play addresses the entire African continent and is dedicated to “all those who have fallen in major and minor forms of genocide in Africa and beyond [and to] lovers of peace.”

The main theme of *The Return of Mgofu* (2011) is largely influenced by the 1994 genocide of Rwanda, where Imbuga spent some five years as a Professor at Kigali Institute and also helped produce a film on the same theme, and the post-election violence of Kenya in 2007-2008. Odhiambo (2013) regards the play, produced one year before Imbuga’s death and less than two years before Kenya’s 2013 general election, “Imbuga’s best legacy for Kenya” linking the playwright’s concerns to “ethnicity and tension” that was already building up as the general election approached.

After about fifty years of perennial instability that can be attributed to different forms of internal conflicts that have resulted in destructions, displacements, massive deaths of innocent citizens and gross violations of human rights across the continent, peace, reconciliation and stability are today household terminologies in most African nations. Most African countries have embarked on different forms of peace initiatives with countries like South Africa and Rwanda having achieved milestones through the processes of Truth and Justice Commissions. Nonetheless, real

peace and stability is still largely an illusion in most other African nations. Even Kenya, that had remained relatively peaceful as other countries were engulfed in civil wars, shocked itself and the whole world in 2007/2008 when violence that had never been witnessed in the country before spontaneously erupted in various parts of the country in what has been widely referred to as post-election violence (PEV). This act of impunity that took about three months resulted in more than 1,300 deaths, about 500,000 internal displacements and intense trauma that had not healed as at the time of my writing of this thesis.

The plot of *The Return of Mgofu* takes the structure of a journey that begins with remembered acts of violence that occurred in Mndika's past, their effects on the present society and their implications for the future. Memory becomes a significant technique of helping society to evaluate itself against its own values. Through overt experimentation with form, Imbuga integrates in the drama a cast of human characters, creatures with certain human features, spirits and ancestors. Thori and Thoriwa, a couple and victims of genocide return from the world of the dead as protagonists in the play to recount the injustices that they witnessed. The ancestors have sent them back to the world of mortals to remind the living of the horrifying stories of their past in order to forestall a repeat of the same events. The fact that these spirits are messengers from the ancestors serves to affirm a moral principle rooted in African traditional belief system in which ancestors are regarded as custodians of the history and values of the community. Thoriwa is categorical that as spirits, unlike human beings they cannot forget the past (Imbuga, 2011:9).

At a different level, the same journey motif is used in the play to remember the past through names of certain characters. In the first place, *Mgofu* is a Maragoli name that embodies old age, wisdom, goodness and virtues associated with African traditions. In the context of the play, *Mgofu* is both an ideology and a character. Thus, *Mgofu* is indeed the equivalent of *Ubuntu*-an abbreviation of a Xhosa proverb that, as explained by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, refers to the "very essence of being human" (Fox, 2011:105). I shall explore this aspect more elaborately in chapter five.

Naming Mgofu's son born in exile after him is a way of keeping his memory alive. Mgofu, also a seer like his father is a living memory of Mndika's significant past and his return to Mndika in the final scene of the play depicts him as a symbol of the reconciliation of the past and present. Other names that bear the memory of Mndika's past are Kadesa's shrine of Katigali and Mgofu's daughter, Nora Ulivaho. The name of priestess Kadesa's Shrine in exile in Nderema is a reminder of the violence that forced the Mndikans into exile. It also means "farewell to ogres" (12) in reference to the Mndikans who lost their humanity by burning children, women and men who had taken refuge in a shrine. Similarly, referring to it as the shrine of peace is a lasting reminder to the Mndikan refugees of the genocide committed by their forefathers in their motherland.

Finally, Nora Ulivaho, the daughter of Mgofu the second is prominently placed in the play to embody the three-pronged structure of the play. Firstly, she belongs to the third generation from the period of the last exile. Also, she has roots in the past through her first name after her grandmother, the wife of the Great Blind Seer. Thori observes that the story of the older Nora, especially how the Seer saved her (together with their unborn child) from the genocide and led her to safety in Nderema, has been told over and over in Mndika. Secondly, she is the one who accompanies her father in the symbolic return journey to Mndinka. Lastly, Nora's second name, Ulivaho, means, "The one who will be there" (33), signifying her role in the future. Nora actually outlives her old and dying father, and as the denouement of the play suggests, she is poised to take on his mantle through her pledge to return and probably assume a leadership position in Mndika.

Imbuga's concept that his play is an "alternative slice of reality" (Imbuga 2011) gains full import in this effort to look for values in the African traditions. The overriding message of the play is contained in the virtues of respect, tolerance and forgiveness. As a character in the play, Mgofu, the Great Blind Seer is the nation's legend, regarded as "Mndika's symbol of well-being" (46). Mgofu's death in exile in Nderema raises consciousness on the moral consequences of violence. Mhando, Mndika's new leader, considers it a disgrace for their forefathers to have forced Mgofu

to go into exile through their acts of impunity. He deeply agonizes over this matter and blames Mndika's woes on past atrocities.

One notices in this play that how a nation handles the traumatic experiences of the past is of paramount importance to Imbuga in the *Return of Mgofu*. Mgofu's return is significant in its intention to solidify peace and stability in Mndika. The male dominance may have prevailed in African literature to a large extent, but *The Return of Mgofu* conveys an optimistic message from the ancestors about respect for humankind and peaceful co-existence. The play broadens spaces for female characters to play roles that were played by male characters in Imbuga's previous works.

Other important structural techniques include the use of dream. The dream device features in virtually all the works of Imbuga examined in this study. Imbuga admits that he believes in dreams as the "seat of all truth" (Harb, 1989:576) and uses it to get to the "psyches of some of the major characters." In *The Return of Mgofu*, Mwami Mhando's concern for his people and his country Mndika is manifested in a dream in which a strange creature referred to as the "man-bird" that he encounters reveals to him that "Mndika's salvation may be shared with Nderema" (Imbuga, 2011:49).

The dreams in Imbuga's works normally depict the complex issues that confront the characters and where need be, like in *The Successor*, a seer or diviner is called upon to offer a reliable interpretation because most of them are usually associated with their ancestors who the characters believe are still part of their daily lives. Likewise concerning Mhando's dream, Mtange asserts: "we are lucky that such spirits still have time for us" (2011:49).

In the world of Imbuga's creative works, the dead play significant roles in the affairs of the society. For instance, in *Aminata* (1988:4), Mama Rosina cautions Jumba against disregarding his dead brother's wishes. In *Game of Silence* (1977:51) the ghost of Flora appears in the courtroom to save Jere from death by reversing the verdict to "Not guilty." Olilo (2002:63) relates this thematic issue in Imbuga's texts to the belief by the Maragoli that the dead play an

intermediary role between the living and the gods. Kabaji (2005) elaborates that among the Maragoli, members of the same clan paid private respects to the dead and made sacrifices to the ancestors beseeching them to resolve societal problems. In *The Return of Mgofu* the ancestors also convey a stern warning to neighbours to stamp out resentment, kill the blame game and seek reconciliation. Further, the ancestors appeal to those with moral conscience to actively play their role in guiding society as Thori states: “The only thing necessary for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing” (5). Adonijah the ‘mad man’ puts it more succinctly when he states that he saw respectable people among those “plotting to shed the blood of their brothers and sisters” (22).

This overview of Imbuga’s oeuvre serves to place my study on the changing images of female characters within the larger context of the writer’s dominant themes and techniques. What is noteworthy in Imbuga’s creative works is the writer’s sensitivity to the social, political, cultural and moral problems that beset the African states. More significant is that the writer does not just raise consciousness on the consequences of undesirable actions like conflict, intimidation and marginalization of others, but he also displays high optimism in the redemptive qualities of the individual members of the society. Imbuga’s strength as a writer lies in the use of literary strategies that make his works accessible to a general audience in any African country. These are the aspects that have particularly appealed to his Kenyan audiences and readers as evidenced in the critical reception of his works, discussed in the next section.

2.6 Critical reception of Imbuga’s oeuvre

Imbuga has been acclaimed as Kenya’s most prolific playwright of stage, radio and television, a highly gifted thespian, a seasoned director of plays and an adjudicator of Kenya’s National Drama Festival (Chesaina 1984, Ruganda 1992, Outa 2001, Indangasi 2002). Indangasi (2002) actually refers to Imbuga as an institution owing to the fact that the playwright was also a poet, novelist, writer of children’s literature and a Professor of Literature. Outa (2001) regards Imbuga as an “intensely satirical writer,” and points out “the play-within-a-play” strategy that introduces *Man of Kafirais* one of the most “genius theatrical scoops in Kenya.”

Nearly all of Imbuga's plays are premiered in Nairobi under different directors. Their productions were well received by both their respective audiences and the media. Slade (as cited in Ruganda, 1992: xx), while acknowledging that Imbuga is the greatest of Kenyan playwrights, remarks that nearly all his plays promote thought and discussion. In this regard, Slade reviews the performance in 1975 of *Betrayal in the City* as a genuine breakthrough for the local Kenyan drama and one that would appeal to a wider audience beyond Kenya.

Other reviewers focused on the play's style, highlighting Imbuga's mastery and good use of satire, wit and sarcasm to examine a Pan-African theme (Mugambi cited in Ruganda, 1992: xiv), wit and pithy humour that has created good entertainment and a theatrical experience almost entirely new in Kenya and skill of handling sensitive issues subtly without attracting hostility from those that the playwright attacks (Kahiga and Wang'ombe, cited in Makini 1985).

Ruganda (1992) argues that Imbuga has sensitively responded to the social and political changes in Kenya, through his stage plays. He posits that *Betrayal in the City* is a projection of what Imbuga saw or read about Africa between 1974 and 1975 while *The Successor* was inspired by the succession debate during President Jomo Kenyatta's tenure in Kenya. *Man of Kafira's* original draft, which was titled *Day of Truth*, was performed for President Daniel arap Moi on May 18, 1979 at Kenyatta University College. The ousted dictator in the play who sought refuge in Abiara was remote to the Kenyan context and only seemed to have affinity with Uganda's Idi Amin and Central African Republic's Jean Bokasa, both of whom had been ousted in their countries and fled to other countries. It was believed that Idi Amin had sought refuge somewhere in Arabia (Ruganda 1992).

The performance of the refined play, *Man of Kafira*, opened to the public in Nairobi in April 1983. The performance of the play was significant in the history of Kenyan theatre in two different ways: firstly, while it brought together Kenya's finest dramatists, the play itself was one of the most finely crafted and technically effective African productions ever performed in Nairobi (Gacheru in Ruganda, 1992: xix). Secondly, it served to launch the Stella Awinja Muka Foundation (SAMFO).³

Imbuga's other play, *Aminata* (1988), regarded as his feminist play (Sigei 2012) marks his first conscious exploration of the position of women in society, thereby creating a female protagonist. As already stated, the play was produced specifically for the delegates attending the Forum 85 and the United Nations Decade for Women conference, held in Nairobi in July 1985. The play was hilariously received and commended for highlighting the Third World literate, professional women's predicament of accommodating the old while still assimilating the new (cited in Ruganda, 1992: xx). Besides, Imbuga was also hailed for clearly stating the positive role of women in modern Kenya and for having made women aware that they should not succumb to the traditional views that would diminish their existence and usefulness (Ruganda, 1992: xx).

Imbuga's use of language in *Aminata* has also been commended as being innovative and resourceful in terms of choice of words, imagery and use of the local idioms, all of which give the drama a local African flavour (Indangasi, 2002:29). Outa's assessment of Imbuga's drama provides an appropriate summary for this section of the study. He argues that Imbuga's drama offer an alternative toolkit within which theatre practitioners can operate through critique and at the same time stay [safely] in the home domain (Outa, 2001:361).

Arguing that good art must protect itself from vilification, and its creator from incarceration, Ruganda (1992: xxi) asserts that the "basic survivalist principle" forms all Imbuga's dramatic creations. Thus he appropriately recognizes Imbuga's aesthetics as being enshrined in the "dialectics of transparent concealment" using strategies of "distancing of setting and dramatis personae" which not only give the plays a multi-dimensional appeal but also ensures the author's security. He further observes that these strategies are enhanced by the use of names that alienate characters from any particular ethnic group and realities outside the context of the texts (1992: 1, 6 – 7), such that the symbolic and connotative meaning of the texts can only be deciphered by academic scholars while the authorities read them superficially and end up deluding themselves that they are not really the targets

Following Imbuga's sudden death on November 18, 2012, glowing tributes abounded in both the print and electronic media, extolling his literary creativity spanning over three decades. Significantly, three factors dominated these tributes from colleagues, scholars, fellow writers, students and journalists: Imbuga's accomplishment as a writer, his unique literary techniques like satire, irony, humour, the play within-a-play that told the truth in a subtle and humorous manner and his deep concern for his country Kenya, and the African nations in general through the socio-political issues that his works addressed (Kabaji; Sigei; Oling'o). For instance, Kabaji (*Daily Nation*, November 20, 2012), recognizes as a distinguishing feature of Imbuga's writing a love for experimentation that has "seen him dabble in realism, magical realism, absurdism, Marxism and feminism. He recognizes Imbuga's application of magical realism in *Miracle of Remera* and *The Return of Mgofu*. While I acknowledge this possibility, my discussion of the latter text pursues the playwright's own reference to it as 'an alternative slice of reality' and applies aspects of the African oral tradition in its analysis.

This study, however, acknowledges Kabaji's views particularly with regard to experimentation and highlights the numerous improvisations in Imbuga's oeuvre. Kabaji further states:

Imbuga's fictional works significantly mirror the turbulence of our history in Kenya in a reflective sombre approach. He always visualized our society as being literally on a wheelchair made by our retrogressive politics [...]. His works have a clear ideological and philosophical underpinning influenced by his overriding vision of a united prosperous Kenya.

Just one week before Imbuga's death, Sigei (*Saturday Nation*, November 10, 2012) had published an interview with Imbuga prompted by the reintroduction of *Betrayal in the City* as a set-book in the secondary school curriculum for the third time. He notes that almost all Imbuga's works indict political leaders as the major betrayers of the aspirations of the citizens. Whereas Sigei generally relates *The Return of Mgofu* to the "recurrent ethnic animosity and intolerance, which continues to ravage most African countries," he specifically singles out the post-election violence (PEV) in Kenya in 2007/2008. Odhiambo (*Sunday Nation*, January 6, 2013) has a similar conception with regards to his article "Why The Return of Mgofu is Imbuga's best legacy to Kenya" as he highlights the relevance of the play to Kenya today and to the African continent:

The Return of Mgofu is a most pressing didactic note on the state of our nation, region and continent. Imbuga is quite clear, in this play, about the need to stop the name calling, blame games, prejudices and unfounded claims to superiority and exceptionalism that characterise our society today.

Odhiambo relates the message of the play, summarized as “[t]he only thing necessary for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing,” more specifically to Kenya today and with reference to the 2013 general election. The point stressed here, is that the Kenyan people should have learnt from the post-election violence to avoid its reoccurrence, as Odhiambo asserts: “*The Return of Mgofu* [is not] a return to the past. It is a reminder of the relevance of the past or history or memory or wisdom.” Significantly, this last published play before Imbuga’s death also has a message of forgiveness and reconciliation between antagonistic groups in the society lending credence to Ruganda’s (1992: xxi) earlier conviction that Imbuga’s “dramatic strategies are grounded in devices of assuagement which admonish the social offender, while giving him [or her] an opportunity to be rehabilitated.

With particular reference to gender issues, Olembo and Kebaya (2013:99) posit that gender disparities pervade many African societies. They view Imbuga as one of the African writers who, through their creative works, have added their voice to the on-going discourses on gender and power and their manifestations in society. Focusing closely on Imbuga’s *Aminata* and Kyallo’s *The Hunter is Back*, Olembo and Kebaya point out that *Aminata* and *Rita* in the two plays respectively, are portrayed as female characters who challenge existing power structures that define, domesticate, oppress and disempower women (2013:104). Thus, the characters “reconfigure themselves and gain new voices” (2013:103). This argument is very significant to my study that recognizes the development of the characterization of females in Imbuga’s oeuvre. Of equal significance is their conclusion:

Post-colonial Kenya has become a site where power relations, socio-cultural and economic practices are contested largely by women folk. For this reason, Kenyan writers [...] have taken the lead in interrogating the marginalisation of women and in (re)constructing and (re)configuring ‘an acceptable order’ which disrupts tradition and reconstructs power positively for both men and women in society (2013:104).

This assertion sheds more light on the complementary theoretical framework that my study is hinged upon that serves to establish a link between the experiences of some female characters in Imbuga's oeuvre with the experiences of Kenyan women in certain contexts. For example, my study considers the depiction of female characters in *The Return of Mgofu* as the culmination of the subversion of the culture of dominance and subordination that Imbuga had initiated in his characterization of Aminata in *Aminata*. In this last play, the dramatist shifts our attention from the female characters' struggle against oppressive societal structures, to their prominent roles in the transformation of the human person in the society. Nonetheless, while my study acknowledges these views, it transcends them by focusing on the formal and moral nature of literature itself to reveal the aesthetic ideals of the roles of the female characters in Imbuga's oeuvre.

The conviction here is that Imbuga has consciously and purposefully used female characters in his oeuvre to portray the changing nature of the African society. The chapter has traced the background and profile of the writer against the backdrop of his Kenyan society to determine how his own socio-cultural and political environment has influenced his writing. In our rapidly changing world, the situation of women reflects the nature of the society.

The argument of this study is that a thorough analysis of the changing image of female characters reveals the writer's vision of society. The two novels and Imbuga's last play have not yet been subjected to thorough critical analysis and this study therefore seeks to examine their artistic and thematic relationship with the author's earlier works. With this general overview of Imbuga's life, works and socio-political context and critical reception, the next chapter focuses on the depiction of female characters in Imbuga's early plays, specifically limited to the author's four political plays published between 1976 and 1984.

Chapter Three

The Patriarchal Context in Imbuga's Early Plays

3.1 Introduction

Francis Imbuga entered the literary scene in the 1970s. This was a critical period in the development of African literature in two main ways: apart from the sharp focus that the literature placed on the social, economic and political issues of the post-independence African nations, it was also a period that heralded a tremendous blossoming of works by African women writers in the hitherto male dominated literature. These works raised consciousness on the literary representations of women by both male and female authors, with particular focus on the female stereotypes in male authored works. This chapter examines the role and status of female characters in Francis Imbuga's political drama of the 1970s and early 1980s. These plays are: *Betrayal in the City* (1976), *Game of Silence* (1977), *The Successor* (1979) and *Man of Kafira* (1984). Of significance in the analysis of the four plays is the extent to which the playwright has interrogated the predominant "male heritage" in the portrayal of female characters in texts authored by African male writers.

Spivak (in Bahri 2004) argues that one needs to read the literary representation of women with specific attention to both the subject and the medium of representation. This study recognizes the importance of interpreting meaning from the formal strategies that Imbuga utilises in his depiction of female characters. Thus, this chapter explores the ways in which Imbuga depicts female characters and their response to patriarchal power, in his earlier plays. I adopt a two dimensional approach in my interpretation of the images of women in these plays. In the first place, I examine the depiction of the female characters in relation to the male characters and the African patriarchal establishment to reveal the power relationships displayed in these works. Secondly, I assess the changes in Imbuga's presentation of these characters as individuals and in their roles as female characters. I then use these changes to draw conclusions about the dramatist's vision of the role of female characters in literature as exemplification of women's changing roles in the African society.

A common thread in these four plays is Imbuga's ardent criticism of post-independence governance of the African states. The leadership of these states is characterized by excessive quest for power, victimization of citizens, betrayal of the people's hopes and aspirations and the resultant disillusionment of the citizens. It is instructive that the main characters in the political arena of these plays are all male with their female counterparts playing the peripheral maternal, marital and maiden roles in the domestic spaces. Amidst all these is the imposing presence of myths and rituals - circumcision, funeral and burial rites, ghosts and apparitions of the dead, shrines and graves as constant metaphors. These, serve to define the social and cultural contexts of post-independence African nations that Imbuga writes about and to define the cultural conflicts that confront some of his characters.

3.2 Power imbalances in Imbuga's early drama

Female characters in male authored works are rarely granted primary status but are depicted as silent and submissive in nature; remaining absent from the public sphere (Kumah 2000:6). Female characters in Imbuga's four plays are excluded from the public domain and only feature in the periphery as "kinship appendages" of their male counterparts. This hierarchy is expressed in terms of number of characters, spheres and roles. The few female characters in each play are cast in their predetermined maternal, marital and maiden roles, within the homes. In such a society, the public and political spheres have largely been the domains of the masculine, while the private and domestic ones have been associated with the feminine and occupied by females.

Thus, to some extent, female characters are used in these plays as symbolic prisms to illuminate the prevalent positions of women and men in a patriarchal set-up. Simone de Beauvoir in her seminal work, *The Second Sex* (1949) first introduced the concept of "otherness" into feminist arguments when she challenged the tendency to define and differentiate woman with reference to man where man is viewed as the essential, the Subject, and the Absolute" while the woman is "the incidental, the inessential, the Other" (Tyson, 2006:1989: xxii). Imbuga's four plays examined in this chapter also constitute his main political drama and he uses them to dramatize a male dominated society where only male protagonists actively and conspicuously participate in the political arena.

In the four plays, male protagonists function in two prominent categories: first, there are the political elites, making important decisions as rulers, government officials and close aides and advisers of the leaders. The others are those that form part and parcel of the intelligentsia and hence are better placed to act as forces of regeneration in the repressive political regimes. Furthermore, at the village level, male characters enjoy exclusive power as elders and heads of households. Imbuga clearly demonstrates this in *The Successor* where the Emperor and his advisers agonize over the issue of his successor because he does not have a son, his only child being a girl. Evidently, therefore, in these plays, the political arena which is a public sphere, is synonymous with male figures of power and authority.

Female characters in these four plays start off as passive, submissive and confined to the homes whether in the urban or rural areas where they mainly provide additional information about the protagonists as mothers, wives, sisters, daughters and lovers. They are situated within the patriarchal structures of the African societies where the homes are understandably the private and the domestic domains reserved for them. Hofstede (as cited in Zola 2010) reinforces this assumption when he states that in a patriarchal society, men are supposed to be concerned with achievements outside the home while women are supposed to be concerned with taking care of the home.

Imbuga clearly illustrates men's power over women in the gender relations that he establishes in the plays. For instance, in *Betrayal in the City*, Regina is a modern female character living in a rented house in the city and, as such, enjoys some amount of economic independence. Yet, her educational background and her economic status seem to be insignificant and do not help to propel her to the intellectual levels of her male counterparts to the extent that while Jusper and Tumbo engage in a political discussion, she is indifferent and more inclined to the kitchen (1976:44, 45, 52).

Imbuga's early drama also displays a heavy presence of patriarchal power and authority in both the political and the domestic spheres. To begin with, *Betrayal in the City* opens with the old

couple Doga and Nina at their son Adika's graveside where they expect to perform the ritual of the shaving ceremony or the second burial as it were. The couple had only two children, both males and undergraduate students at Kafira University. Adika, a student leader is shot dead by police as students demonstrate against the vices of the regime, more specifically against the influx of foreigners. Adika's grave becomes a metaphor that ignites most of the subsequent actions in the play. The grave metaphor recurs for different purposes in *Game of Silence*, *Man of Kafira*, *Aminata* and *Shrine of Tears*. In *Aminata* for instance, the cementing of Pastor Ngoya's grave is used to both highlight and satirize traditional beliefs. It is noteworthy that the masons cementing Ngoya's grave introduce Aminata to the audience in their remarks about her even before she makes a formal appearance in the play.

In *Betrayal in the City*, one of the things that puzzle the couple at the graveside is that the grave has been tampered with and has a crack, an act that must be cleansed, according to tradition. The Maragoli believe that the dead are intermediaries between the living and their gods; and therefore tampering with a grave is a very serious offence that implies violation and lack of respect for humanity and the super powers (Olilo, 2002:63). The couple's other setbacks are: Jusper, who was supposed to guard his brother's grave disappears but when he re-appears, he behaves strangely like a mad person; the shaving ceremony becomes a political issue and two soldiers, Jere and Mulili arrive with an order to cancel the ceremony and take charge of the graveside.

Obviously, both Doga and Nina are shocked at this move to subvert traditional practices that have been integral parts of their lives. Rituals are activities that have social, cultural and moral values for the communities that uphold them because they provide solutions to their problems. (Olilo, 2002:4). However, Imbuga uses rituals not only as prime movers of the action in his drama but more importantly, to comment on the gender relations in society. The rituals take on a symbolic dimension that is quite different from their sociological meaning.

In the context of my study, the first aspect foregrounded about Nina in *Betrayal in the City* is her emotional state in contrast with that of Doga. She "weeps silently" as they approach the grave; but retreats in total shock at the sight of the grave and becomes completely helpless and unable

to comprehend the prevailing hostile political atmosphere (Imbuga, 1976:7). Thus, the female character appears to be the weaker of the two genders in terms of physical, emotional and mental resources. Doga is emotionally stronger and reprimands the retreating Nina, commanding her to come back and to “shut that mouth” (Imbuga: 12).

Evidently, not only does Doga seem to understand the situation better, but he also has a clue about the people responsible for damaging Adika’s grave. He is adamant that the ceremony must proceed as scheduled. His pronouncements are also precise and well thought out, marked by proverbs and sarcastic expressions. His soliloquy (9-10) that sheds light on Adika’s shooting and Jusper’s state of mind. On the contrary, Nina is more cautious and pleads with Doga to report the matter to the authorities and at the same time observe the aspect of tradition that requires them to first cleanse the evil act on the grave.

This contrast between Doga and Nina communicates gender differences and perspectives in this society. Doga’s commands to his wife and his derogatory outburst: “women will never think beyond the beds upon which they hide for the night” (9) show his low opinion of his wife and women in general and also portray him as a male chauvinist. Besides, the fact that Nina does not react to it depicts her as a submissive wife or in Emecheta’s words, “the good woman” (James, 1990:42). Whereas this creates the impression that Imbuga entrenches the patriarchal hegemony, if analysed in the context of Imbuga’s style of communicating pertinent issues through satire, as I endeavour to do later in this chapter, it could as well be interpreted as the playwright’s criticism of gender stereotypical attitudes in a patriarchal society.

Other female characters in the same play are Mercedes and Regina. Nuessel (as cited in Zola 2010) argues that those who give names often occupy positions of power and authority in their families. The name “Boss” means a person in charge of an organization or a group and makes important decisions. In the context of Imbuga’s play, Boss is the leader of Kafira and his name signifies excessive power and control. In order to assert his authority over his wife, Boss erases her real name and nicknames her “Mercedes”, “after the prized German car that he was driving” (Ruganda, 1992:8). In this way he makes her a possession, an object to use as he pleases. While

acknowledging this fact, Ruganda basically highlights that naming in the play is an aspect of Imbuga's strategy of "distancing of setting and dramatis personae" so "they cannot be offensive to over-sensitive politicians" (Ruganda, 1992:8). What Ruganda overlooks is that the dehumanization of a female character to such an extent is a debasement of the women that she represents. No doubt, Mercedes is conspicuously "silent" in the play, thus perpetuating the concept of other.

Gender stereotypes that are apparent in the play include the fact that Boss, as Head of State, is the focal point as opposed to his wife Mercedes whose role is completely irrelevant. She is only mentioned when Boss and other characters refer to her reactions to Boss's attempt to rape Regina. While Regina only narrowly escapes Boss's attempted rape, Boss finds nothing wrong with that but is furious that the incident is leaked to his wife, Mercedes. We do not encounter Mercedes in person but it is reported that Boss locks her up for complaining about her husband's behaviour (Imbuga, 1976:64). In this regard, therefore, Mercedes remains muzzled by patriarchal authority while Regina operates within the stereotypical structure of women's dependence on men.

Clearly, despite Regina's exposure to city life and her associations with the male protagonists, the writer reveals that in such a society, she still remains a female stereotype: she is innocent, naïve, gullible and only concerned with her own survival and that of her relations. She is first mentioned by her boyfriend, Jusper, at Adika's graveside, then in the prison cell in conversations between Mosese and Askari, and Mosese and Jere respectively. But it is the latter conversation that reveals her as the "other." Mosese, a university lecturer and prisoner of political conscience, finds Regina too soft for a prisoner's sister, as displayed by her decision to plead with the Head of State for her brother's release. Mosese is enraged by this weakness (30) and also at those who only watched in silence as soldiers beat up his "innocent sister" in order to force her to give information about him (32). He is infuriated that the soldiers had beaten up a woman, instead of himself, a man (32).

Evidently, Mosese's argument illustrates gender stereotyping and the concept of other in a male dominated society. The male character is expected to be strong while the female character is physically and emotionally weak. Tumbo, one of Boss's top officials, reveals in confidence Boss's ridiculous weakness for women yet, ironically, Tumbo himself sends Regina to Boss to plead for the release of her brother, Mosese. This presumed weakness is what Tumbo also exploits in sending her to Boss knowing very well that her safety is not guaranteed (48-49).

It is noteworthy that through Tumbo, Imbuga satirizes loyalty to Boss and the struggle for Boss's attention as aspects that are more important to the political elite to the extent that how their actions affect other characters, especially the gullible ones, does not matter. Tumbo's attitude towards Regina is reminiscent of male characters' uproar when Okonkwo beats his wife in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Men condemn the brutal act not in defence of Ojiugu as a human being, but because Okonkwo has violated the "week of peace" (Menzu 1995). Sadly, therefore, Tumbo exploits Regina's vulnerability and innocence for his own selfish gains. Regina's inability to reject his offer serves to portray her as too trusting and dependent, incapable of making appropriate decisions even at the risk of her own life. As a matter of fact, Jusper had earlier alluded to Tumbo's readiness to assist Regina as some sort of trap (Imbuga, 1976:41).

This stereotypical portrayal of the female character manifests itself further when Regina associates Jusper's university gown with revenge and pleads with him to give up and be content with the status quo (Imbuga, 1976:38). In the dialogue between Tumbo and Jusper, she is uncomfortable with the latter's forthright criticisms of the regime and constantly pleads with Tumbo to ignore him. Plainly, Regina is the complete opposite of Jusper and would rather just exist in the system if it guarantees her safety.

Equally, in *The Successor*, Kaliyesa, Emperor Chonda's wife, remains in the background and is majorly confined to the domestic space at the Palace. Chonda is assailed by several dreams of his late father, both in broad daylight and at night, a fact known to all the male key characters, yet Kaliyesa, is ignorant of her husband's mental anguish and how it is being manipulated by the Chiefs eager to succeed the Emperor. The explanation for this can only be that the issue is

politicized and hence achieves value in the public sphere as opposed to the domestic sphere. Manifestly, Kaliyesa is at her best in this latter domain when with humility and utter submission, she addresses her husband as “my Lord” and also when her maternal instincts force her to implore her husband to review his stance against the banished Jandi, for the sake of their daughter who has a soft spot for Jandi for rescuing her from drowning (1979:54).

In the same play, Vunami, Jandi’s wife is a “silent” character until the final scene, as opposed to her husband whose presence and importance as one of the protagonists is conspicuously felt right from the beginning of the play to the end, when Emperor Chonda pronounces him his successor to the throne. After her husband’s apparent banishment and Diviner See Through’s strategy to prove Jandi’s innocence, Vunami makes her first appearance in the play in a bid to plead with the Emperor to allow the professional divers of Masero to retrieve the ‘body’ of her husband. Her entry is announced by a Palace guard as “the Wife of the dead man” and later as “Ex-Senior Chief’s widow” (56). Her role here is to appeal to the Emperor’s emotions for the sake of her husband, again reinforcing female characters’ supportive role to the male characters.

Significantly, *Man of Kafira* (1984) develops the events and characters in *Betrayal in the City* (1976). It has more prominent female characters with Regina and Mercedes portrayed in different roles and as more “complex” characters (Chesaina, 1984:3). Regina is abducted and forced into a polygamous marriage as Boss’s third wife. Curiously, Mercedes who remained a silent character in *Betrayal in the City* is now a dutiful and supportive wife to Boss, the deposed Kafira’s President, in exile in Abiara, along with his family. Mercedes addresses her husband as, “my lord” and perfectly fits in her role as senior wife, much like Sadiku does in Soyinka’s *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963). While this is also true of Mizra, the second wife, Regina on the other hand is rebellious, vengeful and sarcastic towards their chauvinistic husband. The most important point being conveyed here is that Regina’s reaction demonstrates her rejection of the condition imposed on her as Boss’s wife who, like her co-wives, should submissively keep vigil on her self-conceited and almost lunatic husband at the expense of their children (1984.39-40).

Other female characters in the same play are wives of leaders: Amina is the wife of President Gafi of Abiara while Rama is the wife of Chairman Jere of Kafira. Apart from Rama who attempts to actively participate in the political issues of the State, all these women play subordinate roles to those their husbands. Tylor's (2003:308) observation that gender influences how we interact with each other and even how we evaluate ourselves appropriately summarizes the portrayal of gender relations in Imbuga's early plays.

At another level, power imbalance is exemplification through Imbuga's depiction of some injustices that female characters experience that portray them as victims. Women become victims when they experience pain and suffering due to forces beyond their control. Several works from different cultural backgrounds give credence to this argument. For instance, in a collection of short stories (Kabira, Karega & Nzioki 1991), Kenyan women depict experiences of rape, humiliation, violence, job discrimination, silencing, and forced marriage as illustrations of women's victimization under patriarchy.

Likewise, Mariama Bâ's (1981) protagonists, Ramatoulaye and Aissatou, exchange views on their predicaments in marriage. Odari (2007:23-31) points out that Japanese women have been viewed as submissive, polite and naive. Her study of women's literature in Japan with reference to the 'Kagero Diary' reveals that women of the Heian era used this form to express their painful experiences. Sophocles' Play, *Oedipus the King*, depicts a highly patriarchal Greek society in which a woman has no decision making powers regardless of her social status. After the death of King Lius, Jokasta the Queen simply obeys the decision made by her brother and other male elders to give her out to the man who has solved the riddle of the sphinx and thus saved the country from the plague. It does not matter that the new King is young enough to be her son, as it tragically turns out. In their classification of Setswana short stories, Mojalefa & Makgato (2007:148) identify oppression and ill-treatment of a female character as one of the characteristics of the phase of womanism depicted in these stories.

Corbett (in Zola 2010) argues that oppressive structures and social relations relegate women to a position of powerlessness and contribute to their susceptibility to social abuse by their male

counterparts. In Imbuga's early plays, the point to note is that two factors combine to portray female characters as victims of societal norms: firstly, female characters play peripheral roles in the plays. Secondly, female characters are, to a large extent, voiceless whenever pertinent issues are discussed and major decisions are made. For instance, in *Betrayal in the City*, Nina's pain is caused by the oppressive regime that has caused the death of one of her sons and the 'madness' of her other son; and that has also denied her the freedom to perform her son's second burial as prescribed by tradition. Similarly, Regina, who has endeavoured to remain non-confrontational within the repressive system, ironically becomes one of its serious victims when soldiers beat her to the extent of damaging her eardrums and when she greatly endangers her life as she jumps out of a ten-foot high window while escaping from an attempted rape by the Head of State (Imbuga, 1976:64).

Rape is a crime of aggression because the focus is on hurting and dominating (Shaw & Lee, 2009:563). It is a form of physical violence used to victimize female characters. Boss's action exposes his immorality and invites the audience to question his values as a leader. Moreover, as is revealed in *Man of Kafira*, the same Boss executes Regina's brother, Mosese, and can also be blamed for the mental state of Jusper, her fiancé. Finally, as Boss is overthrown, he abducts Regina during his flight to Abiara, forcing her into a polygamous marriage and a life of exile. Boss also frustrates her "first ever creative venture" when he destroys her "book of life" (1984:43). All these serve to expose the extent of the oppression of a female character by her male counterpart on the basis of her gender.

We can draw some parallel between Regina and Ada in Buchi Emecheta's *The Second-Class Citizen* (1994). When Ada's husband, Francis, attempts to stifle her creativity by burning her book, she is depressed and deserts him. The act of desertion depicts the African woman's yearning for emancipation and her efforts at conquering a wider public space (Fonchingong, 2006:143). In Imbuga's play, Regina agonizes over her situation to the verge of almost committing suicide. She develops a "fighting spirit" and becomes vengeful as she swears to do "something really big" to prove that she has been "a victim of circumstances" (Imbuga, 1984:41), a conviction she holds until she eventually stabs Boss to death. In this way, Imbuga

ironically empowers the female character to use her disadvantaged position as a tool for self-liberation.

In *Game of Silence* and *The Successor*, Imbuga highlights how the patriarchal discourse of desire (De Lauretis 1996, Selden, 1989) can be utilized to show how female characters become victims of their own quests as well as those of their male counterparts. Flora in *Game of Silence* becomes a victim of her love relationship with Jimmy, the son of the President. Although the author presents this relationship as an attempt to bridge the ever widening gap between the rich and the poor within the society, members of the ruling class consider this an unreasonable and unacceptable affair hence Jimmy's sister ends up fatally poisoning Flora who thus becomes a victim of the fragmented society.

Similarly, in *The Successor*, Zira is a victim of male machinations as well as her own quest for status. The play is set in the empire of Masero and introduces aspects of the African oral traditions that are vital in understanding of Imbuga's themes and techniques. Most of the action of the play takes place in or around the shrine and the palace. A shrine, generally known as a sacred place, is a recurrent feature in Imbuga's works, often used in ironic terms. Imbuga's play opens in a "lonely hut" referred to in the stage directions as the "remains of the shrine of the God of peace." This in itself indicates to the reader that peace is at stake in the society about to be presented. The writer further introduces Diviner See Through as the one in charge of the shrine. Although there is humour in his name, it also implies his role in the play as one that "sees through" situations and offers solutions.

Mbiti (1990:172) explains that in the African religions and philosophy, the functions of diviners are medical and priestly in nature hence they are "the agents of unveiling mysteries of human life." Mbiti adds that the diviners are respected and people "resort to them freely for both private and public affairs." In Imbuga's play, Diviner See Through is a prophet who can predict the future and plays the moral role of steering Masero back to the path of peace and stability through his steadfastness in championing the truth. All the characters, including the Emperor, consult him on matters that require wise decisions. His first client in the play is Zira, a female character

whose portrayal is stereotypical of a weak and naive village girl that desires higher social status. At her disposal are her beauty and her prowess at singing and dancing that endear her to highly placed men, including the Emperor himself (Imbuga, 1979:2, 47). Teresa de Lauretis (1996) asserts that femininity and masculinity in man's story are positions occupied by the subject in relation to desire. She observes further that these are positions "within a movement of narrative discourse that specifies and even produces the masculine position as that of mythical subject, and the feminine as that of a mythical obstacle, or simply, the space which that movement occurs" (1996:271).

Thus, Zira's portrayal in *The Successor* expounds the patriarchal discourse of woman as object and victim of desire in the same way as does Sidi in Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963). In Sidi's case the quest metaphor and her beauty places her between two men at opposite ends of the society's social strata, Lankunle and Baroka; and she submits to the latter's desire because she associates him with power and status that she also desires. At stake in *The Successor* is the initial lie that Oriomra creates around the need for Emperor Chonda, who has no heir, to name his possible successor from his three senior most Chiefs (read deputies), Oriomra, Sasia and Jandi. Oriomra knows that Jandi's "moral uprightness" (Imbuga, 1979:44) endears him to the Emperor and most of the citizens of Masero, making him an obvious choice for the imperial throne. But, in order to discredit Jandi, Oriomra embarks on intrigues to first lure Sasia to his side before eliminating him tactfully to remain the sole contender for the throne. As Ruganda (1992:60) rightly points out, Oriomra "sees it as his duty to appropriate all those who come across his path and to lead them subtly into his amoral territory. Oriomra and Sasia shamelessly manipulate and exploit Zira for their own selfish aggrandizements, to the extent that she ends up demeaning herself. Driven both by her own desire and that of the man, Zira initially consents to an affair with Chief Sasia and later uses her pregnancy as a bait to get him to marry her.

Zira's strategy at this point is twofold: firstly, it is to preserve her dignity as a woman in a community that highly regards marriage and does not approve of conception before marriage. The owl's hooting, a symbolic myth associated with bad luck ushers her into the shrine and Diviner SeeThrough wonders why she has sunk so low (Imbuga, 1979:2). Secondly, marrying

Sasia would elevate her social status in the society as “the wife of the number four man in the whole of Masero” (15). Zira actually asserts that had Sasia agreed to marry her two years earlier, he would now be second only to the Emperor himself (16). This reveals that in her naivety, coupled with an unbridled ambition for status, she associates marriage with power and prestige, contrary to the men’s attitude towards her as an object that can easily be used and discarded. Thus, she represents female characters that have accepted the fact that they can only gain importance in the society through their relationships with males. Indeed, when Sasia realizes that Zira is ready to retract the lie against Jandi and confess the truth and due to his own obsession with the prospect of becoming successor, he degrades her as a “good for nothing cheat”, a “[c]ommon woman” (48) and later stabs her. Seldan (1989:145) objects to the depiction of female characters as sex objects that exist only as the focus of male attention.

Clearly, *The Successor* dramatizes masculine power struggle with a woman acting as a catalyst, initially as a victim but later as a victimizer. Zira’s susceptibility is exposed when she finds herself entangled in the power intrigues of Oriomra and Sasia in their bid to eliminate Jandi from the list of eligible successors to the Emperor’s throne. Oriomra instructs Sasia to “coach her and let her sit on the egg as if it is her own” (1979:29). Equating his tale metaphorically to an egg that Zira has to sit on to hatch, signifies the urgency Oriomra attaches to Zira’s owning of the tale and convincing everyone that indeed Jandi has betrayed the Emperor’s confidence in him as a possible successor. In this power-game, the duo successfully manipulates Zira to accuse Jandi of incest, a serious crime in Masero, for which banishment is the minimum sentence (Imbuga, 1979:27). Ruganda (1992:66) describes Zira’s lie as a magnificent performance because she too is “excited about the prospect of becoming an empress.” Jandi himself declines to denounce the lie, referring to it instead as a story or a song with an ugly tune (Imbuga, 1979:43).

Both Jandi and Kaisia, respectively Zira’s cousin and uncle, consistently refer to her as a child during the court trial. While Jandi considers her as being “too young to know what she is doing” (1979:43), Kaisia on the other hand regards her as a “sick child”, a “little girl filled with demons” (44), and a “senseless little girl” (45). In their view, as members of Zira’s family, she is too naive to have come up with such a story without someone’s influence or instigation, hence

Jandi boldly tells the Emperor, “[...] lest you judge me prematurely, remember that this may not be my trial but yours” (44). It is the Emperor’s trial because, as we know, he has also fallen prey to Oriomra’s intrigues.

A number of important points emerge through this portrayal of Zira: first, Zira’s essence as a female character is subordinate to the dominant masculine ideology that exists in her society, right from the family level. Second, she has been socialized into believing that she can only gain status through marital bonding. This becomes her obsession, ironically robbing her of moral integrity and intelligible reasoning capacity, thus causing her public humiliation. Next, it reveals the political intrigues that some male characters would get involved in to the extent of even sacrificing their female relations. Finally, it draws our attention to the playwright’s aesthetic use of language to juxtapose truth and deceit, reality and illusion, good and evil, with Oriomra as the main architect.

Oriomra’s intrigues tend to be artistic due to his skill in manipulating language and circumstances to his own advantage while at the same time deceiving his victim Sasia that he (Sasia) is the people’s choice for the throne. For instance, he dramatizes Sasia’s inefficiency (23-24) not to assist in boosting his confidence as a probable successor but to lure him as an accomplice against Jandi. In this case even Sasia is gullible and as he partners with Oriomra to use Zira in their scheme, one does not fail to notice that he too is a victim of Oriomra’s web of intrigues. In the same vein, Zira’s portrayal tends to imply that through this play, Imbuga is conscious of the African male writers’ “heritage” that contributes to their negative stereotyping of female characters.

Strong-Leek (2001:4) argues that we must question the “patriarchal notion that devalues women so much that their feelings are not significant.” So far, I have focused on the roles of female characters in these plays and the difference in characterization that exists between them and the male characters. Illustrations drawn from Imbuga’s plays and other texts by both female and male writers have served to lend credence to the assertion that female characters are victims of male oppression and exploitation in a patriarchal society. To develop this argument further, it is

also important to examine the ways in which the female characters themselves respond to their roles.

Through his concept of heteroglossia, Bakhtin (Holquist 1981) acknowledges the diversity of voices in a text and considers the literary text as a fictionalized version of the real world in which language is an important element of identity. In Imbuga's plays, we can view female characters as voices that communicate to us something about the society. It thus becomes imperative that, as a very crucial instrument of subjective self-construction, we evaluate what the female characters say and how they view themselves in relation to others, and as members of their societies. To this extent then, in *Betrayal in the City*, for example, Nina's words and reactions at Adika's graveside reveal her despair as well as her inability to deal with the political dimension that her son's shaving ceremony assumes. She tells her husband, "My heart fails me. This is not our day. Let us get away from this place" (1976:8). Besides, while confessing that Juser is her only hope after the shooting of her other son, Nina laments: "If they should harm him, I will hang myself and raise a curse upon the whole clan" (8). She also threatens the soldiers who come to cancel the shaving ceremony, saying: "I will strip and show you the poor naked bones [...]" (14).

Nina's remarks display her haplessness and frustrations with the situation that her family is forced into. Thus, the curses and threats seem to be her only weapons to counteract these strong forces of injustice. Traditionally, an old woman's nakedness would be a dreaded curse to a younger person (Kabaji 2005), but in this situation, tradition is rendered obsolete as Mulili swiftly responds in his broken English: "How many naked bodies [...] I have seen and I am still Mulili" (1976:15). Moreover, Doga rejects Nina's suggestions on possible ways to tackle their dilemma, reminding her, as it were, of her inferior position traditionally, in relation to him. (9).

When Juser emerges resplendent in a university gown, obviously odd for this occasion, Nina becomes more desperate and pleads with him to "take off that thing" and wear a clean shirt (1976:11). By referring to the academic gown as "thing", Nina shows her ignorance and illiteracy, yet ironically she knows that the gown projects a combatant image that does not augur

well for the occasion. But at another level, this reference serves to further aggravate her frustration and helplessness in the light of their predicament. Mojalefa & Makgato (2007:150) cite ignorance of a female character in Setswana short stories as one of the concerns of womanism.

In *Betrayal in the City*, it is clear that Nina fears for her son who has become vengeful and looks “mad” such that when she invites Doga to join her in prayer, she actually submits herself to fate. The important thing to note here is that throughout this scene, prayer is the only suggestion from Nina that Doga finds acceptable; and he allows her to take the lead as he merely follows (1976:13–14). Thus, the spiritual power that the female character commands serves to contribute to the moral-thematic value of the play.

In the same play, Regina, a relatively younger and educated female character, also ironically refers to Juser’s gown as “that thing” almost thrice during their conversation in her house. Like Nina, she associates the gown with danger, and views it as something shameful to be worn in the streets. Thus, the two female relations of Juser, his mother and girlfriend have a phobia about the university gown since they believe it symbolizes Juser’s vengeance and conspicuously portrays him as a dangerous person. This depiction indicates the playwright’s sensitivity to fear and ignorance as common traits in the stereotyping of female characters, regardless of their social status.

Being conscious that Adika was shot dead during a demonstration by the University students and Mosese incarcerated for making a speech in support of the students at the former’s funeral, Regina considers the students’ actions a waste of time and pleads with Juser to be content with the status quo. Therefore, Regina and Juser as characters, display stereotypes of gender differences: while Juser is assertive, critical, politically conscious and reactionary; Regina is timid, fearful and focused on self-preservation in the midst of mounting harsh realities around her. She also demonstrates a female character’s complacency and lack of foresight by trusting Tumbo in helping her secure the release of Mosese from prison, despite Juser’s warning(Imbuga, 1976:41) that actually turns out to be real when Boss attempts to rape her.

In *The Successor*, as has already been stated, Zira projects herself as an ambitious female character that uses her body as a ladder to gain status in the society. Although, she argues that Sasia took advantage of her and made her pregnant, she gives the impression that she does not regret it as the pregnancy would compel him to marry her. In any case, Diviner See Through also urges her to get married at once to the right man (1979: 4). In her assessment, getting married to Sasia would elevate her social status as the “wife of number four man in the whole of Masero (1979:15). According to her projection, after twelve years, Sasia would be the Emperor and herself the “Empress” (17). Once married, she already knows that she is expected to be passive, as she states: “I am a woman [...] I won’t mind silence, because it will be different then. I will be your wife” (15).

Ironically, Zira’s own ambition makes her susceptible to manipulation by the treacherous male characters interested in their own ascension to the throne. Her worth as a human being diminishes while her pregnancy assumes significance as a motif that the two chiefs of Masero manipulate for their selfish intentions. Oriomra invents his own sub-text woven around Zira’s pregnancy to eliminate his two rivals in the succession to the throne. He succeeds in destroying Sasia’s morality and integrity and henceforth Sasia begins to view his lover as an object to use and discard. Zira’s pregnancy becomes their “chance” to out-manoeuvre their colleague Jandi, the likely successor to the throne (27). Zira also symbolizes the vulnerable but witty female characters being used by the playwright to not only question their treatment within a patriarchal context, but also to show the potential, although ironically, in the female characters to cause change of attitudes towards them in such a society.

Initially, Zira’s gullibility leads her to attach more significance to her pregnancy than her own morality. Hence, while she deludes herself with the possibility of rising to the top through marriage, Sasia, equates her reasoning to that of school-girl simplicity” (15). Similarly, Oriomra refers to her as a little girl that can be persuaded to dance when tree leaves are dancing (28); and, indeed she becomes an accomplice of Oriomra and Sasia in their scheme to implicate and eliminate Jandi (41-45). Oriomra cautions Sasia that she should be coached thoroughly to own

the lie and make everyone, including the Emperor believe that Jandi has actually committed incest and has to be banished from Masero in accordance with tradition. Zira's own words reveal her moral degradation after accepting to tell the lie: "That day is the ugly scar of my life, that day when I stood before the people and bathed my face in shame" (1979:41).

The important point to note here is the play's strategy in redeeming the image of the female character and bestowing upon her the reasoning skill that the male character has robbed her of. Zira's self-perception drastically changes at the realisation that she might have been responsible for Jandi's supposed death and therefore retracts her earlier accusation stating: "I need no prompting from anyone" (1979:59). This statement signals Zira's strong resolve to regain her dignity and independence to make her own decisions without the influence of the male characters. Her drastic transformation is also symbolized by the fact that while Sasia thinks he has stabbed her to death, she regains consciousness and even manages to out-run Oriomra to the Palace to make her confession. This moment marks Zira's journey to liberation and victory over her victimizers.

Man of Kafirais displays a similar development of the female characters. As stated earlier, Mercedes and Regina have completely transformed from the weak characters that they were in *Betrayal in the City* even as their characterization contrasts each other. Although Mercedes is no longer a 'silent' character, she still remains loyal and submissive to Boss. Like other female characters in the unfolding analysis, her 'voice' is restricted within the bounds of domestic space as Boss's senior wife foregrounded by her reference to him as her "Lord", a mark of loyalty and total submission to him. Her concern for her husband and family is revealed through her unsuccessful attempts to dissuade him from leading the family back to Kafira and her later condemnation of Regina for killing Boss. To this extent then, Mercedes's language reveals her as an intelligent character but because of her marginalized role, it largely portrays her as a victim of circumstances, one who has resigned herself to fate and is incapable of influencing change.

One of Imbuga's recurrent strategies is the polarization of two female characters in the struggle for liberation from their marginalized positions in male dominated societies. One can argue that

this approach serves to indicate the extent to which female characters have been deeply rooted in their gender roles that to transform such attitudes cannot be achieved instantly in the society. This then explains why female characters like Mercedes in *Man of Kafira*, Aunt Kezia in *Aminata* and Dora in *Shrine of Tears* are at loggerheads with fellow females struggling for their rights. Such female characters can also be found in Sembene (1995, 1976); Bâ (1981) and Emecheta (1982).

In *Man of Kafira*, Regina's transformation as a female character can be seen in her defiance and assertiveness that is sustained until she stabs Boss on their return to Kafira from exile. The quality of her language also drastically changes from that of conformity with the status quo that she espoused in *Betrayal in the City* to one that is highly symbolic and marked by images that have a bearing on the broader events of the play. For instance, her revelation that Boss has destroyed the "book of her" life that she was writing could symbolically refer to the fact that Boss has actually destroyed her life through the evils that he has committed against her. Her reference to Kafira as a "dark coffin" (1984:41) reveals the extra-judicial killings in her country. After stabbing Boss, her exclamation, "Boss has killed Boss," reveals her conviction that in killing Boss justice has been done because the atrocities that Boss committed, or were committed in his name, were so grave that he can only atone for them by his own life. It also justifies her earlier remark that, "When death is on my mind, it is life I seek to protect" (1984:37).

Regina is also more satirical, especially when speaking to Boss, and generally uses language symbolically and creatively, a reversal of the old order where it was the male characters like Jusper and Mosese who spoke in elevated language. At some point, Regina even uses a proverb, a symbol of wisdom, mostly associated with elders, in reference to her scheme to avenge herself on Boss (1984:50). The title of the play *Man of Kafira* is actually attributed to her own suggestion to Bin Bin for his story about Boss (1984:43).

A feminist reading of the depiction of female characters in Imbuga's drama as deeply rooted in the ideologies of their male-dominated societies and perceiving themselves within their predetermined roles would definitely place Imbuga in the category of male writers who have

created negative female stereotypes in their works. However, an analysis of the formal literary strategies that the writer uses in the portrayal of these female characters reveals that the characters are not created in fixed worlds, there are indications that, like women in our societies, they gradually mould their own independent identities. Thus, as I have expressed at the beginning of this chapter, our assessment of the roles of these female characters would not be comprehensive if we do not explore how they change and some of the important dramatic structures and techniques that the playwright has used. This is particularly important in view of the playwright's "dramaturgical strategy" embedded in his exploitation of "veritable strategies of distancing" and "avoidance art" (Outa, 2001:355-356) or what Ruganda (1992: 1) refers to as the "dialectics of transparent concealment." Ruganda (1992:6) puts it more succinctly:

One of the most thinly disguised alienational effects in Imbuga's drama is distancing. Yet, it is the most deceptive and, therefore, the most protective in societies that are sensitive to social criticism; deceptive because it temporarily conceals or disguises its intended victim, and protective because it facilitates the spectator's discussion of the stage event without undue fear of intimidation or incarceration.

Arguably, "this alienational effect," if not taken into consideration in the analysis of female characters in Imbuga's works leads to conclusions such as, by Ruganda (1992:92) that the shattering of the soil container at the end of *Aminata* signals "the ancestors' rejection of Mama Rosina's accession to the stool of rule," or that Imbuga would suffer immense criticism from male critics if he allowed a female character to inherit ancestral land (Jefwa, 2007:11). My views on Aminata and Mama Rosina as female characters in *Aminata* shall emerge in the next chapter. However, in the subsequent sections of this chapter, and indeed in the next chapters, I will demonstrate that Imbuga's alienational strategies require that, in Ruganda's terms, we get "involved in the drama intellectually rather than emotionally," and that we view the events from "a critical perspective, rather than to react to them frenziedly" (Ruganda,1992:6). It may also be useful to examine the dramatic structure that the playwright has used in the depiction of female characters.

3.3 Quest for space, identity and recognition

Inasmuch as I have argued that Imbuga's early plays that also constitute his major political drama examined in this chapter are about male characters as protagonists in the political domains, there is a strong indication that the female characters on the margins are gradually transforming from the silent, submissive and marginalized characters to stronger characters whose roles and discourses are much improved. Davies (1994) contends that although writers may simply be reflecting socio-cultural realities, the artist has the power to represent the role of women as they might be in the future.

A reading of Imbuga's works in the manner suggested by Ruganda, above, would lead us to uncover the illusion of reality that characterizes these works resulting in ambivalent depiction of female characters. Bakhtin (Holquist, 1981:324) refers to this technique as "double-voiced" discourse. "It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intentions of the character who is speaking and the rephrased intention of the author." Bakhtin also refers to this concept of voices in the text as heteroglossia.

As stated earlier, the strategies that Imbuga exploits in his works make it imperative for us to re-evaluate his underlying purpose in depicting female characters the way he does. Two questions are particularly central to this discussion: Is the writer propagating the patriarchal myths about women? Is he redeeming the image of African women that has been misrepresented in African literature by male writers, in particular? It would seem that in order to liberate female characters from negative stereotyping and different forms of injustices in fictional works by some male writers, Imbuga must first demonstrate the existence of such instances in literary works and in society. It is therefore significant to focus on how this "double-voiced" discourse manifests itself in Imbuga's works examined in this chapter.

In the first place, in *Betrayal in the City*, it is Nina's encounter with the two soldiers at her deceased son's graveside that foregrounds the moral and aesthetic dimension of her portrayal as a mother. Her mistreatment by Mulili leads Jere to a self-realization of the vices that they embody as agents of a repressive State. Jere sympathizes with the couple and pleads with his

colleague to allow them perform their departed son's shaving ceremony in vain. He confesses that Nina's emotional state has compelled him to denounce his position as a soldier at the risk of incarceration. He tells Mulili, "I looked in that old woman's eyes and I saw the futility of calling ourselves citizens of Kafira" (1976:18). In other words, Imbuga sensitizes his audience in general that female characters possess alternative sources of power that are very effective because of their quality to add value to one's life. Nina's other source of strength is that she is prayerful. Making a distinction between male power and female power, Chinweizu (cited in Chukwuma, 2007:3) states:

From a male-centred point of view of what power is, it is easy to be misled into thinking that a female form of power does not exist at all; and even when female power is recognized, it is easy to dismiss it as power of an inferior type, just because it is not hard, aggressive or boastful like the highly visible male form."

Thus, in Nina's case, her emotional state transforms from being a sign of weakness to a "female form of power. "Where Doga considered his wife weak because her emotional state, it is just by observing Nina's emotions and her helplessness that Jere transforms and confronts the harsh reality of the pain that the State subjects the citizens to. Consequently, he prefers incarceration to serving this despotic government. While in police custody Jere discloses to Askari (the prison warden) that his "experience during the last few weeks" has transformed him and made him feel so confident as if he had "been born again" (Imbuga, 1976:22). He instantly aligns himself with Mosese, a political prisoner and confesses that it is actually his experience at Adika's graveside that has awakened him to the realities of their society. He also reveals to Mosese and Askari how he "came face to face with reality" when he was sent to his "own sub-location to restore peace and order" and how it took him only two days to change his mind (1976:27).

In effect, Jere steadily undergoes transformation to the extent that he becomes a champion of the rights of ordinary citizens and together with Mosese and Jusper become agents of change in Kafira. They are the forces behind the coup d'état that sends Boss to exile as Jere himself ascends to the throne as Chairman. Thus, what Jere accomplishes can be attributed to the self-awakening lesson that he receives from his encounter with Nina, a female character. In this way, Imbuga's portrayal of Nina has a moral dimension and contributes to the aesthetic ideal and transformative role of the play.

In the same play, Imbuga's use of the technique of the interplay between reality and illusion serves to portray Regina as a trustworthy character, her relationship with the political dissidents, notwithstanding. To this effect, her power as a female character resides in her innocence, a trait that the playwright uses as a device to create an opportunity for the male characters to meet in her house and boldly expose the vices and weaknesses of the political establishment. Tambo, a government official actually trusts Regina and Jusper with some secrets of Boss's administration.

In this instance, Regina, as a female character, draws her strength from her innocence, an attribute that patriarchy regards as a weakness. Tambo's familiarity with Regina as his tenant brings him face to face with Jusper, Regina's boyfriend and university student, ironically considered dangerous by the regime that Tambo himself serves. The two are less cautious and we understand Kafira better from their dialogue that, at a different venue, would have been considered highly seditious. Tambo openly boasts of his wealth amassed through corruption as Jusper discloses the university students' displeasure at their corrupt and repressive regime.

In essence, Regina's house becomes the playwright's context to expose the regime's vices such as betrayal, corruption, oppression, nepotism, inefficiency, sycophancy, lack of transparency and accountability, bad governance and gross violations of basic human rights. It is also a strategy for the audience/reader to directly encounter Jusper and evaluate his views. Already, other characters think that he is mad, a state that Jusper knows and exploits to the extent that he is the only character that boldly and satirizes Boss and his Government.

What emerges from this encounter between Jusper and Tambo is that its success has largely depended on Regina, the female character, as the moderator, as well as on the playwright's manipulation of language through satire to conceal Jusper's real attitude towards the regime. Tambo actually admires Jusper's forthrightness and admits the weaknesses of the regime. He also learns that Jusper, a philosophy student, is also a writer, a fact that he exploits mainly for his own personal aggrandizement. Tambo reveals that the Government has released funds for playwriting competition to select the best play that would highlight some of the country's

achievements since independence to be performed for a visiting Head of State (1976:47). As the chairman of the entertainment committee entrusted with a quarter million shillings for that purpose, Tumbo intends to pocket a large amount of this money.

Regina also makes it possible for the writer to expose Tumbo and his role in Boss's Government. Tumbo's own remarks reveal that he is only interested in the wealth that he can accrue from the system as an individual: "If I had depended on empty talk when I came back from abroad two years ago, I would not be owning this block and that other one" (Imbuga, 1976:45). Tumbo's advice to Jusper to learn to fight for himself until his presence is felt before he can risk shouting for others (45) is also portray him as an egoistic person. His quest for wealth blots his mind to the extent that he fails to interpret the sort of literature that Jusper has in mind when he says that he writes absurd plays as the only way to safely get the truth across, with only a few things in black and white and the rest in darkness (51). In effect, Tumbo's incompetence reveals itself when he is utterly overwhelmed by Jusper's philosophical and figurative language about the sort of plays that he writes and why publishers consider them dangerous to publish (50).

Bakhtin "double-voiced" discourse again plays out clearly in this dialogue between Tumbo and Jusper. The reader knows that if given a chance, Jusper would use his plays to censure the Government. It is already a fact that university students had demonstrated against the influx of expatriates yet he sarcastically pinpoints to Tumbo that one of the greatest achievements of the regime since independence is the steady increase in the "number of expatriate professionals" that signifies the full extent of the Nation's "potential progress" (51). Coming from Jusper, this is unconvincing, yet Tumbo, carried away by the use of the word "progress", announces Jusper the winner of the proposed play-writing competition to "save the government a lot of money" that would have gone into the whole exercise of organizing a competition (52). Thus, Jusper satirizes Tumbo and the whole issue because he knows, as well as the reader, that Tumbo's approach is undemocratic. Yet, this encounter with Tumbo presents him with the opportunity that he has been looking for to take his revenge on the system for killing his family and to demonstrate his worth to his fellow university students who turned against him (68).

Manifestly, Tumbo is a corrupt and inefficient government official without a moral conscience. His strategy is that out of the six hundred pounds meant for the competition, one third is for Regina and Jusper and two thirds for “putting the record straight” (52). Regina on the other hand is stunned and is uncomfortable with the whole idea and this depicts her as a morally conscious character critical of the impunity displayed by Tumbo. Understandably, Regina’s source of power lies in her integrity; she would have preferred that Jusper wins the contract through a competitive and transparent process.

Nonetheless, this ambivalence in Regina’s portrayal makes it possible for her to bring together opposing forces in her house and initiate a common ground for them for the sake of the development of the plot of the play. One can categorically conclude that as a female character, Regina plays such an important role that paves way for the final scene in which Jusper’s play is used to hold Boss at ransom, to expose to him the kind of advisers he has and to bring him face to face with his own bad governance. This final scene is also the play’s climax in which Mosese, Jere and Jusper emerge as forces of regeneration, fighting impunity and thus negating Tumbo’s selfish strategy of putting self-interest ahead of that of the citizens.

In this final scene, Imbuga uses Jusper’s play-within-a-play to unmask Mulili as the villain, the embodiment of all the evils perpetrated by Boss’s regime. He has all along acted as Boss’s senior adviser who easily eliminates those opposed to the system. It also exposes Tumbo’s inefficiency; he makes no effort to acquaint himself with the details of Jusper’s play as long as it has the words “achievement” and “progress. Mosese actually tells him that their success has been largely due to his inefficiency, an undesirable trait in leadership (76). Jusper’s shooting of Mulili instead of Boss denotes the death of this regime and gives Boss an opportunity to make a fresh start having been provided with a mirror that has reflected “the real faces of Kafira’s front men” (76). We can rightly attribute this powerful ending of the play to Regina’s ability to bring together and mediate between two opposing forces in the state due to her virtues of tolerance and innocence.

Regina in *Man of Kafira*, as has been stated, is a completely transformed female character, having been violated earlier by the very individuals she tried to please in *Betrayal in the City*. As Boss's abducted wife in exile in Abiara, Regina is more defiant and vengeful. She is more intelligent; more informed of social and political issues of her country and admits that she has actually grown from the "young" and "inexperienced" Regina of Kafira (Imbuga, 1984:41). In the African traditional society, abduction was an acceptable method of marriage and women were expected to conform to it. Regina's rejection of this form of marriage is indicative of a female character's rejection of retrogressive patriarchal attitudes that deny women freedom of choice. Her fighting spirit can be linked to the play-within-a-play by the artists at the beginning of *Man of Kafira* where Helna and Desi dramatise women's plight as mothers and wives as they watch their men die while at the same time display their determination to "affirm life" (Chesaina 1984:28).

Regina's knowledge of events in Kafira makes her privy to important information that the audience requires in order to understand the missing links between the two texts. For instance, she reveals to Bin Bin that Mosese and Jere were incorporated into the new Government that Boss formed and Mosese was made the Prime Minister but Boss later turned against them and killed him along with many other Kafiran people including Archbishop Lum Lum, making Kafira, in Regina's metaphoric language, "a dark coffin in which the advocates of truth lie" (1984:41). It is also Regina who makes reference to the coup d'état that overthrew Boss, attributing it to the atrocities he committed. The playwright uses the dream device to expose how the killing of Archbishop Lum Lum disturbs Boss's conscience (1984:50).

Literary critics of Imbuga's works (Outa 2001; Ruganda 1992; Chesaina 1984) have essentially drawn a lot of parallels between Boss and Idi Amin Dada, one of Africa's most ruthless dictators in history. Amin was overthrown and went to exile in Arabia, which the playwright refers to, using the anagram, Abiara. The fictional Archbishop Lum Lum also parallels Archbishop Jonani Luwum of Uganda who was mysteriously killed during the reign of Idi Amin, in 1977.

Evidently, in keeping with global trends, Imbuga has created opportunity in his play for Regina as a female character to change, to a certain extent. Once Boss leads his family back to Kafira, Regina frees herself from his whims and creates her own identity. She publicly reprimands Chairman Jere for Jusper's condition and defies Boss's commands. In full view of everyone gathered at the palace, Regina stabs Boss and symbolically comments: "Boss has killed Boss" (1984:71). While this remark implicates Boss in his death by alluding to the atrocities of his own regime, it also signifies Regina's growth from narrow minded concern with matters that only affect her, to one concerned with broader issues of the nation. Thus, killing Boss is her way of liberating herself from patriarchal constraints. Boss's death at the hands of a female character is quite ironic and demeaning to him, as evidenced from his own reaction as he groans: "Oh no, not a woman" (70). This in itself is an indication that the patriarchal structures that oppress female characters are not fixed, they can be dismantled by the very same authors who created them in their literary texts.

It is noteworthy that Regina's method of liberating herself is by killing her male oppressor. Fictional female characters respond to oppressive situations imposed on them by their masculine counterparts in different ways. Some break out of depressing marriages in search of more fulfilling lives (see for example, Emecheta 1973; Mariama Bâ 1981; Nwapa 1990; Ibsen 1992, Ogola 2004). Others endure subjugation and remain in their marriages while others feel too aggrieved to the extent of killing their male transgressors, as Regina does in Imbuga's play. This category includes Tinka (Ruganda 1980); Zekeya (El Saadawi 1985); Firdaus (El Saadawi 1999) and Beatrice (Adichie 2003).

Chesaina (1984:2) notes that Regina is a good example of complex development of characters. (Olilo 2002) argues that Regina's killing of Boss is a noble and moral cause as it helps her to exonerate herself from Boss and leads to her rebirth into a world of morality. While agree that taking away of life in itself has a moral dimension and undermines the very principles that female characters' sources of power are anchored on, my premise is that female characters in Imbuga's early plays do not remain in their passive roles, they gradually become assertive, an indication of his acknowledgement of their quest for identity and recognition.

In *Game of Silence*, Emma, Raja's wife, is initially a passive character preoccupied with taking care of her husband and daughter but later gains her voice when her husband is arrested. As Raja is whisked away, she is the only one that protests and condemns the arrest as everyone else watches in silence (Imbuga, 1977:46). When her husband becomes a political prisoner and is confined in prison-cum-asylum, she is so inquisitive and critical of how political prisoners are tortured that she regrets why it has taken her a whole lifetime to experience the reality of their society (28). Her reasoning power increases and she engages in a verbal exchange about her husband with both Zumaka and Bango, the agents of the State. While we note the playwright's attempts to show that the female character does have some powers, we cannot yet conclude that Emma is well developed as a positive female character. She is still largely concerned with her kin rather than with the whole society.

In the same play, Raja's sister, Flora, attempts to shape her own destiny through her love affair with Jimmy, the President's son. Portraying Flora this way shows that Imbuga is sensitive to the increasing depictions, by women writers, of female characters that exercise their "rights of choice" (Chukwuma 2007). For example, writers like Flora Nwapa, Mariama Bâ and Buchi Emecheta explore how societal norms impose restrictions on the lives of female characters but through some of these characters, they demonstrate that women should be given a voice in marriage and other affairs that concern them directly (Chukwuma 2007). However, the difference in this case is that whereas these women writers portray female characters that are able to "reject societal norms" and lead "self-fulfilled lives," in Imbuga's play, Flora is killed in the process of fighting for recognition (Imbuga, 1977:37), an indication that the world recreated by Imbuga is not yet receptive to bridging the gender and economic gaps that exist therein.

It is apparent that with the depiction of Flora and Emma in *Game of silence*, Imbuga introduces a moral dimension to the plot of his play. Flora's death brings the people together and creates opportunity for the people's revolution at the end of the play. It is also Emma's conversation with Bango that sheds more light on the character of Raja and clarifies the real issues in the dream framework of the play. When Raja is arrested for attempting to kill Jimmy and for leading

the people's revolution, the playwright uses Flora's ghost in the courtroom to ironically reverse the verdict to "not guilty" (1977:51).

Flora's ghost also plays the symbolic role of restoring hope to Raja who feels that with the death of Bango, the embodiment of the evils of the regime, and his own release from prison, justice has been done. Raja therefore symbolically wakes up from his dream and physically re-unites with his people as he assumes "a new role of a pragmatic visionary" (Olilo, 2002:85). Significantly therefore, Flora's death reinstates a sense of solidarity in the people and as the play ends, the people sing and dance together to celebrate the end of the 'game of silence', the intimidation of innocent citizens, and to usher in a new era of freedom. As it will emerge in my analysis of Imbuga's dramatic structure and technique, the use of ambivalence as a strategy needs a deeper interpretation. Here, it is evident that Flora's apparition ceases to be Flora the female character hence their dramatic roles are different.

In *The Successor*, it is significantly clear that despite Zira's exploitation by the power-hungry male characters and her loss of dignity, she courageously re-examines her own conscience and makes a decision to publicly retract her lie. Like Regina, her strength lies in her moral conscience that would not allow her to sacrifice her human values. She undertakes to confront the obstacles that the male characters have placed before her and to take full control of her own life through the confession, even at the risk of losing her life when Sasia attempts to murder her (Imbuga, 1979:51).

Zira's determination to correct her initial mistake of allowing herself to be manipulated to tell a lie indicates that a completely new and different female is going to be created in her after her confession – a female character capable of making her own judgments and decisions and who would no longer be manipulated by males for their selfish gains. When Sasia insults her for her decision, she responds: "I expected that [...]. Now I can face the future and do what must be done" (48). This shows that in her new identity, Zira has a different quest: to be a champion of truth and justice. These, too, are value added strengths that we can include among the female

characters' alternative sources of power that contribute to positive transformation of individuals and the society as a whole.

Finally, both Amina and Rama in *Man of Kafira* are more assertive as wives of Presidents. They too seem to enjoy some degree of authority as both have the capacity to reason with their husbands. Rama, Chairman Jere's wife, attempts to integrate the private and public spheres in her attempts to support her husband's decisions. She is authoritative and acts like she too shares power with her husband. She uses the plural 'we' and shares in her husband's woes as Head of State. She is highly regarded by others and they believe that she has the powers to persuade the Chairman to accept her point of view. Her tendency to defend some of the Chairman's actions makes characters like Jusper perceive her as having shed off the feminine qualities that she initially had at the influence of her husband. Amina, on her part is capable of interpreting the mood of the people of Abiara and tries to persuade her husband, President Gafi to get rid of Boss. Apart from Segasega who interacts with Regina, she is the only other one who understands Regina and believes in her 'fighting spirit'. 'Amina is concerned about Regina's attempt to commit suicide to free herself from Boss therefore she desperately pleads with Gafi to allow Regina return to Kafira. In solidarity with Regina, Rama reasons with Gafi to understand that Regina has been forced into that marriage, as the following dialogue indicates:

- AMINA:** How do you think she feels staying with the very man at whose hands her brother died?
- GAFI:** There is absolutely no proof that Boss killed Mosese. The point is that Boss and Regina are here living as husband and wife. As far as the world is concerned they are happy (Imbuga, 1984:22).

Through Amina, Imbuga demonstrates the significance of the theme of sisterhood in the female characters' struggle for identity and recognition. Ironically, Gafi's response is also a form of solidarity with his guest in a way that is detrimental to women because it seeks to affirm patriarchal hegemony that these female characters strive to dismantle. Nonetheless, in their struggle for space and recognition, female characters in Imbuga's plays strive to identify with one another's plight as is also the case with Kaliyesa, Emperor Chonda's wife and Vunami in *The Successor*. Kaliyesa identifies with Vunami's 'pain' (even if it is only a strategy to expose

the antagonists) and together they console and nurse Zira, providing her with the support she needs in her path to self-liberation.

Generally, female characters in Imbuga's plays that I have examined in this chapter resort to human values that they possess to challenge the patriarchal structures that have marginalized them on the basis of their gender. These values also make them readily identify with one another's pain. Globally, women come together in solidarity on various issues that affect their gender. Feminism itself began as a women's movement in reaction to social conditions that working women experienced. Therefore, as a literary theme in works by both male and female writers, sisterhood or women's solidarity is important in shaping women's identities because shared ideas and experiences become very effective channels of growth and development.

For instance, Aissatou and Ramatoulaye (Mariama Bâ 1981) have a deep sense of sisterhood as they exchange views about their painful marriages. Sembene (1995) depicts a proactive women's solidarity that enormously contributes to the success of the workers' strike. Ramatoulaye aptly captures the significance of sisterhood in her letter to Aissatou: "My heart rejoices each time a woman emerges from the shadows" (Mariama Bâ, 1981:88).

3.4 Moral roles: regeneration strategies in Imbuga's early drama

One of the objectives of this study is to examine the themes that the female characters expound in Imbuga's oeuvre. A significant aspect of the societies that Imbuga depicts is the need for justice for the oppressed either at the individual, collective or societal levels. Mda (1995:184) cautions on the vicious nature of retributive forms of justice through the war cry that the 'Young Tigers' chant during the funeral of the residents killed in a massacre: "Our people shall not die in vain. Every death shall be avenged. "Regarding Imbuga's criticism of injustice in society, however, the writer strives to create a more harmonious society that respects the rights of each individual. To this effect, the need for truth, justice and reconciliation in society feature prominently in Imbuga's early drama as well as in some of his later works as prerequisites for change and the creation of a more integrated and humane society. Even where an individual has committed an offence, there are still indications that a window for rehabilitation and re-

integration is still open for such offenders. I shall focus on the strategies of justice and reconciliation in Imbuga's plays and the role female characters play in facilitating this moral course.

3.4.1 Female characters and quest for justice

Nina in *Betrayal in the City* is the first character to introduce the idea of 'justice' in Imbuga's drama. The assassination of her son, Adika, the politicizing of his death to the extent of denying the family the right to perform the traditional rituals at the graveside, the destruction of the grave and the arrest and torture of her surviving son, Jusper, all serve to paint a society that is both repressive and disrespectful of human rights. Concerned about Jusper's security, Nina laments: "He is our only hope, if they should harm him, I would hang myself and raise a curse upon the whole clan" (Imbuga, 1976:8). Traditionally, a curse is believed to be a way of invoking the wrath of the ancestors by older members of the community. It is believed to be a severe form of punishment that is meted out only in the case of very extreme offences. In Nina's case, it would act as a form of retributive justice, considering that her other son has been gunned down under mysterious circumstances that would require probing to punish the offenders.

When Doga discourages Nina from her line of thought, she still feels that they should at least report the desecration of Adika's grave to the sub-chief. This too would end up to be a futile exercise considering Doga's response through proverbs: "A mouse does not share a bowl with a cat" and "[w]hen dry thunder tears the sky before our eyes, do we forget the storm of yesterday?" These proverbs allude to the fact that the authorities are responsible for Adika's death and must also be responsible for the crack on the grave. It becomes clear to the couple that Chagaga, the sub-chief's brother, as an agent of the State, is the one who shot Adika (10). Ironically, Doga does not realize that he too shares Nina's quest for justice when in his soliloquy he entreats his dead son to ensure that his death is avenged: "Do not let them tempt you. Follow them to the bitter end" (10).

The point that the old couple's sentiments reveals is that justice is undermined in Kafira. Jusper makes the point more vivid when he eventually reappears at his brother's graveside. This apparent lack of justice becomes an extended metaphor that Imbuga pursues in this play through Jusper. First, we hear his prolonged laughter from off stage which strikes us as strange in his circumstances. Next his father, Doga (Imbuga, 1976:10), provides an explanation in a soliloquy:

That is the voice of the brother of the silent one. [...] they were our only children. When he heard of the death of his brother, Jusper *was never the same again*. He became *wild* at the funeral, singing songs of vengeance; then they came and took him away. Said *he was dangerous to peace loving people and had to be cooled down*. When they brought him back after three months, he was *no longer the son we knew* (Emphasis added).

Jusper's behaviour suggests his quest for retribution yet ironically he is the one arrested and tortured. But far from "cooling him down," his experience in police custody marks his turning point into what other characters view as 'madness.' It also entrenches in him overt hostility towards the regime, as his father laments, "he was no longer the son we knew. Jusper's actions in this scene depict a character who vacillates between sanity and madness. He has taken it upon himself to avenge his brother's death by killing Chagaga, the sub-chief's brother because no one else will do it. He justifies this action through a parody of a class-roll call when he states:

Jupiter! – Absent sir. Jusper! – Present sir. Justice! – Absent sir (11).

Imbuga uses this comical utterance to indicate the negation of justice in Kafira just as Jupiter is remote from the earth. Kafira is a repressive State in which even a funeral ceremony is censored. Mosese, an incarcerated university lecturer, describes to Jere the state of affairs in Kafira and the conditions at Adika's funeral:

The atmosphere was tense at the funeral [...]. A handful of politicians tried to turn the funeral service into a political rally. The service must not take more than ten minutes. The coffin should not be carried by students. Weeping in public is illegal for the academic staff. I couldn't bear it, so I told them my mind. The following day they came for me (29).

This description that is also a form of retribution concretizes the extent of repression in Kafira, where the regime even attempts to control people's emotions. Worse still, anyone who questions the establishment faces incarceration or death. Mosese is arrested for condemning the conditions imposed by the authorities at the University student leader's funeral but ironically he faces a trumped up charge of possessing illegal drugs. Mosese's arrest, Adika's murder and Jusper's detention and probable torture are all indications of a regime determined to manipulate the legal provisions to silence or eliminate its critics.

More significantly, Imbuga sustains this metaphor of the absence of justice and the quest for justice through the characterization of Jusper as a 'mad' character. The mad-identity can be seen as a strategy to circumvent the repressions of Boss's regime. Jusper vacillates between sanity and madness. As a sane person he avenges his brother's death by killing Chagaga. Jusper clearly states that his mission is to fight for justice and restore human dignity (Imbuga, 1976:11). In Kafira, a normal person cannot succeed in this mission hence Imbuga devises for Jusper the mad identity that turns him into a forthright and ardent critic of the State, enhanced by the red academic gown that he dons and the war songs that he sings.

The mad, in real life are unrestrained people who would voice their opinions with least regard to their surroundings. They are daring and can make comments that sane people would not. Therefore, the use of such a character makes it possible for the playwright to level discreet criticism without appearing to cause deliberate offence. The society and even the individuals targeted by a mad person's comments would normally only ignore such remarks and let the mad person get away with it, no matter how true it is. As a strategy therefore, Jusper's seeming madness gives him the leeway to ridicule the State officials like Tumbo. He also exposes the atrocities of the regime, ridicules its foreign policy to the extent that Tumbo himself admits that they all know the evils of the regime but are not as brave as Jusper to challenge it. They have all been reduced to sycophants in order to survive (47).

Jusper's forthrightness in his dialogue with Tumbo earns him admiration from the latter who pronounces him an instant winner of the imaginary playwriting contest for a play to be

performed for a visiting Head of State. While this act in itself exposes the kind of graft in the system, it ironically sets Jusper closer to achieving his mission. Imbuga draws Jusper closer to his quest for justice through a succession of situational ironies and satirical “double-voiced” utterances. Jusper, whose manuscripts have always been rejected by publishers, turns out to be the one commissioned to produce a play for the State visitor. The following dialogue vividly expresses the writer’s manipulation of language to satirize the political establishment:

Tumbo: What kind of plays do you write then?

Jusper: Absurd. It’s the only way to safely get the truth across. Only a few things are in black and white; the rest is darkness.

Tumbo: Just the kind of play we need for the great day: A play that will outline our achievements in black and white and ignore the dark side of the picture. Do you think you can write one for that purpose? [...]. What achievements would you highlight for example?

Jusper: You can’t run short of them. The number of expatriate professionals has steadily increased over the years, signifying the full extent of our potential progress.

Tumbo: Good, I am glad you think in terms of progress (51).

The “double-voiced” element is contained in what Jusper states as achievement yet these were the same reasons for the university students’ demonstrations that caused his brother’s death that he now seeks to revenge. It also exposes Tumbo’s inefficiency to the extent that he cannot accurately interpret Jusper’s satirical remarks.

Retributive justice is vital to Jusper and he intends to fully utilize the opportunity that has presented itself to him. Like Shakespeare’s Hamlet who is possessed by the desire to avenge his father’s death, Jusper will not rest until he has avenged his brother’s and parent’s politically instigated deaths. He recalls one of the dreams in which Adika nearly hit him for shaking hands with the sub-chief. He also feels betrayed by his fellow university students who stripped him of the organizing secretary portfolio for accepting to write the play and believes that, “if this play is a success, I will have demonstrated that determination is greater in worth than numbers” (68).

Thus, the Jusper that Tumbo perceives is different from the real Jusper who has been grossly wronged by the State that has, ironically, commissioned him to write a play. At this point,

Imbuga resorts to obscurity for the success of Jusper's play. Tumbo does not know Jusper's background until the final scene that constitutes the dress rehearsal of Jusper's play embedded in Imbuga's play, through the play-within-a-play technique. Jusper's play is supposed to be performed by political prisoners as a prelude to the release of six hundred prisoners. But Tumbo is not privy to the fact that the two main actors, Jere and Mosese, are in prison because of circumstances related to Adika's funeral and that they are in fact Jusper's allies. At the realisation of Jusper's real identity in the final scene, Tumbo's reaction is that of shock and disbelief: "Why did you not tell me these things before? [...].We have to keep it a secret" (68-69).

Boss too is trapped by the same obscurity. He attends the dress rehearsal in order to ensure that the play is perfect without the full knowledge of the identity of author of the script. Significantly, this final scene marks the first and only encounter between Jusper and Boss in Imbuga's play. The playwright consistently uses the same strategies of obscurity in the dialogue that ensues:

Boss: [...]. Who made you students spokesmen of truth and justice? What do you know about justice?

Jusper: Nothing, Your Excellency.

Boss: [...]. Take the second last time for instance. What was it they were protesting against? Speak out! There will be no victimisation.

Jusper: The influx of expatriate personnel into the country.

Boss: [...]. What do you think they gained by that demonstration?

Jusper: Nothing, sir.

Boss: [...]. A dead student leader and a senior lecturer in prison [...] no, no, the lecturer went in for a different offence. Not so?

Tumbo: [...], Completely.

Later Jusper explains to Boss the meaning of his play-within-the-play, *Betrayal in the City* (71-72). Although the play's meaning is extremely camouflaged and actually targets Boss and his chief adviser Mulili, Boss finds the explanation exciting as he seeks to prove that he is also a good actor who knows the difference between a comedy and a tragedy. He is pleased with Jusper's satiric response that his play is neither of the two but could be both because it is "possible to have a death that is not tragic" (72).

An important aspect about the character of Jusper in this final scene is that he is calm, and there are no traces of “madness” in his statements. The play-within-a-play takes place in a sealed-off room that he has arranged. He has written it, directed it and now helps to stage it. A few of its lines are scripted but basically it is an improvisation that largely depends on chance for its success: one of the actors falls ill and someone has to read his lines; Boss offers to take the role. The props are not ready and the guards are disarmed for their guns to be used by the prisoners, who are actually dissidents and therefore dangerous. In an earlier study (Mbewa 1992:73-74), I had quoted Hallet and Hallet’s *Revenge Tragedy Motifs*:

The play-within-the- play takes place in a closed room [...] controlled by the revenger [...]. No restraining forces that might block the revenger’s will are invited to enter it. *And justice will be done. Where in the real world, the crime had gone unpunished, in the play world guilt receives its due* (Emphasis added).

The emphasis here refers to the fact that Jusper’s is no longer just a scripted play; the improvisation integrates it with the conclusion of Imbuga’s drama when Jusper suddenly exclaims that he cannot believe that they have “done it on the off-chance!” (Imbuga, 1976:75). The astounded Boss cannot locate Jusper’s lines in the script only to be informed that “such lines are never scripted” (75) before it dawns on him that the play acting is over and the guns aimed at him and Mulili are actually a case of a palace coup d’état.

As I argued in the previous study, the play-within-a- play technique functions to obscure truth and enables Imbuga to work towards the climax of his play which brings together the protagonists and the antagonists. Momentarily, Imbuga introduces a new improvisation that serves to justify Jusper’s quest for justice. Mosese and Jere do not shoot their culprits instantly but create opportunity for them to realise their follies. Thus, in a session improvising a truth and reconciliation tribunal, Mulili is unmasked as the villain. Yet, in his desperate efforts to exonerate himself, he ironically exposes the evils he has perpetrated on behalf of the regime, incriminating Boss in the process:

- Jere:** Do you agree he [Boss] should be got rid of?
- Mulili:** Kabisa! One, he takes everything in his hand. Two, he spoil the economy of Kafira. Three, he rule too long. Change is like rest. Four, he kill Kabito.
- Boss:** Am I hearing right? Mulili? (To Jere) Shoot me. Spare me this betrayal. Shoot me!
- Jere:** No [...] we shall not shoot you. Kafira needs each one of us [...]. Our wish was not to swim in human blood, but to provide a mirror for Kafira (75).

The kind of “mirror” Jere refers to is the truth that has revealed the kind of Kafira’s leaders: illiterate, hypocrites and inhuman like Mulili; inefficient, sycophants and corrupt like Tumbo. It is a mirror that reflects Jusper as an innocent person turned into a sacrificial lamb by the state. A mirror that makes Boss realise that he has wrongfully incarcerated his citizens because, as he realises, he has no reason to shoot Jere. But as this improvised truth and reconciliation tribunal ends, Jusper grabs the gun and shoots Mulili but spares Boss. Jusper’s act of retribution, reinforced by the appearance of the ghosts of his parents to re-enact a scene similar to the opening one at Adika’s graveside, finds justification in his final statement that he killed Mulili on behalf of all the Kafiran people (77).

Four very significant points emerge in this ending of *Betrayal in the City*: first, Jusper’s fellow characters and the audience seem to agree with his remarks, hence exonerate him from guilt. Second, the death of Mulili can be interpreted as a symbolic purging of Kafira of the embodiment of its evils thus, paving way for normalcy to be restored in society and for Boss to repent and steer Kafira into the right path of regeneration. Indeed, the fact that Jusper only shoots Mulili and spares Boss points to us that he is advocating, not an overhaul, but a guarded change, a readjustment, rather than a revolution. Next, a new concept of justice that is restorative is introduced in this regeneration process where the offender (Boss) is given a second chance and is reintegrated into the society. Finally, the appearance of the ghosts of Doga and Nina emphasizes the fact that in the traditional African concept of restorative justice, the dead, or the ancestors become integral members of the society. I shall revisit this concept of restorative justice later in this chapter.

In the sequel to *Betrayal in the City*, *Man of Kafira* (1984), Imbuga still alludes to retributive justice with renewed intensity. In fact the entire play can be viewed as a revenge play

considering its focus on life and death, both at the beginning and at the end. It appears that the introduction of retributive justice at the end of *Betrayal in the City* was only short-lived and Boss failed to learn from his previous mistakes. The atrocities of his regime intensified, including politically instigated deaths of prominent citizens like Mosese, a minister and Bishop Lum Lum. Boss is overthrown and escapes with his family to exile in Abiara as Jere takes over the throne.

The first part of the action in *Man of Kafira* takes place in Abiara where Boss, living in delusion, orders a play to be performed for him. Thus, the play opens with a rehearsal of a scripted text much like *Betrayal in the City* ended with the rehearsal of improvised text. One notices that improvisation is a dominant motif in Imbuga's oeuvre. In this play-within-a-play, a wedding turns tragic with the death of two grooms. Taget and Grabio, spirits from the underworld on a revenge mission on earth order the brides to laugh at their dead grooms, lie next to them and resurrect them. Surprisingly, the two brides Desi and Helna, instead of resurrecting their grooms, give birth to two spirits that resemble Grabio and Taget.

The significance of this play-within-a-play is that it foreshadows the events of the play. The two spirits that the brides have metaphorically given birth to turn out to be fighting spirits that terrify Taget and Grabio, the hitherto agents of death. The lullaby that the brides sing for their babies is not an ordinary simplistic song in the description of the genre, but it turns out to be a war cry with the refrain: "our men don't die. They live forever" (Imbuga, 1984:21). A war cry that later strengthens Regina in her quest for retributive justice. But the war cry is not only applicable to Regina; as Ruganda (1992:25) states, it signifies a "deconstructive political statement by the oppressed."

As has been shown, Regina is the most wronged by Boss to the extent that when she stabs Boss on their arrival back in Kafira, the citizens seem to vindicate her retributive act, like that of Juser earlier. Their anxiety for justice makes them readily acknowledge Regina's remark that Boss has killed himself. Regina had actually premeditated the murder and planned to perform the act at the right time and place witnessed by an appreciative audience (Imbuga, 1984:30).

Game of Silence still depicts a society similar to that of *Kafira* and like *Jusper*, Raja is considered dangerous and strange (Imbuga, 1977:12) due to his reactions to the social and political conditions around him. But Raja's is a more complex psychological situation because he is disillusioned with the prevalent conditions to the extent that he takes refuge in the silence of his mind where he inscribes the characters of the play. Thus, Raja's mind acts as the microcosm of the world of the play. In this way Imbuga merges illusion with reality in the psychological setting of Raja's mind.

Bango, whose role is similar to that of Mulili in *Betrayal in the City*, is assigned by the State to spy on Raja and record his activities both abroad and at home. Raja has vivid and wild dreams about the evils of the society. He dreams, for example, that he is locked up, branded violent and accused of instigating a rebellion against the system (1977:50). The peculiarity of this dream is that when Raja comes back home from overseas where he had gone for further studies; he is actually confined in a mental hospital-cum-prison where he is to be observed and isolated from the citizens. Evidently, like *Jusper's* mad identity in the earlier plays, portraying Raja in this manner can be regarded as Imbuga's framework for indicting the political leadership.

In his dreams, Raja envisages a mock trial in which the verdict that he is guilty is already predetermined but ironically, the ghost of his sister Flora whose death he seeks to avenge, appears in the court room and reverses the verdict to "not guilty" and Raja acquitted. Here too, we notice the role of the spirits in the process of justice. The spirit of justice reverses the verdict to the extent that accusers become the accused. Zumaka, who has been in charge of the prison-cum-asylum turns against the system that he has been serving and finds it guilty of injustices committed against him as an individual and against the entire society. Consequently, he shoots Jimmy, the judge, and arrests Bango to account for all the evils of the regime, ironically referring to them as ghosts of justice (51).

Like in the previous two plays, harmony seems to be restored in society after the act of retribution. As the stage directions indicate, "Raja now wakes up from his dream and his sleep" (51) and as Emma informs him, the general strike by the citizens has contributed to the release of

all political prisoners, including Raja himself. Thus, it is possible to argue that, in Imbuga's view, all these instances of retributive acts are geared towards the establishment of a just society for all human beings.

3.4.2 Female characters' contribution to reconciliation and peace

As demonstrated above, restorative justice signifies forgiveness and reconciliation. It requires an offender to confront his or her deeds that had earlier caused suffering to others and caused a breach in the harmonious co-existence of individuals in the society. This argument is derived from the African Ubuntu philosophy geared towards respect between individuals and maintaining harmonious relations in the community. Ruganda (1992: xxi) quotes Imbuga's reference to the role played by African traditional artists:

The creator of traditional oral narrative [...] managed to educate the evil doer in society without making him [or her] feel uncomfortable unnecessarily [...], the performers sought to change society through persuasion and not through threats of punishment however well-deserved [...]. Even the wrong doers felt secure with the knowledge that if they reformed, they would be accepted back into the society.

The emphasis here is on the need to rehabilitate social offenders and reintegrate them into the society. In all the four plays discussed in this chapter, Imbuga draws attention to the need for forgiveness and reconciliation and the opportunities that individuals can exploit for self-reflection. At the graveside scene in *Betrayal in the City*, Doga's wish for Jere as a soldier is that God may open his eyes to the suffering of his people (1976:18). This prayer becomes a reality when Jere confesses to his fellow soldier Mulili that he looked into the old woman's eyes and saw the futility of calling themselves citizens of Kafira (18). We have already explored Raja's conversion from an agent of State against innocent citizens to a critic of the unjust system. In effect, Jere alludes to restorative justice in the final scene when he demonstrates to Boss the value of everyone's life in Kafira.

The elimination of Mulili, himself the embodiment of disharmony in Kafira, provides both the leaders and the citizens with the opportunity for forgiveness and reconciliation. The appearance of the ghosts of Nina and Doga to replay the first scene not only signifies that their spirits have

been appeased and restored to be in harmony with the community, but also serves to symbolize a new beginning.

Similarly, in *Man of Kafira*, once Regina has killed Boss, only Mercedes and Mizra seem to challenge her but the citizens of Kafira that have been pressing for justice seem to share in Jusper's rejoinder that "Boss has killed Boss" (Imbuga, 1984:71). But the most significant aspect of this final scene is that calm is restored in Kafira as Regina re-unites with Jusper. Through this re-union of these two characters who have been concerned about the plight of their people under Boss's repressive regime, the play presents a model of desired leadership that would gear society towards the right path of reconciliation and restoration of harmony. Worth noting is that it is a model that values the contributions of both male and female characters.

What is pivotal in these plays is the need for social and political change for a more cohesive society where, as Jere says, "these events that now take place need not be repeated" (Imbuga, 1976:76). The ending of *Game of Silence* echoes these sentiments when ordinary citizens hold a successful peaceful revolution followed by reconciliation. In *The Successor*, Zira's confession serves to educate the Emperor and the people of Masero on the virtues of good leadership as it also helps to expose power-hungry and inhuman characters. Besides, it helps to solve the Emperor's agony of identifying his successor from among his senior chiefs, thus relieving him of the nightmares that have characterized his life. The Diviner had not only told him that naming his successor would put an end to his sleepless nights, but also warned him to beware of some of his advisers (Imbuga, 1979:38-39).

Emperor Chonda's statement to Jandi appropriately summarizes the state of balance that is restored at the end of the play and Jandi's democratic leadership that is alluded to: "Permit us to rejoice with you in your victory against the intrigues of the devil" (Imbuga, 1979:65). This remark is also relevant to Zira in her victory over male manipulations. In this final scene she spits in Oriomra's face who turns away to hide his "shock and shame." Zira achieves victory as a female character by reversing roles with her former transgressor who then becomes the object of contempt. Zira's confession serves to elevate her position as she is publicly forgiven by other

characters that she had offended. At this point, the playwright symbolically integrates both retributive and restorative justice to punish evil and reward good respectively, for the advancement of society.

3.5 Dramatic structure and technique: female characterization strategies

The foregoing analysis of the portrayal of female characters within the patriarchal context in Imbuga's early plays has revealed the writer's sensitivity to the subordination of and discrimination against female characters as a result of the influence of patriarchal structures in the African societies. This kind of depiction has been mainly attributed to male writers with the exception of only a few who have demonstrated gender sensitivity in their portrayal of female characters. The essence of this study is that in addition to feminist criticism of these works it has also applied the tools grounded within the nature of literature itself to assess the significance of using some literary techniques in the depiction of female characters. It is for this reason that the study finds it important to examine the dramatic structure and technique that Imbuga uses to portray female characters in these plays.

In the first instance, the playwright uses dramatic structures that have very minimal room or none at all for the characters to change. Two of these are the climactic and the episodic play structures. Imbuga uses the climactic play structure in *Betrayal in the City* and *Game of Silence* to represent female characters as mothers, wives and lovers. This structure depicts characters that are already grown and does not provide background information on how they have grown to be what they are. Their roles instantly lead to the climax of the events of the plays without them undergoing any significant change as characters. The episodic play structure, on the other hand, offers some scope for a character's growth and development and Imbuga uses it in *The Successor* to present significant change in Zira. However, in *Man of Kafira*, the writer seems to combine the two structures in addition to the *Deus ex machina* technique in depicting Regina as an ambivalent character. While Regina seems to have a clear focus of her rights as a female character, her quest for revenge that makes her eventually commit a crime in order to liberate herself deprives her of the dignity she could have attained if she had used a more acceptable means.

In summary, a survey of male characters' attitudes towards female characters in these plays, particularly with regard to some of their derogatory remarks, could easily elicit a feminist perspective in the analyses of the works. Such a reading can lead to the conclusion that Imbuga is yet another male writer who has presented us with negative gender stereotypes. In my preliminary interview with the writer, I sought to find out why his male characters use derogatory language towards girls and wives but are more respectful to mothers and grandmothers. His response was:

We cannot run away from the truth. That is how society is, especially at the time I wrote those books. But there are many things that inform the interpretation of a text. I hope you find that writing like that does not mean that I endorse that view.⁴

With this in mind, my investigation of the depiction of female characters within the patriarchal context in Imbuga's early plays has served several functions. In the first place, it has examined Imbuga's presentation of female characters in a variety of roles through strategies that challenge patriarchy and its attendant perpetuation of discrimination against women. It has also enhanced the appreciation of these plays by focusing attention on female characters' response to their situations. This is significant because female characters deceptively play peripheral roles in these political plays hence most scholars of Imbuga's works have tended to pay more attention to the male protagonists and antagonists in relation to their social, economic and political roles. A comprehensive analysis of these female characters creates awareness on the value added forms of power that they possess and their significance in enhancing the aesthetic value of the texts as well as their interpretation. For example, the climax of all the four plays can be attributed to the roles played by the female characters.

At another level, the analysis also reveals that despite Imbuga's attempts to redefine the social status of female characters in the literary texts and in the society, these female characters do not achieve total freedom; they have merely begun to gain self-confidence in male dominated societies. What this means is that the dramatist has used his plays to sensitize society to the fact that patriarchal structures are deeply rooted and cannot be dismantled through a drastic process.

Complete transformation is a gradual process since, to borrow Ngugi wa Thiong'o's words, both men and women need to "decolonize" their "minds" through intensive gender relations programmes.

With this awareness of the changing roles of female characters in literature and those of women in the African societies, in the next chapter I examine Imbuga's response to feminism through his depiction of female characters in *Aminata* (1988) and *The Burning of Rags* (1989) and the literary strategies that he adopts as he strives to achieve complete transformation of the status of female characters in his works.

Chapter Four

Imbuga's Feminism in *Aminata* and *The Burning of Rags*

4.1 Introduction

Having explored how Francis Imbuga has exposed and challenged patriarchy and its marginalization of women in the African society, this chapter focuses on the evolving depiction of female characters in Imbuga's later plays. The plays analysed in this chapter are *Aminata* (1988) and *The Burning of Rags* (1989), a revised version of *The Married Bachelor* (1973). Revised soon after the publication of *Aminata*, the most significant aspect of *The Burning of Rags* is the inclusion of the theme of feminism.

Three things are striking about *Aminata* that are crucial to its interpretation: firstly it is Imbuga's first play that has a female protagonist. Secondly, it predominantly addresses pertinent issues affecting women in the society. Lastly, it was produced ostensibly to depict the objectives and theme of the United Nations Decade for Women Conference, held in Nairobi, Kenya, on July 15-27, 1985. The play that was also supposed to entertain Kenyans and the delegates to the Conference was premiered at the Kenya National Theatre, Nairobi, on July 16, 1985.

Why then would a male writer (Imbuga) be approached and depended upon to produce that all important play for the auspicious global Women's Conference? How best would he articulate women's issues? Notably, at that time, Micere Mugo was the only Kenyan female to have produced a play, which nonetheless was co-authored with Ngugi wa Thiong'o, a prominent male writer. Questions that emerge are: how successful was Imbuga in elucidating the objectives and theme of the women's conference? What other issues does his play raise? To what extent does the play express the playwright's vision of the changing roles of women in society?

More than two decades later, all these questions still remain valid particularly in Kenya as citizens begin to come to terms with the clauses that affect women in the 2010 Constitution. Thus, some in-depth re-reading and re-examination of *Aminata* need to be undertaken, both within the context of Imbuga's earlier and later works and within the play's socio-cultural and historical contexts, with a view to identifying the best possible answers to these questions. As a

male writer who, through this play, ventures deeper into feminism, it is important to investigate Imbuga's response to feminism and womanhood in his portrayal of female characters not only in this play but also in his subsequent publications.

While *The Burning of Rags* is explicitly set in Kenya, *Aminata* is set in a fictional village called Membe. Nonetheless, the issues both plays deal with are modelled on the experiences of both men and women in the rural and urban communities of Kenya. In fact, Imbuga has endeavoured to establish universal contexts for most of his works through the use of several strategies thereby distancing them from the Kenyan scene. Yet, one cannot disregard the fact that certain aspects of *Aminata* are drawn from Kenya. One of the characters, Dr. Mulemi, makes reference to 'mother Kenya' (1988:31), while the village elders, Midambo and Amata discuss a trip to the city (1988:52-3). The city here must therefore be Nairobi, being the only city in Kenya at the time. Indangasi (2002) identifies a number of Luhya names and those others drawn from other Kenyan communities in the play, and presents a detailed analysis of the play's setting. For instance, he explains that Imbuga himself hails from Vamembe, a sub-clan of the Vamasero. The name of the location of the play could have been crafted from that.

Ngugi (1981) argues that a writer responds to a social environment that changes all the time, and that the writer's responsibility is to creatively capture the social, political and economic realities in the society and how they affect social relationships. In this chapter, I focus on Imbuga's conceptualization of the evolving image of women in Kenya through his portrayal of female characters in *Aminata* and *The Burning of Rags*. I begin the analysis by providing brief information on the changing status of women within the social, economic and political developments of Kenya, taking into account the strategies that the Kenyan Government has tried to adopt since 1985 to cope with the changing global trends on the position and role of women. Ultimately, I examine the challenges that Imbuga highlights in *Aminata* and *The Burning of Rags* that are interwoven with the challenges that women in Kenya's communities have faced in the different phases of the country's history.

4.2 *Aminata* (1988) as response to the UN Decade for Women (1975-1985)

The United Nations and its agencies have paid special attention to issues concerning women and gender equality in order to sensitize all countries around the globe on the need to discard all practices that lead to the discrimination against women. This should in effect pave way for the equality of men and women. Since the 1945 Charter, the UN has engaged in myriads of activities across the world geared towards sustaining its commitment to gender equality. The 1985 UN Decade for Women Conference in Nairobi whose theme was equality, development and peace, set out to appreciate the progress made so far. The Conference ended with the ratification and adoption of what were referred to as Forward Looking Strategies to ensure that women's issues are closely monitored globally.

Delegates from 160 countries of which 106 were headed by women attended the Conference. 160 groups also attended the forum for Non-Governmental Organisations; so in total, over 14,000 women from different countries converged in Nairobi, Kenya. At the conclusion of this conference, the delegates realised that although patriarchy may subordinate women all over the world, Western feminisms' model of global sisterhood may not be applicable to the rest of the world, hence transnational feminism, a more heterogeneous and flexible model that recognizes different experiences of women based on historical and cultural differences was embraced (Shaw & Lee 2009:52-53).

Aminata clearly demonstrates this new feminist model by contextualizing rather than generalizing women's issues while at the same time remaining relevant to the global concerns. The play's dominant theme is women's liberation and includes motifs such as gender equality, family planning, education and land inheritance. Although the play is set in a rural community, it also offers some glimpses of urban life, especially changes that have come with modernity and women's empowerment. The use of devices such as juxtaposition, song and dance, humour and irony, serves to create interest and sustain attention in the drama. Strikingly, the dramatist still retains satirical tone and ambivalence in the portrayal of characters and situations in the drama. This accords the audience a series of interpretations and a deeper understanding of his vision.

Aminata was positively received during its premiere performance and according to Margarreta wa Gacheru (cited in Ruganda 1992: xx), it highlighted the third world literate professional women's predicament of accommodating the old while assimilating the new. Ndegwa (cited in Ruganda, 1992: xx)), writing after the publication of the play, commended Imbuga for clearly stating the positive role of women in modern Kenya and for having made women aware that they should not succumb to traditional views that would diminish their existence and usefulness.

Nevertheless, since the play has been performed and the text read and critically analysed at different levels of academia, its depictions of both male and female characters in relation to the transformed roles and status of women in the modern society require much broader interpretations. In this chapter, I conduct an in-depth analysis of gender relationships within the two plays, determining to what extent these depictions have been shaped by the socio-cultural contexts of the plays. I also examine the socializing institutions such as the family, marriage and social and cultural structures of the communities to highlight the challenges that the changing roles pose to both men and women.

4.3 Imbuga's satire on the position of female characters

In the previous chapter, I examined female characters as victims of social norms and patriarchal violence in a more generalised manner. But these two plays, particularly *Aminata*, more elaborately explore negative socio-cultural attitudes and poor socialization that cause gender stereotyping and women's subjugation. *Aminata* presents us with a pervasive patriarchal society in which female characters have deeply internalised their marginalized roles to the extent that the characters themselves castigate efforts by the more enlightened of their lot to fight for equality. It is imperative that we examine the playwright's view of the structures that hinder women's progress and his perspective on women's equality.

Membe, the rural setting of *Aminata* and *the Burning of Rags* is a male dominated community. Domination "constitutes a special case of power" whereby power "is synonymous with control, influence, steadfastness and command" (Ngezem in Kandji, 2006:152-153). The issues of dominance, power and subordination and how these affect individual characters are clearly

depicted in both plays. In *Aminata*, Imbuga contextualizes the themes that the Women's conference set out to deal with by drawing attention to the tensions and conflicts in Membe village, modelled on certain communities of Kenya.

The characters in the play represent different cadres of people in both rural and urban African societies. Their depictions are hinged on the socio-economic forces that create distinctions based on gender and status. One category has the educated male and female characters, professionals and more responsive to change, represented by Aminata, the protagonist, Dr Mulemi, her husband, and Joshua, her brother pursuing further studies abroad. The others are those that have grown in the traditional ways of their community, but have abandoned their erstwhile beliefs and customs, with the advent of Christianity. Thus, for example, such characters have embraced the teachings that condemn their traditional ways. This category is represented by the late Pastor Ngoya, Aminata's father and village elder, only made reference to or appears as a memory, in flashbacks. The other group of characters is the traditional elders who constitute the village council of elders, a major decision-making body and custodian of traditions governing the entire community. Jumba, Pastor Ngoya's brother, is the village headman whose authority is symbolized by the traditional stool, sat on specifically by the male elders and a taboo for women to sit on (Kabaji 2005).

A different category of characters include the reckless drunkards and irresponsible males who not only subject their wives to domestic violence, intimidations and harassment, but also regard women in general as inferior. Ababio, Aminata's brother, belongs to this category; while the marginalized males are represented by Agege. Others are the youth group and the villagers like Mama Rosina and Nuhu who are ready and willing to embrace change. But more significantly, there is the whole stratum of illiterate villagers, deeply entrenched in their traditional beliefs and customs which undermine female characters. Aunt Keziah belongs to this category of villagers.

The point to note is that all these characters are integral to the development of the plot of the play centred on the role and position of women at the grassroots level and the challenges that the educated and professional African women encounter in the patrilineal socio-cultural milieu. The

society's organizational structure is such that the leadership of the village is entrusted to the elders who constitute the council and who make all crucial decisions of the community. The Council is headed by one of the elders referred to as the village headman and who sits on the stool of rule for a defined period reserved for his family before relinquishing it to a member of a different family.

An outstanding feature of this socio-cultural set-up is strict adherence to tradition that also governs the people's relationships. Important among these are belief in the power of ancestral spirits and rituals associated with different rites of passage and taboos. Jumba warns Nuhu that their ancestors "are red eyed when they run out of patience" (1988:14). After the cementing of the late Pastor Ngoya's grave, Mama Rosina cautions Jumba against disregarding his dead brother's wish (1988:4). Ironically, it is the same reverence for the spirits that makes Jumba decide to cement Pastor Ngoya's grave in the belief that it would intern Ngoya's ghost.

Writing about the Maragoli of Western Kenya that is also the social and cultural context of some of Imbuga's works, Kabaji (2005) posits that members of the same clan paid private respects to the dead and made sacrifices to the ancestors beseeching them to help solve societal problems. In addition, he states that male circumcision was and still is an important event in the Maragoli calendar. This significance attached to circumcision is aptly demonstrated in some of Imbuga's works. The major conflict in *The Burning of Rags* is about Yona's circumcision complete with all the rituals that culminate in the burning of the boy's old clothes and the final washing of the wound. In *Aminata*, while delineating the significance attached to the ancestral tree that the Christians uprooted to pave way for the Church, Jumba asserts that the tree was sacred because it grew at the very spot where Membe, the father of their clan was circumcised (1988:15).

Kabaji (2005) further notes that the Maragoli acquired their close-knit social fabric through the associations and age sets created at the time of circumcision. Imbuga alludes to this bond in his oeuvre. In Imbuga's novella/children's story, *Kagai and her Two Brothers* (1995), Magomere's family travels from town to their rural home in Maragoli for the initiation of their two sons. Although the boys have already been circumcised in hospital, they have to take part in other

ceremonies that complete the actual initiation, including each of them choosing and being bonded to a friend from a different home.

In *Aminata*, Jumba who is in conflict with Aminata over the piece of land bequeathed to her by her father discloses his frustrations to Nuhu and remarks, “I only opened the door of my mind to you as my partner on the day of our manhood (read circumcision) (1988:16). Doga in *Betrayal in the City* reminds Jere of the need for the younger generation to respect the age mates of their fathers since they “shared the same knife at circumcision”(1988:15).Kabaji (2005) expounds that among the Maragoli, the age grades provided the base for social solidarity and members of various age sets supported one another in everyday activity.

But where does all this leave the female character? The structures of most Kenyan communities denied women access to decision making processes (Oduol & Kabira 1995:193). In Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* based on the Igbo culture of Nigeria, Okonkwo commands his eldest wife: “Do what you are told, woman [...]. When did you become one of the *ndichie* [elders] of Umuofia?”(1958:10-11), reflecting what Konate (2006) interprets as master and slave relationship.

Anderson (1997:284) states that patriarchy involves many social institutions that regulate and determine the nature of women’s lives. In *Aminata*, there are taboos governing the place of women in the society. For instance, the female characters know that leadership, symbolized by the stool is exclusively in the men’s domain such that when Jumba decides to resign from the stool in favour of his wife, Mama Rosina is quick to remind him, “I am a woman, have you forgotten that?”(Imbuga, 1988:68).They also know that men own property in Membe and so Aunt Kezia accuses Aminata of overstepping her limits as a woman, asserting that a man’s stool “is not for women’s buttocks” and wonders why Aminata is fighting to inherit her father’s land (1988:34). Unknown to Kezia is the fact that Aminata too is well aware of this, such that when her father insists on bequeathing her a piece of land, her immediate reaction is to remind her father that women do not inherit land from their fathers (1988:47).

Therefore, the rural female characters in the play are so indoctrinated with the taboos that also dictate gender roles to the extent that they have passively accepted their subordinate positions in the society. Yet the challenge that the play presents to the proponents of women's liberation is that women in the African rural communities face more complex gender issues that should not be ignored if the cause were to be successfully realized. A number of Kenyan communities have taboos that restrict women's participation in various activities. Some of the taboos relating to women among the Maragoli that Kabaji (2005) identifies and are also reflected in *Aminata* are:

- A woman should not sit on her husband's chair.
- A woman should not serve chicken from the man's pot
- A woman should not eat chicken or egg.

Thus, in the following section, I explore aspects such as the family, marriage and religion and their roles in moulding the perceptions of female characters in Imbuga's plays.

4.4 The Girl-child in *Aminata*: roles and attitudes

As I have already established, inheritance and property rights are core issues in the African society. These are also the central issues in *Aminata* where the playwright dramatizes gender roles in an African context through the microcosm of the fictitious Nyarango family and its extended family members. Parents have the important duty of shaping their children's attitudes positively or negatively towards gender issues in the society. In the traditional society, boys and girls learnt their roles from the older male and female members of their families respectively. It is also in the family where boys and girls are first socialized into the dynamics of power and dominance. Children realise that the older members have more access to power over them, but girls and women in particular, "feel the consequences of masculine power and privilege in the home and family" (Shaw & Lee, 2009:387).

Chinua Achebe's earlier works offer very good examples of the role of the family in the socialisation process of both boys and girls. Achebe portrays polygamous families and the special position the man occupies as head of family and whose status in the community is enhanced by the number of wives and children he has. Okonkwo is contemptuous of his father, Unoka for not being wealthy due to laziness so he sets out to succeed where his father has failed.

He strives to acquire all the five titles conferred on the most prominent men in the community. Okonkwo is disappointed that his own son, Nwoye, has 'feminine' inclinations and is very much like his own father, hence, he prefers his intelligent daughter, Ezinma, and wishes that she were a boy (Achebe 1958). Nonetheless, Ezinma, just like Obiageli (Achebe 1964), is taught her roles as a girl-child in the family, including how girls sit, where they eat from and the chores they are expected to perform.

Similarly, Sembene (1995) portrays the socialisation of nine year old Adjibidji. The girl-child is brought up by her father as the prototype of a new generation of African women who are intelligent and capable of making decisions and independent judgments. Bakayoko, unlike Okonkwo, likes his daughter for what she is, irrespective of her gender. Adjibidji's mother and grandmother are initially uncomfortable with the fact that the girl attends men's meetings, but they later realize that the strike that their people are involved in has brought with it enormous changes. Kadidi and Daisy in Imbuga's *Shrine of Tears* (1993) and *Miracle of Remera* (2004) respectively, belong to this new breed of the girl-child.

Ogola (1994) conceptualizes a family set up in a patriarchal African society through Chief Odera Gogni's home, in Luo Nyanza of Western Kenya. In this community, there is an obvious preference for boys to girls. The Chief delights in the fact that he has sired seven sons and already expects the new-born baby to be a boy. However, as it turns out that the baby is a girl, the Chief begins to appreciate the reality. Ogola uses her novel to dispel the myth among the traditional Luo community that a boy was preferred for the continuity of the clan (1994:13). In this text, the girl-child prospers and as a woman becomes an inspiration to her daughters and granddaughters who excel and even perform better than men in other spheres.

In *Aminata*, the girl-child Aminata grows up more privileged than her counterparts in Membe village due to the family into which she is born. Her father Pastor Ngoya, a Christian convert is vehemently critical of his people's customs, beliefs and practices, particularly those that stereotype and marginalize women. Pastor Ngoya is the first character in the whole community to embrace Christianity and denounce his people's ways of life. Thus, Pastor Ngoya is modelled

on the local people who first embraced Christianity with the advent of missionary activities in Africa in the nineteenth century. When the Christian missionaries arrived in Maragoliland they used the first converts to fight the people's culture (Kabaji 2005).

Using Ngoya's family, Imbuga engages his characters in role reversals. Widowed when Aminata is a baby, Pastor Ngoya raises his daughter singly, guided by a changed world view regarding his people's customs and beliefs. A strong advocate of the emancipation of women, he sets out to sensitize the people of Membe to change their attitudes towards women. Pastor Ngoya demonstrates his convictions by educating his daughter Aminata and giving her equal treatment with his sons, if not better. Aminata enjoys the privileges that were once only accessible to boys: she is educated, studies law and becomes a professional and materially successful woman. As a child, Pastor Ngoya uses her in his campaigns for social change and makes her lead women in drinking chicken soup and eventually eating chicken, hitherto the preserve of men and a taboo for women. More importantly, before his death Ngoya writes a will in which he bequeaths a piece of land to Aminata, directly in breach of Membe's traditions that do not allow women to inherit their fathers' land. Using the Kenyan context, I have already noted that in the African tradition, the deceased's first male son or brother becomes heir to his property, including land.

Aminata's upbringing is therefore different because Pastor Ngoya sets out to reverse the norms. Aunt Kezia, as we shall see, is a good example of what the girl-child growing up in a patriarchal rural family later becomes as a woman; and that is why she finds Aminata strange. This synthesis of cultural and Christian elements is a technique that the writer has exploited to depict relatively peaceful monogamous homes in his oeuvre, unlike the polygamous homes in Achebe's works characterised by tension and violence against women and children. Using Ruganda's hindsight, the strategy can be attributed to Imbuga's own upbringing in a Christian home in a rural community (Ruganda 1992).

4.5 Female characters and dialectics of marital roles

Chukwuma (2007) points out that the marriage institution is sacred to culture, tradition and religion. Among the Maragoli, marriage conveys status and women exist as silent but significant partners who are respected and referred to as “Umukaye” if they bear several male children. Furthermore, the Maragoli consider marriage the most important organizing concept since in it, gender values, ideas and taboos are shaped and framed (Kabaji 2005). Analysing instances of female subordination based on tradition and culture in various literary texts by both African male and women authors, Fonchingong (2006) concludes that women’s voices were mainly silenced, projected more in the private domain; they did not have much say in community matters and were brainwashed into accepting their slavish status.

Female characters in Imbuga’s rural settings are portrayed within the homes mainly as home makers and in rare cases, especially among the elderly ones, as advisers of their husbands who nonetheless are more superior in status. In this section, the female characters analyzed are Aunt Kezia, and Mama Rosina in *Aminata* and Elima in *The Burning of Rags*. The female characters are also portrayed as victims of domestic violence as is the case of Matilda in *The Burning of Rags* and Misiah in *Aminata*.

Aunt Kezia’s portrayal is an extension of the satire on female stereotypes in the previous chapter. She is the epitome of the village woman deeply indoctrinated by patriarchal structures to willingly accept her inferior position as the norm. The use of the dramatic technique of contrast serves to characterize Aunt Kezia as a foil to Aminata and in this way guides the audience to understand the challenges that a modern female character like Aminata has to circumvent. We first encounter Aunt Kezia as her brother’s emissary to the city home of her nephew, Dr. Mulemi, a medical researcher. Among the Maragoli, it is a taboo for a man to take the advice of his aunt lightly (Kabaji 2005); so in this context, Aunt Kezia plays a significant role that also gives her the leeway to own the message. Her major concern is that the relationship between Dr. Mulemi and his wife Aminata has deviated from the ordinary practice in the community and she blames Aminata for Dr. Mulemi’s unexpected behaviour since he has turned out to be different from the “boy we brought up” (Imbuga, 1988:33). Ababio, Aminata’s brother puts it more

candidly when he laments that Dr. Mulemi is not “a truly African man” (1988:54) otherwise he would tame Aminata. Dr. Mulemi’s aunt is critical of Aminata’s quest to obtain the piece of land bequeathed to her by her father and she blames her nephew for supporting his wife. She categorically states that a man’s “stool is not for women’s buttocks” (1988:32) and all they want of Aminata is ‘the woman in her’ (1988:36).

Wangari Maathai’s experience that she recounts in her Memoir (2006:140) concretizes the societal pressure on Imbuga’s fictional modern couple, Aminata and Dr. Mulemi:

Society’s perception [...] placed constant pressure on men to behave in certain ways. Even if their wives had more education or more achievements, they were expected to demonstrate that they were in control of their households and were not henpecked by and under the control of their wives.

Aunt Kezia represents the society that is not yet responsive to the changing roles of women and her attitude indicates that although the likes of Aminata are enlightened and are aware of their rights, there still exists a vast majority of women in the rural communities who strongly adhere to patriarchal power and willingly perpetuate the myth that everything belongs to men. Writers of fiction have continued the tradition of using cultural expressions to articulate women’s concern (Oduol & Kabira, 1995:193). One can therefore argue that the juxtaposition of Aunt Kezia with Aminata is Imbuga’s technique of sensitizing the delegates to the Nairobi Conference to re-examine their approach to women’s liberation since total success may not be realized if women in the village are not brought on board.

As stated above, Aunt Kezia is Aminata’s foil. While Aminata is ready to battle the land case in court, she questions when the ownership of land became a woman’s right (Imbuga, 1988:34). She is critical of Aminata’s small family and castigates her nephew with the biblical adage, “go ye and multiply” (1988:36). She has the misconception that Aminata is the one practising birth control while ironically it is Dr. Mulemi who has undergone vasectomy. In her ignorance, Dr. Mulemi’s experiments on monkeys and rabbits to determine the reversibility of vasectomy are enterprises of lonely men whose wives are given the leeway to roam about pursuing things that

should be in the domain of men instead of being at home where they belong: “A woman is not a woman if she has no time for her husband and her children” (1988:36-7).

Maathai’s (2006:36-7) account of the strong opposition she encountered from both men and women in the course of her professional life illustrates what Imbuga set out to demonstrate through this juxtaposition of Aunt Kezia with Aminata. Maathai also states:

Fighting battles with women is very difficult and sad, because both society and the women themselves often make it appear that most women are happy with the little they have and have no intention of fighting for their rights (2006:116).

Aunt Kezia is comfortable with what she is and completely immerses herself in her gender role. She can be compared to Old Nabou who instructs her niece that the first quality in a woman is docility and that a woman does not need too much education (Mariama Bâ, 1981:29-30). Likewise, in Wole Soyinka’s *The Lion and the Jewel* (1976), Sadiku, the bale’s senior wife, plays her traditional role in “a most submissive manner” (Badiane Ba, 2006:41). Sembene (1976) demonstrates the nature of the socialisation that gives forth to a woman like Kezia. N’Gone’s mother (Sembene, 1976:33) cautions her:

“Remember that men and women are not equal. Man is the master. You must always be available. Don’t run away. Don’t raise your voice. Do as he says. Be submissive. Don’t argue with him.”

But Imbuga also depicts a category of rural female characters with a different outlook. Mama Rosina in *Aminata* and Elima in *The Burning of Rags* are elderly female characters that respond to patriarchal power in a more intelligent manner that also displays their own strength. They are endowed with wisdom and foresight and are responsive to change as demonstrated by their ability to integrate Christianity with their traditions. Nonetheless, since their husbands are traditionally conservative male characters, they too suffer the effects of patriarchal authority when they are excluded from decision making on major issues on the basis of their gender and are constantly admonished to remind them of their inferior status in society. For instance, Jumba views Mama Rosina’s criticisms against the cementing of Ngoya’s grave as women’s talk

(1988:3, 4) and in an effort to silence her reminds her that the “ground around a man’s grave is for men’s feet” (1988:7). Agala too directs such demeaning remarks against women in general at his wife, Elima and blames her for their son Denis’s disregard for traditions (1989:6, 33). In essence, Mama Rosina plays an admirable role as the wife of the village headman. She belongs to the category of the elderly female (and male) characters that command respect from both genders. They are conscious that their cultural beliefs and practices are gradually being erased by a vibrant generation that has also been considerably influenced by Western culture (See also Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s depiction of elderly female characters 1964, 1966).

Mama Rosina’s prominent position accords her the power to caution her husband, Jumba, against his misguided acrimony towards Aminata and Pastor Ngoya. As Indangasi (2002:36) states, “she is able to expose his [Jumba’s] fears and act as his conscience.” We are led to agree with Mama Rosina’s point of view all the time. She emerges as the voice of reason in their family mediating between Jumba and Pastor Ngoya (Imbuga, 1988:3), Jumba and Aminata (10) and Aminata and Ababio (50). Apart from Aminata, she is the only other character in their family that recognizes Agege as a one worth listening to despite being regarded by many as the village idiot. Mama Rosina is open-minded and knows how and when to correct her husband (1988:2 – 3) or when to share his views (1988:67).

Thus, Mama Rosina’s power lies in the fact that she has a clearer focus than Jumba on the relationships in her community. She appreciates Aminata’s material assistance to the family and the entire community. When Jumba realizes that he has failed to enlist the support of the village elders in denying Aminata the piece of land in question, he resorts to wit and succeeds in winning her over as his greatest ally. Worth noting is that this is the only time that Jumba appreciates her potential and states that he knows that he “did not marry a fool” (1988:11).

Elima in *The Burning of Rags* plays a similar role to some extent (1989:6). She cautions her husband, Agala, against bad thoughts that psychologically torture him to the extent of communicating with the dead Matildah. But unlike Mama Rosina, she remains in her submissive and subordinate role, acknowledging the man as the head of the family (1989:32) and being

tolerant of Agala's constant chauvinistic remarks about her and her gender. In this regard, her status is more or less like that of Aunt Kezia.

Finally, Imbuga uses Misiah in *Aminata* and Matilda in *The Burning of Rags* to denounce domestic violence and arranged marriages respectively. Walby (1990:49) cites male violence as one of the structures of patriarchy in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. Misiah is the epitome of the battered African woman, silently suffering at the hands of a male chauvinist reminiscent of Okonkwo's wives in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (Stratton 1994). Misiah is entrapped to Ababio, a drunk and an irresponsible husband who constantly beats her and who believes that tradition gives him authority to do so. She represents the silenced women who are victims of the socio-economic and cultural conditions of the African societies that disempower women. She has no voice as a character and her suffering is only brought to our attention by other characters. The fact that she depends on her sister-in-law, Aminata, for both emotional and material support reveals economic dependency as a factor in some female characters' passivity to domestic violence.

Imbuga uses the dream as a framework to construct Matilda's apparition as a living character. The apparition appears to Agala in a dream and theatrically addresses the audience. The song composed by Denis that her sister sang during her funeral also echoes in some characters' ears, at certain moments in the play. Three issues become apparent from Agala's dream, all indicating that Matilda is bitter and blames him for her death. Firstly, she denies having committed suicide and seems to be incriminating her husband, Denis in her death; she also sheds light on the conflict in the play over Yona's circumcision. Matilda and Denis have different views regarding the boy's circumcision. While Denis, a university lecturer and Professor of culture, wants the operation to be done in hospital, Matilda prefers traditional circumcision and in the dream, urges Agala to take responsibility for the boy's circumcision; finally, Matilda's ghost is not at peace with her father - in - law, Agala, for his role in her arranged marriage to Denis.

It becomes apparent that the playwright uses Matilda's apparition symbolically and it presents him with a framework for social and moral criticism (Olilo 2002). Through Matilda's apparition,

Imbuga reveals Agala's state of mind. Symbolically, the fact that Yona survives the traditional circumcision and is later treated in the hospital emphasizes the significance of the belief in the wishes of the dead in the cultural contexts of Imbuga's oeuvre. Among the Maragoli of Western Kenya to whom the writer belongs, life continues to exist even after death (Olilo 2002). In death, Matilda still plays her role as a mother while Denis remains confused and alienated to both tradition and modernity. It is also after Matilda's ghost appears to Agala that the family discovers that her suicide was caused by a domestic quarrel with Denis.

Matilda's apparition also enhances the theatrical quality of the play. She enters, pulling a long rope whose end we cannot see, but which she ties on one of the legs of Agala's bed while pulling the bleeding Yona at the other end of the rope. This seems to be a symbolic binding of Agala to the fate of Yona; holding the old man accountable for his own son's shortcomings and the marriage that he had arranged. At the thematic level, Matilda's marriage and death after a domestic strife further reveal the female character's susceptibility in a male dominated society. One of Imbuga's strengths in *The Burning of Rags* is the integration of the mystical aspects in his realistic presentation of the Luhya culture. He confirms in an interview with Olilo (2002) that the narratives he was told by his old people, together with their beliefs are all part of his writing.

4.6 Female characters and religion

As stated earlier, in the rural setting of both plays, religious practices, customs and beliefs of the people are all intertwined and these govern the lives of the people. The taboos ensure that individuals conform to the norms of the community. The taboos also serve to socialize the people, especially the women into their gender roles. Shaw & Lee (2009:69) argue that religion as an institution strongly transmits "gendered messages that often support different behaviours for women and men." In some African communities, religion has also contributed to the subordination and dis-empowerment of women (Mariama Bâ 1981; Emecheta 1982; Sembene 1995).

Imbuga presents a society that is in transition. The missionaries have established themselves, built a church and have won over some converts led by Pastor Ngoya in *Aminata*. Pastor Ngoya

spearheads campaigns against traditional practices and sensitizes both male and female characters on the importance of maintaining sustainable family sizes to combat poverty and other social ills. Further, he engages in drastic measures like leading the female characters to reject certain practices that discriminate against them and persuading some male characters, including his brother Jumba, to undergo vasectomy. Before his death, Pastor Ngoya, undermines tradition by bequeathing a three acre piece of land to his daughter and legalizing it in a will. These actions by Pastor Ngoya form the conflicts upon which *Aminata* is based.

Aminata is dedicated to Yohana Amugune and it seems that Ngoya is his parody (Harb 1989; Indangasi 2002). Indangasi elaborates that Amugune was buried at Chavakali, his grave being a stone-throw from the playwright's birth-place (2002:6). Like Indagasi, Kabaji (2005) notes that Yohana Amugune was the first convert among the Maragoli at the advent of Christianity and the missionaries used him alongside other converts to fight the Maragoli culture. The group uprooted ancestral stones and shrines with Amugune encouraging women to eat eggs and chicken, hitherto considered a taboo in the community. He also attacked all institutions in an attempt to reverse the practices dealing with funerals, marriage, divorce, worship and polygamy. On their part, just like Jumba in the play, the Maragoli traditionalists launched a strong resistance against the missionaries.

Jumba, the village headman, feels that his brother's Christian crusades undermine his traditional authority and hence the play's conflict is based on tension between Pastor Ngoya/Aminata and Jumba on one hand and that between Christianity/modernity and tradition on the other. Pastor Ngoya's seemingly good intentions end up creating confusion and animosity not only in his family, but also in the whole village of Membe. At the point of his death, Ngoya ironically states that his grave should not be cemented, a wish that both his son Ababio and brother, Jumba later ignore. The elders and the people of Membe have to confront these two contradictory items of Pastor Ngoya's will after his death, bearing in mind the people's respect for the wishes of the dead, lest they face the wrath of the dead, as Mama Rosina warns (Imbuga,1988: 5).

Pastor Ngoya and his brother Jumba are therefore polarized in the play. While the former advocates change and total rejection of social taboos and superstitions, the latter strongly defends tradition and accuses his religious brother of misleading the community. Jumba also blames Pastor Ngoya for some of the calamities that have befallen the community. The village headman harbours a grudge against his pious brother and the Church for felling the tree long considered the ancestral resting place (1988:15). When lightning later strikes the tree and kills all his children except Mbaluto, who nonetheless becomes mute, Jumba attributes it to the wrath of the ancestors. The animosity is aggravated by the fact that his niece, Aminata escapes unscathed even though she had also taken shelter under the same tree. The vasectomy that Jumba had earlier undergone further compounds his tragedy, given the value that his society places on children. Furthermore, Jumba totally opposes the controversial will drafted by Ngoya, adamantly regarding Ngoya's land as Membe's land that traditionally belongs to his sons, if not his brothers (1988:31). Of significance is that Jumba is the only elder opposed to change because other elders, notably, Nuhu, Midambo and Ndururu seem to be gradually accepting the reality and are ready to blend the positive aspects of tradition with those of modernity (1988:58).

To the extent that Pastor Ngoya uses his daughter Aminata in his gender mission, it is possible to argue that Aminata as a female character is a product of Christian religious values in confrontation with African traditional practices, buttressing the progressive socialisation process that she goes through as a girl-child. This motif of traditionalism versus modernism also confronts the characters in *The Burning of Rags*, with characters like Elima and Babu embracing Christianity while largely adhering to tradition. Elima's knowledge of the Bible enhances her language and empowers her to freely engage in biblical discourse with some male characters like Babu.

It is significantly clear that the socializing institutions examined in this section contribute enormously towards shaping gender perceptions in the rural communities that can only change through some external interventions. It is also apparent that once the gender roles have been internalized, change becomes a gradual process, often met with a lot of resistance. As we analyse

the characters in creative works, it is also important to examine the language used in these plays. Language can be a tool for influencing gender attitudes.

4.7 Language and gender construction

Language as a means by which we communicate is a key aspect of what makes us human and central to ideologies which support systems of inequality and privilege (Shaw and Lee, 2009:71). It is imperative to examine how Imbuga has used language to portray characters and his concerns, and how the characters themselves use language to project their own images. The questions to ask here are: what major strategies do the plays employ to enrich the representations of both males and females and to explore the tension between tradition and modernity? What meaning do we attach to language used by the characters in reference to themselves and to others? How does the language used shed light on the dramatist's vision of the changing roles of women in the society?

Rimmon-Kennan (1983:63) argues that a character's speech, whether in conversation or a silent activity of the mind, can be indicative of a trait or traits both through its content and through its form. Language constructs our senses of ourselves and our subjectivity in ways which are socially specific, and through it differences acquire meaning for the individual (Weedon 1987). In African Literature, writers have used various discourses to portray the socio-political, economic and historical realities of their societies. Many African communities have created myths to explain how things came into being and how the existing hierarchical order was created (Schipper, 1987:37). Different genres and literary strategies have been used to depict the conditions of women in the society.

For instance, in Chinua Achebe's fictional world, narratives and songs are very powerful socialisation strategies in the family. Older female members tell girls “feminine” stories that teach them about their domestic roles and society's expectations, while males tell boys “masculine” stories – about wars and conquests. Okonkwo is disappointed that his son, Nwoye, prefers his mother's stories (Achebe 1958). Kabira (1994:80) explores how the Gikuyu oral narratives portray women and finds that wives are generally portrayed negatively as unreliable,

irresponsible, senseless and forgetful, and as co-wives they are cruel and malicious. Kabaji (2005) highlights how the Maragoli use the folktales to construct gender pointing out both positive and negative attributes.

In *Aminata* (1988) and *The Burning of Rags* (1989) Imbuga uses English language to depict characters in a rural setting where in reality vernacular is the dominant language of interaction. Language in African literature has been a major source of debate for decades since the Conference of African Writers of English Expression held in Makerere in 1962 (Ngugi 1986, 1992; Achebe 2009). Ngugi and Achebe, both renowned writers of African literature have held opposing views in the debate with the former advocating and resorting to writing in indigenous language and the latter defending his ability to effectively express the African experiences in the English language as he also argued for the development of African languages.

The aesthetics of Imbuga's oeuvre lies in his use of English in a peculiar manner. We have already noted his infusion of words and names from different Kenyan and other African communities in the English language. He also skilfully uses imagery and sentence structures that reflect the thought patterns of his Luhya community (Indangasi, 2002:23). Thus, an analysis of the writer's use of language and specific stylistic devices in depicting characters and thematic issues enhances interpretation of the meaning of the texts and his vision of the societies that he portrays.

A significant aspect of the African, and in particular, the Luhya community that the playwright depicts in English is reference to relatives or senior members of the community during conversations. The characters in *Aminata* do not address one another directly by their respective names: the play opens with Jumba referring to Nuhu as "son of Rabala" (Imbuga, 1988:1) and this is repeated in all their subsequent conversations. Nuhu calls Mama Rosina "Mother of people" (2) as a sign of respect for motherhood, even though it invokes memories of her children struck by lightning. Aminata calls Ababio "our mother's son" (48), a conciliatory stance despite his own combative attitude towards her (46). Aunt Kezia too refers to her nephew as "son of my brother" (32).

All these are attempts to establish kinship and communal ties among the characters through language. It also contributes to the aesthetic significance of *Aminata* unlike the chauvinistic language that characterizes *The Burning of Rags* and Imbuga's earlier drama. The playwright also creatively selects his words and sentence structures to present his perspective on the changing roles of women in the society. For instance, he creates four different images of women: the silenced victims of their gender and tradition who suffer silently, represented by Misiah in *Aminata*; those completely indoctrinated to accept male domination as the norm, represented by Aunt Kezia in *Aminata* and Elima in *The Burning of Rags*; those responsive to change in society and improved status of women even as they adhere to aspects of tradition, represented by Mama Rosina and finally, the modern woman who challenges tradition, represented by Aminata and Hilda in the two plays respectively.

4.7.1 Language and the “silenced” female character

Silencing is a significant discourse within feminist study. It is used to perpetuate the ideology of dominance. In *Aminata*, Misiah who suffers domestic violence is a minor character kept off stage and only referred to by other characters, starting with Jumba's allegation that it is Aminata who has driven her away, an allegation that Nuhu promptly refutes (12). We next hear of her in Ababio's soliloquy through which he vents bitterness towards Aminata in regard to the land issue in their late father's will, blaming her also of misleading Misiah by offering to pay their children's school fees (23). Later, in a conversation with Mama Rosina, Ababio still blames Aminata for his wife's desertion (50) but the latter puts him off categorically and lays the blame on him and his drunkenness (51). The matter is later clarified in the exchange between Aminata and Ababio when Aminata recounts all her deeds to her family and to the community (52).

The point here is that the playwright uses language to depict the female character as an undermined character in African literature with minimal decision making roles even in situations that concern her. As stated in the previous chapter, desertion is one of women's options of self-liberation out of subjugating marriages. In Misiah's case, it could only be a temporary measure

since she lacks the economic stability that women require for them to lead independent lives away from men.

4.7.2 Language and female stereotypes

Unlike Misiah who is only talked about by other characters, Aunt Kezia appears in the play only once, when she embarks on a mission from the village to the city purposely to convey her brother's message to his son, Dr. Mulemi. Upon arrival she enquires of her nephew, engrossed in a game of darts: "Dagitari, what are you killing?" (32) "Dagitari" in this case is a linguistic corruption of "doctor" hence, Aunt Kezia's utterance here portrays her as illiterate and ignorant. Her subsequent utterances are sarcastic and highly reflect her mind- set as a village woman with no apologies to make about her inferiority and illiteracy. Indangasi (2002:41) appropriately states that Aunt Kezia "represents the traditional, conservative woman's viewpoint: the female version of Jumba [...]."

We judge Aunt Kezia through her own utterances. She is ignorant, satirical and admonishes Dr. Mulemi for letting Aminata become the "husband in his home" (Imbuga, 1988:37) citing reasons such as having a small family, being more in the public domain than her husband: "Every time we switch on our *wireless* it is Aminata's name we hear. What happened to yours?"(36) (My emphasis). Given Dr. Mulemi's staunch support for Aminata, Aunt Kezia knows that her advice to him to marry a second wife (37) and get more children has fallen on deaf ears yet she has succeeded in voicing the fact that her people are "as skeptical about his masculine hegemony as they are doubtful of Aminata's femininity"(Ruganda,1992:73).

Aunt Kezia's skepticism is sharper when she is full of praise for her son Agata, whose house she considers warmer than Mulemi's because they have just got their eighth child (Imbuga, 1988:38). Hence, she reminds her nephew that by having two children only, he has contravened the traditional practice that requires him to name children after his parents and other members of the extended family, contrasting him with Agata whose new-born child will be named after Mulemi's mother (38). Aunt Kezia's skepticism is ironical because we know that both Aminata and Mulemi are concerned about the future and the consequences of unplanned families (36).

Nonetheless, Aunt Kezia's language illustrates her ignorance of her rights and her indoctrination into accepting her inferior position in the society. She is the prototype of negative stereotyping of female characters in literary texts.

4.7.3 Language as medium of transcending patriarchal boundaries

As a female character in *Aminata*, Mama Rosina's status is higher than that of the rest of the village women. She is the only one who seems to get along with every member of their family, considering acrimonious attitudes that both Ababio and Jumba display towards Aminata. Mama Rosina presents herself as the family mediator, always counselling those who have strayed in one way or another. Her language also reflects her important role in the community. She is the only female character in the play that uses proverbs to warn a man and the village headman at that (3).

If African male elders have been regarded as wise and the custodians of traditions, Mama Rosina represents the elderly female characters that are accorded such status in Imbuga's oeuvre as a way of challenging patriarchal hegemony. Other female characters in this category in these works are Nina in *Betrayal in the City* (1976), Elima in *The Burning of Rags* (1989), Grand Ma in *Shrine of Tears* (1993) and Sandere in *Miracle of Remera* (2004). These female characters are full of insights and act as a moral force. It is possible to argue that such portrayals of the elderly female characters defy the idealized depiction of old women in male authored literary works.

In *Aminata*, when Jumba connives with Ababio to cement Pastor Ngoya's grave against the dead man's wish, Mama Rosina reminds him of tradition, the wishes of the dead and the role of Christianity in Ngoya's life. Her strength lies in her insightfulness reflected in her ability to assess situations in a manner that provides the audience with further information about other characters, particularly Jumba. Mama Rosina forthrightly tells the headman that he makes unwise decisions because he does not listen to her (1, 3) and that his thoughts are his disease (6), sentiments that she reiterates in a conversation with Aminata, stating that only Jumba can cure himself (64).

This study argues that the ability to reason wisely and to counsel Jumba is the power that Mama Rosina possesses that sets her apart from other female characters, and the elders, Jumba included, secretly know it. In order to convince her to support him in his scheme against the elders, Jumba complements her (69) and Nuhu too comments on her advisory role (74). Aminata's assessment of Mama Rosina is an appropriate summary of her worth as a female character: "You have so much wisdom locked up in your simplicity that I sometimes wonder whether we really know you" (65). This is also the playwright's message that a woman could have a lot of potential and insight yet this is stifled by the conditions imposed on her in a male dominated society.

4.7.4 Language, patriarchy and the progressive female character

Imbuga has also skilfully used language in the depiction of Aminata in *Aminata* and Hilda in *The Burning of Rags* whereby given their different contexts, the former is actually a development of the characterization of the latter. Hilda's portrayal reveals glimpses of the male writers' stereotypical perspective on the modern African woman as a city dweller with loose morals (Zola 2010; Kandji 2006; Chesaina 1987). However, the playwright circumvents this through his characteristic utilization of ambivalence as strategy such that only Agala, a traditionalist and a male chauvinist, refers to Hilda as a harlot for cohabiting with Denis. But Hilda's image is redeemed through other characters' interpretation of that relationship. The rest of the characters and the reader are aware of the trend in the contemporary society where couples planning formal marriage may move in and live together.

In the same vein, Hilda's previous love affair with Henricks is down-played by the fact that all major characters in the play, both males and females, have a past that they want to overlook as they focus on the future. Finally, Hilda does not really appear a good cook by traditional standards set by men; and makes less impact on others compared to Aminata. However, she is broadly informed on current affairs and has the freedom to travel and interact with other women in the feminist meetings that she attends. In fact, Denis admits that he is surprised at how much she knows (Imbuga, 1989:57).

In *Aminata*, Imbuga presents Aminata in *media res* such that it is not until almost halfway through the play (towards the end of scene two of part one) that she makes her first appearance on stage. Yet the play is essentially about her and she is also the preoccupation of some of the characters that we encounter much earlier. In this way, other techniques like suspense and flashback, as well as other characters' discourses serve to gather some background information about her. For instance, Mama Rosina first mentions Aminata while informing Jumba of a messenger sent to halt the cementing of her father's grave against his wish. Jumba's reaction that Ngoya should not have "confided in a daughter when he had a brother and sons" (Imbuga, 1988:5) prepares the audience for the binary oppositions and the conflicting versions in the play.

As a Christian convert, Ngoya's perception concerning women's status changes and his new ideology of equality of human beings contributes a great deal to what Aminata becomes and how other characters view her. The point to emphasize here is that Pastor Ngoya's views reflect the playwright's techniques of challenging patriarchal hegemony. Aminata's childhood is different from the norm in the community; unlike the other girls who listen to their mothers' stories, her father's narratives mould her world-view. Smith (2012:145) states that stories are ways of passing down the beliefs and values of a culture in the hope that the new generations will treasure them and pass the story down further. The dramatist is well aware of the power of the narrative as a tool for preserving the past as well as for social change. The most significant of these stories that Pastor Ngoya (Imbuga, 1988:45) recalls and retells Aminata moments before his death is as follows:

When I was a small child, our mothers lived like prisoners. There were numerous activities in which they were not permitted to join. Indeed they were even barred from eating certain types of food. Yes, but as a man of God, I looked at the taboos and the superstitions and said no. We are being unfair to our womenfolk. So I led the campaign that made women to work confidently beside their men. I used you in that campaign [...]. You were only a baby then. At first your mothers were afraid, but gradually they accepted the change and learnt to live with it. The men were not happy either, and your uncle, Jumba, was the unhappiest of all. If he hates you, it is because I used you to prove them wrong.

The past changes Pastor Ngoya's world-view and he uses it to champion women's liberation. Hence, his daughter, Aminata, enjoys privileges that were formerly accessible to boys only such

as education. As Smith (2012:146) argues further, the “story and the story teller both serve to connect the past with the future, one generation with the other, the land with the people and the people with the story. “Pastor Ngoya uses his child in his campaigns for social change; and even after his death Aminata is positioned to be a living example of his gospel of women's liberation by inheriting his piece of land. Jumba's reaction to the whole Christian crusade summarises the acrimony that the phenomenon has bred in the family: “that woman conspired with her father to slap Membe in the face and embarrass me and the stool of rule” (Imbuga, 1988:17). Ruganda (1992:77) elaborates this to mean that Aminata's quest to acquire the land is an indirect way of subverting and invading the male space delineated by tradition justifiably and protectively as a man’s prerogative.

A female character like Aminata is certainly a new phenomenon in the patriarchal Membe community; and she encounters a lot of resistance and antagonism mostly from some male members of her family, a brother and an uncle who feel that her achievements jeopardise their own status. Jumba’s hatred for Aminata is brought out effectively in the animal imagery, that he resorts to, that characterizes her as evil and alienates her from her gender. He calls her a “tigress” (Imbuga, 1988:11) and the egret pulling ticks from a bull's back and thinking it is eating a bull (15). Besides, he also refers to her as “Membe's black sheep out to destroy the ways of ages (13), “the home of the evil spirit that sent the red bird to destroy his (Jumba's) children” (29) and a “he goat on heat” (15). All these serve to rob her of her feminine qualities; distances her further from the ‘masculine’ world that her father has propelled her into. In fact she becomes something weird, not human in Jumba's mind.

Maathai (2006:139) states: “Traditionally, society also puts more value on boys than on girls: Boys are provided education before girls and boys are expected to be greater achievers than girls.” As Pastor Ngoya's eldest child, Ababio feels betrayed by his father who is responsible for Aminata's success, a success that he has failed to measure up to. He feels so undermined that he expunges blood relationship with Aminata from his mind. He obviously feels threatened that Aminata seems to have usurped what he believed was his position in the family as the eldest son: she took their father to hospital and took care of him until he died; she bought the coffin and now

pays school fees for Ababio's children. Ababio is an alcoholic and irresponsible man, yet he ironically blames his sister for his own shortcomings and domestic problems. In an escapist display, like Jumba, he equates Aminata with animals such as “a beast, a she elephant” (Imbuga, 1988:50) and “a serpent” (54). As pressure to hand over the piece of land to Aminata mounts and becomes unbearable for him, he decides to boycott the handing over ceremony.

Aminata's in-laws are equally unwelcoming. As noted earlier, Aunt Kezia's has a skeptical attitude towards Aminata, arguing that Aminata has ignored what is expected of her as a woman. In addition to her sarcastic remarks, Aunt Kezia considers Aminata a cursed woman who has also sold her womanhood to her husband's profession (37). But amidst all these acrimonies, the playwright creates humour and comic relief through Agege, described as a “master of odd jobs” and regarded by some villagers, Jumba and Ababio included, as an idiot, otherwise acknowledged as a reasonable character by characters like Nuhu, Mama Rosina and Aminata. Nuhu tells Jumba, “His words do not smell of the idiot you people say he is” (11) while Aminata advises Ababio to borrow a leaf from Agege (55).

Clearly, Agege's role is stylistically and structurally important to the play. Despite his marginalised position marked by use of ungrammatical English language, he speaks his mind to all cadres of characters in the play without any fear and constantly asserts that his “mouth” is for “truth” and that “there is too much fire” (8). Our first encounter with him is at Ngoya's cemented grave, about which two elders, the headman and his wife argue as Ababio who was supposed to pay the masons squanders all the money. Agege, who apparently was sent to look for Ababio returns to pronounce that Aminata “is equal than Ababio” for a number of reasons: she is generous with money, she has brought water to Membe alongside other deeds (9). He goes on to make the following observation:

First, dead Ngoya is father of Ababio. Second, today is grave cement day. So me I have one question. Why is Ababio in drink place? You see, because of that, me I say, Ababio is village idiot instead of me. I say also that Aminata is first son born of Pastor Ngoya (10).

Agege goes on to suggest to the masons to wait for Aminata to pay them. Strikingly, Agege is the only character that reiterates Pastor Ngoya's thoughts about his daughter Aminata, whom he had preferred over his sons (45). Interestingly, Both Agege and Aminata regard each other highly despite Jumba's antagonistic attitude towards them. Agege's refrain "too much fire" can therefore be decoded as criticism of unnecessary conflict. But more importantly, the term 'idiot' is used ironically and invites us to judge between the anti-Aminata and pro-Aminata forces in the text and determine who the real forces of change are. Thus, Agege's role is that of a deliberately elusive character.

Structurally again, Agege voices the concerns of the 1985 Conference of Women in Nairobi, at a deeper level. His depiction poses a challenge to the delegates on the issue of marginalization and equality. Agege represents men who are also oppressed by fellow men, leading them to seek affinity with female characters. As a child, he pleads with the 'liberated' female characters to also give him some chicken to taste, symbolizing his own plea to be liberated too. He openly rejects his mistreatment and exploitation in the community and fights for his own rights as a human being, just like the others:

Everyday, everyday, Agege do this, Agege do that. Even in middle of dark night, Agege do this. Now I refuse because even idiot need rest. Yes all man is equal. Even me I am equal also. And some women too are equal. Yes like Aminata is equal than Ababio because she brings water (9).

Although Jumba rebukes Agege for this assertion, the latter makes a point about equality and the individual's rights regardless of gender. He rejects his exploitation and affirms the need for a two way respect. Thus, Indangasi (2002:39) rightly observes that Agege's "simple belief in the equality of people, his open appreciation of what Aminata has done, and his criticism of Ababio do reinforce the overall message." It can also be interpreted as Imbuga's challenge to women to reject systems that oppress them.

In conformity with his role of providing comic effect where there is tension, Agege again interrupts Aminata and Ababio embroiled in an argument in which Aminata poses an important question to Ababio: "what is wrong with an enlightened change?" (54)Next, Agege interrupts

Jumba and Mama Rosina in their discussion about Jumba's scheme to resign from the stool of rule in favour of his wife. This section is significant in the sense that Jumba seems to have heeded Agege's complaints and moderates his attitude towards him such that for the first time he does not insult Agege for interrupting his conversations.

Other aspects of language use that enhance the quality of the text include use of proverbs, the trickster and the dance strategy. In the oral tradition, proverbs are not only wise sayings, but are also highly regarded speech elements that enrich conversation and enhance the status of an individual. Usually, proverbs are associated with elders who are regarded as wise and the custodians of a people's knowledge and practices. This aspect is depicted in African Literature where the use of proverbs is still an aspect that characterizes the elders, although due to the transformation of the female character's role and position, some older female characters also use proverbs in their speech.

In *Aminata*, the characters that mostly use proverbs are Jumba, the village headman, Nuhu, a member of the council of elders and Mama Rosina. Aminata too uses one proverb, a new phenomenon given her age. Mama Rosina addresses Jumba using two proverbs at Pastor Ngoya's cemented graveside, mainly to warn him against disregarding the wishes of the dead and belittling her advice on the basis of her gender. She tells him: "A wise man fills his ears before he empties his mouth" and "The tortoise may be slow, but he seldom falls" (3). To emphasize Aminata's role to Jumba, she adds a saying: "He that would bury his dead provides a coffin" (5).

Mama Rosina later warns Ababio against their antagonism (together with Jumba) towards Aminata and their refusal to acknowledge the material gain they have received from her. She says: "The tears of a disturbed marriage are washed by a woman's own people" and "the thanks of a jealous neighbour are accompanied with a curse" (52). Jumba actually threatens the elders and Aminata's father-in law with a curse, the former for their support for Aminata (7) and the latter for failure to stop Aminata's quest to acquire the land (37). This illustrates the degree of

superstition in this community. Aunt Kezia elaborates that the curse of “a father, an uncle or an aunt runs right down the family tree for generations to come” (37).

The proverbs that Nuhu use are attempts to make Jumba realize the futility of his battles with Aminata. Nuhu cautions him: “The bitterness of past events can blur our vision of today’s realities” and “when a village child drowns in the raging waters of a swollen river, do the villagers stop drinking water?” (11). Using the images that invoke differences in power and hierarchy, he tells Jumba that a lion does not challenge a mouse to a duel (12). He directs his other proverb at Mama Rosina who feels that because her two children are dead and the surviving one is mute, she does not deserve the salutation ‘Mother of People.’ Nuhu reassures her that it is her status in the community that is recognized: “A mouth may lack teeth, but it is a mouth still.”

Notably, two proverbs that Jumba uses significantly develop the plot and allude to the ambivalence that overrides the play. Realising that his authority is waning, he obstinately adheres to tradition and vows to defend Membe’s “ways of ages” of which he is the custodian as the village headman. He declares a lone battle against his people who have been swayed away from their practices by Pastor Ngoya’s teachings. He is emphatic in his mission, so he declares: “The calf that is orphaned scratches its own back” (22).

A number of things make Jumba arrive at this conclusion: he has suffered personal tragedies that he believes are due to the wrath of the ancestors when Ngoya led them to accept Christianity and some of its teachings. He cannot forgive Ngoya for the vasectomy that the men of Membe agreed to undergo because of its aspect of irreversibility even in desperate situations like the one Jumba faces after his own children were struck by lightning. He thinks Aminata is evil because she was spared in that tragedy. Jumba also detects decreased levels of allegiance from the elders. Whereas they are expected to defend the stool of rule, ironically, they are sympathetic to Aminata’s cause. Thus the proverb helps to emphasize Jumba’s convictions to defend tradition at whatever cost. He vows to outwit the elders at their “own game, “convinced that he will have the final laugh (67).

Jumba also uses the proverb: “It is not without reason that the bat prefers his upside down posture” (69). This proverb is intertwined with the next stylistic element that the playwright inserts in his text, the trickster. In oral tradition, the trickster narrative’s function is to encourage the physically weaker members of the community, especially children and women, that wit and creativity are also very powerful sources of strength and if used well can bring down the most powerful people in the community. In the fables, it was always the smaller animals that tricked the bigger animals considered dangerous yet foolish.

Most African communities have fables in which animals like hare, tortoise and squirrel manage to trick and challenge huge animals like lion and elephant. Jumba resorts to this aspect of the trickster. Ironically, it reverses his role from that of a powerful character in the community to a weaker one that has to use tricks for his survival. Therefore, Jumba uses the latter proverb to defend himself. In this way, like the African women writers, Imbuga reverses the roles of the male and female characters in order to unmask the social construction of the male socio-cultural supremacy (Gueye in Kandji, 2006:53).

What Jumba resorts to and refers to as ‘battle of wits’ significantly contributes to the meaning of the play. It offers the audience a series of interpretations of language use that leads to the overall message being communicated to the delegates at the Women’s Conference and to those championing women’s liberation. This section of the play, also titled “Battle of Wits,” marks a turning point in the attitude towards both genders in the text and results in Imbuga’s characteristic strategy of creating ambivalent characters. The playwright disrupts the structures that have always favoured the silencing of women in order to inscribe a new discourse (Gueye in Kandji, 2006:53).

A number of factors lead Jumba to resort to this sort of battle: Joshua, Aminata’s younger brother studying abroad, has written a letter, copied to the elders, in support of Aminata’s bid to acquire her father’s piece of land as stated in their father’s will; despite Jumba’s refusal to summon the elders of the land circle to a meeting to deliberate on the issue, the elders themselves have gone

ahead and met without him and approved that Aminata should be allowed to inherit the land; and Jumba's late brother has appeared to him in a dream demanding that Aminata should inherit the piece of land in question. Finding himself powerless amid all these forces, Jumba's only option, like the trickster in the fables is to marshal his own creativity, swearing that he will "let the elders have their way in the matter of land" but eventually he must emerge victorious (67).

But why would Jumba call this serious decision by the elders a game? A systematic analysis of language used in Jumba's scheme could clarify the position. Jumba tells Mama Rosina: "I have been in deep thought" and when she is surprised by that sentence he adds, "Yes, I have been thinking" (66) which he repeats thrice during their conversation. It turns out that these "deep thoughts" have focused on Pastor Ngoya, Aminata and Membe's traditions. Jumba is convinced that Ngoya has defied the "laws of ages" and since the elders have also wavered in their support for the stool of rule, the stool is now "spittle in the sand" and as such he has decided to let the elders hand over the piece of land to Aminata (66).

Jumba designs a clear scheme to deny Aminata the piece of land and so calls it a "battle of wits." He also calls it a "game of wits" because he intends to abdicate the stool and appoint Mama Rosina to replace him, knowing too well that the elders cannot question his decision because tradition demands that his Nyarango family must nominate his replacement should he resign; and the only eligible person is Mama Rosina (1988:68). Jumba is also aware that the elders supporting change do not know its full implication on tradition and making a woman a village head is his way of getting even with them as he says, "I will sell them to you before they sell themselves to strangers" (69). That will also be his test to assess whether or not they are really prepared for change.

Both Mama Rosina and the elders view Jumba's proposal as a joke or a game because tradition does not allow it. They all join in playing Jumba's game, hoping that, at some point, he would change his mind. This cunning ability makes Mama Rosina refer to him as a fox (1988:64), a trait that Aminata had noticed earlier (36). Initially, Mama Rosina accepts the proposal on the basis that it is only a game: "If it is a game partner you want, you can count on me" (68). But

later when she wants to rescind the decision, Jumba reminds her that they “are in it together” (69) and together they consider the challenge of how Mama Rosina would be referred to: Headman, headwoman, headperson or village-head (32).

Incidentally, the playwright too plays this game of wits because he is well aware of the impediments in tradition that militate against women’s inheritance of property or access to political leadership positions. Jumba does not disclose his other accomplices and as it turns out, he has also cunningly enlisted Agege and Ababio to interrupt the handing over ceremony, to his own advantage. Furthermore, Mama Rosina remains oblivious to the obligation that before she is installed as the Village Head, she must perform one “official function before the traditional run through the village” (77) and the function, in this case, is the handing over of the symbolic soil to Aminata. Finally, Mama Rosina is also unaware that being a woman, she cannot hand over the soil directly to Aminata; it must be done by a male member of the family and since Ababio will “boycott” the ceremony, the only other male member to perform the function is the mute Mbaluto.

Through this aspect of style and language use, Imbuga presents to us the contradictions that the Membe community experiences and the need for proper sensitization on the changing roles of women. The dance that is held during the rehearsal of the handing over ceremony is also symbolic. As others sing, it is only Jumba who dances to the song that ends abruptly when he “attempts to thrust the stool on Mama Rosina’s lap.” Mama Rosina, on her part, declines the offer and breaks into her own song during which she grabs the stool from Jumba’s hands (78), giving the impression that she is not just being given the leadership, she is equally capable of ascending to the stool of rule.

Jumba’s game of wits comes to a climax when the panic-stricken Agege bursts in just as Mbaluto is about to hand over the soil container to Aminata, at the signal of Mama Rosina. The whole gathering is dumb-founded with the exception of Jumba who “quickly steps forward and shakes Agege vigorously, trying to extract information from him” (80-81). Agege then announces that Ababio has committed suicide. Curiously, Jumba is the only one who interrogates Agege and

who makes the closing remarks to the already dumb-founded members of his community: “It is not yet too late to learn, yet what have we done?” (81)

The conclusions that we can draw from this scheme by Jumba that also form the ending of the play are manifold. In the first place, Jumba has had ‘the final laugh’ as he had anticipated by subverting Mama Rosina’s official function and hence stopping Aminata from receiving the symbolic soil. Second, Agege’s interruption of the ceremony and Ababio’s presumed death are extensions of Jumba’s game of wits. Next, Jumba’s closing remark seems to target the elders of the stool of rule that are now given a second chance to rethink their stance, especially when, as a superstitious people, they link the shattering of the soil to the wrath of their ancestors, and also considering that all along they had hoped that the whole issue was a joke that would come to pass. Finally, Aminata herself had earlier indicated in her speech that she would own nothing in Membe (80).

Yet, at another level one can argue that Aminata has not really failed. From the literal point of view, the shock has only made her “sink to her knees,” she has not really fallen. From this position she could easily rise up and resume her struggle her right. While the elders have a chance to re-examine themselves, Aminata too has that chance and could learn from what has happened and re-strategize. In any case, the actual handover has not really taken place. This has only been a ‘rehearsal’ for the ceremony scheduled to take place the following day; and rehearsals are usually meant to perfect the performance. Symbolically, therefore, the following day means that at a later period, female characters could still re-invent themselves and approach the struggle differently and win, now that the obstacles or challenges have been exposed.

Whichever interpretation, what seems obvious is the need for social change that involves the whole society with the emancipation of female characters as an integral part of it. However, it is evident that this change, if handled in a drastic manner may also threaten male characters that have been conditioned by the society to view themselves as entitled to more privileges than their female counterparts. The following section explores how the male characters respond to the UN Decade for Women’s theme of equality.

4.8 Male Characters' response to transformation of female characters

African feminism recognizes the necessity of African men being part of the struggle against the traditional social and political dominance of patriarchy (Davies 1986). Through *Aminata*, Imbuga exposes the inequalities between men and women in the rural communities and how these marginalize and oppress women. The play exposes a patriarchal community whose equilibrium has been shattered by a new and foreign doctrine of Christianity that attacks the traditional elements and institutions that have so far placed men in a more privileged position as opposed to women.

Fanon (2004:1) argues that at whatever level, “decolonization is always a violent event” that involves “the substitution of one ‘species’ of mankind by another. “In *Aminata*, whereas the focus on the role of female characters in the community is aimed at creating gender equality, it has also brought forth certain anxieties among some male characters, resulting in acrimony and tension in the community. The brothers, the late Pastor Ngoya and the village headman, Jumba, find themselves and what they espouse at the opposite ends of the pole.

It is instructive that the campaign for the liberation of female characters is a new phenomenon in this rural community; and it is spearheaded by a handful of male characters that have converted to Christianity, and more vehemently by Pastor Ngoya. Both male and female characters are equally puzzled by the new teachings especially when Ngoya convinces the female characters to eat chicken, something that has been a taboo in the community. Jumba recalls how some of the “women took to their heels” (Imbuga, 1988:13) as some of them tore at each other in the scramble for the chicken. But while Ngoya confirms that the female characters were afraid, he reveals that “men were not happy either,” with Jumba as the “unhappiest of them all” (1988:43).

Perhaps what this community needed was some gradual sensitization rather than a direct attack on what they had believed in for ages. The male characters felt that an abomination had been committed and Jumba, as the custodian of tradition expected some cleansing to be performed on *Aminata*, especially because after the incident of the chicken that she partook of, she is the only

one that survived when lightning struck dead Jumba's children as they took shelter under the sacred tree along with her. Jumba actually confesses that as a result of Ngoya's doctrine that undermines tradition and that has caused him personal tragedy, he is too aggrieved and discloses that the "bitterness of it all sits deep" (1988:13) in his heart.

Hence, like the female characters, the play has also created facets of male characters especially in their response to social change and women's liberation. Five categories of male characters are represented in the play and in this section I identify them and examine their reaction to change that has been thrust upon them. My thesis is that like the female characters, male characters have reacted differently, with some like Jumba and Ababio feeling threatened by the changed status of their female counterparts while others like the rest of the elders being ambiguously responsive to change. The five categories are represented by Pastor Ngoya, Jumba, Ababio, the elders and Dr. Mulemi. I analyse these categories below with specific focus on the characters' attitudes to social change and the changing roles of female characters.

4.8.1 Aminata as an artistic prism of reversed roles

The play has a female protagonist and many other female characters, as well as male characters, playing both major and minor roles. The Christian faith that Ngoya embraces is alien to Membe. It is brought to the community by the Right Reverend Abu-Steiner, a white Christian missionary from the city who preached equality and family planning to guarantee peace and root out poverty (Imbuga, 1988:19). Ngoya embraces this gospel literally and adopts it as his own message to his people through practical examples from their own context. His first targets of attack are taboos and superstitions that had barred women from taking part in numerous activities and from eating certain types of food (45). Without considering these issues broadly within the whole context of culture and patriarchy, and without raising adequate consciousness among his own people against their traditions, Ngoya, a Membe elder spearheads his campaigns with his own daughter Aminata as his guinea pig.

According to Pastor Ngoya's teachings, the differences in the sexes are in the people's minds (20, 46) because the ultimate truth is that in "the eyes of the Lord, we are all equal" since we are

all children of God, created in His own image from the same clay (19). With these ‘convictions’ Ngoya demonstrates to the female characters that there is nothing wrong with them eating chicken hence his Church slaughters enough chicken to be tasted in public by “all the strong willed” women led by his girl-child Aminata (21). Pastor Ngoya also prevails upon male characters to undergo vasectomy, referred to by the elders as the ‘second knife’ which in retrospect, “was a difficult decision” (17) and a regrettable one, particularly to Jumba whose children are struck by lightning and who finds his status diminishing in his community. In patriarchal traditional Africa, children were seen as the glory of marriage, which was first and foremost the glory of man (Nasimiyu–Wasike, 1992).

What the playwright presents is a critique on blind adherence to alien concepts without deep consideration of their possible consequences. Pastor Ngoya himself wonders why they fight among themselves yet they are supposed to be equal forgetting his role in planting this whole idea of difference in his own family and among his own children. He is the first culprit of his own doctrine against creating gender differences in the mind. He tells Aminata: “You see, people call you Ngoya's daughter, but in my own mind I say, Aminata is my son: Son, daughter, mother, father, all children of God. What is the difference?” (45)

But Ngoya's reference to Aminata as “son” ironically robs her of her femininity and creates ambivalence in her depiction. In his mind, Aminata is his son, not his daughter, meaning that like Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, he secretly wishes that his daughter was a boy because she is more intelligent than her elder brother Ababio. Unlike most female characters that are stereotyped as weak and emotional, it is not in his Aminata to cry: “Your brother Ababio can cry, but not you,” he tells Aminata (46). Without knowing it, Pastor Ngoya has swapped the genders of his children through a psychological game that he plays on the capabilities of his two children and it is now rooted in his mind that the better one must be a boy. Nasimiyu-Wasike (1992: 104) states:

In patriarchal societies, male children were and are much more valued than female children. Inheritance was solely a male prerogative. Female children had and have no significance in genealogies. The father was and is believed to live on only in his male children [...].

On this basis, one can understand Ngoya's dilemma reinforced by his own prayer shortly before his death:

God, the time tested ways
Of our people are best
Yet Oh, Lord, Make us wise
That we may accept change (Imbuga, 1988:44).

The contradictions in Ngoya's mind evidenced by this prayer form the remaining part of the dialogue between him and Aminata replayed through the flashback technique (44-47). He knows that he is about to die and he also knows his people's beliefs concerning inheritance, yet due to the same mind frame that motivates his actions, he writes a will in which he offers three acres of his piece of land to Aminata. Ironically, Ngoya's educated daughter, a professional lawyer and a prototype of the progressive female character with social and economic independence, is still as perplexed about this new development much like the female characters were years ago about the 'chicken soup' idea. She rejects the offer because she knows that women do not inherit land from their fathers (47). She only accepts the offer at the insistence of her father who views it as an extension of his gospel of change.

Ngoya's depiction is obviously an extension of the playwright's strategy of ambivalence in the portrayal of his characters. Aminata is the one that nurses her father until he dies. She is the one that pays his hospital bill, buys his coffin and takes charge of his burial while Ababio, his son who should have done all this, degenerates into a worthless person. But despite all his efforts to embrace change and lead by example, in his will, Ngoya directs that his grave should not be cemented and this becomes the basis of the conflict at the beginning of the play as traditional wisdom is used to interpret his wish.

The audience is left with the interpretation that being a Membe elder, Pastor Ngoya is threatened that his daughter has succeeded where his son has failed and as much as he seeks to embrace change, his mind remains rooted in the "time tested ways" of his people and his defence mechanism is to obliterate his daughter's gender and replace it with the one that is "desirable" in

their traditional context. And so, psychologically he has no daughter, what Aminata has accomplished can only be attributed to a son. Therefore, without knowing it, he acts in the same way as his brother Jumba. This means that despite the male character's attempts to advocate gender equality using alien tools, his efforts are in vain unless he tackles the customs and beliefs of his community that have sustained gender stereotypes.

4.8.2 Female characters and the dialectics of land ownership

Ababio, Aminata's brother, is present in both the two parts of the play. In the first part he appears in scene one titled "The Imprisonment of a Shadow" and in the second part we encounter him in scene one titled "The Handover." These two scenes are contradictory and very significant to the development of the plot. In the first one, at the instigation of his uncle Jumba, Ababio contracts masons to cement the late Pastor Ngoya's grave in defiance of the dead man's wish. In the second one, the people of Membe intend to honour Pastor Ngoya's will and let Aminata inherit her share of her father's land through an official function to be performed by the new village head.

Certain idiosyncrasies are associated with Ababio. He is the only character whose voice is heard offstage, singing and talking before he enters the stage drunk and staggering; and on both occasions engages in soliloquy through which he projects his anger and emotions onto his sister, Aminata. Ababio presents himself in sharp contrast to his sister Aminata. He is an alcoholic and an irresponsible character who sells a bull to pay the masons but instead uses all the money in alcohol. His lifestyle that also includes domestic violence is the reason for his wife's desertion, and the reason why Aminata now pays his children's school fees. Even here, Agege believes that Aminata would be the best person to pay the masons.

Fanon (2004:2) states that decolonization "which sets out to change the order of the world, is, clearly, an agenda for total disorder. "As the eldest son of Ngoya, Ababio was expected to be the one in charge of his father's burial, but as shown above, Aminata played that role. Aminata therefore succeeds where Ababio has failed. Her economic empowerment has made her initiate various developmental projects that benefit and transform the lives of the villagers. And so,

Aminata's deeds have endeared her to most members of her community to the extent that they sing her praises all over. As has been stated, their father has contributed a great deal to Aminata's social and economic success at the expense of his son. There is nowhere in the play, not even through flashback, that we encounter father and son together, an ironic contravention of the popular belief that traditionally, boys were socialized to emulate their fathers while girls emulated their mothers (Nasimiyu-Wasike 1992).

Despite all his shortcomings and failures, Ababio finds support in his uncle Jumba. Being a traditionalist, Jumba supports Ababio in almost everything wrong that the latter does in order to make him an ally in his own vendetta against Aminata. Jumba makes it clear to those who dismiss Ababio that he may be a drunk, "but he is still Ngoya's eldest son" and should not be "denied his rightful position" as a major decision maker in the family (Imbuga, 1988:4, 5). In African traditional societies, issues to do with inheritance and succession were the prerogative of male members of the family. If one did not have a son, then his land or any other property was inherited by his brother (Onsongo, Owuor, Oketch & Kariuki 2006). Emperor Chonda in Imbuga's *The Successor* (1979) does not have a son. But whereas he has a daughter, the people of Masero, particularly the chiefs, are desperate that he should name his successor from the hierarchy of Masero leaders (See Chapter Three).

Both Jumba and Ababio are aggrieved by Pastor Ngoya's decision to bequeath a three acre piece of land to Aminata. They are also critical of the fact that Ngoya disclosed the contents of his will to Aminata. Therefore, to assert their authority, Jumba incites Ababio to cement Ngoya's grave, partly also to keep his ghost at bay. It is evident then that Aminata is a threat to both of them to the extent that, as revealed earlier, her image that they have conjured lacks both feminine and human qualities. Ababio's escapist soliloquies reveal how deeply and psychologically Aminata's status is a threat to him. Aminata actually confronts him with the fact that his is a deeply rooted inferiority complex due to what she has accomplished that he has been incapable of (Imbuga, 1988:53).

Writing on the post-apartheid era, Walker (2005:225) observes that some men's response to the shifts in gender power relations have been violent, ruthless and reactionary, especially since the 1996 Constitution and Bill of Rights. Similarly, Tyson (2006:88) points out that anger and other violent emotions are means by which men block out fear and pain. These views reflect what characters like Ababio and Jumba experience in *Aminata*. Ababio's hatred for Aminata is too deep to the extent that at some point he proclaims to Mama Rosina: "Aminata is not my sister; she is a beast, a she elephant that wants to trample everyone underfoot" (Imbuga, 1988:50). He grumbles over her education, dismissing it as inconsequential because, the land belongs to him. He says: "They can collect all the degrees in the world [...] but let nobody touch my land [...] no woman will touch my father's land because that is my land [...] what is a will? Zero!" (23).

In this outburst, Ababio uses the word 'zero' four times to present his own version that negates the truth that we already are privy to. In the same manner he also uses the word *Gasia* (Swahili word for rubbish), repeating it in his next soliloquy in which his subject matter is his alcoholism (49). The fact that he remains drunk throughout the play indicates that he drinks to escape from reality and to find courage to express his bitterness towards Aminata. Tyson (2006:87) notes that failure to provide adequate economic support for one's family is considered the most humiliating failure a man can experience.

After this second soliloquy, Ababio meets Mama Rosina who mediates between him and Aminata. Hesitantly, he accepts to meet Aminata but does not want to be left alone with her (Imbuga, 1988:57). In the dialogue that ensues between brother and sister, Ababio resorts to abusive language that can only be construed to be an indication of his frustrations at what conspicuously is a reversal of roles and a denunciation of patriarchal ideology that had privileged men over women.

Amidst increasing pressure to hand over the soil to Aminata, Ababio declares that he would boycott the handing over ceremony. But as it turns out, he collaborates with Jumba in a ploy to undermine and humiliate Aminata. Yet, at the symbolic level, Ababio's "suicide" also signifies that he is threatened by Aminata's achievements. Colluding with Jumba to disrupt the function

exposes their fear of Aminata, for despite his inadequacies, Ababio still maintains that being the eldest son of Ngoya, he is the rightful heir to Ngoya's estate and handing over the piece of land to Aminata undermines that privilege.

4.8.3 “Battle of wits”: language and patriarchal authority

A pertinent aspect of Jumba's character is that he is firmly rooted in the ideology of the dominant; hence he blames his late brother, Pastor Ngoya, for undermining his authority both as a man and the village head. He knows that it is Ngoya who has made Aminata what she is and, like Ababio, his own description of Aminata differs from the one that other characters shower with praises. The Aminata in his mind is something evil (29), something fearful that threatens his position and he tells Ababio: “Aminata is no chicken's feather” (30).

Evaluating the situation in rural Senegal after women's economic liberation, Perry (2005:209) remarks that in rural Wolof, men are generating a discourse of impotence and frustration, different from the confident displays of authority earlier. This is much like what Jumba experiences. He feels that his status has been undermined by Ngoya “for confiding in a daughter when he had a brother and sons” (Imbuga, 1988:3). He also feels that his authority is fading because the elders do not fully support him in his vendetta against Aminata. Nuhu asks him: “In what way is Aminata fighting our laws of ages?” (13) While Ndururu wonders why anyone in Membe would raise a curse against Aminata (12). In addition, Jumba blames Ngoya for his message of equality because it makes women “actually believe we are equal” yet Ndururu feels that there was a great deal of truth in what Ngoya preached (15, 17). Jumba senses that his position in the Nyarango family and in the community as an elder is threatened because Aminata seems to be gaining the support of the elders. Whereas he has vowed to defend Membe's traditions vehemently, he feels that he has lost the full support of the elders and cautions them that Membe's stool is “spittle in the sand without their devotion” (7, 66).

Brittan (1989:4, 6) argues that the “masculine ideology tends to be relatively resistant to change” and that it was never really under attack because “gender relations remained constant.” But in Jumba's case, gender relations are changing with women like Aminata gaining ground in the

public sphere while also enjoying economic independence that endears them even to those who should defend patriarchy. This is what makes Jumba react bitterly and violently to characters like Agege who sing Aminata's praises.

Jumba is deeply affected to the extent that he fears the wrath of Ngoya's ghost, given that he feels that he has already been a victim of the wrath of the ancestors. Therefore he urges Ababio to cement Ngoya's grave in a desperate effort to contain his ghost. But when Ngoya's apparition confronts him in a dream and insists that Aminata be given her piece of land, Jumba has to change tact. His bitterness is also aggravated by the fact that the elders of the land circle have totally disregarded him and have gone on to meet and make a decision on Aminata's case. Mama Rosina presents an accurate assessment of Jumba's state of mind. She tells Aminata: "Only your uncle can cure himself. If only he saw the world around him with a neutral eye [...]" (62).

Thus, through Jumba, the play challenges patriarchy that thrives on subordination of female characters and suggests that patriarchy can be dismantled because not all male characters are resistant to change. But Jumba also reveals the negative consequences of patriarchy because it makes some male characters feel threatened by the changing roles of female characters. Jumba is obsessed by his belief in male supremacy and vows to have the final laugh and as the play ends, the impression created is that he is partially successful in his strategy to block Aminata's bid to inherit her father's piece of land.

4.8.4 The Dialectics of tradition and change

Most of the elders of Membe are receptive to change albeit in varying degrees as they still adhere to their traditions. The remarks and attitudes of some prominent elders who are closer to the village headman are proof that they do not entirely support his extremist defence of tradition and antagonistic attitude towards the late Pastor Ngoya and Aminata. Of these elders, Nuhu is the closest to Jumba due to their bonding at circumcision. Nuhu faithfully plays the role expected of members of the same age-set by advising and cautioning Jumba.

To this end, Nuhu is a foil to Jumba much like Obierika to Okonkwo (Achebe 1958). For every undesirable action that Jumba takes or remark that he makes, Nuhu promptly offers him a wiser, philosophical and the most acceptable alternative position. Being skilled masons with Ndururu, Ababio approaches them to cement Ngoya's grave, which they also do 'professionally,' but without knowledge of the intrigues within the Nyarango family that have made the grave be cemented against the late Pastor's wish. Nuhu categorically declares his position: "I may be Nuhu, but I am also Rabala. I have never locked horns with the Church" (3). The name 'Nuhu' is actually a Luhya way of pronouncing the Christian name Noah (Indangasi 2002).

Thus, Nuhu is a traditionalist who at the same time respects Christianity and change. He has no problem with the vasectomy that his fellow elders underwent only that, in his case, he had just lost his wife and a "new one would need children of her own" (Imbuga, 1988:17). He cautions Jumba against his bitterness towards Ngoya and Aminata saying that Ngoya was "the glow-worm of Membe in gone days" (1) and a "level headed man" (16) while Aminata is "straight and people love and adore her for what she has done for them" (16). Nuhu finds nothing wrong with the elders of the stool deliberating on Ngoya's wish and fulfilling it and so cautions Jumba: "The bitterness of past events can blur our vision of today's realities. Forget the past and accept the face of a little change" (11).

Evidently, Nuhu's assessment of change differs from that of Ndururu who seems contradictory in his attitude towards female characters. While he appreciates Aminata he refers to his own wife as the "devil herself" (25). Concerning Jumba's decision to hand over leadership to Mama Rosina, he laments: "But a woman! I don't trust women in such a position. She will urinate on us" (74). He even thinks it is a 'joke' for Mbaluto, a mute, to play that important role of handing over the soil to Aminata. It takes Nuhu again to reassure him that all will be well. Nuhu is more objective in his evaluation of Mama Rosina: "Mama Rosina will be alright: For several years now, she has been the lioness behind the lion's roar" (74).

Other elders like Midambo and Amata have also noticed the change that is fast spreading to their community from the city. They discuss urbanization and grumble about women's changing roles.

Amata was surprised to see a woman driving a bus during a visit to the city (Imbuga, 1988:37). Perry (2005:209) states that in rural Senegal, old men bemoan a modernity in which women and children think they own themselves now and assert that life has been turned upside down. In the same way, these elders in *Aminata* feel that these changes will affect their “ways of ages” and equate them to a curse that is spreading fast in the whole society (38). This conversation exposes their fear that change would ultimately threaten their position and they lament: “We are being left behind” (37). Yet ironically, they praise Aminata and her contributions to the youth group that will now compete favourably with other teams in the cultural festival.

During the rehearsal of the handing over ceremony, Abade, the eldest male character, leads the function and demonstrates to everyone that change is a welcome thing. He does this first through his prayer which is a mixture of Kimembe and English. He also uses a proverb to emphasize the need for change: “When the lizard loses its tail, does it not grow another?” He equates this proverb with Membe’s stool of rule whereby “When one buttock stands up from it, another sits on it” (76-77). In this scenario it emerges that the elders have not yet assessed the full implication of this handing over of the stool to a woman having just joined in the wave of change. Surprisingly, Nuhu’s sentiments indicate the elders’ reservations about the handover despite the impression that they earlier created of their willingness to embrace change. The following view, coming from Nuhu (Imbuga, 1988: 74) provides an appropriate assessment of all the elders’ reaction to the emancipation of the female characters:

Nuhu: You know, at first, we saw it as a *big joke*, a kind of a *game*. So to tease him a little, we decided to partner him [...]. When I was asked for my opinion, I feigned seriousness and said there was nothing wrong with Mama Rosina taking over the stool of rule. Feigning seriousness too, the other elders nodded their heads in agreement with me. All along we were watching the lines of his face. We waited for the headman to change his mind, but he seemed quite pleased with the decision. *Now our hands are tied. Our only consolation is that with the coming of the new church and government, our stool of rule is no longer what it used to be [...].It is of no real consequence who sits on it. The heavier matter is the matter of Aminata’s soil* (My emphasis).

Generally, these elders' remarks illustrate that male dominance and subjugation of women are socially constructed and different men would respond differently to changing gender roles.

The symbolism of the soil and the characterization of Mbaluto should however be critically examined. It is for aesthetic purposes that the writer uses Mbaluto to hand over the symbolic land to Aminata. The symbolism of Mbaluto as the bridge to Aminata's land ownership communicates the writer's artistic judgement: that the woman still faces many hurdles in her quest for gender equality.

4.8.5 Imbuga's vision of new identities

Not all male characters in these literary works feel threatened by the changing status of female characters. Kimmel (2009:729,731) acknowledges the rise in the number of pro-feminists who support "women's equality and other men's efforts to live ethically consistent and more emotionally resonant lives. "In the two plays under study in this chapter, such characters are represented by Joshua and Dr. Mulemi in *Aminata* and Dr. Agbale in *The Burning of Rags*. In fact the relationship between Dr. Mulemi and Aminata as a couple is a transformation of that between Denis and Hilda in *The Burning of Rags*. Denis is an alienated and paradoxical modern man. He is a university professor who cohabits with Hilda and gives the impression that he is comfortable in their relationship. However, while he supports her participation in feminist meetings, he points out that her meetings are a waste of time (Imbuga, 1989:51) and that equality of the sexes is "western intellectual crap" that educated African women should not listen to because such equality does not exist (1989:62).

Significantly, while it would seem that unlike Denis, Dr. Agbale does not interfere in his wife's affairs, his wife remains a silent and absent character in the play. Dr. Mulemi in *Aminata* is therefore the re-imagining of these educated and professional male characters. His marriage to Aminata based on love and mutual understanding can be seen as a pace setter for gender equality that is still an alien concept in Membe. Taking the cue from Pastor Ngoya's sermons, Dr. Mulemi too undergoes vasectomy to prove that men understand the need for small and therefore manageable families. He supports Aminata in her quest for the right to inherit her father's land and both of them agree to have only two children so that they can dedicate ample time to their

professions. Mulemi's role can be compared to that of Abou (Mariama Bâ1981) and Dr. Sign (Ogola 1994). These are examples of the modern professional male characters, married to professional female characters and are instrumental in dismantling structures that have perpetuated the subjugation of women for centuries.

Ramatoulaye admires the relationship of equality and mutual respect that exists between her daughter Daba and her husband Abou (Mariama Bâ, 1981:73-74). Abou helps his wife in the Kitchen and claims that his wife is neither his slave nor servant. This is also true of the profeminist characters above. Ramatoulaye observes further, "I sense the tenderness growing between this young couples [...]. They identify with each other, discuss everything so as to find a compromise." Such male characters encounter some criticisms from the community and their families. Aunt Kezia argues that Mulemi remains at home playing darts and attending to "monkeys and rabbits" because Aminata has abdicated her role as wife and mother. This changed relationship makes her conclude that Mulemi does not behave like a man in his house and in fact is not the "boy we brought up" (Imbuga, 1988:33). Mulemi experiences a lot of pressure from home to discipline Aminata or even to marry a second wife because the family had sent a lot of "dowry to Aminata's home" yet they "still have nothing to show for it" (35).

Aunt Kezia's standpoint demonstrates a clash between two cultures and the dilemma experienced by the male character that deviates from the community's norms. Thus, while Mulemi views Aminata "as good a wife and mother" as can be found "anywhere among the very best" of the women (37), his stance begins to weaken as a result of the mounting pressure from his family. In addition, Jumba, Aminata's uncle has extended his acrimony to Aminata's matrimonial home through a threatening letter to Mulemi's father. In an ironic twist, Mulemi begins to plead with Aminata to drop the fight and instead concentrate on the family. In fact his argument that Aminata's land case is beginning to slow him down (42) astonishes Aminata who responds: "That doesn't sound like my husband at all" (42).

Dr. Mulemi's reaction portrays him as an unprincipled character who easily succumbs to pressure from his family. He feels that Pastor Ngoya, whom he had initially regarded as their

“inspiration” (42) erred in not informing Ababio and Jumba about the will; and he does not approve of Aminata taking the land issue to court: “I am not too sure of the wisdom in that,” he says (48). Using their own example, Aminata believes that their own daughter cannot be barred from inheriting any part of their property (42), but curiously enough Dr. Mulemi does not pursue that line of argument, instead he remarks: “All I am saying is that this battle need not be fought out there in the village. There is no justice there” (42). Thus Mulemi seems to be backtracking on his conviction that he was doing the right thing. His experiment on rabbits and monkeys to reverse the effects of vasectomy has positive outcomes.

Clearly, the whole campaign for gender equality that begins with Pastor Ngoya and is fulfilled by Dr. Mulemi can only be seen as a pace setter; a lot still has to be achieved, particularly on the issue of the attitudes of men towards women that are deeply rooted in tradition. In this case, through the technique of satire, the writer suggests that drastic measures like vasectomy, village headship being handed over to women and women inheriting their fathers’ land must be approached with caution. Thus, although some male characters experience a sense of inadequacy and loss of power as the roles of their female counterparts change, some of them have made positive steps towards paving way for a more gender inclusive society.

4.9 Female protagonist: epitome of a transitional generation

The ambivalence in the denouement of *Aminata* has elicited varied interpretations of the play and Aminata’s role. Ruganda (1992:93) argues that Aminata’s failure to receive the symbolic soil container during the rehearsal of the handover ceremony and the fact that she “sinks to her knees”, is a symbolic devastation and humiliation. Thus, he concludes that her fall “affirms traditional hegemony in Membe” and reasserts Jumba’s “authority, his manhood and his culture.” Ruganda’s assessment is that at the end of the play it is Jumba who “has the last word and the last laugh.” Similarly, Indangasi (2002:32) states that Jumba’s last speech is the moral of the play and rightly concludes that “we have to keep reminding ourselves that the handover is a mere rehearsal: the real political transition and the real changes are yet to come.”

While I disagree with Ruganda's view that Aminata's quest is abortive and Jumba's authority is reasserted, I want to base my arguments on Indangasi's final observation that I shall revisit more comprehensively later in this chapter while assessing the full implication of Aminata's portrayal as part of the broader theme of social change in the play. As the first female protagonist in Imbuga's oeuvre, Aminata's portrayal marks the playwright's conscious attempt to revise his representation of women and, in general, his portrayal of female characters demonstrate the changing images of women in African literature. From the plays examined so far in this study, only Regina and Hilda, and to some extent, Emma, are more enlightened in the modern sense than the rest of the female characters. Nevertheless, they are still outshined by the stronger male characters within the male dominated social and political environments in which they find themselves. Consequently, although Aminata is the central character, the play reads like a story about male characters.

Through Aminata, the play communicates pertinent issues about social change and the changing roles of female characters. The socialisation process that she goes through is different from the norm in a male dominated rural community. First, Pastor Ngoya abandons his people's ways of life when he becomes a Christian. His outlook towards women changes and he uses his daughter as an example of that change. Second, Aminata is his favourite child whom he educates at a time when it would seem that access to education was largely an issue of gender as well (Kandji 2006). Through Aminata, the play demonstrates that female's education is a very strong strategy of subverting patriarchal stereotypes. Yet, the other issue that arises is that the emancipation of female characters need not necessarily ignore male characters. Ngoya's eldest son, Ababio, remains immersed in tradition while Aminata proceeds to become a lawyer. As her status rises, Ababio degenerates into an irresponsible alcoholic and generally a failure.

In addition, social change needs not be a one person crusade as demonstrated by Pastor Ngoya. It requires conscientious efforts at societal education to involve different groups of stakeholders. It does not also require isolated demonstrations like eating chicken or bequeathing a daughter a piece of land. It requires intensive programmes to help individual members of the community understand the implication of change on culture in totality. This also explains why the elders

readily embrace Ngoya's wish to hand over the piece of land to Aminata because in traditional wisdom, the wishes of the dead are respected. But the same elders are not contented with a woman ascending to Membe's stool of rule, because tradition regards it a taboo.

Such are the challenges that even Aminata herself encounters. She drank the chicken soup as a child at the instigation of her father. It is her father who educates her and initiates the land inheritance issue. He tells her: "The way your innocent hands accepted that bowl of chicken soup, so must you accept the soil, a gift from your father in his last days on earth" (Imbuga, 1988:47). But despite her education, Aminata initially resists the offer because, as she says, "women do not inherit land from their fathers" (47). Kandji's (2006:33) observation aptly describes her predicament: "Modern Educated African women are under the "double yoke" of allegiance to their culture, tradition, religion, family and community, on the one hand, and their aspiration to self-determination and self-fulfilment on the other."

Aminata confesses to her husband that her father really pleaded with her and even demanded that she accepts the offer. For this aspect of change to have been more acceptable, Ngoya would have involved the whole family, especially his brother, Jumba, and his son, Ababio. Aminata further states that she made up her mind to accept the soil soon after her father's death and asserts: "That is why I don't want to disappoint him by giving up the fight for it" (1988:43). Again, it seems that Aminata's actions are largely motivated by the fear of the wishes of the dead.

Emerging from the African traditional context that has been established so far, *Aminata* can therefore be regarded as a pace setter. Change, especially those affecting tradition, cannot be drastic, they must be gradual because they have to do with changing a people's psychology. In Sembene (1995:185), when a female character called Penda addresses a gathering of the railway workers on strike to inform them of the women's decision to join the march to Dakar, male characters regard it a new phenomenon. In small groups, the striking railway workers discuss Penda's initiative and underscore the fact that it was the "first time a woman had spoken in public in Thies." This illustration serves to show how these characters represent people whose mindsets are deeply rooted in tradition to the extent that they need thorough education first

before they can adopt new ways. Based on this, therefore, *Aminata* is a success. The events at the handover ceremony must be viewed from the stylistic and symbolic level. The whole ceremony is a rehearsal, just like the whole text is a demonstration. A rehearsal is meant to improve the production. In this case, it displays to the characters their individual weaknesses and the loopholes in their traditions that they must address for them to realise effective social change. As Indangasi (2002:22) aptly states, this last scene is

Francis Imbuga's most daring attempt at destroying the illusion of reality [...]. The actual handing over ceremony does not take place [...]. The whole set-up is a dramatic ploy, and even the announcement about Ababio's death could be another fabrication.

Aminata has not fallen, she has 'merely sunk on her knees,' a position easier to rise from and continue walking than if she had fallen flat on the ground. In this regard, Aminata has not totally failed in her quest; there are other avenues that she could still explore. The elders' consolation that with the "coming of the new church and government, our stool of rule is no longer what it used to be" (Imbuga, 1988:74) should also be Aminata's consolation. Mulemi tells her that the battle should be fought elsewhere and not in the village (42). In any case, the idea of the will that Ngoya has introduced is a legal aspect that can only be understood in the courts where Aminata contemplates turning to, although she also contradicts herself during the rehearsal of the handing over ceremony when she asserts that when "all is over, you shall see that mine is not a heart of stone, for I will own nothing here" (80).

Aminata's success can also be seen in the light of her husband's pronouncement: "Now she is free to pursue her career to the deepest canyons and help others improve their lives" (36). This is a new thinking considering that in her community females are submissive to males. Her success therefore lies in the fact that together with her husband, they have set the pace for the future generation, as Mulemi says: "A healthy future, a healthy nation for our children and their children" (36). Aminata vows to fight to the bitter end to secure a future where their daughter will not be barred from inheriting part of their property (42). Through Dr. Mulemi and Aminata, Imbuga envisions a relationship based on mutual respect as a stepping stone towards attaining

gender equality that a society requires and which should replace the patriarchal one for the sake of progress of humanity.

It can therefore be noted that while the Aminata that is presented in the earlier parts of the play is a creation of Pastor Ngoya, the one at the end of the play is independent, has a clear vision of her role and position and the challenges that she needs to circumvent. In what can be regarded as Chinua Achebe's efforts to revise the representation of women in his works, his novel, *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987), published around the same period as *Aminata* similarly has Beatrice as his first female protagonist. Beatrice, an educated female character, demonstrates Achebe's new social vision of women's role through the freedom that she enjoys to express her opinion on societal issues and the envisioned socio-political change. Ikem tells her: "I cannot tell you what the new role of women will be. I do not know. I should never presume to know. You have to tell us" (Achebe, 1987:98). Thus, Achebe and Imbuga share a vision of the changing roles of women that starts in the contemporary societies of their texts and looks towards the future.

The symbolism of Agege's role in *Aminata* reveals Imbuga's artistic judgement on gender relationship in society. It is noteworthy that Agege, although characterized as a clown, in a way becomes the voice of reason on issues of female characters' emancipation. Agege is the one that recounts Aminata's contribution to the welfare of individual characters as well as that of groups in Membe: she provides material support to her brother Ababio's family, she has initiated a clean water project and has also engaged a choreographer for the youth group. Agege's role is a challenge to male characters that seem normal superficially but covertly stereotype female characters. Thus, Agege as a symbolic character satirises patriarchal principles that characters such as Ababio and Jumba exhibit.

Imbuga's use of clowns to satirise societal follies also appears in his other play, *The Successor*. In this play Segasega is used as a symbol of wisdom: he understands the extent of corruption in his society and at the end of the play, when Oriomra's evil manipulations are discovered and he has to face judgement, Segasega refers to the judgement as democratic.

In concluding this chapter, we need to restate that *Aminata* and *the Burning of Rags* reveal that patriarchal hegemonies are deeply entrenched in the rural communities. Through Hilda, Imbuga demonstrates the different brands of feminisms and seems to support the notion that Western feminism is elitist and may end up alienating African women from their socio-cultural realities. Hilda's brand of feminism is self-centred and makes others view her lifestyle as alien. This notwithstanding, the plays have also demonstrated that women's roles are socio-culturally determined with the vast majority of them still disempowered. The playwright has made a conscientious effort to establish that the roles of female characters in fiction can change to reflect the developments in society. He has challenged the ideologies of rural patriarchy and created awareness that education is a key element in both social and economic liberation of female characters. But because he is aware that in a community like Membe, it is impossible to impose and sustain drastic change in gender roles, like in the earlier plays, he presents his female characters through dramatic techniques that allow for gradual transformation.

Critics of *Aminata* have often blamed Imbuga for setting out to portray a progressive female character but ending up upholding the views of the patriarchal order when both *Aminata* and *Mama Rosina* seemingly fail in their quests at the end of the play. Imbuga states:

All of us would like to rid the society of prejudices based on gender, but again we have to present things the way they are in order to highlight the seriousness of these issues.⁵

This contradiction can be explained by examining the playwright's dramatic style. Thus, for example, Imbuga's use of the *deus ex machina* dramatic technique in the portrayal of these characters is both deliberate and significant. This technique helps the playwright to present the ideal throughout the play but at the end make a final statement based on the prevailing reality. In which case, the literary critic should still appreciate the writer's efforts in creating awareness on the need for social transformation. Imbuga's vision is that the emancipation of female characters in such a set-up is only possible within the broader view of social change affecting the whole community based on principles of human values.

This is a tenable view within the African feminist arguments that places emphasis on complementary participation of men and women in the struggle for gender equality. The support that Aminata receives from her husband and her brother, Joshua, is a good indication of the playwright's vision that the educated men and women should sensitize their communities to reject all practices that lead to marginalization of women. By revealing instances of insecurity among some male characters in the wake of the liberation of female characters, and the willingness of yet some others to cooperate with female characters, the playwright's ultimate vision is the need for intensive civic education geared towards the social transformation of society. His use of dramatic structures that do not give room for female characters to realise their full potential in their struggle for liberation is also an indication that perhaps the struggle should not begin late in life when women have already internalized the socially constructed views about their gender roles; the target for complete change should be younger female characters who still have the potential to reconfigure their identities.

With this possibility in mind, the next chapter focuses on Imbuga's later texts and keenly examines how, in the light of all these attempts to satirize the marginalization of female characters and to dramatize their efforts to find voice, space and new roles, the writer portrays male and female characters who strive to dismantle the cultures of subordination and discrimination and thereby entrench respect and tolerance in human relations.

Chapter Five

Imbuga's Novels and Last Play: Social Change

5.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the last phase in Imbuga's work according to the methodology of periodization that I have adopted in this research. It is a continuum of the discussion of Imbuga's more explicit and conscious feministic vision explored in the previous chapter. As indicated in the previous chapter, Imbuga responds to feminism particularly through the play *Aminata* that was specifically commissioned for the 1985 World Women's Conference in Nairobi. The play explores the Conference's sub-theme of equality and exposes some impediments to women's struggle for equality associated with patriarchal attitudes in rural Kenya.

A decade later, the fourth World Women's Conference held in Beijing, China, re-affirmed the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). In addition, the 1995 platform for action identified several actions to promote the empowerment of women, including the eradication of harmful cultural practices. Several governments reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening gender equality and hence adopted gender mainstreaming as an overall approach. This approach per se does not look at women in isolation, but regards both women and men as actors in the development process and as its beneficiaries (Wanjala and Odongo 2009).

In the year 2000, a review of the Beijing platform for action acknowledged the progress made and, at the same time, reiterated that major obstacles still persist in the entrenchment of gender equality. Kenya ratified the CEDAW in 1984, adopted the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women (NFLS) in 1985, the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA) in 1995 and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, despite such strong support for these global efforts for the advancement of women, as Imbuga reveals in *Aminata*, patriarchal hegemonies are still deeply entrenched in rural communities where a high percentage of women are disempowered, creating a socio-economic situation that can only be reversed through women's education and sensitizing the whole community to nurture positive gender relations.

Imbuga demonstrates this in the mutual relationship between Aminata and her husband, Dr. Mulemi.

Interestingly, this vision of society that Imbuga has at the end of *Aminata* reflects the gender mainstreaming approach that the Beijing Platform for Action adopted. Indeed, Imbuga expounds on the same agenda in his two novels, *Shrine of Tears* (1993) and *Miracle of Remera* (2004) and in his last play, *The Return of Mgofu* (2011) that are the focus of this chapter.

Concerning the changing roles of female characters in African literature, Nwagbara (2009:5) asserts that Nigerian feminist writers see literature as “a role –reversing narrative, essentially contrived to deflect stereotypes, misrepresentation, and skewed knowledge about the true worth of women. In his analysis of Beatrice in Chinua Achebe’s *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987), Nwagbara highlights the transformation of “Achebe’s women” from marginalized positions to “independent, politically conscious and assertive women” and “people with a voice capable of changing gender relations through participation in the business of the public sphere.” In this regard, Siundu (2004: 56-57) appropriately makes the following observation:

Apart from the women writers who have come out forcefully in assigning new roles to women characters as a way of expanding the limited spaces preserved for women in the earlier writings, male writers are also revising their representation of women characters as a way of acknowledging the increasingly influential roles played by women in their communal set-ups.

Notably, in Imbuga’s works, there is a marked development in the depiction of female characters, indicated by the general improvement in the characters’ roles and relationships. Hence, it is possible to argue that, as indicated at the end of the previous chapter, the writer embarks on the reconstruction of the status of female characters and now depicts more male and female characters with positive gender relationships that seek to improve the welfare of all the members of the society.

5.2 *Shrine of Tears* (1993) and *Miracle of Remera* (2004)

Imbuga's only two novels, *Shrine of Tears* (1995) and *Miracle of Remera* (2004), depict a major shift from his plays with regard to the roles of female characters. Although in *Aminata* (1988) and *The Burning of Rags* (1989), as discussed in the previous chapter, it is evident that Aminata and Hilda are more conscious of their rights due to their education and experience, the author still uses education but in conjunction with mutual relationships between characters as broader strategies for reconstructing the roles of female characters in *Shrine of Tears* (1993) and *Miracle of Remera* (2004). In their new roles, these female characters subvert the societal power structures that had hitherto created the cultures of dominance and subordination and provide opportunities that allow for equal participation of both genders in social and political issues affecting the society.

Thus, in both novels, Imbuga revisits the themes of empowerment of female characters and equality in a much broader context, through more female characters, particularly more educated female characters, playing more prominent roles in association with equally educated male characters. Through this approach, the writer artistically presents his vision of a democratic society where both male and female characters have equal opportunities to participate in the transformation and development of their societies. Thus, Imbuga's characterization of women in these texts can be understood in Gikandi's (2001) assertion that the wisdom of art could be located in a profound engagement with the ever-present reality.

Iwok (2010:19) argues that globally, women's empowerment has been identified as a strategy that enables women to enjoy their right to equal opportunity, participation and choices in all spheres. Imbuga's novels present both older and younger female characters that display great dynamism in the struggle for entrenchment of gender equality in the society. Characters such as Mama Kadi, Kanaya and Kamonya in *Shrine of Tears* and Daisy in *Miracle of Remera* readily play complementary roles to their male counterparts without experiencing any form of oppression or discrimination against them. Although there are instances of such characterization in Imbuga's dramas such as *Betrayal in the City* and *Aminata*, the mutual respect that exists

among characters in these later works, symbolize relationships based on human principles that the writer advocates for the contemporary society.

This chapter will focus on three categories of female characters and the male characters that they relate with, in order to examine Imbuga's perspective on new images of female characters and their roles in confronting social and political issues. A further argument in this chapter is that although the transformation of female characters is a gradual process in a hitherto male-dominated society, its realization is desirable in achieving democracy in the society.

5.3 Female characters as archetypes of social change

Shrine of Tears begins with a dramatization of the crisis of cultural imperialism and exploitation in Kilima. The narrative is anchored on the youth questioning the significance and rationale of the existence of national institutions in Kilima that do not serve the people. Such institutions include the cultural centre, that ironically is mainly frequented by foreigners, and the national shrine (read theatre) that charges exorbitantly and thus denies local artists and scholars entry, yet ironically operates as the nerve centres of white and Asian cultural activities (1993:2-3). Ideally, the university and media fraternities should enjoy unlimited access to these facilities by participating in activities that educate the people on issues of culture and identity, yet on the contrary, characters portrayed as members of these institutions frequent the theatre only to drink and socialize in the bar upstairs. Through these characters that comprise both genders, Imbuga satirizes and castigates Kilima's perverted leadership.

Similarly, in *Miracle of Remera*, Imbuga uses the youth from both genders as proponents of his views on social issues such as peer pressure, girl-child vulnerability and education, the role of social institutions like family units, schools and colleges as well as the community. He also explores attitudes of the people towards HIV/AIDS, using elements that can be associated with magical realism. The novel ends on a note of optimism with emphasis on collaborative research that integrates medical research and African indigenous knowledge in the search for a cure for the disease.

In both novels, female characters remarkably enjoy greater autonomy than they previously did in the plays. Iwok (2010:19) states that women empowerment means improving the capacity of women to be who they wish to be and to be actors in development. In the first place, female characters in Imbuga's novels operate in broader spaces in both rural and urban areas. They are also protagonists alongside male characters in an atmosphere of mutual respect in decision making. Unlike in the plays where Aminata is the only female character enjoying economic independence, more female characters, in the two novels, have access to education; and they compete favourably with male characters for opportunities in various areas, including higher education and performing arts.

A significant aspect of women's education is that it can have both positive and negative consequences for individuals. It impacts negatively on women in a male dominated society when it is viewed as a means to materialistic success, social morbidity and equality with men. Africa's first woman Nobel laureate, Wangari Maathai, in her Memoir (2006:146) states that her husband's reasons for seeking a divorce was that she was "too educated, too strong, too successful, too stubborn and too hard to control. "On the other hand, education has a positive impact on women when it adds value to their lives. Maathai (2006:123-4) further documents how in conjunction with other educated women, she founded the National Council of Women of Kenya (NCWK) as a forum to advocate the rights of women:

[We] were concerned with the social and economic status of the majority of our members, who were poor rural women. We worried about their access to clean water and firewood, how they would feed their children, pay their school fees and afford clothing, and we wondered what we could do to ease their burdens.

Madigan (2006:221) observes that education has a bearing on social and economic development of a society as well as on the individual's ability to realize his or her potential. Similarly, in assessing five early feminist novels - Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* (1980), Flora Nwapa's *One is Enough* (1981); Buchi Emecheta's *Double Yoke* (1982) and *Destination Biafra* (1982), and Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977), Frank (1987:16) concludes that all of them have educated heroines with professional and economic means to live independent lives. Hence, as

Chukwuma (2007) argues, obtaining education is a huge step for women of contemporary African nations.

Imbuga uses education as a metaphor on the development of female characters. As noted in the previous chapter, Aminata's economic independence and material success is attributed to her education. She initiates development projects in her community, including clean water project to save women from walking for long distances in search of water. Yet, the same benefits resulting from education contribute to some of the conflicts between her and some of her male family members.

In these novels, female characters epitomize Imbuga's vision of social transformation through education. Kanaya is a prominent character in *Shrine of Tears*. Having obtained good results in her "A" level examinations in which she emerged with four principal passes, including grade "A" in Mathematics, Kanaya enrolls for an Engineering degree programme at Kilima National University, a profession hitherto regarded as "non-feminine" (Marcus 1994). Her older sister, Kamonya, is a post-graduate student of law at a university in India.

Similarly, Daisy in *Miracle of Remera* excels when she passes her "O" level examinations (2004:150) through an educational system modelled on the 8-4-4 system of Kenya, and is admitted at Mengo University to study medicine. Daisy's characterization here can be compared to that of Wandia in *Ogola* (1994:280). Wandia, the only female student in her medical class, later rises to become a Professor of Medicine. Also, Sally in *Miracle of Remera*, joins Bima University to pursue a degree course in Information and Technology. Evidently, through these female characters, Imbuga demystifies the notion that some courses can only be pursued by men.

Female characters in these two novels are not only highly talented in academics but also excel in co-curricular activities and increasingly emerge as versatile characters. Kanaya in *Shrine of Tears* is a household name among Kiliman theatre goers and one of the greatest actresses of the land (1993:17), a description reminiscent of Kenya's Stella Awinja Muka. As a high school student, Kanaya wins several awards for acting and directing plays and emerges best actress

thrice in the annual schools and drama festivals (1993:17). Likewise, Daisy in *Miracle of Remera* represents her school in the competition during the Annual AIDS Awareness Day and her original solo verse thrills the audience, placing her in the second best position after Ezra Maiyo of the host school. It is noteworthy that dramatization and improvisations feature conspicuously as formal techniques in Imbuga's works, having also devoted his major scholarly works to this dramatic style.

The point to note in these new roles is that educated female characters are quite knowledgeable; and as such they freely participate in discussions on almost all national issues. For instance, in *Shrine of Tears*, the four-hour postponement of the auditions for the Wopner Brothers film, "Gorillas at War" (1993:36) presents an opportunity for Kanaya and Kamonya to discuss the cultural state of Kilima at a table with Kanaya's fiancé, Boge, and his friend Kanzika. Through them, Imbuga exposes the hypocrisy of the leadership of Kilima where the Ministry of Culture operates without a clear cultural policy. In this regard, Kanaya decries the exploitation of her people by foreign film producers who use Africa as settings for their films that ironically portray Africans negatively (1993:28). Later, Boge reveals that Kanaya had actually regretted having participated in a commercial film, for facial lotion, that degraded black women.

This characterization depicts Kanaya as the revising of the portrayals of Regina, Aminata and Hilda in Imbuga's respective plays. Regina prefers to maintain the status quo and pleads with her boyfriend, Jusper, to streamline his criticism of the Government. She prefers to be confined to the kitchen when male characters are embroiled in a discussion of sensitive political issues. Likewise, although Aminata is economically independent, she still operates in a hostile patriarchal society that is critical of her decisions. Hilda too, only seems to possess enough theoretical knowledge, especially on culture and western feminism: she attends women's liberation meetings and is widely travelled; she has even attended a thanksgiving celebration of the American Cultural Attaché and prefers Scottish country music to African music. In this way, the writer satirizes her version of feminism as her male associates fail to view her as African.

Evidently, the educated female characters in the novels operate in a more gender-sensitive environment. Kanaya's sudden death in a road accident (1993:55) albeit too untimely in the novel, also strategically reveals how much other characters, irrespective of their gender, valued her contributions to the well-being of the society. All the characters unanimously agree that Kanaya "had brought so much hope, so much warmth, so much sunshine and laughter to the hearts of many who knew her[...]" (1993:55). Accordingly, Kanaya is mourned by all characters that had interacted with her, including the university community, fellow actors, the barmen at the Shrine (National Theatre), estate children, ordinary villagers and even the grave digger whom she had once given a shirt. Generally, all talk positively of her, portraying her as a daughter, a sister and a friend to many (1993:103). Imbuga artistically uses the characters' attitudes towards Kanaya to portray a society that embraces the freedom of female characters and allows them to make their positive contributions as fictional human beings.

Ironically, Kanaya dies at a time when she was actively involved in a mission of cultural emancipation through theatre, and more specifically, through her production of Boge's play entitled, *Farewell to Ogres*. The significance of this play is twofold: firstly, Kanaya intends to produce the play with the ultimate hope that it would help sensitize the Kilimans to believe in themselves and stand united as a people. Secondly, Imbuga uses this play to express the need for the people's unity of purpose as a step towards development and democracy. Kanaya, an Engineering student recognizes the role of drama in educating the citizens on societal issues and her exemplary performance is the writer's message to the society to broaden spaces for women's participation to include more sectors.

Upon her death, Kanaya leaves a rich legacy in Kilima; and as such, her passing is not in vain: effectively, the artists establish the Luta Kanaya Foundation through which they continue to advance her mission and thus her spirit lives on to inspire her relatives, friends and colleagues, reminiscent of the war cry and Regina's fighting spirit linked to masculinity in *Man of Kafira* referred to in Chapter Three. More importantly, Kanaya's sister, Kamonya, abandons her degree course in India to accomplish her sister's mission, that she finds more enriching as an urgent measure to "decolonize the minds" of the Kilimans. When Kamonya assumes Kanaya's role in

the play, she symbolically becomes the re-incarnation of Kanaya in many ways, including her mannerisms, talent and success on stage; and for these, she is highly appreciated by the audience the same way the audience would have done for Kanaya. But more significantly, it indicates the importance of continuity and sustainability of women's participation if it has to create an impact. For instance, in Ngugi and Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976), when a character referred to as Woman is arrested in her attempt to reach Dedan Kimathi, Girl, (whom she has mentored) quickly fills the void and continues with her role.

In the contemporary society, Kamonya represents progressive women who are capable of making firm decisions on their lives and thus successfully confront difficult challenges that face them. For example, when the scripted play *Farewell to Ogres* is on the verge of failure after Kanaya's death for lack of a lead actor, Kamonya promptly steps in and within only three weeks, masters her role; and this results in the plays' instant success during its premiere performance. No doubt, Kamonya fully understands and appreciates the importance of continuity in the realisation of a worthy mission. Kamonya knows very well that far from simply being a couple, Kanaya and Boge were in a relationship that was meant to set a shining example to the people of Kilima and thus change their lives, through the sensitization process that they had started. She also effectively fills the void and tells Boge. "What we (Kilimans) need is a more permanent rallying point [...]. Yes, I will do it [...].I will be Kanaya for you" (1993:197). Kamonya's decisiveness and confidence here serve to emphasize the point made earlier about the reconstruction of the roles of female characters in these later works. In *Aminata*, Aminata is a lone ranger that if for some reason she is unable to continue with the struggle, there would be no other female character to continue championing her course.

Nonetheless, like Aminata before, Imbuga symbolically uses Kanaya's characterization as a strategy to contextualize the struggle for gender equality. With reference to our predominantly patriarchal rural communities, the writer explores levels of preparedness of male characters to embrace change with regard to the status of female characters, against the backdrop of traditions that have often perpetuated gender discriminations. In Aminata's case, her uncle Jumba, also the village headman leads some elders in resisting Aminata's quest to inherit the piece of land

bequeathed to her by her father. In a similar vein, in *Shrine of Tears*, Kanaya's death exposes instances of gender discrimination in her Seboa village, with regards to traditional mourning and burial rites. According to the village elders, male members of the family are buried to the right side of the family house while the females to the left. In the case of Kanaya, they find the left side "next to the mango tree" most appropriate, since she is unmarried and not even the eldest child, as opposed to under the *mugumo* tree where her late brother had been buried (1993:134). On the contrary, Kanaya's family led by her father Michael Luta, is vehemently opposed to this discrimination preferring under the *mugumo* tree as a common burial site for the whole family. Luta authoritatively states:

I have brought up all my children equally [...]. The days of girls and boys are gone [...]. The days that we now have everywhere in Kilima and elsewhere on this earth are days of children [...]. I want to bury her next to that shade which I once thought would be my own final resting place (1993:135).

The authorial intrusion states that the silence that followed Luta's remarks defied words (135). Essentially, this implies a new order of "more progressive values" (134) beginning to entrench themselves and threatening to erode the elders' hegemony of decision making in the community. Further, just like the changes in the images of women, individuals are also gaining autonomy in making decisions in matters concerning their homes. Finally, the fact that the elders are tight-lipped as Luta's decision is implemented reaffirms Doga's and Amata's sentiments about the role of the elders in a society in transition in *Betrayal in the City* and *Aminata* respectively.

In *Betrayal in the City* examined in Chapter Three. as their son's shaving ceremony is cancelled under unclear circumstances as the surviving son turns "mad" and soldiers deployed to guard the grave, Doga, in desperation acknowledges that "days have changed" and suggests to his wife Nina that they should retreat (1976:17-18). Similarly, in *Aminata*, as Amata appreciates change, he acknowledges that they (the elders) are being left behind (1988:58). Evidently, one can argue that in this new dispensation that Imbuga reconstructs, the collective views of the elders that had epitomized male domination, is symbolically being replaced by independent and objective reasoning by individuals in matters affecting their own lives and that of their families; a strategy that Imbuga proposes to be beneficial to the progress of both genders.

Other female characters that are empowered through education and are therefore economically independent are: Clare Walker and Dora in *Shrine of Tears*, a hospital matron and university lecturer respectively. The other is Brenda in *Miracle of Remera*, a primary school teacher who also operates a tailoring business. Clare, a white woman, is committed to her work; she provides medical attention to Kamonya after Kanaya's death and exactly one year later, takes care of Jay Boge in the Intensive Care Unit at the same hospital, following a fracas at the National Shrine, involving the Director for Culture, Hon. Gasia (1993:219-221). On her part, Brenda, an orphan and a school drop-out due to lack of school fees, is an image of resilience. She is determined to raise her own school fees and resume her education. For this reason, she accepts a job offer as a trainee receptionist at a tourist hotel: "So great was her quest for education that after working for only three months, Brenda enrolled for evening classes (and) took lessons in Mathematics, English and Commerce" (2004:20). She passes her examinations in all the three subjects and decides to join a teacher-training college.

Brenda represents a humble and intelligent female character that displays an exemplary and outstanding performance in her work at the hotel. Being aware of the fact that the quality of her life can only improve through education, she uses her grades in the three subjects to apply for admission into a Teacher's Training College. She is also determined to join the college to the extent that even when she misses the chance, she re-applies for admission during the next intake, until she eventually gets it. But, as Brenda resigns from the hotel to join college, she leaves with mixed feelings. In the first place, she is happy to go and realize her long-time dream particularly having been presented with a multi-purpose sewing machine by her work-mates as a farewell gift.

However, and more significant to the plot of the story, Brenda also leaves with a stigma that threatens to psychologically haunt her forever, after having been sedated and raped by an Ethiopian guest at the same hotel. Through Brenda, Imbuga criticises sexual exploitation of female characters by males. (A more comprehensive discussion of this topic follows later in this chapter). Here, Imbuga demonstrates that female characters have the potential to reconstruct their

identities from merely playing second fiddle in the society to working towards dismantling various obstacles that impede their growth and becoming instrumental in transforming their own lives. Effectively, Brenda goes to college during the day and works at her tailoring shop in the evenings to raise fees for her education.

5.4 Female characters as artistic symbols of traditional aesthetics

Apart from these younger educated female characters, the older ones, notably mothers and grandmothers, form another important category in Imbuga's novels. In his works, beginning with the earlier plays, Imbuga is consistent in the way he depicts maternal roles. Mojalefa & Makgato (2007:152-153) identify the restriction of the role of a female character to taking care of her extended family in Setswana short stories as stereotypical and propagating the patriarchal-traditional- structures.

On the contrary, in applying the moral and formal strategies of literature to the analysis of female characters playing the domestic roles in Imbuga's works, my research recognizes a moral dimension to the maternal roles of these characters. They are hospitable, respectful and mindful of their families; and, more importantly, they are full of wisdom even within their largely patriarchal societies. Inasmuch as they still remain peripheral to the main plot, the reader does not fail to notice their aesthetic significance to the sub-plots of the texts. Imbuga, evidently, empowers them by broadening their spaces and roles in their respective societies. While they retain their traditional role as home-makers on the one hand, the outlook of these female characters embraces the dynamisms in the contemporary society to the extent that more of them comfortably move from the confines of the village to towns, and the private to public life.

In rejecting the notion of women belonging in the kitchen, some earlier advocates of African feminism view the emancipation of female characters as the freedom to make important decisions concerning their own lives even if it means rejecting frustrating marriages (Nwapa 1966, 1984, 1990; Mariama Bâ 1981; Emecheta 1982; Aidoo 1993). Aidoo for instance, depicts Opokuya as fatigued and overburdened by domestic chores in addition to her occupation as a registered nurse. Opokuya's option is to rebel against motherhood permanently in her decision to

have her fallopian tubes singed to avoid more pregnancies. According to Kandji (2006:20), Opokuya embodies the traditional mother-figure, overtly indulgent and self-sacrificing, characterized by her maternal instinct towards her husband and children and keen on lavishing food on everyone around. Kandji further blames the patriarchal society for not allowing women to “indulge in a gratifying marriage” (2006:36). Likewise, in *A Doll's House* (Ibsen1992), when Nora quits her eight-year traumatizing marriage to Helmer Torvald, feminists view it as “a celebration of female freedom and equality between genders” much as Ngezem also considers it a symbolism of “the triumph of the weak over the powerful”(Ngezem, 2006:151, 164).

Instructively, this study finds Imbuga’s perspective on feminism a celebration and an appreciation of female characters’ role as homemakers and views it as a positive role that if utilized efficiently, accords them the potential to help establish peace and harmony in the society. In this regard, mothers and grandmothers in Imbuga’s novels add glamour and grace to the kitchen and their depiction enhances both the moral content and the aesthetic quality of the novels. These mothers are a source of joy and happiness to the youth, through the excellent meals that they cook. The youth who are the protagonists in *Miracle of Remera* are proud of their mothers’ meals and are all eager to invite their friends to their respective homes. In the village, Julia and her daughter, Fiona, cook “delicious food” (Imbuga, 2004:110) for her son, Kefa and his friends. Her neighbour Rita, Bidu’s mother, does the same and is referred to as a “professional cook” who has no problems hosting visitors even at short notice (121).

Similarly, in her town house, Daisy’s mother warmly receives Daisy’s boyfriend, Maiyo, his sister, Sally, and his cousin Kefa, all of whom she treats to “a mouth-watering meal” (138). In the same gesture, Erika, Maiyo’s mother welcomes her son’s cousins and girlfriend in her house and serves them with an elaborate breakfast and lunch. The point to emphasize here is that the female characters’ ability to cook good food is both a skill and a strategy in the novels: it is a common denominator among Imbuga’s characters as mothers, housewives, grandmothers as well as villagers or urban dwellers. In *Shrine of Tears*, Mama Kadi, Headmaster’s wife, is “an excellent cook” who “experiments with various combinations of improvised recipes” (1993:183), thus attracting Boge’s admiration of the warmth and harmony that exists in her family of six

children. On her part, Kanaya's grandmother (Grandma) warmly receives Kanaya and her fiancé, Boge, with a "huge guard full of milk." Similarly, in *Miracle of Remera*, Maiyo's grandmother, Sandere prepares tea for Maiyo and his cousin (2004:71).

In her appreciation of women's peace-building initiatives in South Africa, Cock (2007:278) recognizes the symbolic significance of the African Women's Peace Table that brought together "over 100 women and some men to consult on women's role in peace." With reference to the ideology of motherhood, Cock equates the concept of a "peace table" to women's traditional function of "placing food on the table" which "symbolises their role in maintaining households, families and communities throughout Africa. "Thus she concludes:

It was hoped that the African women's Peace Table would strengthen women's capacities to contribute to peace-making, peace-keeping and peace-building in various capacities- as political leaders, as women in military structures, as women active in peace-building organisations, as mothers and wives, and as citizens (2007:278).

Indeed, Suttner (2007:244) too in acknowledgment of women's role in providing food to the underground movement argues that a woman putting food on the table has a very special meaning and is an essential component of the war effort. He elaborates that whereas motherhood is a conventional role, providing food in this context was not merely a perpetuation of "traditional female roles," but a realization of "an essential element of the success of a military operation" (2007:243). Equally, Suttner reiterates that the concept of parenthood and motherhood was reinforced in the ANC underground movement when "members of the women's section became mother figures" to both younger women and the men (2007:249-250). Suttner's observation is reminiscent of Sembene's (1995) depiction of the symbolic significance of the homesteads of Dyenaba and Ramatoulaye as the homes where all the striking railway workers and their families are accommodated and provided with food and thus helped to transform the concept of family from its simple biological definition to a much broader and symbolic one in the context of a social and political struggle against oppressive and exploitative forces.

In view of all these, this chapter on reconstructing the female character and Imbuga's perspective on social change reiterates that the writer uses the concept of good food served to the family, relatives and friends as a metaphor that acts both as a unifying factor and as a basis for gender harmony in the family. Making meals cooked at home a common practice in many families in the two novels, underscores the potential of female characters to actively participate in the restoration of peaceful gender relations in society. Suffice it to say, these are not just simply biological mothers but, rather, they are symbolic mothers to everyone who comes to visit their homes. These mothers accord every visitor equal hospitality and respect. Consequently, Imbuga introduces a more elegant and aesthetic way of regarding women's prowess as homemakers, an attribute that makes them better placed to spearhead the society's transformational process. Thus for example, Kadesa, in Imbuga's *The Return of Mgofu* (2011) establishes her shrine and refugee camp on these human principles and ends up providing invaluable lessons and services to her people.

As Olembo and Kebaya (2013:97) put it, in Kenyan drama, the gendered self (re)configures her position in society. In keeping with his strategy of ambivalence in the depiction of characters and situations, Imbuga's female characters do not simply confine themselves to the domestic spaces; they also broaden their roles not only to be actively involved in gainful employment, but also to participate in other social activities aimed at achieving the overall development of the society. For instance, Rita, the Headmistress of a local Primary School, collaborates with Julia to participate in women's meetings at the village level. Likewise, Erika attends women's meetings in town while Daisy's mother works with the Examination Council. In this way, Imbuga advocates feminism that appreciates the crucial role female characters play in perpetuating gender harmony in their families and society instead of causing family disintegrations that may impact negatively in society.

Notably, the elderly female characters in Imbuga's novels are so supportive of their children and accommodating of their decisions by easily creating a conducive environment for dialogue in their respective families. In the contemporary Kenyan society, it is not uncommon to find the youth involved in disruptive and undesirable behaviour, such as arson and thuggery, attributed

to, among other factors, lack of proper guidance and the ever widening generational gaps between them and their parents. Imbuga is conscious of this fact and therefore uses his texts to convey a moral lesson. In the novels, the youth invite their friends to their homes and on their part, mothers appreciate their children's relationships with the opposite sexes. In *Miracle of Remera*, Maiyo is "overwhelmed by the reception" accorded to him by Daisy's mother (1993:139). Maiyo's family reciprocates by appreciating Daisy as Rita makes it comfortable for his son, Bidu, to introduce her friends' girlfriends. Likewise, in *Shrine of Tears*, Kanaya's parents respect her decision to join Boge's church and after her death, they still respect Kamonya's decision to enter into a new relationship with her late sister's fiancé (Boge). In the same vein, Grandma instantly approves the relationship between Boge and Kanaya. These women's attitudes towards the youth help to nurture and develop a gender complementarity that a democratic society requires for its gradual development.

Despite this cordial relationship with the youth, the female characters in these novels neither condone nor blindly support everything that their children or grandchildren do. Being open-minded, they are equally critical of undesirable behaviour by the youth. Erika and Julia are surprised at the negative behaviour of some new students at Mengo University - the behaviour that is attributed to the youth's exposure to pornographic pictures from magazines and technological advancement (Imbuga, 1993:142).

A close analysis of the roles of female characters in Imbuga's novels also reveals that they are powerful sources of inspiration as well as reliable mentors to the youth. The words that Grandma Nyamusi in *Shrine of Tears* utter as she mourns Kanaya, express the cordial bond that had existed between her and her granddaughter. Watching her mourn Kanaya, Boge recalls that he "had met her only once before, but that was enough to create a strong pull in him towards her" (1993:131). He recalls her hospitality and the many stories that he had recorded from her. Grandma is the only one who has the courage to publicly criticize the local Member of Parliament (MP), Honourable Mbagaya's hypocrisy at Kanaya's funeral (1993:145). And as the MP's bodyguards mistreat her, Boge is compelled to come to her defence. Moved by this gesture, Grandma is grateful and gives Boge her final blessings with the words, "Son of

somebody, may you grow. I am going to rest” (1993:132). She suddenly dies just as Kanaya is being lowered to the grave, thus leaving a lasting impact particularly on Boge.

On her part, Mama Kadi in *Shrine of Tears*, joins her husband in mentoring the youth. As Boge works on the production of the scripted play “*Farewell to Ogres*,” he feels frustrated by the lack of commitment displayed by the cast during the rehearsal. Thus, Mama Kadi and Headmaster embark on inspiring the cast and ensuring that the production is a success. They instil in the cast “confidence and a sense of pride and belonging” when they attend the rehearsals “throughout the week leading to the premier night” (1993:200). Furthermore, Mama Kadi is responsible for the organisation of the premier night and participates in some decisions that are made as the performance proceeds. Satisfied with the success of the production, the couple prepares a reception for the cast. Through these instances, Mama Kadi and Headmaster represent the kind of mentors that a society needs for its development. Ideally, the mutual respect that the couple display is what the society needs to embrace in order to rid itself of gender discriminations.

The two categories of female characters explored in this section demonstrate the ways in which the characters use their education or general experience to subvert marginalization. They reconstruct new images for themselves that allow for their increased participation in various sectors without relinquishing their distinctive roles of upholding family values and mentoring the youth. The last category of female characters focuses attention on young girls, a late introduction in Imbuga’s social and political world, perhaps out of the need for a paradigm shift in the formal strategies for responding to power imbalances in the society.

5.5 Characterization of the girl-child in Imbuga’s novels

The third category of female characters in Imbuga’s novels is the Girl-child. In our contemporary world, a society can only boast of democracy and development if it caters for the welfare and aspirations of all women and children. Hitherto, in our patriarchal African traditional societies, as noted in Chapter Four, the more children a man had, the higher his social status rose. Boys were particularly valued since they guaranteed the continuity of male hegemony in the society. Girls,

on the other hand, were valued for the wealth that their marriage would bring to their homes through bride price.

In Kenya, the rights of the girl-child were neglected for a long time to the extent that the treatment of the girl-child is still a source of concern in the contemporary society. In quite a number of regions, the percentage of girls accessing basic education is still relatively lower than that of boys. Similarly, the rate of girls dropping out of school due to lack of school fees, early pregnancies and marriages, is still very rampant in Kenya. One notices that in Imbuga's novels, the roles played by female characters of mentoring the youth and upholding family values are crucial in entrenching positive gender relations and hence transforming the society. It is for this reason that this section explores Imbuga's new vision of the girl-child in *Shrine of Tears* and *Miracle of Remera*.

In Imbuga's plays that dominated his writing for almost two decades (1971-1989), children as characters had very little space or none at all. Even where reference was made to them, they were nonetheless peripheral to the main concerns of the plays. In *Game of Silence* (1977), Raja makes reference to his child who is choked to death by a piece of cassava. As he pursues his further studies abroad, he has a premonition that his other daughter has also died. With hindsight, Ruganda (1992: xxii) states that this could have been a projection of the playwrights' restless premonitions and anxieties over his own daughter, born a few months before he departed for further studies abroad.

Further, in *The Successor* (1979) the child that Zira is expecting is symbolically used, firstly to expose the power intrigues involving the Emperor's Senior Chiefs, and to liberate Zira, as a female character, from the whims of male chauvinists. Zira's confession to Emperor Chonda that Chief Sasia is the child's father and not the "banished" Chief Jandi, gives her a voice of her own. She rejects manipulation by Chiefs Oriomra and Sasia. Also, in *Man of Kafira* (1984), children feature in the improvised play that the artists rehearse to be performed for Boss (Head of State) in exile in Abiara. Grabio and Taget who have been murdered by agents of the politically repressive state, order their brides Helna and Desi to resurrect their grooms. Their lullaby, "Our

men don't die" precedes the birth of the two spirits and "signifies a deconstructive political statement by the oppressed" (Ruganda, 1992: 25). In effect, the lullaby that was initially meant to soothe children symbolically turns into a "war cry" to combat oppression. Boss's wives, including Regina, sing a "lullaby" to their husband at the expense of their children, heard crying in the background. The lullaby in the improvised play becomes the vengeful Regina's "war cry" (1984:21) until she stabs Boss to death.

Next, in *The Burning of Rags* (1989), conflict between old Agala and his son Denis is based on whether to circumcise young Yona according to tradition at home, or in hospital as his father, Denis prefers. Yona is purely a victim of adults' views on circumcision and the binary opposition between tradition and modernity. The same is the case with Aminata as a girl-child in *Aminata* (1988). She is merely used by her father, Pastor Ngoya, to criticize tradition that discriminates against women, and to sensitize his people on the need for change of attitudes towards girls and women. Clearly, *Aminata* is significant in the sense that it is Imbuga's first play in which the girl-child is sustained as a character and, in fact, grows to become a central adult character.

Through *Aminata*, the playwright makes an initial attempt to re-mould female characters in a more enduring manner. Towards the end of the play, Aminata and her husband, Dr. Mulemi, look forward to having a "healthy nation for our children and their children" (1988:36) – a nation where their daughter would not be barred from inheriting her parents' property (1988: 42). Seemingly, therefore, the future envisaged here is the one that Imbuga revisits and interrogates in the two novels that also constitute his later works. He focuses our attention on the youth, and in particular, young female characters.

Interestingly, in his earlier Kimaragoli novella, *Lialuka Lia Avaana Magomere* (The Initiation of the Children of Magomere) (1986), Imbuga sets out to educate Maragoli boys on the significance of initiation. In its English version, he draws our attention to the existence of the girl-child in the same family through the title, *Kagai and her two Brothers* (1995). Most of the time the brothers let the young girl get her way; and although she receives tremendous attention, generally, gender roles in the novella significantly expose gender discrimination.

Shrine of Tears and *Miracle of Remera* have three different portraits of girls in contemporary Kenya. The first is the category that has already been explored, the co-protagonists who have reconstructed their identities through education. Women portrayed by such female characters abound in contemporary Kenya in various sectors like education, politics, industry and commerce, among others. The second category of young female characters are naive girls who are still growing up and therefore, are vulnerable and easily fall prey to constant abuse in the largely male-dominated environments. Through this category of characters, Imbuga challenges the society not only to be vigilant, but also to ensure that the girl-child grows up in a more secure and favourable environment.

In essence, such characterization also denotes the moral content of the texts. For instance, the novelist exposes male greed as a major problem that considerably undermines and exploits girls. In *Shrine of Tears*, young female characters perform roles of barmaids in Hell's Gate Bar and Restaurant where they cluster around male patrons who flock to the bar for drinks. One of them, Mwikali, speaks English in a manner that implies that she is most probably a school-dropout. Other young female characters, among them, a school girl dressed in full uniform, are exploited by Silverspoon, a white tycoon who readily buys them drinks and photographs them in the nude under the guise of creating "employment" for them. Generally, the writer satirizes and condemns such extreme exploitation of young female characters.

The theme recurs in *Miracle of Remera* where a female character is satirically named "Brenda of the firewood," in apparent reference to the menial chores she performs as a school drop-out after her teacher, Elam, impregnates her. She is forced into an early marriage to Elam who, ironically, also becomes jobless after being dismissed for impregnating his pupil (2004:72). Through Brenda, Imbuga highlights the plight of numerous girls in Kenya who fall easy prey to paedophiles or men who are otherwise charged with the social responsibilities of moulding and shaping them into better and responsible members of society.

In the same novel, the other female character, also called Brenda, drops out of school due to lack of school fees and consequently gets a job in a tourist hotel where she ends up being sedated and raped by an Ethiopian teenager-guest on transit. By a turn of events, she successfully completes her teacher training course and establishes a flourishing tailoring business. However, as a requirement for the newly recruited teachers, she takes a medical test and discovers that the cruel encounter with the Ethiopian teenager had left her HIV positive. Ironically, Brenda too, quite unknowingly transmits the killer disease to her childhood boyfriend, Ezra Maiyo, in an attempt to erase the memory of her devastating encounter with the Ethiopian.

Evidently, these instances are clear indications that unless men are prepared to change their attitudes towards women and regard them as their equal partners who should neither be abused nor exploited in any way, the gender harmony that is so much desired as a pre-requisite for democracy and development may not be fully achieved in the society. Imbuga, thus, advocates proper support mechanisms for girls and a more gender-inclusive life in the family and society. He supports this view through his new vision of the girl-child in the family represented by Kadidi in *Shrine of Tears* and Fiona in *Miracle of Remera* that forms his third portrait of the girl-child.

No doubt, Imbuga considers the family unit the basic socialization institution from where complete attitude change should emanate and be subsequently spread to the wider society. In this regard, one notices a clear shift in the dramatic structure used in the depiction of these children as they grow up in an environment that shapes their world-view in a more positive manner. By way of this strategy, the writer artistically gives insights pertaining to the role the family should initially play in inculcating positive values and attitudes in the child's life. The girl-child's world-view is shaped by how she is brought up. Himself a "warm family man, with an infectious sense of humour" (Indangasi 2002), Imbuga's view is that a supportive family enables the girl-child to grow up with self-esteem not just as a girl but also as a human being. For instance, in *Aminata*, despite Pastor Ngoya's convictions with regards to the manner in which he treats Aminata, we can credit him for providing her with an enabling environment in which she grows up as a privileged daughter and becomes a professional and an independent female character.

Fiona in *Miracle of Remera*, Julia's last-born daughter, is a humble and dutiful standard five pupil, aged about ten years. When Maiyo visits his grandparents in the village, Julia sends her to the old couple's home to help clean Maiyo's house. Upon finishing the chore, Maiyo is so impressed that a girl so young has done a good job of cleaning the house (2004:69). For the exemplary work, Maiyo rewards Fiona with "a generous amount of money; and the little girl dashes to the market to buy "the soda that she had long craved for" (2004:70). Later, Fiona's older brother, Kefa, invites his cousin, Maiyo, for lunch at their home and he (Kefa) relies on the little girl to cook the chicken which also turns out to be "the first time that young Fiona had been entrusted by anyone to cook a chicken" (2004:109). On her part, Fiona prepares the chicken very dutifully and accurately, starting with the "correct cooking pot" and step-by-step fries the necessary ingredients, adds the chicken pieces, pours some water and eventually covers the pot to cook. Completely, satisfied with her accomplishment, Fiona cannot "wait for her mother to come and appraise her cooking" (2004:109).

Fiona's experience is an indication that the socialization process that she undergoes in her family and, by extension, in the village, is one that perpetuates gender roles. Despite her age, Fiona is the one expected to cook in the absence of her mother. Her older brother, Kefa and their cousin, Maiyo, are also socialized to associate certain domestic roles with girls and women. Although Fiona succeeds in cooking the chicken, Kefa knows very well that the girl is "still too young to cook good brown Ugali for visitors" but instead of doing it himself, he contemplates calling "a neighbour to assist" (2004:110) and is quite relieved when his mother arrives. When the meal is finally ready, Fiona is still the one who sets the food on the table in Kefa's hut and leads the prayers for the meal before going back to join her mother in the kitchen" (2004:110). Thus, Fiona's role and place in the family are clearly marked for her and everyone in the family including Fiona, herself, is thrilled at her success with her first meal ever; and it now seems clear that she has fitted so well in her gender role and more of such meals will henceforth be expected from her.

Yet, it is also appropriate to suggest that despite this socialization into her gender roles, Fiona has a promising future due to her access to education. The diligence with which she performs house chores, if translated into performance in school, would turn her into a more balanced female character in the society. Fiona's depiction is a further illustration of Imbuga's new perspective on feminism unfolding in this research.

In *Shrine of Tears*, Imbuga targets a much younger girl and her parents' role in moulding and shaping her attitude towards herself and her roles as she grows up in the family and society; a view echoed by the Beijing Platform for Action's gender mainstreaming approach, two years after the publication of Imbuga's novel. In the introduction to his *Notes on Francis Imbuga's Aminata*, Indagasi (2002) states that those "who know Imbuga would, no doubt, see a resemblance between his character and that of his heroine, Aminata: generous, public-spirited, politically conscious and intellectually tough." We can add that this resemblance also exists between Imbuga's character and that of Headmaster, also a University Professor and an accomplished thespian, in *Shrine of Tears*.

A "warm family" man who respects and appreciates his wife and children, Headmaster gives ample attention to his youngest daughter, Kadidi. Both Headmaster and Mama Kadi provide an enabling environment for their last-born child. Headmaster comfortably plays children's games with his child (1993:163), in the process exposing her to the mechanics of improvisation. In this way, the girl-child's father plays a significant role to ensure that his daughter develops positive attitudes in the home environment. Kadidi acquires initial skills in self-expression and creativity, which also serve to boost her self-confidence and self-esteem.

Kadidi is described as "only a toddler" yet has "already mastered many effective ways of attracting visitors' attention to herself" (164). Indeed, Kadidi easily imitates Professor Frothingham's walking style to the amusement of her father and his visitor, Boge. At her age, she has already formed an opinion about racial differences and stares at Professor Frothingham with "a mixture of awe and wonder" (175-6), partly because he is a white man and partly for ignoring her. She innocently asks Boge if he can "beat a white man" (176). Later, when Kadidi

succeeds in imitating the gurgling sound made by her father (183), she feels so triumphant that, at least, she knows something that white girls in the television do not know” and “in time she would be able to teach them” (184).

The point to note here is that even at that very tender age, a black child is already indoctrinated with the notion that whites are more superior to blacks. This becomes an important subject of analysis between Headmaster and Boge; and through the two intellectuals’ brainstorming on the little girl’s opinion, Imbuga challenges the adults to re-examine their roles in shaping and developing children’s attitudes. Headmaster reiterates that positive formation is a role that should be played by everyone in the society. It can be seen that Imbuga uses Headmaster’s home as a model for positive socialisation of the girl child. Both Headmaster and Mama Kadi pay great attention to their girl child. Specifically, Headmaster makes his daughter believe in her abilities even if only to accomplish some otherwise insignificant undertakings like imitating her father’s gurgling sound. Mama Kadi, on the other hand, equally plays an important role in moulding Kadidi into a positive person. She educates the little girl into appropriate behaviour in the presence of visitors by constantly calling her to the kitchen, assigning her simple chores like counting plates for serving lunch, to keep her from disrupting the conversation between her father and his visitor (1993:176).

Thus, in these two novels, the relationships in families are a culmination of gender equality that Imbuga envisioned in his portrayal of the relationship between Aminata and Dr. Mulemi in *Aminata*. The way Kadidi’s parents and everyone around her treat her marks the beginning of the ultimate fulfilment of a healthy nation for children that Aminata foresees (Imbuga, 1988:36). It is also part of the realization of the “new role of women” that Beatrice envisages (Achebe, 1987:98). Besides, it can be argued that Imbuga advocates gender relationships based on human values in creating that new nation. In addition, he also considers the family as the best socialisation institution to help establish and maintain positive gender relations in the society; the home is fundamental as the foundation for nurturing and developing attitudes.

5.6 Imbuga's feministic vision

The study of the changing image of women in Francis Imbuga's works has used African feminist critical approach integrated with sociological approach to make the analysis both textual and contextual (Davies and Graves, 1986:12; Chukwuma 2007). This approach calls for a close analysis of a text with a view to establishing its relationship with the social reality. Chukwuma further contends that African feminism is neither anti-male nor motherhood as Davis and Graves argues that the "artist has the power to create new realities" where women are portrayed "as neither victors nor victims but partners in the struggle. Fanon (2004:141-2) states:

In a [developing] country the mobilization of men and women should be undertaken as quickly as possible. [It] must take precaution not to perpetuate feudal traditions that give priority to men over women. Women shall be given equal importance to men, not in the articles of the constitution, but in daily life [...].

In *Shrine of Tears* and *Miracle of Remera*, Imbuga envisions and expounds on Fanon's idea of a society with shared roles between men and women. Headmaster in *Shrine of Tears* reiterates to Boge the need for decolonizing the people's "entire spirit and social environment" because the worm that causes discrimination and lack of self-esteem is "already in our blood" (1993:177). This task, he argues, should not be left to a handful of people; but rather many institutions including the homes and the performing arts should be vehemently involved in positive socialisation, specifically targeting children much younger than Kadidi – probably as young as Elewa's baby girl whom Beatrice uses to challenge tradition in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987:217).

In Achebe's novel, Beatrice performs the child's naming ceremony and names her "Ameachina," a boy's name that means "may-the-path-never-close." This signifies continuity as well as the birth of a new generation of female characters in the society. Imbuga advocates gender complementarity that is nurtured and developed within the family and transferred to the public sphere. It is instructive that the tension, conflicts and male domination that previously characterized most families in the plays no longer exist in the novels. Instead, relationships are enhanced by respect, dialogue and mutual understanding; thus providing the characters with the transformational mechanisms that the society direly needs for its progress.

For example, the old couple, Zakayo and Sandere, in *Miracle of Remera* have a harmonious and cordial relationship; and as such, are a source of inspiration to their grandson, Maiyo, who acquires from them, a great deal of indigenous knowledge that later become quite useful in his life. They also try to counsel Yuda to guard against over-indulgence in alcohol. A similar relationship exists between Maiyo's parents, Joel and Erika, who are caring, understanding and very supportive of their children, as evidenced when they particularly learn that Maiyo has contracted AIDS.

But ideally, it is Headmaster and Mama Kadi in *Shrine of Tears* that demonstrate the complementarity that goes beyond the confines of the family to transform the wider society. Their role as mentors of the youth, particularly with regard to the actors involved in Boge's production in memory of Kanaya, has already been highlighted. In line with the arguments on the transformative role of literature that this study adopts, Headmaster, a name that signifies the head of a school, in a dialogue with Boge, sensitizes the reader on the important role of art in transforming society. Headmaster asserts that their target as artists "should be the deepest possible root of attitude formation (1993:177) while at the same time encouraging the young artist, Boge, to join the collective struggle of "decolonizing" people's attitudes: "It is your battle, Jay, a battle for young artists like you so use your pens and brushes to scatter the word asunder (173). Boge uses the inspiration he receives from Headmaster to sensitize the cast of his production on the need for artistic commitment and unity of purpose as a people (188-9).

A further demonstration of the couple's mutual understanding is noted after the pandemonium in the bar at the National Shrine, during which Headmaster and Boge are arrested, tortured and subsequently hospitalized (219). Mama Kadi ensures that she promptly delivers her husband's manuscript to the publishers. Also, Boge's friend Kanzika, makes good use of the daily newspaper for which he works to expose Hon. Gasia, whose position is equivalent to a cabinet minister, for assaulting Boge. Earlier, Kanzika, at the instigation of Headmaster, compels Dora to surrender the film containing pictures of the incident.

The play *Farewell to Ogres*, written by Boge was initially set to be produced by Kanaya but after her death, Boge himself and the Kanaya Foundation produce it in memory of Kanaya. The play is a big success during its premiere night. The term ‘ogre’ denotes something weird, evil and devastating. In the African traditional stories, the ogre has features of a giant, usually with certain abnormalities in its physical appearance. The ogre also has a tendency to camouflage its nature and may change into anything anytime; and the exaggeration in its physical features underscores how frightening it really is, in the stories.

In the context of Imbuga’s novel, the symbolic significance of the ogre resides in its reference to the indoctrination of the Africans to the extent that they have embraced foreign cultures at the expense of their own real identities. Furthermore, their leaders—represented by the Director of Culture, Hon. Gasia (Kiswahili word for rubbish) and the Director of Information, Hon. Mbagaya – are hypocrites who are only interested in personal aggrandizements at the expense of the people they purport to lead. In this way, they are the new ogres in the contemporary society. Ruganda (1988) uses the same imagery of the ogre to refer to a despotic regime that is a replica of Uganda during President Idi Amin Dada’s reign while Imbuga uses it again in *The Return of Mgofu* (2011) in reference to the lack of humanity in those who commit all manner of violence against their fellow human beings.

Imbuga uses Boge’s play, *Farewell to Ogres* to expose the society’s new ogres that are a stumbling block to the type of complementarity that he envisages for democracy and development. Through the literary technique of juxtaposition, he creates protagonists and antagonists in Kilima. The former comprises Headmaster, Boge, Kanaya, Kamonya, the cast of the play and all their genuine associates, while the latter has the hypocrites, traitors and opportunists that include Soita, a broadcaster with the National Television, and Dora, a university lecturer. Driven by petty jealousy and sheer lack of foresight and commitment, the two are separately responsible for the banning of Boge’s play, the fracas at the bar within the National Shrine (Theatre) and the subsequent arrest and torture of Boge and Headmaster.

Soita is actually the author of the derogatory song and insults about Hon. Gasia, yet Soita himself later joins Hon. Gasia in beating up Boge. Dora, who had secretly hoped to become Boge's new lover, now takes her revenge on him for rejecting her. She withdraws from the cast of the play only three weeks to the premiere of the performance, convinced that it would be impossible to find her replacement for the lead role. When Kamonya replaces her and puts up a sterling performance and the production becomes a success, Dora seizes the opportunity presented by Soita to call the police to the bar. Earlier, she had failed to deliver to Boge, Hon. Gasia's letter in which as Chief Guest at the performance, he had suggested a postponement of the function due to some urgent official matters. But being completely oblivious to Hon. Gasia's postponement letter, Boge is extremely angered by Gasia's failure to honour the invitation.

Therefore, through the characterization of Dora, an educated female character and a university lecturer, Imbuga cautions women that as they fight patriarchy which has historically undermined them, some vices like wickedness and jealousy, traditionally associated with women should also be fought. There are numerous African traditional folktales revolving around wicked women or jealous step mothers who plot to kill other women's children presumed to be better than theirs or in the case of girls, more beautiful. Such women are also the ogres that the society should reject. Yet, in Imbuga's characteristic style of providing characters with opportunities for retrospection, both Soita and Dora later regret their role. In fact, Kanzika uses the pictures that Dora took at the scene of the fracas as evidence against the Hon. Gasia. Besides, as the novel ends, Dora is part of those waiting impatiently outside the hospital for any news about Headmaster's and Boge's condition. Imbuga's model of complementarity here entails condemning retrogressive behaviours and including everyone in the society's development.

This incident at the Shrine also serves to expose Kilima's ironical situation where the Kiliman citizens themselves sabotage the progress of their own people but support foreigners to entrench themselves in the country's social and cultural fabrics. Mrs Carroll Sparks, a white woman, is ironically the Chairperson of the Town Players Performing Arts Association; and the Director of Culture honours her invitation to officially open the play, "*Joseph and His Technicolour Dreamcoat*". It is actually her telephone call that the police respond to after the commotion at the

bar and even goes further to bribe them for their prompt response. In the writer's view, these villains are actually the modern day ogres who also obstruct progress in society. Hence, "*Farewell to Ogres*" rejects all forms of vices, including imperialism, hypocrisy, exploitation and intimidation.

The protagonists, on the other hand, champion the writer's vision of a more humane society. For instance, Headmaster is critical of the exploitation of artists and reveals that the National Television owed Kanaya over one month's payment for all the programmes she had featured in as at the time of her sudden death. He encourages artists to be committed enough to play the role of sensitizing the people on patriotism and unity. Headmaster and Boge represent the writer's view that a successful programme of the emancipation of female characters must also include males who are gender sensitive and ready to enter into partnership with women for the establishment of a more democratic society.

Evidently, the future society that Imbuga visualizes at the end of *Aminata* is a society in which both female and male characters combine efforts to play positive roles in order to realize their overall progress. They are, at the same time, concerned with the well-being of their fellow citizens. Education and awareness are essential tools in the transformation towards the ideal society, hence Imbuga's younger generation in the novels have the potential to actualize that revolution.

The writer has explicitly used similarities and contrasts as techniques in the transformation of characters from his earlier portrayals. The characterization of Boge and Kanaya in *Shrine of Tears* can be seen as a development of that of Jusper and Regina in *Betrayal in the City* and *Man of Kafira*. In *Betrayal in the City*, Jusper starts off as a radical undergraduate literature student, so critical of the repressive regime that he is branded "mad". Thus, in *Man of Kafira*, he remains without any prominent position in the new regime under Jere had helped found.

Similarly, Boge a fine artist, doctorate candidate and literature lecturer is critical of his society to the extent of displaying a strange behaviour of talking to invisible beings. Both Jusper and Boge

utilise art to change society. In Juspér's case, his manuscripts are too sensitive to the extent that they are rejected on several occasions by the publishers until an opportunity presents itself due to Tumbo's inefficiency and craftiness which make him declare Juspér as the "winner" of a non-existent playwriting competition. Juspér's improvised play ironically leads to a coup d'état; but the new regime still does not accommodate him as Jere remains sympathetic to the now deposed Head of State. Boge equally camouflages his play, "*Farewell to Ogres*" in satirical language such that the Director for Culture authorizes its performance, albeit only for one night, before it is sabotaged by malicious forces. Yet the one night's performance creates a tremendous impact on the citizens of Kilima.

The characterization of Kanaya and Kamonya can also be recognized as the transformation of that of Regina in *Betrayal in the City*. Although modestly educated, Regina is submissive and prefers silence in a hostile environment dominated by male chauvinism. Regina in *Man of Kafira* is a victim of patriarchal greed and in an act of revenge stabs Boss to death in order to secure her freedom. But as it has been shown, Kanaya is liberated in many respects. Together with her fiancé, Boge, they have the leadership potential that is desirable in the society that the writer visualises. Both Kanaya and Boge use art to educate their people on the need to be self-confident and strive to re-discover their identity. The play, *Farewell to Ogres*, brings together genuine Kiliman artists who embrace the value of commitment and unity. Boge and Kanaya also inspire many other youths, particularly members of the university fraternity. Indeed, after Kanaya's death, the narrator reflects as follows:

[We] began to feel really united and quite close to one another, the way those with a common cause do. We began to talk with conviction about the need for us young Kilimans to initiate movements that would gradually propel us to our cultural roots [...] rediscovering the secret of our dying strength, through a clear vision of who we were and where we had come from (1993:160).

Fanon (2004:141) advocates the integration of young people into the nation:

A government that proclaims itself national must take responsibility for the entire nation, and in [developing] countries the youth represents one of the most important sectors. The consciousness of the younger generation must be elevated and enlightened.

Taking cognizance of the importance of the role of the youth in society's development, Imbuga underscores gender complementarity among the youth as a new approach to enhance a nation's development. Boge is one of Imbuga's young male characters that is gender-sensitive and concerned about respect and support for the girl-child. Through Boge, Imbuga rejects blatant sexual exploitation of girls. Boge encounters this menace at Hell's Gate Bar and Restaurant where Mr Silverspoon and Mr Gaylord, are good examples of male characters that take advantage of young girls. Boge confronts Mr Silverspoon and reprimands the Whiteman for taking nude photographs of these young girls as well as for buying them alcohol. More importantly, he warns Mr Silverspoon that he considers those young girls his sisters and implores him not to take any more nude pictures of them or any other Kiliman girls again (1993:90).

Through Boge therefore, Imbuga demonstrates that if male characters were more gender sensitive, then cases associated with male exploitation of girls, including rape, teenage pregnancies and early marriages, that are detrimental to the holistic development of the girl-child, would drastically reduce in society. Given the people's momentary appreciation of his production, Boge is optimistic that change is inevitable as depicted in his vision of "gleaming faces of little Kiliman children" (1993:206), akin to Headmaster's earlier vision of art flowing "gently through the veins of our children's tomorrow" and ridding them of the worm that has indoctrinated the minds of their people (1993:177).

Imbuga further recognizes the role of education in enhancing the struggle for gender equality and justice in society. In *Shrine of Tears*, the only leader that passes the integrity test is the Director of Education, Hon. Suja Kamanda, also depicted as having good intentions for his people. His education docket is an important vehicle for cultural revival and emancipation in Kilima. In this regard, the university, particularly through its literature Department, plays a leading role in exposing students to emerging issues, including the importance of patriotism and the need to exploit their talents and skills in the quest for cultural and national identity through artistic performances.

The last novel, *Miracle of Remera*, underscores the important role institutions of higher learning play in acquiring and disseminating knowledge through research aimed at promoting and entrenching gender complementarity in the society. The novel challenges educational institutions to re-examine their approach in equipping the youth with the necessary skills to confront issues that they may encounter in their everyday lives. For instance, Maiyo, a first year Law student at the university had earlier emerged second best in the secondary schools performances during the AIDS Awareness Day, yet ironically, he now discovers that he has contracted AIDS. Maiyo's condition as well as his will-power to fight the disease inspires him to embark on different experiments in search of a cure for the killer disease.

Maiyo, like Boge in *Shrine of Tears*, is gender sensitive. He discloses his HIV status to his girlfriend, Daisy, a medical student at the University and is so encouraged by her support and understanding. This motivates him to continue with his quest to find a cure for the disease. Boge is also concerned with the plight of Brenda who had unknowingly transmitted the disease to him. Consequently, *Miracle of Remera* challenges African researchers to be more focused and aggressive in their search for knowledge. In this case, research and indigenous knowledge become important thematic issues in this novel. Indeed, it is universally acknowledged that a permanent cure for HIV/AIDS is yet to be identified but this notwithstanding, the novel encourages researchers to look beyond university libraries and medical journals, for new knowledge.

Ultimately, this study considers the novel's optimism with regards to the search for the cure for the pandemic as one of Imbuga's major contributions to society. Smith (2012:29) advocates a decolonization process in which the indigenous people engage in the "rewriting and rerighting our position in history" because the indigenous people have the "power to change their own lives and set new directions" (2012:161). For Smith, therefore, indigenous people have the potential to identify their problems and determine the best way to solve them without having to depend on the former colonial masters for solutions. A vital aspect of this endeavour is the rediscovery of indigenous knowledge and its relevance to the people's lives (Smith, 2012:161).

Referring to his novel as *Miracle of Remera* suggests that Imbuga is experimenting with new ways of handling HIV/AIDS in literature unlike the most obvious approach of the inevitable deaths of characters that contract the disease (as seen in Mwangi 2000; McGregor 2007). The reality of course is that so far a cure has not yet been discovered and the anti-retroviral drugs (ARVs) can only prolong life but cannot cure the virus. But Imbuga defies realism by envisioning the discovery of a cure through the application of indigenous knowledge obtained from Remera, a remote fictional African village. The ironic break-through is regarded as a miracle because people are dying in their millions in the developing countries as we wait for the medical researchers in the West to announce to the world a genuine break-through. It is a miracle because the small village of Remera could just go down in history as the ironic saviour of the globe from the pandemic.

In *Miracle of Remera*, the determination of Maiyo, a Law student surpasses even the Medical students themselves in his medical research in the university library. His cousin, Kefa, a medical student, wonders why Maiyo has all of a sudden developed some interest in medical research (Imbuga, 2004: 188). It is possible to argue that Maiyo's earlier experience in his home village immensely contribute to his interests in research into HIV/AIDS. Firstly, he is confronted by his people's stigmatization of the disease when they refer to it as "the big one" and construct numerous narratives, mainly rumours about it. Secondly, a morgue attendant capitalises on the people's ignorance and sells to them plastic bags under the pretext that a government directive requires all coffins to be sealed in those bags before they are released for transportation to different parts of the country. This intensifies people's anxiety about the bodies brought to the village for burial.

A case in point is the villagers' reaction to the casket bearing the body of Mwalimu Manoa that they only watch from a distance. Only the bewildered Maiyo joins the teacher's son in viewing his body and thereby demystifying the myth of the plastic bags. His people's attitude makes him question where all the "money that was supposed to be spent on the Rural AIDS Awareness Programme" went to (2004:86). Next, Maiyo's grandparents, Zakayo and Sandere expose him to various traditional methods of handling ailments and he combines this knowledge with research

into human instinct. Maiyo observes his grandfather's sick goat take control of its condition by identifying the correct medicinal herbs in the bush. His grandfather tells him: "Goats are not like us [...], goats are doctors of themselves. Allow a sick goat into the bush and it will find its own cure" (2004:68). Maiyo also learns about the medicinal value of *ikizuuri*, the bitter green liquid found in the intestines of a freshly slaughtered animal (such as a goat) – a liquid that old men in his village add to their roasted meat. Likewise, he observes his grandmother administer herbs and roots on different forms of ailment, often with proven success.

Therefore, like his grandfather's goat, Maiyo is determined to take control of his own life. In his characteristic style, Imbuga uses the dream device to portray the extent to which Maiyo is committed to his cause. Maiyo dreams about the goat and illiterate pregnant village women searching for and identifying the correct type of soil, rich in iron, that their unborn babies require (Imbuga, 2004:183). These experiences lead Maiyo to the conclusion that "human instinct" is an important but frequently ignored fact in medical research (2004:186). Thus, he also develops an interest in traditional medicine and searches for herbs that he concocts with *ikizuuri* and drinks.

Maiyo's argument about research could as well be Imbuga's challenge to the scientists:

Knowledge ought to be truly fluid [...] the compartments in which we put it are artificial [...] if a medical doctor writes an engaging novel about human nature, should we look down on it because the author did not do literature at school? It is within this spirit that I am now getting interested in medical research (2004: 187).

And so, Maiyo becomes his own guinea pig and some concoctions that he takes are obviously dangerous to his health. On one occasion, Daisy finds him unconscious and calls for help to rush him to the University's Referral Hospital (2004:197). Incidentally, tests that Dr. Nimrod repeatedly performs at the hospital reveal that Maiyo is HIV negative, yet it is him who earlier disclosed Maiyo's HIV status after a blood screening test had contracted the disease. The writer leads us to the conclusion that Maiyo has miraculously cured himself of the dreaded disease. One acknowledges at this point the preponderance of the relevance of the application of magical realism in studying the novel. Magical realism includes the magical and the supernatural as part of reality. Scholars argue that it became popular in African literature when writers found the

convention of realism inadequate in representing the absurdities and violence of neo-colonialism (Knapp, 2006:65). Yet, as I have argued in other sections of this research, I have hinged my analyses on aspects of African oral tradition that also use mystical elements to explain phenomena.

Through Maiyo, Imbuga advocates thorough research in traditional medicine and human instinct as vital aspects of medical knowledge. Aware that so far no cure for HIV/AIDS has been discovered, the writer envisions that the solution will largely depend on thorough research that integrates indigenous knowledge with modern scientific research. Maiyo asserts: “What we now call advancement in technology and other related areas is a far cry from what we are capable of harnessing from our environment” (Imbuga, 2004:207). This prospect of research transcends the limited knowledge that Imbuga’s potential leaders in his earlier plays, *Regina* and *Jusper*, possess. It also solidifies real gender co-operation required for democracy and development in the contemporary society, symbolised by the relationship between Daisy and Maiyo.

With the enormous indigenous knowledge Maiyo has acquired, as well as his interest in medical research combined with modern knowledge in medical practice, he intends to team up with Daisy and Dr. Nimrod to engage in research on HIV/AIDS. Indeed, this is an illustration of collaborative research, using a gender inclusive approach and integration of traditions with modernity. Symbolically, Maiyo’s grandfather, Zakayo, the custodian of indigenous knowledge dies just when he has already bequeathed his wisdom to the younger generation that intends to revitalise it to transform society. Zakayo’s death is therefore the death of the old order that now paves way for the new order that is gender sensitive and more integrated in many respects.

Worth noting in these two novels is that gender relationships underline the writer’s emphasis on both male and female characters playing complementary roles as a framework for establishing a more cohesive society. As the writer returns to drama in his next text, *The Return of Mgofu*, he expounds on this aspect of human relationships and the dignity of individual human beings in the society.

5.7 *The Return of Mgofu: confronting the past*

Imbuga's last published play before his death, *The Return of Mgofu* (2011), is set in a fictional African country called Mndika and is dedicated to "all those who have fallen in major and minor forms of genocide in Africa and beyond [and to] lovers of peace." As stated in Chapter One, this study also focuses on the nature of literature itself to reveal the moral content of the roles of female characters in Imbuga's oeuvre. The outstanding conventional literary strategies that Imbuga utilises in *The Return of Mgofu*, include narration, memory, symbolism, imagery, proverbs and improvisation. Thori and Thoriwa are introduced as "messengers from beyond" who jointly assume the role of "witness-narrator" (Mervis, quoted in Knapp, 2006:59) in a similar way as the communal voice in Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying* (1995). Through dramatization, Thori and Thoriwa narrate events of the past of which they were witnesses until they died along with others in the shrine. By using this narrative strategy within the play, the writer involves the audience watching or reading the play to reflect on the consequences of such actions in their own societies.

The past in *The Return of Mgofu* encourages the present society to focus attention on both perpetrators and victims of violence as well as the nature of the country's governance. Thus, the narrators comment on Kadesa's shrine and refugee camp for the people of Mndika in Nderema. Of significance is their revelation that Mgofu Ngoda, the son of Mgofu the blind seer and symbol of Mndika's well-being, was born and bred in exile. He heads Kadesa's shrine and like his father, he is a seer offering "invaluable advice" to the people of Nderema (Imbuga, 2011:28). The main emphasis here is the irony of how genocide impoverishes a country as its citizens in exile contribute to the prosperity of their host countries. The messengers caution the people of Mndika against a repeat of genocide that has made other regions like Nderema benefit from the services of their people in exile:

Thoriwa: The stone that was ignored in Mndika has become the cornerstone in Nderema.

Thori: Now [...] is the time for you people of Mndika to look back. Your eyes and ears need to open (28).

Concerning governance, the narrators suggest that it takes good leadership to steer the populace away from a repeat of violence or ethnic animosity. As I have shown, leadership is one of the recurrent themes in Imbuga's oeuvre. The underlying message in *The Return of Mgofu* is that Mhando's leadership style is a model of good leadership. It is participatory in approach in the sense that Mhando discusses, consults and agrees with his council of elders before making any decision. Contrary to the leadership styles in Imbuga's previous works that exclude female characters, Mhando's wife is his chief adviser, implying that a female character is the architect of this model of good leadership. This study has revealed in Chapter Three that in Imbuga's early plays, leaders draw a line between domestic and public life, with their wives largely restricted to the domestic sphere. Mhando's council of elders, initially referred to as Elders of State for Exceptional Leadership (ESEL), later transform into servant of people (Suja) to signify a people-driven leadership.

At another level, the essence of the structure of *The Return of Mgofu* lies in its narrative framework that exploits the power of story and memory to dramatise the past. The past shapes the present and the future of any society. The characters tell the stories of the past as they remember them and these serve to represent the reality. Imbuga's play affirms the need to engage with the nation's narratives of the past in order to tackle the realities of the present and to determine the future.

Achebe (1987:124) outlines the significance of memory and story through the parable of the anthills that survive the draught to tell the new grass of the savannah about the previous year's brush fires. In his novel whose title is drawn from the same parable, a character referred to as Old man states, "it is only the story that can continue beyond the war and the warrior" and that the story is our escort into the future. Achebe (2009) and Ngugi (2010) use story telling strategy to revitalise themes covered in some of their earlier works. Equally, Smith (2012:147) reiterates that the remembering of a people relates more specifically to the remembering of a painful past and their responses to that pain. Ndebele (quoted in Knapp, 2006:63) states it more succinctly:

The past is knocking constantly on the doors of our perceptions, refusing to be forgotten, because it is deeply embedded in the present. To neglect it at [...] most crucial moments in our history is to postpone the future.

The Return of Mgofu is Imbuga's means to help society confront the past. Thoriwa alludes to the fact that the story of how Mgofu saved his expectant wife from the genocide has been told and retold and has spread in all the three ridges of Mndika and beyond (Imbuga, 2011:9). Thus, memory and story as aspects of African oral tradition guard against forgetting significant events that could have happened in a people's past. This can explain Imbuga's use of ancestors in this play as the custodians of the past. Mbiti (1990:202) outlines that in their human life, some of the spirits were the "founders or forbearers of the nation," hence certain offences against human beings are also offences against the spirits and the living-dead. In the play, the ancestors have sent Thori and Thoriwa back to the world of the living to remind the people of Mndika of the horrifying story of their past in order to forestall a repeat of the same.

If this play was influenced by the 1994 genocide of Rwanda, where Imbuga later spent some five years as a Professor at Kigali Institute and also helped produce a film on the same theme, then a repeat of a similar event that he was concerned about could as well have been post-election violence of Kenya that occurred between December 2007 and early 2008. As was indicated earlier, Odhiambo (*Sunday Nation*, January 6, 2013) links the play to the Kenyan context while condemning the ethnicity and tension that was already building up in the country as the March 2013 general election approached.

The language of the characters in *The Return of Mgofu* is enriched by the use of proverbs, imagery and irony as they narrate the story and dramatise events of the past and the present. The narrators refer to the shrine where they sought protection from the perpetrators of genocide as the 'sacred cave,' the 'great 'cave,' because ironically, the massacre took place in the shrine, a place that should be revered. Thori refers to that day as the "dreadful eternal darkness" (Imbuga, 2011:7) or "madness" (8) and the perpetrators as "ogres" (17). The narrators also convey various themes through the use proverbs. For example, they use the proverb "[t]he soiled water can still be distilled to freshness" (8) to deliver the message of reconciliation. Mgofu's usefulness to the people of Nderema is highlighted through the proverb: "It's the goat who bleated twice to say he

had found a new home and the dog barked at him” (27). The proverb: “It is experience that trains a squirrel to know where the grains can be scooped” (29) refers to Mhando’s good leadership.

Other important structural techniques include the use of dream. The dreams in Imbuga’s works depict complex issues that confront the characters. Some of the dreams are associated with the ancestors who, the characters believe, are still part of their daily lives. In certain cases like in *The Successor*, a seer or diviner intervenes to offer a reliable interpretation of the dream. Mhando in *The Return of Mgofu* experiences a strange dream in which a creature referred to as the “man-bird” reveals to him that Mndika’s “salvation may be shared with Nderema” (49). Mtange’s assertion that they “are lucky that such spirits still have time for us” implies that the same ancestors who sent the messengers to the living have also appeared to Mhando in a dream. The dream thus serves as a literary strategy that reveals Mhando’s deep concern for his people and his country as well as the need for him to appeal to Mgofu and the exiles rendering important services to Nderema to return to Mndika, their home country. At another level the return of Mgofu to Mndika would directly remind the people of their past in order to help them restore “a lasting peace” (51).

5.7.1 *The Return of Mgofu*: artistic vision of change and reconciliation

The most striking feature of Imbuga’s depiction of female characters is its transformation from a nascent and implicit feministic vision to a more explicit and conscious vision. In his later works therefore, the writer envisions the transformation of the female character as part of the social change that the whole society requires for peaceful relations and prosperity. Thus, my discussion of female characters in *The Return of Mgofu* takes cognizance of Imbuga’s sensitivity to broader socio-historical injustices experienced by both men and women in the African Continent. It also maintains that peace and reconciliation and harmonious relationships that the writer envisions should also entail improved status of women.

Despite half a century of independence of the African countries, peace and reconciliation have become household terminologies due to cases of perennial instability attributed to different forms of internal conflicts and civil wars. In this case, the play addresses the entire African continent

whose countries have experienced different forms of injustice, in varying magnitudes, ranging from ethnic, religious and political related forms of violence, civil wars, to genocide. These have resulted in destructions, deaths of innocent citizens and gross violations of human rights across the continent.

Generally, *The Return of Mgofu* condemns the recurrent ethnic animosity and intolerance that continue to plague most African countries. The fictional nation of Mndika has emerged from the traumatic experience of politically and ethnically instigated acts of genocide. Thori and Thoriwa, characters from the world of spirits, return to tell the story of the past and to convey a message of forgiveness and reconciliation. This technique of omnipotent presence enhances their authoritative voice as the custodians of the nation's master narrative. They jointly tell the story of the genocide in Mndika, how innocent citizens were massacred as they took refuge in the shrine; how the blind old seer, Mgofu, saw it wise to proceed to Nderema in exile to save his expectant wife, Nora; and how the priestess Kadesa, a Mndikan exile from an earlier violence, welcomed Nora in her shrine and refugee camp where her son, the younger Mgofu, is born and how Nderema has eventually become the new home of Mgofu and other exiles from Mndika.

In his tribute to Imbuga, Kabaji (*Daily Nation*, November 19, 2012) hails Imbuga as the father of East African brand of magical realistic mode having consciously used it in his novel *Miracle of Remera* and in *The Return of Mgofu*. Acknowledging Imbuga's reference to it as alternative realism, Kabaji states that magical realism is the "best paradigm of expressing our African reality. "While I concur with the view on magical realism, in the context of this study and in consistency with the forms that I have already identified in Imbuga's previous works, I shall use sociological criticism to relate the text to the realities of the African societies and the mode to the African oral tradition in which the spirits and the ancestors play a prominent role in the world of the living. I have made reference to reverence for the dead, communion between the living and the dead through dreams and respect for wishes of the dead, as dominant features in the world of Imbuga's creative works.

Mbiti (1990) expounds on this aspect of the African traditions through his elaborate account of the African concept of death and the relationship between the dead and the living. In explaining the African people's understanding of the spiritual world, Mbiti points out that the spiritual world is populated with spiritual beings, spirits and the living-dead (ancestors); and that the living-dead is one unit with the physical world (Mbiti, 1990:74). He makes reference to the existence of an active and powerful human relationship with the spirits of the living-dead, those who have recently died or those departed up to five generations (81). Mbiti further observes that the living-dead retain the features that described them in physical terms such as their names and are still in contact with their human families, returning as 'people' from time to time and acting as the link between them and God. In addition, the living-dead are the "guardians of family affairs, traditions, ethics and activities" (82, 157). Consequently, as Mbiti submits, any breach of customs is an "offence not only to the human society but also to the spirits and the living-dead" (202).

Concerning the mystical powers, Mbiti (1990:202) states that the "African peoples are aware of a mystical power in the universe" and recognize it as power that is ultimately from God, but manifested through physical objects, spiritual beings and magic. He notes that some human beings "know how to tap, manipulate and use" some of this power and that if used negatively it can be "harmful and therefore evil." But the mystical power is useful and acceptable if it is "employed for curative, protective, productive and preventive purposes."

In *The Return of Mgofu* Imbuga again defies conventions of realism by using spirits, extraordinary beings alongside the living as characters. The playwright revisits themes and techniques of the African oral tradition to comment on the present world of his play. These aspects are best examined within the framework of the nature of literature itself, as I indicated earlier with regards to Imbuga's previous texts. The title of the play has a multiplicity of meaning: it draws attention to the significance of Mgofu as an allegorical figure, a symbol of Mndika's history, also described as the "symbol of Mndika's well-being" (Imbuga, 2011:46). It also refers to the reincarnation of Mgofu Ngoda, the great half blind seer of Mndika, through the birth of his son named after him. The difference is that his son is born and bred in exile in

Nderema where the older Mgofu fled to after the genocide in his homeland. Also, the 'return' in itself symbolically creates the journey motif in the sense that while it refers to the physical return of Mgofu to Mndika, his ancestral land, it can also be read as a return to the African oral tradition to comment on the present issues. Indeed, as I have shown, Mgofu in *Kimaragoli* implies old age, wisdom, goodness and other virtues of African oral tradition. In the play, the ancestors return to restore a moral order in the world of the living, hence the reunion of the ancestors with the living to restore peace and tranquillity in the society. Ultimately, it signifies Imbuga's return to the genre of drama in which he is most accomplished after a sojourn in other genres. The tributes at his death clearly showed that Kenyans mostly remembered Imbuga as a playwright and a thespian.

Significantly, in *The Return of Mgofu*, Thori and Thoriwa, husband and wife and victims of genocide, return to the world of mortals in their human form, as messengers from the ancestors with a message on the need to reclaim humanity, the need to restore the values of dignity, respect and harmonious relations between people. The point to note here is that both Thori and Thoriwa undertake their mission jointly, with none claiming superiority over the other. They symbolically take turns to push each other on the wheel-chair that has brought them back on earth in a way that emphasises complementary approach to gender relations.

5.7.2 African oral tradition as reconciliation framework

One of the major themes that *The Return of Mgofu* explores is the ways in which a nation handles the traumatic experiences of the past or what is widely regarded in Africa as historical injustices. Violence leaves an indelible mark on the lives of individuals as witnesses, victims or perpetrators. A nation may take either the retributive or restorative approach to justice. As discussed earlier in Chapter Three, the retributive approach requires that the perpetrators of crimes acknowledge their guilt and receive punishment for them as a way of assuring the victims that justice has been done. On the other hand, the restorative approach expects that both victims and perpetrators of injustice confront the truth and strive to restore peace with emphasis on forgiveness and reconciliation.

In conformity with the style of Imbuga's earlier works, the play adopts a restorative approach to justice. The writer experiments with literary strategies that improvise a context of Truth, Justice and Reconciliation (TJR) on the occasion of the Remembrance Day celebrated at the end of the play. This is a significant national day in which the citizens of Mndika commemorate those who died in the genocide as well as those who went in exile to other neighbouring countries like Nderema. At the same time, as their leader Mhando asserts, it is the day to make the people "touch the scars of bad governance" (51); "to open old wounds once and for all" (52) and to say "NEVER AGAIN" to violence (67). The day becomes more important as it marks the return of Mgofu, the embodiment of that significant past and the beginning of the reconciliation process.

In this context therefore, the play advocates a return to the values of the African oral tradition to enhance peaceful relations between individuals in the society. It is also in this context that we should understand the playwright's concept of "alternative slice of reality" (2011). The play's overriding message is contained in the virtues of respect for fellow human beings, tolerance and forgiveness. For this reason, and with regard to the context of my study, Mgofu's return implies a "return" to the re-assessment of the role of African traditions in the subordination of women and the possibility of transforming the roles of female characters in order to integrate them into the mainstream social and political activities of the society. The overriding emphasis in the play is its focus on the individual human beings and their ability to create peaceful relations between themselves, irrespective of their gender.

Mgofu as the personification of the virtues expressed in the play, has an obvious parallel with the African philosophy of Ubuntu that became the motif of guiding principle in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Fox (2011:105) cites Tutu's explanation of Ubuntu as humanness; the very essence of being human. Tutu elaborates that Ubuntu is an "African worldview based on human values of respect, compassion, kindness, hospitality" and that those who possess the virtues of Ubuntu live in harmony with fellow human beings. Likewise, Achebe (2009:123) emphasises on learning to recognize one another's presence and being ready to accord human respect to all people. Furthermore, he states: "Our humanity is contingent on the humanity of our fellows" (Achebe,

2009:166). Thus, in *The Return of Mgofu*, these virtues of Ubuntu are displayed in the wisdom of Mgofu, and the humaneness of characters like Mgofu, Mhando, priestess Kadesa and Nora Ulivaho. These characters can be regarded as ideal characters entrusted with the role of spearheading the process of reconciliation in their society.

5.8 Subverting the cultures of dominance and impunity

The Return of Mgofu conveys an optimistic message from the ancestors about respect for humankind and harmonious relationships. Male dominance may have prevailed in African literature, but the play broadens spaces for female characters to assume roles that only their male counterparts played in Imbuga's early works. For instance, Mizra and Sariku steer official activities of the Remembrance Day. Furthermore, Kadesa plays a magnanimous role in exile in Nderema as priestess of Kitigali Shrine where she has also set up a refugee camp for her people from Mndika. Her shrine is symbolically referred to as "Farewell to Ogres," a sign that these characters have rejected the impunity and intolerance that befell their home country. Mndika.

A particularly important role of Kadesa as priestess of Kitigali Shrine is that she subverts male dominance in that literary space. In the traditional African set-up, shrines are revered places of worship and sacrifice, mostly headed by men as priests and spiritual leaders. This social reality is reflected in African literature in works such as Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*, Wole Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest*, Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are not to Blame* and Imbuga's *The Successor*. Thus as priestess, Kadesa's role is also very crucial to the continuity of Mndika's well-being; she offers refuge to the exiles of Mndika including the older Mgofu's wife who gives birth to the younger Mgofu at her refugee camp. Besides, Kadesa performs both the burial rites and naming rites for the older and the new born Mgofu, respectively. To this effect, Kadesa's Shrine becomes home to the Mgofus; and while the older one is buried at the Shrine, the younger one is brought up there and later as an adult takes over the leadership of the shrine. In this way, not only does Kadesa venture into hitherto male space, she also illustrates that in times of conflicts, women are very instrumental in peace-building.

Equally in *The Return of Mgofu*, female characters are included in the new model of political leadership. As I have previously pointed out, the narrators recognize Mhando's approach as "good leadership" (2011:28). Jere had tried it in *Man of Kafira*, but only to a limited extent. Indeed it is the Mndikans that prevail upon Mhando to stay on for a second term, also a completely new phenomenon in Imbuga's drama where disillusionment sets in immediately a new leader is installed.

Another attribute in Mhando's participatory leadership is that he has also drawn a plan that includes women in his inner circle of elders. Mgofu's message to the people of Mndika confirms that this approach will lead to peace and stability experienced by other regions that are way ahead of Mndika because they thought of involving women much earlier (57). Mgofu champions change and a break with retrogressive tradition that does not help the nation improve human conditions of "its people" (58).

Mgofu's return is symbolic in the sense that its intention is to solidify peace and stability in Mndika. His strong message of "respect for human blood" (69) is double-pronged: firstly, it provides a framework for equality of men and women. Secondly, it is a means to solve the vice of impunity that creates conflict in society. Hence, Mgofu's return brings to the people of Mndika a message of peaceful relations between men and women, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds. This message can also be read as Imbuga's optimism that human beings possess redemptive qualities.

Mgofu, the seer demonstrates his message through his attitude to his daughter, Nora Ulivaho, who accompanies him on his return journey to his motherland, Mndika. Being the guest speaker, he first invites her to address the Mndika people on the great occasion of the Remembrance Day. Moreover, aware that his days are numbered, Mgofu seeks to establish a lasting bond with the Mndikan people. Nora Ulivaho asserts: "I cannot [...] guarantee his return. However, I promise that I shall return to honour the invitation on behalf of my father" (68). In Nora, therefore, we see a self-assured woman who has regained power to represent herself.

Mndika's Remembrance Day ends in suspense with the possibility of the death of Mgofu and continuity of his legacy through his daughter, Nora Ulivaho. The fit of uncontrollable coughing that attacks Mgofu as he concludes his speech, symbolically implies that his mission is accomplished. Nora Ulivaho immediately crosses over to occupy the empty seat, next to Mhando, that would normally be occupied by the latter's wife, now deceased. Henceforth, the characters' actions and stage directions provide clues to the suspense. As a female character, Nora's action does not only suggest her assertiveness, but it also indicates her intention to entrench herself in the political and public space, initially a gendered space in Imbuga's works. Interestingly, her name "Ulivaho" in Kimaragoli language actually means "the one who will be there" (2011:33). Clearly, this name that projects to the future symbolically illustrates Nora's prominence and, in the light of the ending of the play, her future participation in Mndika's political leadership. Consequently, through Nora, Imbuga completes his feminist vision that has kept evolving in the three phases of his writing established in this research.

It can be said, therefore, that the applause from the crowd signifies their appreciation of the developing relationship between Mhando and Nora, which has also been endorsed by Mgofu when he poses the question: "Who in this world is not searching for happiness?" (70). More significantly, the crowd's applause also indicates that the society supports and endorses women's participation in the political space. It is worthwhile to note that Nora's future role also conveys the writer's message of reconciliation and de-gendering spaces; a move that paves way for equal participation of both men and women in reconstructing a society founded on Ubuntu principles that recognize the potentials of individual human beings.

5.8.1 The Changing images of women in Imbuga's oeuvre

In view of the foregoing discussion, there has been a tremendous development in the characterization of women in Imbuga's writing. In *Aminata*, Aminata stands out as an epitome of a progressive woman, educated, professional, economically independent and well respected by her husband and other members of the community. Nevertheless, she does not instantly succeed in dismantling the patriarchal hegemony that still imposes restrictions on her struggle for equality in relation to land inheritance. The social and cultural context within which she operates

is still resistant to change. The depiction of young, educated female characters like Kanaya in *Shrine of Tears* and Daisy in *Miracle of Remera*, in more gender sensitive environments takes what Imbuga has begun in *Aminata* a step further. But Nora Ulivaho in *The Return of Mgofu* establishes herself as a more progressive female character that is better positioned to accomplish these female characters' struggle for equality in male dominated societies.

Nora can be compared and contrasted with Aminata in many respects. In the first place, both Nora and Aminata are daughters of prominent male characters, respectively. Mgofu Ngoda and Pastor Ngoya have immensely contributed to the success of their daughters through support and education. However, while Pastor Ngoya sets out to prove that a daughter can excel and become more successful than a male-child, Mgofu strives for equality between his children. Both Nora and her brother are well educated. She is a graduate of the University of Southampton where she studied International Relations, while her brother is a respected medical doctor and now the personal assistant to Nderema's Prime Minister. This difference in social status highly contributes to the rivalry between Aminata and her brother Ababio, an alcoholic and an irresponsible family man, generally a failure. It is instructive that Ngoya's other son, Joshua (also called Joram), is in India for further studies and as I pointed out in Chapter Three, his letter in support of Aminata is crucial in the elders' decision to hand over to her the piece of land in question.

Explicitly, Mgofu the seer exemplifies that tranquillity that societies seek must first start within the family. While Ngoya uses Aminata to fight tradition, Mgofu demonstrates that only good tradition promotes respect for all human beings and tradition that creates discrimination against others should be discarded. Specifically, Mgofu's viewpoint voices Imbuga's vision which systematically progresses towards concern for woman and man as individual human beings in the society. Thus, Aminata faces acrimony from a section of her community members who largely find her strange for having subverted the norm of the patriarchal order. On the other hand, Nora's society is more responsive to her changing role because her transformation is integral to that of the whole society. It is possible for her to address a crowd that responds with "repeated wild clapping and ululation" (2011:68), an indication that the emergent nation of

Mndika negates prejudice on the basis of gender and instead heeds the ancestors' and Mgofu's calls for respect as a cardinal principle in human relationships.

5.8.2 Imbuga's feministic vision: Kenya as socio-political context

Female characters in Imbuga's oeuvre gradually transform their status from marginalized positions to play prominent roles in society. As I have argued earlier in this research, Imbuga's works closely follow socio-political developments in the African nations with special focus on his own country, Kenya. As we have seen, Kenya is one of the countries that have actively participated in the United Nation's initiatives to advance the status of women, beginning with the 1975 first World Women's Conference, and also hosting the UN Decade for Women Conference. This is a positive effort considering that at independence, more men than women had received formal education and better placed to participate in the struggle for independence as well as in the establishment of the new nation.

Notably, during the independence struggle in the mid-1950s and early 1960s, very few women nationalists were actively involved, and these included a renowned political activist, Virginia Wambui Otieno⁶ and Priscilla Abwao⁷, the only Kenyan woman who attended the 1963 Lancaster House Constitutional talks in England. It is important to note that although Mama Abwao attended the Lancaster House Constitutional talks with her male colleagues in the freedom struggle, she was, however, not given the opportunity to speak at the Conference, and only ended up being a figure representative of Kenyan women. But the fact that in a highly patriarchal society, at least one woman attended these crucial freedom talks, calls for appreciation among proponents of gender equality and Kenyan women as a whole.

After Kenya gained independence from the British on December 12, 1963, with Jomo Kenyatta as the Prime Minister, the new Kenyan African National Union (KANU) Government did not appoint any woman to the Cabinet; nor was any woman appointed to the Civil Service. Even after Kenya became a Republic on December 12, 1964, with Jomo Kenyatta as President and Jaramogi Oginga Odinga as Vice-President, no woman was visible in the public appointments.

Nevertheless, the few women who were already educated began to be actively involved in public matters. Women like Pamela Mboya, Phoebe Asiyo, Virginia Muriuki, Jemimah Gechaga, Grace Onyango, Jane Kiano and Eddah Gachukia founded the Maendeleo ya Wanawake (Development of Women) Organization, with Pamela Mboya as their Chairperson. Through this Organization, they actively advocated for equal women's participation in nation building. Consequently, Grace Onyango became the first woman elected Councillor, and subsequently first woman Mayor in Kenya. In 1969, Mrs Onyango became the first woman elected Member of Parliament when she trounced all her male opponents to become the Member of Parliament (MP) for Kisumu Town, in that year's General Election. President Kenyatta boosted this insignificant number of women's representation by nominating Jemima Gechaga to the August House. Mrs Gechaga thus became the country's first woman nominated MP.

At almost the same time, Miss Margaret Wambui Kenyatta⁸ was elected Nairobi's first woman Mayor in 1971. By 1974 the number of women MPs increased to 7. During that year, President Kenyatta appointed Dr. Julia Auma Ojiambo, as an Assistant Minister for Housing, making her the first Kenyan woman to hold a Ministerial position in Government. Generally, in Independent Kenya's first Government, education played a key role in women's entry in politics and their participation in other national matters and as the above account demonstrates, there was a glaring gender disparity.

Following President Kenyatta's death in August 1978, his successor, President Daniel Toroitich Arap Moi, saw the need to appoint more women to various political positions. Accordingly, after the 1979 General Election, Moi retained Dr. Ojiambo as the Assistant Minister for Housing. During a by-election in Gem, Siaya District (renamed County), in 1985, Mrs. Grace Ogot became the area MP and was subsequently appointed an Assistant Minister in the same Housing Ministry. Mrs. Nyiva Mwendwa became the first Kenyan woman to be appointed to the Cabinet in 1988, three years after the Nairobi Women's Conference; and as Minister, she led the Kenyan delegation to the 1995 World Women Conference in Beijing, China.

By the time Kenya was celebrating 30 years of Independence in 1993, there was a steady increase in the number of Kenyan women who attained basic and higher education and thus became more empowered to participate in the country's national affairs. Accordingly, the number of women representation in Parliament increased from 9 women MPs in 1997, to 20 in 2008.

With the re-introduction of a Multi-party democracy in December 1991, a number of Kenyan women joined their male patriots in calling upon the Moi Administration to broaden the democratic space with regard to legal, constitutional and democratic reforms. Among these women were: Martha Wangari Karua⁹ who became the Member of Parliament for Gichugu in the 1992 first Multi-party polls and Mrs. Charity Kaluki Ngilu who became MP for Kitui Central (1992) and went ahead to be the first Kenyan woman to vie for the Presidency in 1997, thereby registering an impressive performance. Martha Karua took the cue and put up a spirited campaign for Presidency in the 2013 General Election; and she was the only woman alongside six male candidates. Nonetheless she lost and Uhuru Muigai Kenyatta became Kenya's fourth President.

Instructively, with the new Constitutional dispensation in place, Kenyans were for the first time since Independence, to be governed under a devolved system of Government encompassing the Executive, Parliament and Judiciary at the National level, as well as County governments at the grassroots' level. When they went for the polls in March 2013, Kenyans elected, their President who had a running mate as Deputy-president, Senators, Members of National Assembly, and Women County Representatives in the National Assembly, Governors and Members of the County Assembly. Notably, the new Constitution provided a significant change in Kenya's previous political paradigm, particularly with regards to women representation in elective positions in the country.

Thus, at the Senate, out of 67 Senators, 51 are men while 16 are nominated women since no woman was elected directly in Kenya's 47 counties. As for the Kenya National Assembly, out of the 349 Members of National Assembly, 67 are women, including 47 women elected county

representatives, 4 women nominated Members and 16 other women Members elected competitively with their male counterparts to represent their constituencies across the country.

Certainly, women's representation in both the Senate and National Assembly (Parliament) is still a far cry from that of men, but more importantly, the consistency in the increase in the number of women in Parliament since the opening up of the democratic space is significant in various respects: in the first place, it is a reflection of the growing global consciousness of women's role in society. Secondly, it is a source of feedback not only to Kenya's women, but also to the whole country with regard to women's achievements in politics. Finally, it is a basis for the evaluation of the gains made so far and what still remains to be done, as well as the strategies to adopt in order to effectively enhance women's role and position in the country.

Apart from the political sphere, Kenyan women have also made significant strides in Education and other sectors; but I shall focus more on education since, as I have shown in the analysis of Imbuga's texts, education is a key strategy of women's empowerment and gender complementarity. Education guarantees one access to other sectors and as Mazrui (2006:159) asserts, "[In] many African countries, education is seen as the gateway to change and prosperity. Through education, people can be empowered to take control of their destiny." In Kenya, more women have enrolled in basic, tertiary and higher education. Like in politics, progress towards achieving equity is still slow and that is why we cannot fail to celebrate the country's distinguished women.

For instance, the late Professor Wangari Maathai¹⁰, an environmental conservationist, was the first woman in Eastern and Central Africa to get a Ph.D, the first Professor and the first African woman Nobel Peace Laureate (2004). Professor Maathai also served as a Member of Parliament and Assistant Minister. Others are: Dr. Edah Gachukia, a renowned educationist, chairperson of Moi University Council and a pioneer gender activist; Professor Leah Marangu, a nutritionist and the first Kenyan woman Vice- Chancellor (Africa Nazarene University); Professor Olive Mugenda¹¹ of Kenyatta University and Professor Mabel Imbuga¹² of Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, the first and second women Vice Chancellors of public

universities respectively. Besides, there are a few other women professors and those in other management positions like deputy Vice Chancellors of both public and private universities. Nonetheless, studies reveal that the percentage of women in these positions is still lower than that of men (Onsongo 2006).

Evidently, women have made significant strides in various sectors including business and self-help groups especially in rural Kenya. Indeed these groups have been a great source of women's empowerment through their efforts in the dissemination of gender specific training in the areas such as agriculture, health, education and micro-enterprise (Mutugi 2006). Mutugi's account of the Ndia Integrated Women Development Association (NIWDA) is particularly informative in its empowerment and partnership initiatives. In the first place, it is a conglomeration of 100 self-help groups that exchange ideas on development and poverty alleviation. Next, it works in partnership with different institutions to provide members with relevant training and knowledge, and to provide resource people and materials.

Such institutions include: Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT), Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI), International Centre for Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE), Ministries of Agriculture and Health, Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), Maendeleo ya Wanawake, League of Kenya Women Voters and several Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Training focuses on areas like agriculture, health, HIV/AIDS, legal and human rights, business proposal writing, record keeping, saving and reinvestment. Significantly, NIWDA's attention to "natural remedies as a locally available and affordable means of dealing with ill health" as well as its recognition of local people with knowledge of natural remedies demonstrates the importance of indigenous knowledge that Imbuga delineates in *Miracle of Remera*.

I concur with Mutugi that self-help groups "can be utilized for gender sensitive education for development and poverty eradication" (Mutugi, 2006:88). Already NIWDA has established and manages a village bank that provides credit to its members for business enterprises and has also accommodated some men's self-help groups. This model of partnership, if replicated in several

self-help groups in our 47 counties would highly uplift the status of Kenya's rural women, especially in the new dispensation that will see the country move to a devolved system of governance in the form of county governments.

Generally, tremendous efforts have been made by women legislators, gender advocates, women's organisations and the Kenya Government to enhance women's participation in key sectors and to create a more gender inclusive society. These efforts came to fruition with the launching of the Kenya Vision 2030 in 2006 and the promulgation of the Constitution in 2010. Of great significance in these two documents is the emphasis on improved quality of life for all, with special emphasis on gender equality. For instance, the third Principle of the Political Pillar of Vision 2030 states:

Kenya shall be a nation that treats its women and men equally. It will not discriminate any citizen on the basis of gender, race, tribe, religion or ancestral origin.

Further, the Social Pillar emphasizes:

- Equity in power and resource distribution between the sexes
- Increasing the participation of women in all economic, social and political decision-making processes
- Increasing school enrolment for girls and children
- Reducing social inequalities.

Similarly, the Constitution that is the supreme law of the country charts out a good roadmap for women's empowerment and gender partnership. Chapter Four which contains the Bill of Rights, guarantees all basic freedoms and stresses equal opportunities for both men and women in all spheres of life. Moreover, several articles of the Constitution underscore the advancement of women, putting more emphasis on their right to reproductive health, equal opportunities in political, economic and social spheres, as well as their right to property ownership. Kenya's women are now proud of the fact that the constitutional provision for the election of 47 women to represent each county¹³ in the National Assembly was first implemented in the 2013 General Election. Moreover, enough measures have been put in place to ensure that appointments to

public positions are made through a competitive, transparent and gender sensitive process; and women only need to be more vigilant to ensure that this requirement is closely adhered to in all spheres.

Summing up, this third phase of Imbuga's works that comprises two novels and one play has offered him more space to explore the theme of women's liberation that he began in his earlier works. The ideal society that he envisions is one in which, as shown in the context of Kenya, both men and women have equal opportunities to make a contribution. It is also a society inspired by human values of understanding, tolerance, reciprocity and respect. Imbuga consequently champions gender co-operation in aspects that can transform society such as education and research. Furthermore, Imbuga contends that real change in attitude has to be inculcated quite early in a child's life through the socialization agents such as homes, educational institutions and the performance art. His evolving characterization of women that began with *Aminata* during the 1985 United Nation's Decade for Women's World Conference, culminates in the creation of new female characters in a more gender sensitive and inclusive society. Like Achebe's new female characters in the context of Nigeria (Nwagbara 2009), Imbuga's female characters position themselves to be part of Kenya's, and indeed Africa's, transformation process.

An important point to note here is that while Imbuga had attempted to question patriarchal hegemonic ideology in the first two phases of his works, particularly in *Aminata* (1988), he returns to the same theme in this last phase with a firm conviction on the role of the female character as an ideal figure in the redemptive process of society. We can therefore conclude that since the beginning of his writing over three decades before his death, Imbuga has struggled to dismantle female stereotypes and to demonstrate that female characters need space and recognition in equal footing with male characters. His portrayal of female characters has consistently kept transforming and one can rightly argue that Nora Ulivaho in *The Return of Mgofu* is the most enduring female character in Imbuga's oeuvre because symbolically, she "will be there" in all spheres of life. In essence, Imbuga has used his fictional world to demonstrate that women can steadily move from the margins to the centre.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

This study has examined the image of women portrayed by the roles of female characters in Francis Imbuga's literary works. Towards the completion of this research in the year 2012, two significant things happened that forced me to review the study and incorporate new elements. First, Imbuga's new play *The Return of Mgofu* (2011) was released by the publishers. As I read the play with an intention of acknowledging it in my conclusion, I found out that it offered a fresh perspective on the roles of female characters in Imbuga's works that I had set out to study. In this way, it resonated with my hypothesis that the female characters developed with every new publication of Imbuga.

Secondly, Professor Imbuga died suddenly on Sunday November 18, 2012. Indeed, as Kenyan and East African literary scholars, students and general population mourned the demise of this literary icon, for me in particular, his death was devastating and a setback to my research inasmuch as I had already secured an appointment with him for an exclusive interview, on Saturday November 25, 2012, that I intended for the final chapter of my work. Realizing that the just released play, *The Return of Mgofu*, actually marked Imbuga's last publication prior to his death – since *The Green Tree of Kafira* that was already with the publisher was therefore inevitably destined to be published posthumously – it was important for me to make necessary adjustments in my research work. Such adjustments entailed initiating a detailed analysis of the new play, incorporating tributes to Imbuga in the Kenyan newspapers as part of the critical reception of the author's works and changing my style of analysis that had proceeded on the premise that the author was alive and continued to write. Thus, in this research, I have analysed the depiction of female characters in Imbuga's seven plays and two novels to demonstrate the changing images of women in Imbuga's oeuvre.

6.1 Significance and further research

The two main goals of this study were to investigate the ways in which Imbuga, a male writer, has depicted female characters amidst feminist criticism that male writers of African literature depicted female stereotypes in their works, and to determine the impact of the roles played by female characters on the writer's works. My approach to the discussion of the portrayal of female characters in these works was based on three specific objectives:

1. To systematically analyse the depiction of female characters in Imbuga's oeuvre in order to reveal the writer's treatment of female stereotypes and gender inequalities.
2. To examine the literary strategies that Imbuga employs in the depiction of female characters to ascertain their roles and status in the oeuvre.
3. To investigate the changes in the depiction of female characters to determine the writer's vision of society.

The theoretical framework and methodology that I have utilized in my analyses of these works reveal that Imbuga has made a significant contribution to the feminist literary debate. I will recapitulate the significance of my research in the following sections.

6.1.1 Theoretical value

This study supports the previous research on female stereotypes in male authored texts. However, it has demonstrated an alternative approach to the analysis of the portrayal of female characters by focusing on the development in their characterization and the moral and aesthetic value that the female characters contribute to the literary works. The study supports Tyson's (2006:118) argument that it is important to be able to recognize when a literary work depicts patriarchal ideology in order to criticise it or invite us to criticise it.

My study has demonstrated that a comprehensive analysis of the roles of female characters in a literary text needs a framework that goes beyond feminist literary criticism to incorporate the formal strategies of literature. To achieve this, I have employed feminist criticism with elaborate attention to Sara Mills' (1995) model of feminist stylistics to examine the gender relations in

Imbuga's texts. In this way, I have further examined the language of the characters, their choice of words, sentences and their dialogues. I have also related my discussion on Imbuga's texts to the African society, with particular reference to the Kenyan society using the views of scholars and critics such as Ngugi, Achebe, Ruganda, Kabaji and Kabira who emphasise a link between the creative work and the social, political and cultural contexts of its production. Achebe (2009:100) puts it more succinctly when he acknowledges his involvement with Nigeria in his writing because "Nigeria is a reality I could not ignore." Finally, I have used the formal strategies of literature to analyse the literary techniques that the writer utilises and to reveal the moral, symbolic and aesthetic values of the roles of female characters. Such strategies include the identification of what Bakhtin (Holquist 1981) regards as heteroglossia.

6.1.2 Methodological value

In my analysis of the nine texts, I have focused on the overall thematic concerns, language use, and literary strategies that the writer utilises. Within this broad context, I have examined the manner in which Imbuga constructs the female characters by paying close attention to how characters relate with one another - their descriptions, their actions, what they say about others, and what they say about themselves. Further, I have explored the literary strategies used to reveal the characters.

What became apparent in the course of the study was that I had to establish common grounds in the texts through comparison and contrast approach. Thus, I categorised the nine texts into three phases through a periodization pattern, beginning with the earliest political play, *Betrayal in the City* (1976) and ending with the latest one, *The Return of Mgofu* (2011). Based on my objectives, the first phase comprised four plays covering the publication period between 1976 and 1984. The second phase comprised texts published between 1985 and 1989, a period in the writer's creativity that was largely influenced by feminist ideologies considering, as has been stated, that one of his plays, *Aminata* (1988), was specifically commissioned for the 1985 United Nations Decade for Women Conference, held in Nairobi, Kenya. The final phase comprises the two novels and the last play, all published between 1993 and 2011, a period in which the writer is predominantly in favour of new roles for female characters as he emphasises on the survival of

the human person in the society. As is evident in this discussion, each of these phases has formed a chapter of the study.

6.2 Evaluation of the roles of female characters

Through this research, I also sought to evaluate the contribution of the roles of female characters to the overall impact of Imbuga's oeuvre. I have examined the roles of the female characters within the broader contexts of Imbuga's oeuvre and established that although female characters seemingly play peripheral roles, an intense analysis of language and literary techniques used reveal that they are integral to the developments of the plot and thematic concerns of the texts. Furthermore, the ambivalence in their depiction makes these characters inevitable participants in the writer's vision of change in the society. For example, they are very instrumental in illuminating Imbuga's concern with issues of justice/injustice, change and peace and reconciliation.

Chapter two therefore explores the main concerns in each of the nine literary works and finds that the writer uses his works to provide vital lessons on topical issues affecting African societies. The study finds that in depicting fictional repressive post-colonial African regimes, Imbuga is at his best, through techniques such as satire, humour, play-within-a-play and the aesthetic use of language, to juxtapose reality and illusion, sanity and madness, truth and deceit, as well as good and evil. In this way, the writer creates contradictions that enable him to circumvent political censorship while at the same time revealing pertinent truths about the society. His satire targets post-independence leadership of the African states characterized by excessive quest for power, betrayal and victimization of the citizens - illustrated by the rampant injustices, violations of human rights and unwarranted deaths and displacements of persons.

This study has demonstrated the writer's consciousness of female stereotypes and victimization of female characters in literary texts, and the need, as a consequence, to reconfigure their identities to assume new and more positive roles. In doing this, I have found that through a combination of both political and social themes, the denouement of Imbuga's works indicate the need for change that is beneficial not just to women but to the whole society, with the

intelligentsia acting as agents of that change in *Betrayal in the City* (1976) and *Shrine of Tears* (1993). He also sees the populace as having the potential to shape their own destinies by rejecting oppressive regimes as demonstrated by the people's revolution in *Game of Silence* (1977).

During the process of the study, I have also demonstrated that the female characters change and develop in tandem with the changes in the roles of women in our contemporary societies, particularly with regards to Kenya, the writer's (Imbuga's) and this researcher's country. In the plays forming the first phase according to the classification of this study, the female characters are few and confined within domestic spaces. However, towards the end of this phase, they gradually venture out of their domestic roles and in phase two, their education and material success place them in more prominent positions. Their depiction develops to its peak in phase three where they become part of the writer's vision of good leadership model and a democratic and humanist society.

Manifestly, this research also deepens the understanding of the marginalization of female characters in literary texts based on patriarchal societies. Chapter Three examines Imbuga's treatment of female stereotypes in his earlier drama constituting four plays. The writer establishes that African societies are deeply patriarchal and biased against women. Female characters are victimized and play peripheral roles, mainly in the domestic spheres.

A closer analysis of the dramatic strategies that the writer uses reveals a writer with a moralising message through the roles of the female characters. He is critical of such societies and demonstrates, through thematic roles, the moral and aesthetic value of these female characters to his plays. In this case, he reverses the concept of the hero such that the peripheral character plays a significant role in effecting change in the play. For example, in *Betrayal in the City*, the events that lead to the toppling of Boss' tyrannical regime have their roots in the actions of the female characters: Nina's helpless situation drives Jere to rebel against the government and become very instrumental in agitating for change; Regina's seemingly innocence creates a chance for Jusper's seditious play to demonstrate to Boss the ills of his regime.

Likewise, the female characters are instrumental in advancing the theme of justice in all the four plays. Finally, Imbuga demonstrates that the female characters can subvert the restrictions that the patriarchal society has imposed on them by claiming their right to make independent decisions on issues affecting them, as Zira does in *The Successor*.

Through the analysis of *Aminata* and *The Burning of Rags* in Chapter Four, the study reveals the writer's consciousness of the challenges of the struggle for gender equality. The play exposes unequal relations between male and female characters by adopting a feminist perspective in the depiction of female characters. In *Aminata*, Aminata surmounts patriarchal restrictions through her education and material success as a professional female character. She plays a significant moral role through the development projects that she initiates in the community. However, through the techniques of satire, irony and contrast, the playwright denounces obsession with women's rights to the extent of antagonizing male characters, as in the case of Ababio, Aminata's brother. It is for this reason that the writer resorts to the *deus ex machina* technique towards the end of the play to prevent Aminata from inheriting her father's piece of land.

The point to note here is that Imbuga favours equality between males and females, rather than females' superiority over male characters. But he also denounces male hegemony and the socialisation of female characters to internalize peripheral positions as is the case with Aunt Kezia in *Aminata*. Of significance too, in this Chapter, is the playwright's caution to African feminists against embracing brands of feminisms that end up alienating them from their African cultural and social contexts as demonstrated in *The Burning of Rags* by Hilda's apparent adherence to brands of feminism that are more relevant in the West.

Ultimately, this chronological approach that this study adopts is significant in demonstrating the gradual and systematic transformation in the characterization of women in Imbuga's oeuvre. It also reflects the writer's vision of the transformation of the roles of women in the society. Chapter five therefore emphasizes Imbuga's views and the reconstruction of female characters in male authored texts to assume new roles in tandem with the developments and changes in the society. In all the three texts discussed in this chapter, education of female characters is a key strategy that they use to integrate private and public spheres and to confront the restrictions imposed on their lives by a male dominated social order. This depiction of female characters in this last phase of my classification of Imbuga's oeuvre indicates to us a male writer's contribution to the task of redressing the female stereotypes in literature and supports Kolawole's (1997) argument that the feminist task should be undertaken by both male and female writers.

A significant aspect of the new roles for female characters in this phase is the aesthetic use of language to challenge patriarchal hegemony and to reconstruct new female identities. In *Shrine of Tears* (1993) Kanaya rejects cultural exploitation of her people, especially the female characters that advertise commercial products in a manner that diminishes their worth as human beings. Boge and Kanaya use theatre to sensitize their society on cultural exploitation, symbolically linking it to the devastating effect of the ogre, hence the metaplay, *Farewell to Ogres*. Nora in *The Return of Mgofu* (2011) positions herself to assume a key role in the leadership of the new nation of Mndika.

The progressive female characters in these texts recognize that the struggle is no longer about the rights of female characters but that of the human person. Their moral and aesthetic roles are geared towards changing society for a harmonious co-existence between male and female characters. The female characters in this final phase of these works embrace human values that served to create harmony in the African traditional societies.

Ruganda's (1992:188-189) concluding argument on Imbuga's drama also provides an appropriate conclusion for my purposes:

Imbuga's ideal figure(s) of authority seems to be a combination of gender on the one hand, and art on the other. He sees Jusper and Regina as fitting that role. Both having been victims of misguided leadership, and both – having mounted, in their different ways, a concerted struggle to topple the oppressive regimes – are better placed to lead the society into the future. Most significantly, their struggle has unwaveringly embraced the societal dynamics over and above personal interests and concerns.

Ruganda raises the question that those who have betrayed the people must be fought first. Indeed, this is what Imbuga does with the antagonists in his oeuvre by providing them with opportunities to realise their follies. Yet, contrary to Ruganda's submission, my argument is that Jusper and Regina have not fully succeeded in causing the envisaged revolution in view of the hostile forces operating around them. The potential they already have is adequately exploited in the successive works culminating into the complementarity between Maiyo and Daisy in *Miracle of Remera* and ultimately in the envisioned social and political roles of Norah Ulivaho and Mhando in *The Return of Mgofu*.

In the same vein, I have illustrated that Aminata (*Aminata* 1988) fails in her spirited fight for her own right to inherit her father's land because she engages in a lone battle that does not go beyond "personal interests and concerns." Nevertheless, based on Ruganda's argument, Aminata too, probably in partnership with her husband Dr. Mulemi, have the potential to take over from where Jusper and Regina have stopped and push the struggle a step further towards complete fruition.

I find Aminata's argument that the struggle is for both genders and is meant to secure a better future for "tomorrow's generation" (1988:54) quite informative. She relies on the support of her husband in that noble battle for the sake of their daughter's generation. Fortunately, Dr. Mulemi is already not only supportive of the development projects that Aminata has initiated in her community, but also defends her from Aunt Kezia's malicious remarks and categorically asserts that Aminata is now "free to pursue her career to its deepest canyons and help others improve their lives" (36).

Aminata's optimism at the end of this play (that was written for the United Nations Decade for Women Conference in Nairobi in 1985), gains full import twenty six years later with the

publication of *The Return of Mgofu* (2011). This play depicts a remarkable transformation in the roles of female characters. Priestess Kadesa is knowledgeable in her people's history and admirably offers spiritual guidance to the Mndikan exiles in Nderema. Mgofu is born and bred in her shrine due to her hospitality. Mgofu's daughter, Norah Ulivaho, whose name means the "the one who will be there" signifies change and continuity and can be regarded as the epitome of that future generation that Aminata had envisaged.

Through my investigation and analysis of the writer's literary techniques and main concerns in his latest five texts, this research reveals that the writer advocates change in perception right from the socialisation process in the family to the leadership of the nation. In this way attention will shift from the preoccupation with discrimination against, or the roles of women to the concern for the welfare and dignity of the person. The study does this by foregrounding the changing attitudes of male characters to the new roles of their female counterparts, particularly with regard to the younger and educated ones that respect and acknowledge the contributions of the female characters.

In this regard, my conclusion is that the emancipation of female characters requires a gender complementarity approach that Imbuga adopts in the gender relationships that exist in his last three texts. In particular, *The Return of Mgofu* envisions a society that has the potential to learn from vices such as ethnic animosity and intolerance that lead to genocide, massive destructions and exiles, and instead recognize the virtue of respect for fellow human beings that lead to a more harmonious co-existence among individuals, regardless of ethnicity and gender.

In this sense, the study supports Ruganda's conclusion referred to above but adds that the ideal figures of authority envisioned in Imbuga's oeuvre is a combination of youth, gender, and rebranded leadership. Thus, I concur with Smith (2012:153) in her definition of envisioning as the imagining of a future in which people rise above the present-day situations. Imbuga demonstrates that African literature is didactic and the writer can guide the readers and the society to recognize new ways of addressing the challenges facing African nations. Through the characters that he creates and the themes that he explores, Imbuga actively participates in a

search for solutions to the myriad problems that bedevil the contemporary African society, with specific reference to Kenya. For instance, in *Miracle of Remera*, the writer is optimistic that through intensive research into indigenous knowledge integrated with modern scientific methods, African scientists could eventually make a breakthrough in the search for a cure for AIDS pandemic.

Similarly, after three decades of indicting African political leaders for betraying the hopes and aspirations of their people, Imbuga uses his last play before his death, *The Return of Mgofu*, to recreate the historical reality of the genocide that occurred in Rwanda in 1994. He links it to the post-election violence in Kenya in 2007 and 2008, and other forms of conflict that have led to bloodshed in many other African countries. Through literary techniques of memory, narration, humour, imagery, symbolism and improvisation, the writer explores such themes as negative ethnicity and intolerance that results in violence and bloodshed, truth and justice, respect for the rights of fellow human beings, forgiveness and reconciliation and the re-assessment of the role of human values of the African traditions in the restoration of peace and harmony in the contemporary society. Noting that Imbuga's last play explores all these topical issues and the fact that it was published just one year before his death, this study reinforces Odhiambo's summary that the play is "Imbuga's best legacy to Kenya" (*Sunday Nation*, January 6, 2013).

In a nutshell, my research beefs up the library of existing critical works on Imbuga's oeuvre. Its major value is that it is the first to address itself to gender issues in Imbuga's, oeuvre utilising an eclectic theoretical approach that also includes the nature of literature itself. This approach created room for the study to interrogate the writer's use of language and techniques of literature to portray characters in his works. This has ultimately served not only to trace the transformation in the depiction of female characters in Imbuga's works, but also to reveal their moral and aesthetic values to his art.

6.3 Recommendations

In the course of this study, I made reference to various aspects to enhance my arguments. However, I feel that these areas require further and thorough investigation. For example, the use

of art as a technique for social criticism features prominently in Imbuga's texts. In *Miracle of Remera*, the performing arts are used as a means to create awareness among students about HIV/AIDS. However, the focus is more on competition than its didactic aspect. Further study could be carried out into the educative and social role of the performing arts.

Besides, Imbuga's focus on the roles of the youth in the same novel exposes their situation as worthy of critical attention. We have been deeply concerned about the welfare of the girl-child in our societies, perhaps at the detriment of the boy-child. Through Maiyo and Yuda, Imbuga draws our attention to issues like peer pressure, alcoholism, and HIV/AIDS as some of the challenges that the boy-child has to confront. Although Maiyo surmounts these hurdles for a different objective in the novel as I have demonstrated in Chapter Five, the underlying message is that the boy-child needs as much attention as the girl-child.

Another aspect worth investigating further in Imbuga's works is the use of indigenous knowledge in solving contemporary issues. As my discussion has revealed, the writer is optimistic that research into indigenous methods integrated with modern scientific methods may just produce a cure for HIV/AIDS. Furthermore, Imbuga has consistently incorporated aspects of African traditions especially with regard to his Luhya community. Further study could be carried out into the return of ancestors in literature that addresses conflicts in the contemporary society. Ancestors return to provide healing in societies that are almost disintegrating. This is seen in Imbuga's *The Return of Mgofu* and in Zakes Mda's two novels, *Ways of Dying* (1995) and *Heart of Redness* (2000). A comparative approach could be used to investigate the role of ancestors in modern African literature.

A play like *The Return of Mgofu* can be used to educate various communities across the African continent on issues such as consequences of negative ethnicity, national dialogue and cohesion and the need to confront historical injustices that have created instability in various nations. In this regard, intensive research could be done on how it fits within the area of Theatre for Development and the most appropriate model to adopt.

Finally, Imbuga is critical of women's liberation programmes that target adults but ignore childhood. This explains why, Hilda in *The Burning of Rags* does not achieve much as a feminist when she only attends women's meetings and theorizes about women's liberation. Imbuga however recognizes the role of the girl-child's positive socialisation process and the attitude change in men as very instrumental in creating a conducive environment for girls to exploit all their potentials as they grow into adult women. He demonstrates this through Aminata and her vision about her daughters in *Aminata*, Kadidi in *Shrine of Tears*, Fiona and Daisy in *Miracle of Remera* and Nora Ulivaho in *The Return of Mgofu*. A comparative study of Imbuga's depiction of female characters and that of other writers is an area that can still be studied. Such research also needs to focus on the role of male characters in the feministic visions of the writers.

Notes

1. *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, translated to English as 'I will marry when I want' was performed by Kamiriithu, "People based theatre". Ngugi had founded Kamiriithu Educational and Cultural Centre in his own rural home in Limuru. The play mainly focuses on the history of the struggle for land and freedom, Independence, neo-colonialism and the peasants and workers conditions in multinational factories and plantations.
2. A play celebrating Kenyan workers' struggle against imperialist capitalists' confiscation of the peoples' land, forced labour on the same land and taxation to develop and sustain the settler run plantations.
3. Stella Awinja Muka, a University of Nairobi student and talented actress, died in November 1982 when a huge stone from a high rise building under construction hit her. Awinja and other artists along with Francis Imbuga had performed in several productions by the University of Nairobi Players from 1979 till her demise (Ruganda 1992: XIX). Imbuga's *Man of Kafira* is actually dedicated to her.
4. Interview with Prof. Imbuga, on June 14, 2012, at Kenyatta University, Nairobi.
5. Interview on June 14, 2012
6. Wambui Otieno was detained by the British Colonial Administration for her suspected participation in the Mau Mau uprising, in Nairobi, in the early 1950s. After independence in 1963, she entered into elective politics and made several unsuccessful attempts to vie for Langata and Kajiado Parliamentary seats between 1974 and 1992. Wambui Otieno, herself a firebrand fighter for women's rights, was a victim of the patriarchal system in 1985 when she was embroiled in a legal tussle with her late husband's (Lawyer S. M. Otieno's) Umira Kager Clan over the place of his burial. She wanted her late husband to be buried at their Upper Matasia home in Ngong near Nairobi, but her in-laws insisted that their brother was to be laid to rest at their ancestral home in Nyalgunga in Siaya County. She lost the case; but by an ironic turn of events, when she died, in 2011, more

than twenty years later, her in-laws readily respected her wishes to be buried at her Upper Matasia home; and they also attended the funeral.

7. Mama Priscilla Abwao attended the Lancaster House Constitutional talks in England, alongside Kenyan nationalists like Thomas Joseph Mboya, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, Jomo Kenyatta, James Gichuru, Masinde Muliro, Martin Shikuku, Daniel Arap Moi, Ronald Gideon Ngala and Argwings Kodhek, among others.
8. Margaret Kenyatta, a daughter to President Kenyatta trounced her only male opponent Andrew Kimani Ngumba
9. An LLB (Hons) holder from the University of Nairobi, Ms Karua is a former Magistrate. She is one of the first groups of youthful Opposition politicians who fought for the opening up of a more democratic space. Others were Raila Odinga, James Orengo, Kiraitu Murungi, Gitobu Imanyara, Paul Muite, Kijana Wamalwa and Charity Ngilu. When Karua retained her Gichugu Parliamentary seat in 2002, she was appointed to the Cabinet as Minister for Water Development and later Minister for Justice and Constitutional Affairs. In the disputed December 2007 Presidential Polls, Ms Karua was among the Kenyan mediators who participated in the Dr Kofi Annan led mediation talks between Raila Odinga's Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) Party and Mwai Kibaki's Party of National Unity (PNU). These talks culminated into a Grand Coalition Government, with Kibaki as President and Odinga as Prime Minister. This was also the first ever Grand Coalition Government not only in Kenya, but also in Africa.
10. Professor Wangari Muta Maathai's Ph.D. was in Biochemistry and she won the 2004 Nobel Prize for her contributions to sustainable development, democracy and peace. She was also a consistent political leader and gender activist in Kenya. Maathai was also among the Kenyan reformists who pressurized for the repeal of the controversial section 2A of the old Constitution, paving way for the re-introduction of multi-party politics in December 1991. She was first elected to Parliament in 2002 as MP for Tetu constituency

and was subsequently appointed an Assistant Minister for Environment and Natural Resources but lost her seat in the 2007 elections. She died in 2011.

11. Professor Olive Mugenda, an educationist and gender researcher, is also an advocate of girls' education.
12. Professor Mabel Imbuga, a Bio-Chemistry don, Chairperson of Africa Women in Science and Engineering and an advocate of HIV/AIDS education, is the wife of Professor Francis Imbuga whose literary output is the subject of this study.
13. These are separate from the ones who may be elected directly by the electorate in different constituencies.

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