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GENDER ISSUES AND THE AFRICAN PERCEPTION OF SELF AND OTHERNESS IN NGUGI WA THIONG'O'S PETALS OF BLOOD AND DEVIL ON THE CROSS AND AYI KWEI ARMAH'S TWO THOUSAND SEASONS AND KMT: IN THE HOUSE OF LIFE

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ABSTRACT
Employing postcolonial and psychoanalytic theories, this analysis examines how selected novels by Ngugi and Armah deconstruct colonial ideology by reconceptualising gender, self, and otherness. The texts perform a radical critique, symbolically erasing white women to expose the patriarchal core of colonial power while focusing on African women as indispensable architects of cultural meaning. However, a critical gap exists in the potential idealization of pre-colonial gender complementarity, which may obscure internal patriarchal structures. This opens a new debate on the tension between empowering literary symbolism and the material realities of gender struggles, challenging both colonial and indigenous hierarchies in postcolonial societies in Africa.

Keywords: Postcolonial Theory, Psychoanalytic Theory, Gender, Self, Otherness.

1. INTRODUCTION
The contemporary social fabric of Africa, as rendered in its fiction, is profoundly shaped by the burdens of its historical past. Scholarly discourse on this legacy is dominated by three primary perspectives: a Eurocentric view, shared by Babatola Jadesola et al (2012). which argues that Africa benefited from its contact with other civilizations; an Afrocentric position, defended by Augustus Fisher (2022), which casts Africa as a victim of its historical development; and a third, argued by Kimberly Wedeven Segall (2002), forward-looking stance that urges a move beyond victimization narratives while acknowledging a shared responsibility for postcolonial outcomes. This complex intellectual landscape has fuelled extensive interdisciplinary investigations, which have, in turn, gradually incorporated critical discourses on gender. Feminist movements have been pivotal in introducing analytical distinctions between male and female, and, more fundamentally, between the self and the other, into postcolonial writing worldwide.

In African literature, concepts of gender, self, and otherness transcend mere thematic content; they are intricately woven into the very fabric of narrative artistry. Authors central to this study, such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ayi Kwei Armah, deploy these concepts as critical instruments to interrogate power structures and social transformation. However, the textual evidence for these constructs is often implicit, demanding deliberate excavation and analysis to be made visible, especially for readers unacquainted with the continent's unique socio-historical landscape.

This article specifically investigates the formation of gender-based identity as a manifestation

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of social justice within selected novels. The analysis will first delineate the historical power structures—inherited from colonialism and perpetuated in neo-colonial contexts—that have shaped the symbolic meaning of gender. Alongside, it will trace the construction of the "self" in relation to the "other," foregrounding distinctively African perceptions of identity that challenge Western paradigms. A preliminary theoretical overview, grounded in postcolonial and psychoanalytic thought, will establish a foundation for a precise assessment of how these concepts operate within the literary texts. The ultimate objective is to reveal their implications for articulating a vision of social justice that is simultaneously authentically African and universally resonant, demonstrating literature's power as a vital site for deconstructing imposed categories and envisioning more equitable social formations.

2. KEY CONCEPTS OF GENDER, SELF AND OTHER

The concept of gender is addressed as a response to patriarchal deviances in Western civilisation in the selected novels. Patriarchal pervasiveness is a male-centred ruling highly at play in the Western world. Critics agree that the concept of gender is a social construct which differs from the anatomical categorisation of sex. This distinction is underlined in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* by Meyer Howard Abrams (2009) as follows:

> It is widely held that while one's sex as a man or woman is determined by anatomy, the prevailing concepts of gender—of the traits that are conceived to constitute what is masculine and what is feminine in temperament and behavior—are largely, if not entirely, social constructs that were generated by the pervasive patriarchal biases of our civilization. As Simone de Beauvoir put it, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman […] It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature […] which is described as feminine." By this cultural process, the masculine in our culture has come to be widely identified as active, dominating, adventurous, rational, creative; the feminine, by systematic opposition to such traits, has come to be identified as passive, acquiescent, timid, emotional, and conventional.
> *(Abrams, 2009, p. 111)*

Gender is a social categorisation of male and female. It serves to derive masculinity and femininity. When misused, Joan C. Chrisler and Jayde Pryzgoda (2000) underline, the term gender leads to an astonishing rate of 50% assumptions to refer to sex. Gender is a social and arbitrary construct while sex is a biological one.

The term gender comes from the Latin 'genus' meaning 'kind' or 'type'. It is also derived from the Greek root 'gen-' which means 'to produce'. The term is also used to stand for grammatical categories. Today, according to the World Health Organisation (2023), gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics of women and men including how they should interact with others of the same or opposite sex within households, communities and workplaces. This last point of view of gender is that which concerns the current analysis because it helps show how the Westerners relate with typical Africans in the novels.

In this study, the concept of gender is approached from the image given to white women characters and that given to black women characters in the novels. Over decades, gender issues have been discussed worldwide among peoples. Formerly, various speculations have taken place in various fields of study over the world. Those issues have also been famous for dividing people and peoples across ages and space. In the world's contemporary history, America and Europe have particularly witnessed clashes related to gender issues which have culminated to open conflicts in political arena leading to feminist movements. Cases in point are women's suffrage movement in London in the mid-1800s, the women's liberation movement grouping mainly white women in the late 1960s and 1970s in America, the black feminism in America of the 1970s, the feminist sex wars of the 1970s, riot girls of the 1990s (2009). Those clashes

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and movements have consisted in women's claim to be represented in the voting processes, the decision-making spheres, the access to jobs just to mention a few. In America and Europe, Steve Schwartz (2020) remarks that women did no longer agree to be confined only in domestic chores with no right to vote or to be voted. In fact, the then social representation of white women in these western societies is nearly the same marginalisation which black slaves (male and female) underwent in America especially. The social pressure of marginalisation was tough and became unbearable for the white women. Although this depiction is not the aim for this analysis, it is called to offer an overall insight on the development of the concept of gender in Western societies. This insight is particularly useful for allowing the perception of women from both the Western and African societies in the novels which are replicates of real-life experiences.

The concept of self refers to one's own experiences as a distinct individual. Taken from this viewpoint, the concept of self is thus determined by society's influence in the shaping of one's behaviours and experiences. From the opinion of Sanjeev Kumar Mishra (2016), it is a mental and conceptual process of an individual. For William Watson Purkey (1988), The concept of self can be defined as "the totality of a complex, organized, and yet dynamic system of learned attitudes, beliefs, and evaluative judgments that people hold about themselves" (Purkey, 1988, p. 1).

Self is a term that fits well in psychoanalytical theory because it draws much on behaviour and other mental processes of individuals and groups. By creating awareness of self in the novels, the fictionalised African élites, Arabs and Europeans reinforce the contextualisation of alienation of women victims of abuses. When discussed in postcolonial African fiction such as art works considered in this study, the concept of self is differently displayed by Westerners and mimicry of Africans through typical characters. Western characters enact the concept as they orient it to only themselves alone while Africans view themselves through others. When it comes to the contextualisation of self, the old white woman in *Devil on the Cross* is seen sleeping in the nursery, unable to care for the kids for whom she is employed. This inability to care for the kids presents such character as the one narrowing everything to only itself. For that sleepy woman, kids do not represent anything valuable, she only thinks of herself alone by forgetting the multitude of kids. She considers herself as both actor and object. Characters typifying Africans show more flexibility and easily integrate others as part of oneself to exhibit Africa's humanist standards. For them, there is no way to 'self' out of 'we'. They show that, as Mateusz Wozniak (2018) puts, self is "we" and "us" while 'self' stands for "I" and "me" for Westerners (Wozniak, 2018, p. 1667). Given this perception from Western and African views about the concept of self, it is all the same important to discover the concept of 'otherness' as experienced or displayed by characters.

In an analysis on the concept of 'otherness', Jean-François Staszak (2008) brings sharp implications as follows:

> *Opposing Us, the Self, and Them, the Other, is to choose a criterion that allows humanity to be divided into two groups: one that embodies the norm and whose identity is valued and another that is defined by its faults, devalued and susceptible to discrimination. Only dominant groups (such as Westerners in the time colonization) are in a position to impose their categories in the matter. By stigmatizing them as Others, Barbarians, Savages or People of Color, they relegate the peoples that they could dominate or exterminate to the margin of humanity. The otherness of these peoples has notably been based on their supposed spatial marginality. In addition, certain types of spatial organization, like segregation or territorial constructions, allow the opposition between the Self and the Other to be maintained or accentuated. Although it seems that the Other is sometimes valued, as with*

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exoticism, it is done in a stereotypical, reassuring fashion that serves the Self in its feeling of superiority (Staszak, 2008, p. 1).

The passage above is explicit about implications of the concept of 'other' in the realms of this study based on data available in the corpus texts. It will be useful to excavate meaning of scientific validity about Westerners through their portrayal in the novels. It will bring ground for a comparative appraisal of Westerners and Africans as offered by data in the novels.

'Otherness' engenders a mental process of margin or periphery which is forcibly related to centre. The term thus stands for iconic representation of two groups: a dominant group leading the centre and a dominated one confined to the margin. 'Otherness' is rooted in 'other'. For Sabina Civila et al. (2020), The "concept of the 'Other' derives from a binary classification between 'the others' and 'our own'. It is derived from the group notion of 'we' versus 'other' groups. This concept could be expressed as 'the one who does not do as I do, the one whose body- color, size, facial features- is not like mine'" (Civila, Romero-Rodriguez, Aguaded, & Zabala, 2020, p. 5). The above positions which constitute an insight in the handling of matters of identity building in Western and African societies are allegorised in the selected novels that can be identified as postcolonial fiction.

3.TRAUMA, ABJECTION AND UNCONSCIOUS IN THE FRACTURED "SELF" AND THE COLONIAL "OTHER" AND GENDER

The selected African novels allegorise feminist dynamics by highlighting women's exclusion from colonial and neo-colonial power structures. In *Devil on the Cross*, the foreign delegation and competitors in the theft competition are exclusively male, prompting Wariinga to question their legitimacy as thieves (Devil on the Cross, 1982, p. 90). Similarly, *Petals of Blood* depicts the orchestration of neo-colonial transition solely by male figures. This systematic absence of women—both Black and white—from decision-making roles critiques the patriarchal nature of these oppressive systems and mirrors the systemic privations that provoke feminist responses.

When white women are present, as in the educational institutions of Armah's *KMT: in the House of Life*, their agency is strictly circumscribed by the patriarchal colonial hierarchy. Figures like Professor Christine Arendt at the university are permitted to exercise authority only over Black subordinates, acting as functionaries of a white male-dominated system. However, the narrative deliberately undercuts their intellectual legitimacy to critique the condescending, limited role allotted to them. Arendt's conference presentation, which posits European colonialism as a "remedy" (*KMT: in the House of Life*, 2002, p. 179) for Africa's ills, is framed not as a serious scholarly contribution but as a manifestation of a socially constructed and marginalized femininity. The novelist underscores this through the muted reception—a "solitary clap" (*KMT: in the House of Life*, 2002, p. 176) —highlighting how even within the Western power structure, her voice is deemed irrelevant.

By staging a mock academic conference where a female speaker's ideological arguments are easily dismissed, the text executes a dual critique. It first reveals the hollow paternalism of a colonialism that weaponised knowledge for domination. Second, it demonstrates that the marginalization of women is foundational to the Western social fabric, even within knowledge-producing institutions. The novelist's aim is not to cast white women as mere victims, but to leverage their positioned irrelevance to expose the pervasive gender hierarchies underpinning the colonial project. This allegory thus critiques Western gender oppression while modelling a critical analysis essential for deconstructing power in postcolonial contexts.

Whereas *KMT: in the House of Life* offers a tempered gendered critique, the narratives of Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ayi Kwei Armah perform a more radical psychoanalytic operation. They

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enact a deliberate symbolic erasure of white women from the colonial sphere. This narrative strategy mirrors the psychological negation women suffer within the patriarchal-colonial complex, commenting profoundly on their status as non-subjects. The white male psyche consolidates its imperial masculinity by rendering women invisible in public domains, coding colonial agency as intrinsically male. This absence is a powerful diagnostic, revealing a pathological power structure that requires the feminine complete marginalization to sustain its fantasy of mastery. The sole appearance of a white woman in *Devil on the Cross*—as a marketing image for a kindergarten—further underscores this reduction to a utilitarian symbol, absent from real agency as it reads:

> *'I hurried back to the nursery school before the bank started harassing me. I changed its name. I baptised it: MODERN DAY NURSERY SCHOOL. Then I looked for a white woman to be the principal. Luckily, I found one. She was a decrepit old woman, half-blind and hard of hearing, and she was always falling asleep. She agreed to join the staff of my school and to do her dozing there. (Devil on the Cross, 1982, p. 112)*

The "decrepit," somnolent white woman in the nursery is a potent symbol of her nullity within the colonial libidinal economy. This space of expected maternal vigilance becomes her site of symbolic castration; her disabilities and perpetual slumber signify a voided biological and social role. She is rendered a psychologically marginalized non-subject by the white patriarchy. Kihaahu wa Gatheeca's replication of this devaluing gesture is crucial, revealing the mimetic nature of colonial pathology. He internalizes not just exploitation, but the specific gendered contempt that systematically reduces women to inert, disposable objects, perpetuating a cycle of symbolic annihilation.

Many critics who have already ventured in gender issues in *Devil on the Cross* and *Petals of Blood* think along with Syed Zamanat Abbas (1989) that black women are denied visibility through the attitude of the local élites who regularly abused them. This image is seen in relation with the fictitious environment that has prompted the setting and characterisation. In the same logic, the African élites who have learnt much from the white men seem black in colour, because they are no more black people culturally as reflects Tayo Raymond Ezekiel Eegunlusi (2017). African élites have internalised foreign culture and pushed in a mimicry of Western culture. The empowering of women characters in these novels is not thus to show some flaws in African culture. It is rather a means of struggling against deviances that black men have inherited from the Whites during the whole process of acculturation set in motion on the fictional continent.

In *Devil on the Cross,* Wariinga's abuses by the Old Man from Ngorika, by her boss for whom she worked as secretary, Wanja's school quitting because of her pregnancy, the fire set to her studio in the city and other hardships she has faced in Ilmorog are instances that rather show the perversion of colonialism on Africans who replicate it onto women. The élites in these novels stand for a kind of mimicry to show to their colonial whites masters their ability to take over. The behaviour of these elites fits in colonial agenda as observed by Hillis Miller John (1995) in the following passage which has it that, "to disguise its essentially rapacious nature, colonialism has been represented in literary, historical, and political discourses as a species of adventure tale, dominated by an ethic of personal heroism that is embedded in specific national-religious formation" (John, 1995, p. 354). Colonialism has been portrayed cunningly to cover its real agenda that is nothing else but a greedy and heartless expropriation of resources. The African elites feel a kind of heroism in abusing women. At this era of cultural transformational processes (Pewissi, 2017, p. 84) in Africa described in the novels, these élites are much presented as victims of a rapacious system than typical Africans exercising their minds as fully enabled by their culture.

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The claim that pre-colonial African societies, narratives construct a symbolic economy where gender roles, though distinct, are framed as complementary and socially indispensable. Unlike the colonial model of erasure, this framework grants women a stage—not one of unqualified privilege, but of acknowledged power and narrative centrality. This symbolic economy fundamentally subverts colonial ideology and the women's portrayal by the first generation of African writers. Where Western structures often consign women to marginality, the African framework in Ngugi and Armah positions women as the very architects of narrative meaning. Where the first generation of African writers cast women as "victims of all sorts of discrimination and marginalisation on the grounds of sex, culture, religion, politics and economy" as Bawa Kammampoal (2013, p. 2) observes, protagonists like Wariinga, Wanja, and Isanusi are not merely characters but the symbolic consciousness of their communities; their agency generates the plot's moral and political trajectory. Their potential exit would collapse the symbolic universe itself in the novelistic constructions, representing their indispensable role in sustaining the social fabric. This stark contrast—between the peripheral white woman and the ontologically central African woman—enacts a powerful postcolonial critique. It systematically dismantles the myth of Western cultural superiority by revealing that a civilization that symbolically negates its women is fundamentally impoverished, while one that centres them possesses a profound and resilient life-force

The selected novels of Ngugi and Armah for this study are part of postcolonial fiction. As categorised, these works which are prompted by frustrations resulting from conflicts rising between indigenous culture and that of the conquering powers during colonial era in Africa. They seek mainly, as Afat Ahmed Hassan Al-Saidi (2014) puts, to 'remember' the distorted culture of Africa through literature. In this task of remembering the distorted African culture, attention is paid to terms such as self and otherness as appraised by Western and African cultures at play in the novels in this study.

In the literary projects of Ngugi and Armah, the gendered alienation of female protagonists' functions as a powerful allegory for a collective cultural condition. The systematic exploitation endured by women—from being reduced to sexual chattel in *Two Thousand Seasons* to Wariinga's commodified encounters and Wanja's brutalised body—serves as a microcosm of the broader existential estrangement inflicted by colonial powers upon African societies. For James Reid (1972), these atrocities are "the cry of men (and women) who feel themselves the victims of the blind economic forces beyond their control" (Reid, 1972, p. 5). This narrative strategy transcends individual tragedy, framing women's bodies as the primary site where colonial and neo-colonial "blind economic forces," to recall Reid, enact their most intimate violence. The personal fragmentation and psychic dismemberment of these characters thus mirrors the larger division within the colonized community, alienated from its own cultural foundations and modes of being. Their struggle for personhood and fulfilment against systemic pressures becomes the symbolic struggle for the re-integration and decolonization of the African 'self'.

A psychoanalytic approach effectively illuminates the construction of the 'self' in relation to social justice within the selected novels. The concept of the 'self' is fundamentally defined against an 'other', a dynamic that these texts explore to critique both Western and African societies. For instance, in *Devil on the Cross*, the self-assured leader of the foreign delegation embodies a Western selfhood built upon colonial superiority. His calm, firm speech, devoid of uneasiness before a Black audience, demonstrates unshakable confidence. He ends his talk confidingly as he counsels condescendingly "Finally, you should develop the Uhuru of theft, and we shall help you to defend it with all the weapons we have at our disposal" *(Devil on the Cross*, 1982, p. 88). He has a strong self-image constructed by a culture that positions him as

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a dominant figure in opposition to a racialized 'other'. His performance reveals how the colonial psyche internalizes a hierarchical identity, where self-worth is derived from the power to dominate. This contrasts sharply with the often-fragmented or community-oriented 'selves' of African characters, offering a critical lens on how internalized social structures perpetuate injustice. The novels thus use this psychological framework to dissect the very foundations of imperial arrogance and its impact on cross-cultural encounters.

The idea of 'self' in the Western world is also sharply portrayed in *KMT: in the House of Life* but in a reverse manner as compared to how it is presented in *Devil on the Cross.* It comes from character Biko Lema's experience as schoolboy during classes in Whitecastle School. The idea of 'self' portrayed in Armah's novel shows white lecturers upset at Biko's curiosity to venture too far in the field of knowledge in the first chapter "A Garden for Twin Spirits" (*KMT: in the House of Life*, 2002, pp. 11-53) of the first part titled "The Scholars" in the novel. Character Biko's teacher of Literature and English Language, Miss Priscila Snowden, has been upset during class when Biko has dilienated her percetion of Shakespeare in the following passage resulting from her asking Biko to summerise the factors that make Shakespeare the greatest writer the world has ever seen:

Biko answered: "I don't know, Miss Snowden," and the smile on the good teacher's face warped into a grimace of sheer chagrin.

"come now, Biko Lema," Miss Snowden said in the tone she normally reserved for slower students, "I just told you."

"Yes, Miss Snowden. But I thought you wanted my opinion."

"Of course, Biko. You know the answer."

"Miss Snowden, I'm not sure how I can know what makes Shakespeare great before reading what he wrote."

The violence of Miss Snowden's reaction stunned the class into silence. "Get out!" she said, in a whisper. I saw the surprise Biko look at her for several seconds. Then he got up to obey, shaking his head. He had reached the door when Miss Snowden called to him: "Come back and sit down. But mind –behave!" (KMT: in the House of Life, 2002, p. 43).

The shouting of Biko's teacher towards the end of the passage informs a lot on the teacher's inner feelings. She felt humiliated by the logic of her student Biko. From the conception she had about herself, she thought she was far ahead in addressing logic. She was then startled by that of her student Biko who shows incredible easiness with logic and rational. For this reason, he is reluctant to internalise other's opinions. Miss Snowden's conception of 'self' has put her on top of a social ladder among her students from whom she is not ready to feel competed just as Mr Bloom, Biko's Greek teacher. He is also described as being shocked by his student Biko's free mind and rationality. He lost his temper in the following passage:

"Get out of my class!" Mr. Bloom shouted.

"Why sir?" Biko asked.

"All right", Mr. Bloom said, his voice like a razor blade. "You will not get out of my class so I can get on with the job of teaching those of you who need to learn something useful. I will get out and leave you to take my place. Teach the class. (KMT: in the House of Life, 2002, p. 52)

It is not easy when one has an image of himself or herself to be made feel this image as a false

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one by somebody else. Over years, Bloom's experience as a teacher never found such a curious mind as Biko's who overdid in learning. Bloom's perception of himself has always consisted in holding to be true the fact that he is the all-knowing teacher. He feels himself at the centre and relegating students to the margin. But his construction of himself has been dependent on his former experiences until his encounter with the curious Biko.

Instances informing about the concept of self among Westerners in the novels are various. Everywhere it has been displayed in the novels, Westerners such as characters Snowden and Bloom have showed themselves as the only thinking actors who never minded their students in *KMT: in the House of Life*. Each of these teachers reflects on themselves only, conceiving a mental image of themselves as being the only objects of their reflections. In this process, they have forgotten again their students as a possibility of constituting potential objects of their thoughts. Characters Snowden and Bloom identify themselves as teachers as opposed to students. This identification has been extended to the colour of their skin as white which is opposed to students' black colour. Their characterisation in the above passages portrays incongruences occurring in form of mental instabilities between their conception of themselves as the only provider of knowledge and Biko's free mind expressed as judgements and reactions to his teachers' opinions.

When using the same passages above to venture into the concept of self from the black race, there is useful information to be drawn considering character Biko alone. Biko's conception of 'self' moves beyond the idea of Snowden and Bloom. Recognising himself as student, he is aware of his place as a learner. He is grateful to teachers whom he thinks will lead him into knowledge by showing him the first steps. His concept of 'self' makes him realise that knowledge is universal and does not belong to only one race or a category of people. For that reason, Biko does not consider others' opinions as valid until he made his own investigations on the matter. Because of inter-individual differences, echoing with his African cultural influences, Biko makes up his free mind by assuring himself that motivations vary from an individual to another and therefore, everybody has his or her own perception of things according to individual motives. His astonishment to his teachers' intolerance finds ground in his cultural influences which makes him realise that his teachers' behaviours are conflicting with his African background of truthfulness. Biko's consciousness of 'self' is much more oriented on others as part and parcel of his own 'self'. He does not conceive his life out of others' and the other way around. For Biko, even opinions which highly participate in the formation of 'self' must be considered as valid only if others confirm to be so out of individual experiences on the issue. This perception is what motivates his astonishment at his teachers' reactions against his utterances in the novel. If some criticism may opine that Biko's astonishment displays his discomfort with the dismantling of his 'self' by teachers, it is also important to underline that Biko's state of mind at these right moments is bewilderment as opposed to his teachers' open anger. While Biko's astonishment is informing about his openness to learn from others, his teachers' open anger testifies intolerance and systematic refusal of possible social differences or their denial of the existence of alternatives on a given issue.

The selected novels that function as postcolonial fiction in this study because they artistically recreate African postcolonial discourses show Arabs and Europeans who do not consider Africans as people like themselves deserving the same rights and having the same needs to be satisfied. The following passage by foreigners elucidates the point in the novel:

> *'We have come to you as to our friends, who are also the local watchdogs who guard our investments. So when we are here, we feel very much at home. We have visited many caves and lairs owned by local thieves and robbers, and we are very pleased with the work that you*

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people have done. Despite the fact that you were only very recently initiated into the ways of modern theft and robbery, you seem to have grasped and mastered the essentials very quickly. I think that if you continue along these lines, you will become real experts in modern theft and robbery, just like your counterparts in the Western world' (Devil on the Cross, 1982, p. 88).

From a semiotic perspective, in this passage, the leader of foreign delegation of thieves and robbers speaks in a condescending attitude in his address to the audience gathered for the competition. Such words as 'watchdogs', 'initiated', 'essentials', 'become real experts' and 'just like' express the idea of subordination in which foreign delegation is the master and Africans are servants. This fictitious expressed view echoes with the Eurocentric discourses disseminated in the world. Grounding on data available here and which help to see a master-servant relationship, it is legitimate to posit that the authors of Eurocentric literature and their commanders are guilty for a world crime. Their crime is the creation of two opposed classes: the leaders and the led or, to fit the conceptual requirement of the current analysis, the 'centre'/'self' reserved to foreigners and the 'margin'/'other' for Africans. They must thus be charged for cutting short the world history. In this process, foreigners have prevented a great part advancement of the world's knowledge. Colonial masters have contributed to the stagnation and the absence of motion in the artistic worlds in this study.

In *Two Thousand Seasons*, the concept of 'otherness' from Westerners reads through the same image as in *Devil on the Cross* that they have for Africans. The coming of Westerners is all about offering this image of powerful Whites versus powerless Africans:

The white destroyers came. The first wore clothes with pieces of metal shining all along his front, and cords and other nameless things tied around his arm. In addition, he carried a short stick. … The second wore similar clothes but he carried less metal. The third wore a robe unlike the clothes of all the others. It was long, covering him almost completely so that in his movement he was just a red head carrying itself forward above folds of white cloth. Fourth came another in a dress not unlike the clothes of the first two, but with no shiny metal at all on him except his weapons, of which he carried two, a long one on his shoulder and a small one in a pocket by his side. There was a fifth, dressed somewhat like the fourth, carrying nothing. (Two Thousand Seasons, 1973, p. 80)

From this passage, it appears that this coming of Europeans into Africa is not a friendly visit. It entails an open expression of 'otherness' because, had the Europeans considered Africans as people like themselves, they would not have come to them armed as if to wage a war. Throughout the other novels, this concept of 'otherness' has been displayed through constant undermining of Africans who did not have the same appreciation of 'otherness'. On the contrary, Africans show sympathy towards any stranger errand in necessity. It shows below:

In that fertile time before far-listening Anoa made her vatic utterance we were a refuge on this earth for those – hau, too many – bitten hard among their own. In our generosity they found their denied sustenance.

A ruinous openness we had, for those who came as beggars turned snakes after feeding. The suspicious among us had pronounced fears incomprehensible to our spirit then, words generosity failed to understand. (Two Thousand Seasons, 1973, p. 2)

African and Western worldviews present a profound contrast in their conceptions of identity, gender, and social relations. At the heart of this divergence is the African ethos of openness and community, which stands in opposition to a Western paradigm often characterized by conquest, individualism and exclusion.

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This comparative analysis reveals a fundamental divergence in how gender, selfhood, and otherness are articulated. In the African literary context, gender roles are portrayed as culturally defined and complementary. Female protagonists like Wanja and Wariinga are not merely present but are central agents whose narratives are vital to the community's destiny. This stands in stark contrast to the peripheral and often stereotyped roles assigned to women in Western narratives, reflecting a deeper societal devaluation.

This dichotomy extends to the construction of 'self'. The African 'self' is depicted as a relational entity, forged through collective experience and defined by the roles one enacts for the communal good. Conversely, the Western 'self' is often framed individualistically, prioritizing personal ambition and fostering social hierarchies based on individual prominence.

Finally, the concept of 'otherness' is differently mobilized. The Western paradigm historically constructed the African as a separate, exploitable object. The African perspective, however, even when resisting oppression, fundamentally acknowledges the shared humanity of the White 'other'. This is not naiveté, but a profound expression of a worldview that defines itself through connection and ethical responsibility, rather than through separation and domination.

4. CONCLUSION

This analysis concludes that Ngugi and Armah's novels systematically deconstruct colonial ideology by contrasting Western and African frameworks of gender, self, and otherness. A key finding is the strategic narrative erasure or marginalization of white women, which critiques the patriarchal foundations of colonial power, while African women protagonists are positioned as indispensable architects of narrative and cultural meaning.

A significant literary gap identified is the need to move beyond a binary opposition and investigate the internal gender dynamics within depicted African societies, avoiding idealization. This opens new critical debates: to what extent does this literary re-centering of African women confront or coexist with indigenous patriarchal structures? Furthermore, how does this symbolic reclamation translate into tangible social justice within neocolonial realities? Future research must therefore interrogate the intersection of this empowering symbolism with the complex material and political struggles of women, challenging both colonial and native hierarchies to forge a truly emancipatory future.

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