

PATRIARCHY AND SOCIAL DETERMINISM: INTERROGATING FEMINIST AGENDA IN TANZANIA'S NEGLECTED POETRY

Elijah S. Mwaifuge¹

Abstract

This paper examines poems written in English by Tanzanians from a feminist perspective. Specifically, the paper examines how Tanzanian poets in English handle feminist ideas. It interrogates how the poets address issues of human rights, dignity and equality from a feminist perspective in a predominantly patriarchal society. Through a feminist lens, the paper also delineates how the poets depict the reaction of women against masculinity and often female-gender insensitive traditional cultural beliefs which continue to subjugate and marginalise women. The paper contends that despite being ignored in terms of scholarship, Tanzanian poets in English have been preoccupied with the question of gender equality, which helps to define and place their contribution to literary and gender discourse in Tanzania. The paper concludes that Tanzanian poets in English have rhetorically been fostering the feminist agenda to undermine prevalent patriarchal norms and values.

Keywords: Feminists, patriarchy, Tanzanian poets in English, masculinity, identity

1.0 Introduction

The last three decades (1980s and 2000s) have witnessed the emergence of Tanzanian poets in English; an area which had hitherto been dominated by Swahili poets. In Tanzania, soon after the Arusha Declaration in 1967, Kiswahili literature became the *de facto* national literature. Examples of Swahili poets include Shaaban Robert, Mathias Mnyampala, Euphrase Kezilahabi, Kulikoyela Kahigi, Tigiti Sengo and others. Very few Tanzanian Poets, especially in the 1980s wrote in English. Recent poets tend to focus on the equality between men and women. Contemporary poets such as Kundi Faraja, Charles Mloka, Richard Mabala, Sandra Mushi and Neema Komba have taken up a feminist agenda by interrogating in their poems the notion of gender equality and masculinity. This paper examines how these poets handle feminists' notions about gender equality, and human rights against a background of the domineering patriarchal and masculinist culture. Using feminist framework, it specifically interrogates how the poems by Kundi Faraja, Charles Mloka, Richard Mabala, Sandra Mushi and Neema Komba address issues of human rights, dignity and equality in a society that is patriarchal in nature. The aim of this paper is to appreciate the efforts made by the often neglected Tanzanian poets in English in addressing the question of gender equality and their contribution to Tanzania's literary discourse. The paper is divided into three sections. The first section explores how Tanzanian male poets in English depict women in their poems. The second section examines

¹ Department of Literature, College of Humanities, University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
mwaifuge@yahoo.com

the reactions of Tanzanian female poets in English to repressive masculinity and the final section merges the voice of men and women as a way of synthesising how poets of both genders varyingly seek to foster women's emancipation through their poetic expressions.

Since the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, feminists in the United States and in many parts of the world have been questioning the notion of masculinity which is embedded in the ideology of patriarchy. Feminists have focused on championing the rights of girls and women from violence and discrimination (Freedman, 2007, pp. xii-xvii). Their thoughts are addressed in disciplines such as history, religion, political science, arts, music and literature, to name a few. In almost all of these disciplines, the relationship between men and women is presented, with a focus on the inequality of women. The poems written in English by Tanzanians also portray women negatively and often push for their equal treatment with men in their rhetoric. Generally, the radical feminist's agenda has been to overthrow patriarchy and create awareness about gender inequalities which disadvantage women. Nino (2006) posits that the feminist agenda is to raise the status of women socially, economically and politically.

From a historical point of view, and as insisted under the blanket of the radical feminist theory, feminists' thoughts seek to construct positively the image of women and according to Santiago-Quindoza, (1996) they "bring down the structures that maintain the superiority and privileged position of men..." (p.169). However, the feminist literary theory is multifaceted. Kemp and Squires (1997), assert that the theory has been associated with 'otherness,' gender identity and political identity. In line with Flax (1987), this paper focuses on the feminist theory in terms of gender relations and how "gender relations are constituted and experienced..." and "the analysis of male domination" (p, 622).

2.0 Masculinity, tradition and the woman: men's voices

According to Hawley (1970), masculinity is a form of "rugged individualism," (p. 145-146) on the part of men. This is because it hinges on men's feelings without taking others' feelings into account." Individualistic behaviour includes men's failure to admit mistakes, obsession with violence especially "resolving conflicts through violence;" commanding others and "then expecting to be obeyed" (ibid.). Since men benefit from masculinity, in many cases they seek to embrace some rigid forms of masculinity as the analysis of the selected poems by Tanzanian male poets will show. The analysis will also show that these male poets are sensitive to gender equality as they suggest in their poems how to end men's discrimination against women. This duality: male supporting masculinist tendencies and fighting them at the same time runs in Kundi Faraja's poem "Echoes," Charles Mloka's "Marriage

without Coughing” and “Rights of Women” and Richard Mabala’s “Proud Cock.” These poems demonstrate how men exercise their socially constructed masculinity to suggest how to end male discrimination against women. According to Sam *et al.* (2013), “literary works have the potential to transmit history, beliefs, and the whole corpus of habits from one generation to another” (p. 75). Indeed, literary works have the potential of challenging age-old, die-hard customs and behaviours such as discrimination of women under the veil of patriarchal norms and values.

In their poems, Faraja and Mloka present the history and beliefs of societies in which women are invisible primarily because of the secondary roles they play in a male-dominated set-up. The dominance of men over women is illustrated in the poem ‘Echoes’ by Faraja. The persona in the poem makes a plea for the nation and church to stop mistreating women. In the poem, the persona shows how the woman has been viewed traditionally by men, the nation and the church. The opening of the poem reveals the problematical gender-insensitive patriarchal men’s thinking about women. The thinking is rooted in the cultural traditions which treat women as tools of pleasure and as the female gender created to please men:

Me,
 I plead guilty
 That my woman is a tool
 To fulfil my sexual desires,
 That she’s the source of sensual pleasure
 A garden
 Where I plant my seeds
 So as to get children
 Which are mine,
 And not hers,
 Who have the right
 To inherit my property
 And not her (*Summons* 98).

This opening stanza foregrounds the hegemonic status of men. Line six portrays a woman as a ‘garden,’ a ‘symbol of pleasure’ that serves as to tool for use with the purpose of procreation. The woman is thus objectified. Additionally, the stanza revisits the long-established beliefs of some societies that a child belongs to the father’s line and, hence, has the right to inherit property. This resonates with the observation by Richardson (2004), that women in Africa are “denied to inherit land and other property” because customary laws allow men to inherit property and exclude “women from property ownership and inheritance” (p. 19). The poem also objects to the mistreatment of women. In this regard, the persona questions the inequality perpetuated by customs, cultural norms and values. The poem implies

in lines eight and nine that children belong to both the man and the woman, which seeks to undermine the long-established cultural belief.

The question of marrying and paying a bride price is also rooted in traditional and cultural mindsets. A bride price is one of the major characteristics in African marriages. In many African societies, the bride price is paid by a suitor to the parents of the fiancée. Some people, particularly from Western cultures and radical feminists, treat this practice as akin to purchasing a girl, hence turning her into a life of subservience. The persona in the poem “Echoes” confesses:

I plead guilty
That I have regarded my woman
As my property,
Because I paid the bride price
To her parents.
What did her parents think
When they demanded
The cows,
The tanks of beer,
The goats,
The money
They knew
That they were making wealth out of me
Because their girl would work for me
Just like a slave (98).

Feminists reject this objectification and subjection of a woman or girl. Shorter (1998), explains that a bride price “is an indemnity to the bride’s family for their expense in bringing her up” and “a compensation for losing a productive and reproductive family member” (p. 90). In this regard, the bride price is not to be equated with buying a woman as a person think. Feminists, on the other hand, oppose the ‘selling’ of a woman like a commodity and that her dignity should be recognised and upheld. The persona in this poem suggests that marriage contracted on such a basis is like trading the woman as merchandise. This view is consistent with Amakiri (2013), who holds that sometimes marriage contributes to “women’s oppression” (p. 1-2). The persona in the poem “Echoes” shows how the marriage institution serves as a tool for oppressing women by the male gender. In this regard, the bride price the man pays gives him authority to control his wife, which can also be seen as a passport for subjugating women.

The persona is fully aware that he has been subjecting his wife to a secondary status, a patriarchal trait that he has inherited from his parents through socialisation.

Thusly, he confesses:

I plead guilty
 That I have inherited the stupidity
 Of my slavery age parents,
 That I have prolonged inequality.
 That I have continued oppression...
 I am guilty
 For dominating
 My woman (98).

Here, the persona accepts the feminists' challenge to the traditionalists. Like feminists, the persona believes that women are unduly placed at the bottom because men hold supreme authority. The persona is guilty that, as a husband, he exercises absolute power over the family. Thus, he is "guilty" of "dominating" his "woman" (Lines 7-9). His confession in the second stanza, just like the confession in the first stanza, signals that he has realised that equality between him and his wife is important in strengthening the bond of their marriage, which goes against his social conditioning. However, he desires to get this message across to the nation to raise awareness of gender equality.

Having attacked selfish men in the first place, the persona in "Echoes" turns his attention to his nation. In a gibe, he describes how his nation has been trampling upon the rights of women. Citing Ezenwa-Ohaeto, a Nigerian poet, Ifejirika (2013), contends that the role "of a literary artist is to overthrow evil and to enthrone good in society to achieve a society that thrives in the rule of law, equal opportunity, security and equity" (p. 158-159). Like Ifejirika, Faraja in his poem "Echoes" feels that the nation needs to improve the position of women vis-a-vis that of men in society. He sings about how his nation has turned a blind eye to the rights of women to keep women enslaved in the kitchen, and at home to look after the children (Stanza four lines 1-7). He further talks about his nation pleading guilty for giving little room to girls' education compared to the boys (Stanza five lines 1-4). He also sings about how his nation pleads guilty to giving a narrow window of opportunity for women to become teachers, physicians, scientists, leaders of state and public organisations (Stanza six lines 1-10). Instead, the poet wants women not to be relegated to supportive cultural roles when they have the potential to be and to do much more once they are academically and scientifically empowered. The poet underscores how women are poorly treated in his nation. This stand is consistent with the feminist agenda of exposing how women are mistreated in society.

Hodge (2012) contends that the central preoccupations of feminists include challenging the "power structures that generally privilege men over women" in

different societies (p. 1). This is the power that facilitates the poor treatment of women in society. In the poem, “Echoes” the poet does the same by attacking the traditional thinking over women to show that the position of women should be improved. The poet echoes feminist concerns on how women have been denied education in many nations. This view is well-supported by Winterer (2001), who illustrates how women in “Classical Geek” were also given inferior education to men (p. 82-83). Winterer, citing Horace Bushnell’s book *Women’s Suffrage: The Reform against Nature*, argues that women were disqualified in political participation because of lack of education and, thus, their denial of education that could accord them such a privilege appears a deliberate ploy by men to put women off the political arena (cf. p. 83). She further notes that this trend of marginalising women in education continued even among future generations before the feminists intervened to challenge the traditional thinking of men.

In concluding his poem, Faraja also chides the church for also participating in segregating the woman. In stanza seven, lines 10-11 of “Echoes” the poet complains about the exclusion of women in the church leadership and clergy. According to Mudge (2013), since Christianity began the “church’s attitude towards women has often meant double standard and shame” (p.1). Mudge further observes that some churches subject women “to patriarchal and misogynist belief system.” The most known book in the Bible that talks of leadership in the church is the epistle of Timothy. Timothy focuses mostly on the qualities of a church leader. Timothy 1 chapter 3: 1-13 explains that a leader ought to be amorally upright, self-controlled, respectable, and mature. Timothy chapter 2: 11-14 reads:

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first then Eve. And Adam was deceived and became a sinner (1 Timothy 2: 11-14).

Many patriarchal men have tended to cite this biblical authority and other similar verses to consolidate their patriarchal grip on women in society and in the church. This explains why many feminists view men and the church as misogynist. Again, on church leadership, Timothy writes: “I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing. I also want women to dress modestly with decency and propriety...” (1 Timothy 2: 8-9). From a feminist perspective, men’s power has been consolidated by biblical authority. As a result, many churches sideline women as a God-sanctioned right. In the context of the poem, in stanza seven, lines 1-11, the persona opposes the church’s belief that a woman was created from a rib of man, hence occupying a subservient position:

My church is guilty
That it has declared women

Unholy,
 Unsanctified,
 Ungifted to God,
 And that it has confined the alter work
 To the blessed men,
 To the chosen men,
 The gifted men...(99).

The persona challenges the idea of linking the socially-constructed women's inferior position to divine intervention. This standpoint resonates with the views of Ayiba and Efem (2014), who argue that women are "oppressed and disadvantaged by comparison with men without justification" (p. 167). The persona's case is that women are as capable as men, yet they are treated unequally. The persona suggests that the discrimination of women in the church is akin to denial of freedom and human equality. The persona sees this as against natural justice. The persona's unequivocal contention is that women should be respected as independent and capable human beings. This explains why the persona begins by pleading his guilt for mistreating his wife as a property so that he can have moral ground to question the similar mistreatment of women at the higher levels—the national and church levels. In other words, the persona is aware of a dangerous collusion between the man, on the one hand, and the church and the nation on the other. In this regard, the poem constitutes an extreme assault on masculinity and its patriarchal system that denigrates and mistreats women.

The views presented in Faraja's "Echoes" are also taken up by Charles Mloka in "Rights of Women." As the title aptly suggests, the persona's preoccupation in this poem is to assess the rights of women in contemporary context:

Traditional customs
 Still marginalize you
 Gender imbalances,
 Mirrored in societies
 In offices, rural areas,
 Does not need research to verify,
 Inequalities—between man and woman
 Whom should we blame? (*The Wonderful Surgeon* 44).

The question the persona poses in the last line forces the reader to trace the history of patriarchy to know the relationship between men and women. He raises yet another question: "How much of the *Beijing Voice* contributed to set free the woman? (Stanza three, lines 1-2). In this question, the persona seems to blame governments for failing to implement the nice resolutions, covenants and protocols related to women's rights

(Stanza three, lines 3-5). He blames governments for failing to put a stop to customs which oppress women. Some of the customs identified by the persona include the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) which leaves women's "blood oozing, profusely irrigating the dry soil, their lives siphoning away" (Stanza four, lines 1-5). The persona sees that this act of circumcising women/girls is a crime just like "carrying out a *genocide*" (Stanza four, line 10). The persona wants traditional customs which undermine women to be outlawed, a common cry among feminists.

In yet another poem "Marriage without Coughing", Mloka continues with his feminist agenda by making the persona debate on the institution of marriage, in particular the husband-wife relations:

Defect the marriage is, first the woman is accused,
Men will claim,
Always right no defect a man has!
Inherent tradition, for us the most.
Human beings we are, why do we segregate?
Why do we lower the other sex?
The greater the sympathy, is the barren marriage...(18).

The poem suggests openly a direct insult on women based on the men's doctrine of supremacy. Indirectly, the poem makes women the target of masculine attack. Hawley (1970), notes that "Femininity in women becomes a necessary evil" (p.146) forged by men so that they continue to suppress women. The poet is angry and questions the logic behind men's thinking. He asks: "If all are human beings, why should one class oppress, segregate and lower the other class (Lines 6-7)? In the poet's views, a good marriage is based on equality between a man and a woman as a couple.

The poem "Proud Cock" by Richard S. Mabala follows the same pattern of critiquing the use of masculinity to oppress women. "Proud Cock" is a symbolic poem which serves as an extended metaphor as its title suggests. A cock is domesticated a male bird. Rennie (1883), explains that normally a cock is usually proud "erecting himself" through raising "his feathers" and lowering "his wings" (p. 93). The cockerel "elevates his expanded tail, contracts his throat, throws the two tufts of feathers on neck into the form of a ruff, and inflates his whole body, strutting and wheeling about upon the leg with great stateliness". The cock then "draws the whole feathers close to his body" and stretches "himself out, begins to strike upon his sides with his stiffened wings in short and rapid strokes" and "later causes a rumbling sound" (p. 93). These characteristics of a cock signify the strength of a cock linked with male chauvinism under patriarchy. "Proud Cock" prompts readers to examine closely the relationship between the cocks' behaviour and masculinity. In

fact, the cock used in the poem symbolises male domination against women. Stanzas one and three are worth reading:

Proud cock
 Struts,
 Flashing eyes right and left,
 Lord of his domain.
 Around him cluck his faithful hens,
 Foraging for food.
 But always with a wary eye
 On their lord and master
 Whose whims control their lives.
 Neck extended,
 He crows to greet the morning sunlight
 And tells the world
 That he is king.
 Then he spies his special favourite;
 With one swift movement
 He spins the hapless object of his desire,
 Victim in the dust soil,
 And gains brief satisfaction,
 While the others only gaze
 And cluck in helpless sympathy,
 While they too wait the inevitable
 Assault (*Summons* 102-103).

The remaining stanzas (stanza four to eight) depict how the proud cock continues to spin his victims in the dusty soil while glorifying in his strength and disregarding others. This poem symbolizes men-women relationship represented by the cock and his habits toward his female victims—the hens. The status of the hen in this relationship is that of a sexual object that the cock capitalises on by taking advantage of his bigger size, an allusion to the greater power men enjoy in a patriarchal society. The cock ensures that he mates with the hens that are waiting for “the inevitable assault” (Stanza three, lines 12-13). The hens are objectified and oppressed just like the women at the mercy of men in a society governed by patriarchal norms and values. The poem thus explains the power imbalance between men and women, with the female body subjected to male oppression.

The ending of the poem demonstrates that the poet is a feminist. This is illustrated by the idea of freedom the hens seek and fight for. The hens’ struggle against the cock bears fruit. Hens are at last happy as they are freed from “the

incessant assault” of “their tyrant rooster” (Stanza 8 lines 8-10). Mabala, the poet, supports other feminists such as Webb (1970), that for women to win they “must meet and organise for mutual support, solidarity and major social change” (p. 38).

3.0 Up against masculinity: women’s voices

The idea that women are victims of masculinity cannot be overstated. This explains why in many parts of the world, women have been and are still struggling to end male chauvinistic and repressive tendencies against the female gender. According to Bunch-Weeks (1970), the aim of feminism is to oppose women’s oppression “in all the institutions” which “assume male superiority (and female inferiority) in all its day-to-day workings, creating a lower status or a caste for women” (p. 187). This thinking is also evident in the works of female Tanzanian poets as will be demonstrated in the analysis that follows.

The two Tanzanian female poets in English, Sandra Aikaruwa Mushi and Neema Komba, are among the many women involved in consciousness-raising—“a long and logical process which leads to a synthesis of the personal consciousness” (Bunch-Weeks 1970, p. 189). In their poems, they portray how women can re-discover as women to act and react against male oppression. They further show how masculinity works and how it can be challenged.

The two poets first focus on the body of a woman. The body of a woman has been an object of interest to men. The bodies of women have been used to define and control women. Women’s bodies as Tshagofa (2014) explains are used by men to paint a figure of a woman as good, ugly, beautiful; and hence dehumanising women (p. 1). Leavy *et al.* (2009), assert that the worth of a woman is associated with her body (p. 261). LaGuardia (2013), points out that men “are almost always directed towards a manipulation of the visual domain” (p. 228), an act which suggests that men are attracted by the female body for the purpose of controlling and using it. “They Walk among Us” is Sandra Mushi’s most powerful poem which interrogates how men abuse women under the shackles of patriarchy. The poet reveals how men depend on women, yet abuse them. She explains how men feed on women’s kindness and thirst for their love only to end up abusing and hurting them. The poet speaks about the bitter road women pass through:

They dream in music but they sleep on thorns
Poisonous arrows pass through their hearts
Stung by fear for passion
Fleshed ripped with insecurity
They walk a crooked line of broken dreams
Murmuring cold whispers that bring doubts

Their silent symphony so loud...
 Fountain of tears stream down their cheeks
 Choked by emotion no words can they speak.
 Caged around walls of darkness
 Obsessive uncertainty blinding their souls
 Their skin tightened around their eyes
 Sweat beading screening the truth.
 Our unconditional love never satisfies them
 Our tender embraces never warm enough
 Our lonely cries never move them... (*Stains in my Khanga* 28).

The poem directs the reader to consider the behaviour of men and their relationship with women. At any rate, a woman is marginalised as a man takes centre-stage. The poem suggests that women have “nothing” in this world and whatever they try to touch they fail because men do not want them to succeed, hence accomplish their nefarious masculine ambitions that are oppressive to the female gender. In stanza ten lines 1-7, the persona reveals how men are hypocritical by calling women friends, lovers and companions, but only to drown them in sadness. The poet further suggests that men torture women, leaving them wasted, spent, lost and wrung (Stanza twelve line 9). The poem does not provide a direct solution to the problems women face at the hands of men so as to fight back against male oppression. Yet, the poem makes the readers realise that the efforts of women become fruitless because men overpower them. Indeed, in stanza twelve lines 4-5 the persona explains that women attempt to pull back by clutching their hearts but men wrench them out because their power, reinforced by the dominant patriarchal system makes them win against women. In the final stanzas, the poet shows how women’s lives are treated as shadows of men because they neither know where to go nor know their future (Stanza eleven lines 1-8 and stanza twelve lines 1-7). Nevertheless, the poet appears to tell women directly or indirectly that they should react against the oppressive masculinity. In this regard, the poet tells women to discover who they are and begin to understand themselves. This understanding is vital for women to reassert their identity, one of the strategies feminists have deployed to make women understand their position so that they could take action.

Usually, masculinity emphasises men’s pride, power, strength and control, features that make men become aggressive to women and victimise them as men have been conditioned to believe that women are weaker than men. As Keating *et al.* (2000), have pointed out, men reject the characteristics of femininity and prefer masculinity because “masculine role permits and at times requires expressions of aggressive and power” (p. 170). The masculine characteristics embolden them to believe they have a stranglehold over women. The result is that men tend to abuse

women “emotional[ly], physical[ly] and sexual[ly]” as observed in Totten (2005, p. 73). In the poem, “The Visitor,” Sandra Mushi explains how a woman’s body becomes a sexual object which men use, abuse and dump. In this regard, the persona sings sadly:

Yesterday he came to my house
 I wasn’t worth to receive him
 But I honoured his visit
 By letting him seduce me.
 I will be good to you he whispered...
 Shyly I let him touch me,
 His fingers teased and prodded...
 “I have brought you these,” he crooned.
 Teasing me with gifts
Sinia la pilau,² *khanga*,³ a cap and a t-shirt.
 Greedily I opened myself to him,
 Pulled myself up to him,
 Gasping as he entered me,
 “don’t ever leave me,” I moaned,
 “promise you will always be good to me, promise me
 You will provide for me...
 He opened me
 And I let him.
 I gave him the one thing I had
 That was mine and only mine.
 “Tell your friends about me,” he said as he left,
 Throwing a few notes on my creaking bed (78-79).

On the surface, the poem is about love. But the poem’s theme is deeper than the surface meaning. The male persona has only been attracted by the female body. Thus the question of love is not in the mind of the persona as it is in the woman’s mind. The woman loves the man but the man simply wants to buy her by showering her with cheap gifts; she is a property and not an individual; she is reduced to an object. To make matters worse the man mocks her that she should go and tell other women about him, that he is a stud, a symbol of pride and power inherent in masculinity. This attitude cheapens the woman. Just like in the first poem by Sandra Mushi, the poet does not provide a solution or way out of this dilemma. She also does not indicate how women should react. The message in the poem is that all women should

² A platter of pilaf; a kind of rice normally cooked during celebrations.

³ Lady’s print cotton wrap.

realise their potential and the need to understand who they are.

Neema Komba's poems go beyond Sandra Mushi's poems by calling on women to take actions. She explains the position of a woman under masculinity and then offers suggestions on what women should do to challenge masculinity. In the poem "Still don't know what to call this," the persona recollects how she meets a man she loves and gives her body to him. The man abuses her, causing serious pain that will last her "a lifetime." This pain changes her life as she laments about why she even falls in love in the first place (Stanza one lines 1-7). Like Sandra Mushi, Neema Komba develops the same idea of how women are kind and how men exploit their kindness to abuse them. As Sandra Mushi's poem "They Walk among Us" has demonstrated, the persona in a sombre tone laments on how men call women their friends, lovers, companions, "promising to be there when they are needed but end by painning women" (Stanza ten lines 1-6). This betrayal and oppression by the cheating men is repeated in Neema Komba's poem when the persona says: "Your friendship was all I had, and I was dumb enough to fall in love. I made you reason to live this life" (Stanza two, lines 1-3). The poem defines manhood and the characteristics of masculinity. The man abuses the persona not physically, but emotionally and psychologically, which constitutes a deeper kind of hurt to the female gender. In the poem, the poet reveals how this woman suffers both emotionally and psychologically at the hands of the male abuse. This maltreatment is also evident in the tone of the persona:

As swiftly as you came,
Without goodbye you left.
My heart, you ripped from my chest,
And left a big hole instead.
A bleeding heart is all I got now,
So much pain, I can hardly breathe (*See Through the Complicated*
68).

The difference between these two poets is that Neema Komba provides a direct suggestion on what women should do to end the oppression engendered by masculinity. After an emotional appeal, the persona reveals that she has accepted the fact of male repression but she has to live. To live she has to forget what has happened: "A promise of a new beginning. The past had long been gone, And my pain completely forgotten" (Stanza four, lines 4-7).

In the last stanza, the persona urges women to be strong and never to surrender even when abused by men. The persona insists that one has to start anew by learning from the weaknesses and never to trust men to survive. This appeal echoes the words from Mushi's poem "They Walk among Us" in which when the persona insists:

“They walk among us/ feeding on our kindness/ thirsting for our love’ (Stanza one, line 1-3). These words suggest that though men and women co-exist and men depend on women for their survival, women need not trust men who exploit and abuse them. In Neema Komba’s poem “Still don’t know what to call this,” the persona shares the same views as she does not trust men completely, hence her vow to desist from such trust (Stanza six, lines 1-5).

Like “Still don’t know what to call this”, the poem “A Plea to my Love” By Neema Komba continues exploring how men abuse women. The persona complains bitterly about the manner in which her man makes her insane by running away after using her. The most serious question she raises in the poem is: Who gave this man the power to ruin her? (Stanza two, lines 5-6). However, readers know that it is the problematical patriarchal system which gives men power to subjugate women to a life of subservience. Therefore, what the persona experiences is a result of masculinity and its exertions. Although she is becoming insane, she vows to live her life and not think of him again. She wants to be alone, on her own as individual: “Please leave me alone” (Stanza six, line 6). Thus, the persona wants to regain her power, self-esteem and autonomy that the man seeks to undermine. She believes her humanity is within herself and not to be gotten from a man.

On the whole, the poems of Sandra Mushi and Neema Komba are simplistic poems on the surface about men and women relationship. However, these simple poems have profound meanings that question male oppression to empower women by letting them understand themselves. As men hurt women and undermine their potential, the poems of these two female poets call on women to raise their voice of dissent to change their situation for the better through self-identification as strong women and keeping at bay the unwanted male oppression in the name of masculinity under the veil of patriarchal dictates. Other poems by Sandra Mushi such as “Nothing Left,” “I be Standing,” and “Sweet Nothings” and Neema Komba’s other poems such as “They call it Goodbye,” and “You Will Miss My Love” address similar issues with the primary intention of making women individuals and not objects that men oppress. The two poets just like other feminists suggest that women must break the traditional myth to embrace the positive view that they are incapable and, therefore, should struggle to reverse the oppression, subjugation and marginalisation associated with masculinity.

4.0 The merging of the voices of the male and female poets

In analysing issues related to feminism in the selected poems, the voices of both male and female poets are bound to differ because women are the ones who are affected and this explains why their poems have bitter tones. However, both male and female poets embrace the idea of ‘revolution’ as necessary to emancipate women from the

yoke of masculine repression and oppression engendered by patriarchy, which both female and male poets acknowledge as a problem keeping women down.

The sampled poems from men and women present the life of women and develop the identities and the abilities of women. The poets—both male and female—side with the feminists. They want the freedom and equality between men and women. Mwaikusa's poem "Saint Augustina" depicts how a beautiful woman makes men, "flock to her", each wanting her, because of her beauty in body and face. She tires of such advances. One day, with a hard voice, she tells men the truth: "Away with male oppression. We want liberation now!" (Stanza three, lines 7-8). In the first stanza, the poem shows that earlier the woman accepts her role as an objectified woman wanted and used by any man. After learning that she is being exploited by men to satiate their desires, she changes. In Mabala's poem "Proud Cock", the hens struggle against the cock and get their freedom. These poems attest to the power associated with unity: once women join. Faraja's "Echoes" call for women equality as denying women their freedom is tantamount "to refuse [ing] human equality" (Stanza nine, line 3).

Women poets call for freedom and autonomy and want to break away from the oppressive culture of masculinity. Sandra Mushi's poem "Die Freedom" presents the spirits of a new woman who cries out for liberation and emancipation. She wants to be unchained by the locks, bars and cuffs which have been holding her down since her birth (Stanza two, lines 1-8). She does not want to be silenced and this is why she insists on being unchained, unlocked, unbarred, and uncuffed "from segregation, discrimination, homophobia, xenophobia and sexism" (Stanza three, lines 7-10). Neema Komba's "A Letter to Cupid" urges women to reject men's control. The persona blames men for controlling women's bodies, citing how her man tells her how to dress and plait her hair or else he will return to his earlier fling. The woman realises that she loses her virtue and becomes a shadow of that man by responding unquestionably to his egoistical whims (Stanza seven, line 1-6). She thus sees and acknowledges her fault and finds a way out by looking for freedom: "I realised my fault, I put him above myself. Unselfishly invaded insanity, All in the name of feeling, All in the quest of happiness, All to prove I was indeed a woman" (Stanza nine, lines 1-6). What she yearns for is autonomy.

5.0 Conclusion

Mloka's poem "Rights of Women" suggests that the question of gender inequality is a timeless topic. His ideas focus on the "failure" of the Beijing conference and its "weakness" in setting the women free (Stanza three, lines -1-2). This implies that the "failure" of the Beijing conference is due to the undying traditional customs that continue perpetuating the norms and values of patriarchy that elevate masculinity

and male chauvinism at the expense of women's right to equality. The poet further explains why the programmes which aim to empower and liberate women fail to be implemented as required (Stanza five, lines 1-8). Implicitly, this means that women's rights require more than a cosmetic change and efforts. As such, pro-feminist agenda advocates—both male poets and women poetess—the need to continue questioning the gender stereotypes in addition to subverting them so as to establish a new course of outlook and perception among the readers towards shifting from the status quo that continues undermining the rights of women. In this regard, both male and female poets have to continue working together as they seem to be united in their condemnation of masculinity and patriarchy and how they continue subjecting women to oppression and secondary status devoid of equality.

Cited works

- Ayiba, K. O. & Efem, E. E. (2014). The importance of feminist political philosophy. *An International Journal of Language, Literature and Gender Studies*, 3(2), 8, 167-186.
- Amakiri, P. (2014, December 27). Sex and marriage: an African perspective. Retrieved from www.academia.edu/6190019/sex_an_African_perspective.
- Friedman, E. (2007). *The essential feminist reader*. New York: Random House.
- Bunch-Weeks, C. (2010). A broom of one's own: Notes on the women's liberation program. In J. Cooke, C. B. Weeks & R. Morgan (Eds.), *The new woman* (pp. 185-210). Greenwich: Fawcett Premier Book.
- Flax, J. (1987). Postmodern and gender relations in feminist theory, *Signs: Within and Without: Women, Gender, and Theory*, 12(4), pp. 621-643.
- Hawley, A. (1970). A man's view. In J. Cooke, C. B. Weeks & R. Morgan (Eds.), *The new woman* (pp. 145-152). Greenwich: Fawcett Premier Book.
- Hodge, J. (2012, May 16). Feminism F.A.Q.S: Why feminism not equalism or humanism. Gender focus Retrieved May 16, 2016 from <http://www.Gender-focus.com/2092/08/07/feminism-f-a-q-s-feminism-not-equality>
- Holly Bible: New Testament Version*. (1984). London: International Bible Society.
- Iferijika, E. (2013). Poetry for social change: A study of selected poems of Ezenwa Ohaeto. *An International Journal of Language, Literature and Gender Studies*, 2(6), 157-172.
- Keating, M., Grossman, F.K., Sorsoli, L. & Epstein, M. (2000). Containing and resisting masculinity: Narratives of renegotiation among resilient male survivors of childhood sexual abuse. *Psychology of Men and Masculinity*, 6(3), 169-185.

- Kemp, S. & Squires, J. (1997). *Feminisms*. Oxford, New York. Oxford University Press.
- Komba, N. (2011). *See through the complicated*. New York: United States Printers.
- LaGuardia, D. P. (2013). *Intertextual masculinity in French renaissance literature*. UK: Ashgate Publishing.
- Leavy, P., Gnonng, A. & Ross, L. S. (2009). Femininity, masculinity and body image issues among college-age women: An in-depth and written interview study of the mind-body dichotomy. *The Qualitative Report*, 14(2), 261-292.
- Mabala, R. (Ed.) (1980). *Summons: Poems from Tanzania*. Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House.
- Mloka, C. (2007). *The wonderful surgeon and other poems*. Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers.
- Mudge, H. (2013). Christian feminists aim to spread the word on gender equality. The women's blog. Retrieved June, 2015 from <http://www.theguardian.com/lifestyle/the-womens-blog-with-jane-martins>
- Mushi, A. S. (2014). *Stains on my khanga*. Lyttelton, Centurion: Johannesburg.
- Nino, L. (2006). Women, feminism, sexuality and equality in the work place. *E-Leader; Slovakia*, 1-7.
- Richardson, A. M. (2004). Women's inheritance rights in Africa: The need to integrate cultural understanding and legal reform. *Human Rights Brief*, 2, 19-22.
- Rennie, J. (1833). *The domestic habits of birds*. New York: Knights.
- Sam, M. M. Benjamin & Kudakwashe, M. (2013). Unpacking the eurocentric indictment of colonial African-socio-political institutions in literary works: Pfumo reropa and gonawapotera. *Greener Journal of Social Sciences*, 3 (2), 75-83.
- Santiago-Quindoza, L. (1996). Roots of feminist thought in Philippines. *Review of Women's Studies*, 5 & 6 (1 & 2), 159-172.
- Shorter, A. (1998). *African culture: An overview*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa.
- Totten, M. (2015, January 26). Girlfriend abuse as a form of masculinity construction among violent, marginal male Youth. Retrieved from <http://www.tottenadassociates.ca/wp-content/uploads/>.
- Tshegofa, P. (2014). Notions of beauty and attractiveness. Retrieved May 16, 2016 from <http://www.osira.org/buwa/regional/notions-beauty-and-attractiveness>.
- Webb, M. S. (1970). Woman as secretary, sexpot, spender, sow, civic actor, sickie. In J. Cooke, C. B. Weeks and R. Morgan (Eds.), *the New Woman* (117-171).

Greenwich: Fawcett Premier Book.

Winterer, C. (2001). Victoria antigone: Classicism and women's education in America 1840-1900. *American Quarterly* 53(1), 70-93.