

DEFYING THE STATUS QUO: A CASE OF SELECTED FEMALE CHARACTERS IN NGUGI'S 'GRAIN OF WHEAT'

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Abstract

This paper discusses three female characters who defy the status quo in Ngugi's A Grain of Wheat. They defy the status quo by refusing to be intimidated by men. They have gone against the social and political order that defines patriarchal societies in Africa. Succinctly, language is the tool the characters use to express their courage. They publicly rebuke and respond to men's patriarchal-related treatment as shown in the discourse. Through main female characters like Mumbi, Wambui, and Mukami, we see a clear demonstration that women are core-partners in the fight for social justice in African society. The paper analyses figurative lexical items and other clauses with marked meanings that women use as agents of communication and action. The study applied Contextual, Relevance, and Referential theories. Primary data was elicited from Ngugi's A Grain of Wheat by reading chapter by chapter while taking down key clauses, phrases, and sentences that contain target information. The study used qualitative methodology to collect data. The data was descriptively analyzed since the study's objectives were meant to describe, explain, and interpret the conditions of the present phenomena. The study revealed that language in use is context-bound and each contextual use of language should be understood from that particular environment of action. The other factor observed is that language can be used as a weapon for social change. Furthermore, the language female characters use in A Grain of Wheat aid in understanding the text's female characters and their individual and collective personalities.

Keywords: Language, female, characters, defy, patriarchy, Status quo

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Despite enduring harsh circumstances, Ngugi's selected female characters in *A Grain of Wheat* adopt a rare attitude towards patriarchy. They intend to achieve self-autonomy and are vividly devoted to the justice cause of equity and equality. Notwithstanding the aggressive conditions, women in *A Grain of Wheat* express courage through language in use. Unlike the female characters in *Weep not Child* and partly *The River Between*, women in *A Grain of Wheat* abrogate one of patriarchal society's doctrines by refusing to be victims of oppression, cheap labour, inferiority and men dependent. Before then, the representation and perception of women in Africa was that of an object designed to be confined to the walls of a kitchen and warming a man's bed. With time, things begun to change. Ngugi is one writer among many that gives African women a facelift. He does this through some of his female characters who show uncompromised courage in 'A Grain of Wheat.' Characters like Mumbi and Wambui show courage in circumstances where a woman could have said nothing. They defy the existing social and political state of affairs and show

unquestionable reliance against patriarchal dominance. The characters exercise courage through the use of language in various contexts. They vow to fight the unpalatable negative social perception, inhuman treatment, and unjustified social, economic, and political indifferences through the use of language. This paper provides textual evidence and analysis of selected female characters defying the status quo in Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat*. The selected characters are Mumbi, Wambui, and Mukami. The reason for choosing Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* is for the validation of claims the author portrays when he exposes feminine courage through language. To achieve and sustain this, the selected female characters use figurative expressions like metaphors, euphemisms, proverbs, wise sayings etcetera as a medium of expressing their courage. This, therefore, informs the need to analyze how the selected female characters defy the status quo in *A Grain of Wheat* through contextual use of language.

1.1 Research Objectives

- (a) To identify figurative expressions and phrases with marked meaning female characters use to express courage in *A Grain of Wheat*
- (b) To analyse the impact of womanhood courage in *A Grain of Wheat*
- (c) To establish how female characters in *A Grain of Wheat* defy the status quo through language in context

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

First and foremost, the researcher reviewed Sakshi's 'The Delineation of Women Characters in Ngugi WaThiongo's fiction.' In her study, Sakshi recognizes the challenges women face that for ages now, have been exercised by men, norms, traditions, and society largely. According to her findings, in every society, from time immemorial the subjugation of women has given a sanction. She argues that the figure of women and their position in society have changed drastically throughout human history. Coincidentally, the ever-changing reality of African women's lives inevitably reflects itself in Ngugi Wa Thiongo's writing. Her study is an attempt to critically analyze the delineation of women characters in the fiction of Ngugi. She argues that the representation of women in Ngugi's fiction changes with time as the status of women all over the world has been undergoing rapid change. In her analysis, she sees women as victims of colonialism, patriarchy, oppressed figures, mothers, and also freedom fighters. The women have pitted against the unjust social, economic, and political order and play their positive roles in the establishment of a new order. Sakshi's study is similar to the present study in that both aim at showing how women are brave to break the cold of patriarchal dominance as exhibited in Ngugi's 'A Grain of Wheat.' Nevertheless, the present study stipulates how Mumbi, Wambui, and Mukami express courage by defying the status quo through the use of figurative expressions such as metaphors, euphemisms, proverbs, and other quotes with implicitly stated meanings.

Another article reviewed is that of Lubungu (2020). In his study; *Images of Women in God's Bits of Wood: The Perspective of Sex Role Stereotype*, he discusses women from the feminist standpoint. He adds that Ousmane (1962) argues that women can take up leadership positions in the midst of a male-oriented and dominated society. Lubungu explains that Ousmane defies the stereotype that women cannot be leaders and do not possess organisational capacity through his presentation of female characters such as Penda, a political activist. According to Lubungu, Ousmane's portrait of the revolutionary idea of the prostitute (Penda) as a political activist raises a degraded woman to respectability and dignity. Lubungu goes ahead to affirm that Ousmane is a resolute advocate of women's rights and demonstrates that women are legitimate partners in the struggle for social justice. This is the case because Ousmane as argued by Lubungu, supports the integration of women in the struggle against the exploitation of the masses. *God's Bits of Wood*, therefore, is an artistic work in which the Marxist ideology of equality of people of different social classes coincides with the ideology of women as an entity not subservient to men (Lubungu, 2020). His article aligns with the present article in that they both envision a similar ideology of seeing women as partners in social justice. Additionally, both articles are textual based. The difference is that the present article takes

the dimension of how selected female characters in Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* apply context-bound language to express courage, fight for social justice, and show that they too should be treated as equals.

Furthermore, Oladele (2010) looks at some Yoruba proverbs that express women's oppression. In his paper, he posits that there are elements of oppression in some of the Yoruba proverbs that relate to women. He argues that these proverbs violate the rights and dignity of women and that they are indicators of discrimination against women in Yoruba culture. He further argues that the most fundamental but neglected aspect of gender discourse lies in the proverbial resources of the community. Oladele's study provides textual evidence of the proverbial oppression of the feminine gender in Yoruba culture and also underscores their pernicious effects on the struggle for gender balance. The study contends that there is an urgent need to review the assumptions underlying these proverbs. Oladele's study conforms to the present study in that both share the same view on female oppression. The disparity is that Oladele looks at proverbs that are used to oppress women in Yoruba while the present study looks at how women stand to rebuke such oppression through the use of metaphors, proverbs, wise sayings, and phrases with marked meaning.

To crown it on the literature review, the researcher also referred to Sultana (2011)'s study titled: *Patriarchy and Women's Subordination: A Theoretical Analysis*. Sultana argues that Patriarchy is the prime obstacle to women's advancement and development. Despite differences in levels of domination, the broad principles remain the same, i.e. men are in control. According to him, the nature of this control may differ, but ultimately, it's the show of men. To him, it is necessary to understand the system, which keeps women dominated and subordinate, and to unravel its workings to work for women's development systematically. In the modern world where women go ahead by their merit, patriarchy creates obstacles for women to go forward in society. Sultana's findings are that Patriarchal institutions and social relations are responsible for the inferior or secondary status of women. These societies give absolute priority to men and to some extent limits women's human rights. To define it, Patriarchy refers to male domination both in public and private spheres (Bhasin, 2006). In this way, feminists use the term 'patriarchy' to describe the power relationship between men and women as well as to find out the root cause of women's subordination. Therefore, Sultana's article is an attempt to analyze the concept of patriarchy and women's subordination from a theoretical perspective. Arising from this background, the chasm the present study intends to fill is showing how women resist this patriarchal dominance through the contextual use of figurative expressions in *Ngugi's A Grain of Wheat*. Above all, both articles are entirely written based on secondary sources that include journals, proceedings of seminars, reviews of books, and other secondary data sources like novels.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

Considering that the objectives of the study are descriptive, explanatory, and predominantly non-statistical in nature, the qualitative approach is used within the descriptive research design, complemented by the Thematic Analysis Approach based on the contextual analysis of the selected figurative expressions used by the selected female characters in expressing courage and eventually defying the status quo. The three female characters were selected as targets for analysis as they contained desired information that conforms with the aim of the study.

Brink and Wood (1998) argue that a qualitative study like the present one is a better means of understanding human emotions such as rejection, powerlessness, and effort since such human emotions are difficult to quantify by assigning numerical values. The use of a qualitative approach in the study of figurative expressions and other quotes female characters use to express courage in *A Grain of Wheat* is therefore an effective way of understanding the character's actions underpinned in the text (Creswell and Clark in Lelissa, 2018). Thematic analysis is important to this study not necessarily because of the reflection and frequency of a specific theme's appearance within the data, but because of the potential it avails a researcher to conceptualize deeper meanings contained in topical issues (Nowell, 2017). Additionally, the theme of womanhood courage in defying the status quo is analyzed from a latent perspective, which reflects deeper,

more underlying meanings, assumptions, or ideologies (Boyatzis 1998; Braun and Clarke 2006). The researcher identified information that provides important insights that address the research objectives and concretize on character's way of perceiving things (Taylor, 2012).

Furthermore, Ngugi has extensively written many novels based on different situations. To arrive at *A Grain of Wheat*, the researcher read Ngugi's 'The River Between', 'Decolonizing the Mind', 'Petals of Blood', 'Weep not Child', 'Devil on the Cross' and 'A Grain of Wheat'. Having done this exercise, the text that appealed to contain enough instances where female characters expressed courage through language is Ngugi's 'A Grain of Wheat'. Subsequently, the collection of data progressed from the identification and description of relevant linguistic features (selected figures of speech and sentences with marked meaning) in *A Grain of Wheat* to the interpretation of the value these linguistic features have (Mwinlaaru, 2012). Although there are machine extraction programmers, the data was extracted manually. This is because for one to obtain data from a text, it need not be machine-readable. Since the linguistic data required are figurative expressions and key phrases where female characters express courage in Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat*, the researcher read the selected novel several times. This was done by moving from chapter to chapter in the text, picking and noting down in the notebook the selected speaker's utterances therein.

Far and beyond, having read and typed the identified clauses associated with each target figure of speech in Microsoft Word, contextual analysis was done. This was done to identify the clauses in the process types in which a figurative expression or a sentence with marked meaning is inscribed. The analysis made that far was later read repeatedly to identify and correct inaccuracies. Samples of analysis were proofread in line with the coding system used. The data was thereafter analyzed descriptively (Kombo and Tromp 2006). Also, being a qualitative research, the study used thematic analysis in analyzing the collected data and arriving at reasonable conclusions. Furthermore, the identified figurative expressions and other phrases with marked meaning were classified and analyzed in connection with the theme of womanhood courage, literature review, theories and researcher's point of view.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

The present study is anchored on the following theories:

(a) The Referential Theory

The referential theory is attributed primarily to Plato and Aristotle. It simply states that for a word or a linguistic form to have a meaning, it must refer to some existing or subsisting entity. Therefore, words are not more than an "exaggerated theory of reference" as posited by Frege. It is proposed that there is an entity above and beyond the realm of sensible entities from which all particular things derive their meanings. The Referential Theory equates the meaning of a word or a phrase with the entities (person, object, abstract notion, event, or state) to which it refers. Therefore, its denotations or referents and expressions stand for things/objects in reality. Words function like labels; sentences mirror state-of-affairs, designate objects, designate activities, and designate properties. The Referential Theory thrives on the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign as noted by (Ferdinand, 1966). The connection between a word and what it stands for is ARBITRARY. This is one of the defining properties of human language. This theory has been used in this study because Ngugi uses quite several referents in the *A Grain of Wheat* narrative. Some of the objects, abstract notions, and words/ symbols used either mirror the state of affairs or represent some existing information. Nevertheless, Referential Theory has its drawbacks in the sense that it is not in all cases that a referent can be identified for a word or a phrase as it is the case with grammatical words. It simply states that for a word or a linguistic form to have a meaning, it must refer to some existing or subsisting entity. However, the researcher uses this theory only in instances where one word, sentence object, or thing refers to something else.

(b) The Contextual Theory

The theory above is attributed to Wittgenstein (2018). After he observed with concern the possibility of losing meaning of certain classes of words, he was motivated to come up with the Contextual Theory. His fear was that the meaning of certain classes of words could be lost if meaning were treated as just entities. By and large, the contextual theory is one that uses the context (environment of action) to detect meaning of an utterance. The theory was elaborated upon by J. Firth and M.A Halliday in 1978. It is also known as the usage theory or operational theory of meaning. According to the theory, the meaning of a word or an expression is determined by the context of its use. It is the effect created by a linguistic unit within a given context that expresses its full meaning. The Contextual Theory deals with the meaning of words and sentences not as isolated entities but as related situations of occurrence and use.

Over and above, Depraetere (2019) argues that meaning is tied to context and both speakers and hearers rely on context to grasp the full meaning of a given expression. An expression is therefore meaningful if it is used appropriately in its actual context. Context in this case is considered an essential factor for interpreting linguistic data (expressions). Since this study is a contextual analysis of Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat*, such a theory that emphasizes meaning based on context is a must-use. Depraetere, (2019) asserts that one sentence can convey different meanings depending on the situation in which it is uttered. The participants' intentions are based on the context. Despite its strengths, as shown above, the theory has some weaknesses. Among others, there is a misconception of grasping the speaker's intended meaning of certain words when the understanding of their meanings is done in isolation from the context. At times there is also ambiguous comprehension of words, phrases, and sentences when context is ignored or not quickly detected by the hearer to help fully understand the meaning of an utterance at a given place and time. Tune (2016) argues that the complete meaning of a word is always contextual and that the understanding of any sentence should depend on both the language and the world around us (Tune, 2016).

(d) **The Relevance Theory**

Grice (1975) in the TESOL International Journal volume 13 issue 4 (2018), gifted the field of pragmatics with the cooperative principle which is the assumption that participants in a conversation normally attempt to be informative, truthful, relevant, and clear. The goal of inferential pragmatics is to explain how the hearer infers the speaker's meaning based on the evidence provided. Grice says that utterances automatically create expectations that guide the hearer toward the speaker's meaning. The central claim of relevance theory is that the expectations of relevance raised by an utterance are precise enough, and predictable enough, to guide the hearer towards the speaker's meaning. The aim in this case is to explain in cognitively realistic terms what these expectations of relevance amount to, and how they might contribute to an empirically plausible account of comprehension in Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat*.

4.0 **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

In *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi exposes his audience to some female characters who boldly express courage using language. They exercise this courage in various contexts. Consider the following three selected female characters for analysis:

4.1 **Mumbi**

She is a beautiful woman who grew up in Thabai and one of the seven major characters of the novel. She happens to be Kihika's sister, and wife to Gikonyo. During the state of emergency, she looked after her family, a sign of care and responsibility. To justify her care and responsibility, she refuses to revenge her brother's death even when she could. She is among the female characters Ngugi uses to show that women gained courage to face the ugly face of patriarchalism. She one day uses the words below to tell off Gikonyo:

*I may be a woman, but even a cowardly bitch fights back when cornered against a wall”
(A Grain of Wheat, p.206) (Metaphor) and “What sort of man do you call yourself ... You*

think the gates of my parents' hut would be shut against me if I left this tomb?'' (A Grain of Wheat, p.190) (wise saying).

We are forced to perceive Gikonyo as one African traditionalist who still conceived the duty of a woman to be primarily that of childbearing and rearing. In the narrative, he maltreats Mumbi. Nevertheless, even though Mumbi has suffered glumness and psychological trauma, she snaps Gikonyo's abusive utterances towards her with derision. The words in italics exemplify courage, self-reliance, and self-defense. Sadly, this was the time when husbands treated women like vomited bile. Women had gunned up to begin resisting the highly patriarchal and oppressive culture, a thing which was rare before. To concretize her actions, she runs away from her mistreating husband and goes to her parents. She is rebuked for doing this but she defends her decision. The common parlance here was for Mumbi to remain submissive and loyal to her husband despite the mistreatment.

Ironically, Ngugi skilfully informs his audience that the time has come for women to stand up and denounce being dominated, maltreated, and subdued by men. The character speaks boldly and leaves us with the homework of perceiving women as equals. Mumbi through the use of language implicitly tells the world that even they (women) should and can enjoy the same human rights and privileges just like their counterparts. At the time, women had started resisting oppression from their husbands. This is why Mumbi is not ready to accept defeat on the eve of her prime time, symbolically, resisting foreign rule. The relevance of the words in italics is actualized through the reaction and action women take towards the fight against intimidation and marginalization exerted by their husbands and above all, the Whites. The author, through Mumbi, uses the word 'bitch', to refer to a promiscuous woman or a whore. In an African world, a bitch has no right to fight a legally married woman who mistreats her for interfering into one's marriage. But in this case, Mumbi tells Gikonyo that even if she does not have the right to fight back against a 'husband'(Patriarchalism), she would do it to protect herself. After all, she was capable of surviving by herself. Using the referential theory, we can deduce that the author is not referring to an actual prostitute. The term bitch is representational. Additionally, the full meaning of the utterances can only be appropriately interpreted when the environment of action is uncompromisingly considered.

Significantly, the speaker wants us to realize that even if 'the chief duty of a woman in an African context is to sacrifice herself to the physical and emotional needs of others, and above all, submit herself to her husband, woman's power and nobility are to be respected and recognized. Such beliefs are relevant in male-domineering societies across Africa. Furthermore, the speaker wants the audience to recognize the importance of women. He is emphasizing the need to see women as equals. Even if they can be weak and considered second fiddles to men, Mumbi voices out that she can fight back for being quizzed breathlessly. Her space still matters to her as a woman, therefore, Gikonyo must accord her some. The relevance of the utterance can be recognized by both the readers and the interlocutors through the inferred meaning. As pragmatic linguists, we have compromised interest in literal meanings. Instead, we focus on speaker's non-natural meaning. This is the kind of meaning that is the object of study in Gricean and post-Gricean pragmatics. The context under which certain words have been used is crucial in defining a speaker's meaning, and so is, to a greater or lesser degree depending on the approach, the recognition of the speaker's intentions by the addressee (Sperber and Wilson 1986).

As recorded by Sakshi in 'The Delineation of Women Characters in Ngugi Wa Thiongo's Fiction', she recognizes the challenges women face which for ages now, have been exercised by men, norms, traditions, and society largely. According to her findings, in every society, from time immemorial, the subjugation of women has been given a sanction. She argues that the figure of women and their position in society have changed drastically throughout human history. Coincidentally, the ever-changing reality of African women's lives inevitably reflects itself in Ngugi Wa Thiongo's writing. She argues that the representation

of women in Ngugi's fiction changes with time as the status of women all over the world has been undergoing rapid change. As already explained, women have been pitted against the unjust social, economic, and political order and play their positive roles in the establishment of a new order. Mumbi and others achieve this through language in use.

In a separate occurrence, Gikinyo shows some coldness towards Mumbi's son she had bore with Karanja. One day the boy innocently propped himself in between Gikonyo's knees and started chattering desiring to be friendly. Unfortunately, Gikonyo roughly pushed the boy away from the knees, disgust on his face. The boy staggered and fell on his back and burst into tears, looking to the mother for an explanation. Mumbi stood up, and for a minute anger blocked her throat. "*What sort of a man do you call yourself? Have you no manly courage to touch me? Why do you turn a coward's anger on a child, a little child...!*" She seethed like a river that had broken a dam. Words were tossed out, they came in floods, filling her mouth so that she could not hardly articulate them. Before then, a woman could barely raise their voices against men. Nevertheless, the time had come for women to stand firm and express their courage. Contextually, Gikonyo had done that knowing too well that Mumbi would not react in the way she did. She defies the status quo by expressing her anger to her husband, a sign of rebuking men's dominance.

4.2 Wambui

Wambui is an old woman who was a political activist during the struggle. Courageously, women in *A Grain of Wheat* exhibit a great deal of sacrifice and humility to the domestic and socio-political issues in the novel. One such woman is Wambui: "... she carried secrets from the villages to the forest and back to the villages and towns" (*A Grain of Wheat*, pg.23). The narrator also recounts how she exploits the old woman at the battlefield where "... she once carried a pistol tied to her thighs near the groin ..." An act which in patriarchal societies is commonly carried out by men (*A Grain of Wheat*, pg.23-24). Contextually, it was during a drinking spree in Thabai when Wambui recounted how others had died in the hands of the colonial masters trying to fight for independence. In her speech, she reminds her people that there is no sweeter song man can gladly and joyfully sing than that of freedom. She says 'those that have gone before us, those spared to see the sun today, and even those to be born tomorrow, must join the feast. The day we hold Wiyathi (freedom) in our hands we want to drink from the same calabash.' Silence followed these words. Each person is engrossed in himself as turning over words in his mind. The woman cleared her throat, an indication that she was about to take up the thread from Warui.

As indicated earlier, a story is told of how she once carried a pistol tied to her thighs near the groin. As luck would have it, she was suddenly caught in one of those sporadic military and police operations that had plagued the country. She had hidden for safety but was easily located by a Gikuyu police officer. Without shame and respect for women, the officer searched Wambui from head to toe. He started from her chest, rummaged under her armpits, gradually working his way down towards the vital spot. Suddenly, Wambui screamed, and the man stopped, astonished. '*The children of these days, she began. 'Have you lost all shame? Just because the Whiteman tells you so, you would touch your mother's...the woman who gave you birth? All right, I will lift the clothes and you can have a look at your mother, it is so aged, and see what gain it will bring you for the rest of your life. She pretends to be lifting her clothes and exposing her nakedness.* Seeing this, the police officer involuntarily turns his eyes and leaves.

To communicate her message, Wambui uses words tied to the context. As argued by Jenkins (2014), language here has revealed our object of knowledge and also helped us to identify and stimulate certain images or ideas. Arguably, this is why the police officer takes no further action against her. Supposedly, the officer takes no further action against Wambui due to the circumstance that has formed the statement as it is fully understood by the Gikuyu police officer. And the message from Wambui is quite clear, 'leave me alone. After all, we are in this together. We too are people like those who sent you.' The context here has helped the interlocutors to comprehend the message being conveyed.

In expressing courage, the old woman uses a euphemism and at the same time, the statement has attributes of personification. She has done this to avoid portraying an offensive statement directly. She lightens up the actual name of a body part by telling the police officer... *'Just because the Whiteman tells you so, you would touch your mother's...the woman who gave you birth. All right, I will lift the clothes and you can have a look at your mother, it is so aged, and see what gain it will bring you for the rest of your life.'* (A Grain of Wheat, pg. 23-24). The 'aged mother' being referred to is Wambui's private part, and when she says *'...it is so aged,' she has given her body part some human qualities.* As defined by Hornby (2003), euphemism is the substitution of an agreeable or offensive expression for one that may offend or suggest something unpleasant. As argued by Mwanambuyu (2011), euphemisms occur in a wide array of relationships and age groups, although they happen more frequently among elders than the young. In this regard, it may be true to state that the forms euphemisms take and the euphemistic patterns depend on the social distance between the participants, their relative social statuses, age, occupation, gender, and even the power of the speaker and hearer which determines the strategies applied. The other aspect to bear in mind is the context of euphemisms and the intention of the speaker. Some euphemisms are better understood and appreciated by people who share the same social-cultural background or context. Following this argument above, evidence is before us that Wambui and the police officer share some common background since they are both Gikuyu. It is arguably the more reason the officer easily understands what the old woman means.

Language has yet again been used to express courage, and Wambui achieves this through the use of figurative speech (euphemism) as shown above. Ngugi explored his art with such artistic flavor to show the world that women were capable of defying the social order and rising above the intimidation bar. In those days, Wambui would have bowed down to the officer in fear of being killed. Ironically, she expresses courage even amid her purported death. It was this courage expressed through language that her life. And not only language but one punctuated by figurative condensed meanings. Rawson (1981) adds that euphemisms aim at providing a way of speaking the unspeakable. In the case above, the old lady does not only find a way to speak the unspeakable but courageously does this to rebel against male dominance and oppression. These exploits of the woman not only project her as powerful but also create the opportunity for us to recognise the crucial roles women played during the colonial period when men were denouncing their oaths of secrecy to follow the whites. Ousmane (1962) as quoted by Dr. Lubungu (2020) argues that women can take up leadership positions in the midst of a male-oriented and dominated society. He achieves this through his presentation of female characters such as Penda, a political activist, and a revolutionary figure. Realistically, it is only courage that can influence a woman to take up such challenges in an African society.

4.3 Mukami

Despite being brainwashed by the colonial master's biblical teaching that a woman should never exercise authority over man, (NIV Bible, 1 Timothy 2 vs 11-12) Mukami defies this order. She achieves this by always insisting that her husband does what is right in the eyes of society. Instead of learning in silence and avoiding telling her husband what to do, she often rebukes him for his vanity. (*A Grain of Wheat, p.192-193*). To extend this thought, we can rely on Grice's (1975) cooperative principle which implores the purpose of communication as informative, truthful, relevant, and clear. To perceive Mukami's viewpoint, we are guided by the goal of inferential pragmatics through how we infer her intended meaning based on the evidence provided. Arising from the above, it is practically evidenced that Mukami respects her husband, but through her implied speech, she stands to express her freedom, relevance, and equal rights with her husband.

For example, "...Mukami would often rebuke him for his vanity but enjoyed every episode of her man's strength and courage" (*A Grain of Wheat, p. 192-193*). Grice says that utterances automatically create expectations that guide the hearer toward the speaker's meaning. The central claim of relevance theory is

that the expectations of relevance raised by an utterance are precise enough, and predictable enough, to guide the hearer towards the speaker's meaning. The writer's aim in this case is to explain in cognitively realistic terms what these expectations of relevance amount to, and how they might contribute to an empirically plausible account of comprehending roles women take in Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat*.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The language female characters use in *A Grain of Wheat* aid the reader in understanding the text's female characters and their communicative intentions. Ngugi has set his works apart from European writers' works by using euphemisms, direct quotes, proverbs and metaphors to strengthen the aesthetic values of his people and language. Furthermore, in *A Grain of Wheat*, the pragmatic social meaning of language seems to be dependent on the context.

In written language, the reader understands the speaker's values, practices, aspirations, and intentions from the lexical items and other phrases/clauses encountered and what they are used to mean in that particular context. Readers should therefore interpret lexical items and certain clauses in the light of the context to better understand what the author/ speaker intends to communicate. Language in the hands and hearts of willing vessels has the power to shape the world, and the choices that individual language speakers make daily will ultimately determine the validity of their oral and written language. Through the type of language female characters in *A Grain of Wheat* use, we can perceive that every human community has its idiosyncratic cultural patterns through which the totality of what, how, where, and when of man in a context is identified.

Additionally, Mumbi, Mukami, and Wambui are among the major characters who exhibit their authority over patriarchal dominance. Apart from these, even minor characters like Mukami exhibit courage in the text. For instance, she respects her husband quite enough, but she always insists that he does what is right in the eyes of society. Therefore, "... Mukami would often rebuke him for his vanity but enjoyed every episode told of her man's strength and courage" (*A Grain of Wheat*, pg.192-193). Another one is Wangari who at some point resists Gikonyo from maltreating Mumbi. She reproaches him for abandoning her. Even though Mumbi has suffered glumness and psychological trauma, she snaps Gikonyo's abusive utterances towards her with derision. '*What sort of man do you call yourself*', she angrily speaks. Unlike women of Ngugi's *Weep Not, Child* and *The River Between*, women in *A Grain of Wheat* play different roles to reflect good images of African women. They played significant roles, such as domestic, warfare, and economic among others. All such roles could only be actualized through womanhood and courage expressed through language.

Mumbi is a character whose life remains unaffected even in the face of all troubles. She has exhibited the traits of a true African woman. She has zealously maintained her home with the mother-in-law when the husband has been detained. She plays her roles as a mother, wife and political leader of women at the domestic and community levels. She has exhibited masculine traits and organized her fellow women in the celebration of independence of Kenya. This attitude of Mumbi and other women in *A Grain of Wheat* stood contrary to that of typical African women.

5.1 Recommendations

For some time now, the question of gender has spawned considerable debate in contemporary African studies. The debate is no longer based on whether or not African women are oppressed; nor is it on whether or not there is gender inequality in the African cultural community. Rather, there is consensus on the pervasiveness of these problems in Africa. Nevertheless, female autonomy, solidarity and empowerment currently occupy a special place in gender and development discourse in Africa. The cry of feminists in Africa today, for the most part, concerns how the crises of women's empowerment can be resolved. Since

there is a strong conviction that the resolution of the problem is to treat women as equals, it is recommended that action and implementation be seriously taken by all of us.

Secondly, the study recommends that in written discourse, the implied meanings of language contained in lexical items like metaphors, euphemisms, common quotes and proverbs should be contextually understood. This helps close the chasm in conceptualizing the pragmatic meaning of these items that exists when one struggles to comprehend them semantically. Doing this makes the texts appeal to readers from many backgrounds. Furthermore, the findings reveal that a reader can only understand a speaker's intended meaning by considering linguistic context. This is because the aim is to get the implied message which is contextually communicated. To avoid any misconception, it is therefore recommended that context be considered at all costs when grasping the actual meanings of the language of operation. We have seen how Ngugi's female characters have defied the status quo in *A Grain of Wheat* through the use of language in context.

Furthermore, our compromised standards of morality and our laws, which give more rights to men should also be reformed. All that is needed is the recognition of justice and the courage to put an end to this injustice, and male discrimination. Given the fact that patriarchal oppression of women is rooted in the home/family sexuality, and man-woman relationship, this patriarchal oppression and exploitation of women should be stopped from within families. To bring equality, it is essential that those tasked with such responsibilities, establish equal rights between men and women in all respects of life.

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