
Narrating Feminine Rebellion, Dynamism and Resilience in Meja Mwangi's *The Last Plague*

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Abstract

The postcolonial literature that underscores feminist realization has used varied ways to engage and interrogate the many aspects of the fight against the enduring grip of patriarchy. However, as this paper shows, to defeat the plague, believable human effort laced with such enduring virtues as dynamism and resilience should be cultivated. This paper argues that Meja Mwangi's **The Last Plague** is an inspiring metaphor that, with a slant, narrates female rebellion, dynamism and resilience in taming HIV/AIDS in the context of cultural and patriarchal resistance. What Janet and right-minded people like Frank do to have people accept the plague is real and can be deduced through acceptance and change of people's sexual behaviour. Thus, using Psychoanalytic and Feminism theories, this paper examines the apparent resistance to combating HIV/AIDS and the reasons why Janet rebels and, with evident dynamism and resilience, at first and second, take a bold step to fight the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Using **The Last Plague** as the unit of analysis, the paper utilizes a close reading textual analysis methodology for data collection, analysis, discussion and presentation. This paper argues that 'The Last Plague' is a metaphor for HIV/AIDS, and in Mwangi's thinking, this disease is wiping humanity to the bubonic plague level.

Key Words: Narrative, Rebellion, Dynamism, Resilience, Plague, HIV/AIDS

Introduction

Meja Mwangi is a prolific pioneer Kenyan writer, among his contemporaries are Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Grace Ogot, Rebecca Njau, Micere Mugo and playwrights like Francis Imbuga and David Mulwa. He was born in 1948 in Nyeri, Kenya, during the notable Mau Mau struggle for independence. In his formative years he lived in Nanyuki, a military town, under the care of his mother, who worked for British families as a domestic worker. Therefore, it is arguable that Mwangi's childhood was not rosy given his people's fear for British brutality meted out to Mau Mau freedom fighters and their sympathizers. The trauma thus experienced by Mwangi recur a lot in his literary works. Mwangi attended Nanyuki Secondary School, then later Kenyatta College, where he pursued science, before briefly studying at the University of Leeds. He later worked with the French Television Network while writing in his free time. Mwangi is a social realist because he writes mainly about the struggle of the marginalized in devastating social circumstances. Indeed, for the most part, Mwangi's narratives are naturalistic, humorous, but always protest, while giving optimism for the oppressed. The social vision underlined in a majority of Mwangi's works emphasizes struggle as the requisite to the empowerment and attainment of autonomy by the marginalized.

The Last Plague (2000) is set in a remote and melancholic rural town called Crossroads. The text's primary theme is HIV/AIDS and its attendant negative impact on the community and beyond. Mwangi metaphorically presents the pandemic as 'The Last Plague', a menace that has claimed many lives. Significantly, through inspiring admirable efforts of the female protagonist, Janet, the support of right-minded men like Frank, Big Youth and belatedly a transformed Broker, the scourge is tamed despite intrusive and hindering patriarchy, to give people fresh hope to live.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This paper uses Psychoanalytic and Feminism theories to interrogate and present the many aspects of the fight against the enduring grip of patriarchy and taming of HIV/AIDS pandemic in Crossroads. The encounter is presented as narrating rebellion, dynamism and resilience in Meja Mwangi's *The Last Plague*. Psychoanalytic theory is about literature and psychology. In essence, it would look at literature, though in fictional form, as an expression of personality, the state of mind, feelings and desires of the characters or the artist via the characters created. Since the psychoanalytic approach correspond literature to the artist's mental traits, Naya (2010) argues that Psychoanalytic evaluation entails the analysis of language that conveys the repressed desires and conflicts explored in a literary text. Therefore,

psychoanalytic theory is crucial in unearthing the hidden meaning in a literary text and solely relies on the reader's ability to analyse language, provide text-based evidence, apply the tenets underlined in theory, and ultimately present a well-constructed argument. Psychoanalytic theory is used to comprehend the psychology behind men's paranoia and selfishness in jealously perpetuating and maintaining patriarchal hegemony in Meja Mwangi's *The Last Plague*. The crippling and incapacitating patriarchal dominance undermine the narrative of female rebellion, dynamism and resilience in taming HIV/AIDS in the context of cultural and patriarchal resistance in the text.

The core of feminism, in whatever strand and cultural setup, is to establish the existence of social, political and economic barriers that marginalise women in a patriarchal society, to offer the way forward to overcome these roadblocks to achieve women progress. These strategies are necessary to tame patriarchy because, as Millet (1971) observes, patriarchy is prevalent and intrusively anchored in society's social, political, and economic structures and would manifest in different forms in history and place. The ideology of patriarchy is to dominate women. Johnson (1995) argues that patriarchy is terroristic and erroneously elevates men's right to systematically control women through violence, economic marginalisation, and intimidation, among other control manouvres. Marler (2005) views patriarchy as the monopoly of power that men selfishly embrace to entrench themselves in social, economic, legal, and religious institutions to dominate women. However, the ideology of feminism has come to champion the cause of the oppressed and consequently speaks out for the subaltern and all the people considered the Other. Rutere (2010) avers that patriarchy oppresses women, weaker men and children in society. Therefore, it is imperative to tame it and ensure respect, equality, and gender partnership for the progress and survival of society.

The ideology of feminism guides the interrogation of the admirable and inspiring strategies women, especially Janet, employs to withstand patriarchy. Indeed, to tame it, pragmatically circumvent it and ultimately rebel against it with dynamism and resilience and manage the scourging HIV/AIDS in the context of cultural and patriarchal resistance. Specifically, feminism informs the discussion of Janet's single-handed and bold efforts to tame the HIV/AIDS and save lives. Further, it critiques men's egoism and cultural barriers as the stumbling blocks in taming the plague, and foregrounds Janet's rebellion, dynamism and resilience in taming the plague to ensure gender harmony, progress and survival of the society.

This study is purely library based and uses a close reading textual analysis methodology for data collection, analysis, discussion and presentation. Its scope is on the critical discussion of Meja Mwangi's text, *The Last Plague* and the focus is on the metaphor that narrates female rebellion, dynamism and resilience in taming HIV/AIDS in the context of cultural and patriarchal resistance. Towards this end, the thoughts of a few eminent literary critics, tenets of the theories used and the views of the researchers on the selected text are interrogated, conflated and applied to present the argument of the study.

'The Last Plague' as a Metaphor for HIV/AIDS and Individual Idiosyncrasies

Meja Mwangi uses the title 'The Last Plague' metaphorically to explain the incapacitating HIV/AIDS, which is massively claiming lives in Crossroads to the individual and communal idiosyncrasies undermining the management of this pandemic. Therefore, in its extended use in Mwangi's text, the plague becomes a symbol of human fear, stigma, frustration, pain, and death. Muriungi in Ogude & Nyairo (2007) argues that *The Last Plague* could be understood as a metaphorical comparison of the dilapidating human body and the society experiencing socio-economic degeneration. Murage (2014) collaborates with this argument and observes that the instances of environmental decline, as it were, are similar and follow the physical human suffering caused by HIV/AIDS pandemic and the related ailments. The plague has caused havoc on the socio-economic life of Crossroads and beyond. Among other arguments, this paper underscores that the female narrative of rebellion, dynamism and resilience in Mwangi's *The Last Plague* is presented in the context of the gender-inclusive war waged against patriarchal hegemony in Crossroads. The menace has persistently become a stumbling block to the efforts put in place to tame the pandemic wrecking the social-economic life of Crossroads. Before the gender-inclusive war against patriarchy takes shape to check the plague, Janet the protagonist, singlehandedly makes commendable efforts to tame the plague despite the nagging and intrusive male opposition.

Janet is in the centrality of the plot and the action of *The Last Plague*. After her broken marriage, she picks another challenging life of educating the people of Crossroads about HIV/AIDS and the preventive measures to manage the epidemic that has claimed many lives. At first, Janet singlehandedly undertakes the job before he is joined by Frank, a returnee to Crossroads, and Broker, her runaway husband freshly returned. With the assistance of Big Youth, collectively, the trio put up a brave and believable fight against the pandemic and persistently distribute condoms and birth control pills for free. Indeed, it is an admirable, inspiring battle though Broker finally dies, and the

all and sundry are left wondering whether the plague would wipe out the entire population of Crossroads. Mwangi paints a picture of a community heavily weighed on by the toll of the plague. He observes:

And along the country road and the footpaths and cattle trails [...], ox-wagons and donkey carts, loaded with coffins hung with red flags, dutifully delivered their cold burdens to the gaping holes that awaited them in every village and in every hamlet and in every homestead all over Crossroads (TLP, p.20).

In this lonely and sad community, Janet's rebellion, dynamism, and resilience manifest in fighting the plague in the context of the opposition from ignorant men and women who are the majority in the society. But Janet outmaneuvers this irritant opposition to save a community where almost every homestead has a grave of a person who has died of the plague. In Crossroads, burial mounds are constant reminders of the dead. The graves are metaphorically alive: "They grew, they multiplied, and mutated. They turned into monsters; hungry beasts with an insatiable craving for human lives" (TLP, p.20). The graves increased in number every day and "spilt over the burial plots and the farm boundaries and reached out to eat up more homesteads and their homesteaders. They consumed the homesteaders, chewing them up and spitting them in the graves, till the last member of the family had been buried" (TLP p.21). It is said that the dead were "hastily thrown into the yawning graves by fearful neighbours and, just as quickly, covered with the earth" (TLP pg.21). Burying the people with HIV/AIDS had become a routine in Crossroads. In Janet's words to Frank, people in Crossroads were dying more than in any other place and evidently "[G]rave digging had replaced hoeing and, where once they had dug holes and planted yam and cassava, now they planted people" (TLP pg, 29), both young and old. They did not whatsoever have any hope of harvesting anything else but grief.

Janet begins to battle the plague singlehandedly as an employee of the Health Ministry that gives her condoms and pills to distribute for free to Crossroads' men and women. She does this job well despite the stigma, discrimination, ridicule and outright rejection that she experiences. To facilitate her job, the Ministry gives her a bicycle. Janet is a resilient woman who rides "a huge bicycle, a man-sized bicycle with a full crossbar and a carrier cage in front" (TLP pg.26). Men wonder why she accepts such a 'thing' from the Ministry for her work. They blame the Ministry for being foolish to give such a thing and expect "a woman to ride a man's bicycle" (TLP p.27). Nevertheless, Janet soldiers on with her work and blatantly ignores her critics. The men are a notorious source of discouragement: "[T]hey had called her shameless when

instead of sending the abomination [bicycle] back to the government at once as expected, she had simply mounted it and ridden it, just as a man would have done" (TLP, p.27). With time, however, they get used to seeing her ride the bicycle and distribute the condoms and family planning pills. Indeed, "[I]n time, many had come to accept it as inevitable and to admit to themselves, albeit grudgingly, that there was not much that a man could do that a woman could not do too" (TLP p. 27), with skill and accuracy.

In her work, Janet is focused and determined to deliver. She has no time for criticism, especially from idlers, so she always ignores Uncle Mark's cynical greetings and snide jokes. She also ignores non-inspiring talk from men like old Musa, who loudly wonder who in their right minds uses condoms. Janet wittily counters: "[M]en who care for their wives and their lives" (TLP p. 13). Janet is a no-nonsense woman. Mwangi observes that:

[...] all of Crossroads knew that she had a pathological aversion to lecherous men and bullocks and men who lived alone without women. Men who had no purpose in life, other than to lead a quiet life while their world broke into pieces about them. She loathed and detested the whole perverted herd of them (TLP, p.27).

Evidently, Janet is persistent in her pursuit to manage HIV/AIDS and often confronts the diabolical and phobic men like Chief Chupa and Kata Kataa. Chief Chupa the bully is stalking Janet and proposes to have her as one of his wives. He is determined to use his position to win or force Janet to accept him. It is said: "[F]ortune smiled on those whom chief Chupa favoured. No one would defy him and thrive in Crossroads. He was as relentless an enemy as he was generous a patron, and not even God could help those who crossed him" (TLP p.78). Regardless of the many threats to Janet, Chief Chupa is not lucky to have her as a wife. He has threatened her that she would lose her job and be nothing and no one would ever marry her. The Chief likens Janet to a *Mutumba* or second-hand garment and reminds her that she is old and with three children and consequently not appealing to men as a wife or even a concubine. But Janet remains adamant and immobilizes the Chief to impotence. His ego bruised terribly, Chief Chupa walks away humiliated at the end of it all, and Janet becomes his sworn enemy. This explains why he is hostile and in league with all men opposed to Janet's effort to distribute condoms and educate people about safer sex.

Kata Kataa, Janet's brother in law, also confronts a share of Janet's wrath. "Kata Kataa the village herbalist, diviner, fortune-teller, witchdoctor and Chief Circumciser" (TLP, p.31) selfishly with lust had intentions of inheriting his brother's wife after the latter succumbed to the plague. Janet would not

let Kata Kataa do that and kill his wife and her sister, Julia. She also relentlessly wants Kata Kataa to discontinue circumcising boys without proper hygienic measures because of the risks involved in having the initiates contract HIV/AIDS. Janet ups her efforts and sues Kata Kataa in a public court for wanting to inherit the wife of his dead brother when he turns physical and nearly kills her and Frank. Although the Chief and the elders are obviously going rule against her, it is said "[J]anet was notorious for her resistance to authority; her insistence on having her last word and making a mockery of traditional structures" (TLP, p.83). Janet understands how to outmaneuver roadblocks on her way to achieve anything and save lives. Murage (2014) avers that "[J]anet displays a mixture of both conforming and contravening gender roles expectations, depending on what she wishes to achieve at any one given moment" (pp.139-140), and quite often she succeeds. Although Kata Kataa disrupts the meeting convened to check his excesses and Janet does not achieve anything tangible in the way of judgment, she makes an affirmative statement about the bizarre action of wife inheritance in the context of the epidemic claiming lives through that nefarious, outdated practice, among others.

Janet's tenacity and resilience is evident: She covers many kilometres in Crossroads and beyond, encountering resistance and, in some cases, being physically chased out of some homesteads where she visits to give her narrative of condoms and pills being able to save lives. It is underscored that:

She walked and pedaled her bicycle dozens of kilometres, from hill to hill and throughout Crossroads. She talked to numerous people every day; sang them the song of the condom and told them of the benefit of planning their families and of protecting themselves from sexually transmitted diseases (TLP, p.96)

Although many people run to hide from Janet, she goes after them to ensure they hear what she is saying, even if they don't agree with her. She is a subaltern among fellow subalterns because of the hostile reception she receives from them. But she persists since she is convinced that the job she is doing is important, and it is a matter of time before the community embraces her narrative for a more significant cause of saving its people from the deadly HI/AIDS pandemic. Notably, Janet wades through patriarchal opposition to have her people know the consequences of the plague. According to Madete (2016), "The author's portrayal of men in the text tends to build Janet's character. While Janet is brought out as someone willing to sacrifice herself for the sake of the society, men are brought out as selfish people who only think of themselves (p.10). Later in the novel, it is evident that Janet and right-

minded men like Frank and the latter Broker deflate men's egoism and cultural barriers, which are the stumbling blocks, to tame the plague in Crossroads and beyond. Given Janet's heroic deed in taming the plague, it is arguable in the words of Ndumba (2002) that:

Mwangi is also yearning for a society that will recognize and listen to the voice of a woman, a society that will not vilify women when they engage in activities that can change society, a society where women will not be pushed to the kitchen when meaningful issues are being discussed at a "baraza" (p.87).

Indeed, Mwangi's clarion call to women is that, first and foremost they should understand that patriarchy is exclusive and there is a dire need for them to assert themselves for inclusivity in the social political and economic domains in the society in order to make progress to save themselves and the society. Indeed, Mwangi reemphasizes the value for hard work as a strategy women require singly or collectively when he reiterates:

That was why Janet, a woman soldiered on alone. Ignoring the derision and the snide remarks that men made about her, expecting no gratitude from anyone and getting none. Alone, always alone. Alone against the preachers of intolerance and division, alone against the administrators of ignorance and apathy, alone against traditional intractability and obstinacy. Always alone (TLP, p.123)

Indeed, the battle against the pandemic is significantly, and singlehandedly won by Janet long before the male boost from Frank, Broker and Big Youth and the material support from the Ministry and donors; herein Mwangi is quite clear that minority effort can be a success story when patience and persistence prevail.

Men's Egoism and Cultural Barriers: Stumbling Blocks in Taming the Plague

Men's egoism hamper Janet's work to battle the plague in Crossroads and retrogressive cultural barriers perpetuated by patriarchy. The men derisively refer to her as the 'Condom Woman', a deviant who has defied marriage and the cultural expectations and demands that define a woman. They do not use 'her condoms' because they are 'real men'. A woman like Janet, who dares to do the unexpected, is defined and condemned to be tamed for conformity by the majority. The men firmly believe that: "[W]hat Janet needed now [...] was an ox-trainer; a man to beat her back to womanhood" (TLP, p.65). Musa, the old individualist, adds grimly: "[W]hat she needs is a man [...]. To beat her and make her pregnant herself" (TLP, p.65). The lecherous men think Janet is suitable for domestic chores and motherhood purposes only. But Janet's rebellion, dynamism and resilience to save the community from the plague is

the waterloo of men's egoism and cultural roadblocks perpetuated by patriarchy. As argued by Madete (2016), "[W]omen characters are aware that patriarchy is responsible for their exclusion from mainstream society and they are fighting hard against this exclusion (p.1). In league with right-minded men like Frank, Broker and Big Youth, Janet has defied the patriarchal "norms" to be at the forefront of taming the ravaging plague. Murage (2014) in reference to the subversion of legitimate power in the text, observes that:

In *The Last Plague*, there are no passive characters around whom the social power struggles of the aggressive characters oscillate. Instead, Pastor Batolomeo, Musa, Maalim and Grandmother's use of religion to force [patriarchal] concessions on other characters have been met by defiance by Broker, Janet, Frank and Big Youth, who rely on the reference of social power to assert themselves and front the values they cherish (p.194) and [to save the community from the HIV/AIDS pandemic].

Janet has further ignored a female and weaker sex tag to mount an aggressive campaign to educate and distribute condoms and pills to the vulnerable men and women in Crossroads. She has even taken the campaign of safer sex to schools and other educational institutions, despite the irritating opposition from the male heads of such institutions.

On the tag of women as the weaker sex. Madete (2016) discounts and vacates the perception to opine that:

The Last Plague brings this out very well in its portrayal of Janet who goes against the norm when, after being abandoned by her husband, focuses on the struggles to take care of her children and her grandmother. She takes on the fight against AIDS, a job her grandmother thinks belongs to men and the Chief feels is useless because no one uses the condoms Janet is distributing. She is laughed at and ridiculed by men who are thankful that they married real women who do not go against tradition. Many times she is arrested and accused of teaching young children about sex (P. 6).

Nonetheless, Janet does an admirable job to beat men in their selfish scheme of standing the way of the campaign against the plague. Conservative Christianity fronted by Pastor Bat and his parish, Kata Kataa's affinity to the traditional form of male circumcision and wife inheritance, Chief Chupa's red tape bureaucracy and greed; the ignorance and phobic timidity of teacher Paulo of the polytechnic; Head Fredrick Faustian Faru's officialdom and

nasty remarks of idle men make Crossroads, at first, to decline Janet's idea of salvaging the community from the crippling plague. The opposition to Janet is real, and attempts to deliberately undermine her effort are evident. She is often body shamed and physically ejected from the venues she goes to do her job singly or collectively, such as with Frank, Broker or Big Youth. The narrator underlines the patriarchal crucifixion of Janet unequivocally and quips that:

Crossroads had derided a good job and laughed at her and dismissed her crusade as vulgar and foreign imposition and an exercise in futility. Crossroads had said many shameful things about Janet and dumped her reputation in the latrine; along with birth control pills and condoms that no one used (TLP, p.111).

With time, Janet's rebellion, dynamism and resilience, believable support of Frank, Broker and Big Youth and the immense support of both the Ministry and foreign donors, the campaign to tame the epidemic is effective. Consequently, Crossroads accepts HIV/AIDS is real and a threat to her existence. The community eventually embraces the buying and use of pills and condoms for safer sex, among other precautions for her own survival.

Surprisingly, as a vulnerable minority Janet does not want a man in her life to help her do the job considered to be 'for men'. When her Grandmother reminds her that she needs a man to complete her hustling life, Janet defiantly tells her that "[T]esticles do not make a man" (TLP, p.56). In other words being 'male' is a mindset, not a physical attribute. Janet would not hear Grandmother's proposal to have her get remarried to Chief Chupa for the sake of the children. Janet stays put and retorts to her grandmother that "[I] would be happier if you stopped dreaming for me and left me to my own problems. A husband is not one of them right now, let us talk about our Julia. What were you going to do about her husband" (TLP, p.56). Julia, Janet's sister will contract HIV/AIDS if Kata Kataa inherits his dead brother wife's. Janet has already had a showdown with Kata Kataa in public court for the same problem. Later Janet is brave enough to face Kata Kataa, she stops him from circumcising the boys because he would infect them with AIDS if they share one knife. Janet tells Kata Kataa: "I'm here to thwart you [...]. I'm here to stop you from making dead men out of healthy boys, to stop you killing them all with this so-called initiation" (TLP, pp. 102-103). Janet's determination is evident when she convinces Frank not to run away from Crossroads from personal frustrations, hopelessness and imagined sickness. She pleads with Frank to forget his illness and "[L]ive with a purpose and finish the work we have started" (TLP, p.131). Janet is clearly liberal in her mindset: she does stop Broker's advances for a comeback to their estranged

marriage, but gives him stringent conditions that ensures not only her safety, but also that of the children. Although she is opposed to Broker selling government condoms which are supposed to be distributed for free, she is willing to give him a chance to see if it will work.

Janet's pragmatic acceptance to work with difficult men like Frank and Broker is a good testimony of her dynamism in battling with HIV/AIDS menace in Crossroads, and an indicator of the recommended survival techniques for minorities. Her resilience and tenacity is also evident in her efforts to distribute condoms to the youth and in odd place like bars, where a single woman like her cannot be seen without her reputation being soiled. Despite the accusation that she is corrupting the morals of the youth and inciting them to embrace early sex, Janet ultimately has a free hand to do her job: "But soon Janet was officially visiting the bars and teahouses and the lodgings and everywhere where men congregated for whatever purpose. Sometimes she was accompanied by the Health Inspector, and sometimes she went with Frank" (TLP, p.25).

With time, the so-called 'real men', their 'real women', and Crossroad's youth give in to Janet's cause. The visiting Don Donovan delegation compliments Janet for an excellent job in her condom campaign and progress made. Indeed, her work attracts further support in material and human resource to tame the HIV/AIDS epidemic, even further, the evident tangible achievements in Condom and sex education campaign has made both men and women who at first fiercely resist Janet's narrative, embrace it with conviction and enthusiasm.

Gender Harmony: The Way Forward in Taming the Plague

Mwangi's *The Last Plague* underscores a gender inclusive approach to taming HIV/AIDS in Crossroads and beyond. The once stubborn patriarchy is now curving in to allow sex education campaign and use of condoms as some of the necessary and important measures to manage the pandemic. The paradigm shift is a boost to Janet's effort to check on HIV/AIDS menace. Janet is affirmatively on the ground with right minded men like Frank, Broker and Big Youth. They are receiving government support and external aid for their work. Janet and her team have received a galore of compliments from Don Donovan's delegation for the good job. Janet has gone ahead to request for medical test kits for the Crossroads population. Consequently, the Ministry arrive to do a makeshift consultation room in the old post office to test people for HIV/AIDS. Indeed, there is no turning back as far as the campaign against the plague is concerned, all achieved by the viable efforts of the minority.

There is good progress made to have people, especially men, change their attitude and embrace condoms, among other measures. For instance, Hanna's husband has embraced condoms, and the wife has good testimony for Janet. However, Hanna reports to Janet that her husband is doing it discreetly to avoid stigma. Hanna avers "[H]e is afraid. She said to Janet. "[H]e is afraid that men will know about it and consider him a coward. So I must not tell anyone, not even my best friend, about it" (TLP, p.334). Hanna is courageous, and her action to have her spouse use condoms is commendable. Julia also has good news for Janet. Kata Kataa has given in to using condoms and has desisted inheriting his brother's wife and for any conjugal affair. This is significant progress, and by extension, Kata Kataa will abandon his bizarre and sadistic trade of circumcising the boys with one unsterilized knife. Even further, he is going to be less aggressive to Janet and her team. He will be a good model and inspiring to others in the campaign against the pandemic. Janet is grateful for what her sister Julia has done to convince Kata Kataa. It is reported that Julia appreciates her sister for that commendable and immense effort to convince Kata to embrace condoms. She quips to her sister: "[Y]ou have won a great victory today" (TLP, p.364). Excitedly Janet confides to Frank that Julia is transformed: "[S]he is a new woman now [...]. She has solved the Kata problem by herself" (TLP, p. 364). Not one problem, multiple problem, especially with a man who was once hostile to Janet, her condom campaign and her desire to have him stop 'killing' young men through his unhygienic circumcision practice.

Broker's book given earlier to Janet as a tool to educate people about HIV/AIDS is working wonders. Many men and women in Crossroads have read it and seen the actual pictures of people ravaged by HIV/AIDS. Indeed, Brokers unwavering support to Janet on HIV/AIDS campaign is further appreciated. He has invested a lot in this effort. Despite his lousy past, Broker is gradually coming to the reality of being humane. Before, his life was ruled by the lust of worldly things like money, alcohol, sex, crime, just to mention only a few. But now Broker confides to Frank:

He worried too much these days, he confessed, worried about things that had never bothered him before. Things such as environmental pollution, global warming and the ozone. And about people. About justice, and about people. About people who were too poor, too hungry and died too young. About the day of Judgment and about heaven and hell. Things such as had never bothered him before (TLP, p.383).

Broker is really a transformed man and ready to bring change in Crossroad. Muindu (2015) argues that "[H]is renewed value for human connection

enables him to show kindred humanity to the tramp whom he invites to sit with them as they played, recognition that the beggar is a human being deserving respect and not social snobbery (p.12). Broker has further confessed to Frank that something must be done for Crossroads when it is possible and when people are alive. “[S]omething that will live after we are gone. We must reclaim Crossroads back from the dead.” And when Frank doubts, Broker affirms: “[I]sn’t life a communal problem? [...]. Crossroads must be brought back to life” (TLP, p.380). Although Bakari Ben Broker dies after burying petrol tanks and the action foreshadows his death and burial, many people attended his funeral. These are his admirers, critics and so on. Their attendance underlines some testimony of appreciation for Broker’s efforts in HIV/AIDS/ campaign.

Even further, the good results of HIV/AIDS tests of many people testify to the success story of the campaign that Janet singlehandedly started and collectively done at a later stage. Frank, Hanna, Julia and Sikarame, the notorious sex pest and people who would be considered high risk with HIV/AIDS, have tested negative. They are given a chance to rethink and live a responsible and meaningful life in the society. Julia would keep safe that now she has her life back: “[S]he would do everything to keep it. Everything, including leaving him” (TLP, p. 383). She even informs Janet “[A]s of today Julia swore to her, ‘I am cured of men’” (TLP, p. 383). Hanna also swears to murder her husband if he dares to be wayward and engage in unprotected sex. Frank, too regrets having been confirmed positive before, and now that the truth is established about his health status, he will gain courage and hope to soldier on with a new life. In a nutshell, the aforementioned characters are spared the author’s elimination process because they are needed to continue Janet’s inspiring admirable job of fighting the plague and its related menaces. Crossroads must be sanitized to begin a new chapter in life.

Indeed, a society that embraces meaningful gender harmony and inclusivity will as it were achieve significant progress in all endeavours. Such a direction is evident in Mwangi’s *The Last plague* and Ndumba (2002) avers that:

At the end of the novel [young and] old people are yielding to the use of condoms. People living with AIDS have been integrated in society and they have proved to be very productive. These events bring out Mwangi’s vision. He sees a new society that will not stigmatise people living with AIDS (p.89).

In the same vein this paper underlines that the new society will be found on gender respect, equality and partnership for any meaningful progress. The reunion of Janet and Broker is a gesture and pointer to the desired gender

harmony in society. Equally, men and women must have the courage to forgive and move on. Gender unity is an irreducible minimum and a panacea for the progress of society.

Conclusion

This paper has established that Mwangi's *The Last Plague* is a metaphor that narrates female rebellion, dynamism and resilience in taming HIV/AIDS in the context of oppositional culture and patriarchy. It has used Psychoanalytic and Feminism theories as the ideological praxis to read, interrogate and appreciate, singlehanded female effort and collect gender initiative in taming ravaging HIV/AIDS to give people a lifeline. Indeed, through the steps of Janet, a minority, and her male colleague's actions, Crossroads' people accept HIV/AIDS pandemic is real and can be tamed through acceptance and change of people's sexual behaviour. The reality of the pandemic brings a paradigm shift in peoples' attitude, behaviour and consequently, the desired gender respect, equality and partnership in the society. This change eventually becomes the platform to wage a successful battle against the plague and, in the ultimate, normalcy is restored in the society.

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