

# Chapter Twenty Seven

## JAGUA NANA'S CHILDREN: THE IMAGE OF THE PROSTITUTE IN POST COLONIAL AFRICAN LITERATURE

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### Abstract

*This paper, while aligning with the view that prostitution is one of the oldest professions, examines the phenomenon of prostitution as a social fact in post –colonial African society, and the various ramifications of the portraiture of the prostitute in post –colonial African literature, especially male-authored ones. After examining the attitudes to prostitutes and prostitution in ancient Greece, Victorian England and some contemporary societies, the paper x –rays the African novelist’s diagnosis of the causes of prostitution, the social problems associated with it, and the “values” of prostitution. Adopting feminist theory as the implied theoretical framework which need not be reexamined here, the paper asks and tries to answer the larger question: Why do African writers find the prostitute attractive as a choice image in their works? The paper ends by positing that evidence from the works studied suggests that in spite of the negative portraiture of the prostitute by writers, the prostitute is a largely misunderstood and misrepresented person; not only in literatures from other parts of the world where the image of the prostitute first began to appear. It is prominently so also in postcolonial African literature. Therefore, the prostitute’s position demands a more sympathetic appraisal and understanding, especially in relation to the social structures which created her in the first place and still sustain her. The point is also made that although the female prostitute is usually stigmatized while their male clients are often covered up in most patriarchal societies, the men who are served by female prostitutes are as “guilty” as the females for supporting and sustaining an odious institution, since it takes patronage for prostitution to flourish. It is only when we realize this that the problems associated with prostitution in African and other societies can be properly addressed.*

### Introduction

At a certain stage in their historical evolution, traditions of fiction begin to feature certain stereotypes as evidence of their maturity. One of the fictional stereotypes that have developed in western literature, and consequently attracted writers from various regions, is the image of the prostitute.

From what we see in Dostoevsky’s fiction, Arab and North African fiction, and even French feminist theatre of 1870 – 1914, it is clear that the prostitute has become a major figure around which a number of significant literary works have been crafted.

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It is therefore not surprising that in the past nearly five decades or so, African writers have also taken up the issue of prostitutes and prostitution. Unfortunately, these writers, who are male, treat the issue with the usual male chauvinistic attitude that has characterized the stereotyping of women when they handle other women-related issues.

“Jagua Nana’s Children” is used in this essay to refer to the fictional progeny of Jagua Nana, Cyprian Ekwensi’s courtesan/prostitute heroine of his novel, *Jagua Nana*. Using the method of archetypal criticism of the selected works, this paper posits that every other prostitute created in postcolonial African literature is a modification of Jagua Nana, or a fictional representation of some attribute of Jagua Nana as a character.

As a literary archetype, the image of the prostitute adopted by Ekwensi goes far back into history. Prostitution is acknowledged to be one of the oldest professions the human race has known. But despite its age, prostitution is still used pejoratively to describe the occupational engagements of women of cheap virtue who thrive on unbridled sexual promiscuity. This pejorative attitude to prostitution arises from stereotyped social attitudes towards women, prudery and the double standards which men have been observed to operate all through history.

Among the ancient Greeks for instance who had both male and female prostitutes, it was reasoned that “the citizen who prostituted himself... or causes himself to be so maintained... is deprived of making public statements because “he who has sold his own body for the pleasure of others... would not hesitate to sell the interests of the community as a whole” (Wikipedia). Following the above, a prostitute was considered someone who abdicates his/her own dignity for the desire of another. Yet, “the Greeks had no moral qualms about consorting with prostitutes”. In fact, “prostitution was a part of daily life in Ancient Greece”, and in the more important cities, “it employed a significant proportion of the population and represented one of the top levels of economic activity” (Wikipedia). It is unclear, however, why in ancient Greek literature, e.g. Aristophanes’ play, *Assemblymen* and Plato’s *The Republic*, prostitutes are proscribed and prostitution banished.

In the Victorian period in England, especially in *sentimental literature*, prostitutes were presented as victims; and in some works such as Coventry Patmore’s *The Angel in the House* where emphasis was laid on the purity of women, the prostitute was portrayed as soiled, corrupted and in need of cleansing. The anonymity of the city led to a large increase in prostitution, and unsanctioned sexual relationships. Dickens and other writers associated prostitution with the mechanization and industrialization of modern life, portraying

prostitutes as human commodities consumed and thrown away like refuse when they were used up. (This is probably the beginning of the portraiture of the prostitute as an exploited person).

The closure of brothels led to a concentration of street prostitution by the late 1880s. In his landmark study, *Prostitution*, William Acton writes that in 1857 the police reported that in London alone there were 8,600 prostitutes, for which reason prostitution was known as “The Great Social Evil” beginning from the 1840s. But we also need to see this from the point of view that the Victorians were great prudes and were involved in unparalleled moral duplicity, especially in sexual relationships.

In the United States where a lot of research has been conducted on this issue, Farley and Kelly (2000) have reported that “there has been a hugely disparate arrest rate of women in prostitution, compared to arrest of johns [men]. ... law enforcement focus[es] on the women in prostitution rather than on predatory behaviours of pimps and johns... The demand side of prostitution has been largely ignored”. (p.24). This is similar to the scenario in the Bible in the case of the woman who was dragged to Jesus on the charge of prostitution/adultery and was on the verge of being stoned to death but for Jesus’ intervention.

Davis (1993) has also reported “Arrests of women in prostitution and the simultaneous failure to arrest customers comprised unfair and discriminatory practices”.

In her study of the prostitute in Arab and North African fiction, Evelyn Accad (1984) noted the imbalance in sexual privileges which Koranic law allows men, a factor, which she implies, promotes prostitution. She reports that Koranic law allows men “a variety of sexual pleasures: wives (up to four) and concubines (an unlimited number) as long as they are legally engaged in such activities”. Yet the same Koran, she notes, is “against prostitution (bigha, Khana) which is outside the accepted contracts of sexuality, namely, marriage and concubinage (nikah)” (p.74).

According to the above study, the conditions that allowed prostitution to flourish in Arabo – Islamic societies include (i) their sexually repressive nature. Because prostitution allows a certain amount of freedom, it releases part of the sexual tension of men (ii) prostitution provides a way out for men who cannot pay for the legal forms of sexuality (nikah) (i.e. for a wife or for a concubine). (iii) the sexual life of a young Arab male is taken in charge almost entirely by organized prostitution (p.75). It follows from the above that in these societies prostitution is looked at less as a deviant behavior and more as a socially functional and

beneficial practice. As a vital element in the social structure therefore, there is an implied social acceptance that promotes its sustenance.

In South Asian literature also prostitution is presented, and part of Ann Lowry Weir's findings are that "Sex and money are the two invariable items of exchange for both courtesans and prostitutes" (1984:77). The story is the same whether it involves "the beautiful and talented dancing girls of the emperors' courts", or "the starving, ragged derelicts who turn tricks in hopes of surviving from one day to the next" (p.77).

According to Weir also, "Prostitution is employed in [South Asian] fiction to emphasize the generally subjugated condition of Indian women and to assert that a woman turns to the only economically feasible method of survival in a time of great hardship. Several novelists have written of women and girls who were forced into or to the brink of prostitution during World War II or at the time of independence and partition between India and Pakistan in 1947. Others have portrayed characters who find themselves in this situation because of local, familial or personal hardships" (p.82).

Even in French feminist theatre of 1870 -1914, Dostoevsky's fiction and Malaysian and Indonesian literature, the prostitute features prominently. The point is therefore that the prostitute has become a universal stereotype which has continued to attract the imaginative attention of writers. Yet many critics have shown little interest in analyzing the image of the prostitute to see what the writers are actually saying.

So far, in every literary tradition where it has featured, the image of the prostitute depicts her as one whose impecuniosity is exploited by men who use her situation to oppress her. This is because a woman who has to prostitute to feed would not have a strong bargaining power while marketing her wares. Women are thus shown to be socially subjugated and economically insecure.

Since the above scenario is a prominent feature of postcolonial African societies, it is not surprising that in its half a century of existence, postcolonial African literature has found the image of the prostitute attractive, and has therefore featured prostitutes and prostitution from various perspectives.

The African writer who has been at the fore in writing about prostitutes is the late Cyprian Ekwensi in whose *Jagua Nana* (1961) we see the matriarch and archetypal prostitute of African literature. Following Ekwensi, a number of other writers have handled the subject, in spite of adverse critical comments made on *Jagua Nana* when it was first published. The prostitutes in other works, like p'Bitek's *Malaya*, Meja Mwangi's *Wini*, Ocelo Oculi's

nameless prostitute, Naguib Mafouz's Hamida, Ngugi's Wanja, El Sadaawi's Firdaus, Achebe's Gladys, Labo Yari's Binta and Maimuna, Nuruddin Farah's Ebla, Bode Osayin's Jojolo, and Ekwensi's two later characters – Vic in *Survive the Peace* and Liza Nene in *Jagua Nana's Daughter* – are the most significant members of the group of prostitutes we have referred to as “Jagua Nana's children”. They all share in common but in varying degrees the attributes outlined by Pierre L. Horn and Mary Bet Pringle in their book, *The Image of the Prostitute in Modern Literature* (1984).

One significant prefatory comment made by Horn and Pringle is that the prostitute has been represented in literature for centuries “as an object; a symbol, that revealed the patriarchal values and themes of the male writers who depicted her. For, with few exceptions, only men have dealt in fiction with prostitution. And male literary critics who largely have not been concerned with the social and political implications of the problem have reinforced their attitudes. Nor have these critics viewed holistically the psychology of prostitution; rather they have focused on the mind-set of the prostitute and ignored that of her customer” (p.2).

They go on to provide a breakdown of the classes of prostitutes. The first in their list is *the bitch-witch* who embodies wickedness and cruelty, the seductress who leads others to ruin or death. The typical example is Nana in Emile Zola's *Nana*.

Next is the *femme fatale* who resembles the bitch-witch, except that the author focuses on the prostitute's seductive qualities rather than her evil ones. An example of this is found in Abbe Prevost's 1731 masterpiece, *Manon Lescaut* whose heroine, we are told is a demon with an angel's face. She is “coquettish, tender but unthinking; seduces men, bringing them momentary happiness, then suffering and sorrow”. (p.3).

Following the *femme fatale* is *the weak-but-wonderful prostitute*, the whore-with-a-heart-of-gold who despite her profession is often humane, loving, even innocent. We find her in Victor Hugo's 1831 play, *Marion de Lorme* and Charles Dickens' Nancy of *Oliver Twist* (1838) to mention just two examples.

*The Saved Prostitute* comes next and she is essentially a virtuous woman who is redeemed from her profession. A man who risks his reputation to save her usually brings about the conversion. Thais in Anatole France's *Thais* (1890), and Corrie in William Faulkner's *The Reivers* (1962) are examples. (Jagua Nana & Liza are African examples).

*The seduced –and –abandoned Prostitute* is the one that suffers a loss of virginity that leads her to a life in the streets. To this class belongs Maggie in Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, Alice in Dickens' *Dombey and Son* and Little Emily in Dickens' *David*

*Copperfield*. (An African example that comes to mind immediately is Wini in Meja Mwangi's *Going Down River Road*.)

The other class is *the hapless harlot*, "an uncared for victim of society [who] is forced by misfortune and poverty into her degrading work... this prostitute is never shown enjoying moments of comfort or success. Unlike the saved prostitute, she is not rescued from her situation, nor does she transform an unsatisfactory life into a tolerable one by her kindness or strength of character like the whore-with-a-heart –of-gold". In the realistic novels from Spain and Latin America where this type has featured, the focus is more on the political and economic conditions that drive the women into prostitution than on the characterizations of the prostitutes themselves". (p.5).

*The proud pro* through less popular, appears as "the prostitute –turned-entrepreneur, the woman who builds a successful business around her trade". A typical example is Mrs. Warren in George Bernard Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1894). (By the time she opens and starts to run the brothel which Munira razes down in his incendiary action, Ngugi's Wanja in *Petals of Blood* fits into this model).

Lastly is *the cast-of-thousands*, "those prostitutes who sometimes enter as nameless, faceless groups, and sometimes alone with a few moments to evoke the reader's disdain or sorrow. They function as foils for more important characters, typify the debased social setting in which they practice their trade, or represent the valueless life" (p.5). When a male literary character meets such a prostitute, the contract becomes an initiatory rite into manhood; and as youthful purity meets impurity, the innocent male youth finds himself immersed in putrid experience (p.6).

In general, whereas male writers stereotype the prostitute, female writers writing from a gendered perspective humanize them and treat them empathetically.

Horn and Pringle's categories of the prostitute and their applicability to prostitutes in literatures the world over confirms that prostitution is a generic profession, and that the prostitute has remained a generic prototypical figure since the dawn of creation. Only local socio-cultural and religious variables create significant differences in the details that could alter the coloration of this prototype.

How, then, has the prostitute been treated in postcolonial African literature? In various respects, Ekwensi's Jagua Nana embodies all the attributes of the prostitute in modern literature outlined above. For that reason, she is the matriarch of all prostitutes in African literature. In fact I. G. Achufusi has described her as "the greatest courtesan and prostitute of all" (P.2). Since Jagua is the prototype, others modeled after her become sub-sets.

As a *bitch-witch*, the seductress who leads others to ruin or death, her relationship with the young Freddie (who could have been her child, going by his age) becomes revealing. Jagua traps Freddie between her voluptuous thighs and while he seems to be enjoying the relationship, we know that he is helplessly responding to the deadly grip of Jagua, the blood-sucking vampire. It might be for this reason that Clement A. Okafor (1987) describes *Jagua Nana* as “the story about the promiscuous life of a very beautiful and lascivious prostitute” (64), after stating that the current criticism of the novel is influenced by “the question of whether or not the life of a prostitute is an appropriate subject matter for a novel” (61). For that reason, critics who condemned the book, we are told, did so for they felt “it celebrated sexual promiscuity”. And Okafor in fact agrees that Jagua “is abominably promiscuous” (p.64).

What strikes the reader about Jagua is that in spite of her being a prostitute *by choice*, she is also capable of loving (as we see in the way she initiates Freddie, or allows her matronly disposition to envelope Uncle Taiwo; or the way she electrifies Chief Ofubara of Krinameh with her version of love). Even when she resurrects in *Jagua Nana's Daughter*, her early teenage involvement with Nick Papadoupoulos, her first “lover”, marks her out as a potential candidate for the role of courtesan, for once she starts, nothing is able to stop her sexual desire which is set on fire from burning out. It is to confirm this that Ekwensi returns her in a flashback to Chief Ofubara and make him berate the sub-standard sexual prowess of his other wives, when they are placed beside the sexual experience, bedroom skills and physical elegance of Jagua.

One would therefore agree with Emmanuel Obiechina who sees Jagua as “an intensely real person, full of vitality, warmth and humaneness. She is entirely lacking in the gloominess and cynicism which we associate with prostitutes... Her faults are many but in spite of them she remains likeable, even lovable, because she is never mean or contemptible” (1987:p.12). No wonder then she remains attractive to Momah when she appears in *Jagua Nana's Daughter* in her late middle age.

*Jagua Nana's Daughter* extends and completes the unfinished story of Jagua Nana. It is partly a response to the negative criticism of the earlier book, a toast to the silent admirers of *Jagua Nana*, and a demonstration of Ekwensi's love for the sensational. In contrast to her mother, Jagua, however, we never see Liza abused in any way. We see her first as the educated lawyer mistress of Saka Jojo, a rich businessman who has three wives who do not collectively satisfy his sexual appetites. No matter what role Liza's abandonment by George Nando, the first man in her life and father of her son may have played, she does not behave like one on a revenge mission over men. But it is clear that she wants to live her life, independent of men, only acceding to their sexual demands when she feels an emotional kinship with whoever turns up among the elect. That may be why, because of her profession, she is eventually redeemed and established with a respectable man at the end. But before that

point, has she not dented the image of the legal profession by playing the prostitute almost shamelessly?

Emmanuel Obiechina has also said that “No one would doubt that there are Jagua Nanas in Nigeria as well as in any other human society” (1987: p.12). The Jagua Nanas are prostitutes, and their prevalence is a social fact which we must all face; and if we consider them collectively as a problem, then we must pool ideas as to how to solve it, especially now that we have prostitutes who call themselves “sex workers”, and who even have the boldness to go to men of God to pray for them for their floundering business to begin to prosper again!

It would be easy to explain the sexual promiscuity associated with prostitutes by invoking their natural lasciviousness. That might be missing the point.

In this essay, our effort is geared to seeing the post colonial African writer’s portraiture of the prostitute and prostitution not necessarily as a social problem, but an identification with a universal social fact, a reality that also manifests in Africa. Although it is not necessarily exclusive to the emerging urban clusters or metropolitan settlements, the fictional representations of prostitution in post colonial African literature project its rise and spread as being exacerbated by the process of urbanization and rural-urban migrations of the sexually active females whose numbers swelled up in the wake of the colonial encounter.

We find in postcolonial African literature a situation in which the urban female prostitute is treated as a principal or influential figure or icon to be venerated in the emerging social structure.

To explain this, we need to ascertain what in postcolonial African writings, are the causes of prostitution, its social consequences, and its value or uses if any.

Prostitution is presented in post-colonial African literature as a consequence of the sexual and physical violence and assault on women, especially in the form of rape or other forms of sexual abuse that helpless females are subjected to.

As a result of this, prostitutes, whether they joined the profession by choice or by chance, see themselves as an oppressed class who are fighting back to regain or restore their battered



image from their oppressors, using the only weapon over which they have absolute control. In most of such cases, the fighting back results from frustration, or a sudden realization by some females that they have been unfairly used or exploited by men, and thus became victims of circumstances. The prostitutes who think this way also check the psychological profile of men, suddenly realize that many men are not after all as strong as they are thought to be, since they can collapse easily once they are in need of avenues to release their pent-up sexual emotions or urges. Such women therefore go ahead to manipulate the sexual needs of such desperate men.

Farley and Kelly (2000) in their review of medical and social sciences literature have observed with reference to the situation in the United States that most writers fail to address “the sexual violence and psychological harm which both precede and are intrinsic to prostitution” (p.2). A few, they say, have “noted that prostitution involves a life long continuum of sexual exploitation and violence which begins with sexual assault or prostitution in childhood” (p.2). This is not so in Africa where most of the writers focus on this exploitation and violence as a central cause of the phenomenon of prostitution. Ngugi's Wanja in *Petals of Blood* represents prostitutes of this class, just as Jojolo of Bode Osayin's *The Noble Mistress*.

Prostitution is also shown to be the result of the desire of some girls or ladies to become what Accad calls “part of the glittering cash nexus world beyond the alley”, (69), to be like the Joneses. This is the case with the forty-five year old Jagua Nana with her propensity for exposing “what must be concealed” and concealing “what must be exposed” (JN, p.6) in her “insatiable lust for gold and silver” (Acholonu, p. 41). Others are Benne, Captain's wife in Ekwensi's *Survive the Peace*, Gladys in Achebe's short story, “Girls at War”, Alekiri in Amadi's *Estrangement*, and Jojolo in Osayin's *The Noble Mistress*. This “cash-based freedom”, as Accad (69) puts it, is also evident in Naguib Mahfouz's *Midaq Alley*.

Prostitution is also presented as self-sacrifice, “a last resort and survival strategy in times of extreme economic hardship”, as noted by Weir (p.87) with regard to Indian novels. In such cases similar to what is reported by Shameen (1993) about Taiwanese women who choose prostitution consciously to meet family obligations, African prostitutes are shown to often resort to prostitution in order to be able to fend for themselves and their families. Even widows are also involved, as Yabo Lari shows with Maimuna (in *Climate of Corruption*), and El Sadaawi shows with Firdaus (in *Woman at Point Zero*), especially when they are not educated.

In very poor homes, the economic empowerment which prostitutes get as income earners, and their subsequent reduced dependence on their parents makes many parents reluctant and

unable to confront and query their prostitute children, even when it is clear that such children have got involved in prostitution. This comes to be seen as a subtle approval, since the gifts such parents receive periodically attract applause instead of condemnation. This picture is similar to what we find in ancient Greece: “for a Greek, for a man or woman to prostitute themselves was either a case of necessity through poverty or a desire for financial enrichment; sexual appetite does not appear to be considered a factor” (Wikipedia).

As we see in postcolonial African literature, this happens when the poverty of parents makes them incapable of seeing their children through school. This is one point that emerges from Farah’s portrait of Ebla in *From a Crooked Rib*, which Florence Stratton (1985:p.25) correctly observes emphasizes that “the structure of the Somali family makes prostitutes of all Somali women”. Added to this is the adjunct fear of such parents being accused of infringing on the fundamental human rights of their female children in a world that is increasingly creating a wider operational space for children to exercise their freedom.

Other prostitutes begin as schoolgirl sexually inquisitive adventurers in search of fun, and are often introduced to it by more exposed and more experienced members of their peer group. Although economic hardship might also combine with the spirit of adventure in such cases, most of those involved end up as nymphomaniacs who develop an unbridled and insatiable lust for male sexual company.

But how do prostitutes perceive themselves? Some are ashamed of their profession, but because they are helpless and need the income they derive from it, they carry it out in secret. It is this category that tends to opt out as soon as they get a more secure and respectable employment. Some prostitutes see themselves as *home pacifiers* or “spare tyres” who are used to resolve marital conflicts in overheated and stressed homes where husbands would like to reduce stress and let off steam without having to always quarrel with or kick out their wives. This is what we observe in the relationship between Nene Liza and Saka Jojo in *Jagua Nana’s Daughter*. In such cases, prostitutes may even become permanent girl friends to men who always run to the haven provided by their girl friends for succor, and subsequently get stabilized psychologically.

The economic factor, which we mentioned above, has also affected the way prostitutes are perceived in the societies where they flourish. For example, Indonesia and Malaysia are reported to have a flourishing trade in child prostitution where tourists can have sex with eleven-year-old girls. It is also reported that South Africa is about to introduce a legislation that legitimizes prostitution. It is expected that this would give a wider operational space for prostitutes and their clients.

In the above cases, it would seem that the governments also see prostitution as a source of income to government coffers, since a number of lewd tourists may find the availability of youthful prostitutes a good reason to travel to those countries where prostitutes operate without legal restrictions. In a number of African countries, registered prostitutes (sometimes called "sex workers") are compelled to pay tax to the government on their income. The landlords who house them also surcharge them or receive commissions from them, while such agents pay taxes to government.

Has prostitution any value? Opinions on this are divided because of the ethical issues surrounding the subject; but generally some studies have indentified some positive sides to the service that prostitutes provide. For example, in families where circumcised wives are sexually frigid, the husband seeks and finds sexual satisfaction outside, sometimes with prostitutes. Again, it is believed that prostitutes provide an essential service that could douse the flame of inter-spouse conflicts in stressed homes. This is in addition to catering for the sexual needs of men, e.g. long distance truck drivers, business executives, who travel outside their business headquarters for days or weeks. (Some of these could take along schoolgirl prostitutes to keep them company while they are away from their wives). In this way, prostitution provides a psychological buffer for both the prostitute and her client.

Moreover, prostitution is considered as having helped to depopulate the overflowing labour market in many African countries, thus converting many job seekers into employers of labour.

But in spite of whatever could be said for prostitution as we have done above, its dangers for the nations of Africa far outweigh its advantages. One does not need to go too far to observe the moral atrophy, which has become a hallmark of contemporary life in Africa, a factor often linked with unbridled sexual behaviour among sexually active persons. A high percentage of African youths are so sexually promiscuous that they are so undiscerning about whom to have sex with.

Furthermore, prostitutes provide a natural haven for criminals; and it has been suggested that there could be a relationship in some countries between increased prostitution and increased crime rates.

In addition, the high incidence of STDs and HIV/AIDs is traceable to high rates of prostitution, and this has come to be associated with high mortality rate among the youth and

other persons who engage in casual and unprotected sex. Following this also is the rapid increase of orphans and the attendant social problems.

The social problems associated with prostitution lead to psychological problems such as depression arising from frustration and the non-achievement of expectations by prostitutes. This is more serious when some societies (such as those of Elechi Amadi's *Estrangement*) can still stigmatize women of cheap virtue and make them figures for scorn. This is part of Alekiri's worry in that novel, as she discusses the offer of marriage made her by Dansuku:

Already they think I am wayward for joining the Commando Girls and wearing Khaki trousers. I don't want to worsen my bad name... Any woman in trousers is a harlot as far as they are concerned... that is the way we live. I cannot run away from my people... (p.3).

What has the post-colonial African writer, then, made of the prostitute? Apart from Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana*, Okot p'Bitek's *Malaya* is the chief advocate of African prostitutes, and through her we get a rationalization of the practice of prostitution in African literature. Richard Nturu is right in considering "Song of Malaya" an attack on hypocrisy. This hypocrisy results from the unwholesome adoption of Christian sexual ethics, which imposes restrictions on sexual behaviours which are not African. Thus, as G.A. Heron (1976) has noted, "The Malaya celebrates the universality of sexual desire and attacks impediments to its fulfillment" (p.139). Nturu captures the essence of p'Bitek's portrait of the prostitute thus:

... p'Bitek's point ... is that for as long as the policeman sleeps with the prostitute tonight and arrests her tomorrow, for as long as the MP passes the slum clearance law and hires the prostitute a suburban bungalow, for as long as the Supreme Planning Commission retires to arrange favours of prostitutes after serious deliberations on social development, inevitably for so long shall prostitution remain with us... (pp 39 -40).

Postcolonial African writers who deal with the prostitute portray African society as one that contradicts itself. The image of the prostitute is a male construct from a social structure based on gender relations in a patriarchal society. The prostitute becomes a figure for subtly examining post-colonial African societies with a view to assessing them in terms of their declared goals and overall achievements so far. Within the general new patronizing attitude to women encouraged by feminism, we have now in the prostitute another voice calling for compassion, sympathy and an appreciative consciousness willing to carve a niche for the

prostitute as woman, realizing the real reasons for what could be called her aberrant behavior, and seeing her relevance in contemporary society. The attitude would seem to be that whatever problems her profession has caused for society should be addressed, alongside the problems that have also brought about her own predicament.

This is why in the portraits of the prostitutes we have, we find a dogged resilience and determination to succeed, in women who can confront and compete favourably with men, and even call the shots when they relate with men with the only weapon (sex) they have.

Whether or not we see prostitutes as opportunists who exploit the sexual weakness of men whenever they have the opportunity, to prove that men are really weak, prostitutes are imbued with strength to prove that the proverbial strength of men is as temporary as an erection, which cannot be sustained over a long time. A man remains as strong as a woman wants him to be (during the sexual act). So, from the image of the sexually compromising woman which created problems for Ekwensi in his portrait of Jagua Nana, African literature has matured into projecting prostitutes as exploited underdog females, an attitude that parries with the feminist belief that prostitution is inherently exploitative.

Andree Dworkin ( an ex-prostitute) argued in the 1980s that commercial sex is a form of rape enforced by poverty. They believe that the assumptions that women exist for men's sexual enjoyment, that all men "need" sex, or that the bodily integrity and sexual pleasure of women is irrelevant underlie the whole idea of prostitution and make it an inherently exploitative, sexual practice.

Farley and Kelly have made the point that

for the vast majority of the world's prostituted women, prostitution is the experience of being hunted, dominated, harassed, assaulted, and battered. Intrinsic to prostitution are numerous violations of human rights: sexual harassment, economic servitude, educational deprivation, job discrimination, domestic violence, racism, classism, vulnerability to frequent physical and sexual assault, and being subjected to body invasions which are equivalent to torture (p.29).

There is hardly any prostitute in African literature that does not undergo one or some of the above experiences, confirming the kinship of prostitutes the world over.

In Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*, Wanja's vendetta against Chui, Kimeria and Mzigo must be seen as her revenge mission on these men who have abused her at various points in her life. As Govind Sharma (1979) has observed, Wanja is "exploited and ill-used by the Kimerias, Chuis and Mzigos, fighting for sheer survival and hungering for fulfillment, still retaining her beauty and kindness, dignity and decency" (p.312). There is no doubt that Wanja retains her beauty and possibly her kindness, in a way similar to Jagua Nana. But dignity and decency are not associated with prostitutes and prostitution. When she decides to settle down as a

matron manager of a brothel, whatever dignity she ever had would have completely been eroded.

For one thing, “Wanja’s vengeance is given the opportunity to grow when she is blackmailed into an affair by a school teacher. An illegitimate offspring is born and destroyed. After the shock of the event she embarks on the strange career of barmaid. A barmaid’s path is the path to economic profit through abuse of the body” (Nwankwo; 1992:121). The violence she employs in dealing with them is part of her process of “recovering from the social battering from men”, as Chimalum Nwankwo (p.122) puts it.

However, no matter how it may be said that their opting for prostitution is an expression of anger by women at men in a male-dominated society, the writers who present matron prostitutes who engage young girls, house them and “sell” them to men who need their services are indicting such women as being part of the problem of the female folk in postcolonial African society. Sister Kate of *Jagua Nana’s Daughter* who uses Liza Nene, and Wanja who uses the girls in her brothel to service the big men in Nairobi fall under this category. In fact her nefarious activities accounts for Sister Kate being haunted by her past as both Liza Nene and Jagua herself chase after her in their quest to find out the truth about Jagua Nana’s daughter who she claimed was dead, and for whom she had organized a mock burial and circulated the news.

Our writers also show that the modern school system in Africa is flawed, since it lacks the disciplinary checks and balances that are needed to keep sexually active girls under effective control. The society is therefore criticized as one that has no real future to offer girls, especially as men whose job is to ruin little girls, and cause them to end up as prostitutes run it. It is for this reason that we would agree with Asthana and Oostvogel’s prediction that “programs to assist those in prostitution would continue to fail unless significant changes were made to systems which keep women in a position of subordination and exploitation” (in Kelly, p. 24).

As we find in Arab and North African fiction, writers from other parts of Africa describe prostitutes in passages “that reveal the double standards and hypocrisy of [their] society” (Accad, p.67).

The entire post colonial African society is thus indicted with the portrait of the prostitute not just in reemphasizing the feminist outcry against the subjugated condition of African women or showing the legal or other discriminations against them. I. G. Achufusi has in fact noted

that “in Moslem areas of Africa”, “Women are depicted as slaves and beasts of burden. It is to avoid this ordeal that some women fall prey to prostitution” (p.16).

Through the image of the prostitute, the African writer shows the conditions of the neglected rural poor, since many of the rural –urban migrant girls who end up as prostitutes are those from very poor homes, who fall easy prey to any male who dangles any form of financial or material “help” before them as aid.

Let us conclude with the following terminal statement by Jojolo, Bode Osayin’s heroine in *The Noble Mistress*:

We all are prostitutes ourselves, one way or the other. The real prostitutes and their host of clients are only the archetype. See how much derision is being heaped on these people when we are all guilty of about the same sin, in one form or another. Some “harlots” are more innocent than some house wives. When a politician sells out his principles, or simply throws them to the wind to obtain naked power, might and monetary riches, when a policeman takes bribe; when a wife milks dry her husband’s bank account and later sues for divorce; when a soldier’s gun becomes his personal weapon – these and many others are acts of prostitution (p.275).

It follows then that the prostitute is a largely misunderstood and misrepresented person and that her position demands a more sympathetic appraisal, especially in relation to the social structures and attitudes that created her in the first place, and still sustain her. We must unveil the double standards which have stigmatized prostitutes while covering up their male clients, since it takes male patronage for prostitution to flourish. Once we start doing this, we would have started to address the problems that have created the odious institution of prostitution.

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*Against the background of the intolerable, unbearable, and alarming rate at which the ills in the Nigerian society blossom, the poets recognise the fact that only an extraordinary prophylactic measure can forestall the total breakdown of society.*