

51. The road to prostitution: Ngugi's Wanja and Ekwensi's Jagua Nana

Eren BOLAT¹

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Abstract

Every individual has to make decisions that will significantly affect their destinies/futures at certain periods of their lives. Sometimes they take these decisions in line with their own wishes, and sometimes have to take it because of external factors and against their own wills. Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Wanja and Nigerian writer Cyprian Ekwensi's Jagua Nana, who are the subject of this study, also make decisions that will change the course of their lives in the end and they begin to live by means of prostitution. Both characters choose this profession for separate purposes/reasons, however, the profession they want/have to do is the same. In general, prostitution, which is perceived as inappropriate for the moral codes, beliefs and lifestyles of the society in most regions, is carried out professionally and systematically in today's Kenya and Nigeria. Prostitution, mostly preferred for economic reasons, has even become a tourism sector. The major factor behind is the colonial past, which seriously affected the African continent and left deep scars in the lives of the people living in the region. Therefore, in the light of these elements, while examining the preferences of Wanja and Jagua Nana, the condition of women in the colonized lands, how colonialism affected these native women as well as the relationship between colonialism and prostitution will also be examined in this study for they are the background forces that have triggered such choices.

Keywords: Wanja, Jagua Nana, African Woman, Prostitution

Hayat kadınlığına giden yol: Ngugi'nin Wanja'sı ve Ekwensi'nin Jagua Nana'sı

Öz

Her birey, hayatının belli dönemlerinde kaderini/geleceğini önemli derece etkileyecek kararlar almak zorunda kalır. Bu kararlarını kimi zaman kendi içinden gelen istekler doğrultusunda alır kimi zaman da dış faktörler yüzünden ve kendi arzusu dışında almak zorunda kalır. Bu çalışmaya konu olan Kenyalı yazar Ngugi wa Thiong'o'nun Wanja karakteri ve Nijeryalı yazar Cyprian Ekwensi'nin Jagua Nana'sı da ahir hayatlarının seyrini değiştirecek kararlar alır ve hayatlarını hayat kadınlığı ile sürdürmeye başlarlar. Her iki karakterin meslek seçimindeki nedenleri birbirinden farklı olsa da yapmak istedikleri/zorunda kaldıkları meslek aynıdır. Genel olarak çoğu bölgede, toplumun ahlaki kodlarına, inançlarına ve yaşam tarzlarına uygun bulunmayan hayat kadınlığı günümüz Kenya ve Nijerya'sında profesyonel ve sistematik bir şekilde yapılmaktadır. Bir iş haline gelen ve genelde ekonomik temelli nedenler yüzünden tercih edilen hayat kadınlığı hatta bir turizm sektörü haline gelmiştir. Bunun arkasındaki en büyük etken, Afrika kıtasını ciddi şekilde etkileyen ve bölge halkının hayatlarında derin izler bırakan sömürgecilik geçmiřidir. Dolayısıyla, bu unsurlar ışığında Wanja ve Jagua Nana'nın tercihleri incelenirken, bu tür seçimleri tetikleyen arka plan güçleri olduğu için,

1 Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Hitit Üniversitesi, Yabancı Diller Yüksekokulu, Yabancı Diller Bölümü (Çorum, Türkiye), ernblit@gmail.com, ORCID ID: 0000-0001-8148-522X [Arařtırma makalesi, Makale kayıt tarihi: 29.06.2022-kabul tarihi: 20.08.2022; DOI: 10.29000/rumelide.1164900]

sömürülen topraklardaki kadınların durumu, sömürgeciliğin bu yerli kadınları nasıl etkilediği ve sömürgecilik ile hayat kadınlığı arasındaki ilişki de bu çalışmada incelenecektir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Wanja, Jagua Nana, Afrikalı Kadın, Hayat Kadınlığı

1. Introduction

Domination of human being or exploiting another for their own interests is a phenomenon that has occurred for several years. In any region of the world, it is highly common to encounter someone who has endured persecution and oppression. For the people subjected to colonization, the intensity and seriousness of this predicament is substantially greater. Moreover, it is more likely to be exploited if you are a woman in a colonized area. The exploitation of African women by both the patriarchy and the colonialists are the factors that make their lives dilapidated. In addition to issues like starvation, poverty and polygamy, African women were also exposed to sexual exploitation, and some of them were forced to live by prostitution in order to survive. Because of these issues, African women have been the focus of a number of current debate since they are one of the most visible marginalized and oppressed groups on a global scale. Bearing in mind preceding discussion, in this study, I aim to analyze the professions of two African female characters who work as prostitutes and how they are marginalized because of their choices. Accordingly, I will commence by discussing the issue of prostitution before addressing the character of Wanja in Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* and eponymous character Jagua in Nigerian writer Cyprian Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana* in this context.

In its general sense, prostitution is a touchy and divisive subject that involves both intercourse and payment. Prostitution has been euphemized as “the oldest profession” (Ditmore, 2006, p. xxvi) and it is a grim reality in every region of the world where people are present. It is quite tough to fathom prostitution as an accepted or revered occupation in most societies despite the fact that it is a prevalent profession. Prostitutes are perceived “both deviant and worker, embodied and disembodied, natural and unnatural, subject and object” (Carpenter, 2006, p. 115). For that matter, prostitution is perceived as a derogatory term for the occupations of women of low moral character surviving on unfettered deviancy (Nwahunanya, 2014, p. 340). Prostitutes' activity is inextricably linked to the cultural contexts in which they operate (Ekpootu, 2017, p. 306). For this reason, prostitution creates an intertextual discussion on sexuality, morality, the broader public, and belief (Zink, 2006, p. 94).

In African communities, which have been exploited for many years, it is culturally not seen as moral for a woman to be a prostitute and sell her body. On the other hand, such norms and ethical codes determined by the society and generally considered to be rational may not always coincide with the women's expectations, creating a clash between the woman and the society (Karaca Küçük, 2022, p. 254). Although women having expectations beyond the societal norms are aware of the communal pressure they will encounter, they on occasion opt for to canalize their lives in accordance with their desires, which are not welcomed and even labelled as immoral by their societies. However, ironically, those who label women's professions as unethical are the ones who drive them to act in this way. Notwithstanding this fact, since it is not accepted and excluded by the society, the female body must contort, torture, and even prostitute itself to be free of external limitations, so that, it can have voice to be recognized (Tugba, 2014, p. 1).

It is undeniably true that native people in their own societies have an impact on the prostitution of African women; nonetheless, in addition to the internal factors, it is essential to note the crucial role that

colonialism played in these women's lives. According to historical researches, colonization contributed to the prostitution problem existing today in Nigeria. Prostitution became institutionalized and sex worker women became problematic as a result of socio-economic changes brought about by colonialism (Dewey et al. 2019, pp. 148-149). Accordingly, prostitution is generally treated in African literature as a product of the ruptures wrought on African societies by colonial culture and economy; an outcome of urban decadence and of the unfinished project of modernity (2019, p. 461). Many African authors, unable to ignore the turbulent circumstances in their own societies, used a prostitute character as the protagonist of their works in an effort to depict the events from their perspectives. That means, "prostitution has been used by several African authors as a potent instrument for capturing the inhumanity, decadence, and suffocation in just about all African regimes" (Ditmore, 2006, p. 14). In fact, it is prevalent to use prostitute characters as protagonists to mirror up the status quo, and multitudinous literary works belonging to divergent genres are generated in this way. Except the African writers, diverse authors from various parts of the globe have addressed this issue and prostitution has been a popular topic handled in multifarious literary forms. Accordingly, copious iconic authors employed prostitutes as their protagonists in literary works. For example, the novella, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, written by the American writer Stephen Crane, which was very popular and not widely accepted at the time it was written, is the story of Maggie Johnson who grew up in poverty and misery, then turned to prostitution due to her disappointment after being abandoned by her lover. George Bernard Shaw's play, *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, also brings the subject of prostitution to the center of the play focusing on the relationship between the brothel owner Mrs. Warren and her daughter Vivie. Likewise, French writer Emile Zola's eponymous novel *Nana* tells the story of a young prostitute. Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* also touch upon the prostitution. As is evident, numerous authors from separate cultures have written on the theme of prostitution. Although each work presents prostitution from a specific lens, several causes including poverty, lack of love, and the desire to advance in society are frequently portrayed as the precursors to prostitution. In addition to the forenamed agents, the tendency towards prostitution was triggered with disparate motivations in the selected novels. Howbeit, particularly in African countries, the basis of prostitution predominantly lies in economic reasons, in other words, impoverishment.

As in other places of poverty² and injustice, physical exploitation of women is also ubiquitous in Kenya and Nigeria, which resulted in sex tourism. The term "sex tourism" alludes how prostitution and tourism are intertwined, connects the global and the regional, and promotes both the production and use of sexual services (Wonders & Michalowski, 2001, p. 545). This is what happens when prostitution "turns tourism into a national religion and build it shrines of worship all over the country" (Thiong'o, 1978, p. 134). It is well known, particularly in Kenya, that international tourists visit the region exclusively for sex, and this has morphed into a thriving industry. "Foreign and Kenyan visitors have for years stoked demand for sex with young women - and minors" (Bhalla, 2018). Due to the severe traditional and social factors that were created against women, which render them defenseless and vile, women and young girls are obliged to participate in this system. Certain measures to prevent this situation have been implemented, however, since prostitution has become a sector including several people from all layers of the society, it is unlikely to jugulate it. Even while attempting to avert it, an unfair and discriminatory strategy is adopted. And what is worse, women are penalized for prostitution in court proceedings. Biased and invidious procedures include the arrest of women engaged in prostitution while failing to

² The presently booming sex tourism sector in Kenya is not solely influenced or supported by destitution. Another factor is lame politics, which results from weak governmental power (Hope, Sr., 2013, p. 540).

prosecute clients. Preferring a one-sided (against women) punishment/deterrent approach makes women victims once again.

The aforementioned marginalization of prostitution-related women and their encounter with injustice diminish their status in society and even overshadow their struggle for their own country's freedom. For instance, Kenyan prostitutes participated in the Mau Mau revolt (Smith & Mac, 2020, p. 14), one of the symbols of their nation's freedom, and set a real example of fight despite being despised by both members of their own community and foreigners since they were forced to pursue this profession. What I really want to tell here is that while these women have been oppressed in various ways because of prostitution, they have fought for survival at the rate of their own strength- in some case showing severe reactions to their oppressors. So, are the prostitute women victims or victimizers? In the following parts, I aim to examine how the selected works address this subject.

2. Wanja in *Petals of Blood*

It is indisputable that wherever colonialism persists, there will be cruelty, tears and blood; however, Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong'o, whose works have had an international impact, believed that flowers can bloom despite all of these challenging circumstances and voiced his hope in his novel *Petals of Blood*³. The novel, whose title has a metaphorical meaning, takes a broad view of the social, cultural, and economic change that Kenya has undergone since gaining independence. In Ngugi's novels, we get a sense of fiction, however, he adroitly adumbrates that all the events and problems are entirely true (Kurtz, 1998, p. 27). All the incidents he recounted in *Petals of Blood* mirror the postcolonial realities of Kenya. With his righteous manner and moral character, Ngugi prefers not to downplay the complex forms of discrimination and oppression against women (Tawiah-Boateng, 2001, p. 68). Instead of attitudinizing a male-centered stance, he creates a major female character, Wanja, in his novel. Ngugi utilizes her predicament to remark on the circumstances of several juvenile Kenyan women, staying loyal to his objective to narrate a history of humanity (Roos, 2002, p. 159). He employs Wanja as a barmaid because prostitution is carried out systematically through bars. Wanja describes this circumstance succinctly: "you will find us, barmaids, wherever there is a bar in Kenya. Even in Ilmorog" (Thiong'o, 1978, p. 100). Her statement sheds light on real events in Kenya's bars. Ngugi handles his characters so realistically that the reader can empathize with the tough situations that the character is exposed to, and can even develop sympathy for the character by not being apathetic to the saddening condition; Wanja is the epitome of this phenomenon (Porter, 1981, p. 73).

Wanja- the outsider in her own society (Gikandi, 2000, p. 155)- is a product of the capitalist perspective of the neocolonial era because her first fall, which happened against her will, began when she was duped by prosperous industrialist Kimeria and became pregnant while she was still a student. Therefore, she can be regarded as "the victim of the sexploitation" (Porter, 1981, p. 64) This sexual exploitation and abandonment paved the first stones for Wanja to become a prostitute. In a manner, Wanja is the undesiring victim of a group of powerful people who will do anything to further their lusty obsession. In order to escape this victimization and alleviate the anguish of all of her experiences, Wanja decides to battle against those who exploit her and sets up her own brothel where anyone can have sex for a price⁴. Her decision demonstrates that she had to play by their rule in order to survive. The fact that Wanja slept with Munira, with whom she had a past relationship, for financial gain, is the best indication that

³ It is an allusion to Derek Walcott's poem, *The Swamp*.

⁴ Men's availability to money to purchase things and women's inaccessibility to it encourage women's sex work within the frame of the dominant ideology of hegemonic heterosexuality (Scambler & Scambler, 1997, p. xiii).

she engaged in prostitution as a business. She says: "No free things in Kenya. A hundred shillings on the table if you want high-class treatment" (Thiong'o, 1978, p. 279). Her attitude actually puts the emphasis on both the condition of new Kenya and her own transformation. Wanja symbolizes her country striving to reconcile its prostitution with its raped colonial history in order to find a positive expression in its future (Chetin, 1991, p. 43).

Wanja utilizes prostitution and brothel not just for financial gain but also as a means of retaliation against all the oppressors. In fact, Wanja not only pursues her personal vengeance, but also takes this path to seek revenge against everyone subjugating her own people, the aggrieved and the oppressed.

I have hired young girls. It was not hard. I promised them security, and for that they let me trade their bodies. What is the difference whether you are sweating it out on a plantation, in a factory or lying on your back, anyway? I have various types for various types of men. Some prefer short ones, tall ones, motherly ones, religious ones, sympathetic ones, rude ones, tough ones, a different nationality. I have them all here. And me? Me too! I have not spared myself. It has been the only way I can get my own back on Chui, Mzigo, and Kimeria.... They pay for it. They pay for their rivalry to possess me. Each wants to make his sole woman. (Thiong'o, 1978, p. 293)

Wanja tortures men by feeding on their desires in a sort of mesmerizing manner. Their hearts bleed as a result of her attraction and subsequent abandonment, which causes her to be pleased because she feels that by behaving in that way, she will be able to take vengeance on the male dominated world for everything it has inflicted to her (Shamim, 2017, p. 85). Wanja enacts retaliatory behaviors because she witnesses all the oppressors around her carrying on with their daily routines without any condemnation or penalty. She is unable to accept the fact that Kimeria destroyed her life and persisted in doing so while growing richer and exploiting all of the available economic opportunities in her homeland. Wanja wakens and interiorizes the motto in this system: "Eat or you are eaten" (Thiong'o, 1978, p. 293). Despite being sorrowful and sarcastic, her choice to switch to prostitution in the end is a rational and reasonable response to the issue she encounters (Roos, 2002, p. 154). This discovery prompts Wanja to launch a brothel and begin selling sex. Because it is so difficult for a woman to strive to stand on her own feet in a post-colonial culture, thus, Wanja embraces an abrasive persona. There are just two options accessible to women in this land: get married or start living as a prostitute (Thiong'o, 1978, p. 293). They are inured that despite their best attempts, their paths always lead to the kitchen and the bedroom (1978, p. 37). On the other hand, although it is viewed as a degrading profession, prostitution is often the last resort for women in the postcolonial areas. Wanja emphasizes the prevalence of this scenario by claiming that prostitution is only one of the other professions. She contends that both industrial and field work require a lot of effort and sweat as it is in prostitution, so, they cannot be distinguished from prostitution in any way (1978, p. 293). With Wanja's gamey expressions, Ngugi also illustrates the brutal structure that the capitalist system has imposed on workers. In furtherance to this notion, he reckons that there is no difference between the exploitation of a woman's body and a worker's labor. The only difference between them is that women are exploited because of their gender and the hole in their body (1978, p. 293).

Wanja's predisposition toward prostitution as a means of combat and retaliation against the exploitation built up towards her and her country is also a result of the love she was unable to witness in her family during her childhood. Being a girl/woman and being reduced to a secondary position in a colonized society characterized by patriarchal domination cause girls to be systematically ignored from a really tender age. Domestic violence, which is thought to be relatively typical, and a lack of affection for the family are other significant contributors to young girls' downfall in this process. For instance, at one occasion, Wanja was locked and beaten by her parents, "her father with his belt and her mother with a cowhide strap" (1978, p. 38). Young girls are extremely prone to external threats when they taste the

domestic violence. Growing up in such an atmosphere of violence and lovelessness, they are obliged to remain silent upon facing with a situation that will hurt them as they cognize that they will not be able to receive support from their families. The subsequent unfavorable events between *Wanja* and *Kimeria* serve as the best illustration of this predicament. *Wanja* was seduced by *Kimeria* when she was still a youngster, became pregnant as a result, and was abandoned. She was unable to confide in her family about the agony she endured as a result of this affair because she did not believe that they would be supportive of her. In a patriarchal structure dominated by fear and violence, the only option left to girls with no family support is to marry or to engage in prostitution. During all these phases, the effect of colonialism in the prostitution of young African girls is an indubitable truth, however, the patriarchal system also had an impact in the denigration of African girls. The young girls- loathed even by their own families- have to unwillingly engage in prostitution in order to survive the excruciating living conditions while they go through the process of becoming independent and developing their own identities.

Despite all of these impoundments and complications, as the novel's title suggests, *Wanja* still blossoms in spite of all the drawbacks I listed. Notwithstanding the awful memories the city evokes for her, she resolutely sets out on a journey with the others and keeps going even after being molested. She ameliorates her inner suffering. She is a puissant woman aware of how long she can keep things in her heart (1978, p. 38). With her rain-spirit soul, *Wanja* turns out to be the symbol of hope, alchemizing everything she touches.

3. Eponymous heroine in *Jagua Nana*

As a multifaceted industry, prostitution has numerous shapes, working circumstances and statuses (Ekpootu, 2017, p. 326). However, prostitution, which is illegal especially in the northern and southern states of Nigeria, is generally perceived as a pejorative profession by people prescinding from the reasons underlying it. In the history of Nigeria, it is deemed inappropriate by the society for young girls to have premarital intercourse or to have sexual intimacy before marriage during pre-colonial period. The prostitution phenomenon was brought on by the way that African women's bodies were recognized as a center of attraction, particularly during the colonial era, and that they began to be exploited by both the colonizers and later by their own people, which also resulted in concubinage. Nigerian women were sexually harassed from a range of perspectives and for a variety of motives even during the times of war. By placing a prostitute female character named *Jagua Nana* at the center of his story and attempting to reflect the prostitution through her lenses, Cyprian Ekwensi depicts this reality in his country from his own perspective.

Ekwensi has created a complicated figure with *Jagua Nana* who amalgamates the profuse traits, both good and bad, that society associates with prostitutes and that have typically been reflected in contemporary writing around the world (Dewey et.al. 2019, p. 458). With her sophisticated nature, *Jagua Nana* encapsulates all the features of the prostitute in modern literature (Nwahunanya, 2014, p. 344) and transforms into a fashionable city prostitute (Senkoro, 1982, p. 64). Ekwensi creates a plethora of colorful, immoral figure who abandoned her rustic roots and embraced the unscrupulous, pleasurable metropolitan lifestyle (Britannica, 2021). Accordingly, rusticity and naivety juxtapose with metropolitan immorality and corrupt experiences (Riche & Bensemanne, 2007 p. 44).

With her actions and attitudes like wearing jeans, riding a bike, laughing boisterously, which deviate from the typical/conventional Nigerian female figure, *Jagua Nana* has captured the people's attention and has taken center stage (Ekwensi, 1975, p. 166). Charming *Jagua Nana* marries a rich businessman

and tries to be a decent wife, but she grows bored of this way of life (1975, p. 167). She was not happy with her marriage because her husband avoided taking her to the parties and wore sloppy clothes for fear of running out of money. His style of thinking in no way appealed to her. Therefore, she thwarted conforming to his routine life (1975, p. 167). Due to these factors- contrary to the typical fall narratives and inclinations to prostitution because of impoverishment-Jagua Nana's path to prostitution starts out as a contumacy against what she regards as the dullness of marriage. As it can be understood, Jagua Nana consciously and ultroneously prefers to be a prostitute since she could not adopt her current lifestyle, so we cannot pertain her as a victim. She emerges as more of a participant than a passive observer of the events. As a reaction to the restrictive nature of marriage, her choice can actually be considered as her rejection of one of the iconic traditional lifestyle symbols. By taking this decision, Jagua Nana actually demolishes the stereotypical docile, malleable and passive African female figure. At first impression, it may appear that her husband's search for a new spouse was prompted by her lack of a child, and that her sense of inadequacy played a role in her decision-making. However, Ekwensi's use of the phrase 'hot thirst for adventure' suggests that Jagua Nana will take this decision no matter how the dice fall.

Ekwensi's description implies that he "combines an obvious sexual attraction to the prostitute with a heavy moral condemnation of her" (Petersen, 1984, p. 40). However, on the other hand, Jagua Nana is not a character that can easily be unriddled. She alternates between being brutal and wonderfully sweet, softening the hearts of vicious political leaders in the city and elderly country rulers (McClusky, 1976, p. 216). Jagua Nana is a remarkably authentic individual who exudes life, tenderness and humanity. She has none of the melancholy or cynicism that associated with prostitutes. Despite her myriad flaws, she nevertheless manages to be likable and even attractive because she is never unkind or despicable (Obiechina, 1987, p. 12). Although Ekwensi evolves a character who strays massively from the moral standards of the society, he does not delineate her as wholly evil; however, this does not alter the fact that he neither endorses Jagua Nana's decision and prostitution nor does he empathize with this situation.

Ekwensi also touches on the difference between city and village lives, implying that urbanization is the inception of decay. Jagua Nana's resolution to travel to Lagos in order to gain her independence, her fondness for the vibrant life there and her ability to easily engage in prostitution demonstrate the allure of city life, which on the other hand becomes a metaphor for the individual's demise. Urbanization and the city are actually associated with the colonial system because both have been destructive to the indigenous people. This destructive effect of colonialism also spread to the political system of the country, and the same destructiveness was perpetrated through politics in the postcolonial period. Since the novel was written at a time of postcolonial criticism, postcolonial studies and specifically at a time of post/modernism, which is defined as the extension of modernity, hence, unfinished project of Enlightenment, Ekwensi peculiarly sheds light on the issues of social degradation, political manipulation and economic exploitation with the help of 'pétit recit/s to expound fully the personal miseries instead of trying to do so/'giving justice to' the case at hand by means of 'grand narratives' from which the representation will greatly suffer and/or fall short. (Şafak, 2018, p. 219) Ekwensi dwells on the corruption of the political system and politicians working against their own people as well as affiliating politics with prostitution. This rottenness is further reinforced by what Jagua said about politics to her young lover Freddie. Jagua argues that politics is not for Freddie because he is an educated, cultured and honorable person in contrast to politicians. Despite Freddie's polished demeanor, Jagua underlines that politics is a game for dogs and may even be the hardest game in the world. She adds particularly that Freddie, who is good and clean in this tough game, will become

contaminated by politics that are bad and dirty (Ekwensi, 1975, p. 137). Ekwensi conveys these thoughts with his prostitute main character implying that prostitution and politics have a similar nature.

4. Conclusion

Today, prostitution, which is carried out under different motives and conditions, has become a tourism sector in the African continent, and the growth of this large-scale industry dates back to the colonial period when it started to be done systematically. Expressing the catastrophic effect of the colonial system on native people (peculiarly on women) and their countries, Ngugi and Ekwensi handled prostitution- one of the consequences of the colonial system- in their works and created female prostitute figures as their main characters, Wanja and Jagua Nana. Both authors particularly advert to the transition between village and city lives correlating them with the prostitution. For their authors, meeting on common ground, "both Wanja and Jagua have to be redeemed from their profligate life in the city by a devotion to motherhood and to village life" (Stratton, 1994, p. 118) because the ostentatious life of the cities and the presence of bars, which are the hub of the prostitution trade network, cause Wanja and Jagua Nana to move away from the village where they took their roots and in a way their fall. In line with this notion, bars are utilized as one of the common metaphors and place images by the two authors.

In most societies, the concepts of politics and prostitution are intertwined. The characters Kimeria in *Petals of Blood* and Uncle Taiwo in *Jagua Nana* are also connected to Wanja and Jagua Nana, so people with political identities or influence are associated with prostitution in some way. Given this connection, both authors put up the notion that moral and political degradation in society proceed synchronically.

The key motive generating the prostitute characters to plump for prostitution is the base ground where two authors diverge significantly from one another. In contrast to Ngugi's Wanja, who favors prostitution due to external factors such as oppression, exploitation and ignorance, Ekwensi's Jagua Nana chooses to become a prostitute with her own free will and without being exposed to any nimious circumstances. While Wanja discerns prostitution as a kind of defiance to the oppressive postcolonial system, Jagua Nana's preference can be characterized as a transgression of the traditional male-dominated social structure. Whatever their motivations for resorting to prostitution are, the two characters have a lot in common, especially the fact that they both have emancipated and rebellious personas. Wanja rebelled against the neocolonial system and displayed a strong rejection to the male supremacy and Jagua Nana left a traditional marriage since she was bored, which illustrates that both of them made radical choices in such a conservative traditional milieu. Wanja and Jagua Nana take actions (such as being prostitute) wholly repugnant for their own people (and that is still approached with a derogatory attitude in most of the world), which means that they have somehow destroyed the norms imposed on African women. Walking against the current and daring to deviate from social standards, both characters exhibit courageous and action-oriented traits.

Wanja and Jagua Nana ultimately chose prostitution at the crossroads between marriage and prostitution because they were unable to achieve financial independence or build their own lives. However, before making their final decisions, Wanja thought of getting married to Kimeria, who had deceived her, but this did not come true. Likewise, Jagua Nana married a wealthy businessman, but she did not receive the fulfillment she had longed for from the relationship. As a result, the paths/destinies of both characters are united in prostitution though the journeys of the both characters are unique to them. When all of these factors are explored, one can see that prostitution is not only about poverty,

being ignored or lovelessness as in the story of Wanja, but also about the mundane traditional lifestyle and codes that cannot appeal to the soul of the individual, as in the case of Jagua Nana.

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