

**RELIGION, MENTORSHIP AND MASCULINITY IN DAVID MULWA'S  
MUTEMA IN *REDEMPTION***

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**Abstract**

This study examines the interplay of religion and masculinity in David Mulwa's *Redemption* through the character Pastor Mutema. It involved an investigation of the impact of mentorship in identity formation. Theoretical frameworks from the fields of post colonialism and psychoanalysis were used in the study. Among these were Franz Fanon's ideas on cultural identity, and Sigmund Freud's arguments on defense mechanisms and the subconscious. This is because of the need to interrogate the character motives and mind workings as well as the impact of colonial legacies in masculine identities. This study involved a critical assessment of the effects of actualizing deviant masculinities. The study discovered that intense human suffering and disruption of basic relationships is the end result of adapting violent identities, in the guise of religion.

**Key Words:** Masculinity, Identity, mentorship

## **1.0: Introduction**

A simple definition of masculinity is that aspect of possessing qualities and characteristics considered typical or appropriate to a man. This study adopts Connell's perspective of masculinity as a social construct and not a biological state. Unlike maleness which is a biological state, masculinity is a gender identity category constructed socially and interpreted from a cultural perspective. It has multiple and ambiguous meanings according to contexts and changes over time. Notions of masculinity vary among cultures and belief systems, educational backgrounds, age and gender groups. The underlying assumption for this study is that the author engages with a certain religious masculinity that contributes to the discourse of masculinity among Kenyan men.

Through characterization Mulwa explores the various enactments of Masculinities within the Christian circles. He creates men whose approach to God's service and to relationships in general is dictated by their own identity crises. The author sharply contrasts the character of the aged one with that of Mutema. The aged one is mature, wise and compassionate implying that old age is not an excuse for rigidity. He correctly interprets biblical principles and exercises his authority as church head wisely. Mutema on the other hand choose, for various reasons, to distort biblical interpretations to the detriment of the community. Mulwa uses religion as a metaphor in navigating masculinities.

This paper examines how the author comments on distorted masculinities through the character of Pastor Mutema. The church is symbolically used to dramatize some of the contemporary challenges facing the family due to identity crises. As the spiritual leader of the Church of the old tradition the pastor has the moral obligation to not only offer encouraging direction to the church members, but also to love and listen to them. However, he is bent on enforcing traditional religious standards among his followers while totally disregarding their immediate spiritual and physical needs. He sacrifices his own family as well as the church to satisfy his ego. Three years earlier the churches had gathered to usher in the golden age of success and with it there was so much expectation. However, the people are disillusioned. In sector three "attendance trickles to a sprinkling...only the old the aged and infirm attend church" p.2. Through the pastor the author explores the impact of the mechanistic rigidity of men in leadership positions on communal growth and development.

## 2.0: Colonial Mentorship

Ania Loomba (1998) argues “the vast new world (Africa included) was interpreted by the Europeans “through ideological filters or ways of seeing provided by their own culture” p.71

The European missionaries and administrators saw the “backward” African nations as incapable of progress of any sort on their own. From the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century various missionary groups went out to Africa to spread the message of the gospel. These movements considered such ventures to be their contribution to Europe’s reparation for centuries of exploitation of Africans during the slave trade era. In their enthusiasm however, some of these missionaries did not take time to understand the African culture and situation. They were also blinded by the racial superiority myths which European exploitation had thrived on. The western world according to Ngugi wa Thiong’o (2000), equates knowledge modernity, modernization civilization progress and development to itself, while it views the third world from the perspective of the antithesis of these positive qualities.

As Ayobami Kehinde argues in *Postcolonial African Literature as a Counter-Discourse: J. M. Coetzee’s Foe and the Reworking of the Canon*, post colonial African fiction has become a veritable weapon used to dismantle the hegemonic boundaries and determinants that create unequal relations of power, based on binary oppositions such as Us and Them. (93)The thesis of this study is that wrong mentorship can create retrogressive thought systems that hinder personal and communal growth. Mulwa seems to suggest a “decolonizing of the African mind to assume healthy identities that can confront contemporary challenges. He attempts to liberate Africans from their “debased inscription as Europe’s monolithic and shackled other” (Bhabha 1988)

The problems caused by the white missionaries themselves arose largely from a misconception of what Africa represented. Europe looked at Africa as a “dark continent” with very primitive civilizations, and most Europeans refused to adapt their religion to suit the local situation. This research looks at how such misconceptions were transferred to the African clergy who approached them as gospel truth. . This study explored wrong mentorship as part of what creates the deviant masculinity in Pastor Mutema. Through Pastor Mutema the author shows the impact of missionary legacies among the African leaders. His leadership style is arrogant and pompous and his preaching rigid, uncompromising and biased His lack of mercy and forgiveness is similar to that of the biblical Pharisees who expected too much of their converts earning Jesus’ rebuke. His inspiration and mentor is a former missionary, Bishop Hardy Hardenstein, who taught him that Africans lived in a dark abyss, in fear and superstition, ignorance disease and hopelessness. During his moments of

crises, the pastor clings onto the picture of Bishop Hardenstein rather than look at Christ as expected of a Christian leader. “He takes down the picture of Bishop Hardenstein and regards it, fondly holding it in his hands as one cradles a child” (23). Mulwa creates a clear contrast between the aged one who looks at a picture of Christ for inspiration, and pastor Mutema’s hero worship of his mentor. The pictures symbolize allegiance. Mulwa uses Pastor Mutema to bring out the continual influence of colonial thought systems that were oppressive and a hindrance to progress. Spiritual stagnation in the church of the old tradition parallels economic retardation in African peoples who refuse to adapt to the changing times and thought systems.

The colonial bishop had mentored him into believing that Africans were “a people pretending to seek their God beneath fig trees .A people without any will and purpose. A people ear marked for eternal fire.” P.23 The allusion to fig trees alludes to the African cultural way of worship which the blacks had been taught to despise. Pastor Mutema subscribes to a strand of religion that gives no room for contrary views or opinions by a people he has learnt to consider as visionless and pathetic. In judging his own kind as such, he becomes what Franz Fanon calls a “black skin white mask”. Mutema belittles the traditional cultural belief systems and religions which had held Africans together before the coming of the missionaries. He bears the prejudices of former colonialists who justified their intrusion on African nations as a mercy civilizing mission in a dark continent. Europe purported to contribute to the spread of civilization through introduction of Christianity and political control over indigenous peoples of Africa.

In his relationships at home and church the pastor usurps the rights of these he considers “the other” to speak for themselves. He subverts the spiritual domain into a political one in which the subaltern are voiceless. The ideological differences between him and his congregants symbolize the tensions and conflicts permeating society because of bloated masculinities that thrive on neo-colonial othering. By portraying lack of dialogue as the cause of church disintegration, the author shows that true progress is only possible if there is mutual respect and “cross fertilization of ideas”. (Kehinde 2006)

### **3.0: Religious Fanaticism and Distorted Fatherhoods**

The dictionary defines a fanatic as someone with excessive zeal or obsessive enthusiasm. It is the unquestioning, uncritical and unconditional belief that rules out reality. In *Redemption*, the author condemns inflexible fatherhoods that sacrifice their own children to prove their manliness. The play dramatizes the tragedy of a religious man who forgets the fact that he is a husband and father first,

and he has an obligation to his family. Mutema's home environment is one of tension and fear because of his iron fisted leadership style. His wife does not dare refer to him using endearing terms expected of a wife. She calls him pastor as though that was all he is to her. To satirize this unorthodox relationship, Mulwa causes Rebecca to question the mother's reference to her husband as pastor. Martha: "Hasn't the pastor returned yet?" Rebecca ... "pastor! ... Oh, father?"(10). By contesting the reference to her father as pastor the writer uses Rebecca to examine how religion may overshadow the male personality at the expense of family relations. It is because of religious fanaticism that the pastor's roles as father and husband are negated.

The pastor's religion is a kind of mask for his narcissistic character. The term narcissism as used in Sigmund Freud's clinical study has behavioral observations such as self aggrandizement, vulnerability, defense mechanisms, perfectionism and interpersonal conflict. A narcissistic parent is someone who lives through and engages in marginalizing competition with the offspring.

The family fiends between The Mutemas and The Muthembas is reminiscent of William Shakespeare's montagues and Capulets in *Romeo and Juliet*. Pastor Muthemba breaks away and forms his own church with the splinter group that follows him. This betrayal creates intense bitterness and Mutema feels humiliated by his enemies. Rebecca's good character and her eventual admission to the university is, according to her father, a sign that God had not abandoned them. When she gets pregnant for the son of his arch enemy pastor Mutema's manhood is so hurt that he acts in total disregard to the scriptures he purports to teach. By disowning his daughter the Pastor portrays un-Christ-like behaviour. His sense of betrayal is heightened especially by the fact that so much hope had lain on their fallen daughter. Her being at the university as well as success in general is to be their source of redemption in the eyes of their enemies.

Mutema interprets God as a severe vengeful being; who should send down thunderbolts to burn his competition. God's failure to act as the pastor expected is such a big blow to his manhood that he breaks down and cries. He is so overwhelmed by bitterness that he is incapable of loving even those that remain. His sense of insecurity and suspicion makes him treat the church members harshly failing to lovingly address their weaknesses. Rebecca then becomes his tool of revenge

To maintain their self esteem and protect their vulnerabilities, narcissists try to control the behavior of others and to intimidate them so as to achieve gratification. The writer uses a Rebecca to question the rationale behind parental weaponizing of their children in their manliness rivalries. She continuously rebels against her father's orders not to associate with the son of his arch enemy. Rather than teach her how to relate with men, Pastor Mutema gives senseless orders without

explaining to her why she needed to be careful around opportunistic men. Through Rebecca, Mulwa highlights the folly of being so engrossed in selfish pursuits of vengeance and displays of masculinity that fathers fail to prepare their daughters to face the world of men. The suffocating home environment pushes her further and further away from her parents till she is all alone and vulnerable at a time when she most needs them. At puberty a girl seeks fatherly affirmation and acceptance to thrive. The play satirizes men who choose to be ignorant of the emotional needs of their daughters at such a crucial stage due to their own unresolved issues. The play offers hope, however since Mutema eventually comes back to his senses and seeks reconciliation with his daughter. The writer seems to suggest that there is a need for men to face their fears and come to terms with their pasts to be able to be emotionally available for their families.

#### **4.0: Conclusion**

There is a clear relationship between wrong mentorships, masculinity rivalries and contests and family decline. The Pastor's failure as a family man and church leader symbolizes the outcome of imbibing racially prejudiced religious identities and battling of manhood insecurities and. The author through a mockery of such identities educates society to regain belief in itself and adopt healthy progressive identities.

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