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BOOK REVIEW
George Mujajati (Mwana Waamai), Reviewed by Barbara C. Manyarara,
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BOOK REVIEW

George Mujajati,
Mwana Waamai (My Mother’s Daughter),
Harare: Longman, 2008

Reviewed by
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Written in ChiShona, Mwana Waamai, George Mujajati’s fifth literary offering, grimly predicts the horrendous Joseph Fritzl tale of incest and abduction (first brought to light in April, 2008 and to court in March, 2009. Fritzl fathered seven children with his own daughter: “I am not a monster,” is his perception of himself!). Creating a niche for himself on the Zimbabwean literary scene, Mujajati won the first prize in the Zimbabwe Book Publishers’ Award, 2008 for Mwana Waamai.

Composed of sixty-five personal letters exchanged between two girlfriends, Monica and Gamuchirai, the novel is entirely epistolary. Spanning a period of nearly seven years, essentially the writer/narrator tells the life stories of the two girls from puberty to young womanhood. Thus, the epistolary form recognises letters as an important form of interpersonal communication. However, in this novel, the form underscores the grave lack of communication among most people in both girls’ milieu. Be it in the home, at school or in the world of work, there is very little supportive interaction.

Written from a very subjective point of view, Mwana Waamai does not attempt to capture objective reality, rather, it becomes a performance filtered through both girls’ consciousness. We cannot say the novel seeks the truth behind the events narrated. The girls’ consciousness is not mimetic, so we cannot measure the truthfulness of the tale’s representation. Instead, the two narrators relate how they lived through those events and they reserve the right, not only to be selective, but also to act as they do. From the beginning, the girl, Monica, tells us of the threat of sexual violence by her own father, but does nothing about it except to confide in her friend, Gamuchirai. Eventually, the father violently rapes her, resulting in pregnancy. Again she does nothing about it despite her seeming consciousness and Gamu’s advice that she make a police report. Thus, we find the girl’s letters
emphasisising both the real and the fictional nature of *Mwana Waamai*. There
is demarcation between art and reality, between life and fiction because as
readers, we recognise the all too real problem of sexual abuse perpetrated
against children, especially girls, and all within their families and at school,
the two institutions specifically charged with their safety and security. The
girls are not presented as good, docile or just empowered. They are both
realistically portrayed as vulnerable.

To the girls' sixty-five letters, are grafted Rudo's (Gamu's mother) three.
This polyphony forces different points of view to enter the novel. Rudo's
three letters written in a Monotype Corsiva size 10 font, suggest some
intrusion of explanation in a narrative she recognisers as belonging to the
two girls. However, her own circumstances as a mature woman left for a
much young girl, emphasises her own empowerment through hard work
and enterprise, something she later passes onto Monica, thus, empowering
a daughter. Rudo's three letters are important for taking readers beyond the
two girls' narrative, adding multiplicity to the otherwise choppy presentation
of the tale. The grafted letters allow the voicing of other subjectivities,
thus, authenticating and adding gravity to the girls' consciousness of their
situation.

Temporal and spatial dislocations are important features of *Mwana Waamai*.
Monica writes the first and last letters. The first thirteen are written from
Chivese Primary School, Monica's rural base. Chronologically, we learn
of her hardships caused by the abusive father, an exploitative employer;
the incestuous pregnancy, the hurtful stigmatisation from the community at
large and a distinct lack of support from an invalid mother and her daughter.
Mujajati upsets the usual notion of urban spaces as places of social conflict
and contradictions. He fictionally uses it for Monica to find herself and
establish tentative platonic friendships with males. Although this fails, she is
not devastated. Instead, she brings her own daughter, Musodzi, to town to
heal after her own father (and her daughter's father too) had again sexually
abused someone he is socially sanctioned to protect. Similarly, Gamu's
mother's relocation to Harare enhances her capacity to sustain herself and
her daughter. This way, urban space is made socially symbolic, particularly
for Monica, by the subversion of the distinctly patriarchal indigenous social
structures that tend to treat urbanised single women as parasites and
prostitutes. Her extended family introduces the element of ngozi to absolve
her father's abuse of her and her daughter but she refuses to comply with
the family's demands. She is perceptive enough to realise that she does
not have to be both the victim and the sacrifice to atone for wrongs imagined
or real. Here is a young woman who, despite the odds, is successfully
empowered to run her own life, unlike Gamuchirai. Gamuchira’s letters presented in Times New Roman font size 10 are, from the beginning, concerned with self-awareness, particularly her sexuality. She writes a total of thirty-six letters. As co-communicant to Monica, Gamu is Monica’s Manichean opposite, functioning as Monica’s confidante in turn. She confides all her joys and sorrows and life’s challenges. Unlike Monica, she has the opportunity to proceed to secondary school, but her own unbridled sexuality proves to be her downfall. She fails to complete formal school. The several love affairs she engages in all seem to fit the “forbidden fruit” category. She deliberately overdoses on malarial tablets and almost dies, leading to an abortion; attempts to coerce a former boyfriend into marrying her, but she finds herself physically abused severely. In the end, she suffers a nervous breakdown and ends up a roving preacher, somewhat putting to question her sanity. Despite all this, the humanity evident between Monica and Gamuchirai is a very rare quality indeed making them much more than mere girlfriends but a mother’s daughters.

*Mwana Waamai* is suitable for both young and older readers. The subject matter is quite disturbing. The various sets of forbidden relationships are potentially destructive. This novel draws all readers’ attention to the roles of advocacy and social responsibility that all adults should exercise over youths and minors, and who better than teachers should take up that challenge? Although the language of the text is contaminated by a macaronic mix of ChiShona and English (a common feature of Zimbabwean speech), George Mujajati is to be applauded for his attempt to tell woman’s story sympathetically.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS TO OUR REVIEWERS

The *Zimbabwe Journal of Educational Research* and its Acting Editor-in-Chief would like to acknowledge with warm gratitude, all the article reviewers for a job extremely well done. Reviewers’ work is very special to the journal. Without these dedicated scholars, this journal would not be there because it would not be possible to maintain its high standard in writing style, language technicalities and scholarly content of the articles. They read the articles and return comments in record time. Authors have said that they find the comments to be extremely helpful because the reviews are thorough and very detailed. This, in turn, makes the journal’s editorial work easier.

Below we have tried to capture the names of all those people who reviewed for *ZJER* up to October this year, 2009. If some names have been left out, it is because of a genuine mistake and not because of a deliberate oversight.

My sincere gratitude to all of you and may you continue to render your selfless service to beloved *ZJER*!

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