

**The People's Democratic Republic of Algeria**  
**Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research**  
**Djillali Liabes University of Sidi Bel Abbas**



**Faculty of Letters, Languages and Arts**  
**Department of English Language**  
**A Thesis Entitled:**

**The Politics of Gender in Ngugi's Fiction: A  
Postcolonial-Feminist Study of Five Selected  
Novels**

**By:**

**Samir Arab**

**Supervisor:**

**Prof. Boulenouar Mohammed Yamin**

**Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Letters, Languages and  
Arts at Djillali Liabes University of Sidi Bel Abbas, in  
candidacy for the degree of Doctorate in English Literature**

**Academic Year: 2019-2020**

# **The Politics of Gender in Ngugi's Fiction: A Postcolonial-Feminist Study of Five Selected Novels**

**By**

**Samir Arab**

**Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Letters, Languages and Arts at Djillali Liabes University of Sidi Bel Abbas, in candidacy for the degree of Doctorate in English Literature**

## **Board of Examiners**

Mrs. Bedjaoui Fewzia (Prof) President	University of Sidi Bel Abbas
Mr. Boulenuar Mohammed Yamin (Prof) Supervisor ,	University of Sidi Bel Abbas
Mr. Benseddik Belkacem, (M.C.A) Examiner,	University of Sidi Bel Abbas
Mrs. Mouro Wassila, (M.C.A) Examiner,	University of Tlemcen
Mr. Kheladi Mohammed (M.C.A) Examiner,	University of Tlemcen
Mr. Hicham Ghembaza (M.C.A) Examiner,	University of Saida

Academic Year 2019/2020

**Fiche de dépôt de sujet  
(2<sup>ème</sup> post-Graduation)  
de Doctorat en Sciences**

2020/2021

<b>Faculté :</b>	Des Lettres, des langues et des Arts	<b>Département :</b>	Anglais
<b>Spécialité* :</b>	Anglais		
<b>Option* :</b>	Littérature anglaise		

\* : Se renseigner auprès du département sur les dénominations réglementaires

Identification de l'Étudiant			
<b>Nom :</b>	Arab		
<b>Prénom :</b>	Samir		
<b>Date de Naissance :</b>	18/09/1988		
<b>Lieu de Naissance :</b>	Chlef		
<b>Wilaya de Naissance :</b>	Chlef		
<b>Pays de Naissance :</b>	Algérie	<b>Nationalité :</b>	Algérienne

Identification des Encadreurs			
Directeur de thèse		Co-directeur de thèse (rang magistral : Pr., MCA)	
<b>Nom et Prénom :</b>	BOULENOUAR MOHAMMED YAMIN	<b>Nom et Prénom :</b>	
<b>Grade :</b>	Professeur	<b>Grade :</b>	
<b>Faculté :</b>	Des Lettres, des langues et des Arts	<b>Faculté :</b>	
<b>Etablissement de Rattachement :</b>	Université Djillali Liabès de Sidi Bel-Abbès	<b>Etablissement de Rattachement :</b>	

Identification du Sujet de Recherche	
<b>Intitulé du sujet :</b>	The Politics of Gender in Ngugi's Fiction: A Postcolonial-Feminist Study of Five Selected Novels

Date et Signature de l'étudiant

Visa du Doyen

29/06/2020

## Declaration

I, Samir Arab, hereby declare that the thesis entitled **The Politics of Gender in Ngugi's Fiction: A Postcolonial-Feminist Study of Five Selected Novels**, is my original work, which has been undertaken under the guidance of Professor Boulenouar Mohammed Yamin. The present thesis has not been submitted to any University or to any Higher Learning Institution for the award of any degree.

I submit my research thesis to English Department at Djillali Liabes University of Sidi Bel Abbas, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English.

Except quotes and direct references, which have been appropriately acknowledged for the research purpose herein, the whole thesis is my original work.

Signature of the Candidate

Date:

## Supervisor's Certificate

This is to certify that the Ph.D thesis on **The Politics of Gender in Ngugi's Fiction: A Postcolonial-Feminist Study of Five Selected Novels**, is a bonafide work of Samir Arab, , carried out under my direct supervision and guidance. The thesis has not been submitted to any University either in part or fully for the award of any degree.

The present thesis is submitted to English Department at Djillali Liabes University of Sidi Bel Abbes, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English.

This is also certified that the candidate has fulfilled all the requirements of the University Ordinance relating to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Place: Sidi Bel Abbes

Prof. Bouelnouar Med

Yamin

Date:

## **Dedication**

*To my Father and Mother*

*Djillali and Badiaa*

*To my beloved brothers and sister:*

*Khaled, Fatima, Mohamed, and Ahmed*

*To my sisters in law:*

*Malika and Aicha*

*To my brother in law Houari*

*To my dear nephews and nieces:*

*Amine, Yanis, Mohamed Iyad, Khaled Rawad, Mohamed Ezine, Lila, Imene, Sarra,  
Manel, and Tesnime*

*To my colleagues and friends: Dr. Hassane Missoum Benziane, Dr. Malika Zourgui,  
Dr. Nouredine Dahmane, Mr. Farid Oumamar, Mahfoudh Bensidhom, Ibrahim  
Abdrabo, Ibrahim Abadna, Mohamed Al Mohtaseb, El Hadj Bourouina, and Amin Al-  
Zou'bi*

**To Mrs Hadj Henni Radia**

*Whose encouragement gives me strength and determination*

*To my second home Jordan*

*To the soul of **Mr. Karim Mekrouz**....brother, friend and colleague*

## Acknowledgments

Thanks be to Allah, the Almighty, the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful who provided me with enthusiasm, patience and hope whenever my energy dwindled.

No thesis is ever written alone. In writing this one, I have benefited immeasurably from the help, support, and kindness of many people. To these loved ones, friends and colleagues, I record my thanks and appreciation.

At the beginning, I have to thank my supervisor **Prof. Boulenouar Mohammed Yamin**, without whose help and guidance this research work would not have materialized. In Professor Boulenouar I had a superb supervisor who made the early stages of this work possible. I thank him for his exemplary rigor, enthusiasm and meticulous critique.

Thanks are extended to the distinguished members of the examining committee for accepting to read and evaluate my work. I wish to place on records my heartfelt and sincere thanks to **Professor Fewzia Bedjaoui** for her generosity and valuable remarks. I really appreciate her contribution and insightful observations which made this work noteworthy. Similarly, I recognize the good ideas offered to me by **Dr. Benseddik Belkacem** and **Dr. Mohammed Kheladi**. I have benefited from the steady support and direction of each. I acknowledge **Dr. Wassila Mourou** and **Dr. Hicham Ghembaza** for proofreading and evaluating this manuscript. The human atmosphere I encountered in my interactions with the distinguished board of examiners will always be remembered.

I wish to express my gratitude to **Professor Lamia Khalil Hammad** for her ever available advice, kindness, patience, help and continual suggestions during the course of this study. I owe my solemn and earnest gratitude to **Dr. Mohand Amokrane Ait Djida**, for providing moral support and valuable guidance whenever needed.

I am so grateful to **Professor Abbes Bahous** and **Dr. Larbi Youcef Abdel-Djallil** for their encouragement and useful observation. I thank them immensely for their advice, guidance, support, and I hope that this thesis will repay their efforts in some part. I am greatly indebted to my dear colleague **Dr. Kamel Atta Allah** for his help, care, and encouragement. I would be remiss if I did not thank **Professor Hacene Mahmoudi** who deserves credit for being a source of inspiration and motivation. I am so grateful to **Professor Joseph Mbele** for encouraging me and providing me with his book.

Last but certainly not least, my profoundest gratitude is reserved to my colleague **Miss. Khadidja Khodja** whose help and encouragement are dearly valued.

## Table of Contents

Declaration.....	iv
Supervisor’s Certificate.....	v
Dedication.....	vi
Acknowledgments.....	vii
Table of Contents.....	viii
Abbreviations.....	xiii
Abstract.....	xiv
General Introduction.....	1
Part One.....	16
Setting the Theoretical Background.....	16
<b>Chapter One:</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>On African Literature, Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Post-Colonial Feminism.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>1.1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>1.2. African Literature: Definitions and Features.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>1.3. The Evolution of African Literature.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>1.3.1. Pre-Colonial Literature: Oral literature.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>1.3.2. Colonial Literature: Literature of Protest/ Combat.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>1.3.3. Postcolonial African Literature: Literature of Denunciation/ Inward         Criticism.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>1.4. The Postcolonial African Text as a Tool of Resistance and Emancipation.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>1.5. Postcolonial Theory: Meaning and Significance.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>1.5.1. Postcolonial Theory: Definition.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>1.6. Post-colonialism/ Postcolonialism: Does the Hyphen Make Any Difference?.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>1.7. The Historical Foundation of Postcolonial Theory/Literature.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>1.7.1. Edward Said’s Contribution.....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>1.7.2. Postcolonialism and Postmodernism: Affinities and Differences in the two         Posts.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>1.8. Postcolonial Theory’s /Literature’s Project.....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>1.8.1. The New Cultural Identity of the Colonized.....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>1.8.2. The Question Mark of Independence.....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>1.8.3. Subalternity and Marginality.....</b>	<b>50</b>

<b>1.9. From Postcolonialism to Feminism .....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>1.9.1. Feminism: A Movement of Reclamation.....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>1.9.2. Waves of Feminism .....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>1.10. Feminism and Postcolonialism: Similarities and Differences .....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>1.11. Postcolonial-Feminism: Definition, Features, and Major Concerns .....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>1.12. From Postcolonial-Feminism to Black Feminism/ Womanism: Can the Black Subaltern Speak? .....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>1.13. Womanism and African Consciousness .....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>1.14. Conclusion.....</b>	<b>69</b>
Chapter Two:.....	70
African Women’s Speech and the Constricted Throat: Exploring Women’s Role and Position in African Literature and Ngugi wa Thiong’o Major Works .....	70
<b>2.1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>2.2. On Gender and Patriarchy.....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>2.3. African Women and Oral Literature .....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>2.4. The Rise of the Manuscript and the Invisibility of Women .....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>2.5. Exploring the One-Sided Reflection of Women in African Literary Canon .....</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>2.6. The Romanticized Woman in the Negritude Poetry .....</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>2.7. On Women’s Entrance into the Literary Canon and the Politics of Gender .....</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>2.8. Woman’s Image in the works of Gynandrists .....</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>2.9. Toward the Careful Reconsideration of Women’s Roles in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s Fiction.....</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>2.10. Reviewing the Critical Reception of Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s Female Representation .....</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>2.11. Conclusion.....</b>	<b>118</b>
Chapter Three:.....	120
Ngugi wa Thiong’o: The Revolutionary Author.....	120
<b>3.1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>3.2. Ngugi’s Life and Literary Career:.....</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>3.3. Ngugi wa Thiong’o as a Committed Writer.....</b>	<b>125</b>
<b>3.3.1. On African Literature and Commitment.....</b>	<b>126</b>
<b>3.3.2. Commitment as a Morality in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s Oeuvre .....</b>	<b>127</b>
<b>3.4. Ngugi’s Contribution to Kenya’s History .....</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>3.4.1. The African text and the Pre-colonial Paradise .....</b>	<b>134</b>
<b>3.4.2. Paradise Disturbed: The African Novel as a Mirror of the Colonial Experience.....</b>	<b>136</b>

3.4.3. Paradise Lost: Toward the Reintegration of the Silenced Voices .....	137
3.5. Marxism and Ngugi's Political Activism.....	139
3.5.1. Marxism: A Political Philosophy .....	139
3.5.2. Ngugi wa Thiong'o: The Marxist Writer .....	141
3.6. From Class-Struggle to Women's Plight.....	145
3.7. Conclusion.....	147
Part Two.....	149
Ventriloquized Voices: Revisiting Women's Plight in Ngugi's Colonial Novels .....	149
Chapter Four .....	150
The Panopticon of the Patriarchy in <i>Weep Not, Child</i> : Women Under Competing Discourses of Power .....	150
4.1. Introduction.....	150
4.2. <i>Weep Not, Child</i> : Critical Reception and Synopsis.....	151
4.3. Factional and Factual in Ngugi's Novel: Autobiographical Reading of <i>Weep Not, Child</i> .....	155
4.4. Locating the Docile Body within the Violent Hierarchies .....	159
4.5. Associating the Female Body with the Land.....	169
4.6. Patriarchal Aftermath: Disintegrated Family .....	173
4.7. Conclusion.....	181
Chapter Five:.....	183
The Body Between: On Double Patriarchy and the Female Body in <i>The River Between</i> .....	183
5.1. Introduction.....	183
5.2. <i>The River Between</i> : Critical Reception and Literary Review.....	184
5.3. Female Circumcision Controversy .....	186
5.4. Paradise Disturbed: The Cultural Clash and the Divided Nation.....	190
5.4.1. The Crisis of Leadership .....	194
5.4.2. From the Clash of Civilizations to the Clash of Masculinity .....	201
5.4.3. Circumcision Between Appropriation and Abrogation.....	203
5.5. On the Liminal-Zone, Female Body and Double Patriarchy: Women's Uncertain Fate in a Cultural Clash-Based Society.....	206
5.5.1. Mutilating the Body: Muthoni's Tragic Death and the Question of Rightness.....	210
5.5.2. A Pre-determined Love: Nyambura's Uncertain Fate and the Tragic Downfall of the Hero.....	214
5.6. An Unfulfilled Reconciliation: From <i>The River Between</i> to the Body Between.....	222
5.7. Conclusion.....	224
Chapter Six:.....	225

Gendering History in <i>A Grain of Wheat</i> : Rehistoricizing .....	225
Woman's Conflicted Figure.....	225
<b>6.1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>225</b>
<b>6.2. On History and Gender Studies</b> .....	<b>226</b>
<b>6.3. <i>A Grain of Wheat</i>: Context and Critical Reception</b> .....	<b>228</b>
6.3.1. Two Grains of Wheat: 1967 and 1986 .....	231
6.3.2. <i>A Grain of Wheat</i> : Synopsis, Framing Voice and Narrative Structure .....	235
<b>6.4. Challenging the Linear Historiography Through <i>A Grain of Wheat</i></b> .....	<b>240</b>
6.4.1 Toward the Reintegration of the Marginalized Voice.....	243
6.4.2. Aspects of Women's Double Colonization: On Objectification, Sexual Assault, and Displacement.....	253
<b>6.5. The Question Mark on <i>Harambee</i></b> .....	<b>265</b>
<b>6.6. Conclusion</b> .....	<b>271</b>
Part Three.....	272
Not Yet <i>Uhuru</i> ...La Luta Continua! .....	272
Chapter Seven: .....	273
The Political Dimension of Alienation and Prostitution in <i>Petals of Blood</i> .....	273
<b>7.1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>273</b>
<b>7.2. <i>Petals of Blood</i>: Critical Reception and Synopsis</b> .....	<b>274</b>
<b>7.3. A Marxist-Fanonist Interpretation of the Novel: Elitism, Capitalism, and Class     Struggle</b> .....	<b>278</b>
<b>7.4. The Literal and Figurative Meanings of Alienation: Women as a Second Class ...</b>	<b>285</b>
<b>7.5. Confiscating the Female Body in Capitalist Society</b> .....	<b>291</b>
<b>7.6. Prostitution in New Kenya: A Sign of Emancipation or Exploitation?</b> .....	<b>296</b>
<b>7.7. Reflecting the Nation through the Body</b> .....	<b>303</b>
<b>7.8. Conclusion</b> .....	<b>306</b>
Chapter Eight: .....	308
On <i>Uhuru</i> of Sexploitation and Women's Rebellious Voice in <i>Devil on the Cross</i> .....	308
<b>8.1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>308</b>
<b>8.2. Ngugi Speaks to the Masses: <i>Devil on the Cross</i>' Form and Language</b> .....	<b>309</b>
<b>8.3. The Rhetoric of Irony and Satire: Uncovering Neo-Colonial Praxis and Paradox</b>	<b>312</b>
8.3.1. Body Politics: The Grotesque Image in Ngugi's Satire .....	318
<b>8.4. Toward a Prostituted Economy: Women Under the Mercy of the Local     Bourgeoisie and Foreign Domination</b> .....	<b>322</b>
<b>8.5. On the Rebellious Voice and the Strategy of Gender Egalitarianism</b> .....	<b>335</b>
<b>8.6. Conclusion</b> .....	<b>348</b>

General Conclusion.....	350
Works Cited.....	364
<b>Appendices: Novels Synopses.....</b>	<b>383</b>
<b>Appendix A: <i>Weep Not, Child</i>.....</b>	<b>383</b>
<b>Appendix B: <i>The River Between</i>.....</b>	<b>384</b>
<b>Appendix C : <i>A Grain of Wheat</i> .....</b>	<b>386</b>
<b>Appendix D: <i>Petals of Blood</i>.....</b>	<b>387</b>
<b>Appendix E: <i>Devil on the Cross</i>.....</b>	<b>389</b>
Résumé.....	391
ملخص.....	392

## Abbreviations

### Ngugi's Novels

*Weep Not, Child*

*The River Between*

*A Grain of Wheat*

*Petals of Blood*

*Devil on the Cross*

### Abbreviations

*WNC*

*TRB*

*AGOW*

*POB*

*DOC*

## Abstract

Recent years have seen proliferation of English language African novels. Most of these novels deal with contemporary issues in the wake of globalization, capitalism and colonial aftermath. African literature, like any other Third-World literature, conveys vital messages that form the core of postcolonial studies. Meanwhile, African authors have always been faithful to their masses revealing their plights and position during the colonial era and the postcolonial epoch. Terms such as subalternity, centre-periphery, and patriarchy need no sophisticated introduction in Postcolonial-Feminist African fiction.

The colonial experience is a common feature of Third-World literatures. African literature cannot be read and discussed far from its colonial context which forms its source and driving force for any modern literary creation. In its examination of the post-independence era, African literature concerns itself with the devastating colonial aftermath. African authors usually rely on the plight of the masses throughout their critical evaluation of the two periods. It was Frantz Fanon who first coined the term ‘the wretched of the earth’ which finds its meaning in Antonio Gramsci’s subalternity. The two concepts are used as references to people of inferior rank. Interest in this social category has increased as soon as writers from the continent began to notice the effects of the unfulfilled hope on the masses. Historically, this social category was subject to colonial domination. Following independence, it is assumed, the wretched of the earth have occupied the margins. Male African authors like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Nurudin Farah and Ngugi wa Thiong’o consider women as the wretched of the earth and the most exploited on the continent.

A critical review of the existing African literature clearly shows that women occupy an inferior position in society. Patriarchy is the prime obstacle to women’s advancement and development. African authors believe that in spite of the differences in levels of domination, the broad principles of the patriarchy remain the same. Men remain the controllers and are placed on the top of the social hierarchy. Patriarchal society gives absolute priority to men and to some extent limits women’s human rights. By definition, the word ‘patriarchy’ literally means the rule of the father or the ‘patriarch’. Originally, it was used to describe a specific type of ‘male-dominated family’. Nowadays, the concept is used more generally “to refer to male domination, to the power relationships by which men dominate women, and to characterize a system

whereby women are kept subordinate in a number of ways. In dealing with the patriarchy and women's subordination, African writers concentrate on things such as the so-called humiliations of polygamy, the dangers and imaginary deprivations associated with female circumcision and the limited participation of women in social affairs.

Ngugi's novels demonstrate his ability to present African women, their fears, hopes, roles and responsibilities in appropriate historical and cultural contexts. Accordingly, his fiction enables its readers to perceive women as human beings who are timid or brave, shy or outspoken, indolent or hardworking; human beings who could be victims of social circumstances or perpetrators of injustice. Like many other African societies, the Kenyan society is essentially patriarchal; hence men are considered to be more superior to women. Ngugi attacks the traditional female discourse of the African woman as being dominated, exploited, abused and merely used as a beast of burden. The pathetic state of women by the mechanism of exploitation is a major reason behind Ngugi's decision to align himself with their struggle for a meaningful existence.

This thesis examines women's plight in Ngugi's fiction. The aim is to examine the way in which Kenya's most gifted author, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, has portrayed the impact of colonialism and neo-colonialism on women. It is an attempt to identify the significance of women's plight as far as the author's political vision is concerned. My interest lies in how Ngugi handles the issues of women in colonial and postcolonial Kenya with respect to their nationalistic fervor in his five novels; *Weep Not, Child*, *The River Between*, *A Grain of Wheat*, *Petals of Blood*, and *Devil on the Cross*. Based on the author's declaration that his writing is an attempt to understand himself and his situation in society and history, the nub of this work is to illuminate the politics of gender and its significance in his attack on colonial and postcolonial institutions. The practical side of this dissertation consists of two parts; one part is devoted to women's plight in Ngugi's colonial novels, while the second one analyzes their predicaments in his post-independence novels. To examine women's subordination in two different phases, then, is to probe the central core of the novels, for such an approach sheds light not just on the narrative substance; rather it explores the socio-political philosophy which produces Ngugi's reconstructions of the past, examination of the present and his prediction of the future.

**Keywords:** Alienation, female body, history, hybridity, marginality, neo-colonialism, oppression, panopticism, prostitution, revolution.

## General Introduction

The term 'Third World' was first coined and used by the French demographer Alfred Savvy in 1952 to name the newly emergent and developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The old order of colonialism got liquidated in phases after the Second World War and the newly emergent countries were perceived as constituting a distinct political grouping—the Third World. As a matter of fact The Third World countries share a common past of domination by Western imperialists and therefore have a common history of struggle for independence. Following independence, Third-World countries entered a new phase of indirect dependency. They have been apparently dominated by a new class of bourgeois rulers who perpetuate the new form of colonialism by serving their Western Masters.

In a world where personal becomes political, literary writings can no longer remain neutral and apolitical, propounding the art for art's sake slogan. Third World literature reflects the political and ideological stances of the masses in the country. Essentially, Africans have been writing in English since the eighteenth century. However, it was until the early fifties of the twentieth century that African literature gained its reputation in the West. Since then, African literature has grown remarkably. Amos Tutola's *Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952) is considered as the novel which paved the way for African writers to make heard their voices. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) marked the real beginning of postcolonial African novel. Third World literature is known for its vigorous concentration on the colonial aftermath. The African novel is also devoted to the task of revisiting the colonial epoch and reflecting the years of intense cultural nationalism. The novel was the rebellious voice and the weapon for African independence. . In "The Novelist as Teacher," Achebe asserts that his purpose in writing was to help his society "regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement" (44). African authors used the novel as a means to arouse the political consciousness of the masses and help them break the silence.

Postcolonial African novel is a historical record of the changing consciousness of Africa. It depicts Africa in its three different historical phases. It records the socio-political transition of the continent. Novels which deal with the first phase are noted for their attempt to shed light on the lost dignity, identity, and the distorted history. The writers tell their readers that their past "was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them" (Achebe 45). Therefore, African novelists' main project is the cultural rehabilitation of the past. They revolve around the cultural purity of African societies before they were disrupted by European contact.

Following independence, African novel shifted in terms of content. The unity of the national crusade began to crumble. The sense of euphoria turned into despair and agony. The rise of the petit bourgeoisie shook the continent. Accordingly, the paradise which independence offered seemed unattainable. Africans in general, and writers in particular, recognized a continuation of exploitation, the only difference was that the exploiters were Africans. The colonial powers continued their economic domination by controlling the economic policies of the African democracies and exerting technological influence over them. A feeling of betrayal set in and a period of intense disillusion followed. Writers began to redirect their angst against neo-colonialism and African leadership. Moreover, postcolonial African novel presents Europeans or Americans as agents of international capitalism who seek to destabilize African democracies that are under the grip of tribalism, nepotism, and corruption. Westerners are depicted as roaming their ex-colonies with seductive offers to lure the African leaders to corruption and venality. Being modernist in form and content, African novels are marked by pessimism, disillusion, anger and helplessness. They are highly critical of the manipulations of the Western capitalist economy, the potential dangers of neo-colonialism and of the corrupt African leadership. Thematically, African novelists concentrate on issues like alienation, search for identity, corruption, vandalism, cultural colonization and value crunch.

Essentially, the third phase of the African novel can be called the 'liberation phase'. The resistance to cultural imperialism, neo-colonialism and corrupt leadership continues. However, the novel transforms itself into a narrative of liberation as Fanon envisaged in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Cultural decolonization is aimed through a more confident assertion of black identity and an overt challenge to Europe's myth of

black Africa. During this phase, the novel has become therapeutic in nature and the novelists are engaged in a mission of healing the African psyche of its traumatic experiences of colonialism. African novels offer solutions to the stranglehold of cultural imperialism. They are more optimistic, constructive, visionary and more functional than their predecessors. The novelists of this period betray a remarkable influence of Fanon. This is the period when the writer turns himself into an awakener of the people. This is the period of "a fighting literature, a revolutionary literature, and a national literature." (*The Wretched of the Earth* 179)

The postcolonial African novel has had its beginning as an anti-colonial weapon and throughout its successive periods it has continued to foreground resistance to imperialism of all forms. It has been a response to and a reaction against the colonial discourse. It challenges the Western construct of African reality and continues to offer cultural resistance to European hegemony. The African author aims at transforming the state of consciousness of the African which has been shaped by the colonial discourse. Hence, African literature is a discursive formation aimed at decolonizing the mind through projects of re-Africanization. Moreover, the 'new' voice of Africa, the contemporary African writing in English has vehemently contested the western antithesis of Africa and African. It tries to emancipate Africa from its literary stereotype and complexes born of years of dilapidation and self-degradation.

African literature has to be studied and examined in African context from the point of view of African aesthetics, politics and history. Beauty and pleasure are not the basic things as in most of Western literature. It has gained significance not for its historicity but for presenting in the more restricted and more immediate sense, the socio-cultural environment prevailing in Africa. It is the bounteous duty of an African writer to awaken and sensitize African to his cultural identity and African. Besides, writers are supposed to reflect the devastating state of the nation and record the socio-political realities. Pioneers of African literature like Chinua Achebe, James Ngugi have tried to analyze African experience and the nature of mutation in African society exposed to the onslaughts of the West. These authors are sensitive to the prevailing conditions of life in Africa and have skillfully dramatized the historical events to trace the growth of African consciousness. Throughout their novels, there is a particular ordering of events to reveal a tragic pattern and record the effects of colonialism on the natives.

As a matter of fact, women studies have recently become a favorite subject for critical scrutiny and interpretation, in the wake of the important movement of feminism. In the post-modern world of fractured self and broken images, women issues have drawn readers' attention and gained a prominent place in literary criticism. Third World women are worse off than women in the rest of the world. They are subject to marginality and discrimination. Being an offshoot of feminism, womanism is a contemporary concept which is relevant to women studies in literature of minorities. The incursion of feminism into the postcolonial world gave birth to postcolonial-feminism. Postcolonial literature is a field in which the text is subject to multidisciplinary readings. Third world women provoke close attention. It is only in Womanism that women in Black find the right corner they have been looking for. Womanism as a concept engendered a different reading of the Third World woman, particularly the Black African Woman. Women writers in Black Africa, like Emecheta, who asserted that —if I am now a feminist, then I am an African feministl (“feminism with a small f” 179) admit to the significance of the new entry in the index 'Womanism'.

As feminism originates at the conference halls of the white women academia, the pressing concerns of the Black woman are ignored and it is this that womanism surfaces to answer. If women are a subjugated second sex, black woman is a doubly colonized race, suffering alike from patriarchal as well as racial stigmatization. Womanism gives the marginalized black woman a platform to proclaim her identity and liberate herself from the shackles of patriarchy. Women in Africa are a distinct race and of an ancient civilization. But critical attention has not been focused on them as Black American woman writing has stolen the limelight with names such as Alice Walker and Toni Morrison.

Essentially, woman in Black Africa falls categorically under the umbrella term of womanism along with the Diasporas in different parts of the world, and with other women of color. The African woman has rediscovered her voice in recent literary productions. The social situation of the African woman can be seen portrayed in the literature of the respective countries from the beginning of the 20th century to the present. Contemporary African women writers subscribe to the notions of womanism, where the female of the species stands out as a unique entity without recourse to male support and is able to chart out an unrestricted identity for herself.

Jacques Lacan believes that discourse in general is phallogocentric. He takes up Sigmund Freud's theory of psyche and gender and adds to it the dimension of language. From a psychoanalytical point of view, it is assumed that the child on birth is a sexless, neutral body – he does not realize his sex. Consequently, the child passes through the different phases like oral, anal and phallic stage during infantile sexuality. The Oedepal stage is significant in Lacan's theory since it coincides with the child identifying himself with his father and the girl with the mother as the family representative of culture. Such cultural representations on the growing psyche are seen etched in the initial state of mind. The language used and promoted by the culture is one that reflects the binary logic that polarizes such terms as active/passive, masculine/feminine, sun/moon, father/mother, head/heart, intelligent/ sensitive, phallus/vagina, and reason/emotion since this logic tends to categorize the more dominant terms with masculinity. Therefore French feminists call the structure of language phallogocentric, i.e., privileging the phallus or masculinity by associating them with values appreciated by the male dominated culture.

As a matter of fact, in patriarchal societies women occupy the margins. In some cultures, they represent the frontier between men and chaos. This has also been inculcated into the social framework of society in most cultures worldwide. In literature, women are represented in two antithetical patterns; one as the ideal representations of man's desires such as the pure and innocent virgin, the 'Angel in the House', and the other as the demonic projection of men's sexual fear and dislike. They have taken on the object position in literary representations, as opposed to the active subject or 'doing' part played by the male. Women have been treated as the inferior sector in the gendered population, considerably weaker in power and utility than the male.

In essence, woman is the effect of social conditioning or acculturation to patriarchal modes of thought. Using Althusser's term, women imbibe the 'ideology' of patriarchy as they grow and develop in society. It is "a system of representation at the heart of a given society" (Goldstein 23). Women take in this ideology or the implicit and unrecognized values and assumptions which pervade the art and culture of the civilization of the period. It is this ideology that projects men as powerful and secures the unknowing psychological consent of women in considering themselves inferior. In *Of Woman Born* Adrienne Rich captures all the different facets of the African traditional conditions when she says, that patriarchy is:

[T]he power of the fathers: a familial, social, ideological and political system in which by direct pressure – or through tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education and division of labour—men determine what parts women shall or shall not play and the female is everywhere subsumed by the male. (57-8)

African novel of the nineteenth and twentieth century has generally depicted the patriarchal society as being highly dominated by male. Women in the society are relegated to a secondary place. Frank Katherine in her controversial article “Women Without Men: The Feminist Novel in Africa” encourages women to assert themselves and shape their own destiny. She argues that the feminist writers of Africa portray women “not only as taking active and shared roles with men but also as finding a destiny of their own . . . destiny with vengeance” (34). African novel emerging from the underlying tension between the notion of pan-African unity and national identity testifies to the writers’ belief that ‘fiction has a vital social responsibility’, and most of the material of the narrative constitutes ‘charting their own social reality’. It deals with the precision and the plight of the marginalized woman struggling to sustain herself and her non-entity status and disappointments overshadowing her existence and above all the choked voice. Postcolonial African novel shows women as victims of eternal degradation and humiliation struggling hard to be heard but all this with the undercurrent of the typical African tradition and culture.

The African novel depicts how the suppressed and oppressed women are sacrificed at the altar of male-oriented society. It focuses on men’s exploitation of women to maintain male dominance and thus subjecting women to struggle for their self-actualization and recognition outside the domestic sphere. Even the characters in African novel without character growth represent some aspects of traditional values or vision of life. African male authors usually portray female characters just as background figures. Their female representation is done from a fiercely male perspective. Women are seen primarily in relation to male protagonists who occupy central positions.

The African novel has until recently been noted for the absence of what can be called the 'feminine point of view'. Up till now women as portrayed in African novel by the male writers like Achebe, Soyinka, Ekwensi, Amadi, Beti, Ousmane, and Laye in the traditional environment and male dominated society, are content with their subordinate role. The status quo changed with time, and with the entry of women

writers on the scene, the 'second sex' secured a niche and a voice. The situation changed with women soon fighting for their ground and establishing their place in all fields of literature. They speak about their own exclusive conditions in the society, and bring out the multiple oppressions that women underwent in terms of their race and gender. In "The African Woman as Writer" Lloyd Brown asserts that women writers "offer self-images, patterns of analysis, and general insights into the woman's situations which are ignored by, or are inaccessible to the male writer." (494). Writers like Flora Nwapa, Mariamma Ba and Buchi Emecheta write about the woman who is powerfully aware of the unfairness of the system and who longs to be fulfilled in herself, thus bringing out the cataclysmic changes in the situation of the African woman of the contemporary times.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, also known as James Ngugi, is a prolific and prominent Kenyan writer. He is the earliest writer from East Africa who has been widely read abroad. He started to write under the influence of Chinua Achebe and soon rose as the pioneer of the decolonization movement. His literary career is full of achievements. His first two novels, *Weep Not Child*(1964) and *The River Between*(1965) are celebrations of the past and fall under the cultural nationalist phase of the African novel. His fame is usually related to his third novel, *A Grain of Wheat*(1967) which is considered by critics as the missing piece of Kenyan history. The fourth novel, *Petals of Blood* (1977) shows that Ngugi's thinking has grown more radical. The novel criticizes contemporary Kenya, the corruption and inefficiency of bureaucracy and the failure of the government of Jomo Kenyatta. Ngugi's commitment to his people has led him to part ways with the metropolitan English and therefore choosing the mother tongue as the medium of communication with his people through fiction. He wrote three novels in Gikuyu *Devil on the Cross* (1981), *Matigari* (1987), and *Wizard of the Crow* (2006). These novels have been translated into English. Most of Ngugi's works are an amalgam of fable, folklore, orature, fact, fiction, satire and humor, all woven in a simple narrative, about the colonial and neocolonial history of Kenya focusing more on its workers and women.

Of all African writers, Ngugi wa Thiong'o is well known for his participation in the growth of African literature. Being considered by Shrikant Sawant as a pillar of postcolonialism and one of the well-known postcolonial critics, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's fame has extremely increased to the fact that scholars usually compare him with

American writers like John Steinbeck. He is one of the best African intellectuals to appear after colonialism. To the world of literature, philosophy and politics, Ngugi is still regarded as Kenya's gift. Formerly known as James Ngugi, he started writing when he was young to become Kenya's most important essayist, dramatist and a novelist. Consequently, critics believe that he is the foremost writer among East African writers in English to emerge after Kenya's independence in 1963.

Born in Limuru, Kimerithu of Kenya, on the 5th January, 1938, Ngugi wa Thiong'o is the fifth child of his father's four wives. Ngugi got his education at mission school and at Gikuyu independent school. Afterwards, he would attend the Alliance High School in 1955-1959, and Makerere University College in Kampala, Uganda, in 1959-1964. His fame is the aftermath of his serious criticism and the crucial thematic issues that his novels usually portray. Critics argue that Ngugi's fictional and non-fictional works function as a link between Africa's pioneers and the younger generation of postcolonial writers. In her book *African Literature as Political Philosophy*, professor MSC Okolo writes:

His works provide the strongest links with Kenya's political past and also cover the four major stages in the development of modern African writing in English: imperialist incursion into Africa; the entrenchment of the colonial rule and the foreign culture and the beginning of the anti-imperialist movement; revolt against imperialism and colonialism; and the post-independence period of disappointment. (36)

Ngugi's fiction is perceived as the true voice of the marginalized. Ngugi stands from the belief that Africans are chained and have suffered from the unfairness of colonialism and the postcolonial exploitations. Thus, his role in Kenyan society is evident; he must employ all his intellectual capacities to reverse the social hierarchies and bring his people to the top. Throughout his fictional and non-fictional works, he portrays the subalterns as being victimized while he aims to make their voices heard. His earlier fiction exhibits their distress during the colonial age. In his post-colonial fiction Ngugi accuses Kenya's élites. For him, Kenyan élites have betrayed the hopes of the masses. Besides, he portrays the new structure of Kenyan society which consists of two spheres; the bourgeoisie and the proletariats. This structure, he believes, is unfair and victimizes the workers, the peasants, and women.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o has always attempted to defend the concerns of women. He thinks that women have been respected in Kenya. Although women participated in the struggle against the British, following independence they are excluded and compelled to occupy the margins. Essentially, Kenyan society is known for its patriarchal order. Kenyan women witnessed oppression in the colonial and postcolonial ages. In *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*, Ngugi asserts that he often discussed women of "different careers, especially barmaids, secretaries and engineers, as well as different aspects of social life and bourgeois rivalry in Nairobi." (9)

Unique in its style and theme, Ngugi's novel shows women's endurance and courage. It also shows that they have been victims of male domination from time immemorial. Being the second and the weakest sex, women have always been looked down upon as objects of pleasure. The subjugation of women is sanctioned by the society itself. Though there have been movements protesting inequality, the condition of women remains the same. African women are the worst affected as they are exploited on the basis of race, class and gender. They are all victims of exploitation directly or indirectly either by the colonizers or by their own people. However, they fight back for their survival. Ngugi's novels show that it is men who cause the major problem to women. Women have been degraded because of the dominant control men had over social, cultural, and political domains.

Throughout his novels, Ngugi wa Thiong'o has brought out important issues related to women. Interviewed by Kenneth Parker on September 1982, Ngugi wa Thiong'o maintains that women in Kenya, as indeed in most African countries, "are often doubly, or even more than doubly, exploited and oppressed" (*Marxism Today* 34). In *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*, Ngugi wa Thiong'o asserts that because women are the most exploited and oppressed section of the entire working class, "I would create a picture of a strong determined woman with a will to resist and to struggle against the conditions of her present being" (10). Thus, it is apparent that Ngugi's concentration on the issue of gender and women's suffering is never done arbitrarily. He felt it necessary to create brave, resilient, resourceful and determined women in his fiction as they were the most exploited section of the entire working class. Thus, he portrays his female characters not only as mere objects of pleasure but also as powerful people with the determination, courage, and the will to survive. His novels are set against the background of Kenya's history and bring out the predicament of a woman in societal

and national problems. A close reading of his novels will clearly demonstrate how positively the writer projects his female characters and how he brings out both their strengths and weakness in their fight against their enemies

Ngugi's admiration for such women and their resistance to colonial oppression takes shape in all his novels in the form of the leading female characters. His motif in portraying the exploitation of women was to condemn the exploiters in society and prove that these women faced their problems boldly never succumbing to situation. Ngugi was not for distancing and objectifying women and so he gave them leading roles in his novels. In spite of exploitation and oppression, women in Ngugi's novel emerge victorious. They stand high above their male counterparts in spirit, determination, courage, endurance and self-reliance. He has done more than any other male African author in repositioning women in fiction. He has done even more than women writers. This achievement could be the result of his politics and his role as a sensitive needle which registers with varying degrees the tensions and conflicts of the subalterns. Even when his fiction seems to subordinate women, as the present thesis shows, Ngugi emphasizes women's courage, strength, ability, and integrity. His female characters suffer secondary roles in certain aspects, yet they are somewhat compensated.

The representation of women in Ngugi's novels conveys multiple socio-cultural and political messages. Women, being among the prominent groups of people who are oppressed either due to historical reasons or other socio-political factors, have become the subject of discussion in recent times. Despite the number of studies and researches that have been conducted as attempts to read Ngugi's criticism, most of these studies have dealt with the issues of history, identity and culture. Up to my knowledge, very few of the several studies that have been submitted have concentrated on women's marginality in Ngugi's fiction with regards to his literary-political commitment. The present study deals with the issue of gender and its political significance in Ngugi's fiction. It reveals the set of problems Kenyan women are surrounded by and puts forward the idea that Kenyan society, whether in the colonial or postcolonial, is patriarchal. Relying on the state of women and the politics of gender, the present study answers the following questions:

How does Ngugi wa Thiong'o represent the Kenyan female? Is the female body vital to Ngugi's criticism? Did women take any positive role in the anti-colonial

struggle? Does Kenya's independence bring any changes to Kenyan women? How do women in Kenya react against/to the fake promises of independence? By the time Ngugi came to produce his fictional works, decolonization was at hand. Why, then, do his Novels seem so pessimistic? Why are they read in the context of "arrested decolonization"? Why was Ngugi's engagement with women's concerns in his literary career so tentative? Why did not the coming of independence generate a celebratory narrative?

It is hoped that this study answers these questions to argue that the women's position in Kenya plays a crucial role in Ngugi's fight against colonialism and neo-colonialism. Women's oppression and the gender inequalities are the tools used by the author to argue that colonialism and neo-colonialism are two faces of the same coin. My intended contribution, throughout this study, is to argue that as far as women are put aside, denied and sexually abused, African freedom must be revised. The oppression of women is clear sign that hope has not yet been fulfilled. In other words, women must be taken into consideration and their dignity must be restored to form the union dictated by the martyrs and the Mau Mau fighters.

The present study offers a postcolonial-feminist reading of Ngugi's novels. It examines women's oppression and their reactions to the patriarchy in five selected novels by Ngugi wa Thiong'o. It analyses Ngugi's *Weep, Not Child* (1964), *The River Between* (1965), *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), *Petals of Blood* (1977), and *Devil on the Cross*(1980). Nevertheless, it also offers an extended commentary on Ngugi's plays, essays, and short stories to reach a comprehensive interpretation of his gender politics. Discussed from different theoretical angles that contribute to women studies, the present thesis is made to alert the ongoing female dilemma. Ngugi's representation of women subjugation requires an acquaintance with other modern and postmodern trends such as Marxism, Marxist-feminism, radical feminism, and womanism. Set within this multidisciplinary framework, the present work relates Ngugi's texts to his socio-political activism, Kenyan history, and Gikuyu anthropology. It differs significantly from the preceding studies on Ngugi in the sense that it investigates how narrative constructions of gender inequality are influenced by the author's anti-imperial vision.

Divided into three main parts, this thesis is made of an introduction, eight chapters, and a general conclusion. The general introduction is made to smoothly

introduce the reader to the main topic, research questions and the structure of the present scrutiny. The first part of the thesis consists of three chapters. The first chapter entitled “On African Literature, Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Post-Colonial Feminism” is an attempt to put the reader in the context within which Ngugi’s novels will be discussed. It sheds light on African literature, its features, historical foundation, and evolution. Further, it defines concepts like postcolonialism, feminism, postcolonial-feminism, and Womanism which construct a broad theoretical framework within which the overall research questions are investigated. Chapter two entitled “African Women’s Speech and the Constricted Throat: Exploring Women’s Role and Position in African Literature and Ngugi wa Thiong’o Major Works” is dedicated to the task of reviewing the related literature. It explores women’s position in literature both as writers and characters. Part of this chapter is dedicated to the task of summarizing Ngugi’s appreciation of women through his plays, short stories, and novels. This task has been achieved through reviewing most of the preceding researches that have been conducted on the female representation in Ngugi’s oeuvre. An author like Ngugi wa Thiong’o requires at least a whole chapter to trace the evolution of his thematic concerns. Thus, the third chapter entitled “Ngugi wa Thiong’o: The Revolutionary Author” is devoted to the task of revisiting Ngugi’s literary career and political activism. It is consistently concerned with historical, cultural, and political issues in his works. It aims to show the impact of history, culture, and the socio-economic problems on his writings. This chapter considers Ngugi as a prominent committed African author whose Marxist, Fanonist, and Feminist concerns place him as a promising Kenyan spokesman whose main task is to make the subaltern speak.

The selection of Ngugi’s five novels for analysis is deliberate. Since the main objective of the present thesis is considering women’s ordeals as Ngugi’s vehicle toward the re-assessment of independence, the researcher has chosen three novels that deal with their issues during the colonial phase and two novels recording their dilemma in post-*Uhuru* phase. The setting of *Weep Not, Child*, *The River Between*, and *A Grain of Wheat* is Kenya during the colonial era. *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross*’ main events are set in independent Kenya. Based on the setting of the novels, the practical side of the present thesis consists of two main parts. While the second part of this thesis is devoted to the analysis of women subordination and their double-oppression during

the colonial age, the third part examines their double-subjugation in the neo-colonial phase of Kenya.

Few thinkers have influenced contemporary feminist scholarship on the themes of power, sexuality, and the subject to the extent that Michel Foucault has. Foucault's writing on power and knowledge and the production of subjectivity has been profoundly influential, not least amongst feminist theorists who have extensively critiqued and developed his work and philosophy. Although feminists have engaged at length with his theories, Foucault himself never showed much interest in feminism or gender issues. According to Sandra Lee Bartky "Women, like men, are subject to many of the same disciplinary practices Foucault describes." (63). Bartky's comment is the main reason behind the choice of Foucault's philosophy as the framework of the fourth chapter. Chapter four entitled "The Panopticon of the Patriarchy in *Weep Not, Child*: Women under Competing Discourses of Power" offers a Foucauldian-Feminist reading of Ngugi's first published novel. The body is an over-determined site of power for feminists as well as for Foucault; a surface inscribed with culturally and historically specific practices and subject to political and economic forces. Relying on Foucault's notion of panopticism, this chapter takes up this conceptualization of power treats the account of self-surveillance offered by the model of the Panopticon as a compelling explanatory paradigm for women's acquiescence to, and collusion with, patriarchal standards of femininity. Two specific areas of Foucault's work are drawn on in this chapter: the discussion of disciplinary measures in *Discipline and Punish*, encompassing the subthemes of docile bodies, surveillance, and the normalizing gaze; and, in the same text, the thesis on Panopticonism-referring to Bentham's design for a prison that would leave prisoners perpetually exposed to view and therefore likely to police themselves. The competing discourses and the will to conquer that dominated Kenya in 1952-1960, setting of the novel, and the competition between the colonizer and colonized form a patriarchal order which like the panopticon imprisons and chains women who become docile bodies watching their double exploitation. The association of the female body with the land in the novel draws our attention to Ngugi's deliberate use of the female body as a metaphor of the nation under the colonial rule.

Chapter Five entitled "The Body Between: On Double Patriarchy and the Female Body in *The River Between*" deals with cultural clash and hybridity in the context of gender, and theorizes that power relations, in domestic space, are similar in

two different cultural environments. It examines the impact of the cultural-clash on women in early colonial Kenya. The central issue that this chapter attempts to read from a postcolonial-feminist angle is female circumcision. Set against Bhabha's problematic liminal-zone and Owofolabo Ajayi-Soyinka's term 'Double Patriarchy', this chapter sheds light on the pathetic position of female characters like Nyambura and Mothuni who fail to break the chains of the patriarchy inspite of their assertiveness and will to survive. It is intended to consider the Honia River as a symbol of the female body which is constricted between traditionalism and modernization of the nation through Christian faith. Concepts like cultural clash, mimicry, hybridity, and ambivalence are crucial to the critical reading of circumcision in the story.

Chapter Six entitled "Gendering History in *A Grain of Wheat*: Rehistoricizing Woman's Conflicted Figure" examines Ngugi's attempt to re-visit and re-write Kenyan history from a gender perspective. Based on Edith Sauer's claim that historians are blind to the power of gender, and Kathi Kern call for the creation of a new "feminist pedagogy" to substitute the discredited 'narrative' of history, this chapter examines Ngugi's contribution to gender studies through reintegrating the second sex in the pages of history. This chapter provides evidence of women's contribution and their central role in the struggle for independence. Besides, it sheds light on the fallen women who become sexual objects and are preyed upon by the British and Black men. Significantly, Ngugi reintegrates the second sex and makes their plight visible to put the question mark on *Harambee*.

Ngugi's post-colonial novels are known for their pessimistic tone. They record the agony and despair of the masses in the wake of capitalism and neo-colonialism. Chapter Seven entitled The Political Dimension of Alienation and Prostitution in *Petals of Blood* begins with Ngugi's Marxist criticism in *Petals of Blood*. As a champion of Marxist aesthetics, this chapter shows the extent to which the pen is mightier than a gun. The novelist accuses the new Kenyan rules for being responsible for degradation of women's situation. Capitalism and the new social order put women under a double subjugation. Based on themes of alienation and prostitution, this chapter proves that women in post-independent Kenya are doubly exploited both as a second sex, and second class.

Chapter Eight entitled “On *Uhuru* of Sexploitation and Women’s Rebellious Voice in *Devil on the Cross*” investigates images of ‘sexploited’ women who bear a double yoke. This chapter consists of two sections. While the first section deals with sexploitation of women by foreigners and local watchdogs, the second section tackles the rebellious voice of the heroine. The first section proves that sexploitation is the result of capitalism which does not yield to the end of colonialism. Hence, the rebellious voice of women in the novel is meant to establish a new social order. But, what kind of social order does Ngugi’s novel provide as a model?

The general conclusion sums up the main arguments and reveals how women’s plight is an essential element in Ngugi’s colonial and postcolonial novels.

# Part One

## Setting the Theoretical Background

African literature is an autonomous entity separate and apart from all other literatures. It has its own traditions, models and norms. Its constituency is separate and radically different from that of the European or other literatures. And its historical and cultural imperatives impose upon it concerns and constraints quite different. (Chinweizu et al, *Toward the Decolonization of the African Literature* 4)

# **Chapter One:**

## **On African Literature, Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Post-Colonial Feminism**

Literature does not grow or develop in a vacuum; it is given impetus, shape, direction and even area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society. The relationship between creative literature and these other forces cannot be ignored, especially against the glory background of European imperialism and its changing manifestations: slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism. (Ngugi, *Homecoming* xv)

### **1.1. Introduction**

In the last decade, African literature has become the interest of readers and critics. Books have been published to discuss the quality as well as the importance of this literature in the literary world. Yet, few questions remain still unanswered especially questions related to the nature of African literature, its origins and theoretical background. The nub of this chapter is put the reader in the context within which Ngugi's novels will be discussed. Hence, it is intended to begin with defining African literature relying on the sayings and arguments of the well known African critics mainly stemming from the works of Si Abderahmane Arab and Ali Marzui's whose definitions of African literature are trustworthy. Further, this chapter summarizes the major features and thematic concerns of postcolonial and postcolonial-feminism.

In his book *Introduction to Literary Studies*, Mario Klarer argues that in most cases, "literature is referred to as the entirety of written expression" (1). Any definition of African literature starts from the claim that it concerns itself with the African problems

dating back to the age of colonialism. Nevertheless, African literature has a very long history rooted in the continent's famous storytelling and performance traditions. Its linguistic traditions are ancient and date back to the Pharaonic Egypt, the Carthage of the Romans, the Sudanese empires, the Eastern Christian traditions of Ethiopia, the kingdoms of the Lakes region and southern Africa, and the Islamic heritage of West and Eastern Africa.

## **1.2. African Literature: Definitions and Features**

Essentially, African literature started to be known around the second half of the twentieth century when a group of African writers introduced the misery of the Africans during the colonial era. Simon Gikandi assumes that "it is only in twentieth century, especially its last half, that African literature became an institutionalized subject of study and debate in the institutions of education and interpretation" (xi). African literature refers to traditional oral and written literatures in Afro-Asiatic and African languages together with works written by Africans in European languages. In its oral and written forms, African literature has always been associated with the continent's drive for freedom from European domination and the search for the African identity.

Compared to Western literature, African literature is always regarded as being unique in its content and form. This uniqueness, however, is the result of numerous factors. In their book *Toward the Decolonization of the African Literature*, Chinweizu et al write:

African literature is an autonomous entity separate and apart from all other literatures. It has its own traditions, models and norms. Its constituency is separate and radically different from that of the European or other literatures. And its historical and cultural imperatives impose upon it concerns and constraints quite different. (4)

In his book *African Political Values and Educated Class in Africa*, Ali Al'Amin Marzui states that African literature has in fact, been "a meeting point between African creativity and African political activity at large" (9). Furthermore, Marzui demonstrates the rebellious and political aspects of African literature. He asserts that African literature works as a protest and political observation. In this respect, he writes:

The politics come in sometimes directly as protest. Here then you have art being invoked as a method of registering political grievance and asserting

militant objection. But there are occasions when the political component in African literature is merely an exercise in political observation and recording. (9)

In addition to its political tone, African literature has a long history which inspired a host of literary critics and historians.

### **1.3. The Evolution of African Literature**

In this chapter, it is intended to look at African literature from an angle that opposes the European view which evaluates and considers African literature as being new and lacking a literary history. In his book *Politics and the Novel in Africa*, Si Abderahmane Arab puts forth the assumption that African literature's birth was:

[a] response to the colonial situation, a response which is both cultural by the fact that it interprets its world in European terms and political as it is informed by a national stance. It is the permanent and fundamental antagonism between colonialism and the African revolution which forms the source and driving force of its modern literary creation in Africa. (5)

This statement, however, can be used as a reference when modern African literature is concerned. By the concept 'modern' the researcher means African literature in the age of colonialism. In this respect, it must be stated that like other literatures, African literature has a long history rooted in traditional and classical literary works that were recorded before the coming of the colonizer.

In their book *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature*, Simon Gikandi and F. Abiola Irele argue that:

African literature had, of course, been produced outside the institutions of colonialism: the existence of oral literature in all African languages and precolonial writing in Arabic, Amharic, Swahili, and other African languages is ample evidence of a thriving literary tradition in precolonial Africa. (379)

Critics who are interested in tracing the evolution of African literature believe that there are three distinct stages which marked its development. Accordingly, they have traced the various vicissitudes of the evolution and development of African literature: from oral literature, through pre-colonial literature, colonial literature, to post-colonial literature.

### 1.3.1. Pre-Colonial Literature: Oral literature

In point of fact, the term African literature covers Swahili literature, diasporic literature, central African literature, apartheid and Afrikaans literatures, Francophone Literature, Portuguese Literature, Amazigh and Arabic Literatures. Many attempts have been made to precise the exact history of African literature. In this respect, critics argue that writing in European languages began around the 18th century. Slave narratives began in the 18th century with writers like Olaudah Equiano, Quobna Ottobah Cuguanu, and Johannes Capitein who opposed slavery and domination. For a host of scholars, however, to maintain that African literature began in the 18th century would be a major misconception. Literary historians suppose that African literature has been for as long as Africans themselves have existed on the continent. An extensive reservoir of oral records has made this argument valid. These oral narratives came from over ten thousand small civilizations and societies that existed on the continent before colonialism.

Before writing developed as a system of signs, texts were passed orally. Most of the early classical and Old English epics like ‘Beowulf’ were orally narrated and later preserved in written form. The richness of Africa, culturally speaking, is the result of the different tribes and ethnic groups. Generally speaking, there was a transition from an oral to literate culture in societies that did not have a written script before the arrival of colonialists. Africans inherited centuries-old collections of legendary stories and poems that passed down from one generation to another by mouth. Critics argue that African literature encompasses oral records and written documents. Oral literature is basically the art of verbal story-telling. It was the Ugandan scholar Pio Zirumu who first coined the term ‘orature’ to mean oral literature. It includes local proverbs, riddles, songs of praise, mythical, and legendary stories. Horst Zander argues that many of the significant features of traditional African societies “appear as central characteristics in their literature, and further particularities of that literature are as a result of its orality as such” (*Fact-Fiction-“Faction”* 171). In this respect, Anthony West (1953) argues that in reading Tutuola Amos’ first novel *The Palm Wine Drinkard*, ‘One catches a glimpse of the very beginning of literature, that moment when writing at last seizes and pins down the myths and legends of analphabetic culture [i.e. a non-literate culture: a ‘culture without an alphabet’]’ (qtd in Talib 57)

It is extremely important to know that there is hardly any occasion or activity in traditional African life that is not accompanied by songs or chants. Thus, the historical and cultural background plays a significant role in understanding the form and content of the oral traditions. Essentially, since oral literature blends myth with reality with an attempt to create a timeless impression, Parker and Rathbone admit that oral traditions were too demanding and far from being easy and straight forward. In this view, they write:

Oral Traditions... were far from straight forward. They were generated within particular cultures and strongly shaped by local aesthetic preferences, with narratives often advancing by way of spiritual or magical transformation rather than incremental chronological change. (58)

In African oral traditions, long narratives are usually in poetic form. Critics maintain that Orature was a medium of societal education and entertainment. Accordingly, Joseph George asserts that:

...traditionally, Africans do not radically separate art from teaching. Rather, they write or sing for beauty in itself, African writers, taking their cue from oral literature, use beauty to help communicate important truths and information to society. Indeed, an object is considered beautiful because of the truths it reveals and the communities it helps to build. (qtd in Gordon & Gordon 304)

According to Zander, oral literature does not present individualized or three-dimensional characters. Indeed, it celebrates the community spirit and rejects individualism. Oral art, therefore, focuses on society rather than on the individual.

Oral records have persisted in written literature. While some critics may see writing as a linguistic advance, some South African writers did not appreciate manuscript. They believe that “written literature violated one of the most important literary tenets by privatizing literature” (Talib 16). African writers still estimate oral traditions in their writings. This positive attitude towards orality is shared by a number of critics. West African scholars like Chinweizu and Madubuike claimed that critics of African literature “should be more mindful of the importance of Oral traditions in Africa and their contributions to the development of modern African literature” (qtd. in Talib 75). The Ghanaian poet Kofi Ayidoho asserts that “the fundamental impulse of my work derives from the oral poetic tradition” (Wilkinson 8). The Nigerian critic Izevbaye (1974) argues that:

The oral tradition is an important background to the literature because it is the first experience of literature for most Nigerians. Although the oral form of transmitting literature exists in all cultures it is more alive and more strongly felt in a country like Nigeria than in countries with longer histories of literacy. It is therefore more often treated by writers as the primary, though not necessarily more accessible, literary tradition. (qtd. in Talib 60)

The rise of the script in Africa does not mean the end of orality. Instead this cultural tradition continues to be vibrant and, thus, has become a vital aspect of African literature. The Ugandan poet Okot P'Bitek's poetry is a good example to explain this influence. Aspects of orality are found in contemporary African poetry and fiction. Therefore, writing is not separate from orality. Edouard Glissant describes this relation as "the complex union of writing and orality" (qtd in Talib 59). Ngugi wa Thiong'o's novels and plays can be cited as far as this complex union is concerned. In an interview about his novel *Devil on the Cross* and his play *Matigari Ma Njruungi*, Ngugi explains that neither work remains as written literature but both have been appropriated into the oral tradition of the language. In another interview Ngugi explains how *Devil on the Cross* and *Ngaahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want)* have been read as part of the Gikuyu oral traditions:

Now the reception of the novel and the play was really fantastic because they—particularly the novel—were read in buses, in *matatũs*, ordinary taxis; they were read in homes; workers grouped together during the lunch hour or whenever they had their own time to rest and would get one of their literate members to read for them. So in fact the novel was appropriated by the people and made part and parcel of their oral tradition. (qtd in Taib 61)

### **1.3.2. Colonial Literature: Literature of Protest/ Combat**

African literature's corpus is vast and varied, but there are two impulses or currents in African creative works of which we might make special notes: the reclaiming of the voice and subjectivity and the critique of the abusive power. As noted previously, African literature attempts to reclaim the Negro's voice and oppose the abusive colonial power. Late in 1951, an Unknown Nigerian writer with six years of primary school education submitted the manuscript of his first novel to the British publishing house of Faber and Faber. That manuscript entitled *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* was accepted as authored by Amos Tutuola. In this respect, he became the first African novelist to gain extensive exposure among Western Literary audiences.

One of the most persistent themes in African literature is the impact of colonialism on the local society. Colonialism has always been considered as an important step in the rise of African literature and the African novel. Critics believe that modern African literature appeared during the last decade of colonialism. Modern East African literature came into being in the late 1950s and early 1960s as an attempt to account for the process of colonialism and its consequences.

Indeed African literature's boom is the result of being a response to the colonial legacy. The text in Africa during colonialism was a sort of protest and combat. In the 1950s and early 1960s, the moment when nations in Africa gradually stood to achieve their decolonization, literature was also used as a rebellious means. Polemicists, novelists, poets, and essayists proved that the pen was/is mightier than the sword. Following the rise of revolution and the verbal declaration of independence, a new type of poetry and fiction appeared. Being highly didactic and committed, African poetry and fiction, in that period, encouraged teaching and preaching against the colonizer. Eileen Julien argues that African narrative was born "in protest against history and myths constructed with the colonial enterprise" (297).

According to Birago Diop "[t]ruth depends not only on who listens but on who speaks' (qtd in Julien 295). The true African image, therefore, depends on the African writer who speaks about the continent. As a matter of fact, the first African texts attempted to correct the false images and the stereotypical representations of Africans by Europeans in the nineteenth century literature. Michael Parker and Roger Starkey argue that "European colonists and earlier generations of European writers, of course, had regarded vast regions of the world merely as blank spaces, lands 'without narratives', waiting to be mapped, mined, written into existence" (*Postcolonial Literatures*3). Particularly since the Second World War, Edward Said once argues, "there has been a massive intellectual, moral and imaginative overhaul and deconstruction of western representation of non-Western world" (Parker and Starkey 3). As a good example, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a response to the one-sided representations of Africans by British and other European writers such as Joseph Conrad, Pierre Loti, and Joyce Kilmer. The aim was/is to oppose the European view which suggests that the African past, before colonialism, was but one long 'night of savagery'.

The intellectual war against the colonizer was waged by a body of anti-colonial

writers. Those writers tackled themes like colonial injustices, the effects of colonialism on the culture and traditions of the natives, liberation, political independence and cultural emancipation. Being sharper in its content, African literature in the colonial period has been named the literature of protest. Some critics call it the literature of combat. In his book *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon assumes that this literature (literature of combat):

Calls on the whole people to fight for their existence as a nation...it moulds the national consciousness, giving it form and contours and flinging open before it new boundless horizons; it is a literature of combat because it assumes responsibility , and because it is the will to liberty expressed in terms of time and space. (193)

The condemnation of the colonial injustice is the ultimate theme of the literature of protest. Poetry played a significant role in criticizing the colonizer and displaying the image of sufferance the Africans lived by. The temper is found in the Portuguese-language poetry of Agostinho Neto. In essence, Simon Gikandi assumes that the best African poets have not written odes, elegies and sonnets. Instead they have invented new models to embody their reactions to modern life. Further, a very particular strain of anti-colonialist poetry is the French language tradition known as *negritude*. Within the tradition of protest, *Negritude* poetry was first launched in 1930's Paris, "in the climate of modernism, surrealism, and jazz" (Julien 297). Negritude poets felt that their first duty is the affirmation of the culture from which they had been alienated. Accordingly, the aim was to restore the African civilization and introduce it to the Africans first, and then to the New World.

The term 'colonialist literature' is usually used as a reference to the literature produced during the colonial period. By this, it is meant that it refers to those literary works which tackled the issue of colonialism and its injustices. Colonialist texts appeared as reactions to the praxis and orientation of colonialism. Further, the body of some colonialist texts tackled the pre-colonial and early colonial periods. A good example to mention is Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Colonial African literature was produced under the imperial license. Thematically, Europeans did not appreciate the African novel for its subversive nature. As a matter of fact, any publication of dissemination of works was controlled by imperial ruling class. Thus, Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin argued that African literature at this level "comes into being within the

constraint of a discourse and institutional practices of patronage system which...undercuts their assertion of a different perspective.” (*The Empire Writes Back* 6)

Modern African literature takes its cue from works of authors like Thomas Mofolo. During the colonial reign, names like Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Ferdinand Oyono, Camara Laye, and others contributed to the task of making the African voice heard. Their primary assignment, as far as literary commitment is concerned, was to fight, combat, and interrogate the colonialist literature and epistemology which articulate and justify the moral authority of the colonized, and posit the inferiority of the native as metaphysical fact. These authors, Ogungbesan (1978) argues, were content to affirm the worth of African civilization. In this respect, Ogejuru claims that in this period, African literature was “full of/ based on its writer’s desire to rediscover and uphold African traditional values” (3).

In essence, the African writers eventually emerged from the fight as the vanguards. According to Chinua Achebe, the ultimate goal was to inform the world that “African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans... They had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty and dignity” (‘The Role of the Writer in the New Nation’ 158). That was the literary tradition during the colonial age. During the 1960s most of African countries gained their independence. This socio-political change had a great impact on thematic concerns of African literature.

### **1.3.3. Postcolonial African Literature: Literature of Denunciation/ Inward Criticism**

Following independence African literature has changed its shape and thematic concerns. It is said that even after independence, African authors carried the political aspect of African literature in their works. The core of postcolonial literature is the disastrous situation which dominated the continent. A good African text is the one that questions the new phase. The best example is found in the works of the Ghanaian famous writer Ayi Kwei Armah. In his satirical fictional works, Armah summarizes some features of postcolonial African novel which is made to question the African waste land:

How long will Africa be cursed with its leaders? There were men dying from the loss of hope, and others were finding gaudy ways to enjoy power they did not have. We were ready here for big and beautiful things, but what we had

was our own black men hugging new paunches scrambling to ask the white man to welcome them onto our backs. These men who were to lead us out of our despair, they came like men already grown fat and cynical with the eating of centuries of power they had never struggled for, old before they had even been born into power, and ready only for the grave.... (*The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* 80-1)

The above citation is from Ayi Kwei Armah's magnum opus *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. Armah is among the best African writers who contributed to the escalation of African literature following independence. His pen has always been devoted to the socio-political illnesses that dominated Ghana and Africa. Likewise, Ngugi, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and others mirror and reflect the impact of the colonial experience on Africans at the socio-political, cultural, and economic levels.

The second half of the twentieth century is a turning point in the African history. The anti-colonial struggle was fruitful and Africans got rid of the chains of colonialism. More importantly, during the years that preceded independence a sense of hope and optimism dominated the continent. On the first days of independence a sense of euphoria and joy also dominated the continent. Africans have finally realized their dream. Nevertheless, the sense of happiness and joy turned into a sense of disaster and despair. Accordingly, the situation in Africa has become more turbulent and unbearable for the natives.

Post-independence era marked a new page in the history of African literature. The period since 1960's is precisely the era which witnessed the most extensive flowering of written literature in Africa. A reservoir of nationalist writers was created from which new talented authors emerged. Moreover, an expanding pool of potential readers of African literature came into being. The novel has become the most basic form of creative literature in this period.

Critics maintain that following independence, African literature has reached its highest peak. The new combat with the disastrous situation which dominated the continent has become its core and was the main reason behind naming it "the literature of denunciation". Known as the literature of inward-criticism or literature of self-criticism, this new African literature has become sharper and extremely committed. The largest literary space in Africa is devoted to expression of disillusionment with independent Africa.

There have been some attempts to claim whether or not African literature

following independence can be read as an extension of the colonial literature. The debate on the nature of postcolonial African literature and its relation to the colonial era is of graver import. A number of critics argue that African literature can never be discussed far from the context of colonialism and its aftermath. In her article entitled “The end of the Single Story? The Post-colonial African Novel and Society”, Anna Pöysä writes:

However, my argument is that in order to grasp the social dimension of literature some other concepts are required too. Perhaps African postcolonial literature could be read as a continuum that starts from anticipating the liberation movements, then reflects on the independence and the situation after that, in which the unequal power relations still exist, and in this situation searches for liberation from these relations. This way to see African literatures could also enhance the view of it as an independent literature, which would not be read through the relationship between the (ex-) colonizer and the (ex-) colonized. (16)

In point of fact, Postcolonial African literature is hardly discussed outside its contemporary socio-political problems. Essentially, Postcolonial African literature continues to be a mirror of the society that shows the extent to which people on the entire continent are trapped in a tremendously serious socio-economic crisis. Hence, Chidi Amuta states that:

...it is indisputable that national history and national social experience furnish a thematic quarry and an ideology imperative in the context of which African writers have been working, especially in the postcolonial period. Individual African writers have consistently testified to this fact in both their polemical utterances and literary creativity. (62-3)

Literature of denunciation is an expression of the continent’s social changes. African writers have become more concerned with their colonial past and their present history of decadence. It is noteworthy to mention that the most serious changes Africa had been subjected to since the colonial rule is cultural and political. Within this cultural and socio-political context, Ali Marzui summarizes the major concerns of postcolonial African literature as follows:

... the clash between Africa's past and present, between tradition and modernity, between indigenous and foreign, between individualism and community, between socialism and capitalism, between development and self-reliance and between Africanity and humanity. (qtd. in Adetuyi & Adeniran 24)

Following the chronological order, it becomes more evident that Post-colonial African literature is often devoted to the consequences of colonialism. Thematically, Postcolonial African literature is not only bound to discuss the seven conflicts mentioned previously. However, these conflicts have been discussed frequently and are revealed in a number of literary texts. Other themes like assimilation, racism, lack of education and dual identity of the mixed people dominate some texts. More importantly, the postcolonial African text betrays its author's desire to find a way of escape. Authors use their novels to argue that the colonial rule is ended, yet the mission has not yet been fulfilled and that the road is too long.

#### **1.4. The Postcolonial African Text as a Tool of Resistance and Emancipation**

As a matter of fact, the very large corpus of African novels in both English and French has been one of the very important literary developments in the last two decades. The emergence of a well-educated élites resulted in a number of literary works that were designed to express the strength, validity, and beauty of African life and culture. Earliest novels of Camara Laye, Tutuola, and Chinua Achebe attempted to argue that Africa has a culture she could be proud of. The earliest novels had a distinctly sociological bias. A central theme to African literature during and following colonialism is the call for resistance and liberation. It is a theme that has been discussed in a number of texts. To begin with, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is among the first texts to reveal the trauma which followed Africa's encounter with Europe. Within the context of tradition and modernity, the past and the present, the novel displays how Umofia represents the traditional side of the Ibo society. Meanwhile, Achebe exposes the social change that Nigeria underwent during the early colonial rule. The tragic end of the novel, undoubtedly, is the result of the cultural clash that followed the natives' acceptance of European traditions and norms. Hence, Achebe is among the first authors to draw readers' attention to the cultural clash and the crisis of identity through fictional works.

In essence, the political tone of the African novel and its themes are usually interpreted in relation to African authors' role. Aschroft et al argue that what really makes African literature different from European literature or American one is its "insistence on the social role of the African artist and the denial of the European

preoccupation with individual experience” (*The Empire Writes Back* 125). African writers usually abandon individualism and embark on a literary journey by which they take their social responsibility. Jameson believes that authors like Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Ousmane Sembène use their literary works to prove that they “have a passion for change and social regeneration which has not yet found its agents” (81). Similarly, Chinua Achebe argues:

[t]he writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done. I for one would not wish to be excused. I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past – with all its imperfections – was not one long night of savagery. (45)

A well-made novel, Arnold Kettle argues, is the one whose essential prerequisites should be ‘life’ and ‘pattern’ (qtd. in Palmer x). Not very far from this context, African novel is usually devoted to the study of life in Africa. African novel’s thrust is extremely based on the experience of African life from its past to its actual present. Besides, it gives much importance to the physical realities and human experience with forces he cannot control.

Contemporary African fiction abandons the past and sheds light on the ‘now-reality’. Hence, Wole Soyinka avows that the African writer “needs an urgent release from fascination of the past” in order to fulfill his duty as “the record of the modes and experience of his society as the voice of vision in his own time” (qtd. in Olney23). It is Achebe who better summarizes the role of the African novelist in the wake of a number of social problems in Africa. Achebe’s belief is based on the idea that “most of Africa today is politically free...Thirty-six independent African states managing their own affairs sometimes very badly. A new situation has thus arisen. One of the writer’s functions has always been to expose and attack injustice... (“The Back Writer’s Burden” 138). Therefore, Achebe believes that the black novelist lifts the burden “to express our thought and feeling, even against ourselves, without anxiety that what we say will be taken in evidence against our race.” (139)

Independence is a turning point in the history of Africa. Life has enormously changed. The black man has finally realized his dream of ruling the country by his own. Nevertheless, the new ruler appeared to be much intolerant and unjust. Most of African rulers proved that they have been faithful to their masters from the West. They occupied an intermediary position where they would serve them. This led to the rise of the neo-

colonial era. They have brought back the colonial rule indirectly. In this respect, they have exacerbated and aggravated the masses' situation. This is the reason why Postcolonial African literature describes and interrogates post-independence problems in Africa.

Out of the socio-political change which took place in Africa, African writers produced a number of literary works known for their pessimistic tones. Thematically, African novel is known for its disillusionment that pounces upon the current realities like civil war in Nigeria or ruthless suppression by the politicians of their own race color and apartheid in South-African nation. African novel, more importantly, coincides with the socio-political upheavals. Some of the works in this phase include *A Man of the People* (1996) by Achebe, *The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born* (1969) by Armah, *Petals of Blood*(1986) by Ngugi; plays like *Once Upon Four Robbers* (1980) and *Morountodun* (1982) by Osofisan, *Madmen and Specialists* (1971) by Soyinka, *The State Visit* (2002) by Osundare, *Today is not Forever* (2008) by Agbool aOlatunji and poetic works like *Village Voices* (1984) by Niyi Osundare. These works, describe Africa in its worse situation in spite of independence. The aim of African authors is to interrogate the social problems and attain the real freedom. Thus, African novel, in this case, works as a means of emancipation and awakening. To conclude, Bernth Lindfors observes a more significant and recent developments in African fiction and states that “few writers seek to transcend the chaos of the present by using the experience of the past to examine Africa’s prospects for the future. History thus, serves as an aid to prophecy, not just as a means of reconstructing a lost heritage.”(“Negritude and After: Responses to Colonialism and Independence in African Literature” 25)

## **1.5. Postcolonial Theory: Meaning and Significance**

Essentially, understanding a poem, a novel, or a play requires having an idea about the context of the text. Nevertheless, reading the context is not enough to fully understand the text. By the term context, the researcher means the author’s biography and the surrounding events or circumstances that led the author to raise his pen and write. There are other strategies that any literary reader is bound to take into consideration whenever he comes to decode the meaning of the short story, the novel, or the play. There is no literary text that can be read far from the literary school that its writer belongs to. In reading Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, for instance, one is

obliged to understand the principles of *realism* since the text is perceived as the first realistic novel which depicts life verisimilarly.

In actual fact, scholars define literary theory as a set of ideas and methods that readers use in the practical reading of literature. It simply refers to theories that reveal what literature means. To argue, one may say that it is the literary theory which formulates the relationship between the author and his work. To make it clear, literary theory develops the importance and significance of race, class, and gender for a literary reading, both from the angle of the biography of the author and the thematic reading of the text itself. Etymologically, the concept ‘theory’, from Greek ‘theoria’, indicates a view or a perspective. This is exactly what literary theory offers, through specific theories to present a complete system for decoding the meaning of a particular literary text. Additionally, literary theory in recent years has sought to explain the extent to which the text is more the product of a culture than an individual author and in turn how those texts help to create the culture. In *Feminist Frameworks* Alison Jaggar and Paula Rothenberg suggest the following regarding theory:

A theory offers a general account of how a range of phenomena are systematically connected; by placing individual items in a larger context, it increases our understanding both of the whole and of the parts constituting the whole. Theory is a systematic, analytic approach to everyday experience. (54)

Like any other literature, African literature is better understood through literary theory. Since it emerged as a reaction to the cultural legacy of colonialism, African literature is regarded as applying and addressing themes and concerns that form the core of postcolonial theory. African novelists, poets, or playwrights discuss and criticize the colonial legacy just like postcolonial thinkers do. To better understand Ngugi’s or Achebe’ texts, the reader’s major task is to gather ideas and information about postcolonial theory which critics perceive as the key to facilitate the grasping of African writer’s mentality, philosophy, and his socio-political commitment.

### **1.5.1. Postcolonial Theory: Definition**

In recent years, postcolonial theory has gained an enormous reputation. It has taken its well-established place with theories like Marxism, feminism, psychoanalysis and post-structuralism as a major critical discourse in the humanities. There have been many attempts to define postcolonialism in terms of its origins, relation to colonialism

and independence, thematic concerns, and its relevance as far as Third World and contemporary literatures are concerned. Etymologically, the term postcolonial or post-colonialism is used as a reference to the period that followed colonialism. The term postcolonial was first used by historians as a reference to the post World War II era. In literature, however, the name has been introduced in the 1970s and early 80s as a name of a new literary school.

In essence, Postcolonialism or post-colonialism designates a broad, postmodern intellectual discourse that has renovated the perception and understanding of modern history, cultural studies, political theories and literary criticism. By definition, postcolonial aesthetic is an interdisciplinary field fusing a set other theories found among the texts and sub-texts of literature, philosophy and political science. In this respect, in *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* Leela Ghandi assumes that this theory “emerged both as a meeting point and a battleground for a variety of disciplines and theories” (3). Scholars associate its birth with the publication of Edward Said’s book *Orientalism* in 1978. The school has since gained an astonishing reputation among literary readers and scholars. This reputation, Sawant assumes, is the fruitful outcome of works of “writers like Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Edward Said, Bill Ashcroft and his collaborators, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Aijaz Ahmad and others.” (120)

Postcolonial theory emerged from the colonial testimony of third world countries and the discourse of *minorities*. It is widely acknowledged that it emerged as a retort and reaction to the cultural legacy of colonialism. Ashcroft et al maintain that postcolonial theory appeared “from the inability of European theory” to deal effectively with the challenges and varied cultural provenance of postcolonial writing (11-13). It is a theoretical procedure used to interpret, read and critically analyze the cultural practices of colonialism. It focuses on the question of race within colonialism and shows how the optic of race enables the colonial powers to represent, reflect and make visible native cultures in inferior ways. The theory began with the assumption that colonial writings, art, legal system, science and other socio-cultural practices are always radicalized and unequal where the colonizer does the representation and the native is represented. In his book *The Location of Culture* Homi Bhabha argues that postcolonial criticism “bears witness to the unequal and universal forces of cultural representation” that are involved in a constant competition for political and economic control in the contemporary world.

Moreover, Bhabha (1994) sees postcolonial critique emerging from colonial experiences and the discourses of minorities. In this respect, he writes:

Postcolonial criticism bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order. Postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of “minorities” within the geopolitical divisions of East and West, North and South. They intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic “normality” to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, race, communities, peoples. (171)

Postcolonial theory develops its criticism around the social histories, cultural differences and the political discrimination that are dictated and imposed by the colonial machineries. In this respect, Robert Young asserts in his book *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* that the theory is concerned with the history of colonialism “only to the extent that history has determined the configurations and power structures of the present.” (67). It also recognizes the anti-colonial movement as a source and driving force for its political inspiration. Therefore, postcolonialism can be defined as ‘a dialectical discourse’ which broadly marks the historical facts of decolonization to allow people of inferior rank reclaim their sovereignty. In words of Young, “it gives them a negotiating space for equity.” (67)

Robert Young assumes that postcolonial theory appeared as a ‘political discourse’ rising mainly from the experiences of oppression, persecution, and the struggles for freedom after the ‘tricontinental’ awakening in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Philosophically, Young believes, this theory is made not to declare war on the past, but its primary task is to declare war against the present realities which result from that past. It is, therefore, a theoretical retort to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath. It has been argued that postcolonial theory is devoted to the academic task of re-visiting, Re-membling, and crucially interrogating the colonial and the pre-colonial past. The ultimate objective is to shed light on imperialism and its agents (international and local) that are still enforced through political, economic and social exploitation in post-independent nations.

## 1.6. Post-colonialism/ Postcolonialism: Does the Hyphen Make Any Difference?

For a cohort of critics the term Postcolonialism did not exist before 1970's. The term came into being following independences. However, features of postcolonialism existed within anti-colonial literary works of the 1950's and 1960's. In his book *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, Neil Lazarus writes:

Post-colonial (or —postcolonial- the American variant), in these usages from the early 1970s, was a periodising term, historical and not an ideological concept. It bespoke no political desire or aspiration, looked forward to no particular social or political order. Erstwhile colonial territories that had been decolonized were —postcolonial states. It was as simple as that. (2)

It is noted that the term 'postcolonialism' is replete with contradictions. In his article 'Postcolonialism: An Aesthetic of Subversion and Reclamation', D.P. Digole argues that:

[I]t has a plentitude of connotations and/or significations that can denote a historical transition, a dying colonialism, an achieved epoch, a *weltanschauung* (world-view), a cultural location, an extension of anti-colonial movements, a theoretical stance or a critical practice and so on" (128).

Commenting on the term, Timothy Brenann (2007) puts forth the claim that the term survived in part because it successfully euphemized harsher terms like imperialism or racism in professionally respectable academic environments" (132). In this sense, the Indian Marxist-theorist and political commenter Ahmed Aijaz (1995) asserts that "postcolonial is simply a polite way of saying not white, not Europe or perhaps not Europe-but-inside-Europe." (qtd. in Lazarus 211)

According to Shrikant B. Sawant, like deconstruction and other postmodern approaches, "postcolonialism is a heterogeneous field of study where even its spelling provides several alternatives" (120). Slemon (1995) maintains that one of the most "vexed areas of debate within the field of postcolonial theory has to do with the term 'postcolonial' itself" ("Post-Colonial Critical Theories" 179). There is much debate and discontent about the way in which the concept 'postcolonialism' or post-colonialism' has entered the lexicon of colonial and postcolonial discourses. It must be stated that critics have noticed that the prefix 'post' signifies two different meanings in one compound word. Critics like Aschroft et al, Slemon, Young, and Moore have discussed

this issue. The debate ranges from whether ‘post-colonial’ should be hyphenated to the very legitimacy of the term as well as its currency in the academy.

The hyphenated and non-hyphenated terms are not always used consistently which fuel the debate regarding the very nomenclature. Critics are not on the agreement on whether the term should be used with or without the hyphen. The hyphenated term ‘post-colonial’ marks a historical period as suggested by phrases like ‘after colonialism’ or ‘after independence’. It tends to refer to the historical period after a nation has officially gained its independence. Ashcroft Bill, Griffith and Tiffin assume that ‘the semantic basis of the term post-colonialism’ might seem to suggest a concern only with the national culture after the departure of imperial power” (*The Empire Writes Back* 1).

According to Moore, many critics prefer the term “postcolonial” without a hyphen because it is less “suggestive of (imagined) chronological or ideological supersession” (*Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*182). The unhyphenated ‘postcolonialism’ refers to the features of a society or a culture from the time of decolonization to the present day. The non-hyphenated term designates libratory and oppositional responses to colonialism more broadly than the hyphenated term. Commenting on the term ‘postcolonial’, George P. Landow argues that this term is the best we can find to fit the context of reading, analyzing, and studying all aspects of formerly colonized nations. In this respect, he writes:

Terms like postcolonial or —Victorian are always open-ended: they are never answers, and they never end a discussion, they begin it...The purpose of using postcolonial as a label is that it provides a practicable, convenient means of discussing texts and other matters that interest us. (*Why I Use The Term Postcolonial* 3)

Likewise, Digole argues that ‘postcolonialism’ “denotes the consequences of colonialism from the time of its first impact” (129). Indeed, it refers to the unrepresentable in the colonial: racial differences, legal inequality, subalternity and all of the submerged or suppressed contradictions within the colonial social order itself.

### **1.7. The Historical Foundation of Postcolonial Theory/Literature**

Postcolonialism comprises methods of intellectual discourses that present analyses of imperialism that draw from different post-modern schools of thought. The

field has been gaining prominence since the 1970s. Although its features existed in literary texts that were written during the colonial epoch, some critics would date its rise to the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978. Further, the school can be discussed within the postmodern context since its philosophy is the rejection of *logocentrism* while examining the binary oppositions.

### 1.7.1. Edward Said's Contribution

Theories of colonial discourses have been very influential in the evolution of postcolonialism. It is claimed that the postcolonial discourse was the result of several authors such as Aimé Césaire, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, Aijaz Ahmad and others. Essentially, their works explore the modes of representations and perceptions that were fundamentally used as tools by the colonizer to keep the colonized subservient to the colonial rule. Yet, no writer has been as influential as Edward Said in developing the theory. It has been claimed that Edward Said played a vital role in the emergence of Postcolonial theory. Robert Young argues that Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and Edward Said represent the 'Holy Trinity' of Postcolonialism.

If the origin of postcolonial aesthetics lies in Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), its theory is found in Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). By definition Orientalism is a "Western style for dominating, restructuring having authority over orient" (Said 3). The term refers to the false images and the myths about the Eastern which have been constructed in Western discourses including literature. It is based on the idea that the Western is superior to the Eastern. Said began his research of what he calls 'Orientalizing project' of the west by claiming that "as much as the west itself, the Orient (referring to the middle east) is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West" (3). According to Ania Loomba, Said argues that "the representation of the orient in European literary texts, travelogues and other writings contributed to the creation of a dichotomy between Europe and its 'other' (*Colonialism/Postcolonialism* 44)

Said's *Orientalism* is a courageous reaction to Imperialism and its fake promises. In her book *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*, Leela Ghandi (1998) argues that "*Orientalism* is the first book in which Said relentlessly unmasks the ideological disguises of imperialism" (67). Western attitude towards Orientalists is

based on ignorance of Eastern culture and literature. As a matter of fact, Europeans imposed their culture, and literature on the colonized through means of education and literature. One of Edward Said's objectives in his book is to show how knowledge about the Orient was part of the colonial domination. Additionally, through his book, Said puts forth the assumption that Westerners were wrong to treat the Eastern as inferior both intellectually and culturally. The West has always misrepresented the East as a mystic place of exoticism, moral laxity, and sexual degeneracy. In Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* for instance, Africa is described as a land of wilderness, decadence, savagery, and cannibalism. These images, Edward Said believes, often result from the West's dreams and fantasies.

In *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Michel Foucault studies and analyzes the origins of discourses, knowledge, and disciplinary boundaries. In essence, Foucault's influence on Edward Said is understood through his example of the relationship between what is called 'the excavator' of knowledge and 'the excavated'. By the excavated Foucault meant humans or concepts that are subjects of the excavation. Foucault observes that what is noted about a subject is usually observed and noted from the outside, rather than noted from the inside. Thus, he terms this disconnect between the excavator and the subject "exteriority".

Foucault explains that a characteristic of the enunciative function is that "the analysis of statements treats them in the system form of exteriority" (120). This means that when someone analyzes a statement or a discourse, one is outside that statement or discourse. Therefore, any analysis of someone's culture by someone who is outside that culture would not be objective enough to count as analytical. In this respect, Foucault assumes that a reliable analysis requires objectivity and a close-distance as two essential parameters.

Foucault's 'exteriority' serves Said's research on the Orientalist project. To begin with, Said noticed that the Orientalist discourse was created by some Eurocentric philologists who interpreted culture and language of the East. Accordingly, he maintains that this discourse developed out of a large body of "imaginative and travel literature" (99). In this respect, a question that comes to mind is: To what extent is it possible to understand a group of which one is not a member? Taking into account the Orientalist discourse, one is able to ask: to what extent is it possible to represent a given people's culture by someone who is not a member of? In *Orientalism*, Said puts forth his claim

that Western philologists mis-represented the Orient. Thus, a question that needs to be asked is: Is it possible to be objectively represented by someone who is not Orient?

A term that accompanies exteriority in Foucault's book is interiority. He describes it as an attempt to 're-do, in the opposite direction, the work of expression: to go back from statements preserved through time and dispersed through space, towards the interior secret that preceded them, and is betrayed by them' (121). In essence, Said enacts Foucault's method of returning to interiority. Unraveling the discourse that was created out of a racist discrimination and misunderstanding, Said aims at de-orientalizing the Orient. He believes that as a judge of the Orient, "the modern Orientalist does not, as he believes and even says, stand apart from it objectively" (104). He further claims that "his Orient is not the Orient as it is, but the Orient as it has been Orientalized" (104). He seems to be suggesting that there are two Orients. The real Orient as it exists to be known by its own parameters of consciousness and knowing and the second Orient, the Orient created by and through the above mentioned 'tradition of thought, imagery and vocabulary' of the west. A key postulation in Said's book is that the Orientalizing project is possible because of the hierarchy of power in which the west was on the top. He claims that the occident orientalized the Orient because "could be - that is, submitted to being - made Oriental" (25). In this respect, "European culture gained the strength and identity by getting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self." (25)

Drawing upon Michel Foucault's work on discursive formation, Said argues that texts "can create not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe. In time such knowledge and reality produce a tradition, or what Michel Foucault calls a discourse" (*Orientalism* 94). The Orient, Said claims, exists as a discursive formation, one which is subject to the whims and fancies of those exterior to it. Shrikant Sawant claims that Said's major task is to "do away the binary opposition between the west and the east so that one cannot claim the superiority over the other" (123). Accordingly, his magnum opus *Orientalism* offers an opportunity for the Orient to emancipate himself from the imposition of his imposed definition. D.P Digole argues that through this book, "Said enlarged the scope of postcolonialism by exposing the Eurocentric universalism that establishes Western superiority over the East" (131). In *World Yearbook of Education 2010*, Mazawi argues that through *Orientalism*, Said attempts to show that "the colonial project was not reducible to a simple military-

economic system, but was also underpinned by a discursive infrastructure and whole apparatus of knowledge whose violence was as much epistemic as it was physical.” (322)

### **1.7.2. Postcolonialism and Postmodernism: Affinities and Differences in the two Posts**

To begin with, postcolonialism is not only subject to critic from the outside but also from within. The debate on the hyphenated term, time and local has been raised by critics who supposedly represent the school. Additionally, its political implications, some critics maintain, may signal a crisis in the theory itself (Ahluwalia 1). Epistemologically, the theory has been considered as being indebted to both postmodernism and post-structuralism. In this respect, it becomes evident that such a reading may denigrate the authenticity of the theory by rendering it subservient and theoretically ‘vulnerable to charges leveled at post-structuralism and postmodernism.’ (1)

As a matter of fact, Edward Said’s *Orientalism* played a significant role in founding postcolonialism as a new interdisciplinary field of literature and criticism. For a host of critics, Said’s work is but a theoretical marriage between Micheal Foucault’s post-structuralism and Antonio Gramsci’s Marxism (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 23). Postcolonialism, therefore, is a product of post-structuralism and postmodernism. In her book *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Theory*, Leela Gandhi (1998) assumes that “postcolonial theory is situated somewhere in the interstices between Marxism and postmodernism/poststructuralism.” (167)

Critics like Arif Dirlik, Aijaz Ahmad and Linda Hutcheon represent a group of scholars whose tendency to conflate the ‘post’ ‘isms’ is very clear. Essentially, Linda Hutcheon notes that inspite of the difference in terms of definitions, function, time and locale between the schools, what these ‘post isms’ share is , ‘their common oppositional grounding in – or, rather, against – what has been generalized and usually demonized into this thing called “modernity” ’ (Hutcheon 205). According to McLaren (1991), this opposition is the outcome of the Enlightenment’s failure ‘to construct autonomous subjects who are capable of overcoming their alienation by reconciling their “authentic” subjectivity against that of the “other” through the master narratives of identity formation.’ (*Postmodernism, Post-Colonialism and Pedagogy* 8)

Arif Dirlik (1994) has gone further in his analysis of the relationship between postcolonialism and postmodernism by arguing that post-colonialism is ‘a child of postmodernism’ (348). He also states that postcolonialism is a progeny of postmodernism and that this can be observed in the manner in which post-colonial critics acknowledge their debt to both postmodernist and post-structuralist thinking. For him, postcolonialism is an attempt to rephrase the older problems in the study of the Third World in the language of post-structuralism.” (352)

In essence, Postcolonial theory remains beleaguered by charges that it is the product of postmodernism. Undoubtedly, Linda Hutcheon is among the scholars who share this view and maintain this position. She argues that there is a great deal of overlap in ‘their concerns: formal, thematic, strategic’ (Hutcheon 151). In terms of similarities, Hutcheon goes further to state that:

The *post-colonial* is therefore as implicated in that which it challenges as is the *postmodern* .... the post-colonial has at its disposal various ways of subverting from within the dominant culture – such as irony, allegory, and self-reflexivity– that it shares with the complicitous critique of postmodernism .... (170–1)

Anne McClintock is another scholar who has a tendency to conflate the post-isms. In her view, the relation between postcolonialism and postmodernism is more of a marketing strategy, whereby postcolonialism appears to be riding on the postmodern bandwagon. Accordingly, Ahluwalia maintains that “she views the post-colonial turn as a disciplinary trend which legitimizes Third World studies in the West, making them more palatable and less threatening than previous incarnations.” (3)

In terms of similarities, critics share the view that both postmodernism and post-colonialism are rebellious. Ashcroft et al note that postmodernism is the deconstruction of the ‘logocentric’ meta-narratives of European culture. Accordingly, they maintain that this aspect of postmodernism is similar to the postcolonial project of breaking down the binary opposition like West and east. Therefore Ashcroft et al argue that it is very useful to examine the intersection of both postcolonialism and postmodernism as theoretical models with regards to “decentring of discourse, the focus on the significance of language and writing in the construction of experience; the use of subversive strategies of mimicry, parody and irony.” (117)

Few attempts to define postcolonial theory have taken into account its political dimension. In “Past the Last Post (Review)”, Roger Berger (1992) writes:

[P]ostmodernism is simultaneously (or variously) a textual practice (often oppositional, sometimes not), a subcultural style or fashion, a definition of western, postindustrial cultures and the emergent or always already dominant global culture. At the same time, postcolonialism is simultaneously (or variously) a geographical site, an existential condition, a political reality, a textual practice, and the emergent or dominant global culture (or counter-culture). (2)

Accordingly, it becomes obvious from Berger’s definition that two movements congregate in some respective purposes. They are ‘textual practices’. Meanwhile, they both examine an ‘emergent or dominant global culture’. Equally, the two schools explore the notion of authority. For this reason, it has been claimed that it is not an easy task to draw a clear boundary between the two. Nevertheless, in his article “Postmodernism or Postcolonialism Tomorrow: The Relevance of a Dialogical Framework for Postcolonial Criticism”, Cameron Richards makes a clear distinction between the two movements in terms of their exploration of authority. He argues that while postcolonial writers attempt to “unmask European authority” in their reaction to the colonial legacy, postmodernists unmask authority in general. (36)

At the same time as some critics accepted the link and conflation between post-colonialism and postmodernism taking into consideration the similarities, other critics have argued that post-colonialism needs to mark its distance from postmodernism. Therefore, any attempt to bring the two terms has a tendency to become blurred and might be thought to further compound difficulties. Sangari (1987) and Tiffin (1988) believe that to collocate the two is an attempt to disempower the postcolonial, which is conceived to be more concerned with pressing economic, political, and cultural inequalities (qtd. in Schwarz and Ray 87 ). Pal Ahluwalia argues that postcolonialism is not concerned with a specific place but it represents the ignored and marginalized groups. He further maintains that the term post-colonial then is one which needs to be used with careful consideration, taking into account the specific historical processes and the manner in which colonialism has affected a particular colony. This is to argue that unlike Postmodernism, postcolonialism cannot be accepted as an all-encompassing term.

In "Post-Colonialism, Postmodernism and the Rehabilitation of PostColonial History", Helen Tiffin distinguishes between the two theories:

A number of strategies, such as the move away from realist representation, the refusal of closure, the exposure of the politics of metaphor, the interrogation of forms, the rehabilitation of allegory and the attack on binary structuration of concept and language, are characteristics of both the generally postcolonial and the European postmodern, *but they are energised by different theoretical assumptions and by vastly different political motivations.* (172)

Through this passage, Tiffin attempts to claim that in spite of the similarities between the two schools, their motives are different. His claim that they are energized by different theoretical assumption is a reference to the postmodernist who focuses on aesthetics. Postcolonialists, however, focus on the European authority. Accordingly, it is possible to make a distinction between postcolonialism and postmodernism. Prakash (1996) argues that Postcolonialism is a counter-discourse that disrupts "the cultural hegemony of the modern West with all its imperial structures of feeling and knowledge, whereas postmodernism is primarily a counter-discourse that emerges within modernism itself." (qtd. in Ahluwalia 164)

## **1.8. Postcolonial Theory's /Literature's Project**

Postcolonialism has renewed the perception and understanding of modern history, cultural studies, political theories and literary criticism. Relying on Homi Bhabha's perception, the school emerged from the colonial testimony of Third world countries and the discourses of minorities to shed light on the 'colonial amnesia' with an attempt to rewrite, rethink, and crucially interrogate aspects of colonialism from the very beginning of the colonial contact to address the questions of culture, history, identity, ethnicity, gender, language and education. In *Interrogating Postcolonialism: Theory, Text and Context*, Meenakshi Mukherdije (1996) writes:

Post-colonialism is not merely a chronological label referring to the period after the demise of empires. It is ideologically an emancipatory concept particularly for the students of literature outside the Western world, because it makes us interrogate many concepts of the study of literature that we were made to take for granted, enabling us not only to read our own texts in our own terms, but also to re-interpret some of the old canonical texts from Europe from the perspective of our specific historical and geographical location. (3-4)

Postcolonialism emerged in the 1970's as a new consciousness in the rise of political independences sought by various African and Asian countries. Using Charles E. Bressler's words postcolonialism "is an approach to literary analysis that concerns itself particularly with literature written in English in formerly colonized countries" (264). It focuses on writings from colonized cultures in Australia, New Zealand, Africa, and other countries that were ex-colonies. Critics assume that these Asian and African countries share a common history of colonial domination. Additionally, these countries witnessed an imposition of English and other foreign languages as they inherited the Western ways and styles. As a result, these countries lost their indigenous cultures. In this regard, postcolonialism's main task was/is to reject the psychological dependency and oppose the Western Hegemony. Accordingly, it exploits Derrida's deconstructive manners to destabilize Eurocentric norms.

Postcolonialism does not herald a brave new world where all the mistakes and ills of the colonial past have been cured. Rather, the theory's advocates recognize the historical continuity and change. Modes of binary representations, they maintain, are still available. That is to say, today's representation is very much similar to the one during the colonial period. It also asserts the premise, the possibility, and the continuing necessity of change. According to Ngugi wa Thiong'o the purpose of postcolonial studies "is to assist the total and absolute decolonization of societies in psychological as well as political terms, involving massive and powerful recuperations of the pre-colonial cultures." (qtd. in *The Empire Writes Back* 194)

Postcolonial literature represents any writings after independence which tackle one of these subjects: the new cultural identity of the colonized (that is to deal with the occurring cultural and social changes within postcolonial societies), the notion of independence in itself (whether these postcolonial societies are really fully independent or not), and the issue of marginalization and alienation (within the Western society, or their own postcolonial societies). So, no matters how variant are the ways scholars perceive postcolonial literature, they always get close around the same perspectives. Postcolonial studies main project can be summarized in the following points: rethinking "self", deconstructing the discourse of the "regimes of othering", reconstructing "historical self-invention", and recreating or deleting the "painful memories of the colonial era" and its consequences after independence like the imperial linguistic, literary and cultural domination.

### 1.8.1. The New Cultural Identity of the Colonized

In her book entitled *Postcolonialism: Introduction*, Marie Rose Napierkowski argues that postcolonialism represents culture, race, ethnicity, and identity in post-colonial countries. Further, Leela Gandhi (1998) argues that Post-colonialism pursues post national reading of the colonial encounter by focusing on the global amalgam of cultures and identities consolidated by 'imperialism' (Gandhi 129). Therefore, it is a challenge for the postcolonial writer to construct an identity for the postcolonial people which is often suppressed by the colonial encounter. Interviewed in 1998, Adam Storlorow maintained that,

Postcolonial concerns are about the encounter of cultures. As the editors of *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* state in the introduction to their collection, postcolonialism addresses all aspects of the colonial process from the beginning of colonial contact. So we could say it begins with the cultural encounter of colonization. Repression and resistance, hybridity and difference all have their start here. (qtd in. Cheriet 19)

In their book entitled *The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature*, Drabble and Stringer (2003), argue that postcolonial literature “consists of a body of writing emanating from Europe’s former colonies which addresses questions of history, identity, ethnicity, gender and language” (12). They maintain that postcolonial literature aims at awakening people politically and culturally to abolish colonial rule. In his book *Intimate Enemy* (1983), Ashis Nandy states that colonialism is on two forms. The first form is direct and visible which is the physical conquest of territories. This mode of colonization is violent, transparent in its self-interest and greed. The second form, however, is the colonization of the minds through means of modernization and civilization. According to Nandy:

This colonialism colonizes the minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once and for all. In the process, it helps to generalize the concept of the modern West from a geographical and temporal entity to psychological category. The West is now everywhere, within the West and outside; in structures and in minds. (xi)

Postcolonial literature has always been regarded as a vehicle by which the colonized revisits his past and interrogates the colonial influence. In *Modern Literary Criticism and History*, Habib writes:

Postcolonial literature aims at re-examining the history of colonialism from the perspective of the colonized; to determine the economic, political, and cultural impact of colonialism on both the colonized peoples and the colonizing powers; to analyze the process of decolonization; and above all; to participate in the goals of political liberation, which includes equal access to material resources, the contestation of forms of domination, and the articulation of political and cultural identities (739)

The question of culture and identity is one of the controversial issues in postcolonial literature. In their book entitled *Narrative and Identity*, Donald Carbaugh and Jones Brockmeier state that identity stands for a large area of intellectual problems that have been studied in a variety of disciplines and from diverse theoretical point of views. The issue of identity, according to Pieterse, is the aftermath of colonialism. He argues that the issue came to the surface at the time of decolonization when imperial identities were decentered.

Within the perspective of the binary opposition between the West and East, or Self and the Other, the issue of identity becomes more controversial and debatable. In “Ethnicity: Identity and Difference”, Stuart Hull (1989) argues that in this context identity emerges as a kind of an unsettled space or an unresolved question in that space, between a number of intersecting discourses” (qtd.in Aschroft et al 218). It was Frantz Fanon who first tackled this dilemma. In his analysis of the colonial consequences, Fanon examines the experience of having to wear “White masks” to get by Europe, of having to bend one’s own identity so as to appear to the colonizer to be free of all taint of primitive traits.” (Ryan 118)

For a cohort of critics, it is identity which distinguishes a person from another or a nation from another. Stuart Hall believes that we all possess a myriad of different cultural identity positions which result from the multiplicity of sources. Further, he maintains that identity is defined by as it stems from nationality, ethnicity, race, social class, language, gender, and sexuality. In his discussion of cultural identity, Hall came up with the two contesting views of cultural identity construction. The first one, Hall notes, is essentialist cultural identity which is “constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation” (Hall and Du Gay 2). The second view is termed “discursive approach” to cultural identity which regards identification as a construction, a process never complete – always ‘in process’” (2).

Postcolonialist critics believe that identity, in ex-colonized nations, has been affected and thus transformed through the process of exposure to the colonial culture. Since Africans and other third-world countries experienced colonialism, they were introduced to different languages, customs and traditions. In this case, their identities have been affected. The result of the cultural clashes is the inward struggle to achieve a fixed identity. Therefore, a new identity emerges. In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi Bhabha names this new unfixed identity as a 'hybrid identity'. Other critics use concepts like 'in-between' or 'third spaces' as synonyms of Bhabha's unfixed identity. Homi Bhabha asserts that the third space of Enunciation "is a space of 'in-betweenness and liminality' in which a new form of identity is recreated" (37). Within this space, the colonized and colonizer's cultures connect to each other. Accordingly, he assumes that 'all cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation" (37).

In recent years, terms like hybridity, mimicry and ambivalence have been considered as touchstones for controversial debates on colonial discourse and postcolonial identity. Ania Loomba (1998) argues that postcolonialists have always been occupied with "hybridity, creolization, in-betweenness, diasporas and liminality, with mobility and crossover of ideas and identities generated by colonialism" (173). By definition, hybridity implies simultaneous presence of different fragments. Ashcroft et al (2000) argue that it refers "to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization" (96). In multicultural countries, hybridity refers to the blending or the mingling of different, separate and discrete ways of living.

In the last decade, recent debates on hybridity proved the divergent ways of thinking about this phenomenon. To begin with, a positive attitude towards this issue is found in the writing of the Cuban critic Fernandez Retamar who invoked hybridity as an anti-colonial tool. Fernandez Retamar (1971) gives the example of America as a land where the majority of its population is racially mixed. He writes that "because the majority of the population is racially mixed, it continues to use language of our colonizers', and 'so many of their conceptual tools . . . are also now our conceptual tools' (qtd. inLoomba27).

The influential postcolonial critic Robert Young differentiates between the unconscious and conscious hybridity. He considers hybridity as "part of the tendency of discourse analysis to de-historicize and dislocate cultures from temporal, spatial,

geographical and linguistic context” (qtd in Ashcroft et al 120). He asserts that it became a part of colonialist discourse of racism. According to Homi Bhabha, colonial identity is always a matter of agony. He shares with Frantz Fanon the view that hybridity is the ultimate attribute of colonial education. In Bhabha’s view, colonial hybridity is a strategy premised on cultural purity. Cultural identity emerges in a contradictory and ambivalent space. This is to argue that no hierarchical purity of culture is possible. In this thread, Bhabha writes:

It is significant that the productive capacities of this third space have a colonial or postcolonial provenance. For willingness to descend into that alien territory . . . may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exotism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity. (*The Location of Culture* 33)

In some postcolonial societies where mutual trans-culturalization is absent, hybridity is frequently reduced to mimicry. From a Foucauldian angle, mimicry is defined as “the best strategy of colonial power and knowledge” (Bhabha 35). The colonial discourse encourages and urges the colonized subjects to mimic and imitate the colonizer. This can only be made possible by adopting the colonizer’s cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values. Ashcroft et al maintain that “the result of mimicry is a blurred copy of the colonized that can be quite threatening” (139). Leela Gandhi (1998) argues that the West “remains the privileged meeting ground for all ostensibly cross cultural conversations” (136). Although the sense of mixing in hybridity seems to break down the strict polarization of imperialism, “there is nothing in the idea of hybridity as such that suggests that mutuality negates the hierarchical nature of the imperial process that it involves the idea of an equal exchange” (Ashcroft et al 119). Therefore, colonial mimicry, using Bhabha’s words, is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite” (86). Hence, Mimicry is ambivalent, because it requires a similarity and dissimilarity. It relies on the colonized becoming like the colonizer but always remaining different.

The debate on hybridity and mimicry began in the close of the nineteenth century with a group of literary and political thinkers. Unlike those theorists who argue for the possibility of assimilation and equality through hybridity, thinkers like Frantz Fanon and Naipul criticized this phenomenon. According to Fanon, the colonized loses his autonomous identity under mimicry and hybridity. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon (1952) introduces the psychological impact of racism that accompanies

colonialism. In essence, Fanon believes that the stereotypical representation of Africans is among the most harmful aspects of colonialism. It was the rejection of African customs and culture which paved the way for Europeans to dominate<sup>1</sup>

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon agrees with Bhabha's theory of hybridity. He claims that it is the colonist who fabricated and continues to fabricate the colonized subject" and that "decolonization is truly the creation of new men" because the 'thing' colonized becomes a man through the very process of liberation" (24). Fanon argues that the colonized subjects fall in psychic trauma as soon as they realize that they can never attain the whiteness that they have been taught to desire. In this respect, Fanon has advocated a radical response on the parts of the African oppressed and marginalized to return to one's traditions and values. This can be successfully done through rejecting the colonizer's traditions and culture. Fanon attempts to revive and reconstruct the black consciousness which has been destructed through means of cultural assimilation. In this respect, it is only through rejecting the colonizer's habits and traditions that the colonized is supposed to end European domination over African and other Third-world countries.

### **1.8.2. The Question Mark of Independence**

The period after the Second World War saw an upsurge of new independent states. The majority of African states achieved their independences in the 1960s. Other Caribbean countries did not gain independence until the 1980s. Nevertheless, critics argue that independence did not always occur in a simple and final form. Postcolonialism offers the chance to question and evaluate independence. In their book entitled *Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies*, Ashcroft et al argue that "post-colonialism is absolutely and only congruent with overt resistance and opposition (anti-colonialism) and that independence has often simply meant the installation of a neo-colonial form of government by local élite." (128)

Essentially, the term post-colonial state is often used as the clearest indicator of the separation between the colonizers and colonized. Practically, however, independence may come to be seen as superficial. Technically, colonialism has ended

---

<sup>1</sup>Pramod K Nayar observes, "The colonial 'plan' for such as hybrid native is clearly described in T.B Macaulay's (in)famous 'Minutes' of 1835 where he described the creation of Europeanized native as the creation of 'a class of persons', Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals, and in intellect

but the lust for domination still continues. Even after giving independence to their colonies, it is proved that the mentality of the imperialist powers has not changed. With change in circumstances and the centers of power, colonialism has also changed its shape and still continues to do so with the result that imperialist powers still continue to dominate various countries of the world but through new methods. More importantly, postcolonial states have been tied to the former colonial administrations, legal economic systems which limited their independent actions. In this sense, the term 'neo-colonialism' has been invented to describe the new shape of colonialism. The Marxist revolutionary and political activist Che Guevara argues that "as long as imperialism exists it will, by definition, exert its domination over other countries. Today that domination is called neo-colonialism."(qtd in Nkrumah 10)

The term neo-colonialism was first introduced in 1965 by the first Ghanaian president, and the leading exponent of pan-Africanism, Kwame Nkrumah in his book *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. Critics believe that this book remains the best oeuvre on the essential dimension of neo-colonialism as a cog of global imperial designs. Essentially, Nkrumah assumes that the major objective of neo-colonialism is to create apparently independent African states, with outward trappings of international sovereignty, while their economic and political policies are directed from the West. Further, Nkrumah views neocolonialism as a new form of subjugation of the economic, social, cultural, and political life of the African. His postulation is that European imperialism of Africa has passed through several stages, from slavery to colonization and subsequently to neocolonialism being the last stage of the imperialist subjugation and exploitation process.

The forces of neocolonialism are part of the contentious problem of whether independence really meant the end of colonialism or merely its mutation. It was Edward Said who assumed that "the colonial aftermath does not yield to the end of colonialism" (qtd in Ghandi 7). This view has also been shared by the Tunisian critic Albert Memmi. Nkrumah asserts that neo-colonialism was more insidious and more difficult to detect and resist than the older overt colonialism. He explains that neocolonialist exploitation is implemented in the political, religious, ideological, economic, and cultural spheres of society. Neo-colonialism, therefore, proves that colonialism, as Edward Said claims, is a "fate with lasting, indeed grotesquely unfair results" (*Orientalism* 207).

Postcolonialism attempts to argue that the collapse of the colonial empire and the proclamation of independence do not necessarily mean the end exploitation. What is evident here is that the flag of independence brought no economic self-determination and that imperialism and colonialism are still active in new shapes. Therefore, postcolonial literature reveals that ‘postcoloniality’ as a historical condition is characterized by its visible apparatus of freedom and the concealed persistence of unfreedom.

### **1.8.3. Subalternity and Marginality**

Postcolonial aesthetics entered the agenda of metropolitan intellectuals and academics as a reflex of a new consciousness around 1960s in the wake of political independence. In his essay “Some Issues in Post-colonial Theory”, John Lye argues that “post-colonial theory deals with the reading and writing of literature written in previously or currently colonized countries, or literature written in colonizing countries which deals with colonization or colonized peoples” (qtd. in Al-Saidi 95). In recent years, the theory became associated with terms like subalternity and marginality. The term Subaltern was first introduced by Antonio Gramsci to mean people of inferior rank. In other words, the term stands for the individuals who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes.

Likewise, postcolonialism stands for the cultures and societies that occupy the margin. Meanwhile it challenges the centre-margin archetype with an intention of the amputation of inequality. Postcolonial thinkers vindicate that Western traditions and values are guilty of ‘repressive ethnocentrism’. Therefore, their values and thoughts are instrumental in creating the centre-margin archetype and marginalizing the non-western values and traditions. This view is strengthened by Edward Said in *Orientalism*. Pointing out to the Eurocentric universalism that establishes Western superiority over the East, Said argues that ‘Orientalism’ can be defined as “a Western style of dominating, restructuring, having authority over the Orient”. In this sense, “European culture gained the strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (*Culture and Imperialism* 3). Accordingly, being seen as masses and not as individuals, Easterners are attributed negative qualities like laziness, decadence, and ignorance. Westerners, in this case, have essentialized their own culture and traditions by denuding the native cultures.

Postcolonialism is an attempt to overcome the stigma of marginality or otherness by celebrating differences and diversity. Initially, postcolonialists believe that “colonialism could only exist at all by postulating that there existed a binary opposition into which the world was divided” (Aschroft et al 36). According to GayatriSpivak when “a cultural identity is thrust upon one because the centre wants an identifiable margin, claims marginality assure validation from the centre” (*Outside in the Teaching Machine* 55). Within this context, imperial Europe is defined as the centre, and everything that lay outside that centre can be defined as the margin or periphery of culture, power and civilization. In her essay entitled “Post-Structuralism, Marginality, Postcoloniality and Value” GayatriSpivak puts forth the assumption that postcoloniality is a conceptual structure that needs to be deconstructed. Further, in “Can the Subaltern Speak? She denies the possibility of voicing the exploited. Yet, intellectuals like Michel Foucault and Gilles Deuleuze believe that it is the responsibility of the colonized to speak, act, and know themselves. From a Fanonian point of view, Peter Barry shares the assumption that the colonized needs to reclaim his past and culture in order to speak:

The first step for colonized people in finding a voice and an identity is to reclaim their own past. For centuries the European colonizing power will have devalued the nation’s past, seeing its pre-colonial era as a pre-civilized limbo, or even as a historical void. Children, both black and white, will have been taught to see history, culture and progress as beginning with the arrival of the Europeans. If the first step towards a post colonial perspective is to reclaim one’s own past, then the second is to begin to erode the colonialist ideology by which that past had been devalued. (*Beginning Theory*192)

Thus, it should be noted that postcolonialism is a subversive theory which aims at erasing the debunking of cultural past by the colonizers . Moreover, its main targer is reflect, refract, and make visible the ex-colonies’ condition.

## **1.9. From Postcolonialism to Feminism**

As it has been stated previously, this research falls within a postcolonial-feminist context. Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s texts convey his socio-political messages which are the outcomes of his experience with colonialism and its disastrous effects on the masses. Being a committed author, Ngugi employs his literariness to record the situation of the most exploited in his country. Accordingly, having the feature of anti-colonial texts, his novels can be seen as responding to the principles of postcolonialism in the sense that they reveal the effects of colonialism and reject its devastating effects. Meanwhile, their

concentration on the ordinary people belonging to the middle and lower classes is a reason to state that these novels attempt to voice the marginalized and subalterns. Further, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's intention to reveal the position of women in his society is a compelling motif to shed light on aspects of feminism in his novels. This section is divided into three main parts. The first part is devoted to definitions and synopsis of the feminist historical foundations and summary of its three feminist waves. The second part is devoted to list out the affinities that exist between feminism and postcolonialism. Finally, it is intended to close the section with a brief comparison between Feminism and Womanism.

### **1.9.1. Feminism: A Movement of Reclamation**

Feminism can be said to be a turning point, not only in literature, but also in human history. Writers of the field express their disgust and disillusionment with their surrounding atmosphere which was characterized by much violence, oppression and materialism. Female writers, at the turn of the twentieth century, began to exteriorize their interests, concerns, and growing awareness as well as rejection of their fabricated status within patriarchal societies. Accordingly, it is believed that the Civil War and its consequences, the increasing urbanization, the immigration and the industrialization changed women's lives and perceptions. Consequently, women started rethinking and questioning their state and positions within the public sphere. Meanwhile, they also started wondering about their rights of education, properties, and their status within marriage.

Those questions forced women to move to liberating themselves through writing. With a strong desire to develop a literature of their own, women gave birth to feminist literature. They attacked concepts like "the Cult Domesticity" and "True Womanhood"<sup>1</sup>, while they introduced the "New Woman". In "Feminist Long Fiction", Virginia Brackett asserts that the reality was easily explained, as the majority of novelists were white men. By the mid-twentieth century, a plethora of long fiction by women began to appear, with realistic female characters. Moreover, Brackett argues that women's fiction "transformed from products of imitation of a male aesthetic, eventually

---

<sup>1</sup>Carrol Smith-Rosenberg maintained that everything started with male doctors around the 1860s and 1870s who "began systematically to transpose the Cult of True Womanhood into a medical and scientific dogma...Gender distinctions were rooted in biology, and so, therefore, was the patriarchal world order" (23). Thus, any attempt by women to break out the defined roles was forbidden.

becoming self-defining works of literature” (4). Among these female revolutionary writers, one can mention Kate Chopin (1851-1904), Virginia Woolf (1882—1941), Rebecca West (1892—1983), Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860—1937), and others.

Feminism, in the words of Mario Klerer, is “the most productive and, at the same time, most revolutionary movement of the younger theories of literary criticism” (91). It started with Simone De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex, or Le Deuxieme Sex* (1949), and gained momentum in the 1960s. The movement can be said to be a serious attempt to formulate the issues and find solutions to gender problems. It started with the assumption that gender difference is an important aspect that has always been neglected in the traditional literary criticism. Thus, scholars of the field tend to re-examine all the traditional domains of literary criticism from a “gender-oriented perspective” (Klerer 91). By so doing, feminists concentrate on stereotypes or distorted images of women in literary traditions dominated by men.

### **1.9.2. Waves of Feminism**

Feminism, with a long history of over two centuries, is a movement supporting the equal rights for women. It can be broken up into three waves; first wave which spans from the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, second wave that spans from the early 1960s through the late 1980’s, and a third wave that began in 1990’s, and is still working through present time. The first wave began in the United States and United Kingdom around the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Critics consider the first wave to have ended when the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was passed, granting women the right to vote.

Unlike the first wave, the second wave, which began in the 1960s, is identified by its vigorous concentration on the avalanche of inequalities that women suffered from. In this phase, women writers started encouraging other women to understand aspects of their personal lives. Besides, they insisted on women’s rights of education. However, this wave, compared to the first, was considered to be a failure. Consequently, third-wave would be the last hope to carry the fire and bring out women on the same line with men.

The second wave of feminism has been followed by another remarkable wave. It appeared as a response to the failure of the second wave. Third-wave of feminism is believed to be a success. It is informed that this wave shows how feminism got

influenced by postcolonialism. It is characterized by a strong desire of young women to speak and make heard their voices. Essentially, it was Rebecca Walker who first coined the term “Third Wave”.

In his book entitled *Deals With the Devil and Other Reasons to Riot*, Pearl Cleage (1993) admits that feminism is the belief that “women are full human beings capable of participation and leadership in the full range of human activities—intellectual, political, social, sexual, spiritual and economic” (23). As a body of thought, feminism sheds light on the economic status of women and the different issues related to women such as poverty, environmental racism, educational opportunities, prostitution, and other problems that determined the downgraded position of females in their societies. Politically, feminism aims at ensuring women’s rights like voting, the rights of assembly, traveling in public, and office holding. It also stands against rape and torture. Further, it concerns itself with marital and family issues like marriage, child custody policies, divorce laws, and domestic labor. In “What’s in a Name? Womanism, Black Feminism, and Beyond”, Patricia Hill Collins asserts that “women’s health and survival issues, such as reproductive rights, pregnancy, sexuality, and AIDS constitute another area of global feminist concern” (13). This broad global feminist agenda, Collins concludes, “finds varying expression in different regions of the world and among diverse populations.” (13)

### **1.10. Feminism and Postcolonialism: Similarities and Differences**

As a matter of fact, following independence, women’s status has become an interest of a host of critics. Further, under the current circumstances of globalization and almost complete sway toward a capitalist world-view, the condition of women has become a more urgent issue than ever. In the last decades, Feminism and Postcolonialism have followed what Bill Ashcroft et al call ‘a path of convergent evolution’ (82). Both bodies of thoughts, Leela Gandhi asserts, have concerned themselves with the study and defense of the marginalized ‘Other’ with repressive structures of domination. Therefore, they both have followed a remarkably similar theoretical trajectory. Moreover, the two theories began with an attempt to overturn prevailing binary oppositions of gender, culture, and race. In this respect, critics argue

that the two theories have gradually welcomed the poststructuralist urge to deny the binary oppositions upon which patriarchal/colonial authority is based.

Recently, the two theories have come together in a very volatile and tenuous partnership. In *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, Neil Lazarus argues that "feminist theory and postcolonial theory are occupied with similar question of representation, voice, marginalization, and the relation between politics and literature" (201). Accordingly, the two schools emerged as responses to rejection of women, racial minorities, and marginalized cultures or communities. In this thread, Ashcroft et al. argue that feminism and postcolonialism "seek to reinstate the marginalized in the face of the dominant, and early feminist theory, like early nationalist post-colonial criticism, was concerned with inverting the structures of domination, substituting, for instance, a female tradition or traditions for a male-dominated canon."(*The Postcolonial Studies Reader* 249)

Essentially, feminism is of a crucial interest to postcolonialism for at least two major reasons. First, both imperialism and patriarchy can be seen to exert analogous forms of domination over those who render subordinate. Both post-colonialism and feminism speak against power structures and the hegemonic nature of authority, but post-colonial feminism has focused on issues like essentialism, particularly in the representation of womanhood. It should be stressed that women's experiences in patriarchy and those of colonized masses can be paralleled in a number of ways. More importantly, both schools oppose such dominance. Gender is the second reason of why feminism is important to postcolonialism. Indeed vigorous debates have been raised to argue on whether gender or colonial oppression is the most important political factor in women's lives. The debate, however, has led to a split between Western feminist critics and non-Western critics. Recently, the two bodies of thought are entwined, in which "the condition of colonial dominance affects, in material ways, the position of women within their societies" (*Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* 102). This fusion gave birth to a new body of thought known as postcolonial-Feminism.

### 1.11. Postcolonial-Feminism: Definition, Features, and Major Concerns

By definition, Postcolonial feminist theory is primarily concerned with the representation of women in formerly colonized countries and in western locations. It is a new feather wishes to bring into light the typicality of the problems of women of the Third world nations. It focuses on the construction of gender difference in colonial and anti-colonial discourses. The postcolonial-feminist uses a number of conceptual, methodological and political problems involved in the study of gender representation.

It is argued that the task of postcolonial-feminism is of graver import and complicated meanwhile. Indeed, while the task of postcolonialism is to revolt against the misrepresentation of the colonized, postcolonial-feminism is preoccupied with women's double colonization<sup>1</sup>. A postcolonial-feminist is compelled to resist the oppression of a brother who is not her accomplice, but her oppressor. Additionally, postcolonialism is sometimes criticized for obliterating women's role from the struggle for independence, and also for misrepresenting them in the nationalist discourses. In this respect, Carole Boyce Davies put forth his famous question: "where are the women in the theorizing of postcoloniality?" (*Black Women, Writing and Identity* 80)

In his article entitled "Understanding Postcolonial Feminism in Relation with Postcolonial and Feminist Theories", Dr Ritu Tyagi (2014) argues that in his struggle against the colonizer, the postcolonial feminist reveals the extent to which "Third world women suffer at the hands of Western feminists who misrepresent their colonized counterparts by imposing silence on their racial, cultural social and political specificities" (45). Indeed, any research on third world women suggests that their image is blurry, and generally excluded from the feminist discourse. Gayatri Spivak argued that "western feminism has failed to 'dehegemonize' woman figure all over the world" (qtd in Gilbert et al 30 ). Non-white women, accordingly, have always been ignored and silenced by western feminists. More importantly, woman as a concept was narrowed to the white, heterosexual and middle class woman. In this respect, Chandra Talpade Mohanty affirms that "white woman image is always depicted as chaste, domesticated, and morally pure and black woman is regarded as promiscuous, available plantation

---

<sup>1</sup> The term was first coined and used by Kirsten Holst Peterson and Anna Rutherford. It refers to the ways in which women are not only marginalized but have simultaneously experienced the oppression of colonialism and patriarchy.

workers” (*Feminism without Borders* 13). She further argues that third world women’s position is defined by the intersection of “various factors of class, race, sexuality, and the nation” (13). Being highly concerned with third world women, postcolonial feminism contends that women in the formerly colonized countries are subjected to the colonial domination on the one hand, and patriarchy on the second hand. Hence, postcolonial feminism is but an investigation of and at the connections of colonialism and neocolonialism with gender, nation, class, race, and sexualities in the different contexts of women’s lives, their subjectivities, work, sexuality, and rights.

Postcolonial feminism’s objection to Western feminism is derived from its critics’ conviction that feminists failed at including women of color in their discourses. It is said that Western feminists’ assumption that gender overrode cultural differences to create a universal feminine category, was operating from hidden, universalist assumptions with a middle-class, Euro-centric bias. In their article entitled “Postcolonial-Feminist Elements in E.M Forster’s *A Passage to India*”, Sarah Tavasoli and Narges Mirzapour argue that “white women who dominate feminist discourse today rarely question whether or not their perspective on women’s reality is true to the lived experiences of women as collective group” (70). In her prominent and influential essay entitled “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses”, Chandra Talpade Mohanty examines the extent to which Western feminism has eluded the specific cultural difference through naturalizing women’s oppression into European models. Accordingly, she admits that “it is in this process of homogenization and systematization of the oppression of women in the third world that power is exercised in much of recent Western feminist discourse, and this power needs to be defined and named....”(68). Audre Lorde also shares the view that Western feminism failed at dealing women outside the Western circle. Accordingly, he writes:

By and large within the women's movement today, white women focus upon their oppression as women and ignore differences of race, sexual preferences, class and age. There is a pretense to a homogeneity of experience covered by the word ‘sisterhood’ that does not in fact exist. (*Sister Outsider* 116)

Essentially, Western feminism is based on the idea that all third-women must be represented since they cannot speak for themselves. Within this context, Mohanty puts forth the assumption that third-world women’s portrayal as ‘ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domesticated, family-oriented, victimized’, facilitates and privileges

the self-representation of Western women ‘as educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and “sexualities”, and the “freedom” to make their own decisions’ (261). Taking Indian women as a case study, Katherine Mayo writes:

It would be an evil day for India if Indian women indiscriminately copy and imitate Western women. Our women will progress in their own way... We are by no means prepared to think that the Western woman of today is a model to be copied. What has often been termed in the West as the emancipation of women is only a glorified name for the disintegration of the family. (qtd. in Tavassol & Mizapour 70)

Thus, out of their Eurocentric perceptions, Western feminists fail to apply feminist theories to the historical, political, and socio-cultural specification of black or third-world women.

Chandra Mohanty maintains that white feminists do not genuinely engage in a dialogue with women of color. Consequently, feminists from the western part of the globe rarely understand Eastern women’s concerns and experiences. In this case, what is really required is a body of thought which takes into consideration the needs of black and Third world women to prevent them from becoming “the silence objects of Western analysis”. Writing in the same vein, bell hooks urges writers to make heard the marginalized to assure their self-affirmation. In this regard, she writes:

Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is the act of speech, of ‘talking back’, that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject—the liberated voice. (*Talking Back Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*211)

On the same line, Mohanty invites Third-World women writers to write about the politics of feminism and practice writing in a form of ‘storytelling or autobiography’ that works as a useful “discourse of oppositional consciousness and agency” (39). These stories are meant to describe, criticize, and change the patriarchal systems by making heard the marginalized voices.

Postcolonial feminism is a turning point in the history of Third World women. A question that readers are supposed to ask is how does it contribute to the improvement of their situation? In “Key Issues in Postcolonial Feminism: A Western Perspective”, Chris Weedon notes that the project of postcolonial feminism is involving women in

both the developing and developed world. In contrast to Western feminism whose Eurocentric values have led its proponents to consider their societies and cultures as models for the rest of the world, postcolonial feminism asserts that third world countries have their own active indigenous women's movements which are concerned with specific issues in their countries. This is the reason that makes its rejection by Westerners. Additionally, Weedon believes that the Third World women are not only analyzing their own situations but they also openly "criticize Western feminism and its Eurocentricism, the West's amnesia about colonial history and its tendency to reproduce colonial modes of representation" (qtd in Zachariah 4). Furthermore, Robert Young also encircles the boundaries of postcolonial feminism as follow:

Postcolonial feminism has never operated as a separate entity from postcolonialism; rather it has directly inspired the forms and the force of postcolonial politics. Where its feminist focus is foregrounded, it comprises non-western feminisms which negotiate the political demands of nationalism, socialist feminism, liberalism, and ecofeminism, alongside the social challenge of everyday patriarchy, typically supported by its institutional and legal discrimination: of domestic violence, sexual abuse, rape, honour killings, dowry deaths, female foeticide, child abuse. Feminism in a postcolonial frame begins with the situation of the ordinary woman in a particular place, while also thinking her situation through in relation to broader issues to give her the more powerful basis of collectivity. It will highlight the degree to which women are still working against a colonial legacy that was itself powerfully patriarchal – institutional, economic, political, and ideological. (*Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* 116)

### **1.12. From Postcolonial-Feminism to Black Feminism/ Womanism: Can the Black Subaltern Speak?**

In recent years, the term postcolonial-feminism and Womanism have been used interchangeably. Compared to feminism, which originates at the conference halls of white women academia, it is assumed that postcolonial feminism concerns itself with the colored women whose concerns are denied and rejected. In this respect, due to its interest in color, particularly 'Black', a new concept known as womanism came on the surface. If women in general are a subjugated second sex, a black woman is a doubly colonized race, suffering alike from patriarchal as well as racial stigmatization. Within this context, Womanism appeared to give the marginalized black woman a platform to proclaim her identity and liberate herself from the shackles of patriarchy.

It should be noted that the Black woman, as it has been argued by Showalter (1977), is “the ‘Other’ woman, the silenced partner” (214). In literature, black women have been rejected from Western texts. Showalter believes that throughout the years, black females have protested against “the sexism of black literary history...the racism of feminist literary history” (214). Black women found themselves irrevocably excluded from both sides of inquiry. They experience a unique form of oppression in discursive and non-discursive practices alike because they are victims at once of sexism, racism and by extension classism. According to Ward and Herold, black women are “doubly marginalized” (741). This state of double-marginalization is the result of gender as well as race. In this respect, Smith asserts that “the meaning of blackness...shapes profoundly the experience of gender, just as the conditions of womanhood affect ineluctably the experience of race” (*Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* 317). This double marginalization, hooks argues, makes black females in a privileged position where they are supposed to negotiate their oppression:

[I]t is essential that black women recognize the special vantage point [their] marginality gives [them] and make use of this perspective to criticize the dominant racist, classist, sexist hegemony as well as to envision and create a counter-hegemony. (*Feminist Theory: from Margin to Center* 16)

Black women writers like Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Gayl Jones, Toni Cade Bambara and Gloria Naylor have, among other things, candidly focused on the perilous, sometimes embittered and brutal relationship between black men and women. Throughout their novels, they proved that black women encounter the problem of sexism not only from outside, but also from within. Commenting on this phenomenon, hooks (1992) writes:

It is obvious that most Black men are not in positions that allow them to exert the kind of institutionalized patriarchal power and control over Black women's lives that privileged white men do in this society. But it is undeniable that they do exert a lot of power over Black women and children in everyday life. (“Feminism – It's a black thang!” 124)

In “Feminism – it's a black thang!”, hooks bell (1992) writes:

Every Black person concerned about our collective survival must acknowledge that sexism is a destructive force in Black life that cannot be effectively addressed without an organized political movement to change consciousness, behavior and institutions. What we need is a feminist revolution in Black life. But to have such a revolution, we must first have a feminist movement. Many

Black folks do not know what the word feminism means. They may think of it only as something having to do with white women's desire to share equal rights with white men. In reality, feminism is a movement to end all sexism and sexist oppression. The strategies necessary to achieve that end are many. We need to find ways to address the specific forms that sexism takes in our diverse communities. (124-5)

Being black males or females, the black feminism movement, hooks admits, is a call for a reunion by which they can guarantee their liberation. In this regard, hooks writes that a feminist movement that addresses the needs of Black women, men and children "can strengthen our bonds with one another, deepen our sense of community and further Black liberation." (124)

Barbara Omolade argues that "black feminism" is sometimes referred to as womanism because both are concerned with struggles against sexism and racism by black women who are themselves part of the black community's efforts to achieve equity and liberty" (*The Rising Song of African American Women*xx). It was Alice Walker who first coined the term Womanism in her essays collection entitled *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*. It should be noted that Alice Walker's definition of womanism implies that the concept is rooted in Black women's concrete history in racial and gender oppression. Womanism, critics argue, provides a large space and a safe avenue to foster stronger relationships between black women and black men. In this respect, Walker argues that womanists are "committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female" (xi). Compared to western feminism which is exclusively for women and at worst dedicated to attacking and eliminating men, Black feminism offers men and male writers the chance to defend black women's concerns. In addition to that, womanism supplies a way for black women to address gender oppression without attacking men. In "Some Implications of Womanist Theory", Shirley Williams (1990) asserts that "womanist inquiry...assumes that it can talk both effectively and productively about men." (70)

In her book entitled *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, Alice Walker (1984) states that "black women are the most fascinating creations in the world" (251). She believes that black women are doubly subjugated and oppressed. For her, "it is the black women's words that have the most meaning for us, her daughters, because she, like us, has experienced life not only as a black person, but as a woman" (275). A black woman, accordingly, is "oppressed almost beyond recognition—oppressed by *everyone*."

(Walker 149). They have been handed the burdens that “everyone else refused to carry” (237). Although black feminism is trend that reveals the co-existence between black males and females as it has been stated previously, black women, Walker asserts suffer even within their black society:

I tell [Coretta King] how important I feel this is: that black men not take out their anger and frustration on their wives and children. A temptation that is all too obvious. Coretta’s face is thoughtful as she says, “Maybe I shouldn’t say this, because I don’t *know* it, it’s just a feeling I have... but few black men seem to feel secure enough as men that they can make women feel like women. (151-2)

Womanism, thus, exhibits the double marginalization of black women which is the result of the white feminist discourse and the black oppression. This position, however, requires a change that can only occur when artists interfere and use their pens. Womanists are known for their literary commitment. Walker urges black women to play the spokeswomen role. Black women, therefore, should be playing a leading role in constructing a safe future. In this case, she cites Coretta King to support her point of view:

“The black woman,” [Coretta King] says, “has a special role to play. Our heritage of suffering and our experience in having to struggle against all odds to raise our children gives us a greater capacity for understanding both suffering and the need and meaning of compassion. (...) Women, in general, are not a part of the corruption of the past, so they can give a new kind of leadership, a new image for mankind. (...)” (152-3)

In her writing, the American womanist Pearl Clear appears to be very zealous about the issues of black life. She considers writing as a way of emancipation and liberation. Moreover, she maintains her committed role as a womanist. In his regard, she writes:

I am writing to expose and explore the point where racism and sexism meet. I am writing to help understand the full effects of being black and female in a culture that is both racist and sexist. I am writing to try and communicate that information to my sisters first and then to any brothers of good will and honest intent who will take the time to listen. . . . I am writing to allow myself to feel the anger. I am writing to keep from running toward it or away from it or into anybody’s arms.. . . I am writing, writing, writing, for my life. (*Deals with the Devil* 7)

In this respect, Womanism is revolutionary and an emancipator trend. It is a paradigm shift wherein Black women no longer look to others for their liberation, but instead look to themselves. The revolutionaries are Black women scholars, who have raised their pens not simply to dismantle the mater's house, but to do the more important work of bulding a house of their own. A wamanist is revolutionary in the sense that she/he undertakes praxis that liberates theory from its captivity to the intellectual frames and cultural values of those which cause and perpetuate the marginalization of Black women in the first place. Womanists have claimed their turf, re-envisioned history, and shared their thoughts so that the revolution will continue. What characterizes womanist discourse is that Black women are engaged in the process of knowledge production that is most necessary for their own flourishing rather than being exploited for the enlightenment and entertainment of white psyches and male egos. Accordingly, Floyd-Thomas writes about womanism what follows:

Womanism for our time is rather a praxis of solidarity and of building relationships and allies, both within Black communities and among womanist, Black, feminist, and other liberationist scholars and communities. And more importantly, it is an epistemology that will continually strive to delve deeper. (*Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*12)

### **1.13. Womanism and African Consciousness**

Launched in the United States of America, Womanism has since been regarded as the flag of liberty for Afro-American women. It was a noticeable change that permitted women of color to speak. They raised their voices in protest against the politics of exclusion, bigotry and homophobia of a predominantly white bourgeois and middle class, feminist movement. Gloria T. Hull sees Womanism as:

One of the most dramatic changes in the literary world over the last decade has been the blossoming of a large corps of female writers, poets, critics. It is not that black women writers did not exist prior to this period, but the black literary scene had historically been predominantly a male preserve. On the one hand, a white, male-dominated publishing industry hadn't seen fit to publish the works of black women writers; on the other hand, even among the black intelligentsia, only the male articulation of the black experience had been viewed as worthy of literary expression. In conjunction with the growth of a movement for women's liberation, however, this situation has dramatically been reversed in recent years ... In the process black women are currently making a valuable contribution to the U.S. literary landscape, bringing their own experiences as women to life in the form of exciting female characters who confront not only a racist world but a sexist one. (qtd. in Nfah-Abbenyi 1)

In "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female," Frances M. Beal assumes that Womanists defined and re-defined the lives and marginal position of black women as one characterized by double jeopardy, multiple jeopardy and multiple consciousness (166-76). She puts forth the assumption that Black feminists called for the 'uplift of black people' by rejecting and combating in the same time. An important feature of womanism is the vigorous concentration on the black color. It has been founded to defend the concerns of black women. A question that one should ask is what is the position of black Africans in womanist literary space? In other words, as it has been assumed previously that black feminism began in America to adjust the position of Afro-Americans living there; do womanists include African women living in Africa in their literary productions?

In essence, African women writers have been recently linked to and influenced by the literary reactions of Afro-American feminists. African women writers have had to endure the same exclusions and contempt of a predominantly male dominated African literary scene. In Africa, literature was man's business. It has been the preserve of male writers like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Ayi Kwei Armah, and others for a very long period of time. Women, however, were not given their right to be heard. In *Women Writers in Black Africa*, Lloyd Brown (1981) examines African literature to explain the extent to which women writers are/were marginalized. In this respect, he writes:

Interest in African literature continues to grow, and there is every reason to believe that the African writer will be heard and studied for a long time to come, as artist, social analyst, and literary critic. But in all of this, African literature has to be understood as a literature by African men, for interest in African literature has, with very rare exceptions, excluded women writers. The women writers of Africa are the other voices, the unheard voices, rarely discussed and seldom accorded space in the repetitive anthologies and the predictably male-oriented studies in the field. Relatively few literary magazines and scholarly journals, in the West and in Africa itself, have found significant space or time for African women writers. The ignoring of African women writers on the continent has become a tradition, implicit, rather than formally stated, but a tradition nonetheless--and a rather unfortunate one at that. (3)

Attempts have been recorded to list-out the reasons behind male's dominance in African literature. One of the reasons, some critics affirm, is related to the late arrival of women in Africa to the literary domain. Brown thinks that the late arrival is a consequence of the African family system which favors men over women in terms of

education. Indeed, men were the first to be educated while women scarcely had the chance to attend schools.

Since primordial times, African women have always witnessed many hardships, from their family and social surrounding and this is due to the belief that women are inferior to men. Within the class-based context, women in Africa are regarded as 'second-class citizens'. Furthermore, Eboh Mp assumes that:

[W]oman is fundamentally manacled by the legacy of cultural domination and thralldom. Viewed essentially as a mere object, woman is grossly marginalized by a patriarchal culture which assigns her the "sacred and vital" role of wife and mother in the domestic sphere. (qtd in. Eze 332-3).

In *The Second Sex*, Simon de Beauvoir contends that in patriarchal societies women are constructed by men as passive and inconsequential objects. This position is the aftermath of the perpetuation of female self-effacement and self-erasure which have insidiously demeaned womanhood for a long time. Men in African societies determine and create structures for others to adhere. This is a fact which African literature reveals. In "Images of Women in African Literature: Some Examples of Inequality in the Colonial Period", Esther Smith argues that One facet of this male tradition that has come increasingly "under attack has been the image that the African male writer has given of the African woman" (44). Women are not seen as contributors to the development of their society. Critics have subsequently blamed African authors for attributing minor roles to African women. Writers have constructed images of women whose destiny is linked to that of men.

Women's predicaments in African began to change in the 1980's with the rise of women's studies, particularly Black feminism. A tremendous interest has been given to African and Afro-American writings. Auspiciously, the urgent need for self re-definition and self-evaluation has placed African females and female writers at a crucial ideological spike. As evidence, one can point out to the increasing number of female literary creations in the two last decades. Womanism opened the door for African female writers to speak out. Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi argues that

[T]o the womanist, therefore the vital unity of a people evolving a philosophy of life acceptable to both men and women is a better approach to the woman palava than a debilitating and devastating political struggle for women's libera-

tion, independence, and equality with men, to prove a feminist point. (*Africa Wo/Man Palava: The Nigerian Novel by Women* 121)

This ideology is the basic principle that sustains womanism in literature. Womanism in this sense is trying to show the true nature of woman, her role, and her contribution to the development of her society, which were played down or neglected in the works of the male writers.

Womanism has provided African women with the chance to speak for themselves. In recent years, women have occupied front seats in the invention of their own reality. As a matter of fact, African women writers have always been interpreted and studied within the feminist and womanist context. Female writers like Nwapa, Aidoo, Bà and Emecheta represent a host of critics who embraced principles of feminism and some womanist concerns in their writings. Nevertheless, in her 'femaleness' and struggle for self-realization and self-articulation, African womanist does not see that her role has having originated from the Western world.

In their quest for a positive and wholesome definition of womanhood and empowerment, African women do not exclude men. This belief finds its roots in Afro-American literary traditions. Indeed, like that of womanists in the US, African female writers' struggle is made through a team-work that seeks and includes the survival of the female as well as male. Kolawole (1997) observes that African men must not be vilified and excluded because African society is marked by non-excludability and non-rivalry:

The African woman seeks self-fulfillment within this plural cultural context. The average African woman is not a hater of men, nor does she seek to build a wall around her gender across which she throws ideological missiles. She desires self-respect, an active role, dynamic participation in all areas of social development, and dignity alongside men. (37)

Essentially, the Africana womanist instead holds that African women must always be in concert with males in struggle. The African is westernized and as Hudson-Weems (2008) observes:

Unlike the mainstream feminist, whose struggle is characteristically independent of and oftentimes adverse to male participation, the Africana womanist invites her male counterpart into her struggle for liberation and parity in society as this struggle has been traditionally the glue that has held them together and enabled them to survive...(61)

Africans consider dialogue as the basic element for their social progress. Women's position changes only if men and women work together. In this regard, Chivaura (2000) argues:

In a collective or cultural progress, dialogue between men and women encourages unity of purpose. It looks forward to everyone's participation in social life. The dialogue is based on the individual's capacity to be creative and contributive to the collective good. It operates at all levels and enriches all involved. (22)

In *Africa Wo/Man Palva*, Ogunyemi summarizes the value of womanism and the extent to which this trend has succeeded in reestablishing the human order in Africa. In this respect, she writes:

Womanism, with its myriad manifestation is therefore a renaissance that aims to establish healthy relationships among people, despite ethnic, geographical, educational, gender, ethical, class, religious, military, and political differences. (124)

Ogunyemi argues that the African writer is constantly aware of the negative connotations of feminism. Out of the fear of being accused by African males of allying with the white outsider has turned most 'women writers womanism; a black outgrowth from feminism' (124). The term, however, has been given other alternatives in Africa. Within the context of blackness and consciousness, Acholonu (1995) uses the term 'Motherism' as a substitute of "Africa's alternative to Western Feminism" (3). She believes that the African motherist is a humanist and environmentalist who vigorously "respects the interconnectedness of all life, the ecosystem and the entire human race." (112)

In many ways, Womanism has changed African women's images in literature and society. To begin with, Ogunyemi argues that:

Womanism is black centered, it is accommodationist. It believes in the freedom and independence of women like feminism; unlike radical feminism, it wants meaningful union between black women and black men and black children and will see to it that men begin to change from their sexist stand. (65)

Another positive attitude towards Womanism in African has been revealed by Obioma Nnaemeka. Due to its controversial contribution in African women affairs, Nnaemeka prefers using the term 'Nego-feminism' instead of womanism. She defines Nego-Feminism as follows:

Nego-feminism is the feminism of negotiation; second, nego-feminism stands for no-ego feminism. In the foundation of shared values in many African cultures are the principles of negotiation, give and take, compromise and balance...African feminism (or feminism as I have seen it practiced in Africa) challenges through negotiations and compromise. It knows when, where, and how to detonate patriarchal land mines. In other words, it know when, where, and how to negotiate with or negotiate around patriarchy in different contexts. (357)

In a nutshell, womanism finds in Africa a good terrain where its philosophy can be exercised. African 'women' writers find in Womanism a way of emancipation. Reciprocally, Womanists consider African women's position as a fertile area of debate and criticism. A question that one is supposed to ask is what are the major themes that a womanist in Africa tackles through literature? In "African Women, Culture and Another Development" Ogunjipe Leslie (1984) examines the thematic concerns of Womanism in the contemporary social and political transformation in Africa. Hence, she comes up with the idea that:

African feminism for me, therefore, must include issues around the woman's body, her person, her immediate family, her society, her nation, her continent and their locations within the international economic order because those realities in the international economic order determine African politics and impact on the women. There is no way we can discuss the situation of the African woman today without considering what the IMF policies and World Bank are doing to her status and her conditions. (228)

To conclude, thanks to Womanism that women have thus visibly situated themselves at 'various epistemological positions that are relevant' to the task before them. As Kolawole further puts it:

They are deconstructing imperialistic images of the African, rejecting liminal and negative images of women that are prevalent in African literature by men and they are reacting to mainstream western feminism. Having broken the yoke of voicelessness, these women are speaking out. (193)

Critics like Obioma Nnaemeka, Chikwenye Ogunyemi and Marie Umeh, through their analyses of Nwapa's works, advocate the potential for an African-based feminist or womanist theory which does not reject but rather builds from the foundations of traditional culture. This is to argue that African feminism is seen to arise from texts focused on African preoccupations and conditions, which supersede any interventionist western constructions.

## **1.14. Conclusion**

African literature has a long history and its richness results from the different phases it passed through. Any discussion of an African text requires gathering information about postcolonial theory. As this chapter has proved postcolonial theory finds in African literature the fertile area where its principles can be applied and discussed. They both stand in an opposite direction to colonialism. Indeed, they both refuse the colonizer's cultural legacy. Meanwhile, African literature, applying the philosophy of postcolonialism, sheds light on people of inferior rank. This is why it is regarded as the literature of subalterns or minorities. Women are among minorities that authors like Ngugi wa Thiong'o attempt to make their voices heard. In this regard, African literature, and Ngugi's texts, cannot be analyzed far from postcolonial-feminism. This school focuses tremendously on women's position in their societies. Since African literature is also inspired by ideas of womanism, one is supposed to ask the following questions: How does African literature reveal women's plight? Which trend is suitable to our analysis of Ngugi's novels? Is Ngugi a feminist or womanist? These questions will be answered in the next chapter which works as a review of related literature.

## Chapter Two:

### **African Women's Speech and the Constricted Throat: Exploring Women's Role and Position in African Literature and Ngugi wa Thiong'o Major Works**

We all know that a man is the head of the family and his wives do his bidding. A child belongs to its father and his family and not to its mother and her family. A man belongs to his fatherland and not to his motherland. And yet we say Nneka – 'Mother is Supreme.' Why is that?"  
(*Things Fall Apart* 9)

#### **2.1. Introduction**

African literature offers its reader the chance to learn about the sociology of its culture and the conditions by which Africans are surrounded. Some critics, for instance, see colonial African literature as a rallying cry that spurred the masses to awaken and break free of the psychological and physical shackles of colonialism. It is the product of time, race and milieu. Indeed, it faithfully mirrors the social changes.

One of the massive changes that Africa has witnessed since the realization of independence is the rise of literary and socio-political movements like feminism which changed the literary dimension of African texts. In the rise of Black-feminism, African literature has drawn the attention of its readers. Since Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* readers noticed that the presence of women is of a graver import. Achebe and other writers deliberately portray women whose social status is in jeopardy and thus needs to be revised. Within the context of fictional and factual, this chapter examines the representation of women in African literature by shedding light on their misery which has been revealed through numerous texts. Further, it is also intended to concentrate on women's plight and its significance in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's oeuvre. Hence, the researcher will summarize the previous studies and researches that have been conducted on this issue. The task of this documentary is critical. It shows how male structures of power are inscribed (or encoded) within in African literary inheritance and the consequences of that encoding for women—as characters and as writers

## 2.2. On Gender and Patriarchy

Before exploring the image of women in African literature, it is necessary to define concepts like gender and patriarchy. For a number of critics understanding these concepts is a must for a better grasping of feminist and womanist criticism. The reason why the researcher has opted for defining and detailing the concepts is the fact that they are very useful in locating women's position in literature both as writers and fictional characters.

Gender issues are usually sensitive and very debatable. This sensitivity is the result of the controversies which gender scholars often generate. To begin with, one of these controversies is apparent in defining the term gender itself. Readers may often use the term gender and sex interchangeably. However, the debate between scholars in the field has led to establish a clear distinction between the two concepts. The term sex refers to the biological characteristics which define humans as males or females. The concept gender, however, is associated with the economic, political, and cultural difference between man and woman. In *Sociology: A Global Introduction* Macionis and Ken Plummer (2005) argue that the term gender refers to “the social aspect of difference and hierarchies between male and female” (309). They further write that while “sex may be male or female; gender refers to the social naming of masculinity and femininity.” (309)

The concept of gender first appeared in literature during the early 1970s. At that time, the term was used as an analytical category to draw a line to differentiate between sex differences and the way these biological sex differences are used to inform behaviors and competencies which are assigned as either ‘masculine’ or feminine. Gender is known as the amount of masculinity or femininity found in a person. It is used to refer to the social, cultural and psychological aspects of masculinity or femininity. Scott S. (1993) considers the term as “[a] constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, the knowledge that establishes meanings for bodily difference ...” (qtd in Nancy256). It can be seen as the space carved out by culture for male or female to operate in a given society. Hence, the stratification of space is made and organized in a way that puts men at the upper stratum and women at the bottom.

An important concept that emerged as an aftermath of such a space is 'patriarchy'. The term patriarchy is used as a reference to the rule by the male head of social unit. In literature, the concept was used even before the rise of feminist studies. Feminists have used the term to point out to the social system of male domination over women. In other words, patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices, in which men dominate, oppress, marginalize, and exploit women. It is perceived as the social structure in which males have more status than females. According to Rich, in Kramarae and Treichler, (1985) patriarchy not only refers to the preventing of women from occupying powerful positions in society, but "it also creates the negative social view which men attach to women" (323). Morten, in Kramarae and Treichler views patriarchy as follows:

It is a way of structuring reality in terms of good/evil, redemption/guilt, authority/obedience, reward/punishment, power/powerlessness, haves/have-nots, and master/slave. The first in each opposite was assigned to the patriarchal father, or the patriarch's Father God, frequently indistinguishable from one another. The second refers to women as "the other" and, in time, to all "others" who could be exploited. The father did the naming, the owning, the controlling, the ordering, the forgiving, the giving, considering himself capable of making the best decisions for all. (232)

This briefly suggests that patriarchy is not simply hierarchical organization, but a hierarchy in which a particular gender fills particular places. It is a system where power is vested on the shoulders of the man, who is taken unquestioningly to be the head of the family. This is one of the main reasons why men, in the social power stratum, are ranked higher than women, while women are expected to take instructions from them.

The term patriarchy is used by feminists as a reference to the social system of male domination over women. The feminist critic's task is to explore the way in which male dominance over female constitutes the most pervasive ideology of peoples' culture and provides the most fundamental concept, namely power. In African societies, male dominance over females is pervasive. Men have been culturally constructed as "Self" while women are perceived as men's "Other". Such constructions are the products of the patriarchal culture prevalent in most African societies. Hence, one is able to maintain that patriarchy is a culture that promotes phallogocentric ideology which designates women as inferior beings and men as superior beings. One of the most

fundamental aspects of African culture is the importance African societies attach to men. African society, one might say, has been a man-centered.

As a matter of fact, patriarchy refers to the rule of men over women. In “Women, Sex and Patriarchy”, Lise Fortier contends that:

Virtually every society [. . .] has been patriarchal. [Indeed], patriarchy defines a system of relationships in which men “own” the women and children and rule over them. [. . .] Throughout history, patriarchy has enjoyed the solid support of religion, the political system and culture” (278).

Patriarchy is synonymous to the social arrangement in which men possess structural power by monopolizing high-status positions in important social, economic, legal, and religious institutions. Hence, some critics believe that patriarchy leads to injustice. In “Patriarchal Terrorism and Common Couple Violence: Two Forms of Violence against Women” Michel P. Johnson frames the concept “patriarchal terrorism” to define the social injustice that succeeds any rule of men over women. In his view that patriarchal terrorism is:

a product of patriarchal traditions of men’s right to control ‘their’ women [. . .], [precisely] a form of terroristic control of wives by their husbands that involves the systematic use of not only violence, but economic subordination, threats, isolation, and other control tactics” (284).

Similarly and also giving patriarchal hegemony a historical perspective, it can be said that once established as a functioning system of complex hierarchical relationships, patriarchy transforms sexual, social, economic relations and dominated all system of ideas. Therefore, it is appropriate to presume that patriarchy entails the amassing of power by men, and the consequent domination of the powerless in the society.

A patriarchal culture empowers men to use their higher position to subjugate and marginalize women rendering them invisible and inaudible. It is a culture that is slanted so that men are valued a lot and women are valued less, or in which man’s prestige is up and woman’s prestige is down. In Africa, the female gender often experiences inhumane acts such as girl-child discrimination, forced marriage, retention of a girl in her paternal family for procreation, widowhood practices, genital mutilation, rape and sexual abuse, wife battering, lack of right to inheritance, leadership discrimination, physical abuse, marginalization in education and employment opportunities. Accordingly to women are generally stereotyped as bad, sub-human elements, chattels

to fulfill sexual needs, commodities and symbols of exchange, mindless, irrational, jealous, hysterical, materialistic, emotional, and weaker sex.

It is stated that even in matriarchal cultures, women are not excluded from the lashes of oppression. In some African regions, whether they are patriarchal or matriarchal, women are deprived from their rights and hence cast into total obscurity. Critics and readers usually point out to this contradiction and give the example of Ghanaian Akan woman who is weighed down by the Akan law of inheritance under the matrilineal system. Although, descent is traced through the mother, the woman lives patrilocally.

All the modern feminist meanings of gender have roots in Simone de Beauvoir's insight that one is not born a woman. Gender is a concept which developed to "contest the naturalization of sexual difference in multiple arenas of struggle. Feminist theory and practice around gender seek to explain and change historical systems of sexual difference, whereby 'men' and 'women' are socially constituted and positioned in relations of hierarchy and antagonism. Elaine Showalter believes that gender has been introduced to the Anglo-American discourse as a reference to the social, cultural, and psychological meaning imposed upon biological sexual identity. This introduction, Showalter argues, "marks a new phase in feminist criticism, an investigation of the ways that all reading and writing, by men as well as women, is marked by gender" (*Speaking of Gender* 2). She thinks that it was a remarkable shift since the sexual difference had been central to the critique of representation.

It was Ngugi wa Thiong'o who stated that literature does not occur in a vacuum and that it is shaped by the political, social, cultural, and economic ideologies. Indeed any literature is specific to a given location or people and encompasses the culture, societal norms, values, religion, and other aspects of lifestyle of the people. One of the major aspects of African literature, as stated by George Joseph, is its socio-cultural and socio-political dimension. In *Understanding Contemporary Africa*, George Joseph asserts that:

[t]raditionally, Africans do not radically separate art from teaching. Rather than write or sing for beauty in itself, African writers, taking their cue from oral literature, use beauty to help communicate important truths and information to society. Indeed, an object is considered beautiful because of the truths it reveals and the communities it helps to build. (378)

A common aspect of African fiction and poetry is the vigorous concentration on the role of women in the social milieu, their sufferance, and their literary position. Terms like gender and patriarchy are highly recommended in exploring African literature. Edward Said (1993) put forth the claim that Third World societies are designated in exclusionary terms so that women are excluded lot from most discourses even those that concern them. Third World women are treated as an out-group to be spoken for by mainstream in group. The position and the roles assigned to women within a body of literature can certainly serve to investigate the society they belong to and the societal attitudes towards women.

Indeed, the activities and the duties allocated to a particular gender demonstrate the position they occupy in their society. This idea has been thoroughly explained by Roslodo and Lamphere (1985) in *Women, Culture and Society*. In this magnum opus they argue that all contemporary societies, regardless of kinship organization are featured by a remarkable degree of male dominance. Other critics like James Tsaaior believe that women are narrowed to insignificant space in the affairs of society. This claim resonate with Kabaji who contends that everywhere women are excluded from certain crucial economic and political activities and their roles as wives and mothers are associated with fewer powers and prerogatives than male roles.

Although the dominant theme in African literature is colonialism and its devastating effects on the masses, the issue of gender and patriarchy play a vital role in localizing most the nature of literary texts. Since many postcolonial texts are set in traditionally patriarchal societies, in which boys are thought more worthy than girls of formal education, any discussion of language and power must include gender politics. One of the major objectives of the present chapter is to reveal the impact of concepts like gender and patriarchy on African literature. The aim is to show that this patriarchal culture has excluded women from the literary space.

### **2.3. African Women and Oral Literature**

Women in Africa played a vital role in keeping customs and traditions alive. They were considered the mainstay of African oral literature and thus were the transmitters of culture. In the past it was women's responsibility to educate children and keep the link between the family members. In the pre-colonial period, women were to be found in virtually all spheres of human endeavour. They were active in agriculture and were responsible in keeping the unity within the family.

In literature, African women participated in preserving the seeds of literature. In African oral traditions women were highly visible not only as performers but also as producers of knowledge, particularly regarding oral literature's educational relevance and moral obligations. As stated in Chapter one, African oral traditions could be kept alive due to narration by mouth from one generation to another. Women played a vital role in preserving and transmitting the legendary stories, folktales, proverbs, and songs. Nnaemeka further argues that they "played a prominent role not only in panegyric poetry but also in elegiac poetry" (138). In *Woman Blooming Out of Gloom: A Thematic Perspective on the Novels of Mariama BA*, Jayant S. Cherekar affirms that women were the composers "who transformed and re-created an existing body of oral traditions" (14). Similarly, Ruth Finnegan confirms this positive role by assuming that:

[e]very Akan woman is expected to have some competence in the dirge, and though some singers are considered more accomplished than others, nevertheless every woman mourner at a funeral is expected to sing—or run the risk of strong criticism, possibly even suspicion of complicity in death. (*Oral Literature in Africa* 103)

Women's contribution to African literature is also understood through their participation in the early African prose narratives. Most of the stories were written and narrated by the most gifted old women. In "African Women Writers: Towards a Literary History", Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory admit the fundamental role of women. They both agree that their contribution has been a source of inspiration for contemporary African women (311-346). Contemporary Women writers have repeatedly acknowledged their gratitude to mothers who were great and resourceful storytellers. Deirdre Lapin gives the example of the Malian political writer Aoua Keita. He observes that her autobiography *Femme d'Afrique* attributes her moral strength and forcefulness to the lessons she learnt from the local activities of women that oral traditions documented. The Kenyan writer Grace Ogot declares her influence by her grandmother in her first novel *The Promised Land* (1966). In this thread, she writes: [M]y interest in writing fiction may have started at a very early age, stimulated by my childhood keenness to listen to my grandmother's folk tales. She was a renowned storyteller." ("Interview with Grace Ogot", 57)

An important point that one should pay attention to is that oral literature has also been viewed as a space through which women challenged the patriarchal social structure. It was a site for contesting these structures, relationships, identities and

ideology. African authors consider the folktale performers, mostly women, as active agents who struggle for a space in the patriarchal society. Drawing from the discourse of *Othering*, they believe that the condition of otherness enables the African woman to stand back and criticize the norms, values, and practices that the dominant culture of patriarchy imposes on everyone including those who live at the margins. In “Some Aspects of Women's Voices from Northern Nigeria.” Margret Kassam (1996) also affirms that African women contest their oppression and confinement in limited space by creating and recreating popular culture/songs suitable for both public and private consumption.

#### **2.4. The Rise of the Manuscript and the Invisibility of Women**

In the preface of Simone Kaya's work *Les Danseuses d'Impe-Eya* (1976), Cheikh Hamidou Kane sheds light on the position of women writers and writes: “parmi ces enfants de l'Afrique qui se sont livrés à l'entreprise d'écriture, les filles de l'Afrique ont, jusqu'à présent, figuré en très petit nombre” [among these children of Africa who have been engaged in writing, the daughters of Africa have, thus far, been small in number]<sup>1</sup>. Similarly, Arlette Chemain-Degrange (1980) highlighted the female condition in francophone African novels and then concluded by maintaining that, “il n'existe pas de femme, à l'heure actuelle, qui ait pensé sa propre condition et donné à sa réflexion la forme d'une fiction romanesque,” [At the present time, there is no woman who has thought about her own condition and put it a novelistic form.] (qtd. in Mutunda 43-4). A number of studies have proved that African women's written literature is young. They began to write during the 1950s. However, their production was sporadic until the 1970s when the female literary corpus took its shape and established its roots.

In essence, as the change was made from orality to written literature new perspectives for mastery in the written mode of expression emerged. There are three important factors which led to this change. Any investigation to list out these factors leads to the assumption that African women lost their position in literature due to the medium of communication, the cultural colonial aftermath which changed the social structure, and the conditions of publication. Jayant S. Cherekar posits that the factors which legitimated centrality shifted from those based upon age and sex to those based

---

<sup>1</sup>My own translation.

upon knowledge of the colonizers' languages---English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese" (15). It should be argued that the tardiness of female literary creation dates back to the colonial era, when European colonialists privileged the schooling of males<sup>1</sup>. In this respect, they gave them the training they needed to carry out their colonial administrative policies. Women, therefore, were prevented from attaining the same educational level as men. Maryse Condé (1979) reinforces this idea and argues that: "Comme dans un premier temps, [l']école [européenne] était réservée aux garçons, elle a introduit plus qu'un fossé entre "lettrés" et "illettrés," une division radicale entre les deux sexes"(3) [Because, from the beginning, the (European)school was reserved for boys, it introduced more than a gap between literates men and illiterates women - a radical division between the sexes]. (qtd. in Mutunda 45)

Jayant S. Cherekar adds another important factor related to the sexual politics and Victorian ideals of colonial education which created a hierarchy, licensing "men to virtually erase any presence of female" (15). Although regional and cultural specificities affected the degree of demotion, the position of African women was significantly compromised by the imposition of colonial institutions. Commenting on the effectiveness of colonial education in establishing the sexual inequalities, Ifi Amadiume, author of *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, argues:

[w]hereas indigenous concepts linked to flexible gender constructions in terms of access to power and authority mediated dual-sex divisions, the new Western concepts carried strong sex and class inequalities supported by rigid gender ideology and constructions. (119)

Indeed, while the forced implementation of European governments, Western schools of thought, and religion were introducing these gender distinctions, the colonial government's educational systems were reinforcing them.

In "Women Who Are Writers in Our Century: One Out of Twelve" Tillie Olsen states that the standard records of literary achievement—reviewers, textbooks—show eleven male writers for every one woman. Her explanation pervades feminist criticism and annoys some of its opponents. The fault, however, is not in women's biology but in

---

<sup>1</sup> In "A Study of Women in Zulu Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods* and Tess Onwueme's *The Broken Calabash*" Julie Okoh shares this idea and writes:

It was the colonization, which to a high degree that upset the legal arrangement of Nigerian communities by the introduction of the nineteenth century European notions of patriarchy. As a result, the traditional system, which gave women the opportunity to exercise their rights in both private sphere and public domain, was disrupted (31).

society's treatment of women, the cultural and religious devaluation, the lack of female literacy and education, and the conflict between work and family life. African women writers have had to endure the exclusion from the male-oriented African literary space. Despite the enviable position they occupied as oral artists, African women writers were not given the attention they deserved. Even after the rise of the feminist movement, the male voice continued to be dominant. Llyod Brown (1981) best expresses this dilemma in *Women Writers in Black Africa* by arguing that:

... interest in African literature continues to grow, and there is every reason to believe that the African writer will be heard and studied for a long time to come, as artist, social analyst, and literary critic. But in all of this, African literature has to be understood as a literature by African men, for interest in African literature has, with very rare exceptions, excluded women writers. The women writers of Africa are the other voices, the unheard voices, rarely discussed and seldom accorded space in the repetitive anthologies and the predictably male-oriented studies in the field. Relatively few literary magazines and scholarly journals, in the West and in Africa itself, have found significant space or time for African women writers. The ignoring of African women writers on the continent has become a tradition, implicit, rather than formally stated, but a tradition nonetheless--and a rather unfortunate one at that. (3)

The rise of the manuscript limited the literary space devoted to the second sex. The conditions of publication complicated women's status. Obviously, female-authored works are alone in their subjection to gendered-based categorization; a fact that is indicative of the presupposition that literary authorship is an innately male preserve. Interviewed by Lindfors, Grace Ogot summarizes this situation out of the exaggerated conditions of publication during the colonial reign:

As far as book publishing was concerned, the East African Literature Bureau was ready to publish anything written in the mother tongue languages. They could also publish material in English, but at that time they did not encourage creative writing at all. I remember taking some of my short stories to the Manager, including the one which was later published in *Black Orpheus*. They really couldn't understand how a Christian woman could write such stories, involved with sacrifices, traditional medicines and all, instead of writing about Salvation and Christianity. (63)

In actual fact, women writers were excluded from anthologies and critical texts. Carol Boyce Davies' *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature* sheds light on the historical background that has spawned the literary relationships between women writers and critics. In her essay entitled "Feminist Consciousness and African Literary Criticism" she puts forth the claim that African literature was initially critiqued by

“European academicians who communicated the Western, male-oriented mode of creating and evaluating literature” (2). Western critics were succeeded by male African authors who perpetuated the same phallogentric criticisms that were previously ascribed. In this respect, African literature was founded upon the marginalization of women’s concerns.

Ama Ata Aidoo cogently described the problems that African women writers faced. During the Second African Writer’ Conference held in Stockholm in 1986 and while presenting her paper entitled “To Be an African Woman Writer: An Overview and a Detail”, Aidoo explained how gender discrimination and the traditional roles assigned to women within patriarchal society played vital roles in the late arrival of women to the literary scene:

It is definite that anything that had to do with African women was of all vital pieces of information, the most unknown (or rather unsought) the most ignored of all concerns, the most unseen of all the visibles, and we might as well face it, of everything to do with humanity, the most despised. This had nothing to do with anything that women did or failed to do. It had to do with the politics of sex and the politics of the wealthy of this earth who grabbed it and who had it. (qtd.in Abbenyi and Makuchi 3)

Aidoo’s commentary on the situation that African women lived by is a call for change. She beleives that like menwomen have the absolute right to be treated equally. Moreover, Aidoo urges crititics to employ their energies and thus improve women’s conditions.

African literature has been the stronghold of male reviewers and writers. According to Mikene Schipper, author of *Beyond the Boundaries*, “literary criticism is primarily in the hands of male critics and since the critics determine who is and who is not an ’important author’, the status of a writer depends largely on their assessment” (qtd. in Stratton 3). In many ways, male authors’ dominance in the acts of literary creation and evaluation has assigned minor roles to women. Cherekar views women’s subordination as the outcome of colonialism which resulted in the imposition of rigid European definitions. Colonialism altered male-female power equations resulting in the detriment of women. This political development considerably altered the role of women restricting their position only to domestic tasks.

The neglect of women's role in society extended even to the level of neglecting good female writers of excellence, who were not included in literary reviews and criticism. Women's invisibility in the African literary Canon longed for at five decades. It was until 1966 that Flora Nwapa published her first novel *Efuru*. Davies admits that as a result of the peripheralization of women that was imbedded in the literary criticisms the first female critics "had to utilize the same critical apparta as their male contemporaries" (2). Women like Margaret Amosu, Molly Mahood, and Lilyan Kesteloot participated in the phallogocentric criticisms and their works cannot be discussed far from those of their predecessors. Davies further suggests that inspite of the rise of female writers and feminist critics, the gender-based discrepancies in literary criticism still exist- the political significance of which Ama Ata Aidoo firmly illustrates.

Exploring the history of African literature, with a particular emphasis on the colonial rule, suggests that earlier male authors were vigorously concerned and preoccupied with the task of glorifying their nation. By nature, African literature like any Third-world literature is characterized by its authors' nation-belonging. In a view of that, Fredric Jameson states that:

[t]hird-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic—necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society.* ("Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" 69)

The projection of men in their writing is that of active citizens, whereas women are/were passive objects. Cherekar maintains that in male's writings "women are used only as objects signifying and symbolizing men's honor and glory" (16). In *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* Stratton assumes that "[w]hether, it is Senghor's Negritude or Ngugi's social vision, woman's function is merely to embody man's vision. It also inevitably gave rise to woman as symbol, which often leads to stereotyping her roles in African male literature" (46). For these reasons, Cherekar puts forth the assumption that colonial African literature, therefore, is featured by its authors' insistence on "the one-sided, prejudiced and unfair portrayal of women." (15)

## 2.5. Exploring the One-Sided Reflection of Women in African Literary Canon

In the last two decades, Africa has witnessed an upsurge in literature triggered by the feminist and womanist movements. Such an unprecedented event has affected all the literary genres. In essence, African authors are usually entrenched in a macho<sup>1</sup> conviviality and a one-sided representation of women who are compelled to occupy the margin and assume peripheral roles. African male novelists tend to assign their female characters nothing but their traditional roles. They portray women who are bound to fulfill their daily tasks. In his article, “Male Involvement in Domestic Affairs: Some Reflections” Samuel A. Adewuji analyzes few literary works written by Nigerian authors. He asserts that:

Among all Nigerians but to a larger extent among rural, urban, poor, illiterate and nonilliterate ones, a woman, just like a little child, should only be seen and heard. In fact, within the pervasive extended polygamous network, she is regarded as a little higher in esteem than household chattels. (130)

As a matter of fact, women are poorly represented in contemporary male texts. Nelly Furman captures this ugly scenario when she says “in a world defined by man, the trouble with woman is that she is at once an object of desire and an object of exchange, valued on the one hand as a person in her own right, and on the other considered simply as a relational sign between” (61). African male writers have scarcely introduced positive images of women in their fiction. If they are not depicted as docile wives whose identities are recognized through their husbands, female characters gain identity through motherhood.

Taking Camara Laye’s *The African Child* as an example, Sonia Lee (1974) observes in *L’Image de la femme dans le Roman Francophone del’Afrique Occidentale* that the mother is “both the symbol of fertility and of rich past tradition” (60). The maternal image also symbolizes happiness in the family and a reassurance for children. For a host of literary critics the female gender in Africa is defined by aspects of social patriarchy, culture, and tradition.

---

<sup>1</sup> The terms macho, machismo and machista behaviour all illustrate the complicated map that latino and Chicano manhood has traveled over the years. Gloria Anzaldua gives an insightful commentary on the terms when she claims that ‘macho’ meant “being strong enough to protect and support my mother and us.” (83)

In “The Absence of the African Woman Writer”, Roseann Bell (1978) argues that African women were not given the attention they deserved despite the advent of the feminist movement, and “the male voice continued to be dominant” (492). One of the reasons is the fact that the study of African literature has been the preserve of male writers for a long period of time. According to Kolawole, the early phase of African literature is identified by the rise of a host of male writers who encouraged the peripheral roles of women.

Male’s representation of the second sex has always been the main interest of literary critics. In “Images of Women in African Literature: Some Examples of Inequality in the Colonial”, Esther Smith (1986) argues that

One facet of this male tradition that “has come increasingly under attack has been the image that the African male writer has given to the African woman. They are portrayed as passive, as always prepared to do the bidding of their husbands and family, as having the status of their own and therefore completely dependent on their husband...These men have been criticized for providing few images of African women as heroic characters as self-determined subjects with agency. (4)

Indeed, most male authors have been extremely criticized for their representations of African women in subservient gender roles. This representation makes them passive and ready to the bidding of their husbands and family. Since they have no status of their own as they are dependent on their husbands African females characters are marginal to the novels’ plot. The ideal female character created by male African authors acts within the framework of her traditional roles as wife and mother. Such representation has prompted what Deidre Lapin (1984) suggested to be “the classic and inescapable image of self-wife mother at the core of the feminine literary persona.” (qtd. in *Women in African Literature* 102)

African literary works written by males are overloaded with stereotypical images. By definition, Stereotypes refer to a process wherein individuals interact with the conviction that they have to do and think in an acceptable behavioral manner with their environment. According to Sekhukhune:

Most of these stereotypes which are, for the moment, exemplified by idiomatic and proverbial expressions, have relegated the social status of women to that of a nonentity. The gender role stereotypes of men have acquired aggressive

qualities and command absolute power and authority, while those of women demonstrate a lack of assertiveness and certainty. (qtd. in Mtuze 3)

Harry Blamires states that “the stereotyping of female roles in male-produced literature has a negative influence on women readers in imposing traditional roles upon them” (*A History of Literary Criticism* 24). Stereotypes are culturally determined pictures that intrude between an individual’s cognitive faculties and his or her perceptions of the world. Gender stereotypes are consensual beliefs about the different characteristics of men and women.

African male writers expose women in their traditional society as being weak, dependent and irrational. They play down the social significance of women in their writing or traditionally accepted virtues that confine women within familyhood. These images clearly confirm the patriarchal traditional society of their countries. Indigenous patriarchy and imposed colonial patriarchal customs and laws figure in women’s oppression. The patriarchal order by which African societies are characterized determines and defines women as marginal to symbolic order. While women in some African regions represent the frontier between men and chaos, Ngugi writes in his play *I Will Marry When I Want* that in Kenya “two women are two pots of poison” (124). Some African texts reveal women as being denigrated through mythical representations. As a result of the male-dominated literary traditions, women’s representation is reductive-perpetuating popular myths of female subordination. In *Concubine*, Elechi Amadi weaves an entangling web of myth around Ihuma supposing to be married to a marine deity, hence being responsible for the seemingly coincidental deaths of her spouses. Such mythical representations situate women as powerless and voiceless victims of ever deepening oppression.

African drama is also another fertile area of debate and criticism. As far as women’s portrayal is concerned, African playwrights’ contribution to the negative representation of women is noticeable. In their book entitled *African Theatre Women*, Martin Benham et al argue that “in a raft of mainly male-authored plays, women are seen as either angelically virtuous or more often, as dangerous, duplicitous and rapaciously greedy” (xiii). Most of African plays are phallogocentric reflecting the Lacanian argument that social arrangement like culture, language and writing are dominated by *thephallus*, which is the symbolic order. In Wole Soyinka’s plays like *The Strong Breed* and *Death and the King’s Horseman*, women are revealed as weak and

inactive creatures. His plays are congested with stereotypical images. In *A Dance of the Forests* (1963) the heroine Rola is introduced to the reader as a woman with a fatal attractiveness and who has callously sent her lovers to death. In *Kong'is Harvest* (1965), stereotypical representation reached its highest peak. Segi is described as “a right cannibal of the female species” (104). This image circumscribes women’s contribution to societal development. Accordingly, stereotyping aimed at affirming sexist values, boosting male ego and psychology and strengthening sexist political ideology. The result is a further subordination of the second sex.

It is argued that African literary tradition is characterized by a prostitution trope, one that is certainly exemplary of the debasement African women suffer at the hands of male authors. Yaba Badoe writes that African women find themselves in one of the either two categories when described by their male counterparts. They are either seen as “rootsie sisters or ravaged urban whores” (102). The African whore is a frequent image which some critics relate to Africa’s devastation during and following colonialism. In his famous sociological work *African Women in Towns*, Kenneth Little discusses the effects of urbanization of the African woman’s life. This urbanization liberated women from traditional shackles leading them to prostitution as a means of living. This literary device, however, nullifies women’s agency and reduces them to mere physicality. Ogun-dipe Leslie observes the exception in the works of some authors like Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Nuruddin Farah, and Alex la Guma. In *The Collector of Treasure* Bessie Head et al reinforce the idea of ravaged urban whores which is placed on female characters: “The attraction of this particular woman for Garesego Mokopi, so her former lovers said with a snicker, was that she went in for heady forms of love-making like biting and scratching” (68). This position is the result of the ancestors who mistakenly put women at the bottom of the society:

The ancestors made so many errors and one of the most bitter-making things was that they relegated to men a superior position in the tribe, while women were regarded, in a congenital sense, as being an inferior form of human life. (59)

Mongo Beti’s famous novel *Christ of Bomba* (1971) is a massive satirical text which attacks Catholic missionary practices in Cameroon during the colonial reign. It

also shows the misery, exploitation, and oppression of young women kept in the Sixa<sup>1</sup>. The novelist's intention is to criticize Cameroon's clergymen whose highest religious and social status could not prevent them from exploiting the second sex. The narrator tells the reader that the overseer of the church Father Drumont claims to have built the Sixa in order to prepare young women as future mothers and wives. However, he and his male agents exploit the young women and force them to work in construction and do domestic chores without pay. Commenting on their plight, Gerald Moore argues that "Raphael, the catechist-doctor of the Sixa, has been systematically debauching the girls in his charge and infecting them with syphilis . . . the girls are cruelly overworked and constantly intimidated by the catechist"(qtd. in Mutunda 53). These young girls found themselves forced by Raphael to become prostitutes.

Mongo Beti courageously unmask and reveals the hypocritical side of his society. Through his magnum opus, Beti claims that although men forced women to "give in" and thus become prostitutes, women are the only blamed. When Father Drumont leaves for a quick tour of other areas, Raphael turns the Sixa into a brothel where he becomes the pimp. He makes a fortune as he collects fees and forces the young ladies to have sex with clients. When Father Drumont comes back from and hears about the scandal, he interrogates the girls who confess. Ironically, his failure to punish the male workers who turned them into sexual objects makes him blame women. In this respect, the author makes forth his assumption that in the patriarchal system, women are always blamed for what goes wrong in society.

In reading Oludhe Macgoye's *Victoria and Murder in Majengo* and Genga-Idowu's *Lady in Chains*, Muriungi (2005) sheds light on the theme of prostitution in African male texts which many critics relate to the national metaphor of moral decay. Nevertheless, her study concludes by arguing that inspite of the already interpretation of the image as a metaphor of moral devastation, prostitution can be read as a way of emancipation since it permits women to break away from certain traditional roles and networks to forge more fulfilling networks far from the watchful eyes of the husband.

---

<sup>1</sup> In every Catholic mission in Southern Cameroon, there is a building which houses all the young girls engaged to be married. Every girl who wishes to be married in the Catholic way must stay in the sixa for two to four months, except in special cases, which are numerous. The defenders of this institution proclaim its usefulness and even its necessity. (*Poor Christ of Boomba* 5)

In African literature, Badoe claims, women are portrayed as alluring, dangerous, and anarchic force in society to be disciplined by the assertion of male authority. She further describes their pathetic situation by arguing that:

[I]n much of this writing women tend to become symbols of societies in transition; they may be used to represent a romantic golden age of traditional order, strong, submissive and elemental, or alternatively they are seen as symbols of urban decay and decadence: the grasping ghetto prostitute vying with the sophisticated 'been-to' for the chief resource available to them through men- money. (102)

Female gender's representation is mostly sloppy and biased. Using Chukukere's famous statement, one may claim that in their examination of women, African male authors assist in endorsing a one-sided vision of female characters. Charles C. Fonchingong gives the example of Cyprain Ekwensi who treats females through preconceived stereotypes like prostitution versus motherhood and wifehood. Compared to Leopold Senghor whose writing raises women to certain metaphysical proportions, Cyprain Ekwensi considers motherhood as the ideal norm for women.

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is probably the first text to draw readers' attention to the subordinate position of women. Joseph Mbele summarizes women's position as follows:

The women in *Things Fall Apart* are active as bearers of the positive cultural values of the society. They are the primary educators of children. Through storytelling and other forms of discourse, they educate and socialize the children, inspiring in them intellectual curiosity about social values, relationships, and the human condition....The women bear children, cook and take of the household in many other ways. Through their labor, they support the society; they are not just victims. (*Notes on Achebe's Things Fall Apart* 23-4)

Mbele's comment is somehow positive in the sense that he tackles the constructive role of women. Some critics have accepted Achebe's novel as a mirror reflecting women as subalterns. He is among the first African novelists to reveal women as victims of the society's cultural norms and traditional values.

In his attempt to revise the past in the hope of restoring the dignity and the pride of the black culture, Achebe marks the stress on masculinity as the only existing feature of heroism. This *macho* image is revealed in most of his novels. A good example is when Okonkwo vents his anger at his son Nwoye who prefers his mother's stories of the

tortoise to his father's stories of violence. When he committed the ultimate 'abomination' of establishing links with church goers, Okonkwo repudiates him :

How then would he have begotten a son like Nwoye... Perhaps he was not his son! No! ... How could he have begotten a woman for a son? Looking at his favourite daughter, Ezinma, he had thought: 'she should have been a boy. (61-63)

This is to argue that in the Igbo culture sons were perceived as feminine only when they were involved in some malpractices. This macho image suggests that Achebe leaves a little room for positive feminine values. Throughout his novels, women are indoctrinated to envision the world from a patriarchal perspective.

The most astonishing image that African texts introduced to the literary world is the perception of woman as a property. Joseph Mbele claims that "a woman is considered as man's property and status symbol" (22). Mongo Beti's novel *Mission to Kala* revolves around the life of Niam who exercises his power over his wife. The novelist skillfully reveals that in African societies, men think that women can be treated as properties. While the female character in the story finds herself caught up in a web of domination and submission, the novel's main character Niam believes that because of the bride price he paid for his wife, he has the absolute right to subordinate, exploit, and treat her as a property. The novel reveals the extent to which patriarchy has enabled Niam to exercise his power and believe that men are superior to women who therefore should be subdued.

A common feature of all African male-authored novels is the patriarchal subjection of women. D'Almeida asserts that in male-authored novels, women are assigned secondary roles. They have indeed been shorn of any heroic proportions. According to D'Almeida (1995):

La femme est rarement un personnage principal aussi bien dans la trame narrative que dans la thématique où elle occupe une place tout à fait secondaire, se situe donc à l'arrière plan et ne se trouve définie que par rapport aux hommes"

[The woman is rarely presented as the main character both in the narrative structure and thematic framework; she is assigned a secondary position in the background and is defined only in relation to men.] (Mutunda 54)

Female characters are scarcely granted primary status. Their roles are trivialized to varying degrees and they are revealed as silent, passive, and submissive in nature. According to Simone de Beauvoir patriarchal ideology presents women as immanence

and men as transcendence. Using de Beauvoir own words, one may say that in African literature and society, a woman is not born a woman; rather, one becomes a woman. They remain absent from the public sphere. Some African writers' representations of women were replications of the colonized mythologizing of Africa as 'Other'. A female is the negative binary of male. Women have been regarded as man's 'Other'. According to Ahmed Yerima:

The masculine traditional cannon has always dominated the African consciousness concerning beliefs and existence. The culture, the tradition, the languages, the names, the types of vocation, even the biological and physiological structure of human as determined by this environment and nature, have always reemphasized the dominance of the male. Man grew with such cultural beliefs, believing in it, guided through life by the society, and practicing such beliefs even in later stories he created to his death. The female counterpart was made to accept it as the only way... woman was indeed a stereotype, a symbol of life, cocooned by cultural beliefs (59-60).

For this reason Achebe's women, for instance, are denied the right to their own subjectivity and responsibility. Indeed, women's honor and dignity are defined in terms of their strict and total adherence to idealized norms of wifehood and motherhood. A reliable example is when Okonkwo heavily beats his wife Anasi for failing to provide his meal.

Critics have criticized Achebe for his one-dimensional portrayal of women. They maintained that his female characters lack the complexity and the development his male protagonists receive. Kolawole argues that "Achebe's world in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* is the world of ostentatious male heroism, patriarchy, and patrimony" (111). In fact, many of the celebrated works of Africa include these sexist elements-dismissing the socio-political and economic agency women traditionally maintained. Emecheta attacks this method of characterization of Achebe and other African authors claiming that:

The good woman, in Achebe's portrayal, is the one who kneels down and drinks the dregs after her husband. In *The Arrow of God*, when the husband is beating his wife, the other women stand around saying, 'It's enough, it's enough'. In his view, that kind of subordinate woman is the good woman. (qtd. in James 42)

Historically, African women's contributions are minimalized and sometimes omitted or superficially tackled in African novels. The Nigerian writer Ogundipe-Leslie analyzes the false characterization of African woman. She comes with the idea that the

African woman has been portrayed as a childish subject lacking agency. This fictional woman, Ogunidipe Leslie considers, is submissive, apolitical, passive, and unable to understand modern technological advances. Romanticized as the sole “repositories of culture and tradition,” these women are juxtaposed with evolution and innovation-creating a stagnation that the central male characters are not subject to. Hence, passivity and socio- economic dependency are portrayed as inherently female in several male-authored African texts; a negation of women’s large contribution to the agricultural, fishing, and herding industries.

In essence, African female characters are often depicted only in relation to male protagonists rather than as seats of consciousness in themselves. It becomes more evident from the aforementioned that gender bias was a prevalent part of the African culture and therefore a fundamental part in African literature. Any reader of African literary texts would notice that men and women were not equally represented as they hold different roles. Nnolim graphically captures this debased image of African women as depicted by sexist writers like Achebe and Ekwensi. Women, in their works, are exposed helpless, dependent, brutalized, disparaged. They are either concubines or prostitutes destined, in Ogunyemi’s words, “to carry foofoo and soup to men dealing with important matters.” Accordingly, Nnolim writes:

Right from the Edenic myth to modern times, women have been depicted as angels with feet of clay, as purveyors of unhappiness both for themselves and for their male counterparts”. The image of women in African literature is a gloomy one, compounded by the unhelpful hand of tradition and patriarchy (165).

Femi Osofisan explains this trend:

As far as the women are concerned, the bulk of our literature is secretly a weapon of male propaganda, of an agenda to keep the female under perpetual dominance... they mention works like Soyinka’s *The Lion and the Jewel*, Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, Clark’s *Song of a Goat*, Wale Ogunyemi’s *The Divorce* and so on, as examples of this sexist agenda. (4)

In essence, the overriding focal thrust of African male authors has always been to foreground the physical, prurient, negative nature of woman. By their negative portrayal of women, men expose their propensity to suppress women. They are perceived as responsible for all the ills of the society. They are also noted for moral bankruptcy, loose tongue, gossip, flippancy, rumour mongering, hypocrisy, treachery,

and many more. These allegations against women are mere figments of male imagination. Women's portrayal as sex objects and mostly as mothers and wives forecloses their other capabilities. In this respect, African Feminists/ Postcolonial-feminists are engaged in the struggle for a fundamental change in gender relations so as to recognize the role of women as full and active participants in the development process.

## **2.6. The Romanticized Woman in the Negritude Poetry**

Poets use powerful words to x-ray deep thought about man, his feelings, and the social milieu. The importance of poetry as a literary genre is in its exploration and use of imagery to delineate important perceptions. The cardinal focus of poetry is the literary consciousness. A poem's subject matter is anchored in the use of rich imagery. African poetry has expressed various concerns within the context of African ethos and traditions. Commenting on these various voices in African poetic representations, Wole Soyinka (1999) argues that African poetry:

[e]mbrace most of the experience of the African world- modern and historic though naturally no claim is made here for an unattainable comprehensiveness of themes; or for their mutual exclusiveness. The overlapping is obvious and frequent. What gives, for instance, the love poems of Denis Brutus their raw, passionate desperation is the fact that they are just as much poems about love as they are poems of indictment -a word I prefer to protest-against the brutish environment from which such emotions are painfully wrenched, that they speak of integral refuge and outer defiance, hope and resolve, within one breathe. Even when the poem emerges as essentially tender, its poignancy remains a yet more lacerating accusation. (qtd.in Hirsch 196)

In Africa, poetry is the only literary genre which uncovers significantly different images from the stereotypical representations of women as mothers, wives and marginalized beings. The idealization of African women is another phenomenon which occurs in some of the male authored texts. African poetry provides another image of women. Edited by Wole Soyinka (1975) the anthology entitled *Poems of Black Africa* portrays women from a new and multi-dimensional perspective. Preoccupied with behavior and practices that negate women, African poets underscore the primordial role of women in their societies. By so doing, some poems project women as community builders. The idealized woman introduced through poetry is the one who was mother-nurturer and by extension symbol of a sweeter, more secured Africa.

African poetry explores women's community servitude. Women occupy a central position due to their reproductive role which Viriato da Cruz exhibits in *Black Mother* in which the physical capability of the black mother is x-rayed through her "gleaming back" and her "sustaining milk" which has given several generations a livelihood. Similarly, in his poem entitled 'Woman' Valente Malangatana eulogizes women for their indispensable role in production and procreation. This is evident in his vivid description of the black woman "who adorns the fields...woman who is the fruit of man" (260).

Women's idealization is more apparent in the Negritude literature. Although the term Negritude has yielded multiple definitions, it is commonly described as the acknowledgement of one's African ancestry, and is associated with a tremendous sense of pride and renewed self-respect. Leopold Sedar Senghor- one of its chief pioneers- defines Negritude as the "sum total of the values of the civilization of the African world" (qtd. in Stratton 40). Being highly influenced by both the Harlem Renaissance and the "literary activities in the Antilles," the Negritude poets anchored their works in issues concerning colonization, slavery, self-awareness, and religious institutions such as Christianity. This "cultural and intellectual movement" mainly provided a means of deconstructing the colonial images of the "dark continent" and its "savage natives". This deconstructionist principle paved the way for the Negritude poets to abandon the stereotypical images and the negative representations of women. Unfortunately, the Negritude author's seemingly positive portrayal of African women "operated against the latter's interests" (Stratton 40).

African poets have strongly criticized and condemned practices like prostitutions and infanticide which neutralize the virtues of motherhood. In his famous poem 'The Roses are Withering' Richard Nturu explores and frowns the notion of prostitution which has eaten deep into the African social fabric. He sheds light on his debased society where every woman is a core of a prostitute" and man uses "cheques as a passport to sex. Negritude poetry idealized women and romanticized motherhood. Women, in this respect, are synonymous with traditions and African. Andrea Benton Rushing asserts that there are few negative images of women in African poetry and those are related to women who rejected traditional roles.

African women's virtues are celebrated in the writing of the Negritude poet Leopold Sedar Senghor. In his poems Senghor is found caught by the feeling of nostalgia for his homeland. One such depiction would be that of "Mother Africa"- a trope that is largely definitive of Negritude poetry. A good example is found in his poem 'For Khalam' which celebrates the African ancestry and landscape with a particular emphasis on the African woman:

When Shall I see again my country, the pure horizon of your face?  
When Shall I sit down once more at the dark table of your breast?  
Hidden in the half darkness, the nest of gentle words  
I shall see skies and other eyes  
I shall drink at the spring of other mouths cooler than lemons

Senghor's idealized representation of the African woman is echoed by Camara Laye in his poem "To My Mother," which Aduke Adebayo describes as "the maternal epic par excellence" (Adebayo 179). In this nostalgic poem, Laye reveals the cultural relevance of the African woman as a nurturer. Laye hails his mother's resignation and patience:

Black woman, woman of Africa, O my mother, I am  
thinking of you . . .  
O Daman. O my mother, you who bore me Upon your  
back, you who gave me suck, you who Watched over  
my first faltering steps, you who were the first  
to open my eyes to the wonders of the earth, I am  
thinking of you . . .  
Woman of the fields, woman of the rivers,  
woman of the great river-banks, O you my mother,  
I am thinking of you . . .  
Woman of great simplicity, woman of great  
Resignation,  
O my mother I am thinking of you.  
(Camara Laye, "To My Mother")

This poem indicates that 'the mother' is the ideal image of black African woman. The poem's addressee can be perceived as either Laye's real mother or 'Mother Africa'. In both cases, however, the woman is judged on her role as a mother whose qualities are patience, resignation and self-denial. Such qualities are considered by male writers as positive.

Woman's image in poetry has been the interest of critics. Several questions have been raised to discuss and problematize this idealization. According to Irene D'Almeida, author of *Francophone African Women Writers*, this image is one in which "Africa is compared to a nurturing mother and the African mother is given the proportion of the whole continent" (91). Consequently, African women and their experiences are idealized transforming them into "mythical and symbolic figures" (D'Almeida 8). Ba strongly opposes this element of the male-authored tradition declaring, "We can no longer be satisfied with the nostalgic songs dedicated to the African mother, and confused by men in their anxieties with Mother Africa" (D'Almeida 8). Although the exaltation of African women may have been the original intention fueling the creation of this image, the Negritude poets and other writers who have evoked these images in their works, are being criticized for placing African women on fictional pedestals. For as D'Almeida suggests, "this notion is far removed from the reality of women's daily existence" (91). Nevertheless, the African continent is continually feminized- the female body likened to the African landscape- and as a result, women are disparaged once again. Stratton submits that the "Mother Africa" image must be examined within the context of female/male power relations. Her description of the elements of Negritude literature is as follows:

The speaker is invariably male, a western-educated intellectual. The addressee is always a woman. He is constituted as a writing subject, a producer of art and of socio- political visions; her status is that of an aesthetic/sexual object. She takes the form either of a girl, nubile and erotic, or of a fecund, nurturing mother. The poetry celebrates his intellect at the same time as it pays tribute to her body. (41)

The male author speaks of the woman and her virtues, but she remains mute- an object of his gaze.

Women's representation by the Négritude movement has also been under attack and criticism. The images of women that the Negritude poets reveal were severely censured and criticized. A famous image to be mentioned is Senghor's idealization of woman as a symbol of Earth and Mother Africa. Senghor writes that "woman does not need to be liberated. She has been free for many thousands of years." (qtd. in Brown 493). In *Gender in African Women's Writing*, Juliana Sam-Abbenyi claims that the idealization of the African woman that posits her unparalleled status as transcendental symbol found itself duplicated in African literature with the stress on the supremacy of motherhood, of the fertile mother, of fecundity" (5). Nevertheless, the stress on

motherhood and fecundity also had the adverse effect. In one way or another, the emphasis re-affirmed women's subordinate roles, given that in the writing and thinking of these male authors, African women were virtually silent observers who simply fulfilled their destiny without questioning it or the structures that sanctioned the roles they were made to assume.

In presenting Negritude in his poetry, Senghor frequently employs a trope which also occurs, though sometimes in a different guise, in contemporary male-authored writing: the embodiment of Africa in the figure of a woman. In *Littérature Féminine*, Herzberger-Fofana states that:

Parmi les différentes images que le poète [de la Négritude] et ceux du même mouvement littéraire exaltent, l'image de la mère occupe une place prépondérante. Personnage mythique ou imaginaire, la mère devient le symbole du royaume de l'enfance et du paradis perdu. Aux heures de détresse, d'amertume elle est celle qui efface la souffrance et redonne l'espoir à l'exilé. Cette idéalisation et mystification de la femme africaine caractérisent les poètes mais également les romanciers de la même période.

[Among the various images glorified by the Negritude poets and those of the same literary movement, the mother image carries the greatest weight. Whether mythical or imaginary, the mother becomes the symbol of childhood kingdom and a lost paradise. In times of distress or bitterness, she is the one who wipes away the suffering and restores the exile's hope. Such idealization and mystification of the African woman characterize both the poets and novelists of the Negritude era.] (qtd. in Mutunda 49-50)

Like Herzberger Fofana, d'Almeida believes that this glorification of African women as idealized mother conceals their social reality. In "Tyrannies: Les 'cordes du langage' et les mots de la Mère" d'Almeida writes:

La métaphore de la "Mère Afrique", on le sait, fut très récurrente dans la poésie de la négritude. Elle représentait un concept pan-nationaliste dont le but était essentiellement politique. L'équation est bien connue: la femme = la mère = la terre = l'Afrique = "La Mère Afrique". Ce modèle établi par les chantres de la Négritude et inlassablement repris par leurs épigones a nourri pendant longtemps la représentation de la femme dans la littérature africaine. . . Ce modèle de représentation [est] pour le moins mythique. . . C'est pour cette raison que, une fois venues à l'écriture, les femmes africaines qui ont hérité de ce modèle en font une critique sévère et tentent d'en modifier la teneur.

[It is a well known fact: the metaphor of "Mother Africa" was very recurrent in negritude poetry. It represented a pan-Nationalist concept, the aim of which was essentially political. The equation is well known: woman = earth = Africa = "Mother Africa." This model established by the Negritude poets and tirelessly repeated by their epigons has, for a long time, nurtured the

representation of the woman in African literature. . . . This model of representation [is] at the least mythical. . . . That is the reason why, once they came to writing, African women who inherited this model criticize it strongly and attempt to change its tenor.] (qtd. in Mutunda 50)

Some critics of African literature believe that the idea of "mother Africa" often found in male literature is a ploy to silence the woman. Stratton deliberately criticized the Mother Africa Trope in African male literature and the subsequent romanticization of African womanhood. She believes that the romanticization of African masks subordination and perpetuation of patriarchal socio-political order. Further, she maintains that this trope goes against the interests of African women and should be purposefully interrogated to subvert male dominance:

*Whether she is elevated to the status of a goddess or reduced to the level of a prostitute, the designation is degrading, for he does the naming, whereas her experience as a woman is trivialized and distorted. Metaphorically, she is of the highest importance; practically she is nothing. She has no autonomy, no status as a character, for her person and her story are shaped to meet the requirements of his vision. One of these requirements is that she provides attractive packaging. She is thus constructed as beauty, eroticism, fecundity—the qualities the male Self values most in the female Other. (123)*

Thus, it can be stated that the African woman was spoken for. Commenting on woman's situation, one might argue that African woman was a woman who existed on paper. Whether in fiction or poetry, she was misrepresented and made silent. While the novelists clearly reveal them from a one-sided angle, poets who supposedly romanticized 'man's other' but indirectly limited her autonomy and re-affirmed her subordinate role. In this respect, Molaria Ogundiê-Leslie argues that women are obliged to demystify certain male stereotypes of the African woman as goddess or as Supreme Mother, self-sacrificing and suffering willingly and silently. She says that women should not completely embrace the image of the fertile mother of the nation, an image that African male writers have helped in disseminating. It is generally agreed that "Mother Africa" may have been declared free, but mothers of Africa remained manifestly oppressed.

## **2.7. On Women's Entrance into the Literary Canon and the Politics of Gender**

The author of *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* Florence Stratton observed that Bernth Lindfors' "The Famous Authors' Reputation Test: An Update to 1986" suggests that African literature is dominated by

male authors. Essentially, writers like Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and Wole Soyinka occupy the top three positions. The next seven positions are occupied by Ayi Kwei Armah, John Pepper Clark, Okot p'Bitek, Christopher Ikigbo, Pete Abrahams, Alex La Guma, and Dennis Brutus. Further, Stratton notes that women writers, compared to male authors, are far from the top places. Ama Ata Aidoo and Bessie Head occupy the fifteenth and eighteenth position respectively. In *Women in African Literature Today: A Review* Jones et al. assert that women writers have faced the same historical struggle in being neglected by male critics, observing that the Euro-centric is replaced by the African male-centric to reflect an equal subordination of a newer body of writers. The editors therefore emphasize the need for a certain flexibility and open-mindedness in approaching the work of African women writers, all the while being conscious of the risk of leaving women outside of the official circuit by placing them in a 'separate women's tradition' (4). Nfah-Abbenyi believes that this situation is gradually changing, since many scholars of African literature in the West are now tackling women writers in their courses. Such a change, Abbenyi asserts, has also affected many African universities, where curricula have traditionally been "Eurocentric and/or African male-oriented." (Zulfiqar 9)

Hence, African women writers have challenged the increased pressure for meaningful dialogue along gender lines. They struggled to gain literary attention and admission to the literary canon. In *Unwinding Threads: Writing by Women in Africa*, Charlotte Bruner (1983) maintains that African women writers practice their craft under pressure and that they usually experience some tough circumstances.

[t]he African woman writing fiction today has to be somehow exceptional. Despite vast differences in traditions and beliefs among African societies, any female writer must have defied prevailing tradition if she speaks out as an individual and as a woman. In order to reach an international audience directly, she often has had to cross linguistic barriers. She may well have confronted the dictates of societies in which the perpetuation of a tradition submerges the contribution of the innovator, in which the subservience of the individual to the community is reinforced by group sanctions. In such societies, the accepted role of any artist is to commemorate custom, in words, in song, and in the selection of the details that validate the accepted ethics of that society. Generally, then, the perpetuator is preferred to the creator. To be outstanding is to court rejection. (vii)

African women writers are creators in the sense that their works create an 'egalitarian culture' and challenge the narrow-minded and patriarchal ethics of their respective

societies. As a matter of fact, these female writers are under-scrutinized by readers and academic critics. Nevertheless, their novels are numerous, inventively eclectic and insightful.

In essence, during the 1970's more women writing was produced. It would be superfluous to argue that studies on African women writers have been few. Critics have since become more interested in the female literary creativeness. To cite, Lloyd Brown's *Women Writers in Black Africa* is a praiseworthy work which has made a detailed scrutiny of five famous African writers namely Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emechta, Ama Ata Aidoo, Bessie Head and Efua Sutherland. Florence Stratton's *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* is also another laudable work which evaluates the woman writing against the works already present in the literary scene and makes an insightful study of the concept of gender in African literature. Additionally, Obioma Nnaemeka's anthology entitled *The Politics of (M)othering: Womanhood, Identity and Resistance in African Literature* is a collection of essays that examines the female voice in the works of African women writers.

Contemporary African women authors tend to tackle women's sufferance in a verisimilar way. Their realistic representations bring out a new version of African womanhood which diverges from the notion of 'Mother is Supreme' and 'the Wine in the Wilderness' image of the African Queen that were introduced by the Negritude writers. African women writers, hence, demonstrate the African woman as a beast of burden who has to cope with the expectations of the local culture and tradition which encumbered her with the task of being the backbone of the family. The black woman's responsibilities, and the insult of male chauvinism that patriarchy subjects her to, are tragically represented by African women poets like Noemia de Sousa, Marina Gashe, Efua Sutherland, Mabel Segun, Omolara Ogundipe Leslie, and Catherine Acholonu.

African poetry has become women's corner where they are able to express their feeling and make heard their voices. Within the context of patriarchy, colonialism and sexuality, African women's poetry is seen rebellious and satirical. In her poem 'Appeal' the Mozambican poet Noemia de Sousa lampoons the idealized image of womanhood during their rebellion against the Portuguese colonizer. The poem puts forth the assumption that women suffer from 'the double yoke' of patriarchy and colonization. The Kenyan poet Marina Gashe uses her poetry to explore the deplorable condition of

womanhood. Her poems are about the drudgery undergone by the rural woman as beasts of burden along with the burden of motherhood. In her poems 'Wife of Husband' and 'The Village', Micere Githae Mugo criticizes the uncaring husband who heaps the whole responsibility of the household on his wife.

Drama is another literary genre through which African women writers have proved their literary qualities. Names like Patience Henaku Addo, Efua Sutherland, and Rebecca Njau are always the first to be cited as the pillars of African women's drama. Their dramatic works are sharp in content and usually devoted to the task of criticizing the social life on the continent. Their plays can be grouped under the protest writing. Thematically African female drama mainly deals with subjects like poverty, motherhood, and drudgery of rural life. In her play *Company Pot* (1972) the Ghanaian playwright Patience Henaku Addo tackles the conflict between the rural morality and the disturbing lifestyle in a westernized city. In this play, she amusingly exaggerates the portrayal of an innocent beautiful lady who comes to the city a job as a bar-girl. The play's heroine realizes that, due to the westernization of the county, the only role left to women in society is sexuality.

Of all the literary genres, fiction is probably the most recognized in Africa. Although its origins are far from being native since it is western by definition, in the last decades readers of African literature have shown their interest in the novel and novella which writers like Achebe, Armah, and Ngugi are behind in its fame. According to Wole Soyinka, the novel is a half-child genre since it was not originally an African literary form. Yet, the novel has become an indispensable medium to give a picture of the conflicts the natives live by. Similarly, women writers find in this genre a way to escape from the social shackles. They consider it as a medium to convey their messages and tales of double colonization. Roopali Sircar's *The Twice Colonised: Women in Africa* is well-researched study of the African woman wherein the concept of double colonization of the black women by both patriarchy and colonization in some of the major works in African literature is dealt with.

In the last decades, African women's writing has become a platform for airing the condition of the black woman who is doubly subjugated. Women writers describe the inferior position of women in Africa. Readers usually come across the exploited figure as in Grace Ogot's works or Flora Nwapa's *One is Enough* or Mariamma Ba's *So*

*Long a Letter*. African women novelists have paid attention to matters related to the society and the problems that chain or disturb women. Philosophically, they are convinced that any society cannot improve without improving the lot of women. Such a belief is derived from the 19<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Martin Delany who declares in “The Condition, Elevation and Destiny of the Coloured People of the United States, Politically Considered” that:

Our females must be qualified, because they are to be the mothers of our children. As mothers they are the first nurses and instructors of children... No people are elevated above the condition of their females... To know the position of a people, it is only necessary to know the condition of their females; and despite themselves, they cannot rise above their level. (qtd. in Brotz 92)

Although Flora Nwapa is considered as the mother of modern female novel, critics consider the Kenyan writer Grace Ogot as the first female writer to focus on women’s predicaments. In her novel *The Promised Land* (1966), she sheds light on the sexual stereotypes in the images of the two heroines of the novel. The male chauvinism of Ochola and his disregard of the wife’s wishes and Nyapol’s resignation to it are vividly brought out in the novel. Ogot has also pointed to the problem of sexuality in her short stories. In ‘Honorable Minister’ she depicts the new woman evolving in the metro cities in Africa. Moreover, she puts forth her belief that the social pressure makes the housewife decide on trading sexual favors for material benefits such as a house loan. In a view of that, the novelist shows the new urban woman as being dissatisfied with the standard of living provided by their idealistic and hardworking husbands.

The most powerful voice in African woman novel is that of Bessie Head. Her novels embody the lives of the black women in South African who are compelled to cope with both sexist discrimination. Her first novel entitled *When the Rain Clouds Gather* (1969) reflects the racist undercurrents which constantly swamp the community. The same issue is revealed in another novel entitled *Maru* that was published in 1971. Based on the story of Margaret Cadmore, a girl belonging to the Masrwa (bushman) community, the novel reveals the double subjugation of women in South African who are subject to racism on the one hand and oppression on the second. In her third novel entitled *Question of Power*, published in 1974, Head appears to be aware of the psychological effects of racism and sexuality on the black women’s lives. Indeed, the novel reveals the psychological turmoil of the heroine Elizabeth who experiences the double subjugation which obliges leave her husband and the racist homeland. Compared

to Margeret in *Maru* who finds herself victimized in a society where male's superiority is the only leading morality, Elizabeth in *A Question of Power* is able to break the fetters imprisoning her. In this respect, compared to other women writers, Head's works establish the African woman as an evolving entity.

Ama Ata Aidoo is among the female writers who experimented with all the literary genres and stamped their names in all with sterling products. She is a prolific author whose works resemble those of Nwapa and Buchi Emechta in the sense that they explore the condition of postcolonial Africans and report the oppression of women who yearn for emotional emancipation. A good example is her novel *A Love Story* which gives a realistic image of the urban African woman. The novel's heroine Esi-Sekyi is a modern woman who divorces her husband on the ground of marital rape. Again, in novels like *Someone Talking to Sometime* (1985) and *An Angry Letter in January* (1992), Aidoo carries her literary attack on issues like racism and sexism to depict the double colonization of women and their transition.

A careful reading of the various literary genres in early African woman writing reveals the changing shades in the personality of women. A historical review of women's representation in African literature reveals a remarkable change in the authors' and the society's perception of women. In *African Women Writers and the Politics of Gender*, Sadia Zulfiqar asserts that there is a noticeable change in

[t]he works of a cluster of African women writers who have emerged over the last forty years. In the work of authors such as Mariama Bâ (Senegal), Buchi Emecheta (Nigeria), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Nigeria), Tsitsi Dangarembga (Zimbabwe), and Leila Aboulela (Sudan), there is a clear and robust attempt to complicate or subvert the tradition of male writing in which female characters are often relegated to the margins of the culture, and confined to the domestic, private sphere. (10)

Those authors gave birth to the new African woman whose presence is featured by courage and the will to survive. The New Woman represents a theory of personhood where the individual exists as an independent entity. She has a responsibility to realize her potential for happiness and reach her objectives. Moreover, the new African woman does not accept her subordination. Instead, she must reason about her own values rather than fit into a stereotyped tradition.

In essence, the shift in woman's life is well described in the works of Mariamma Ba's *So Long a Letter* and Flora Nwapa's *One is Enough*. In these two novels, it is

polygamy that prompts the heroines to say that ‘enough is enough’ to their miserable conjugal state. In Ba’s *So Long a Letter*, the last straw that broke the camel’s back is Ramatouleye’s husband taking as a second wife the schoolmate of one of their daughters – after thirty years of marriage and twelve children. The long letter is written to her closest friend Aissatou upon the occasion, as she also was a woman who faced such a condition some time back. In Nwapa’s *One is Enough*, the novel’s heroine Amaka rejects her husband after knowing that he is married to a second wife. Their separation makes her stronger enough and increases her will to survive. Amaka becomes a prosperous business woman. Further, she gives birth to twin boys in a relationship with a priest. When the priest declares his wish to marry her, Amaka’s refusal is crystal clear: “I don’t want to be a wife... A mistress, yes, but not a wife...As a wife, I am never free. I am a shadow of myself. As a wife, I am almost impotent. I am in prison, unable to advance in body or soul”(132). This shows the contemporary perception of marriage as an imprisonment. Compared to that Negritude poets have praised the traditional notion of ‘wifhood’, women writers see in marriage sufferance and misery.

African women literature displays the image of an educated female whose education permits her to challenge all the obstacles. Buchi Emecheta’s novels are good example to cite as illustrations of the new educated African woman. In novels like *Kehinde* and *Destination Biafra* the heroines are educated and liberated women who repudiate the degrading advances of men to set out for a destiny of their own. Emecheta is among the womanists who consider education as the panacea to change life. The two novels’ heroines AkuNna and Gwendolen are attracted by books of enlightenment. In this regard, these books give them an imaginative power and widen their awareness of the possibilities that life and the world hold out to them.

The new educated woman in African literature finds in education a way to escape from the shackles of patriarchy. Taking into account Emecheta’s two novels, the reader is able to understand that education has a massive changing effect on the heroines’ lives. They both employ education in naming their children. In *Kehinde* AkuNna and Chike name their daughter ‘Joy’ to express their happiness. Similarly, Gwendolen gives her daughter the Yoruba name Iyamide which means “my mother is here”. Accordingly, it is felt through the heroines’ reactions, that the new African woman acquitted a voice that indicates an improvement in the female

position. Emecheta's novels speak of female solidarity, power, and independence of women's bodies, minds and spirits. They reconcile feminist aspiration and African integrity. Further, they bestow wholeness and call for rebirth and renewal. Feminists perceive education as the best means of emancipation. In Emecheta's novels, education is the elixir which reforms women's lives.

In a nutshell, African women writers have proved their contribution and their intentions to reintegrate women and reform the society. Although they lately entered the literary space, African women's writers proved their literary qualities and their commitment. While African male authors portray women in stereotypical subservient and unchanging roles, female characters are revealed as speaking subjects and agents of change by women writers. They have introduced a new woman who is known for her power, beauty and endurance. Mariamma Bà urged all African women writers to defend the concerns of the marginalized African women. She believes that women writers are the real agents of change and that they must scrupulously register with varying degrees of accuracy and success women's conflicts and tensions in their changing societies. In a view of that, she argues in an interview that:

Societal pressure shamelessly suffocates individual attempts at change...As women, we must work for our own future, we must overthrow the status quo which hems us and we must no longer submit to it. Like men, we must use literature as a non-violent but effective weapon! (qtd. in Schipper47)

Bâ has invited African women to join the literary bridge and challenge all the obstacles. She believes that women are obliged to abandon the social imposed roles and free themselves from the chains. The best solution to realize liberty is writing:

We no longer accept the nostalgic praise to the African mother who, in his anxiety man confuses with mother Africa. Women have a place within African literature, the place due to them on the basis of their participation side by side - with men -in all places of the liberation struggle and their contribution to economic development but women will have to fight for the place with all their might. (qtd. in Marzui 235)

Recently, women novelists, who wrote about the complicated situation of women, have been able to change women's situation and ask for justice. African women writers' function is to dispel the misconceptions and stereotypes that male authors have intentionally introduced through their works. Critics like Davies and Ogundipe-Leslie (1987) believe that they are compelled to confront the gender stereotypes created by male authors. Further, Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie asserts that it is woman writer's duty to

correct these false images. Similarly, Jones et al. (1987) believe that women writers can bring to the fore a more adequate critical analysis of issues like polygamy, childrearing, motherhood and subordination that exclusively affect their gender. Hence, women can best represent their interests in society as, ‘only a mother knows what it is to bear a child’.

## **2.8. Woman’s Image in the works of Gynandrists**

Virtues of African women are celebrated in some male-authored novels. Some male writers have made frantic efforts to reconstitute the fragmented presentation given the African female in the early write-ups. The perceptible imbalance in the literary sphere which hitherto was male centered is being given a critical re-think. These male authors have attempted to revisit some earlier approaches by presenting women in an all rounded perspective. Hence, a new concept emerged to name this group of male writers. Literary speaking, these men are known as the Gynandrists. They are male writers at the periphery who are deemed by radical feminist to be sympathetic to their course.

Gynandrists are praised by feminists for belonging to the feminist camp or championing the feminist cause. They are said to cast African women in a good manner. Hence, they believe that it is their duty to redeem and correct the disparaged and debased image of African women. Gynandrists’ method of characterization, therefore, is unique. A gynacritical characterization is known for its deviation from the phallogocentric depiction of women readers encounter in the works of Soyinka, Achebe, Rotimi and others. They portray women as talented and capable of achieving great things. They do not sexually objectify their female characters as was common in the works of earlier dramatists and novelists. This group of writers is populated by talented authors like Isidore Okpewho, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Elechi Amadi, Ernest Emenyonu, Ousmane Sembene and Femi Ojo Ade.

In essence, Sembene Ousmane is among the male writers who have championed women’s cause in Africa. His first step towards the recognition of women’s contribution and participation in improving the society is the rejection of all stereotypes. He deliberately rejects the stereotype that women cannot be leaders and that they lack the organizational skills. His conviction made him declare that no society can develop effectively without integration of women in public and social activities. Interviewed by Kembe Milolo in 1984, he declared:

Il m'est difficile de séparer l'homme et la femme dans ma tête, dans ma vie, même privée. Je ne les prends pas séparément. Je refuse de tomber dans cette catégorisation où la femme est ici, l'homme est là. Mais pour le mouvement auquel nous avons participé dans les années 40-60, les femmes ont pris leur part. Et lorsqu'on retrace honnêtement ce mouvement on doit rendre à la femme sa place.

[In my mind, in my life, and even in my private life, it is difficult to separate men from women. I don't consider them as separate entities. I refuse to fall into the categorization that places men on one side and women on the other. But for the movement in which we participated in the 1940s to the 1960s, women played their part. And when we honestly recount the history of that movement, we have to give women the position they deserve.] (qtd. in Mutunda 55)

Sembène's works reveal an array of radical women. He is a revolutionary author who attempts to make his female characters break the chains and make their voices heard. In *God's Bits of Wood*, he tackles the political force and potential of women from a feminist angle. Compared to the position of the second sex in Africa, Ousmane Sembène's depiction of women is highly idealistic. His female characters prove their solidarity and union to change their society. In this novel, each female has the feeling of belonging to the community and strives to work for the betterment of the people.

Sembène's female characters are known for their radicalism, inner strength, and self-esteem. In his novel *Xala* (1976) Rama is portrayed as an emancipated and revolutionary female who defies and rejects custom and tradition. One of the traditions she objects and rejects is polygamy. This is clear when she tells her father that she is "against this marriage, father. A polygamist is never frank" (13). She rejects polygamy out of her conviction that it impedes women's total liberation from patriarchal society. Sembène's fifth novel entitled *L'Harmattan* is also based on the story of a courageous named Tioumbé Koeboghi. She is a school teacher and a secretary of a Marxist political party that advocates complete independence from France. She defies her father's authority as she attempts to confront him physically. Sembène's novel works as a means of giving voice to the concerns of women, and as an attempt to imagine a new set of male-female relationships. Undeniably, he relies on bold female characters to testify his vision of a bright future for the African woman.

The positive images of women are also found in the works of Ahmadou Kourouma. He is known for his radical characterization. His female characters are known for their inner strength and courage. To argue, one is able to mention the story of Salimata in his novel *The Suns of Independence* (1981). Salimata is a courageous

woman who tends to make her own destiny. She understands her existential situation and that she is thrown meaninglessly. Hence, she decides to change her life by making risky decisions. She has been victimized in the sense that she witnessed a sexual abuse by the medicine-man Tiékoura. This incidence turned her into an aggressive woman who refuses to have sexual relations even with her husband Baffi. Further, she courageously rejects the traditional mores and defies her family's menace when she refuses to marry her husband's brother after she becomes a widow. For that reason, she represents the new African woman who has the ability to choose what is best for her.

## **2.9. Toward the Careful Reconsideration of Women's Roles in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Fiction**

With the onset of the feminist movement and the attempts to reconstitute the debased images of women, contemporary male writers have made significant strides in attempting to redefine the role of women in African literature. Contemporary male writers attempt to bridge the gender gap in African literature. There are some compelling evidences that the second sex is given an extended treatment which takes into account their multifaceted roles in their societies. Of all African writers who are noted for their attempt to subvert the earlier female treatments, the Kenyan gifted author Ngugi wa Thiong'o is the most recognized. His works have made him distinct from the male writers. It is assumed that he neither writes from the male perspective nor overtly glorifies male domination over women.

Ngugi is sympathetic to women as subjects of oppression. His interest in women as the most exploited workers and producers has drawn the attention of his readers. He is a gynandrist author who stands against all forms of women's oppression. He deliberately dissociates himself from the male authors' tendency to be classified as male-centric. His novels reveal his interest in women's affairs and their reciprocal contribution in his literary position. Ngugi wittingly takes up women's case and talks about both their submissive and rebellious nature. His women are revealed as impervious, dauntless and rebellious, yet enigmatic and uncanny.

Reading Ngugi's plays enables us to understand his remarkable efforts to transform the negative images of African women who usually pass from their state of passivity to that of responsibility. In plays like *The Rebel*, *A Wound in the Heart*, *This Time Tommorrow*, *The Black Hermit*, he offers a new way of interpreting women's role

in building their societies. Therefore, in his plays, Ngugi demonstrates his ability to present African women and their roles and responsibilities in appropriate historical and cultural contexts. Such a method of characterization is an attempt to humanize women's representation. Ngugi's approach enables readers to identify African women as the human beings who may be timid or brave, shy or outspoken, indolent or hardworking. Meanwhile, they are represented as human beings who could be victims of social circumstances or perpetrators of injustice.

As a gynandrist Ngugi proves that he champions the feminist case. He tackles women's case from a feminist point of view. By so doing, his works identify the new African woman with a will to resist and change. In *The Rebels*, Ngugi tackles the issue of marriage and reveals the conflict between traditionalism and modernity. His intention is to expose the clash between the old and modern values. As the play opens, the reader is told that the village elder Nguru has chosen Mumbi the chief's daughter to marry his educated son Charles. Charles returns to the city with Mary his preferred choice for wife. Mary fails to convince Charles to ignore the prearranged marriage imposed by his parents. While Charles prevaricates, Mary leaves the village. Moreover, Mumbi also refuses this marriage. Her refusal is followed by her suicide. In this play Ngugi supports the feminist interpretation of suicide. Like feminists, he exposes the new female who views suicide as means of emancipation. Despite their different social backgrounds, the two women in the story reject passivity and demonstrate the individual will. As the play's title indicates, women rebelled against a stifling traditionalism.

In Africa, neo-colonial historians have excluded women from history. Their active participation in liberating their countries is scarcely documented. Critics have noticed Ngugi's deliberate attempt to reintegrate women in Kenya's official history. In *Detained*, wa Thiong'o declares that he "would create a picture of a strong determined woman with a will to resist and to struggle against the conditions of her present being" (10). Essentially, his intention is to delineate the active roles played by the Kenyan women in the context of colonial and neocolonial resistance makes him deviate from the traditional gender tropes and archetypes configured by his predecessors and contemporaries.

Elleke Boehmer and James Ogude maintain that Ngugi's portrayal of women is gendered sharing the allegories of national discourse. Jame Ogude asserts that his

heroines are either allegorized as a trope for the nation or the repositories of ethnicity. He claims that in his earlier texts “the portrayal of women owes something to a long-standing iconography of women in nationalist literature which inevitably mobilizes women as the central metaphor for the nation” (109). In *Ngugi’s Novels and African History*, Ogude writes:

The element of historical invention could provide a useful point of entry into Ngugi’s concept of history, particularly when one bears in mind Ngugi’s stated commitment to presenting ‘true’ images of Africa’s past as a counter to ‘false’ colonial portrayals of the continent. (2)

Ngugi posits his art as an agent of history because it provides the space for challenging the use of history, and the manner in which that history is deployed in power contestation in modern Kenya and Africa. Moreover, it should be stated that Ngugi’s attempt to revisit Kenya’s past is well motivated by his desire to correct history by reintegrating women. In his play *The Wound in the Heart*, Ngugi revisits the past of his country and sheds light on the Mau Mau revolution. The message being conveyed through this play is that women’s involvement and contribution are no less noble than those of their male counterparts.

Ngugi wa Thiong’o examines women’s participation in the revolutionary struggle against the colonizer. His focus on women’s involvement springs from his sympathies for working class women. From a socialist point of view, Ngugi immensely believes in the co-operative spirit between men and women in liberating the country. A good example is *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* which Ngugi co-authored with Micene Mugo. The play was written as a response to the overall misrepresentation of the Mau Mau movement. The play is intense and comprehensive in revising the capabilities of women in their society. In this play women played very significant roles in the war. Their commitment as freedom fighters was as unconditional and unreserved as that of men. Although Kamithi is portrayed as the moving spirit of African nationalism, his heroic role is accentuated by pairing him with a woman endowed with a unique courage and an exceptional wisdom. Critical readings of the play suggest that every situation in the play reflects full testimony of the capability of women to participate as men. Kimathi is supported by a female counterpart called “woman”. She represents in different situations a moral conscience. She is the other part of the creative or societal productive principle which must unite successfully with Kimathi.

Ngugi's representation of women is also featured by his vigorous concentration on their victimization in the post-independence era. Although his female characters are courageous and have the rebellious spirit, they encounter a number of difficulties which threaten their social status. In *The Black Hermit*, Ngugi's fourth play, the story takes place in the post-independence period. Thematically, the play discusses the extent to which fake loyalties to tribe, religion and custom affect the meaning of independence. The story's heroine Remi is a victim of prearranged marriage. However, she refuses this marriage and commits a suicide. Remi's will is explained in her words before committing suicide:

I can't stay here in this place.  
To be like an unwanted maize plant  
That has been pulled out and flung on the earth  
To be trodden beneath men's feet. (68)

A careful consideration of Ngugi's plays reveals that he devotes his art to the re-consideration of women's role in Africa and African literature. According to Hal Wylie in African literature "a common thread has been the search for new roles of women and for new definitions of Third World identity, or identities" (*Contemporary African Literature* 1). It is believed that this search is undertaken in the face of intrusive patriarchy, and the disabling imperialist cultures. Through his literary works, Ngugi has joined the voice of African feminists. He is interested in recovering the fake images of women. He casts his portrayal of women in the history of struggle. In "Mother Africa and the Heroic Whore: Female Images in *Petals of Blood*," Jennifer Evans argues that "for Ngugi, struggle is the dynamic of history and society, and is central to his reappraisal of the African past" (303). She further argues that he transcends the passive image of the African woman [damaged] by both colonial and male domination by presenting courageous women who have important roles in the struggle against oppression and exploitation directed to them and the society. (303)

In a point of fact, Ngugi's women characters "are resourceful, determined and resilient, and when necessary, break through barriers imposed by tradition with the creators' full endorsement, [and] take their stand by men" (Jones 1). Consequently, Florence Stratton's argument that Ngugi's women like Wariinga in *Devil on the Cross* have their "stereotypical feminine qualities" [changed] into equally stereotypical masculine ones" (162) in order to survive is untenable. In his plays, women are made to

work as equal partners of men. Indeed, taking the examples of Nyobi in *The Black Hermit* or Njango in *This Time Tomorrow*, the reader is able to understand that their responsibilities do not suggest any type of inferiority to men. Alternatively, Eustace Palmer contends that “there is an element of masculinity in all Ngugi’s major women, just as there is an element of femininity in all his major men. Perhaps they [women] have to be masculine to make up for their men folk’s indecision and lack of resolution” (297), especially in view of the crises facing the society. For instance, Ngugi applauds Nyakinyua, a traditional Gikuyu woman in *Petals of Blood* because he values the central role of women in the regeneration of African culture for the reconstruction of the oppressive postcolonial society so as to engender respect and equity. In the light of the remarkable changes taking place on in gynandrists’ works, it might be very useful to conclude by arguing that gynandrists’ literature in general, and Ngugi’s plays in particular, reflect a reliable corresponding change in women, in the gradual re-characterization of women from passive ‘object’ to active participants in social advancement.

## **2.10. Reviewing the Critical Reception of Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s Female Representation**

The well-known image of women in African literature is that of victimization and marginalization. Essentially, the exclusion of females from social settings and their rightful opportunities to stand up for themselves in their communities also give substance to the marginalization of females from important decision-making processes in their communities and families. Ngugi attacks the traditional female discourse of the African woman as being dominated, exploited, abused and merely used as a beast of burden. This attitude has drawn the attention of readers and critics who consider him as a unique male author. A number of studies and researches have been conducted on his portrayal of women. Critical books, articles, and essays were published to discuss the positive representation of the female characters in Ngugi’s fiction.

To begin with, Chimalum Nwankwo’s *The Works of Ngugi wa Thiong’o: Towards the Kingdom of Woman and Man* (1992) surveys the wide variety of Ngugi’s works from the beginning to the most recent. Inspired by Ngugi’s works this collection of twelve essays is a direct response to Ngugi’s eloquent appeal to “move the centre” and create a worldwide and truly democratic ‘pluralism of cultures, literatures, and

languages'. The book discusses his writings in English and Gikuyu, the use of oral techniques and the effects of the tragic exile and the author's revolutionary spirit on his representation of women. Therefore, it is an attempt to assess women's role in Ngugi's fiction. In 'Women in Ngugi's Novels', Giovanna La Magna (1986) states that "women in Ngugi's novels bear the sorrows of life without being crushed by them" (qtd. in Brendon 4). Similarly, Nwankwo argues that although Ngugi's women "suffer secondary roles in certain respects, in others they are somewhat compensated" (4). He further argues that "questions about the general ability of women [are] answered with varying degrees of satisfaction... particularly in the novels." (4)

James Ogude's *Ngugi's Novels and African History: Narrating the Nation* (1999) sheds light on Ngugi's historical revisionism. It tackles the author's fictional representation of the Mau Mau revolution and the class struggle in postcolonial Kenya. He further examines the influence of Karl Max and Frantz Fanon's revolutionary philosophies on Ngugi. The book interprets Ngugi's novels from a Fanonist angle. Ogude is not the first critic to maintain that Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* is an influential book which has a massive impact on Ngugi's political spirit. Taking into account his third novel *A Grain of Wheat* Gikandi claims that Ngugi "was in the process of writing this novel when he came across Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*" (98). Ogude's book comes to the conclusion that "Ngugi is sympathetic to women as subjects of oppression, he is primarily interested in women as exploited workers or producers" (124). This oppression, Ogude states, is not very different from that suffered by the oppressed male and this tends to obscure the interaction between gender and other social institutions that a whole 'clan' of women may suffer from in spite of their class background. In this respect, Ogude asserts that Ngugi's fiction "creates the impression that there are no essential differences between working-class women." (124)

Simon Gikandi's book entitled *Ngugi wa Thiong'o* (2000) analyzes Ngugi's endeavor to politicize Kenya's history. Gikandi traces Ngugi's radicalism and political engagement with nationalism, empire and postcoloniality to demonstrate how Ngugi unremittingly fights for social, political, and economic justice in Kenya and Africa. It should be noted, however, that in dealing with Ngugi's quest for democracy in Kenya, Gikandi's book does not adequately focus on the changing images of women. Gikandi's interpretation of Ngugi's women suggests they are allegorical figures who fit the author's thematic concerns:

[t]he portrayal of women owes something to a long-standing iconography of women in nationalist literature which inevitably mobilizes women as the central metaphor for the nation. Ngugi's women protagonists in these novels fulfill something of this function by becoming primary sites for testing the reconciliation of ethnicity and the nation, tradition and modernity, betrayal and hope and, indeed, the possibility of rebirth. In the latter texts, however, the women protagonists become an index, a reflection of the state of the nation. In their portrayal they often stand for the state of degradation in a postcolony and in their striving gesture towards the possibilities of redemption and the birth of a nation free of class exploitation in the first instance and free of gender inequality in the second. In other words, if Ngugi enlists women as carriers of tradition and nationalism in his earlier texts, in his later texts he mobilizes them as metaphors of a class war. (108)

In his book *Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Gender, and the Ethics of Postcolonial Reading*, Brendon Nicholls (2010) attempts to interrogate Ngugi's representations of women by questioning the fiction's patriarchal assumptions and by inhabiting the historical narratives enabled by his female representations. Nicholls reads Ngugi's novels to explore how his narratives develop patriarchal and nationalist ideologies. The book makes its reader discover the itinerary of gender silencing that frames his historiography of women's struggle. It also locates moments of disruption in Ngugi's texts that offer a place from which the female might enter the field of fictional representation and its rhetoric of struggle as a woman. The book's author argues that Ngugi's novels show that "gender oppression is deeply implicated in the formation of and construction of Kenyan postcolonial nationhood, with the result that some Kenyan women have been placed in a fraught relationship to national subjectivity" (3). Nicholls believes that:

Ngugi has done more than any other male African writer to revise and reconsider his female representations, perhaps because his politics is so deeply invested in them. Even where his fiction appears to subordinate women, it works hard to emphasize the resilience, courage, strength, sagacity, loyalty, ability and integrity of female characters. (4)

Several articles and journals have been published to expose Ngugi's literary commitment and his political role in his society. Scholars have paid attention to the author's biography and the way he attacks colonialism and its devastating effects. As a matter of fact, it has been noted that few articles and journals that tackle women's resilience to patriarchy in Thiong'o's works have not adequately tackled the notion.

To begin with, Carol Shicherman's "Ngugi's Colonial Education: The Subversion...of the African Mind" (1995) revises Ngugi's educational career and its

effects on his literary achievements. Sicherman has examined the deficiencies of higher education and its psychological effects on Ngugi's retort and rebellion against elitism. This article is of graver import since it explores the relevance of Western education in the colonial and postcolonial epochs. Further, Shicherman's aim is to reveal the role of Western education in the marginalization of African women by giving examples from Ngugi's novels.

In "Re-Historicizing the Conflicted Figure of Woman in Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*" Bonnie Roos (2002) sheds light on the important role of women in achieving their goals. The study puts forth the claim that women are the agents of justice and social change. Roos reestablishes Wanja's identity as a bold and strong woman whose power enables her to be very successful. Therefore, Roos' aim is to show how women are presented as agents of change in a society which is dominated by men.

Some studies have been conducted to criticize Ngugi's language and method of characterization. In "The Gendered Politics of Untranslated Language and Aporia in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*" Evans Mwangi (2004) explores Ngugi's self-contradiction in depicting women characters, particularly through untranslated language. Further, through this scrutiny, Mwangi notices that Ngugi does not overcome the domineering patriarchal and colonial dominance that the text tries to deconstruct.

Chijjoke Uwasomba "The Politics of Resistance and Liberation in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross*" (2006) examines Kenyans' struggle for change in the postcolonial period. Based on the analysis of the two novels, Uwasomba acknowledges women's quest for selfhood and their struggle to achieve liberty. Meanwhile, he also examines how they underwent all kinds of patriarchal humiliation. Uwasomba claims that in *Petals of Blood* men coerce Wanja into prostitution before rising to economic independence. Furthermore, he maintains that Wariinga's metamorphosis as an assertive woman in *Devil on the Cross* is the outcome of the long journey of men's oppression.

Elleke Boehmer's "The Master's Dance to the Master's voice: Revolution Nationalism and the Representation of women in the writing of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o," (2009) explores the significance of women in Ngugi's novels. While Eko rightly claims that Ngugi is "a ground breaking example of the modern African male author's shift

from portraying women as objects to that of subjects" (212), Boehmer examines this shift and comes to the conclusion that:

Ngugi tends in his recent work especially to set his women characters as icons and allegorical figures representing all that is resistant and strong in the Kenya people. He thus seeks to identify with the liberation of African women as a part of his resistance to all forms of oppression. (189)

Njogu Waita's "Identity, Politics and Gender Dimensions in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow*" (2013) provides a critical overview of the treatment of the questions of identity, politics and gender in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's latest novel *The Wizard of the Crow*. The issue of identity is explored against the backdrop of the experiences of slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism and globalization in Africa. Waita's paper discusses the author's consciousness and his feminist vision. Based on the novel's story, Waita's study affirms that Nyawira is an example of Ngugi's women who are ready to confront the social, cultural and political challenges of postcolonial Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Further, he concludes with his remark that Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow* does not offer any explicit solution to the problems facing women in Africa. The paper also argues that through the multiple voices and elective voices in the novel African people should not expect any progress as long as their dreams of development are tied to global capital which puts them in 'a permanent debt trap' and dictates unworkable political systems.

Sayad Sadek's "The Struggle of African Women in selected works by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o" (2014) treats the various aspects of the resistance mechanisms devised by Ngugi wa Thiongo in order to empower the African women in a male-dominated society. It shows the wrongs to which women are subjected such as polygamy and wife-beating. It also analyzes Ngugi's firm belief that change is a gradual process as reflected in the novels subject of study. Sadek's article ends with his statement that Ngugi's works witness the rebirth of women characters and how they begin to acquire new identities. The women move from self-ignorance to awareness, assurance, and self-reliance. Ngugi's female protagonists become increasingly resourceful as the novels progress. Those women who fight without giving up hope, herald the impending change in the position for both men and women as they reconsider their social roles.

Sakchi Semwal's "The Delineation of Women Characters in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Fiction" (2015) is an attempt to critically analyze the delineation of women

characters in the fiction of Ngugi. The main aim is to argue that the representation of women in Ngugi's fiction changes with time as the status of women all over the world has been undergoing a rapid change. Semwal focuses on the way Ngugi portrays women as victims of colonialism, patriarchy, oppressed figures, mothers, and also freedom fighters. She argues that women have pitted against the unjust social, economic and political order, and play their positive roles for the establishment of a new order. In this regard, she argues:

In his early novels he shows women as an object and victims of patriarchy and colonialism. African women were one of the most exploited women of the world. They were being suppressed on the basis of gender, class and race. Woman has assigned a lower and subordinate position in the social set-up of African Society. However important the duties of a woman are, she is always neglected by the society. Women have accepted this role without any complaint and protest, despite the fact that they have a kingdom of their own with both its recognition and obligations. Women accepted the frame work of the family with a blind faith and rarely showed a spirit of rebellion. She continued to be self sacrificing, loving, patience and capable of suffering. But in his later novels, readers can see the radical shift in the portrayal of women characters. His later works break new grounds for women characters as women acquire more experience and become empowered through female consciousness. (377-8)

In "Gender Dimensions in the Fiction of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o" Manisha Sharma (2016) provides a critical overview of women's treatment and the questions of identity and gender in Kenyan novelist Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's work. Specifically, the study analyzes Ngugi's *Weep Not, Child*, *The River Between*, *A Grain of Wheat*, *Petals of Blood*, *Devil on the Cross*, and *Wizard of the Crow*. It pays attention to various strategies which women use to in responding to patriarchy. Sharma aims to say that Ngugi's fiction delineates the exploitation of the Africans by the Whites and the consequential effect of such exploitation on the lives of the Africans. More importantly, Sharma maintains that Ngugi's objective is to project the African woman as a survivor of the harshest conditions. She believes that his fiction exposes a number of the patriarchal challenges and constraints imposed upon helpless women by traditional African societies. The study concludes with the idea that Ngugi's women move from self-ignorance to awareness, assurance, and self-reliance. His female characters become primary sites for testing the reconciliation of betrayal and hope as well as the possibility of regeneration.

Eustace Palmer's "Ngugi wa Thiong'o: *Petals of Blood*" (1979) focuses on Ngugi's historical revisionism in *The River Between*, *Weep Not, Child*, *A Grain of Wheat* and *Petals of Blood*. He also explores women's position in these novels. Palmer notices the good images of women in his novels. He gives the example Nyakinyua who is called 'Mother of Men' and appreciates her quality of resilience with which she inspires women like Wanja to fight the oppressive patriarchy in postcolonial Kenya. The essay sheds light on the antagonism between Wanja's vitality and Munira's inertia which forms the source and driving force of the novel. Accordingly, Palmer notes that 'Wanja' belongs to that outstanding breed of Ngugi's women such as Mwhaki, Nyambura, Muthoni, Mumbi, and Wambuku who are known for their endurance, courage, and resourcefulness.

Bernth Lindfors' "*Petals of Blood* as a Popular Novel" (1983) examines the social problems that Ngugi tackles through this novel. Lindfors' essay scrutinizes the committed role of women who tend to participate in softening the atmosphere and fighting against all types of corruption. Lindfors asserts that this novel introduces women as part of the correct course of modern revolution intended to overthrow the oppressors obsessed with corrupt power in post-colonial Kenya. He believes that 'prostitution' in Ngugi's postcolonial novel is not only a sign of decadence, but also a clear indication of women's attempt to liberate themselves. A good example is Wanja who goes back to prostitution in order to take vengeance on the men who violated her, especially Kimeria who took advantage of her twice. So, at the closure of the novel, argues Lindfors, there is a possibility of paradise lost giving way to paradise regained for the oppressed.

Jennifer Evans' famous essay "Mother Africa and the Heroic Whore: Female Images in *Petals of Blood*" (1983) examines Ngugi's perception of struggle, history, and his society. Evans argues that Ngugi uses the metaphor of struggle to reappraise the past on the one hand, and underline African women as the victims of colonialism and male domination on the second. Further, it is claimed that Ngugi acknowledges women's fundamental role in the struggle against oppression. Evans states that Ngugi's women are central to his narrations. He presents them as custodians of the traditional culture and symbols of authentic Gikuyu identity. In a view of that, Evans observes that heroines like Nyambura in *The River Between*, Mumbi in *A Grain of Wheat*, and Wanja in *Petals of Blood* are in the forefront of social change. Commenting on the devastated

life of Wanja in *Petals of Blood*, Evans affirms that her life is an argument by the author to reveal the historical continuity, especially in the struggle against oppression in the society.

The female body in Ngugi's fiction has drawn the attention of many critics. The issue of female circumcision is well discussed in Tobe Levin's "Women as Scapegoats of Culture and Cult: An Activist's View of Female Circumcision in Ngugi's *The River Between*" (1986). This essay considers circumcision as one of the traditional aspects of Kenya which the Westerners misunderstood. He states that circumcision became an appendage to women's oppression during colonialism. Levin explains how this controversial female rite is fulfilling to Muthoni in *The River Between* because she submits to it following what her foremothers have done before. In this respect, Levin states that Muthoni's rebellion is symbolic since it underlines women's ability to revolt, overcome, and survive.

Charles Nama's "Daughters of Moombi: Ngugi's Heroines and Traditional Gikuyu Aesthetics" (1986) focuses on Ngugi's retrieval of ancient African cultural practices in his writings for the purpose of underlining the historical female resilience common in his heroines. Nama gives the example of Nyakinyua in *Petals of Blood* and considers her as the heroine who connects people to their heroic past, and inspires them to rebel against the postcolonial rulers. Additionally, Nama concentrates on the life of Wariinga in *Devil on the Cross* whose victimization encourages her to overcome the stifling oppression. In a view of that, Nama concludes the essay by claiming that Ngugi's women have an admirable task to save Kenya from foreign domination.

Florence Stratton focuses on the gender dialogue in Ngugi's literary works. In "Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender" (1994) Stratton considers *Devil on the Cross* as one of the most important works written by male authors that engage women in a dialogue of gender. The novel reveals the remarkable transformation of Wariinga who moves from a recipient to an actor of change. It should be noted, however, that Stratton has criticized Ngugi for retaining patriarchal patterns in the introduction of his women characters. While presenting Wariinga in a masculinized manner, Ngugi excludes the feminine aspects. In this regard Stratton asserts that he reconstitutes gender in order to fulfill the requirements of his master narrative. Similarly, in "Ngugi Wa Thiong'o: *Devil on the Cross*" Keith M. Booker considers

Ngugi's women in general, and Wariinga in particular as an exemplary model for African women. Wariinga's action, argues Booker, is a further testimony that women are no longer outsiders, but active participants in the revolution to free the society. Even further, Booker reiterates that Wariinga's action symbolizes Kenya as feminine and a victim of rape through neocolonial oppression.

## **2.11. Conclusion**

African women have played a significant role in the molding of their culture by virtue of their position as bearers of customs and traditions. Besides, they acted as agents of change in the sense that they have been the mainstay of the basic societal institution of the family. Nevertheless, the patriarchal order of the African society has excluded women from the daily activities which men dominate. This order, as the chapter has proved, is the reason behind the late arrival of women to the literary scene. During their absence, African male authors contributed to women's subjugation by producing literary works that carried out the social perception of women. Overloaded with stereotypical images and examples of women's subjugation, male's literature compelled and encouraged women to join the literary bridge and make heard their sufferance and concerns. Names like Flora Nwapa, Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta, and Mariamma Bâ have not only reconsidered women in literature but they also affected male authors. As an extension of the positive representation of women that female authors came up with, gynandrists carried out this new literary tradition. They successfully reconsidered women in their works and gave new positive images of the second sex. As a gynandrist, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's devotes his art to the reconsideration of women's role in both society and literature. His attempt to reveal active women has drawn the attention of many critics and readers. However, in spite of the remarkable number of studies that have been conducted on the issue of gender and women's representation in Ngugi's art, the political significance of gender in Ngugi's novels remains untackled. Hence, the present thesis' task is to clarify this significance and demystify its ambiguity.

Having provided a useful literary background and a considerable review of related literature, the next chapter's objective is to examine Ngugi wa Thiong'o's political activism. It is intended to work within the context of literary commitment and

explore the effects of Kenya's history, politics and culture on Ngugi's intention to politicize literature and gender issues in his fiction.

## Chapter Three:

### Ngugi wa Thiong'o: The Revolutionary Author

I'm more trying to connect; I'm more listening to people.  
Whatever I get is very meaningful to me. Ngugi wa  
Thiong'o

#### 3.1. Introduction

The fifties of the twentieth century saw an expansion of tremendous anti-imperialistic and anti-colonial revolutionary upheavals, moral disorder, and the socio-political, religious and psychological turmoil of the Africans which are all reflected in the novels of authors like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ayi Kwei Armah and Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Ngugi wa Thiong'o is Kenya's most eminent modern writer. Undoubtedly, Ngugi's fame is the fruitful result of his seriousness and literary abilities. His novels provide a glance at the chaotic existence in Kenya and other African countries. In this respect, his fiction scrupulously highlights the pathetic conflicts and passions of human drama along with historical objectivity.

Mario Klarer assumes that it is more enlightening "to look at literature or text as cultural and historical phenomena and to investigate the conditions of their production and reception" (*Introduction to Literary Studies* 1). Any attempt to discuss an author like Ngugi wa Thiong'o requires providing the background information which facilitate the grasping of his works and critical views. It becomes incumbent on any student of Ngugi's writings to look at his works against the background of the forces that were brought to bear on the novelist's personal development, for these formative influences are important in shaping the individual's personality and world view. The present chapter introduces the author and tackles the most important points with regards to his personal life and literary criticism. It is hoped that this chapter relates Kenya's history, politics and culture to Ngugi's fictional and non-fictional works. Besides, the aim is to discover Ngugi's political activism and the way his views got strengthened by his

personal life. The nub of this chapter is not to claim that Ngugi's writing is always subjective or self-reflective; rather it aims to reveal how he perceives his own relationship to colonial and postcolonial Kenya as connected to later ideological questions.

### **3.2. Ngugi's Life and Literary Career:**

On January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1938, Kenyans were on a rendezvous to witness the birth of their voice. In a village named Limuru Kamirithu, which is just 12 miles north of Nairobi the capital of Kenya, an African writer of an international repute, mainly named Ngugi wa Thiong'o was born. Formerly known as James Ngugi, Ngugi wa Thiong'o is a Kenyan essayist, dramatist, and a novelist who is considered the foremost writer among East African writers in English to emerge after Kenya's independence in 1963. He is the fifth child of the third of his father's four wives, and one of the very rare prolific writers in Africa.

A member of the Gikuyu ethnic group, Ngugi attended a mission-run school at Kamaandura in Limuru, Karinga School in Maanguu. Afterwards, he would become the only student from the whole Limuru to get into the prestigious Alliance High School in 1955. In 1959 Ngugi went up to Makerere University College in Kampala (Uganda) where he would notice that the syllabus and critical approach adopted by the English department were highly based on acknowledged Western Classics and canonical texts that did not reflect embryonic African literatures and local cultures.

Pursuing the graduate studies at Leeds University in 1964 enabled Ngugi to be more acquainted with *socialism* through his critical interaction with socialist critics such as Frantz Fanon (mainly his book *The Wretched of the Earth*), while he would have read Robert Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*. In *African Literature as Political Philosophy*, MSC Okolo argues that Ngugi's reading of the previously mentioned books "re-oriented him and turned him into a socialist" (37).

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's fame is the result of his well acclaimed novels. His novels, particularly, seem to present a consistent revision of cultural, historical and political thoughts that occupy prominent place in the corpus of African literature and criticism. As an international novelist, Ngugi wa Thiong'o made his successful debut with the publication of *Weep Not Child* in 1964. This masterpiece was immediately followed by

*The River Between* that was originally published in 1965. It was in 1967 that Ngugi became internationally well known out of his publication of *A Grain of Wheat*. Part of the attraction of *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) is the sheer volume of criticism it has drawn from admirers of Ngugi's style and politics. Throughout his earlier novels, Ngugi aimed to go beyond the simple historicism to bring-back the forgotten scenes of Kenya's past that has always been written by Neo-colonial historians.

The son of a tenant Gikuyu farmer and one of the twenty eight children in an extended family, Ngugi was able to witness a number of conflicts and divisions within his family that reflected the struggle against British colonialism in the Emergency period 1952-1962. Kenya's past plays an important role when it comes to make a sense of and interpret Ngugi's texts. Ngugi's fictional and non-fictional works reveal his insistence that Africans have their own system of values, steeped in long, tested and evoking traditions, which are seriously disturbed by colonial intervention. Accordingly, throughout his novels, he appears to be haunted by a sense of the past. In *Homecoming* (1972), Ngugi asserts that the colonial middle-class education and brainwashing told the African that "he had no history" (41). To make it clear, he perceives the role of the author as that of restoring the African character to his history and therefore restoring the African dignity. In a view of that, Simon Gikandi argues that Ngugi's narrativization of history, is after all, engendered by his strapping desire "to go beyond the simple historicism" (*Ngugi wa Thiong'o* 3).

Ngugi's literature has always been regarded as a response to his personal life, especially the wide range of conflicts he witnessed during his childhood. In this respect, critics came to the conclusion that his fictional texts are autobiographical. Just like most of the characters in his novels, Ngugi grew up in a pure African environment to be a victim of the colonizer's intolerance. Accordingly he writes:

I grew up in a small village. My father with his four wives had no land. They lived as tenants-at-will on somebody else's land. Harvests were often poor. Sweetened tea with milk at any time of day was a luxury. We had one meal a day – late in the evening. Every day the women would go to their scruffy little strips of shamba. (*Homecoming* 48)

Critics noticed a number of similarities between the author's childhood and the pessimistic life of Njoroge in *Weep Not, Child*. In his article "Ngugi wa Thiong'o: The

Problems of Communal Regeneration” Abdul R. Jan Mohamed holds the same view by maintaining that:

*Weep Not, Child* is set in the Kenya of the 1930s and 1950s, and it ends amidst the violence of the Mau Mau War. It is thus the most autobiographical of Ngugi’s novels; Njoroge, its child protagonist, is about the same age as Ngugi would have been at that time. (186)

This view is almost confirmed by Ngugi himself who once stated that his novels, short stories and plays are “from my creative autobiography over the last twelve years and touch on ideas and moods affecting me over the same period. My writing is really an attempt to understand my situation in society and in history” (qtd. in Gikandi 6). Like his characters, Ngugi grew up in a difficult situation where his family was among the dispossessed masses who were forced to live under the mercy of the wealthy landlords.

Readers of Ngugi wa Thiong’o notice his acquaintance with the Christian Bible and Biblical stories. Critics have always agreed on considering him as a Christian writer due to his reliance on Biblical symbols to faithfully convey his political and socio-economic messages. His familiarity with the Bible resulted from his attendance at Alliance High School. Indeed, Alliance High School played a significant role in giving Ngugi a thorough knowledge about Jesus Christ and God’s messages which he acknowledges to Micere Githae Mugo. In an interview with Micere Hugo Ngugi admitted the use of the Biblical references saying that:

Gikuyu society is lacking in mythological background. The Bible provides a convenient framework. For example the idea of destiny with regard to the Israelites and their struggle against slavery. Gikuyu people have had similar experiences. (Micere 21)

Ngugi was the only student from his region to attend Alliance High School at his time. As he grew up, however, Ngugi perceived the school as a training center for colonial administrator. In reference to the lectures delivered by his teacher Carey Francis, Ngugi writes:

In his lectures... we were being trained to become obedient servants of Her Majesty the Queen of England, to serve her and the British Empire, and never to question the legitimacy or correctness of that Empire. Therefore, politics were frowned upon: African nationalities were castigated, they were seen as irresponsible agitators, as hooligans. (qtd. in Robson4)

In literature, memory has a prominent place. Readers of Ngugi wa Thiong'o have come across the idea that Ngugi relies on his memory to deliver his inner conflicts. His memory dictates some incidents that happened in the past and still have a certain impact on his present. While he was a student at Alliance High School, Ngugi witnessed the punishment of students who were caught speaking Gikuyu instead of English. In this respect he writes:

The culprit was given corporal punishment- three to five strikes of the cane on bare buttocks- or made to carry a metal plate around the neck with inscriptions such as I AM STUPID or I AM A DONKEY. Sometimes the culprits were fined money they could hardly afford. And how did the teachers catch the culprits? A button was initially given to one pupil who was supposed to hand it over whoever was caught speaking his mother tongue. Whoever has the button at the end of the day would sing who had given it to him and the ensuing process would bring out all the culprits of the day. These children were turned into witch hunters and in the process were being taught the lucrative value of being a traitor to one's immediate community. (*Writers in Politics* 11)

This humiliating memory helps readers to understand Ngugi's denial of Christianity and his dissatisfaction with the role of the church in Africa. Its role, as he argued, was indoctrinating how to sow conflicts and discords and how to be faithful to the empire. Further, the seeds of betrayal, a theme that runs throughout Ngugi's fiction, were planted in Kenya with the help of moral institutions.

Following his attendance at Alliance High School, Ngugi carried his ambition as a knowledge-seeker to study at Makerere University of Uganda. It was during this inspirational stay, that Ngugi began his international literary productions. As part of the university's competition, Ngugi wrote short plays. His first play *The Black Hermit* (1962) was an undertaking requested by students at Makerere to celebrate Uganda's independence. Published in 1968, *The Black Hermit* was the first play to be written in English by an East African and was first performed at Uganda National Theatre.

One of the incidents that had a deep influence on Ngugi's literary pronouncements and subject matter is a conference that took place at Makerere University in 1962. The conference was primarily on African literature which brought African writers with a diversity of thoughts on the objectives and major topics of African literature. It was meant to dictate a common definition of literature vis-à-vis the African continent and history ranging over a wide spectrum of social, economic and political subjects. The conference must have captured Ngugi's attention and his political

vision regarding the role of the author in African societies. By the end of the conference, Ngugi entered his years of political activism and literary commitment.

### **3.3. Ngugi wa Thiong'o as a Committed Writer**

In his book *The Writer in Modern Africa* Wole Soyinka argues that “the time has now come when the African writer must have the courage to determine what alone can be salvaged from the recurrent cycle of human stupidity” (20). Although this statement is almost four decades old, made by Wole Soyinka in 1968, it has not lost any of its validity over the years. Critics believe that in the first decade of the third millennium, African literature turns from retrospection to prospection. Comparing John Keats’ poetry to that of William Wordsworth, Paul de Man argues that a poet should take Keats’ poetry as a model to be perceived as a prospective poet. Any poet or a novelist, from de Man’s point of view, must deliver a literary work that “consists of hopeful preparations, anticipations of future power rather than meditative reflections on past moments of insights harmony.” (Royle 103)

By its very nature, literature is a social art committed to human values. It occupies a venerable position within societies and plays a massive role as a potent means of communication. It carries a great deal of social significance especially when it is committed to politics. Literature is the platform whence we may command a view of our life, and by which we may move it. The classical image of the author, poet or a playwright as a vendor of illusions is no longer warranted as far as contemporary literature is concerned. Writing has become an act of communication through which the writer imposes his social and political point of views. Thus, commitment stands for the basic genuine devotion of the writer to a cause and his convictions. Seemingly negative, Oxford English Dictionary defines the term as an engagement that restricts freedom and liberty of action. Nevertheless, critics are convinced that it indicates an ideology and a perspective adhered to with zeal and dedication. Hence, Cuddon assumes that a committed or an engaged writer is the one “who through his work, is dedicated to the advocacy of certain beliefs and programmes especially those which are political or ideological and in aid of social reform” (*A Dictionary of Literary Terms* 139).

### 3.3.1. On African Literature and Commitment

No one denies that de Man's vision is a reliable outcome which places the literariness of Africa in a good stead. The tradition among African writers is to embark on a journey and undertake a curative pilgrimage into their society's past. Writers from this continent use their pens to dig the ground of the African history in the hope of illuminating the cruelty of the past and the injustice of colonialism. Certainly, the journey can be explained in terms of these authors' willingness to redeem Africans' shattered past.

African literature provides good illustrations of the relationship between the author and his or her social milieu. The general concerns of African literature reveal the writers' attitudes toward the socio-political situations at specific periods of Africa's evolution. The ugly side of colonialism and the colonizer's slave trade inspired African writers. In this respect, Arab points out to this antagonism and reactive element in African literature by maintaining that in its modern phase, African literature appeared as a response to colonialism. The bulk of African literature in the 1960s onwards, however, has been the product of a serious resistance to neo-colonialism<sup>1</sup>.

Literature has always been considered as a means of pleasure and truth-exhibition. In Africa, literature is a vehicle of the self recognition. Revisiting the past, reflecting and refracting the postcolonial state and the direct critical role of the author to examine the social illnesses and the socio-economic as well as the cultural malaises are reasons to define African literature as being committed. Accordingly, Leopold Sedar Senghor declared, in the international conference of Negro writers and artists at Serbon in 1956, that African literature is politically committed. Further, he claimed that all African art has at least three characteristics: "it is functional, collective, and committing or committed." (Karenga 33)

Known as 'La Littérature Engagée', African committed literature serves as a recorder and an interpreter of socio-political activities in Africa. Jaya Raomaintains that any truthful and fruitful human experience forms the basis for written expression in any

---

<sup>1</sup> Neo-colonialism, literally 'new colonialism', the term was first coined by the first president of independent Ghana, and the leading exponent of Pan-Africanism, Nkrumah in his *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965). Bill Ashcroft et al. argued that the term "has since been widely used to refer to any and all forms of control of the ex-colonies" (*Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* 163)

branch of literature” (1). Boris Suchkov claims that this literature’s aim “is to understand and take cognizance of life” (232). He declares that any type of literature which deals with “society, its conflicts and contradictions provides the key to cognizance of man himself in all the complexity of his personal and social manifestations” (232). Chinua Achebe, on the other hands, stresses the role of literature in Africa and demonstrates its ability to create and establish a different order:

Art [literature] is man’s constant effort to create for himself a different order of reality from that which is given to him; an inspiration to provide himself with a second handle on existence through his imagination. (qtd. in Okolo 2)

Commitment is one of the debatable concepts in African literature. The debate on whether literature should or should not concern itself with the social realities appears the same as the art-for-art’s sake controversy. It might appear that any African writer should be relevant to the discussion of commitment. Nevertheless, some attempts have been recorded to relegate literary commitment at the expense of the artistic pleasure. Such critics believe that the whole acceptance of dealing with social concerns forcibly leads to the decline of African literature and the tragic loss of its artistic pleasure. John Nagenda is among the minority of African writers who rejects commitment. Definitely turning his back on his society and clearly opposing the concerns of the masses, Nagenda declares:

As far as I am concerned, my part in society is not necessarily to make the society better than I found it, that is a good bonus, but essentially all I care about as an individual, as a writer...is that I have an individual capacity...to live my life in this world before I die...And if it came to a point at which all the rest of the world was being murdered and I could escape to live in a cave and still manage to find a private ‘explosion’ I would do that, and to hell with the rest of the world. (qtd. in Gugelberger 33)

### **3.3.2. Commitment as a Morality in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s Oeuvre**

Among the African intellectuals who side with their masses and thus can be treated as committed authors, one is able to list out thinkers like Chinua Achebe, Ayi Kwei Armah and Ngugi wa Thiong’o. These critics share with Wole Soyinka the view that an author must be “the special eye and ear, the special knowledge and response” .Simon Gikandi notes in *Ngugi Wa Thiong’o* that, “[T]rue, the Gikuyu constitute a major referent in Ngugi’s works: they are his primary cultural field and experience; their institutions provide the stage in which the central political and cultural conflicts in

the author's work and thought are fought out" (14). As a matter of fact, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's literary targets include historical facts, governmental corruption, religious hypocrisy and the unmerciful socioeconomic exploitations which characterize the new-born Africa and Kenya in particular.

As a committed writer, James Ngugi attests his noble role to side with his people. As any engaged author, Ngugi perceives his society's members as being chained and victims of numerous exploitations during and after colonialism. In his essay "The Role of a Writer in a New Nation", Chinua Achebe maintains that "one of the key motivations for producing African literature was to restore the moral integrity and cultural autonomy of all the Africans in the age of decolonization" (8). Thus, the African writer lifts a burden to defend the nation and regain the lost dignity. At an African-Scandinavian Writers Conference held at Hassel by in 1967, James Ngugi argued that "it was time that the African writers also started to talk in terms of those workers and peasants". In a view of that, Ngugi writes:

I believe that the African intellectuals must align themselves with the struggles of the African masses for a meaningful national ideal. For, we must strive for a form of social organization that will free the manacled spirit and energy of our people so we can build a new country, and sing a new song. Perhaps in a small way, the African writer can help in articulating the feelings behind this struggle. (*Homecoming* 50)

Ngugi's literary commitment has been the major concern of contemporary critics for a number of reasons. Si Abderahman Arab observes that his novels "combine the lessons learnt from literature Engagée with the vitality of the American novel of the twenties and thirties in their attempt to undermine the colonialist hegemony in its political structure..." (37). Ngugi has shown a tremendous dissatisfaction with colonialism and its aftermath. His fierce attack against the colonial and neo-colonial ages is derived from his credence that hope has not yet been fulfilled and that the masses' dignity needs to be restored. Accordingly, he regards himself as belonging to a new generation of students and teachers who are committed to a national aesthetics of liberation challenging those "who are sold to the culture of imperialism." (*Writers* 40)

For Ngugi and a number of critics who share the same view African literature does not usually belong to surreal or metaphysical worlds; rather it is made to reflect social realities. He uses his pen to reveal the plight of the people and demonstrate their position. In *Writers in Politics*, he re-asserts the previously mentioned claim that the

progressive African writer “has no choice other than aligning himself with the revolutionary forces of change at every historical phase of the struggle” (104). Additionally, the African author, for Ngugi, must “capture not only the vibrations of the very intricate human interactions in space, but also their vibration and contradictions in the structural reformation of society in time” (104). Ngugi’s duty, as he explicitly argues, is to be “with the people so as to articulate their deepest aspirations for freedom and higher quality of life.” (140)

Ngugi’s belief in commitment is widely explained in his books of collected essays which are very helpful and ultimately needed in understanding his fiction. Throughout books such as *Homecoming*, *Writers in Politics*, and *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngugi makes statements informed and carried through by a passion and intellect which are only in circumscribed evidence in his best creative work. Furthermore, it is noticeable that some of these essays, however, reveal militancy and a fierce criticism not commonly witnessed in his novels. Yet, ImeIkkideh comes to the conclusion that novelists can seldom be as direct didactic and polemical in novels as essayists can be through their essays.

Ngugi’s writing demonstrates his willingness to harshly criticize institutions of power in Kenya. He perceives the position of the artist, and the novelist particularly, in his or her society as the one upon whom a great responsibility is imposed. Further, he shares with Chinua Achebe the view that literature must be in the service of man. By this, Ngugi rejects the notion of art-for-art’s sake. Being extremely convinced that literature should not ignore the big issues that bedevil African and other Third-World societies, Ngugi opposes and definitely abandons neutrality. In this regard, he argues that any writer “whether or not he is aware of it, he works to reflect one or more aspects of the intense economic, political, cultural and ideological struggles in a society...what he or she cannot do is to remain neutral”. (Preface, *Writers in Politics*)

Beside siding with the masses, Ngugi’s moral duty is being closer to them using the language they understand. Critics noticed a remarkable change in Ngugi’s fictional career. His early fictional works including *Weep Not, Child*, *The River Between*, and *A Grain of Wheat* are loaded with images, descriptions and characters that echo a Western literary tradition. However, in his recent works like *Devil on the Cross*, *Matigari* and *Wizard of the Crow*, he appears much closer to his people in the sense that he uses new

elements and narrative structure closer to Gikuyu oral traditions. In “Orality and the Literature of Combat: The Legacy of Fanon” Alamin Marzui and Lupenga Mphande notice the way this “museum-type” of orality was changed into a creative and a dynamic aspect of his later works once he managed to redefine his public and began to write for Gikuyu audience.

Language choice in Ngugi’s criticism is controversial and highly debatable. Out of the publication of *Petals of Blood* in 1977, James Ngugi was put in Kamiti Maximum Security Prison. Being detained and deprived from all means of writing, Ngugi felt the injustice and the bitterness of living under an oppressive regime. The detention order was signed by Daniel Arap Moi. Though designed to ostracize and punish him for challenging the establishment, Ngugi’s detention, ironically, had some positive effects. In jail, Ngugi’s political activism got immensely strengthened. In jail he wrote two massive political works, *Detained: A Writer’s Prison Diary* and *Caitani Mutharabaini (Devil on the Cross)*. The most notable change, however, was the adoption of a distinct medium of communication in his literary career. While he immediately rejected English language, Ngugi adopted Gikuyu his mother tongue.

The decision to write in Gikuyu has been interpreted in different ways while numerous critics relate it to the author’s commitment. In *Decolonizing the Mind* Ngugi justifies his choice by claiming that “African writers are bound by our calling to do for our languages what Spenser, Milton and Shakespeare did for English, what Pushkin and Tolstoy did for English” (29). The question of language, undoubtedly, has become central to Ngugi’s intellectual and cultural project. In “Return to the Roots”, he started to question his previous investment in the institution of literature in English:

To choose a language is to choose a world, once said a West Indian thinker, and although I do not share the assumed primacy of language over the world, the choice of language already predetermines the answer to the most important question for producers of imaginative literature: For whom do I write? Who is my audience ... The question of audience has a bearing on the next few problems for a writer: what is the subject and content of my works? From whose stand do I look at that content or not? (*Writers in Politics* 53-4)

Additionally, Ngugi’s decision to adopt the mother tongue is an attempt to establish a clear and direct connection with his linguistic past. Moreover, in his essay “Return to the Roots”, he writes:

Only by a return to the roots of our being in the languages and cultures and heroic histories of the Kenyan people can we rise up the challenge of helping in the creation of a Kenyan patriotic national culture that will be the envy and pride of Kenyans. (65)

From their point of view, Marzui and Mphande argue that Ngugi's return to his people, in terms of narrative structure and language, places his latest fictional works within what Frantz Fanon called a "literature of combat," that is, a literature which "moulds the national consciousness," "assumes responsibility," and "is the will to liberty expressed in terms of time and space." (171)

As a matter of fact, Ngugi's first attempt to use the Gikuyu language was to have startling consequences. In 197 he collaborated with Ngugi wa Mirii in writing a play in Gikuyu entitled *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, which narrates the story of a poor peasant who loses his land to a rich farmer. By the end of the year, he helped to stage it with local actors and actresses, at Kamiriithu Community Centre near his home in Limuru. The play's popularity alarmed the government authorities. Consequently, it was quickly banned and on 31 January 1977, Ngugi was arrested. Since his release Ngugi has never been reinstated in his job at the university. Nevertheless, far from being overawed by his detention, Ngugi has become more militant than ever in fighting for autonomy and cultural regeneration and social justice.

### **3.4. Ngugi's Contribution to Kenya's History**

Essentially, history and literature share a number of similarities. Nevertheless, few attempts have been recorded to relegate the literary effectiveness in recording, deconstructing and re-writing history. Tony Bennet believes that this tendency of regarding history as being 'more real' is an attempt "to privilege history as both the literature's source and its ultimate referent" (*Outside Literature*42). It was Aristotle who first claimed that, in terms of reality, the distinction between the historian and the poet was that one describes the thing that has been, and the other a kind of thing that might be. For Aristotle, "poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since the statements are of the nature of universals whereas those of history are singular" (*Homecoming* 39). Thus, what comes to minds is that the literary text can be treated as part of the wider historiography in its own right.

The 'ideal' African novel, Ngugi once maintained in an interview in 1969, would "embrace the pre-colonial past...the colonial past, and the postcolonial period with a pointer to the future" (Friedberger ii). Preoccupied with history from the start, Ngugi has frequently declared his view of the interwoven relationship of literature and history. He believes that history and literature are inextricably linked with each other because both are about "living men, actual men and women and children, breathing, eating, crying, laughing, creating, dying, frowning, men in history of which they are the product and the maker" (Writers in Politics 72). Additionally, he has altered his perception of the relationship of the author as both a writer and historian. Therefore, Gikandi assumes that in their thematic concerns, language and structure, "Ngugi's novels demand particular attention to the historical events that are also their condition of possibility." (289)

Fiction, therefore, provides Ngugi with the space to imagine the African history that had been repressed by colonialism. His writing, using Edward Said's statement, is an attempt which "revised visions of the past tending towards a postcolonial future, as urgently reinterpretable and redeployable experiences, in which the formerly silent speaks and acts on territory reclaimed as part of general movement of resistance, from the colonist" (*Culture and Imperialism* 256). James Ogude argues that Ngugi posits fiction as "an agent of history because it provides the space for challenging our notions of national identities, uses of history, and ways in which they are deployed in power contestation in modern Kenya and Africa in general" (2). Ngugi's interest in the concept of history is a duty dictated by his morality. He is preoccupied with history because he knows that his self-inclined role as a teacher-critic of the society is incomplete unless he copes with the past.

As a matter of fact, the current understanding of third world literature has its distant roots in the work of the French philosopher Michel Foucault. Two insights from Foucault's philosophy have served as the pillars of postcolonial literature. His view that knowledge is contextual is the first insight which plays a vital role. From a Foucauldian angle, knowledge whether practical or theoretical is always a matter of what he called 'episteme'. By this, Foucault meant the pre-cognitive space which determines "on what historical a priori, and in the element of what positivity, ideas could appear, sciences be established, experiences be reflected in philosophies, rationalities be formed, only, perhaps, to dissolve and vanish afterwards" (*The Order of Things* xxii). The second

important insight which vigorously influenced postcolonial thinkers such as Edward Said, asserts that no knowledge is for knowledge sake. Knowledge always involves a play power. A discourse of knowledge is a discourse of power, for knowledge is an effort not only at ordering facts, social events and human activities, but also of ordering human beings according to a given center.

Relying on Foucault's insights, Edward Said argues in his book *Orientalism* (1978) that the Orient does not exist in reality, for, "as a cultural apparatus Orientalism is all aggression, activity, judgment, will to truth and knowledge" (204). Accordingly, the Orient has been created to serve in Western imaginary as that colonized other. This is apparent when he says: "My whole point about this system is not that it is a misrepresentation of some Oriental essence—in which I do not for a moment believe but that it operates as representations usually do, for a purpose, according to a tendency, in a specific historical, intellectual, and even economic setting" (273). Similarly, V. Y. Mudimbe argues in his book *The Invention of Africa* that the colonial library, which is made for those supposedly scientific "discourses on African societies, cultures, and peoples" was invented to "mark off Africa and the African as the other of the West and the Westerner" (ix). What is at the stake is the fact that Western production of the African knowledge is devoid of any objectivity. Therefore, it serves consciously or subconsciously a hegemonic desire. Similarly, In *Rapport sur la Propagande du Parti*, Leopold Senghor, one of the Negritude's founding fathers, argues that "our colonizers were legitimating our political and economic dependence by appealing to a theory of tabula rasa. They claimed that people of African descent had invented nothing, created nothing, written nothing, painted nothing, sung nothing, etc" (qtd in. Kestelot 2)

Part of Ngugi's literary and political commitment is the documentation of Kenya's cultural heritage and history. In *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, Simon Gikandi puts forth the assumption that the reader is asked to read about Kenya's history which is, in turn, woven into his novels and plays. Like Chinua Achebe, and other African writers, Ngugi began his writing career as a historical novelist. Like the Igbo author, his image of the past had been distorted by his colonial education:

---

<sup>1</sup> Hegemony, initially a term referring to the dominance of one state within a confederation, is now generally understood to mean domination by consent. Fundamentally, hegemony is the power of the ruling class to convince other classes that their interests are the interests of all. (Ashcroft et al 116)

His colonial middle-class education and brainwashing told him that he had no history. The black man did not really exist, had slept in the dark continent until the Levingstones and Stanleys woke him into history, through a mixture of piety and violence, the Bible and the gun. (*Homecoming* 41)

According to James Ogude, “Ngugi recognizes the link between history and fiction. Indeed for Ngugi, the narrative is a tool for shaping, ordering and reinterpreting history” (88). Additionally, Cook and Okenimpke maintain that “Ngugi looks to the past provide a meaningful continuum with the present and the future” (113). Devoting his fictional pen to the history of Africa and Kenya in particular, Ngugi narrates the three phases of his people’s history. Thus, his novel, which embraces the principles of historiography, sheds light on the precolonial, colonial, and the postcolonial epochs.

### **3.4.1. The African text and the Pre-colonial Paradise**

The creative imagination, according to Ngugi, is one of the greatest remembering practices that the artist should fulfill. Africans are bound to recall and the reconnect with their pre-colonial memory. Being essential and crucial, Ngugi gives memory its relevance to argue in his book *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance* that “the question of memory may not only explain what ails contemporary Africa but may also contain the seeds of communal renewal and self confidence” (ix). Writers are supposed to give memory its place in their literary works. African past is one of the prominent themes in African literature. In the words of the Ghanaian poet Kofi Anyindoho, Africa is:

[a] home land that history has often denied and contemporary reality is constantly transforming into a quicksand: a land reputed to be among the best endowed in both human and yet much better known worldwide for its proverbial conditions of poverty, Africa the birth place of humanity and human civilization now strangely transformed into expanding graveyards and battlefields for the enactment of some of the contemporary world’s worst human tragedies. (“Art in a Society in Transition” 76)

Literary and political critics have interpreted those problems in relation to Africa’s ‘colonial past’ and its downgraded position in the world. Accordingly, the Kenyan academic political writer argues that such problems are brought about “as a result of Africa being at the bottom of the global heap, with the Western world at the

top” (3). This violent-like binary opposition suggests the absence of any peaceful co-existence between Westerners and their others. In a view of that, Ngugi writes:

Africa as a continent has been a victim of forces of colonial exploitation, oppression and human degradation. In the field of culture she was taught to look at Europe as her teacher and the centre of man’s civilization, and herself as the pupil. In this event Western culture became the centre of Africa’s processes of learning, and Africa was relegated to the background. Africa uncritically imbibed values that were alien and had no immediate relevance to her people. Thus was the richness of Africa’s cultural heritage degraded, and her people labeled as primitive and savage. The colonizer’s values were placed in the limelight, and in the process, evolved a new African who denied his original image, and exhibited a considerable lack of confidence in his creative potential. (*Decolonizing the Mind* 100)

From a Western point of view, Hegel asserts that Europe is the absolute end of Universal History. He goes further in his assessment of Africa’s development in history to argue that:

Africa is in general a closed land, and this maintains its fundamental character...Africa does not have history as such. Consequently we abandon Africa, to never mention it again. It is not part of the historical world. It does not evidence historical movement or development. (qtd.in Aguilar 78)

The exclusion of the black man and the rejection of Africa’s precolonial past was an attempt to reinforce and guarantee the Western dominance. Thereupon, Ngugi maintains that:

European colonizer instinctively knew and feared the threat posed by men with confidence in their past and heritage. Why should he devote his military might, his religious fervor, and his intellectual energy to denying that the African had true gods, had a culture, had a significant past? The missionary attacked the primitive rites, the dances, the graven images, recoiling from their suggestion of satanic sensuality. (*Homecoming* 9)

In essence, the retrieval of the glorious ancient age of African culture is a significant dimension of Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s writings. One of the major concerns that Ngugi frequently explores through his fictional works is the effects of colonialism. He repeatedly introduces the stability that preceded the age of colonialism and the colonial disaster. The Westerner’s mission around the 19<sup>th</sup> century was to bring light to the Dark Continent by transforming the so-called natives into progressive citizens, ready to take their place into the modern world. Nevertheless, Walter Rodney maintained that “colonialism is a one-armed bandit” which devastated and underdeveloped Africa in order to serve the interests of the metropolises.” (205)

Accordingly, Ngugi's main task is to respond with his total personality to the European fictitious and philanthropic mission that was meant to oppress the natives. In *Moving the Centre*, he claims that "the authentic existence was disturbed by the colonizer who used force and military repression" (88). In this respect, Simon Gikandi argues that as a historian Ngugi "invokes a precolonial Gikuyu world to counterbalance the devastating effects of colonial modernity" (*Ngugi wa Thiong'o 14*). In this respect, the African writer's main assignment as a historian is to reveal the precolonial stability as a response to the colonial claim that Africa is a land of wilderness and darkness. This is to maintain that the African has a glorious history which should not be negated by the westerner. Equally, this writer should also document the colonial period through fiction in an attempt to evaluate the colonizer's savagery and the native resistance.

### **3.4.2. Paradise Disturbed: The African Novel as a Mirror of the Colonial Experience**

No one denies that colonialism played a significant role in the rise of African literature. Si Abderahman Arab believes that African literature first appeared as a reaction to colonialism. Within this revolutionary context James Ogude claims that early African narratives have always been regarded as writing "against colonial discursive practices in an attempt to validate Africa's historiography denied by colonialism" (1). It was an attempt to reconstitute a shattered community, to save or restore the sense and fact of community against all the pressures of the colonial system. Accordingly, Edward Said identifies it as an emancipator effort by which writers are invited to restore "the imprisoned community to itself" (259). In this respect, it becomes apparent that history dominates African fiction. Ngugi assumes that if there is one consistent theme in the history of Kenya over the last four hundred years or so since the sixteenth century, "it is surely one of the Kenyan people's struggle against the foreign domination" (*Moving the Centre* 114). The colonial domination was meant to cover up the true history of Kenya.

The colonial era occupies a prominent place in Ngugi's oeuvre. His texts microscopically describe and depict the colonial experience in Kenya. *A Grain of Wheat*, Nadine Gordimer believes, is a crucial text since it brings a new theme to African literature; "the effects on a people of the changes brought about in themselves by the demands of a bloody and bitter struggle for independence" (266). While Ngugi's

main task through re-writing the colonial past is addressing an attack to the British invasion by discussing the bloody treatment of the natives, his texts indicate that the colonial occupation was accompanied by the heroic resistance of the colonized. The colonial capitalist system gave birth to the proletariat spirit. In dealing with colonialism, Ngugi reveals how the workers forged links with the peasants to overcome the “divide-and-rule” policy of the British. By so doing, he sheds light on the rise of the Mau Mau rebellion which restored the lost dignity and liberated the Kenyans from the chains of colonialism.

### **3.4.3. Paradise Lost: Toward the Reintegration of the Silenced Voices**

Maintaining that “a writer’s subject matter is history” (*Writers in Politics* 68), Ngugi has skillfully interwoven his interaction with the history of Kenya into his fictional world. Like Chinua Achebe, Ngugi devoted his pen to the literature that reflects the consequences of the imperialist intrusion into Africa. Essentially, this phenomenon proceeded in three distinct phases. *The River Between* reveals the clash between the alien civilization and indigenous values while *Weep Not, Child* and *A Grain of Wheat* work as a reflection of the resistance in a noble attempt to throw off the imperialist yoke.

In his “Dignitaries Not Spread”, the Kenyan historian Ochieng’ argues that “the role of the writer is not to pester society, but to inform, to educate and to raise issues for debates. Ngugi is operating beyond the limits of his role as a writer. He is terrorizing us” (39). This statement brings out the assumption that historians are hostile towards Ngugi’s intrusion into the field of history. Nevertheless, his contribution to history, which is stemmed from his conviction that literature and history cannot be separated, has made him among the very few authors to be cited by historians.

Following independence, Ngugi has urged for a radical re-assessment of the Kenyan history. He argued that Kenya’s history has been corrupted by the colonial writers of Kenya who were trained in the West. In *Detained*, he condemned Ochieng’ and other Kenyan historians for being partners in the neo-colonial game. Further, in *Detained*, he maintains that “Most of the books by Ochieng’ which I had read before were based on a neocolonial interpretation of Kenyan history” (132). In *Petals of Blood*,

Ngugi writes: “For there are many questions about our history which remain unanswered. Our present day historians, following on similar theories yarned out by defenders of imperialism, insist we only arrived yesterday.” (67)

Using Cooper’s words, James Ogude argues that Ngugi’s interest in the process of history-making is an attempt to “recover the lives of people who are forgotten in narratives of global exploitation and national mobilization” (8). Interviewed by Bettye J. Parker ,Ngugi claims that “Unless people learn from their history, they are doomed to repeat it” (66). To make it clear, Ngugi’s novels are devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering, and crucially interrogating the colonial past. His readers usually tend to know the reason behind this revisionism and the extent to which his insistence on the commoners can affect the already established neo-colonial history.

For Ngugi, history can only be accepted when it includes the different categories of society. In his book *Rethinking the Mau Mau in Colonial Kenya*, S.M Shamsul Alam assumes that “early historians of colonial societies are often colonial administrators: their vision of written history, apart from its partiality to the colonial élite, is partial to the indigenous elite as well” (195). Having the same view, Ngugi avers that Kenyan history should be about the struggles of the subaltern<sup>1</sup>. A historian or a novelist should depict the masses’ resistance to colonial aggression and neocolonial domination following independence. In *Writers in Politics*, Ngugi notes that “in writing one hears all the whispering, and the shouting and crying and the loving and the hating of the many voices in the past and those voices will never speak” (60). The writer, therefore, should be “a kind of sensitive needle” to register the conflicts and tensions of the marginalized. To conclude, Gikandi argues that Ngugi’s novels are the vehicles through which “two generations of Kenyan readers have been able to access their past or, more modestly, to see their history as a key factor in the shaping of postcolonial cultures and identities.” (290)

---

<sup>1</sup> Subaltern, meaning ‘of inferior rank’, is a term adopted by Antonio Gramsci to refer to those groups in society who are subjects to the hegemony of the ruling classes. Subaltern classes may include peasants, workers and other groups denied access to ‘hegemonic’ power.(Ashcroft et al 215)

### **3.5. Marxism and Ngugi's Political Activism**

Scholars usually discuss Ngugi wa Thiong'o's texts from a political point of view. Indeed, his texts are overloaded with socio-political and economic messages which are meant to describe the decadence his society has witnessed as a result of the colonial encounter. Further, his insistence on the capitalist devastating power which paralyzed the masses in the wake of consumerism and globalization has put him in a Marxist category. For a number of readers Ngugi is but a pure Marxist. Although he has never articulated his Marxist belonging, it can be proved that his texts betray a sense of anti-capitalism and anti-class based society.

#### **3.5.1. Marxism: A Political Philosophy**

Marxism is the political and economic philosophy of Karl Marx and Fredirick Engels. A point needs to be stated from the outset Karl Marx has no clear theory on literature. Marxist aesthetics, however, can be derived from examining statements contained in Marx and Engels' philosophy in which the concept of class struggle plays a crucial and central role in evitable development from bourgeois oppression under capitalism to a socialist and ultimately classless society. Accordingly, Meriam Webster's dictionary (10<sup>th</sup> edition) defines Marxism as the political, economic and social principles and policies advocated by Marx especially a theory and practice of socialism, including labour theory of value, dialectical materialism, the class struggle and dictatorship of the proletariat until the establishment of a classless theory. The core of Marxism, MSC Okolo argues, "can be located in the primacy of matter over mind." (98)

Marxists believe that human contemporary life is highly related to economics. For them, economics defines and governs human relationships. In this respect, Marx and Engels maintain that man's consciousness changes with every change in the condition of material existence, in social relations and social life. Hence, for Marx and his followers, "existence, clearly, precedes consciousness" (Okolo 98). Human social milieu, according to Marxists, is highly anchored to a material base; the constituents of which are the productive forces and associated productive relationships. The economic structure "determines the form, the legal, political, moral, aesthetic, religious, philosophical characteristics of any given society will take" (Okolo99). By this count,

Marx has once stated that “life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness determined by life.” (198)

In *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marx and Engels argue that “the history of the hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle” (12). The traditional image of the class-based society is that which consists of three categories: upper class, middle class, and the lower one. In a class-based society such that engendered by capitalism, the struggle, however, is the result of “two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat” (12).

While economics is the most crucial factor in determining every relationship, the only incontrovertible means to bring about a change in such exploitative society is an organized political revolution. Erich Fromm claims that “History is the history of man’s self-realization; it is nothing but the self creation of man through the process of his work and his production” (26). Accordingly, Karl Marx maintains that “a being does not regard himself as independent unless he is his own master and he is only his own master when he owes his existence to himself” (qtd. in Fromm 37). Being teleological, Marxism, therefore, encourages political revolutions to re-transform the exploitative societies. The most desirable social condition will only emerge when the state withers away and communism takes place. Real change, Okolo argues, demands “the recognition that transformation of society can be achieved only by overcoming the alienation of the mankind from the product of its labour; reconciling knowledge with social ends; and dismantling all class structure” (100).

Literature offers a large space for the Marxist ideologies. Being committed, African literature is dominated by Marxism. Undoubtedly, Marxist literature is determined by the mode of production of material life- the economic structure which defines and governs other activities. Literature’s role, therefore, is the typical reflection of the economic arrangements in society and the nature of the relationships they consequently foster. Since they belong to a given social class, writers cannot be neutral and must approach their task as social act which evaluates the mode of production in society and the type of the human relationship that emerges out of the antagonism between the various classes. In this manner, they can offer critical appraisal of the existing socio-political situation to redirect and mould their societies’ actions.

### 3.5.2. Ngugi wa Thiong'o: The Marxist Writer

From a Marxist point of view, literature can only be understood if its full context-historical, economic, social, cultural- is taken into account. Thus, to better understand and interpret literary texts, one is asked to take into account the period during which the text was written in addition to its political, cultural, and the socio-economic background. In a view of that, Simon Gikandi assumes that to understand the relation between Ngugi's texts and their contexts, we need, among the other things "to have a clear sense of the ways in which his life is wrapped up with the cultural history of Kenya since the 1920's and how this history is, in turn, woven into his novels and plays" (25)

Part of Ngugi's political commitment is appealing to many members of groups who find themselves subject to a harsh state of injustice and exploitation. A clear assumption of Marxists is that culture [including literature] "is an expression of the prevailing social and economic situation" (Ryan 116). Moreover, Marxists believe that literature's task is producing the class structure of society and reflecting unproblematically the values and ideals of the class in dominance. Within this context, Ngugi's literary and political aim is the articulation of a politics that seeks to include those who have access to power whose voices are simply ignored, or worse, erased.

As a matter of fact, Ngugi's activism and commitment is reminiscent of Marxist ideology though he does not expressly state so in any of his literary essays contained in *Homecoming* (1972) and *Decolonizing the Mind* (1992). Undoubtedly, Ngugi has always been influenced by the writing of Karl Marx and his followers. This is perceptible throughout his novels which are meant to deeply analyze Kenya's social structure and the injustices brought by the adoption of Western capitalism. Readers of Ngugi place him as an advocate of Marxism in Africa. To begin with, Roscoe states that "if ever the point was in doubt, Ngugi's *Homecoming* records how deeply his world view has been influenced by Marx" (177). Other critics like Ime Ikkideh (1972), G.D. Killam (1984), Sander Linfors, Sicherman (1994), Charles Cantapulo (1995), James Ogude (1999) Boony Roos (2002), MCS Okollo have always perceived Ngugi as a leading voice of Marxism.

*Homecoming* is considered as a testament of Ngugi's critical views and philosophy which dominate his fiction. In his interpretation of the book, Angus Calder

considers Ngugi as a subtle and resolute Marxist humanist. Interviewed by Sicherman, Ngugi maintained that it was at Leeds University where he found himself introduced to Marx and his assumptions. However, it should be stressed that it was through reading the revolutionary African thinker Frantz Fanon that Ngugi found the way which led him to Marx. In *An Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi*, Gordon Douglas Killam assumes that it is “Marx who articulates a political and economic philosophy which will suit Ngugi’s conviction about post independence Kenyan development. It is Fanon who places the thinking of Marx in the African context.” (50). His visit to Russia where he completed *Petals of Blood* (1977), as it has been argued, was another essential event which shaped Ngugi’s mind as a Marxist<sup>1</sup>. Following the rejection of Christianity, Ngugi in 1976, changed his original name James Ngugi, which he saw as a sign of colonialism, to Ngugi wa Thiong’o in honor of his Gikuyu heritage. Sicherman, in a view of that, relates this sudden rejection to his Marxist conviction.

Ngugi’s fiction represents his most radical contribution to African literature. With its didactic and political overtones, his fiction is ultimately designed to instruct the African working class about the danger and the corrupt nature of capitalism. Following Marxist assumptions, Ngugi began his socio-economic and political analysis by a tremendous focus on the economic conditions and the miserable situation of the different categories and classes that form Kenya’s society. Consequently, he came up with his credence that the capitalist system adopted by the Kenyan government is the major reason behind the devastation which turned the sense of jubilation and euphoria that preceded independence into a sense of despair and disillusionment. In an interview with Anita Shreve in 1977, Ngugi declares:

---

1 Although this visit contributed to his development as a Marxist, his exposure to the word and visit to England in 1964 played a vital role in this literary shift. To quote Imelkkideh:

Ngugi arrived in England in 1964 and settled into the revolutionary atmosphere of Leeds University where he studied the next few years. Extensive travels around Britain and Europe acquainted him with some eminent British socialist scholars, including his supervisor Dr. Arnold Kettle and discussions with the radical student group led by Alan Hunt. These revealed that the root cause of incessant industrial strife in Britain was no more than the old inter-class hostility inherent in the Capitalist system. Thus Leeds provided an ideological framework for opinion that he already vaguely held. (qtd. in *Homecoming* xiii)

... the root cause of evil. Our economy is dependent on international capitalism. And capitalism can never bring about equality of people. The exploitation of one group by another is the very essence of capitalism. The peasants and workers are very much exploited in this country. They get very low pay, very poor housing, and unemployment effects them more than anyone else. (Shreve 35)

Evidently, capitalism, Ngugi says, is an unfair system where “the loss of the masses is the gain of the few” (*Devil on the Cross* 105). In *Homecoming*, he states that “today, in Africa, we are harvesting the bitter fruits of the capitalist and colonialist policy of the divide and rule, and those of the colonial legacy of an even development... now there are only two tribes left in Africa: the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’.” (xvii)

The class struggle occupies a prominent spot in Ngugi’s fiction. At first glance, his novels reveal that as long as Kenya has embraced Western capitalism, the social struggle between the rich and the poor, the hunter and the hunted, is inevitable. Ngugi perceives literature as a reflection of the material reality under which Africans live. One of the African writer’s primary tasks is revealing the class struggle and the gap between the rich and the poor which shaped the African daily life. The meaningful literary text is the one which assumes a revolutionary stance. As a committed author, Ngugi appreciates a literature that is confrontational and assertive. He calls for an African literature that must be teleological to bring a fundamental change in men’s relationships and transform the African societies.

Ngugi’s literature works as a vehicle of emancipation from Western capitalism which placed Africa at the periphery and the West at the core of the world’s socio-economic relations. In *Homecoming*, Ngugi argues that the African writer must help in the struggle of building a place for the masses to “feel at home” (46). The role of artist, accordingly, is to serve the struggle of the people against their exploiters. Karl Marx asserts that “the philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it” (qtd. in Okolo 99). In Okolo’s view, the African writer ‘must shun ‘abstract notions of justice and peace’ and actively support the actual struggle of the African people.

In a class-based society, where money is the only leading power which ends up with determinate political and economic influence in all social spheres, the law does not reflect the interest of ‘have nots’. Equally, given that an author is a member of the society, he or she cannot be immune from its antagonistic class relationships. Ngugi

once maintained that there have been two opposing aesthetics in literature, “the aesthetics of oppression and exploitation and of acquiescence with imperialism; and that of human struggle for total liberation” (*Writers* 31). According to Omafune Onoge “the political criterion of excellent art is art which serves the struggle for the people against their oppression.” (44)

A heavy responsibility lies on Ngugi’s (the African writer’s) shoulders to portray the basic opposition between the forces of colonialism and imperialism. Further, his responsibility is also to depict the forces of national liberation and socialism. By so doing, the writer discusses the struggles between the chosen ‘haves’ and the cursed ‘have nots’. Unlike other African writers, Ngugi enlarged his literary space to tackle the struggle against the white men and the postcolonial ills. In his treatment of the social structure, he writes:

For as long as there are classes defined by where or how the various people stand in relation to the means of production a truly human contact in love, joy, laughter, creative fulfillment in labor will never be possible. We can talk meaningfully of class love, class joy, class marriages, class family, class culture. (*Writers in Politics* 79)

The essence of art, therefore, is to serve the struggle of the people against what Matigari, Ngugi’s hero in his novel *Matigari*, calls ‘Those who reap where they never sowed’ (75). The belief that the change for the better is possible, despite the odds, is a persistent feature of all Ngugi’s novels. Furthermore, from the standpoint of the revolutionary author, Ngugi’s task is seeking a classless society where all its members must taste the fruits of independence. In this respect, he argues:

My thesis, when we come to today’s Africa, is then very simple: a completely socialized economy, collectively owned and controlled by the people, is necessary for a national culture: a complete total liberation of the people, through the elimination of all exploitative forces, is necessary for a national culture. (*Homecoming* 13)

In this regard, Ngugi perceives himself as a radical and revolutionary author whose works are dedicated to the peasants in the hope of developing a “true national culture which can produce healthy ‘stubborn youth’, a culture that nurtures a society based on co-operation and not ruthless exploitation, ruthless grab-and-take, a culture that is born of a people’s collective labor.” (*Homecoming* 21-22).

### 3.6. From Class-Struggle to Women's Plight

A member and an eyewitness of his society, Ngugi carries his literary commitment further to analyze the agony and the plight of the masses. To begin with, the concept of 'subalternity' is a key to understand and decode the encrypted messages conveyed by an author like Ngugi. By definition the term, as explained by Antonio Gramsci, refers to the people belonging to a lower social rank. Having already assumed that he is a committed author whose Marxist spirit runs through fiction to deeply analyze the social illnesses, one is compelled to deal with women issues and their position in Ngugi's oeuvre. Commenting on *Devil on the Cross*, Jean Zida argues that "Ngugi's concern no longer revolves around an overriding national cause, as he brings into focus the plight of the most wretched victim of African society, the African women" (104). His fiction feeds on women issues to successfully reveal certain political ideologies which are pertinent to his philosophy.

While Ngugi's writing is definitely overdetermined by the reality of British imperial rule in Kenya, it is equally attuned to the sufferance of the masses and women in particular. Indeed, a large literary space is devoted to women and their positions in Kenya. Ngugi is for the view that women's predicaments represent the illnesses of the society. Out of his conviction that the economic and political structures have extremely crippled people in Africa, wa Thiong'o has become more militant in his position against neocolonial politics that exist to support the power structure rather than the masses. In this respect, he is among the leading African pioneers who take into account women and their plights within this context. His refusal to join the élites and his conviction that independence 'did not always result in the empowerment of people' (*Moving* 125), are pivotal in his urge to use literature as a means of protest. Ngugi places women in the narrative and in the historical context in ways that foster the renovation of identity and tradition, and redefine their roles in the development of a revolutionary consciousness.

Wa Thiong'o's works including his non-fictional books reveal him as being much closed to women's obstacles. His interest in women and gender has attracted a number of scholars. The eminent feminist scholar Elleke Boehmer argues that the strong position that women characters have held in Ngugi's works over the years is 'a position virtually unique in Anglophone African literature where African writers have tended to concentrate on themes of national self assertion and struggle' (188). Equally, James

Ogude believes that Ngugi is sympathetic to women as subjects of oppression while he is interested in women as “exploited workers and producers.” (124)

Throughout history, women have been reduced to objects for men. Woman, accordingly, has been reduced into men’s ‘other’ . This exclusion, gives substance to the marginalization of females from important decision-making processes in their communities and families. As a matter of fact, the standard female presentation is sloppy and biased. One of the questions that this thesis attempts to answer is how does Ngugi wa Thiong’o represent women? According to Amoko, James Ngugi has struggled “to formulate an aesthetic fully capable of representing the beleaguered, dispossessed, and disempowered African postcolony” (159). Further, Ngugi is currently the leader of male authors who seriously study the plight of women. In his view, Ebele Eko asserts that “Ngugi is a good groundbreaking example of modern African male author’s shift from portraying women as objects to that of subjects” (212). His approach, is the one that evokes a veneration of the African woman with “mountains on her back”. In his latest novel *Wizard of the Crow* (2006), Ngugi summarizes the plight of women:

Does rough weather choose men over women? Does the sun beat on men, leaving women nice and cool?' Nyawira asked rather sharply. 'Women bear the brunt of poverty. What choices does a woman have in life, especially in times of misery? She can marry or live with a man. She can bear children and bring them up, and be abused by her man. (137)

In “Women and Resistance in Ngugi’s *Devil on the Cross*”, Jennifer Evans asserts that Ngugi’s novels are sensitive to the burdens that Kenya women bear” (131). Women in his fiction are “the strongest symbols of cultural identity, community, and continuity” (131). In a view of that, James Ogude elucidates Ngugi’s view by arguing that women protagonists, in his fiction, become an index, a reflection of the state of the nation. Their portrayal, Ogude adds, stands for the devastation and “degradation in the postcolony” (109). Interviewed by Anita Shreve in 1977, and in relation to colonialism and the evils of capitalism, Ngugi argues that women for the majority of this category of peasants. Women, he insists, “*are doubly oppressed and exploited.*”

In *Detained*, Ngugi writes: “for me, in writing a novel, I love to hear the voices of the people... I need the vibrant voices of beautiful women: their touch, their sights, their tears, and their laughter” (8-9). Henceforth, the literary space that he devotes to

women is an attempt to evoke and awaken in the observer, listener, or reader emotions and impulses to action or opposition. Women's predicament is the subject by which Ngugi tends to fulfill his commitment and moral obligations. Therefore, readers are bound to question Ngugi's reaction to the injustices women live by in Kenya.

According to Cheryl Walker, a feminist is "someone who perceives that women in a given society are oppressed as women and believes that this should be changed" (*Women and Resistance in South Africa* xxiii). The pitiable condition of women by the mechanism of exploitation is a major reason behind Ngugi's decision to align himself with their struggle for a meaningful existence. His pen fulfills Gayatri Spivak's expectation that postcolonial writers should speak on the behalf of the subalterns. This rebellious habit is echoed by Ngugi's declaration that:

Because women are the most exploited and oppressed section of the entire working class, I would create a picture of a strong determined woman with a will to resist and struggle against the conditions of her present being. Had I not seen glimpses of this type in real life among women of Kamiriithu Community Education and Cultural Center? Isn't Kenyan history replete with this type of woman? (*Detained* 10)

### **3.7. Conclusion**

Ngugi declares his literary commitment and the significance of literature in his intellectual war against colonialism and neo-colonialism:

Literature is indeed a powerful weapon. I believe that we in Africa or anywhere else for that matter have to use literature deliberately and consciously as a weapon of struggle in two ways: a) first by trying as much as possible to correctly reflect the world of struggle in all its stark reality, and (b) secondly, by weighting our sympathies on the side of those forces struggling against national and class oppression and exploitation say, against the entire system of imperialisms in the world today. I believe that the more conscious a writer is about the social forces at work in his society and in the world, the more effective he or she is likely to be as a writer. We writers must reject the bourgeois image of a writer as a mindless genius. (qtd. in Sander & Lindfors 28)

Ngugi has always expressed his faith in the Orthodox Marxist assumption that the literary form is determined by content. In *Decolonizing the Mind*, he argues that in writing for worker/peasant readership, "the most important thing was to go for a subject matter, for a content, which had a weight and complexity and the challenge for their everyday struggles." (78)

Ngugi is a product of Kenyan society and much of his writings express his political outlook, shaped by the cultural and social environments of Kenya. He dedicates his works to the advocacy of certain beliefs and programs especially pertaining to his own African community. He is for the view that the writer's main role is to channel his or her creative forces towards the invention of literary and artistic productions that must be devoted to the fight for freedom. For him, there's no borderline between personal morality and political engagement. His beliefs emanate from his sense of moral obligation, righteousness, awareness and his conviction that hope has not yet been fulfilled. His literary creations reveal a tremendous exploitation of the masses by the whites and the consequences of colonialism on their lives. By so doing, he scrupulously identifies three facets of encounter of the Africans with the European imperialists- slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism. His sensitiveness and concern for shaping and molding his community is stemmed from his conviction that an intellectual can help in articulating the feelings behind the struggle. Thus, for an author like Ngugi, by recording the ills in society, the author sides with the oppressed. Within the Postcolonial-Feminist context and relying on Ngugi's socio-political and literary commitment, the next chapters analyze the author's depiction of the maltreatment of women in Kenya and examine his commitment.

## **Part Two**

# **Ventriloquized Voices: Revisiting Women's Plight in Ngugi's Colonial Novels**

“I wanted to scream, but I must have lost my voice because no sound left my throat” (*A Grain of Wheat* 136)

## **Chapter Four**

### **The Panopticon of the Patriarchy in *Weep Not, Child*: Women Under Competing Discourses of Power**

*Actually in the novel I have tried to show the effect of the Mau-Mau war on the ordinary man and woman who were left in the villages. I think the terrible thing about the Mau-Mau war was the destruction of family life, the destruction of personal relationships (Ngugi, qtd. in African Writers Talking 121)*

#### **4.1. Introduction**

*Weep Not, Child* occupies a prominent place in Ngugi's oeuvre. It was his first English published novel that deals with the relationship between Africans and the British colonists. Specifically, *Weep Not, Child* deals with the Mau Mau Uprising, and the bewildering dispossession of an entire people from their ancestral land. Throughout the novel, aspects of gender subordination are revealed as consequences of interplay of male-dominated discourses and competing discourses of power and conquest. Based on Michel Foucault's panopticism, the present chapter analyzes the position of the female body in Kenyan society. The analysis takes into account the competing discourses that construct the society. The competing discourses (Christianity, traditionalism, and nationalism) create hierarchies which place men on the top and women at the bottom. This societal panopticon, as the chapter suggests, is perpetuated by more subtle forces which allow acts of violence and subordinate women. It is intended to show that in a panoptic society women, of whatever race, are under the currents of subjugation both at the familial and societal levels. Woman's association with body/nature is strengthened by biological essentialist and determinist paradigms which define woman according to her reproductive physiology. She is thus feeble and passive, literally a receptacle for the desires of the male for his offspring; a creature driven by emotion and instinct; a slave to her reproductive organs/hormones. This chapter sheds light on Ngugi's gendering of the land and his intentional association of the female body with the land. It asserts that woman is a body and represents nature: irrational, emotional and driven by instinct and physical need. The aim is to reveal how

Ngugi politicizes the docile body to become an extended metaphor of the imprisoned nation.

#### **4.2. *Weep Not, Child*: Critical Reception and Synopsis**

Ngugi's early novels and short stories were written in the shadow colonial period in its most violent form. He witnessed the years of emergency which historians and critics consider as the most traumatic years in Kenya's history. *Weep Not, Child* is Ngugi's first published novel. Chronologically, the novel could be read as a continuation of *The River Between*. It was written in 1963 and published in 1964. Critics argue that the novel's events and its date of publication correspond with Kenya's transition from colony to independent nation—beginning with Kenyatta's release from incarceration (1961) and ending with the declaration of the Republic in 1964. .

The novel's title, Brendon Nicholls assumes, is derived from a line in Walt Whitman's poem 'On the Beach at Night'. Brendon argues that the novel's title "is indebted to a literary forbear, Walt Whitman, who is the subject of a gentle critique elsewhere in Ngugi's oeuvre" (12) In many ways, the poem's contribution to Ngugi's novel can be deduced. Written in a period of spiritual convalescence after the disastrous American Civil War (1861-65), particularly in the autumn of 1870, Whitman's poem reveals the consolations provided by the American national unity. Similarly, *Weep Not, Child* is positioned in its mediations upon the national independence (1963). For a cohort of critics this novel represents its author's intention to understand the moral arena in which political debates are carried out in a colonial situation. Being a novel in which all aspirations boil down to the occupation of the land. *Weep Not, Child* introduces the readers to a tightly-knit network of power where the relations and dynamics (of power) are decided by the inter-action of the common people with the repressive colonial regime and the settlers on the one hand and the resistance provided by the Mau Mau on the other. Throughout this novel, it is revealed that Kenyans are subject to oppression and exploitation but the injury of suffering is double in case of women because colonization alienated women from their traditional status.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's first novel, *Weep Not Child*, tells the tragic story of a young boy called Njoroge who finds himself victimized by forces he cannot control. The novel falls within the Bildungsroman genre and therefore traces the adolescence of Njoroge whose life fell apart when the country began to gain its freedom. Jean Zida

believes that the novel can be read as Ngugi's intention to explore the African tragedy from the standpoint of Njoroge. In essence, the child lives in his little world of innocence and illusion at a time of growing unrest. In terms of structure, the novel is made of two parts which are made of eighteen chapters. The novel's two parts, 'Waning Light' and 'Darkness Falls', deal with Njoroge's unbounded optimism in spite of the already dominating pessimistic social atmosphere and despair that overwhelms the child whose dreams are swept away in the outbreak of violence.

Set in a Gikuyu village in Kenya during the '1952-1960 Emergency', a tumultuous and violent period which would eventually lead to Kenya's independence from Britain, *Weep Not, Child* evokes the story of Njoroge whose life began to change as soon as he got the chance to go to school. Throughout the story, we are told that the boy's main obsession is helping his family and community to improve. Eventually, he pins his hope on formal education and believes that hard work and righteousness are adequate solutions to the evils he is surrounded by:

Education for him, as for many boys of his generation, held the key of the future ... Njoroge came to place his faith in the Bible and with his vision of education life in the future was blended a belief in the righteousness of God. Equity and justice were there in the world. If you did well and remained to your God, the kingdom of heaven would be yours. The tribal stories told him by mother had strengthen his belief in the virtue of toil and perseverance. His belief in the future for his family and the village rested then not only on a hope for a sound education but also on a belief in a God of love and mercy, who long ago walked on the earth with Gikuyu and Mumbi, or Adam and Eve. (WNC 55)

Based on the pathetic story of Njoroge, Ngugi uses the novel to explore the social tensions that dominated Kenya during the years of emergency. He sheds light on the widening class differences between two layers of the society. It examines the differences between the rising, land-owning, collaborating black bourgeoisie represented by Jacobo, and the dispossessed masses whom Ngotho, Njoroge's father, stands for. Further, Njoroge's family finds itself under pressure of the black bourgeoisie on the one hand, and exacerbated by the colonial oppressive regime which is represented by Howlands.

A common feature of Ngugi's narratives is his deliberate return to the past. It has been argued that the past is frequently evoked by Ngugi as a challenge and at times a parallel to the present chaos. Undoubtedly, he tends to find a sense of self in a recovery

of history. Gikandi, in this regard, assumes that the impulse to re-establish the link with the past is underpinned by the powerful evocation of land: “the vital link between man and nature... the principal means of production whose loss signifies the disruptive and savage nature of imperial conquest” (qtd. in Ogude 46). As a matter of fact, *Weep Not, Child* revolves around the expropriation of peasants’ land. Howlands’ land grabbing signifies the systematic colonial policy which deprived the natives of their land.

Being one of the dispossessed, Ngotho informs his children that after being forcibly sent to fight in the World War I, their land had been confiscated and has become the property of Howlands and Jacobo. Hence, he found himself working in Howlands’ plantation and it was there that the idea of sending his son to school came to his mind. The idea of providing his son with a chance of education was stemmed from the belief that “it would lead to the recovery of the land” (WNC 43). Throughout the story, readers are informed that Ngotho spins his hope on the nationalist leader Jomo Kenyatta. Gradually, he would become more aware of the situation and that they are the exploited. This awareness can be explained in terms of the short-lived strike which Ngotho and the working class organized in the hope of making their life better through obtaining a livable wage.

The strike becomes a nationalist demand for liberty and the recovery of the peasants’ land. In this respect, the struggle for freedom turns into a clash between Ngotho and Jacobo. Jacobo’s attempt to convince the workers to stop the strike and go back to work has made Ngotho believe that Jacobo, the richest man in all the land around, has been:

Crystallized into a concrete betrayal of the people. He became the physical personification of the long years of waiting and suffering- Jacobo was a Traitor. Ngotho rose. He made his way towards the platform while everyone watched, wondering what was happening. He was now near Jacobo. The battle was not between the two—Jacobo on the side of the white people and he on the side of the black people... then all of a sudden as if led by Ngotho, the crowd rose and rushed towards Jacobo. (WNC 66)

Accordingly, Ngotho becomes the hero of the day. However, he has lost his house in the process, as Jacobo orders him to vacate his land. Furthermore, Ngugi, at this stage, skillfully dramatizes the events that culminated in the Mau Mau warfare. He gradually informs us about the arrest of nationalist leaders and the sudden heightening of tension at the national level.

The platform's incident can be seen as a moment of intensity that has worsened the situation. Howlands becomes the new District Officer, while Jacobo has been named his chief. Thus, the animosity between the new chief and Ngotho ferociously boils to the surface shortly after the death of six natives including Teacher Issaka and Bible students except Njoroge. Those horrific events made the natives believe in the need of taking up arms to defend themselves and restore the land. The call for freedom and dignity has made the colonial government declare the state of Emergency.

Njoroge's life underwent hardships when his brothers join the Mau Mau revolution, and hence getting involved in the terrifying politics of the region. All this strife, however, only spurs him on his optimistic vision of the future. Indeed, he still believes that education can change things, and hence he becomes more faithful to his studies. Further, he successfully passed his final exam to Siriana Secondary School with Mwihaki Jacobo's daughter. His optimism, therefore, increased as long as he believes that they both are the country's future saviors:

Our country has great need of us...

The country needs me. It needs you. And the remnant.

We must get together and rebuild the country. That was what your father told me the day that I was at your home.'

The country is so dark now' she whispered to herself. She whispered to herself The sun will rise tomorrow, he said triumphantly, looking at her as if he would tell her that he would never lose faith, knowing as he did that God had a secret plan. (WNC 120)

Accused of taking the Oath and tortured, Njoroge finds himself suddenly dismissed from school. Hence, his dreams are shattered. The reason why he is expelled is the fact that Jacobo has been found murdered and Ngotho's family becomes the immediate suspect. While Ngotho was arrested and castrated on Howlands' orders, Njoroge finds himself helpless and begins to lose hope:"the dreamer and visionary, who consoled himself faced by the difficulties of the moment by a look of a better day to come, is shocked and shown a different world from the one he had believed himself living in." (WNC 135)

The novel ends with a romantic hope when the protagonist keeps in mind an escapist project with Mwihaki. Knowing that his tomorrow was an illusion, running away from Kenya with Mwihaki becomes his last chance for a brilliant future: 'Mwihaki you are the one dear thing left to me. I feel bound to you and I know that I

can fully depend upon you. I have no hope but for you, for now I know that my tomorrow was an illusion. (WNC 149). His last hope is to run away to Uganda with Mwihaki. However, Mwihaki declares that she cannot leave her mother to go with him. Mwihaki turns down his offer, finds it too easy a way-out and reminds him of their duty: "our duty to other people is our biggest responsibility as grown men and women" (WNC 151). Feeling that he has been forsaken by everything he once cares for, Njoroge attempts suicide but is fortunately rescued by his two mothers Nyokabi and Njeri.

### **4.3. Factional and Factual in Ngugi's Novel: Autobiographical Reading of *Weep Not, Child***

In essence, East African region has not produced famous literary autobiographies to equal the power of classical texts such as E'skia Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue*, and Peter Abrahams' *Tell Freedom*. Gikandi believes that African ethnography derives its authority from its author's claim to a certain intimacy with the culture about which he/she is about to write. In *Facing Mount Jomo Kenyatta* assumes that, in such works, the author relies on his personal involvement with cultural practices he was describing, concluding that he could "speak as a representative of my people, with personal experience of many different aspects of their life" (xx). Autobiography was posited as conduit for recovering a usable African past. Indeed, writers of ethnographies often posited themselves and their works as the bridge between their past and present. The bridge usually represents a moment of crisis as long the author finds himself caught between the nostalgic past and the devastated present.

To begin with, it should be maintained that the relation between the structure of autobiography and the moment of crisis is evident in what one may call "autobiographical fiction," narratives that attempt to mimic autobiography or to have a close relation to the author's life. A case in point is Ngugi's first published novel, *Weep Not, Child*, which, while not strictly autobiographical, is anchored around key moments in the author's life, or, rather, with his engagement with history, especially Mau Mau. Given the traumatic nature of the events surrounding it, Mau Mau was a discernable feature of autobiographical writing from Kenya in the period after decolonization.

As a matter of fact, Ngugi's early texts were written in the shadow of colonial rule in its most violent form. Simon Gikandi relates this literary tradition to the author's acquaintance with the years of emergency. The years in which Ngugi was educated

were some of the most difficult and traumatic in the country's history. Within this context and from a Fanonist point of view, Ngugi's early texts put forth the claim that violence comes to rule "over ordering of the colonial world." (qtd. in Gikandi 71)

The novel is read as a semi-autobiographical *Bildungsroman*<sup>1</sup> that details an intellectual consciousness whose evolution and whose contradictory affinities (traditionalism, liberal progressive colonial education, nationalism, Christianity) follow trajectories that are occasionally at odds with its political conscientization. Ngugi structured the novel as a *Bildungsroman* as he valorized novelistic conventions in the hope of inviting his readers to identify with the protagonist's struggle to establish his personal identity and understand a hostile world. Njoroge's life and education microscopically paralleled that of Ngugi. Gikandi assumes that the early affective power of *Weep Not, Child* "depended on many readers' ability to establish this kind of autobiographical contract and to assume that what they were reading about in the novel could very well have been a record of the author's own life." (WNC 81)

For a host of critics, Ngugi's biography turns around the love of the mother, the tenuous authority of the father, the role and expectations of the colonial school, and the concurrent terror and romance of the Mau Mau revolution. As stated in the previous chapter, his parents were *ahoi*, landless tenants at will; and in a patriarchal culture in which authority was vested in male heads of households and notions of wealth and virtue were derived from the ownership of land, the state of radical displacement engendered by being a tenant was particularly hard on the father. In other words, without the ownership of the land, the heads of such households were condemned to states of doubt, recrimination, and guilt. Furthermore, fathers were reduced to servitude in the service of white settlers and the new African *Kulak* class. In this regard, mothers became the centers.

Interviewed by Katebaliwe Amoti wa Irumba, Ngugi assumed that after the separation of his parents, it was his mother who took full responsibility for raising the children:

---

<sup>1</sup> In *Colombia Guide to East African Literature*, Simon Gikandi and Evan Mwangi assert that both *Weep Not, Child* and *The River Between* were still cast within a familiar European framework—the romance of childhood, the *Bildungsroman*, and the individual subject's search for a moral position above collective interests—the dominant themes were drawn directly from the discourse of cultural nationalism. (12)

My parents lived partly on land, cultivating little stretches of land here and there, eking a living, and also working on other people's land for wages. My father and mother separated in 1946 or 1947, and thereafter my mother was the one who took care of us; that is, we three brothers and three sisters. She virtually shouldered every responsibility of our struggle for food, shelter, clothing, and education. It was my mother who initially suggested that I go to school. I remember those nights when I would come back home from school, and not knowing that she could not read or write, I would tell her everything I had learnt in school or read to her something, and she would listen very keenly and give me a word of advice here and there . (qtd. in Sicherman 18)

A superficial reading of the novel may suggest that the victimization of Ngugi's mother is central to the representation of Njoroge as a colonial subject in *Weep Not, Child*. The narrator tells us that Njoroge is unable to "understand how his father had become a *muhoi*. Maybe a child did not know such matters" (WNC 13). His story is based on the assumption that education is the solution to understand such matters. His mother plays a vital role in making him attain his objective. Gikandi asserts that it is the mother "who weaves simple social processes—being educated and growing up—into a complex know in which the history of colonialism and African resistance to it is enmeshed with private loss, failure, and mourning." (*Ngugi wa Thiong'o* 82)

Just like Ngugi's mother who found herself victim of the disruption brought by colonial alienation and an agent of a new identity affected by Western education, Nyokabi sends Njoroge to the colonial school in the hope of overcoming the constrictors of colonialism itself and thus encompass "something broader than that which could be had from her social circumstances and conditions" (WNC 16). Accordingly, Nyokabi and Ngugi's mother represent what Jonathan Culler (1974) calls in *Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty* "the coefficient of optimism" (28). Having assumed that the mother is the coefficient of optimism, Ngugi's depiction of women, therefore, is not devoid of positive images. Such a representation finds its roots in Ngugi's personal biography as he himself and critics have assumed that his mother was a source of motivation and inspiration in his personal educational and personal career.

The absence of Thiong'o, Ngugi's father, after the separation is apparent and felt in *Weep Not, Child*. Traditionally, Gikuyu householders were defined by "the father figure". Throughout the novel, Ngugi shows that the crisis of colonialism casts fathers like Ngotho in the role of worthless symbols. Indeed, the novel demonstrates Ngotho as a subject who is unable to hold the house together and ensure the success of his

progenies. The absence of the father is more apparent when Njoroge does not see his father a source of security. His fear is not that his father might one day die and leave him orphan, but that his brother Kamau would be drawn into the city which “would lead to a final break-up and ruin the cozy security which one felt in thinking of home. Kamau was the man of the home.” (WNC 48)

Further, just like Ngugi’s generation, Njoroge is supposed to construct a new vision of the future; a vision which is presented by the mother who sends him to school. However, it should be argued that Njoroge is asked to carry out an impossible cultural mission in the sense that the future he seeks to guarantee is colonial-made. In this regard, Gikandi writes:

...colonialism comes to play a decisive role: it is the imposition of the colonial rule that renders the older narratives irrelevant; it is the unquestioned belief that the vision of the future can only be realized through colonial institutions that makes the process of education perilous and suicidal. And it is in reflecting on Njoroge’s attempts to fashion a narrative to explain – and perhaps reconcile – what Fanon would call “the reciprocal exclusivity” of the antagonistic colonial sectors that Ngugi tries to transform his own autobiography into an allegory of colonial times. (86)

In spite of the autobiographical dimension, Ngugi has successfully made his narrative style neutral. His voice is barely heard throughout the novel. Indeed, what makes the reader believe that Njoroge’s life is equivalent to that of the author is his biography. In *An Introduction to the African Novel*, Eustace Palmer argues that “Ngugi’s presentation of Njoroge provides evidence of his intelligent objectivity” (4). In this regard, Gikandi puts forth the assumption that what makes the novel so important in Ngugi’s development as an author is “the ironic distance he is able to maintain, in the process of narrating the dilemmas presented by a colonial education, between his own subjective experiences and their representation in the novel as someone else’s story.” (86)

Against this background, *Weep Not, Child* can be read as a novel that reflects the truth. Depicting the reality from the eyes of a young boy is perhaps the novel’s main weakness. It is a weakness not because Njoroge is a passive and ineffective character who cannot occupy the centre of the story, but simply because he is a young, inexperienced boy and therefore he is not the best vehicle of a historical novel. Nevertheless, being a Bildungsroman in its form and structure, one might say that the boy passes from a state of naivety to that of consciousness. His awareness increases

especially as the novel comes to its end. To argue, reading the novel as a semi-autobiographical allows us to understand that the story is overloaded with facts and that the present reading of the novel should consider these realities in discussing the state of women in Kenya.

#### **4.4. Locating the Docile Body within the Violent Hierarchies**

Before exploring the position and the state of Kenyan women in *Weep Not, Child*, it is necessary to begin with the gendered mode that the novel conveys from the title. Having already assumed and pointed out to the inter-textual relationship between the novel and Whitman's poem, it should be mentioned that there have been many attempts by readers to locate the gendered mode of address that both works are featured by. To begin with, in Whitman's poem we are told that a child holds her father's hand to feel safe and comfortable. In Ngugi's masterpiece this gendered mode of address works with the infantilization of women. A useful example for a better illustration is when we are informed that Njoroge always longed for the day when he would be a man, for then he would have the freedom to "sit with big circumcised girls and touch them as he saw the young men do" (*WNC* 22). Brenden Nichols assumes that in the story 'circumcised women are 'big girls'- and therefore remain children—despite the fact that it is exactly clitoridectomy that traditionally confers adult status upon Gikuyu women" (120). Nichols observes that "the distinction between 'big circumcised girls' (not 'women') and young men reveals a mechanism of gender diminution that is arguably also at work in the novel's title." (12)

In many ways, the novel has been read as the cry of the suppressed and the oppressed. Of all Ngugi's characters, Mwihaki is the character who cries most abundantly and whom Ngugi portrays in a childlike imagery. This image is reinforced when we are told that Njoroge's political vision which at a certain degree aspires to the task of comforting people betrays his failure to convince and console Mwihaki. Like a child, Mwihaki turns down his offer to leave the country and prefers keeping attached to her mother. Readers of the novel's title significance may find it difficult to understand the underlying message that the title itself conveys. A question that one should ask is; how is it possible to read the novel as a cry while its title forbids weeping?

Two important remarks have been introduced by Nichol Brendon which can be used as answers of the already stated question. First, the novel, using Nichols own

words, is “an injection to silence. It is a consolation, but it forbids the expression of grief or pain (the ‘Eeeeeee, Eeeee in’ *Weep Not, Child*) that it expressly attempts to silence” (12). Such attempt is stemmed from the author’s own culture. Indeed, a similar cultural injunction forbidding the expression of grief or pain is operative as Gikuyu girls undergo circumcision. Hence, being an injection to silence and a consolation which forbids any grief expression, and having roots in the Gikuyu tradition, one is able to argue that everything in the novel turns around the notion of the female body. Within a postcolonial-feminist framework, the present section sheds light on women’s spaces of articulation in the novel. These spaces, however, are known for their limitedness. It is intended to show that Kenyan women in Ngugi’s first novel occupy sites of censure and repudiation. This section does not only reveal women’s grief and the violence they witness and live by, but it also investigates and looks for the source of women’s silence in Kenya. Such an investigation takes into account the term ‘woman’ as a culturally produced sign mobilized within the ideological formation of Kenyan nationalism.

Michel Foucault is well known for his philosophical assumption of power and knowledge. His belief in the idea that power is constructed within social activities made him declare that power may force people to do things which they never liked. Power, Foucault assumes, is already there within the system and discourse helps to bring it out. In the postcolonial context, it is the discourse which brings out the power used to suppress and dominate people. Much has been written on Foucault’s writings on panopticism and much has been written on the topic of mass surveillance. In *Discipline and Punish* Michel Foucault introduces the notion of panopticism. He writes on controlling populations and workforces and normalizing things to make people, whom he refers to as “bodies” once they have entered the disciplinary apparatus, more docile. The original idea of the panoptic prison, or panopticon, was designed by the English social theorist Jeremy Bentham in the late 18th century as a prison institution in which one guard would be able to observe all prisoners, but the prisoners themselves would not be able to see the guard or each other. The panoptic structure for the Benthamite prison was a circular atrium with cells along the perimeter facing inwards, and with a single watchtower in the middle where the watchman would be able to observe without being observed. Therefore, the prisoners could be watched at all times, but they would not know whether or not there was someone in the watchtower to observe them. As they

were subjected to this gaze, they would modify their behavior and be less likely to instigate trouble.

Foucault's presentation of the Panopticon directly represents and results in the relationship between male and female in patriarchal societies. In *Ways of Seeing* John Berger draws upon Foucault's panopticism to argue that in patriarchal societies "Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at." (47). Berger shows that the patriarchy is exhibited as being panoptic first through the action of men objectifying women. Panopticism creates hierarchical rules, concepts of flattery, superiority, and objectification come flooding in. As Foucault states, "The Panopticon is a machine for disassociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen," (555). Berger mirrors this quotation in his own work when he says that the presence of men is reliant on "a power which he exercises on others... [whereas] to be born a woman has been to be born, within an allotted and confined space, into the keeping of men," (46). Men are the center of the system — the group that is entitled to watch — while women are placed along the outer edges of the system in the group that is forced into subjection.

Both Berger and Foucault agree that the dominance of masculinity has to do with the social relation between the spectator and the subject. Foucault talks about the distribution of power within the Panopticon saying:

Power has its principles not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up... There is a machinery that assures dissymmetry, disequilibrium, and difference. Consequently, it does not matter who exercises power. Any individual, taken almost at random, can operate the machine. (555)

Berger discusses the objectified female body in art ranging from classic oil paintings to commercials of the twenty-first century. He assumes that women are depicted in a quite different way from men "because the 'ideal' spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him," (64). The power of one individual man is not more than the power of one individual woman. Instead, the masculine is assumed to be superior to the feminine. This is why women are used in all forms of life as objects rather than partners.

As a matter of fact, literature is the product of the social and cultural background. A text is shaped by its author's culture. The most influential French feminists Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément argue in their book *The Newly Born Woman* that "we are living in an age where the conceptual foundation of an ancient culture is in the process of being undermined"(65). Their writing usually brings into the contemporary theoretical discussions a uniquely forceful argument about gendered identity, discursive transgressions, rebellions and resistance, about woman's place within the different social layers and spheres. Drawing on poststructural philosophy, Cixous' writing is understood as an attempt to dispute Western phallogocentric discourse that has historically excluded the female subject from discursive productions. Additionally, she also draws on Derrida's critique of the logocentric constitution of Western thinking, and on his contention of language which through both 'difference' and 'deferral' always occupies the space of 'différance'.

Paying attention to binary logic and taking into account woman's position, Cixous points out that philosophy is constructed on the premise of woman's abasement. Cixous puts forth her assumption that thought has always worked through oppositions. Likewise, culture has also worked in terms of dual hierarchal oppositions. Oppositions like Superior/ Inferior, High/ Low suggest that 'Logocentrism' subjects thought—all concepts, codes and values—to a binary system, related to the duality of man/woman. Hence, casted against this dualistic background, Cixous interrogates woman's position. She poignantly asks about her place within the cultural, philosophical, and the literary history; 'Where is she?' Accordingly, Cixous comes up with the claim that either woman is passive or she does not exist. What is left of her is unthinkable, unthought. In this respect, she writes:

Moreover, woman is always associated with passivity in philosophy. Whenever it is a question of woman, when one examines kinship structures, when a family model is brought into play. In fact, as soon as the question of ontology raises its head, as soon as one asks oneself "what is it?" as soon as there is intended meaning. Intention: desire, authority—examines them and you are led right back... to the father. It is even possible not to notice that there is no place whatsoever for woman in the calculations. Ultimately the world of "being" can function while precluding the mother. No need for a mother, as long as there is some motherliness: and it is the father, then, who acts the part, who is the mother. Either woman is passive or she does not exist. What is left of her is unthinkable, unthought. Which certainly means that she is not thought, that she does not enter into the oppositions, that she does not make a couple with the father (who makes a couple with the son). (*The Newly Born Woman* 64)

Reading *Weep Not, Child* as a detached story that can be tackled far from the socio-cultural background is misleading. In reading the novel, one may discover the different interpretations that critics have introduced. Sollars and Arbolina (2008) argue that *Weep Not Child* can be read as a novel that attempts “to explain the impossibly mutable cultural psychological mazes pre-independence population had to figure out and traverse” (863). Meanwhile, Simon Gikandi and Evan Mwangi (2007) argue that the novel is about “the alienation of the African subjects from their lands and traditions, and the culture of violence associated with decolonization” (122). The culture of violence that both critics have referred to is the result of bloody fight between the natives and the colonizer.

Essentially, the novel records scenes of the anti-colonial struggle of the Mau Mau and shows its effects on the peasants and the workers. Although the novel sheds light on the effects of the Mau Mau on the peasants, a large space is devoted to the victimization of women by men supporting patriarchal ideology. In their book *The Newly Born Woman*, Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément (1986) argue that “Everything on the order of culture and cultural objects has a prohibition placed on it, which causes class positions in relation to culture. Likewise, woman is uneasy in relation to a certain sort of production – the production of signs” (145). The story indicates that men support prevalent patriarchal ideology because of which beating an angry woman is considered as a part of the tradition in which a man can “[slap] her on the face and raise his hand” to repeat the violence again and again” (*WNC* 60).

Published in 1964, *Weep Not, Child* depicts factual moments of ubiquitous struggle, suppression, and oppression in Kenyan women’s life. Although Ngugi’s first mission is to display images of the colonial cruelty and its oppressive side, the novelist successfully penetrates into both white and black families to shed light on a furtive and implicit cruelty in order to show the misery that lies behind the walls. This narrative strategy is reinforced and better explained by the author in *Homecoming* (1972) where he argues that he is interested in [people’s] hidden lives; their fears and hopes, their loves and hates, and how the very tension in their hearts affects their daily contact with other men.” (13)

In essence, Ngugi’s *Weep Not Child* is an attempt to record the patriarchal side of Kenyan culture and society. From the very beginning of the novel, it is apparent that

Kenyan society is highly patriarchal and that the patriarchal conduct is a prevalent phenomenon which dominates all the social layers. A good example to illustrate that patriarchy does not only affect women but it also overwhelms all the peasants and workers is when Kamau, Njoroge's brother, says that there are some people who "don't want others to rise above them and aim to be the source of knowledge and share it piecemeal to others less endowed" (WNC 24). The physical female body is a useful force in society. It provides pleasure for men (productive) often at the expense of the woman (subjected). Though it would be obvious to point to cases of male on female violence (rape, domestic abuse, etc.), the societal Panopticon is perpetuated by more subtle forces that allow those acts of violence to occur in the first place. In such a social context, women are found sexually abused, physically and mentally oppressed. The novel microscopically records some violent images of rape, verbal and physical violence, polygamy, and successive pregnancies. These examples explain the extent to which women are oppressed in a society where race and class play significant roles in deciding on women's status.

The novel, therefore, is overloaded with examples that demonstrate the way gender works. It also reveals that gender subordination is the result of an avalanche of factors derived from a male-dominated discourses overlapped by Christianity and Gikuyu traditionalism. Despite its apparent simplicity, Ngugi's novel reflects the Kenyan culture and its underlying patriarchal conduct very effectively. Socialist feminists like Eisenstein, Sheila Rowbotham, and Mitchell believe that family is "a powerful instrument of socialization, where we learn to adopt particular postures in relation to the patriarchal power structure; that is, where we learn positions of subordination and domination" (Madsen 185). Although Ngotho's family's is a good point to start with the discussion, it is preferred to begin with images of female subordination in the society itself and then list-out the effects of such oppression on the family itself.

To begin with, the most apparent example of gender inequality which suggests a colonial-like relationship between male and female in the novel is barber's story. Recounting his reminiscences of the Second World War to his customers, the barber draws a comparison between 'the sweaty black female body' and the thin white Madonna's body:

'[In this war] we carried guns and we shot white men.'

'White men?'

Y-e-e-e-s. They are not the gods we had thought them to be. We even slept with their women.'

'Ha! How are they --?'

'Not different. Not different. I like a good fleshy black body with sweat. But they are ...you know...so thin... without flesh...nothing.'

'But it was wonderful to...'

'Well! Before you started ... you thought...it was eh- eh- wonderful. But after... it was nothing. And you had to pay some money.' (WNC 10-1)

Throughout this passage, one should pay attention to the possibility of transgression that Ngugi is referring to. The white woman allowed him to go beyond the hierarchical confines. Nevertheless, one should also pay attention to the setting of the story. Being told that the act of sleeping with white women took place in Jerusalem, a question that we should normally ask is; what is the significance of this holy land in the story? As far as the Christian belief is concerned, Jerusalem was the place where Jesus Christ was crucified. Moreover, describing Jerusalem's citizens as 'whites' holds within its lines some flawed ethnic, racial, and geographical indications. The story, then, is not about a peaceful co-existence between the black males and the white females as one may easily think. Nicholls Brendon, in this respect, clarifies:

The barber's narrative of sexual triumph instrumentalizes black and 'white' women in its establishment of a chauvinistic anti-colonial discourse. In other words, the anecdote produces 'woman' as a sign that enables the reciprocation of dialogue between male oppressed subjects and the colonial Christian and racist discourses that have previously inscribed their subjectivities. (16)

It can be assumed that the overarching category of whiteness in the barber's tale does not overturn the hierarchy, rather it mystifies the historical condition of Kenya's oppression. In his book *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, Patrick Williams argues that there is a contradiction in the fact that we are told in the opening lines of the passage that white women are not different to black women only to become 'so thin... without flesh... nothing' when measured against 'a good fleshy black body with sweat' (52). It becomes evident, however, that black female is estimated to the fact that critics have noted that the black woman's body is perceived from a mythical angle. In accordance with this idea, Nicholls argues that this substantiality of the black female is a disempowering myth designed to consolidate the displacements and dispersals of colonial space within which the text's narratives of resistance operate.

The binary opposition between West and East or White and Black reaches its highest peak in the story. This becomes clearer when the narrator tells us about the story of the Italian Prisoners. While the barber's story betrays a sense of masculine sexual conquest, the sexual relationships between the Italians and black women are revealed as being less seductive:

The Italian prisoners who built the long tarmac road had left a name for themselves because some went about with black women and black women had white children. Only, the children by black mothers and Italian prisoners who were also white men were not 'white' in the usual way. They were ugly and some grew up to have small wounds all over the body and especially around the mouth so that flies followed them at all times and at all places. Some people said that this was a punishment. Black people should not sleep with white men who ruled them and treated them badly. (WNC 6)

This passage explicitly suggests that sexual acts created a ground where 'whites' and 'black' would meet. This union, however, is one dimensional in the sense that both black women and Italian prisoners are situated between the English colonizer and the African peasantry. In other words, like the black women, Italian prisoners are also governed by the British. The narrator tells us that there are lots of women who were impregnated by Italian prisoners. Accordingly, this act is interpreted as a *sin* committed by poor women who had no other option rather than sleeping with those prisoners. The sexual meeting, therefore, resulted in a 'diseased progeny'.

Although the passage seems to be very simple while dealing with a sexual story of prisoners and black women, this simplicity vanishes as one would read it from a Christian discourse angle. Stylistically speaking, Ngugi is known for his biblical narratives to the fact that critics have considered him a religious author. He usually discusses issues of oppression in relation to the Biblical stories. In *An Introduction to the African Novel*, Eustace Palmer argues that his novel's "biblical aura is most appropriate for the description of the sufferings of a people in bondage" (9). His discussion of Kenyans' plight takes into account Children of Israel's plight in the Pharaonic age. The Gikuyu see the story of their tribe in somewhat similar light to that of the Jews in the Old Testament. When the colonizer imprisoned Jomo Kenyatta, as it is revealed in the story, the Gikuyu people saw this as a persecution of their 'messiah'. Kenyatta had assumed mythic dimensions in keeping with Mugo wa Kibiro's

prophecy<sup>1</sup>. His imprisonment became the trial of Kenya's political and spiritual leader. This shows that the Gikuyu political system was theocracy—a system in which political and religious leadership are blended together. Kenyatta's trial and subsequent imprisonment became the last straw that broke camel's back in the novel. The narrator tells us that Jomo was their promised savior through whom their providential destiny would be realized:

There was a man sent from God whose name was Jomo. He was the Black Moses empowered by God to tell the white Pharaoh 'Let my people go!' And that's. what we have gathered here to tell the British. Today, we, with one voice, we must rise and shout: "The time has come. Let my People go. Let my people go! We want back our land! Now!" (*Hysterical applause*) (WNC 65)

The poor women, the narrator tells, are rejected by their own clan on the ground because they are sinners. Their children are reported to “have small wounds around the mouth so that flies followed them all the time and at all places”, and this is what the narrator considers “a punishment” for the black women whom, he believes, should not have slept “with white men who ruled them and treated them badly” (WNC 6). The notion of the wound and the flies echoes the story of the mixed-race children that one can read about in the Exodus, particularly in the Plague of flies that beset Egyptian oppressor of the Israelites as a punishment. Nicholls believes that the situation of the wounds around the mouth indicates that these children may have become contaminated at the site of nurture (the breast) during suckling as ‘they may have inherited venereal disease’ (17). It works as a heavy symbol that reminds of the intercourse between the native black women and foreigners. Nevertheless, relying on the idea of the disease, Ngugi foreshadows Kenya's future. Children are symptoms of colonialism which is also infectious culturally, politically, and economically.

This disease, however, should be perceived as an extra burden which makes women's life more difficult. In this case, women are bound to be under two forms of oppression. On the one hand, they are under ‘the curse’ of colonialism and ‘sexual colonization’. On the second hand, however, they are compelled to sustain the pressure of the society. The wounds which surround their children's mouths will keep reminding

---

<sup>1</sup> Mugo wa Kibiro appears in different literary works on Ngugi wa Thiong'o. He is a wise man whom people think that he is able to predict the future. In the novel we are told that: “Then came the white man as had long been prophesized by Mugo wa Kibiro... Mugo had told the people of the coming of the white man. He had warned the tribe.” (WNC 29)

both women and the society of the sin they committed; a sin which is not tolerated in a patriarchal society. Accordingly, one needs to take into account the double colonization of women, both as subjects of colonization and by patriarchal structures in African Societies.

In dealing with oppression Ngugi focuses not only on the physical action but also the verbal abuse. He records the language used by men which suggests the extent to which women have been reduced into 'things' or 'objects'. The author attempts to suggest that what worsens women's situation is their exposure to the harsh, debilitating language used by men to communicate with them. The narrator tells us that Indians "were not liked and they abused women, using dirty words they had learnt in Swahili" (WNC 8). This seems to be more a well-conceived strategy to implement the patriarchal ideology than a simple lapse of tongue or momentous name-calling.

Compared to the barber's story which is a tale of triumph and victory, women's plight out of the encounter with the Italian prisoners is filled with weakness and pessimism. Critics believe that this case disempowers the passive women. In *Essays on African Writing*, Abdulrazak Gurnah draws a comparison between the cases of the white and black women in the story. He argues that:

What the barber and his listeners comment on is that white women for all their grandness will still sleep with black men, a response which implies both self-contempt and deference, the triumph of a discourse of conquest. The black women having babies which are not "white: in the usual way', on the other hand, offends a deeper sense of what is moral and clean. Underlying it is the assumption that or women sex is equivalent to submission, which is itself the bedrock of patriarchal authority. The 'white' oppressor is indistinct and undifferentiated in this case, different and same: Italian or English, prisoner or settler. And since it was 'the white' who brought calamity on the people, for African women to submit to them is abject. (144)

The two passages, then, form a hierarchy of values that negate female body and female sexual agency. Ngugi seems to follow Nietzsche and Foucault in his focus on the body. Sexual abuse of women has been woven in a society which is highly patriarchal and where nobody objects to this system. The author approaches the issue of victimization without clearly defining his point of view.

According to Foucault it is difficult to step outside the network of power. Sexual harassment of women has been woven in all patriarchal culture and nobody objects to this system as it is welcomed and accepted by all. The barber's story describes female

body as a 'thing' only. In his story he has not talked about emotions of women. Through the barber's narrative, Ngugi tries to approach the issue of victimization of women but whether he is genuinely concerned with the emotions of women or not remains unclear. The narrative objectifies female body and shows how it has been looked at by men. The soul is imprisoned in the female body and a woman has no choice to express herself. The body of a woman has been made 'a docile body' in Foucault's concept. (qtd. in Taylor 86)

#### **4.5. Associating the Female Body with the Land**

Throughout his literary works, James Ngugi displays a considerable faith in women. It has been noted that his female characters rarely die in the story. They have an insight and wisdom that guide and keep their children safe to reconstruct a new society from the ashes of the old. Their firmness, strength, and courage are symbolic of regeneration of a society which will not "quicken, except it dies". It is from the ruins that shall emerge a new-earth, as David Cook believes. Sigrid Peike believes that the future lies in women. The onus for the continuation and survival of the society is upon women. In Kenya, there exists a close association between women and the land. According to Jomo Kenyatta:

The Gikuyu consider the earth as the mother of the tribe, for the reason that the mother bears her burden for about eight or nine moons while the child is in her womb, and then for a short period of suckling. But it is the soil that feeds the child for a lifetime; and again after death it is the soil that nurses the spirit of dead for eternity. Thus the earth is the most scared thing above all that dwell in or on it. Among the Gikuyu the soil is especially honored, and an everlasting oath is to swear by earth. (21)

In Kenya political freedom means the repossession of the land. For Kenyans land is not only held to be of much greater importance than money or cattle, it has spiritual associations. Ngotho's inspired story about the origin of the land brings out this point:

And the creator who is also called Murungu took Gikuyu and Mumbi from his holy mountain. He took them to the country of ridges near Siriana and there stood them on a big ridge before he finally took them to Mukuruwe wa Gathanga about which you have heard so much. But he had shown them all the land - yes, children, God showed Gikuyu and Mumbi all the land and told them, 'This land I hand over to you. O Man and woman it's yours to rule and till in serenity sacrificing only to me, your God, under my scared tree. (WNC 27)

Accordingly, Kenyans see the alienation of the land, and its appropriation by an alien, not only as God's punishment for their sins, but as an alienation from their God and ancestors. Hence its recovery is a must. This is why Nguni tells his son in a poignant moment in the novel "Education is everything...Yet he doubted this because he knew inside his heart that land was everything. Education was good only because it would lead to the recovery of the lost lands." (WNC 43)

Throughout Nguni's novels, it is argued, land stands for a site of opposition to political power. Its place in his literary oeuvre is vital. All his thematic issues are discussed in relation to land possession. In this respect, he writes:

Writing has always been my way of reconnecting myself to the landscape of my birth and upbringing. Not surprisingly the natural landscape dominates the East African literary imagination. This awareness of the land as the central actor in our lives distinguishes East African literature from others in the continent and it certainly looms large in my own writing from *The River Between* to *Matigari*. (qtd. in Gikandi 194).

In most of his novels he is determined to show how the Mau Mau, known as a rebel movement, for example, fought for land restitution. Land is an institution by itself in Nguni's literature. It was interpreted differently by whites and indigenous black people in Kenya.

Land is not only an idea as one might think. Its place in Kenyan culture is well established. Nguni sees the land as something more than a commercial asset. It is the link with God and his ancestors. In *Facing Mount Kenya*, Jomo Kenyatta argues that the Gikuyu "consider the earth as 'the mother' of the tribe" (21). In *Weep Not, Child* gender issues cannot be discussed far from the land issue. There is a clear equation of women with the land. This comparison is rooted in Nguni's subject formation within a Kenyan context.

Due to some cultural, spiritual and ideological values, black female characters are compared to the land. It is interesting to maintain that the struggle for the land is a struggle for possession. Comparing Nguni's attitude towards the land to that of Mr Howlands, it is possible to say that while Nguni's attitudes suggest the land's spiritual significance in Gikuyu culture, Mr Howlands loves the land with the satisfaction of possession and subjugation. His love of the land made him declare: "This

is my land.” Mr. Howlands said this as a man would say, this is my woman.” (WNC 145)

Ngugi’s early texts bear that powerful evocation of land. The land is revealed both as a signifier of a glorious past during which man and woman lived harmoniously with nature and, hence, presupposing a stable identity linked to landownership and as signifier of loss whose recovery would imply the recovery of identity. *Weep Not, Child* reflects the social organization and the parameters upon which Gikuyu culture is based. In Kenya, one’s wealth is measured by the number of lands he possesses:

Any man who had land was considered rich. If a man had plenty of money, many motor cars, but no land, he could never be counted as rich. A man who went with tattered clothes but and at least an acre of red earth was better off than the man with money. Nganga could afford three wives, although he was younger than Ngotho. (WNC 22)

In essence, national identity was inscribed in the land designated by the founders of the community. Moreover, the myth of creation which legitimizes the claim to landownership by turning it into a covenant between man and his creators transforms this and into an inviolable and living entity. James Ogude maintains that this myth transforms land into “a space for cultural and political contestation” (47).

Ngotho, as a patriarch of African heritage and tradition, treats land with reverence and he is profoundly alienated by the subsequent issues engendered by its loss. The land provides the spiritual link to his ancestors. This is apparent when we are told that “he owed it to the dead, the living and the unborn of his line, to keep guard over it” (WNC 33). Nevertheless, the same land is under the eyes of Mr Howlands who perceives it as ‘virgin’ and ‘wild’ which fits to be conquered. For him, Kenya was “a big trace of wild country to conquer... and he alone was responsible for taming this unoccupied wildness” (WNC 32). In *An Introduction to the Writing of Ngugi*, Douglas G. Killam (1980) argues that “Howlands expounds the morality of paternal colonialism in conjunction with a belief in his right to land” (49). Ogude describes Howlands’ smacks of an obsession as “a disease in the psyche of the colonial settler, to conquer land as a release from a nervous condition and therefore irrational” (49). Howlands equates the land’s possession with the sexual conquest. In the novel we are told that “For him the farm was the woman whom he had wooed and conquered. He had to keep an eye on her lest she should be possessed by someone else.” (WNC 144)

Ngugi wa Thiong'o is one of the best African authors who employ allegorical typology in fiction. One of the primary functions of allegory is constraining the ability of the reader to decode meaning. In *Blindness and Insight*, Paul de Man (1983) defines allegorical typology as 'a sign that refers to one meaning and thus exhausts its suggestive potentialities once it has been deciphered' (188). Throughout his novels, Ngugi conflates allegory and symbolism. His allegory is rooted in nationalism which seeks to fabricate a discourse of resistance. Moreover, while conflating symbolism and allegory, it becomes more apparent that land stands for nationhood rooted in the people's values and at the same time allegorizing the state of the nation; a nation in turmoil. The land, therefore, does not only mean a physical space, but more importantly it signifies the state of women who are the most exploited in the country.

In gendering the land, Ngugi reveals many affinities that black women share with the land. The female body is under possession just like the land which Mr Howlands conquers. This character stands for the British imperialism which is motivated by the desire of growth and extension. His pleasure can be summarized in two things; the female body and the land. In the story we are told that "[h]e wondered if he would go and get the black woman he had taken the night before. He had discovered that black women could be a good relief" (WNC 144). Just like the female body, Mr Howlands idealizes the land: "This is my land.' Mr Howlands said this as a man would say, this is my woman." (WNC 145)

As it has been stated previously about black women who found themselves victims of the Italian prisoners, Ngugi presents an image of women who are raped and seen as fickle sex objects. Women, in the novel, share with the land images of rape. In the opening chapters of the novel, the narrator indicates that the land has been taken by the colonizer. Metaphorically, the exploitation of the land is compared to women's rape. A good illustration is when Boro confronts Mr Howlands telling him "you killed many sons of the land. You raped our women." (WNC 145). In terms of figurative language, Ngugi in this passage gives a human attribute to a non-human. It is a personification by which the author portrays the land as a woman whose sons were killed by the settler. In addition to that, he raped black women whom he considers a good relief. Therefore, rape in this case is shared by both black females and Kenyan land.

Other affinities between the black female body and the land are revealed through the notion of the disease. The diseased progeny which stands as enduring symbol of the unnatural intercourse between the native black females and the foreigners re-appears in the land trope. Landscape is located in a discourse linking colonial history with pathology. In first pages of the novel, the narrator describes the Kikuyuland:

In a country of ridges, such as Kikuyuland, there are many valleys and small plains. Even the big road went through a valley on the opposite side. Where the two met they had as it were embraced and widened themselves into a plain. The plain, more or less rectangular in shape, had four valleys leading into or out of it at the corners. The first two valleys went into the Country of the Black People. The other two divided the land of the Black People from the land of the White People. This meant that there were four ridges that stood and watched one another. Two of the ridges on the opposite sides of the long sides of the plain were plain were broad and near one another. The other two were narrow and had pointed ends. You could tell the land of Black People because it was red, rough and sickly, while the land of the white settlers was green and was not lacerated into small strips. (*WNC* 7-8)

Words like 'rough' and 'sickly' brings to mind the idea of the disease. What kind of relationship does the passage suggest as far the land and black women are concerned? Having already assumed that both women and the land are under Western possession (Mr Howland and Italian Prisoners) and that the act of sleeping with Italian prisoners equals and echoes that of Hawlands' 'raping' the land, it is therefore possible to argue that the surface of the Black People's land is infected and contaminated out of the penetrative intrusion of the settler just as the children f the Italian prisoners.

As a matter of fact, just like Black females whose bodies work as sites where the 'Self' and 'other' meet, the land, Brendon argues, serves simultaneously to unite and divide colonial Self and the colonized other. They both enable the relationship between the settler and the natives. Accordingly, this comparison can be understood as instituting a disempowering gender mechanism. While the male dominates culture and practices pressure on the second sex, black women are allied and associated with nature. In this thread, the gendered land strengthens the belief that women in the story are not only marginalized rather they are silenced.

#### **4.6. Patriarchal Aftermath: Disintegrated Family**

As a matter of fact, the society which Ngugi attempts to reflect in *Weep Not, Child* is highly patriarchal. Like any African text, this novel microscopically depicts the

state of jeopardy black women live by. It suggests that male dominates culture while women are perceived as silent objects. In “Responding to the Challenge: Feminist Consciousness in *Breaking the Silence: An Anthology of Short Stories*.” Bassey and Eton (2012) consider African literature as the literature which examines male-dominated societies “in which women became mere appendages: as wives to be bullied, and help the man to preserve his lineage, or as daughters to be given away in marriage” (47). The images of rape and sexual abuses indicate the plight of women. Feminist critics, delve into the issues related to family and shed light on images of sexual, verbal, and physical abuses.

Other facets of gender oppression in *Weep Not, Child* can be understood in dealing with the family representation in the story. Feminist critics pay attention to the family structure and order while dealing with women oppression. They believe that family is the mirror that reflects the nature of the society. However, it should be argued that if a society is patriarchal, it is so because the family played a vital role in endorsing the unbalanced power distribution. In a patriarchal society, a patriarchal family is based on the presence of the father whose manhood permits him to be the centre. Women, on the other hands, should be obedient and turn around the centre. These women must obey men who are unkind and cruelly non-responsive and whose character is not devoid of violence and insult. Nguni's family stands as a good example of a family where oppressive relations disempower the second sex and gives authority to man. Nguni's wives are not permitted to disobey him. He convinces Njeri and Nyokabi that he believes that “if you have a stable centre, then the family will hold” (*WNC* 46). As a head of the family, Nguni obliges his wives divide the house chores and domestic labor between themselves while the benefit of all they do goes to the centre.

The fact that Nguni is married to Njeri and Nyokabi, Nguni apparently discusses the issue of polygamy. Polygamy, feminist critics believe, is one facet of patriarchy. They vehemently reject the idea and believe that polygamy increases the amount of pressure on women. The Nigerian women's rights activist Funmilayo Ransome Kuti denies the fact that polygamy is a form of harmony and happiness and that it does not reveal any sense of respect towards women's feeling:

They smile while their wives weep. Women . . . were created with blood and flesh like men. I wonder how a man could tolerate any of his wives should have a male friend . . . I think this attitude of disrespect to women's feelings

was caused by the fact that the purchase price had been paid on the women.  
(qtd. in Reed171)

Ransome Kuti's revulsion of polygamy is also echoed by Awa Thiam who urges African women to not rest until they have status to that of their European counterparts" ( qtd. in Reed 171). In the novel we are informed that:

The feeling of oneness was a thing that most distinguished Ngotho's household from any other polygamous families. Njeri and Noyokabi went to the shamba or market together. Sometimes they agreed amongst themselves that while one did that job the other would do this one. This was attributed to Ngotho, the centre of home. (WNC 45)

The narrator says that "[Ngotho's] home was well known for being a place of peace," (WNC 12) which implies that his two wives live together in harmony inspite of the psychological pain this habit is likely to cause. As stated previously, women in Africa are under men's possession. Keeping this idea in mind, one may argue that in this passage, Nejri and Nyokabi's obedience does not necessarily mean a harmonious relationship within the family. The fact that they are possessed, these women are denied the right to oppose any form of aggressive practice and therefore they have to remain silent.

The image of silence is also accompanied by other images of blindness. Throughout the story, women are bound to be obedient and keep silent. This obedience, however, is not well appreciated by men. Men's unfaithfulness to their wives reaches its highest peak in the novel. This is also another form of sexist oppression permeating the Kenyan society. The narrator informs us about women's deception as long as they know that while they are obliged to engage in the domestic labor, their husbands enjoy themselves without paying any attention to their wives. Conscious of their immoral and irresponsible behavior, these men "cannot even look at [women] in the face" because they know that their women are sure that their men go "to loiter in the town...to avoid work...and drink...while...[women] must live in toil and sweat" (qtd. in Maleki & Labakhsh. 69 ). In "Reading Ngugi's *Weep Not. Child* along with Alice Walker's *Womanism*", Abd El-Sayed Hassan maintains that:

Here women pretend to be blind to their men's filthy conduct. However, their delayed response to their husbands' foul behavior seems to be a deliberate strategy meant to shame them into recognizing and therefore amending their disgraceful ways. This testifies to women's shrewdness and proves that they are more intelligent and willful than men in the novel. (153)

Nevertheless, it should be argued that Abd El-Sayed Hassan' view does not fit the nature of the patriarchal family. Women's reaction suggests that they do not pretend, rather they are compelled to avoid leaving remarks or comments. In the narrator's attempt to introduce the barber, he assumes that in Kenya: "A fool, in the town's vocabulary, meant a man who had a wife who would not let him leave her lap even for a second" (*WNC* 10). Hence, since men are supposed to be the heads and the centers of the family, and since the tradition does not permit them to be seen as fools, women are also obliged to respect the traditions and 'pretend' to be 'blind' and 'deaf'.

There are some images in the story that demonstrate women's exposure to verbal and physical violence in their families. In essence, physical abuse is a form of oppression that women suffer from in patriarchal societies. Nguni's family is known for its peace. We are told that "Nguni did not beat his wives much. On the contrary, his home was well known for being a place of peace" (*WNC* 12). However, this does not mean that his relation with his wives is devoid of violence when it comes to taking decisions. He finds himself between 'the devil and the deep sea' when he hears about a forthcoming strike seeking better wages and fair treatment. Nguni's desire to participate is equivalent to his fear of losing the job and love of the land. Being told that in Kenya "When a woman was angry no amount of beating would pacify her" (*WNC* 12), Nguni finds himself helpless in facing Nyokabi's anger:

"I must be a man in my own house."

"Yes - be a man and lose a job."

"I shall do whatever I like. I have never taken orders from a woman."

"We shall starve. . . ." "You starve ! This strike is important for the black people. We shall get bigger salaries."

"What's black people to us when we starve?"

"Shut that mouth. How long do you think I can endure this drudgery, for the sake of a white man and his children?"

"But he's paying you money. What if the strike fails?"

"Don't woman me I" he shouted hysterically. (*WNC* 60)

The fight culminates in physical abuse when Nguni "slapped her on the face and raised his hand again" (*WNC* 60). This passage also indicates the amount of pressure women are surrounded by in Kenya. Sympathetically, it is possible to say that Nyokabi is a wise woman who cares about her family and seeks their security. Nguni's physical abuse suggests that beating women lies at the core of the Kenyan culture. This is one of consequences of the patriarchal system as Ngugi would say in the novel.

Ngugi considers family as the source of patriarchy. It is in families that people are taught how to practice pressure and marginalize women. More importantly, children were taught to obey their fathers. In the novel we are informed that ever since he was a child, Njoroge had seen his father as “the centre of everything” and as the symbol of continuity in a rapidly changing world – “As long as he lived, nothing could go wrong”( *WNC* 55). Being a member of a family defined by patriarchal philosophy, Njoroge assimilates a lot of its tenets which he unquestionably puts into practice. His inherited patriarchal behavior is felt while returning late from school with Mwhaki. Knowing that his mother was annoyed, he takes out his anger on Mwhaki. He considers “it all Mwhaki’s fault. And he thought her a bad girl and promised himself that he would not play with her any more. Or even wait for her” (*WNC* 18). Significantly, Njoroge’s aggressive attitude towards Mwhaki stands for a common practice in his community where males take out their anger and frustration on females.

In many ways Ngotho appears to be somehow devoid of any pathetic feeling and respect toward his wives. Ngotho shares with Mr Howlands the interest in woman’s physical appearance and sexual attraction. Such a belief made him admit that he married his wives out of pity. Accordingly, Maleki and Labakhsh (2012) consider this as “a humiliating justification that does not seem to be true,” and they also see that Ngotho’s relationship with his wives “is a sign of [his] (and other men’s) materialistic attitude towards women; a sign that justifies having more than one wife simultaneously” (*WNC* 70). For Ngotho, a good wife (woman) is a “fleshy, black body with sweat ... a fat woman” not a woman that like his Memsahib’s wife is “so thin that [he] at times wondered if the woman had flesh at all” (*WNC* 12). This is a sign of Ngotho’s (and other men’s) attitude towards women; a sign that justifies their positive attitude toward polygamy. Similarly, Mr. Howlands has married his wife not because he loves her, but because he feels lonely on the African lands and therefore leaves for England to “[pick] the first woman who could get.” (*WNC* 31)

Ngugi’s family description in the novel explains the extent to which women are exposed to pressure and oppression. In a more forthright manner, Ngotho’s wives keep silent and rarely speak. This is apparent when Njeri comment subtly and astutely on the unfairness of Jomo Kenyatta’s trial:

Nyokabi said, I knew he would lose. I always said that white men are the same. His lawyers must be bribed.’

‘It is more than that,’ said Njeri. ‘And although I am only a woman and cannot explain it, it seems all as clear as daylight. The white man makes a law or a rule. Through that rule or what you may call it, he takes away the land and then imposes many laws on the people concerning that land and many other things, all without people agreeing first as in the old days of the tribe. Now a man rises and opposes that law which made right the taking away of the land. Now that man is taken by the same people who made the laws which that man was fighting. He is tried under those alien rules. Now tell me who is that man who can win even if the angels of God were his lawyers... I mean.’

Njeri was panting. Njoroge had never heard her speak for such a long time. Yet there seemed to be something in what she had said. Everyone looked at her. Tears were on her face. (*WNC* 85)

Two important remarks can be deduced from this passage. First, Njoroge involuntary exclamation suggests that Nyokabi has indeed been silenced. Moreover, Njoroge’s reaction is not because of Nyokabi’s inability to speak in normal issues rather he is surprised because she has never been permitted to talk in political issues. A common feature of African societies is that women are placed on the margins as far as political issues are concerned. In a view of that, Nichols comments on this exclusion to maintain that:

The upshot of Ngugi’s placement of women in a reactionary discourse is that women are excluded from political dialogue. It is interesting that the three men—Howlands, Jacobo and Ngotho—hold dialogue with one another at various narrative junctures, whereas their wives never once hold dialogue among themselves, nor with each other’s husbands. This gender-political strategy situates women outside of history, denying them sites of articulation and occasions for political community. (27)

The second remark is related to her speech which contains a forceful rhetoric which crystallizes the structures of dominance. By her questions, Nyokabi deviates from the patriarchal discourse and Christian ideologies. This ability results from the fact that she shares with Kenyatta injustice and, hence, she subconsciously reacts to the intolerance.

Nyokabi’s courage and reaction leaves the reader wondering about the possibility of change that may occur in women’s position. The story does not suggest any change in women’s role even when it comes to its closure. Yet, it can be stated that in spite of the darkness these women live by, they still play positive roles and therefore they represent the new hope which Njoroge and his generation are looking for. In “Narrative Design in the African Novel”, Felix Mnthali (2004) asserts that in Ngugi’s novels “woman remains a beacon of hope and a source of strength to those who do not as yet see the light, which is the sum-total of the struggle for the land” (37). Ngugi’s

family permits the reader to witness the positive role which the second sex plays in keeping the family harmonious. No matter how the amount of pressure and oppression is, Kenyan women represent the source of hope. This issue is revealed through the notion of motherhood.

As a matter of fact, as it has been stated in the introductory pages of this chapter, the mother is a coefficient of hope and optimism. Ngugi's homage to the mother figure in the story enables him to undermine in a systematic and blunt way, the paradigm of prophetic restoration associated with paternal figures like Njoroge. This is clear as the novel comes to its end. When faced by the tattered dreams of his colonial education, Njoroge tries to suicide. The narrator tells us that Njoroge wanted to kill himself only to be called back from the brink of death by his mother's voice: "His mother was looking for him. For a time he stood irresolute. Then courage failed him" (*WNC* 153). In "Black Woman, Indoctrination of The Male, And Subversion of the Patriarchy in Ngugi's *Weep Not, Child*" Maleki and Lalbakhsh argue that Nyokabi takes her son back home "to save him from suicide and to give him another chance to restart his half-finished education in the school of matriculture" (73). Ngugi's women believe that education brings knowledge to the life of the oppressed and equips them with the power and understanding to fight oppression

In Ngugi's oeuvre mothers are given due attention and are perceived as nurturers and sustainers of the values of society. He focuses on the positive role played by women in bringing radical changes by schooling and socializing their kids. Simon Gikandi assumes that "It is the mother who weaves simple social processes - being educated and growing up - into a complex knot in which the history of colonialism and African resistance to it is enmeshed with private loss, failure, and mourning" (82). In *Weep Not, Child*, Nyokabi exemplifies the stresses which women undergo to ensure the economic survival of the family. It is said that she would shell castor oil seeds for sale. The narrator informs us that "she often did this and when she accumulated enough after a number of months she sold them at the market" (*WNC* 15). Evidently, part of Nyokabi's earnings is used to educate her son, Njoroge, while the other part goes towards catering for her family.

Nyokabi's effort to educate Njoroge is typical of a Gikuyu woman's sense of economic achievement. According to Nyokabi, "[I]t did not matter if anyone died poor provided he or she could one day say. 'Look I've a son as good and well-educated as

any you can find in the land'" (WNC 16). Confidently, Nyokabi reckons that if Njoroge acquires education, her husband, Ngotho will never work as a squatter for Mr. Howlands, the white settler farmer. Further, Nyokabi says that "if she had much money she would send her married daughters to school. All would then have a schooling that would at least enable them speak English" (WNC 16), the language of power and a gateway to riches. Therefore, Nyokabi's resolution to educate Njoroge is seen as part of female resilience to empower the family in which men are absent, unable, or oppressive. In "Black Woman, Indoctrination of The Male, And Subversion of the Patriarchy in Ngugi's *Weep Not, Child*" Maleki and Lalbakhsh (2012) argue that contrary to Ngotho who is obsessed with the idea of revenge, "Nyokabi changes the dream to reality by sending her son to learn and acquire the knowledge he later needs to fight against any oppressive system" (72). That is why it is Nyokabi who saves her son at the eleventh hour when he thinks of committing suicide, not Ngotho. She comes to him carrying a light in her hand and inviting him back home:

He saw the light she was carrying and falteringly went towards it. It was a glowing piece of wood which she carried to light the way.

'Mother.' He felt a strange relief.

'Njoroge.'

'I am here.'

Nyokabi clung to him. She did not ask anything.

'Let's go home,' she commanded weakly. (WNC 153)

It is through this passage that the reader is supposed to understand that the mother is 'the coefficient of optimism'. Symbolically, carrying the glowing piece of wood to light the way is a clear sign that women in general, and mother in particular, are the source of light in a gloomy and dark society.

Ngugi admits that while fathers and brothers represent the forces of darkness, bloodshed and death, the wise women stand for light and hope. Thus, the mother here acts as a spiritual guide who takes her son by hand and shows him the right path of knowledge and light. In this respect, Jennifer Evans asserts that "Ngugi's female characters are all in their own ways resistance heroines and the strongest symbols of cultural identity, community and continuity"(31). Moreover, Cook and Okenimpe (1983) praise the concluding events in the novel for "reversing the negative trends, and thrusting us out hopefully and actively into the future" (84). In *Ngugi wa Thiong'o* David Cook and Michael Okenimpe write:

Those who point the way are, as so often in Ngugi, the mother figures, Nyokabi and Njeri. They, throughout, have been positive characters, the centre of harmonious collaboration in Ngotho's family, involved with other people, concerned and informed about their environment. The rescue and possible rehabilitation of Njoroge is their triumph, and this with all its overtones and undertones, is the concluding event of the book, reversing the negative trends, and thrusting us out hopefully, actively into an unknown future" (67)

As far as characters' names are concerned, Ngugi is known for choosing names which fit the subject of his themes. Throughout this thesis, it is intended to discuss names' significance and relate them to the fictional thematic issues. In *Justice for the Oppressed*, Herta Meyer (1991) argues that Ngugi's choice of Nyokabi and Njeri, whose names are equivalent to 'devoted, is motivated by religious/mythic productions of woman as nurturer and homemaker" (30). Ngugi's construction, in this case, entrenches traditional female roles and strengths patriarchal privilege. This ending, however, is highly symbolic since it underlines Ngugi's intention to give Njoroge another chance to live and become a responsible man. Evidently, Njoroge is expected to fill the gap left by his dead father, and consequently complement the roles of his two mothers in providing for his big family. Further, it can be argued that Ngugi uses this ending to bring the male and female genders together because he believes that their partnership is necessary for the survival and continuity of the family and society.

Cook and Okenimkie's assumption that the concluding scene of the novel leads us to an unknown future is an important remark that one needs to explain. Although Nyokabi is regarded as the last hope of restoration in the story, by the end of the novel readers are expected to understand that the image of the future is blurry. What keeps this image unclear is the fact that the reader knows that she cannot escape from the patriarchal oppression. On the one hand, Nyokabi seeks preserving stability and prosperity of her family. This is why she invested in Njoroge's education. On the second hand, however, her domestic interest runs contrary to the realization of her son's dream.

#### **4.7. Conclusion**

The patriarchy has been weaved into Kenyan society by means of Panopticism. As it has been revealed the male figure is the subjector, the gazer, the center of the Panopticon while the female figure is the subjected, the gazed at, the periphery of the Panopticon. Foucault could not have said it better when he articulated that Panopticism

is “an event in the ‘history of the human mind’... through it a whole type of society emerges” (561). Without panopticism, the male gaze would not be so firmly dominant over the female spirit. *Weep Not, Child* marks Ngugi’s intention to embark on a journey whose aim is to locate the female voice in Kenyan society. Ngunjiri’s wives in the novel seem to have no voice and have learnt to live in harmony within an obviously acrimonious polygamous structure. At the societal level, Kenyan women learnt that they are subject to sexual exploitation. The author suggests that women’s sexuality is muffled, strangled, and deemed ultimately unimportant compared to that of the man’s.

## Chapter Five:

### **The Body Between: On Double Patriarchy and the Female Body in *The River Between***

I wrote *The River Between* first. I was concerned with trying to remove the central Christian doctrine from the dress of Western culture, and seeing how this might be grafted on to the central beliefs, of our people. *The River Between* was concerned with that purpose, (Ngugi qtd. in Edgar Wright 97)

#### **5.1. Introduction**

*The River Between* is Ngugi's first written novel. Essentially, he began writing under the pressure of three powerful cultural institutions in colonial Kenya: Protestant Church which dominated the country and became the major conduit for modern identities; the mission school as an entry to cultural legacy of colonialism; and Gikuyu cultural nationalism, which manifested itself in the tradition of independent schools that Ngugi himself attended in his youth. Each of these conflicting institutions held promises of emancipation from the shackles of class and ethnicity. Nevertheless, they also led to unexpected dilemmas and increased the tension. Set against this background, this chapter is devoted to the task of exhibiting women's plight that follows the increased tension between the competing cultures in Ngugi's *The River Between*.

In *The Location of Culture* Bhabha critically re-assesses the power relations between colonizer and colonized to dissolve the alleged dualism of dominance and subordination between these social groups. Instead, Bhabha reads the interaction between colonizer and colonized as relationships of mutual dependence and impact. He believes that this particular struggle for power is actually being "neither One nor the Other but something else besides, in-between" (Bhabha 313). Ania Loomba asserts that Bhabha's "colonial subject in his work is remarkably free of gender, race, caste or other distinctions" (Loomba 316) and, thus, requires further revision. The inclusion of gender, as demonstrated by Darling-Wolf, thus allows the applicability of postcolonial theory to contexts other than a retrospective reading of colonial conditions. Darling-Wolf

demands to read gender categorization against the backdrop of hybridity to unveil gender categorization as being in an ever evolving process, negating the imposed static character of the concept. This chapter includes ‘the female body’ in the competition and the clash between traditionalism and Christianity in Kenya during the 1930’s. Female circumcision is a controversial issue which widens the gap between the two competing discourses. In this case, women represent the in-between. They are subject to a double patriarchy which does not tolerate and accept negotiation. The aim of this chapter is to show that circumcision had a greater social, political, and ideological impact on the concept ‘woman’. Between appropriation and abrogation of circumcision, women are lost and subject to exclusion. The end of the story suggests that even hybrid female characters are excluded in a society which is culturally divided.

## **5.2. *The River Between*: Critical Reception and Literary Review**

Compared to *Weep Not, Child*, *The River Between* is a more accomplished novel. Indeed, critics and readers have noticed Ngugi’s stylistic development from *Weep Not, Child*, through *The River Between* to *A Grain of Wheat*. Chronologically, *The River Between* is Ngugi’s second published novel though it was written before *Weep Not Child*. In terms of setting, the novel’s events take place in a period that is prior to that of Ngugi’s first published novel. A question mark has been marked by readers on Ngugi’s decision to postpone its publication. Eustace Palmer asserts that probably Ngugi ‘delayed its publication because he was dissatisfied with it, and only offered it to a publisher after some polishing and pruning.’ (11)

Before proceeding with a detailed analysis of the novel in terms of women’s representation and the significance of the body, it is worth pointing out that *The River Between* is the novel which marked Ngugi’s noticeable literary development. A remarkable improvement in terms of language control is noticed in this novel. Compared to *Weep Not, Child* which is known for its simplicity, *The River Between* proves Ngugi’s stylistic sophistication and awareness of the complex rhythms of English. Moreover, the method of characterization in this novel seems to have improved. As it has been stated previously, the main weakness of *Weep Not, Child* is the fact that it is based on an inexperienced character. Compared to Njoroge who fails to come to life, Waiyaki’s personality allows him to have that weight which makes him a hero. Njoroge’s ahistorical characterization is abandoned in this novel. Waiyaki can be

seen from different angles. It is through Waiyaki that we feel that Ngugi's method of characterization is a modernist one. The text allows us to go inside his mind and know what he thinks about. In addition to that, the out description of the character makes the reader feel that he is acquainted with. Palmer, in this respect, argues that Waiyaki "is strong enough to carry the novel's message." (12)

In terms of affinities, the two novels share the author's interest in the theme of love. The love story between Njoroge and Mwhaki is equivalent to that of Waiyaki and Nambura. However, love treatment in *The River Between* demonstrates a greater sensitivity. The growing strength of feeling between the hero and Nyambura is much more powerfully evoked than in the adolescent affair in *Weep Not, Child*. Further, both novels' structure is defined by the heroes' path from initial optimism, through part-fulfillment of their aspirations, to ultimate disaster cause by forces that the heroes cannot control.

Stylistically, symbolism is also another feature which distinguished *The River Between*. Compared to *Weep Not, Child*, Ngugi heavily relies on symbols from the opening pages of the novel. The most obvious symbol is the figure of the sleeping Lions, the ridges Mauyu and Kamenno representing the divisions in Waiyaki's society. The river Honia is also another symbol which means 'cure'. This river is also known as the river of life which flows through the valley of life. Symbolically, Honia is seen as a symbol of division in the sense that it keeps the two ridges apart.

Critics have always discussed the novel as Ngugi's first text when dealing with his colonial trilogy. A reason why *The River Between* is considered the first novel is the fact that its events take place in a time when the colonial cultural effect was in its early phases. The period of Kenya's history dealt within the story is prior to that of *Weep Not, Child*. The novel demonstrates the author's intention to critically examine and assess the cultural clash between the Africans and the colonizer. This evaluation is successfully done through representing the antagonism between Christianity and Traditionalism. Traditional religion and Christianity, the clashes between the two tribes and the scheming nature of reformers and statesmen find place in the novel. The leadership is very much distanced from the throng. In the words of Cook and Okenimpe:

The novel depicts a situation in which a properly unified programs me for defending the integrity of indigenous society is dangerously spilt between rival

polities. Education and Political activism, instead of being partners, became antagonist. (27)

*The River Between* was written in time when African literature began to flourish. Just like Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Ngugi's second published novel reflected the cultural upheavals that African societies had to undergo. In his essay "The Situational Novel", Charles Larson argues that novels portraying the initial exposure to the west, such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* or James Ngugi's *The River Between* are "commonly concerned with the African confrontation with Western religion and for the initial stages of colonial government" (114). This stage, historically speaking, is known for its instability due to the cultural and political conflicts which tore the African society. Apollo Amoko maintains that

... *The River Between* discloses that the conflicts afflicting the human world are the result of contingent human action and have no basis in or connection with the natural world. The conflict between Kameno and Makuyu precedes and enables colonial conquest. (39)

Ngugi wrote *The River Between* when Kenyan literature had already reached a high level of self-consciousness. Set in the pre-independent period of Kenya's history, this masterpiece deals with pre-colonial Africa (Kenya) in all its ethnicity followed by the colonial invasion and the calamities caused to finally advocate a united movement to overthrow colonialism and its disastrous impact. Wergner Ginga assumes that the novel "deals with the earlier period of modern Kenyan history stretching from the advent of Christian missionaries in the 1880's to the circumcision crisis and independent school movement in 1930's" (212). Indeed, the novel deals with a pivotal moment in the history of Kenya when the circumcision debate became the main issue. Ngugi himself declares that the novel "deals with a situation in the thirties when there was a clash between the Kikuyu and the missionaries and also between the Kikuyu and the government." (qtd. in Duerden and Pieterse 122)

### **5.3. Female Circumcision Controversy**

In a point of fact, female circumcision is one of the debatable issues in Africa. Historically the issue of circumcision proved that women are not seen as actors but as objects and symbols to be manipulated by others who have taken centre stage. In Africa, this issue brought together three different groups, all arguably patriarchal- the local/native nationalist movement, the colonial state, and Christian missionaries- in a head-on

confrontation for political legitimacy, in which women's sexually became the battleground. Assuming that they champion women's needs, none of the groups, however, has consulted women to take their own point of view regarding this issue. The reason why these groups neglected women's voice is the fact that they believe that women are unable to construct their own positions and interests.

Female bodies became the sites of acute struggle between the contending hierarchies of authority. Each of three groups, attempts to stake a claim to power on women. Essentially, the nationalists believe that the circumcised female body is not a flesh and blood boundary; rather it is a means of revealing and proving loyalty to tradition. More importantly, they think that it is a measure of challenging colonial rule. The colonial state used the debate to discredit the nationalist movement in the eyes of European sympathizers. It has been noted that the Christian missionaries believed that banning female circumcision would eliminate the immorality and physical dangers they associated with the practice.

During the colonial era, female circumcision was used as a tool by the nationalist movement to gain political mileage. It has been claimed that unequal gender relations during the freedom struggle laid the basis for post-independence gender inequality and discrimination. Instead of addressing women's issues arising from the customary law introduced by the colonizer, the Kenyan nationalist movement worsened the situation by manipulating women's case for the benefit of ideological propaganda. As the war came to its end and Kenya gained its independence in 1963, the gender and generationally discriminative customary law was appropriated by African elites to continue serving their interests at the expense of women. In terms of power structure, it has been reported that nothing changed as far as women's status is concerned. It was until 2001 that Kenyan government adopted the Children's Act which forbade circumcision for girls under the age of 18 years.

The debate on female circumcision reached its highest peak in Kenya after the First World War when a number of missionary societies denounced the practice and forbade it among its members. In 1928, when the Church of Scotland Mission demanded that its members renounce circumcision as a condition of their continued membership in the Church, a large number of athomi balked, breaking away to form their own independent churches. In 1929 the African Inland Mission (AIM), and the

Gospel Missionary Society (GMS), issued a formal declaration that required African followers to sign a disavowal of female circumcision. The Protestant missionaries demanded that their African faithful sign a pledge (called a *kirore*, or thumbprint) to the effect that they would not participate in female circumcision or join the nationalist Kikuyu Central Association (KCA), a nationalist party of which Jomo Kenyatta was the general secretary. The reaction of African congregation to the missionaries' demand was immediate as it led to a massive boycott of mission schools and churches. The breakaway Africans established their own schools and churches, independent of government and missionary management, and allowed female circumcision.

Circumcision or 'Clitoridectomy' produced a crisis for the missionaries whose liberal-humanist discourse dictated the belief that the Gikuyu can only be recognized in Western images. Christian missionaries assumed to protect African women's bodily integrity. Their attempt to ban female circumcision was extremely motivated by other concerns related to sexual morality. They believed that circumcision licensed the social reproduction of backward, heathen bodies which should be brought into the realm of Christian morality. However, the Gikuyu community's argument opposed this view. Culturally, Gikuyu community thinks that this operation is/was the very fabric of the community. For them, it was absolutely crucial to their traditional social, economic, sexual and political organization of the community.

In the Gikuyu, life is associated with stages which determine and govern one's social integration and his political participation. It is argued that there are four life stages in the Gikuyu social culture; babyhood, childhood, adulthood and old age. The body plays a significant role in precising one age and life stage. In between one life stage and another, there is 'a bridge' called rite of passage or the second birth which is associated with circumcision. Circumcision, then, was the central rite in the Gikuyu way of life. Brendon argues that it "allowed one to marry" (35). In a view of that, Kenyatta admits that "[N]o proper Gikuyu would dream of marrying a girl who has not been circumcised, and vice versa. It is a taboo for a Gikuyu man or woman to have sexual relations with someone who has not undergone this operation." (132). In Kenya circumcised girls and boys formed "age-group" that would govern the community. Hence, their groups' names were to be historically acclaimed and remembered. In this regard, Kenyatta writes;

It is important to note that the moral code of the tribe is bound up with this custom and that it symbolizes the unification of the whole tribal organization... The *irua* (ceremony) marks the commencement of participation in various governing groups in the tribal administration, because the real age-groups begin from the day of the physical operation. The history and legends of the people are explained and remembered according to the names given to various age-groups at the time of the initiation ceremony. (134)

Clitoridectomy was important factor in the social organization. In Kenya, this operation played a decisive role in power distribution within the community. Jomo Kenyatta argues that in Kenya if a girl is seen “touching that part of her body she is at once told that she is doing wrong. It may be said that this, among other reasons, is probably the motive of trimming the clitoris, to prevent girls from developing sexual feelings around that point.” (162). Circumcision, therefore, was meant to erase one aspect of female sexuality in a patriarchal culture. In a view of that, Brenden argues that “clitoridectomy enacted something akin to the relations of male dominance and female submission that constitute a patriarchal social order.” (36)

Written in the early sixties, particularly in 1961, Ngugi first written novel *The River Between* quasi-historical portrayal of the period in which the debate on female circumcision in Kenya had erupted into a violent conflict between the Gikuyu and Christian missionaries. The novel also sheds its light on how the Gikuyu had become the most active in establishing schools that were independent of the influential missions. It tells the reader that while offering Western style of education, Gikuyu protected their traditional practices.

The Church preached against circumcision and considered it a barbarous custom that should be banned. According to Kenyatta circumcision is “looked upon as a deciding factor in giving a boy or girl the status of manhood or womanhood in the Gikuyu community” (*Facing Mount* 132-3). Thus, it was integral to the very fabric of Gikuyu tribal organization. The intention to ban and prohibit circumcision by the Church, Kenyatta believes, stands as an attempt to undermine the social and religious institutions which held the tribe together:

The real argument lies not in the defense of the surgical operation or its details, but in the understanding of a very important fact in the tribal psychology of the Gikuyu—namely, that this operation is still regarded as the very essence of an institution which has enormous social, moral, and religious implications, quite... The abolition of *irua* will destroy the tribal symbol which identifies the age-groups, and prevent the Gikuyu from perpetuating that spirit of

collectivism and national solidarity which they have been able to maintain from time immemorial. (*Facing Mount* 133-5)

Circumcision or ‘Clitoridectomy’ is a significant feature of women’s attachment to their roots and culture. Recent world literature on the topic focuses on the health aspects of ‘genital mutilation’ while they ignore their cultural importance in a way that reminds the reader of the Church of Scotland Mission which banned female circumcision among its Christian converts in Kenya between 1928 and 1931. In her investigation on its importance, Davison notes that *irua* :

Had an integrative role in enabling a girl to gain access to an age-set that had both historical and social significance. Historically, the attachment of a *riika* name provided a means of keeping track of events, as each age-group was identified with an event that occurred concurrently with *Irua*. Socially, *riika* meant identification with a ‘sisterhood’ that provided solidarity and mutual aid throughout the lifespan. Finally, *Irua* was an enabling process that allowed the mother and father of the initiate to assume new role-statuses as elders in the community ... such a transition included eligibility for the *kiama* (council of elders)... (*Voices from Mutira* 201)

Commenting on the widening rift between Christian and non-Christian Gikuyu, Sicherman argues that Clitoridectomy “prefigures the gulf between loyalists and nationalists during the Mau Mau period” (*Ngugi wa Thiong’o* 64). It had been assumed that the attack on this custom was also considered to be integral to Gikuyu community cohesiveness, particularly Christian-converts, and thus gave rise to leadership conflict within the same tribe. While some African converts (Kenya as far as the case study is concerned) accepted the ruling of the missions, the majority supported the retention and defense of tribal customs.

#### **5.4. Paradise Disturbed: The Cultural Clash and the Divided Nation**

In point of fact Ngugi wa Thiong’o has always been interested in colonialism and its disastrous effects on the lives of the masses. His interest is motivated by his intention to reveal what has been damaged and devastated out of the contact between the local culture and the foreign civilizations. By so doing, he tends to prove that colonialism undermined existing social and economic arrangements, and that it altered Africa’s perception of itself to the fact that Africans perceive themselves through the eyes of colonists’ intent on establishing European control. Ngugi argues that colonialism’s “most important area of domination was the mental universe of the

colonized, the control through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world.” ( *Decolonizing the Mind* 118)

Western education, which characters like Njoroge seeks to acquire in *Weep Not, Child*, inevitably leads to embracing Western values. This makes the possibility of resisting the imported culture difficult to sustain. Traditional societies have been disrupted in many ways, and not the least by the creation of a class of deracinated intellectuals who, like the African compradors, used Capitalist system as a way to enrich themselves at the expense of the masses. Ngugi’s early novels demonstrate the rifts and divisions in Gikuyu community which had been widened irrevocably by Western social, economic and cultural factors. His novels are noted for their vigorous concentration on the impact of colonialism on the individual.

*The River Between* portrays individuals who find themselves alienated from large traditional communities. This novel is perceived as an exemplary text of the ambivalence that characterized the works of a host of writers who lived under the pressure of colonialism in 1920s. Ngugi grew up in a society that struggled to maintain its own culture and take the best in the Western culture. According to Simon Gikandi “the more ambivalent portrait in the early works, especially, *The River Between*, seems to be closer to the historical records. Both colonizer and colonized were engaged in acts of cultural translation, trying to invent their traditions and selves in relation to the realities of the other” (17). Ngugi himself had been exposed to Western education which made him develop his artistic potential in an ambivalent attitude toward the Western culture. Hence, this education provided him with a hybrid background. In this regard, Gikandi assumes:

Ngugi began his writing career under the pressure of three powerful cultural institutions in colonial Kenya: the Protestant church, which was the major conduit for modern identities in the colonial sphere; the mission school, which through its valorization of literacy as the point of entry into the culture of colonialism, promoted new narratives of temporality and identity; and Gikuyu cultural nationalism, which manifested itself in the tradition of independent schools that the novelist attended in his youth (*Ngugi wa Thiong’o* 39).

This explains the startling combination of the Gikuyu and Western culture in Ngugi's writings. His belief was that one should be true to his country and his culture but this does not mean that fanaticism is the best solution. There could be a way in which a

native can learn from the advancement of other societies while being loyal to the culture to which he/she belongs. Later, Ngugi's writing career was marked with a transition from a Christianized view to a Marxist position. Such transition divides Ngugi's works into two stages which are usually referred to as the early and the later phases.

*The River Between* examines the historical period in Kenya in the period between 1928 and 1931, when the conflict regarding the issue of circumcision reached its highest peak. In terms of women's status and their plight, the novel records the colonial marginalization of women during the period when the clash between the Gikuyu traditionalism and Christianity reached its highest peak. Kamau-Goro(2010) dates the setting of the novel in the 1930s, 'a period when the Gĩkũyũ people were being intensely evangelized by European missions'. In addition to the missionaries' general disavowal of local African cultures and their polarizing missionary strategies, in Gĩkũyũ land "a particular conflict had emerged over the issue of female circumcision" (13). This becomes a central theme in the novel—a focus that is clearly biographically informed, as becomes clear from Ngũgĩ's childhood memoir. In *Dreams in the Time of War* he points out that *The River Between* was an attempt to understand the 'great historic divide' (114)—about circumcision, but fundamentally about issues of cultural and national identity—that had begun before he was born and that dramatically shaped his childhood and youth experiences, and indeed his own identity. These issues, accordingly, have widened the gap not only between the natives and the colonizer, but more importantly between the natives themselves.

In this novel, Ngugi makes a deliberate attempt to use symbols relevantly. The most obvious symbol as novel opens is the figure of the Sleeping Lions, the ridges Makuyu and Kameno, facing each other antagonistically and representing the divisions in Waiyaki's society:

The two ridges lay side by side. One was Kameno, the other was Makuyu. Between them was a valley. It was called the valley of life. Behind Kameno and Makuyu were many more valleys and ridges, lying without any discernible plan. They were like many sleeping lions which never woke. They just slept, the big deep sleep of their Creator.

A river flowed through the valley of life. If there had been no bush and no forest trees covering the slopes, you could have seen the river when you stood on top of either Kameno or Mukuyu. Now you had to come down. Even then you could not see the whole extent of the river as it gracefully, and without any apparent haste, wound its way down the valley, like a snake. The

river was called Honia, which meant cure, or bring-back-to-life. Honia river never dried: it seemed to possess a strong will to live, scorning droughts and weather changes. And it went on in the same way, never hurrying, never hesitating. People saw this and were happy.

Honia was the soul of Kameno and Makuyu. It jointed them. And men, cattle, wild beasts and trees, were all united by this life-stream. (*TRB* 1)

The passage is of graver import and significance. Ngugi opens the novel by calling attention to the Manichean geography of the colonial situation. Known for his complicated symbolism especially in *A Grain of Wheat*, *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross* where his symbolic narratives are too demanding, Ngugi opens *The River Between* by directly explaining some of symbols which suggest the Manichean geography of the colonial situation. The language, as it appears, foregrounds the diachronic relationship between two communities separated by a river. Symbolically, the river stands for and works as a signifier of the mutual identity and a mark of radical separation. Each of the two ridges acquires its personality in relation to contested meanings about traditional pasts and colonial present. Kamau Goro (2011) maintains that Honia River ‘signifies two contesting ideological positions, prefiguring two political theories of responding to colonial subjugation.’ (72)

The novel addresses issues of antagonism and difference in its opening pages. At the beginning of the novel, with few simple, evocative sentences Ngũgĩ sketches what Trevor James (2001, 228) has called ‘a spiritual landscape’ in which the river is the source of life uniting the two ridges. However, at the same time the river also divides the two ridges. Looking at them from the valley, they antagonistically face each other ‘like two rivals ready to come to blows in a life and death struggle for the leadership of this isolated region’ (*TRB* 1). This image of division carries in itself other indications of harmony between the inhabitants of each ridge. Ngugi suggests that there were Gikuyu in areas that had been “left alone, unaffected by turbulent forces outside” (3). These inhabitants had continued to adhere to traditional practices which served to reinforce tribal identity along with religious and cultural unity:

These ancient hills and ridges were the heart and the soul of the land. They kept the tribes’ magic and rituals, pure and intact. Their people rejoiced together, giving one another the blood and warmth of their laughter. Sometimes they fought. But that was among themselves and no outsider need ever know. To the stranger they kept dumb, breathing none of the secrets of which they were the guardians. *Kagutui ka Mucii gatihukagwo Ageni*; the oilskin of the house is not for rubbing into the skin of strangers. (3)

In this passage, the author indicates the idyllic existence. Both ridges claimed to be the resting place of the founding father and mother, Gikuyu and Mumbi. The description suggests that the two ridges were like the sleeping lions where people lived in a self-contained world with nothing to fear.

In dealing with this antagonism, Ngugi begins by establishing a certain mythology defined by an idiom of prophecy. Kameno's description suggests that it is the 'chosen place' of the Gikuyu "the chosen people":

Kameno had a good record to beat out this story. A scared grove had sprung out of the place where Gikuyu and Mumbi stood; people still paid homage to it. It could also be seen, by any who cared to count, that Kameno threw up more heroes and leaders than any other ridge. Mugo wa Kibiri, that great Gikuyu seer of old, had been born there. And he had grown up, seeing visions of the future and speaking them to the many people who came to see and hear him. (TRB 2)

In "Prayers of Waiyaki: Political Uses of the Kikuyu Past", John Lonsdale (1995) argues that it is through an appeal to the prophetic narrative associated with Mugo wa Kibiri that a Gikuyu historiography is invented and instituted." (qtd. in Gikandi 50). The prophetic trope<sup>1</sup> in the story can be read as the author's own response to both colonialism and Christian conversion. Nevertheless, the cultural crisis in the story is triggered by a certain misunderstanding about the prophecy's meaning and its efficacy. The narrator tells us about Chege's despair which arose from his realization that the tangible evidence of colonial encroachment did not convince people that the old prophecy come true: "the white man had come to Siriana, and Joshua and Kabonyi had been converted. They had abandoned the ridges and followed the new faith. Still people shrugged their shoulders and went to with their work..." (TRB 8)

### 5.4.1. The Crisis of Leadership

In essence, Werner Glinga considers *The River Between* as a novel which concentrates on what he calls the crisis of leadership since the colonial encounter. Previous critical studies on the novel tackled the story in terms of the ancient wisdom embedded in the "the ways of the hill" and the creation Myth of the Gikuyu people.

---

<sup>1</sup>Mugo wa Kibiri appears in *Weep Not Child*, and *The River Between*. We are told that he is the great Gikuyu seer of old and that he had grown up seeing visions of the future and speaking them to the many people who came to see and hear him...And he still spoke aloud his message and cried: 'There shall come a people with clothes like butterflies.' These were the white men. (TRB 2)

There is a strong reference to yearning for peace and reconciliation between the two hostile groups living and inhabiting the two ridges of Kameno and Makuyu. Within the context of landscape, *The River Between* deals with the land which serves as the medium of forging spiritual bonds with the people. It turns around the Gikuyu myth creation according to which Murungu, the Gikuyu God, told the people: This land I give to you, O man and woman. It is yours to rule and till you and your posterity.” ( *TRB2*). The age-old conflict between Makuyu and Makeno concerns the question on which side of the river Gĩkũyũ and Mumbi stood when Murungu showed them the land, and related to that, which of the two villages can claim spiritual superiority and leadership.

By deploying the Gĩkũyũ myth, with its sacred claim on the land, at the beginning of a novel that deals with the loom of colonialism, Ngũgĩ sets up an almost ontological contestation between Gĩkũyũ religious mythology and the Christian colonizing ideology. The novel, then, takes its cue from the colonial encounter and the clash of civilizations. In his reference to Ngugi’s novels, Killam (1980) argues that “the life in his novels is shaped by the presence of Christianity and his first novel *The River Between* was written when he was a devout Christian. Christianity is a major influence in both the colonial and neocolonial novels of Ngugi”(7). Traditional religion and Christianity, the clashes between the two tribes and the scheming nature of reformers and statesmen find place in the novel. The leadership is very much distanced from the throng.

In essence, Waiyaki, Joshua and Kabonyi are the three agents in a conflict that deepens the rivalry between the neighboring communities. They are the first wave of Western-educated Kenyans. Chege, claiming decent from Mugo wa Kibiri, has echoed the old prophecy concerning the European invasion of the land. He sees in his son Waiyaki, the prophesized savior who will lead the people in successful defense of the land. He sent him away to “acquire all the wisdom and the secrets of the white man”, without the ‘vices, commending him to remain “true to his people and the ancient rites” (24). Chege believes that he has awakened in his son the sense of higher duty to the community.

Mukuyu’s enthusiastic capitulation to Christianity under the leadership of Joshua has worsened the situation. His submission becomes a source of disturbance and division among the Gikuyu. The geographic gulf between the two ridges becomes

emblematic of the ideological difference. This division is suggested through characters who also choose one side in the clash. In the novel we are told that Joshua, for instance, is a loyal and an intolerant Christian. Initially converted to Christianity, Kabonyi is reconverted to 'Tribal Purity' which he fanatically defends. Within this clash, Waiyaki takes another position and stands as a midway between the two conflicting ideologies. Perceived by his community as a symbol of purity, he finds himself favoring development and conciliation at the expense of tribal zealousness. His attendance at Siriana School permitted him to shift his horizons beyond the local village dissolving the parameters and confines set by his father's generation. He accepts leadership within his community. However, he experiences some internal conflicts while choosing between cultural isolation and progress. His conflict is revealed through soliloquies or reflections on the community's expectation of the savior, culminating, by the end of the novel, his return to the sacred ancestral grove for spiritual guidance as soon as the conflict between the traditional Kameno and Christian Makuyu reaches the point of erupting into physical violence, and when his leadership within the community reaches a crisis point.

Waiyaki's dilemma is caught up in the archetypal problem of the colonized African. Holding on to the dream of an autonomous future, he finds himself tenuously connected and linked to his traditional past. Very early in the novel, we are informed that Waiyaki wrestles with a chaotic past which still haunts him and a future in which facts of colonial rule are intermixed with the sweet dreams of national uhuru. Waiyaki's own conflict is featured by a sense of melancholy and depression. This is apparent when he compares his alienation to Demi and Mathathi's unity. Demi and Muthani "were giants of the tribe. They had lived a long way back, at the beginning of time....They own many cattle, sheep and goats and they often sacrificed to Murungu and held communion with ancestral spirits" (10). Waiyaki wished "he knew what they had looked like" (10). This wish, however, turns into a doubt and hesitation. The community's savior lives in doubt about the efficacy of the ancient prophecy. His alienation compels him to doubt about the Gikuyu culture's power in overcoming the contamination brought by Christian conversion. In this respect, the narrator draws the reader's attention to the antagonistic representation of Waiyaki whose doubt forces him to live the crisis, and Joshua whose certainty and strong Christian faith makes him

totally reject Gikuyu culture. Before exploring the significance of Joshua and his role, it is necessary to pay attention to the idea of the savior and its Biblical origins.

Within a Biblical context, *The River Between's* major issues find their roots in Ngugi's acquaintance with the Bible. Writing about African literature, F. Hale (2007) points out that:

The relationship between missionary Christianity and traditional African cultures was a prominent theme in post-colonial literature during and for many years after the era of decolonisation. (...) At least as early as the 1950s, and seen perhaps most vividly in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, African *littérateurs* began to use fiction as a forum in which to challenge the tribulations resulting from the impact of European cultures on their own. (47)

As it has been argued in the third chapter, the Bible provides a convenient framework for Ngugi. Like a cohort of African authors, Ngugi makes Christian parable a prominent theme in his fiction. He finds the Biblical narratives very useful in establishing a socio-political discourse. According to Kamau-Goro (2011) Ngugi began his literary career as a Christian but later "developed into a radical critic of Christianity. Despite this, Christian idioms and allegories remained prominent features of his aesthetic praxis. Of all African writers Ngũgĩ has perhaps most consistently used the Bible as a frame of aesthetic reference." (68)

*The River Between* demonstrates the author's attempt to Christianize the story while Africanizing the Biblical narratives. This fusion indicates the author's position in a society where he grew up both as a Christian and Gikuyu. In "Resuming a Broken Dialogue: Prophecy, Nationalist Strategies, and Religious Discourses in Ngugi's Early Work", Mark Mathuray writes:

It is a common place to note that in his fiction Ngugi fuses mythological tropes from the Gikuyu and Christian religions. In all of his novels, be it part of the narrative strategy or in the language spoken by his characters, Biblical language, symbols and narratives are ubiquitous. (44)

The novel is overloaded with passages that interrogate Christian terms with the Gikuyu culture. A question that one should ask is why does Ngugi consider the Bible as a frame of aesthetic reference? Interviewed by Githae-Mugo, Kenya's gifted author has already claimed that "the Bible conveniently provides one with a relevant framework... The Gikuyu people have had similar experiences. Biblical mythology is widely known, and has the advantage of being easily understood by most audiences." (qtd. in Meyer 41)

Originally, the novel's title was *The Black Messiah* which indicates the infusion of two different cultures in the story. The title is richly polysemous as it combines two contradictory parts. Its central reference may be to draw a parallel between the sacrificial lives of Waiyaki and Jesus Christ. Messiah is a Christian term that is associated with the whites but here the messiah is described as black. Hence, from the first moment, readers realize the novel's context. This messianic motive as described by Scott and Housley "allows various associations" (230). To illustrate, one should pay attention to another prophecy by Mugo wa Kibiri. Filled with messianic hope, Mugo whispered an ancient Gikuyu prophecy: 'Salvation shall come from the hills. From the blood that flows in me, I say from the same tree, a son shall rise. And his duty shall be to lead and save the people' (*TRB* 20). Although the prophecy records the Gikuyu's hope in restoring the purity of the national culture, it contains within its lines a sort of hybridity in the sense that it is stemmed from the Biblical belief in the awaited savior. Kamau Goro, in this context, (2010) believes that:

These prophecies are clad in a multi-voiced idiom. The Christian nuanced idiom of "salvation" notwithstanding, Mugo's language reflects the metaphoric richness of Gĩkũyũ egalitarian culture now threatened by foreign influences (clothes like butterflies) as well as the language of Gĩkũyũ traditional kinship and lineage ties (from the same blood). (12)

Based on the Gikuyu messianic myth, Chege takes Waiyaki to the sacred place on top of 'the hill of God' to tell him that he is Mugo's offspring. On the top of the ridge he addresses his son and gives some advices:

I am old, my time is gone. Remember that you are the last in this line. Arise. Heed the prophecy. Go to the Mission place. Learn all the wisdom and all the secrets of the white man. But do not follow his vices. Be true to your people and the ancient rites. ... And keep on remembering, salvation shall come from the hills. A man must rise and save the people in their hour of need. (*TRB* 20-1)

Thus, at this sacred place, standing under the tree of Murungu, from where they could survey the land and see the ridges laying in peace, Waiyaki learns about the secret messianic prophecy of a savior coming from the hills and is told that he is the last in the line of those who might fulfill it. It is here that a sense of messianic masculinity is instilled in him. As the narrator describes, in the days after the event Waiyaki 'felt a heaviness making him a man. In body, he was still a boy.' (*TRB* 21)

Throughout the novel, Waiyaki is revealed as a reincarnation of Jesus Christ. His description brings to mind the idea of the 'Second Coming'. They share the same

qualities as they both seek saving the nation. Although Waiyaki is described earlier in the novel as a savior to echo Christ's mission, it is only when he is circumcised that the reader witnesses his 'second-birth'. Circumcision has a symbolic value in the novel. It is very significant that Chege took Waiyaki to the hill after going through the second-birth ritual which prepares him for his final initiation to manhood through the ritual of circumcision. Its importance, for Kameno's people, lies not in the physical act, but 'in what it did inside a person. Waiyaki realizes that this act establishes a bond between the initiate and his community. The narrator tells us that when he is circumcised "his blood tricked freely on to the ground, sinking into the soil. Henceforth a religious bond linked Waiyaki to the earth, as if his blood was an offering' (52). Being dipped into the Honia River, he came out clean. This ceremony echoes the Christian sacrament of baptism, including the ideas of being made a new to fulfill a spiritual vocation" (James 235). Indeed, this ceremony of second birth resembles the story of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River after which he took up his messianic mission.

In an antagonistic manner, Ngugi dramatizes the cultural clash between the two ridges in terms of two competing ideologies; traditionalism and Christianity. To argue, prophecy increases the tension between the inhabitants of the ridges. Mugo's prophecy of salvation that comes from the hills is part of the contestation between Christianity and Gikuyu mythology. By this, it is meant to maintain that the awaited 'Savior' has widened the gap between Kameno and Mukuyu. The competition, therefore, is between Chege's son and Joshua the zealous convert. In spite of the challenges presented by a resurgent traditionalism, Joshua's faith has been described as a kind of 'possession' built on the authority of radical renunciation. He is different from Waiyaki in the sense that his Christian faith is unquestionable. His self-esteem and strong faith is the result of denying the Gikuyu culture. This faith allows him to share with Livingstone and other white Christians the belief that 'the tribe's magic, power and ritual' were signs of darkness and thus their cultural narratives were inherently flawed:

His people worshipped Murungu, Mwenenyaga, Ngai. The unerring white man had called the Gikuyu god the prince of darkness...Isaiah, the white man's seer, had prophesied of Jesus. He had told the coming of a messiah. Had Mugo wa Kibiri, the Gikuyu seer, ever foretold of such a savior? No. Isaiah was great. He had told of Jesus, the savior of the world. (*TRB* 29)

Throughout the novel we are told that Joshua mediates on Isaiah's prophecy of a 'virgin' bearing a savior whose name must be Immanuel. The contest between the two ridges on the awaited savior suggests the amount of division among the natives. Waiyaki's attendance at Joshua's church suggests the amount of hatred between the two communities. Out of Waiyaki's attendance, Joshua steals out with a disturbed hearth because "As the hymn reached his ears, he again felt that insatiable longing for something beyond him, something that would contain the whole of himself" (*TRB* 87). By the end of the novel the reader feels that he is reading about Jesus Christ's deception. Indeed, Waiyaki and his passion are tragically denied and rejected by his people. In "Images of Christ in East African Literature: The Novels of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o" John Anonby (1999) argues that the end of the novel is equivalent to Jesus narrative with Waiyaki's childhood companion, Kamau, paralleling Judas' betrayal of Jesus; his friend Kinuthia echoing Peter's denial of Jesus; and with Kabonyi who presides the assembly acting as a counterpart (though less neutral) of Pilate." (244-5). Regardless the end of the novel, the story turns around the idea of rebirth or the second coming of Jesus. Hence, a question that the reader is supposed to ask is what is the significance of the *Second Coming* in the story? Or what role will Waiyaki embody as a Christ?

In essence, the reincarnation of Jesus Christ in the novel implies a perceived need for spiritual leadership, especially in the face of the colonial denigration of African values. It has been reported that Ngugi's implication of the biblical narratives in the story was a source of criticism. Some critics consider the use of the Christian narratives in an African context a sign of secularism. His appropriation of the biblical language of salvation and the Judeo-Christian term 'messiah' to depict a non-Christian Gikuyu hero is significant and has been regarded as subversive. In "African Culture and the Language of Nationalist Imagination", Kamau Goro (2010) writes:

The reification of the Christian notion of messianism in the person of a black man highlights the 'black' aspect of Ngũgĩ's ideological consciousness which reflects his awareness of the black person's disadvantaged position in the postcolonial world. It is satirical of the conventional association of the saviour with whiteness and thus highly subversive of the discourses of Christianity and colonialist historiography in relation to the black persons' identity in the world. (15)

Ngugi's re-contextualization of the 'messiah' is a sign of his consciousness to oppose European missionary Christianity with its intricate links to colonialism. The black

messiah is supposed to save the community from the shackles of European missionary. The novel demonstrates that Ngugi is sympathetic to the ideals of Gikuyu restoration which Waiyaki embodies. Meanwhile, it is revealed that his attitude toward Joshua's Christian conversion is skeptical.

#### **5.4.2. From the Clash of Civilizations to the Clash of Masculinity**

As it has been previously argued, *The River Between* sheds its light on the competing cultural forces and their devastating effects. Meanwhile, it also takes into consideration the gender roles as it makes male characters' cultural competition its main focus. The messianic images and the hero's (Waiyaki's) mission to save the nation are also opposed by Joshua who mediates on Isaiah's prophecy of a 'virgin' bearing a savior whose name must be Immanuel. Essentially, Joshua's name is of Hebrew origins. It means 'God is salvation'. He therefore stands as an opponent who challenges Mugo's prophecy which asserts that 'salvation shall come from the hills'. The narrator's description of Joshua's fanaticism suggests that he is a firm Christian patriarch. In the story we are told that "Joshua was such a staunch man of God and such a firm believer in the Old Testament, that he would never refrain from punishing a sin, even if this meant beating his wife" (*TRB* 31). His messianic name is ironic in the sense that he "renounced his past and cut himself away from those life-giving traditions of the tribe" (*TRB*141). Moreover, he believes that the suitable salvation is that which makes him fanatically cling to whatever promised security." (*TRB*141)

At the heart of the novel are rigidly uncompromising attitudes which can be described as 'egoisms'. The traditionalists, whose stronghold is Kameno, are determined to keep Kameno pure in the face of the threatened encroachment by the white man and his religion. Kabonyi is the only one who might also know about the prophecy. He competes with Waiyaki considering himself, or otherwise his son Kamau, to be "the savior for whom the people waited" (*TRB* 144). As a zealous leader of the Kiama, which was founded to protect and keep the purity of the tribe, Kabonyi's major objective is to undermine Waiyaki's popularity among the villagers by publically addressing him as 'young man' while "The other elders call him the Teacher as a sign of respect" (81). Age in the Gikuyu traditions is a sign of manhood. As long as the boy is circumcised this is also another sign of manhood. Waiyaki's circumcision permitted

him to reach manhood and become up to leadership. Kabonyi's underestimation of Waiyaki betrays a sense of conflict of masculinity. Kamau Goro, in this respect, argues that the conflict between Waiyaki and Kabonyi, revolves around the identity of the saviour foretold in the ancient prophecy' but 'more fundamentally, there's a conflict over the interpretation of the prophecy and the strategies to face the colonial threat.' (14)

Essentially, the novel successfully reveals a three-dimensional cultural clash. It is evident that both Kabonyi and Joshua are two opposing ideological poles as far as their responses to Christianity and colonialism are concerned. In spite of their difference, they appear to share the same hate of Waiyaki whom they both consider as a threat since he tries to negotiate and synthesize their position. Werner Glinga argues that Waiyaki is "the mediator...who searches for the unity necessary for defence and resistance" (212).

In terms of masculinity, both Joshua and Kabonyi, as Hammond (2011, 116) observes, 'share a belief in the aggressive, autocratic regulation of family and community'. The suggestion in the novel, then, is that the effects of colonialism on male identity in twentieth century Kenya is generally negative because typically patriarchal aspects of masculinity were reinforced both among the Christian converts and the traditionalists. In 'Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o & the Crisis of Kenyan Masculinity', Andrew Hammond (2011) makes a comparison between Waiyaki, Kabonyi and Joshua. Compared to the ridges' leaders, Waiyaki wisdom is the result of his interest in unity which can only be achieved through education. Kamau Goro considers Waiyaki as the 'synergetic leader who appropriates elements of tradition and colonial modernity to espouse an ideology of passive, long-term resistance to colonialism' (16). His qualities of leadership are conspicuous. Indeed, he possesses drive, intelligence, enthusiasm, and great organizing ability. In a view of that, Hammond writes:

Waiyaki appears to represent a more sympathetic style of leadership. The emphasis that he places on education leads to an advocacy of non-violent methods of political resistance, and his ambitions to overcome local divisions through the promotion of tribal unity stands against the masculinist creeds of competition and self-aggrandizement. (116)

Waiyaki perceives himself as a man whose main objective is to serve his community. He considers himself as the embodiment of the new spirit sweeping the land. He is the spirit of cultural nationalism. According to Simon Gikandi:

Ngugi did not invent Waiyaki to fulfill the demands of the Makerere School of English. Beneath the image of a would-be bourgeois hero struggling with his desires as they come into conflict with the moral claims of his culture, is the portrait of the kind of men who championed Gikuyu nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s. These men, the most notable being Jomo Kenyatta, advocated the restoration of old traditions while insisting on the freedom to assert their individual identity and their role as agents of cultural transgression in the name of modernity. These men's attitude toward the notion of tradition was hence ambivalent: they invoked tradition in their ethnographic work because they saw it as the counterpoint to colonial modernity; but in their own lives and experiences, they sought to master modernity as a prerequisite to communal regeneration. The Gikuyu *polis* could not have an autonomous identity without a recuperation of precolonial traditions; but autonomy only made sense in its modern rationality. (65-6)

Hence, Waiyaki's position in the novel illustrates the possibility of a peaceful co-existence between the two different cultures. To use Bhabha's term, he occupies a hybrid zone, or the in-betweenness. He defines his mission in terms of traditional duties, yet it is obvious that he has also been a prisoner of the institution he defends. The narrator tells us that his activities "were being watched by everyone. His freedom was being curbed" (*TRB* 81). He acknowledges that his traditionalism is compelled by the need to carry out an ancestral mission. Further, his actions suggest that he is closer to the culture of the colonizer and the Christian discourse.

The savior, however, is not a strong leader who is able to realize his vision of education, freedom and unity. It should be argued that the opposing forces are too strong. Waiyaki finds himself victim of opposing ideologies. His love for Joshua's uncircumcised daughter, Nyambura, and his refusal to leave her, are the reasons of his trouble with his own people. They leave his fate in the hands of Kiama whose leader is Kabonyi. Hammond asserts that Waiyaki 'has internalized the ethos of Western individualism' and therefore 'finds it difficult to subordinate his individual will to the demands of a communal policy that has its own ancient rules of belonging' (74). Waiyaki's defeat by the end of the novel illustrates that the competition of masculinity, that is to say the clash between traditionalism and Christianity, is devastating.

### **5.4.3. Circumcision Between Appropriation and Abrogation**

As a matter of fact, *The River Between* tackles the effects of the cultural clash in Kenya on women. Women's plight in the story suggests the tensions within the author's ideological formation. Undoubtedly, the issue that clearly epitomizes the fissure and

divisions among the Kenyan society is circumcision. The story reveals that there are two tendencies towards this tradition. Within the context of appropriation and abrogation, that is to say between acceptance and denial, circumcision betrays a sense of aporia in the societal ideological formation. In both cases, circumcision highly suggests women's victimization.

Female circumcision's appropriation<sup>1</sup> by Kenyan pegans is highly significant. From a local or traditional point of view, the novel demonstrates the importance of circumcision socially and culturally. Earlier in the story we are told that Chege taught the natives that "circumcision was a central rite in the Gikuyu way of life. Who had ever heard of a girl that was not circumcised? Who would ever pay cows and goats for such a girl? (*TRB* 37-8) Ironically, however, Ngugi reveals that it is Waiyaki, Chege's son, who falls in love with Nyambura the uncircumcised girl. This can be read a sign of crisis in the novel. The crisis, hence, is a result of the protagonist's cultural transgression.

The traditional community performs its primary rites of identity such as circumcision in the belief that these rites constitute historical continuity. The rite of circumcision is the essence of the Gikuyu community. It is the process by which one enters into an associative relationship. Further, it expresses one's deep patriotic sentiments and erotic desires. Circumcision is a sign of racial harmony and a key to protect progeny. Indeed, women's exchange in Gikuyu culture cements social and political relationships between men. The narrator tells us that:

Circumcision was an important ritual to the tribe. It kept people together, bound the tribe. It was at the core of the social structure, and a something that gave meaning to a man's life. End the custom and the spiritual basis of the tribe's cohesion and integration would be no more. The cry was up. Gikuyu Karinga. Keep the tribe pure. Tutikwenda Irigu. It was a soul's cry, a soul's wish. (*TRB* 68)

---

<sup>1</sup> Achroft et al consider appropriation as a term used to describe the ways in which post-colonial societies take over those aspects of the imperial culture – language, forms of writing, film, theatre, even modes of thought and argument such as rationalism, logic and analysis – that may be of use to them in articulating their own social and cultural identities. This process is sometimes used to describe the strategy by which the dominant imperial power incorporates as its own the territory or culture that it surveys and invades (Spurr 1993: 28). However, post-colonial theory focuses instead on an exploration of the ways in which the dominated or colonized culture can use the tools of the dominant discourse to resist its political or cultural control (15). In my case, however, it is intended to show that circumcision is appropriated by Kenyan pegans to resist the Christian cultural control.

This passage draws the reader's attention to the importance of circumcision which is no longer a physical act; rather it is a cornerstone upon which the Gikuyu patriarchy is founded. Throughout his novels, Ngugi deliberately uses some Swahili words without any explanation. He clearly introduces his mother tongue, which became his first medium of communication since the publication of *Devil on the Cross*, for two main reasons. First, his intention to use some Swahili words in his earlier fiction was an attempt to introduce the local tradition in its purest original context. The second reason is stemmed from the author's conviction that since his detention, Gikuyu language would make it easier to communicate with natives whom he considers as the seeds of change. In this passage the phrase 'Tutikwenda Irigu' means 'we do not want uncircumcised girls'. Out of this translation, it becomes clearer that Ngugi points out to the construction of a masculine performative through the pronoun 'we'. If this has a meaning behind, it surely means that the Gikuyu culture is patriarchal by nature.

In essence, Mukuyu is the strong hold of those who have embraced Christianity and abandoned the tribal rituals. Their leader Joshua is a bigoted whose fanatic behavior is exceptional. It is through this character that the author successfully reveals the dangerous consequences of accepting an alien ideology. Joshua accepts Christianity with a naivety which is almost the reason of his family's disintegration. Like most Christian fanatics, he knows the Bible thoroughly. His reliance on the Bible as he quotes from it with proficiency impresses Waiyaki. The irony is that his examples are drawn from the Old Testament. This is a clear sign that his religion is not the religion of love and mercy preached by Christ, but that of Moses and the Patriarchs. Palmer Eustace's evaluation of Joshua's faith made him assert that it is "a religion of vengeance and justice untempered by mercy." (14)

As far as the female circumcision is concerned, Joshua's position is defined by a clear abrogation<sup>1</sup>. The narrator clearly suggests that Joshua's position is rigidly uncompromising: To Joshua, indulging this ceremony was the unforgivable sin. Had he not been told to take up everything and leave Egypt? He would journey courageously, a

---

1 Ashcroft et al maintain that "Abrogation refers to the rejection by post-colonial writers of a normative concept of 'correct' or 'standard' English used by certain classes or groups, and of the corresponding concepts of inferior 'dialects' or 'marginal variants' (3-4). As far as Joshua's tendency towards circumcision is concerned, the researcher uses the term abrogation as a reference of a total refusal of the practice.

Christian soldier, going to the promised land. Nobody would deflect him from his set purpose. He wanted to enter the new Jerusalem a whole man.

In fact, Joshua believed circumcision to be so sinful that he devoted a prayer to asking God to forgive him for marrying a woman who had been circumcised. (31)

Joshua embraces the missionary view of Gikuyu culture and religion as demonic. He is consistently grateful to the missionary in the local mission for having made it possible for him to leave what he considers the “Egypt” of his traditional and cultural life. Further, in the story we are told that he is ashamed of his traditions, particularly initiation rites. He continuously supplicates God and asks him to finish the evil ways:

“O, God, look at their preparations,  
O, God, why don't you descend on this wicked generation and finish their evil ways? Circumcision is coming.  
Fight by me, Oh Lord.’

He felt like going out with a stick, punishing these people, forcing them on to their knees. Was this not what was done to those children of Israel who turned away from God, who would not hearken to his voice?  
Bring down fire and thunder,  
Bring down the flood. (32)

### **5.5. On the Liminal-Zone, Female Body and Double Patriarchy: Women's Uncertain Fate in a Cultural Clash-Based Society**

The term ‘hybridity’ has always been associated with the work of Homi K. Bhabha whose analysis of the colonial/ colonized relations stresses their independence and mutual construction of their subjectivities. In *The Location of Culture*, the Indian-American critic Homi K Bhabha sheds light on the "liminal" negotiation of cultural identity across differences of race, class, gender, and cultural traditions:

It is in the emergence of the interstices--the overlap and displacement of domains of difference--that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated. How are subjects formed 'in-between', or in excess of, the sum of the 'parts' of difference (usually intoned as race/class/gender,etc.)? How do strategies of representation or empowerment come to be formulated in the competing claims of communities where, despite shared histories of deprivation and discrimination, the exchange of values, meanings and priorities may not always be collaborative and dialogical, but may be profoundly antagonistic, conflictual and even incommensurable? (2)

The 'liminal-zone' carries the burden and meaning of culture. Ashcroft et al argue that this 'third space of enunciation' has been widely criticized, since it usually "implies negating and neglecting the imbalance and inequality of the power relations it references" (*Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* 119). To illustrate, for Bakhtin, hybridity is a politicized term which embraces the subversion and challenge of division and separation. Young, who also offers a number of objections to the indiscriminate use of the term, notes that Bakhtin's view of hybridity 'sets different points of view against each other in a conflictual structure, which retains "a certain elemental, organic energy and openendedness" (21-22)

According to Bhabha this "liminal space", or "in-between the designations of identity" becomes the process of "symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white" (4). Bhabha's model also introduces a number of potentially serious problems in its translation to the complicated process of collective social transformation. Further, his formulation of an exilic, liminal space between (rather than supportive of) national constituencies is problematic in that it fails to engage the material conditions of the colonized Third World.

In "Black Feminist Criticism and Drama: Thoughts on Double Patriarchy", Owofolabo Ajayi-Soyinka uses the concept 'Double Patriarchy' as a reference to a system under which sexism, the weapon of patriarchal power and its various manifestation, politically, socially and economically oppress women twice" (167). A sign of double-colonization or double oppression is being under the 'mercy' of two oppositional cultures. The colonial factor in black women's experience subjects them to another form of patriarchal authority, "a foreign power, in addition to the one in their cultures; for both the colonizing powers and indigenous African cultures, including even the matrilineal cultures (where the parental authority and responsibilities are derived from the mother, male relatives, are patriarchies'. These patriarchal systems co-exist within a universal regime of patriarchy where alternative masculinities may complement or contradict one another in the course of the global power struggles.

Therefore, the current global tensions which have been identified as "clash of civilizations" can, in fact, be perceived as clash between alternative masculine claims for power, in the course of which women are instrumentalized. Illustrative is the

“civilizing” intervention in Afghanistan, where women became the ‘war zone’ in the battle between the Taliban and the American military, representing masculinities from two different patriarchal regimes that are at odds with each other; the former claiming to protect women from Western corruption and the latter from Taliban’s “archaic brutality”.

Set against Bhabha’s problematic liminal zone which fails to engage the material conditions of the colonized, and Owofolabo Ajayi-Soyinka’s term ‘Double Patriarchy’, the present section is an attempt to examine women’s status in *The River Between*. Having already assumed that the major cultural issue is circumcision which widened the gap between Christians and non-Christians, the nub of this examination is to show double colonization of female characters like Muthoni and Nyambura who fail to survive and cope with the pressures of the competing antagonistic patriarchal discourses in spite of their hybrid identities.

Before exploring the devastating effects of the double patriarchy on women in Kenya, it is necessary to demonstrate some aspects of patriarchal discourse that exist in both sides of the cultural clash. In the novel, a reference to a secret language is made. The narrator tells us that the colonizer does not understand a secret language of the Kenyan highlands. Although the content of this language is not apparently revealed, this language, as the narrator explains, forms part of a coded reference to the Gikuyu proprietorship of the land:

On sunny days the green leaves and the virgin gaiety of the flowers made your heart swell with expectation. At such times the women could be seen cultivating; no, not cultivating, but talking in a secret language with the crops and the soil. Women sang gay songs. The children too. And the plants and all the trees around, swaying little as if they were surrendering themselves to the touch of the wind, seemed to understand the joy of the mothers. (79)

Two important ideas can be deduced from this passage. The author demonstrates the relationship between women and the land. This brings back to mind Ngugi’s interest in the landscape image. What links the subaltern women and the land in this passage is the secret language. The secret language, in this case, indicates the alienation and detachment of women for one reason or another. Nichols Brendon argues that ‘the privileged realm of women’s dialogue is also a realm of suppression, in which female speech is subsumed in landscape’ (43). In this respect, the alignment of women with nature legitimizes a broader narrative which divests women of a controlling hand in the

realm of culture and politics. Nichols believes that this narrative describes the overthrow of a prehistorical matriarchy in Gikuyuland.

In most of traditional African societies, men are considered the pillars of the society. They are accorded leadership and the responsibility of heading the family. Women, however, are perceived weaker and are polarized from men. Even in matrilineal societies, a decision cannot be reached without the input of men because they are considered stronger than women. The Kikuyu community of Kenya is one example of a tribe with a matrilineal social system. Fredrick Nafukho et al. (2005) observe that:

...among the Kikuyu of central Kenya, before, during and after colonial influence, every Kikuyu was seen as a son or daughter of Mumbi, the mother of the Kikuyu community. Girls and women were generally expected to take a leadership role while children were considered as belonging to the women. (91)

Throughout the novel, we are informed that people in the Kameno are taught from an early age that women are the subalterns. In the opening scenes of the story, Chege takes Waiyaki on a trek on the scared grove to explain women and men's roles in Kameno:

Long ago women used to rule this land and its men. They were harsh and men began to resent their hard hand. So when all the women were pregnant, men came together and overthrew them. Before this, women owned everything. The animal you saw was their goat. But because the women could not manage them, the goats ran away. They knew women to be weak. So why should they fear them? It was then Waiyaki understood why his mother owned nothing. (15)

This passage shows how males in the Gikuyu tribe carry on the societal construct of gender where males are dominant over women. By narrating this story, Chege teaches his son that women are weaker, and they have rightfully lost their ability to be in charge and have authority. He believes in the tradition of maintaining a patriarchal society and looks to pass that sentiment on to his son.

The most obvious example which illustrates the patriarchal exercise in Kameno is the existence of the Kiama. The kiama is highly based on the male authority. Its elders make political decisions which affect the community members. In its foundation, the Kiama is made of males. The narrator does not mention 'a woman as member'. In a view of that, Orchardson Marzui maintains that "in traditional communities some

elderly women are leaders in the realm of rituals and ceremonies pertaining to girls and women, (but) people rarely talk about them as leaders” (152).

As a representative of Makuyu’s villagers, Joshua’s behavior is identified by his belief in men’s supremacy at the expense of women’s inferiority. At home, he is the man who must be obeyed. His wife Miriamu follows him with unwavering obedience. Each time she tells her daughters “your father says this’. Moreover, she expects her daughters to obey their father without fuss and resentment. It is through Miriamu that Ngugi reveals the patriarchal side of the Kenyan Christian family. Miriamu’s obedience of her husband is the result of her belief in the Christian value of submission. She thought that “every believer had the same attitude to life” (34). She believes that as a good Christian, she must obey her husband and her daughters must do the same.

Joshua’s religious fanaticism is highly destructive. His attitude can be seen as life-denying in the sense that it has totally destroyed the family union and led a total family disintegration. His rejection of circumcision, which his people consider as a life-affirming, is a clear sign that he cut himself and his followers from a source of life. The narrator tells that his brand of Christianity has stifled the life in his wife, however, one “could still tell by her eyes that this was a religion learnt and accepted; inside the true Gikuyu woman was sleeping” (39). Joshua’s life-denying and his religious fanaticism lead to Muthoni’s secret longing for circumcision as a path to ‘life’, and subsequently to her acceptance of Waiyaki’s philosophy of love and mercy.

### **5.5.1. Mutilating the Body: Muthoni’s Tragic Death and the Question of Rightness**

As a matter of fact, very few of the previous studies that have been conducted on *The River Between* from a feminist or postcolonial-feminist angles, have taken into account the contradictory status of characters whose behavior and reactions are parameters in assuming their hybrid position in the story. Waiyaki’s mission of reconciliation is a path toward the liminal zone. Besides, female characters like Muthoni and Nyambura stand as good examples of characters occupying the middle ground in the ideological divide between Western Christianity and Gikuyu traditionalism. Such characters, however, are offered a revolutionary potential in the text.

The dramatic struggle, at the tribal level, is based on the debate of circumcision. As maintained earlier, the conflict provides a shocking individual act of rebellion on both sides of the ridges. Joshua's outspoken denunciation of female clitoridectomy is the reason behind Muthoni's dilemma. In Gikuyu Muthoni means 'a relative marriage'. In the text Muthoni becomes an emblem of a relative culture fusion. She occupies a crucial place in the novel for many reasons. First, she provokes some serious doubts about Waiyaki's hope of cultural regeneration and compels him to problematize the depth of his commitment to the prophecy he is supposed to embody. Secondly, Ngugi uses Muthoni to articulate the issue of cultural and religious hybridity. She deliberately articulates her Christian faith and her desire to be initiated into the ways of the tribe: "I am a Christian and my father and mother have followed the new faith. I have not run away from that. But I want to be initiated into the ways of the tribe" (*TRB*43). In her attempt to defend her cultural hybridity, Muthoni is aware of the personal risks involved in cultural syncretism. She reputedly articulates her desire to "be a woman made beautiful in the manner of the tribe" (*TRB* 44). Muthoni, therefore, is convinced that to be a woman is to be circumcised. Participating in a ritual that strengthens collective ties at the expense of individuality is a sign of strong will to rebel against individuality.

Muthoni is a controversial figure whose prominence in the novel is unquestionable. She is an assertive character seeking independence from the shackles of her father's fanaticism. She does not want to be controlled by the circumstances. Her choice of being circumcised despite her Christian faith makes her a symbol of reconciliation. She tells Nyambura: "Look, I—I want to be a woman. I want to be a real girl, a real woman, knowing all the ways of the hills and ridges." (*TRB* 44). She insists on her demand to get circumcised though she has been warned and informed by Nyambura that it is a pagan rite and that it is 'devil's work' which tempts her. From a Derridean angle, Muthoni is defined by her difference from Nyambura. While Nyambura seems to be obedient in the sense that she respects her father's instructions, Muthoni is a bold and assertive character who seeks liberty. Her decision to get circumcised is clear sign that she spans the gap between the warring ideologies:

Father and mother are circumcised. Are they not Christians? Circumcision did not prevent them from being Christians. I too have embraced the white man's faith. However, I know it is beautiful, oh so beautiful to be initiated into womanhood. You learn the ways of the tribe. Yes, the white man's God does

not quite satisfy me. I want, I need something more. My life and your life are here, in the hills that you and I know. (*TRB* 44)

Muthoni's middle position demonstrates that highest individuality can co-exist with the highest regard for the community. Moreover, the greatest offering to the community can come from the greatest individuality; the individuality of sacrifice for the community. This is what makes Muthoni a heroic figure though her position, as far as the story is concerned, is marginal. She perceives circumcision not as a painful physical act rather she considers it a step toward being beautiful in the manner of the tribe<sup>1</sup>. This is a clear sign that her revolutionary potential does not offer her liberation from the chains of the patriarchal order. Being beautiful in the tribe requests acquiring an ideologically 'determined beauty' which ensures the patriarchal organization of the Gikuyu tribe. Hence, she will not be able to get rid of the patriarchal confine. This is what has worsened her situation in the story. Though she knows that 'removing the clitoris' would erase her female desire, Muthoni underwent circumcision in order to find her personal fulfillment in the tribal role that was assigned to her.

The ritual that transforms Muthoni into a woman of the tribe creates a religious conflict that is only reconcilable in death. It should be stressed that Joshua's fanatic desire to keep his daughter faithful to her religion indicates that the imposition of seemingly innocuous forms of colonialism can easily lead to a family disintegration as it may provoke a certain lack of tribal harmony and cohesion. Muthoni's decision to submit to circumcision demonstrates a desire to retain tribal identity and unity which is stronger enough to over-ride Christian teachings and the fear of her father. Waiyaki realizes that "Mothuni had tried. Hers was a search for salvation for herself...She had realized her need, the need to have a wholesome and beautiful life" (*TRB*163). Her ultimate hybrid status is confirmed by asserting to Waiyaki that she is "still a Christian, see, a Christian in the tribe. Look. I am a woman and will grow big and healthy in the tribe... tell Nyambura I see Jesus. And I am a woman, beautiful in the tribe..."(*TRB*53). It is in passage that the image of the hybrid Mothuni is revealed. On the one hand she embraces a tribal rite which permits her to get the tribal beauty. On the second

---

1 In his article 'This Rape is Political: The Siting of Women's Experience in Novels by Aidoo, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Farah and El Shaadawi', Chris Dunon (2000) reveals that circumcision is the preservation of an indigenous social order...The Gikuyu woman's identity as 'a woman' was produced by the ritual of circumcision...it was only by submitting to clitoridectomy that a Gikuyu woman could call herself 'a Gikuyu woman'. (9)

hand, she is convinced that the rite of passage does not prevent her from being Christian. However, as soon as she gets circumcised, the wound gets infected. Her health deteriorates and she dies in the hospital.

Muhtoni's death negates all the positive possibilities that the text affords her. Although she is a distinguished rebellious female character, she fails in her attempt to constitute an ideological synthesis of the Gikuyu nationalist and Christian stances in relation through circumcision. Waiyaki becomes convinced that the herbs which the aunt gave to Muthoni would not cure her. The injuries she sustains during circumcision can neither be cured by Gikuyu remedies nor by Western medicines. Moreover, her death brings back the old clash between the two ridges. Gikandi argues that her death exhibits what "Ngugi would consider, after Conrad, to be the morality of action, Muthoni cannot translate her desires to others" (62). In spite of her attempt of reconciliation, she becomes an alienated individual who is unable to affect change neither in the traditional nor in the Christian community. It is because of her failure to bring a change that her death becomes a contentious issue in the culture as different factions interpret this death as prefiguration according to their own positions. On the one hand, the Christians believe that her death "forever confirmed the barbarity of Gikuyu customs" (55). Chege and his followers, on the second hand, consider her death a confirmation of the old prophetic authority:

He had done his work. Had he not seen the estrangement between father and daughter, son and father, because of the new faith? This was a punishment to Joshua. It was also a punishment to the hills. It was a warning to all, to stick to the ways of the ridges, to the ancient wisdom of the land, to its ritual and song. (TRB53)

Muthoni's death is a sign of the radical split between the two cultures which she tried to reconcile. Her death can, in fact, be read as a failure of building cultural bridge. Her death proves that she is exposed to attacks from both sides. Muthoni's desire to be operated represents her personal flaw. From her death onwards, the novel and Waiyaki's mission become split narratives. The novel exhibits the subjects' desire to assert the rights of the colonized to secure their own cultural identities and their acute sense of the irreversible changes brought about by colonialism.

### **5.5.2. A Pre-determined Love: Nyambura's Uncertain Fate and the Tragic Downfall of the Hero**

In essence, Waiyaki walks on Muthoni's paths and works harder to overcome the radical divisions between Makuyu and Kameno. His break with Christian Mission at Siriana was motivated by his belief that a middle path is found 'between' the ideality of a colonial education and Gikuyu traditional life. Nevertheless, he is plagued by doubts and uncertainty about the efficacy of hybridity. His doubts made him ask "why should they who had been educated at Siriana, be so vehement against it? It was just like his father, who had sent him to the Mission to which he had all his life objected" (*TRB64*). These questions reveal the hero's contradictory cultural project. He realizes that the idea of school, which he considers as a continuation of the old prophecy, emerges out of his personal effort to figure out a modern identity between the competing views of Christianity and traditionalism. The narrator keeps informing us that the notion of school and its efficacy are inseparable and that the hero keeps considering it a must in achieving his cultural project. The second half of the novel introduces Waiyaki as the savior of his community. It is in this half that the reader is bound to shuttle between the hero's conflicting role both as a reconciler of competing factions and as an agent of school reformation and change that engender cultural divisions.

Very much like the modernist heroes we read about in the works of Joseph Conrad and D.H Lawrence, Waiyaki finds himself occupying the 'in-between' position. He is both inside and outside the norms defined by his community. Following Muthoni's death, his doubts about the efficacy of the cultural project increased. This is more apparent when the narrator tells us that he "wondered if he himself fitted anywhere. Did Kabonyi? Which of the two was the messiah, the man who was to bring hope in salvation to a troubled people?... He did not quite know where he was going or what he really wanted to tell his people" (*TRB141-42*). For many reasons Waiyaki shares with Jomo Kenyatta the belief in restoring old traditions while insisting on the freedom to assert their personal role as agents of cultural transgression through modernity. Their attitudes toward tradition are characterized by ambivalence. Waiyaki invokes tradition because he perceives it as the counter point to colonial modernity, meanwhile he seeks to master modernity as a prerequisite to communal regeneration.

Ambivalence toward traditionalism reaches its highest peak in Waiyaki's romance with Nyambura. For a cohort of critics, romantic love is an imaginative mechanism for overcoming the fissures and divisions. Throughout the novel, Ngugi has woven a unique love story. He makes Waiyaki and Nyambura's love an attempt to transcend the limitations of religious rivalry. Moreover, their love becomes a prey to the conflict for power within the members of the tribe. Nyambura occupies a prominent place in Waiyaki's project. The narrator tells us that she is regarded as "the shape in his mind that had refused to melt into nothingness." (*TRB74*)

The love relationship that the hero attempts to develop fuels both Kabonyi's personal animosity for the teacher and the rising hostility between the rival communities. In a point of fact, their love story echoes that of Romeo and Juliet in the sense that they find their love for each other tragically blighted by their feuding communities. It is Waiyaki's individualism, expressed partly in his obsessive drive for more schools, and more particularly in his blossoming relationship with Nyambura, which gives Kabonyi the leverage to prove his disloyalty to the community and tribal purity. The narrator informs us that what they come to feel for each other is personal, "untainted with religion, social conventions or any tradition." (*TRB88*)

Throughout Ngugi's fiction, a special space is always devoted to the impact of the dilemma on the Kenyan family. Most of his novels end with a partial or a total family disintegration. Within the context of family disintegration, the love relationship has widened the gap between Joshua's family members. As it has been stated previously, Joshua is very stubborn. He disowns his daughters since they are not in conformity with him. Although their mother 'Miriamu' is always in favor of her daughters, she seeks peace and stability and does not want them to rebel against their father. In the novel we are informed that "she is a peace-loving woman and she never likes unnecessary tension in the house"(112). Nyambura's agreement with Waiyaki to develop their love relationship leads to a total disagreement. On the one hand, Joshua immediately disowns her and says: "you are not my daughter.... You will come to an ultimate end. Go!" (*TRB123*). On the second hand, however, Miriamu goes against his decision and asks him to never let her go. The narrator tells us that Miriamu keeps "weeping and saying don't let her go. Don't" (*TRB123*). This scene reveals the extent to which colonialism had inculcated hatred among the family members.

Relying on Nyambura and Waiyaki's decision, Ngugi aims at showing that women are not forcibly submissive beings and that they are able to stand against oppression and subjugation. In this case, Nyambura is an assertive girl who is offered a revolutionary position. Being Christian and uncircumcised, Nyambura finds herself outcast unclean according to Kiama. She defies her father's order not to develop a love relationship with Waiyaki, and when Waiyaki warns Joshua and his followers of the Kiama's plan to harm them, she declares her love for him:

Joshua was fierce. He hated the young man with a hatred which a man of God has towards Satan. There was another murmur in the room. Then silence reigned as Nyambura walked across towards Waiyaki while all the eyes watched her. Waiyaki and Joshua must have been struck by her grace and mature youthfulness. She held Waiyaki's hand and said what no other girl at that time would have dared to say, what she herself could not have done a few days before.

'You are brave and I love you' (*TRB136*)

Nyambura and Mothuni are strong women who engage in positive struggles for the antagonistic forces. Their actions against the patriarchal domination have been interpreted as acts of reconciliation. The dualism inherent in Honia River's symbolic representation of division and unity reinforces the tentativeness upon which reconciliation is posited. Nyambura made her path toward reconciliation as she fell in love with Waiyaki. Her romantic view that wholeness can only be reached and experienced with Waiyaki promotes the image of women as forces for reconciliation.

While identifying the devastating features of missionary, Waiyaki's own perception also recommends reconciliation:

For Waiyaki knew that not all the ways of the white man were bad. Even his religion was not essentially bad. Some good, some truth shone through it. But the religion, the faith, needed washing cleaning away all the dirt, leaving only the eternal. And that eternal that was the truth had to be reconciled to the traditions of the people. A people's traditions could not simply be swept away overnight. That way laid disintegration. Such a tribe would have no roots, for a people's roots were in their traditions going back to the past, the very beginning, Gikuyu and Mumbi. A religion that took no count of people's way of life...would not satisfy. It would not be a living experience, a source of life and vitality. It would only maim a man's soul, making him cling to whatever promised security, otherwise he would be lost. (*TRB162-63*)

Waiyaki, therefore, believes that a successful leader is the one who sticks on the tribal roots. This becomes more apparent when he asks himself: how could a man be a savior

when he himself had already lost that contact with the past?" (*TRB163*). The tribal roots are necessary for both the individual and the community. Joshua's loyalty to Christianity made him renounce "his past and cut himself away from those life-giving traditions of the tribe" (*TRB163*). Against this background Ngugi discusses the central dilemma and sees little opportunity for compromise. It is against this background that the reader is supposed to question the possibility of success as far as Waiyaki and Nyambura's love is concerned.

Waiyaki and Nyambura's love is highly affected by the circumcision conflict. They find themselves victims of the tribal conflict and the clash of civilizations. In essence, the certainty of Waiyaki's demise reaches its highest peak when the story gains momentum. Gradually, the reader notices the loss of contact with the ordinary people who look to him to do far more than provide new schools. Hence, a noticeable gap between the masses' expectations of their savior and Waiyaki's achievements rapidly grows and increases. He perceives himself as a visionary who has been chosen to redeem the Gikuyu community from the conflicts through education. At the beginning of the story we are informed that Nyambura decided to avoid Waiyaki's proposal for she knew that he would not agree to marry an uncircumcised girl. In regard to Chege, he wonders if there would be man willing to pay cows and goats for such a girl and assumes, ironically, that Waiyaki will never do because he will not betray the tribe.

It is precisely Waiyaki's ambition to enter into a companionate marriage with Nyambura that marks his position as a half-outsider in relation to the Makuyu and Kamenio communities. The narrator informs us that he "was losing that contact with the people that can only come through taking part together in a ritual" (*TRB129*). Waiyaki's lack of realization of the importance of his name and the rising power of the Kiama lead to his downfall. This lack of consciousness makes him act spontaneously and neglect the plans that are set against him by his adversaries. In spite of the warnings that he receives from his friend, Kinuthia, and his mother, Waiyaki goes on his way, unaware of the danger that lies in front of him:

Be careful, Waiyaki. You know the people look up to you. You are the symbol of the tribe, born again with all its purity. They adore you. They worship you. You don't know about the new oath. You have been too busy. But they are taking the new oath in your name. In the name of the Teacher and the purity of the tribe. And remember, Kabonyi hates you, hates you. He would kill you if he could. And he is the one who is doing all this. Why? The Kiama has power.

Power. And your name is on it, giving it even greater power. Your name will be your ruin. Be careful.... (TRB112)

Moreover, Waiyaki's mother keeps warning him that the individual must heed the voice of the community. Accordingly, she advises him against marrying Nyambura:

You know what this would mean. You must not do it. Fear the voice of the Kiama. It is the voice of the people. When the breath of the people turns against you, it is the greatest curse you can ever get. (TRB141)

Nyambura's refusal to get circumcised is the main reason behind Waiyaki's conflict with the elders. They interpret his intention to marry her as unfaithfulness to the tribe. Further, because Waiyaki is not a Christian, Joshua considers their love to be a violation of Nyambura's allegiance to both him and Jesus Christ. She regularly meets Waiyaki at Honia, the river in the valley termed by the ancients as the Valley of Life. Accordingly, Ngugi's use of the landscape becomes contradictory and multi-dimensional. At the beginning of the story we are told that the river connects the two ridges. Yet, the meeting ground becomes a symbol of separation. It can be argued that Ngugi's aim, as far as the love story is concerned, is to maintain that irreversible Western influences have poisoned both of them so that they look incompatible for one another, otherwise, their relation would have been benign far from the colonial influence. The narrator informs us that Waiyaki keeps wondering how Honia has become the place of separation: "Perhaps they would remain like that, a big, deep valley separating them" (TRB 123). In this regard, it is not only the river which separates them but more importantly it is their longing for syncretism which separates them from inclusion in their ridge. Such a representation reveals Ngugi's intention to blend the two cultures while it simultaneously suggests the impossibility of such an occurrence. The Valley of Life, suggestively a place where growth and sustainability once occurred, has become instead a place where hopes of growth are thwarted. Both characters find themselves in a state of crisis, excluded from life everywhere because their identity as a unified couple will not coalesce with the culture of either ridge.

Waiyaki's mother believes that that there is no individual action which does not have repercussions on the community especially when it is the leader who acts. For Waiyaki, however, circumcision is not important enough to stand in the face of his love. Hence, his decision is encountered by the refusal of his people. Such a relationship would be illegal in their eyes as it violates his oath of keeping the purity of the tribe. At

the end of the novel the people of Kameno wonder "How could he work for the purity and togetherness of the tribe and then marry a girl who was not circumcised?" (*TRB* 151). The trial scene that follows shows the divergence and difference between the hero's vision and that of the Kiama. He is convinced that fanaticism and rigid tribalism will never promote "healing the rift between Makuyu and Kameno; between Joshua and the others" (*TRB*147). The only solution in this case is compromise. While the leaders accuse Waiyaki of infidelity, he maintains that loyalty to the tribe does not forbid him to love people:

I too am concerned with the purity of the tribe. I am also concerned with the growth and development of the ridges. We cannot do this through hatred. We must be united. Christians and non-Christians, Makuyu or Kameno. For salvation of the hills lies in our hands. (*TRB*147)

Consequently, the end of Waiyaki's love is another situation that Ngugi employs to further demonstrate the intensity of the ongoing clashes. In essence, the hero's love affair is a clear message conveyed by the author to Kenyans. Love is the last hope to offer a little opportunity for compromise. James Ogude believes that Ngugi resorts to a romantic affair between Waiyaki and Nyambura "to articulate nationalism as the ultimate alternative to ethnicity" (110). The romance, then, is the author's vehicle for the ideal nationhood. Moreover, the theme of romance as a trope for achieving communal redemption comes to the surface only when reconciliation and unity seem to be fading. Waiyaki's relationship with Nyambura and his love for education are allegorical for a "failed romance" of colonialism and the Gikuyu traditions. At the end of the story, Waiyaki predominantly wants to bring the opposing ridges together, using a language of romance in his attempt to sway the leaders of the Kiama (Gikandi 67-8). He still views himself as a savior but he also believes that his purpose as savior is not to rid the country of colonial influences of education and religion. His main objective, then, is to find a way to reconcile those differences instead. In the last few pages of the novel, Waiyaki expands his vision beyond the horizons of education alone; prophetically, he foretells that patience and action are also necessary ingredients to his dream's success, painting a "new vision. Education, Unity, and Political Freedom." (*TRB*143)

Nyambura occupies a prominent place in the story. Her presence in the story is of graver import and one may say that just like Waiyaki, she can be considered as a

heroine. Indeed, they both felt the strength of the other's presence inspite of the vagueness of their future. Ngugi demonstrates the unexpected change of Nyambura who passed from an obedient timid girl to a mature girl who is ready to become a rebel like Muthoni. She knew that:

...she could never be saved by Christ; that Christ who died would only be meaningful if Waiyaki was there for her to touch, for her to feel and talk to. She could only be saved through Waiyaki. Waiyaki then was her savior her black Messiah, the promised one who would come and lead her into the light. (TRB102).

Moreover, G.D Killam believes that:

Nyambura re-enacts her sister's spiritual quest. Like Muthoni she accepts the brand of Christianity Joshua preaches, partly out of fear of him but partly because it seems to fulfill her spiritual need. But the example of Muthoni, the fact that she achieved peace even in death causes Nyambura to seek some resolution to the conflict which comes to drive her—her loyalty to her father and his religion, and her own spiritual needs. (29)

It is only after establishing the relationship with Nyambura that Waiyaki is able to articulate. The narrator informs us that “all at once action Waiyaki realized what the ridges wanted. People wanted action now. Now he knew what he would preach if he ever got another chance: education for unity. Unity for political freedom” (TRB143). Elias Bongmba argues that “Waiyaki finds in Nyambura the solution to his personal as well as spiritual path of reconciliation, which he believes will enable him resolve persona and public strife in Gikuyu society” (303). A feature of African feminist thinking is seeking equality between man and woman. Gynandrists like Ngugi are known for their efforts to introduce female characters with a will to resist and change. This will, however, is different from the Western female's will to survive. Women in Africa are rebellious and their rebellions are meant to live harmoniously with men. Nyambura's rebellion against the patriarchal order is stemmed from her desire to live peacefully and harmoniously with Waiyaki. Being assertive does not allow Nyambura to detach herself from her surrounding especially Waiyaki whom she thinks is the essence of her existence. The mutual love, therefore, permits Charles R. Larson to argue that “this novel, however, moves towards being what we in the west think of as a love story-through the depiction of the lover's relationship is rendered not in the Western concepts but in those which are fully African.” (158)

Kenyan women have always been under the pressures of modernity that colonialism dictated and the duty of purity which the local culture also dictates. A detailed reading of *The River Between* indicates that women like Mothuni and Nyambura are endowed with courage and strength. Their lives are shown as changing. They both reacted against the shackles and the chains of patriarchy. According to Judith Cochrane, “Ngugi’s women are guardians of the tribe”(1). It should be noted that his female characters are not only created to support male characters or merely as the background against which the entire plot is set, but they are made assertive and their presence is to articulate and share their opinions. They find themselves thrown in a milieu where all the forces are set against them. A good illustration is Nyambura whose assertive voice becomes a powerful instrument for dissembling the hardened ideological positions which contribute to the crisis. As far as the theme of reconciliation is concerned, her voice has no effect. Moreover, just like Waiyaki, she finds herself a sacrificial victim of the Kiama in a society that is torn by the forces of modernity and traditionalism.

Throughout the story, we are informed that Joshua was aggressively vigilant on Nyambura and her love relationship with Waiyaki. Yet, it is too late for the overzealous Joshua since his daughter had already made her decision to love his rival. In this respect, the narrator declares that Joshua could not control her body...he could not control her heart. And so, day by day, she walked with him [Waiyaki], touching him and holding him to herself in her own way. She lived in a dream. She was always with Waiyaki” (*TRB* 134). Further, the narrator notices that she “had never rebelled before; not with deliberation. This was her first act of rebellion and she knew that she was beyond the grasp of Joshua. The call of her inner voice that urged her on, the call of the land beyond Joshua’s confining hand, was too strong” (*TRB* 136-7). Like her father, Nyambura was not going to rescind her decision and turn back. After all, her battle with Joshua had been fought and won. Nevertheless, Nyambura would now brace for another battle with Kabonyi-Kamau led Kiama which had encroached on her relationship with Waiyaki.

Waiyaki’s decision to court an uncircumcised girl makes him lose his popularity as a savior of Kameno and Makuyu. The elders who finally met to decide on his fate could not believe that the teacher “is involved with an uncircumcised girl, and more so a

daughter of Joshua, the enemy of the people” (*TRB* 143). Nyambura is entirely blamed for the teacher’s down fall. During Waiyaki’s trial, one of the elders cites the story of Nganyira, the great Gikuyu warrior who led the tribe and later “betrayed the tribe’s secrets to the enemy” after a Masai woman seduced him (*TRB*126). This male scapegoat or bestializing of women for men’s downfall is clearly discussed is highly symbolic. It is patriarchal, demeaning, and universally cuts across cultures. Nyambura’s relationship with Waiyaki notwithstanding, the teacher is bound to fail. He is obsessed with the idea of more education for the people and consequently loses sight of the rapid pace the Kamen-Makuyu conflict is taking. He also ignores the traps laid for him by his enemies and the powers Kabonyi- Kamau led Kiama have over him. Therefore, it can be said that Waiyaki’s lack of judgment is comparable to Njoroge who had always been a dreamer, a visionary who consoled himself faced by difficulties of the moment by a look at a better day to come. Hence, Njoroge and Waiyaki fail in their missions because of their stubbornness.

## **5.6. An Unfulfilled Reconciliation: From *The River Between* to the Body Between**

The novel’s closure is problematic. Although the story suggests that reconciliation is needed for progress, the death of three characters while the struggle between the ridges remains unsolved leads the reader to question the validity and the effectiveness of compromise. Ian Glenn considers this closure as the author’s attempt to produce a ‘nation-building text’. Glenn believes that what makes the novel problematic and interesting “is that the appeal for unity fails, that the difficulty of the reconciliation remains clear” (55). Central to *The River Between* is the precarious possibility of reconciliation. Waiyaki, Muthoni, and Nyambura, the three hybridized characters, became victims of this cultural clash. In a view of that, Ian Glenn argues in “Ngugi wa Thiong’o and the Dilemmas of the Intellectual Elite in Africa” that:

Clearly the situation and dilemma of the heroes [of Ngugi’s novels] is structurally related to that of the élite whose alienation is, paradoxically, their source of power. How are we to understand the persistent failure and sacrifice of the hero? It is a resurgence in African writing of the colonial novelist’s theme of the tragedy of the educated African, the man of two worlds? In some sense, yes, it seems to me that the novels reflect the strain of this mediating position, this double alienation, and exonerate the hero by suggesting that the task of modernizing his primordial attachments or satisfying the various allegiances is impossible, that the contradictions cannot be lived out. At the

same time, in death as sacrifice, the elite finds an ideal individualist gesture and intellectual act through which the opposites may be reconciled. (63)

Within the social class context, Nyambura and Muthoni belong to the upper wealthy class. Two main reasons can be cited in classifying them in such a social class. Their mission school education and the missionary Joshua demarcate their class affinity with a wealthy, literate minority. Essentially, Nyambura and Muthoni represent the two poles of hybridity. Muthoni's hybrid position leans to and is closed to purity. She is a circumcised Christian girl. Nyambura's hybrid position, however, is closed to the second pole of the cultural clash in the sense that she is an uncircumcised Christian girl who sticks on her principle and made a path toward the in-betweenness through falling in love with a circumcised Gikuyu man.

Such a construction offers the two girls a reconciliatory potential. Nevertheless, this reconciliation has provided a sense of ambiguity following Muthoni's death and Nyambura's uncertain fate. Accordingly, the fates of the two sisters are yoked into a heroic failure. This failure is the result of and a sign of the impossibility of compromise. Muthoni's circumcision compelled Joshua to disown her since his faith does not permit this barbaric ritual. Her death widened the gap between both ridges. Meanwhile, her tragic death was interpreted by Chege and his followers as a sign of punishment while Joshua himself also considers it as a sign of punishment and God's dissatisfaction with the barbaric act. Similarly, Nyambura finds herself excluded from both sides. Her father disowns her because of her love relationship with Waiyaki. She musters up courage to join Waiyaki leaving her parents and home behind. Her Christian faith and refusal to undergo circumcision made it impossible for her to find a place in Kameno. Moreover, Nyambura represents the flaw which tragically overturned Waiyaki's life and devastated his popularity.

Although the major theme of the novel is the clash of civilizations, Ngugi uses circumcision as the focal point in the debate between imperialism (colonial modernity) and resistant native culture. By so doing, and within the cultural clash context, the novelist skillfully draws the reader's attention from the metaphor of Honia River and the two opposing ridges to another implicit metaphor which stands for women's situation in the opposing ridges. Having already assumed that circumcision is the issue which widened the gap between Makuyu and Kameno, the novel's main objective, therefore, is to shed light on the Kenyan female body which is under the pressures of

two opposing patriarchal forces. Commenting on this situation, Brendon Nicholls writes:

The upshot of collusion between colonial- Christian and traditionalist-national ideologues in the circumcision debate was that both camps divide upon a shared referent (the peasant woman) and differed only as to whether she should be symbolically or physically clitoridectomised. (44)

Muthoni and Nyambura find themselves wedged somewhere between the Makuyu and Kamenos. In spite of their endurance, courage, and assertiveness they could not realize their dream of reconciliation. Hence, from *The River Between* image, we are bound to read the novel as depicting the image of the female body between. The Kenyan female body is between two opposing patriarchal poles. The circumcision debate and the myth which legitimizes male power conspire to place subaltern women in a double bind from which even hybrid females like Muthoni and Nyambura cannot escape.

## **5.7. Conclusion**

In a nutshell, *The River Between* derives largely from an anxiety surrounding circumcision--an indigenous Kenyan rite practiced upon both boys and girls that ensures their successful passage into adulthood, manhood, and womanhood. Coupled with the novel's setting between two mountain ridges, Ngugi's portrayal of female circumcision enacts a sustained sexual metaphor that crudely genders these mountain ridges as a female-coded liminal zone and, in addition, portrays the contending Kamenos and Makuyus' claims for these ridges as figurative "circumcision" narratives themselves. As perhaps Ann McClintock might argue, Ngugi genders the novel's Kenyan landscape as female in an attempt to portray Kamenos and Makuyus' antagonism as a fundamentally masculinist competition for patriarchal dominance. Moreover, the female body becomes an emblem of the infected local culture and thus exhibits the amount of hatred and hostility in Kenya. The author's interest in women's predicament through this novel is motivated by his conviction that in cultural clash-based society women are the wretched of the earth; an idea that he develops in his third novel *A Grain of Wheat*.

**Chapter Six:**  
**Gendering History in *A Grain of Wheat*: Rehistoricizing**  
**Woman's Conflicted Figure**

“The present is born of the power plays of the past.”  
— Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Birth of a Dream Weaver: A*  
*Writer's Awakening*

“Unless people learn from their history, they are  
doomed to repeat it” (Ngugi, Interview with Bettye J.  
Parker 66)

### **6.1. Introduction**

*A Grain of Wheat* (1967) concerns the Mau Mau campaign, placed in its lengthy historical setting, and the relationships of this movement to independence. It is a novel about heroic corporate effort towards an independent nation, and about betrayal. It is a fierce, passionate examination of heroism and treachery. Socially positive behavior is lauded and all that is anti-social is condemned. At the same time, it is an infinitely complex work, exploring the nature and causes of frailty and failure, and expressing a humane concern for social misfits and even delinquents. Motivated by the author's intention to shed light on the forgotten past, *A Grain of Wheat* is a historical revisionist text. The novel contributes to the feminist world by re-integrating the female voice in the official history of Kenya. It responds to the exclusion of women from history in spite of their honorable past. Postcolonial feminist theory exerts a pressure on mainstream postcolonial theory in its constant iteration of the necessity to consider gender issues. Postcolonialism and feminism have come to share a tense relationship as some feminist critics point out that postcolonial theory is a male-centered field that has not only excluded the concerns of women, but also exploited them. Postcolonial feminist theorists have accused postcolonial theorists not only of obliterating the role of women from the struggle for independence, but also of misrepresenting them in the nationalist discourses. Based on the author's attempt to re-write history from a gender perspective, the present chapter highlights the author's intention behind the historical revisionism. It

puts forth the assumption that while women's contribution to independence is one of Ngugi's objectives, their double oppression by colonialists and black men during the years of emergency is his main target.

## **6.2. On History and Gender Studies**

History has always been regarded as a fertile area of debate and criticism. Feminist and gender studies have a remarkable impact on the issue of writing and teaching history. Feminism has produced the subfield which is known as 'women's history'. In essence, as far as women's position within the pages of history is concerned, historians have been criticized for the personal enterprises. Historians whose preoccupation is women's place in the past increasingly look to the development of a feminist history; a history which will have an impact beyond the study of the history of one half of the human race. Edith Sauer's analysis of women's position in Austrian history is noted for its confusing terms like 'women's history', 'gender history', and 'feminist history' which are used interchangeably. Edith believes that as long as the field of history is concerned, the traditional hierarchy of events which created categories such as 'general history' or 'microhistory' is inadequate for gender historians who think that gender and gender-relations are compulsory in the documentation of history. In "Women's History in Austria: A Critical Assessment," Edith maintains that gender/feminist historians reject traditional branches of history because "of past disappointments and outrage, of understanding silence and distortion, and of rejecting a history whose hierarchy of values left no place for women or for reflections on the role of gender as a social category." (267)

Edith Sauer distinguishes between authors of general history and the authors of the history who devote pages to women. She believes that authors of "general history" are "largely blind to the power of gender" (261). Feminists recommend a historical revisionism which redefines women's position and their roles. Feminists like Edith believe that the 'general history' "will continue to exclude women" (263). It is believed that 'social history' is a fertile area for feminists due to its interest in family and private life and its close connection with anthropological approaches. In this respect, Edith Sauer urges feminist historians to avoid the traditional approaches of writing history. She believes that:

A traditional history of events cannot be the goal of women's and gender history, even if it were to take account of women...Making women visible in history, as well as analyzing gender relations and structures based on gender, requires a critical and exact eye; it engenders an interest in detail as a medium of reconstruction and clarity, in the 'peripheral' history of one's own culture, and in the deconstruction and comparison. (267)

Gender studies devote a specific corner in the field to the task of dealing with traditional topics such as institutional and political history in the nineteenth or/and twentieth century. Gender studies' critics believe that there are no references to women contribution within the pages of history. Taking American history as a case study, Kathi Kern calls for the creation of a new "feminist pedagogy" to substitute the discredited 'narrative' which, she believes, makes up the American history survey course. Tracey Rizzo is another feminist critic who insists on the necessity of reintegrating women within the historical lines. Yet, she believes that "integrating women into the Western civilization survey is not the same as gendering it" (qtd. in Saurer 267). Gendering history involves a radical revisionism which does not only include women as passive social category but it also requires the historian's attempt to make them visible and active participants. In her discussion of the world history, Judith Zinsser declares that a radical new approach is required to honor both men and women in history. In this respect, she writes:

I do not believe that the standard narrative organization for world, European, or U.S. history makes that possible...in order to gender the survey one must rethink history in terms of actions, interactions, and reactions, by women and men, between women and men, by women, and by men. (qtd. in Saurer 269)

Peter N. Stearns, in generally laudatory comments on these presentations, nonetheless warns that "...it is clear that gender issues are much more pressing, much more contested, at some points than at others." (13) Clearly, we are living through one of those "contested" times and it remains to be seen whether, as Edith Sauer concludes, "[a] new consciousness has engendered a new history" or whether gender history will prove to be "one of the passing historical styles, like cliometrics or psychohistory, that have occasionally adorned Clio's body."(287)

The professionalization of historiography in Europe and the U.S during the past 200 years has meant ignoring the fact that women have a past. It is noted that women were long disqualified from writing the so called 'professional history'. Women who wrote history were left out the traditional historiographic canon.

In *Gendering Historiography: Beyond National Canon* Angelika Epple and Angelika Schaser compare the exclusion of female historians, their works and themes from the official history to a “metaphorical death” (7). The marginalization of female historians and their histories had a great impact on the traditional canon written by male historians which covered almost exclusively male gendered subjects. Regima Wecker argues that practices of exclusion make historiography part of the modern project. Wecker asserts that the absence of historical multiplicity makes of modernity “a uniform, certain and determined development” (qtd. in Epple & Schaser 8). Gender history questions historical uniformity, certainty and determination.

Gendering history is based on the historian’s task to deconstruct the master narratives of general history. Mak maintains that “gender history gives women’s contribution to history its due. From the general history perspective, women’s history is less important and at best “supplementary”. A gender historian believes that the only way out of the theoretical dilemma and misleading alternative of general versus supplementary history is the deconstruction of all master narratives that make general or universal claims” (qtd in Epple & Schaser 8). Historians like Lynn Hunt and Claudia Opitz recommend a total reconstruction of history to escape the gender order of historiography and reestablish equilibrium. Gendering history, therefore, offers the best preconditions since it has consistently historicized the category of ‘gender’.

### **6.3. *A Grain of Wheat*: Context and Critical Reception**

Of all Ngugi’s works, *A Grain of Wheat* is his well acclaimed and the most celebrated novel. It is the novel which catapulted Ngugi and made him a recognized author. The novel works as a link between Ngugi’s colonial novels and his postcolonial ones. Further, it depicts a set of deviations in Ngugi’s own perception of historical events and heroic figures that Kenyans were compelled to unquestionably respect and consider their pride. The novel was written in the years 1964 to 1966, when Ngugi was a postgraduate student at Leeds University in England. At that time James Ngugi was working on his M.A thesis conducting a research on the works of George Lamming. His M.A work at Leeds University was in Caribbean Literature under the supervision of Professor Douglas Grant. His first draft of the thesis was supposed to be edited and revised. Instead of completing the task, Ngugi read widely and devoted all his time and energy to write and publish *A Grain of Wheat*.

Intrinsically, the novel's fame was the result of Ngugi's remarkable political shift which followed his attendance at Leeds. It was there that, he was exposed to a radical environment. His exposure to Frantz Fanon, and Karl Marx made his novel a revolutionary text. Simon Gikandi assumes that Wa Thiong'o was in the process of writing this novel when he came across Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*" (98). The political weight of the novel is also the result of the political conditions at Leeds and the world at large. Ngugi himself argued that certain events and political conditions were the source of his radicalization:

The Vietnamese people's struggle had a lot of impact on the students at Leeds, as did the Palestinian struggle. The beginnings of a student's movement all over Europe had an impact on us at Leeds. As for the Socialist writers, my exposure to Marx's works and ideas was at Leeds University. Reading novels like Robert Tressell's *The Ragged, Trousered Philanthropists* and Brecht's works was also important to the development of my ideas. (qtd. in Amoti 22)

Technically, *A Grain of Wheat* marked Ngugi's abandonment of simplicity and linearity in narration. The novel, then, demonstrates a change from the earlier novels in narrative structure, mode of characterization and polyphonic rather than singled-voiced narration. The novel's point of view and the plot structure demonstrate Ngugi's break with traditional narration. This makes the claim that Ngugi is a modernist author more valid. It was through this novel that Ngugi has shifted from the conflicted individual of *Weep Not, Child* and *The River Between* to a dual perspective which gives voice to each of the narrative's isolated individuals as well as the collective itself. This literary modernity in Ngugi's oeuvre is also the result of his exposure to Joseph Conrad. Just like Conrad, Ngugi experimented with variations in narrative voice through the use of 'multiple-voice' which brought more 'evidence' or information on the events. George Lamming's works played vital role in this shift. Ngugi found in Lamming's use of the omniscient narrator, the diaries, reportage, third person narration and direct authorial intervention a way by which he would make his novel a unique work.

As far as intertextuality is concerned, *A Grain of Wheat* has an apparent intertextual relationship with Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*. In "Ngugi's Colonial Education: 'The Subversion...of the African Mind' Carol Sicherman refers to this novel as being much more closely related to Ngũgĩ's academic work: "The most evident proof of the Conradian pudding was to lie in *A Grain of Wheat*, in which he transmuted *Under Western Eyes* into a tale of Kenya at the moment of independence, on the model already

exemplified in Kironde's transposition of Synge" (24). Conrad's hero Razumov is a literary twin-brother of Ngugi's Mugo the traitor. In *Under Western Eyes* Razumov strives courageously to lift himself from poverty and obscurity. He therefore resents any claims upon him by causes or individuals. Again, revolutionary colleagues often mistake his constant aloofness as evidence of his austere dedication to the cause. The young revolutionary hero, Haldin, also visits Razumov immediately after an undisguised assassination. This is the case of Mugo who is also visited by Kihika in Ngugi's text. As Kihika expresses faith in his taciturn and unwilling host (Mugo), so does Haldin express faith in Razumov. Thematically, the two novels share the notion of betrayal. This intertextual thematic focus is a means to comment on some of the universal problems of man, that is, modern man, irrespective of geographical setting, cultural affiliation and social status, is a betrayer. Some critics have drawn the readers' attentions to the similarities between *A Grain of Wheat* and Conrad's *Lord Jim*. The two novels treat the psychological disposition of man under guilt. Jim's fate is full of guilt, confession and expiation. This is akin to the experience of Mugo after his betrayal of Kihika. The biblical guilty conscience of Judas who betrayed Jesus Christ is a common motif in both novels.

Intertextuality is not a sign of the text's worthlessness. Instead, intertextuality made Ngugi's text a modernist masterpiece. For a cohort of critics, the similarities between Ngugi's text and those of Joseph Conrad do not dismiss the literary quality and the value of the text. Critics like Bu-Buakei Jabbi and Nadine Gordimer consider *A Grain of Wheat* an original piece of literature for two main reasons. First, Buakei Jabbi maintains that the historical experiences of late colonial Kenya, by which Ngugi grew up, had made the difference. Second, Nadine Gordimer argues that thematically the novel is original. She argues that the novel's originality lies in dealing with a new theme. The novel brought a new theme to African literature: "the effects on a people of the changes brought about in themselves by the demands of a bloody and bitter struggle for independence" (226). Set in the colonial period and the early days of independence, the novel's main focus is the years of the emergency to reveal the plight of the masses during the bloody years. Meanwhile, the story depicts the natives' uncertainty during the celebration of Uhuru and foreshadows their future.

### 6.3.1. Two Grains of Wheat: 1967 and 1986

For a host of critics, *A Grain of Wheat* cemented Ngugi's reputation as a pillar of African literature. By employing Fanonism and Marxism, Gikandi argues, Ngugi has made a great path toward discovering "the politics of socialism and a grammar for representing colonialism and what has now come to be known as arrested decolonization" (98). Fanon's critique of decolonization as an arrested moment and that decolonization has become 'an empty shell' served Ngugi's thematic concerns in the novel. The novel is overloaded with epigraphs which determine the reader's expectations as he/she enters the text. The first epigraph that precedes the first pages of the story works as a good entry to the text by explaining the image of the grain which wilts and dies so that others shall live.

The novel's events are set on the eve of Uhuru in December 1963. Basically, the novel displays certain interplay between Kenya's past and present. It sheds light on colonial era to re-examine the meaning of Mau Mau resistance against colonial intrusion. This focus, however, does not mean that the author's main interest is championing the rebellious movement. Instead, the author focuses on the lives of the ordinary individuals who find themselves caught in the cross-fire between colonial torture and national resistance. Within this context, the novel reveals the Mau Mau fighters' and the ordinary masses' perception of the Emergency. While the Mau Mau fighters considered the Emergency as a baptism of fire, the ordinary people believed that the Emergency was the complete destruction of their community and unity.

The Mau Mau movement has attracted the attention of creative African authors. David Maughan-Brown categorizes most of Mau Mau fiction as colonial fiction, which he identifies as the settlers' novelists. He gives examples of authors like E. Harley, Richard Ruark, M. Cornish, V.S. Reid, and G.R. Fazakerley whose works remain hostile to Mau Mau and its objectives. Following *Uhuru*, new published novels tackled the Mau Mau as a political movement. These novels, according to Maughan-Brown, are known as "the novels of freedom" (206) which include Meja Mwangi's *Taste of Death* (1975), G. Wachira's *Ordeal in the Forest*, and Charles Mangua's *A Tail in the Mouth* (1972). Novels of freedom were written between 1967 and 1975 to reflect the period when Kenya's neocolonial bourgeoisie consolidated its power. In *Land, Freedom and Fiction*, Maughan-Brown argues that:

...all the three novels...ultimately (whether deliberately or not) represented Mau Mau in just as negatively equivocal a manner as the politicians and businessmen whose political and commercial interests were most obviously served by the tactic of retrospective “criminalization” of the movement. (206)

Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s contribution to the novels of freedom is identified by his vigorous concentration on the Mau Mau. His literary use of the Mau Mau should be regarded as having subversive intent toward the postcolonial condition. Ngugi’s tendency toward the movement appeared earlier in *The River Between*, yet the concept ‘Mau Mau’ is not found in the text. According to Maughan-Brown:

*The River Between* (1965) illustrates wa Thiong’o’s position on Mau Mau in two respects. First, Kiama, the group dedicated to overthrowing the colonial regime, is vaguely similar to the structure and objectives of the Mau Mau. The relationship between Kiama and the major characters of the story is characterized by ambivalence and ambiguity, as if the characters cannot quite decide what to think of Kiama. Secondly, the character Waiyaki is portrayed in purely individualistic terms and is more concerned with his personal ambition and desires than with serving the community so devastated by colonialism. (qtd. in Shamsul Alam 147)

*A Grain of Wheat* represents Ngugi’s intention to interpret the role of the Mau Mau in Kenya’s transition from colonialism to independence. The novel has been published twice. The first publication was in 1967. Nearly twenty years later, Ngugi revised the first edition of his novel. That revision was motivated by Ngugi’s interest in the image of the Mau Mau. Critics paid attention to Ngugi’s ambivalence towards the Mau Mau. In other words, the two editions differ in their ‘historiographic-interpretation’ of the role of the Mau Mau. The first edition of the novel portrays the period in which the colonial forces sought to repress what they perceived as an uprising by disaffected Africans. Embedded within, the narrative is a remarkable elaboration of the conflicting and different views which characterized historical and political accounts of the colonial period. The first version marked a change from the earlier novels, more specifically in the political stance, to reflect Ngugi’s acquaintance with Fanon and Marx. The revised version of the novel, Ngugi modified his original picture of the Mau Mau to reinforce its legitimacy and role as a revolutionary force in Kenya’s struggle for freedom. According to David Maughan-Brown, two main reasons are behind Ngugi’s remarkable ambivalence towards Mau Mau:

Firstly, the fiction is clearly rendering visible residual ideological formations, most traces of which have been consciously expunged from essays. Secondly, Ngugi’s notion of ‘good’ fiction, based on an aesthetic ideology derived from

his literary 'education' in English departments oriented towards traditional critical orthodoxies, demanded a 'balance' which prevented the fictional expression of certain positions (particularly those tending towards the deconstruction of concept 'violence') articulated outside the fiction. (252)

Ngugi's documentation of the fifties suggests that the period witnessed the final fragmentation of what remained of the collective under colonial rule. The first two novels had already explored the disintegrative forces at work on Gikuyu community through a central protagonist in each novel. In *A Grain of Wheat*, the reader is introduced to a collage of responses to the Emergency and its impact on the individuals. This is suggested through the epigraph in the opening pages of the novel:

Although set in contemporary Kenya, all the characters in this book are fictitious. Names like that of Jomo Kenyatta and Waiyaki are unavoidably mentioned as part of the history and institutions of our country. But the situation and the problems are real—sometimes too painfully real for the peasants who fought the British yet who now see all that they fought for being put on one side. (AGOWvi)

This epigraph has been read as Ngugi's attempt to promote the assumption that history is made individually. Leaders like Jomo Kenyatta, who would later lead the new nation's government, and Harry Thuku provided part of the impulse not only for African unity but also collective resistance to colonial oppression. Further, the legendary hero Waiyaki wa Hinga is also a brave leader who opposed the British. About him, the narrator asserts that he was the grain "which gave birth to a political party whose main strength thereafter sprang from a bond with the soil" (AGOW15). These three characters are all members of a political party who urged people to join them in order to "find strength in unity" (AGOW12). Kihika is also another hero who urged people to sacrifice for the party.

It is the Mau Mau which unified the masses and not the local community. The sacrifices which Thuku and Kihika call for, involve a total break between the family and the community. Ngugi's depiction of Kihika as a hero who urges the masses to abandon their families and join the movement suggests that national unity is to be forged at the expense of tribal and community cohesiveness. This becomes more evident when he proclaims that a day will come "when a brother shall give up his brother, a mother her son, when you and I have heard the call of a nation in turmoil" (AGOW15). Mau Mau and political issues replaced ethnicity and traditional ties. This is why individual leaders became alienated from their ethnic origins. In the novel we are told that "the Party had

broken barriers between tribes” (14). This was due to the leaders’ vision of national rather than tribal freedom from the colonial chains.

Part of Ngugi’s examination of Mau Mau movement is devoted to the role of Christianity. While Christianity was introduced as the new faith which divided the community in *The River Between*, *A Grain of Wheat* offers the faith its legitimacy. It is the same faith which was responsible for the destruction of the union which is now creating a new harmony. The narrator puts forth the claim that the Kenyan Christian converts “who were converted, started speaking a faith foreign to the ways of the land” (11). He further informs us that they decided to support the cause of the colonized rather than aligning themselves with the settlers, their brothers in Christ.

Maughan-Brown examination of Ngugi’s representations of the Mau Mau suggests that such representations are identified by his vigorous concentration on individualism. These representations make the reader problematize and question the author’s Marxist philosophy that does not fit his collective resistance which is led either by violent killers like General R who murdered a clergyman, rapists like Koinandu, or self-made heroes like Kihika. In ‘African Fiction and Popular Struggle: The Case of *A Grain of Wheat*’ Michael Vaughan (1981) writes that “Ngugi’s tendency towards a Messianic mode of characterization expresses a type of individualism that is, I think, typically petty-bourgeois. Its role is not so much historically illuminating as ideological” (27). This means that Christianity underpins the representations of Mau Mau in Ngugi’s novel. Maughan-Brown asserts that Ngugi privileges a ‘literate Christian Mau Mau’. This is why Maughan-Brown believes that the novel is a ‘crisis text.’ (247)

*A Grain of Wheat* (1967) reveals the colonial aftermath and the rise of nationalist ideologies while reflecting the sense of a divided community. Against this background Obumsele considers the text as “a radically divided work” (qtd. in Caminero-Santangelo 139). Ngugi’s revised edition (1986) was highly motivated by his intention to address this ambiguity. Nevertheless, the revision does not clarify many things related to Christianity, violence, and the Mau Mau. Again the revision suggests the author’s Fanonist aesthetics. In “Mau Mau, Violence and Culture”, Ngugi argues that “Violence in order to change an intolerable unjust social order is not savagery: it purifies man. Violence to protect and preserve an unjust, oppressive social order is criminal, and

diminishes man” (in *Homecoming* 28). In the revised edition, Ngugi erased some of the cruder acts of violence like the act of raping the plant pathologist Dr Lynd. Moreover, the earlier image of Mau Mau as an unsanctioned guerilla force which frightened and terrorized the masses is reconstructed as a national liberation army that sought to expel the colonizer. A sign of change in the novel is substituting the term ‘Party’ by ‘the Movement’ which “had always been there, a rallying centre for action...gathering greater and greater strength, till on the eve of Uhuru.” (AGOW10). The original version of the novel seeks less to lay blame and is more open up for interrogation, the cross-currents and errors of judgment that the historical account of the emergency cannot reveal. The revised edition of the novel, however, adjusts the perspective to apportion blame where Ngugi has since consistently said it should be, on the heads of those who sided with the colonizer to finally become the first to taste the fruits of independence.

### **6.3.2. *A Grain of Wheat*: Synopsis, Framing Voice and Narrative Structure**

In essence, *A Grain of Wheat* reveals a world in which the struggle for independence is largely completed. The events, as the novel opens, take place on the eve of *Uhuru*. Yet, through modernist literary techniques such as flashbacks and the stream of consciousness, the narrator allows the reader to read about the years in which the natives fought the colonizer. Having emerged from the horrors of the Emergency, the villagers of Thabai, a microcosm of Kenya, have reason to substitute the vision of apocalyptic destruction described in *Weep Not, Child* and *The River Between*, with a more positive view of the future. In spite of the optimistic view and the sense of euphoria which dominated the village, the story gradually conjures soul-searching moments of self-reappraisals, with the past projected large and casting its shadow on everybody. The story indicates that the memory of the past’s horrors is too fresh to be forgotten. It further shows that the traumatizing colonial experience is intricately woven into the Kenyans’ lives and that it can hardly be separated from the present. Concepts like dispossession, Emergency, Mau Mau struggles, the Oath, detention camps, suffering, death, betrayals of all sorts, become the dominant motifs of *A Grain of Wheat*.

The characters of the novel are caught and hunted by their past. The story begins with Mugo’s unstable situation. He is withdrawn by guilt having committed treachery

which no one knows about. Githong's mother is also deemed by sorrow since her only son was killed in the indiscriminate repression against Mau Mau movement. The notorious white district officer of Rira, Thompson, is disillusioned and ready to leave the country before it reaches independence. The reader is also told that Mumbi, Kihika's sister, lives estranged from Gikonyo after having betrayed him with his rival; Karanja. The novel is an emblem of a panoramic human drama of all races. The conflict reaches its highest peak between the faithful villagers and the traitors of the oath. The novel is complex in its narrative techniques, thematic concerns, and in the reflection and refraction of the Kenyan reality.

In its opening pages, the reader is told that a sense of euphoria, optimism, and ecstasy dominated the village in the four days leading up to the celebration of Uhuru. To make the celebration a success, the villagers decided to honor the Mau Mau leader Kihika who sacrificed his life during the fights against the British colonizer. Kihika's dream was to see Kenya free from the shackles and the chains of colonialism. The villagers have finally realized their dream of ruling their country by themselves. Kihika died during the war against the colonizer and only one hero remained to be honored on the Uhuru celebrations. In Thabai, Mugo is also another hero. The villagers perceive him as Kihika's reincarnation and have decided to praise and honor him. The narrator minutely describes the scene:

A minute before midnight, lights were put out at the Nairobi stadium so that people from all over the country and the world who gathered there for midnight ceremony were swallowed by the darkness. In the dark, the Union Jack was quickly lowered. When next the lights came on the new Kenya flag was flying and fluttering and waving, in the air. The police band played the New National Anthem and the crowd cheered continuously when they saw the flag was black, and red and green. The cheering sounded one intense cracking of many trees, falling on the thick mud in the stadium. (AGOW199)

Throughout the novel, Ngugi employs flashbacks and interior monologues to revisit the colonial era. The novel demonstrates the fierce battles against the British military forces. It deals with the past complexities and paradoxes. In his exploration of the past, Ngugi relies on Kihika and Mugo. The villagers consider them as two important leaders of the Mau Mau revolution. However, on the day of Uhuru celebration, they discover that only one of the two is in fact a protagonist. They discover that Mugo, the mythical figure, is Kihika's traitor.

The novel turns around the tension between the individual and the community. It tackles the notion of the individual survival which takes precedence over the collective. A good example to illustrate is Gikonyo, Mumbi's husband, who becomes "respected and admired as symbol of what everyone aspired to be: fiercely independent, bending all effort to success in any enterprise" (18). Gikonyo becomes the epitome of Western individualism. Essentially, from the first lines and opening passages of the story, the narrator positions each character at a distance from the rest of the community. Some critics have read this detachment as Ngugi's attempt to reinforce the irony that Mau Mau, instead of uniting the desperate sections of the community, has increased the African tension and division. The novel introduces a large cast of characters whose roles vary and differ throughout the story. Most of these characters are 'ahistorical', and introduced without any familial context. The most detached character in the story is Mugo. The narrator introduces the instable situation by directly referring to Mugo's psychological and moral disorder:

Mugo felt nervous. He was lying on his back and looking at the roof. Sooty locks from the fern and grass thatch and all pointed at his heart. A clear drop of water was delicately suspended above him. The drop fattened and grew dirtier as it absorbed grains of soot. Ten it started drawing toward him. He tried to shut his eyes. They would not close. He tried to move his head: it was firmly chained to the bed frame. (AGOW 1)

Mugo is caught up in a nightmare that rocks his mental and physical state. The setting suggests that a state of pessimism and disillusionment dominates the story. He was orphaned at a young age. Hence, he was brought up by a drunken distant aunt. After her death, he was left alone and has grown into a tormented and isolated man. Simon Gikandi argues that this is why he is introduced to us as "an archetypal subject defined by moral crisis. His relation to his environment, community, and temporality is one of alienation." (108)

Mugo serves Ngugi's main critical perspectives. His moral crisis is resulted from his solitude and lack of communication. Ngugi represents his society as an individualistic one. Mugo is distanced from the rest of the community, but Warui, the crippled Githua, Gitogo, Mugo's aunt Waithererero, Wambui and Gikonyo are also presented as having something of Mugo's isolation. In *Writers in Exile* Andrew Gurr (1971) maintains that the novel is "set at the point of maximum social disintegration, the end of colonial rule, and the method of narration reflects the isolation of the figures in

it” (106). This is why it was difficult for Mugo to integrate. It was their fathers’ mistake, as Kihika would say, to keep a distance. With a binary context, Ngugi draws the reader’s attention to the effects of Mau Mau collectivism and the natives’ individualism. Other characters such as Lt. Koina and General R are also revealed as lacking any familial background. This is to reinforce the idea that the Emergency created a void and that the period was featured by detachment, loneliness and alienation. Hence, life during the colonial period was not generally conducive to the realization of a strong collectivism, inspite of the Mau Mau leaders’ efforts. Central to the narration is the assumption that the Movement was the main reason behind the division and displacing the tribal-based notions of unity along with the tribal exclusiveness of traditional communities.

One of the most striking aspects of *A Grain of Wheat* is the method of its narration. The framing voice is a third-person narrator, who at given times speaks with a clear political awareness of the historical context of Kenya, and at other occasions slides quietly into the inclusiveness of the oral story-teller speaking to listeners who are familiar with the main events. The story’s uniqueness lies in its manner of narration. Compared to other writers of his generation, Ngugi is among the rare authors who employed multiple voices by engaging most of his characters in narration. All the main figures tell their own stories in confessional encounters and in interior monologues, stories which intersect and challenge each other, and which in a formal sense are inaccessible to the narrator. Hence, the narrative frequently slips in and out of present-time and between the voices to create a sort of instability about what is known and what it means to know. G.D Killam (1986), cited in *Essays on Contemporary Post-Colonial Fiction*, argues that the characters themselves take part in the historical events of Kenya “by accident rather than choice, through ignorance rather than apprehension” (88). In this respect, the author introduces a multiplicity of individual responses to the political events. Besides, the extensive use of flash-backs disrupts the chronological unfolding of events, delaying information. This technical device encourages the reader to defer judgment until the whole evidence has been presented.

The main actions in the novel are set in the present and the past. Stylistically, the dislocated chronology frustrates the narrative meaning. Ime Ikkideh puts forth the assumption that the distinction between the past and the present “is sometimes so blurred that the reader loses his way and finds himself in a tangled

mesh...It is a case of clarity of story unwittingly sacrificed for the art of the novel” (9). Although the time span for the novel’s present is only five days leading up to *Uhuru* celebration, each character reflects back on events which both preceded and followed the years of Emergency, and hence, constructing a second narrative time scale embedded within the first. The novel confirms the Kenyan history of resistance, grounded in Gikuyu people and their fight against the British. In “Heroism in *A Grain of Wheat*”, Eileen Julien (1983) argues that all the characters in the novel gain a measure of self-knowledge “through act of talking. Little action in fact takes place in [the immediate present of] the story. From the moment Mugo is introduced until the race on Uhuru day, the story consists primarily of encounters in which the principle activity is an exchange of words.” (139)

Essentially, the past is revisited through the personal reminiscences of one or other of the characters, not only as interior monologue but also through confessional acts. A good example is Mugo’s two confessional acts of Kihika’s betrayal first to Mumbi and then to the community. Following the confessions, Mugo realizes that the acceptance of his culpability for Kihika’s death and for bringing collective punishment meted out to Thabai, ensures his psychological reintegration into the community. His confession reminds each member of the community of his/her own past moral lapses. Gikonyo relives his experience at the detention camps and feels the shame that has followed him home. He was pricked with guilt and courage had failed him. Compared to Gikonyo and others, Mugo was at least honest and courageous enough to inform the villagers of his guilt when it became clear that Karanja was about to be blamed and pay for Kihika’s death. Gikonyo who has kept secret of his betrayal of the movement while re-establishing himself in the village. He rhetorically asks himself “what the difference was there between him and Karanja or Mugo or those who had openly betrayed people and worked with the whiteman to save themselves?” (241)

Through Mugo’s confession a national crisis is revealed. The gloomy shadow of the past looms over everyone. The gatherings become choked and paralyzed after encountering the reality. The narrator informs us that “they rose and started talking, moving away in different directions, as if the meeting ended with Mugo’s confession” (*AGOW* 219). By bringing the past, the reader reaches the novel’s climax. It is the highest moment of intensity in which everything returns to the unstable situation we are introduced to in the opening passages of the story. People in Thabai are unable to

escape the consequences of the past mistakes. General R. tells Mugo that “your deeds alone will condemn you... No one will ever escape from his own actions.” (AGOW234). The past is still there, and Uhuru becomes another copy of the old days.

#### **6.4. Challenging the Linear Historiography Through *A Grain of Wheat***

The rootedness of African literary writing in the historical process of colonialism has shaped Ngugi’s fiction to a larger extent. Postcolonial theory offers a special space to history and delineates its thematic scope. History and its critical interpretation became parcel of postcolonial agenda. African writers like Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka have addressed the pressing historical and political issues of their epoch through fiction. In formerly colonized countries, literature is the vehicle by which the natives revisit their past. It plays a vital role in recovering the national consciousness. It was within the realm of fictional stories that the notions of national identity, history, and culture have been challenged, revisited, and revised. The intention to revive, revise, and re-interpret history is always accompanied by a revival of national myths which contribute to the rise of national mobilization. Eleke Boehmer, in this sense, argued that there was a remarkable shift in literary rhetoric and more importantly “a moving away from colonial definitions, transgressing the boundaries of colonialist discourse...to...borrowing, taking over, or appropriating the ideological, linguistic, and textual forms of colonial power” (101). The writer, accordingly, is the advocate of revision, recovery, and mobilization.

Ngugi’s literary-political commitment is devoted to history and the task of historical revisionism. Characterized by his political and socialist activism, Ngugi participates in the task of social reconstruction and rejuvenation. He asserts that any writer who deals with serious problems that confront an individual must write about the whole social and political society. The author’s main objective is to raise consciousness of the people. Ngugi’s novel is molded in a manner which minutely reflects and examines reality.

Ngugi considers history as the terrain that is subject to reinterpretation and revision. It is assumed that his novels are not historically mimetic. In “Rewriting History in Fiction: Elements of Postmodernism in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s Later Novel” Kessler (1994) argues that:

Ngugi problematizes the concept of historical meaning by blurring boundaries between national and individual events, between factual history and fiction, thus throwing into question the process by which subjects position themselves in history and the ways they might conceive and tell the story. (76)

While documenting his country's history, Ngugi finds in fiction the suitable space where the task of revision can be exercised. He tackles history from the perception of the formerly colonized who was silenced and deprived of his/her voice. James Ogude argues that he posits narrative here as "an agent of history because it provides the space for challenging our notions of national identities, uses of history, and the ways in which they are deployed in power contestant in modern Kenya and Africa in general" (2). He reconstructs and modifies historical narratives according to his political and artistic vision.

Novels like *Weep Not, Child*, *The River Between* and *A Grain of Wheat* revolve around the colonial past. Patric Williams asserts that one should read Ngugi's fiction as "an increasingly politically committed anatomizing of the troubled development of the twentieth-century Kenya as a nation or at least as a nation-state" (17). Ngugi himself argued that by returning to the turbulent colonial period and documenting its event from a committed perspective, the novelist counters the simplistic European response to the African experience which often labeled the colonized culture as ahistorical. (qtd. in Sandra and Lindfors 39)

In essence, Ngugi's historical revisionism in *A Grain of Wheat* has drawn the attention of a host of critics. Critics like G.D Killam and Andrew Gurr categorize the author's retrospective gaze within the postcolonial and subaltern frames in which "received history is tampered with, rewritten, and realigned from the point of view of the victims of its destructive process" (Aschroft et al 34). They also believe that Ngugi's first three novels provide his version of Kenya's history from 1920s to the Uhuru day. Similarly, in 'Ngugi wa Thiong'o: The Novelist as Historian' Ime Ikiddeh (1994) asserts that Ngugi focuses on key phases in Kenyan history.

*A Grain of Wheat* represents the author's attempt to stick on his committed literary traditions. Some critics have noted Ngugi's failure to unify his thematic concerns while devoting the greatest space to the historical facts. Shatto Gakwandi considers the novel as a fictional recreation of history. For Gakwandi, it is a historical novel which fails to deliver since it lacks thematic unity out of the excessive use of

flashbacks and foreshadowing (118). In his evaluation of the novel in terms of historical facts, dates, and real political characters, Charles Nnolim contends that the novel is “flawed by countless blind spots” (80). Further, in ‘Themes and Development in the Novels of Ngugi’ W.J Howard (1973) notices Wa Thiong’o’s confusion between fiction and history. He argues that “the author is true to himself ...his work succeeds very well; where the personally involved historian is not edited or the history is transformed, the writing fails, through either uncertainty or obvious bad judgment.” (119)

Readers of Ngugi noticed the limitations of the historical novel. He is blamed for mixing the factual and fictional. In a distinctive literary style, Ngugi has interrogated history. Within the postcolonial context, the epistemological usefulness of a literary text depends on the extent to which that text approximates the historical reality which is its ultimate referent. In his evaluation of *A Grain of Wheat*, James Ogude implied that there is a “historical truth out there—firm, solid, fixed, and immutable—and the novel, to be successful, has to conform to it” (3). Regardless its conformity with the historical truth, the novel should be critically read in terms of its contribution to that truth and its validity in relation to the author’s reasoning.

Ngugi believes that history is the very fabric in which lives are woven in a complex intermingling, and where they are quite often in tension. He considers historical revisionism as the very basis of change, for it provides him with the basis of defining himself in the mainstream of his people’s historical drama” (‘The African Writer and his Past’ 4). Ngugi perceives Kenyan history in *A Grain of Wheat* through the lives of the peasants and the workers and their contribution to the Mau Mau. The novel reveals Kenyans who go through a real conflict while experiencing a great deal of agonizing sufferance. Intellectually, Ngugi uses *A Grain of Wheat* as a text of combat with Kenyan historians who because of their mental colonization precipitated by both colonial and neocolonial education, they documented unreliable accounts of the Mau Mau. In this respect, the novel opposes the neocolonial historians’ attempt to arrest history.

The story takes place in village named Thabai which represents the peasants of the entire country. It captures their pains during the years of emergency as it reveals their uncertainty in the five days leading up to Uhuru celebration. In ‘The African Writer and his Past’ Ngugi assumes that “it is only in a socialist context that a look at

yesterday can be meaningful in illuminating today and tomorrow” (8). Hence, *A Grain of Wheat* goes beyond the bounds of traditional historical narrative to answer socio-political questions in a fictional mode.

The interplay between the past and the present in the novel is stemmed from the author’s attempt to revise the mistakes and expose the colonial aftermath. According to Lela Ghandi, postcolonialism “is a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past” (4). Revisiting the past is a complex task that leads not only to re-telling the past events, but it also recollects “compelling seductions of colonial power” (Ghandi 4). Memory is, therefore, the necessary bridge that connects the past and presents. According to Albert Memmi the colonial aftermath is deluded in its hope that “the architecture of a new world will magically emerge from the physical ruins of colonialism” (qtd. in Ghandi 6). The discipline of history that emerged during and after colonialism is connected with technology of power. S.M. Shamsul Alam argues in his book *Rethinking the Mau Mau in Colonial Kenya* that history is an integral part of dominant culture, whose main goal is to consolidate and perpetuate colonial power” (195). Ngugi and Shamsul Alam share the view that ‘official history’ ignores the voice of the subalterns who are put aside because they “are at the bottom of the social hierarchy.” (195)

#### **6.4.1 Toward the Reintegration of the Marginalized Voice**

Fiction has always been a rostrum for the committed authors to make heard the masses’ voice. Ngugi devoted *A Grain of Wheat* to the task of giving voice to the voiceless. The novel tackles the concerns of the most exploited in Kenya; women. Ngugi believes that a writer needs people around him. In *Detained* he writes: “For me, in writing a novel, I love to hear the voices of the people . . . I need the vibrant voices of beautiful women: their touch, their sighs, their tears, their laughter” (9). In *Novels of Ngugi wa Thiong’o: Politics as Fiction*, Harish Narang (1995) opines:

With *A Grain of Wheat* Ngugi began a conscious attempt to not only create positively powerful women characters but he also began to make them more “visible” by providing them with greater ‘space’ in his books. This effort culminated in his portrayal of Wariinga as the protagonist in his *Devil on the Cross*. (84)

As a matter of fact, Kenyan Mau Mau fiction is a literary terrain where male voices and heroes are privileged. It has been reported that this literary tradition has

resulted in sidelining of female participants in the war. Just like historical documents, the novel records the past from an angle that privileges men as participants in the war. Cora Presely (1992) believes that even when female characters are inserted in such narratives, they are only visible in “liminal spaces, mainly being credited with minimal importance and accomplishments” (123). Therefore, women’s activities in the Mau Mau war can generally be said to have been kept in the shadow of men’s accomplishments. In this respect, Jean O’Barr (1985) argues that in firsthand accounts of the Mau Mau war, and in Kenyan fiction, women only emerge as supporting characters in a play dominated by men (6). O’Barr reiterates that although narratives of involvement in Mau Mau, which are mostly written by men, acknowledge women’s presence, they do not explore women’s presence beyond those of sexual partners and couriers, and mostly these women remain nameless (6).

In essence, the negative images and the bias on women’s contribution and role in the Mau Mau struggle are revealed in the writings of personal life experiences such as the autobiographies and memoirs by the Mau Mau fighters. Critics believe that women who took part in the war were unable to document their own experiences. Moreover, it is assumed that those women kept a low profile which has given the impression that it is only men who took active roles in the struggle. Accordingly, Mau Mau autobiographies written by men and narratives about the war are told as witnessed by male characters. Godfrey Okoth (2010) argues that among the thirteen memoirs that the historian Marshall Clough analyzes in his book *Mau Mau Memoirs: History, Memory and Politics*, few are written by women. Wambui Otieno-Mbugua who was herself a Mau Mau fighter has been quoted in the Style Magazine in Kenya lamenting the invisibility of women who took part in the Mau Mau liberation struggle. In this respect, the magazine reporter writes:

Now in the twilight of her life, Wambui is angry at the fact that women who were involved in Mau Mau war never get recognition as their male counterparts do. "Women in Mau Mau did so much, yet hardly anything is said about them. I wish I was a teacher to teach all these," she interjects. "You people read history, some of which is false. Have you ever heard of any woman who was arrested with the Kapenguria Six?" she quips. (3)

Wambui gives the example of Mama Nyoroka and Sarah Salai, the two female fighters, who were arrested with the Kapenguria Six. She believes that no one knows if they ever existed because it is only men documented stories which are accepted as part

of the official history. Author of *Dedan Kimathi: Leader of Mau Mau* (2003) David Njeng'ere tells the story of Dedan Kimathi who was a hero of the Mau Mau war. It speaks about the hero who was convicted and executed [hanged] by British colonial government in Kenya because he was considered a Mau Mau terrorist. In this biography Kimathi's story is interwoven with that of Mau Mau, so much so that the text becomes like an avenue for teaching children about the colonizer's intolerance that influenced people and compelled the masses to choose the forest as a refuge. They went into the forest to hide and fight the enemy. Besides, it also reveals the difficulties experienced by the Mau Mau liberation fighters. Njeng'ere uses female narrator to give women a room where they become able to tell their stories. The narrator in this case not only tells Kimathi's story but she at the same time narrates women's accomplishments in the Mau Mau war.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's early fiction provides insight into women's roles during the emergency. Although Ngugi's stories centre on male characters, they offer special space to women and make them visible. His texts provide insights into actions attributed to the second sex during the emergency. In *A Grain of Wheat* women's actions are apparently appreciated. The story turns around male characters who had taken the oath, some of whom were jailed, or betrayed. The violent Mau Mau activities are rendered through the eyes of male characters. Meanwhile, the reader is informed about women's involvement in the war by providing food, or carrying weapons to the fighters. Nevertheless, these women are only visible and mentioned in a few instances.

In essence, Ngugi's women in *A Grain of Wheat* are mainly seen in their motherhood roles, or beyond this presentation, they make food available for their sons [for example Gikonyo's mother], or are girlfriends to men. Further, woman is sometimes represented as an object of male desire. For instance, when Gikonyo is jailed he longs to come back to his wife Mumbi, and Karanja collaborates with the colonialist to evade jail, so that he could be close to Mumbi. Women's influence on men, rather than their activities in the war is emphasized so much in this text, so that even when news on Kihika's capture is received, Koinandu speculates that he [Kihika] "was going to meet a woman" (*AGOW* 26). In addition, Wambuku is beaten by a homeguard [which causes her death] because she turned down his sexual advances (*AGOW* 137), while Mumbi, the woman who is a central character in this text is assaulted by Karanja and bears his child. This sexual imagery in Ngugi's text minimizes women's choices as

political actors because they are seemingly confronted by the disadvantage of being women in the war.

In essence, Mau Mau revolution was waged by the Agikuyu peasants and workers against the British government. Peasants from Meru and Embu raised their weapons to restore the land that was expropriated for the colonial settlement. In a view of that, Caroline Elkins asserts that the “Kikuyu were agriculturalists who lost over sixty thousand acres to the settlers mostly in southern Kiambu, a highly fertile region outside of Nairobi that would become some of the most productive European farmland in the colony” (12). Ngugi believes that the land is a crucial attribute which is collectively owned in the traditional African society. The Agikuyu were forced to work and squat on the same land. Therefore, Mau Mau became a forum for Kenyans to express their dissatisfaction with racist colonial policies which marginalized Africans.

*A Grain of Wheat* is Ngugi’s attempt to rewrite the historical and heroic struggle and reveal the colonial injustice. Further, the novel demonstrates that the author strives to account for colonial inequities. James Ogude asserts that “for Ngugi the history of conflict in Africa is the history of colonialism and how it affected the African populace.” (90). He consistently recapitulates the ideals of Mau Mau because they sanction an egalitarian society. Moreover, he views Mau Mau struggle as an important point of departure for Kenyans in their struggle against neocolonialism.

Mau Mau was a movement of Gikuyu workers and peasants. Ngugi uses this struggle to project Kenyans’ sacrifice and fight against colonialism and colonial brutality in Kenya. Consequently, Ogude reiterates that “[F]or Ngugi, the Mau Mau war was not just a localized anti-colonial resistance waged by a section of the Kikuyu, but a national phenomenon and a point at which the schismatic segments of Kenya history are summoned and ordered to a coherent centre” (97). Equally, in *Women and Patriarchal Power in the Selected Novels of Ngugi wa Thiong’o* Albert Mugambi Rutere restates that Mau Mau war was a gendered national cause, and on most part Ngugi uses his literary works to underline the invaluable input of women in this historical and heroic struggle.

In essence, the novel demonstrates women’s roles and their links to the clandestine activities of the Mau Mau. The author sheds light on their roles in passing information and smuggling guns to the Mau Mau fighters. Women provided an

invisible backbone to the movement and their contributions were made at the cost of enormous adversity and suffering. In *Kenya's Warning*, Christopher Wilson (1954) points out to the colonial assumption that Gikuyu women were backward. He believes that this belief contributed to the government's underestimation of Mau Mau. Consequently, women were able to easily pass through the landscape undetected by the colonial surveillance. They could conduct the Mau Mau's secrets and business unnoticed. Waruhiu Itote argues that '[g]irls found it simpler to disguise themselves, or at least to be inconspicuous' (78). Hence, women played a vital role in the success of the movement. In *Mau Mau and Kenya*, Wunyabari O. Maloba asserts that those women's main roles:

...included organization and maintenance of the supply lines which directed food, supplies, medicine, guns and information to the forest forces. Those women who went to the forest were 'responsible' for cooking, water-hauling, knitting sweaters etc.

...Women formed the valuable link between the forest fighters and the passive wing in the reserves. Those women who went to the forests tended on the whole to be engaged in noncombat roles, acting as 'transport, signals, medical corps and ordnance to their male counterparts. ( 177)

Wambui is one of the female characters whose role in the war was distinctive. She was the link between the fighters and the villagers. The narrator tells that:

Wambui was not very old, although she had lost most of her teeth. During the Emergency, she carried secrets from the villages and towns. She knew the underground movements in Nakuru, Njoro, Elburgon and other places in and outside the Rift Valley. The story is told how she once carried a pistol tied to her thighs near the groin. She was dressed in long, wide and heavy clothes, the picture of decrepitude and senile decay. She was taking the gun to Naivasha. As luck would have it, she was suddenly caught in one of those sporadic military and police operations which plagued the country. People were collected into the square behind the shops. Soon came her turn to be searched. Her tooth started aching; she twisted her lips, moaned; saliva tossed out of the corners of her mouth and flowed down her chin. The Gikuyu policeman searching her was saying in Swahili: Pole mama: made other sympathetic noises and went on searching. He started from her chest, rummaged under her armpits, gradually working his way down towards the vital spot. And suddenly Wambui screamed, the man stopped, astonished.

"The children of these days ' , she began. 'Have you lost all shame? Just because the whiteman tells you so, you would actually touch your own mother's... the woman who gave you birth? All right, I'll lift the clothes and you can have a look at your mother, it is so aged, and see what you gain it'll bring you for the rest of your life.'

She actually made as if to lift her clothes and expose her nakedness. The man involuntarily turned his eyes away.... Wambui never told this story; but she

never denied it; if people asked her about it, she only smiled enigmatically. (AGOW 19-20)

This passage indicates that Wambui is figure of resistance whose contribution was very positive. Moreover, Ngugi draws our attention to the strategy by which she successfully avoided the colonial detection. Within a patriarchal society where motherhood is the major role women are supposed to perform, Wambui recasts gender oppression by inhabiting motherhood as a strategy.

One of the remarkable aspects of Ngugi's female characters is their readiness to praise and honor male and female heroes. Women in Kenya are the pillars of social harmony. Wambui encourages the villagers to honor heroes like Kihika. She tells Mumbi, Gikonyo and Mugo that:

It is like our elders who always poured a little beer on the ground before they themselves drank.' Wambui now said. 'Why did they do that? It's because they always remembered the spirits of those below. We too cannot forget our sons. And Kihika was such a man, a great man.' (AGOW 20)

Moreover, Ngugi's female characters prove that women were the link between the villagers and the freedom fighters. In *Women and Mau Mau in Kenya*, Muthoni Likimani argues that:

Without women's contributions in hiding and feeding the freedom fighters, nothing could have been achieved. It was the women who transported arms and food to the forest edge. It was the women who steered loyalists into the fighters' traps; it was the women, even the prostitutes, who stole guns and bullets from those fighting their brothers. And it was the women who spied for the freedom fighters. The women as much as the men hazarded their lives to gain back a country. (114)

Throughout the story women proved their undeniable contribution. They are assertive in the sense that they expose themselves to danger. Wambui is one of famous assertive women from the river. She believes in the power of women to influence events, especially where men "failed to act, or seemed indecisive" (AGOW 175). She encourages men, in a meeting at Rung'ei, to discuss the workers' strike at a shoe factory near Thabai in 1950. The strike becomes important to African people to paralyze the British administration and make the situation more difficult for the colonizer to govern the country. Accordingly, the author shows that women have potentiality to achieve something concrete and have impact on social life. Women's contribution lies in the fact that they encouraged their male counterparts to resist colonialism. Wambui makes it

evident that women are more enthusiastic and courageous than men in order to free Kenya. This is apparent when she says:

Was there any circumcised man who felt water in the stomach at the sight of a whiteman? Women, she said, had brought their Mithuru and Miengu to the platform. Let therefore such men, she jeered, come forward, wear the women's skirts and aprons and give up their trousers to the women. (*AGOW* 175)

In this respect, Ngugi explicitly puts forth the assumption that women are/were not docile. He portrays Wambui as a strong and brave woman. Hence, he delivers the message through his novel that women fought to bring freedom. They heroically participated in various activities. Therefore, Ngugi breaks the stereotypical images of women that depict them as weak, passive, and submissive creatures.

Throughout the novel, Kenyan women are either revealed as active participants in the war or as male fighters' supporters. While Mbugua, Kihika's father, refused and regretted his son's decision to join the guerilla fighters, Mumbi supports her brother and comes in his defense. She tells him that Kihika who could not have escaped the arrest which had occurred to leaders like Kenyatta "had to choose between prison and forest. He chose the forest." (*AGOW* 97). Similarly, Njeri, Kihika's girlfriend whom he is indebted to, eagerly looks forward to joining him in the forest. Compared to other female characters, Njeri is a bold and tough woman. The narrator informs us that in Thabai, men called her "a cat" and that "few could impose their will on her" (*AGOW* 98). Further, compared to her rival Wambuku, Kihika's second girlfriend, who refused to join her beloved, Njeri "stood alone in the dark outside her home peering in the direction of Kinenie forest...Njeri emotionally addresses Kihika, "You are my warrior....She [Wambuku] does not love you, Kihika... I will come to you, my handsome warrior, I will come to you" (*AGOW* 98). Accordingly, she is a typical example of women's resilience during the struggle. Her passionate devotion to her handsome warrior suggests that Kihika is figure of resistance and a true icon of potency. Brendon Nicholls puts forth the claim that Kihika's phallic heroism can "enjoin the domestic with the political, which equates masculine sexual and cultural prerogatives in an extremely subtle move." (91)

It has been noted that Ngugi often endows his female characters with more decisiveness than their male counterparts. Judith Cochrane argues that his female characters are portrayed as "the guardians of the tribe". They symbolize the

regeneration and continuity of the people. In this respect, Ngugi juxtaposes most of his male characters with strong female characters. Essentially, Kihika is not the only Mau Mau representative whose martial activity is formed in relation to female. General R. has been expelled from his home village since he failed at rescuing his mother from being beaten by his father. The harmonious relations between men and women reach the highest peak with Mugo's attempt to save Wambuku, pregnant with child, from a beating by homeguards.

A particular aspect of Ngugi's fiction is that it does not only shed light on the women's contribution to the realization of independence, but it goes beyond any simple representation and considers women as the community's signifiers. The second sex, as it appears throughout the story, is the basis upon which the social relationships are built. Moreover, women play vital roles in networking the male heroes. Gikonyo's wife, Mumbi, is one of the female characters whose role is establishing these links. She has been a focal point in the community. Her importance in the text lies in the fact that she collects the missing parts of the story and thus provides the reader with the details to make a sense of the whole text. Mumbi's close ties with the community and her vital and pivotal roles during the years of the Emergency are undeniable. Ngugi pays high attention to familial, domestic, and the political positions that female characters like Mumbi occupy. To begin with, Mumbi inherited from Kihika the love of the country and the desire to pay her blood and sweat for the sake of freedom. Like Kihika, Mumbi believes that "a man should grab at freedom and die for it" (AGOW 186). They both are convinced that the "few shall die that the many shall live" (AGOW 186). The narrator informs us that she finds inspiration in Gikuyu traditions and that she:

...had ardently yearned for a life in which love and heroism, suffering, and martyrdom were possible. She was young. She had fed on stories in which Gikuyu women braved the terrors of the forest to save people, of beautiful girls given to the gods as sacrifice before rains. (AGOW 89)

She represents a nurturing force that, even in her idealized dreams, is capable of bringing together elements of culture that represent a potential source of strength and offer a vision of continuity in a dislocated world.

Mumbi's political stand in the national case is understood through her successful attempt in leading Mugo to confess. It is through this act that the author himself conveys his political messages. In *Ngugi wa Thiong'o* Patrick Williams analyzes the

extent to which male characters experience existence in relation to Mumbi. He believes that she “enables the most important homosocial and political constellations in the novel.” (64). Indeed, she is the only character around whom most of the characters have revolved in the course of the narrative. In “Structure and Theme” Nnolim considers her as the only sustained narrative thread “unbroken though thin...in a badly structured and over-crowded novel. She is the “the nerve-center” of her age group...In a novel in which unity and disunity feature so prominently, she is the symbol of unity, the repository of people’s confidence, even of the sly, go-it-alone Mugo” (218-19). Selected as the voice of women and children in the whole community, Mumbi has been urged to convince Mugo to take the lead and deliver a speech during Uhuru celebration. It is Wambui who sent her to Mugo: “This matter concerns all Thabai. Forget your troubles in the home and in the heart. Go to Mugo. Tell him this: the women and the children need him” (AGOW 170). Wambui’s faith in Mumbi comes is the result of her conviction that women had to act. The reader is told that she “believed in the power of women to influence events, especially where men had failed to act, or seemed indecisive” (AGOW 204). In this respect, Ngugi, through Wambui’s utterance, invokes women’s abilities to shape history. More importantly the solidarity and moral strength of Wambui and Mumbi suggest that African women are survivors under duress.

As a matter of fact, Ngugi deliberately stems from Gikuyu myth to create impressive characters. Most of his characters’ names or situations are symbolic. More importantly the reader is able to notice the gender framing of the nation especially in the relationship between Gikonyo and Mumbi. Their names evoke the two founders of the Gikuyu community: Gikuyu and Mumbi. According to the Gikuyu legend, Gikuyu and Mumbi stayed in Kenya and more precisely in Kameno and Makuyu (*The River Between*’s setting). The myth of Gikonyo and Mumbi created by the characters of Ngugi echoes the story of Adam and Eve. Hence, just like the Christians who believe that Adam and Eve are the first men<sup>1</sup> on earth, the traditional Gikuyu people also believe that the first men on the Kenyan earth are Gikonyo and Mumbi. So from that point of view, we can understand that if Adam and Eve were created by the God of Christians, then Gikonyo and Mumbi come from the gods of Africa. Following this assumption, Brendon argues that:

---

<sup>1</sup> The concept ‘men’ is used in its general form to mean humanity.

Gikonyo and Mumbi's framing in Gikuyu folklore yokes them into a nationalist lineage originating in a mythical prehistory that precedes the emergence of the nation as a modern political form. Therefore, Gikonyo and Mumbi index Gikuyu communal origins and all Gikuyu history. (102)

Having pointed to the mythical interpretation of Gikonyo and Mumbi, it is necessary to argue that they both represent a 'gendered' significance within the text and the Kenyan social milieu. Yet, while Mumbi's name remains unchanged, Gikonyo's name is derived from 'Gikuyu'. Brendon Nicholls assumes that Gikonyo bears the inscription of modernity and that he represents the Gikuyu male peasant whose identity has been fragmented by colonial strategies of detection and detention (102). Mumbi's name which remains unchangeable is a clear sign that women's situation has not changed as well. Besides, her duty towards her husband is exhibited in terms of wholeness. This image is clear when we are told that in their lovemaking Gikonyo feels himself being made "whole, renewed" (*AGOW* 114). The novelist keeps reminding his readers that women are the source of power and that their existence. Before detention, the relationship between Mumbi and Gikonyo is revealed in terms of harmony:

Play now, please play it to me,' she said eagerly. Gikonyo took this for a challenge, he feared strength would desert him.

'Then you must sing as I play. Your voice is so nice,' he said, and took his instrument.

But he found his hands were shaking. He strummed the strings a little, trying to steady himself. Mumbi waited for him to play the tune. As his confidence rose, Gikonyo felt Thabai come under his thumb. Mumbi's voice sent a shudder down his back. His fingers and heart were full. So he groped, slowly, surely, in the dark, towards Mumbi. He struck, he appealed, he knew his heart fed power to his fingers. He felt light, almost gay. (*AGOW* 77)

During his detention, Gikonyo looked across a gulf of silence between himself and the woman for whom he feels he has compromised his manhood. He believed that homecoming would bring him back to life. Life's meaning "was contained in his final return to Mumbi" (*AGOW* 133). Hence, one is able to argue that women in Kenya are signifiers of the community and archetypes of harmony and wholeness. Ngugi has opted for Mumbi as a representative of women to portray their difficulties and privations.

In the final passages of the novel, Ngugi makes it clear for the reader that the future Kenya requires women's contributions. Women are supposed to build a new nation and fulfill their tasks. After Kenya's Independence Day, during a post-mortem of the previous day's events, Wambui, Warui and Mumbi realize that they have to bear the

burden and that they have responsibilities to attain in rebuilding the nation as they deliberately declare in the following conversation:

“I must go now. I’m sure the fire is ready at home. Perhaps we should not worry too much about the meeting ... or ... about Mugo. We have got to live.”

“Yes, we have the village to build,” Warui agreed.

“And the market tomorrow, and the fields to dig and cultivate ready for the next season,” observed Wambui, her eyes trying to see beyond the drizzle and the mist.

“And children to look after,” finished Mumbi. (*AGOW* 238)

Therefore, women are conscious of the fact that for their country to grow, they are compelled to go out and cultivate the farms and embark on trading activities for a strong economy. They are also aware of the fact that children have to be looked after. Every community regards children as a symbol and hope of the future. Hence, the necessity to nurture them well by providing for their physical and emotional needs is a task which Mumbi will have to carry alone for her son’s wellness. Yet, Ngugi’s skillfulness in employing symbolism makes us interrogate the validity of this hope. The drizzle and mist which prevent Wambui from seeing clearly suggest the uncertainty the future holds for them.

#### **6.4.2. Aspects of Women’s Double Colonization: On Objectification, Sexual Assault, and Displacement**

Throughout the novel, mothering is the major role attributed to Kenyan women. As a matter of fact, feminists agree that it was the idealization of motherhood – good mother or angelic mother, that added to the stress and pressure upon a maternal situation and reduced it to a task that was to be performed for the society and others, rather than a source for the gratification of the maternal instinct, as it may be believed as, a celebration of her womanhood. Accordingly, feminists in the late 1970’s and 80’s, considered motherhood as something that is beyond the biological process or that is a patriarchal construct.

Beyond this description, female characters are described as men’s girlfriends. Such description can be culturally interpreted. Gikuyu culture is noted for its patriarchal nature. It is male-dominated and thus provides men with the authority to dominate and conquer. In his article “Daughters of Moombi: Ngugi’s Heroines and Traditional Gikuyu Aesthetics”, Charles Nama Believes that Ngugi’s aim is to remind his readers of

the traditional Gikuyu mythology. By so doing, he deliberately re-establishes healthy links to Kenya's past and a foundation for its national identity. Hence, women are placed in the narrative in the historical context in ways which foster the renovation of identity and tradition and redefine their roles in spite of the development of a revolutionary consciousness. Accordingly, Charles Nama asserts that "the unequivocal liberation of Africans lies not in Westernization but in the resuscitation of traditional cultural values that have been an intrinsic part of the people's lives from ancient times" (140). In *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi engages the various narrative strands with ancient stories of Wangu Makeri and Waiyaki and with the heroic deeds of Harry Thuku and Jomo Kenyatta.

A remarkable feature of Ngugi's masterpiece is the religious discourses that run throughout the story. The author associates the events with Judeo-Christian events. This is the reason why its language is highly elevated. Within this cultural and literary tradition Ngugi brings his female characters into what Nama calls "the tribe mythology" (145). The tribe mythology is an important factor that decides on issues of cultural affirmation, sexual status, and gender relations. This is more apparent in the significant exchange of banter between men and women. Throughout the novel men are described as idlers. A sign of their carelessness is the fact that they leave their women without supporting them financially. In this respect, it is women's responsibility to ensure the adequate money to provide basic things for their families. The narrator asserts that:

... at the Old Rung'ei centre where young men spent their time talking the day away. Occasionally the men went on errands for the shop-owners and earned a few coins 'for the pockets only, just to keep the trousers warm'. (*AGOW* 4)

The absence of men increases the amount of pressure. Women, in this case, are compelled to cope with the situation and fulfill their duties. In the absence of her husband, Mumbi is found "on the roof hammering in the nails" (*AGOW* 124). This image demonstrates not only the necessary rethinking of the traditional roles of men and women but performs a traditional aesthetic and cultural function within the text. Moreover, it depicts the Gikuyu community's building process. Such process involved clearly defined relations among gender, work, and artistic creativity. This image, therefore, asserts the complementary relationships between man as artists and women who "enhance the beauty of Gikuyu art forms" (Nama 140). Yet, the narrator reports the extent to which men teasingly blame women for the awkward situation they are

surrounded by: "It was all because a woman — a new Wangu — in England — had been crowned: what good ever came of a woman's rule?" (AGOW 124). To which the women reply, "Aah, but that is not true ... Doesn't Governor Baring, who rules Kenya, have a penis?" (AGOW 124). Giroux argues that in this seemingly crude vignette, Ngugi achieves a renovation of traditional values in the context of the contemporary crisis, recycling traditions in a way that seeks to establish their value as a means of "name[ing] the partial, the particular, and the specific" (231) as elements of community selfhood, rather than seeking to establish a sense of traditional authority.

The novel sheds light on the tough responsibilities attributed to Kenyan women. Earlier in the novel, the reader is told that women are supposed to make food available for their kids. Women work harder on the farms as well as at home. They are cruelly left by their men to work single handedly. They are selfishly used by men as slaves and maids just to do domestic chores:

Mugo found that some women had risen before him, that some were already returning from the river, their frail backs arched double with water-barrels, in time to prepare tea or porridge for their husbands and children. The sun was now up: shadows of trees and huts and men were thin and long on the ground. (AGOW 2)

In his historical revisionism, Ngugi has made an astonishing effort to shed light on social significance of the female body. In *The River Between*, the female body was highly mutilated. Women were set somewhere doubly oppressed in a liminal-zone. In *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi exposes the way women are sexually abused by men. Throughout the story, the reader is provided with images that reveal the extent to which women are underestimated and perceived by men as means of entertainment and objects to satisfy and quench their sexual desire and thirst. Philosophically and thematically, therefore, the novel deals with one of the prominent feminist themes; female sexual objectification.

In essence, studies have proved that people's sociality turns around sex. Determining society's nature revolves around the way sex is perceived by its member. A patriarchal society is the one in which male is sexually dominant. Male's dominance allows him to treat the second sex as a sexualized object. This has been interpreted as one of the darkest sides of human sexuality. Etymologically, 'sexual objectification', was first introduced to the world of philosophy and literature by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant. Kant (1785) assumes that sexual objectification occurs

when one considers a person not as an “end-in-itself”, but only as means to satisfy his sexual desire and pleasure. Sexual objectification, in this sense, occurs when a partner is recognized in terms of sexual usefulness. (Papadaki NP)

Feminist scholars have pointed out to the sexual objectification in their works. Feminist scholars like Catherine Mackinnon (1982) and Andrea Dworkin (2000) have also located objectification within the sexual domain, referring to pornography as the quintessential form of female objectification where women are regarded as sex objects accessible to men. They also define sexual objectification in gendered terms, maintaining that it is a powerful manifestation of broader gender inequalities.

Feminist thinkers, therefore, have taken objectification outside of the marital/extramarital context considering it as a form of gender oppression. The manners in which a person can be objectified have recently undergone considerable expansion. M. Nussbaum (1995) defines objectification as the behavior of treating a person “as an object and identified instrumentality, denial of autonomy, inertness, fungibility, violability, ownership, and denial of subjectivity as its main manifestations” (291). Furthermore, in *Sexual solipsism: Philosophical Essays on Pornography and Objectification* Rae Langton (2009) added three further aspects to Nussbaum’s list: treating a person as identified with her body (reduction to body or body parts); treating a person in terms of how she looks (reduction to appearance); treating a person as if she lacks the human capability to speak (silencing). Women’s personal value is openly reduced to their body, and they are considered and treated as sexual objects. Accordingly, sexual objectification occurs not only when women are identified with their body but also when women’s value is determined on the base of their physical appearance.

Ngugi’s female characters are subject to objectification. Women are revealed as men’s objects of satisfaction. An obvious example of sexual objectification is when Gikonyo longs to come back to his wife. His rival Karanja, however, collaborates with the colonialists to evade jail so that he could be close to Mumbi and quench his sexual thirst. Moreover, Gikonyo’s mother, Wangari, is hard working who refuses to give in to the obstacles of life. When her husband, Waruhiu kicks her out of the matrimonial home in Elburgon, she decides to soldier on. She boards in a train to settle in Thabai with her son. Waruhiu does not wish to live with his wife anymore because he thinks now she

cannot satisfy him sexually. Consequently, he drives her away from the matrimonial home. In his early novels, Ngugi's female characters remain silent as wives, mother and daughters and were trapped in polygamy and patriarchy. Polygamy and patriarchy have long been comfortable bedfellows, and the rights of women had always been subordinated to the larger freedoms enjoyed by men and to the patriarchal perception of the good of the community.

African societies are known for their polygamous structures. Polygamy is more common in African countries than anywhere else in the rest of the world. Indeed, it is a socially accepted practice among tribes and communities in a number of African countries. Statistically, Elbedour and Bergstrom argued, in some African regions and estimated twenty to fifty percent of all marriages are polygamous. Polygamy in Africa is encouraged by diverse factors, and its prevalence reflects differences in tribes and religions, as well as in economic and social structures. In "Historical Perspective, Current Literature and an Opinion Survey Among Muslim Women in Contemporary South Africa: A Case Study" Dangor (2001) argues that polygamy creates inequality amongst co-wives since the husband cannot care for and cater to the needs of more than one wife, and that polygamy gives men 'boundless power and authority' (15). Experiences of women in African polygamous families vary with the socio-cultural features of their surrounding tribe, community or region. Most, if not all, follow a patriarchal structure. However, the degree of authority held by the husband often depends on the cultural and social expectations for his behavior.

Essentially, polygamy is one of the reasons that increased the amount of women objectification. In the African context, before marriage, a woman does not have an independent identity. A woman is regarded as the daughter of her father. After marriage she becomes the wife of her husband. In this case, women are considered as objects even after marriage. Polygamy increases women objectification. One of the traditional sufferings of women in the novel is polygamy. Actually, the epistolary novel is a treatise on polygamy and its side effects. In the main, the novel foregrounds a catalogue of problems resulting from the traditional system of marriage which allows polygamy. Polygamy is one of the main reasons behind women's plight and family disintegration. In the story we are informed that:

Waruhiu found himself the centre of attraction to many women. He got new brides and complained that the thighs of the first wife [Wangari] did not yield

warmth any more. He beat her, hoping that this would drive her away. Wangari stuck on. Eventually, Waruhiu ordered her to leave his home and cursed mother and son to a life of ever-wandering on God's earth. (AGOW 71-2)

Ngugi portrays how men manipulate women and use them to quench their libido. Women who refuse to obey men to fulfill their sexual need are subject to physical acts. A good example is Wambuku who has been beaten by a homeguard because she turned down his sexual advances. Wambuku, a pregnant woman, is severely beaten by a village guard and dies there in pregnancy. Homeguards take "her body and threw it into a grave dug a few yards from the trench" (AGOW 139). Not only Wambuku, but also all the people of Thabi village were hit by the violence of homeguards and white Government in one way or the other. Mumbi remembers the days when "soldiers and homeguards entered the trench and beat anybody who raised their back or slowed down in any way" (139). In 'Ngugi's Christian Vision, Theme and Pattern in *A Grain of Wheat*' Govind Narayan Sharma argues that:

A considerable portion of Ngugi's novel is devoted to the portrayal of violence that was done not merely to the body -the lands, home and hearts of the Gikuyu- but also their soul in the form of a spiritual suffering and agony inflicted on them by the Whitemen. (168)

As a matter of fact, Ngugi portrays vividly the uncongenial conditional of the African women during emergency. His uniqueness lies in the fact that he does not only shed light on the physical and sexual abuse, but more importantly in the fact that he describes their experience as individuals who were forced to be acquainted with turmoil of colonialism. In his play *I Will Marry When I Want*, the farm laborer Kigondo describes the hardship and the gravity of the situation that the natives lived by:

Our patriots,  
Men and women of,  
Limuru and the whole country,  
Were arrested  
The emergency laws became very oppressive  
Our homes were burnt down  
We were jailed...  
We were taken to detention camps  
Some of us were crippled through beating  
Others were castrated  
Our women were raped  
Our wives and daughters were raped before our eyes. (27)

Women, whose men were arrested, could not earn their living. Besides, their situation became worse out of the heavy taxes that were imposed on them. Their children made

end to their educational careers due their inability to meet the educational expenditure. Consequently, women struggled to feed the aged and children at home. A woman in *A Grain of Wheat* cries in vain to meet M.P. in the town every day spending all her time there with hungry stomach.

In *The River Between*, Ngugi's female characters found themselves under the mercy of two competing cultural forces. Throughout *A Grain of Wheat*, women are the victims of the two competing political forces. On the one hand, they are bound to fulfill their tasks and participate in liberating the country. On the second hand, however, they are compelled to bear the consequences of their eagerness and pay for the contribution. In *Voices From Mutira*, Jean Davidson details the position of women who remained behind in the villages. One of women's personal recollections of life during the years of the Emergency stresses the hardship and the fear experienced by women in the villages:

Those times were bad. People were living between fear of Mau Mau and fear of the Home Guards. Both were our enemies. The Home Guards supported the British and the Mau Mau were on the side of the Agikuyu. If you made a mistake with the Home Guards, you would die. If you made a mistake with the Mau Mau you would die, too." (52)

As a result of their active participation in the war women in Thabai find themselves subject not only to physical abuse but also to violence and displacement. They were arrested by a white district officer Robson to vacate their huts and move into a new place within the given time. Their huts were burnt down even when they were in bed at night. Mumbi described the sadism of Homeguards:

I remember the red flames. There were two huts. One belonged to my mother, the other was mine. They told us to remove our bedding and clothes and utensils. They splashed some petrol on the grass-thatch of my mother's hut. I then idly thought this was unnecessary as the grass was dry. Anyway, they poured petrol on the dry thatch. The sun burnt hot. My mother sat on a stool by the pile of things from our huts and I stood beside her. I had a Gikoi on my head. The leader of the homeguards struck a match and threw it at the roof... At the fourth attempt the roof caught fire. Dark and blue smoke tossed from the roof, and the flames leapt to the sky. They went to my hut. I could not bear to see the game repeated, so I shut my eyes. I wanted to scream, but I must have lost my voice because no sound left my throat. I suddenly remembered my mother beside, and I wanted to take her from the scene, to prevent her from the seeing it all to the end. For those huts meant much to her because she had built them after Waruhiu, her husband in the Rift Valley, had divorced her from his side... The roofs were cracking. I remember the pain as the cracking noise repeated in my heart...Something gave way in my heart, something in me cracked when I saw our home fall. (AGOW 135-6)

Thabai village was completely destroyed. Displacing and punishing Thabai's women were meant to warn other villages, never to give food or extend any kind of support to the Mau Mau fighters. Women and children lifted the burden and were highly victimized. They became workers in various fields. Mumbi says that they "were prisoners in the village and the soldiers had built their camps all round to prevent and escape. We went without food. The cry of children was terrible to hear" (AGOW 139). Shortly, they were forced to fulfill unbearable tasks. They were made to dig trenches within the given time. Some women tried to work in European farmhouses, tea plantations and digging Muthangari grass for White people. In the tense ridden Thabai village, women like Mumbi face constant fear and threat from the White people. This is obvious when Mumbi says:

The new D.O. did not mind the cries. He even permitted the soldiers to pick women and carry them to their tents. God! I did not know how I escaped from that ignominy. Every night, I prayed that such a thing should never happen to me. Wambuku died in the trench. They took h er body and threw it into the grave dug a few yards from the trench. (AGOW 139)

Forced labor leads to sexual harassment. Cruel white soldiers, African Homeguards and even their officers Thomson and Robson picked up women as articles in a market. The African women's opposition to such kind of harassment put to an end by beating them till they die. Then hunger deaths occurred; a number of women secretly and voluntarily offered themselves to the soldiers for a little food. The narrator tells us that "at that time a number of women secretly and voluntarily offered themselves to the soldiers for a little food" (142). In this respect, Ngugi sheds light on prostitution during the colonial period.

Prostitution is one of the main problems that few African authors tackled in their novels. In essence the concept is new to the polygamous African societies. Ngugi skillfully reveals that the issue is the result of the colonial condition. Mumbi's claim that they offered themselves to the soldiers for a little food suggests that women would not permit themselves if they were not in real need. Moreover, they found themselves ruthlessly exploited by the Whites and the Blacks. The sexual exploitation of African women during the colonial time by the white settlers, and even by the missionary people slowly led to the rise of prostitution. In "Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*" E. Palmer argues that the African society "was cleverly thrown back into prostitution by the schemes of the white and the new black imperialists" (168).

In *A Grain of Wheat*, African women were sexually exploited by the people of their own race. Of all women characters' stories, Mumbi's is the most pathetic and significant story. Ngugi's political vision is apparently revealed through her plight. There are three main reasons behind the importance of her pathetic story. First, Mumbi is a major character in the story and thus her misery is part of the whole story. Second, Mumbi's position as a "Mother of Men" and her 'gendered' significance within the text and the Kenyan social milieu are the reasons that make the reader believe that her plight is the plight of all women in Kenya. Third, the tragic end of her story which results from her flaw permits the author to reveal his prediction of Kenya's future under the rule of Karanja and his likes.

Mumbi is assaulted by Karanja and bears his child. The Homeguards' leader exploited her sexually. In the absence of Gikonyo, Karanja seized the opportunity to mock at Mumbi's hope of her husband's return from detention. At the beginning we are told that she resisted and checked his arrogant advances with great difficulty. Yet, after knowing from Karanja that her husband would come back soon, Mumbi was overwhelmed with happiness. She offered herself to Karanja out of joy and gratefulness. Ngugi's reader would notice the similarities between Mumbi's story and Muthoni's in Ngugi's short story *The Return*. On his return from jail, the protagonist Kamau is told that his wife has remarried his old rival, Karanja, who had told his parents and wife that Kamau had died while imprisoned. Here Kamau discovers that his challenge in life is no longer limited to finding revenge against the wazungu (Europeans or white people) but also the loss of his wife. He feels "bitter against all, all the people including his father and mother. They had betrayed him. They had leagued against him" (*The Return* 49). On his return from detention, Gikonyo underwent moments of despair and agony due to his wife's mistake.

Critics have interpreted Mumbi's affair differently. Ngugi describes women's participation as emerging from their maternal attributes or as being based on their sexual prowess. The author's concentration on the homeguard's sexual hostility has an unfortunate corollary on women's contribution in the war. According to Jean O'bar Mumbi's violation at the end of the emergency "symbolically eliminates the personal and political contribution to the struggle, denying a social status other than that based on sexuality and maternity." (qtd. in Muthoni 12). Accordingly, these images of 'sexuality' and 'maternity' which are attributed to women suggest that women have less chance to

be successful political leaders since they are confronted by the disadvantages of being the second sex in a highly patriarchal society. Sexual assaults have a literary power that overwhelms women's powerful acts in the struggle.

Mumbi's sexual affair with Karanja overturned her life. Far from O'bar's interpretation, Mumbi's mistake affects her husband's own perception. Unfortunately, Gikonyo remains indifferent to her and calls her a "whore" in a desperate mood. In his article entitled "Conrad's Influence on Betrayal in *A Grain of Wheat*", Bu Buakei Jabbi (1980) writes:

...for her single affair with Karanja was not adultery after all since she was exploited his position as a chief and her dazed anxiety over her husband's too suddenly the moral perspectives bearing upon the Gikonyo -- Mumbi plot in which Gikonyo's own breeding slave of jealousy has been the only known factor getting the tone so far in the narrative. Mumbi's story is thus, reminiscence, a flash back that also induces a valuable sense, a moral scurrility and complexity in the novel. (63-4)

Ngugi casts Mumbi as the 'Trophy' wife who has to be contested over between two personalities. She is emblematic of the mother of the tribe. Furthermore, she is compelled to bear the consequences of Karanja's rape. It can be argued that Gikonyo's act of beating and calling her a whore, reveal the cultural and national male status whose defining code is marked by assertion of itself on the top. According to Greonwald:

Masculinity circumcises femininity; it rejects the feminine lexicon of experience, which includes care, tenderness, passivity, sensivity, expression, and domesticity. Conversely, masculinity is predicted on the affirmation of activity, strength, bravery, rationality, aggression, violence and self-mastery. Authentic man is ostensibly, not woman. (qtd. in Ochieng 51)

Mumbi is subject to a heavy and an unbearable oppression. The exploitative colonial conditions changed the whole pattern of her harmonious life with Gikonyo. Moreover, offering herself to her husband's rival has worsened the situation. She bears the burden of being rejected by her husband who feels his masculinity unsettled. The reader is told that the boy is the source of troubles and that he is the cause of Gikonyo's anger. Mumbi, carrying the name after the Gikuyu mother, did not abandon the innocent child. In this respect, Karanja's son became the barrier to their marital relationship. Her husband grew bitter towards her. But she does everything to keep her husband in good humor. In 'The Potrayal of Women in African Literature' Emmanuel Ngara (1980) maintains that:

The life of Gikonyo and Mumbi is one of the most significant points of attention in *A Grain of Wheat* because it enlarges the traditional conflict between man and woman in society and prescribes solution, which is still relevant to the entire situation in the novel. The most important prescription is a recognition of equality and mutual cooperation. (38)

The chock of Mumbi's act of betrayal has detached Gikonyo instantly. The narrator tells us that he looks across a gulf of silence between himself and the women for whom he feels has compromised his manhood. He believes that "life's meaning was contained in his return to Mumbi" (AGOW 133). Yet, the return home has destabilized him to the point where he eschews the intimacy of marriage. Gikonyo is so distraught that when his mother embraces him, he concludes, "Mumbi had gone to bed with other men in his absence" (AGOW 99), and when Mumbi steals glances at him, Gikonyo thinks, "She is mocking me" (AGOW100). He imagines Mumbi walking to another man's bed, and allowing him, "actually held another man's dangling thing between her thighs, her flesh, had rapturously welcomed the explosion of that man's seeds into her. And this not once but every night for the last six years." (AGOW 114)

At the beginning, Gikonyo treated the boy politely showing neither affection nor hatred. Gikonyo dissuades from this action, but decides, "I would never talk about the child. I would continue life as if nothing had happened. But I would never enter Mumbi's bed" (AGOW 119). Nonetheless, this apathetic attitude is short-lived:

Previously, Gikonyo also treated the boy politely, showing neither resentment nor affection. For, as he argued in his heart, a child was a child and was not responsible for his birth. The boy had sensed coldness and instinctively respected the distance. Today, however, he proposed himself in between Gikonyo's knees, and started chattering, desiring to be friendly.

'Grandma has told me such a story—a good one—about—about—Do you know the one about the Irimu?

Gikonyo roughly pushed the boy away from the knees, disgust on his face. The boy staggered and fell on his back and burst into tears." (AGOW 162-3)

Wangari's story reminded Gikonyo of Mumbi's sin. Essentially, *Irimu* is an ogre who captures a girl who was on her way to meet her lover in the forest. The ogre's intention was to devour the girl. Yet, she delayed his advances by singing until the arrival of her lover who would make an end to the ogre's life. Gikonyo is the Mau Mau warrior who meets and makes love to Mumbi in the forest. After leaving her lonely in the forest, Karanja seizes the opportunity and begets a son by Mumbi in Gikonyo's absence. Therefore, Karanja is the ogre. More importantly, his mother's name is Wairimu which

means either son of or daughter of an irumu. It was her name which provoked Gikonyo to react irrationally.

In spite of the intensive patriarchal discourse, Ngugi's women in the novel drastically react to the injustice. Mumbi belongs to the strong breed of Ngugi women with her ability to rise to any occasion and face any adversity. She almost challenges Gikonyo when he pushes around her child in a rough manner. She reacts to her husband's violence: "what sort of a man do you call yourself?...Why do you turn your anger on a child, a little child..." (AGOW 146). Moreover, the author reveals that harmonious relationship between women and their complicity through their reactions to oppression. Gikonyo's mother Wangari supports Mumbi and reacts to her son's intolerance. It is Wangari's interference which made Gikonyo leave the hut:

'This does not concern you, Mother!'

Does not concern me? She raised her voice, slapping her sides with both hands. 'Come all the earth and see what a son, my son, answers me. Does not concern me who brought you forth from these thighs? That the day should come- hah! – Touch her again if you call yourself a man! (AGOW 168)

Wangari silences her son's patriarchal power. She is convinced that it does not matter who has fathered the child. Accordingly, she exposes the confines of a discourse which demarcates female subjectivity within the mothering role. Brendon Nichols believes that "Wangari and Mumbi force a subaltern sisterhood that plays devil's advocate to the patriarchal law." (100)

The author shows the extent to which sexual assault has a devastating power in destroying and disintegrating the family. The situation compelled Mumbi to abandon her marriage and go back to her parents. From a mythical point of view, Wangari considers this decision as a threat to the nation-building. In this respect, she warns Gikonyo: "Let us see what profit it will bring you, to go on poisoning your mind with these things when you should have accepted and sought how best to build your life" (AGOW 172). Wangari knows that Mumbi's life without Gikonyo might also be shattered. Out of anger and despair, Gikonyo yells: "Let her never come back" (AGOW 172). The dilemma ends with a definitive separation and Mumbi assumes and bears its burden.

Gikonyo and Mumbi's broken relationship has reached rock bottom. They both show no room for compromise and this has a negative impact on nation building. In spite of their separation, Mumbi pays a visit to Gikonyo at Timoro Hospital after

breaking his arm during the contest on Independence Day. There, Gikonyo comes to his senses and becomes aware of the need to reconcile with Mumbi. The narrator tells us that “he had never seen himself as father to Mumbi’s children. Now it crossed his mind: what would his child by Mumbi look like?” (AGOW 241). For the fulfillment of this dream Gikonyo decides to carve a stool decorated with the figure of a man and a woman stretching their hands to meet on a child’s head or shoulders. The chair becomes the final symbol of accepting Mumbi’s child. Moreover, when Mumbi arrives at the hospital to see him, Gikonyo is keen to talk about the child for the consummation of the anticipated reconciliation but the following argument arises:

“Let us talk about the child.” ...  
“In here, at the hospital?” she asked, without any excitement.  
“Now, yes.”  
“No, not today,” she said, almost impatiently, as if she was now really aware of her independence. Gikonyo was surprised by the new firmness in her voice.  
“All right. When I leave the hospital ... Will you go back to the house, light the fire, and see things don’t decay?” ...  
“No, Gikonyo. People try to rub out things, but they cannot. Things are not so easy. What has passed between us is too much to be passed over in a sentence. We need to talk, to open our hearts to one another, examine them, and then together plan the future we want. But now, I must go, for the child is ill.”  
“Will you –will you come tomorrow?” he asked, unable to hide his anxiety and fear ... “All right. Maybe I shall come.” ... (AGOW 243)

The passage indicates that Mumbi has taken a decision to continue her life independently. This becomes clearer in her refusal to talk about the child. Moreover, she does not promise Gikonyo anything substantial. The adverb “maybe” suggests a possibility but not a certainty. As Mumbi walks out, Gikonyo observes that, “she walked away with determined steps, sad but almost sure” (AGOW 243). Mumbi has gained the confidence to brave the trials of life independently without the influence of a man. She does not understand the value of reconciliation because she feels that it has been offered too late. However, Gikonyo is not discouraged by Mumbi’s present attitude as he continues to think about the stool and even concludes, “I’ll change the woman’s figure. I shall carve a woman big – big with child.” (AGOW 243)

### **6.5. The Question Mark on *Harambee***

As it has been assumed at the beginning of this chapter, what makes *A Grain of Wheata* complex novel is the deployment of multiple subject positions, interior

monologue, and the use of different modes of narrative focalization. Such a form has been related to Ngugi's desire to recover a usable past. Simon Gikandi, in this regard, maintains that:

The author's desire is to turn the historic past into what Arjun Appadurai has called (in a different context) a "symbolic resource" is evident at the beginning of the novel when he makes two historiographical moves; first, Ngugi tries to make his readings comprehend the past through a group of characters who are haunted by repressed histories "pestering memories". Secondly, he uses these characters' memories—and their remembrance of things past—to play off competing modes of representing the past. (115)

Most of his characters are haunted by the colonial experiences. Following his confession, Mugo, referring to his act of betrayal, says that "this thing has eaten into my life all these years" (*AGOW* 218). He finally exorcised his haunting experience to construct his postcolonial identity. All the characters are expected to confront their personal histories and transform them into a source of meaning. In this respect, their past actions and experiences become vehicles for the difficult choices they have to make on the eve of independence.

The novel's characters are defined by their attempts to establish a sort of connection or disconnection between the past and their imagined future. Gikandi admits that in Ngugi's fiction, historiographical operation depends on what Michel de Certeau would call "a double-edged effect" (117). He successfully recreates the past from the vantage of the present. The novel is made up of competing stories. It is based on a specific mode of narration that is as much about the colonial past and the postcolonial future. Telling the stories is obviously one way of clarifying the past's significance and its meaning to control with its haunting powers. This mode of narration depends on the readers' engagement with the emotions and desires of the characters. Hence, the reader is inclined to state the significance of this mode of narration in the interpretation of history.

*A Grain of Wheat* goes beyond the confines of the traditional historical narrative to investigate larger questions through fictional mode. It is an unraveling of the past of Thabai villagers who pragmatically represent all those laborers and peasants of Kenya. By the novel, the author sheds light on the theme of creation. This theme is revealed through Gikonyo's work as an artist/carpenter, particularly in this imaging of a stool in the form of a man, a pregnant woman, and a child. Moreover, this thematic concern is

also evident in Gikonyo's estrangement and ultimate reconciliation with Mumbi and his association of Mumbi with a "the birth of a new Kenya."

In essence, the novel's conclusion suggests a cause for optimism and euphoria. The last chapter of the novel advocates the Kenyan future and the changes Kenyans are supposed to witness and experience. The future has been summarized in the chapter's title '*Harambee*' which is Swahili word that means 'working together' or 'unite'. Kenyans' future seems to be promising since the British will not administer the country. Accordingly, '*Harambee*' advocates that the future of Kenya relies on the masses readiness to unite and work together. Ngugi, however, summarizes this union in the future possibility of the union between Gikonyo and Mumbi. Indeed, by the end of the last chapter the narrator foreshadows the possibility of Mumbi and Gikonyo uniting again after all what they have been through. This signifies that people getting together will be the key for the success of Kenya's future. By the end of the novel, Gikonyo decides to reckon with Mumbi's "feelings, her thoughts, her desires" (AGOW 243).

Mugo's courage in publicly confessing and expiating his act of betrayal provides the inspiration for Gikonyo to reconsider his harsh rejection of Mumbi and her child. Their reconciliation which, through the closeness of their names to those of Gikuyu and Mumbi, the mythical founders of the Gikuyu nation, implicitly symbolizes the regeneration of the Gikuyu people and post independence Kenya as a whole-is emblemized at the end of the novel in Gikonyo's plans for the carving of a traditional stool as a gift for Mumbi. The stool will not only incorporate a figure of a woman pregnant with a child as a symbol of hope for the future, but Gikonyo contemplates working into beads on the seat an image of "a field needing clearance and cultivating." Ngugi devoted his novel to the task of alerting the masses. The novel suggests that the struggle is not over with the celebration of independence and that much clearing still needs to be done if the ground for genuine freedom is to be successfully cultivated.

Essentially, through the promise of reconciliation between Gikonyo and Mumbi, the novel foreshadows a hierarchy of values in which communal investments triumph over self-interest. The carving of the stool, an act accompanied by her husband's hands to touch wood and chisel, culminates in his intention to carve a woman "big with child" on its surface. Not only promising Gikonyo's eventual reconciliation with Mumbi, his return to his craft entails a movement towards overcoming the condition of trauma visited upon Kenya by the colonial system. Gikonyo's return to carving consists of a

departure from alienated labor as a petty trader to fulfilling labor as a craftsman. Forming his original intention to carve the stool while still in detention, Gikonyo's decision at the end of the novel to begin working on it promises a transformation of the past sufferance into a just and productive future. Not simply an individual act, Gikonyo's return to a traditional aesthetic cultural form serves as "a leit-motif of the mythical and socio-political experience of the entire society" (Awuyah 9). The return to tradition signifies not so much a return to the past as a rediscovery of a fundamental link to other human beings effaced by the colonial system.

The novel's end suggests that the damage of betrayal is alienating. After the renewal of the seven days of rest in the hospital, Gikonyo becomes ready for change. Mumbi's claim that "what has passed between them is too much to be passed over in one sentence" suggests the difficulty of the union. Moreover, the child's sickness, symbolically speaking, reveals the difficulty which lies in the potential of marriage between them. The process of reconciliation and forgiveness will be meaningful if it is done with patience, through dialogue, and openness between the stakeholders. According to Ngugi:

Actually, in the novel I have tried to show the effect of the Mau Mau war on the ordinary man and woman who were left in the villages. I think the terrible thing about the Mau Mau war was a destruction of family life, the destruction of personal relationship. You found a friend betraying a friend, a father suspicious of the son, a brother doubting the sincerity or the good intentions of a brother, and above all these things the terrible fear under which these people live. (qtd.in Curry 12 )

Mumbi and Gikonyo's story illuminates the consequences of the damages done to the social fabric of Kenya during the years of emergency in Kenya between 1952 and 1963. Symbolically, the child has become the reminder of the past; a past which, like the child's actual state, was ill. The fact that his father is a homeguard, traitor and a collaborator, this child will forcibly bring back the ghost of the colonial past and its bitterness. On the *Uhuru Day*, General R. reminded the gathering crowd of Reverend Jackson acts of betrayal and how he plotted against the Mau Mau. Referring to the traitors, he informs the villagers that they are proudly saying "we are still here. We whom you called traitors and collaborators will never die." (AGOW 216). Moreover, Koina also talked of "seeing the ghost of the colonial past still haunting Independent Kenya" (AGOW 216). Gikonyo and Mumbi's future depends on their readiness to accept their past with all its seductions. The child's existence, however, may indicate the rebirth of the past but in another shape. Since his father was a traitor who 'will never

die' the child can be regarded as an emblem of neo-colonialism. Commenting on Karanja's child, Lisa Curtis argues that the child represents the future:

Lives cannot be fashioned as Gikonyo fashions his stool, since they are products of uncontrollable forces. Like the liberated nation, the child's beginning was surrounded by guilt and moral failure. The bastard conceived in fear and hate that needs to be reared and nurtured at the expense of great personal sacrifice is the crowning symbol of the new Kenya. (*Novels of Ngugi* 197)

Essentially, just like the transition to independence, Gikonyo's sentimental wounds as well as his final acceptance of his rival's child are slow to heal. At this level, Ngugi puts forth the assumption that Kenyans' wounds and their acceptance of the past are slow to heal. It seems that Gikonyo has done some kind of penance, and has finally realized the irrationality of his conduct. They both have gone through harrowing experiences. What has happened between them cannot be glossed over nightly. They need to open their hearts and re-plan their future in the light of changed circumstances.

*A Grain of Wheat* was written at the University of Leeds. This was the time of Ngugi's thinking in relation to the issues of poverty, growing inequalities all over the world and the increasing friction between capitalism and communism. The original title of the novel was conceived as "Wrestling with God". The novel was built around "the will of God", "destiny" and 'fate' which is antithetical to a socialist ideology. In fact, the novel is concerned with the egalitarian values of a people who are ready to learn and cultivate the habit of living in harmony with each other in a spirit of mutual trust, respect and tolerance for one another. The novel's concluding chapter suggests that the regeneration of the whole Gikuyu culture is implicit in the symbolic references by Mumbi and Gikonyo to the mythic ancestors of their nation; Gikuyu and Mumbi. This view finds its place in Gikonyo's belief that his "reunion with Mumbi would see the birth of a new Kenya" (*AGOW* 121). His decision is the true meaning of Harambee. It implies a coming together of a communal effort.

One of the main modernist features that the novel responds to is the non-conventional plot. Modernist techniques like flashbacks, stream of consciousness, and the interior-monologue are the main reasons behind the lack of linearity in narrating the events. In this respect, the novel's plot is elastic. The open-ended story permits the reader to expect the future and the rest of the events. In *Homecoming* Ngugi maintains that the author "must feel himself in the mainstream of his people's historical drama. At

the same time, he must be able to stand aside and merely contemplate the currents. He must do both: simultaneously swim, struggle and also watch, on the shore” (39). The last chapter of the novel suggests that the author is on the shore watching and expecting his readers to speculate and predict the future of Mumbi, and by extension Kenya.

As far as independent Kenya is concerned, the reader is provided with some passages that foreshadow the future state of the country. Mwaura tells Karanja that “an African, a man with a black skin like you or me, is coming to replace him” (*AGOW* 154). People are doomed to re-experience the misery of the past. Hence, Ngugi agrees with Fanon that postcolonial African nations end in disaster when they replace their white colonial bourgeoisie leaders with Black African bourgeoisie trained by Europeans. In the story, we are told that “the coming of the black rule would not mean, could never mean the end of the white power” (*AGOW* 38). The author ends his novel by arguing that “life was a constant repetition of what happened yesterday and the day before” (*AGOW* 239). This makes us question the validity of *Harambee*. At this level, several questions must be raised. Yet, the most important ones are; Would independence really change the situation of women in Kenya? Would *Harambee* be a turning point in Mumbi’s life and other Kenyan women?

Although it is too earlier to answer these questions, the novel’s end is helpful in predicting the future. The birth of the New Kenya, that the conclusion suggests, silences “femininity”. As their relationship mellows, Gikonyo alters the image of the woman on the stool leg: “I shall carve a woman big, big with child” (243). The stool symbolizes the rebirth of Kenya. Brendon argues that Gikonyo’s resolution to change the woman’s figure and carve a big woman with a child “may presage the resumption of Gikuyu male privilege in culture” (106). Yet, Brendon does not discuss the significance of the child in the stool. Far from the already mentioned significance of the child as a reminder of the past, the child limits Mumbi’s role in the future. This stool, symbolically, foreshadows ‘mothering roles’ attributed to Mumbi and women in general. In this respect, New Kenya will coincide with the resumption of the legitimized Gikuyu *patrilineage*. At this level, the reader is bound to keep in mind the novelist’s attempt to remind us of the pre-historical matriarchy in the opening passages of the novel where we are told that:

It was many and many years ago. Then women ruled the land of the Agikuyu. Men had no property, they were only there to serve the whims and needs of the

women. Those were hard years. So they waited for the women to go to war., they plotted a revolt, taking an oath of secrecy to keep them bound each to each in the common pursuit of freedom. They would sleep with all the women at once, for didn't they know the heroines would return hungry for love and relaxation? Fate did the rest; women were pregnant; the takeover met with little resistance. (AGOW 11)

This passage foreshadows the future of Kenyan women. It indicates that matriarchy was weak. This is why men impregnated all women and took over the running of the culture. Given Mumbi's implication in myth, her imminent pregnancy is less promising. Pregnancy which excluded women in the pre-historical matriarchy would exclude Mumbi from her political agency and power. Since the last passages indicate that Mumbi, and women in Kenya, will be divested of political agency in the future, it is left to the reader to put a question mark on *Harambee*.

## 6.6. Conclusion

Ngugi's belief that historical records are open to examination and reinterpretation was the main reason behind the publication of *A Grain of Wheat*. By re-examining Kenyan history from the subaltern perspective, Ngugi resists the historical 'fiction' constructed by the colonial masters and tries to subvert the norms instituted by colonial historiography. Interested in investigating history from below, Ngugi gives voice to peasants and women more importantly to validate their role in the history-making process. He peruses one of the prominent concerns in postcolonial literature by re-asking Gayatri Spivak's famous question "Can the Subaltern Speak? By gendering history Ngugi sheds light on women's sufferance in the past and their contribution and participation in achieving freedom. The novel's end justifies Ngugi's intention behind this radical historical revisionism. Based on Mumbi's tragic story and experience during the colonial period and her blurry future, Ngugi seems to argue that women could not speak in the past since they were subject to two patriarchal political discourses. Will they be able to speak in the future? The answer can be found in Ngugi's *Petals of Blood and Devil on the Cross* that the last part of the present scrutiny is concerned with.

## Part Three

### Not Yet *Uhuru*....*La Luta Continua!*

How does a writer, a novelist, shock his readers by telling them that these are neo-slaves when they themselves, the neo-slaves, are openly announcing the fact on the rooftops? How do you shock your readers by pointing out that these are mass murderers, looters, robbers, thieves, when they, the perpetrators of these anti-people crimes, aren't even attempting to hide the fact? When in some cases they are actually and proudly celebrating their massacre of children, and the theft and robbery of the nation? How do you satirise their utterances and claims when their own words beat all fictional exaggerations?

— Ngūgī wa Thiong'o, Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature

## Chapter Seven:

### The Political Dimension of Alienation and Prostitution in *Petals of Blood*

Here a writer has no choice... What he can choose is one or the other side in the battle field: the side of the people, or the side of those social forces and classes that try to keep the people down. What he or she cannot do is to remain neutral. Every writer is a writer in politics. The Only question is what and whose politics? (Preface, *Writers in Politics* ii)

If women were the prostitutes  
I'd like someone to tell me  
with whom they prostitute  
with women?  
So you see, men prostitutes  
don't consider themselves prostitutes. (David Maillu,  
*After 4.30* 9)

#### 7.1. Introduction

Ngugi has a very long list of feminist supporters due to his unique female characters and the specific space he devotes to women issues in his novels. As a matter of fact, over fifty years ago, Leon Trotsky et al could write in *Problems of Life* that “there are no limits to masculine egotism. In order to understand the world, we must look at it through the eyes of women.” It was Trotsky who once argued that “the position of woman is the most graphic and telling indicator for evaluating a social regime and state policy. Engels believes that woman was “the first slave of the slave.” (50). Other Marxists followed and developed Engels’ and Marx’s basic premise that women were doubly exploited as women and as workers. Within this theoretical framework, the present chapter is an attempt to locate women’s position in Ngugi’s *Petals of Blood*. It is his last novel to be published in English and the first in which he wages an intellectual war against capitalism. This system is the main reason behind the degradation of the social life in Kenya. This chapter tackles two main themes: Alienation and prostitution from a Marxist-feminist point of view. The aim is to show the extent to which women are subjugated and humiliated by forces of capitalism that

place women at the bottom of society. In a capitalist society, woman's double oppression is the result of being treated as a second-class and/or a second sex. Set within this context, this chapter concludes by claiming that alienation and prostitution are Ngugi's tools to describe the social degradation.

## **7.2. *Petals of Blood*: Critical Reception and Synopsis**

With the publication of *Petals of Blood*, Ngugi has entered a new phase in his socio-political commitment. Critics noticed a clear change in Ngugi's political vision. In his previous novels, short stories, and plays, Ngugi dedicated his pen to decolonizing nationalism and its disastrous effects on Kenyans. *Petals of Blood*, however, permits Ngugi to go beyond the Kenyan boundaries to describe the effects of neocolonialism that dominated the continent. Chronologically, *Petals of Blood* is his fourth novel and the last to be published in English. It is his most ambitious novel. It brings to African literature several political themes and hence mirrors the African reality. Palmer believes that "of all African novels... *Petals of Blood* probably represents the most comprehensive analysis to date of the evils perpetrated in independent African society by knowledge Black imperialists and capitalists" (qtd. in Uwasomba 98). Since its publication, Gikandi argues, critics "have never been sure where to locate *Petals of Blood*" (128). Gikandi cites Joseph McLaren's article "Ideology and Form: The Critical Reception of *Petals of Blood*" which brings several modes of interpretations regarding Ngugi's Marxist politics that "were pushing his novels in the 1970s." (128)

*Petals of Blood* links Ngugi's colonial and postcolonial novels. Ngara and Ayinidoho consider the novel as breaking new ground for African novel and literature. For a number of critics the novel can be read as a continuation of *A Grain of Wheat*. Simon Gikandi believes that this reading is reliable and that "it was because it seemed to exist both inside and outside the tradition of the European novel" (28). This novel is also read as rapture against the traditional novel of nineteenth century. Ngugi devoted *Petals of Blood* to the literary task of challenging the limits of the "bourgeois novel" and "its inability to transcend the social and cultural situation it represented and to function as an aesthetic agent of radical change" (Gikandi 128). Thematically, the novel develops the major ideas that have been tackled in *A Grain of Wheat*.

The end of *A Grain of Wheat* foreshadows and forecasts the thematic concerns of *Petals of Blood*. The two texts share the main themes and ideas that Ngugi is known for.

In fact, Ngugi still sheds light on the plight of peasants and workers. The text is essentially about postcolonial Kenya and the consequences of colonialism. In a truly Fanonist fashion, the novel begins with a critique of the postcolonial nationalist elite. Accordingly, Shamsul Alam argues that “*Petals of Blood* starts where *A Grain of Wheat* ends and goes on to give us a comprehensive picture of what the author regards as the misrule and the evils pervasive in Kenya under the postcolonial nationalist elite” (*Rethinking Mau Mau* 153-4). The author devotes his novel to the task of reminding the “few rulers” of Kenya that hope has not been fulfilled, and that “none of the promises had yet materialized” (*Petals of Blood* 123). The novel initiates a new world of discrimination in which only the few can survive and enjoy a life that equals nothing without the sufferings of the others. The main reason behind people’s plight, Ngugi, would say, is the rise of the bourgeoisie and modernity which reshaped Kenyan society.

Intertextuality occupies a prominent place in Ngugi’s fiction. Just like *A Grain of Wheat*, *Petals of Blood* reveals the extent to which Ngugi is influenced by other critics and writers. The novel’s title is derived from Derek Walcott’s poem “The Swamp”. The novel’s main theme is the postcolonial decadence and the neocolonial exploitation. This thematic concern, critics believe, came from Ngugi’s introduction to the works of George Lamming at Leeds University. Of all Lamming’s works, *In the Castle of my Skin* has always been considered as the genesis of *Petals of Blood*’s plot structure. In terms of events development and plot structure the two novels are identical. The beginning with the drought experience in Ngugi’s novel reminds us of the flood images in Lamming’s work. Further, the journey to the city to protest to the MP in *Petals of Blood* echoes the strike in Lamming’s masterpiece. In terms of conclusion characters of both novels are exposed to astonishing changes that lead up to unhappy and tragic ending. *Petals of Blood* ends with the marketability of Theng’eta which leads to the rise of the corrupting economic forces and the New Ilmorog. Similarly, *In the Castle of my Skin* landlord Creighton has sold up and the new owners have decided to sell the villagers’ homes. In terms of the framing voice, the two novels mix the first person and the third person narrator to recollect an elaborated historical perspective.

*Petals of Blood* is a detective<sup>1</sup> style novel which depicts the gloomy atmosphere that dominated the newly independent Kenya. In *Ngugi wa Thiong'o: An Exploration of his Writings* Cook and Okenimkpe (1983) argue that “*Petals of Blood* is the first of Ngugi’s novels which is fairly and squarely about independent Africa” (90). It sheds light on the corruption and the unfair exploitation of the poor peasants and workers by the bourgeoisie. The novel balances between the present and the past relying on the characters’ memories and flashbacks. The events take place in three different phases; pre-colonial age, colonial phase, and postcolonial era. In *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngugi writes:

*Petals of Blood* had taken a stage further the techniques of flashbacks, multiple narratives, voices, movement in time and space and parallel biographies and stories. The technique allowed me to move freely in time and space through the centuries and through all the important landmarks in Kenya’s history from the early times and back to the twelve days duration of the present of the novel. (77)

Ngugi draws a historical line to investigate the similarities between Kenya’s past and present. This is why Wanja, Nyakinyua, Abdulla, Munira, and Karega arrive to the discovery of a shared humiliating past. Brendon maintains that “*Petals of Blood* undertakes an aesthetic of reconnection with the aim of overthrowing global oppression by mobilizing global dissent” (118). This reconnection is made by the author to confirm Edward Said claim that colonialism is “fate with lasting, indeed grotesquely unfair results” (“Representing the Colonized” 207).

Published in 1977, *Petals of Blood* begins with the arrests of Munira, Abdulla and Karega in connection with the murder of three prominent personalities – Chui, Mzigo, and Kimeria – who are the African directors of Theng’eta Breweries and Enterprises Ltd. The three are burnt to death in a warehouse that Wanja runs and so a police officer goes to interrogate Wanja in the hospital where she is still lying in shock after the arson. In the rest of the story, as Inspector Godfrey solves the murder mystery, the novel explores socio-economic issues that characterize the grounds on which the characters of the story interact. The story makes use of flashbacks to show how each of the four murder suspects – Abdulla, Munira, Wanja and Karega – went to live in

---

<sup>1</sup> By generic convention, the detective novel culminates in an act of nomination, when the processes of deduction combine to name the criminal (Nichols 119). Udumukwu (2006) posits that “*Petals of Blood* is a detective novel because the action moves in a circle, which brings somewhere very close to the denouement. (171)

Ilmorog, the scene of murder and the central setting of the novel. Each of the characters has a motive to have murdered the three directors.

Set in Ilmorog, a forgotten and deprived village facing drought, poverty, and famine, the novel focuses on the lives of four characters; Wanja, Munira, Abdulla, and Karega. These characters represent the society's different categories. Meanwhile, each character is victim of the social injustice. Abdulla is a disabled Mau Mau veteran who struggles as a lowly trader in a corrupt country increasingly hostile to his record of the heroic struggle during the years of Emergency. He stands for the heroes who fought the British yet who now see all that they fought for being put on one side. Karega and Munira are untrained teachers at the local primary school. They were students at Siriana where they have been expelled for opposing the colonialist headmaster Cambridge Fraudsham. These two characters represent the honest intellectual masses in Kenya who remain unaffected by the corrupted atmosphere. Munira comes from a wealthy family. He refuses to follow his siblings who all pursue elite education and prestigious career. He chooses to teach at New Ilmorog Primary School, a deprived school where its inspector finds it difficult to find teachers and conduct regular classes. Munira fulfils his teaching tasks and duties while remaining passive and apolitical.

In all Ngugi's novels there must be a character who seems to speak on the behalf of the author. In *Petals of Blood* Ngugi's revolutionary thought is represented through Karega. He is unrepentantly militant. He remains well read due to the library that he acquires from a wealthy but hard-working Nairobi Lawyer. He sharply criticizes the elite educational institution in Kenya. Karega feels that these institutions are responsible for the neocolonial exploitation and oppression. In this respect, he develops an alternative politically engaged pedagogy at school. He empowers the inhabitants of Ilmorog and organizes an epic journey to seek redress in the capital, Nairobi. The painful march proves to be successful as they meet the government officials including the corrupt Ilmorog member of parliament Nderi wa Riera who promises the delegation to find solutions that make an end to famine. Nevertheless, the march leads to a disastrous ending since Ilmorog is opened up for rapacious capitalist exploitation in the name of renewed development.

Wanja represents the Kenyan women who are subject to exploitation and injustice. She was forced to drop out of school after an unplanned pregnancy. She works

as a barmaid, a gendered menial job rife with exploitation and abuse. Following years of exploitation in the capital, she moves to Ilmorog to live with her grandmother Nyakinyua. In Ilmorog she sleeps with Munira but their relationship seems adrift. Consequently, she dates and falls in love with Karega. Her interest in his idealism and militancy envies Munira who fires the radical lawyer. Karega's departure leaves Wanja bereft. Helpless and defeated by the forces of modernity and Ilmorog's renewal, Wanja joins her erstwhile enemies and opens up a brother and a bar.

One of the major issues that the novel tackles is the discrepancy between the level of poverty and the relative wealth of the businessmen and landowners in Kenya following independence. Ngugi wages an intellectual war against a system which perpetuates inequality. The novel depicts a torn nation and a divided society in which the majority of the masses are under the mercy of the powerful minority. The propertied class is revealed as retaining its position of privilege by acting as agents and protectors of foreign investment. The Trans-African road linking Nairobi and Ilmorog to the many cities of the continent becomes the means by which the wealthy can increase their wealth at the expense of the poor peasants and workers. Foreign investment extracted large profits in which the masses had no share. This capitalist system is the reason behind the masses' misery. In *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngugi asserts that imperialism has proved its power to "annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle... It even plants serious doubts about the moral rightness of struggle." (3). Imperialism and capitalism are the major thematic concern of the novelist through his masterpiece. In *Writers in Politics*, Ngugi writes:

This is what I was trying to show in *Petals of Blood*: that imperialism can never develop our country or develop us Kenyans. In doing so, I was trying to be faithful to what Kenyan workers and peasants have always realized, as shown by their historical struggle since 1895. (97)

### **7.3. A Marxist-Fanonist Interpretation of the Novel: Elitism, Capitalism, and Class Struggle**

*Petals of Blood* is a literary bomb-shell. Its literary and political weight is stemmed from the author's political commitment which is highly anti-European. The novel inscribes African cultural ideology within a narrative form which responds to the European novel standards. In his article "Ngugi's Comic Vision", Roger Berger (1989) maintains that the novel is a transitional text in which the author struggles "to discover

anew vision for his audience”, a vision portrayed through “the comic elements” (9-10). The satirical weight of the novel suggests that the author entered a new phase of his literary commitment. Killam accounts for the influence of Karl Marx and Frantz Fanon on Ngugi. In this respect he writes:

It is Marx who articulates a political and economic philosophy which will suit Ngugi's conviction about post-independent Kenyan development. It is Fanon who places the thinking of Marx in the African context. (Qtd. in Lindfors 11)

*Petals of Blood* marks Ngugi's first steps towards Marxist-Fanonism. In *African Literature as Political Philosophy*, M.S Okolo argues that the novel is a “fictional account of Marx's history of class struggles” (103). Throughout the story, the novelist balances between Fanonist and Marxists perspectives. Commenting on the novel's position in African fiction and Ngugi's literary career, Palmer admits that it is easily [Ngugi's] most representative novel since it “incorporates all the major preoccupations of his career as a novelist” and “all the major preoccupations of the African novel from its beginnings to the present day” (“Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*” 271). It begins as a Fanonist text in the sense that it reveals the state of depression, agony, and waste that characterizes, using Fanon's term, the “empty shell” decolonization. Meanwhile, the author's introduction of the black bourgeoisie as a reincarnation of the Western bourgeoisie has another Fanonist weight. Simultaneously, Ngugi's critical interpretation of the capitalist system is derived from the writings of Karl Marx and his followers.

As a fictional account of Marx's history of struggle, *Petals of Blood* sheds light on the struggle for the land ownership. The history of conflicts and struggles, which forms the basis of Ngugi's writing, is the result of colonialism. In most of African literary works that deal with postcolonial experiences, the colonial context always serves as a major backdrop against which the postcolonial phase is examined. According to James Ogude, the land is “an important metaphor for explicating Kenya's past and present” (28). Ngugi uses the land as a metaphorical example of the Kenya's mobility. The shift from colonialism to neocolonialism is understood by the fact that the land which was controlled by the white colonizer is currently under the control of the black bourgeoisie.

The position of the land determines and identifies the position of the workers and peasants. It is actually controlled by compradors like Kimeria, Mzigo, Chui, and

Nderi. Ngugi uses the term “wasteland”, a philosophical term initiated by T.S Eliot, to suggest the dehumanized atmosphere in the newly independent Kenya. The term can also be understood as a reference to the state of the masses. In *Writers in Politics*, Ngugi (1981) argues that the novel is about the peasants and workers who “have built Kenya, and who, through their blood and sweat, have written a history of grandeur and dignity and fearless resistance to foreign economic, political and cultural domination” (98). In this challenging path, Ngugi creates a solid foundation not only for African countries but also for all the colonized nations. The novel sheds light on characters whose conduct is rooted in concrete material history and changing social conditions.

By determining the position of the land, Ngugi reflects the structure of Kenyan society. The land is controlled by the petite-bourgeoisie who also manipulates the commoners. Accordingly, the author skillfully introduces his readers to the clash between the bourgeois (upper-class) and the proletarians. The new structure, Ngugi would say, is the result of the adoption of capitalism which widens the gap between the rich and the poor. Moreover, Ngugi assumes that one of the consequences of capitalism is “the turning of peasants into proletarians by alienating them from the land.” (*Writers* 94)

Ngugi is known for his purposeful comparison between the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial phases. Precolonial age was an era of peace as it was devoid of any turmoil and conflict until the advent of colonialism. Ilmorog, which is the actual setting of injustice, was the land of glory and peaceful coexistence between the natives:

Ilmorog, the scene of the unfolding drama, had not always been a small cluster of mud huts lived in the only by old men and women and children with occasional visits from wandering herdsmen. It had its days of glory: thriving villages with a huge population of sturdy peasants... In those days, there were no vultures in the sky waiting the carcasses of dead workers, and no insect-flies feeding on the fact blood of unsuspecting toilers. (*POB* 145)

Colonialism changed the situation. Europeans robbed the farmers of the ‘virgin soil’ they needed for shifting cultivation. Trapped in farming with poor implements, their production declined drastically. The youths were lured by better facilities to work on European farms. As soon as the colonial government began to introduce taxes, the natives sold their labor to European farmers to earn money. What they earned through sweated labor went to the colonizer as tax. Since Western countries were highly industrialized, Africans were taught to copy the West and adopt their way of life and the

paraphernalia that goes with it. During the war, Africans were introduced to the white man's metal money. Following the war, those who took part in the struggle were no longer interested in the farms. Hence, they preferred to work for the Europeans so as to earn the white man's metal which they spent on taxes and other "useless things of the foreigner" (*Petals* 123). Accordingly, the novel considers the attempt to adopt the characteristics of Western societies as the main weakness of African societies.

Events in the novel shift from the colonial age to the neo-colonial phase. The native expected that independence would lead to vigorous programs of development to lift Africa from dependency, underdevelopment, social injustice, mental inferiority and distortion of culture. Anne McLinton believes that "colonialism returns at moments of disappearance...in a world situation in which severe inequalities persist in older colonial forms or their neo-colonial reconfigurations" (qtd. in Dirilik 83). Similarly, Ngugi argues that neo-colonialism means the continued economic exploitation of Africa's total resources by "international monopoly capitalism through sustained creation and maintenance of subservient weak capitalistic economic structures, captained or supervised by a native ruling class" (*Writers* 24). Neo-colonialism, in Ngugi's novels, is restored by a group of ex-collaborators and traitors who inherited exploitation and injustice from their European Masters.

Nderi wa Riera, the MP representing the waste Ilmorog, is one of the traitors who do not differ from the colonizer. In the novel, the reader is told that he adopts the colonizer's ethical code of "greed and accumulation" (*POB* 163). All his intention is taken up in enriching himself and ingratiating himself with the West. Nderi accepts offers of directorships in foreign-owned companies, and diverts the money he collects from his constituents for a water project as a security for further loans which permit him to buy shares in companies, invest in land, in housing and in small business. Nderi advocates "the need for people to grow and face reality. Africa needs capital and investment for real growth—not socialist slogans" (*POB* 209). Through Nderi, Ngugi echoes Fanon's claim that "the psychology of national bourgeoisie is that of businessman, not of captain of industry" (*The Wretched of the Earth* 150).

The aim of nationalization project by the postcolonial elites is to consolidate its political and economic base. According to Cabral:

In post-colonial Africa, the leadership group is made up for the most part of petit-bourgeois nationalists who on the whole, were more interested in replacing Europeans in the leading positions of power and privilege than in effecting a radical transformation of the state and the society around it... (*Unity and Struggle* 136)

Nderi forms the *Kiama-kamwene* Cultural Organization with his friends to “bring unity between the rich and the poor and bring cultural harmony to all the regions” (*POB* 85). The poor are compelled to take an oath (tea drinking) that will protect the riches of the elites. The tea is not free and the poor are forced to pay twelve shillings and fifty cents. Hence, the loot collected from the mass tea drinking goes to make the few rich richer. In fact, the aim of KCO is not to improve the village and solve the masses’ problems. It has been created by Nderi to “strengthen progressive cooperation and active economic partnership with imperialism.” (*POB* 186)

Nderi’s first step toward the modernization of Ilmorog is marked by linking the village with other cities through the Trans-Africa road. The road has been “built, not to give reality to the vision of the continent” (*POB* 311), but to facilitate the transportation and therefore fulfill the desires of making more money with the help of foreign experts. Gikandi argues that “the power of Ngugi’s novel, however, lies in its complicated and contradictory representation of the process of change (in modernity) and the diverse responses it triggers among different subjects and classes” (*POB*140). Although the road has been established to create a new thriving modern village, Ngugi depicts it as a reason of decline. Nderi reinforces the misery of the masses by destroying their huts that stand in the way of the road. Mwathi’s place, an important monument, is razed to the ground. This destruction wipes out the villagers’ past represented by the rings, metal work, spears and smelting works found in the place.

The Chiri country council’s decision to establish a shopping centre at Ilmorog has deprived the natives from their rights of cultivating the land. Due to Nderi’s project, the reader is told, “every prominent person in the country owned a bit of Ilmorog: from the big factory to the shanty dwelling” (*POB*334). As a result, peasants are compelled into “hiring themselves out to any who needed their labor for a wage” (*POB*273). The project prevents Abdulla and Wanja from the ownership of Theng’eta breweries. Instead, it is Mzigo, Kimeria, and Chui who have the monopoly and the right to brew Theng’eta. Moreover, their bar and meat-roasting centers are closed to provide the right environment for the tourist centre owned by Nderi and his foreign partner. The

Utamaduni Cultural Tourist Centre is built to entertain “Watali from USA, Japan, West Germany, and other parts of Western Europe” (*POB334*). Consequently, Abdulla is forced to sell oranges and sheepskin on the street for the tourists.

Kenyan politicians are traitors and hypocrites. Nderi’s hypocrisy is illustrated through marginalization of the masses’ concerns. His promise of developing Ilmorog is a step toward decadence and deprivation. Ilmorogians have been obliged to register their lands to acquire title deeds which secure their property with the banks without being informed about its consequences. Peasants who benefited from the bank’s offers of loans are actually unable to give back the money they borrowed. Thus, they are forced to sell their sweated labor in the market. This is another example that illustrates how neo-colonial regimes betray their masses. Everyone else in Ilmorog has been duped into taking loans on their land. Nyakinyua tries to fight back for her land that has been taken. She urges the villagers to rebel, yet it was only after her death that Wanja and Abdulla attempt to redeem her land by selling their business to Mzigo.

Modernity has completely reshaped the social life in Ilmorog. Nderi’s activities permit the few rulers to gain and increase their wealth. Kenyan capitalists have successfully re-shaped Ilmorog and transformed the primitive village into a “New Ilmorog”. The project is identified by building roads, Banks, Shopping Centre, Police station, brewery, and a church. Due to this rapid transformation the peasants have been displaced and dispossessed:

Ilmorog peasants had been displaced from the land: some had joined the army of workers, others were semi-workers with one foot in a plot of land and one foot in a factory, while others became petty traders in hovels and shanties they did not even own, along the Trans-Africa Road, or criminals and prostitutes who with their stolen guns and over-used cunts eked a precarious living from each and everybody—worker, peasants, factory owners, blacks, whites—indiscriminately. (*POB359*)

The most important result of modernity is the construction of a class-based society in which Nderi, Chui, Kimeria, and Mzigo are able to determine who eats, what, and where. The rich and the poor live in different residential areas. The poor migrants and floating worker, prostitutes, and small traders are located in ‘New Jerusalem’, while Cape Town is occupied by the wealthy aristocrats. Commenting on this situation, a character in the novel laments:

...this was the society they were building: this was the society they had been building since independence, a society in which a black few allied to other interests from Europe, would continue the colonial game of robbing others of their sweat, denying them the right to full flowers in air and sunlight. (POB348)

The village is described with such phrases as a 'deserted homestead', 'a forgotten village', and island of underdevelopment which after being sucked thin and dry was itself left standing, static, a grotesque distorted image of what peasant life was and could be" (POB220). This gloomy and dark atmosphere compelled Coke and Okenimpke to consider the novel as:

An exposé of the nature of capitalism, of the insensitivity, callousness, and insatiable ambition of those who control vested interests in order to gain power and wealth, impoverishing the underprivileged, imposing misery and suffering on the majority. (90)

James Ngugi perceives capitalism as a demonic product of colonialism which crushes every aspect of human life. He believes that liberating Kenya from the British colonizers does not mean the end of colonialism as long as the neocolonial powers dominate the political and economic scene. These forces reconstitute the colonial regime and impose their power over the masses. Keith Booker asserts that "Ngugi's major political concern is international capitalism's neocolonial exploitation of Kenya and the complicity of the postcolonial Kenyan regime in this exploitation" (43). Accordingly, the novel is a fatal stab at the heart of capitalism and imperialism in neo-colonial Africa. It attacks the socio-political reality in Africa, bribery, corruption and nepotism. It is a clear picture of Ngugi's struggle against the process of neocolonial powers and its impact on the marginalized workers and peasants whose legs were broken and limbed, their faces were mutilated, and their backs were stabbed in the anti-colonial resistance.

Marxists and feminists often find themselves on the same side in struggles for women's rights. Marxists have always championed female equality and women's right, while regarding women's oppression (like racial, national and other forms of special oppression) as something that cannot be eradicated without overturning the capitalist social system that nurtures and sustains it. Marxists assert that women's liberation is bound up with the struggle against capitalism because, in the final analysis, sexual oppression serves the material interests of the ruling class. Moreover, Marxist-feminism

discusses classism as the fundamental of women's oppression. In a view of that, Rosemarie Tong (2009) asserts that:

...classical Marxist feminists work within conceptual terrain laid out by Marx, Engels, Lenin, and other nineteenth-century thinkers. They regard classism rather than sexism as the fundamental cause of women's oppression..." (Feminist Thought: A more Comprehensive Introduction 96)

Marxist feminists believe that social class or social structure is the fundamental that causes discrimination of women. Female oppression, the most universal and deeply rooted form of social oppression, is a characteristic of capitalist society. In his groundbreaking 1884 study, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Frederick Engels observed that in societies based chiefly on hunting and gathering, where all members of the tribe worked, and all property was owned communally, women did not have second-class status. He noted further that the subordination of women arose alongside the development of distinct social classes based on private property. The conclusion that Engels drew from this is that male supremacy, which in varying forms has characterized all known civilizations, is not the product of hard-wired biological distinctions between the sexes, but rather a historically-determined phenomenon. Engels's observation that women did not have a second-class status concerns European women in the nineteenth and early twentieth century when society was divided into three main layers; upper, middle, and lower classes. The twenty-first century, the social structure witnessed a radical change. Capitalism divided society into two different classes: bourgeois, and proletarians. Within this context, the following section shows women's position within a capitalist society.

#### **7.4.The Literal and Figurative Meanings of Alienation: Women as a Second Class**

Ngugi introduces the evils of imperialism and its consequences in the mapping of New Kenya. In *Writers in Politics*, he states that one of its main results is "the turning of the peasants into proletarians by alienating them from the land" (94). The peasants and workers are deprived from the land and the means of production which cost them their blood and sweat. Munira, Karega, Wanja, and Abdulla retreat to Ilmorog to regain the sense of wholeness and identity they have each lost. Accordingly, they become catalysts in the transformation of a rural village into a commercially viable city swallowed up by the entrepreneurial greed of the capital. Therefore, the story is an

allegorical exploration of the devastating effects of capitalism on the national rural population.

Central to Marxism, feminism, and Marxist-feminism is the concept of alienation. Robert Heilbroner (2009) defines alienation as “a profoundly fragmenting experience .Things or persons who are or should be connected in some significant way are instead viewed as separate” (qtd in. Tong 98). Karl Marx and his followers consider human history as the history of struggles between classes; the oppressed and the oppressing. The most significant classes are the bourgeoisie; people who own land, resources, factories and other means of production and proletariat; people who work for wages. Marx believed that the system was unfair under capitalism; workers would become poorer and alienated. Reiss (1997) mentions that once workers are alienated from the products of their hands, they become powerless. It was Virginia Woolf who first tackled women’s financial issues in literature. In *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf put forth the question: “Why are women so poor?” Women, have typically held less property than men. Sometimes, as in classical ‘democratic’ Athens “women had no property at all.” (Dickenson 1)

Capitalist production entails class divisions and contradictions between the interests of not only of capitalist men and women, but also those of the capitalist women and propertyless women; among the latter, socioeconomic status differences create antagonisms between, for example, “middle-class” and working-class women. Martha Gimenez (2005) maintains that “as long as capitalism rules, propertyless women will remain oppressed because most men’s and women’s ability to satisfy their needs, reproducing themselves daily and generationally, will remain subordinate to the changing needs of capital accumulation.” (29) Marxist workers and women are presented in similar situations: alienated, exploited, and trapped. Alison Jaggar provided a two-system explanation of women’s oppression. Instead of identifying capitalism as the primary cause of women’s low status, she reserved this “honor” for patriarchy. Capitalism oppresses women as workers, but patriarchy oppresses women as women, an oppression that affects women’s identity as well as activity. In *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*, Rosemarie Tong argues that:

A woman is always a woman, even when she is not working. Rejecting the classical Marxist doctrine that a person has to participate directly in the capitalist relations of production to be considered truly alienated,

Jaggard claimed, as did Foreman, that all women, no matter their work role, are alienated in ways that men are not. (110)

In the same way waged workers may be alienated from the products on which they work, women, regarded simply as women, may also be alienated from the “products” on which they typically work. The concept of alienation that this chapter is concerned with is an economic one, and not the psychoanalytical Freudian or Foucauldian concepts on which many feminists have concentrated.

Unlike other African authors whose literary works devote less space to women, Ngugi wa Thiong’o is known for attributing major roles to women. He has been increasingly outspoken on the women’s plight, female equality, and their contribution to Kenya’s resistance history. For this reason, he has a long list of feminist supporters. In “Women as Guardians of the Tribe” Judith Cochrane argues that in Ngugi’s novels it is the Gikuyu women “rather than their menfolk who seem to have the better understanding of the needs of their own people and of the new Kenya, and who seem better able to reconcile those needs with traditional values and customs” (90). The strength of his female characters and their position attracted a cohort of critics. Boehmer assumes that in the field of Anglophone African fiction written by men, Ngugi’s women characters remain pioneers. He further states that in their strength of character, their spirit, and their self reliance, they are undoubtedly unique.” (“The Master’s Dance to the Master’s Voice” 39)

Central to Ngugi’s representation of women is the image of women as the guardians of the tribe. Nyakinyua, Wanja’s grandmother, is referred to as the “mother of men” (123). This is a clear sign that she occupies a prominent place in her society. Through Nyakinyua, Ngugi portrays the traditional woman who holds the values of the past to preserve the local culture. Her stories and heroes are drawn from the past. She recalls the durability of the people’s resistance heritage. She works as a link between the mythological past, the era of the Emergency, and the present of the novel. On their journey to Nairobi, Nyakinyua promotes the resistance spirit and nurtures the sense of collective identity. The narrator informs us that Ilmorog’s deterioration “was a community crisis needing a communal response. Nyakinyua was the spirit that guided them together.” (*POB* 123). She is an embodiment of the past; a past which neo-colonial historians corrupted. Therefore, Ngugi considers the mother of men as the community’s historian “singing their recent history.” (*POB* 209)

Nyakinyua is the link to history. She narrates the heroic deeds of Gikuyu men and women and those of her husband Njamba Nene. Besides she recreates the Theng'eta drink whose potency gave poets inspiration and "facilitated seers in their prophecies, and guaranteed men sexual prowess and barren women fertility" (*POB* 244). The drink is Ngugi's regeneration of the organic whole of Gikuyu heritage. The drink is later appropriated by the triumvirate Kimeria, Chui, and Mzigo who highjack and claim sole license to it. They give birth to an international corporation out of their capitalist greed and corruption.

As a matter of fact, the most painful experience regarding gender in *Petals of Blood* is that of Nyakinyua. The end of her story is sad and tragic. Kerega who had been away from Ilmorog for five years arrives and is getting filled in on what transpired between. Munira, the narrator of the scene, goes on at length about all the details, stories, and events, but when it comes to her end, he is so brief framing from the Bible: "And Jesus wept!...'She is dead' he added quickly, almost aggressively waking up from his memories." (*POB* 327)

Nyakinyua is one of the victims of capitalism. Due to the capitalist system which Nderi and his fellow have brought to Ilmorog, women, just like male peasants and workers, are doomed to occupy the second class. Rosemarie Tong maintains that due to the capitalist particular division of labor, "men seized the means of production; they became the "bourgeois" and women became the 'proletariat'" (181). This position, however, does not permit women to control the means of production. Instead in capitalist patriarchies, women are alienated from everything: the products of their labor and 'nature'. The new capitalist machine grabs Nyakinyua's land. The guardian of the tribe, who fails to repay the loan, gets no help:

Nyakinyua, the old woman, tried to fight back. She tramped from hut to hut calling upon the peasants of Ilmorog to get together and fight it out. They looked at her and shook their heads; Whom would they fight? The government? The Bank? KCO? The Party? Nderi [MP]? Yes who would they really fight? But she tried to convince them at all these were one and that she would fight them. Her land would never be settled by strangers. There was something grand, and defiant in women's action- she with her failing health and flesh trying to organize the dispossessed of Ilmorog into a protest. But there was pathos in the exercise. Those whose land had not yet been taken looked nervously aloof and distant. One or two even made disparaging remarks about an old woman not quite right in the head. Others genuinely not seeing the point of a march to Ruwa-ini or to the Big City restrained her. She could not

walk all the way, they told her. But she said: I'll go alone...my man fought the white man. He paid for it with his blood... I will struggle against these black oppressors...alone...alone. (*POB* 327-8)

Nyakinyua lacks the physical strength to put up the struggle as she is old and frail. Her will to assert herself as the rightful owner of her land is a defense of the right to land ownership. Land in this case is portrayed almost in spiritual sense as a cultural heritage to which a stranger is not entitled. As Gakwandi observes, injecting Kikuyus from their land signifies material deprivation as well as an attack on the people's traditions. Gakwandi further quotes Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya* to show that land implications go beyond the merely economic: "the earth as the 'mother' ...feeds the child through a lifetime; and...after death it...nurses the spirit of the dead for eternity" (112). Nyakinyua's death is a defiance of exploitation as culturally she would not want to be buried in someone else's land. She thinks she owes her late husband an explanation as to why she would not guard the land that the husband had secured for her through fighting the white man: "Nyakinyua died peacefully in her sleep a few days after the news of the bank threat...she had said that she could not think of being buried in somebody else's land: for what would her man say to her when she met him on the other side?" (*POB* 276). Being so closed to her grandmother, Wanja knows the spiritual link between her grandmother, herself and the land, and therefore sacrifices all she has to pay off the loan and in this way redeem Nyakinyua's land. Wanja's action defends the human dignity which would otherwise be lost through forced sale of their family land, and it goes further to defend the cultural rights of a people whose identification with their own land is important.

In Africa, innate biological differences between men and women are used to support social norms defining the adequate behavior of men and women and determine the differentiated economic, social, and political power between men and women. Gender roles are manifested in social rights and entitlements in a form which denies women equal economic and political empowerment and, in particular, women right to own land. The truth of gender discrimination in land ownership is women's lack of access to land which constitutes a major source and means of wealth creation and economic empowerment, hence women's vulnerability to poverty. According to Cagatay (2001), women are more vulnerable to poverty due to lack of "ownership and control of land, access to credit and income earned through work in the labor market" (*Trade, Gender, and Poverty* 14). Relevant literature has identified the relationship

between gender discrimination in land ownership and women's poverty. Christine Delphy believes that it is "women as economic agents who are excluded from the (exchange) market, not what they produce" (18). Nyakinyua's alienation from the land's ownership reveals that capitalism intensifies women's marginalization and perpetuates the patriarchal order by giving men the 'monopoly' to own, rule, and control the land.

The death of Nyakinyua occurs at time it does to herald the passing away of the old ways. When the homestead of the traditional sage, Mugo wa Mwathi, is razed flat by bulldozers, the shrines of traditional life is destroyed; the act that signifies to Nyakinyua and her peers that their time has passed. Nyakinyua and Muthoni in *The River Between* are the only females who die in Ngugi's novels. By the very realistic nature, their deaths enhance the already considerable stature of women in Ngugi's writings. Their deaths especially become ritual passages of an era in their societies, heralding the death of the old ways. Thus, Ngugi chooses Nyakinyua's plight as a symbol of the cultural devastation which follows the adoption of modern capitalism. In *Moving the Centre*, he argues that:

Imperialism, the conquest and the subjugation of the entire labor power of other countries by the concentrated capital, or money power, of another country came to realize that economic exploitation and the political domination of a people could never be complete without cultural and hence mental and spiritual subjugation. (60)

*Petals of Blood* reveals the extent to which women are subject to exploitation and subjugation not only by men but also by bourgeois women. As soon as Wanja enters the world of 'Eat or Be Eaten', she turns into a materialist woman grabbing like Nderi, Chui, Mzigo and other capitalist men. Proletarian women have little in common with bourgeois women, who are the economic, social, and political as well as sexual partners of the bourgeois men to whom they are linked. Bourgeois women are not united with proletarian women but with bourgeois men in defense of private property. Rosemarie Tong assumes that bourgeois women were capable of "oppressing both proletarian men and women. In a capitalist system, money is most often power." (104). By the end of the novel, Karega criticized Wanja for seeking to retain Nyakinyua's hut exactly as it had been during her life, that is, as a monument frozen in time. When a surprised Wanja reminds Karega that he used to obsess about the importance of the past, he responds:

True... but only as a living lesson for the present. I mean we must not preserve our past as a museum: rather, we must study it critically, without illusions, and

see what lessons we can draw from it in today's battlefield of the future and the present. But to worship it—no. Maybe I used to do it: but I don't want to continue worshipping in the temples of a past without tarmac roads, without electric cookers, a world dominated by slavery to nature. (*POB* 323)

David Cook and Michael Okenimkpe read the passage as Ngugi's moderation of an erstwhile authorial investment in the idea of a great past when all Africa controlled its own earth. As a Marxist, Ngugi, who speaks through Karega, is an advocate of the key ingredients of modernity—the rationalization of culture, the restoration of individual authority, and industrial progress. But as an African, Gikandi argues, he sees modernity as the primary threat to the culture" (142). On the one hand, the author seems to indicate that modernity arrives with a vengeance, threatening to sweep traditional values. On the second, however, Ngugi brings the reader full circle, returning at last to the social order of the precolonial village. By so doing, he rejects romantic nostalgia and returns to a village oriented to the future and eager for change.

Nyakinyua's pathetic story permits the author to successfully describe the effects and danger of capitalism. As it has been proved earlier, capitalism enhances the patriarchal order and excludes women from their rights of ownership and access to land. Economically, it worsened women's situation by making them poorer. Culturally, her dramatic end and Wanja's retention of the hut suggest that the old community is destroyed by the more advanced forces of industrial capitalism. Yet, Ngugi does not stop at the cultural and economic aftermath of capitalism. Instead, he also projects its social effect relying on Wanja's victimization.

### **7.5. Confiscating the Female Body in Capitalist Society**

*Petals of Bloodmarks* Ngugi wa Thiong'o's interest in bold and strong women characters like Wanja. Her significance lies in the fact that she expresses Ngugi's critical perception of postcolonial issues in Kenya. Wanja succeeds in areas where women literary figures traditionally do not. There are two versions of Wanja in the novel. On the one hand, she is portrayed as a woman who transcends traditional limitations, on the second hand, she is the victim of capitalist society. Her link with the land, her strength both as a mother and nurturer figure for the whole village, and her ability to forge her own destiny prove that she is a female figure rife with agency and power. In spite of the unpleasant memories that Nairobi holds for her, Wanja accompanies the villagers to complain about their miserable situation. Relying on her

experience in the domain of marketing, she forms with Abdulla a successful partnership to improve his business. She considers her final turn to whoredom as a solution to the problem she faces.

Wanja's uniqueness lies in her gradual change that occurs due to some circumstances. She carries hopes for African women and for their depiction in postcolonial African literature. As a primary school pupil she was referred to as Wanja kahii (a boy) as she was good in things which are considered to fall specifically within the male domain such as freewheeling, tree-climbing and maths. Accordingly, she is seen as unique and, in sense, naturally predisposed to subverting gender stereotypes. According to Deirdre Lapin Wanja is an "admirable, indeed heroic, character" ("Women in African Literature" (116). She is one of the main four characters used by Ngugi to dramatize his Marxist-Fanonist philosophy. Ngugi, Fanon, and Karl Marx idealize the revolutionary discourse and revolution of the agricultural working masses. Wanja's revolution against the exploitative forces lead Eustace Palmer to argue that she is "brave, resilient, resourceful and determined" ("Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* 278-9)

*Petals of Blood* reveals that women are still entrapped within the male-constructed identity of women as mere objects of sex and as naturally inferior. In spite of her strength, Wanja becomes an emblem of sexual exploitation. She considers her sexual organ as a curse and a source of slavery. She believes that a woman's life is predetermined. A woman has only two choices: marrying or whoredom: "If you have a cunt... if you are born with this hole, instead of being a source of pride, you are doomed to either marrying some or else being a whore" (*POB* 293). Yet, Wanja's assumption is misleading. It is true that the organ is a reason behind women's plight in Kenya. Yet, it is the social attitude toward womanhood and the construction of the female identity as the weaker sex which enslave her. Wanja's plight indicates that Ngugi considers capitalism as a new factor which enhances her slavery.

*Petals of Blood* is considered a fatal stab at the heart of capitalism and imperialism in neo-colonial Kenya. Its title suggests destruction, corruption, evil and the unnatural death. The imagery of flowering is given its due in the novel. The image is associated with Wanja. Brendon Nicholls argues that as 'a fallen woman, Wanja is repeatedly rendered in terms of imagery of deflowering' (*Ngugi wa Thiong'o* 129). The novel attacks the socio-political reality in Africa, bribery, corruption and nepotism. It is

a clear picture of Ngugi's struggle against the process of neocolonial powers and its impact on the marginalized women. Male domination and sexism persists in capitalist society, not only because men own and control the wealth and power, as well as all the major institutions of capitalism. In turn, the wealth of the capitalists and the success of their institutions depend upon women's oppression. The ideology of male chauvinism has a life of its own, which like racism today, has transcended its original material base. Male chauvinism or sexism is irrational in some senses. Sometimes there is no longer a material basis for sexist ideas and practices, but men and even women cling to them because they give a sense of confidence, security, importance, power or hope – no matter how illusory.

The principal image of Wanja which emerges throughout the novel is that of being a victim and subject to male bourgeois domination and capitalist forces. She epitomizes the dilemma that girls face in Kenya. Despite being a brilliant pupil in class, her pathetic and depressing story is the story of shattered hopes and paralysis. Narrating her story, Wanja captures the situation and conditions that women lived by:

But were always more confident about the future than us girls. They seemed to know what they wanted to become later in life: whereas with us girls the future seemed vague... it was as if we knew that no matter what efforts we put into our studies, our road led to the kitchen and to the bedroom. (*POB* 44)

Under this condition, it is no surprise when the wealthy former homeguard, her father's friend, Hawkins Kimeria assaults her sexually. She becomes pregnant and the vision of a bright and beautiful future evaporates like a mirage. Throughout the story, and within the context of capitalist aftermath, Ngugi problematizes sex and sexuality at three main levels: age, gender, and race.

Essentially, sexual exploitation on the basis of age is evident in the presence of underage girls working in Mombasa resorts with whom tourists have sexual relations. Wanja is equally a young girl when Kimeria deceives her into a sexual affair. She is a schoolgirl in her last year in primary school with expectations of joining high school upon scoring high marks in the final national examination. She becomes pregnant and hopes that Kimeria would marry her, she runs away from home before her mother could know about the pregnancy. Nevertheless, Kimeria evades responsibility for the pregnancy, claiming to be much older than Wanja and to be a Christian too. It is ironical that Kimeria who claims to be old enough to be Wanja's father and to be a Christian, a

religion that is opposed to sexual promiscuity, should engage in an adulterous relationship with minor. Wanja and the Mombasa girls have not attained the age at which they can consent to a sexual relationship therefore the men who relate this way with them are taking advantage of their age to abuse the sexual rights of the girls and to exploit these girls' bodies as objects of pleasure. Kimeria further abuses Wanja's right to education as she drops out of school.

Wanja runs to Nairobi where she kills her child due to some financial issues. She discovers that life in the city is harder. She has murdered her child in youthful confusion and desperation. In this respect, she is in many ways an unlikely "Madonna" figure, as evidenced in the volatile, loaded image chosen to represent this betrayal—a mother abandoning her own child in a latrine. Further, she joins the chains of others whose lives follow a predictable, albeit unpleasant pattern:

I was young... I have tried my hands at various jobs, but work in bars seems to be the one readily available to us girls—dropouts from school and CPE failures and even some dropouts from high schools. (*POB* 48)

Wanja kills her child because she does not want to raise him in a corrupted social milieu. Eastleigh in Nairobi is a hub of sex, drugs and alcohol. Her life becomes overlapped with pain, sorrow, void, and nothingness. At an epiphanical moment in the story, we are told that:

Struggling in the depths of such a void and emptiness, she would then suddenly become aware that in the long run it was men who triumphed and walked over her body, buying insurance against deep involvement with money and guilty smiles or in exaggerated fits of jealousy...she had come to find out that behind most faces was deep loneliness, uncertainty and anxiety and this would often make her sad or want to cry. (*POB* 67)

Wanja escapes from Nairobi in the hope of starting a new life where she could earn a decent living and at the same time to be useful to others. She runs back to Ilmorog to take residence with her grandmother. Nevertheless, following her grandmother's death, Karega's escape, and the advent of the new economic and social order in Ilmorog Wanja joins the world of whoredom.

Far from the city Wanja yearns for fulfillment in the traditional role of motherhood. Her main objective is to overcome her apparent emptiness and replace her discarded child. Her desire to be a mother can also be read as both a generalization of

the situation in Africa and as a specific allusion to women's history. The death of Wanja's first child as a symbol for the death of Kenya's children is clear. And the child's death at the hands of the mother is a distinct reference to the burgeoning Independent Kenya, which is quashed by those very heroes who once struggled to create and nurture it. Her return to Ilmorog makes her closer to Nyakinyua. Thus, she combines traditional and non-traditional lifestyles. She wins over the village stalwarts who approve of her willingness to soil her hands with honest work by bringing her knowledge of the bar-culture to bear on Abdulla's hitherto poorly equipped shop. She decides to help him make a reasonable profit and send Joseph to school.

Wanja becomes the emblem of success and leadership in old Ilmorog. The framing co-operative established by Wanja and Nyakinyua enhances the community's identity. Besides, her involvement with the Ndemi-Nyakinyua group gives her a new sense of women's collective spirit. Women and the rest of villagers come to feel "the stirrings of a new birth, an unknown power riding wings of fear and hope" (201). The narrator tells the reader that Munira feels drawn towards his community as if he is "on the verge of being inside things" (*POB* 201). It is the same Wanja whose admiration makes Abdulla put aside his past bitterness.

In spite of her strength and self determination, Wanja is still portrayed stereotypically. Although the repentant Wanja is kind to Joseph, empathetic in the extreme, and regretful of her tragic error, her mothering and nurturing behavior is not altogether consistent. Jennifer Evans states that Wanja "can at times be selfish, callous and vindictive" (59). She avenges herself on Munira in humiliating him by making him pay for sex with her (*POB* 279), fulfilling her promise to be "a hard woman . . . and somebody, either now or later, will have to pay" (*POB* 251). She is stereotypically portrayed as nurturing children and providing sex for men; Munira, Karega, Abdulla and later at Sunshine Lodge, Mzigo, Chui, and Kimera who become her clients. Her sensuality empowers her, yet it also makes her subject to abuse. However, she is less as an exploiter and more as a victim of the capitalist system and patriarchy.

Wanja has always been the agent for regeneration in others. Meanwhile, she finds in her sexual affairs chances for her own regeneration. She facilitates the sexual renewal of mankind through the agency of her body. She knows that women's lives are predetermined and that women are compelled to accept their sexual roles. Munira,

Karega, and Abdulla feel renewed after making love to her. Munira feels hopeful he will “harvest” Wanja (*POB* 41). Karega’s sexual affair with her is also depicted in regenerative terms as a flowering of new life. It endows him with a strong sense power to heal, power over death, power, power...” (*POB* 230). Abdulla also feels renewed when “it was his turn to feel the old world roll away” (*POB* 314). This is what makes him put aside all his painful experiences of the past. Wanja’s return to Ilmorog is a sort of ‘homecoming’. That homecoming has been driven by her desire to look for a cure for her pains. The nostalgic feeling sends back to the village seeking fulfillment through traditional means of motherhood, both in taking care of Joseph, and in her own pregnancy to Abdulla.

Ngugi’s depiction of Wanja before joining the world of capitalism suggests that she cannot escape her fate. On their march to Nairobi she meets for the second time Kimeria who destroyed her life at younger age. Her return to Ilmorog was an attempt to escape and forget her past. Yet, as long as the same Kimeria has become one of the black directors of Theng’eta Breweries, Wanja is doomed to never forget the past:

I could hardly accept this twist of fate...Kimeria, who had ruined my life and later humiliated me by making me sleep with him during our journey to the city... this same Kimeria was one of those who benefit from the new economic progress of Ilmorog. (*POB* 293)

At this level, Wanja is aware of her situation. She knows that she is trapped in a vicious circle from which there is no exit. Interviewed by Anita Shreve in 1977, Ngugi maintains that there are always possibilities of renewal and growth”, he says of Wanja; but only in a different kind of system” (36). This different kind of system is prostitution.

## **7.6. Prostitution in New Kenya: A Sign of Emancipation or Exploitation?**

In *The Prostitute in African Literature*, Senkoro asserts that critics and many writers in African literature have tended to avoid the issue of prostitution because it is viewed as a forbidden field that is circumscribed with rules and taboos. Therefore any writer who dares to venture in this field must break these rules and “justify his dealings with the forbidden ‘dirty’ subject of prostitutes and prostitution.”(ix). It is this taboo that Ngugi wa Thiong’o breaks. Indeed, Ngugi is among the few Kenyan and African authors who have unequivocally looked at the institutions of prostitution. He goes beyond the simple depiction of the issue to trace its roots and effects on society.

Besides, Ngugi revises and disavows both the male and the socio-cultural conception of the prostitute in Kenya.

According to Claire Robertson writing about women in the urban economy in Africa, shows that colonialism facilitated prostitution. Robertson believes that the establishment of towns by colonialists provided jobs only for men and not for women. This gender discrimination enhanced women's sufferance. Women were then left only with the choice of "employment opportunities such as provision of cooked food and prostitution." ("Women in the Urban Economy"44). Prostitution, therefore, became one of the earliest economically rewarding jobs for women especially in the case of Africa. Luise White, who has conducted extensive research on prostitution in Nairobi, asserts that this phenomenon existed in urban Kenya as early as the days before the turn of the twentieth century. White supports Robertson's idea that colonialists only provided jobs for men. Further, she maintains that with the absence of conventional employment opportunities, prostitution "enabled many women to earn money with which to acquire property" (*The Comfort Home* 1). She states that "women saw prostitution as a reliable means of capital accumulation [and] not as a despicable fate or a temporary strategy."(1-2). White shows that the work of prostitutes was like family labor because a prostitute would either choose to invest in an urban estate or buy her 'property' in the rural areas using the money earned from prostitution, or sometimes assist other members of the family.

The new economic and social order in Ilmorog enhances Wanja's victimization. As a matter of fact, African writers, including Ngugi, believe that the fall of traditional and tribal ties has led to the overall sexual exploitation of women. In "Images of Women in East African Fiction" Judith Cochrane argues that women become victims of social and political changes "which inevitably alter the fundamental patterns of traditional and family life because they alter attitudes, aspirations and visions of individual Africans" (36). Moreover, Cochrane puts forth the claim that "reforming ties of kinship, the reassertion of communal values, the preservation of traditional customs and responsibilities and their adaptation to a changing society, would appear to be what East African writers see as women's crucial tasks" (42-4). While attacking the political and economic structures that generate and maintain the oppression of one class by

another, Ngugi attempts to portray Wanja as a typical reflection of the material conditions of the exploited women in Kenya.

The question of what form was best suited to representing agents of social change appeared so urgent to Ngugi when he started writing *Petals of Blood*. He finds in women's predicament the best content of a literary work that reveals the postcolonial disillusionment. Ngugi employs Wanja as an archetypal victim of the neo-colonial policy. Moreover, her consciousness represents what the author considers to be the split between the dream of national consciousness and the 'empty shell' it has become as hopes and expectations give way to cynicism and disenchantment. Ironically, the novel reveals that Ilmorog is totally destroyed in the process of modernization and integration into the national economy. What one is supposed to understand is not the irony of progress itself; rather it is the class which takes on the responsibility for transforming the new village but ends up destroying it. The agents of bourgeois modernity in the novel - Chui, Mzigo, Kimeria - are part of the new postcolonial caste which, in Fanon's memorable terms is "not engaged in production, nor in invention, nor building, nor labor; it is completely canalized into activities of the intermediary type." (*Wretched* 149).

In Ngugi's postcolonial novels, Kenyan women are stereotyped and commodified to be sold in whorehouses. Wanja, as a girl who represents the dilemma that girls face in Kenya, becomes barmaid and a prostitute under the neo-colonial and imperialistic conditions. She is seduced as a schoolgirl by middle class Africans who consider her as an object of sexual pleasure. G. D. Killam states: "For Ngugi, Wanja represents- as all his women characters do- something larger than life; she stands for modern Kenyan womanhood" (*An Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi* 136). She becomes victim of local capitalists acting in conjunction with international capital in Ilmorog. She has been forced to sell their house to Mzigo. She cannot continue with Nyakinyua's business since the license has been cancelled and subsequently awarded to multinationals. In this respect, the author tries to alert his people and reader to realize the causes of prostitution.

Ngugi attributes the causes of moral decadence of Kenyan and other African women to the bourgeois. He invokes the prostitutes themselves to feel the causes of their moral decadence and to fight against them. Wanja is victim of being thrown in a

world where people's slogan is "eat or you are eaten". Outside her home, she is considered as a sexual doll and in her home she lives through violence with her family. She lives in conflicts with the capitalist mentality of her father who is singing and worshipping the British and their capitalist ways. She states:

You eat or you are eaten. How true I have found it. I decided to act, and I quickly built this house ... Nothing would I ever let for free ... I have many rooms, many entrances and four yards ... I have hired young girls ... it was not hard ... I promised them security ... and for that ...they let me trade their bodies... (*POB* 293)

Wanja becomes a typical reflection of the material conditions of the 'wretched' women. She improves her financial situation not only by prostituting her body, but also by putting those of other women into her service. In this respect, Wanja gradually becomes a bourgeois woman. Reed believes that bourgeois women were capable of "oppressing both proletarian men and women. In a capitalist system, money is most often power." (qtd. in Tong 104). Capitalism leads to a social Darwinian atmosphere. Wanja's diction 'eat or you are eaten' echoes Darwin's notion of the survival of the fittest. Wanja, in this respect, seizes places within the nascent capitalist economy. James Ogude argues that she subverts colonial enterprise through her social networks with her call-girls, and her relationships with the new capital engendered by capitalism." (*Ngugi's Novels and African History* 118). By putting her body and those of the girls into the service of the clients, Wanja makes the reader see the exploitation which is based on gender. This is the second level of exploitation that Ngugi's novel deals with. Exploitation on the basis of gender is evident in the case of the girls in the Mombasa resorts who are perceived as sexual objects. Wanja and the girls are exploited as women. Therefore, this becomes a violation of human rights based on gender differences. It is a case of men taking advantage of women due to gender differences.

The debate on whether prostitution is a means of emancipation or a sign of imprisonment is puzzling. Radical feminist writers consider prostitution as a means of emancipation. However, in Ngugi's context, the author seems to agree with De Beauvoir that prostitution is a path to entrapment and slavery. Simon De Beauvoir's analysis of the prostitute was complex. She asserts that the prostitute is a paradigm for woman as the other, as object, as the exploited one. Further, De Beauvoir believes that the prostitute, like the man who purchases her services, is a self, a subject, an exploiter. She prostitutes herself, suggested de Beauvoir, not simply for the money but for the

homage men pay to her “otherness.” Unlike men’s wives and girlfriends, prostitutes get something for yielding their bodies to men’s dreams: “wealth, and fame. Conceding that the so-called streetwalker often sells her body because it is the only thing she has to sell, de Beauvoir stressed that in contrast the ‘hetaera’ (prostitute), who regards her whole self as capital, usually has the upper hand in a relationship. Men need her more than she needs them. De Beauvoir’s point seems to be that even if the hetaera, like the wife and the mother, cannot escape being the other. (qtd. in Tong 185)

In *Petals of Blood* prostitutes cannot escape being the other. The third level of sexual exploitation that the novel deals with is the exploitation which is based on race. This image is palpable in the cases where Europeans oppress and exploit Africans. In other words, this kind of exploitation is evident in the case of sexual exploitation of the girls and Wanja by foreigners. The narrator observes that the two resorts in Mombasa, whose ownership is associated with Nderi, are “special places where even an aging European could buy an authentic African virgin girl of fourteen to fifteen to the price of a ticket to a cheap cinema show” (*POB* 175). A German tourist lures Wanja into his house to force her into a sexual activity with his dog. By forcing Wanja to mate with an animal the tourist robs her of her humanity which requires that sexual relations be confined to fellow human beings. The German tourist dehumanizes Wanja by placing her on the same plane with animals. The case is an abuse not only of her right to choose a partner in sexual relations but also of her humanity. Racial exploitation thrives on the assumption that the Europeans are superior to Africans.

Prostitution reflects the economic situation of the country. In the light of poverty women were compelled to sell their bodies and guarantee food and money for their families. In this respect, Luise White states that:

...prostitutes worked intensively for relatively short periods—measured in years, however—to revive the failing economies of their families of origin. These women willingly accepted—indeed, many sought—the mean conditions of wazi-wazi work because almost all the monies so earned could be funneled back to their parents. (*Comforts* 20)

Prostitution is the product of poverty. Following White’s claim, prostitutes are the primary economic sources for their families. It is the main source of capital accumulation available to women in the postcolonial era. Wanja considers prostitution an occupation that does not differ from any other jobs. Addressing Karega, Wanja asks:

“What is the difference whether you are sweating it out on a plantation, in a factory or lying on your back anyway?” (*POB* 293). She uses the money to save Nyakinyua’s land, which is of vital philosophical importance to both herself and Karega, and to Gikuyu tradition, even if she uses it for the wrong reasons—“[H]ow could I have let this land go to the African Economic Bank [. . .]. Even if I had to sell myself over and over again” (*POB* 325). She also puts Joseph through school, believing it to be “the only good thing she had ever done” (*POB* 328). Accordingly, Wanja is a caretaker of her adopted family, of Abdulla and Joseph, and as one who upholds Nyakinyua’s traditions.

Within the class-struggle context, the figure of the prostitute is appreciated by some critics who consider the ‘Jazebel’ as a heroine. David Cook and Michael Okenimkpe argue that the most enigmatic aspect of Wanja’s life:

...is her exultant assertion of prostitution as a weapon for revenge in the new Ilmorog. She now has other options, but she prefers to set up her perfected brothel in Sunshine Lodge and to outface all those who have belittled and degraded her and her sisterhood. (111)

Similarly, Palmer argues that Wanja is:

... a practical realist who recognizes that in order to survive in this new society one must be prepared to use its weapons. Mere idealism will never do. Like Karega, we may not agree with her methods, but we can certainly appreciate her reasons. (279)

Ngugi is cognizant of the thin line he walks between Wanja as fully taken in by the capitalist advantages offered by prostitution and her truth to herself and her own ideals. This awareness becomes expressed in Wanja’s “painful” recognition of the dangerous the barmaid profession holds for her, despite her desire to leave it:

She was somehow sure of her power over men: she knew how they could be very weak before her body. Sometimes she was afraid of this power and she often had wanted to run away from bar kingdoms. But she was not really fit for much else and besides, she thought with a shuddering pain of recognition, she had come to enjoy the elation at seeing a trick—a smile, a certain look, maybe even raising one’s brow, or a gesture like carelessly brushing against a customer—turn a man into a captive and a sighing fool [. . .] she would then suddenly become aware that in the long run it was men who triumphed and walked over her body buying insurance against deep involvement with money and guilty smiles or in exaggerated fits of jealousy. She would often seek somebody in whom she could be involved, somebody for whom she could care and be proud to carry his child. For that reason she had somehow avoided direct trading, and that was why she had run away from her cousin who had wanted her straight in the market. (*POB* 56)

Capitalism makes it possible for Wanja to emancipate herself from male domination. The new capitalist forces permit a degree of female economic independence. It is because she has failed to fight domination in the traditional context that Wanja switches into a capitalist prostitute.

Prostitution suggests that women's plight does not differ from that of the working class. Wanja's statement to Karega that there is no difference whether you are sweating it out on a plantation, in a factory or lying on your back' indicates that women's sexual exploitation is similar to that of male working class. Wanja's manipulation of women is confusing. At this level, however, Ngugi wants to argue that women were also partners of bourgeois men in oppressing proletariat men and women. In this respect, the reader is supposed to understand that Wanja, who represents the oppressed women, has also succumbed to the values and principles of capitalism and capitalist exploitation. Thus, instead of siding with exploited in the struggle, she switches into a capitalist exploiter, and hence becomes a traitor. As a thriving madam, obviously equipped with an extremely longsuffering body, Wanja becomes a ready symbol for the ravaged state of Kenya.

In the last chapters, Ngugi introduces a new Wanja who is guilty because she has been an exploiter. Her courage and resourcefulness in turning her exploitation as a woman and as a member of the oppressed classes to her advantage is finally discredited. As Karega self-righteously makes explicit, thereby laying down male law, her struggle means very little because her method of resistance is simply to exploit in return. His final word is one of condemnation; no possibility of negotiation and certainly no expression of tenderness are permitted. And yet at times the only way in which Wanja was able to survive was 'to sell [herself] over and over again' (*POB* 325). Her immense resilience is recognized, but in the last pages of the novel the priority is given to the workers' struggle. In "Mother Africa and the Heroic Whore" Jennifer Evans asserts that Wanja's confrontation with Karega is really "a confrontation with herself, where she imagines the possibility of re-channeling her ambitions and strengths in a manner more consistent with Ngugi's choice of resistance (61). Wanja's change is felt at a given epiphanical moment as she felt the stirrings of a new person...She had been after all been baptized by fire" (*POB* 337). Fire, in Ngugi's novels, is a redemptive force. Metaphorically, fire stands for Wanja's inner forces; the power of retaliation and revenge.

Revenge is the only option left to Wanja to purge herself from the immoral past. Only then, Ngugi would say, can the prostitute Wanja be liberated. In Ngugi's thought it is the political commitment which defines the citizen's morality. To clarify, one may say that the author's attitude toward prostitution is neutral. The author does not condemn or exclude them from the social structure. Throughout the story, we feel that the author sympathizes with the prostitutes. He does not blame them; instead Ngugi believes that they are victims of the wrong adopted system. Furthermore, Ngugi urges Kenyan prostitutes to side with the oppressed in the battle to usher in a new social order, 'bringing to an end the reign of the few over the many...Then, only then, would the kingdom of man and woman really begin.' (*POB*344). Accordingly, Evans claims that "it would be a mistake to see Wanja simply as an innocent victim. Her potential is wasted and she is exploited, but she also exploits others, most obviously in running her own whorehouse." (58)

Wanja finally decides to reject her prostitution in the hope of something new. She employs her strength and self-determination to kill the man who has been so instrumental in her humiliation, and thereby move to set her new life in motion. In fact, it is her position as a prostitute which enables her to become indirectly complicit in the deaths of Chui and Mzigo, who might have escaped the "burning whorehouse had she not locked their doors" (*POB* 329). On her decision to kill Kimeria, the omniscient narrator in the story tells us that Wanja already knew that "He must die, a voice thudded within, he must die. It was simple. It was bitterly sweet" (*POB* 157). Just like a femme-fatal, she uses her body and sexuality to renew her link with Kimeria, Mzigo and Chui. This is how she succeeds in "realizing her lifelong will to avenge herself, settling a debt "with the world, out there" (*POB* 78). By so doing, she simultaneously avenges Karega, whose brother was murdered by Kimeria, and Abdulla who was betrayed by Kimeria. They both promised to destroy Kimeria and his conspirators Mzigo and Chui, but failed to do so. Moreover, Wanja avenges not just herself, Karega, and Abdulla, but also Munira, Nyakinyua, and the entire village of Ilmorog whose land has been co-opted and stolen by these three villains.

### **7.7. Reflecting the Nation through the Body**

The exploitation and trauma of the colonized nation have often been written upon the female body, and in turn the land has been accorded feminine characteristics.

European colonizers talked of their divine, patriotic mission to penetrate virgin lands in order to inseminate them with the seed of civilization. In Fredric Jameson's terms, postcolonial literary works are 'national allegories'. What distinguishes them as a special class within African literature is that in each case it is 'the private individual destiny' of a female figure that serves as 'an allegory of the embattled situation of the public...culture and society' (qtd. in Stratton 41). The dominant image of Africa's fecundity was not denied in African discourse, as the trope of Mother Africa has been common in anti-colonial and nationalist struggle. African literature is known for the metaphorical use of female body that works as a marker of the sociopolitical problems of the nation. In this regard, Boehmer argues, 'the woman (...) figure stands for the national territory and for certain national values: symbolically she is ranged above the men; in reality she is kept below them' (29)

*Petals of Blood* is one of the African novels in which women are closely related to the land. Their sexuality and their reproductive skills are linked with the agricultural capacity of the land. In the novel references to this gendered mode are clearly made by the peasant Njuguna who points out to the virginity of the land saying that "The land seemed not to yield much and there was now no virgin soil to escape to as in those days before colonialism" (*POB* 9). As a teacher, Munira is able to note that women are inseparable from the land. Among all the female characters, Wanja is one whose link with the land is apparently declared by the narrator and other characters. It is through sex that Keraga aligns Wanja with the land. As they have intercourse, the narrator tells us that "so many experiences, so many discoveries in a night and a half. Harvest time for seeds planted in time past." (*POB* 234)

Wanja's prominent place in the text lies not only in her relation to the land, but also in her attempt to bring life back to the soils of Ilmorog. She organizes a women's collective work force to till the earth. This is what allows her to reap its bounty as it finally yields a harvest. Palmer asserts that her "dynamism and vitality are suggested by her association with the fields and the plains" (qtd. in Killam 278-9). Wanja associates herself with the land in her response to Munira as she says "I feel I am about to flower" (*POB* 251). For Abdulla, she becomes his promised land:

[F]or him now, a woman was truly the other world: with its own contours, valleys, rivers, streams, hills, ridges, mountains, sharp turns, steep and slow climbs and descents, and above all, movement of secret springs of life. Which explorer, despite the boasts of men, could claim to have touched every corner

of that world and drunk of every stream in her? Let others stay with their own worlds: flat, grey, without contours, unexpected turns, or surprises—so predictable. A woman was a world, the world. (*POB* 315)

Femininity and sexuality are constructed through the tropes of ‘harvesting’ and ‘flowering’. By the time the rains begin, she becomes particularly sexualized through her association with the earth. The narrator tells us that “Wanja was possessed of the rain-spirit. She walked through it, clothes drenched, skirt-hem tight against her thighs, reveling in the waters from heaven” (*POB* 196). For a cohort of critics, Wanja is used by Ngugi as a trope, or the archetypal nature of her characterization. The feminist Eustace Palmer, for example, who writes in such glowing terms of Wanja, nonetheless identifies Ngugi’s use of her as an allegory for Kenya and Africa:

The drought is also political, spiritual, economic and emotional, as with Wanja who, yearning after a release from barrenness, becomes restless and moody in proportion to the aridity of the environment. The drought generally refers to the people’s deprivation of all those things that should make life meaningful. (273)

Similarly, Govind Narain Sharma argues that Wanja “is the spirit and earth of Kenya, humiliated, exploited and ill-used” (302). Out of this affirming acceptance of Ngugi’s use of Wanja as trope, we are compelled to question Ngugi’s intention behind the use of Wanja as a trope as far as his literary commitment is concerned.

In Gikuyu tradition the female body is associated with land and land transfer. According to Cora Ann Presley, woman’s body in Gikuyu tradition works as a marker of purity. She gives the example of their presence in ceremonial occasions as symbols of purification. As symbol of purity, one is supposed to question the paradoxical association of Wanja’s sexuality and purity. In other words, how can the prostitute Wanja stand as a symbol of purity? Presley does not state that only virgin women were considered as correct subjects of purity. Bases on this assumption, Bonnie Roos goes further to state that in her closeness to the land, Wanja fulfills a specifically “Gikuyu ideal in depriving purity from the lands and working it together with other women” (157).

The conversion of the Mother Africa trope into a prostitute metaphor is itself a recurring feature of the contemporary tradition in men’s fiction. Having already interpreted the relationship between Wanja and the land, one is able to maintain that Wanja’s story serves as an index of the state of the Kenyan nation and Africa. Therefore, Ngugi conflates in Wanja’s body the figure of Africa as a mother and whore.

Wanja represents the nation's moments of degradation in her portrait as abused womanhood and an allegorical parallel to the postcolonial phase in Africa. She acquiesces in her complete degradation by adopting the '[e]at or you are eaten' (*POB* 293) ideology of her oppressors: she becomes a whorehouse madam. Through Karega, another of Wanja's early lovers, Ngugi explicitly relates prostitution and national degradation:

[I]n a world of grab and take, in a world built on a structure of inequality and injustice, in a world where some can eat while others can only toil, some can send their children to schools and others cannot...in a world where a man who has never set foot on this land can sit in a New York or London office and determine what I shall eat, read, think, do, only because he sits on a heap of billions taken from the world's poor, in such a world, we are all prostituted. (*POB* 240)

Thus, Ngugi employs Wanja as a trope, as a stand-in for all Kenya, beautiful and strong, exploited and tarnished.

## 7.8. Conclusion

Alexandra Kollontai, a leader of the Russian women's liberation movement, and a member of the Bolshevik Party argued that women faced special oppression, and that special oppression was based upon the private family in class society. In *Communism and the Family*, written in 1918, she explained:

Capitalism has placed on the shoulders of the woman a burden which crushes her: it has made of her a wage worker without having lessened her cares as a housekeeper and mother. We therefore find woman crushed under her triple, unupportable burden. (qtd. in Sen 1639)

*Petals of Blood* is a turning point in Ngugi's literary commitment. The novel marks Ngugi's adoption of Marxist and Fanonist ideologies in his analysis of women's plight. From a Marxist feminist angle, the novel sheds light on two important main themes; alienation and prostitution. Through alienation, Ngugi shows that women are treated as second class. They are deprived from their right of ownership and access to land. Prostitution is Ngugi's tool to attack capitalism. He adopts a new perspective of prostitution. He wants his readers to go beyond any simple or superficial reading of prostitution by examining its roots and effects on society. Through Wanja we are made to realize that capitalism is responsible not only for the poverty and misery of the likes of Abdulla, but also for the rise of prostitution. Wanja is what she is as a result of the

social and economic conditions of her society. She is completely alienated from herself, not only by selling her labor, but by selling her body as a commodity. For her life in Kenya has been reduced to the survival of the fittest. Either you exploit or you are exploited.

Wanja is symbolic character standing for the nation of Kenya. What Ngugi seems to be saying is that Kenya is a prostitute like Wanja for she invites capitalist forces and allows herself to be exploited in the same way, and that as long as she carries on like that she cannot hope to be productive. It is therefore necessary for Kenya to disengage from exploitative and other unproductive forces and align herself with progressive forces.

## Chapter Eight:

### On *Uhuru* of Sexploitation and Women's Rebellious Voice in *Devil on the Cross*

Some men writers, 'men of good will' as Mariama Bâ would call them, have also attempted to transcend the sexual allegory and hence to resolve the problems of gender in ways that run counter to the biases embedded in the contemporary African male literary tradition. (Florence 158)

#### 8.1. Introduction

Ngugi's authorial intention to displace the prescriptive model of female identity and create a new woman is palpable in *Devil on the Cross*. His fifth novel has often been hailed by critics as continuity of *Petals of Blood*. Throughout these two novels Ngugi has been in the forefront of repositioning the subaltern. With *Devil on the Cross*, Ngugi marks the beginning of a new mission to recover the Black woman's identity in neo-colonial Kenya. The construction of neocolony offers decidedly unfavorable outcomes to Kenyan women. The rise of the bourgeoisie and their partnership with foreign 'human-flesh eaters' is the context within which Ngugi's novel sheds light on women's plight. Doubly oppressed and exploited, Wariinga, the heroine of resistance, fights aggressively against the twin-power structure constituted of neo colonial power nexus and a strong black patriarchy. This chapter continues to investigate images of the fallen woman in *Devil on the Cross*. Two important critical assumptions work as framework of the present chapter. It relies on Marie Eboh's view that "The African Woman Bears a Double Yoke"(333) and Florence Stratton's claim that the African woman "is doubly oppressed, enmeshed in the structures of an indigenous patriarchy and a foreign masculinist colonialism"(173). Based on Wariinga's story and set against these critical assumptions, the aim of the present chapter is to argue that under the mercy of foreign capitalists and their local watchdogs, women's plight is Ngugi's tool to argue that capitalism does not yield to the end of colonization. Further, efforts to resist oppression are central to the narrative. This chapter devotes a remarkable space to the rebellious voice of women in the novel. Ngugi's exertions to include women in his

vision of a Kenya liberated from neo-colonial domination merit recognition. It shows that as a feminist of color who exposes the sexist tragedy of Wariinga, protests the ongoing degradation of women, and celebrates the physical and intellectual capabilities, Ngugi wa Thiong'o is committed to the survival and wholeness of an entire people; male and female.

## **8.2. Ngugi Speaks to the Masses: *Devil on the Cross*' Form and Language**

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's battle with colonialism, neo-colonialism, and elitism reached its highest peak with the publication of his fifth novel *Devil on the Cross* in 1980. Secretly written on sheets of toilet paper during his detention in Kamiti Maximum Security Prison, *Caitani Muthraba-ini*, or *Devil on the Cross*, is Ngugi's first novel to be originally published in Gikuyu. His decision to abandon English as a first medium of communication has brought Ngugi to a fierce criticism. The interpretations varied from one reader to another. Yet, all his readers came up with the conclusion that this decision comes from the author's conviction that a committed author should express his feelings, philosophies and thoughts in a language that peasant farmers can grasp. Therefore, it is a question of mutual intelligibility that stands behind the author's new medium of communication.

The decision to abandon English and adopt Gikuyu is well justified in *Decolonizing the Mind*. As its title implies, the book suggests that the African mind is still colonized. Hence, Ngugi gives the issue of language choice cultural and political interpretations. He maintains that African literature written in English is "caged within the linguistic fence of its colonial inheritance" (*Decolonizing the Mind* 21-2). English written African literature, from Ngugi's point of view, criticizes the colonial aftermath but in the language of the metropolis. Writing in English, he believes, perpetuates "at the level of cultural practice, the very neo-colonialism he is condemning at the level of economic and political practice" (*Writing Against Neocolonialism* 18). In "The Position of Foreign Language in African Literature" Professor Boulenouar Mohamed Yamin and Samir Arab argue that "Language choice in Ngugi's criticism is a question of "to be or not to be". His fatalistic view, they write, "is palpable in the sense that he urges the denial of foreign languages that were used as tools to divide and rule." (537)

Ngugi feels his moral compulsion to write in the native language. He frames his decision to confront the problem of Englishness in the following phrase: “I knew what I was writing about but whom I was writing for?” (*Decolonizing* 29). Amoko states that Ngugi has chosen to write in Gikuyu because he “sought to transcend the limits of the Kenyan school culture and reach out to a broad popular Gikuyu audience—the workers and farmers whose oppression forms the core of all his writing, men and women not literate in English, perhaps not literate at all” (92). Therefore, writing in mother tongue is meant to directly address the peasants and the farmers who have the ability to respond positively to ideas of reform. Gikuyu language permits Ngugi to become linked to his people’s traditions and culture. In “From the Corridors of Silence” (1989), Ngugi justifies his language choice:

...I wrote *Matigari*, a novel of return, in the Gikuyu language, and I felt a sense of belonging such as I had felt when in 1978 at Kamiti Maximum Security Prison in Cell No.16, I had written *Caitani Mutharabaini (Devil on the Cross)* as an attempt to reconnect myself to the community from which I had been so brutally cut by the neocolonial regime in Kenya. Now I had done the same thing and experienced not too dissimilar emotions. (*Moving the Centre* 106)

Ngugi’s national audience broadens considerably. His primary audience seems to be those who share his own ethnic and linguistic origins. Translation also permitted Ngugi’s international audience to follow his literary achievements. It has been noted that while he wrote his novels in Gikuyu, Ngugi did not abandon English in his memoirs and critical books. He keeps moving between Gikuyu and English as occasions demand. However, this does not mean that Ngugi deviated from his main objective of encouraging African and other Postcolonial writers to tighten the link with their local audience by using their medium of communication.

*Devil on the Cross* in Ngugi’s most challenging novel. Its challenge and complexity lie in the interrelation between its form and content. Simon Gikandi maintains that it is a “schizophrenic” novel and that it is a work that wants to maintain its generic identity as “a novel in the European sense of the word while rejecting the central ideologies that have made this form what it is, including the assumption of an elite audience” (210). The novel marks Ngugi’s deliberate return to oral traditions. By adopting the Gikuyu language and orality, Ngugi had taken up the task of decolonizing the African novel. The story of the novel is in the form of a narration by a Gicaandi Player also called “Prophet of justice”. The most interesting fact is that Ngugi assigns a

male artist the task of narrating the story of the heroine. In “Gender, Unreliable Oral narration, and the Untranslated Preface in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Devil on the Cross*.” Evan Mwangi elaborates on Gicaandi thus:

A highly specialized and stylized art – form gicanndi is a genre of Gikuyu poetry that encodes all aspects of Gikuyu life in sublime riddling that is performed in public by contesting poets. An artist’s inability to encode messages in sophisticated metaphors or to decode the performances of fellow poets disqualifies him or her from performing in public. Gicaandi is also the instrument (a gourd engraved with hieroglyphs) that the oral artist rattles as he or she dances and riddles with other poets and the audiences. (29)

Orality permits the author to distance himself from the text. Ngugi, accordingly, revives one of the earliest features of African literature by creating a sort of space between himself and the text. He uses the method to narrate the story through a different person thereby giving the impression that the narrator is different from the author. He makes the novel truly African in form and content. Moreover, Ngugi chose the method of narration that the underprivileged and marginalized members of his society are acquainted with. Thus, by choosing their local medium of communication and a method of narration that they are familiar with, Ngugi attempts to speak and directly address the Kenya’s masses. The use of traditional story-telling techniques—including proverbs, stock characters and themes altered to suit contemporary conditions, songs and chants—brings the narrative closer to a tradition of story-telling with which the Kenyan reader is already acquainted. In this respect, both the author and his readers revive a sense of cultural heritage. In “The Strength of the Rhetoric of Oral Tradition in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Devil on the Cross*” Sam. A. Adewoye comments on the usefulness of oral traditions:

... Ngugi uses the rhetoric of oral tradition in the novel in order to delve into the authenticity of the novelist’s reflection on the experiences and life of his own people, demonstrating that the African is artistically rich because of the African materials embodied in the work and not necessarily because of the conflicts arising from the Africans’ relationship with alien cultures. (qtd. in Booker 11)

The novel represents an unusual combination of literary modes, combining narrative styles and modern techniques. This combination fits the thematic concerns of the author who states that his main objective was to:

..use any and everything [he] had ever learnt about the craft of fiction—allegory, parable, satire, narrative, description, reminiscence, flash-back,

interior monologue, stream of consciousness, dialogue, drama—provided it came naturally in the development of character, theme and story. But content—not language and technique—would determine the eventual form of the novel. And the content? The Kenyan people’s struggles against the neo-colonial form and stage of imperialism! (*Detained* 8)

### **8.3. The Rhetoric of Irony and Satire: Uncovering Neo-Colonial Praxis and Paradox**

*Devil on the Cross* addresses issues and problems related to Kenya following independence. The novel is divided into parts and chapters that look different and sometimes working against one another. Amoko argues that the opening section takes the form of a “mythical Gikuyu folktale” (92). In the second half, which is radically disconnected from the first, readers would notice Ngugi’s return to his earlier thematic concerns of tragic national romance interlaced with irony. Thematically, the novel deals with the plight of the subalterns and the socio-economic decadence in Kenya. Having already maintained that the novel is schizophrenic, it should be argued that this literary schizophrenia does not mean that the text is detached and can be read far from Ngugi’s previous novels. At a first glance, the novel reads like a sequel to *Petals of Blood*. Its opening scenes follow almost seamlessly from the ending of *Petals of Blood*. Mirza Baig claims that *Devil on the Cross* is the continuation of *Petals of Blood*. He writes that if *Petals of Blood* represents ‘new Kenya’ then *Devil on the Cross* can be said as its transformation into a modern state in which materiality is valued” (187). Ngugi’s method of characterization does not differ. Harish Narang notices the affinities between the two texts in terms of characterization and thematic issues:

Jacinta Wariinga is a mother avatar of Wanja Kaii while Wangari like Nyakinyua in the earlier novel provides a link with the freedom struggle. Muturi like Karega, the Rich Old Man, Mwireri, and Robin Mwaura like Kimeria, Chui, Mzigo and Nderi wa Riera in *Petals of Blood* represent the forces pitted against the people of Kenya. The theme too is the same: complete and most inhuman exploitation of the Kenyan masses by the nexus of the ruling comprador bourgeoisie and the criminal thugs in alliance with their ‘global allies’. (116)

*Petals of Blood* deals with the evils of corruption and decadence that dominate Kenya in its postcolonial epoch. It sheds light on the rapid transformation of Kenya into an advanced nation in which the gap between the rich and the poor has been widened. It also reveals that the victimizations of the peasants and the workers become habitual. Based on the tragic story of Jacinta Wariinga, a young woman trapped by her own

sexuality and who emigrates from her rural town to the modernized Nairobi to be victim of wide range of exploitations in a polluted capitalist social milieu, *Devil on the Cross* demonstrates the bloody class struggle between Kenya's rich and poor, the exploiter and exploited. The heroine falls prey to the predatory nature of the wealthy rulers. His depiction of corruption in the novel is reminiscent of the pervasiveness of Ghanaian corruption in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments*. Ngugi has made the difference by shedding light on sexual harassment and women subjugation. Unfairly fired from her job as a secretary for refusing to quench her Boss' sexual thirst, and rejected subsequently by her lover who accuses her of duplicity, the heroine is finally evicted without cause from her rented room.

The novel begins with the passengers on a matatu bus who are on their way to Ilmorog. The return to Ilmorog, the setting of *Petals of Blood*, can be read as the author's intention to elaborate and figure out the consequences and political contradictions of neo-colonialism and capitalism. On the bus, the reader is introduced to the bus driver Robin Mwaura and five passengers; Wariinga, Wangari, Muturi, Gatuiria and Mwireri wa Mukiraai discussing their dramatic stories and socio-political exploitation in Kenya. Simon Gikandi asserts that "the six characters in the taxi are cast as representations of different classes and sectors of population" (216). His examination of the characters' symbolic meaning comes to the conclusion that:

Mwaura literally means one who makes off with other people's things, a thief; Muturi is a blacksmith, a worker; Wangari is a mother, named after one of the daughters of Gikuyu and Mumbi... Wariinga means a woman in chains, while Gatuiria is the seeker of truth; Mwireri wa Mukiraai is one who thinks only of himself. (216)

Wariinga's return to Ilmorog on the matatu coincides with a competition that draws others from Nairobi. The Devil's Feast is the name given to the competition. The feast is a satirical fantasy which dramatically exposes the way in which the nation's businessmen and politicians, licensed by capitalism, drain the country of its wealth. Ngugi's attempt at rediscovering national roots through orature, satire comes handy as Ngugi himself tells: "Satire is certainly one of the most effective weapons in oral traditions." (*Decolonizing* 81)

In *Devil of the Cross* Ngugi's attack on the international capitalism takes on the shape of the grotesque as he tries to achieve his objective of satirizing the capitalist

class by blowing them up to the level of the macabre and the bizarre. Readers are expected to notice that while his attacks on the form of international capitalism are clearly visible in his *Petals of Blood*, it is in the present novel that his voice finds a new pitch and edge. The competition of thieves and robbers which forms the crux of the satire on international capitalism is a process which is based primarily on confessions through boasting how each one of the thieves and robbers gathered during the feast is an expert in hood-winking and looting the poor. These confessions, while they serve to highlight the nature of the competitors who are vying for the Crown of the Devil's disciple, also serve to heighten the sense of the grotesque and the macabre ingrained in the process.

To the sense of the grotesque is added the sense of the ridiculous. This becomes apparent when a candidate vying for the crown of the King of thieves and robbers comes forth with the idea of capturing all the land in Kenya and then selling it in small tins and buckets at exorbitant prices to the people who would compete with one another for these small scoops of land. A weird proposal is also raised by one of the competitors for selling air in small packets so that the sellers earn not just sure money but also have ultimate control over the people. In his opinion, if ever the people were to rise in rebellion against them, they could simply cut off the supply of air and force them on their knees. This is taken as the ultimate achievement of their power over others. Although it seems weird and humorous at the same time, the author's intention is not to make his readers laugh but to point out the extent of the greed of the capitalists for wealth and power.

In *Writers in Politics*, Ngugi defines neo-colonialism as "the continued economic exploitation of Africa's total resources and of Africa's labor power by international monopoly capitalism" (24). Neo-colonialism, which is considered by critics as the last stage of colonialism, is mainly perpetuated by the efforts of Kenya's bourgeoisie whom Ngugi calls Westerners' "spies, "watchdogs" and "their disciples" (DOC 166). In *Homecoming*, he states that the colonial system "produced the kind of education which nurtured subservience, self-hatred, and mutual suspicion. It produced a people uprooted from the masses" (14). Colonialists encouraged a slave mentality with a reverent awe for achievements of Europe. *Devil on the Cross* reveals that national bourgeoisie who took over the charge of the administration from colonial administrators

degenerated themselves into Westerners' servants. In the novel, the narrator names them as "the imperialist watchdogs, the children of the Devil." (*DOC* 196)

Ngugi perceives capitalism as a threat whose very condition of growth is cut-throat competition, inequality, and oppression of one group by another. During the feast, Mwireri tells the gathering that capitalism is a corrupted system which is "based on the theft of the sweat and blood of the workers and peasants" (166). The author's main objective is to demonstrate the cruelty of those elites who substituted the British imperialists to persecute, oppress, and exploit the masses. The local watchdogs perpetuate the post-colonial dependency. In this respect, Chijioke Uwasomba admits that:

It is no wonder, then, that the major trope in *Devil on the Cross* could be neo-colonial dependency, with *Devil on the Cross* as the structuring symbol. This is best illustrated in Wariinga's nightmare in which the white colonialist Devil is crucified by the masses (apparently, a reference to the political independence) only to be resuscitated by local compradors. (102)

The Feast of the Devil, which actually turns out to be a competition in proving how much each contestant is capable of serving the interest of the foreigners who have gathered there to choose the most capable of them to look after their empire in Kenya and reap the highest amount of profit for them by exploiting the poor countrymen. James Ogude argues that the feast becomes "the privileged language through which power speaks, acts and coerces" (58). Every competitor is supposed to "mount the platform, and he will tell us how he first came to steal and rob and where he has stolen and robbed" (*DOC* 87). Each participant gives his name, address, and the number of his wives and mistresses. Robbers are also asked to declare the type of cars that they and their wives drive. The very motif of the *Feast* thus allows the author to pour out his scorn and satire on the lot of thieves and robbers in Kenya who rob the wealth of the masses to share it with others in return of a meager amount of benefit. Competitors are expected to invent strategies that strengthen their liaison with their foreign guests. The aim was to show us how "we can develop partnership between us and foreigners so that we can hasten our ascent into the heaven of foreign commodities and other delight" (*DOC* 78)

The competition to choose the most capable robber to represent the international gang of thieves and robbers in Kenya is held at a secret place in Ilmorog in front of the

foreign delegates who represent different developed countries. These foreign guests are in the lookout for the perfect person to look after their interests in Kenya and further their mission of making the rich richer and the poor poorer. This is indeed the height of international robbery in the name of international capitalism. The description of the competition arranged by the Devil to find out the biggest robber provides Ngugi with a literary space to critically examine the theme of power in the socio-economic and political context of independent Kenya.

Compared to *Petals of Blood* which concentrates on the local capitalist regime, *Devil on the Cross* takes its readers further to witness the effects of 'international capitalism'. This system is presented in this novel as a corrupting force and a powerful tool for keeping the former colonies under the exploitation of the imperial powers even after they have been granted independence. In the ultimate analysis, it is not unlikely to seem that money serves as the most potent tool in maintaining disguised authority since the competitors and the organizers of the Devil's feast in the novel are ready to cut throats for money. The presence of the foreign delegates who have been invited to act as judges in the Feast of the Devil implies the presence of the colonial machinery of exploitation in a disguised form in Kenya. In order to make the episode of the competition interesting and humorous and with his dislike for international capitalism, Ngugi names the organization from which the foreign delegates have come as International Organization for Theft and Robbery (IOTR), thereby satirizing the entire competition for the selection of the most efficient robber/thief in Kenya to be chosen by the foreign delegates to be their watchdog in the country. The leader of the delegates mentions America as the breeding ground for exploitation and a model that Kenyans have to copy:

I think there is no one who does not know that theft and robbery are the cornerstones of America and western civilization. Money is the heart that beats to keep the western world on the move. If you people want to build a great civilization like ours, then kneel down before the god of money. Ignore the beautiful faces of your children, of your parents, of your brothers and sisters. Look only on the splendid face of money, and you'll never, never go wrong. It's far better to drink the blood of your people and to eat their flesh than to retreat a step. (DOC 89)

The narrator tells us that delegates come from many countries, far and wide; from the USA, England, Germany, France, The Scandinavian countries - Sweden, Norway and Denmark - Italy and Japan. They share "the same principles as they form one

organization with one aim and one faith; theft” (*DOC* 88). The fact that they are ready to drink the blood of the people and eat their flesh, Ngugi alerts his masses by stressing the consequences of international capitalism.

Thieves and robbers form a strong class that works against the commoners. Members of such class are not permitted to work against each others. This becomes apparent when Kihaahu wa Gatheeca boasts of having robbed his own kind by establishing 'European' schools, he is cried down in the most vehement manner. Other competitors make it clear that robbery should be carried out only upon the poor and not upon the members of the same class:

'Son of Gatheeca, don't you feel ashamed? Weren't you embarrassed, standing there in front of us bragging about deceiving people of your class, shamelessly boasting about how you have stolen from people of your class? If we start robbing, thieving and cheating one another, how will our unity as a class take roots? (*DOC* 120-1)

Delegates plead for the unity of the robber class. At this level, Ngugi satire reaches its highest peak. To allay the fear of a possible revolt by the exploited peasants and workers, Gitutu wa Gattaanguru suggests that members of IOTR should get complete control over the essentials of life so that they can make the poor cringe on their knees if such need were to arise. He comes up with the ridiculous idea that they should try to assume control over the supply of air in the country so that in case of any fear of revolt they should be in a position to cut off its supply to the desired areas and keep people under control. This is how the author shows the darkest side of capitalists who are ready to control and exploit the poor.

On Ngugi's "technical brilliance" in *Devil on the Cross*, Cook and Okenimpke maintain that "the blending of formalized realism and extreme ironic satire is more than a technical triumph" (*Ngugi wa Thiong'o* 123). In the name of long live peace, love and unity between foreigners and natives the master of ceremonies concludes his speech by arguing:

Long live peace, love and unity between me and my local representatives!  
What is so bad about that? You bite twice and I bite four times. We'll fool the gullible masses. Long live stability for progress! Long live progress for profit!  
Long love foreigners and expatriate experts! (*DOC* 86)

This passage indicates that Kenyan upper class is playing the role of intermediary. They are the foreigners' local watchdogs. Hence, what can be noted here is the fact that the

author is depicting the new social order in Kenya. In *Petals of Blood* society consists of two main layers; the upper class and the proletariats. The passage suggests that the foreigners occupy the upper class and that the second class is occupied by the local watchdogs. In this respect, the masses are doubly exploited occupying the bottom of the society. It is within this context that Ngugi places his female characters.

### **8.3.1. Body Politics: The Grotesque Image in Ngugi's Satire**

Ngugi's satire has drawn the attention of a host of readers and critics. In "Ngugi's Comic Vision" Roger Berger (1989) assumes that his vision in the final analysis is a comic one and that the narrative style in [*Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross*]*—*a mashing of popular forms and modernistic techniques*—*allows him in a comic and hence circuitous manner to offer 'serious' political analysis" (2). Berger focuses on the political genius of the comic and grotesque in the two novels. Berger's analysis of Ngugi's sacrilegious way sheds light on the way in which authority can be undermined. His final findings suggest that Ngugi uses Christian mythology in structuring the central comic and that such hyperbolic description "undermines any pretence of seriousness that the ruling classes...claim for themselves." (19)

In 'Provisional Notes on the Postcolony', Achille Mbembe (1992) talks about power-performances in postcolonies. Commenting on the postcolonial regime of violence, Mbembe argues that post-colony is characterized by a distinctive style of political improvisation, by a tendency to excess and "a lack of proportion ... [and] ... a series of corporate institutions and political machinery which, once they are in place, constitute a distinctive regime of violence" (3). Critics have noticed that new independent countries, like Kenya, have inherited violence, verbal and physical aggressions which the colonial relationship *par excellence* involves. Mbembe frames the concept "the banality of power' as a reference to this theatrical display of power in the Postcolony" (qtd.Ogude 55). James Ogude assumes that Mbembe used "banality" as a reference to those "elements of the obscene and the grotesque that Mikhail Bakhtin claims to have located in 'non-official' cultures but which, in fact, are intrinsic to all systems are confirmed or deconstructed." (55)

Grotesque is both an artistic and literary technique whose main function is the representation of distorted and deformed images of the body in an exaggerated way sometimes to be funny and other times to be frightening. Philip Thomson argues that a

classic experience of the grotesque is “the experience of amusement and disgust, laughter and horror, mirth and revulsion, simultaneously” (25). In literature, the grotesque focuses on human body and how it can be misshaped in humorous or scary way. Its main objective is to elicit empathy and disgust simultaneously. The grotesque bases its creativity on the unfamiliar, unreal, fantastic, and imaginary. Essentially, grotesque and obscene are the basic features that identify regimes of domination in postcolonial African literature.

The Devil’s feast is Ngugi’s main tool to deconstruct the banality of power in postcolonial Kenya. Using Bakhtin’s grotesque and obscene Ngugi successfully turns Kenyan elites into objects of ridicule. It is to the local comprador bourgeoisie, who boast about their cleverness and their cunning on how to steal from the people as well as how to bow to foreign control, that the grotesque is restricted. Ngugi dramatizes the local watchdogs’ magnificence through a weird and absurd ceremonial exhibition of wealth. Ogude assumes that the feast permits Ngugi to erect “the monstrous image of capitalism as a fetish. The worshippers of the fetish gather to preach before it, ‘the fiction of its perfection’.” (57). The delegates’ speeches prove that the Postcolony becomes a stage for bizarre self-gratification; an absurd display of buffoons, fools and clowns in the feast of ‘modern robbery and theft’. This is significant when the American delegate tells the competitors that they are asked to drink the blood of their people. The author relies on this scene to reveal the thieves’ dehumanization and the evils of capitalism.

In dealing with the grotesque image of the body, Ngugi brings to the surface images related to the belly, the mouth, and the phallus. In *Rabelais and His World* Bakhtin (1968) assumes that the grotesque body “outgrows its own self, transgressing its own body, in which it conceives a new, second body: the bowels and the phallus” (317). The physical description of the delegates and the competitors engaged in this competition is remarkable as it gives the readers hints about their nature through their physical appearances. It has been seen that in the case of most of those present in the cave, only a particular or some portions of their body would be developed more than other parts depending on the peculiar dispositions of their characters. The portrayal of thieves in the cave suggests that the belly and the mouth are features of the compradors. This is best captured in the narrator’s description of Gitutu’s body:

Gitutu had a belly that protruded so far that it would have touched the ground had it not been supported by the braces that held up his trousers. It seemed as if his belly had absorbed all his limbs and all the other organs of his body. Gitutu had no neck – at least, his neck was not visible. His arms and legs were short stumps. His head had shrunk to the size of a fist. (*DOC* 99)

Gitutu's body transgresses itself. His neck, arms, legs and head have been metamorphosed into a grotesque animal shape; it is, as Bakhtin states, "a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth, and becoming." (29)

In Ngugi's novels characters' names are rooted in the Gikuyu culture. About the name Gitutu wa Gataanguru, Ndirigi (1991) argues that while Gitutu refers to a 'big jigger', Gataanguru refers to 'a belly infested with tapeworms which produce a bloating effect' (101). His physical appearance is placed in stark juxtaposition to the physical features of a jigger. Ogude maintains that these features underscore the parasitic nature of jiggers and by extension the parasitism of the ruling class in the postcolonial state that Gitutu represents or parallels.

Ngugi's use of the grotesque image of the body is very much grounded in the ordinary politics of independent Kenya. Wariinga's nightmare, in which the white colonialist Devil is crucified by the masses, is an apparent reference to political independence, only to be rescued by the local comprador. The omniscient narrator's description of the devil suggests that the Devil "had two mouths, one on his forehead and the other at the back of his head. His belly sagged, as if it were about to give birth to all the evils of the world. His skin was red, like that of a pig" (*DOC* 13). This is significant because the physical features of the Devil draw the reader's attention to his grotesque image, the same image that he gives to those that rescue him and in turn serve him. Significantly, again, the Devil rewards his rescuers by fattening their bellies.

Far from Gitutu's deformity, thieves like Ndikita wa Nguunji request true monstrosity. Dehumanization reaches its highest peak and ultimate form through Ndikita's speech by which he encouraged the rich to ensure their "immortality through the purchase of spare organs of human body, thus leaving death as the sole prerogative of the poor" (100). Ogude relates Ndikita's proposition to the insecurity of masculine authority. He gives the example of Ndikita's wife who becomes enthusiastic about the prospect of having two female organs. Ndikita expresses horror at the idea of such

equality between the sexes. He urges his wife to support African culture and heed tradition. Ogude argues that it is to serve his own masculine quest for privilege and power that he invokes the authority of tradition. Mbembe asserts that the author aims at revealing the phallogocentric system which turns postcoloniality into ‘a world of anxious virility, a world hostile to continence, frugality, sobriety.’ (9). Ndikita’s wife felt elated at the idea of having two hearts, two bellies and two cunts. Unable to accept the idea of his wife having two female organs, the rich man asked, “Tell me: what would you use two for?” She retorted, “Why do you want two? What would you use two for? If you have two, then I must have two. We must have equality of the sexes” (*DOC* 180). In this respect, Ngugi exposes the rigid patriarchal and sexist bias of his society, which even on sheer flimsy grounds cannot bear with the idea of gender equality.

The grotesque image of body plays a vital role in Ngugi’s description of power distribution and the rulers’ nature in postcolonial Kenya. Mbembe believes that the body itself “is the principle locale of the idioms and fantasies used in depicting power” (7). The use of the grotesque mode draws the readers’ attention to the body as a site upon which power is contested. Indeed, grotesque characters, marked as they are by bodily deficiencies or deformation, would seem to offer Ngugi a perfect means of figuring the qualities that have tended to characterize either the local comprador or the ruling elite in the postcolonial state in Africa. Accordingly, for an author like Ngugi, the grotesque at its best exaggerates and caricatures the negative, the inappropriate, and the antihuman that the comprador class symbolizes in his works.

The elites’ boastful confessions highlight the actual processes by which money magnates milk the national resources, above all the sweat and blood of workers and peasants. There is an indirect link between the participants’ game of robbery and Kenya’s socio-economic devastation due to Kenyatta and his KANU allies indulged in loot and plunder and made it their national activity. It is content, not language and technique, which would determine the eventual form of the novel. The Devil’s feast has a close bearing with the anarchic socio-political situation of the country. In this lengthy dramatic scene, readers may understand how the mechanism of power operates in Kenya and how the Black Kenyans are enjoying a derivative power from their international European masters. This powerful dramatic scene where various speakers stake their claims to prove that they are the best in loot and plunder and therefore should

be coroneted with the International crown for engineering universal embezzlement, though a fantasy yet speaks of “the nightmarish unreality which is its disabling truth” (Williams 112). The scene, which runs almost into one-half of the novel's length, is a pungently satirical fantasy and a ribald comedy of manners.

#### **8.4. Toward a Prostituted Economy: Women Under the Mercy of the Local Bourgeoisie and Foreign Domination**

*Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross* both shed light on the subordinate status of women in independent Kenya. The intertextual relation of the two texts suggests the author's intention to revise, correct, or maintain his personal interpretation of women's predicaments. The two novels portray the heroines' victimization in the wake of neo-colonialism. Wanja and Wariinga embody the values of the ‘wretched of the earth’. Wariinga's life runs parallel to Wanja's—up to a point. Both women hail from Ilmorog. Both go to Nairobi when a schoolgirl pregnancy blasts their dreams of academic success. Like Wanja, Wariinga has been seduced by a wealthy businessman, a friend of the family, who denies responsibility for the pregnancy. Both have difficulty finding work and both are tempted to resort to prostitution. Yet, it is this temptation that distinguishes Wariinga from Wanja.

A detailed reading of *Devil on the Cross*, from a gender perspective, suggests that the author places his female protagonists more prominently in the social world outside home. The novel records the hard journey of Wangari and Wariinga in a capitalist world. More importantly, it is through their stories of alienation, subjugation, oppression, and sexploitation that corruption and the politics of neocolonialism is ruthlessly exposed. The novel can be read as a continuity of *Petals of Blood* since they both consider capitalism as the reason behind women's imprisonment and exploitation. This inequality is illustrated through the pathetic story of the heroine Jaciinta Wariinga who becomes a victim of the brutality of capitalism and male chauvinism in a purely larger patriarchal set up. Wariinga is not the only female character whose story is central to Ngugi's literary commitment.

Wangari's story highlights the effects of the class tensions that divided the nation. In *The African Novel in English: An Introduction*, Keith Booker assumes that ‘*Devil on the Cross* is a didactic work designated to educate Kenyan peasants and

workers the true nature of capitalism” (177). The novel’s setting is very suggestive. Its description illustrates the class division and the gap between the rich and the poor:

The residential area is divided into two parts. The first part is *Ilmorog Golden Heights* residential area. In the past it used to be called *Cape Town*, but it’s known as *Golden Heights* or simply *Heights*. The air there is good and clean, and that’s where anyone lives in Ilmorog. It contains the home of the wealthy and the powerful...The other part of the residential area is called New Jerusalem, Njeruca. That’s the residential area for the workers, the unemployed. It’s where the wretched of Kenya live. (DOC 130)

The core characters of the novel provide a wide-angled view of the impact of this class struggle. Apart from the Gaturia and his fiancé Wariinga whose position can only be identified by the end of the novel, the rest of the major characters fall fairly readily into those who are allied with the eaters like Mwaura and Mwireri, or those allied with the eaten like Muturi and Wangari.

Like Nyakinyua in *Petals of Blood*, Wangari represents women who paid their blood and sweat to free the country yet who now see all what they fought for being put on one side. She is another strong character who proudly narrates her past contributions during the Emergency. In her contribution to the topic of *Harambee* discussed by other passengers in Mwaura’s Matatu heading to Ilmorog, Wangari underlines her heroism in the struggle:

I, the Wangari you see before you, was a small girl then... and I was never afraid even when I slipped through the lines of the enemy and their home guard allies. Our people, today when I recall those things, my heart weakens and I want to cry! (DOC 40)

She is unable to pay the greedy bus driver Robin Mwaura who annoys her by telling that independence is “the sound of money in one’s pocket. Don’t joke with me. Get out or let us hear the sound of coins so that we can continue” (DOC 37). She clicked her tongue, cleared her throat and started talking in a voice full of bitterness:

When we fought for independence, it was not money that did the fighting, it was love. Love for Kenya, our country, was what gave our young men courage to face the prospect of being moved down by enemy bullets – and they would not let go of the soil. (DOC 41)

Ngugi’s concentration on Wangari’s contribution to freedom and her actual melancholic state is an attempt to argue that those who participated in the war are duped by the deceiving promises of modern capitalism. The author blames the system which

widened the gap between the social categories. Wangari is convinced that in modern Kenya “there is no single corner, even in the most far-flung reaches of Kenya, where a poor man can run to escape poverty” (DOC 41). It is because of capitalism, as Wangari says, that “the land rewards not those who clear it but those who come after it has been cleared.” (DOC 37)

Wangari’s land of two acres was auctioned by *Kenya Economic Bank* as she failed to make a timely payment for a loan she contracted to send her child to school. The withdrawal of her land is the reason behind her journey toward Nairobi. The journey is meant to expose the general policy of betraying Kenya’s masses. Wangari’s shamba is sold for nonpayment of a loan of five thousand Kenyan shillings. Left with no other means of survival, Wangari goes to Nairobi to look for a job. Unfortunately, she does not get a job even after being humiliated and later arraigned in court for vagrancy. She courageously responds to her vagrancy by saying: “I Wangari, a Kenyan by birth—how can I be a vagrant in my country?” (DOC43). Just like Abdulla and Nyakinyua in *Petals of Blood*, Wangari becomes a stranger in the land which witnessed her birth. In the court she faces the European judge “with a skin that was red like a pig’s” (DOC 43), to reveal her disillusionment with the decline of the Mau Mau dream due to neo-colonialism:

Look at me properly. I am not a foreigner here like you. And I am not a vagrant here in Kenya... Kenya is our country. We were born here. We were given this land by God, and we redeemed it from the hands of our enemies with our blood. Today you see us clothed in rags, but we, the peasants and the workers, are the same people who were around at the time of Kimaathi. Now, look at me closely again, I am not a thief... (DOC 44)

Wangari epitomizes the woman-warrior who once fought heroically for the love of the country, during the Mau Mau rebellion. However, she is now marginalized and neglected like trash in the new social system which has no place for revolutionary radicalism. She is the embodiment of combativeness when she describes the real African woman to be the one who adorns her body not with extravagant ornament but with bullets and guns to oppose the adversary. According to Evans, Wangari is “the archetypal peasant woman...the embodiment and symbol of Mother Kenya” (qtd. in Cantalupo 310). She occupies a prominent place both as a character and an individual within the story. Ngugi portrays her as the guardian of Kenyans’, more specifically Kenyan women’s, history. In “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial

Discourses” the postcolonial feminist critic, Chandra Mohanty draws our attention to how the first world strives to build a singularized and homogenized image of the Third world woman which “effectively subsumes the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world” (17). Both Nyakinyua and Wangari act as reminders of the heritage of Kenya’s past glory that they try to indoctrinate and resurrect through the new generation of Wanja and Wariinga. Together they create a collective identity of African women, subjected to histories of humiliation but rising every time with an inherent strength of soul and spirit.

Relieved to find a fellow African in charge of the shop, she explains her difficulty in finding a paid work. She is treated with derision: “He collapsed with laughter! He told me that the only job he could offer me was that of spreading my legs, that women with mature bodies were experts at that job” (*DOC 42*). She is released by the court only when she promises to co-operate in nabbing thieves and robbers in the country. Her tragic neglect by the post-colonial society touches the lowest when in Nairobi she is offered a job of spreading her legs in the market of love through a shameless suggestion that “women with mature bodies were experts at that job. The irony is that she tells: “these legs have carried many bullets and many guns to our fighters in the forest...” (*DOC 40*). She further points out to the sacrifice that woman in the Mau-Mau war made: “ours was not a time for adorning our bodies with flowers and necklaces. Ours was a time for decorating ourselves with bullets in the fight for Kenya's freedom!” (*DOC 127*)

In Wangari Ngugi creates an admirable woman whose mission is to carry Nyakinyua’s fire. Her plight means that in modern Kenya even old women are subject to displacement, vagrancy, exploitation and oppression. She is a confident peasant woman who is proud of her own contribution to the National cause: “that the deeds of her youth had changed Kenya's history” (*DOC 127*). Her narrative of Mau-Mau that if “a bean fell to the ground, we split it among ourselves” (*DOC 39*), is Ngugi's attempt to humanize the much-maligned Mau Mau movement. Muturi thinks of her as “Wangari, heroine of our country—all Wangaris, heroines of our land!” (*DOC 127*). The end of Wangari’s story is tragic. Her definition of theft deviates from the official one. The grimly comic outcome of her mission suggests the cultural divide which is already entrenched in the nation. True to her character, it is Wangari again, who in her patriotic rage, picks up the courage to inform the police authorities about the assembling of

thieves and robbers in Ilmorog, but the irony is that she is herself falsely implicated and arrested for “disturbing the peace of the town”, “for spreading rumors that might start violence and endanger peace and stability in the land.” (DOC 204)

*Devil on the Cross* sheds light on the misery of the most wretched and exploited victims of African societies; African women. It sheds light on the plight of Jacinta Wariinga who experiences series of misfortunes, maltreatments, and deprivations at the hands of greedy men in Kenya. Wariinga, whose name means “woman in chains”, has been “dismissed from her job for rejecting the advances of her Boss Kihara her employer who was the Manager Director of the Firm” (DOC 104). In “Victimization of Jacinta Wariinga in Ngugi’s *Devil on the Cross*” Shamrao Waghmare (2012) argues that it is “a common practice in neo-colonial Kenya where females are treated as articles of utilization” (107). Wariinga’s past too is an unhappy one which has left a deep scar behind. Her sexuality is the centre of the text and Ngugi clearly brings out the fact that woman’s sexuality had become a commodity which can be used whenever needed and thrown when not needed. In a view of that, Patrick Williams assumes that Wariinga’s story of sexual exploitation is Ngugi’s attempt to break down “the power of patriarchy” (108)

The novel opens with a very discomfoting sentence: "Certain people in Ilmorog, our Ilmorog told me that this story was too disgraceful, too shameful, that it should be concealed in the depths of everlasting darkness." (DOC 7). Gicaandi Player or Prophet of Justice is like a Brechtian narrator who is narrating the story of Jacinta Wariinga on the request of her mother, "so that each may pass judgment only when he knows the whole truth" (DOC 7). Infact, 'the whole truth' is the story of Wariinga's constant harassment, exploitation and deprivation in the male-dominated society which does shameful things to woman and which it would prefer to conceal but is brought to light by James Ngugi. The novelist not only depicts the woman's predicament but also exposes the larger network of corruption, exploitation and oppression in the neocolonial set up through Wariinga's perceptions and narration.

After her parents were arrested by the British imperialists, Warringa was brought up by her aunt. She grew up as a spiritually inclined girl for her age. She loved going to the church and listening to the sermons. She spent the happiest years of her life

dreaming of passing school with high honor. She longed to study engineering because she felt that it would be challenging for women to opt for such jobs:

Wariinga could not understand why girls hardly ever opted for such challenging jobs, leaving the whole field open to men. There is no job that a girl cannot accomplish if she sets her mind to it and believes she can do it: that was what Wariinga told the other girls, who would often laugh at the daring of her thoughts. But they were convinced that Wariinga could complete an engineering course successfully. (*DOC* 141)

Such was her spirit that she was always a source and inspiration to other girls. She possessed all the ideal qualities a girl of her age dreamt to have.

The novel is based on Ngugi's assumption that the body is the main reason behind women's predicaments. Wariinga was convinced that "her appearance was the root cause of all her problems" (*DOC* 11). Her sexuality is a major issue in the text that raises questions about her feelings of validity on an individual level, but also serves as a forum to illustrate the sexual oppression of women on a societal level. Throughout the novel, we are told that capitalism is a tyrannical system where "the loss of the masses is the gain of the few" (*DOC* 105). In *Homecoming*, Ngugi argues that Africans "are harvesting the bitter fruits of capitalist and colonialist policy" (xvii). Succumbing to the neo-colonial voice as a schoolgirl, Wariinga became the 'sugar girl' of a man whom the text refers to solely as the Rich Old Man from Ngorika. This man remains significantly nameless for two reasons; he is a symbolic representation of the Kenyan upper class who preys on the labor of poor workers and the sexuality of poor women, and because he is her fiancé's father. Her uncle, desiring a boon from the Rich Old Man, enabled the rendezvous between him and Wariinga for his personal gain. It took the Rich Old Man months to weaken Wariinga's resolve to be a good Christian schoolgirl, but when she fell prey to his enticements of money, riding in a Mercedes-Benz, and taking trips to hotels she lost her resolve, believing his lies that he would leave his wife for her (*DOC* 143-47). When she became pregnant Wariinga was awakened to the harshness of reality.

The sexual oppression of women was caused by the men who dominated the society. Readers are supposed to sympathize with Wariinga who is victim of uncle. She epitomizes sugar girls who have been forced into this cannibalistic atmosphere by their relatives. Her life went astray because of her uncle who served some whites faithfully. He wanted to become wealthy as quick as possible but could not. His companions were

some rich men from Njoro and Ngarika. He believed "...that he who walked with the rich might himself become rich, that he who searched diligently would eventually find wealth" (*DOC* 142). A Rich Old Man from Ngorika got him a house for hire purchase for which in turn he wanted Wariinga. The uncle slowly introduced Wariinga to the Rich Old Man who tried to tempt her with his Mercedes Benz and pocket money. This was the strategy followed by the rich to trap the poor. The poor women were forced to succumb to the riches becoming victims to their lust. Wariinga too, tempted by the luxuries, developed an aversion for studies and school and felt that a new world awaited her. The narrator tells us that she "grew wings. She tried out the wings and flew once with her Rich Old Man" (*DOC* 143)

Ngugi is known for his figurative language and modernist literary style. All his novels are symbolic, a feature that fits his thematic concerns. In *Devil on the Cross*, the author's description of the game called the "Hunter and the Hunted" is highly symbolic for it not only shows how Wariinga is made weak by the Rich Old Man but also brings out the fact that the Kenyan upper class used the same strategy to prey on the lower class and their sexuality:

...they would play a game called the Hunter and the Hunted. The Hunter would take the pistol to chase the Hunted until the Hunted was worn out and exhausted, where upon the Hunter would catch the Hunted and fire into the sky to announce his victory. (*DOC* 144)

The Rich Old Man was the "Hunter" usually and would chase Wariinga. Being much younger to him, Wariinga would not get exhausted that easily but slowly she noticed the man's frustration in trying to get her and thus pretended to get tired of his chase. He would then catch her and shoot into the sky in happiness.

The game of the Hunter and the Hunted suggests that women are easily weakened and tempted. Wariinga pretended being exhausted because she wanted her love to enjoy victory. It is this weakness of women that is taken advantage of by men. On one occasion, Wariinga getting fed up with the game, ran and even before she could catch him, fired, the shot of victory which missed the body of the man by just an inch or more and hit a pregnant antelope. Though the man was shivering and sweating, he pretended to be courageous and decided never to give the gun to her. He did the hunting from then onwards. This game has a lot of significance in the text as it reveals Wariinga's nature. Wariinga, however, is not able to withstand and soon falls a prey to

the Rich Old Man. The Hunter having hunted his prey enjoys his victory while Wariinga realizes that she has become pregnant. She expected that he would marry her as he had promised and would make her his wife with a “proper church ceremony” (*DOC 145*). But to her shock the man reacts as if he had nothing to do with it:

How could you possibly have conceived so soon if I were the only man who went with you? Go away and look for the young man who has got you into trouble, and tell him to marry you or to take you to the forest or somewhere else for an abortion. I thought all along that I was going with a clean school girl, a girl without too many problems, a girl I would have loved to marry, so that she could be balm for my old bones. But instead I picked on Kareendi Ready-to-Yield did I? (*DOC 146*)

These words of the Rich Old Man were so shocking to Wariinga that she did not know how to react. She uttered nothing in return. Neither did she justify herself nor protested against what he said. The agony and sorrow that Wariinga experienced for the next few days bring to light the plight of many young girls who were deceived by the upper class.

At a younger age Wariinga carried an agonizing burden mentally and physically. She was a practical woman who did not reflect on the past and wept. In fact nowhere does Ngugi describe her as weeping and becoming hysterical after coming to have known that she is pregnant. She only thinks of various ways to get rid of the whole thing for marriage had gone beyond everything. She tried to find out ways of getting the foetus aborted through her classmates. She thinks of an action which sounds fatal and frightening. She even tried to go by herself to a doctor but could not do it successfully. When all her efforts become futile, she asked herself “... had she really chosen the hell, or had the hell been forced on her?” (*DOC 147*). It was true that it was forced on her in the form of her uncle. For his personal “boons” he had pledged the life and future of Wariinga. She felt ashamed of herself:

All she wanted was that her name should be wiped off the face of the Earth. All she wanted was to vanish as if she had never been born. All she prayed for was for the Angel of Death to come for her and to remove her name from the ledgers of Heaven and Earth. (*DOC 151*)

She decides to throw herself before a train but she is rescued. Wariinga’s sexuality has become a commodity. The people behind it were men; her uncle who literally sold her and the Rich Old Man who made use of her to get sexually satisfied. Women, in a male-dominated society were not even aware that their physical attributes were worth more than anything.

Through Wariinga's suicidal attempt, Ngugi touches one of the main feminist themes. In *The Madwoman in the Attic: the Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination* Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (2000) argue that "women frequently create characters who attempt to escape, if only into nothingness, through the suicidal self salvation"(85). Wariing's attempt to commit suicide is an attempt to escape the confines of the patriarchal society. Ngugi makes his readers believe that in Kenya little or no options were available for women. Indeed, in a dehumanized world perpetuated by thieves and robbers, she found herself thrown into the lake of fire by her uncle who should provide her safety and security. Hence, suicide was her last choice to get rid of the burden she lifted. However, after being saved by Munti, Wariinga would experience other troubles.

The nexus between neocolonialism and patriarchy has been highlighted in the central episode in the narrative. The Devil's Feast not only exposes the means and crude ways adopted by the imperialist forces to victimize the developing nations and the proletariat within them, but also how these forces are successful in the subjugation of women. The cave is the place where Wariinga is able to recognize the danger of being in a capitalist society lead by greedy and lecherous men. The perception of the power game and its wide spread network in which woman is the loser is experienced by Wariinga at the Devil's Feast. She witnesses the rich and powerful men boasting about their wealth, power, status and the women who are kept as slaves by them. She also has an insight into her own self, her own life in which she has been subjugated and exploited at each step.

In the novel Ngugi juxtaposes neo-colonialism and patriarchy. He thinks that both are the aftermath of the balance-of-power being tilted in the favor of a few people. There are only two faces in the world--the eater and the eaten, the exploiter and the exploited, the robber and the robbed, the master and the slave. According to Amiya Bagchi "[t]he malodorous, overcrowded insanitary slums are as much part of the exploitation system in the Third World as the places and suburbs of the rich and comfortable." (*The Political Economy of Underdevelopment* 218). If the poor are being exploited by the capitalists of one's own country, they in turn are being exploited by the imperialist forces. Neo-colonial and imperial forces entrap women and place them at the bottom and the margins of the society.

The rise of capitalism in Kenya is marked by set of ambivalent moods of corruption explained through several examples of dehumanization. Wariinga's own predicament illuminates the inescapable fate awaiting Kenyan and other African females. A comparative reading of *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross* suggests that the two novels place women in a class-based context to maintain that they are doubly exploited both as workers and second sex. Robbers are the neo-colonizers who employ their strategies of cunning and subjugation to keep women powerless. Wariinga realizes that her body is reason of her agony. At the time of revelation during the Devil's Feast, Wariinga becomes conscious of this fact:

Wariinga; But won't the workers refuse to let their bodies be exploited like that? Won't they refuse to be robbed of their lives?  
Voice: Why have you never prevented your own body from being exploited?  
(DOC 188)

In the novel women's objectification reaches its highest peak. In a materialist society women do not have final or total say about when, where, how, or by whom their bodies will be used, because their bodies can be suddenly appropriated from them through acts ranging from the "male gaze" to sexual harassment to rape. Tong Rosemarie believes that in capitalist society women "may start to experience their bodies as objects or commodities" (110). In Ngugi's novel, we are told that the female body is commercialized. Woman becomes an object for sale and the body is the ground on which the tourism flourishes. After being informed that Boss Kihara and a group of foreigners from Germany, USA, and Japan are about to build a big tourist hotel on the site where their garage was, Wariinga tells her fellow workers that "they're building a factory for modern prostitution" (DOC 223). Poor women are often forced to submit to prostitution because that is their only option. Wariinga and Wangari both have experienced this bitter reality. The only work everybody was ready to offer Wariinga was either prostitution or being a mistress as she states: "The Modern Love Bar and Lodging has become the main employment bureau for girls, and women's thighs are the tables on which contracts are signed." (DOC 19)

Postcolonial-feminists are somewhat critical of developed nations' efforts to improve developing nations' economies in general and women's lot in particular. Essentially, postcolonial-feminists are skeptical about Western development programs for formerly colonized peoples, owing to a history of those people having been exploited by their former colonizers as sources of cheap labor and valuable resources. In

Ngugi's view, foreign investment is another aspect of patriarchy. In *Women: The Last Colony* Maria Mies et al assume that in postcolonial capitalist societies, where money is the leading principle, women "are forced to earn their living as prostitutes for First World male tourists. Women's bodies are used without inhibition...to tour for investment market their airlines and encourage tourism" (163). In the novel we are told that even the adolescent school girls are subject to sexual exploitation. Robin Mwaura boasts being partner in the game of the hunter and the hunted. He tells the guests that an old American, whose face was full of deep valleys, had with him an African girl, so tiny she could "have been a schoolgirl. They sat in the back. I drove them all round Nairobi for an hour or... When the girl pretended to feel pain and she cried out a little, the American would light up with happiness" (*DOC* 70-1)

In an essay entitled "White Man's Dilemma: His Search for What He Has Destroyed," Maria Mies tackles some of the mind-boggling ways all people, but particularly white men in capitalist patriarchies, aim to connect with nature. First, she believes that the white man attempts to run away from the confines of his urban office "into 'Nature,' the 'wilderness,' the 'underdeveloped' countries of the South, to areas where the white man has not yet 'penetrated'. Second, continues Mies, rather than trying to unite with the "mundane" nature right in his backyard, the white man seeks to experience a more "exotic" type of nature: nature as "colony, backward, exotic, distant and dangerous, the nature of Asia, Africa, South America." Third, she says, the white man longs for yet another kind of nature, the space known as a 'woman's body'. It, too, is wild terrain, the "dark continent," so the white man relates to a woman's body as he relates to nature: as object of his gaze, as commodity, as a form of play to liberate him, if only for a moment, from his relentless workday." (qtd. in Rosemarie 278). The American tourist who flirted with the young schoolgirl is a glaring example of Western tourists who long for the wild terrain. After flirting with the young girl for the day the American tourist says:

"Kenya is a great country... fantastic wild game... and afterwards fantastic women, so beautiful.... Even I, an old man, I can get a chick.... I'll come back with even more tourists so that they can see Kenya's wild game and women for themselves.... Truly a beautiful country... stability... progress..." (*DOC* 71).

In a world of thieves and robbers, hunter and hunted, haves and have not, exploiter and exploited, all women are viewed as sexual objects. Women are fated to suffer because men use them for their own convenience. Woman faces uncontrollable

hardships and a miserable life full of blames and guilt while man wants the best of both the worlds—a family complete with a wife and children, and any number of sugar-girls. The number of women a man has enjoyed and kept, becomes a sign of his affluence and status. He has a feeling of triumph and glory by making her submit to him and overpowering her physically and psychologically. She is like a looted booty at war. He is able to reduce the identity of the woman to that of a slave whether for work or for physical pleasure, both at his will and comfort. Boss Kihara and the Rich-Old Man belong to this category of men who are rich and powerful and enjoy the best of all worlds. What the Devil's Feast reveals is the fact that even bourgeois women are subject to sexual harassment. Kihaahu boasts his submissive wife and the number of women he is able to enslave.

Now for my sugar girls. I never run after schoolgirls... I like other people's wives. One gets such a glorious feeling of victory. You know, don't you, that that's another kind of stealing? I am particularly good at bourgeois women. They never resist. And they have no pretensions...this is because their husbands are always at nightclubs with their girlfriends...They are not expensive. (*DOC 110*)

The passage suggests that a woman becomes a pawn in the power game. Wives are saved and caged in the closed world whereas other women are molested. Woman is a victim of lust and treachery in the garb of love. Woman— wife or mistress—is not allowed to raise her voice. She is never given the right to express her feeling and ask for her right to live peacefully. Women—wives or mistresses—are conditioned into being play dolls. Men are able to create mistrust and hatred amongst women for their own benefit.

In sequences that portray Wariinga as a fragile, placid and a woman preyed upon by unscrupulous males, Ngugi urges his readers to understand the double exploitation of women in Kenya. The novel particularly highlights the violence man inflicts on the woman—on her body, mind and emotions. Women are preyed upon by foreign capitalists and the local watchdogs. The case of Wariinga, Wangari, and the schoolgirls reveals that neo-colonialism increases and doubles the misery of women. It is the era of the theft, robbery, sexploitation and sexual assaults. Wariinga as a representative of second sex speaks in a voice of sorrow and agony:

Are they aware how many hearts they have broken into tiny pieces? Aware of the many bodies they have destroyed, the many lives they have trodden into the

dust, so that every girl, examining her own body, can see only the leprosy she has caught from men? These days a woman's youth has become a rotting corpse, the warmth of her body a bonfire that consumes her life, her womanhood a grave in which her fertility is buried.... (DOC 136)

Essentially the distinguishing feature of *Devil on the Cross* as a literary genre is its vigorous concentration on the verisimilitude in terms of themes, method of characterization, language, and the geographical setting. The novel responds to the three main principles of realism; ordinary character, ordinary language, and an ordinary setting. In spite of the fantastic aspects which serve Ngugi's mission to depict Kenyan contemporary reality, the novel is realistic. The author's skillfulness lies in the fact that he successfully transforms fantasy into realism. In "Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross*: the Novel as Hagiography of a Marxist" F. Odun Balogun claims that there are three factors behind Ngugi's ability to transform fantasy into realism:

These include (1) his judicious balancing of the elements of romanticism throughout the novel's plot development, (2) his use of the style of psychological realism, and (3) his reliance on a narrative language heavily saturated with common folk patterns of speech. (137)

Aspects of fantasy are marked from the very beginning of the novel. It begins with a biblical prophet narration which turns into an omniscient twentieth-century narrator. Other features of fantasy can be related to Wariinga's nightmare, the mysterious voices, and the recall of her miraculous escapes from the suicidal death. The novel gradually turns into a realistic novel as soon as it makes Wariinga's predicament central to the narration. Her sudden joblessness and homelessness are vividly presented in concrete realistic details. In *Thomas Mofolo and the Emergence of Written Sesotho Prose*, Daniel Kunene argues that the fantastic is used in didactic writing "to add to the persuasive power of the message or to enhance the dramatic impact of the words, or both." (180)

As a realistic novel, *Devil on the Cross* is patterned by loss in terms of economic dispossession, neocolonial political reversal, and in terms of psychosexual anxieties. In the first section of the novel, gender functions as a metaphor for class and social degradation. Being sexually abused and 'sexploited' by the ruling class, Wariinga becomes a symbol for the debased state of neocolonial Kenya. Her own sexual experience—that of a young girl seduced and impregnated by the Rich Old Man—is being collapsed quite straightforwardly on to a national historical narrative. Ngugi

offers Wariinga's past a microcosm of the larger national picture. Wariinga believes that the IOTR is like "a child planning to rob its mother and inviting others to join in the crime!" (DOC 184). The analogy becomes explicit when Muturi states that "our country, is pregnant. What it will give birth to, God only knows..." (DOC 45-6). The author equates the nation with a raped or impregnated mother to represent neocolonialism as a prostituted economy.

### **8.5. On the Rebellious Voice and the Strategy of Gender Egalitarianism**

*Devil on the Cross* marks Ngugi's womanist phase. Although aspects of womanism are found in his previous novels and short-stories, *Devil on the Cross* is the novel which best illustrates Ngugi's deliberate attempt to create a conceptual space for women. This phase began in the last chapter of *Petals of Blood* where readers would notice the author's attempt to attain his regenerative roots by aligning with the powerless peasants, workers, and women. In "Resurrecting the Devil: Notes on Ngugi's Theory of the Oral-Aural African Novel" Christopher Wise asserts that "[t]he experience [of Kamiriithu Theater] ... forever altered his life and approach to writing" (135). Indeed, he reached his first Gikuyu novel via his Kamiirithu community theatre experience. He learnt the art of dissolving his own bourgeois conditioning of identity at the feet of common people, which he terms as an "epistemological break with his past," (*Decolonizing* 44). The novel has been tremendously influenced by the aspects of "Brechtian theatre" due to his search in the rural theatre about the vital role played by peasants and workers especially that of women which gave a new flip to his imagination.

Ngugi is among the very rare male African authors who included women in the nationalist agenda. He gives women a considerable space and makes them subjects in his intellectual battle with forces of neo-colonialism. Ania Loomba argues that if the nation is "an imagined community, that imagination is profoundly gendered." (215). Ngugi's imagination of the new nation is dominated by images of women as rebellious subjects. Critics believe that one of the greatest problems of womanist discourse, by which male writers are committed and engaged in correcting the historical distortion of the female identity, is the fact that the anti-colonial nationalist discourse has often been found to subsume the feminist concerns. Third world and postcolonial critics have

rendered visible the patriarchal underpinnings of such a discourse. Deborah McDowell assumes that in Black aesthetic discourse, race is “the sole determinant of being and identity, subsuming sexual difference” (qtd. in Dubey 3). Most of these critics came with the assumption that Black Nationalist agenda is either predominantly gendered or aggressively macho<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, there is a total unanimity among these women theorists that there is a commonality of interest. As far as the female identity is concerned, between the colonial and neo-colonial discourses there is what Leela Ghandi calls “a shared will to power.” (99). Leela Ghandi argues that the female body has always been implicated “in a struggle between competing masculinities” (98). In Ngugi’s first edition of *A Grain of Wheat*, Dr. Lynd’s rape by a blackman can be read as the black man’s desire to possess and explore a white female body becomes a desire for national revenge.

For a host of feminist critics, gender is a submerged category in colonial and postcolonial discourses. They observed that in such discourses woman remains an object. It is argued among these feminist critics that inspite of the repositioning of women within the nationalist agenda, and inspite of the female power, women remain silent. Gayatri Spivak’s conclusion in her article “Can the Subaltern Speak?” admits that women’s voicelessness is an apt emblem of the shared violence of the colonialist and the patriarchy. Hence, whether it is nationalism of the colonialist or of the anti-colonialist, woman's body has been used as a space for writing their nationalist texts. Ania Loomba, after citing Indian, African and the Latin American feminists engaged in dismantling male literary traditions of the nationalist and the imperialist discourses concludes: “Thus despite their differences, and despite their contests over women, colonial and indigenous patriarchies often collaborated to keep woman in their place.” (222)

Ngugi as an artist of resistance does not simply accept Gayatri Spivak's essentialising assumption about the silence of gendered subaltern that is the subaltern cannot speak or cannot be spoken about. Since the beginning of his literary career, Ngugi has remained engaged in recovering the “muted” or “gagged” voices of both men

---

<sup>1</sup>Madhu Dubey quotes Michella Wallace who asserts that “the Black Liberation Movement proved a vehicle for black Macho” (*Black Women Novelist and the National Aesthetics* 16)

and women, of peasants and workers under siege of the condescending or condemning colonial and neo-colonial power structures. He has been unraveling in his plays and novels, voices from the bottom, and “histories from below” of the marginalized and the oppressed black identity. Commenting on the nature of representation of women in Ngugi’s earlier novels Charu Verma says:

Women are represented as embodiments of courage and fearlessness who are capable of rebellion. They are in fact better than men. They have positive qualities like courage, confidence, ability to see truth more lucidly and they are constant inspiration to men. (197)

While Verma estimates Ngugi’s method of characterization of the second sex, Stratton accuses him of maintaining the patriarchal order inspite of his efforts to make bold women his major characters. Commenting on *Petals of Blood*, she claims that he “draws verbal maps of Africa on woman's naked body” (54). The feminization of Africa, where Ngugi analogizes national degradation with prostitution, shows that Wanja as woman has been reduced to what Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie calls a “national scapegoat” by the political and patriarchal agenda of the novel. This is to argue that Ngugi’s nationalist agenda inscribing patriarchy to a large extent affects the black female identity. This is why Mariama Ba advices male African writers, including Ngugi, to revolutionize their female representation by arguing that a special “room must be made for women.” (qtd. in Stratton 55)

*Devil on the Cross* is the first novel by which Ngugi responds to Mariama Ba’s invitation to create a special room for women. The novel has often been hailed by feminist critics like Stratton as the female Bildungsroman. It is another path-breaking milestone through which the author has been able to break fresh grounds and provide literary impetus to the African Resistance discourse by his conscious concern for repositioning the woman as a rebellious individual and a subject of history. In Ngugi’s novels the comprador and women constitute the most important binary opposition. Torn between the values of his elitist background and those of the oppressed, Ngugi ultimately succumbs to the bidding of the heart and betrays the struggle. His oppressed characters are rebellious and escapists. In *Detained*, the critical book which most of critics consider as a companion to *Devil on the Cross*, he states about his commitment to the feminist agenda when he asserts “... Wariinga heroine of toil ... there she walks haughtily carrying her freedom in her hands...” (*Detained* 3). Ngugi's authorial intention to displace the prescriptive model of female identity and create a new woman is

palpable in Wariinga's new metamorphosis. He has always been in the forefront of resituating the marginalized in the face of the dominant; this time the focus is on the recovery of the Black woman's identity in neo-colonial Kenya. Accordingly, Wa Thiong'o has placed Wariinga at the centre. Moreover, he has also redrawn the circle of existence around her and has shifted the angles of vision at the periphery.

Wariinga represents Ngugi's epistemological break with the past. She represents his attempt to mark his departure from the earlier woman representation and response to Mariama Ba's call to create a special room for the second sex. Compared to Mumbi and Wanja, Wariinga is a full-fledged central figure of resistance against the patriarchy and neo-colonialism. *Devil on the Cross* is its author's first novel where all male characters around a female character remain on the margin. The central locus of the novel is her evolution from victimhood to a combatant character. Through her experience, the reader witnesses the growth and development of a traditional, meek, sexually exploited woman into an educated, courageous, energetic and self-reliant woman. In the process of metamorphosis from a typist to a revolutionary young woman, we notice the innocent Wariinga full of dreams and aspirations for a bright tomorrow, being exploited and crushed, and then rejuvenating into a rebel. With renewed strength and determination she paves the way for herself in the male-dominated society. She is aware of the fact that to prove herself, she has to be not only equivalent to men but superior to them.

Wariinga is the bearer of Ngugi's political vision of resistance against neocolonialism. To correct the historical erasure, Ngugi has constructed a strong black woman's identity in the form of Wariinga. Her life runs parallel to Wanja's. Both of them hail from Illmorog. Both of them are seduced in their school age by a wealthy businessman who denies responsibility for pregnancy. Both are outstanding in studies but suffer heavily when the school-age pregnancy thwarts their dreams of academic success. Both suffer at the hands of big bosses in Nairobi. Thus frustrated, both are tempted to resort to prostitution. Yet, the affinities end here. For while Wanja succumbs to the temptation and joins the comfortable bag-wagon of the "Eaters", Wariinga refuses to submit point blank. Wariinga differs from Wanja through her refusal to throw her child and slide into the polluted life of barmaid and prostitution. In the first part of the novel, Wariinga is totally fallen apart. When working for Boss Kihara, or as a schoolgirl in the clutches of the Rich Old Man, the natural union between Wariinga's labor and her person were corrupted by the sexist idea that her "true job" was on her back and her

force in labor was aligned with her sexual availability and exploitation. The commodity fetishism of capitalist thinking caused Boss Kihara to view Wariinga's labor and sexuality as commodities. In *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*, Rosemarie Tong writes:

Just as women's violated bodies are used to sell all sorts of commodities, such as cars, boats, and designer jeans, so, too, is nature's violated "body" used similarly. Women, implied Griffin, must refuse to let themselves and nature be exploited in such ways. Reform, indeed revolution, begins with saying no to what is and instead seeks what might be. (269)

Wariinga understands the system of "eat or you are eaten" which dominates Kenya and hence gets ready to fight against the neocolonial forces that perpetuate gender inequality. The patriarchal system is characterized by power, dominance, hierarchy, and competition. Ngugi knows that it is not just patriarchy's legal and political structures that must be overturned on the way to women's liberation. Its social and cultural institutions (especially the family and organized religion) must also be thoroughly transformed. Wariinga becomes the index of Kenya and the model of the new woman who is endowed with the strength and the will to resist the smoldering neo-colonialism which has become more ruthlessly aggressive, shameless, naked and inhumanly debased than Wanja had found it in *Petals of Blood*.

In *Devil on the Cross*, readers are introduced to a character whose mission is to go against the meaning of her name. Having already maintained that Wariinga's name means the woman in chain, the heroine embarks on a journey to break those chains. Simon Gikandi argues that her project is to break out of "the prison house of self-hate and victimization and to assert her identity outside the culture and economy of arrested decolonization" (220). She is compelled to reject the cultural assumption that weakens the second sex and find her strength as a woman. The journey to Ilmorog permits her to change the manner she perceives herself and her social role. Her mission is not only to reclaim her sexuality, but also to reject all what she assumed to be correct about her identity in terms of her Christian faith, the work force, and the struggle for Uhuru. Accordingly, the author suggests that the aim of Wariinga's personal freedom is its use in propelling the nation to independence through the independence of the individual and her facility in the cooperative national effort. Her first attempt toward her personal Uhuru is her identification of her labor and body as unified in comprising her identity and with her nation.

Wariinga finds herself a completely transformed person after the meeting at the cave and her acquaintance with the national activists. For the first time she recognizes the importance of her contribution to the struggle. She experiences the quest for personal freedom which would also lead to the liberation of her nation. Her perspectives have undergone a change and she started identifying herself first as a Kenyan and then as a victim of exploitation:

We who work as clerks, copy typists and secretaries, which side are we on? We who type and take dictation from Boss Kihara and his kind, whose side are we on this dance? Are we on the side of the workers, or on the side of the rich? Who are we? Who are we?... I've often heard girls bragging about their bosses, and when you check carefully to see what they're bragging about, you can't find a thing. A few hundred shillings a month for a woman with children to feed, and we proudly call that a salary? And in exchange for so little we have sacrificed four things" (*DOC* 206).

Wariinga details the four things that capitalism and its agents have stolen. Women lost their 'arms', 'brains', 'humanity', and their 'thighs' (*DOC* 206). Thighs are the tables on which contracts are signed. To keep their jobs, women must allow licentious behavior in their employers. She states that these office women are their bosses' real wives, but not their legal ones; the contrast she draws is between a "goat for slaughter and one for grazing" the working women are of course represented by the animal consumed. (*DOC* 206)

Marxist intellectuals have always perceived religion, which they call 'the opium of the people', as an instrument of bourgeois exploitation. Bourgeois intellectuals, on the other hand, have used atheism as a pretext to attack Marxism. Nevertheless, the identification of capitalism with Christianity and Marxism with atheism usually ignores the fact that there are capitalists who are atheists and Marxists who are Christians. Throughout his novels, Ngugi has revealed a growing impatience with the socio-political role of Christianity in Kenyan history. As a bourgeois intellectual in the fifties and sixties, his criticism of Christianity was understandably mild. *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross* mark Ngugi's Marxist attempt to criticize religion. Ogude criticizes Ngugi depiction of religion stating that his presentation of religion is "one-dimensional. For Ngugi, religion is a tool of oppression-a vehicle for lulling the poor and turning them away from the material reality of this world." (104).

Ngugi still regards religion as instrument of bourgeois exploitation, but he was not interested in satire as in depicting Christianity in the ironic situation of undermining capitalism and of actively promoting Marxism. He subverts Biblical stories and imagery through the unique way and reveals Christianity as a tool of oppression in the mantra of thieves and robbers, while powerfully illustrating Wariinga's redemption with Christ like imagery. This dichotomy demonstrates the ability of religion to exist on multiple levels, depending on individual interpretation; its value as a tool of oppression is no longer fixed. Wa Thiong'o appropriates traditional parables as well as Christian parables; in the text both "the good guys" and "the bad guys" use both traditional and Christian teachings to justify or make sense of their surroundings.

The novel's title announces the author's mischievous intention to force Christian faith into a non-traditional role; instead of Christ on the Cross, it is *Devil on the Cross*. Throughout the novel, Biblical narratives are hitched to the wagon of revolution. This permits the author to introduce religion as a source of power for the heroine; a source of power which is not one-dimensional as Ogude would argue. In "Resurrecting the Devil: Notes on Ngugi's Theory of the Oral-Aural African Novel." Christopher Wise argues that *Devil on the Cross*' radically "anti-Christian content, its anti-gospel or bad news for Kenya's oppressed, may be complicated, if not wholly neutralized, by Ngugi's latently "Christian" and unexamined faith that the spoken word may be reborn after its death by writing" (139). Ngugi uses the idea of rebirth as a metaphor for Wariinga's transformation simultaneously with the reinstatement of the capitalist value structure after Uhuru. By using the same imagery to describe both events he is demonstrating the nature of theory; it can be applied in various ways to achieve various answers. When applied to Wariinga, the traditional patriarchal structure of Christianity is subverted and becomes a feminist tool.

Jacinta Wariinga is a highly religious person. She is so devout in her belief that she prays constantly and her prayers are most of the time miraculously answered. She is represented as a special elect of God. She hears heavenly voices, and future events are revealed to her in prophetic dreams. The first part of the novel, dealing with Wariinga's journey, can be read as a hagiography. The first chapters make the reader see the chaotic life of 'Saint Wariinga'. The author's main objective in the second part of the novel is to reveal the heroine's gradual growth from a devout Christian to a devout Marxist

rebellious woman. The hagiographic narrative style lends religious authenticity to a Marxist heroine revolting against the capitalist system.

Wariinga's first step toward her personal freedom comes in a form of a dream. Her dream of Devil's crucifixion reveals her subconscious wish to hang the villain of her life and that is the reason why the dream keeps on haunting her. According to Davinder Mohan, Wariinga's dream:

...is meant to become the controlling symbology of the unfolding narrative. In semiotic context, it represents the colossal sign of the whole fictional discourse. The events transforming themselves as the dream signifies make the connecting links of the structure which this dream unfolds in Kenya's colonial history in terms of Wariinga's experience. (209)

Revelations and dreams exist in the Bible where God or an angel visits a holy person to teach truth, call to action, or deliver prophecy. The idea is the same, yet the context is totally different. Wariinga is visited by Satan. Through the description of the Devil of modern theft and robbery and the role of Christianity in these ventures the link between capitalism and Christianity is finally revealed. Moreover, through Satan's tempting of Wariinga the link between capitalism, Christianity, and oppression is unveiled. What Davinder Mohan overlooks in his reading of Wariinga's of dream is the semiotics of resistance inscribed in the altered signifier of crucifixion, which is a usual device with Ngugi to create his novel. It is quite evident from the dream that it is the Devil and not the Christ that is going to be put on the Cross. Wariinga's repeated identification with the nightmarish dream since her senior secondary days, reflects her subconscious desire to annihilate the 'Devil' that she finds resurrected by the Black capitalist class hastily on the third day or even before as shown in her last chance encounter with the Devil.

Wariinga's freedom is noted by the examination of the opposite of what Satan put forth. This scene in the text takes place after Wariinga has attended the Devil's Feast. Confused, disturbed, and upset by all she has heard and witnessed, Wariinga leaves the cave for fresh air and begins drifting into sleep, contemplating all she has witnessed. It is not clear whether or not Wariinga is actually dreaming or only half-asleep when the disembodied voice of the Devil approaches her. The Devil introduces himself as, "the roaming spirit who distributes the knowledge that enables men to tell the difference between good and evil," it is Wariinga who names him "The Tempter," identifying him as the Biblical figure of Satan. Satan started with his work of tempting

Wariinga to use her body to get rid of poverty. He tempts her by describing her beauty and how men would "...kneel before your body... merely to touch the soil on which your feet have trodden..." (DOC192). Wariinga does not get tempted and chases away the one who calls himself, "Oppressor, Exploiter, Liar, Grabber" (DOC 192). Her resistance to temptation proves strength for she never wanted to make herself a commodity. She was never prepared to sell her soul to anybody or any temptation: "If I were to give you my soul, what would I be left with?" Like Christ during his interlude with Satan in the desert, Wariinga cries out, "No! No! Get thee behind me, Satan..."(DOC 192). What is important to mention at this level is the foreshadowing of the last scene between Rich Old Man and Wariinga in Ngorika. Whether the Devil's job for Wariinga was to kill the Rich Old Man and deliver him to Hell, or if it was something totally different, this dream sequence in its identification of Wariinga as Christ follows chronologically the sequence of Christ's temptation the night in the Garden of Gethsemane. The difference here is that Wariinga will not be crucified, instead the Devil will be.

Ironically Satan helps Wariinga understand her position in the capitalist world. His temptation pushed the heroine to examine herself. She had been timid all these days and had been running from place to place to get rid of her misfortunes. She did not want to boldly face her problems. But Satan revealed to her, her inner strength and power. After this experience, Wariinga felt completely transformed. The events that followed one another proved Wariinga as a strong woman physically and mentally. Ngugi's strategy in the novel seems to have created a paradoxical situation whereby the reader seems to be witnessing the unfolding of the Christian process of beatification for a Marxist revolutionary. The satirical Biblical motif runs throughout the novel, from the title to the last page. Instead of Christ being on the cross, it is the *Devil on the Cross*, which means that the Devil had acquired more importance than the Savior. The Feast is being held on a Sunday—a day when Jesus' resurrection took place. Wariinga is jobless, homeless, detached and isolated on a Friday—the day Jesus was crucified, tormented and violated. Thus, like Jesus resurrected on a Sunday, so does Wariinga rise to struggle after her epiphanic moments on a Sunday.

Wariinga becomes a new assertive woman. Aspects of change are obvious in her attempt to join the polytechnic for a course in mechanical engineering, her long cherished desire. She learns judo-karate to defend her person and to support her

education, she joins a motor garage run on co-operative bases by the workers. Just in two years time, she regains her lost self-confidence. She is no longer interested in bleaching creams to lighten her skin, or straighten her hair. By rejecting what Fanon calls "lactification" a sign of racial inferiority-complex and the traditional woman's freeze frame: "To cook, to make beds and to spread their legs in the market of love" (*DOC* 218), she declares her ownership of both her body and mind: "Her thighs are hers her brain is hers, her hands are hers and her body is hers" (*DOC* 218). Wariinga's final no to Satan proves that she is no longer an innocent Eve who could be mesmerized by Satan's seductive camouflage. She has finally matured into a figure of resistance:

Today's Wariinga has decided that she'll never again allow herself to be a mere flower, whose purpose is to decorate the doors and windows and tables of other people's lives, waiting to be thrown on to a rubbish heap the moment the splendor of her body withers. The Wariinga of today has decided to be self-reliant all the time, to plunge into the middle of the arena of life's struggles in order to discover her real strength and to realize her true humanity. (*DOC* 216)

By the end of the story, Wariinga takes the position of God while Rich Old Man goes down on his knees appealing her mercy. Ngugi portrays the Rich Old Man as the Devil who tries several methods to trap Wariinga. His mind turns quickly from humility and supplication to manipulation, standing up and offering her 'a return' to her place as his "sugar girl." He seeks to commoditize her body once again without regard to his son, his wife, or herself. When this tactic fails as well, he resorts to threats, speaking in terms of Lucifer's fall from heaven. Overcome by her beauty, the Rich Old Man falls again to his knees and begs her to save him. Wariinga remains in the god-like position of judge and savior and after his useless words of persuasion, she asks him to face her, look at her in the eye while he kneels before her, and then pulls her pistol from her purse and shoots him dead.

Through this act Ngugi makes Wariinga's transformation complete. Oliver Lovesey argues that in "the cannibalistic economy of sugar girls and their daddies, the hunter and the hunted, she recognizes the power conveyed by holding the phallic gun" (155). Wariinga gains strength and courage from the day she takes possession of Muturi's gun. She never failed to carry the gun wherever she went. The heroine breaks the chains and rejects the enslavement of capitalism by killing the symbol of capitalist beast. While leaving this "Devil" once for all on the Cross, she shoots two more 'celebrated' robbers, whom she had met in the festival of loot and plunder. She does so

as she is reminded of Wangari and Maturi's humiliation at their hands during the Devil's feast. In this way Wariinga becomes a full-fledged agent of resistance by whom the dream of the Devil's crucifixion is finally converted into a reality. Nevertheless, this is "la luta continua" , for Wariinga knows fully that "the hardest struggles of her life's journey lay ahead..." (*DOC254*). Due to the open-ended nature of the novel, the seemingly melodramatic ending of the novel in Wariinga's gunshots becomes more realistic.

Wariinga is the author's mouthpiece, who voices the individuality of women. Her rebellion is not only in rejecting the advances made by men, but also in fighting for her rights though she has to face open hostility in the process. She moves from the state of being into that of becoming. Indeed, she changes from a spectator to a participant in the struggle. She refuses to accept the ascribed and attributed role to her and other women. She becomes the woman who, using Simone de Beauvoir words, "protests against man, against life, against her situation, but she does not make good escape from them." According to Killam "Wariinga becomes Ngugi's armed avenger when she assassinates her fiancé's father, her first seducer and the epitome of the malevolent forces behind modern capitalism." (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 126). Her confrontation with Rich Old Man suggests that the author resorts to headlong inversion of masculine assertiveness and feminine passivity. In terms of gender relations, the heroine becomes powerful while Gatura's father becomes weaker. At this level, Ngugi succumbs to the strategy adopted by contemporary women writers. Commenting on this strategy, Florence Stratton writes:

Such an inversion -female and male, good and evil, subject and object—does not resolve the problems of gender, but it is, nonetheless, a subversive maneuver. For it exposes the sexist bias of the male literary tradition and creates space for the female subject. ... inversion is a strategy that other women writers have also employed in their attempt to combat patriarchal Manichaeism. (162)

Ngugi's portrayal of Wariinga as an actor of change makes his male characters invisible and marginalized. When she kills Rich Old Man and two other business tycoons, we are told that "Gatura did not know what to do...as if he had lost the use of his tongue, his arms, his legs" (*DOC254*). Sexually exploited and abused by the black bourgeoisie in the first part of the novel, Wariinga works as index of degradation of the nation. She is an emblem of the depraved neo-colonial state of Kenya. In this second

part of the novel, however, due to her sudden transformation the analogy between gender and nation ends. It is the female character who takes away the initiative from men and becomes an active agent of change. She is the rebellious voice against patriarchy and neo-colonial forces. In spite of her heroine's uniqueness in terms of power and assertiveness, Ngugi has been subject to severe criticism.

Feminist critics like Florence Stratton believe that Ngugi's anti-neocolonial discourse has not allowed Wariinga entertain us with her internal psychological intricacies or intimacies as a woman or as a radical feminist with her throwing away her bra against black patriarchy. A detailed analysis of Wariinga's story indicates that her reactions are motivated by the author's philosophical perspectives. Thematically, we are told that she is an emblem of women who are doubly exploited by the local watchdogs and foreigners. Technically, in terms of characterization, her transformation makes her a round character. This transformation is the result of the author's Marxist and womanist agenda. The text is dominated by the author's nationalist ideology and his proletarian class perspective which prevent the heroine from emerging as a full-fledged female. Monique Wittig assumes that Ngugi is highly interested in "woman as an historical and social class rather than as an immutable female essence." (qtd. in Andrea Cady 142)

Due to Ngugi's Marxist and nationalist orientations, Wariinga has become the voice of change. Accordingly, the heroine does not enjoy sufficient space in the text. Stratton supports this view by maintaining that "ignoring the heterogeneity of subject construction, Ngugi subordinates gender (as well as other social distinctions) to class" (160). She locates aspects of patriarchal discourse in Ngugi's description of the heroine by claiming that Wariinga is caught in the "authorial male-gaze" and accuses Ngugi of a "tendency toward male titillation" (163). To illustrate, Stratton cites the passage where the narrator describes her physical appearance: "Her body was a feast for the eyes. [W]hen she walked along the road ... her breasts swaying jauntily like two ripe fruits in the breeze" (*DOC* 11). In this respect, Ngugi is accused for treating the heroine as a flower" in the text. Stratton comes to the following conclusion:

He deviates into sexism because his class dialectic leaves no room for the female other. The only way in which he is able to challenge the Manichean allegory of gender is to make the other the same as men - equal but with no difference from them. This is what he attempts in his portrayal of Wariinga as a gun-totting revolutionary'. From his class perspective, a strong determined woman is to all intents and purposes a man. (*DOC* 163)

Stratton criticizes Ngugi for making Wariinga don androgynous costumes (tight jeans) to compete in the male world. She admits that Ngugi treats either Wariinga as a mere object (a mere flower to be looked at) or an absence as woman. By the term “absence” Stratton means that the heroine’s femininity vanishes as soon as the author turns her into a rebellious woman who acts like men. Stratton's arguments are quite reliable and credible as the novel does not fully transcend the patriarchal thought patterns and as such it cannot claim to be a genuine feminist literary text. This becomes quite clear when we look at the binary inversion of gender codes to which Ngugi resorts to create his womanist text. Wariinga's wedding of pistol in somewhat melodramatic ending of the novel is in fact, a mere reversal of the situation, which has clear-cut sexual connotations. The traditional symbolic association of gun with phallic power is obvious in the novel. The Rich Old Man used to fire from his pistol to announce his sexual victory while playing love game of the hunter and the hunted with Wariinga. Wariinga's resorting to pistol firing amounts to just an inversion of a gender code. This kind of inversion is a necessary stage for any discourse to emerge as authentic.

In essence, Ngugi’s strategy in *Devil on the Cross* is to have created a paradoxical situation by which the reader would notice the unfolding of the Christian process of beatification for a Marxist revolution. Wariinga’s story is revealed to a ‘Prophet of Justice’. To end up the reign of the few over the many, Ngugi reverses the gender codes to prove that Gayatri Spivak’s claim that “the subaltern cannot speak is no longer valid. Wariinga refuses to be subalternized. She refuses to be “acted upon” and instead chooses to act. She is empowered by the author to speak against the patriarchy and the subalternization of the African masses and the second sex. Womanists seek to raise awareness as to the plight of women, who, like their white sisters-in-oppression, are struggling to co-exist in a man's world where they are regarded as appendages. Ngugi exposes the tragedy of woman’s history and protests the ongoing degradation of women. Meanwhile he celebrates women’s intellectual capabilities to unfold revolutionary vision of their role. In “The Master’s Dance to the Master’s Voice” Elleke Boehmer argues:

With Wariinga, certainly, Ngugi has pulled out all the stops. After her experience at the Devil’s Feast, a competition to choose the most successful thieves and robbers in the world, Wariinga finds a new purpose in life, the struggle for a more equitable social system, and changes accordingly. (149)

Wariinga's story proves that women's emancipation, as far as Ngugi's literary commitment is concerned, takes a second place to the national struggle against neocolonialism. To Ngugi, all other interest must give way before "the higher social system of democracy and socialism within free Kenya" (*Barrel of a Pen* 99). To ensure Kenya's Uhuru and Kenyans' emancipation from the shackles of neocolonialism, women are bound to either wait in the sidelines for new social order, as structured by men, to emerge, or must contribute to the struggle by fighting alongside their men. In fact, the narrative canonization extends beyond Wariinga to include Muturi, Wangari, and the student leader, all of whom are called "The Holy Trinity of the worker, the peasant, the patriot" (*DOC* 230). Wariinga is rapidly growing in social consciousness as a result of deepening oppression and exploitation at the hands of Kenyan bourgeoisie. If the Holy Trinity of Devil's is —Grabbing, Extortion and Confiscation; that of angels is —the worker, the peasant and the patriot. But, the woman bears the double cross of oppressive social conditions and men. In Wariinga we have a heroine of resistance who rises to the challenge which confronts her. She is a positive model of a woman who moves from the given destiny to self emancipation.

## **8.6. Conclusion**

Wariinga emerges out as an embodiment of strength and courage which gives an impetus to the making and growing of the revolutionary Third World. As she finds ways to resist patriarchal oppression so also the strong, the politically-conscious and the determined can resist exploitation and find their way in the times of neocolonialism. Ngugi's overt use of Wariinga as heroine and model for Kenyan women does much to affirm Ojaide's earlier assertion that modern African fiction is typically didactic. In the case of Devil, Boehmer also states that Wariinga is clearly, "put in service of the didactic text" (195). *Devil on the Cross* does indeed operate as a didactic text in that Wariinga is suggested as a positive social model; but given the need for social revolution in modern Kenya, without an answer to the people's cry for true Uhuru, the novel would lack power and force. Wariinga is one of many answers to the neo-colonial issues plaguing Kenya. She is more than a social hero. Her strength and determination to overcome the ideologies of men that constrict her throat seem bionic in the sense that few women would have the courage to struggle for a feminist identity. By making the central character of his novel female, Ngugi is not compartmentalizing women in the quest for Uhuru but rather he is stating that Uhuru will never happen without the free

willed independence of the individual. He is not even including Wariinga in a typically male endeavor; rather he is equalizing gender through the leveling act of revolution. The struggle is that of the people of Kenya; if Kenyan women were to follow Wariinga's example there would be no room for patriarchal rule to flourish once Uhuru had been established-the revolution would be complete. She is a role model created by Ngugi not only for women but also for Kenyan men to fight oppression and exploitation. By taking revolution out of the hands of men and into the hands of Wariinga, Ngugi is not privileging any gender; rather he is privileging the mother land. Without this ultimate freedom, the freedom of the individual from the neo-colonial influence will never be possible. Ngugi is not privileging the freedom of a nation over the freedom of women, rather he is equating national freedom with feminism. This is to argue that he is a womanist writer.

## General Conclusion

Contemporary African authors like Wole Soyinka, Cyprian Ekwensi, Chinua Achebe, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o have always attempted to emancipate Africa from its literary stereotypes and the African novel from its anthropological clichés subordinating anthropology to the human condition in Africa. Being highly committed, these authors are concerned with the human plight in Africa. The African novel's content is drawn much from the African mythology and oral literature to give authenticity and African flavor and make the African novel in English distinctly different from Western and European novel. African writers' objective is to regenerate the native society as to preserve its cultural identity. They do not sentimentally idealize what is traditional and past; rather they are also critical about their rituals which they think are humanly wrong.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o is Kenya's gift to the world of literature and politics. He is the most influential literary figure in Africa. His literary activities are aimed at his honest concern with the welfare of the peasants and workers. His seriousness and political tone place him among the leading figures of African literature. His fiction discusses African issues and problems. In terms of form and style, his fiction responds to the most universal principles of literature. According to Julie Rivkin and Rayan Michael literature can only be understood if its full context—historical, economic, social, cultural—is taken into account” (644). Similarly, Ngugi believes that African literature is only understood in its fullest context. Convinced that commitment is the background of African literature, Ngugi writes that “literature is of course primarily concerned with what any political and economic arrangement does to the spirit and the values governing human relationships.” (*Homecoming* xvi). He believed in true art and literature that is not for aesthetic pleasure but that is at service of man reflecting African cultural heritage.

Novels of Ngugi embody his philosophy, his message and his view of the human race. His fiction is not meant merely for entertainment and pleasure, but also for social change. Indeed throughout his novels readers may notice that the art for art's controversy does not fit the author's political vision. He believes that literature and politics are inextricably tied and linked with each other because both are about "living men, actual men and women and children, breathing, eating, crying, laughing, creating,

dying, frowning, men in history of which they are the product and the maker." (*Writers* 72). In this respect, he chose as the subject of his writings that single event in the history of Kenya which has affected them the most, namely, the most crucial phase of their struggle for freedom - the so-called Mau Mau. Again, Ngugi is convinced that the primary task of literature is not merely to entertain but also to persuade. He, therefore, does not confine himself to mere chronicling of factual details of historical events, but he also takes a certain partisan attitude towards them.

Ngugi perceives himself as an awakener of the masses. He regards the analysis of the contemporary situations as the writer's mandatory moral duty. Like Frantz Fanon, Ngugi considers the postcolonial author's socio-political function as a moral imperative:

...because literature cannot escape from the class power structures that shape our everyday life. Here a writer has no choice. Whether or not he is aware of it, his works reflect one or more aspects of the intense economic, political, cultural and ideological struggles in a society. What he can choose is one or the other side in the battle field: the side of the people, or the side of those social forces and classes that try to keep the people down. What he or she cannot do is remain neutral. Every writer is a writer in politics. The only question is what and whose politics? (Preface, *Writers in Politics* ii)

In a similar vein, Jean Paul Sartre in *What is Literature?* defines the role of literature as that which strives to positively change the world as opposed to its "syncretic" role which simply offers an explanatory view of the world. Ngugi is among the vanguard of African authors insisting on cultural and political relevance. His literary commitment places him a responsible citizen whose main task is to reveal to his people the true picture of the political scenario prevalent in the nation. The outcry following his unveiling of the politicians was evident in the country as the people were outraged at the government for cheating on them.

Women situation forms the core of Ngugi's literature. As a committed author who devotes his pen to the subalterns, Ngugi considers women as the most exploited. With great sympathy, Ngugi has recreated the dissolution of community which witnessed the cruelty of the colonizer and the subsequent African struggle to regain political autonomy as a tragedy which was inevitable as it was complete. He courageously turns his eyes on women's plight while analyzing the predicament of the whole nation. As this thesis has shown, Ngugi's representation of women has made him distinct from other African authors, especially male writers. He made a remarkable shift

from the usual course followed by the male African writers in the past with regard to their approach towards the women of their nation. He wittingly dissociated himself from the male African writers' jeopardy of being categorized as male-centric. In other words, Ngugi neither represents women from a male perspective nor overtly glorifies male domination over the second sex. As a gynandrist, he raises his voice against women oppressors.

Simon Gikandi asserts that Ngugi's novels are "the vehicles through which two generations of Kenyan readers have been able to access to their past or, more modestly, to see their history as a key factor in the shaping of postcolonial cultures and identities" (290). Ngugi's novels, one may say, are the vehicles through which a whole nation has been examined. As far as the female voice is concerned, his novels can be read as an attempt to re-ask Spivak's famous question: Can the subaltern speak? Throughout this thesis, the researcher discussed the significance of women's plight in Ngugi's fiction. It offered a postcolonial-feminist reading of five novels to question the significance of women's predicament vis-a-vis Ngugi's political activism.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o is sympathetic to women as subjects of oppression. He is highly interested in exploited women both as workers and producers. This interest is revealed through his deliberate exploration of their hidden lives during the colonial and post-colonial eras. Ngugi has felt from the outset of his career as a writer that writing should serve social and political purpose. Ngugi's purposes for writing are therefore plain in his novels: each examines the consequences of public, socio-political events as they affect the lives of Kenyan women. He does not deny that his novels are recreations of reality. He recognizes that history has a place in his works. Killiam quotes Sander and Ian who cited Ngugi as saying that his novels, stories and plays:

....form my creative autobiography over the last twelve years and touch on ideas and moods affecting me over the period. My writing is really an attempt to understand myself and my situation in society and in history. (6)

Ngugi's first three novels; *Weep Not, Child*, *The River Between*, and *A Grain of Wheat*, copiously do draw on documented historical facts as background. They cover the period in Kenya's history dating from the first arrival of the white men and the Indians in the late nineteenth century to the attainment of independence in 1963. They centre on what constitute the most momentous real events in Kenya. These include the earliest co-ordinated attempt by the Gikuyu people to fight European colonialism on

religious, political, economic and cultural fronts, the intensification of nationalistic consciousness resulting in the Mau Mau war, the victory of independence and the consequent disillusionment. In this respect, we shall be authenticating that Ngugi Wa Thiong'o is a realistic novelist who used historical incidents in Kenya as the raw materials for the actualization of his literary vision regarding women exploitation and predicament.

In this thesis an attempt was made to trace the development of Ngugi's treatment of women throughout his five novels. Within the same context of exploiter and exploited in a patriarchal society, the researcher has tackled women's double oppression from different angles depending on the author's intention. The very first novel of Ngugi, *Weep Not, Child* has been read from a Foucauldian-feminist angle. Throughout this novel, as chapter four has proved, Kenyan society is highly patriarchal. The competing powers and the will to conquer bring to mind Foucault's notion of panopticism. Patriarchy becomes synonymous to panopticism in the sense that they both represent a society which is defined by competing powers and surveillance. This social structure increases women's subjugation and toughens their misery. The novel is overloaded with examples that depict the extent to which Kenyan women are preyed upon by foreigners, colonialists, and the native men. The panopticon puts them somewhere as prisoners who could be watched at all times, but they would not know whether or not there was someone in the watchtower to observe them. From another Foucauldian perspective, Kenyan women, during the colonial age, were docile bodies.

The possession of land is just like the possession of a woman. In our reading of *Weep Not, Child*, an attempt was made to critically read Ngugi's land gendering. He obviously associates the docile body with the colonized land. In the novel, we are told that a Kenyan woman's fate is in the hands of men. The body is exploited the same way the land is exploited by the natives and the colonizer. In Foucauldian term body is made an object. Meanwhile Spivak's theory of subaltern perceives women as inferior to men. A woman has to yield herself to men and the same kind of submissiveness is expected from land. Body and sexuality are related as body suffers because of repressive mechanism of power. The mechanism of power controls the body and centers the dichotomy of the conqueror and the conquered. The body of the conquered has to provide pleasure to the conqueror. The female bodies were made docile and passive. Hence, women were forced to be submissive and obedient to the authority. The female

body, in *Weep Not, Child*, is highly symbolic. It throws light upon the docile and passive mentality of the whole nation under the British rule. The imperial government exercised power over the colonized nations. Black people were considered as minority and among black people women were considered as minority. In the colonial system the body of the other was controlled. This relation works on gender politics, masculine gender and feminine gender. This classification is social. There is a difference between sex and gender. Sex is natural and gender is created. Power plays a major role in the creation of gender. The nation of the colonizers comes in the category of masculine gender and the colonized nations are made feminine. All the differences are the result of this idea.

*The River Between* went into publication after *Weep Not, Child*. This novel, too, has colonialism as its theme. The first obvious reality in this novel is its setting. According to Nwankwo "Ngugi's Gikuyuland is located on a plateau in Kenya's Central Province, an area dissected by hills, ridges and rivers, the same landscape that features in *The River Between*." (*The Works of Ngugi wa Thiong'o* 11). Killiam records that this novel represents the first phase of Ngugi's artistic recreation of the cultural history of his people. In the novel, Ngugi records the socio-cultural, economic and religious events in Kenya from the period before the arrival of the Europeans to the era of colonial domination." (20). It turns around the people of the two ridges, Makuyu and Kameno, who are both united as well as separated by the River Honia that flows in between. The novel deals with the conflict prevalent in the tribe that is caused by some people accepting Christianity and others remaining true to their indigenous religion. Both the parties, one led by Joshua (convert) and the other by Waiyaki (traditionalist), are firm in their belief and thinking and consider the other in the dark.

As chapter five revealed, the competing discourses and the fanatic attitude toward female circumcision add extra burden on women's shoulders. Preoccupied with how things fell apart, Ngugi shows that the competing cultural discourses double women oppression. The main problem which toughens the situation is the female circumcision. The two tendencies towards this ritual exclude circumcised and uncircumcised women from both ridges. While traditionalists like Chege are taught to consider female circumcision to be central rite in the Gikuyu way of life, Christian-converts like Joshua reject it and consider it a devil's work. Joshua, according to Ngugi, abhors it to the extent of rejecting his daughter, Muthoni, who wants to become a "real

woman". Joshua is a representative type of many other Kenyan converts. His action is in compliance with the demand of the church. The tragic end of Muthoni, who proves her assertiveness through challenging her father and thus gets circumcised, is followed by the hero's downfall. Waiyaki's love relationship with Nyambura, Joshua's second daughter who refuses to get circumcised, is the main reason behind his trial. Because of her decision to fall in love with Waiyaki, Nyambura is disowned by Joshua. Muthoni, Nyambura, and Waiyaki, the three hybrid characters, suggest the impossibility of reconciliation. Thus, Ngugi's main interest in the female body is obvious. The body becomes a reminder of the cultural clash and the impossible reconciliation.

Ngugi has insisted that his writing is very much part of Kenya's historiography. He posits his fiction as an agent of history because it provides the requested space to challenge notions of national identities, uses of history, and the ways in which they are deployed in power contestation in modern Kenya. *A Grain of Wheat* shows the extent to which Ngugi agrees with Edward Said who believes that the text represents "revised visions of the past tending towards a postcolonial future, as urgently reinterpretable and redeployable experiences, in which the formerly silent native speaks and acts on territory reclaimed as part of a general movement of resistance, from colonist" (256). Cooper's claim that Ngugi's intervention in re-writing history strives to recover the lives of people who are forgotten in narratives of global exploitation and national mobilization is relevant to our critical reading of *A Grain of Wheat* in chapter six. As it has been revealed through the sixth chapter, Ngugi rejects those historical archives akin to the West. For him, any revision of the Kenyan history must take into consideration the struggles of the subalterns and their resistance to colonial and neocolonial domination in the postcolonial state. His historical revisionism has been read within the context of gendering history.

The professionalization of historiography in Kenya has meant ignoring the fact that women have a past. It is noted that women were long disqualified from writing the so called 'professional history'. Ngugi's reaction to this tradition is revealed through his reintegration of women in the anti-colonial struggle. His aim is to make women's voice heard. The novel provides insight into women's roles during the emergency. It offers special space to women and makes them visible. The novel provides insights into actions attributed to the second sex during the emergency. It demonstrates women's roles and their links to the clandestine activities of the Mau Mau. Ngugi sheds light on

their roles in passing information and smuggling guns to the Mau Mau fighters. What is really particular about this novel is the fact that while women are depicted as contributors to the struggle, the largest space is devoted to their double exploitation. It exposes the way women are sexually abused by men. Ngugi's female characters are subject to objectification. They are revealed as men's objects of satisfaction. Men manipulate women and use them to quench their libido. Women who refuse to obey men to fulfill their sexual need are subject to physical acts. On the one hand, women are bound to fulfill their tasks and participate in liberating the country. On the second hand, however, they are compelled to bear the consequences of their eagerness and pay for the contribution. As a result of their intervention in the war, Kenyan became subject to physical violence, rape and displacement.

In *A Grain of Wheat*, women are preyed upon by the homeguards. The homeguards in this novel are Kenya's future rulers. They are what Ngugi names 'elites' in *Petals of Blood*, *Devil on the Cross*, *Matigari*, and *Wizard of the Crow*. The collaborator Karanja who destroys Mumbi's life is the best representative of this social category. By the end of the novel, Ngugi puts the female body under the pressure of this category to foreshadow Kenya's future. As early as 1966, Ngugi's bitterness was beginning to show. In a note to *A Grain of Wheat* he asserts that "the problems are real – sometimes too painfully real for peasants who fought the British yet who now see all that they fought for being put to one side." Like many of his contemporaries, Ngugi was beginning to suspect that for the national bourgeoisie independence did not entail fulfilling the fundamental promises the nationalist elite had made at the height of nationalism. Gikonyo and Mumbi's last meeting becomes highly symbolic. Their refusal to talk about Karanja's child proves that there will be no room for compromise and this has a negative impact on nation building. Being sexually exploited by the collaborator, Mumbi plays two important roles in Ngugi's political vision. On the one hand she represents Kenyan women who are preyed upon by black men. On the second, however, she represents the whole nation who will be exploited by the future rulers. This is why the novel's end is ambiguous. Accordingly, women's plight gives the author the chance to question *Uhuru* and *Harambee*. Nevertheless, as the novel comes to its end this task has not been fulfilled. The reader is left expecting the future of both women and Kenya in the hands of the new rulers. The third part of the present thesis is devoted to the task of investigating Ngugi's body politics in his post-independence

novels. The aim was to trace the development of his political consciousness as far as women plight is concerned.

Third phase of African literature is known for its sharpness and high criticism. Known as the literature of denunciation, self-criticism, or the inward-looking, post-colonial African literature unveils the postcolonial condition. In terms of content and style, post-colonial African novel is marked by its difference from the colonial texts. The African novel has moved towards more and more of national commitment and Marxist or socialist ideology. In his post-independence novels, Ngugi's literary commitment reached its highest peak. In *Art and Ideology* Emmanuel Ngara shows how the African writers are profoundly influenced by "proliferation of Marxist ideas, whether consciously or unconsciously" (50). Ngara discusses the novels of Armah, Sembene Ousmane, and Ngugi. The reason for this is that the influence of any ideology on a body of literature is largely a result of historical conditions and can enter invisibly into a writer's consciousness and his creative work. The committed novelist faces this challenge of sublimating ideology into art more acutely. Ngugi's problem is the problem of the African novelist as a whole, which is fully highlighted by Kelwyn Sole in his article "Art and Activism in Kenya", when he argues that:

The Western trained critics, then, should perhaps not be too quick in condemning his [Ngugi's] lack of subtlety. The fact of the matter is that a discussion of Ngugi's consciously chosen position as regards literature relates to the problem of the position of the African writer in his or her society and connected problems of criticism. (28)

*Petals of Blood* is Ngugi's first attempt to reflect the postcolonial disillusionment. Highly determined by his Marxist political ideology, the novel reveals the devastation of the whole nation by the greedy capitalists. In this novel the author protests vehemently against the continued exploitation of peasants and workers in their respective countries. His writings give a boost to resist new coined words-such as neocolonialism, post-colonialism, and capitalism which are rooted in colonialism itself. For an author like Ngugi, literature is a sort of machete to fight against the injustice meted out on the masses in particular and on the mankind in general. *Petals of Blood* is a fictional representation of the Kenyan society which is made of two extreme layers; exploiter and exploited, or oppressor and oppressed. Chapter seven of the present thesis analyzed women situation in Ngugi's fourth and last English-published novel. An attempt was made in this chapter to perceive post-independent Kenya from the eyes of

women. Preoccupied with capitalism and its devastating forces, Ngugi exhibits the cruelty of the new rulers who transform the Kenya into a modern country where money is the leading power. As it has been argued in chapter seven, capitalism imprisons and chains women. They are doubly oppressed, both as second sex, and second class. Capitalism enhances the patriarchal order, excludes women and deprives them of their rights of ownership. The alienation and displacement of Nyakinyua show that in a capitalist society women are treated second class and therefore as propertyless. Moreover, money widens the gap between the rich and the poor. In such situation, women are objectified. They are still entrapped within the male-constructed identity of women as mere objects of sex and as naturally inferior. Women exploitation, in the novel, is Ngugi's vehicle to criticize the new rulers who sexually abuse young girls like Wanja. By this, Ngugi would say that capitalism also subjugates women and treats them like sexual objects.

The largest space in the novel is devoted to the heroine's transformation into a whore. Writers in Africa have always avoided dealing with prostitution. Ngugi is among the first African writers to shed light on this phenomenon. He attributes the causes of moral decadence of Kenyan and other African women to the bourgeois. Wanja successfully reflects the material conditions of the 'wretched' women. She understands that in a world of exploiter and exploited, one must eat before he or she is eaten. This is main reason behind joining the world of whoredom. She is compelled to be a prostitute to be preyed upon and prey upon other women whom she leads to increase her wealth. The novel ends suggesting that women are exploited by capitalist men and capitalist women. In this case, the novelist would say that prostitution is the ultimate form of capitalism. Ngugi conflates in Wanja's body the figure of Africa as a mother and whore. Wanja represents the nation's moments of degradation in her portrait as abused womanhood and an allegorical parallel to the postcolonial phase in Africa.

*Devil on the Cross* is an attack on the neocolonial conditions that prevail in modern Kenya. According to Ngugi, today's African young generation has become the victim of corrupt politicians and false promises given by them. As a sensitive writer, Ngugi is worried about corruption that prevails in the Kenyan society. He believes that capitalism is a systematic robbery of peasants and workers. It is a robbery protected and sanctified by large courts, parliament, religion, armed forces, police and educational institutions. The novel renders how Kenyan bourgeois elites exploited the masses.

Ngugi frames the concept 'local watchdog' to name those elites who collaborate with their European masters to rob the masses. They are described as the thieves, robbers, hypocrites and criminals. Ngugi conveys that exploiters would go to any extent to promote their interest. They have a desire to make money at the cost of moral scruples. It is due to their materialistic interest that they sold their motherland to the colonizers. It is for the same reason that they continue to serve it into neo-colonialism.

As chapter eight of the present thesis showed, exploitation of women is also exposed in the novel. It centers on the predicaments of Kenyan women whom Wangari and Wariinga represent. Wangari's story echoes that of Nyakinyua in *Petals of Blood*. They both represent women who are Kenyans by birth, yet the capitalist fake promises make them vagrant in their country. Wangari's plight, which begins as soon as she fails to make a timely payment for a loan she contracted to send her child to school, suggests that in modern Kenya even old women are subject to displacement, vagrancy, exploitation and oppression. Through Wariinga's plight, Ngugi shows how women, in neo-colonial countries, were used as means of income. They are subject to double exploitation and preyed upon by foreigners and native Kenyans. They were raped by the new black masters as well as tourists. In the first section of the novel, gender functions as a metaphor for class and social degradation. Wariinga's exploitation by Rich Old Man becomes a symbol for the debased state of neocolonial Kenya. As it has been revealed, Ngugi associates the body with the land to make the female body a vivid metaphor of the nation. He deliberately equates the nation with a raped or impregnated mother to represent neocolonialism as a prostituted economy.

One of the most striking features of Ngugi's novels is women's rebellious voice in spite of their subjugation. His female characters are shown as being in conflict with the patriarchal forces of the outer world. Gĩkũyũ women depicted by Ngũgĩ are mothers, educators, nurturers, helpers, supporters and epitome of love and affection. They are stereotyped since ages as useless beings, but finally through their insurmountable contributions made for their home and society, they succeed in carving a niche for themselves in the community. Ngugi's women also act as bread-earners for the family and care takers of their husband and children. All his female characters are delicate beings and may turn into steadfast and witty individuals depending on their needs and the situation.

Ngugi's post-independence novels portray heroines who evolve from exploited females to self-reliant women and ultimately into rebellious gun-toting women. The transformation of the heroines in this line seems to complete the circle of what Ngugi seems to have envisioned about the evolution of his female characters from submissive and exploited females into armed revolutionaries. Wanja uses prostitution as a means of emancipation and a way to bring about the doom of her exploiters. If it be objected that she does not take up guns to fight for the sake of Kenya like the earlier revolutionaries did, she is at least fighting for the sake of justice for the exploited female in the context of contemporary Kenya and her fight for her rights is the fight for the rights of every other woman who has felt the brunt of exploitation under similar circumstances.

Wariinga also is noted for her transformation to wreak revenge. Revolution occupies a prominent place in Ngugi's novels. Resistance in *Devil on the Cross* can be seen in the actions of Wariinga. In fact, the development of the heroine in the novel can be taken as an important example of the presence of conflict and resistance. Wariinga is certainly the strongest woman character created by Ngugi who combines unusual strength with determination to resist the patriarchal pressures and injustices, and who has a clear perception of her own situation. She no longer accepts exploitation. Her inner turmoil and suffering of so many years, her retaliations and her submissions find an outlet in her final action. She kills the Rich-Old-Man so that never again he is able to victimize an innocent girl like her and impart a whole life's suffering to her. By the end of the novel, and after killing Rich Old Man, Wariinga looks disturbed and shattered since all her desires to begin a new life are destroyed. The ravishing fire of anger and hatred towards these rich and greedy men cannot be extinguished till vengeance in some form or the other has taken place. Killing of the Rich-Old-Man is her revenge on him for all the injuries inflicted on her physically and mentally. She is able to charter her own course of life although it is much more difficult and challenging after the murder of the Rich-Old-Man, as revealed in the last line of the novel: "But she knew with all her heart that the hardest struggles of her life's journey lay ahead..." (254). The open ending of the novel suggests that Wariinga's future is vague and dark. It is also suggestive of Ngugi's personal feeling that a new society, a new age in neocolonial countries is an illusion, and much has to be fought before the dawn breaks on a new society, and a 'New Woman' who is free from the power strands of neocolonialism and patriarchy. The ellipses that end the novel are clearly ambivalent and can be interpreted in either of

two ways: they can be seen as space in which the reader can provide an aftermath for Wariinga's story as it moves into the future; or they can function as the most visible sign of Ngugi's uncertainty about the future.

Over the course of this thesis, my aim has been to demonstrate the significance of women's predicaments in Ngugi's fiction. This long research has taken into account women's plight in two different phases as revealed and demonstrated by Ngugi's novels. Throughout his colonial and postcolonial novels, Ngugi reveals his interest in women's plight, their hopes and loves. Part two of the present thesis examined women's position in Ngugi's colonial novels. It has been found that his colonial novels reflect women under the pressure of the patriarchy. They were subject to double colonization and thus objectified. In this case, Ngugi's colonial novels can be read as attempting to maintain that during the colonial era women were suppressed. Third part of this thesis dealt with women in Ngugi's post-independence novels. It attempted to answer the main questions that the second part raised by its end. Throughout *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross* it is clear that independence worsened women's situation. They are subject to double oppression in a neo-colonized country. This situation is better summarized in Ngugi's latest novel *Wizard of the Crow* (2006) where Nyawira asserts that Kenyan woman carries three burdens which make her the most oppressed person in the world: "She is oppressed on account of her color like all black people in the world; she is oppressed on account of her gender like all women in the world; and she is exploited and oppressed on account of her class like all workers and peasants in the world" (428). Women just like the peasants of the workers form the wretched of the earth who became disappointed with post-independence era. In *Homecoming*, Ngugi (1972) writes:

What have these peasants gained from Uhuru? Has our ruling élite tried to change the colonial social and economic structure? Are the Peasants and the workers in control of the land they fought for? When I look around me, I see sad faces, I see unfulfilled hope and promise. (49)

In "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," Frederic Jameson (1986) revives the conception of national allegory, which he had discussed at some length in his *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, or, the Modernist as Fascist* (1979), in order to argue that "Third-World texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic — necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture*

*and society*” (69; italics in original). Although this statement has been dismissed by postcolonial writers and critics like Aijaz Ahmad, it finds its legitimacy in Ngugi’s political activism. Far from sympathizing with Kenyan women, Ngugi’s interest in their plight is of a political weight. In *Wizard of the Crow*, Ngugi equates the nation with women’s ordeal:

...if a woman who had been at the mountaintop of power and visibility could be made to disappear, be silenced forever while alive, what about the ordinary woman worker and peasant? The condition of women in a nation is the real measure of its progress. You imprison a woman and you have imprisoned a nation, we sang in a song of celebration. (253)

Women’s condition is the real measure of the nation’s progress. Ngugi relies on their condition to put the question mark on independence. Like many postcolonial writers, he shares with Edward Said the belief that the colonial aftermath does not yield to the end of colonialism. He has always been sensitive to the notion of independence and the compromised nature of Uhuru:

To the majority of African people in the new states, independence did not bring about fundamental changes. It was independence with the ruler holding a begging bowl and the ruled holding a shrinking belly. It was independence with a question mark. The age of independence had produced a new class and a new leadership that often was not very different from the old one. Black skins, white masks? White skins, black masks? Black skins concealing colonial settlers’ hearts? In each of the African languages there was an attempt to explain the new phenomenon in terms of the ‘White’ and ‘Black’ symbols by which colonialism had been seen and fought out. But really, this was a new company, a company of African profiteers firmly deriving their character, power, and inspiration from their guardianship of imperialist interests. (*Moving* 83)

Women’s condition, Ngugi would say, is the real measure of a nation’s independence. As long as women are chained and imprisoned, a nation’s independence must be revised. Interviewed by Albert Mugambi Rutere, Ngugi argues that “The liberation of woman is the key to the liberation of society as a whole, in Africa and the world.” (213). In this respect, Ngugi agrees with Nurudin Farah’s famous statement that only “when the women are free, then and only then, can we talk about a free Somalia” (qtd. in Florence<sup>51</sup>). In a nutshell the victimized woman appears as a metaphor for the nation under dictatorship, and male sexual power is perceived as a further manifestation of political power along a continuum of patriarchal authority. Interviewed by Albert Rutere who asked Ngugi the following question: Is the changing (rebellious) image of a

woman now complete in your *Wizard of the Crow*, or you still believe women are yet to do more in keeping the patriarchal African state of Kenya on its toes? (213). Ngugi simply replied: “The struggle continues.” (Rutere 213). At this level, one is supposed to ask the question: Which struggle is suitable for Ngugi’s women to restore their dignity in a world of consumerism, globalization, and total despair?

## Works Cited

### a- Primary Sources

#### Novels

Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *Weep Not, Child*. London: Heinemann, 1964.

----- *The River Between*. London: Heinemann, 1965.

----- *A Grain of Wheat*. London: Heinemann, 1965.'

----- *Petals of Blood*. London: Heinemann, 1977.

----- *Devil on the Cross*. London: Heinemann, 1982.

----- *Matigari*. London: Heinemann, 1989.

----- *Wizard of the Crow*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2006.

#### Short Stories:

----- *Secret Lives, a Collection*. London: Heinemann, 1970.

#### Plays

----- *The Black Hermit*. London: Heinemann, 1968

----- *The Trail of Dedan Kimathi*. London: Heinemann, 1976.

----- *I Will Marry When I Want*. London: Heinemann, 1982

#### Non-Fiction

----- *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics*.  
London: Heinemann, 1972

----- *Writers in Politics: A Re-Engagement with Issues of Literature and Society*.  
London: Heinemann, 1982

----- *Barrel of a Pen: Resistance to a Repression in Neo-colonial Kenya*. Trenton, NJ:  
African World Press, 1983

----- *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. London:  
James Currey Ltd. 1986.

-----*Moving the Centre: Struggle for Cultural Research in African Literature* Freedom.  
London: James Currey Ltd. 1993.

-----*Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams: Toward a Critical Theory of the Arts and the State in Africa.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.

-----*Something Torn & New: An African Renaissance.* Basic Civitas Books, 2009.

## **Memoirs**

-----*Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary.* London: Heinemann 1982;

-----*Dreams at the Time of War: A Childhood Memoir.* London: Vintage Books, 2010.

-----*In the House of the Interpreter: A Memoir.* New York: Pantheon, 2012.

## **b- Secondary Sources**

### **Books, Articles and Theses**

Achebe, Chinua. "The Black Writer's Burden," *Presence Africaine*, no. 59, 1996, pp.135-139.

----. "The African Writer and the Biafran Cause." *Morning Yet on Creation Day: Essays.* London: Heinemann, 1966: 55-62.

----. "The Role of the Writer in the New Nation." *African Writers on African Writing.* Ed. G. D. Killam. London: Heinemann, 1973.

Acholonu, C. *Motherism: The Afro-centric Alternative to Feminism.* Owerri: Afa, 1995.

Adetuyi, Chris Ajibade, and Adeola Adetomi Adeniran. "African Poetry as an Expression of Agony." *World Journal of English Language*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2018, p. 21., doi:10.5430/wjel.v8n1p21.

Adewoyem Sam. A. "The Strength of the Rhetoric of Oral Tradition in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross.*" *A Practical Introduction to Literary Theory and Criticism*, by M. Keith. Booker, Longman, 1996.

Aguilar, Mario I. *Theology, Liberation and Genocide.* SCM Press, 2009.

Ahluwalia, Pal. *Politics and Post-Colonial Theory: African Inflections.* Routledge, 2001.

Ajayi-Soyinka, Omofolabo. "Black Feminist Criticism and Drama: Thoughts on Double Patriarchy." *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism.* Vol. 7, no.2, 1993.

Alam, S. *Rethinking the Mau Mau in Colonial Kenya.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

- Al-Saidi, Afaf Ahmed Hasan. "Post-Colonialism Literature the Concept of Self and the Other in Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*: An Analytical Approach." *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2014, doi:10.4304/jltr.5.1.95-105.
- Amadiume, Ifi. *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*. Zed Books, 2015.
- Amoko, Apollo Obonyo. *Postcolonialism in the Wake of Nairobi Revolution: Ngugi wa Thiong'o and the Idea of African Literature*. USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. Print.
- Amooti, wa Irumba. "The Making of a Rebel." *Index on Censorship*. Vol 3, 1980, pp.20-24.
- Amuta, Chidi. *Theory of African Literature: Implications for Practical Criticism*. Zed Books Ltd, 2017.
- Anonby, John. 'Images of Christ in East African Literature: The Novels of NgũgĩwaThiong'o', in Stanley E. Porter et al (eds.), *Images of Christ: Ancient and Modern*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999.
- Arab, Samir., Boulenouar, M.Y. "The Position of Foreign Language in African Literature." *Djoussour El-maaréfa*, vol. 5, no.1, 2019, pp. 535-541.
- Arab, Si Abderahmane. *Politics and the Novel in Africa*. Algiers: O.P.U, 1982.
- Armah, Ayi K. *The Beautiful Ones Are Not yet Born: A Novel*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968.
- Ashcroft, Bill, et al. *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*. London; New York: Routledge, 2001. Print.
- Ashcroft, Bill, et al. *The Empire writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Ashcroft, Bill, et al. *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. Routledge, 2006.
- Ashcroft, Bill., Pal Ahluwalia. *Edward Said*. London & New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Awuyah, Chris Kwame. "The Motif of Carving in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat*." *Notes on Contemporary Literature*. Vol.19, no. 5, 1989, pp.9-10.
- Bachtin Michail Michajlovič. *Rabelais and His World*. Indiana University Press, 2009.
- Badoe, Yaba, et al. "Women in African Literature." *Feminist Review*, no. 17, 1984, p. 102., doi:10.2307/1395023.
- Bagchi, Amiya Kumar. *The Political Economy of Underdevelopment*. Univ. Press, 1993.

- Baig, Mirza Sultan. "Re/Conceiving the Post/Colonial Ethos in Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross*". Proceeding of National Seminar on Postmodern Literary Theory and Literature, Jan. 27-28, 2012
- Baldick, Chris. *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Balogun, F. Odun. "Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross*: The Novel as Hagiography of a Marxist". *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, vol. 16, no.2, 1998.
- Bartky, S. L. 'Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power' in I. Diamond and L. Quinby (eds.) *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections of Resistance* Northeastern University Press: Boston, 1988.
- Bassey, U.D. and Eton, S.D. "Responding to the Challenge: Feminist Consciousness in Breaking the Silence: An Anthology of Short Stories". *BAHIR DAR, ETHIOPIA: AFRREV IJAH An International Journal of Arts and Humanities*. Vol. 1, No. 4, 2012, pp. 46-56.
- Beal, Frances M. "Double Jeopardy." *Meridians*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2008, pp. 166–176., doi:10.2979/mer.2008.8.2.166.
- Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex: Simone De Beauvoir*. Alfred A. Knopf, 1953.
- Bell, Roseann P. "The Absence of the African Woman Writer." *CLA Journal*, vol. 21, no. 4, 1978, pp. 491–498. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/44329402.
- Bennett, Tony. *Outside Literature*. London, New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Berger, Roger A. "Ngũgĩ's Comic Vision." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 20, no. 1, 1989, pp. 1–25. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3819081.
- "Past the Last Post (Review)." *Postmodern Culture*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1992, doi:10.1353/pmc.1992.0005.
- Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994. Print.
- Blamires, Harry. *A History of Literary Criticism*. Macmillan, 1992.
- Bock, Hedwig, and Albert Wertheim. *Essays on Contemporary Post-Colonial Fiction*. Max Hueber Verlag, 1986.
- Boehmer, Elleke. "'The Master's Dance to the Master's Voice': Revolutionary Nationalism and Women's Representation in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o." *Stories of Women*, 2005., doi:10.7228/manchester/9780719068782.003.0003.
- Bongmba, E. "On Love: Literary Images Of A Phenomenology Of Love In Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*." *Literature and Theology*, vol. 15, no. 4, 2001, pp. 373–395., doi:10.1093/litthe/15.4.373.

- Booker, M. Keith. *The African Novel in English: An Introduction. Studies in African Literature*. Oxford: James Currey, 1998.
- Boulenouar, M.Y. "Arab Women Written Discourse to Confront Patriarchy and Domination" *AT-TALIMIA*, vol 4 , no5. , 2013.
- Brennan, Timothy. *Wars of Position: the Cultural Politics of Left and Right*. Columbia University Press, 2007.
- Bressler, Charles E. *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1999.
- Brockmeier, Jens, and Donal Carbaugh. *Narrative and Identity: Studies in Autobiography, Self and Culture*. John Benjamins, 2001.
- Brotz, Howard. *African-American Social and Political Thought: 1850-1920*. Routledge, 2017.
- Brown, Lloyd W. *Women Writers in Black Africa*. Greenwood Press, 1981.
- . "The African Woman as Writer". *Canadian Journal of African Studies*. 9.3. (1975): 493-501.
- Bruner, Charlotte H. *Unwinding Threads: Writing by Women in Africa*. Heinemann, 1994.
- Cabral, Amilcar. *Unity and Struggle: Speeches and Writings*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979. Print.
- Cagatay , Nilufer. *Trade, Gender and Poverty*. UNDP, 2001.
- Caminero-Santangelo, Byron. "Neocolonialism and the Betrayal Plot in 'A Grain of Wheat': Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's Re-Vision of 'Under Western Eyes.'" *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 29, no. 1, 1998, pp. 139–152. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/3820536](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3820536).
- Cantalupo, Charles.ed. *Ngugi wa Thiong'o : Text and Contexts*. Trenton: African World Press, 1995.
- Cherekar, Dr Jayant S. *Woman Blooming out of Gloom: a Thematic Perspective on the Novels of Mariama Ba*. Eloquent Books, 2013.
- Chinweizu, et al. *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature*. Washington D.C.: Howard University Press, 1986.
- Chivaura, V.G. 'The Art of Dialogue on Male-Female Relationships in African Culture: Implications for Black Writers on Human Development and Social Progress.' in *The International Journal of African Studies*. Vol 6 No 1. November/December 2000 National Council for Black Studies. pp22-9.

- Cixous Hélène, and Clément Catherine. *The Newly Born Woman*. University of Minnesota Press, 2008.
- Cleage, Pearl. *Deals with the Devil: and Other Reasons to Riot*. Ballantine Books, 1994.
- Clough, Marshall S. *Mau Mau Memoirs: History, Memory, and Politics*. Colo., 1998.
- Cochrane, Judith. "Some Images of Women in East African Fiction." *Association For Commonwealth Literature Language Studies*, vol. 5, no.1, 1978, pp.27-41.
- Collins, Patricia Hill .“What’s in a Name? Womanism, Black Feminism, and Beyond”, *Black Scholar; Winter/Spring 96*, Vol. 26 Issue 1, 1996, p.9.
- Cook, David., Michael Okenimpke. *Ngugi wa Thiong’o: An Exploration of His Writings*. London: Heinemann, 1983. Print.
- Culler, Jonathan D. *Flaubert: the Uses of Uncertainty*. Davies Group, 2006.
- Curtis, Lisa. "The Divergence of Art and in the Later Novels of Ngugi wa Thiong'o: A Critique." *Ufahamu*. Vol 13, no.2,1984 pp.186-214.
- Dangor, Suleman. “Historical Perspective, Current Literature and an Opinion Survey among Muslim Women in Contemporary South Africa: A Case Study.” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2001, pp. 109–129., doi:10.1080/13602000120050578.
- Davies, Carole Boyce. *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*. Routledge, 2002.
- Davison, Jean. *Voices from Mutira: Lives of Rural Gikuyu Women*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996.
- De Man, Paul. 1989. Introduction to the Poetry of John Keats. In: Nicholas Royle (ed.), Jacques Derrida. London: Routledge.
- Delphy, Christine. *Close to Home: A Materialist Analysis of Women’s Oppression*, translated and edited by Diana Leonard. London: Hutchinson, 1984.
- DeMan, Paul. *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*. Routledge, 1996.
- Dickenson, Donna L. “Property and Women's Alienation from Their Own Reproductive Labour.” *Bioethics*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2001, pp. 205–217., doi:10.1111/1467-8519.00232.
- Digole, D. P. “Postcolonial: An Aesthetic of Subversion and Reclamation”. *Proceedings of National Seminar on Postmodern Literary Theory and Literature*, Jan. 128-134, 2012.
- Dirilik, Arif. *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism*. USA: Westview Press, 1997.

- Drabble, Margaret, and Jenny Stringer. *The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature*. Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Dubey, Madhu. *Black Women Novelists and the Nationalist Aesthetic*. Indiana University Press, 1994.
- Dunton, Chris. "This Rape is Political: The Siting of Women's Experience in Novels by Aidoo, Ngugi, Farah, and El Saadawi." *English in Africa* . vol 27, no.1, 2000.
- Eboh, MP. 'The Woman Question: African and Western Perspectives' in Eze, EC.(ed.) *African Philosophy: An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998.
- Egejuru, P. A. *Towards African Literary Independence*. London: Greenwood Press, 1980
- Elkins, Caroline. *Imperial Reckoning the Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya*. CNIB, 2008.
- Emecheta, Buchi. "feminism with a small f!". *Criticism and Ideology: Second African Writers Conference, Stockholm 1986*. Ed. Kirsten Holst Peterson Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1988, pp.173-81.
- Emecheta, Buchi. *Double Yoke*. London & Nigeria: Ogwugwu Afor Co. 1982.
- Engels, Friedrich. *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, in the Light of the Research of Lewis H. Morgan*. International Publ., 1942
- Epple, Angelika, and Angelika Schaser. *Gendering Historiography: beyond National Canons*. Campus Verlag, 2009.
- Esther smith, "Images of Women in African literature: . Some Examples of Inequality in the Colonial Period," *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*, ed. Carole Boyce Davies and Anne Adams Graves . Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1986.
- Evans, Jennifer. 'Women and Resistance in Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross*', *African Literature Today*. Vol.15.1987.
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched Of The Earth*. New York : Grove Press, 1963.
- Finnegan, Ruth H. *Oral Literature in Africa*. Oxford Univ. Press, 1993.
- Floyd-Thomas, Stacey. *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*. New York University Press., 2006.
- Fortier, Lise. "Women, Sex and Patriarchy." *Family Planning Perspectives*, vol. 7, no. 6, 1975, p. 278., doi:10.2307/2133662.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish*. USA: Vintage Books, 1995.

- Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge: Michel Foucault*. Pantheon Books, 1972.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: an Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. Routledge, 2010.
- Frank, Katherine. "Women without Men: The Feminist Novel in Africa"l. *Women in African Literature Today*. Ed. Eldred Durosimi Jones. Africa World Press, Inc. Trenton, N.J (1987): 14-33.
- Gakwindi, Shatto Arthur. "Ngugi's A Grain of Wheat." ed. G.D. Killam. *Critical Perspectives on Nqugi wa Thiong'o*. Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1984.
- Gandhi, Leela. *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*. New York: Edinburgh University, 1998.
- Gikandi, Simon, and Evan Mwangi. *The Columbia Guide to East African Literature in English since 1945*. Columbia University Press, 2007.
- Gikandi, Simon. *Ngugi Wa Thiong'o*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: the Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Yale University Press, 2006.
- Gimenez, Martha E. "Capitalism and the Oppression of Women: Marx Revisited." *Science & Society*, vol. 69, no. 1, 2005, pp. 11–32. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/40404227](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40404227).
- Giroux, Henry A., ed. *Postmodernism, Feminism, and Cultural Politics: Redrawing Educational Boundaries*. Albany: State U of New York P, 1991.
- Glenn, Ian, 'Ngugi wa Thiong'o and the Dilemmas of the Intellectual Elite in Africa: A Sociological Perspective', *English in Africa*. vol 8, no. 2, 1981, pp. 53–66.
- Glinga, Werner. "The River Between and Its Forerunners: A Contribution to the Theory of the Kenyan Novel." *World Literature Written in English*, vol. 26, no. 2, 1986, pp. 211–228., doi:10.1080/17449858608588978.
- Goldstein, Philip. *The Politics of Literary Theory: An Introduction to Marxist Criticism*. Florida: Florida State UP, 1990.
- Gordimer, Nadine. *Review of A Grain Of Wheat*. Michigan Quarterly Review, 1970.
- Gordon, April A., and Donald L. Gordon. *Understanding Contemporary Africa*. Lynne Rienner, 1997.
- Gugelberger, Georg M. *Marxism and African Literature*. USA: Africa World Press, 1986.

- Gurnah, Abdulrazak. *Essays on African Writing*. Heinemann, 1995.
- Gurr, Andrew. *Writers in Exile: the Identity of Home in Modern Literature*. Harvester Press, 1981.
- Habib, Rafey. *Modern Literary Criticism and Theory: a History*. Blackwell, 2008.
- Hale, F. "The Critique of Gikuyu Religion and Culture in S.N.Ngubiah's a Curse from God." *Acta Theologica*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2007, doi:10.4314/actat.v27i1.5491.
- Hammond, Andrew. 'Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o & the Crisis of Kenyan Masculinity', in Lahoucine Ouzgane (ed.), *Men in African Film & Fiction*, Suffolk: James Currey, 2011.
- Hassan, Abd El-Sayed. "Reading Ngugi's *Weep Not, Child* Along with Alice Walker's Womanism". *European Scientific Journal*. vol.10, No.14, 2014.
- Hooks, Bell. "Feminism – It's a black thang!" *Essence*. Vol 23, No 3, 1992.p. 124
- . *Feminist Theory: from Margin to Center*. Routledge, 2015.
- . *Talking Back Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. Routledge, 2015.
- Howard, W.J. "Themes and Development in the Novels of Ngugi." ed. Edgar Wright. *The Critical Evaluation of Literature*. London: Heinemann, 1973, pp.95-119.
- Hudson-Weems, Clenora. *Africana Womanism & Race & Gender in the Presidential Candidacy of Barack Obama*. AuthorHouse, 2009.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *Irony's Edge: the Theory and Politics of Irony*. Taylor and Francis, 2013.
- Ikiddeh, Ime. "Ngugi wa Thiong'o: The Novelist as Historian." ed. Bruce King and Kolawole Ogungbesan. of *Black and African Writing*. Zaria: University Bello and Oxford University Press, 1975, pp. 204-216.
- Irele F. Abiola and Simon Gikandi, eds. *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature*. 2 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2006
- Jabbi, Bu-Buakei. "Conrad's Influence on Betrayal in 'A Grain of Wheat.'" *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1980, pp. 50–83. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/3818591](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3818591).
- Jaggar, Alison M., and Paula S. Rothenberg. *Feminist Frameworks Alternative Theoretical Accounts of the Relations between Women and Men*. Braille Jymico Inc., 2003.

- James, Adeola. *In Their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk*. Currey, 1991.
- James, Trevor . ‘Theology of Landscape and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *The River Between*’, in Jamie S. Scott and Paul Simpson-Housley (eds.), *Mapping the Sacred: Religion, Geography and Postcolonial Literatures*. Rodopi, 2011.
- Jameson, Frederic . “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism”. *Social Text* 15 (1986): 65-88. JSTOR. Web. 10 Feb. 2016.
- JanMohamed, Abdul. “Ngugi wa Thiong’o: The Problems of Communal Regeneration”. In *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983, pp. 225-62
- Johnson, Michael P. “Patriarchal Terrorism and Common Couple Violence: Two Forms of Violence Against Women.” *Domestic Violence*, 2017., doi:10.4324/9781315264905-2.
- Julien, Eileen. "African Literature." In: *Africa*, 3rd edition, edited by Phyllis M. Martin & Patrick O'Meara, pp. 295-312. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- . "Heroism in Grain of Wheat." ed. Eldred Jones. *African Literature Today*. New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1983, pp. 136- 143.
- Kamau-Goro, Nicholas. ‘African Culture and the Language of Nationalist Imagination: The Reconfiguration of Christianity in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *The River Between* and *Weep Not Child*’, *Studies in World Christianity* 16:1, 2010.
- Kamau-Goro, Nicholas. ‘Rejection or Reappropriation? Christian Allegory and the Critique of Postcolonial Public Culture in the Early Novels of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’, in Harri Englund (ed.), *Christianity and Public Culture in Africa*, Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011.
- Karenga, Maulana. “Black Art : Mute Matter Given Force and Function”. *Black Poets and Prophets*. Ed. Woodie King and Earl Anthony. New York: Mentor Books, 1972
- Kathy Kessler, 'Rewriting History in Fiction: Elements of Postmodernism in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Later Novels', *Ariel*, vol. 25, no.2, 1994, pp.75-90.
- Kaya, Simone, and Cheikh Hamidou Kane. *Les Danseuses D'impé-Eya Jeunes Filles à Abidjan*. Inades, 1976.
- Kenyatta, Jomo. *Facing Mount Kenya: the Tribal Life of the Gikuyu. With an Introd. by B. Malinowski*. Secker & Warburg, 1971.
- Kesteloot, L. *BlackWriters in French: A Literacy history of Negritude*. Philadelphia: Sample University press, 1974.

- Killam, G. D. *An Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi*. Heinemann, 1980.
- Klerer, Mario. *Introduction to Literary Studies*. London & New York: Routledge, 1983.
- Kofi, Anyidoho. "Art in a Society in Transition", In *African Quarterly on the Arts*. Vol.11 , No.4. 1999.
- Kolawole, Mary Egun Modupe. *Womanism and African Consciousness*. Africa World Press, 1997.
- Kramarae, Cherie, and Paula A. Treichler. *A Feminist Dictionary*. University of Illinois Press, 1991.
- Kunene, Daniel P. *Thomas Mofolo and the Emergence of Written Sesotho Prose*. Ravan Press, 1989.
- Langton, R. *Sexual Solipsism: Philosophical Essays on Pornography Objectification*. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- LaPin, Deirdre. "Women in African Literature". *African Women, South of the Sahara*. Ed. Hay, Margaret Jean and Stichter, Sharon. Harlow, Essex: Longman Group Limited, 1984, pp.102-118.
- Larson, Charles R. "The Situational Novel." *The Emergence of African Fiction*, Indiana University Press, 1972.
- Lazarus, Neil. *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*. Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Lee, Sonia M. "L'Image De La Femme Dans Le Roman Francophone De L'Afrique Occidentale." *Amherst, Mass., University of Massachusetts, Phil. Diss*, 1974.
- Lemon, Stephen. "Post-Colonial Critical Theories." *New National and PostColonial Literatures: An Introduction*. Ed. Bruce King. Oxford: Clarendon, 1996, pp.178–97.
- Likimani, Muthoni G. *Passbook Number F.47927: Women and Mau Mau in Kenya*. Noni's Publicity, 2004.
- Lindfors, Bernth. "Interview with Grace Ogot." *World Literature Written in English*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1979, pp. 57–68., doi:10.1080/17449857908588584.
- , "Negritude and After: Responses to Colonialism and Independence in African Literature". *Colonial Consciousness in Commonwealth Literature*. Eds. G.S Amur and S.K. Desai. Bombay: Somaiya, 1984.
- Lonsdale, John . 'The Prayers of Waiyaki: Political Uses of the Kikuyu Past', in David M. Anderson and Douglas H. Johnson (eds.), *Revealing Prophets: Prophecy in Eastern African History*, London: James Currey, 1995.

- Loomba, Ania. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. London; New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Crossing Press, 2015.
- Lovesey, Oliver. "Writing the Female Subject: Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Postcolonial Discourse." *World Literature Written in English*. 32.2 and 33.1, 1992.
- Macionis, John J., and Kenneth Plummer. *Sociology: a Global Introduction*. Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2012.
- Madsen, Deborah L. *Feminist Theory and Literary Practice*. Pluto Press, 2000.
- Maleki, Nasser, & Lalbakhsh, Pedram. "Black Woman, Indoctrination of The Male, and Subversion of the Patriarchy in Ngugi's Weep Not, Child." *The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, Vol. 18, no. 4, 2012.
- Maloba, Wunyabari O. *Mau Mau and Kenya: an Analysis of a Peasant Revolt*. Indiana Univ. Press, 1989.
- Mathuray, Mark. "Resuming a Broken Dialogue: Prophecy, Nationalist Strategies, and Religious Discourses in Ngugi's Early Work." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2009, pp. 40–62., doi:10.2979/ral.2009.40.2.40.
- Maughan-Brown, David. *Land, Freedom and Fiction: History and Ideology in Kenya*. Zed Books, 2017.
- Mazawi, AndreElias. *World Yearbook of Education 2010: "Education and the Arab 'World': Political Projects, Struggles, and Geometries of Power "*. Routledge, 2017.
- Mazrui, Ali A. *Political Values and Educational Class in Africa*. University of California Press, 1978
- Mbele, Joseph. *Notes on Achebe's Things Fall Apart*. Africonexion, 2005.
- Mbembe, Achille. "Provisional Notes on the Postcolony." *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, vol. 62, no. 1, 1992, pp. 3–37. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/1160062](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1160062).
- McLaren, Peter. *Postmodernism, Post-Colonialism and Pedagogy*. James Nicholas Publishers, 1996.
- Meyer, Herta. *"Justice for the Oppressed ..." the Political Dimension in the Language Use of Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o*. Verl. Die Blaue Eule, 1991.
- Mies, Maria, et al. *Women: The Last Colony*. Zed Books, 1991.
- Mies, Maria. "White Man's Dilemma: His Search for What He Has Destroyed." *Ecofeminism*, by Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, Zed Books, 2014.

- Mnthali, Felix. "Narrative Design in the African Novel." *An Introduction to the African Prose Narrative*, by Lokangaka Losambe, Africa World Press, 2004.
- Mohan, Devinder. "Semiology of Wariinga's Dream in Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross*." *Commonwealth Fiction*. (Ed.). R.K Dhawan. New Delhi: Classical Publishing Company, 1988. Print.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *Gender*, 2000, pp. 51–71., doi:10.1007/978-1-137-07412-6\_5.
- . *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Point Par Point, 2007.
- Moore, Barrington. *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1967.
- Mtuzze, P. T. *A Feminist Critique of the Image of Woman in the Prose Works of Selected Xhosa Writers (1909-1980)*. University of Cape Town, 1990.
- Mudimbe, V. Y. *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*. Indiana University Press, 2011.
- Mukherjee, Meenakshi. "Interrogating Post-colonialism". *Interrogating Post-Colonialism: Theory, Text and Context*. Ed. Harish Trivedi and Meenakshi Mukherjee. Shimla: IAS, 1996.
- Mutunda, Sylvester. "Through A Female Lens: Aspects of Masculinity in Francophone African Women's Writing." *The University of Arizona.*, 2009.
- Mwangi, Evan. "Gender, Unreliable Oral Narration, and the Untranslated Preface in Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's 'Devil on the Cross.'" *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 38, no. 4, 2007, pp. 28–46. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/20109536](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20109536).
- Nafukho, Fredrick, et al. *Foundations of Adult Education in Africa: Fredrick Nafukho, Maurice Amutabi, Ruth Otunga*. Pearson Education, 2005.
- Nama, Charles. "Daughters of Mumbi: Ngugi's Heroines and Traditional Gikuyu Aesthetics." Ed. Carol Boyce Davies and Anne Adams Graves. *Ngambika Studies of Women in African Literature*. New Jersey: Africa World P, 1986
- Nandy, Ashis. *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*. Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Napierkowski, Marie Rose. "Postcolonialism: Introduction." *Literary Movements for Students*. Marie Rose. Vol. 1. Detroit: Gale, 1998

- Narang, Harish. *Politics As Fiction The Novels of Ngugi wa Thiong'o*. New Delhi: Creative Books. 1995. Print.
- Narang, Harish. *Politics as Fiction: The Novels of Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, , New Delhi: Creative Books, 1995.
- Nfah-Abbenyi, Juliana Makuchi. *Gender in African Women's Writing: Identity, Sexuality, and Difference*. Indiana Univ. Press, 2011.
- Ngara, Emmanuel A. *Art and Ideology in the African Novel: a Study of the Influence of Marxism on African Writing*. Heinemann, 1987.
- Ngara, Emmanuel. "The Portrayal of Women in African Literature". *Kunapipi*, Vol. 11, No.3, 1989.
- Nicholls, Brendon. *Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Gender, and the Ethics of Postcolonial Reading*. England: Ashgate, 2010. Print.
- Nkurmah, Kwame. *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. London: Panaf, 1965.
- Nnaemeka, Obioma. "Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa's Way." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2004, pp. 357–385., doi:10.1086/378553.
- Nnolim, Charles. *Issues in African Literature*. Yenagoa: Treasure Resource Communications limited, 2009.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. "Objectification." *Philosophy Public Affairs*, vol. 24, no. 4, 1995, pp. 249–291., doi:10.1111/j.1088-4963.1995.tb00032.x.
- Ogundipe, Leslie Omolara. "African Women, Culture and Another Development." *Présence Africaine*, vol. 141, no. 1, 1987, doi:10.3917/presa.141.0123.
- Ogungbesin, K. *New West African literature*. London: Heinemann, 1978
- Ogunyemi, Chikwenye Okonjo. *Africa Wo/Man Palava: the Nigerian Novel by Women*. University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Okolo, Mary Stella Chika. *African Literature as Political Philosophy*. Zed Books, 2013.
- Okolo, MSC. *African Literature As Political Philosophy*. London; New York: Zed Books, 2007.
- Olney, James. *Tell Me Africa: an Approach to African Literature*. Princeton University Press, 2015.
- Omolade, Barbara. *The Rising Song of African American Women*. Routledge, 1994.
- Osofisan, Femi. "Literature and the Cannibal Mother" In *Literature and the Pressures of Freedom: Essays, Speeches and Songs*. Ibadan: Opon Ifa Readers, 2001

- Palmer Eustace. "Ngugi's Petals of Blood". In *African Literature Today*. Eldred Jones (ed). London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1979. p. 157
- . "Négritude Rediscovered: A Reading Of The Recent Novels Of Armah, Ngugi, And Soyinka". *The International Fiction Review*, vol 8, no. 1, 1981.
- Palmer, Eustace. *An Introduction to the African Novel a Critical Study of Twelve Books*. Heinemann, 1981.
- Papadaki E. *Feminist perspectives on objectification*. In: Zalta EN (ed) The Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy, Winter 2012 edition. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/feminismobjectification/>. Accessed 24 December 2018.
- Parker, John, and Richard Rathbone. *African History: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007
- Parker, Michael, and Starkey Roger, ds. *Postcolonial Literatures: Achebe, Ngugi, Desai, Walcott*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995.
- Partner, Nancy, and Sarah R. I. Foot. *SAGE Handbook of Historical Theory: SAGE Publications*. SAGE Publications, 2012.
- Poysa, Anne. *"The end of a single story? The post-colonial African Novel and Society"*. Universida de de Coimbra : Doutoramento em Pós-colonialismose Cidadania Global, 2011.
- Rao, Jaya. "African English Poetry: Some Themes and Features". *Postimperial and Postcolonial Literature in English*. 2002. 1-10.
- Ray, Sangeeta, and Schwarz, Henry. *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies: a Historical Introduction*. Blackwell Publishers, 2005.
- Reed, Pamela Yaa Asantewaa. "African Womanism and African Feminism: A Philosophical, Literary, and Cosmological Dialectic on Family." *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 25 (3), 2001.
- Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. New York: Norton, 1976.
- Richards, Cameron. "Postmodernism or Postcolonialism Tomorrow: the relevance of a Dialogical framework for postcolonial criticism," *Journal of the South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (SPAN)*, Vol. 36, 1993.
- Rivkin, Julie, and Michael Ryan. *Literary Theory An Anthology*. John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2017.

- Robertson, Claire C. "Women in the Urban Economy." *African Women, South of the Sahara*. Ed. Hay, Margaret Jean and Stichter, Sharon. Harlow, Essex: Longman Group Limited, 1984, pp. 33-49.
- Robson, James Stephen. *Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Fight against Colonialism and Neocolonialism: an Exploration of the Theme of Betrayal*. Simon Frazer University, 1989.
- Rodney, W. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Harare: ZPH, 1981.
- Rutere, Albert Mugambi. *Women and Patriarchal Power in the Selected Novels of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o*. Proquest, Umi Dissertatio, 2011.
- Rutere, Albert Mugambi. *Women and Patriarchal Power in the Selected Novels of Ngugi wa Thiong'o*. Morgan State University, 2009. Unpublished Thesis
- Ryan, Michael. *Literary Theory A Practical Introduction*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2007.
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.
- Said, Edward. "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors". *Critical Inquiry*. Vol. 15, no. 2, 1989.
- Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1993.
- Sander, R. and B. Lindfors (eds.). *Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o Speaks*. Nairobi: James Currey Oxford, 2006.
- Saurer, Edith. "Women's History in Austria: An Almost Critical Assessment." *Austrian History Yearbook*, vol. 27, 1996, pp. 261–287., doi:10.1017/s0067237800005907.
- Sawant, Shrikant B. "Postcolonial Theory: Meaning and Significance". Proceedings of National Seminar on Postmodern Literary Theory and Literature, Jan. 27-28, 2012.
- Schaff, Adam, et al. "Marx's Concept of Man." *History and Theory*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1963, p. 307., doi:10.2307/2504111.
- Sen, Ilina. "Feminists, Women's Movement, and the Working Class." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 24, no. 29, 1989, pp. 1639–1641. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/4395103.
- Senkoro, Fikeni E. M. K. *The Prostitute in African Literature*. Dar Es Salaam University Press, 1982.
- Sharma, Govind Narain. 'Ngugi's Christian Vision: Theme and Pattern in *A Grain of Wheat*'. *African Literature Today: Prospect and Retrospect*, ed. Eldred Durosimi Jones, Heinemann, London, 1979, pp. 167–78.

- Showalter, Elaine. "A Criticism of our own, Autonomy and Assimilation in Afro American and Feminist Literary Theory". In *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Robyn R Ward and Diane Price Herndl. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997.
- Shreve, Anita. "Interview with Ngugi wa Thiong'o". *Viva July*, 1977.
- Sicherman, Carol. "Ngugi's Colonial Education: 'The Subversion...of the African Mind.'" *African Studies Review*, vol. 38, no. 3, 1995, pp. 11–41., doi:10.2307/524791.
- Smith, B.A. *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*. New York: Yale University Press, 1986.
- Sole, Kelwyn. "Art and Activism in Kenya." *Africa Perspective*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1978, pp. 26-31.
- Sollars, Michael David., and Arbolina Llamas. Jennings. *The Facts on File Companion to the World Novel: 1900 to the Present*. Facts On File, 2008.
- Soyinka, Wole. "The Writer in a Modern African State". In: Per Wastberg (ed.), *The Writer in Modern Africa*. Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1968.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *Outside in the Teaching Machine*. Routledge, 2015.
- Stearns, Peter N. *Gender in World History*. Routledge, 2015.
- Stolorow, Adam. "Interviewing My Own Authoritative Voice: The Definition, Usefulness, and Limitations of the Term Postcolonial". *Political Discourse: Theories of Colonialism and Postcolonialism*. Brown University, 1997.
- Stratton, Florence. *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Suchkov, Boris. *A History of Realism*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973.
- Talib, Ismail S. *The Language of Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Tavassol, Sarah, and Mizapour, Narges. "Postcolonial-Feminist Elements in E.M Forster's *A Passage to India*". *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol 17, № 3, 2014, pp. 69-76.
- Thomson, Phillip. *The Grotesque*. London: Methuen Ltd, 1972.

- Tong, Rosemarie, and Tina Fernandes. Botts. *Feminist Thought: a More Comprehensive Introduction*. Westview Press, 2017.
- Trotsky, L., et al. *Problems of Life*. Hyperion Pr., 1973.
- Tyagi, Ritu. "Understanding Postcolonial Feminism in Relation with Postcolonial and Feminist Theories". *International Journal of Language and Linguistics*, Vol 1, no 2 2014, pp. 45-50.
- Uwasomba, Chijioke. "The Politics of Resistance and Liberation in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross*". *Journal of Pan African Studies*. Vol 6, no.1, 2006.
- Vaughan, Michael. "African Fiction and Popular Struggle: The Case of 'A Grain of Wheat.'" *English in Africa*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1981, pp. 23–52. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/40399034](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40399034).
- Verma, Charu. *Feminism in third world contemporary fiction a comparative study of Selected Works of Gabriel Garcia Marquez Ngugi Wa Thiongo and Bhisham Sahni*. Himachal Pradesh University, 1995. Unpublished Thesis
- Waghmar, Shamarao. "Victimization of Jacinta Wariinga in Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross*". *Research Spectrum*: Vol. 3. Issue:1, 2012.
- Walker, Alice. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. Open Road Media, 2011.
- Walker, Cheryl. *Women and Resistance in South Africa*. David Philip, 1991.
- Ward, Robyn R. & Herndl, Diane Price. "Ethnicity." In *Feminisms. An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Robyn R. Ward and Diane Price Herndl. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997. 741-745.
- Weedon, Chris, 'Migration, Identity, and Belonging in British Black and South Asian Women's Writing.' *Contemporary Women's Writing*, vol 2.No 1, 2008, pp. 17-35.
- White, Luise. *The Comfort of Home Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi*. University of Chicago Press, 1990.
- Wilkinson, J. (ed.) *Talking with African Writers: Interviews by Jane Wilkinson*, London and Portsmouth: James Currey and Heinemann, 1992.
- Williams, Sherley Anne. "Some Implications of Womanist Theory." *Callaloo*, no. 27, 1986, p. 303., doi:10.2307/2930649.
- Wilson, Christopher. *Kenya's Warning: The Challenge to White Supremacy in Our British Colony*. Nairobi: English Press, 1954.

- Wise, Christopher. "Resurrecting the Devil: Notes on Ngũgĩ's Theory of the Oral-Aural African Novel." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 28, no. 1, 1997, pp. 134–140. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/3819924](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3819924).
- Yerima, Ahmed. "The Woman as Character in Nigerian Drama: A Discourse of Gender and Culture" In *Trends in the Theory and Practice of Theatre in Nigeria*. Eds. Duro Oni and Ahmed Yerima. Abuja: Society of Nigerian Theatre Artists, 2008.
- Young, Robert. *Postcolonialism: an Historical Introduction*. Wiley Blackwell, 2016.
- Zachariah, Tirzah Zubeidah. *Silence and Representation in Selected Postcolonial Texts*. Department of English Studies University of Stirling, April 2016. Unpublished Thesis.
- Zander, Horst. *Fact - Fiction - "Faction": A Study of Black South African Literature in English*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1999.
- Zida, Jean. *Commitment As An Aesthetic Form: Ngugi wa Thiong'o and John Steinbeck*. The University of Iowa, 1992. Unpublished Thesis.
- Zulfiqar, Sadia. *African Women Writers and the Politics of Gender*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016.

## Appendices: Novels Synopses

### Appendix A: *Weep Not, Child*

Published in 1964, Ngugi's first novel *Weep Not, Child*, centers around the interactions between British colonists in Kenya and the native people. The story takes place during the Mau Mau Uprising, an eight-year struggle in British-controlled colonial Kenya. During this 1950s uprising, the British killed somewhere between 12,000 and 20,000 African rebels. The success of the British Empire can be attributed to their "divide and rule" strategy, a political tactic first utilized by the ancient Greeks. This practice makes it difficult or impossible for smaller groups of people to band together and revolt—and that is exactly what happened during the Mau Mau Uprising.

The novel opens with Njoroge, whose mother wants him to go to be the first in their family to attend school. They live on Jacobo's land—Jacobco being an African who deals with the white settlers in order to to make his fortune. Among those settlers is Mr. Howlands, who owns much of the land in the area. Njoroge has two brothers, Kamau and Boro. Kamau is apprenticed to a carpenter. Boro was forced to fight in World War II and suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Njoroge's father, Ngotho, farms on Mr. Howlands' lands. He is a man who treats the land with reverence. When local African workers strike for better pay, Ngotho fears losing his job if he participates. Yet, he attends a strike meeting despite both of his wives' disapproval. At the meeting, Jacobo tries to end the strike before it can begin, prompting Ngotho to attack him. A riot begins. Two people are killed during the riot and Jacobo promises to exact revenge. Consequently, Ngotho loses his job and must move his family; Njoroge's brothers fund his education so that he can go to school.

Njoroge transfers school because of his father's loss of employment and is separated from his friend Mwihaki, Jacobo's daughter. She and Njoroge were once classmates and close friends, but she now attends a boarding school for girls. Njoroge is embarrassed about his father's attack against Jacobo, and so he is grateful for the distance between Mwihaki and himself. Meanwhile, in the Mau Mau Uprising, one of the leaders—Jomo Kenyatta—is about to stand trial. While many of the native Kenyans think he will be their savior from British rule, he loses at trial and faces imprisonment.

On the Kenyan side, there are more protests. The British colonists take actions to further suppress and oppress them.

The uprising touches Njoroge's family when Jacobo accuses Ngotho of leading the Mau Mau. Jacobo hopes that the whole family will be imprisoned. The situation for the Kenyans is, overall, getting worse. Violence reaches its highest peak when British forces drag people believed to be involved with the Mau Mau out of their homes and execute them.

While the situation in the country is deteriorating, Njoroge is succeeding in school. He passes a rigorous high school entrance exam, and his village, proud of his scholastic success, collects money to fund his tuition. He and Mwhiki encounter one another again and this time, Njoroge does not find their fathers' differences to be a hurdle in their friendship. However, his life is not free from the Mau Mau Uprising for long. One day, Jacobo is found murdered. Njoroge is pulled out of school by Mr. Howlands and questioned, and both he and his father Ngotho are beaten nearly to death before being released. The reader soon discovers that Njoroge's brothers killed Jacobo, and that Boro is a Mau Mau leader. Their father dies from his injuries and Njoroge learns that his father was only protecting Kamau and Boro, despite the fact that they lost respect for him after he lost his job. When Kamau is imprisoned, Njoroge must provide for both of his mothers. He is forced to abandon both school and his faith.

Njoroge has fallen in love with Mwhiki, and professes his love to her, asking her to leave with him. In spite of the mutual love, Mwhiki refuses because she feels compelled to remain in Kenya and with her mother now that Jacobo is dead. Njoroge attempts to hang himself. He is stopped by his mothers but descends into hopelessness and shame.

## **Appendix B: *The River Between***

*Published in 1965, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's The River Between* tells the story of the first settlement of Kenya by white Europeans. Their arrival sparked a period of revolutionary change that challenged the Kenyan people's traditional ways of life. The imposition of a new way of thinking by the colonists presented a fundamental paradigm shift in the minds of the indigenous communities. Either they accepted the 'new world,' or rejected it in favor of keeping their traditional Kenyan culture undiluted. A village on

one side of the river embraced the Europeans and their new religious views. Another village sought to preserve the independence of their tribe.

Ngugi's novel tells the story of a girl whose family embraced Christianity and decided to convert. The young girl Muthoni had decided to undergo the ceremonial act of circumcision, a ritual considered by the tribe to mark a girl's transition into womanhood, signaling that she was ready for marriage. She eventually dies due to complications from the surgery and even her death is interpreted in two distinctly different ways. Some thought it was a sign that the new religion had angered the spirits. Others saw it as the inevitable result of an antiquated system of beliefs and thought circumcision should be eliminated. The girl's death also symbolized the rejection of the idea that these two conflicting viewpoints could ever be reconciled.

The young teacher Waiyaki is another focal point in Ngugi's story. Although he was the youngest of the three, he was able to put a stop to the violence. Ngugi reveals the three boys, Waiyaki, Kamua and Kinuthia are all destined to study at a local mission school nearby and from there, to become teachers. Waiyaki is eventually enrolled at the school at the behest of his father, Chege. He explains to young Waiyaki the legend of a savior who would be born into their village and accomplish great things for his people. Waiyaki's father believes that he is that savior. Although Waiyaki is skeptical of such a fantastical prophesy, he excels in the school and is well on his way to playing a vital role in the development of his people. The significance of Chege's eagerness to send Waiyaki to the mission school rests on the fact that the boy would be in a position to learn the wisdom of the colonists. This knowledge would equip Waiyaki for the struggle against the colonial government. Despite the liberating potential of this knowledge, Waiyaki must ensure he does not embrace the colonial system, as doing so would defeat the purpose of his training.

As the story progresses, the division between the two villages intensifies and the proposed circumcision of the young girl Muthoni causes much dissention within the community. Her tragic death galvanizes the missionary school—in which Waiyaki is enrolled—into action, going so far as to expel children whose parents still uphold the tradition of circumcision. Waiyaki is among those forced from the school. In response, he decides to take up the challenge of building a school for the expelled children. While he still does not fully understand the leadership role his father predicted he would take

up, he begins to realize that his mission is to enable education for the children of the villages. He becomes so preoccupied with this goal that he fails to recognize and address the other needs of his community, such as reclaiming lands seized by the colonists. Some villagers begin conspiring behind closed doors, eventually forming a secret organization known as Kiama, whose singular purpose is to ensure the purity of the tribe.

As a result of this upheaval, Waiyaki makes enemies. Among them is Kabonyi who begins to provoke dissenters in the community to undermine and destroy Waiyaki. Eventually, Waiyaki succumbs to Kabonyi's trickery. While he desires nothing more than to quell the growing unrest within the village, and heal the angst among the people, he is powerless to undo the polarizing effects of colonialism. Waiyaki blames himself for having failed to address the lack of unity in time. The story concludes on an ominous note. Waiyaki and his new love interest Nyambura find themselves in the hands of the Kiama who must inevitably decide their fate.

### **Appendix C : A Grain of Wheat**

Set between the past and the present, Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* records the years of the Emergency and chronicles the events leading up to Kenyan independence, or Uruhu, in a Kenyan village. Gikonyo and Mumbi are newlyweds in love when Gikonyo is sent to detention. When he comes back six years later, Mumbi has carried and given birth to his rival's child. Instead of talking about their trials, a wall of anger separates them. Mumbi's brother Kihika, a local hero, is captured and hanged, and his comrades search for the betrayer. Mugo becomes a hero through leading a hunger strike in detention, and the town wants him to become a political leader. Mugo, though, struggles with guilt and ultimately confesses that he betrayed Kihika.

The novel opens with Mugo in his dark and gloomy hut where he receives villagers who ask him to deliver a speech on Uruhu day and become a leader. They also ask if Kihika mentioned Karanja, a worker for the white government who is suspected of betraying his friend, before his death. Kihika, a rebel fighter from the village, was captured and publicly hanged. Mugo denies knowing anything about Kihika's death. Gikonyo, one of the men who asks Mugo to speak, feels his life falling apart after coming home from detention camps. As a young man, he is deeply in love with Mumbi, and his rival is Karanja. Mumbi chooses Gikonyo, and they marry. Gikonyo, a

carpenter, is happy, but he is arrested as a rebel. Gikonyo spends six years in concentration camps, even after he confesses his oath to the Movement, in order to come back home. He feels guilty about his confession. When he returns home, though, his wife has a child by another man, Karanja. Their relationship reaches rock bottom as they show no room for compromise.

The novel sheds light on the colonial past and the violent scenes during the darkest period in Kenyan history. While Gikonyo is away, the town is punished. The huts are burned down and the people are forced to rebuild in a contained area. They are put into forced labor building a trench around the town, and they suffer food shortage. People are beaten, raped, and starved. During this time, Mugo protests a guard beating a woman in a trench and is arrested and taken away. Mumbi works hard and is faithful to Gikonyo, though she doesn't know if he's alive or dead. She finds out finally that Gikonyo is coming home, and in a moment of weakness, allows Karanja to have sex with her. Afterwards, she rejects him again, and never wants to see him. Karanja has embraced the white government to gain power.

Mugo struggles with his own guilt. Before Karanja's death, he hopes to have a quiet life, building a home, business, and family. One day after shooting the British officer Robson, Kihika comes to his house and asks him to join the Movement. Mugo is afraid that either the rebels or the government will kill him. He turns Kihika over to the government, but immediately regrets it. At the detention camp for intervening in the beating, Mugo truthfully claims to have taken no rebel oath. No one believes him. He is beaten mercilessly and inspires a hunger strike. Afterwards, the townspeople consider him a hero, but Mugo is driven by his conscience to confess at the Ururhu celebration, and later is taken away by the former Freedom Fighters to be punished. After the celebration, Gikonyo breaks his arm. By the end of the story, he realizes that he needs to open up communication with Mumbi and that he wants to rebuild their marriage.

### **Appendix D: *Petals of Blood***

Set in the aftermath of Kenyan independence, revered Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong'o's novel *Petals of Blood* (1977) follows schoolteachers Munira and Karega, and barmaid Wanja and her boss, Abdulla, as they cope with the rapid modernization of their rural village, Ilmorog. The novel examines the effects of the Mau Mau rebellion and the legacy of colonialism while criticizing the Kenyan government for reproducing the inequalities of the colonial regime. The title is taken from "The Swamp," a poem by

Derek Walcott. The novel begins with a glance at its ending: three notable Kenyans—a teacher and two successful businessmen—have died in a fire. Inspector Godfrey, who believes that the police force is “the maker of modern Kenya,” investigates. His suspicion falls on the schoolteacher Munira.

The novel moves back to the beginning of the story. Schoolteacher Munira arrives in the pastoral village of Ilmorog, to take up a position at the village school. Many teachers from the city have come and gone in Ilmorog, and the villagers assume that Munira won't last. His new neighbors treat him with suspicion, and few children come to his classes. However, Munira befriends the owner of a local bar, Abdulla, a hero of the Mau Mau rebellion, who helps Munira to settle in the village. Munira also befriends Joseph, a young boy whom Abdulla has adopted. Eventually, Munira is accepted as one of Ilmorog's own. Another refugee from the city arrives, Wanja, the granddaughter of a respected Ilmorog elder. She begins working in Abdulla's bar, helping him to expand the business. Soon, Munira finds himself falling in love with her. Munira and Wanja have a brief relationship, but Munira is married, and when Wanja discovers this, she is bitterly disappointed. She leaves the village for a time; when she returns, she breaks off the affair.

A former colleague of Munira's, Karega, arrives in Ilmorog to question Munira about events at the school where both used to work. Karega ends up taking a position at the school. That year, the village suffers a long, dry summer and a poor harvest. Karega rallies the villagers and leads them to Nairobi to ask their Member of Parliament for help. It is a long journey. On the way, Joseph grows very ill. As soon as the villagers arrive in Nairobi, they try to get help for Joseph. A minister turns them away, assuming they are beggars. Finally, they are admitted to the house of a rich man, only to be rounded up and imprisoned in the building. They are subjected to questioning by the house's owner, Kimeria, an unscrupulous businessman who explains to the villagers that he and their MP are allies. Later, he blackmails and rapes Wanja.

The villagers go to meet their MP Nderi wa Riera. They find that he is an empty demagogue with no interest in their plight. When the rains finally come, the villagers celebrate with ritual dances. The mother of the tribe Nyakinyua brews a powerful traditional drink made from the Thang'eta plant. All the villagers partake of the drink. Under its influence, Karega confesses to Munira that he had an affair with Munira's older sister, Mukami. Munira and Mukami's father forced her to leave Karega due to

Karega's brother's involvement in the Mau Mau rebellion. This was the real reason for Mukami's suicide.

A plane crashes in the village, miraculously killing no one but Abdulla's donkey. Many people come to see the wreckage, and Wanja suggests they capitalize on this tourism by selling the Thang'eta drink in Abdulla's bar. The drink becomes a notorious attraction of the village, and tourists begin visiting just to try it. Soon, Wanja starts a brewery making the drink. Moreover, the government begins building a new road—the Trans-Africa road—right through the village. Workers arrive, and the village rapidly expands. Soon it is a town, New Ilmorog. The farmers of the old village are advised to fence their lands and mortgage them, so they can prove they own them. Banks offer them loans against their harvests to pay for this. When Nyakinyua dies, the bank moves to seize her land, so Wanja sells her brewery in order to buy Nyakinkua's land. She opens a brothel catering to the new arrivals and is eventually forced to work as a prostitute herself.

Wanja comes up with a plan to rid herself of the men who have taken advantage of her. She invites them all to the brothel, including Karega and Kimeria. Her plan is to present Abdulla to them as her chosen partner. However, Munira sees Karega arrive and then leave again; in a fit of jealousy, he sets fire to the brothel. The other men die, while Wanja is hospitalized. Inspector Godfrey charges Munira with arson and Munira is imprisoned.

### **Appendix E: *Devil on the Cross***

Originally published in the Ngugi's native language of Gikuyu as *Caitaani mũtharaba-Inĩ*, *Devil on the Cross* represents the author's attempt to focus on the corrupting influences of international money and culture on Kenya following its independence. It opens with the narrator accepting his duty to tell a sad, perhaps shameful, story of an incident in Ilmorog. Gradually, the reader is introduced to the heroine Jacinta Wariinga who loses her secretarial job and boyfriend. When she attempts to kill herself, the man who rescues her hands her an invitation to the "Devil's Feast" in her parents' hometown, Ilmorog. She takes a matatũ to Ilmorog. The driver is Mwaũra, who idolizes money. The passengers include Gatuĩria, a foreign-educated African Studies professor; Wangarĩ, a rural peasant woman; Mũturi, a worker; and Mwĩreri wa Mũkĩraaĩ, a businessman. Together, they decide to attend the Devil's Feast.

At the Devil's Feast, local Kenyan elites from the Organization for Modern Theft and Robbery in Ilmorog compete to be chosen as disciples to a foreign delegation of businessmen. During the competition, they boast about their various schemes and swindles, through which they have profited enormously off the labor of the poor and working classes. General discord breaks out when Mwĩreri wa Mũkiraaĩ suggests that they kick the foreigners out in order to better consolidate their power and wealth. While Warĩinga and Gatuĩria agree to remain as observers, Mũturi and Wangarĩ are disgusted by these events and plot to bring the police to arrest these thieves and robbers. However, when they do so, the police arrest Wangarĩ rather than the guests at the Devil's Feast. Wangarĩ is taken away, and Mũturi leads a march of irate Ilmorog students, workers, intellectuals, and peasants towards the cave. The businessmen all escape.

Two years pass. Warĩinga and Gatuĩria are engaged. Warĩinga is now an engineer, while Gatuĩria has completed his musical composition honoring Kenya's national history and culture. When Gatuĩria takes Warĩinga to a tea party at his parents' house, Warĩinga discovers that Gatuĩria's father is the same "Rich Old Man" from Ngorika who once impregnated her and left her. Upset and determined not to let these elites continue to abuse her, Warĩinga shoots the Rich Old Man and a number of the other guests in attendance. These guests were all participants in the Devil's Feast. While Gatuĩria stands, unsure of what to do, Warĩinga strides out of the party.

## Résumé

La littérature peut être définie comme étant un ensemble d'œuvres écrites ou orales auxquelles on reconnaît une valeur esthétique. Elle est toujours considérée comme une transcription de la pensée. Il est important de rappeler que la littérature africaine issue du post-colonialisme, qui était à ses débuts dominée par les hommes, ne se préoccupait pas de la condition féminine ou ne la décrit que d'une façon bien particulière.

Ces dernières années, le problème de la femme dans les pays africains a occupé le devant de la scène. L'œuvre romanesque de Ngugi wa Thiong'o, le célèbre écrivain Kényan, se caractérise par un certain nombre de traits distinctifs aux niveaux de la structure narrative, de la langue et de l'univers du discours. Ngugi wa Thiong'o propose à la littérature africaine d'oublier un peu l'Afrique pour s'intéresser au monde depuis un lieu concret, qui correspond à l'expérience de chacun. Il rejette, donc, la conception classique de l'art pour l'art et assure une mission bien précise à la littérature, à savoir refléter la situation socio-politique et économique de la société à un moment donné de son histoire et militer en faveur d'un changement qualitatif des conditions de vie de l'être humain.

Le corps féminin tient une place prépondérante dans les romans de Ngugi. Ce travail de recherche est une étude postcoloniale- féministe qui examine la condition de la femme kenyane dans l'œuvre de Ngugi. La partie pratique de cette thèse prend en considération cinq romans de Ngugi : *Weep Not, Child* (1964); *The River Between* (1965); *A Grain of Wheat*(1967); *Petals of Blood* (1977), et *Devil on the Cross* (1981). Nous avons considéré que le traitement de la condition des femmes kenyanes requiert une analyse de leur statut à deux périodes différentes : celle précédant l'émergence des mouvements de libération, et celle d'après. Nous avons analysé les différents aspects de la condition de vie des femmes kenyanes ; une condition marquée par des injustices sociales et traditionnelles imposées par une société particulièrement phallocrate et qui ne demande aux femmes rien de plus qu'une soumission aux hommes. Cependant, on peut considérer que les femmes kenyanes souffrent de la phallocratie de leur société tout comme d'un système hérité du colonialisme.

Mots clés :Marginalisation, post-colonialisme, féminisme, corps de la femme, indépendance, littérature engagée, la phallocratie

## ملخص

يعتبر الأدب نوع من أنواع التعبير الإنساني الراقى و الذي يتيح لصاحبه فرصة التعبير عن مجمل العواطف و الأفكار و الحواطر بأرقى الأساليب الكتابية و التي تتنوع من النثر إلى النثر المنظوم الى الشعر الموزون. لذا وجب التنويه إلى أن الأدب قد حصر معناه في ترجمة الأفكار الإنسانية بطريقة فنية كتابية كانت أم شفوية. إن للأدب الإفريقي وقعا على نفوس قارئيه لما يترجمه من معان و قيم سامية لمجتمع أقل ما يقال عنه أنه قد عاصر الكبوات و كان عرضة لجمال من الأزمان على مر التاريخ. وما يعاب على الأدب الإفريقي الاستعماري و أدب ما بعد الاستقلال، أنه و في بداياته فقد شهد سيطرة شبه مطلقة لكتاب ذكور تناسوا وأهملوا المرأة الإفريقية ولم يكلفوا أنفسهم عناء تشخيص المرأة إلا نادرا و سطحيا.

باتت مشاكل المرأة الإفريقية خلال السنوات الأخيرة تتصدر واجهة مسرح الأدب الإفريقي. حيث شهد القراء تركيزا غير مسبوق على مشاكل و وضعية المرأة و معانيتها داخل مجتمعاتها. تصنف روايات الكاتب الإفريقي الكيني الشهير نجوجي واثيونغو في خانة الأدب الملتزم والذي لطالما نادى بضرورة عكس، تصوير و تشخيص المجتمع بمحاسنه و مساوئه. لقد دعى كاتب كينيا الشهير رفاقه من الكتاب الإفريقيين الى ضرورة التخلي عن فكرة تصوير ماضي افريقيا الجميل و العيش في كنف حلم ما قبل الاستعمار. كما دعاهم للاستجابة لمقترح التركيز على حياة الفرد و مشاكله السياسية و الاجتماعية التي يتخبط فيها. لذا، فقد نادى نجوجي واثيونغو بضرورة التخلي عن مبدأ الفن للفن الذي اشتهر به الأدب عموما و الأدب الغربي خصوصا.

إن لجسد المرأة مكانة مرموقة في أدب نجوجي واثيونغو. تهدف هذه الرسالة الى تسليط الضوء على وضعية المرأة الكينية في روايات نجوجي وذلك من وجهة نظر ما بعد الاستعمار النسوية. خصص جانب الرسالة التطبيقي لدراسة خمسة روايات المعنونة ب: لا تبكي يا صغيري (1964)، النهر الفاصل (1965)، حبة قمح (1967)، بتلات الدم (1977)، و شيطان على صليب (1981). هدفت الرسالة الى تشخيص حالة المرأة خلال حقبتين من الزمن: حقبة الاستعمار و زمن ثورة التحرير، و فترة ما بعد الاستقلال. كما توصلنا خلال تحليلنا إلى أن وضعية المرأة خلال الفترتين سالفتي الذكر تكاد تكون متطابقة تماما. فقد كانت المرأة الكينية و لا تزال عرضة للظلم الاجتماعي و الضغط و التهميش و التعدي الجنسي داخل مجتمع ذكوري بامتياز يمارس كافة الضغوطات التي اكتسبها من ثقافة المجتمع التي سيدته على جنس الانثى في حين ان المرأة كتب عليها وراثيا ان تعيش تحت ظل الرجل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التهميش، ما بعد الاستعمار، النسوية، جسد المرأة، الاستقلال، إفريقيا، الأدب الملتزم

## Summary

This thesis examines women's plight in Ngugi's fiction. The aim is to examine the way in which Kenya's most gifted author, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, has portrayed the impact of colonialism and neo-colonialism on women. It is an attempt to identify the significance of women's plight as far as the author's political vision is concerned. My interest lies in how Ngugi handles the issues of women in colonial and postcolonial Kenya with respect to their nationalistic fervor in his five novels; *Weep Not, Child*, *The River Between*, *A Grain of Wheat*, *Petals of Blood*, and *Devil on the Cross*. Based on the author's declaration that his writing is an attempt to understand himself and his situation in society and history, the nub of this work is to illuminate the politics of gender and its significance in his attack on colonial and postcolonial institutions. The practical side of this dissertation consists of two parts; one part is devoted to women's plight in Ngugi's colonial novels, while the second one analyzes their predicaments in his post-independence novels. To examine women's subordination in two different phases, then, is to probe the central core of the novels, for such an approach sheds light not just on the narrative substance; rather it explores the socio-political philosophy which produces Ngugi's reconstructions of the past, examination of the present and his prediction of the future.

## Résumé

Le corps féminin tient une place prépondérante dans les romans de Ngugiwa Thiong'o. Ce travail de recherche est une étude postcoloniale- féministe qui examine la condition de la femme kenyane dans l'œuvre de Ngugi. La partie pratique de cette thèse prend en considération cinq romans de Ngugi : *Weep Not, Child* (1964); *The River Between* (1965); *A Grain of Wheat*(1967); *Petals of Blood* (1977), et *Devil on the Cross* (1981). Nous avons considéré que le traitement de la condition des femmes kenyanes requiert une analyse de leur statut à deux périodes différentes : celle précédant l'émergence des mouvements de libération, et celle d'après. Nous avons analysé les différents aspects de la condition de vie des femmes kenyanes ; une condition marquée par des injustices sociales et traditionnelles imposées par une société particulièrement phallocrate et qui ne demande aux femmes rien de plus qu'une soumission aux hommes. Cependant, on peut considérer que les femmes kenyanes souffrent de la phallocratie de leur société tout comme d'un système hérité du colonialisme.

## ملخص

إن لجسد المرأة مكانة مرموقة في أدب نغوجي واثيرونغو. تهدف هذه الرسالة الى تسليط الضوء على وضعية المرأة الكينية في روايات نغوجي وذلك من وجهة نظر ما بعد الاستعمار النسوية. خصص جانب الرسالة التطبيقي لدراسة خمسة روايات المعنونة ب: لا تبكي يا صغيري (1964)، النهر الفاصل (1965)، حبة قمح (1967)، بتلات الدم (1977)، و شيطان على صليب (1981). هدفت الرسالة الى تشخيص حالة المرأة خلال حقبتين من الزمن: حقبة الاستعمار و زمن ثورة التحرير، و فترة ما بعد الاستقلال. كما توصلنا خلال تحليلنا إلى أن وضعية المرأة خلال الفترتين سالفتي الذكر تكاد تكون متطابقة تماما. فقد كانت المرأة الكينية و لا تزال عرضة للظلم الاجتماعي و الضغط و التهميش و التعدي الجنسي داخل مجتمع ذكوري بامتياز يمارس كافة الضغوطات التي اكتسبها من ثقافة المجتمع التي سيدته على جنس الانثى في حين ان المرأة كتب عليها وراثيا ان تعيش تحت ظل الرجل.