

POLITICS OF GENDER AND IDENTITY IN NGUGI'S *PETALS OF BLOOD AND DEVIL ON THE CROSS*

¹JOHN ODE IYANYA JOHN, PhD, & ²IFEOMA CATHERINE
ONWUGBUFOR

¹jonniode@gmail.com & ²flyckeringhope@gmail.com

Department of English,
Nasarawa State University, Keffi-Nigeria

Abstract

Imperialism debilitated the positive trajectory which the issues of gender and identity raise. Illustrated generously by Ngugi across his works, the politics which defines gender and identity in Ilmorog characterize the experiences across the continent. In his early and late writing career, Ngugi ensures to foster a discourse which in most times, concentrates on constant paradigm affecting gender dialogue. Marxist Feminism being the critical theory of interrogation, this paper evaluates the manoeuvring of gender concerns leading to identity crisis which the women resist in Devil on the Cross and Petals of Blood. Capitalism in neo-colonial Kenya oppresses the working class in which women are in the majority. It is against this backdrop that this work attempts to illuminate the factors which negate and frustrate women, especially.

Keywords: Gender, Identity, Imperialism, Neo-Colonialism, Marxist Feminism

Introduction

Imperialism or neo-colonialism brings about negative impact on the populace, in most instances. The working class is inundated with exploitation of their labour, leading to deprivation of all sorts. Both the male and female gender are subjected to the vagaries of the economic activities that are tendentiously displayed by new masters of capitalism. However, it takes its toll on the female gender more, as the burden tilts dangerously on the way of the women who inadvertently are doubly oppressed.

It is for many reasons that it can be argued that the impact of the twain evils of colonialism and imperialism are harder on the woman in relation with her gender; and the fact that she functions more in the working class places her as an underdog couched by gender politics. Her identity is defined for her; being

described as submissive, docile, passive and obedient and must take the command and dictation of patriarchy and society. More apparent is the fact that, the female gender is commodified and objectified. Many fictional works by some African writers like Ayi Kwei Armah, Helon Habila, and others delineate the exploitation of Africans by the whites and the consequential effects of such exploitation on the lives of the Africans. These works project the African woman as a survivor of the harshest conditions; and vividly expose a plethora of patriarchal challenges and constraints imposed on women regarded as helpless by traditional African societies.

Incidentally, the women in the works transcend from self-ignorance to awareness, assurance, and self-reliance. Ngugi, being an African and writer, painstakingly recreates a living past in most of his works. His female characters become prime sites for testing the reconciliation of betrayal and hope; as well as, the possibility of regeneration. The issue of identity is explored against the backdrop of the tortuous experience of slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism and globalisation in Africa.

In this paper, we undertake a critical overview of the novelist's treatment of gender contrivance and women identity in Ngugi's selected novels. The multiplicity of the identity is reflected in the leadership, aristocratic class, and peasants and working class of Ngugi's imaginary country, which is conceptualized in his fictions under study, namely, *Devil on the Cross* and *Petals of Blood*. However, it is a given that identity crisis is more palpable among the lower class of people; the working class. This is the group, incidentally, to which most women belong.

Politics of Gender Identity

A fastidious description of some terms, such as gender and identity will position the perspective of the paper clearly. Most discourses surrounding third world concerns are basically that of identity; as it defines the personality of an individual. Identities make up one's self-concept variously described as what comes to mind when one thinks of oneself (Neisser 1993; Stets & Burke 2003; Stryker 1980; Tajfel 1981), one's theory of one's personality (Markus and Cross 1990), and what one believes is true of oneself (Baumeister 1998; Forgas and Williams 2002). If we look at the other aspect of self-concepts, people also know themselves in other ways: They have self-images and self-feelings, as well as, images drawn from the other senses - a sense of what they sound like, what they feel like tactically, and also, a sense of their bodies in motion. Oyserman (2012) observes that "identities are not the fixed markers people assume them to be but are instead dynamically constructed in the moment." If that were so, the politicisation of gender identity is given an impetus with a

particular gender, in this case the female, subjected to insidious iridescence of denigration.

The common assumption is that certain roles, functions, skills and behaviours are the prerogative of the male gender; and for this and other reasons, the issue of identity takes an interdisciplinary approach. For instance, in political theory, the question of identity marks numerous arguments on gender, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, and culture in relation to liberalism and its alternatives (Young 1990; Connolly 1991; Kymlicka 1995; Miller 1995; Taylor 1989) Unarguably, gender identity forms an important part of identity in pPsychology, as it can dictate, to a significant degree, how one views oneself both as a person and in relation to other people, ideas and nature. In Cognitive Psychology, the term ‘identity’ refers to the capacity for self-reflection and the awareness of self (Leary and Tangney 3)

It is instructive to acknowledge that gender is not something we are born with, and not something we have, but something we do (West and Zimmerman 1987) – something we perform (Butler 1990). Gender refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women that are created in our families, our societies and our cultures. “We live in a world which is organized around the idea that women and men have different bodies, different capabilities, and different needs and desires.” (1) Herein lies the politics of gender where a woman is restricted to particularities dictated by the society and patriarchy. A Marxist feminist interrogation will ascertain the extent to which the issues of politics, gender and identity are fervently addressed in Ngugi’s two works under study.

Marxist Feminism from the Eyes of Ngugi

Marxist’s work is not gender specific but relies immensely on intersectionality, Marx’s approach captures Marxist feminist attempts to recognize the predicament of the female proletariats within the economy. The female gender is mostly used as reserved labour especially during hostilities; saddled with the huge responsibility of production and reproduction, and, care giving to the elderly and babies/children; domestic errands/chores, tendering of the sick even when contagious, especially during epidemics/pandemics, wars and insurrections; and also, the dual responsibility of creating wealth and running the business of the home at the same time.

The crux of these observations by Marxist feminists is that in all of these, the female gender is hardly appreciated, or paid for these services which are regarded by the society as her natural or default roles. Marxist feminism has been described as (Stefano 2014) “.... a species of feminist theory and politics that takes its theoretical bearings from Marxism, notably the criticism of

capitalism as a set of structures, practices, institutions, incentives, and sensibilities that promote the exploitation of labour, the alienation of human beings, and the debasement of freedom.”

Gilbert (2019) sees Marxist feminists as those who ally themselves with the philosophical and economic theories of Karl Marx, who discovered the economic laws underlying capitalism and wrote about them in his masterpiece. The Marxist feminists bring home the question: then, what is the role of the men? If women who are meant to produce and raise kids, make the home, care for the elderly, work in place of men during wars, carter for the family during outbreaks of diseases, and so on; find themselves also, working as hard and as late as the men? In the end, she reinvests her earnings into the family, and is mostly never lauded or remunerated for these. It only denotes that the woman in the end, works for nothing and gains nothing.

Ngugi, laudably preoccupied with writing literatures “... which evoke the post-independence social and political climate” (Gakwandi 11) chooses to ameliorate the injustice against his female characters by granting them the ‘hero status’. Ngugi in *Devil on the Cross* recognizes, as asserted by (Hossain, Ahmad and Siraj 2016) that “... the present captialistiic mode of production is one of the main causes of women’s second class status in society.” (12) In the works under study, Ngugi’s characterization depicts the economic, psychological and political phases of a post-independent nation dealing with societal rot and debauchery in leadership. Hence, the avowal of Raja (2019) who speaks of Ngugi’s *Devil on the Cross*, as “... one of the finest critiques of national elite of Kenya and their (former) colonial masters, the international financiers and bankers who still pull the strings in Ngugi’s imagined Kenya.” Demonstrating Ngugi’s personal definition of freedom, Raja further asserts that writing in Gikuyu language corroborates Ngugi’s ideology of “independence from the colonial heritage and influences”.

Ngugi recognizes the patriarchal structures that are very much potent in the imaginary country on which his story is set. Using the third person omniscient voice, Ngugi establishes a Marxist feminist foremost fact (1982), thus: “People love to denigrate the intelligence and intellectual capacity of our women by saying that the only jobs a woman can do are to cook, to make beds and to spread legs in the market of love.” (218)

Capitalism had taken the center stage, leaving the peasants and working class totally exhausted, deprived and impoverished. Attacking this economic system enthroned in Ngugi’s imaginary country, Robson (1987) citing Ngugi in an interview with Anita Shreve in July 1977 describes capitalism thus:

... 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 affects them more than anyone else. Now, women form the majority in this category of peasants. Women are doubly exploited and oppressed.

The above, however is the position of Marxist feminists, who believe that even within the peasants and working class, the females are the most vulnerable and traumatized. Addressing issues pertaining to women as reserved labour, (11) Ngugi thus, describes the Marxist feminist character which he creates, "...That's why the Wariinga of today has said goodbye to being a secretary and has sworn that she will never type again for the likes of Boss Kihara, bosses whose condition for employing a girl is a meeting for five minutes of love after a hard drink. (Ngugi 218)

As observed by Marxist feminists, the onset of patriarchy made it possible for the woman's class to be automatically elevated by the virtue of marriage, even when married to a rich husband. Although the woman's status and lifestyle may be upgraded by such opulent marriage, she still does not have control over her rich husband's assets, earnings or estate. This is corroborated by the testimony of Nditika wa Nguuni, the eventual winner of the competition for the crown of the seven cleverest modern thieves and robbers, who narrates thus:

It was revealed to me ... that in this country we should have a factory for manufacturing human parts like mouths, bellies, hearts, and so on ... spare parts for the human body. This would mean that a rich man who could afford them could have two or three mouths, two bellies, two cocks and two hearts ... I was delighted with the idea. But I made a mistake in telling my wife about it ... At first, my wife was very pleased with the idea, ... She said that if the idea ever bore fruit, it would be wonderful, ... but after the factory was built, the wives of the rich would be distinguished from those of the poor by their two mouths, two bellies, two or more hearts and ... two or more female things. When I heard her mention two female organs and say that she would be able to have two instead of one, I was horrified ... I told her I would not mind her having two mouths, or two bellies But to have two ... no, no! She retorted We must have equality of the sexes. By this time, I was really very angry! I told her to take her equalities to Europe or America. Here, we are Africans, and we must practice African culture. I struck her a blow on her face. She started crying. I struck her again. But just

as I was about to strike her a third time, she surrendered. She said I could have three, or ten. She would be satisfied with just one. (Ngugi 180-181)

II. Women Identity in *Devil on the Cross* and *Petals of Blood*

The loss of identity is a general phenomenon in which the Gikuyu was enmeshed at the onset of colonialism. Several decades after independence, Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross* confirms deep-rooted presence of loss of identity in their national psyche. Ker (2004) affirms that "... Their feeling of exile and alienation derived from the seizure of their homelands by white settlers." (53) Significantly, an individual is expected to have a sense of belonging within the bounds of his or her polity. National identity comprises a great deal of how an individual thinks about herself in relation to the world and the most obvious manifestation of what she knows as the world being the culture in which she lives.

Ngugi in his works, undoubtedly describes the tension between the diametric value system alive in Kenya as two forces in Africa today that are mutually opposed to each other. These are an imperialist tradition on one hand, and a resistance on the other hand. In reconstructing the past of the Gikuyu people, Ngugi in his early and late fiction establishes the collaboration between imperialism and neocolonialism as these tear decisively at the societal strata of the settings of his works. Demonstrated by the Devil's Feast which happens at the Ilmorog Cave at the beginning of the novel, *Devil on the Cross*, the demons of neocolonialism and the struggle for identity according eventually, "...produced two types of political prisoners: those who finally succumbed and said yes to an oppressive system, and those who defied and said, 'Never'." (Ngugi 105) It is against this backdrop that participants in the Devil's Feast are tersely described as 'collaborators with imperialists' (107)

In dealing with their identity crises enabled by patriarchal influence on the proletariat females within the imaginary society Ngugi writes about, his foremost female characters in *Devil on the Cross*, Wariinga and Wangari find themselves as Ola (1983) avers "...as victims of a long-established social practice ..." (58) Justifying the angst of Marxist feminists, Wariinga and Wangari experience hardships due to the rejection and deprivation which they suffer as members of the working class.

Centered on a young, beautiful woman named Jacinta Wariinga, *Devil on the Cross*, probes the politics of gender and the burden of women identity. Speaking to the rot and neo-colonialist absurdity necessitated by the continued affiliation of the African rulership in Ngugi's imaginary country to Western capitalist influence, Ngugi explores the quagmire of the working class women

describing the hopelessness of the state of the nation, and also, the preposterousness of the aristocratic class. The awkward policies by the government of Ngugi's imaginary country, which give neocolonialism the wings to fly, can be seen in the illogicality of the competitors for the crown of the seven cleverest modern thieves and robbers during the Devil's feast at the Cave (Ngugi 78)

Ngugi recognizes the patriarchal structures that are very much potent in the imaginary country on which his story is set. Using the third person omniscient voice, Ngugi establishes a Marxist feminist foremost fact (1982), "People love to denigrate the intelligence and intellectual capacity of our women by saying that the only jobs a woman can do are to cook, to make beds and to spread legs in the market of love." (218)

In the wake of the spate of self-identity in the world created in *Devil on the Cross*, Ngugi's Wariinga encounters hardships which she attributes to the colour of her skin and her teeth. The gicaandi player describes Wariinga's mental despair and says:

Wariinga was convinced that her appearance was the root cause of all her problems. Whenever she looked at herself in the mirror she thought herself very ugly. What she hated most was her blackness, so she would disfigure her body with skin-lightening creams like Ambi and Snow fire, forgetting the saying: That which is born black will never be white. Now her body was covered with light and dark spots like the guinea fowl. Her hair was splitting, and it had browned to the colour of moleskin because it had been straightened with red-hot iron combs. Wariinga also hated her teeth. They were a little stained; they were not as white as she would have liked them to be. She often tried to hide them, and she seldom laughed openly ((Ngugi 11)

Incidentally, Warringa has split personality, assessing her beauty using the standard of European definition of beauty only puts her in double jeopardy being treated as a second class citizen by the Europeans and her native culture. Interestingly; "When Wariinga was happy and forgot to worry about the fading whiteness of her teeth and about the blackness of her skin and laughed with all her heart, her laughter completely disarmed people". (11); consequently, refusing to imitate is the strongest weapon for liberation.

Furthermore, Ngugi wants us to know that the dominance of patriarchal ideology in the capitalistic democratic system has worsened the plight of girls in the newborn Kenya. Young girls and women who would have become

doctors and engineers for their country drop out of schooling and become either barmaids or the imperialist's sex slaves. Wariinga's story is revelatory; her parents pray that one day she becomes successful in her education, and free them from the chain of poverty. True to time, she becomes quick at learning and is often top of her class sometimes coaching her cousins at Mathematics and even those who are a class ahead. Her ambition is to study electrical, mechanical, or civil engineering.

The "word 'engineer' is what made her heart beat whenever she shut her eyes and tried to look into the tomorrow of her life" (140). However, the fictional world of Ngugi has little space for the girl-child in the domain of engineering. Rather, the girl-child is short-changed and sentenced to the life of debauchery, prostitution and low life. The imperialists bourgeois class wrecks the life of the female gender in the then political set-up such that the educational of young schoolgirls is brutally disrupted. So, the little pocket money she is given by the rich, old man deceives Wariinga; ensuring that her dream of becoming an engineer remains a facade after she happens to start a sexual affair with the rich, old man.

In *Devil on the Cross*, Ngugi teaches that the Devil or the imperialists do not want to have an affair with the girls once they get pregnant. Therefore, for the rich a woman is nothing more than a sex object; and they do not care for the future generation or the development of their country.

The experience Wariinga suffers in the hands of men, creates a defeatist personality of her. In the narrative, she is fired for refusing to sleep with her boss, Boss Kihara, evicted from her apartment by a group of thugs for refusing to pay an exorbitant amount of rent unexpectedly demanded of her, and dumped by her sweetheart at the University because he erroneously and unfairly believes she is sleeping with her boss. The fact that Wariinga's sweetheart disbelieves her protestations of innocence is also a paradigm of sexist politics. Jim Kimwana, Wariinga's boyfriend, disbelieves her because the material gain associated with becoming a powerful man's "sugar girl" is thought to be irresistible to women, due to the fact that many women succumbed to the temptation. In reality, this "temptation" is actually victimisation; women like Wariinga who refuse to sleep with their bosses are replaced with women who would.

As Simon Gikandi states, "Wariinga's project is to break out of the prison house of self-hate and victimisation and to assert her identity outside the culture and economy of arrested decolonization" (220). In order to break from her imprisoned identity, Wariinga must go on a quest for the identity she desires by rejecting the cultural voice that tells her she is ugly and weak; and discover her power as a woman and an individual. Through a journey and adventure to

her hometown of Ilmorog, Wariinga gradually changes and becomes impassioned with a nationalist spirit. Her experiences change the way she views herself and how she operates in her society; she becomes a feminist. The battlefield for her is not only the reclamation of her sexuality, but also, the rejection of what she has assumed to be true about her identity in terms of Christianity, the workforce, and the war for national Uhuru (independence).

Her role in Uhuru is equally as important as her feminization, the process of adopting feminist values. Indeed, Ngugi suggests that the purpose of Wariinga's feminism is its use in propelling the nation to independence through the independence of the individual and her facility in the cooperative national effort. The equation of freedom on the individual level versus the cultural level is one of the many ways in which Ngugi's Marxist theory is evident in the text; person and product are not separate.

Objectification of women is prevalent in the novel. They are there as emotional dispensers for the men such as serving the emotional desperation like anger. Using *Devil on the Cross*, Wariinga demonstrates that everywhere, women become victim of male anger, even at work. She says:

Yes, Boss Kihara and his kind work out their frustrations on us when they quarrel with their wives at home, they bring their anger to the office; when something goes wrong with their business, they bring all their furry to the office. We are insulted, but we keep quiet because we are supposed to have hearts that are not easily moved to tears. (206)

Here, women are unfairly made to receive the consequences of frustration and anger of their bosses externally induced. Even though, they are not the ones with whom their husbands or bosses are “quarreling” with, the women in offices, and organizations are made to bear the brunt of the men’s fury. It shows of double oppression for the woman, first because she is support staff that occupies an inferior or subordinate position. This is class status bar.

Seen as a woman whose existence is assumed to pleasure men, She is also downgraded because of her gender. This sort of anger is based on gender and class as there is a clear difference created between wives and middle class working women. Wariinga also says: “Forth, our thighs, yes, because except for the lucky few, most of us can get jobs or keep them only by allowing the likes of Boss Kihara to paw our thighs” (206).

Equally, objectification of a woman’s body becomes a source of income. Kenyan women are forced into prostitutions and bar tending. They are forced to decorate the white man’s bed. The female body is indirectly or directly used to attract customers. In the novel, Ngugi writes:

Barmaids moved from table to table, taking orders for drinks. They were all dressed in cat suits of black wool. The suits were form-fitting: they clung to the contours of the girls' bodies so closely that a distant onlooker might have thought that the girls were naked. On the girls' bottoms were fixed small white patches shaped like rabbit's tails. On their breasts were pinned two plastic fruits. Each girl also wore a band around her head on which was written in English: I Love You. The girls looked like apparitions from another world. (92)

The narrative above is dehumanizing enough for any rational being who will join in the denunciation of commodifying the female gender. It is in that respect that the new Wariinga fights.

Wariinga grows and learns from the experience of the two days, for when we meet her two years later in Nairobi, she has undergone a metamorphosis, and self-reliance is now her motto. The new Wariinga is a car mechanic, "our engineering hero who specialized in motor vehicles and other combustion engines." She is also "an expert at fitting and turning, at forging and welding." She has totally shed the stereotypical image of the placid, submissive African woman, only able to "cook, to make beds and to spread [her] legs in the market of love" (218).

Petals of Blood is a narration on the exploitation of the Africans generally, and women in particular. The approach being fronted is to forge a common front on the basis of race, class and gender to dismantle the domination, exploitation and oppression of the masses and women in particular. Ngugi strongly desires that women see themselves as human beings first; and then, change their lives to become equal with men. Ngugi portrays Mariamu, a squatter on Munira's (the central character in the novel and a schoolteacher) father's farm as assertive, refusing to be submissive to her husband any more. She complains about her triple duties to her child Nding'uri; to her husband and to her European landlord.

Mariamu becomes intolerant of her situation as she doesn't see a cent from her produce. Her husband takes all her money for himself and gives her little amount of money. This testifies to the identity a woman is ascribed in the society, a beast of burden for the interest of the male gender. Finally, she rebels against him and he beats her in frustration. She takes Nding'uri and runs back to Limuru where she begs for cultivation rights from Munira's father. In Limuru, Munira's father's, brother Ezekiel, a wealthy landowner and a respected elder in the hierarchy of the Presbyterian Church, tries to exploit her

and wants to have sex with her but she refuses him openly. Ngugi describes this to reveal women's plight at home, as well as, outside. Her body is principally traded for men's pleasure.

Ngugi portrays Wanja as an active woman who forms a group which is called Ndemi-Nyakinyua, to cultivate and weed the land. The purpose is to work in group and help other women to increase their efficiency in work. She also works as a barmaid. Her salary is paid to her according to the whims of her employer. She wants to quit the job, but does not have any one to rely on. Her father runs after money and does not care for her. As a result, Wanja becomes a prostitute and opens a brothel. Ngugi portrays her as an example of Kenyan woman's exploitation. According to him, neo-colonial and imperialistic conditions are responsible for this. Wanja tries to go beyond traditions and is caught in the clutches of the colonial capitalist society. Mala Pandurang writes: "Significant in Ngugi's portraiture of Wanja is the amount of heroic energy packed into her tortured body, for in spite of the numerous violent experiences that have seared her psyche, she still emerges as an admirable character who exudes the most telling traits of selfless humanism." (198)

Ngugi describes how economic decline drives men to exploit women. One of the reasons that drives Wanja to prostitution is her exploitation by a wealthy and ruthless businessman, Mr. Kimeria who holds her hostage and rapes her. Wanja wants to find her identity and build her personality, but discovers it is difficult for a woman in a patriarchal society to do so. Mala Pandurang asserts that: "Kenya's brutalized and exploited womanhood finds expression in the portrait of Wanja Kahili, the barmaid whore. And in her portrait is etched the agonies of the lumped classes of Kenyan women who are victims of Kenya's capitalist structures" (23).

Wanja starts life as a brilliant pupil from a working-class family. But her working-class background is to be her undoing since her parents, long exploited and brutalized by the power of capital, thirst for the luxuries of life enjoyed by their propertied neighbours. It is one of these neighbours, —a family friend, Hawkins Kimeria, that seduces her and terminates her educational career; thus turning her into a lumped element that would roam the many bars of Kenya's tourist centres.

Wanja financially is in a critical condition. She says: "Kimeria who has 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 would benefit from the new economic progress of Ilmorog." (96)

Wanja thinks going back from the city which she hates to Ilmorog will salvage her but has to return to the city, reluctantly establishes a brothel on the basis of the law, —you eat or you are eaten: "If you have a cunt... if you are

born with this hole, instead of it being a source of pride, you are doomed to either marrying someone or else being a whore. You eat or you are eaten. How true I have founded it. I decided to act, and I quickly built this house” (97). The above comment reflects women’s ascribed image and helplessness.

Of course, Ngugi draws both positive and negative aspects of female characters and does not create unrealistic and fanciful female characters. Ngugi clearly emphasizes the worthy side of his female characters. In delineating Wanja’s character, he brings out her kindness, resourcefulness, mental strength and loving nature. James Stephen Robson states:

Wanja, like her predecessor, Mumbi is the most resilient and the most victimized character in *Petals of Blood*. Her betrayal is the most complex of all the characters...Yet in spite of these betrayals she is capable of regeneration. This is evident throughout the novel from personal sacrifices on the Journey to the co-operative farmers’ organization in Ilmorog to the elimination of Kimeria before the fire in Sunshine Lodge. Wanja’s character is later proletarianized further through Wariinga in *Devil on the Cross*, although in her case the possibility of a regenerated political environment is less likely. (103).

Ngugi maintains that women are more worried about the welfare of the community than men. Nyakinyua is an assertive woman against colonialism and advises people to be aware of colonialism. She thinks that colonialism has oppressed and exploited women more than their men and westernisation has affected the people to leave their village and parents and become idlers. She observes the situation in this regard: “Our young men and women have left us.[...] They go, and the young women only return now and then to deposit the newborn with their grandmothers already aged with scratching this earth for a morsel of life” (104).

Nyakinyua’s observation brings out the condition of women and the plight of the poor. Thus, *Petals of Blood* deals with the exploitation of the African women on the basis of race, class and gender. In this way, Ngugi’s women characters are brave, resilient, determined and resourceful. In *Petals of Blood*, for example, we can see that when life in the rural areas gets harder, because of the system of imperialism, girls in particular and the peasant population in general flee their homes in search of better life in the nearby towns and cities, where they will be used as sex-slaves by the local bourgeois class and their capitalist masters. This is what Guthera becomes in Ngugi’s *Matigari*. The bourgeoisie needs the girls only before they conceive. As soon as they get

pregnant, they will look for other girls in substitution. This is to mean that women are considered not as creatures capable of self-determined actions, but as only objects of male gaze. We are told:

Our young men and women have left us. The glittering metal has called them. They go, and the young women only return now and then to deposit the newborn with their grandmothers already aged with scratching this earth for a morsel of life. They say: there in the city there is room for only one...our employers, they don't want babies about the tiny rooms in tiny yards. (7)

So be it under the colonial regime or post-colonial, the life of women remains the same. Prostitution and sexual violence against women is still on the rise.

Some people even consider women, especially barmaids, as good for nothing beings. For them, a woman is just like a commodity they can purchase from the market. We can verify this fact as Wanja tells one of her unforgettable coincidences as a barmaid to Munira and Abdulla that a person tries to buy her with his money, but she declines. What "money, I asked him? Cider, cider he, shouted. I put on my most innocent face and put sugar and honey in my voice. You mean you wanted me last night?" (77). Therefore the dominance of the patriarchal ideology can be seen in the novel as almost all men consider themselves as superior.

We barmaids never settle in one place. Sometimes you are dismissed because you refused to sleep with your boss. Or your face may become too well known in one place. You want a new territory. Do you know, it is so funny that when you go to a new place the men treat you as if you were a virgin. They will outdo one another to buy you beers. Each wants to be the first. (129)

After independence, the number of bars highly increased in the new Kenya and prostitution becomes the only vacant position or a normal way of life for many girls who migrate into the towns being deceived by the bourgeois. Ngugi discloses the fact that women, who constitute almost half of the total population of the world, are in a very threatening life condition under the leadership of the Black-white imperialists in Kenya.

In the referent society in which the novel is written, the people believe that women can never be equal to men. They "seemed to think that women deserved low pay and heavy work: women's real job, they argued amidst noises and

laughter was to lie on their backs and open their legs to man's passage to the kingdom of leisure." (304). This shows that women's creative ability in science and technology and their contribution for the socio-economic development of one's country has been totally neglected under the imperialist system. They think that a woman deserves low pay and hard works; taking care of children, washing clothes, cooking food and so on. That is to mean, the realm of a woman, according to them, should be limited to the household environment, thereby, denying women's potential and creative power for the development of our world as a whole.

Ngugi, also has a vision of the self-reliant Kenyan woman. The unexpected airplane crash at Ilmorog that costs the life of Abdulla's donkey becomes the cause of Wanja's and Abdulla's progress in business--from a barmaid to a business girl. Upon seeing a crowd of people who flock into Ilmorog to watch the airplane, Wanja comes up with a business idea that if they start selling roasted meat and Thenget'a, they will become rich in a very short period of time. As she expects, people begin coming to see the airplane from inside and outside of Ilmorog.

She had turned her energy and time after Karega had disappeared, into work. She seizes the devil spirit of brewing and selling and counting and hatching out more plants for the progress of her trade/ business partnership with Abdulla. In time she employs three barmaids...she also hired a band composed entirely of women from many Kenyan nationalities, and this brought more customers flocking to see for themselves. (270)

From this extract we can understand that the writer has a vision that if the system is changed, or if imperialism is eradicated from Africa, the life of the women will improve. It is the system that makes the women remain employed, and servants of men. It is a call for all to join hands to dismantle imperialism which cages women from attaining freedom. It is not only women that will wage this war but all who are sympathetic to the course of humanity and womanhood.

Conclusion

The politics of gender has affected women negatively leading to the kind of identity crisis ascribed to her which she resists vehemently. As proletariat, women in Ngugi's novels suffer double oppression first as working class people that the predatory activities of the imperialists or neo-colonialists take toll on; and second, they are severely undermined as female gender whose identity is that of commodification and objectification. They only give pleasure to the male gender and so must not aspire for any high position, skill or talents.

Ngugi portrays the women as resisting the negative identity they are dabbled, His strong female characters rather chart a new cause in tandem with

Marxist Feminists who believe that the female gender is not an underdog. Many of the female characters possess virile character and image. For instance, at the end of the narrative in *Devil on the Cross*, Ngugi closes the lacuna between mental slavery and industrial slavery, barely few centuries after the African continent suffered the transatlantic slavery. This, Ngugi achieves using the dialogue between Wariinga and the 'roaming spirit' who also, refers to itself as 'the Tempter and the Judge'. (184-194) During the extended dialogue, Wariinga successfully extricates herself from the slavery targeted at her mentality by promptly rebuking the 'roaming spirit' thus: "No! No! Get thee behind me, Satan ..." (Ngugi 194)

Works Cited

- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 1990.
- Connolly, William E. *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox*. Cornell University Press, 1991.
- Daniel, Gilbert, et al, editors. *The Handbook of Social Psychology*, 4th ed. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1998.
- Daphna, Oyserman, et al, editors. *Self, Self-Concept and Identity, Handbook of Self and Identity, 2nd Edition*, Guilford Press, 2012.
- Dewan, Hossain, et al. "Marxist Feminist Perspective of Corporate Gender Disclosures." *Asian Journal of Accounting and Governance*, vol. 7, 2018, pp. 11-24. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309654491_Marxist_Feminist_Perspective_of_Corporate_Gender_Disclosures
- Gakwandi, Shatto A. *The Novel and Contemporary Experience in Africa*. Heinemann Educational Books, 1977.
- Gilbert, Helen. "An Introduction to Marxist Feminism." *Feminist Ezine*, 2019, 12th June Retrieved as at March 15th, 2021 from www.feministezine.com/feminist/
- Joseph, Forgas, and Kipling, Williams, editors. *The Social Self: Cognitive, Interpersonal, And Intergroup Perspectives*. Psychology Press, 2002
- Ker, David I. *Literature and Society in Africa*. Spectrum Books, 2004.
- Kruglanski, Arie, and Higgins, Tori, editors. *Social Psychology: Handbook of Basic Principles*, 2nd Ed., Guilford Press, 2007.
- Kymlicka, Will. *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*. Clarendon Press, 1995.
- Lasswell, Harold. *Politics: Who Gets What, When, and How*. Whittlesey House, 1936, Retrieved from

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/american-political-science-review/article/abs/politics-who-gets-what-when-how-by-harold-d-lasswell-new-york-whittlesey-house-1936-pp-ix-264/90C407BEDE6963B3D2C84FF79C695E1E>

Mark Leary, and June, Tangney, editors. *Handbook of Self and Identity*. Guilford Press, 2003.

Miller, David. *Nationalism*. Oxford University Press, 1995.

Neisser, Ulric. *The Perceived Self: Ecological and Interpersonal Sources of Self Knowledge*. Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *In the House of the Interpreter*. Vintage, 2013.

------. *Wresting with the Devil: A Prison Memoir*. Vintage, 2018.

------. *Devil on the Cross*. Heinemann, 1982.

------. *Wizard of the Crow*. Anchor books, 2006.

Ola V. U., editor. *Identity Crisis in the Tragic Novels of Isidore Okpewho*, Heinemann Educational Books, 1983.

Raja, Masood. "Reading Notes for Devil on the Cross by Ngugi wa Thiong'o," 2019, July 11. Retrieved from <https://postcolonial.net/2019/07/reading-notes-for-devil-on-the-cross-by-ngugi-wa-thiongo/>

Robson, James S. "Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Fight against Colonialism and Neocolonialism: An Exploration of the Theme of Betrayal." Being a thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of English, Simon Fraser University. December 1987. Retrieved from https://summit.sfu.ca/system/files/interns1/5170/b14966918.pdf&ved=2ahUKEwiR9JfzmeLoAhVITBoKHWXqA_UFQjABegQIBhAB&usq=AOvVaw37g41SbJNT294At1XfdUJc

Stefano, Christine D. "Marxist feminism." *The Encyclopedia of Political Thought*, 2014, September 15. Retrieved from <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9781118474396.wbpt0653>

Stryker, Sheldon. *Symbolic Interactionism: A Social Structural Version*. Benjamin Cummings, 1980.

Tajfel, Henri. *Human Groups and Social Identity*. Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Taylor, Charles. *The Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Harvard University Press, 1989.

West, Candace, and Zimmerman, Don. *Doing Gender. Gender and Society*, 1987.

Young, Iris M. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton University Press, 1990.