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EXPLORING LAND CONFLICTS IN NGUGI WA THIONGO'S PETALS OF BLOOD (1977) AND DEVIL ON THE CROSS (1980)

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Abstract

This paper aims at giving more insights into how land conflicts are dealt with by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o in such selected novels as *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross*. In these novels, the Kenyan writer raises the thought-provoking issue of the great responsibility befalling Africans at large and African decision-makers in particular as regards how they can reverse the trend today by really managing their own domestic affairs after the achievement of the hard-won independence of their countries. Through the lens of post-colonial criticism, psychoanalysis and Marxist literary criticism coupled with qualitative data approach, this paper arouses Africans' awareness on the role that they have to play with a view to paving the way for their continent's development. The results of our findings lead us to impart to the reader how the responsibility befalling Africans to really achieve their own empowerment in this globalised world is quite tremendous. With this in view, Africans at large and African decision-makers in particular need to show the former colonial powers that after the independences, they are really committed to putting their respective countries on the path of development through a healthier and profitable cooperation with advanced countries.

Keywords: Land; Conflicts; Ngugi; *Petals of Blood*; *Devil on the Cross*.

Résumé

Ce travail de recherche vise à faire découvrir au lecteur comment Ngugi Wa Thiong'o s'est efforcé à aborder la thématique des conflits fonciers dans *Petals of Blood* et *Devil on the Cross*. À travers ces romans précités,

l'écrivain Kényan touche du doigt la grande responsabilité des Africains en général et celle des décideurs politiques en particulier sur les stratégies qu'ils peuvent mettre en œuvre en vue de changer la tendance de nos jours en prenant au sérieux la résolution des maux qui minent leurs divers pays au lendemain des indépendances conquises de haute lutte. En nous inspirant des théories littéraires telles que la critique post-coloniale, la psychanalyse et la critique littéraire marxiste assorties de l'approche qualitative, ce travail de recherche suscite une prise de conscience des Africains sur la partition qui est la leur sur le décollage du continent noir. Les résultats de nos travaux nous amènent à faire découvrir au lecteur que la responsabilité des Africains à franchir le Rubicon en vue d'atteindre leur propre autonomie dans ce monde en proie à la mondialisation est tout à fait énorme. Pour réussir ce pari, les Africains et de surcroît les décideurs politiques ont l'impérieuse obligation de montrer aux anciennes puissances coloniales qu'au lendemain des indépendances, ils sont plus que jamais déterminés à mettre leurs pays respectifs sur la voie du développement à travers des partenariats sains et porteurs d'avenir avec les pays évolués.

Mots-clés: Terre; Conflits; Ngugi; *Petals of Blood*; *Devil on the Cross*.

Introduction

The realm of African literature has burst into bloom with such African writers cast in the mould of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. As a Kenyan-born writer, Ngugi is mainly concerned with not only restoring the African past but also with entrusting the native people in his home country with the great responsibility befalling them as regards the conquest of their ancestral land from the white men who have robbed those lands during colonial era. Even during post-independent period, the aforesaid well-known Kenyan writer who is committed with campaigning for the legitimate rights of downtrodden people is now concerned with how land conflicts are dealt with in his native Kenya. In actual fact, in such novels as *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross* released respectively in 1977 and 1980, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o has revealed to the whole world how land conflict is still a major concern in post-independent Kenya, a bone of contention

which native people at large and the down-and-out people in particular have endeavoured to settle or nip in the bud by following in the footsteps of the ringleaders of the **Mau-Mau** revolt by toppling or overthrowing all those who are hand in glove with the former colonial powers and their allies to perpetuate the exploitation of the resources of Kenya.

1- Theoretical framework

As critical framework, this paper essentially employs postcolonial criticism, psychoanalysis, and Marxist literary theory as mentioned above.

To set the stage, it is worth saying that postcolonial criticism is a literary theory which seeks to investigate the master-servant relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. In fact, “post-colonial critics,” as averred by the Purdue Online Writing Lab, “are concerned with literature produced by colonial powers and works produced by those who were or are colonized. Post-colonial theory looks at issues of power, economics, politics, religion, and culture and how these elements work in relation to colonial hegemony (Western colonizers controlling the colonized)”¹. As underscored by Bill Aschcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, in *The Post-Colonial Studies Readers*; London and New York, 1995:

Post-colonial literatures are a result of this interaction between imperial culture and the complex of indigenous cultural practices. As a consequence, ‘post-colonial theory’ has existed for a long time before that particular name was used to describe it. Once colonised peoples had caused to reflect on and express the tension which ensued from this problematic and contested, but eventually vibrant and powerful mixture of imperial language and local experience, post-colonial ‘theory’ came into being. [...]

Post-colonial ‘theory’ has been produced in all societies into which the imperial force of Europe has intruded, though not always in the formal guise of theoretical texts. (Bill et al. p.2)

The choice of approaching this paper through the postcolonial criticism lens is underpinned by the fact that this theory will help us delve into the

¹See: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/subject_specific_writing/writing_in_literature/literary_theory_and_schools_of_criticism/post_colonial_criticism.html# Accessed on 22 May 2022.

master-servant relationship that has always existed between white people and Africans. In this regard, it is worth dwelling upon the fact that the relationships between the colonizer and the colonized in the selected novels are mainly based on the exploitation and enslavement of Africans by the white predators who claim to set foot in Africa with a view to civilising or enlightening the people in that part of the world but who in actual fact stray away from their so-called original missions.

Worse still, this situation is still going on today after the achievement of the independences of African countries. As can be noticed, even in post-independent Africa, as we shall deal with deeply in the process of this research work, the former colonial masters do not really want to wholly sever their relationships with their former colonies and sustain in powers corrupt leaders who can help them keep on exploiting or plundering the wealths and resources available in their former colonies as dealt with by Ngugi in *Petals of Blood* (1977) and *Devil on the Cross* (1980).

As regards the second literary theory that we have employed here, that is to say psychoanalysis, is a doctrine of which the German philosopher Sigmund Freud got the paternity in the late nineteenth century and which refers in lay terms to the theory of the human mind. That theory is attacked on a great number of grounds, the most common of which is sexuality. In actual fact, critics think that Freud "brings everything down to sex" while hinting at Oedipus complex (Eagleton 159). However, as Eagleton Terry cogently observed: "Psychoanalysis is not only a theory of the human mind, but a practice for curing those who are considered mentally ill or disturbed. Such cures, for Freud, are not achieved just by explaining to the patient what is wrong with him, revealing to him his unconscious motivations" (Eagleton 159)

The main reason which underlies our conducting this study through the psychoanalysis lens is that this theory being "concerned with the inner side of the individual; fear, hatred, frustration," it will help us to give more insights into "all the negative feelings that dominate blacks as being the oppressed and whites the oppressors."² A deep or thorough analysis reveals that native people sustain a great dissatisfaction faced with the

²Salem, Amar. *Prejudice, Violence and Death in Alex La Guma's A Walk in the Night and Richard Wright's Native Son*, University of Tizi-Ouzou; Degree of Magister in English, 2011; p.7

situation they undergo but they fear to rise up because the white predators have succeeded in brainwashing them into believing that as black people they are innately inferior to the white men who, acting on God's behalf have come to deliver them from the long nights of savagery and murky past in which they are benighted; and hence any rebellion from the native people will unleash God's wrath on them. As Ngugi has pointed out in *Homecoming*, the white missionaries have endeavoured to steep into native people's mind that if their living conditions are deplorable, it is because Almighty God has really willed it to be so; and for that specific reason, black people have to accept or worse still endure it by praying continuously so as to have everlasting life in heaven because the earthly possessions do no matter according to God. Paradoxically enough, quite sure that they have diverted the black men's interests from the earthly possessions, the same white men busy themselves plundering all the natural resources that they come across in Africa.

With regard to the third and last literary theory which we have deemed important to employ in this research work, that is to say Marxist literary criticism, is a theory or doctrine of which Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels got the paternity in the nineteenth century. In actual fact, Marxist literary criticism is "the belief that literature reflects class struggle and materialism, and investigates how literature can work as a force for social change or a reaffirmation of existing conditions."³ The major tenets of that theory are encapsulated in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) in which Marx and Engels have asserted "that the history of all existing societies is the history of class struggle." (Mathias, I. O., and Nathaniel, O. S., 67).

Hinting at Marxist literary criticism, Mathias, I. O., and Nathaniel, O. S. wrote that:

Marxism is a theory that attacks capitalism and feudalism by proposing communism/socialism as the ideal state. The theory avers that there are two opposing classes in every human society, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and that these two classes form the

³ Available at:

<https://www.google.com/search?q=marxist+criticism&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=PPb3CCM1stpbEM%253A%252Cj7bomO2zFMqfVM%252C%252Fm%252F0dgnc>. Accessed on 16 May 2023.

elites/haves and the have not, respectively. Marxist tenet seeks to remove this dichotomy in human society by arguing for a classless society where intellectuals rule, a society birthed by the commonness and equal distribution of wealth, a society where exploitation and oppression are eliminated by means of proletariat revolution, an egalitarian and utopic society. (Mathias, I. O., and Nathaniel, O. S., 67).

Marxist literary theory as averred by Eagleton will enable us to examine the various social classes in the selected novels as well as their interaction in terms of exploitation. In actual fact, in the selected novels, the reader is kept abreast of two diametrically opposed worlds: the world of the haves (the bourgeois) and the world of the have-nots (the proletariats) epitomized respectively by Whites and Blacks. The first social class includes the white men and their black henchmen in post-independent Kenya who think that they are the only masters on board under God and hence reign supreme over everything in their colonies. As regards the second social class, it includes to a large extent native people and especially the black community who works on their ancestral land for a mere pittance. To make ends meet, these native people are compelled to carry out drudgery or menial jobs.

Class struggles in the novels under study have taken on the form of unequal distribution of wealths as well as economic exploitation. In fact, native people who show a great dynamism to hard work are turned into bondsmen and businessmen on their forefathers' land to produce a wealth which only the white minority living overseas will really profit by. For instance, in Ngugi's selected novels, the new leaders as well as all the people holding a position of influence in post-independent Kenya are spurred on mobilising all the resources in their native land by all manners of means for the survival and the benefit of Western land which are in a dire need of those resources.

Equally remarkable, not only are the so-called white masters as well as their henchmen living in Africa entitled to buy and own very large plots of lands for their business, but they can sell the resources in the Dark Continent overseas and get scot-free thus turning the newly-independent African countries into reservoirs of raw materials and outlets for finished goods. In such conditions, the former African colonies keep on bending

under the yoke of the former colonial powers that exploit them. Unarguably, native people can be seen complaining of what they are made to undergo and the only way out of that predicament is to muster their courage so as to free themselves from neo-colonialism which stands today as the worst stage of colonialism in Africa today.

Marxist literary theory will also enable us to show how the selected novels can significantly impact positive changes among the readers. For instance, any good reader who goes thoroughly through the selected novels will easily become aware of the social political and economic implications of foreign invasions in Africa and what they can do to prevent the side effects of neo-colonialism in Africa in any shape or form. As can be easily inferred, Africans at large and African decision makers in particular need to learn from the continent's experience to be very cautious about any attempt from white people to collaborate with them. They must bear in mind that, being essentially capitalists, foreign countries will always base their relationships with Africa on a maximum of profits. In this regard, while drawing the attention of his readers on the function of literature, Ngugi puts the matter this way in *Homecoming*:

Literature is, of course, primarily concerned with what any political and economic arrangement does the spirit and values governing human relationship. [.....] It is the height of irony that we, who have suffered most from exploitation, are now supporting a system that not only continues that basic exploitation, but exacerbates destructive rivalries between brothers and sisters, a system that thrives on the survival instincts of dwellers in a Darwinian jungle. The writer cannot be exempted from the task of exposing the distorted values governing such a jungle precisely because this distorts healthy human relationships. (qtd in Killam, p.6).

In *An Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi*, G.D, Killam even quotes Ngugi who is more emphatic about the awareness of his readers in an interview that the Kenyan writer is granted in the *Black Books Bulletin* in August 1978:

Black people have been victims of double exploitation. They have been exploited on the level of class because they constitute the majority of the working class and the labouring masses. They have also been exploited on the dimension of race because of the whole colonial context in which Black and White people have met. Thus,

Black people must realize themselves on the level of class and take anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist positions. Also, they must proclaim their color with pride, their culture with pride, their history with pride, their whole past with pride. (qtd in Killam, p. 7)

With a view to better dealing with the topic under study, we have deemed important to use the qualitative data approach, an approach that has helped us to go through some research works and novels as well as resorting to the internet resources. The materials that we have gathered far and wide have afforded us the opportunity to explore the topic under study at great breadth and depth and to see how it will significantly contribute to scholarly debates or research.

2- Master and servant relationships in the selected novels.

As averred by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* published in 1848, "the history of all existing societies is the history of class struggle" (qtd in Mathias, I. O., and Nathaniel, O. S., 2018; p. 67). In fact, all existing societies are earmarked by the presence of two social classes: the bourgeois (the haves) and the proletariat (the have-nots). In *Petals of Blood*, class struggles are pervasive and take on the form of the overexploitation of the powerless native people by the businessmen as well as all the people holding a position of influence in post-independent Kenya. Pitifully enough, native people have placed all their trust in those holding a position of influence in the mistaken belief that the independences will help meet their expectations and fulfil all their long-awaited dreams of finding a secure job as well as living in a country where land conflicts belong to bygone days of colonial era. Such is the harrowing testimony or the bitter experience that such characters as Wanjia and her grandmother Nyakinyua as well as all the dispossessed people have to undergo for having mistakenly accepted a loan from a bank of which objective is rather to sink these people in utter destitution and wretchedness.

The case of the old woman Nyakinyua has claimed our attention because she is not only exploited but she is also left to her own device after losing her land which is her only source of hope. Thinking that her cause can be favourably echoed by the people around her, she has made up her mind

to resort to strong means so that her legitimate rights can be respected. Unfortunately, she realises that all her endeavours in that light have proved abortive. Critically enough, even her grandchild Wanja who can cater for her needs has also suffered the same lot; and the latter has found out that they are living in a post-independent society where either you accept to go with the tide or you are carried away by it. Among the businessmen who regard themselves as the only master on board under God in post-independent Kenya as shown in *Petals of Blood* can be named essentially M.P Nderi wa Riera, Chui, Mzigo and Kimeria.

In *Devil on the Cross*, the author depicts two diametrically-opposed social classes which are respectively 'the have' epitomised by the wealthy businessmen of post-independent Kenya who are committed to fattening up to the detriment of the masses who toil away but do not reap at all the fruits of their endeavours. The second social class, as one can easily guess is that of the 'have-not' or the powerless black people. In *Devil on the Cross*, the wealthy businessmen include the local businessmen and capitalists as well as the leaders of the foreign delegation who have organised the great feast or competition in Ilmorog to select Seven Experts in Modern Theft and Robbery by way of celebrating corruption in all its acute forms amidst some destitute people who are over-exploited to the marrow of their bones. Among the local businessmen who regard themselves as the only master on board under God in post-independent Kenya as shown in *Devil on the Cross* can be named essentially Boss Kihara, the Managing Director of *Champion Construction Company* in Tom Mboya Street where Wariinga is laid off for refusing to grease her boss' palm in dens of iniquity referred to as Modern Love Bar and *Lodging*.

Another local businessman holding a position of influence in *Devil on the Cross*, stands as Gaturia's father, referred to in the novel as the Old Rich Man, who has impregnated Wariinga and refused to be held responsible for that but, who unfortunately like a snake that bites its own tail, is trapped by the same female character that he has offended that avails herself of the ultimate opportunity afforded to her to avenge herself at the turn of the novel by killing him with a pistol.

Turning now to the powerless black people in *Devil on the Cross*, they include to a large extent nearly the whole black community and especially the farmers, the workers, the jobless people, the whores and trade unionists or freedom fighters like Muturi, Wangari and the student leader as well as those whose lands have been snatched through cunning ways. In fact, in post-independent Kenya, as shown in *Devil on the Cross*, the powerless black community is summoned to quit their premises so that those places can be used for tourism areas for the foreigners to spend the night or sleep with Kenyan beautiful girls. That is for instance Wariinga's great sorrow at being informed that they have to quit their Mwhitori garage premises for her former boss Mr Boss Kihara to set up his new company referred to as the *Tourists' Paradise Development Company*. As can be seen, it is within the second social that can be found the two female characters Wariinga and Wangari that have succeeded, even amidst difficulties, in polishing up the image of women. In *Devil on the Cross*, it can be underscored that after the independences, the masses among whom are the female protagonists of the novel are over-exploited not only by their own black leaders but also by the foreigners who prove to be hand in glove with the same black leaders to plunder the resources of their own country.

3- Land conflicts as dealt with in post-independent Kenya

While expressing his great concern about land conflicts in post-independent Kenya, Ngugi observes in *Homecoming* that:

There has been little attempt at breaking with our inherited colonial past – our inherited economic and other institutions, apart from blackanizing the personnel running them. There has been no basic land reform; the settler owning 600 acres of land is replaced by a single African owning the same 600 acres. There has been no change in the structure and nature of ownership of various companies, banks and industries; the two or three European directors go away to be replaced by two or three indigenous directors – the companies remain foreign-owned. (Ngugi pp. xv-xvi)

As an east-African country, Kenya had experienced land conflicts during colonial era; and the social struggles that some freedom fighters were committed to fighting till the departure from the political arena of the colonial masters made many Kenyans yearn for the return of their

ancestral land with the election of the Messiah, Jomo Kenyatta, as the first black President of independent Kenya. Hence, on the eve of *Uhuru*⁴, there were flags out all over the main streets of the country by way of showing that the long-awaited moment of happiness has eventually come, and that the citizens of Kenya can, for ever, sigh with relief just to bear out that *Mau-Mau* revolt was really worth the game.

However, that euphoria was short-lived and Kenyans at large were not long in realizing much to their disillusion, like the well-known Ghanaian writer Ayi Kwei Armah, that indeed the “beautiful ones are not yet born”⁵ in post-independent Kenya. So, faithful to his literary commitments to being in the service of his native people, Ngugi Wa Thiong’o keeps on publishing some works of fiction to favourably echo to the world as a whole the heartfelt cry of Kenyans. In the process of this research work, we will show how Ngugi’s *Petals of Blood* (1977)⁶ and *Devil on the Cross* (1980)⁷ really stand as the depiction of land conflicts in post-independent Kenya.

To set the stage, it is worth dwelling upon the fact that, Ngugi’s *Petals of Blood* stands as a harsh indictment of the management of domestic affairs in post-independent Kenya. In actual fact, through that aforesaid novel, Ngugi reveals how the post-independent leaders in Kenya have made things even harder for native people by overexploiting them to the marrow of their bones. Indeed, post-independent Kenya has become a country where the minority leads a life of ease while the great majority wallows in an unprecedented poverty. This state of affairs mainly stems from the involvement of the former colonial masters and their allies in the domestic affairs of Kenya where money has become a semi-god and the people its servants.

With intent to maintain the large majority of the country in utter destitution, the colonial masters through the new leaders are set on robbing the majority of their ancestral land. In that case, large plots of land can be robbed from native people in underhanded ways. One

4 Gikuyu word meaning “independence”.

5 The right spelling of Ayi Kwei Arma’s novel is rather *The Beautiful Ones Are not Yet Born*.

6 Ngugi, Wa Thiong’o. *Petals of Blood*, London, Heinemann, 1977.

7 Ngugi, Wa Thiong’o. *Devil on the Cross*, London, Heinemann, 1980.

instance where such a situation is pervasive through *Petals of Blood* is when native people are lured into taking loans from banks for them to invest the loans into farming and husbandry. However, the pitfall lurking ahead of them is that in case of failure to pay back the interests in due course, the banks can without further ado foreclose on native people's ancestral land as mortgage. The character who is the hardest hit by land expropriation in *Petals of Blood* stands as Old Nyakinyua, Wanjia's grandmother. In fact, having "*been lured into loans and into fencing off*" her "*land and buying imported fertilisers*" (Ngugi 275), Old Nyakinyua finds herself debt-ridden to the bank from which she has taken a loan. Consequently, without further delay, Nyakinyua's plot of land has been sold by public auction by the bank, and a few whiles later, are set up on the premises new breweries "owned by an Anglo-American international combine but of course with African directors and even shareholders. Three of the four leading local personalities were Mzigo, Chui and Kimeria" (Ngugi 281).

In spite of her "failing health and flesh", Old Nyakinyua decides to fight back. She then tramples "from hut to hut calling upon the peasants of Ilmorog to get together and fight it out" (Ngugi 276). Her main objective is to organise all the dispossessed of Ilmorog into a protest and raise an outcry about what the powerless people are going through in the hands of black oppressors after the achievement of Kenyan independence. The immediate outcome resulting from that mishap is that Abdulla and Wanjia are driven out of the place where they have set up a shop and a bar to live in shanty areas and the former place where they have set up their business ventures has undergone great changes and is referred to as New Ilmorog. Some parts of that place are reserved for tourism centres where foreigners and rich people can enjoy themselves or spend the night. Other parts of New Ilmorog shopping centre have been turned into a great farmland of wheatfields and ranches around the plains and the herdsmen living there are simply driven further afield into the drier parts of Ilmorog. In the meantime, a few of these herdsmen are turned into labourers on these same farms which used to belong to them. The new owners of that place are the wealthy businessmen who drive about in big-engined cars and in whose awe the majority stands; and in those

conditions, nobody in position of influence seems to care about the down-and-out majority.

Equally remarkable, Old Nyakinyua is not the only person to go through that bad experience. As a matter of fact,

a whole lot of peasants and herdsmen of Old Ilmorog who had been lured into loans and into fencing off their land and buying imported fertilisers and were unable to pay back were similarly affected. Without much labour, without machinery, without breaking with old habits and outlook, and without much advice they had not been able to make the land yield enough to meet their food needs and pay back the loans. Some had used the money to pay school fees. Now the inexorable law of the metal power was driving them from the land. (Ngugi 275)

Like the whole of Kenya, Ilmorog is then divided into two areas as earlier mentioned. The first one which is the apple of every citizen's eye and is regarded as an Eldorado is "*the residential area of the farm managers, County Council officials, public service officers, the managers of Barclays, Standard and African Economic Banks, and other servants of state and money power.*" (Ngugi 280)

As regards the second area, as one can easily guess, it is "*a shanty town of migrant and floating workers, the unemployed, the prostitutes and small traders in tin and scrap metal*" (Ngugi 280-81). That second area which is referred to as New Jerusalem can be likened to the backwaters of SOWETO areas during apartheid time in South Africa.

It is also worth observing that even after the independences, the exploitation of the masses continues gaining ground and a great majority of people "*continue to sweat so that a few, a very few, might keep a thousand dollars in the bank of the one monster-god that for four hundred years had ravished a continent*" (Ngugi 166). Those who really exploit the masses are hailed as good citizens as is the case with the three people murdered in the aforesaid novel namely Chui, Mzigo and Kimeria who are wrongly described in the *Sunday Mouthpiece* as being "the three well-known nationalist fighters for political, educational, and above all, economic freedom for Africans. Their ownership and management of *Theng'eta Breweries & Enterprises Ltd.*" is supposed to have "brought happiness and prosperity to every home in the area as well as

international fame for the country" (Ngugi 194). For this reason, they are said to be unmatched for their entrepreneurial genial worldwide, which really accounts for Inspector Godfrey's full involvement in finding the real culprits of the arson in which they are killed.

As Ngugi really emphasises in *Petals of Blood*, after the independences, land problem is still a permanent headache for some Kenyans since no law has been passed to regulate land reforms (Ngugi 254) and the great majority of the country has to undergo this problem powerlessly. In fact, in many regards, it has been proved that:

The demarcation and the fencing off of land had deprived a lot of tillers and herdsmen of their hitherto unquestioned rights of use and cultivation. Now they were hiring themselves out to any who needed their labour for a wage. (Ngugi 272-73)

Another instance where Kenyans have to undergo land injustice powerlessly in Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* in post-independent Kenya is when the company sugar plantation where Karega has worked in West Kenya has extensively driven the peasants off their ancestral land for the so-called purpose of making "room for the company's nuclear estates" (Ngugi 289). Pitifully enough, even the peasants who are lucky enough and are not driven off their ancestral legacy are encouraged to grow sugar canes on their plots of land instead of food crops in order to hold famine and starvation at bay. Worse still, "*the company buys the sugar at whatever price they deem fit.*" (Ngugi 289).

The only people who succeed in those conditions, on top of those holding a position of influence, are people like Ezechiel Waweru, Munira's father who have refused in the past to take the **Mau Mau** oath for African Land and Freedom and even after independence, who have also taken the oath to divide the Kenyans and to concentrate the wealths in the hands of only a few (Ngugi 341). This is surely the underlying reason accounting for the fact that Wanja, the professional whore and one of the female protagonists of *Petals of Blood* has come to the conclusion that exploitation of the downtrodden masses in post independent Kenya has reached a pitch where the only alternative left to them is either to go with the tide or to accept being carried away by it: "*You eat or you are eaten. [...] I have had to be hard ... It is the only way ... the only way ... Look at*

Abdulla ... reduced to a fruit seller ... oranges ... sheepskins ... No, I will never return to the herd of victims ... Never ... Never" (Ngugi 293-94).

Once back to Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross*, it is worth setting the stage by pointing out that that work of fiction "was conceived and written during the author's one-year detention in prison, in Kenya, where he was held without trial after the performance by peasants and workers of his play *Ngaahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want)*"⁸. Like *Petals of Blood*, Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross* is also a harsh indictment of the management of domestic affairs in post-independent Kenya. In fact, the novel opens on the misadventure of the female protagonist Wariinga who is coldly dismissed from work for daring to turn down the overtures of her boss Mr Boss Kihara, the Managing Director of the *Champion Construction Company* in Tom Mboya Street. As if misfortune is still trailing that young girl hailing from a poor family, that same self-day, Wariinga is abandoned by her sweetheart John Kimwana knee-deep in the mire of her troubles alleging that she is Boss Kihara's mistress. To cap it all, the descent into hell for Wariinga progresses as the next day morning, she is visited by her landlord who summons her to vacate the premises without further delay as she is increasing the rent of the house in which she lives in Olafa Jericho, Nairobi. In the mistaken belief that she can settle that matter in a friendly way, Wariinga objects to quitting the premises and without further delay, the landlord goes to look for "three thugs wearing sunglasses" who humiliate her by throwing her things out of the room and locking "the door with a new padlock." (Ngugi 10)

Having no other choice than returning to her native village Ilmorog, Wariinga goes to take a taxi which is quite unexpectedly going to the celebration of the thieves and robbers organised in Ilmorog to which she is invited by the man who has helped her when she has lost consciousness while waiting for a bus by the roadside after her misfortune of the day. It is only then that Wariinga comes into contact with how the wealths of the country are overexploited by a minority of businessmen who are proud to boast about the way they live off the majority of the population. Among the country's wealths that are robbed by those businessmen, stands out

⁸ See the introductory notes to *A Grain of Wheat* by Simon E. Gikandi just after the cover page of the novel.

the ancestral land for which native people have fought during **Mau Mau** revolt for *Uhuru*. One instance where Wariinga experiences the tragic shock of land tenure as dealt with in post-independent Kenya in *Devil on the Cross* is when one day, she goes to the garage where she does part-time work to cater for her school fees at *Polytechnic* and is kept abreast that the place has already been sold off by the City Council to her former employer “*Boss Kihara and a group of foreigners from the USA, Germany and Japan*” (Ngugi 223) for them to build tourist hotels referred to as *Tourists' Paradise Development Company* so that Kenyan women can sell their flesh to foreigners. Owing to that reason, Wariinga and her colleagues are summoned to quit their Mwihotori garage premises without further delay.

As can be seen, land conflicts continue to be a thought-provoking issue after Kenyan independence since only wealthy people like Boss Kihara and his like who have managed to go up the financial ladder can afford to buy or trade the large plots of the country's land as the fancy takes them to the detriment of the down-and-out and in that instance the large majority of the population who are the hardest hit by colonial and neo-colonial system because they are turned into farm workers or sharecroppers left in utter destitution. As the narrator observes in *Devil on the Cross*,

After Uhuru [independence of Kenya] a few black people started buying the lands for which the Mau Mau had fought. What was very surprising – and, indeed, this delighted a lot of people who not long before had been alarmed by the news of Uhuru – was that apparently it did not matter on what side one had fought in the battle for freedom. It did not matter whether one was called Mr Hot, Mr Cold or Mr Lukewarm. The question of whether one had formerly been cold or hot or lukewarm was irrelevant when it came to the grabbing of land. (Ngugi 103)

Interestingly enough, land speculation after the independences also consists in “*selling soil in pots and tins, so that a man will at least be able to plant a seed in them. [...] Later they will hang their few grains of soil from their roofs or verandahs and plant in them potatoes to bribe their crying children to be quiet!*” (Ngugi 107).

In *Devil on the Cross*, Gitutu is a pot-bellied businessman who is really proud of confessing how he has worked his way through the financial ladder by robbing the powerless people of their ancestral land at affordable price which he sub-divided into plots before selling them at very high prices to his fellow Kenyan businessmen:

The question is this. The land wasn't mine, and the money with which I'd paid for it wasn't mine, and I hadn't added anything to the land – where did I get the 220,000 shillings? From the pockets of the people. Yes, because the land really belonged to the people, and the money with which I bought it came from the people! (Ngugi 106)

Gitutu even goes to the length of accounting to the panel of thieves and robbers how he goes about his business of land expropriation nearly as follows:

I remember one farm in Subukia. That was the farm that really made me! It was a thousand-acre farm, and it had on it countless cows. The owner was one of those Boers who used to swear that they would never live in a Kenya ruled by blacks. So he was selling the farm cheaply because he was in a hurry to migrate to South Africa before Congo-type chaos broke over the new Kenya. I was introduced to him by Gateru. I bought the farm for 250 shillings an acre – the whole farm cost me 250, 000 shillings. As was now my practice, I divided the farm into two equal parts. One half, 500 acres, was for the society. The other half was divided into smaller plots of two acres each, so that each member of the society, on buying a share, would become the owner of a plot. There were 250 shares in all. A share cost 500 shillings. So the contributions of all the members amounted to a total of 1,250, 000 shillings. After giving the Boer his 250, 000 shillings, I was left with a cool million. I put the whole sum into my bank account. I gave the people the farm. They were delighted. (Ngugi 106)

Faced with that situation in which they have to fight hard so as to make ends meet, the masses make up their mind to resort to strong actions. Standing up like one bold man, the driving forces of Kenya including the peasants, the workers, and the union officials have set on dismantling neo-colonialism by marching to the cave where the thieves and robbers lie hidden. The watchword is general mobilisation and their refusal “*to go on being the pot that cooks but never tastes the food*” (Ngugi 208). Once on the spot, they have set fire to the cave and pursued their enemies to their last retrenchments. As can be seen, Ngugi is launching a vibrant appeal

to all the downtrodden people in the world at large and those in Africa in particular by giving them the boldness that really forsakes them to free themselves from neo-colonialism bondage or noose. For Ngugi, and this is quite true, neo-colonialism is the last stage of the development of imperialism tentacles in Africa through the plundering of the wealths and resources of Africa in collaboration with some Africans who stands as the followers of the white men in Africa.

Out of all the testimonies provided by the contestants at Ilmorog celebration, Mwîreri wa Mukiraaï's testimony is more poignant all the more since it calls on all the modern thieves and robbers to sever all links with foreigners who only regard Africa as a cash cow that they milk thus keeping the Dark Continent's wealths and resources overseas whereas Africans themselves wallow in sheer or utter poverty. In Mwîreri's opinion,

Our country [Kenya] has iron ore. Our country has workers in metal. The skills needed to smelt iron ore and turn it into pig iron has been with us for generations. Before imperialism these were the very skills that were marshalled to make spears, swords, hoes and different types of ring. [...] When the foreigners came here, they deliberately suppressed this native knowledge of metal working to make us buy things made abroad and thus help the growth of their industries.

So today I say this. Let's unite, big and small, to develop our own machine tools, because the sweat and the blood of our own people is in cheap and in endless supply. (Ngugi 170)

Mwîreri also goes to the length of observing pointedly that:

The sweat of our workers would enable us [Africans] to manufacture machine tools to make pins, razor blades, scissors, machetes, hoes, axes, basins, water, containers, tins and corrugated iron sheets, motor vehicles, tractors, steam and diesel engines, ships, aeroplanes, spears, swords, guns, bombs, missiles, missile-launching rockets or rockets for launching people into space - in short, to make for ourselves all the goods that are now made by foreigners. Then we would see if we too could not benefit from modern science and technology. (Ngugi 171)

The appeal that Ngugi is launching through the character of Mwîreri wa Mukiraaï is quite in keeping with the dream of setting up a real African

Union as envisaged by the former Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah and the Libyan Guide late Muammar Khadafi. This, to my humble mind, will help Africans successfully face the challenges of neo-colonialism and globalisation.

Conclusion

In the light of the above, we can conclude that through the selected novels, the well-known Kenyan writer, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, has played the part of eye-opener to Africans at large and African decision-makers in particular so that they can become aware of the great responsibility awaiting them as regards the development of their continent in the decades ahead. For a new Africa to really emerge so as to challenge the dated stereotypes of a lost Dark Continent⁹, African decision-makers and heads of States need to reshape the way they regard their cooperation with the outer world and bear in mind that, given that Africa abounds in tremendous natural resources which the former colonial powers envy, the latter will always be looking for the ways and means to maintain the Dark Continent in a position that can allow them to treat it as a cash cow in almost all the domains of life.

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