

**AFRICAN WOMEN AND THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM IN NGUGI WA THIONG'O'S *DEVIL ON THE CROSS***

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**Abstract**

On the eve of political independences, African literature, was rather inclined to fight against neocolonial predation. In this framework, Women's agency has gradually emerged as a central issue with the evolution of African narrative fiction. This article indeed, questions motives, the form and the outcome of women's struggle for freedom in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross*. Reference to Marxism and post-colonial feminism theory reveals that African women can shift from exploitative condition to hero of their community. They sacrifice their personal interest to free their country from domestic and international tycoons and robbers. Through such a commitment, they break with the traditional gender expectations that confine them to the subaltern and exploited roles. This article, therefore, asserts that Ngugi's women are not just as a link in the chain for the liberation struggle, but essential and effective leader in the achievement of their political ideal.

**Keywords:** African Women, Freedom, Gender Expectations, Neocolonialism, Patriarchy

**Les femmes africaines et la lutte pour la libération dans *Devil on the Cross* de Ngugi Wa Thiong'o**

**Résumé**

A l'orée des indépendances politiques, la littérature africaine, était plutôt encline à la lutte contre la prédation néocoloniale. Dans ce cadre, l'agentivité des femmes, s'est progressivement imposée dans cette littérature, comme une question centrale avec l'évolution de la fiction narrative africaine. Cet article questionne en effet, les raisons, la forme et la finalité de la lutte des femmes pour la liberté dans *Devil on the Cross* de Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. La référence au marxisme et à la théorie du féminisme postcolonial révèle que les femmes africaines peuvent passer d'une condition d'exploitation à celle d'héroïne de leur communauté. Elles sacrifient leur intérêt personnel pour libérer leur pays des magnats et des voleurs nationaux et internationaux. Par un tel engagement, elles rompent avec les attentes traditionnelles de genre qui les enferment dans les rôles de subalternes et d'exploitées. Cet article soutient donc que les femmes de Ngugi ne sont pas seulement un maillon dans la chaîne de la lutte de libération, mais des leaders incontournables et efficaces dans la réalisation de leur idéal politique.

**Mots-clés :** Femmes Africaines, Libération, Attentes de Genre, Néocolonialisme, Patriarcat

## Introduction

African literary criticism has it that the representation of women in male post-independent narrative fiction, has most of the time sidelined women's effective role in the political liberation of the African society. Women were relegated to the background of the society. They either played the traditional roles of family caretakers or were relegated to plaything or prostitute. Female characters were self-effacing and passive in the issues related to the political evolution of the African society. Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful ones are not yet born* is a significant illustration of African female characters' marginalization and loss of prestige. According to (S. Arndt, 2002, p. 2) "African male writers silenced African women in their texts and portrayed them stereotypically and thus excluded them from literature but also from history".

The representation of female characters was amended with the rise of African female writers by the 1970's. Their creative writings unveiled a dynamic and gleaming facet of African women so far marginalized by male writers. Women in narrative fiction shifted from passivity to heroism. Female writers investigated issues like the biases of patriarchy and women's struggle for social self-determination. The empowerment of women became central despite their divers and various representations. Yet, the issue of political commitment for the liberation of Africa from Western clutches and local political elites has not been a chief, usual and shared artistic concern.

In the meanwhile, African male writers have progressively polished the image of women as essential in the conduct of the political and social matters. Ayi Kwei Armah's historical novels, Nurruddin Farah's, *From a crooked Rib* (1970), and recently Ben Okri's *Every Leaf a Hallelujah* (2021) are a few examples of male writers' involvement in the rehabilitation of women in their literary works of fiction. Earlier in 1982, in an interview about his work, *Detained: A Writers' Prison Diary*, (W. T. Ngugi, 1981, p. 11) described African women as "the most exploited and oppressed section of the entire working class: exploited as workers at home, and also, by the backward elements in the culture" His female characters therefore display a fearless will to overcome hurdles set against their agency. They are examples of Ngugi's determination to rehabilitate the African women as capable of self-determination.

That standpoint irrigates, in a way, the writing of *Devil on the Cross*. The novel indeed is a head-on denunciation of women's oppression and the assertion of their capacity for empowerment. Ngugi's novel depicts a woman that grapples with an androcentric African postcolonial society and the rapacity of neocolonialism. The resistance against all those forms of oppressions will transform a passive, self-loathing, isolated, desperate and depressive woman into a pugnacious, opened up, conscious, self-pride and optimistic woman. The social and political agency of Wariinga's represents a significant problematic to apprehend the quest for women's liberation in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross*.

This article, based on Ngugi's aforementioned novel, explores the intricacies of a post-independent Kenyan society's aspiration to welfare through the peripeteia of a woman. The Kenyan symbolizes Africa in its struggle for freedom. The ideological stance of that narrative infers some questions. What is the impact of the colonial legacies on the construction of a nominal African free society? What is the place and the role of the African woman in that postcolonial social fabric? What are the strategies and the outcomes of the struggle undertaken by Wariinga and the other women to set themselves free? This article argues that African women prove an effective leadership capacity and heroic contribution to the political liberation of the African society.

The implementation of that standpoint, that is, the constructive development of the female protagonist from victimhood to self-assertion, leans on the theories of Marxism and postcolonial feminism. Karl Marx's concept of class exploitation and class struggle sheds light on the societal structure of modern Kenya as represented in the narrative. It also highlights the impacts of the ideological apparatus like patriarchy and family in the domination of women and their commitment to freedom. Patricia Hill Collins' reference to Intersectionality and agency are used as concepts of the postcolonial feminism to show that African women's exploitation in the narrative, is shaped by multiple factors of which colonial legacy and men's phallocratic conviction are the most blatant. Postcolonial feminism also advocates that despite the hindrances women show that they can struggle to achieve freedom.

The first part of this article explores the reification of women by an African phallocentric neocolonial society whereby men expect women to be passive and silent. In the second part, a link is drawn between the neocolonial space and the subjugation of African women. Women, no matter the space are downtrodden. The third part shows African women's resilience to achieve a social and political agency. Women unveil their capacity to put an end to their debasement by showing their sense of struggle for freedom.

### 1. The Neocolonial Social Fabric and the Commodification of the African Woman

The analysis related to the typology of characters and their relationships, uncovers the social structure in the narrative. It reveals at the same time, the inherent contradictions of capitalism and neo-colonialism that bring about the fragmentation of the Kenyan society in which women's low social ranking is more proven. African women in that context are relegated not only to the background of the society, but worse they are objectified for the welfare of men. As such, they are considered, for example, as objects that can be sold for the (sexual) pleasure of the ruling class. In Marxism view one can say that African women, in Ngugi's narrative, are commodified. They are viewed as sexual objects.

As a critical novel of socio-political facts in post-independent Kenya, *Devil on the Cross* lays bare the destructive effects of capitalism and neo-colonialism on the lives of Kenyans. The inegalitarian class structure bred by capitalism in this post-independence society results in the existence of two antagonistic social categories; the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The first group is represented by ruthless capitalist's tycoons, such as Gitutu, Kihaahu and the Rich Old Man, presented as "local watchdogs" (W. T. Ngugi, 1982, p. 97). They are concerned with exploiting the masses by living on the fruit of the labor of peasants and workers. The second category is represented by Wariinga, the female protagonist, Wangari, Muturi and the students' leader. This group represents the whole Kenyan workers and peasantry who are struggling against capitalism and neo-colonial forces.

The fragmentation of the Kenyan society, according to Ngugi, is visible through the continuing class struggle between the rich and the poor. He sums up this view arguing that; "They are two types of human beings in every country; the manager and the managed, the man who grabs and the man who hopes for leftovers, the man who gives and the man who waits to receive" (W. T. Ngugi, 1982, p. 79). From this point of view, it is established that in that Kenyan societal structure, there is a class line and class conflict among Kenyans as the result of Western capitalism. The appalling socio-economic impact of capitalism on Kenyans' lives is depicted in the novel in terms of inequalities, exploitation, corruption and injustice. All these aspects disrupted the former social

cohesion in Kenya and divided Kenyan along class categories. The social and economic gaps are substantiated in the description Wariinga makes of Ilmorog:

Ilmorog is several villages in one. Let me start with the outer edges of the town, where the peasants live and those whose strips of land have. Not yet been sold off by the banks or swallowed by the wealthy and the powerful [...] The residential area is divided into two parts. The first is the *Ilmorog Golden Heights residential area* ... The air there is good and clean, and that's where anyone who is anyone lives in Ilmorog. It contains the home of the wealthy and the powerful. ... The other parts of the residential area is called *New Jerusalem*, Njeruca. That's the residential area for the workers the unemployed. These are the slums of Ilmorog. ... It's where the wretched of Kenya live ... These are the slums of Ilmorog (W. T. Ngugi, 1982, p. 130).

Significantly, the above lines capture the chaotic socio-economic reality of the Kenyan unprivileged masses among whom women are an essential category. The advent of western capitalism in Africa did more wrong to women as it strengthens the existing social rift between women and men through labor exploitation and the reinforcement of patriarchy (women's labor at home, low wages, and reproductive function). These internal contradictions true to capitalism confine women within a secondary ranking and belittle their existence in the Kenyan society.

Women's secondary roles and place in modern Kenya's class configuration is better understood only if it is juxtaposed to their revered pre-colonial status. In fact, this point is relevant in so far as it gives insight into those women's pre-colonial lives and at the same time it enhances the perceptions of the drastic effect of colonialism and neo-colonialism on African peoples' lives. While the pre-colonial era establishes women as respected partners and agents in the management of the different chores of the household such as educating children, breeding cattle and farming (C. Saidi, 2020), the colonial period, in turn, witnesses strong nationalist female fighter who played important roles in the liberation struggle in colonial Kenya.

This is demonstrated through the resilience of Wangari, a Mau Mau fighter who holds the view that women's roles in the colonial era were of paramount importance because they were in charge of taking care of their families in the absence of their husbands engaged in the battlefield against the colonial oppressors. At that time, the social organization was framed in the term of *Harambee* (togetherness) which foregrounded solidarity and equity among Kenyans: "... If a bean falls to the ground, we split it among ourselves" (W. T. Ngugi, 1982, p. 40).

Unlike their revered status in the pre-colonial era and the social value of togetherness in the colonial era, women in modern post-independence Kenya are located within the lower class where they are considered as objects with secondary ranking in the social ladder. Under the neo-colonial rule, women are denigrated, marginalized and abused as it is demonstrated through Wariinga and Wangari's lives' experience in the hands of capitalist exploiters. They are not given any concrete or leading responsibility apart from that of reproduction and mere sexual objects. Wariinga's typical example of sexual exploitation in the hands of the Rich Old Man and her boss Kihara, showcase the Marxist assumption of women's commodification in a Capitalist system. She lumps in a word the terrible experience of Kenyan woman in the following:

She enters another office. She finds there another Mr Boss. The smiles are the same, the questions are the same, the Rendezvous is the same-and the target is still Kareendi's Thighs. 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. A maiden once

drowned in a sea of sweetness...Modern problems are resolved with the aid of thighs (W. T. Ngugi, 1982, p. 19).

The above statement points to the troubles women are confronted with in post-independent Kenya. It informs on the corrupt and the sexual politics which characterized modern Kenya and also lays bare the marginalized position of women in the class structure borne out of capitalism. The relationship between the bourgeois upper class on the one hand and women on the other hand is described in term of sexual abuse in the above extract. In the Marxist perspective, Wariinga's exchange value takes precedence over her use value. She is commodified, that is, she is transformed into (sexual) object for the good of the exploiter. It is a trade-like relationship in which she loses her pride, her dignity to the profit of a greedy, shameless and merciless exploiter. The critic (G. Ndigirigi, 1991, p. 106) makes the point about the commodification of the woman in Ngugi's novel:

*Devil on the Cross* shows that the woman is regarded as a decoration, a flower to adorn men's lives. She is seen as a game to be played when a man is bored or old, rekindling a kind of vitality that the wives cannot by implication rekindle. She is an animal to be hunted. The woman, especially, the young woman is seen as a veal or the spring chicken for an old man's toothless gums. She is perfume to be applied when it is scented but to be discarded at will when it has lost its scent. She is the fruit to be picked at leisure, sucked juiceless and discarded, and is something that can be owned. She is the rings to be worn, an adornment to men. At another level, the woman is regarded as a being with only one organ.

Other instances in the novel also justify women's exploitation as the result of patriarchal ideology. This aspect is mainly uncovered in the treatment and perception of women by the Kenyan communities. A flashing example of this fact is emphasized when Wariinga is denigrated and mocked at while attempting to integrate the male-dominated field of mechanics. She is literally rebuked by a male counterpart in these terms: "Woman, why don't you go and sell beer in a bar? Here there's no juke box to stand beside so that you can swing your skirt to attract men" (W.T.Ngugi, 1982, p. 220). This statement unproblematically substantiates women's secondary ranking in the social structure in modern African societies. African women evolve in a neo-colonial space that also subjugates them.

## 2. African Women in the Trap of the Neo-colonial Space

In Ngugi's novel some spatial aspects are discussed in order to unveil the link between their symbolism and the exploitation of women in the Kenyan society as a whole. It analyses human spaces such as the cities, the streets, the land and some public places. The description of these spaces exposes the socio-economic exploitation of women and justifies the need for these women to revolt against their condition of existence imposed by capitalism and neo-colonialism.

The exploration of the post-colonial cities depicted in the novel has permitted to uncover the transformation of these cities into a corrupt and alienated one as the result of Western capitalism and neo-colonial rule. The abrupt change brought about by this system in terms of profit-making, individualism, quest for power and properties reflects the daily difficulties Kenyans have to adapt to this new way of life.

Wariinga is an illustration of that situation of exploitation. In fact, she is driven out of her flat mercilessly by the landlord. Not bearing the burden of life, she attempts suicide twice but is timely rescued by a worker. The current state of the city of Nairobi is further described by the saviour with words that reflect its decline: "Nairobi is large, soulless and corrupt" (W. T. Ngugi, 1982, p.

15). Being a shadow of its own self, Nairobi is alienated by existing western's capital policy with social insecurity, poverty, prostitution, and unemployment reminiscent everywhere.

Significantly, all the cities (Nakuru, Ilmorog) are presented as spaces where neo-colonialist and capitalist proliferate. Like Nairobi which is seen through its institutions as places of women's sexual exploitation and a place of corruption, Nakuru and Ilmorog are samely considered as corrupt cities where the capitalist exploiters deploy their schemes. Nakuru is the space where the Rich Old Man impregnates Wariinga and Ilmorog is the space that hosts the competition in Modern Theft and Robbery. All these places appear to be infested with neo-capitalists' predators and are no solace for its inhabitants' pain and sufferings. These cities have forcefully been turned into ones burdened by socio-economic pressure, which in turn entraps Kenyans into dire existential conditions.

The capitalist hold on the Kenyan human spaces is harshly reflected through a system of opposition between two different asymmetrical spaces. According to Mathurin Songossaye (2005), the opposition between these spaces is part of the logic of distancing centrifugal forces and centripetal forces. This aspect is very important in so far as it shows how in *Devil on the Cross* the lower class is swallowed by the dominant one. Practically, the description of the town of Ilmorog highlights two different social realities. On the one hand, there is a space that attracts the *Ilmorog Golden heights Residential Area*, a space built from the top and is by excellence the place of the bourgeoisie. On the other hand, *Njeruca*, the place of the proletarians, is the space from below.

The streets and the public places are other components whose exploration discloses the latent predicament of Kenyan women. By following Wariinga, the female protagonist in her journey across these streets, one understands the relationship that is established between her character and her experiences across these spaces. The first encounter with Wariinga takes place in the streets of Nairobi after her setbacks with her landlord, her boss and her boyfriend who drop her mercilessly. The teeming and appalling characteristics of the streets in the city of Nairobi is symbolically the cause of Wariinga's general state of stress and dizziness; the people, the trees, motors cars, streets began to swirl before her eyes (W. T. Ngugi, 1982, p.12). The general atmosphere that emerges from the description of these streets coincidentally causes Wariinga's descent into "depths of darkness" (W. T. Ngugi, 1982, p. 12) and at the same time announces the revisit of Wariinga by the Devil.

The land, like the streets and the cave in the novel are all symbolic representation of alienation, corruption and exploitation. For the first one, its confiscation by Western ex-colonialists and current neo-colonialists is the major motive of the struggle in the novel. The betrayal of the Kenyan woman is portrayed through the character of Wangari who suffers the trials of the neo-colonial system of capitalism. Indeed, she is deprived of the tenure of her land on the ground that she is incapable of paying back the loan she contracts with the bank. With nothing to live off, she drops in Nairobi looking for a job and is later humiliated, abused and sued to court for vagrancy.

Notwithstanding the attachment of Kenyans to their land and the intrinsic connection between kinship, the spirit of the deceased and the land which characterized Kenyans, (M. Songossaye, 2005, p. 274), the land in *Devil on the Cross* is presented as alienated and desecrated by the intrusion of imperialism capitalism in Kenya. The vampiric testimonies of the contestants in Ilmorog demonstrate this fact. Gitutu's strategy for example, is to expropriate lands from the peasants and sell them at exorbitant prices, thus creating famine in communities. His principle

like that of a capitalist society is to make profit by causing the loss of the masses. By causing hunger through the expropriation of arable land, Gitutu is certainly driving peasants in a competition for portions of land at unaffordable prices. This process illustrates the ideology of capitalism which preys on the insecurities of people in its needs to sell more goods (A. B. Dobie, 2011, p. 88). Despite the situation of domination, women display in the narrative, a determined will to resist and overcome all kinds of masculine and neo-colonial predatory projects.

### 3. African Women's Resilience: Breaking the Yoke of Domination

This section mainly focuses on women's resilience and leading capacity in the class struggle that opposes the Kenyan proletariat to the neo-capitalist ruling élites. It scrutinizes the motives of the struggle and the strategies developed by women to face the challenges of the neo-colonial and capitalist powers. Moreover, the section casts light on the novel's main protagonist, Wariinga as the embodiment of women's struggle and on their victory as the result of their fierce commitment to achieve freedom.

Wariinga's embodiment of gender struggle is well understood when set against the backdrop of Marangoly Rosemary George's (2006) definition of postcolonial Feminist approach. In fact, this approach emphasizes the typical life's experience of marginalized Third World women in terms of their sexuality, gender function and class exploitation in the context of Africa. These aspects are given prominence in the novel and through the feminine characterization of Wariinga, These socio-cultural biases are questioned and rejected. More importantly, with her characterization, the narration reveals gender equality through levelling the act of revolution on a woman. With her individual and typical experience as an allegory of the entire Kenyan nation, Wariinga's succeeds in many instances, to change her mindset and to take revolutionary actions for the future of women. They are at the intersection of many intricacies that display their challenges. (P. H. Collins, 2019, p. 2), explains the logic that sustains intersectionality which operates as a concept of postcolonial feminism:

Intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. (...) When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other.

Men's gaze at women is commonly depreciative. Women in the narrative are confronted with a multitude form of oppression: patriarchy, sexual exploitation, marginalization, lack of agency, gender-based violence etc. In addition, women are dominated by a corrupt political elite which is in league with western power. There is an interference of those forms of oppression that push the women in the struggle for their freedom. In the framework of intersectionality, African women's particular experience, in the narrative, is viewed as central and specific to them. The struggle for sisterhood, solidarity operates as a commitment for freedom. It reveals their capacity for self-determination.

In "Wariinga Got a Gun: Feminism and Revolution in *Devil on the Cross*", Brumley following the footsteps of Boehmer, assumes that the powerful representation of Wariinga attests to the fact that she is "put in service of the didactic text" (E. Brumley, 2007, p. 12). As a matter of fact, Ngugi's didacticism to show a Kenyan woman with a strong will to resist oppression is meant to arouse women's interest in their freedom. To achieve this revolutionary goal, women implement

diverse strategies ranging from feminine consciousness and solidarity, to education, hard work and purposefulness.

Violence is also part of the revolutionary mission ascribed to the female characters. According to Frantz Fanon, it is both a means to an end and an end in itself. Frantz Fanon sees in violence cleansing and self-actualizing virtues to the oppressed individual. On this account he puts that “At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect” (F. Fanon 1966, p. 94). The assassination of the symbol of capitalism (The Rich Old Man) at end of the plot by Wariinga and the relief and feeling of being less of a heavy burden corroborates Fanon’s reflexion. Ndigirigi makes this point clear when he states that in the very act of killing the symbol of women’s oppression, Wariinga “...removes the obstacles to the realizations of women’s dreams” (G. Ndigirigi, 1991, p. 102). Violence by Wariinga is a mandatory violence that aims at freeing the nation. It is not an absolute violence, that is, violence for violence’s sake. Fanon’s view of legitimate violence is illustrated through Wariinga’s action. Overall, this final heroic act of Wariinga represents the triumph of women in the political battle that is engaged between the two classes. Violence becomes an efficient armament for the oppressed woman to restore her freedom. (F. Fanon, 1966, p. 73). asserts in that perspective that “The colonized man finds his freedom in and through violence. This rule of conduct enlightens the agent because it indicates to him both the means and the end.”

Considerably, Wariinga’s effort to get educated enables her to have good insight into women’s condition of existence and allows her to take the lead of the struggle. She has the capacity to understand the stakes pertaining the struggle for their freedom. She sums up the essential of her vision in the following:

We who work as clerks, copy typist and secretaries, which side are we on? We who type and take dictation from Boss Kihara and his kind, whose side are we on in this dance? Are on the side of the workers or on the side of the rich? Who are we? Who are we? Many a time, I’ve heard women say:” Our firm does this and that,” “In our firm, we employ so many workers, who earn this much,” “Our company made this much profit,” and as they speak, they do not have any cent for their bus fare in the evening. Yes, I’ve often heard girls bragging about their bosses, and when you check carefully to see what they are bragging about, you can’t find a thing. A few hundred shilling a month for a woman with children to feed, and we proudly call that a salary? And in exchange of so little we have sacrificed four things (W. T. Ngugi, p. 206).

The foregoing quotation establishes Wariinga’s leading role in awakening her sisters to the reality of post-independence Kenya. She is calling the womenfolk not to have an attitude of complaint but to desire profound social and political change. This illustrative quotation of Wariinga’s mindset after her bitter experiences and the scene she sees in the cave will lead to her strong personal development.

Indeed, Wariinga’s new perspective comes close to Judith Butler’s concept of performativity which assumes that identity, instead of being innate, is performative; what a person does at particular times determines gender and identity (A.B. Dobie, 2011). In this regard, Wariinga defines her authentic identity against the traditional binarism of male/ female and assert herself. Thanks to her performative identity she removes herself from her initial state of oppressed female character to responsible and industrious woman who takes charges of her life. She puts:

No, this Wariinga is not that other Wariinga. Today's Wariinga has decided that she will 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 The moment the splendour 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. Cleanliness is bathing. A hero is known only on the battlefield. A good dancer is known only in the dance arena (W. T. Ngugi, 1982, p. 216-17).

Along with this depiction of Wariinga's mental and physical readiness to meet neo-colonial challenges, the narrator seems to enthusiastically suggest that she appears more authentic when she is not alienated from the notion of herself. Her former experience of victimized girl is discarded and room is made for revolution. This revolution is rooted in the principle of socialism and comprises all the components of the Kenyan nation. The struggle for socialism and women's liberation is therefore interconnected because for the author Ngugi, freedom will be achieved through the collective struggle of Kenyans as undivided people with strong national consciousness. This perspective of collectiveness is strongly demonstrated through "The Holy Trinity of the worker, the peasant, the patriot" (W. T. Ngugi, 1982, p. 230).

Undoubtedly, women, like the other fighters for freedom fully integrate this prospect of socialism by taking part in the common actions. Wariinga's involvement in the community-owned enterprise is a consequence of her appropriation and spread of socialist principles and values. Through the combined efforts of the 'Holy Trinity' mentioned above, women have been able to fight back their stigmatization by proving resilient and resourceful. The strong feminine consciousness they display helps them to reject their initial state of victimhood to embrace ways of freedom. The final act of the female protagonist Wariinga in which she shoots down the symbol of women's abuse is an epitome of women's triumph over the evil doers of modern Kenya. Although this act is fundamentally an isolated and individual action, it symbolizes her capacity of leader and it sheds the premises for the beginning of a new life for the Kenyan nation.

## Conclusion

This study, based on Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* analyses the contribution of female characters to the political liberation of Kenya. The resort to Marxism and Postcolonial Feminism enables this study to unveil the leadership capacity of women to change their society. The exploration of the social structure in the novel has permitted to establish class antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat and has also revealed women's secondary ranking within this class configuration in contemporary Kenyan. The main objective of the study has been to prove that women's liberation predicated on their resilient political commitment to the ongoing class struggle in Kenya. Upstream of this point, the study first addresses the question of alienation and oppression of the different human spaces in the novel, and concludes that patriarchy and modern capitalism occlude women's emancipation.

To achieve freedom for them and for the entire Kenyan society, women engage in a battle against neo-colonial and capitalist forces. They identify with the cause of the downtrodden Kenyan masses and line up on their side, reiterating their firm will to put an end to the yoke of neo-colonial rulers. Wariinga, the main female character's change of mindset face to the chaotic socio-economic reality of modern Kenya, symbolically triggers women's ingenuity to develop various strategies to cope with the oppressive capitalist powers. Through feminine consciousness, solidarity, education and hard work, women succeed to resist these powers and to pave a way to their freedom.

Essentially, women owe their liberation to their resilience and diligence in the quest for a new social dispensation for the Kenyan society. The political leadership of women demonstrated through their ability to take the lead and to take significant measures, grants them a prominent place in the liberation process in Kenya. The resolution of the conflict with the killing of the figurehead of capitalism and woman's abuses brings notes of hope for womenfolk and for the Kenyan society. Thanks to their leadership capacity,

women take control of the situation and avenge Kenyans of the abuses perpetuated by capitalism and the neo-colonial forces.

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