



ISSN: 0975-833X

Available online at <http://www.journalcra.com>

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
OF CURRENT RESEARCH

International Journal of Current Research
Vol. 14, Issue, 12, pp.22994-22999, December, 2022
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24941/ijcr.44433.12.2022>

RESEARCH ARTICLE

WOMEN'S PRECIOUS ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICA IN DARKO'S BEYOND THE HORIZON, NGUGI'S DEVIL ON THE CROSS AND A GRAIN OF WHEAT

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 27th September, 2022
Received in revised form
19th October, 2022
Accepted 10th November, 2022
Published online 30th December, 2022

Key words:

Women; Precious; Role;
Development; Africa.

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at imparting to the reader the precious role that African women can play in the development process of their continent as dealt with in Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*, Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross* and *A Grain of Wheat*. In fact, formerly relegated to the background, women's awareness is raised on how they can significantly impact their destiny by carving out a place for themselves in the society through daily struggles so as to emerge from the darkness from which tradition has sunk them for aeons of ages and then influence positively the development of their respective country and therefore Africa in general. The results of our findings will enable us to give more insights into the significant role that African women can play in the development of both their country and Africa as a whole. With this in view, African women must awaken from their torpor so as to challenge the old image that people generally have of women in the world at large and in Africa in particular. Feminism, womanism and Marxist literary criticism are the literary theories used to delve in to the novels under study so as to reveal how both their form and content bear on the topic above by questioning the traditional image of women in Africa.

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Citation: Théophile HOUNDJO, Gerson Vêshou ALISSA, Koumagnon Alfred DJOSSOU AGBOADANNON and Nicolas GBEGNAVO. 2022. "Women's precious role in the development of africa in darko's beyond the horizon, ngugi's devil on the cross and a grain of wheat". *International Journal of Current Research*, 14, (12), 22994-22999.

INTRODUCTION

Formerly relegated to the background because of their only restricted role to household chores and childbearing, African women are nowadays enlightened, by feminists, on what effort they can really put forth to positively impact the development of Africa. Among the very few contemporary African writers that have dealt with the precious role that women can really play in the development process of Africa can be named the self-taught Senegalese writer and film-maker Sembène Ousmane with his well-known novel *God's Bits of Wood*, the female Senegalese writer Mariama Bâ with *So Long a Letter*, the Nigerian Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie with *Purple Hibiscus*, and the Nobel Prize Laureate and South African writer and activist Nadine Gordimer with *July's People* and *The Conservationist*. As though to follow in the footsteps of the writers named above, Amma Darko in *Beyond the Horizon*, and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o in *Devil on the Cross* and *A Grain of Wheat* have made great strides in delineating to women an important role in the development process of Africa. It is worth saying a few words about the literary theories employed to explore this paper. In fact, as critical framework, this paper mainly employs feminism, womanism and Marxist literary theory. Similarly, this paper also employs post-colonialism. Feminism is defined by Brunell, L. and Burkett, E. as being "the belief in social, economic, and political equality of the sexes." Both authors went on to say that "although largely originating in the West, feminism is manifested worldwide and is represented by various institutions committed to

from the social political sphere. While quoting Rana, Neeraj (2018, p.429), we shall point out that:

Feminism is a movement influenced by the ideas postulated, popularized and precipitated by thinkers and authors like Alice Walker, Naomi Little bear, Judith Felterbey, Michele Wallace, Lillian Smith, Elaine Showalter, Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millet and others. It is a modern movement expressing protest against the male domination. The aim of feminist is to understand women's oppression keeping in mind race, gender, class and sexual preferences.

The choice of approaching this paper through the feminism lens is underpinned by the fact that this literary theory has enabled us to point out that, like many African writers, the well-known Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o sides with the Ghanaian Amma Darko by revealing that African women can really achieve their own empowerment if they become aware of the great potential that they are endowed with. Turning now to the second literary theory employed here which is womanism, it is worth underscoring that this is a theory that seeks to reveal the necessary and useful complementarity that should really exist or prevail between men and women in a society. This literary theory has enabled us to show that to some extent, women can, like the female warriors in our native country Benin (former Danxomè), come to the fore and play some roles that are reserved to men. As regards Marxist literary criticism which is the third literary theory employed in this research work, it must be said that it is a "theory that has evolved from the works of

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels" (Mathias, I. O., and Nathaniel, O. S.; 2018; p. 67). Similarly, it is worth observing that Marxism represents the philosophy of a famous German philosopher of the nineteenth century named Karl Marx. 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."ⁱⁱⁱ The major tenets of that theory are encapsulated in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) in which Marx and Engels asserted "that the history of all existing societies is the history of class struggle." (Mathias, I. O., and Nathaniel, O. S.; 2018; p. 67)

While referring to that third theory employed in this paper, Mathias, I. O., and Nathaniel, O. S (2018; p.67) observed cogently 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 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.

Adopting Eagleton Terry's own way of approaching Marxist literary theory in *Literary Theory: An Introduction* published in 1983 has enabled us to examine the various social classes in the selected novels and their interaction in terms of exploitation. In fact, in Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*, the reader is kept abreast of two social classes: the class of those who owing to their social standing in German society and especially some black men who trap their mistresses or girlfriends and even their wives living in Africa who stand as the embodiment of the second social class to travel to Germany in order to make money easily but who are unfortunately forced or blackmailed into going whoring to enrich their husbands or boyfriends. In the same literary vein, Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross* also shows two diametrically opposed worlds: the world of the haves (the bourgeois) and the world of the have-nots (the proletariat) epitomized respectively by the white masters in Kenyan society and their black henchmen many of whom hold position of influence in post-independent Kenya as well as the poor black peasants and herdsmen of whose expectations are foiled shortly after the independences. In *A Grain of Wheat*, both social classes are epitomized by the white settlers and their black servants who are fighting hard to free themselves from the noose of colonial bondage. To put the matter in a nutshell, while hinting at Ngugi's selected novels, it must be said that the first social class includes to a large extent the white minority cheating on the down-and-out native people in Kenya because the former think that they are the only masters on board under God in that country. As regards the second social class, it includes to a large extent the black majority and especially the peasants, the herdsmen and the petty traders who undergo powerlessly the pressure imposed on them by the minority. These two social classes live in a country called Kenya located in east Africa in which only the minority of the population leads a life of ease and moves about in high-powered cars. As a matter of convenience, it must be said that the choice of approaching this research work from the Marxist literary criticism angle is underpinned by the fact that post-independent African literature is socially committed and reflects the upsurge of a certain national bourgeoisie that tends to identify itself, as Frantz Fanon, observes 'with the Western bourgeoisie from whom it has learnt its lessons'. So, in most cases throughout Africa, the masses sustain a great discomfort at the way their own black brothers overexploit them thus becoming aware of their obligation to fight hard so as to improve their living conditions. As regard postcolonial criticism, it is worth underscoring that it 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 A schroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, in *The Post-Colonial Studies Readers*:

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 cause 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.; 1995; p.2)

Our choice of approaching this study through the postcolonial criticism lens is underpinned by the fact that this theory will help us delve into the master-servant relationship that has always existed between the white men as shown by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o in the selected novels. This paper consists of three main parts. The first part deals with the master and servant relationship in the selected novels. As regards the second part, it analyses the way women were seen in traditional Africa as described in the novels under study. With regard to the third part, it lays emphasis on how African women are fighting the scourge today to reverse the traditional trend of bygone days.

Master and servant relationships in the selected novels: As averred by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* published 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 *Beyond the Horizon*, class struggles are pervasive and take on the form of the overexploitation of black women by their husband or boyfriend who paint in glowing colours the financial success that the former can achieve once they set foot in Germany. Pitifully enough, the former fall prey to that falsehood and unfortunately once overseas, they realised that they are just trapped to come and go whoring to enrich those who have succeeded in enticing them to come overseas. Such is the case of Vivian, Osey's wife; Kaye, Pee's wife and worse still the case of the female protagonist Mara, Akobi's wife. The case of the last female character has claimed our attention because she is not only ill-treated in Africa by her husband Akobi but by a strange irony of fate, she is also convinced by that same man to come and achieve success in Germany. Once in Germany, she notices much to her surprise that she is compelled to lead a life of housemaid at the service of her husband and her German wife to whom she is compelled never to disclose any secret about her love affair with Akobi. Critically enough, she is later on blackmailed to go whoring so that her husband can provide for the needs of his lover Comfort who has previously snubbed him in Africa because of a wealthy man who has finally failed to keep his promises. Seeing in her lover Comfort a really ambitious woman that he is not really averse to losing, Akobi uses the money that he gains from Mara's prostitution with white men to renovate a house for that lover in her native village Sumanyi so that she can lead a happy life once back home In *Devil on the Cross*, the author depicts two diametrically-opposed social classes which are respectively 'the have' epitomized 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

¹See: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/subject_specific_writing/writing_in_literature/literary_theory_and_schools_of_criticism/post_colonial_criticism.html# Accessed on 14 May 2021.

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 M boy a 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. 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 Mwhotori 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, an account of which will be deeply dealt with in the third part of this paper. 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. Last but not least, class struggles also stand out in *A Grain of Wheat*. One instance where class struggles pervade through that novel is when the prisoners or detainees at Yala camp are compelled by their white master "to break stones in a quarry five miles away from Yala" (Ngugi; 1967; p. 120). In fact, "the stones were for building houses for new officers and warders." (Ngugi; 1967; p. 120) Surprisingly enough, the prisoners have to walk "through hot sand in a flat spotted with cactus bush and tiny thorny trees without leaves." (Ngugi; 1967; p. 120). Unquestionably, most of those detainees' wives are left to their own device since they have to go to great lengths in order to cater for their family in country where the living conditions of the powerless people are the least of the leaders' worries.

African women bearing the burden in traditional societies: To set the stage, we have deemed to say a few words about the image that people generally have of women in African traditional societies. Although this has been dealt with in another paper, it is also relevant for the coherence of our analysis here. As a matter of fact, in our traditional societies, the role of women is restricted to household chores, childbearing, farming, animal husbandry and small or petty trade. Hence, it is throwing money down the drain than envisage sending one's daughter (s) to school. While bearing out that thesis, Amma Darko makes the female protagonist of *Beyond the Horizon*, Mara, reply to Osey's wife just on her arrival in Germany that:

I don't know what it is to love a man. I never learnt it because I wasn't taught. I never experienced it because I never got the chance to love before this marriage was arranged with Akobi. I only know that a girl grows up, is given to a man by her parents and she has to please the man, serve him and obey him and bear him plenty children. Is that love? (Darko; 1991; p. 86).

The embodiment of women folk in traditional Africa in *A Grain of Wheat* and as Mumbi's mother, Wanjiku. In fact, when her daughter Mumbi has returned to see her after being unfairly beaten by her husband, she does not find her right and rather observes solemnly that:

The women of today surprise me. They cannot take a slap, soft as a feather, or the slightest breath, from a man. In our time, a woman could take blow and blow from her husband without a thought of running back to her parents. (Ngugi; 1967; p. 196)

Equally remarkable, it is really pretentious from a woman or a young girl in African traditional societies to claim to hold a position of influence in society. So, for many years or decades, this stereotype has remained embedded in women's mind in Africa, which accounts for the fact that a lot of women are really averse to running for presidency or legislative elections because women themselves are quite sure that they won't go further ahead with these plans. As can be seen, in women's mindset, there seems to be constructed a certain complex of inferiority which leads women to think that the highest ranks of the social ladder are for men. Even such trainings as mechanics, welding, brick-laying and so forth which require muscular strength are supposed to be reserved to men because as the common saying goes, 'woman is the weaker sex'. In that same regard, the same complex of inferiority leads women to be totally submissive or subservient, if we may be allowed to speak so, to their husband whatever situation they go through as shown earlier through Mumbi's mother, Wanjiku in *A Grain of Wheat*. It is only with the advent of modernity which is triggered by the setting up of schools in Africa at large and even in African landlocked areas in particular; and the breakthroughs or the spillovers of the means of communication impelled by the radio and the television that the traditional image of woman in Africa is thought to be outworn and more and more women have embarked on working their way up to fame by deciding to reverse the traditional trend of bygone days.

Yes, We Can", the revealed motto of African women: The objective of this part which stands as the heart and navel of the topic discussed in this paper is to reveal how African women can gear themselves up for Africa's development process by polishing up woman's image which was wrongly disfigured by the ins-and out of tradition who hold it that the contribution of women to the development process of Africa is of relatively small importance or really makes no difference at all. To begin with, it is worth saying that the female characters in the selected novels are depicted in the throes of a real twist of fate or a real predicament which really calls for their resorting to strong means so as to face the challenges lying ahead of them. In fact, in *Beyond the Horizon*, the reader is kept abreast of the plights inflicted on the black female characters and especially the female protagonist Mara by her husband Akobi. Once in a stalemate whereas she feels duty-bound to help her parents and children out of utter destitution with the money she is expected to make in Germany, Mara has enlisted the service of Kaye to marry a German guy so as to get a legal resident paper enabling her to travel all over Germany thus setting up in Munich as a whore to make more money which she sends to her parents and children to whom she has planned to build a house. Even if going whoring is a shame in African traditional societies, it can be argued that this is the only alternative left to the female protagonist to face the challenges lying ahead of her in Germany. Better still, it must be said in all fairness to that female protagonist that going whoring is quite unlike her since in Africa Mara is depicted as a submissive and faithful wife to the only man she has known in her life. Another black woman who has become aware of what she can do to be helpful to her people in *Beyond the Horizon* stands as Vivian, Osey's wife who prior to Mara has managed to get married with a Government Issue named Marvin who has taken her to the U.S. As can be seen, both Mara and Vivian have eventually realised that they really need to grasp the nettle by resorting to strong means if they want to be of great benefit to their respective families in Africa who are expecting a lot from them and failing such a mission is tantamount to committing a great crime. Hence, it is out of sheer necessity or as a last desperate shift that the black female characters in *Beyond the Horizon* have indulged in a business which does not really honour them. The people

that should be blamed here are normally the men who have succeeded in convincing those female characters to come overseas in order to achieve a great success. This goes without saying that the fact that both Akobi and Osey's wives have eventually made up their mind to totally break ties with their husband towards the end of *Beyond the Horizon* points to the author's willpower to show that such men as Akobi and Osey who ill-treat their wives as slaves really need to be combated to their last retrenchments all the more since these men stand as thoroughgoing impediments to women's empowerment and therefore to the capacity of African women to fully take an active part in the development process of their country and their continent. Such men as Akobi who keep on ill-treating their wife both in Africa and in Germany are not even worth existing and worse still setting up a household with a woman who yearns for a real empowerment. Equally remarkable, the fact that both Akobi and Osey's wives have eventually resolved to help their parents out of poverty in spite of what they are made to go through overseas is a praiseworthy initiative since this is a way of holding poverty at bay in their respective families and therefore in Africa at large which really needs the precious contribution of all Africans to successfully cope with the uphill challenges lying ahead of her; and if all African women behave so, it will be easier to stem poverty instead of expecting foreigners to do this for us nowadays. *Devil on the Cross* which is the second novel on which is based the topic of this paper opens on the plights inflicted on the female character Wariinga who has to go to great lengths before improving her living condition which is buffeted as the fancy takes the wealthy businessmen in post-independent Kenya. In fact, the dire living conditions of the masses who rub shoulders with a minority group that leads a life of ease in the main cities are the major reasons which have led the characters in that novel to organise a great strike. To make matters worse, instead of sympathising with the powerless people, the minority group calls on the latter to attend the great competition that they are organising in Ilmorog to vie among themselves in order to select the best thieves and robbers who exploit the masses by reaping where they have not even sown. Greatly vexed with that situation, the masses have resolved to take the law into their own hands and all the other sections of the society feel concerned with that social struggle with its gnawing at their interests. With a view to achieving social changes for the benefit of all, two female characters have succeeded in carving out a place for themselves in *Devil on the Cross*, and each one of them bears the indelible scars of the sufferings inflicted on the majority group. These are respectively Wariinga and Wangari. The former is introduced to the reader as a young student hailing from a poor family and who is unfortunately impregnated by a very well-off man known as Old Rich Man after having made wonderful promises to her. Once she breaks the news of her pregnancy to that wealthy businessman on whom she has placed all her hopes, the latter refuses to accept the responsibility of his misdemeanour thus leaving the young girl deal with it in her parents' custody. Instead of being baffled by that sad experience, Wariinga makes up her mind to cope on her own. Self-reliant in her capacities to face the challenges of life, she has another image of her own personality ranging from the way she gets dressed and the way she does her hair. Then, she "has her dresses made for her or she buys them ready-made" (Ngugi; 1982; p. 218) and resolves to enrol at *Polytechnic* to improve her skills in engineering. She is then "filled with the joy of someone who matches the power of her mind and body struggling against nature, turning molten iron, for instance into products designed to enhance human lives." (Ngugi; 1982; p. 218). Although the first year at the *Polytechnic* proves to be a more challenging one since she has to pay all her fees and costs on her own contrary to the other students who have sponsors, Wariinga is determined not to be remiss in her efforts. She does not even "want to bind herself to Gatuiria or to anyone else with strings of gratitude for charity" (Ngugi; 1982; p. 219). She then carries on "odd jobs like hairdressing in a *Beauty Saloon*, or typing research papers and dissertations" to make money (Ngugi; 1982; p. 219). Determined to face the challenges of life and polish up her own image, Wariinga tries to find a job the following year as a self-employed mechanic at *Mwihotori Kiwanja Garage*, near Munyua Road by challenging some men at work with a lorry which has an unpleasant noise. "From that day on, a deep friendship developed between Wariinga and the other

workers. The more they saw Wariinga at work and observed that she did not avoid any type of work, the more they respected her." (Ngugi; 1982; p. 221). Equally remarkable, what has also spread Wariinga's fame to every corner of the city is the fact that she has knocked down a man who has come with his car for a check. In fact, bewitched by Wariinga's beauty, the man "started teasing her light-heartedly, and then he touched her breasts" (Ngugi; 1982; p. 221). In spite of Wariinga's warning him firmly, "the man took this to be the usual woman's come-hither pretence at offence, intended to lure him on" and goes to the length of fondling her buttocks when she bends over her work again. In a fit of anger, Wariinga, "assaulted him with so many judo kicks and karate chops that for a time he saw stars." (Ngugi; 1982; p. 221). From that moment onwards, "the respect of the other workers for her increased, and they sang of their diligence, perseverance and courage" (Ngugi; 1982; pp. 221-2). After many ups and downs, Wariinga eventually succeeds in getting "her EACE, a certificate to indicate that she passes English, Swahili and Religion." (Ngugi; 1982; p.18). Her enrolment at the Nairobi Secretarial College enables her to get her Pitman's certificate and eligible for applying for a job; which she does at *Mr Boss'* company as secretary and shorthand. But, her sojourn at that company is short-lived since Wariinga is dismissed for refusing to go out with her boss Mr Kihara. This is Wariinga's descent into the hell since after her dismissal by Mr Boss Kihara, the Managing Director of a well-known firm, the *Champion Construction Company* in Tom Mboya Street, the door of troubles is widely open to her. Thinking that she can find solace with her new fiancé, John Kimwana, to whom she has pledged to be faithful; that same self-day, and more specifically in the evening, Wariinga is abandoned by that fiancé knee-deep in the mire of her troubles because the latter blames her of being Boss Kihara's mistress. As misfortune never comes alone, that is the beginning of an endless trap for Wariinga who comes into contact with a real predicament. As one trouble seems to spawn another one, the next day morning, that is on Saturday, Wariinga is visited by her landlord, the owner of the house in Olafa Jericho, Nairobi, who summons her to vacate the premises without further delay as she is increasing the rent that house. As Wariinga objects to that order on the ground "that the matter should be referred to the *Rent Tribunal* for settlement," the landlord climbs into his Mercedes Benz and comes back in a twinkling of an eye with "three thugs wearing sunglasses" who humiliate Wariinga by throwing her things out of the room and locking "the door with a new padlock." (Ngugi; 1982; p. 10). To bid her farewell and by way of deterring her, one of the thugs tosses a piece of paper at her, a paper on which is written:

We are the Devil's Angels: Private Business. Make the slightest move to take this matter to the authorities, and we shall issue you with a single ticket to God's kingdom or Satan's – a one-day ticket to Heaven or Hell (Ngugi; 1982; p.10).

Faced with such a situation, Wariinga quickly makes up her mind to go back to her native village after stacking her things in the next-door room belonging to a Mkamba woman so as to make the preparations for the journey. Wariinga is endowed with a great natural beauty that bewitches men, all the same, she puts the blames of all her misfortunes on the "fading whiteness of her teeth" and "the blackness of her skin", which prompts her to decide to "disfigure her body with skin-lightening creams like *Ambi* and *Snowfire*," thus "forgetting the saying" that "That which is born black will never be white." (Ngugi; 1982; p. 11). The narrator reports that Wariinga:

could never appreciate the sheer splendour of her body. She yearned to change herself, in covetous pursuit of the beauty of other selves. Often she failed to dress in harmony with her body. She rushed to copy the ways in which other women dressed. Fashion, whether or not it flattered the shade of her skin or the shape of her figure, was what governed her choice of clothes. Sometimes Wariinga distorted the way in which she held herself by trying to imitate another girl's stride. She forgot the saying: *Aping others cost the frog its buttocks.* (Ngugi; 1982; pp. 11-12)

Unquestionably, while resorting to technique of omniscient narrator, Ngugi goes on to reveal the innermost feelings of Wariinga thus:

Insistent self-doubt and crushing self-pity formed the burden that Wariinga was carrying that Saturday as she walked through the Nairobi streets towards a bus stop to catch a *matatū* to take her to her parents' home in Ilmorog buttocks. (Ngugi; 1982; p. 12)

All these reactions from the female protagonist can be accounted for the situation which she is going through in post-independent Kenya. Happily enough, she holds on and goes to find a bus to give her a lift home. Wariinga loses consciousness and as she is about to fall, she feels someone grabbing her by her right arm to support her and she lets herself be led out of the sun to the steps of the Kaka *Heavenly Massage and Hairdressing Salon* as though fate itself wants her to achieve her dream of disfiguring her beauty; which is not the case since, in her daydream, she hears a voice whispering to her ears:

I mourn over my own body,
The one I was given by God, the All-Powerful.
I ask myself:
When they bury me,
With whom shall I share my grave ...? (Ngugi;1982; p.13)

In her daydream, Wariinga sees a crowd of people dressed in rags who are getting ready to crucify the Devil who leads the masses or the common run of people "into the blindness of the heart and into the deafness of the mind" (Ngugi; 1982; p. 7) through his mischievous attitude which consists in shedding crocodile's tears after building "Hell for the people on Earth" (Ngugi; 1980; p. 13). As can be seen, that Devil turns out to be the thieves or local businessmen and capitalists who are corrupt to the marrow of the bones and the crowd of people who are ready to crucify the Devil stand for the masses who are pitifully dressed in rags whereas the Devil himself is smartly dressed "in a silk suit and carries a walking stick shaped like a folded umbrella." (Ngugi; 1982; p. 13). The Devil's entreaties are not worth the game since the masses have finally finished him off. Through this scene, Ngugi is depicting the post-independent society in which the masses who work hard to really achieve success are unfortunately exploited by the minority of people who usually lead a life of ease and dress up smartly and once fed up with that situation, the masses finally resort to the way of violence so as to re-conquer their rights as can be seen through Wariinga's reaction at the end of the novel.

A while later, Wariinga regains consciousness and takes an old bus bound to the great celebration of the thieves and robbers organised in her native village Ilmorog to notice with her naked eyes how a few minority of the so-called businessmen fatten themselves to the detriment of the masses who boil their midnight oil so as to live on the sweat of their forehead as recommended in the *Holy Scriptures*. Faced with that situation which is gaining ground in post-independent Kenya, the masses resort to the way of violence by setting fire to the cave which is supposed to be the lair of the thieves and robbers. Importantly enough, toward the end of the novel, Wariinga, the female protagonist of *Devil on the Cross* realises the mission she is entrusted which is to definitely dismantle the group of the thieves and robbers. Then, with a pistol, Wariinga shoots the Old Rich Man who is one of the ringleaders of the businessmen thus striking utter fear among all those who have come to attend her wedding ceremony with the beloved son of that wealthy man. That event which closes the novel is a way for the Kenyan writer to show that capitalist people cast in the same mould as the businessmen in *Devil on the Cross* are not entitled to live in a society in which everybody is supposed to combine their endeavours for the benefit and achievement of all and sundry at large and the women folk in particular who are generally the hardest hit by that system of exploitation. Better still, while affording Wariinga the opportunity to finish off the Old Rich Man, Ngugi is thus giving African women the courage and bravery that sometimes forsakes them to fulfil their own empowerment hence waiting for happiness to fall right into their laps. Wariinga is not the only female character that has become aware of the precious responsibility of women toward the society in which they live. Wangari, one of the passengers to the great celebration of the thieves and robbers in Ilmorog is happy enough to confess to the other passengers how she has proudly fought for the freedom of her native country Kenya with her own hands, thus availing herself of that opportunity to tell the

passengers onboard the same bus with her that that, as a small girl, she has carried "many bullets and many guns to" the freedom fighters in the forest with her legs during Mau Mau revolt even if this requires from her to slip "through the lines of the enemy and their home guard allies" hence regretting that once the independence are achieved, the new generation people only think of the power of money (Ngugi; 1982; p. 40). She even goes on to say that:

when we fought for independence, it was not money that did the fighting: it was love. Love for Kenya, our country, was what gave our young men courage to face the prospect of being mowed down by enemy bullets – and they would not let go of the soil. When we fought for independence, we did not look at the way a person dressed and say: 'This one is dressed in rags. Let him be thrown into jail.' In fact, the man in rags was the one in the front line, and he did not know the word retreat. But the man in the tie would run to pick up the hat of the imperialist felled by the bullets from our front line and reserve forces! And when you hear me talk like this, our people, don't think that I've been drinking alcohol or smoking bhang. No. I'm speaking in this way because of what I have gone through in the Nairobi we have left behind. Modern Haraambe ... I don't know where it is leading us, the Kenyan people....' (Ngugi; 1982; pp. 40-41)

Through this quotation above, the female character Wangari is drawing the young generation's attention on their duty towards their country and therefore their continent. This is her way of impacting the development of her continent through the promotion of such moral values as patriotism, loyalty, and Pan Africanism which are values that Africans need to trigger the development process of their country today. Such brave African women who command respect and authority around them are very few today and such characters like The Great Princess Royal in *The Ambiguous Adventure* by Cheikh Hamidou Kane; Penda the prostitute and the ringleader of women through the long march from Dakar to Thiès to back up the strikers in Sembène Ousmane's *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* as well as Ramatoulaye, the woman who, out of sheer bravery, has killed the ram of the Iman who is hand in glove with the white men in that same novel by the self-taught writer and film-maker Sembène Ousmane are really great treasures that must be hailed as good examples to the women folk. Another moral value of which embodiment Wangari is in *Devil on the Cross* is unselfishness since that female character confesses that she does not care the type of job she will be blessed to find in the big cities shortly after the independences: "So, alone in my hut, I told myself this: I can't fail to find a job in Nairobi. At least I could sweep out offices or wipe children's bottoms. I don't mind what job I do, for he who is given a piece of meat does not expect fat as well." (Ngugi; 1982; p. 42). Normally, having taken an active part in the Mau Mau revolt, Wangari should be boasting about her contribution to the independence of her country and hence claim that she must be hailed as a good and brave citizen to hold a position of influence in her native country. However, Wangari embodies all the moral values that can lay the foundation stones of peace in her country and therefore Africa today contrary to some women who claim many things from their husband alleging that they have helped him to reach his current level in the society. No matter what Wangari undergoes in the search of a job, she does get angry at all since as for Wangari, a person who is really in need of a job as Achebe said in *A Man of the People* must never be angry. Even in a shop owned by a black man she is told that the only job she can be offered is that of spreading her legs since women with mature bodies are experts in that job (Ngugi; 1982; p. 42). Not discouraged to find an employment one day, Wangari has had a mishap while roaming the streets or shops for jobs: in fact, for the record, Wangari unfortunately comes back to an Indian shop where she has already gone, and the black man there calls the police to take her suspecting her of being ill-intentioned or being a spy employed robbers on shops (Ngugi; 1982; p.43). She is then imprisoned in a cell which turns out to be "a lair for mosquitoes, lice, fleas and bedbugs" for three nights before being taken to court for trial. (Ngugi; 1982; p. 43). Our lavishing too many pages to sing the praises of these female characters in *Devil on the Cross* is that they epitomise some moral values which are rare to find today, and even if

like Wanja, one of the female character of *Petals of Blood*, both characters have also come to the conclusion that the 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; 1977; pp. 293-94). More importantly still, instead of going with the tide, Wariinga and Wangari have fought the devil that prevents the masses from leading a happy life. The assassination of the Old Rich Man at the end of the novels really points to the precious role woman can play in impacting positive changes in African societies.

In *A Grain of Wheat* too, Ngugi has also delineated to African women a great responsibility in the achievement of social changes as shown through Wambui's bravery in succeeding to carry bullets from the village to the forest during the Emergency state. In fact, very conversant with the "underground movements in Nakuru, Njoro, Elburgeon and other places in and outside the Rift Valley, [...] she once carried a pistol tied to her thighs near the groin" (Ngugi; 1967; p. 21), and has got dressed in long wide and heavy clothes. While taking the gun to Naivasha, she has aptly escaped the military and police search till she reaches her destination. Even on the eve of Kenyan independence, Wambui is seen taking an active part in the political debate of her country with the ringleaders of the resistance movement who have left the forest under the Uhuru amnesty and including for that matter Lieutenant Koina, and General R who are both ex-servicemen. Wambui's commitment to social struggles is also shown on the eve of Kenyan independence through her unremitting endeavours to reveal the potential that is hidden in women which is their power to win too many people over to their way of thinking and especially when old Mugo refuses to attend that momentous event. For Wambui,

Women had to act, Women had to force the issue. [...] She believed in the power of women to influence events, especially where men had failed to act, or seemed indecisive. Many people in Thabai remembered her now famous dram at the workers' strike in 1950. In fact, the strike was meant to paralyse (Ngugi; 1967; p. 195).

Like Wambui, one of Mumbi's great friend named Njeri who has a sneaking love for Mumbi's brother Kihika, sets the good example to the women's folk by going to the length of running away to the forest to fight at Kihika's side. Even if "she was shot dead in a battle, soon after Kihika's death" (Ngugi; 1967;p.151), Njeri stands as great source of inspiration to the woman folk and Mumbi herself who tells Mugo that her dream is to make her husband happy by standing by him in times of fight and especially by accepting to "carry his sheath and as fast as he shot into the enemy"(Ngugi; 1967; p. 149) adding afterwards that she "would feed him with arrows" and in case "danger came and he fell, he would fall into" her "arms and" she "would bring him home safely to" herself (Ngugi; 1967; p. 149). Another instance where Ngugi delineates a great responsibility to women in Africa in *A Grain of Wheat* has to do with Gikonyo's mother Wangari fighting hard to send her beloved child Gikonyo to school after being snubbed or estranged by her husband Waruhiu. In fact, having got new brides, Waruhiu starts complaining that the thighs of his first wife does not yield warm any more, and hence beats Wangari hoping that this would drive her away. On her insistence to stay, her husband orders her to leave his home thus cursing her son Gikonyo and her of ever-wandering on God's earth (Ngugi;1967;p. 80). It is only then that the woman takes a train and sets foot in Thabai. Wangari's resolution to bring up her child alone and provide for his education in spite of the fact that she has to go to great lengths really points to the fact that the education of children should not be the sole responsibility of men as some women think and by so doing, she is taking an active part in the development process of her country and therefore Africa since no development is possible without education. More importantly still, the seminal role of women to educate children is given by Wairimu, Karanja's mother who is seen laying the foundation stones of a good education to his beloved son at a tender age. Even during the

Emergency state, Wairimu strongly objects to "her son becoming a homeguard and a Chief." (Ngugi; 1967; p. 245). Calling her son's attention on the need to go with the tide, Wairimu usually warns her son not to go against his people thus stressing that: "A man who ignores the voice of his own people comes to no good end" (Ngugi; 1967; p. 245). Even if Wairimu's son has taken her mother's advice for granted by betraying his people, it can be said that the old woman can be seen as a seer who can see in advance what the future has in store for any child who tramples underfoot his or her parents' advice.

Conclusion

In the light of the above, we can conclude that through the selected novels by Amma Darko and Ngugi, the authors have played the part of eye-openers to African women on how they can significantly contribute to Africa's development through social struggles. Gender equality, as can be seen, will be an idle word unless it is shown through concrete actions. It is then up to women to reveal their inner potential and not to wait for social achievement to fall right into their laps.

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ⁱSee: Brunell, Laura. Burket, Elinor, 2019, "Feminism sociology", Available at: britannica.com/topic/feminism. Accessed on 19 January 2020.

ⁱⁱ Idem

ⁱⁱⁱ Availblbe at:

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