Determining Parameters of Women's Problem in
Ngugi wa Thing'o's Fiction

As stated earlier, it is with the intention of studying the problem of women's struggle for liberation in Kenya that the study of the fictions of only one writer - Ngugi wa Thing'o - who is not only the most prolific of contemporary Kenyan Writers but who is also the most prominent one too, has been undertaken in this dissertation. This chapter will concentrate on discussing the various determining parameters of women's problem in Ngugi wa Thing'o's fiction. But before carrying out such a study it is essential to know about him as a writer and the themes, issues and the broad parameters that he has taken in his fictional writings.

Born in 1938, in the family of a landless squatter on the land of a well-to-do farmer in Kaimithu village near Limuru in Kiambu, district, Ngugi wa Thing'o went to the mission run Kaamandura school in Limuru and later to a school of the Independent schools Movement. Later he joined the Alliance High School-Kenya's first full-fledged school for Africans. It is here that Ngugi wa Thing'o's religious awareness about Christianity- a fact that is more than obvious from his writings, particularly in A Grain of Wheat where
copious references were made to the Bible - was formed. After finishing school education at Alliance High School Ngugi joined B.A (Hons) in English at Makrere University College at Kampala, Uganda. It is here that his creative talents developed. Before graduating in 1963, Ngugi had written his first full length play - The Black Hermit - which was performed on the occasion of the independence of Uganda in 1962. He had also written his first two novels - The River Between and Weep Not Child.

Leeds was Ngugi's next halt for education. Here he soon became a part of Arnold Kettle's group, which provided him with new perspectives on various issues - Political, social, cultural and academic. What is significant about his stay in Leeds is that it is here that he published his next novel - A Grain of Wheat in 1967.

Returning home the same year, Ngugi became a lecturer at the English department of Nairobi University. But he resigned from his position in 1969, due to the stiff attitude of the university against students. Back to Makrere where he accepted a year's fellowship, Ngugi wa Thing'o helped the institution to organize its English department. Ngugi went to the USA for a year to teach African Literature at North Western University, Illinois where he got an opportunity to observe, as he put it in The Trial of Dedan.
Kimathi, 'Neo-Imperialism at close quarters'. In 1971 he was back in Nairobi University. The period from 1972 to 1977 proved very fruitful in Ngugi's literary career. He published a number of books beginning with *Homecoming and other Essays* (1972), *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976), which he wrote together with his colleague Dr. Micere Mugo. *Secret lives* (1975), *A Collection of Stories* and *Petals of Blood* (1977), his next novel, were also published during this period. Ngugi got into trouble with political authorities over portions of his *Petals of Blood* in which he dealt for the first time with situations in Post-independence Kenya. In addition, the text of a play – *Ngaaheka Ndeena* (I will Marry When I Want) – about peasants in independent Kenya, was objected to by the authorities who eventually banned its performances on November 16, 1977. On 31st December 1977, Ngugi was taken to a police station and was detained without trial for almost a year until December 12, 1978. He was released as inexplicably as he had been detained. During his detention, Ngugi wrote down on pieces of toilet paper the details of his routine as a detainee, which was later published as *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* in 1981.

After he was released from detention in the conciliatory atmosphere of the early months of President Arap Moi’s rule he was
not restored back to his position as Professor at the Nairobi University, despite his repeated request. Ngugi wa Thing'o went away to England, setting down as a full time writer. It is from here that a number of his books, _Writers in Politics, Barrel of a Pen, Decolonising the Mind_ and his latest novel _Matigari_ have been published. He has also made common cause with all those who are fighting for the restoration of democracy in Kenya.

Despite the agony in prison and the loss of his job as the Chairman of the Literature department at the University of Nairobi, Ngugi refused to be silent, as is evident from his even more blatant exposures of Post-independent society in his later novels _Devil on the Cross_ (1982) and _Matigari_ (1987).

Ngugi wa Thingo's contribution to African literature has been outstanding. Starting from his first novel _Weep not Child_ which was published in 1964 until _Matigari_ in 1987, his journey as a novelist has not only given to Kenya a sensitive writer but also a body of thought provoking literature, that has caused stir in the Kenyan society. As we trace his literary career from the very beginning, we get to see the development and growth of Ngugi's views on various issues and Ngugi as a critic and social thinker.
Ngugi is a socialist writer committed to the cause of his people and country but his themes are varied. He writes about the anti-colonial struggles of the Mau-Mau guerrillas against the British regime; about Kenya as an independent country in 1963; about peasants and workers in independent, neo-colonial Kenya. Simultaneously, he also paints a vivid picture of African culture as well. Despite the variations in theme, two features recur in his writings are his anti-capitalistic attitude and his anti-imperialistic attitude and his anti-patriarchal attitude. Ngugi's sympathy is with the oppressed and, therefore, he takes side with the oppressed and exploited, be they workers or women. He makes this stand very clear in the Preface to this play The Trial of Dedan Kimathi: “We cannot stand on the fence. We are either on the side of the people or on the side of imperialism.... We believe that good theater is that which is on the side of the people...”

Weep not Child and The River Between, though relatively simple, effectively reflect the African culture focusing on various customs and rituals existing in the different tribes. The novels also sensitively record the suffering and struggle of Kenyans in a colonial land. They are exploited not only by the Britishers but also

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by the Blacks who have joined hands with the white rulers. The rich blacks not only make the natives work as labourers on their agricultural land, but also try to covert them to Christianity. In *The River Between* Ngugi's efforts to recreate the history of his people from the very beginning to the most recent times. In this novel Ngugi critically examines and evaluates, primarily through the aspect of Christianity the cultural clash between the Africans and the foreign invaders.

*Weep not Child* and *The River Between* deals with the disintegration of a traditional Kenyan society under pressure from within and without. Rigid, obscurantist traditional people who refuse to move towards modernisation create the pressure from within. And the pressure from without being that of ruthless self-opiniated European people with superior technology. The disintegration is tragic for people, who are neither rigid about a totally traditional way of life nor keen about a totally modern, Christian way of life. Since they do not identify themselves completely either way, not only are their efforts of reconciling the mutually exclusive systems frustrated by extremists, but they themselves meet tragic ends. Through out the novels education as the panacea for all the ills of the traditional society at cross roads of
modernisation has been represented. It is not only Ngugi's own personal faith but also of a whole generation of the African population. Through the character Waiyaki in the novel *The River Between* Ngugi portrays very effectively the inherent contradictions in the desire of the Kenyans going all out to acquire western education in order to equip themselves with knowledge, which they hoped to be useful for freeing themselves from the colonial rule. Nevertheless, in the very process of acquiring it became alienated from not only their customs and duties but also from the people themselves.

Ngugi also shows that the western system of education has done something worse than just weakening the hold of tribal customs and rituals on the minds of the young. It makes them so pliant that the very idea of disobeying authority, however unjust and oppressive, is repugnant to them.

This theme of disillusionment with western education is something that Ngugi has continued to pursue through his later writings—both fictional and non-fictional. The obvious reason for this pursuance was that it played a very crucial role at a critical juncture in the Kenyan struggle for freedom, as has been pointed out by numerous national leaders. According to Odinga Odinga:
Yet events proved in the long run that mission activities and policy anticipated the needs of government before the latter itself realized them. The mission produced men who were rebels against the old way of life for a while but were then themselves absorbed into mission and administration. They became tame middlemen, shadows and subjects of white mission men and any strivings in them to become independent leaders of their people were suppressed by the allegiance to the mission hierarchy, and the fact that, once educated they were absorbed into the government machine.... The purpose of education was not to train for independence but for subservience.²

Ngugi through the Character Waiyaki not only represents his ambivalent attitude to Christianity during his youth but also that of a whole generation of Kenyan freedom fighters.

In his very first novel-The River Between thus Ngugi wa Thing'o chooses to critically examine the two most significant symbols of cultural clash between the natives and the foreign invaders, namely education and religion.

In Ngugi's first published novel *Weep not Child* he has depicted an important phase in the Kenyan freedom struggle when education-western education was still looked upon by Kenyans as a possible solution to their ills under colonialism. In the backdrop of a society which is not only in transition but is in turmoil too, the novel Portrays a typical Gikuyu family a microcosm of the entire Kenyan society, which is destroyed when it tries to adapt itself to the ways of the west, particularly its culture. We also see how Ngugi binds the theme of education with that of political independence. Through the character Njoroge who represent certain section of the society, Ngugi shows how they have placed hopes of national independence on acquisition of western education. On the other hand Ngugi through the character Bora represents another section of the society; who have no faith in western system of education. During the long drawn out struggle for freedom, right to education had been made an issue by the Kenyans, which is reflected in the novel. He infact critically examines in these two novels the wisdom of Africans in pioneering their hopes on a western system of education as a means to fighting the western colonialism. But also he wants to clearly show that the western education cannot get the Africans what they want of it namely in acquiring the lands. But
that it definitely takes them away from such a goal by alienating from their way of life, which revolved invariably around land.

In these first two novels Ngugi has plunged straight into the political theme of Kenyan national movement and clearly shows the lack of unified approach among the Kenyan Africans. The determining parameter in these two novels has been the issue of western education in the backdrop of the violent freedom struggle, which was so ripe at that time and around which whole of both the fictions revolves. However in his next novel *A Grain of Wheat*, the violent phase of the freedom struggle, viz. The Mau Mau becomes the broad governing parameters. Through a series of flashback in the lives and experiences of his principal characters - Mugo, Gikonyo, Mumbi, Kihika, Karanja and Thompson- all of whom reflect on it on the eve of the Uhuru, Ngugi is able to weave, extremely skillfully, a multifaced but a powerful picture of the struggle. Both through direct narration and reflections by his characters, Ngugi creates an atmosphere of hopes and fears, successes and defects, loyalties and betrayals that were typical of the period of the struggle. There could not have been a more precise yet more forthright portrayal of the part of Kenyan history towards
the end of the nineteenth century when the British launched a two
prolonged attack by the clergy and the soldier to colonise Kenya.

Ngugi's message is very clear in this novel. He shows how the
Mau Mau struggle was born out of the frustrations of the people to
persuade the colonial masters to restore them what was theirs.
Through his characters he recalls many raids by the freedom
fighters, to obtain ration and ammunitions, as oppression. He also
accounts the torture of civilians on a mass scale simultaneously
with the militant struggle, million Kenyans through the
concentration camps and the 'pipeline' during the four years of
emergency. Ngugi has also never failed to throw light upon the role
of women during the freedom struggle. Several women had played a
very heroic role in the freedom movement - the names of Me Kitilili
and Mary Nyanjiru spring to the mind immediately – and through
the characters Wambui and Mumbi, in women warriors. He was to
do this again through the character of 'the Women' in his play The
Trial of Dedan Kimathi (1976). In fact with A Grain of Wheat Ngugi
began a conscious attempt to not only to write about positively
powerful women, but he also began to make them more 'visible' by
providing them with greater 'space' in his books. This effort
culminates in his portrayal of Waringa as the protagonist in his *Devil on the Cross*.

Within the broader framework of freedom struggle Ngugi presents a very complex portrayal of Kenyan society. He has tried to capture within a limited canvas the role of various sections of the society, their hopes and fears on the threshold of the freedom. By focusing on the traumatic times which the Kenyans faced during their struggle for freedom, Ngugi also hints at the shape of things to come in independent Kenya – an ensuring struggle between the people and their leaders in new Kenya. He takes up this theme in his next novel *Petals of Blood* that is situated in the politically independent Kenya.

In *Petals of Blood* there is a qualitative shift in Ngugi’s point of view about the three issues which form a common core underlying most of his novels namely the role of Christianity, the western system of education and the alienation of land from the people not only during the colonial period, but also on independent Kenya as well. His ambivalent attitude towards western education and Christianity, which is seen in his earlier novels, is no more present here, rather it becomes clearer. His disillusionment towards the religion – Christianity and western education is portrayed
through his character. Ngugi also exposes a new class of exploiters in the form of local politicians who were working in league with local Businessmen. He depicts the friction of such a nexus by illuminating the economic structure, class formations, conflicts and contradictions and political and cultural struggles in contemporary Kenya. He shows how within no time of attaining independence, Kenyan society has decayed and became rotten at the core, though at the face of it, it appeared healthy and thriving. Through the character, Karega he also raised his vision of renewed a struggle by the Kenyan masses – a theme which he explores in his next two novels - *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari* both written originally in Gikuyu.

*Devil on the Cross* (1982) Portrays the transformation of Kenya into a Modern State in which nothing is free. The theme is almost same with *Petals of Blood*, which is inhuman exploitation of the Kenyan masses by a nexus of the ruling comprador bourgeoisie and the criminal thugs in alliance with their ‘global allies’. Unlike *Petals of Blood* Ngugi makes women – Jacinta Waringa – his Principal Character assigning minor roles to his male characters. One things which Ngugi brings out clearly in this fiction is that there are two nations within modern Kenya – One comprising
peasants, workers and intellectuals who were in the forefront of the freedom struggle but who have been marginalized after independence and other comprising traders and businessmen, like Mwaura and Mukirai who were lackeys of the colonial administration, but who have usurped power in the new situation and have continued the exploitation of the Kenyan people with the help of the financial hold which their former colonial masters still have over their country. There is rampant corruption, thuggery, nexus between business and crime, politicians and swindlers – both national and international. Apart from focusing on the theme of modern theft and robbery, Ngugi focuses on the problems of women that twice – colonized community. Ngugi sets out to show how women are exploited first as Kenyan masses and then for their sex. He shows the depth of depravity to which men sometime sink. However, Ngugi does not show women suppression here; rather their anger and mood of revenge are portrayed.

Ngugi is surer of himself in accusing the comprador bourgeoisie for their ills of contemporary Kenya and does not hesitate in naming the international collaborators. Devil on the Cross shows Ngugi at his boldest best and also in his angriest mood.
His latest novel *Matigari* (1989) is also like *Devil on the Cross* – a critique of contemporary Kenya. He presents a new social vision which is that of the forces of revolution comprising the patriot peasants represented by *Matigiri*, the working class represented by Ngaruro Wa Kiriro, youth represented by Muriki and women represented by Guthera confronting their forces of repression by the state police, and minister of Truth and Justice.

In the above discussion of his novel, we get to see the kind of issues that has been taken by Ngugi wa Thing'o in his novels. His every novel is situated at a particular epoch – the epoch has been Pre-independence or post-independence. The issues and circumstances belong to that period – either colonial or post-colonial time. The parameters, which Ngugi has taken in, his novels generally rest on the issues, which he highlights in them. However, our common concern in this chapter remains to determine the parameters of women problem in his fictions but before that the broad parameters within which his novels revolve needs to be discussed. In all his fictions depicting the colonial period the following parameters have been undertaken by Ngugi: As for instance the problem faced by the Kenyan masses in the act of suppression and oppression in the hands of colonial stooges.
The ambivalent attitude of the common people towards the western system of education and the religion Christianity that seemed to offering them the panacea for all the ills. People's alienation from their own land, which had been the provider of food and shelter to them. The frustrations of the Kenyan masses due to the exploitation by the colonial masters. The untold miseries inflicted upon the ordinary people by them. The suppression of the people with the weapons of the religion Christianity and western education, by crippling their minds and keeping them subservient. A cultural clash between the native religion and Christianity emanating as a great force. The inherent contradiction in the desire of Kenyan masses to acquire western education in order to equip themselves with knowledge which they hoped to use for freeing themselves from the colonial rules but in the very process acquiring it, becoming alienated from not only their customs and rites but also from the people themselves. Atrocities inflicted upon the African by not only Europeans but also Africans. Indictment of a section of Africans for the perpetuation of colonialism in Kenya. The violent phase of Kenyan national Liberation movement. The freedom movement being the result of ills of colonization affecting almost all tribes in Kenya. Liberation movement conducted in secrecy and graded oaths. The harsh and brutal measures taken by
the government to stop the oath and in turn being counterproductive as increasingly young people impatient for change took the oath. The Mau Mau struggle for freedom being a violent militant struggle carried by those youths who had lost faith in constitutional method of fighting for independence. The torture and plight of those Kenyans who were taken to prison and those detained and other general masses by the colonizers in the period of emergency to suppress their endeavor. The above-mentioned are the briefly stated parameters taken up by Ngugi in those fictions depicting colonial reality.

However in his fictions depicting Post-independent situation – like The Petals of Blood, The Devil on the Cross and Matigari, The parameters are more or less similar to that of the fictions portraying the colonial situation. The parameters are similar because issues are similar. Below are the briefly mentioned parameters circumscribing the above-referred fictions. They are: the conflicts and contradictions and political and cultural struggles in the contemporary Kenya; The nexus between the politicians, businessman and criminal, backed by the international forces of neo-colonialism fitted against the poor, simple peasants, workers and women of Kenya; The decaying and the rotting Kenyan society
from within the core; The marginalisation of the freedom fighters; The crumbling of the hopes and aspirations of the people to have a better way of life; A renewed liberation struggle coming to light with the first independence been sold back to imperialism by the servants they put in power; The state forces of repression continue to line in constant fear, which the people have overcome theirs; The oppression of patriarchy gathering force along with neocolonialism; Women struggling for liberation from the forces of patriarchy and also trying to liberate the society from the exploitation of the forces of neocolonialism and capitalism as they had done earlier during the freedom struggle movement.

Having discussed the broad parameters taken up by Ngugi wa Thing'o in this fiction, we would now discuss the parameters of women's problem, which he has addressed in his fictions. His early fictions which reflect the colonial time depicts women's role in the liberation struggle and also her role in domestic sphere, where she is found struggling against the common enemy i.e. the colonizers and as well at home against the Patriarchal structure.

Ngugi shows that women confront with the problem of independence along with men in the public sphere and in the private sphere she confronts the problem of survival at the face of
abject poverty and also the oppression of patriarchy through its customs, rites and rituals and male dominance.

In his novel *Weep not Child* where Ngugi has taken upon theme of anti-colonialism, western Education and Religion, he shows various aspects of women’s problem. Ngugi portrays a polygamous family where women are found contended with their life. They love and respect each other and have personal space too and it is because power is not the pivot. Yet, a woman does not escape from a bad treatment. Women has been considered a safety valve for men who may beat her, inflict sexual violence on her body to pour out his tensions, guilt or uncertainty. In Ngotho’s family in this novel, there was a discord on the issue of strike. Ngotho’s wife has doubts about the success of the strike and the fears that failure of strike would mean starvation for the family. Ngothe himself is uncertain about his participation in the strike and its success. However, all his anxiety and uncertainty he takes out on his wife in a hysterical outburst:

I shall do whatever I like. I have never taken orders from a woman...What if the strike fails? Don’t women me! He shouted hysterically. The possibility was what he feared most. She sensed the note of uncertainty and
fear and seized upon it. What if the strike fails, tell me that! Ngothe could bear it no longer. She was driving him mad. He slapped her on the face and raised his hand again.\textsuperscript{3}

In a way, this is reassurance of the right of man in patriarchy to use the women as an anchor for him at the same time. She is a source of not only inspiration but also of courage, support and fulfillment. Njorage the son of Ngotho looks upon women for inspiration and support for him. Mwihaki inspires Njoroge to study further and work hard. She not only instills confidence in him, but also helps him develop his positive qualities. Ngugi shows the strength in the character of women, while weakness in man. Man by the act of beating is though trying to overpower the women, but in the other hand, it shows frail, and feebleness of man's mind and character, as compared to women. The Nyokabi who is beaten here, though succumbs to her husband's violent behavior, yet is a women of strength. At the time of despair, she consoles her son and restores strength and hope in him. She does not physically fight with her husband, may be because of her love for her husband and family but nevertheless she is a women of strength and integrity.

who is struggling to keep her family happy at the face of colonial oppression.

In the next novel *The River Between* Ngugi focuses the problem of culture clash in the lives of two women Muthoui and Nyamburu. The fiction reveals the tension between the two groups of people – those who are for African Culture and those who are being a part of and are helping in the process of colonialization and civilization. The colonizers to bring in stability and thereby ruling on the natives more effectively have perpetrated these tensions. In the backdrop of this tension, Ngugi depicts the courage of women to fight against forces, which imposes on them certain tradition to follow. The characters Muthoni and Nyambura are the daughters of a Christian father who is reluctant to let his daughters follow the traditional custom of African tribe. But Muthoni defies such kind of imposition of his father she runs away and gets circumcised. In the process, she develops infection and dies. Nyambura on the other hand is in love with Waiyaki. They meet stealthily and rarely, as she is a Christian. Later it is she, who has the courage to declare in front of the whole tribe, when they are summoned to speak and defend themselves, that she loves Waiyaki and to face the consequences. Ngugi presents women as embodiments of courage
and fearlessness who are capable of rebellion. They are in fact better than men. They have positive qualities like courage, confidence, ability to see truth more lucidly and they are a constant inspiration to men. Muthoni could defy her father for asserting her faith and belief on the African way of life. Nyambura boldly declares her love for Waykai and prepares herself for any consequences to befall on her. She is not sacred to live up to her commitments at the face of all odds. Ngugi portrays the significant role, which women play in the liberation movement. The public and private role of women is not separate for her. She considers the freedom movement as her own problem and not only the problem of men, because she is and affected by colonial exploitation. Her predicament is that she is twice exploited – once for being a native or African while secondly for being a woman. In Trial of Dedan Kimathi Women is seen as helping Kimathi in his detention days. She has the guts to send a gun in a loaf of bread through two children one a boy other a girl, and the girl being more daring as compared to the boy. Ngugi universalizes the women, character by addressing them as ‘Women’ and ‘Girl’. He wants to show that at the time of need even women can play an equally crucial role at the face of danger. The ‘women’ stands up against exploitation and spreads the message all by herself. In certain crucial moments, she even reveals greater
lucidity and wisdom. Ngugi presents them as heroines who have an important role to play. They are not only conscious about their own rights but also are politically aware of the circumstances that try to make their country subservient.

Ngugi in his works has not only portrayed women as heroines and embodiment of courage at the face of exploitation but also as victims, which they are not only in the Pre-independence Kenya but also in Post-independence Kenya where neo-colonialism has even more subtle way of exploiting them. In his early novels Ngugi in fact has ignored the social pressures, which cannot be ignored. In the later novels, however he has addressed this problem of women.

In *Grain of Wheat* we first find a depiction of women suffering in patriarchal set-up. On the one hand, there is the independence struggle going on and on the other, women are selling their bodies to buy a piece of bread to quench the family’s hunger. The women protagonist ‘Mumbi’ who symbolizes the Kenyan women is depicted as a slave performing all household chores. Unmindful of her desires and feelings she has to work from dawn to dusk. One of her major duty is to please men regardless of the fact whether she is beaten and thrown out of the house and not given a chance to explain herself.
In a colonial setup, there are oppressions of both men and women, but as stated earlier women are double sufferers, because they are suffering not only due to capitalist oppression but also at the hands of their own men. Mumbi’s husband did not give a chance to explain as to how she conceived a child in his detention days. Only if he heard of her distressing story and tried to understand the suffering and humiliation that she underwent, he might have respected her. “Gikonyo instead...hurried to vent his anger on Mumbi... He would thrash Mumbi until she cried for mercy. She is repeatedly called a ‘Whore’ and ‘Women who sleeps with different men everyday’."4

After numerous insults Mumbi leaves the house to return to her parents, but is not welcome there. Her father’s attitude remains same as that of her husband. He is orthodox and traditional like most men when it comes to dominate her. He retorts, “The women today surprise me. They cannot take a slap soft as a feather or the slightest breath from a man. In our time a women could take blow after blow from her husband without a thought of running back to her parents.”5 But Mumbi is not a submissive one. However, she

had been dominated in life, but refuses to be suppressed any more. In the end of the novel, we see a new Mumbi emerging.

Will you—will you come tomorrow? He (Gikonyo) asked, unable to hide his anxiety and fear. He knew, at once, that in future he would reckon with her feelings, her thoughts and her desires— a new Mumbi... She took her leave, she walked away with determined sad but almost sure 6

Mumbi is in fact an evidence of the basic paradox of a women’s situation. She is central in the lives of men yet she is badly treated. Mumbi is seduced by Karanja the Chief Homeguard in a moment of her helplessness and dependence on him and Gikonyo her husband instead of appreciating her role in his absence discard her, assaulting all kinds of violence on her. Like the workers, they are central to building up the society and yet they are made to appear on the margin. Ngugi hints at this paradoxical situation of women which had been brought out by Toril Moi: The

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6 Ibid, p. 250
paradox of the position of women and the working class is that they are at one and the same time central and marginal(ized)."

In this novel, we get to see that women’s personal problem interacting with the social and political. “The woman here is a sufferer not so much of the colonial set-up as of patriarchy. Public pressures overcoming Private dreams of women is highlighted and elaborately discussed in his last two novels.

In *Petals of Blood*, which deals with the theme of neo-colonialism a patriarchy, Ngugi depicts the plight of Kenyan masses after independence in 1963. It reveals how its innocent, ignorant, illiterate, helpless working class and women is susceptible to exploitation by capitalist forces. The parallel between women and workers is emphasized by Simone de Beauvoir, “...Women and the workers have this in common: that they are both oppressed.” In *Petals of Blood* Karega’s mother complains:

“...about her triple duties: to her child N’ dinguiri; to her husband and to her European landlord. She was expected to work on the European farms, to work on her own piece of land: and to keep the house in unity,

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8 Bebel, Quoted by Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, (trans.) H.M. Parshley, p.19
healthy and peace. At the same time she never saw a cent from her produce...she rebelled...He beat her in frustration."

Ngugi depicts that women's problem in post-independent Kenya was no less worse than that of pre-independent Kenya. Even after independence struggle, for which she had fought along with her fellow men, she is found struggling for liberation-liberation from poverty, liberation from patriarchy and liberation of the Kenyan society from the exploitation and oppression of neocolonial and capitalist forces. When she is struggling to liberate her society, she is liberating herself. It is this problem of women that Ngugi portrays in his fiction. As stated earlier her problem is equivalent to that of the worker.

The method of workers exploitation in capitalist society is explained by Bagchi: "The theme that native workers need be paid only a subsistence wage' and no more, recurs frequently in the policy pronouncements of the colonial administrators and businessmen...One basic device for keeping wages low was combination among the masters...an agreement about the unborn

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9 Ngugi wa Thing'o, Petals of Blood, 1977; rpt. (Nairobi, Heinemann Kenya, 1989), p-58
inferiority of the natives was enough.” 10 Women’s exploitation also takes place on similar lines. Ngugi draws a kind of parallelism between women’s problem and that of workers in the Post-independent, Capitalist Kenyan society.

Women being economically weak and for her body becomes more vulnerable than the workers. The character Wanja in Petals of Blood is the representative of all traditional Kenyan women who becomes the victim of male exploitation. She is a barmaid - a profession which circumstances forced her to chose. She conceives a child in her adolescence by being enticed by a rich old man. Her child is refused to be accepted. She has no place in her home. Her father throws her out addressing her as prostitute. She is left lonely and without money. As a result, she throws the child into a latrine, but faces a dual feeling of agony and guilty throughout her life. She is condemned to suffer. Wanja’s aim is to earn money because she learns from her experience that money makes the mare go and her motto for her life is you eat or you are eaten. Hence, she is pushed into whoredom. Her only desire is to bear a child once more and she conceives a child from Abdulla.

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Here Ngugi reflects the crumbling of aspirations and a dream to pursue a peaceful and respectful happy life by Wanja who represents many Kenyan women. The patriarchal forces and capitalist forces repress her desires and dream. She becomes a victim but eventually learns how to survive in such society. She is not totally cowed down by such forms of exploitation. Rather with renewed strength, she lives her own way of life.

Though Ngugi gives greater space to the problem of women in his novels *Petals of Blood* yet finally in *Devil on the Cross*, he addresses the women’s issue more poignantly. Here also Ngugi focuses on the subordination, exploitation and violence done on women in many ways. Under the twin pressures of money and men, they are oppressed. Money stands for capitalism while men for patriarchy when power is confined in few hands misuses certainly there. Men use women for their pleasure and convenience and then dismiss them. In a man’s eye women is merely a part of property, an instrument of power, and the number of women a man has shows his status for him. She is supposed to have no honour or respect; she is just supposed to be puppet. In addition to economic exploitation, there is physical, emotional, and psychological torture in terms of seduction, illegitimate children and subsequent guilt to her.
Ngugi reveals that women's body becomes her undoing. "The modern Love Bar and Lodging has become the main employment bureau for girls, and women's thighs are the table on which contracts are signed"\(^{11}\) and the hostels are a "factory for modern prostitution."\(^{12}\)

The body of women is sold like a commodity. Her intellectual capacity has no relevance for man. For example, when the character Waringa - a mechanical engineer, is repairing an engine the men standing around jeer at her. Only after she finishes her work, she gets recognition by men.

Even sexual exploitation of middle aged women character in *Devil on the Cross*, reveals that after independence "... the only job he could offer me was that of spreading my legs, that women with mature bodies were experts at the job. I felt a tear drop to the ground."\(^{13}\) Warringa is one of those many women who had fought for independence or Uhuru and had been a party to the Mau Mau guerrillas. Never has she thought that this will be her plight in the post-colonial situation.

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\(^{12}\) Ibid, p. 223

\(^{13}\) Ibid, p. 42
Ngugi through his characters Wanja and Warringa, reveals that the women never subdued before oppression and exploitation by men. They refused to resign themselves to male dominant society. Waringa wants to excel men, through sexual intimacy because “She was somehow sure of her power over men: She knew how they could be very weak before her body”\textsuperscript{14} Both of them have the fire of revenge blazing within them. They eliminate those who exploit their life. The Rich Old Man who exploits Wanja and Waringa is a symbolic representation of the rich and powerful oppressions. Wanja and Waringa universalize the women of not only Kenya but also the world over, and particularly of the third world.

Women and worker are made to realize that there are only two worlds – the eater and the eaten, that the exploiter and the exploited, the robber and the robbed, the master and the slave. Marlyn French writes “Because capitalism is founded on their ideals of private property, the oppression of women is inherent within it and necessary for its perpetuation.”\textsuperscript{15}

So women is a double sufferer both colonial and neocolonial world. Ngugi in one side presents a sensitive and detailed

\textsuperscript{15} Marlyn French, \textit{Beyond Power: On women, Men and Moraly}, (London: Joanathen, 1980), p. 56
description of her exploitation, agony and suffering starting from *A Grain of Wheat* through *Petals of Blood* to *Devil on the Cross*, on the other hand we find the whole system being exposed where neocolonialism and Patriarchy go hand-in-hand - in keeping the women poor, weak, helpless and oppressed. However, the inner strength of women does not allow them to be exploited, they rather struggle for their emancipation and at the same time they also try to liberate the society from all forms of ignorance and backwardness. Their role is important as they function in both private and public.

So the parameters of women's problem which determine Ngugi wa Thingo's fiction are varied and relates to the circumstances. Their problem is situated not only in the private domain but also in the public domain too and both are interrelated. In our next chapter, we will be discussing those parameters of women's problem, which govern her socio-economic, political, economic and cultural role in Kenya.