

ISSN 0976-8165

The Criterion



The Criterion

An International Journal in English

Quarterly Refereed & Indexed Open Access Journal

April 2013 Vol. 4 Issue- II

Editor-in-Chief

Dr. Vishwanath Bite

Managing Editor

Madhuri Bite

www.the-criterion.com
criterionejournal@gmail.com

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* as a Mirror of the African Revolution

Akinwumi Olutola

Federal University Oye,
Ekiti State, Nigeria

Abstract

The paper focuses on African revolution through Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*. It analyses the revolutionary temper over the years especially in the contemporary African novels. Many African writers and some intellectuals have been preoccupied with social and political circumstances of their societies. These writers who constitute first, second and third generations of the African literary history have worked truthfully on the reality of African situations. The fact is that the colonial regime in African societies is the negation of creation and action. True to expectation, with the demise of colonialism and the institution of people's government, African societies became degenerated rather than progressive. African writers and intellectuals alike became furious to see their societies being run according to the style and manners of their departed colonial masters. It reflects change in Ngugi's work from portraying the colonial era to reflecting the exploitation and corruption in Kenya.

Introduction

Revolution as a concept is a special form of the process of development, which we call historical change. All realms of historical existence are subject to this change, each of them capable of being initiated by a wide range of assorted factors. There are, for example, the almost imperceptible, protracted developments, which preserve continuity as they unfold, that is, follows an evolutionary course. Evolution, seen as a gradual adjustment of institutions and forms of existence to altered human living conditions, is not to be equated with adjustment by means of deliberate reforms which presuppose an understanding of the need for change coupled with the determination to preserve continuity. However, change can also be eruptive in the form of sudden discharges and 'accelerated processes', as when preceded by periods of acute crisis.

It should be noted that the development of a specific revolutionary concept entails subjective revolutionary awareness and a determination on the part of supporting or activist groups to change prevailing organization and systems in accordance with certain programmatic ideas. Revolution is, undoubtedly, the most widely studied problem among the major scope of the historical process, which is the main thrust of this paper.

The difficulty of defining the specific content of a term increases as its range of application expands. This is true of the term 'revolution', where the individual revolution is concerned. Therefore, one must concentrate on the occurrence, which in the course of events is marked out by relatively hard facts or sequences of facts. The great modern revolutions are total revolutions to the extent that they embrace all spheres of life and transform them with varying degrees of permanency and completeness. According to Kerning C.D., all great revolutions pass through an introductory or preliminary phase which already exemplifies the basic features of the revolution itself, likewise a waning or reverberating phase governed by the same characteristics. The ideological foundations of a revolution, the classes behind it and their style of conduct can thus, be perceived and defined both before and after its chief revolutionary occurrences. Although, not all revolutions can be regarded as precisely similar in this respect, the undoubted

fact that revolutions represent a process over an extended period of time entitles one to speak not of this or that revolution but always of a revolutionary era.

Revolution as a Weapon of Social Change

African writers played an important role in the struggle for political independence. They successfully depicted the way the colonisers exploited African masses and natural resources. At the same time, they urged Africans to be aware of the real intention of the white colonisers, that is, the exploitation of African resources to enrich the Western capitalist countries. African writers through their works tried to conscientise Africans on the issues of White exploitation. At different levels, especially through the revolutionaries, they urged Africans to be aware of dangers of the presence of colonialists on the African continent.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* is a typical example of contemporary African novels and it is the focus of this paper. The issue of revolutionary temper and how the novel reflects it are discussed. So, this contemporary African novel sensitises the consciousness of the colonised Africans to the exploitative and ugly nature of the Colonialism. It reflects the conflicts between labour and capital, the oppressed and oppressor and the attempts made by the oppressed to achieve political and economic emancipation. With the Marxist undertone, Ngugi makes the masses aware of their condition and make them to fight for liberty and freedom. Such attempts at improving the people's standard of living cannot but involve revolutionary actions. It is observable that the ability of the fictional historian to portray the travails of the people in the society is linked with Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's emotional ties with the people whose problems, hopes and aspirations this author shares.

Petals of Blood attacks the socio-political reality in Africa. Bribery, corruption and nepotism became the order of the day. It is this social reality that aroused the interest of Ngugi. According to Kolawole Ogungbesan (1972: 5-6), whose view goes along with the bone of contention of this paper:

A writer is a member of society and his sensibility is conditioned by the social and political happenings around him. These issues form a part of the substance of life within which his instinct as a writer must struggle.

Ngugi, therefore, appeals and shocks the consciousness of their people in a political slumber to awareness by x-raying the different realm of contemporary African experience as the forces of imperialism governed them. This present reality in Africa generally, encapsulates Ngugi's exploration of the nature and extent of imperialist control and exploitation of the neocolonial states. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o especially indicated at the launching of the novel *Petals of Blood* that:

Imperialism...can never develop a country or a people. This was what I was trying to show in *Petals of Blood*; that imperialism can never develop us, Kenyans. In doing so, I was only trying to be faithful to what Kenyan workers and peasants have realized as shown by their historical struggle since 1895 (Amuda; 1989: 145).

The thrust of this study is to establish the fact that Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* is highly revolutionary. That is, African writers of this tradition strongly hold the view that revolution is a potent weapon of social change without which the continent will remain under perpetual enslavement and subjugation.

Petals of Blood as a Mirror of the African Revolution

In Africa, the socio-political and economic situation during the colonial era was so repulsive that the people of Kenya especially, had to re-make their own history. They woke up from a contemplative stance to praxis by wrenching their own land and liberty from alien squatters. At this very moment of history, fighting was a way of life. Kenyans took their destiny in their hands and threw the it-is-the-will-of-God attitude into a fast-roaring wind. This is why Boro, who is a representative of the youth, became more militant in his action unlike his father, Ngotho, who folded his hands watched his land and liberty being taken away by the human devils in Ngugi's *Weep Not Child*.

Kenyans had had enough of dehumanization. There is always a time for everything under the sun, which is a general belief. The time had come to put a final end to the White exploitation of Kenyan's natural and human resources and the denial of their rightfully owned land. In order to achieve this aim, there is the need to revolutionize the society. In human history, nothing is static. Revolution simply means a struggle that is more or less successfully and completely accomplished in which the ruling power of the country passes from an economic class or political group to another class or group. Man's society is an embodiment of dynamism. Change, like death, is inevitable. Change is the only constant theme in nature, society and human thought.

Ngugi's novel is a demonstration of the truth and validity of Lenin's analysis as applied to the post-independence state, not only Kenya, but also Africa. Nevertheless, Ngugi is deeply conscious that imperialist finance capital is the real enemy in Africa today. As one of the characters in the novel reflects, it is because of imperialist finance capital that "a man who has never set foot on this land can sit in a New York or London office and determine what I shall eat, read, think, do, only because he sits on a heap of billions taken from the world's poor..." (Georg, 1985: 130).

The novel pinpoints the inanity and apologia for imperialism that characterizes the scholarship of African professors and so-called educators trained in imperialist universities and other institutions of "higher learning". Hence, when the young teacher, Karega, tries to further his education, he is confronted with incoherence, incomprehension and futility as he tries one area of learning after another. Karega looked in vain for anything about colonialism and imperialism, occasionally; there were abstract phrases about inequality of opportunities or the ethnic balancing act of modern governments.

Petals of Blood, being primarily concerned to expose vividly, powerfully and memorably the clients nature of the post-colonial state in Africa, is also concerned to depict the proletarianization of the African peasantry and the rest of the working masses of the continent. The setting of the novel not only in the country village of Ilmorogo but also in the suburbs of Nairobi and on the edge of the Trans-Africa Highway delineates the theme of proletarianization, which is part of the leitmotif of the novel. Ngugi, like Karl Marx, can see the revolutionary side of poverty in that poverty engenders resistance, revolt and insurgency as well the search for a way out of exploitation and misery.

The novel affirms according to Grant Kamenju that:
"indeed, the true lesson of history is that, the so-called victims, the downtrodden, the masses, had always struggled with spears and arrows, with their hands and songs of courage and hopes to end their exploitation. That they would continue struggling until a human kingdom came, a world in which goodness and beauty and strength and courage would be seen not in how cunning one can be, not in how much power to oppress one possessed, but only in one's contribution in creating a humane world in which the inherited inventive genius of man in culture and science from all ages and climes would not be the monopoly of a few, but for the use of all, so that flowers in all

their different colours would ripen and bear fruits and seeds. And the seeds would be put into the ground and they would once again sprout and flower in rain and sunshine” (Tamarkin, 1978: 312).

The novel’s title suggests destruction, corruption, evil, the unnatural and death. It points to the centrality of the symbolism in the elucidation of meaning. One dominant symbol cluster relates to flowers and other forms of vegetation. At times, these suggest regeneration, fecundity and luxuriance, but more often, they suggest destruction, corruption, evil and death.

It might seem that the title *Petals of Blood* is connected with the potent lily, one of the destructive and repulsive plants, which gives a natural and beautiful scene, an eerie, unnatural and evil aura. The imagery suggests the distortion of things from the normal and natural to the abnormal and evil and the introduction of chaos and destruction where there should be beauty and order. But in the novel itself, we discover that the flower with the petals of blood belongs to a plant that grows wild in the plains and is itself the victim of evil. The agents of corruption have destroyed its innocence. The flower thus becomes a symbol of the entire society, potentially healthy, beautiful and productive, but its potential is unrealized and destroyed by the agents of corruption and death.

The plant with petals of blood is actually the Theng’eta plant, which grows wild on the plains that are associated with luxuriance, vitality and vigour. It symbolizes truth and purity that is why the people of Ilmorog under the leadership of Nyakinyua, the staunch upholder of traditional values, decided to reengage in the production of Theng’eta. It symbolizes a decision to return to the purity of traditional values and the transformation of Theng’eta into a debased modern spirit by the capitalist suggests the erosion of traditional innocence by the corrupt and deprived agents of modernism.

The symbolism of sterility, which pervades Ilmorog, also extends to characters that on the spiritual level are also sterile. They live a life devoid of meaning, joy and happiness. These characters long for self-fulfillment. Abdulla, the unsung hero of Mau Mau lost a leg as a result of his involvement in the liberation struggle. Frustrated, he moves to drought-ridden Ilmorog to set up a small shop, forming the rhythm of his life pattern. Wanja, who drops out of school, runs to the city driven by the urge to acquire the new knowledge. She experiences the evils, which the city embodies and so decides to come back home like the prodigal son.

Karega, who was booted out of Siriana because of his involvement in series of strikes against colonial educational policies, roams the entire country until he finally settles in Ilmorog. He takes the trade unionism to galvanize the consciousness of the working class to the ills of the system represented by the directors of the Ilmorog Theng’eta Brewery.

There is also Munira, a failure who finds peace in Ilmorog by isolating himself from the sneers and jeers of his more successful brother and sisters, from his father and even from his wife. There are characters around which the disillusionment of independence revolves. The revolution against the system is that of all Kenyans. Their search and yearning for self-fulfillment is an expression of disgust against a system whose maxim is “eat or be eaten”. The characters and indeed all the people of Ilmorog are in a slumber; hence, they walk with their eyes wide open without actually identifying the cause of their poverty and general sterility.

Petals of Blood reflects the exploitation of Africans by the fellow Blacks. When Kenyans were fighting for independence, they all had one voice and one common enemy. But with the attainment of independence, the reality becomes that of a hen feeding on her laid eggs. In his independence speech, Jomo Kenyatta, the first Prime Minister of Kenya, remarked that:

Our march to freedom has been long and difficult. There have been times of despair, when only the burning conviction of the rightness of our cause has sustained us. Today, the tragedies and misunderstandings of the past are behind us. Today, we start on the great adventure of building the Kenya nation (Maughan-Brown; 1985: 184).

The Kenyan nation today is being built on the capitalist imperialist foundation, rather than on her original communalism. The majority of Kenyan peasants live in a state of poverty. The life of the urban poor is made worse by appalling housing conditions and poor urban services, the socio-economic position of the Kenyan masses is desperate J.M. Kariuki says in (160):

A small but powerful group, greedy self-seeking elite in form of politicians, civil servants and businessmen, which has steadily but very surely monopolized the fruits of independence to the exclusion of the majority of the people(160).

Kenya, since independence has exhibited ever more starkly the classical faces of underdevelopment – the stultifying poverty and conspicuous consumption by a privileged minority, which, as Ngugi Wa Thiong’o puts it, Surrounds itself with country houses, cars, washing machines, television sets and all the consumer durables that are associated with an acquisitive middle class(280).

The new foreign and local capitalists maim characters in Ilmorog physically spiritually through the new machination. The exploited masses become homeless as their lands are mortgaged. For the dispossessed characters and Ilmorog, the process is that of rebirth of soul. The re-birth of Ilmorog is a transformation of its landscape into a new Ilmorog devoid of all sanity. Munira remarks that: “Ilmorog was never quite the same after the journey” (Nwankwo, 1992: 48-49).

Petals of Blood draws a distinction between patriots and traitors. While the true heroes and patriots like Abdulla are cast aside in the neo-colonial period, those who had collaborated with the imperialists emerge as government officials and big time business barons. The march to the city marks the beginning of the people’s exposure to the inefficiency of government and their representatives. Government attention is, however, drawn to the plight of the people and so, they return to Ilmorog awaiting government aid or charity. These are all to be illusions because the land and its people are to pass through a new baptism of fire.

First, it was Ilmorog’s capitalism that fully entrenches itself in Ilmorog. Businessmen move into Ilmorog with roads, banks, factories and estate agencies. This is a process of cultural diffusion and consequently, the old Ilmorog, which has traditional value as its framework gives way. A giant bulldozer destroys the hut of Mwathi – the people’s oracle. This is symbolic of the complete destruction of a community that could hitherto boast of her values as diluted. As Ilmorog is transformed into an industrial and capitalist complex, the attendant problems of prostitution, social inequalities and inadequate infrastructure. Ilmorog experiences destruction twice, once by white imperialists and now by their successors, the black oppressors.

Characters also undergo the process of rebirth. There is Wanja whom the system forces to play the tough city game. She is forced out of school, goes into high-class prostitution. This is as a result of the schemes of the system. She is a practical individual, a realist, who recognizes that to survive in this new system, the individual must be prepared to use his weapons. Wanja is associated with fire throughout the novel. She has to undergo the ordeal of fire so as to be

exposed to the horrors of existence. It is a process of testing her character and even though she emerges tarnished, she becomes toughened and is now prepared to fight the system. The resort to prostitution in the new Ilmorog and her building a whorehouse are all protests against the system.

Nyakinyua, the old woman also has to experience the evils of the system. As the new masters of Kenya entrench themselves in Ilmorog, she finds herself out of the rhythm of things. She is dispossessed of her land and so, she tries to fight back with the zeal with which Mau Mau was fought, she calls on the people of Ilmorog to come out and fight it out. But it seems everyone has lost the voice of reason. The response she gets is a negative one. Those who still retain their land refuse her call for a protest. In dismay, she dies before Wanja redeems her land.

It is through the eyes of Karega that we see the damage done to Ilmorog and to individuals. There are now several Ilmorog. At best, Ilmorog can now be described as a city where apartheid is practised. Karega tells us of several Ilmorogs:

One was the residential area of the farm managers, county council officials, public service officers, the manager of Barclays, standard and African Economic Banks...The other – called New Jerusalem – was a shanty town of migrant and floating workers, the unemployed, the prostitutes, small traders in tin and scrap metal (Killam, 1986: 199-200).

For the second group of people who live in this New Jerusalem, life is hell and has no meaning. It is here that Wanja, Karega and Munira must “celebrate” their poverty. Kenya with its attendant conflicts reduces man to the level of bestiality where man’s “id” rules over his “ego”. *Petals of Blood* depicts the contemporary despicable socio-economic and political situation in Kenya. Politicians and the state forces of coercion do the acts of savagery and brutality carried out on individuals’, Ngugi Wa Thiong’o’s ultimate thematic insistence is to underline the inevitability of a revolution of the workers and peasants and the overthrow of the dispensation of the comprador bourgeoisie.

Ime Ikiddeh says: “it should be noted from the outset that Ngugi’s parabolic thesis is a realistic, fictional dramatization of the social situation set out in the Communist Manifesto of Marx and Engel’s, that is, the well known history of class struggles and workers’ solidarity through unions. According to Marx, it is the economic arrangement, which shapes the consciousness of men in society, just as its further development inevitably brings conflict in economic relations into the open, leading to “an epoch of social revolution,” of change in the economic foundation, and the transformation of the entire superstructure. Remarkably, the society of Ilmorog in *Petals of Blood* lends credence to Marx’s dialectic, for the economic relation is everywhere discernible, developing to a point where a revolution and transformation are imminent.

In its creative approaches and moral stances, *Petals of Blood* is reminiscent of Ngugi’s earlier work and it makes its subject the stark injustice of post-independence Kenya. It exposes and denounces a system which has kept the workers of Kenya in servitude promoted through devious forms of Christian hypocrisy and by the perpetration of colonial ties to serve foreign interests, a system manifested in capitalist greed for building money empires on the sweat and blood of the rest as typified in the novel by Kimeria, Chui and Mzigo.

Although, Ngugi’s scathing attack on capitalism and his call for its overthrow is undisguised in the novel, *Petals of Blood* rises above a bare manifesto in its content and organization. In it, the novelist’s well known narrative skill and the artist’s imaginative powers and sense of order are everywhere apparent.

According to Ime Ikiddeh,

“the central characters attain a complex fullness of life both as individual adventures; each seeking for harmony with self, and as a community whose fate hangs together in their struggle against external forces. The novel carefully traces the various stages in the development of the society, which becomes the scene of the characters’ interaction and joint struggle” (Ikiddeh, 1979: 288).

We have in all Ngugi’s novels characters that tell stories, which reflect the intentions of their creator. Ngugi is no doubt primarily concerned with “restoring the African character to his history,” to enable him to find an “identity in an essentially colonial situation” and discover a source of pride in his people’s past accomplishments. They are stories of a past when “African controlled its own destiny”, of “heroic resistance,” which Karega, *Petals of Blood*, goes to such trouble to impart to his students: they are found only in legends passed from generation to generation. The difference between authentic and literary myth is made plain by Ngugi as the mythic figures, legendary and heroic, from the past have the stories told alongside contemporary heroes whose songs are composed, telling of the resistance efforts of actual historical figures in the immediate, colonial past. The efforts of these individuals are made to exemplify – however, much of the motives may be misunderstood – the courage and determination of Kenyan nationalists. G. D. Killam says: “to understand the present, you must understand the past. To know who you are, you must know where you come from”(288).

Petals of Blood has the characteristic of the epic. The action stretches over a sufficient span of years, evoking Kenya of the 1940s, the liberation struggle of the 1950s. Indeed, we are taken further back to where Ngugi, in his use of myth and legend, conveys impressions of pre-colonial Ilmorog where barter was in terms of equivalent exchange of the wealth of the land and where the folk heroes through their valour might justly be described as epic heroes.

But the peasantry was at one with its hero-leaders in the original Ilmorog, the modern peasantry has no heroes. Their leaders are their exploiters; the collaborators are sometimes the dupes of the capitalist exploiters. The peasants are unconscious or unaware of alternatives to their own way of life, but they recognize the need to achieve an alternative to their present circumstances. The peasantry, possessing idealism and capable of courageous action – symbolized by the drought-ridden march to Nairobi- are brought to disillusion and despair through betrayal.

Ngugi is an important writer and certainly the best known from East Africa. Ngugi’s compassion for the people of his fictional world is everywhere apparent and as he has said, he sees in the plight of his Kenyans the plight of a larger number throughout the world:

I think what we’re striving for is a form of organization that will release this tremendous energy (of the people of East Africa). I think there is the danger of a black bourgeoisie blocking this energy of the bourgeoisie, but of the middle class everywhere, trying to block the energy of people. But even more important in Africa, there is the problem of sheer economic development- the colonial government left Africa, especially Kenya or Uganda in a state of sheer primitive underdevelopment, so the problem is clearer in these countries because of the smallness of the bourgeoisie and because of the enormous underdevelopment of the countries. And also on the whole the economy of the country is not always in the control of the people inside so there are a lot of troubles in East Africa (Eagleton, 1976: 46-47).

According to Karega, the past needs not be preserved like a museum:

Rather, we can draw from it in today’s battlefield the future and the present. But to worship it-no. May be I used to do it: but I don’t want to continue worshipping in the temple of a past without

tarmac roads, without electric cookers, a world dominated by slavery to nature (Ngugi, 1977: 323)

Karega, revolutionist in the novel, is detained for a murder he did not commit, but there is no holding back the revolutionary spirit he has let loose. Behind his cause already are sympathies from unexpected quarters, like the case of the liberal – minded who is later murdered for his political views. The actual vanguard pools together all sections of workers and the youth. Abdulla's adopted son Joseph, still a schoolboy, assures his father he wants to contribute to the liberation of Kenya. The young girl Akinyi who visits Karega in prison brings news of the new mass movement of workers at Ilmorog and voices hope in her simple words, "You'll come back". The novel ends at the point where revolutionary action has taken over. It is appropriate to end on the note of Karega's last assurance to Wanja poured out in breathless fury, of the inevitable failure of the exploiter and the ultimate victory of the workers, which actually clinches the revolutionary message of the novel:

They are bound to fail. Can't you see: we, the workers, the poor peasants, ordinary people, the masses are now too awake to be deceived by tribal loyalties, regional assemblies, glorious pasts, utamaduniwa zamani, all that- when we are starving and we are jobless, or else living on miserable pay... Tell them this: there are a million Karegas for every ten Kimerias. They can kill the lawyer or ten such lawyers. But the poor, the dispossessed, the working millions and the poor peasants are their own lawyers. With guns and swords and organization, they can and will change the conditions of their oppression (326-27).

Wanja represents Kenya's deprived young womanhood who can only earn a living through odd jobs under conditions that force them into prostitution. She arrives at Ilmorog in her quest for another kind of life in which she can earn a more decent living and at the same time be useful to others. This "quest spirit" dictates her total involvement in the life of the village. But the combined blow of her grandmother's death and advent of the new economic and social order at Ilmorog sends Wanja back to whoredom. She demonstrates her newly acquired values to Munira whilst retaining a special place in her heart for Karega who had touched off the best she could offer in love. But she has to break with Karega in favour of Abdulla in response to her changed circumstances. The secret of Wanja's continuing success, as Karega rationalizes, lies in the fact "that she could appeal to so many different people at different times as if each could find reflected in her the condition of his being (322-23).

It is immensely symbolic that Wanja's whorehouse is burnt down, that the three capitalists' lords are killed in the fire. And that Wanja is expecting a child for Abdulla. This last fire is the third in Wanja's experience, and each one takes place at a crucial stage where her life has to be purified and re-dedicated. She briefly narrates the story of the fires in her life to the police officer who is questioning her on the latest incident, ending significantly in the words: 'so you see I have been running away from one fire into greater flames' (321).

Chimalum Nwankwo says, in the context of *Petals of Blood*, which is Ngugi's endorsement of violence as the only productive way of inducing changes that, "the conflict in the society between the rich and the poor can only end in this way" (321). As in most of his works, he also reminds us that this has happened once in the Emergency and is bound to happen again unless there is change.

In attempting to settle this conflict, a difference must be established between the basic ideology, which a writer holds and the writer's presentation of that ideology in artistic form. On this, Marx and Engel's propounded "objective partisanship" theory which in practice works out

as a compromise between political commitment, which should be embraced, and its open expression in fiction, which is to be avoided. Summarizing these views of the founding fathers, Terry Eagleton, a leading Marxist critic, writes:

The political tendency must emerge unobtrusively from the dramatized situations; only in this indirect way could revolutionary fiction work effectively on the bourgeois consciousness of readers...Taken together, Engels' two letters (1885, 1888) suggest that overt political commitment in fiction is unnecessary (not of course unacceptable) because truly realist writing itself dramatizes the significant forces of social life, breaking beyond both the photographically observable and the imposed rhetoric of a "political solution" (Eagleton, 1976: 47).

Ngugi, therefore, identified himself with the masses, with the peasant class. Some commentators claim that this imposes a severe limitation upon his achievement in the novels because he is forced to present characters that are too simple and inarticulate to provide an appreciation of the complexities of understanding implicit in the national political scene. The people in the novel talk less about politics than Ngugi does in his non-fictional writing. But they are his primary concern and the alleviation of their plight his primary quest. In this respect, he differs from a writer like Soyinka of whose characters Ngugi made the following observation:

Soyinka's good man is the uncorrupted individual: his liberal humanism leads him to admire an individual's lone act of courage, and thus often he ignores the creative struggle of the masses. The ordinary people, the workers and peasants, in his plays remain passive watchers on the shore or pitiful comedians on the road (Ngugi, 1972: 65).

In judging Ngugi on the question of commitment to an ideology and scoring him on the overall success of *Petals of Blood*, it is appropriate to note and end with another revealing statement from Terry Eagleton. It is on that basis also that other contemporary African writers stand cleared or condemned:

There are periods and societies where conscious, "progressive" political commitment need not to be a necessary condition for producing major art, there are other periods-fascism for example – when to survive and produce as an artist at all involves the kind of questioning which is likely to result in explicit commitment. In such societies, conscious political partisanship, and the capacity to produce significant art at all, goes spontaneously together. Such periods however are not limited to fascism (57-8).

Conclusion

In this paper, *Petals of Blood* actually reveals Marxist vision, which states that, the proletariat, "the comradeship of the down-trodden" will achieve revolutionary change in the society especially as a mirror of the African revolutionary actions in the wake of mass political awareness in the novel. This means that the novel is being portrayed as a mirror of the African revolution that is the demonstration of truth and reflection of African revolution in the society as a whole.

This paper analysed that African writers played an important role in the long struggle for political independence. They successfully depicted the way the colonisers exploited African masses and natural resources, at the same time. They urged Africans to be aware of the real intention of the white colonisers that is, the exploitation of African resources to enrich the Western capitalist countries. African writers through their works tried to conscientize Africans to

the issues of white exploitation. At different levels, they urged Africans to be aware of dangers of the presence of colonialists on the African continent.

Works Cited:

- Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Petals of Blood*, London: Heinemann, 1977.
-----, *Homecoming*, London: Heinemann, 1972.
-----, *Weep not Child*, London: Heinemann, 1972.
- Eagleton, Terry, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, London: Methuen, 1976.
- Georg Gulgelberger, M., *Marxism and African Literature*, Great Britain: James Currey Ltd., 1985.
- Kenyatta, Jomo, *Suffering Without Bitterness*, Nairobi: EAPH, 1968.
- Kernig, C.D., *Marxism, Communism and Western Society: A Comparative Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 7, West Germany: Herder and Herder, 1973.
- Killam, G.D., "Themes and Treatments in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o Novels" in Samuel Omo Asein & Albert Olu Ashaolu (ed.), *Studies in African Novel*, Vol. 1, Nigeria: Ibadan University Press, 1986.
- Maughan-Brown, David, *Land, Freedom and Fiction*, London: Zed Books, 1985.
- Nwankwo, Chimalum, *The Works of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o: Towards the Kingdom of Woman and Man*, Nigeria: Longman, 1992.
- Odetola, Olutola, Olafisayo, "The Revolutionary Temper in the Contemporary African Novel: The Examples of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* and Ousmane Sembene's *God's Bits of Wood*" (an essay presented to the Department of English Studies, Faculty of Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, June 2002)
- Ogungbesan, Kolawole, "The Modern Writer and Commitment" (a paper presented at a conference on Literature and Modern West African Culture, University of Nigeria, Nsukka 11-15 September)
- Palmer, Eustace, *The Growth of the African Novel*, London: Heineman, 1979.
- Sander Reinhard & Ian Munro, *Tolstoy in Africa*, Ba Shiru, Vol. 5, 1973.
- Tamarkin, M., *The Roots of Political Stability in Kenya*, Nairobi: Africa Affairs, 1978.