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THE FIGURE OF POSTCOLONIAL WOMEN IN NGUGI WA THIONGO'S *PETALS OF BLOOD AND A GRAIN OF WHEAT*¹

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the figure of postcolonial women in Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *Petals of Blood* and *A grain of Wheat*. These novels deal with the condition of Kenya after the colonial period. In this study, the women figures of the novels have been focused on and analyzed in the light of race, class, gender, colonialism, and postcolonial feminism. After a profound reading of the both books, it has been understood that Ngugi portrays various types of women characters in his two books. We see women characters as victims of colonialism and patriarchy, mothers, oppressed figures, and also freedom fighters. Apart from this, *A Grain Wheat* also includes white women characters and deals with the attitudes of them against black women. That is, this study analyzes various postcolonial women characters from various aspects.

Key Words: *Colonialism, Postcolonialism, Feminism, Postcolonial Feminism, Women, Patriarchy*

Ngugi Wa Thiongo'nun *Kan Çiçekleri* ve *Bir Buğday Tanesi* Eserlerindeki Sömürgecilik Sonrası Kadın Figürü

Özet

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Ngugi Wa Thiongo'nun *Petals of Blood* (*Kan Çiçekleri*) ve *A Grain of Wheat* (*Bir Buğday Tanesi*) adlı eserlerindeki sömürgecilik sonrası kadın figürlerini incelemektir. Bu iki roman sömürgecilik sonrası Kenya'nın durumunu yansıtmaktadır. Bu çalışmada, bahsedilen romanlardaki kadın figürlerine odaklanılmış ve bu karakterler ırk, sınıf, cinsiyet, sömürgecilik, sömürgecilik sonrası feminizm bağlamında incelenmiştir. Kitapların derinlemesine okuması yapıldıktan sonra, Ngugi'nin, eserlerinde çeşitli kadın figürlerine yer verildiği görülmüştür. Her iki eserde

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kadınları sömürgeciliğin kurbanı, anne, ezilmiş ve özgürlük savaşçısı gibi çeşitli şekillerde görmekteyiz. Bunların dışında, *A Grain of Wheat (Bir Buğday Tanesi)* adlı eserde beyaz kadın figüründen ve onların siyah kadınlara karşı tutumundan da bahsedilmiştir. Kısacası, bu çalışma çeşitli kadın figürlerini çeşitli açılardan incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Sömürgecilik, Sömürgecilik Sonrası, Feminizm, Sömürgecilik Sonrası Feminizm, Kadın, Ataerkillik*

INTRODUCTION

The figure of woman and her position in the society have changed drastically throughout the human history. Towards the end of 21st century feminist activists have made great contributions to arouse the interest of people on the women's right that they have not obtained throughout the history. Feminist theory generally touched on the subordinate position of the women in the society, and also tried to obtain the same rights that men have. In this process of searching for the equality, it also examined the intermingled relation between women and society. However, in feminist theory, middle-class white women took place on the basis of the theory, which is the most important lack of the theory. As a result; racial, social, economic, and cultural differences of the women were underestimated. And especially, third world women stayed out of the theory.

The problem of the third world women has not been solved even after the proposals of the postcolonial theory. In spite of the fact that theory concerns with the problem of third world people, women again remained outside. The reason of this problem is that the theory has a male dominant attitude towards the problem of the colonized people.

Postcolonial theory has begun to go side by side with the feminist theory after 1980s. The main concern of both these theories is to show the problems of colonized women who are under the exposure of both colonialism and patriarchy. That is, double-colonization of the third world women torn between patriarchy and colonialism has started to be questioned. Postcolonial feminist critics have begun to deal with the suffering of colored women and examined the race, class and gender in relation to the problem.

Postcolonial writers, especially postcolonial feminist writers, have placed emphasis on the problem of non-white women, and draw a picture of the colored women, which is unlike the depicted ones in the white centered works. That is, the figure of postcolonial women has been reflected through the race,

Ngugi Wa Thiongo'nun *Kan Çiçekleri ve Bir Buğday Tanesi*
Eserlerindeki Sömürgecilik Sonrası Kadın Figürü

gender and class because their blackness and female identity has been determined by the man and white colonizers. Ngugi wa Thiong'o is one of these writers who mentioned the problem of colored women and their position in the society. In his works, *Petals of Blood* and *A Grain of Wheat*, he depicts the figure of colored women living in an African society. The main purpose of this study is to reflect the figure of postcolonial women in the works of Ngugi wa Thiong'o: *Petals of Blood* and *A Grain of Wheat*.

WOMEN IN AFRICAN SOCIETIES AND KENYA

Since this study aims to portray the figure of postcolonial women in *Petals of Blood* and *A Grain of Wheat*, in which novels we witness the condition of women in colonized Africa, especially Kenya, firstly the figure of women in African societies and Kenya will be mentioned.

Generally the position and condition of a woman in an African society are determined according to the familial system that the society constructed, in which they live in. In its common sense, African families are composed of extended families, in which the dominance of man is clearly seen. This type of family is ruled by a man with many wives and unmarried males such as brothers, uncles. That is, polygamy lies on the basis of these extended families.

In African societies, both patrilineal and matrilineal family types can be seen. Patrilineal family was a common family type in African societies. In this family system, a person's rights and responsibilities are dependent on who his/her father, and men were always seen as permanent figures of households (Koopman 10). Children are thought to belong to their father (Potash 70). In this type of family, women have a more passive role in the rule of the family and have fewer rights when compared with the matrilineal family. When a woman marries to someone, she has to go her husband's region and live there for the rest of her life. To be a real member of the family, she has to show her fidelity and endeavor to her husband's relatives. Bearing many children and working on land are the key factors to be accepted by the other members of the family.

On the contrary, in matrilineal societies, extended families depend on the mother, sister and daughter. In this type of families, rights and properties are given in a matrilineal line, that is, there is a female based process. When a woman marries in such a society, she can stay in her own village, and she sometimes visits her husband's village. However, that does not mean women

have the right to control the family. As it is in patrilineal societies, family is ruled and controlled by the men. The only difference is that it is not fathers who rule the family but uncles and brothers.

In pre-colonial African societies, economy mainly depended on agriculture, so that, the number of people working on the land was so important for the production. That is, the more people worked, the more production they would get. For this reason, women had an important place in the society because of their bearings. Jane Bryce Okunlola mentions the position of women in pre-colonial African societies:

African woman has long held a position of power in society; she has long been an integral part of the struggle for survival; she has ruled millions of people successfully. She is respected for her qualities and treated as a human-being. She is the mother, she from whom all life emanates; she is indeed the most important element of survival and continuity (Okunlola 202).

In many African societies, women are valuable because they work on the land also they give birth, which means more people to work on farms. Cindy Courville points out the productive power of women in African societies:

Women's productive and reproductive capacity made their social and economic resource, which provided men with political leverage. African women were primarily responsible for their economic, social, and political reproduction of the household; the bearing of and caring for children, the production, storage and preparation of food. As well, women had exchange value within the context of marriage, forming alliances between households, clans and nations (qtd. in Schipper 2).

In African societies, women are expected to bear children, and while the number of children they are bearing is increasing, they become more secure in the society, because of their productivity. However, bearing child is not the only duty of women; they also have some other duties. Rose Waruhiu makes clear this situation with these lines: "early images of the African woman south of the Sahara depict her with a heavy load on her back, a back straddles on top and hands left free to wieve a kiondo or shell maize as she walks. Her back is bent over; she is fulfilling three roles at once: work-provider, manager, mother" (Waruhiu 136).

After mentioning women in African societies, now I will focus on the position of women in Kenya. It can be said that approximately fifty percent of

Ngugi Wa Thiongo'nun *Kan Çiçekleri ve Bir Buğday Tanesi*
Eserlerindeki Sömürgecilik Sonrası Kadın Figürü

Kenya's population is constituted by women, most of whom are illiterate and poor, and several of them are still affected by the customs and traditions.

Prior to the colonization of Kenya by the English, the society was controlled and ruled by the elderly men of the society. The duty of the women and girls is to take care of children, harvest, farm and serve to their husbands. Girls were generally regarded as lady of the house and raiser. Since some women were let to sell their farm products, they had a bit economic security, but on the other hand, in some societies, this decision was given by the elders of the society or by the men.

During the colonial period, women were affected in a great way, because they lost their control on their lands and had no right to farm or earn money. As a result, they became dependent on the men from the economic aspect. This situation made the patriarchy more intensive. As the colonization was going on, the role of the women in the society, especially on the land, declined day by day. As a matter of fact, women were locked into the house. And, the dominance of the men in the society started to rise.

After the end of colonization, that is the period after independence of Kenya, some girls had to chance to go to school, but these were a minority of the community. These girls were the daughters of families who had good relationships with colonizers during the colonial period. Most of the girls were not as lucky as these girls, because they were not sent to school. More dramatically, these young girls were forced to marry in early ages. Moreover, the age of marriage fell to twelve. After that, many social groups have started to fight against this plight of young girls. At the beginning of the 21st century, female consciousness has started to rise. From now on, women struggle for the injustice that Kenyan women faced with. To our surprise, women have shown great improvement, even today, we see the women in the Kenyan parliament. And also, they have the highest number of female in the parliament after the independence.

THE WOMEN TORN BETWEEN PATRIARCHY AND COLONIALISM

Women are generally ignored in postcolonial writings, because early postcolonial writers were mainly male. So, postcolonial texts were male based works. Therefore, we never witnessed women figures and their sufferings so

much in early postcolonial writings. Many critics argue that western patriarchy is the main cause of this situation, which is penetrated into the colonized regions and societies with the colonization. Tony Affigne mentions this problem: it is a kind of system which is “deeply embedded pattern of social hierarchy—a Western system of patriarchal power, in the family, community, and polity, perpetuated through socialization, law, and physical force” (Affigne 10).

The women in colonized societies have experienced oppression from both the colonizers and patriarchy. This “double colonization” is a basic concept which should be analyzed in postcolonial theory. The term “double colonization” first used by Kirsten Holst-Peterson and Anna Rutherford in their works *A Double Colonization: Colonial and Post-Colonial Writings*. This theory points out that the native women in colonized societies are oppressed doubly by the colonization and patriarchy, because of their womanhood. Combahee River Collective points out that,

We believe that sexual politics under patriarchy is as pervasive in Black women's lives as are the politics of class and race. We also often find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously. We know that there is such a thing as racial-sexual oppression which is neither solely racial nor solely sexual, e.g., the history of rape of Black women by white men as a weapon of political repression.

Although we are feminists and lesbians, we feel solidarity with progressive Black men and do not advocate the fractionalization that white women who are separatists demand. Our situation as Black people necessitates that we have solidarity around the fact of race, which white women of course do not need to have with white men, unless it is their negative solidarity as racial oppressors. We struggle together with Black men against racism, while we also struggle with Black men about sexism (Collective 2013).

The women in colonized societies are exploited by both colonizers and indigenous people. That is colonized women are double exploited by the patriarchy and colonial powers; Young mentions this situation with these lines:

For women, the problem centered on the fact that the conditions against which they were campaigning were the product of two kinds of oppression which put the antagonists of the nationalist struggle in the same camp: patriarchal systems of exploitation were common to both colonial regimes and

Ngugi Wa Thiongo'nun *Kan Çiçekleri ve Bir Buğday Tanesi*
Eserlerindeki Sömürgecilik Sonrası Kadın Figürü

indigenous societies. Women therefore had to fight the double colonization of patriarchal domination in its local as well as its imperial forms (Young 379).

Colonialism is a male based plan, to which patriarchy contributed so much. That is, they are intermingled and cannot be separated easily. Val Kalei Kanuha explains this:

We need to counter claims that colonization has not led to violence against women, by pointing out that there is in fact a tight connection between colonization and patriarchy. Some would even say that you could not have colonization without patriarchy. [...] They were mostly men (that is not to say women cannot be colonizers). [...] Patriarchy and colonization go hand and hand. It is this nexus that keeps the structures of gender violence so well entrenched (Kanuha 4).

After the colonization, family structures of the colonized societies also changed. Instead of extended families, nuclear family became dominant. And as a result, the power of the women in the family diminished slowly. When a woman did not become pregnant, she lost all her value in the family. We see this in Buchi Emecheta's *Joys of Motherhood*. After learning his wife is not pregnant, Amatokwu says:

What do you want me to do?" Amatokwu asked. "I am a busy man. I have no time to waste my precious male seed on a woman who is infertile. I have to raise children for my life. If you really want to know, you don't appeal to me anymore. You are so dry and jumpy. When a man comes to a woman he wants to be cooled, not scratched by a nervy female who is all bones (Emecheta 32).

As it is clearly seen, if a woman cannot bear a child, she has no value for the family. The main reason of this is the colonization and its effect which made man more dominant in the colonized communities. Before the colonization, women were more productive, they could work on the land and farms even if they could not bear children. In any way, colonization made them disabled and helpless. On the other side, patriarchy gained power and men became more dominant. That is, the oppression that women suffering was doubled. Women had to struggle with both colonialism and patriarchy. They became more dependent on the male, and could not struggle for their rights. Women were started to be seen as a sexual object by the colonizers and native men of the society. And also, some women were forced to earn money by means of their

body. We see this situation in *Petals of Blood*. The main character of the novel, Wanja, becomes a prostitute as a result of the patriarchal and colonial problems. Traditions and also social structure play an important role in her sufferings. Wanja explains her sufferings: "In the evening you are supposed to give them yourself and sighs in bed" (Thiong'o 76). "Them" refers to the colonizers in this line; she points out the problems of all oppressed women in a colonized community.

In *A Grain of Wheat*, we see the effect of patriarchy in the marriage of Mumbi. Although she has some problems in her marriage, she cannot tell her family, and also though she wants to go her parents' home, she cannot do this because of the patriarchal ideology, because in such a society, her parents take sides with her husband. Her mother's statements upon Mumbi's decision to go home demonstrate the power of patriarchal ideology. Wanjiku, Mumbi's mother, says Mumbi "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." (Thiong'o 176)

In a patriarchal society, women are seen as properties. Ngugi points out this situation in "*A Grain of Wheat*". For instance, Karanja's father sees his mother as property and even we can say that he buys her. And, he has four wives, when he is bored of them and find more beautiful girl, he sends them away. That is, it can be said that women are the victims of Karanja's father. Following lines support these statements: "She was the third of the four wives that Karanja's father had acquired by paying so much bride price in goats and cattle. He acquired them, yes and then left them to their own resources" (Thiong'o 220).

Gikonyo's mother, Wangari, also suffered from the patriarchy. Her husband beat her several times and forced her to leave home. Since he is not pleased with her wife's sexual conditions, he falls out of love with her wife. Following extract expresses the thought of him about her wife:

He got new brides and complained that the thighs of the first wife did not yield warmth any more. He beat her, hoping that this would drive her away. Wangari struck on. Eventually, Waruhiu ordered her to leave his home and cursed mother and son to life of ever wandering on God's earth (Thiong'o 71-72).

Ngugi Wa Thiongo'nun *Kan Çiçekleri ve Bir Buğday Tanesi*
Eserlerindeki Sömürgecilik Sonrası Kadın Figürü

Ngugi also calls attention the lack of romanticism and shyness of women in postcolonial period. Because of the traditions and rough conditions of the period, women do not have enough courage to tell their feelings. In such societies, in which gender discrimination is highly seen, women cannot declare their love. If they behave in this way, they can be seen as abnormal. For instance, the conversation between Njeri and Wambuku shows the love perception in a postcolonial society. It also draws attention to the attitudes of men towards love. "Don't you love him? Njeri asked. I do-I did-I kept myself from other men for his sake. At night I only thought of him. I wanted him. I could have saved him. He was a man, Njeri, strong, sure, but also weak, weak like a little child" to tell his love (Thiong'o 100).

To sum up, the oppression felt by the postcolonial women is not only caused by the colonialism, patriarchy also affects their lives deeply. In the works of Ngugi, the hard conditions, in which they live, have been emphasized, too. That is, the double-colonization of the women is an undeniable fact of the postcolonial world, and Ngugi is good at depicting their problems in a clear way.

THE FIGURE OF POSTCOLONIAL WOMEN IN *PETALS OF BLOOD*

Petals of Blood is the fourth novel of Ngugi, and in this novel, he concentrates on the status of women in postcolonial Kenya. To reflect the condition of women, he chooses the character of Wanja, who is a prostitute. He makes it clear that she is the product of all combined forces.

Prostitution as a system became dominant during the colonial period. Native women were oppressed and humiliated by the white colonizers, such as polices, soldiers and officers. Prostitution started to be seen in bars throughout Kenya. It became a different kind of tourism. Wanja tells one of her experiences:

He took me to a house in Nairobi west. He made me some coffee and gave me some tablets and showed me a place to sleep. I must have slept through the night and through the following day. He let me stay for another night and I told him my story and he asked me a few question: would I know the house? Would I recognize him? Then he looked at one place and said: It is no use. This is what happens when you turn tourism in to a national religion and build it

shrines of worship all over the country. I did not ask him what he meant, but I know he sounded angry. The following day he took me to Machacos bus stop and I felt like crying now with gratitude because he had not so much as tried anything on me, and had treated me without any contempt (Thiong'o 134).

Wanja is a barmaid, who works under bad conditions and experiences the harsh sides of this disgusting system. One day, she exposed to the bad behaviors of a German man, who wants to have sexual relation with her. Wanja tells:

And the man was now fumbling with my clothes and the animal was growling and wagging its tail and the man was trembling. The watchful feeling became stronger and stronger, struggling with the deathless, and the animal was about to lick my gingers when somewhere inside me I heard my own voice exclaim: "Oh, but you know I left my handbag in your car". The moment I heard my voice I knew that the deathless was defeated and I was returning to life. He remarks: "Don't worry; I will get it for you". I said: "No, a woman's bag contains secrets, so could he take me to the car?" It was my voice all right but commanded by I didn't know who inside me..... I stood up. He led the way to the door. The animal followed behind. And now I was silently praying: give me more strength, give me more strength. He went out first and I quickly shut the door so that the animal was shut in Even now I can't tell where I got sings from. I flew and flew through the trees and the grass undergrowth and I only looked back once when I reached the main tarmac road... (Thiong'o 133-134).

From the expression of Wanja, the exploitation of women by the white settlers is clearly understood, and this has been done under the name of tourism. This can be called as the victimization of the colonized women. To reflect this humiliation, Ngugi chooses the profession of barmaid consciously. By doing this, he shows the lives of barmaids suffering from the colonizers and their own people. Related to this, Wanja says:

We barmaids never settle in one place. Sometimes you are dismissed because you refused to sleep your boss. Or your face may become too well known in one place. You want a new territory. Do you know, it is so funny when you go to a new place the men treat you as if you were a virgin. They will outdo one another to buy you beers. Each wants to be the first. So you will find us, barmaids, wherever there is a bar in Kenya. Even in Ilmorog (Thiong'o 100).

This shows the anguish of the barmaids who are exploited by both customers and owners of the bars. They have no value for anybody, and they are

Ngugi Wa Thiongo'nun *Kan Çiçekleri ve Bir Buğday Tanesi*
Eserlerindeki Sömürgecilik Sonrası Kadın Figürü

seen as a tool for the owners. Moreover, the police, who have to protect people, exploit women. Wanja mentions an exploitation of her by a police officer: "He was a police inspector. He arrested us because we were selling beer late at a bar in Kikuyu town, and when he searched boys he found they had bhang. I was frightened. He put the boys in the jail. He took me to his house. Well, I saved myself that way" (Thiong'o 130). Through these lines, Ngugi also criticizes the wrong deeds of the state.

Although Ngugi reflects Wanja as a strong and successful woman in some cases, she thinks her femininity as a handicap, because, in her society, which is dominated by males, women are seen as objects and subaltern creatures. Wanja thinks that if you are a woman your fate is to marry someone or be a whore. She asserts that "If you have a cunt, if you are born with this hole, instead of being a source of pride, you are doomed to either marrying someone or else being a whore" (Thiong'o 293). Ngugi points out the factors which force Wanja to the prostitution. Through the image of Wanja, Ngugi stresses the condition of all exploited women in Africa, especially in Kenya. Though prostitution is seen as a humiliating job, it is the final destination of many women in postcolonial regions. Even Wanja thinks that there is no difference between a worker and prostitute. She says "What is the difference whether you are sweating it out on plantation, in a factory or lying on your back, anyway?" (Thiong'o 293). With the statements of Wanja, Ngugi calls attention the destructive effect of capitalism, that is, for him, there is no difference between the exploitation of women as a prostitute or men as worker; they are victims of the capitalism. The only difference is that women are exploited because of their sex.

Through the character of Wanja, Ngugi draws the picture of postcolonial Kenya and Africa. The story of Wanja is a kind of apologue, which tells the story of Kenyan people, especially the Kenyan women. Govind Narain Sharma says that Wanja "is the spirit and earth of Kenya, humiliated, exploited and ill-used" (qtd. in Killam 302). Eustace Palmer also points out that,

The drought is also political, spiritual, economic and emotional, as with Wanja who, yearning after a release from barrenness, becomes restless and moody in proportion to the aridity of the environment. The drought generally refers to the people's deprivation of all those things that should make life meaningful (qtd. in Killam 273).

We see the impact of oppression that Wanja suffered while she was working as a barmaid. When Munira meets Wanja he thinks that “How could a city woman so dirty her hands? How could she strap a tin of water to a head beautifully crowned with a mass of shiny black hair” (Thiong’o 31). This shows the condition of all oppressed women in the cities. Working as a barmaid affects all women not only psychologically but also physically.

Wanja also clearly shows the injustice and inequality between men and women. She is aware of what will happen to her in a colonized and patriarchal society. The gendered discrimination is clearly understood from the lines of Wanja. She says:

...but boys were always more confident about the future than girls. They seemed to know what they wanted to become later in life: whereas with us girls the future seemed vague... It was as if we knew that no matter what efforts we put into our studies, our road led to the kitchen and to the bedroom” (Thiong’o 37).

In a patriarchal society, women are not regarded as equal to the men. Njuguna says that “But a man is more important than a woman” (Thiong’o 162). Ndemi also shares the same thoughts with Njuguna: “For a woman alone can never do all the work on the farm. How could she grow sugar cane, yams, sweet potatoes which used to be man’ domain? How break new ground? And how could she smith, make chains, pull wires, make beehives, wicker work for barns?” (Thiong’o 213). They think that women are nothing without men, and women cannot live without the aids of men.

Patriarchy also makes a great impact on the lives of postcolonial women. Even in their homes, women are oppressed by their fathers or the others. When Wanja was a young girl, she was beaten by her father since she came home late and spoke to her mother in a different way that her parents did not expect.

My father said: she is now a woman; she even talks to her mother as equals. They locked me in my room and they both beat me, my father with his belt and my mother with a cowhide strap we used for trying and carrying things. This will teach you to come home holding hands with boys! This will teach you be talking like equals to your mother. It was no unfair and I was determined not to cry. This seemed to add to their anger. They were now beating to make me cry (Thiong’o 38).

In this condition, Wanja also stresses the class discrimination and the importance of economy in Kenya. She says that “I felt then that they were

Ngugi Wa Thiongo'nun *Kan Çiçekleri ve Bir Buğday Tanesi*
Eserlerindeki Sömürgecilik Sonrası Kadın Figürü

beating me not just because I was with a boy, but because he came from a family even poorer than ours” (Thiong’o 38). With these statements Ngugi criticizes the oppression that poor experienced, because if you are a poor man you are always underestimated and oppressed by the rich. And also he questions this with Wanja’s thoughts: “My parents had often beaten me, but, it was the first time I was so rebellious in my thoughts. How could I get my own back? Was it a sin to be poor? We ourselves were not rich: were we sinners?” (Thiong’o 38).

After all her suffering in her home, Wanja becomes miserable again because of her pregnancy. She became pregnant after her affair with a sugar-daddy. This is the turning point in Wanja’s life, which causes her to be a prostitute. Furthermore, she faces up with the loose behaviors of her sugar-daddy, which makes her disappointed. She says “... but the results of my vengeance also followed me. I started vomiting and feeling a little tired. So I was pregnant? I ran back to my lover. I will marry you all right, he assured me, if you don’t mind being a second wife, and my first is so harsh she will make you her slave” (Thiong’o 40). We also become aware of the polygyny problem in colonized communities. Wanja’s lover offers her to be his second wife, which shocks Wanja deeply. That is, being a woman in a patriarchal and colonized society is very hard. If you are a woman you are generally regarded as subaltern and inferior. The suffering of Wanja’s cousin shows this inferiority clearly:

She had married a man who kept on beating her. There was nothing that she could do right. He would always find an excuse to beat her. He accused her of going about with men. If she had money through working on the land he would take it away from her and he would drink it all and come to beat her. So one day she just took her clothes and ran away to the city (Thiong’o 64).

Wanja is also a sufferer woman in colonized society. Her mortification goes on more deeply after her downfall with the pregnancy of her. She started to use her body and sexual power to live off. She tells her condition and how she attracts men:

Well, that is how we used to lure men. It was our only minute of glory. Two girls could be dancing together on the floor. Men would beg with their eyes and beg with their hands and in the end with their drinks and money. I am really wicked. I hate a man thinking he can buy me with money. I once made a man spend over two hundred shillings buying me imported cider. Cider can

never make you drunk you see. I simply walked out on him. I went with another who had not spent a cent on me. It felt good (Thiong'o 77).

Wanja also sees prostitution as a business; she behaves men in a serious way as if she was working. She says to Mwalimu "No, Mwalimu. No free things in Kenya. A hundred shillings on the table if you want high-class treatment" (Thiong'o 279). She also treats Munira in this way. "This is New Kenya. You want it, you pay for it, for the bed and the light and my time and the drink that I shall later give you and the breakfast tomorrow. And all for a hundred shillings. For you. Because of old times. For others it will be more expensive" (Thiong'o 279). From the speech of Wanja, we also understand the merciless sides of Kenya, and also all colonized communities for the women. After colonialism and capitalism, everything changes in Kenya. Wanja summarizes this harsh face of the Kenya with these lines: "This world... this Kenya... this Africa knows only one law. You eat somebody or you are eaten" (Thiong'o 291). And as an example of new Kenya, she establishes her own system in Ilmorog. Prostitution becomes a source of money. Here is what Wanja explains about prostitution:

I have hired young girls. It was not hard. I promised them security, and for that they let me trade their bodies. What is the difference whether you are sweating it out on a plantation, in a factory or lying on your back, anyway? I have various types for various types of men. Some prefer short ones, tall ones, motherly ones, religious ones, sympathetic ones, rude ones, tough ones, a different nationality. I have them all here. And me? Me too! I have not spared myself. It has been the only way I can get my own back on Chui, Mzigo, and Kimeria.... They pay for it. They pay for their rivalry to possess me. Each wants to make his sole woman" (Thiong'o 293).

Although Wanja accepts her condition, and her prostitution, she has heartbreak in her innards. In spite of the fact that she has many wounds, she is waiting for to be healed with love. The hard conditions that she lived did not make her hopeless. Her affair with Karega makes her feel good and better. She confesses this:

For the first time, I feel wanted...a human being...no longer humiliated...degraded...foot-trodden...do you understand? It is not given to many: a second chance to be a woman, to be human without this or that "except", "except"...without shame. He was reawakened my smothered woman-ness, my girlhood, and I feel I am about to flower (Thiong'o 251).

Ngugi Wa Thiongo'nun *Kan Çiçekleri ve Bir Buğday Tanesi*
Eserlerindeki Sömürgecilik Sonrası Kadın Figürü

The hope of Wanja is also the hope of Kenya. Ngugi uses the hope as an allegory to mention all people's hope for the Kenya. The whole country is waiting for absolute freedom and to become free from the chains of the colonizer, and also to rule their own country without any interference of the colonizers. Ngugi especially focuses on women who are resisting against the colonialism and imperial powers. He reflects Wanja as a strong woman figure in spite of her hard experiences. Wanja says, "I nursed the pain in my soul. I am a hard woman and I know I can carry things inside my heart for a long time" (Thiong'o 38). She is the hopeful woman figure who endures rough and tough living conditions. Munira also sees Wanja as a strong character. He says, "She is the most powerful woman in all Ilmorog. She owns houses between here and Nairobi. She owns a fleet of matatus. She owns a fleet of big transport lorries. She is that bird periodically born out of the ashes and dust" (Thiong'o 281).

Ngugi also stresses the importance of women in the resistance period of women. Colonized women protest against the social injustice and search for right for women. "Housewives holding processions and shouting obscene slogans in protest against the high food prices; armed robbers holding up banks in daylight with crowds cheering; women refusing to be relegated to the kitchen and bedroom, demanding equal places in men's former citadel of power privilege" (Thiong'o 42). They also show reaction against the colonizers. A woman in *Petals of Blood* shouts to the colonizers "Let us pull out their penises and see if they are really men" (Thiong'o 86).

Munira also compares himself with the resisting women. He thinks that "I had not shown the courage shown by Ilmorog women, or by the worker who protested, or by all those men and women in the country who were openly criticizing the whole thing at the risk of their lives" (Thiong'o 106).

All in all, we see a different type of woman character in *Petals of Blood*, who is courageous, active, and strong in spite of all his deep sufferings. Wanja, the main female character of the novel, can be regarded as the hope of Kenya, which has never died.

THE FIGURE OF POSTCOLONIAL WOMEN IN A *GRAIN OF WHEAT*

A Grain of Wheat is Ngugi's third novel, in which he stressed the struggle of the Kenyan people, and their fight against the colonizers. These people live

in the forests and fight for the freedom of their land and country. The movement they started is called Mau-Mau rebellion. Their main purpose is to kill colonialists who stole their land from them. On the other hand, they suffered from the colonizers so much, by deceiving native people; colonizers also killed many forest fighters. A great number of colonized people betrayed their own people. Those who betrayed had great opportunities such as having a good education in Britain.

First of all, the women who struggled for their freedom and supported Mau-Mau movement should be mentioned. Several women fought against the colonizers, and they were excruciated, suffered, and even died during this resistance movement. In the novel, Ngugi mentions a woman fighter who died during the fighting, and we witness a morning for this brave woman:

When I remember Wambuku
A woman who was beautiful so...
Who will forget the sun and the dust today
And the trench I dug with blood!
When they pushed me into the trench,
Tears from my heart freely flowed (Thiong'o 140).

Many female characters in the novel suffered from the oppression of the colonizers. They were tortured, mistreated, left hungry all during their life. For instance, after Gitogo was killed by the colonizers her mother was alone in this harsh world. As a result, she could not resist anymore and died of severe hunger. Like Gitogo's mother, mother of Mugo also died as a poor woman. Mukami, wife of Warui, also died of poverty. Miserable lives of Mugo's and Gitogo's mother were mentioned in the novel. "She (Gitogo's mother) had a small face grooved with wrinkles. Her eyes were small but occasionally flashed with life. Otherwise they looked dead... It was her eyes that most disturbed Mugo...her loneliness struck a chord of pity in him" (Thiong'o 5). Mugo's mother also suffered from poverty. "Mugo's mother had died poor, leaving him, an only child in the hands of a distant aunt. Waithereo was a widow with six married daughters. When drunk she would come home and remind Mugo of this fact" (Thiong'o 6).

Njeri is also a victim of the white colonialists, who died in a battle during Mau-Mau rebellion. She lived in the forest with the other freedom fighters, and took sides with Kihika, a patriot who also died for his country. She faced up with hunger and hard conditions, but never gave up. But her inevitable end was

Ngugi Wa Thiongo'nun *Kan Çiçekleri ve Bir Buğday Tanesi*
Eserlerindeki Sömürgecilik Sonrası Kadın Figürü

dying for freedom. With the character of Njeri, Ngugi expresses the lives of women fighters and the plight they suffered during their struggle. Following lines reflects the sufferings of Njeri: "A sacrifice ...and then was Njeri...She was a friend, my friend... She often quarreled and fought with both men and other girls. Anyway, not until she ran away to the forest to fight at Kihika's side. She was shot dead in a battle, soon after Kihika's death" (Thiong'o 134).

Mumbi can be seen as the main female character of the novel. Ngugi shows the African women's suffering through Mumbi. She is oppressed, disdained, and humiliated by the colonizers. Even, she was desolated after her husband, Gikonyo, was sent to detention camp. Because of this, she suffers so much from poverty, living in a simple cottage. The colonizers spread fear to her heart when her husband was arrested. Following lines show her fear:

One day the arm of the white man touched Mumbi's door. She had fearfully waited for the day, indeed had armed herself against its deadlines. But when the time came, she found herself powerless to save her man. She collected all her will and strength into a cry that went to the hearts of many present: Come back to me Gikonyo (Thiong'o 101).

Mumbi's husband stayed at detention camp for six years, because of her relation with the Mau-Mau rebellion. During this period, Mumbi lived very harsh days. She even slept with Karanja, because he promised her to release her husband if she slept with him. That is, she sacrificed herself for her husband, Gikonyo. However, when Gikonyo returned, he saw the child with Mumbi, and mistreated her. The sufferings of Mumbi never stopped even after the arrival of Gikonyo. Gikonyo even thought that of "killing her and the child, and ending all misery"(Thiong'o 112). After a while Gikonyo thought about Mumbi that "she had betrayed the bound, the secret between them" (Thiong'o 114). As a matter of fact, Mumbi has an extensive love for her husband and never betrays him. Mumbi tells her love for Gikonyo "I hung on to Gikonyo with all my heart. I would wait for him, my husband, even if I was fated to rejoin him in the grave" (Thiong'o 145). She behaves her husband as if he was her master. Following lines show her dependence on her husband. "Mumbi brought back the fire. She put the pot, full of water, on the fire, and sat again to watch her husband. She appeared expectant, a bird ready to fly at the first sign or word from the master" (Thiong'o 29).

Mumbi clearly depicts the figure of postcolonial women in the novel. From the statements of her, it is understood that women have a low position in the colonized society. Mumbi says “I had forgotten that I am a nobody” (Thiong’o 29). Even her husband behaves her in a bad way without knowing Mumbi’s sacrificing for him. Gikonyo says to Mumbi “I will make you shut this mouth of a whore” (Thiong’o 163). He does not show respect to her wife.

Although Mumbi suffered so much, she is a strong woman. She does the duties actually men do. “Mumbi tied a belt around her waist and took on a man’s work” (Thiong’o 136). We also understand that she is a brave woman as she says “I may be a woman, but even a cowardly bitch fights back when cornered against a wall” (Thiong’o 176). She is also a proud woman. When Gikonyo kicks her out of the home, she never returns. She says “I will not go back to his home, not if he kneels before me” (Thiong’o 228).

During the colonial period, women’s suffering reached a high point. They were humiliated and seduced by the white colonizers. Mumbi tells the hard conditions of the colonial period and reflects the merciless face of poverty:

We are prisoners in the village, and the soldiers had built their camps all around to prevent any escape. We went without food. The cry of children was terrible to hear. The new DO did not mind the cries. He even permitted soldiers to pick women and carry them to their tents. God! I did not know how I escaped from that ignominy. Every night I prayed that such a thing should never happen to me (Thiong’o 139).

Women were also forced to sleep with the colonizers just only for a piece of bread. Mumbi tells that “a number of women secretly and voluntarily offered themselves to the soldiers for a little food, and I felt no different” (Thiong’o 142). People of their community also behave women in this way, and exploit them.

The men organized themselves in groups according to the ridges of origin. Thabai was famous because men from there successfully fought other groups and took away their women ...the man who beat you the pervious Sunday and took away your woman, was a friend but he knew later in the wood you would look for a chance to stay him and took away his women (Thiong’o 71).

Woman offered their naked bodies to him, even some of the most respectable came to him by night. But Mumbi, his Mumbi, would not yield, and he could never bring himself to force her (Thiong’o 205).

Ngugi Wa Thiongo'nun *Kan Çiçekleri ve Bir Buğday Tanesi*
Eserlerindeki Sömürgecilik Sonrası Kadın Figürü

That shows the bitter lives of colonized women in a wretched society. Even they were enjoying with themselves, women have the fear of humiliation. Ngugi says in the novel “Mothers warned their daughters to take care not to be raped in the dark” in the festival of celebration (Thiong’o 199).

Ngugi portrays strong women figures, too. Wambui is one of these women, who successfully struggled for her country. Ngugi describes her: “Wambui was not very old, although she had lost most of her teeth. During the emergency, she carried secrets from the village to the forest and back to the villages and towns” (Thiong’o 19). She helped to the freedom fighters by giving messages from their compatriots. Although she was an old woman, she never lost her power to fight against the colonizers. She believes that women have to take an important place in the resistance movement. She tries to make women conscious; “she went around the market place determined to put her secret resolve into practice. 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” (Thiong’o 175). Ngugi gives a nationalistic role to Wambui; following lines express her thoughts on the necessity of women for the freedom of their country:

Wambui suddenly broke through the crowd and led a group of women to the platform. She grabbed the microphone from the speaker. People were interested. Was there any circumcised man who felt water in stomach at the sight of a white man? Women, she said, had brought their Mithuru and Miengu to the platform let therefore such men, she jeered, come forward, wear the women’s skirts and aprons and give up their trousers to the women. Men sat rigidly in their seats and tried to laugh with the crowd to hide the inner discomfort (Thiong’o 175).

Wambui also tries to raise consciousness of men for the freedom of their country. One day a policeman stopped and searched her. “He started from her breast towards the vital spot” (Ngugi 19). But Wambui screamed and resisted her. Upon this event, she spoke to her village men to activate them against the colonizers. She said: “‘The children of these days’, she began. ‘Have you lost all shame? Just because the white man tells you so, you would actually touch your own mother’s...the woman who gave you birth? All right, I’ll lift the clothes and you can have a look at your mother...’” (Thiong’o 19).

Many women also started to demand justice. For instance, in the novel, a woman complained to the MP “Last Saturday, they came and arrested my man because he has not paid taxes. But how does he pay poll tax? He has no job. Our two children have had to leave school because no money” (Thiong’o 60). This is not a common situation during the colonial period, because women were silenced in that period; however a glimmer of light appeared among the women to resist against the colonizers.

Ngugi also reflects the condition of pre-colonial society, in which women were dominant. The process of women’s position in the society has undergone a drastic change throughout the history of Kenya. Although women had the control of the society in some periods, it did not continue so much, again, men took the control. Ngugi argues in the novel that once upon a time woman had the power the country, but because of her sexuality she lost her ruling power. When she became pregnant, man took over the control.

Women had a low position in the postcolonial society, and seen as a subaltern creature. For instance, Karanja thinks that “women are cowards” (Thiong’o 87). They are not as brave as men. In fact, he has no courage when compared with Wambui. And also, the story of Gatu shows the statue of women. Gatu tells a story about queen of England: “she said if you sell me your valley, I will let you...once. Women are women you know. In my country, I told her, we do not buy that thing from our women. We get it free” (Thiong’o 96). Mwaura also agrees with Gatu, he says Karanja “There will be plenty of women. You know how they go free (even married ones) on such occasions” (Thiong’o 155). Because of the traditions and common thoughts of the society, they think in this way.

The conversation between Gikonyo and his mother reflects the general thought of men on the duty of women: “‘whatever we say, these people are truly clever. How did they think of such tools which can cut anything?’ Wangari always referred to white men as these people. ‘Go and cook. These things are beyond women’” said Gikonyo (Thiong’o 73). As it is clearly understood, the only duty of women is to cook, and also take care of children. That is, women were passivized during the postcolonial period because of the colonization. On the other hand, there were certain jobs that men could do. When they try new things, they are criticized by the society. For example, Gikonyo experienced such a thing. People criticized Gikonyo because of his job “At first other men

Ngugi Wa Thiongo'nun *Kan Çiçekleri ve Bir Buğday Tanesi*
Eserlerindeki Sömürgecilik Sonrası Kadın Figürü

deride him for doing a woman's job. Brushing sides with women's skirt. But when his fortunes changed, they started to respect him" (Thiong'o 57).

Except for native Kenyan women, we also see white female characters in *A Grain of Wheat*. These women are reflected as superior to the native women. While native women have a hard life, white women have nice and luxurious life. Mrs. Margery, Dr. Lynd, and Mrs. Dickinson are some of these white women. They spend their time for pleasant things while native women were suffering in their own land. Ngugi portrays Mrs. Margery as follows: "Mrs. Margery Thompson had cultivated red roses, white roses, and pink roses- roses of all shades. Now she emerged from this garden of color and came to the door. She was dressed in thin white trousers and a blouse that seemed suspended from her pointed breasts" (Thiong'o 36).

On the other hand, we witness the luxurious life of Mrs. Dickinson. While native women cannot find anything to eat, and even they sell their bodies just for a loaf of bread, Mrs. Dickinson spends a lot of money for her dog.

Mrs. Dickinson was the librarian.... An enthusiast for the east African safari, she always took part, co-driving with her boyfriend, but she never once finished the course. Her missions were the ones Karanja hated most: often she sent him, for instance to the African quarters to buy meat for two dogs (Thiong'o 36).

They see their animals more worthy than the native people. Dr. Lynd is also such a woman who behaves native people in a rough way. Her attitudes towards Karanja show her rough behaviors. "Dr. Lynd, a plant pathologist at the station cross the tarmac road.... she held her dog by the collar with the left hand and pointed an accusing finger at Karanja... 'I am ashamed of you, utterly ashamed of you'" (Thiong'o 41-42). For the sake of her dog, she behaves people in a bad manner. That is, they see animals more important than native people.

In *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi portrays various types of women figures. Postcolonial women are sufferers; on the other hand, white women have a good and luxurious life. While white women are sitting in their cosy houses, postcolonial women live in the forest to fight against the colonizers.

CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this study is to examine the figure of postcolonial women in the works *Petals of Blood* and *A grain of Wheat* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o. These two works are the examples of postcolonial literature, which explicitly reflect the condition of women in the colonized societies.

In his novels, besides the concepts such as nationhood, betrayal, and resistance, Ngugi portrays the postcolonial women figures in various types of characters. In *Petals of Blood*, we see a strong character with her wounds in her heart. Wanja is the major female character of the novel, who is a barmaid and also a prostitute. Ngugi depicts her as an intelligent woman figure, who is admired by all men. She has the capacity to overcome all difficulties, even after she was raped, she continued to live as she wanted, which is an abnormal condition for the postcolonial women. That is, Wanja can be defined as a courageous, active, and awe-inspiring woman figure.

Through the image of Wanja, Ngugi reflects the soul of Kenya, and also Kenyan women. The life of Wanja mirrors up to the lives of all Kenyan women, who are exploited and oppressed by several factors. That is, the sufferings of Wanja, and Kenyan women, do not result from only colonialism, but also patriarchy and gender discrimination play an important role in the plight of native women. As a matter of fact, the first fall of Wanja is because of her exploitation by a Kenyan man, who seduced her and left her alone after her exploitation. We see several examples of this kind of exploitation in *Petals of Blood*, and especially on the character of Wanja. Kimeria, Mzigo, and Chui are the exploiters. One day Joseph, brother of Abdulla, becomes ill, and upon this, Wanja and Karega search for help in the city. After lots of trials, a man accepts them to help. This man was Kimeria, who seduced Wanja in her teenage years and left her alone. Although several years have passed, Kimeria again wants to exploit Wanja in return for medication for Joseph. That is, Wanja cannot escape from her destiny and sleep with Kimeria to save Joseph. This extract also shows us that colonialism is not the single cause of the oppression of women, in addition to colonialism, postcolonial women have been oppressed by their own citizens.

Patriarchy also makes a great impact on the lives of women in colonized nations. Wanja's experiences show the harsh face of patriarchy and discomfort of women in their own house. Wanja expresses in *Petals of Blood*: "Once I went home. My father said: I do not want a prostitute in the house" (Thiong'o 1991). Even her father behaves her in a rough way.

Ngugi Wa Thiongo'nun *Kan Çiçekleri ve Bir Buğday Tanesi*
Eserlerindeki Sömürgecilik Sonrası Kadın Figürü

In spite of all her oppressions and hard life, Ngugi depicts a strong and an active woman figure. In anyway, Wanja can be seen the glimmer of light of Kenya, and also she can be seen as the rebirth of Kenya after very harsh years. When Wanja comes to Ilmorog, the village starts to refresh. Her energy makes all villagers awake. For instance, she helps Abdulla in his shop. The business of Abdulla starts to improve with the touch of Wanja, by using her advertising skills, she makes Abdulla's profit rise.

In *A Grain of Wheat*, contrary to *Petals of Blood*, Ngugi portrays various types of women figures. We see fourteen women characters in the novel, who are depicted as freedom fighters and also sufferers.

In its general sense, we see the sufferings of postcolonial women in *A Grain of Wheat*. While drawing the picture of postcolonial women, Ngugi reflects them as sufferer; on the other hand, we see the benefactive white women figures, too. All these postcolonial women characters are the victims of colonialism and highly suffered from it. For instance, we witness the deaths of Wambuku and Njeri, who died while fighting against the colonizers. Ngugi also emphasizes the poverty that female characters faced up with. Upon losing their lands, Kenyan people put up a fight against poverty, however, many women died of hunger, such as Mukami, Gitogo's mother and Mugo's mother. On the other hand, Ngugi also mentions white women, living a luxurious life. Mrs. Dickinson, Mrs. Margery, and Dr. Lynd are the white women who benefit from the opportunities of colonialism.

Ngugi gives importance to the struggle of women in the postcolonial period. As a result, in *A Grain of Wheat*, he creates brave, honorable and strong women figures, fighting for the freedom of their country. For instance, Wambui is such a courageous woman who becomes the symbol of resistance in the novel. She has a protest attitude against the colonizers and organizes women to fight against the colonizers.

In spite of their struggle, we see the plight of women during the Mau-Mau rebellion. They experienced many bad things during the resistance movement, including rape. Several women were killed cruelly by the colonizers. By mentioning these facts, Ngugi aims to show the devilish face of the colonizers. However, besides these disgusting conditions, Ngugi puts emphasis on the innocence and self-sacrifice of Mumbi. Although she sleeps with Karanja, she does not actually betray her husband. For the sake of her

husband's freedom, she throws herself to the wolves. And, she never stops loving her husband.

In this study, the figures of postcolonial women in the works of Ngugi, *Petals of Blood* and *A Grain of Wheat* have been examined. In these two novels, we see various types of postcolonial women, who were exploited and oppressed by several elements. No matter how they are oppressed and exploited, the postcolonial women are the victims of colonialism and their own society. And, in spite of all their sufferings, they achieve to stand against all the harsh sides of life, like a flower growing in a bloody garden.

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