
Exploring Elements of Postcolonial Theory in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross*: Cultural Imperialism, Mimicry, and Hybridity in Post-Independence Kenya

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Abstract

This study examines Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's seminal novel *Devil on the Cross* (1982) through the analytical lens of postcolonial theory, focusing on the concepts of cultural imperialism, mimicry, hybridity, and ambivalence as articulated by theorists such as Homi K. Bhabha, Edward Said, and Frantz Fanon. The novel presents a scathing critique of post-independence Kenya, revealing how neocolonial structures perpetuate the exploitation of the working class and the marginalization of women within a capitalist framework that mirrors colonial oppression. Through close textual analysis, this research demonstrates how Thiong'o deconstructs the colonial legacy's impact on African societies, particularly examining the protagonist Jacinta Wariinga's journey from victimhood to revolutionary consciousness. The study argues that *Devil on the Cross* serves as both a literary masterpiece and a political manifesto, exposing the psychological and economic dimensions of cultural imperialism while advocating for authentic African identity and resistance against neocolonial domination. By employing qualitative content analysis and examining key passages from the novel, this research reveals how postcolonial elements manifest in character development, narrative structure, and thematic concerns. The findings demonstrate that Thiong'o's work illuminates the stratification within African nations, the perpetuation of colonial mentalities among the postcolonial elite, and the vital role of women's resistance in challenging oppressive systems. This analysis contributes to broader discussions of decolonization, cultural authenticity, and gender politics in postcolonial African literature.

Keywords: Postcolonial Theory, Cultural Imperialism, Mimicry, Hybridity, Neocolonialism, African Literature, Feminist Resistance, Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, Devil On The Cross

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

Postcolonial theory constitutes a critical framework through which literary texts can be analyzed to reveal the enduring impacts of colonialism on formerly colonized societies. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross*, published in 1982, stands as a landmark text in African literature, offering a searing indictment of post-independence Kenya's descent into neocolonial capitalism. Originally written in Gĩkũyũ during Thiong'o's imprisonment at Kamiti Maximum Security Prison (1977-1978) and subsequently translated into English by the author himself, the novel was banned by Kenyan authorities upon its release—a testament to its radical

political content and unflinching critique of the ruling elite.

The novel's publication occurred during a tumultuous period in Kenya's history, approximately two decades after independence from British colonial rule in 1963. Rather than ushering in an era of genuine liberation and equitable development, Kenya's post-independence trajectory saw the emergence of a comprador bourgeoisie—a native elite class that collaborated with international capital to exploit the country's resources and labor force. Thiong'o's novel exposes this betrayal of the independence struggle's promises, demonstrating how political sovereignty without economic independence merely replaces white colonial masters with black neocolonial oppressors.

1.2 Significance of the Study

Devil on the Cross explicitly addresses cultural imperialism within the context of postcolonial studies and depicts the multifaceted exploitation of working-class Kenyans, particularly women. The novel is notable for representing a society in which oppressive structures transcend the formal end of colonial rule, revealing continuities between colonial and postcolonial forms of domination. Thiong'o demonstrates how native people are systematically deprived of authentic identity and coerced into mimicking foreign cultural patterns within the dynamics of political power and economic exploitation.

The protagonist, Jacinta Wariinga, emerges as an emblematic figure—a remarkable heroine who endures multiple forms of social injustice, representing both her historical moment and the degraded conditions imposed upon African women by intersecting systems of patriarchal, capitalist, and neocolonial oppression. Her character arc from victimhood to revolutionary consciousness embodies the novel's central theme: the necessity of both individual and collective resistance against structures of domination. Through Wariinga's experiences, Thiong'o illustrates the complex interplay of cultural imperialism and ambivalence, revealing mentalities shaped by foreign influence, oppressive business practices, and the erosion of indigenous values.

1.3 The Novel's Political and Literary Significance

When *Devil on the Cross* was released to readers, Kenyan authorities swiftly banned the work, recognizing its potential to inspire critical consciousness and political resistance. Thiong'o's imprisonment and the subsequent censorship of his novel underscore the threatening power of literature that challenges established hierarchies. The author was deeply concerned with how the promises of independence had been betrayed, how Africans continued to be exploited in their own land, and how the colonial mentality persisted among the ruling class who now occupied positions once held by European masters.

The novel reveals that native people remain deprived of authentic identity, engaging in mimicry of foreign cultures within the pompous displays of political power. Cultural imperialism has effectively wiped out genuine freedom, creating psychological and cultural distance between the African elite and the masses through the perpetuation of colonial values and economic systems. This unpardonable insularity, established during the early decades of independence, has gradually transformed into institutionalized structures of neocolonial control.

1.4 Research Objective

This study aims to examine postcolonial elements in *Devil on the Cross*, focusing on cultural imperialism, mimicry, and hybridity, and how Wariinga's transformation reflects resistance in post-independence Kenya.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Postcolonial Theory and African Literature

Postcolonial theory constitutes a comprehensive philosophical framework that examines the exploitation of the working class and oppressed women within the context of cultural values, power relations, and economic systems. The novel *Devil on the Cross* focuses on the brutal landscape of post-independence Kenya, delving

into the indirect exploitation—metaphorically described as "blood-sucking"—that continues to influence socio-economic oppression long after the formal end of colonial rule.

Postcolonial criticism interrogates power relationships between colonizers and colonized peoples, explores processes of cultural domination and resistance, and analyzes how colonial discourse continues to shape contemporary global inequalities. Within African literary studies, postcolonial theory provides essential tools for understanding how authors engage with colonial history and its aftermath. African literature written in the post-independence era frequently grapples with questions of cultural authenticity, linguistic politics, economic dependency, and political corruption—themes central to Thiong'o's oeuvre.

2.2 Critical Reception and Scholarly Perspectives

Opara (2002) argues that Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* employs atypical political satire to achieve universal moral significance, making profound judgments about people and progress. The novel exposes a parasitic relationship between Kenya's ruling class and international capital, revealing how the elite feed off the labor and resources of the masses. This satirical approach allows Thiong'o to expose the absurdity and moral bankruptcy of a system that enriches a few while impoverishing the majority.

Abbas (2022) examines the novel's representation of African women, arguing that despite facing tremendous hardships and occupying oppressive positions within Kenyan society, women are portrayed as assertive and fearless in confronting their challenges. The novel paints women as tremendous creatures who, despite being subdued and demeaned, maintain agency and resistance. Even while victimized and suffering, women continue their muted campaigns for change, demonstrating courage in their struggles against multiple forms of oppression.

Karumuhinzi (2022) suggests that *Devil on the Cross* exposes a system of contemporary manipulation of Black natives under miserable circumstances, focusing on how the elite and ruling class perpetuate tribulations for ordinary citizens. This approach applies conceptual criteria from colonial feudalism to analyze the fictional Kenya presented in the novel, revealing how supposedly independent African nations remain trapped in neocolonial structures that mirror colonial exploitation.

Abdelaziz (2020) discusses how the novel sheds light on the ignominious status of post-independence Africa, exposing the policies of native rulers who engage in postcolonial suppression and exploitation driven by greed. As a Kenyan author, Thiong'o offers censure by investigating and disapproving of intractable corrupt behaviors, making visible the mechanisms through which corruption operates and spreads throughout society. Ram (2024) perceives *Devil on the Cross* as a mockery of postcolonial independent Kenya, arguing that the work vehemently addresses marginalization and the descent into soulless cruelty and boundless greed—practices that remain consistently aligned with imperial masters who continue to function as overmasters despite nominal independence. This perspective emphasizes how neocolonialism represents not a break from colonialism but rather its continuation through different means.

M'BRA (2023) argues that subtle acts of resistance and crafty strategies represent women's agency, which emerges slowly and continuously throughout the novel. Women are portrayed as strong figures who sacrifice their bodies and souls in struggles against tycoons and robbers. They seek to break artificial traditions and challenge exploitative roles in society, enabling readers to recognize and engage with important political ideas about gender, power, and resistance.

Onwuegbuche (2023) explores how African nations often constitute suppressed societies where many leaders have failed due to improper actions and inadequate attention to genuine problems. The novel suggests solutions based on collective action and proper organization of resistance. The existing system has left a sour taste throughout African nations, creating disillusionment and suffering that demand alternative approaches to development.

Bonaventure (2012) conducted a study concentrating on issues of cultural imperialism and societal oppression, demonstrating the flexibility of Marxist critique in examining literary works. This study examines

the Marxist components of Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross*, including its depiction of worker alienation, class struggle, and exploitation. The intersection of Marxist and postcolonial frameworks proves particularly valuable for understanding how economic and cultural forms of domination reinforce each other.

Abis (2011) notes that Thiong'o's novel circulates around cruel politics and explores these dynamics through the Marxist theoretical framework while depicting postcolonial studies with particular commitment and clarity. Kenya and Africa have suffered under the insolence of imperialism and the predations of a greedy capitalist society that values profit over human dignity and communal welfare.

2.3 Intersections of History and Literature

Postcolonialism emphasizes how history and literature interact, arguing that historical circumstances significantly influence how art and culture are expressed. Literary works like *Devil on the Cross* cannot be understood apart from the historical contexts that produced them—in this case, the specific trajectory of Kenyan decolonization, the betrayal of independence promises, and the emergence of neocolonial capitalism. Literature becomes a site where historical struggles are represented, contested, and reimagined, offering both critique and potential pathways toward transformation.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Foundational Postcolonial Theorists

Postcolonialism serves as the theoretical framework for analyzing cultural imperialism, mimicry, and hybridity in *Devil on the Cross*. Three major theorists provide the conceptual foundation for this analysis:

Edward Said developed the concept of Orientalism, demonstrating how Western discourse constructed the "Orient" as fundamentally different, inferior, and in need of Western guidance and control. Said's work reveals how cultural representations serve political and economic domination, creating knowledge systems that justify imperial power. This framework helps illuminate how Western cultural imperialism operates in the novel through education, economic practices, and psychological colonization.

Frantz Fanon addressed the psychological impacts of colonialism on colonized peoples in works such as *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon demonstrated how colonialism produces profound psychological damage, including internalized racism, alienation from indigenous culture, and identification with the colonizer. His analysis of the colonized intellectual's relationship to European culture proves particularly relevant for understanding characters in *Devil on the Cross* who imitate Western values and behaviors.

Homi K. Bhabha developed influential concepts of hybridity, mimicry, and the "third space" in postcolonial contexts. Bhabha argues that colonialism produces hybrid identities that are neither fully colonized nor fully indigenous, creating ambivalent subjects who simultaneously imitate and resist colonial authority. His concept of mimicry—described as "almost the same but not quite"—captures the paradoxical position of colonized elites who adopt colonial culture but can never fully become equivalent to colonizers. The "third space" represents sites of cultural negotiation where new identities and possibilities emerge from the collision of colonial and indigenous cultures.

3.2 Application to *Devil on the Cross*

These theoretical perspectives illuminate how society in *Devil on the Cross* is victimized by systems resembling feudalism, where workers and lower classes remain marginalized and disadvantaged despite formal independence. Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and mimicry prove particularly valuable for analyzing how the novel represents the mixture of colonial influence and indigenous culture, the imitation of Western practices among African elites, and the emergence of hybrid identities that exist in a conflicted third space between African and Western worldviews.

The novel demonstrates how characteristic elements of postcolonialism—cultural imperialism, mimicry,

hybridity, and ambivalence—manifest in the lived experiences of Kenyan characters. Women in particular are shown as devoid of traditional rights and prerogatives, subjected to multiple forms of oppression that combine patriarchal, capitalist, and neocolonial dimensions. The theoretical framework enables analysis of both structural forms of domination and the psychological internalization of colonial values that perpetuate oppression.

4. Key Concepts of Postcolonial Theory

4.1 Cultural Imperialism

Culture encompasses the collective worldview of any nation, shaping language, art, social structures, beliefs, and practices that define community identity and values. However, cultural imperialism constitutes a virulent regime that threatens this indigenous cultural fabric. Cultural imperialism operates as the imposition of one culture over another, typically involving the dominance of Western cultural values, consumption patterns, and ideological frameworks over non-Western societies.

This form of imperialism manifests through various channels: advertisements promoting Western products and lifestyles, media productions that glorify Western norms, educational systems that privilege European knowledge, and economic structures that enforce dependency on Western markets and technologies. Cultural imperialism has been reinforced by military forces and political pressure, creating comprehensive systems of domination that approach total control in postcolonial contexts. It slowly normalizes ruthlessness and devastation, making oppressive conditions appear natural and inevitable rather than politically constructed and subject to change.

In *Devil on the Cross*, cultural imperialism appears as the psychological colonization that persists after formal political independence, shaping how Kenyans think, what they value, and how they understand themselves in relation to the West and to their own indigenous heritage.

4.2 Mimicry

Mimicry involves the imitation of culture, language, and behavior, particularly the adoption by colonized peoples of colonizer cultures and practices. In postcolonial theory, mimicry represents a complex phenomenon that serves both as a tool of colonial control and a potential site of resistance. Colonized elites are encouraged to become "almost the same" as their colonizers through education, dress, manners, and values—but they can never become fully equivalent, always remaining marked by racial, cultural, or national difference.

Mimicry has been transformed by the production of colonial subjectivities and must be understood in relation to the economic exploitation that accompanies cultural domination. It often involves the loss of joy and authenticity in life, replacing indigenous cultural practices with performances that highlight capitalist values and competitive individualism. Mimicry creates subjects who appear successful by colonial standards but who have become alienated from their communities and cultural roots.

In the novel, mimicry appears in characters who adopt Western education, speak English, aspire to European lifestyles, and internalize values that serve their own exploitation—all while believing they have achieved progress and enlightenment.

4.3 Hybridity

Hybridity refers to cultural phenomena that emerge from the mixing of colonizer and colonized cultures, creating new identities and practices that belong fully to neither tradition. Bhabha conceptualizes hybridity as occurring in a "third space"—a conceptual zone where cultural meanings are negotiated, contested, and transformed. This third space represents both the site of colonial domination and the potential location of resistance and creative cultural production.

In *Devil on the Cross*, Wariinga's identity embodies hybridity. Her identity as African remains foundational, yet her experiences—including her uncle securing her employment with a wealthy old man, her exposure to

Western education, and her navigation of urban Kenyan society—force her to struggle with Western cultural influences. This process of mixing cultures creates internal conflicts, ambivalences, and contradictions that characterize hybrid subjectivity.

Hybridity emerges when colonized societies both resist and partially accommodate oppression, creating complex cultural formations that cannot be reduced to either pure indigenous tradition or complete colonial assimilation. The third space of hybridity thus becomes a site where postcolonial subjects negotiate their identities amid competing cultural demands and where possibilities for resistance and transformation may emerge.

4.4 Ambivalence

Ambivalence, according to Bhabha, refers to the complex and contradictory feelings that characterize both colonizer and colonized relationships to colonial authority and cultural identity. Colonized subjects often experience simultaneous attraction to and rebellion against colonial culture, mixing identification with detraction, admiration with resentment. This psychological complexity prevents simple resistance or acceptance, creating subjects who internalize contradictions that reflect the paradoxes of colonial and neocolonial power.

In *Devil on the Cross*, characters embody this ambivalence by simultaneously mimicking colonizers and recognizing their oppression, by desiring Western goods while resenting Western domination, and by aspiring to elite status while understanding that the elite system perpetuates their communities' suffering. Ambivalence creates psychological conflicts that disrupt clear-cut hierarchies and reveal the contradictions inherent in postcolonial existence, ultimately disrupting comfortable assumptions about identity, power, and humanity.

5. Research Methodology

This study employs qualitative textual analysis and content analysis to examine postcolonial aspects of *Devil on the Cross*. The methodology focuses on close reading of the novel's text, examining relationships between characters, analyzing dialogue, and interpreting symbolic and thematic elements that reveal the workings of cultural imperialism, mimicry, hybridity, and ambivalence.

Textual analysis allows for detailed examination of how postcolonial themes manifest in narrative structure, characterization, and language. The relationship between characters and their dialogues is examined to reveal underlying ideologies, power dynamics, and sites of resistance. Particular attention is given to Wariinga as the novel's central pillar, analyzing how her hardships represent the working class under bourgeois control and how her transformation embodies possibilities for revolutionary consciousness.

The research draws extensively on representations of oppressed women and downtrodden communities throughout the novel, recognizing that *Devil on the Cross* offers rich ideological interpretations of women's experiences in post-colonial Kenya. By combining close textual reading with theoretical frameworks from postcolonial studies, this methodology enables comprehensive analysis of how Thiong'o critiques neocolonial capitalism while imagining alternative futures rooted in authentic African values and collective resistance.

6. Textual Analysis of *Devil on the Cross*

6.1 Overview: The Novel's Political Vision

Devil on the Cross vociferously critiques Kenya's trajectory following independence, representing a moment when the country had lost its democratic legislative processes and when nominal independence had merged back into forms of colonial oppression under different guises. The novel employs a postcolonial approach to examine relationships with former colonizer countries, analyzing imperialism, racism, colonial power structures, and the enduring legacy of colonialism in contemporary African society.

The novel presents a vivid picture of post-colonial oppression, which grinds down the fields of culture, language, and economic organization while simultaneously inspiring resistance. The "Devil's feast"—a central

allegorical device in the novel—symbolizes both the predatory nature of neocolonial capitalism and the collaboration between African elites and international capital. This feast represents foreign economic policies that slowly bankrupt the nation "like fire to wild grass," creating a microcosm of a society consumed by corruption and capitalist exploitation.

Wariinga struggles within the lowest strata of Kenyan society, yet her character develops into a revolutionary figure who signifies broader possibilities for resistance and transformation. She faces realities including sexual harassment and propositions from powerful men, but she resists these pressures, fighting for her right to live with dignity and committing to struggles with remarkable bravery. Her journey from victimization to agency embodies the novel's vision of how individual transformation can contribute to collective liberation.

6.2 Cultural Imperialism in the Text

Culture serves as a fundamental means of sustaining life in society, encompassing language, values, art, beliefs, and the systems that shape successive generations. However, the novel demonstrates how Kenyan culture has been dominated by Western ideological frameworks that perpetuate psychological and economic colonization.

A crucial passage explicitly addresses this domination:

Our culture...sorry, I mean, our culture has been dominated by the western imperialistic cultures. That is what we call in English, 'cultural imperialism'. Cultural imperialism is mother to the slavery of the mind and the body. It is cultural imperialism that gives birth to the mental blindness and deafness that persuades people to allow foreigners to tell them what to do in their own country, to make foreigners the ears and mouths of their national affairs... (pp. 56-58)

This passage articulates the novel's central critique: cultural imperialism functions as imperialism not through direct military occupation but through psychological domination. Western cultural supremacy operates through what might be called "soft power"—influencing minds and values rather than directly controlling bodies, though the effects prove equally devastating. This form of domination can actually be more dangerous than physical oppression because it operates invisibly, creating subjects who willingly accept foreign control and who internalize the logic of their own subordination.

The people of Kenya are shown as welcoming outside pressure from Western nations, accepting foreign advisers, and embracing international products and practices. This occurs particularly in economic contexts where traditions of inequality have become perpetuated and psychologically normalized. The novel critiques how postcolonial society has come to view Western models as naturally superior, as representing inevitable development and progress rather than as serving specific interests that perpetuate exploitation.

Another powerful metaphor captures the permanence of racial and cultural identity:

"That which is born black will never be white." (Chapter 2, p. 5)

This stark statement highlights fundamental questions of identity and belonging. It emphasizes indigenous roots and racial identity, showing how racial hierarchies position whiteness as dominant and superior over nations and peoples marked as inferior. The metaphor suggests that regardless of how skillful, educated, or Westernized Black Africans become, the stamp of racism continues to mark them as different, as unable to achieve full equality within systems structured by white supremacy and Western cultural dominance.

This reality reflects persistent identity hierarchies rooted in supremacist nationalism. The novel runs throughout its pages with examples of injustice toward Black people, and through Wariinga's experiences in society, Thiong'o demonstrates his realization that these systems will continue to dehumanize Black women—and all Black people—unless fundamental transformations occur in both consciousness and material structures of power.

6.3 Mimicry and Educational Colonization

Mimicry in the novel recalls processes of cultural displacement and the imposition of Western consciousness

in African contexts. It manifests in formations of gender, race, and persistent forms of enslavement affecting Black people. The representation of Black feminism in the novel presents a complex picture combining assertions of strength with the reality of racism and power imbalances. Meanwhile, educational systems teach Africans to become anglicized, creating subjects who speak, think, and value according to Western norms—a process the novel presents as simultaneously masterful in its effectiveness and devastating in its consequences.

Wariinga's own reflections on education reveal her growing critical consciousness:

"What's wrong with our system of education? Does it not produce men and women who think and reason in the same way as the men and women in Europe and America?" (Chapter 3)

This passage suggests profound critique of Kenya's educational system. Rather than developing independent, creative thinking rooted in African realities and needs, the education system has become a mechanism for producing imitators of Western philosophy and thought patterns. Those who achieve independence in political terms remain followers and imitators in intellectual and cultural terms, unable to imagine alternatives to Western models.

Wariinga recognizes that the education system fails to encourage innovation or genuine progress for Kenyan society. Instead, it perpetuates economic frameworks and knowledge systems derived from colonizers, enacting the same mental structures in the minds of oppressed communities. This creates particular challenges for suppressed groups who find their own knowledge, languages, and ways of understanding dismissed as backward or irrelevant. Wariinga struggles with these thoughts, recognizing the system's inadequacy while trapped within its logic.

Mimicry emerges as a dangerous phenomenon that mechanizes cultural degradation. Under such conditions, genuine enlightenment and impartial hope for development become impossible to achieve. Survival itself becomes shaped by imitative patterns, as currently witnessed throughout many formerly colonized nations. Mimicry ultimately represents a broken, degraded form of eloquence—a ruthless individual and collective condition that destroys authentic culture while failing to deliver the promised benefits of Westernization.

6.4 Hybridity and Cultural Alienation

Hybridity demonstrates the mixed feelings of individuals caught between cultures, where some aspects of Western influence may be valued while others inspire repulsion, creating contradictory inner spaces as individuals attempt to forge identities amid competing demands.

A striking example of linguistic and cultural hybridity appears in one character's boast about his children:

"As for my children, I have quite a few. All of them speak English through the nose, exactly like people born and brought up in England. If you were to hear them speak Gĩkũyũ or Kiswahili, you would laugh until you pissed yourself. It is so funny." (p. 109)

These lines powerfully capture individual and collective truths about postcolonial influence within African societies. They reveal cultural alienation from indigenous languages and the ironic pain embedded in hierarchies that privilege English speakers while disempowering African languages and their speakers. The character presents his children's inability to speak their ancestral languages as a source of pride rather than shame, demonstrating how deeply colonial values have been internalized.

This passage illustrates the legacy of Western ideology and colonial power operating through education systems to produce hybrid subjects. The hybrid language situation represents a form of imperialism that encompasses political heritage while generating profound sadness about cultural loss and transformation. The passage illustrates stark disconnection between generations, where children cannot communicate with their grandparents or community elders, creating ruptures in cultural transmission. This disconnection is imbued with cultural displacement and bears the replacement effects of postcolonial conditions that particularly impact women's roles and feminist possibilities within changing social structures.

Another passage offers a different perspective on consciousness and responsibility:

"The deaf man is he who can't hear for the nation! The blind man is he who can't see for the nation!" (p. 58) Thiong'o employs satire and deliberately exaggerated patriotic voice to make his point. He seeks to restore and rebuild structures of justice and equality in Kenya, including feminist frameworks that have been discarded or destroyed. As a postcolonial activist, Thiong'o demonstrates concern for conditions throughout Africa and other colonized regions. The nation suffers from elite monopolization of resources, social injustice, and systematic discrimination against women of color who are pushed from rural areas through processes of racist economic development.

According to this perspective, the deaf and blind are not those who lack physical abilities or education. Rather, the truly deaf and blind are those who refuse to hear or see the suffering of their people—particularly women who remain resistant to injustice and exploitation that pervade societies worldwide. True literacy and vision involve political consciousness and commitment to collective welfare rather than merely individual advancement.

6.5 Postcolonialism as Analytical Framework

Postcolonial analysis involves examining official documentation and representations of European power—expressions, transformations, discoveries, knowledge production, and inquiry-based systems that narrate and justify control over "Others." This theoretical framework holds particular relevance for understanding experiences throughout Asia, Africa, and South Asia, regions that share histories of colonial domination and ongoing neocolonial exploitation.

The critical value of postcolonialism lies in raising consciousness about social injustices rooted in racism, providing a theoretical prism through which to analyze how colonialism continues to affect formerly colonized peoples. Postcolonialism reveals how cultural appropriation creates devaluation of indigenous practices, how colonial frameworks constructed colonized peoples as immoral, depraved, and pagan to justify domination. It exposes how European practices based on political imperialism and ideological displays continue to shape contemporary global inequalities.

Postcolonial theory thus provides a lens through which cultural and political issues can be viewed and analyzed in literary texts and in the actual degraded conditions of countries suffering from colonial legacies. It enables recognition of how power operates through culture as well as through economics and politics, and how resistance must therefore address all these dimensions of domination.

7. Discussion: Wariinga's Transformation and Revolutionary Consciousness

7.1 From Victim to Revolutionary

Wariinga's character arc represents the novel's most powerful illustration of how individual transformation can embody collective possibilities for liberation. She begins the novel in conditions of extreme victimization—sexually exploited, economically marginalized, psychologically traumatized, and socially degraded. Multiple men proposition her for sex, powerful figures attempt to purchase her body and labor, and systemic forces conspire to deny her dignity and agency.

However, Wariinga does not remain passive. She resists exploitation, fighting for her right to live with dignity and autonomy. Her commitment to struggle, despite overwhelming obstacles, demonstrates remarkable bravery and growing political consciousness. Through her experiences and relationships, Wariinga develops understanding of how individual suffering connects to broader structures of oppression—how her personal victimization reflects systemic exploitation of women, workers, and colonized peoples.

This transformation from victim to revolutionary figure represents the novel's central hope: that consciousness can be transformed, that resistance is possible, and that collective struggle can challenge even deeply entrenched systems of domination. Wariinga's journey illustrates hybrid identity struggles—she must navigate Western and African cultural frameworks, capitalist and communal economic logics, patriarchal and feminist possibilities for women's roles.

7.2 Gender and Neocolonial Capitalism

The novel demonstrates particular attention to how women experience neocolonial capitalism's intersecting oppressions. Women face exploitation as workers, as sexual objects, as cultural symbols, and as bearers of traditions in rapidly changing societies. The capitalist system commodifies women's bodies and labor while patriarchal structures deny them political voice and economic independence.

Yet the novel also shows women as sites of resistance and potential transformation. Women like Wariinga refuse to accept their designated roles, challenge powerful men, develop critical consciousness, and imagine alternative futures. Their struggles highlight how liberation must address gender oppression alongside economic exploitation and cultural imperialism—these forms of domination reinforce each other and must be challenged together.

7.3 The Role of Satire and Allegory

Thiong'o employs satire and allegory throughout *Devil on the Cross* to expose the absurdities and moral bankruptcy of neocolonial capitalism. The "Devil's feast" serves as extended allegory for how the elite devour the nation's resources while ordinary people starve. Satirical characterizations reveal how those who claim to be national leaders actually serve foreign interests and their own greed.

These literary techniques enable Thiong'o to make powerful political critiques while avoiding simplistic didacticism. Satire reveals contradictions, exposes hypocrisies, and creates distance that allows readers to see familiar conditions with fresh critical awareness. Allegory enables representation of complex political-economic processes in concrete, memorable narrative form.

8. Conclusion

Devil on the Cross by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o stands as a powerful work that explores the profound and enduring impacts of colonialism on African societies. The novel demonstrates particular interest in cultural imperialism, mimicry, and hybridity, conceptually uncovering the complex colonial legacy and its overpowering influence on contemporary Kenya and, by extension, other postcolonial African nations.

Through the character of Jacinta Wariinga, Thiong'o symbolizes the conditions of oppressed women within capitalist and neocolonial systems. Her transformation throughout the novel—from victim of patriarchal and economic oppression to revolutionary figure committed to resistance—embodies struggles for authentic identity within contexts of hybridity. This transformation highlights how Western values have left deep imprints on African consciousness, how they continue to marginalize indigenous cultures, and how they perpetuate exploitation even after formal colonial rule has ended.

However, Wariinga's resistance also demonstrates possibilities for challenging these conditions. She personally reflects growing consciousness and commitment to facing postcolonial realities rather than accepting them passively. Her journey underscores how understanding the past and present enables imagination of different futures, how breaking chains of historical exploitation requires both individual courage and collective organization, especially among women who have too long remained silent and marginalized.

The novel's postcolonial analysis reveals several crucial insights. First, political independence without economic independence and cultural decolonization merely replaces the faces of oppressors without eliminating oppression itself. Second, cultural imperialism operates through education, language, consumption patterns, and psychological colonization, creating subjects who internalize the logic of their own subordination. Third, mimicry produces hybrid subjects caught between cultures, often alienated from indigenous traditions while never fully accepted within Western frameworks. Fourth, resistance remains possible and necessary, requiring critical consciousness, collective organization, and willingness to imagine and fight for alternative social arrangements.

Devil on the Cross thus serves multiple functions: as literary art, as political manifesto, as historical

documentation, and as call to action. It demonstrates how literature can serve liberation struggles by making visible the mechanisms of oppression, by inspiring critical consciousness, by preserving memory of resistance, and by imagining alternative futures. For contemporary readers, the novel remains urgently relevant as neocolonial capitalism continues to exploit formerly colonized nations and as struggles for genuine decolonization, economic justice, and cultural authenticity continue worldwide.

The study of *Devil on the Cross* through postcolonial theoretical frameworks illuminates not only the specific Kenyan historical context but also broader patterns of neocolonial domination and resistance applicable across postcolonial societies. Understanding these patterns constitutes essential work for anyone committed to decolonization, social justice, and human liberation.

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