



Mechanisms of Cultural Control: Hegemony and Ideology in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*

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Abstract

The present study examines the dynamics of cultural control in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* in relation to the interaction of hegemony and ideology as articulated by Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser, and also by reference to the postcolonial theory. The post-independence Kenya in which the novel is set is well-suited as a locale in which to explore the continued predominance of culture, and ideological programming (which we feel goes hand in hand with cultural domination), in the wake of formal de-colonisation. Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony explains how the dominant class dominates the oppressed class through consent, shaping norms and values of society that reproduce inequality and are repressive of opposition. At the same time, Althusser's concepts of the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) can also be used to explain how the institutions such as education, religion, and media in the novel are involved in shaping the population for the benefit of the capitalist and neo-colonial power structures, and thus contributing to the dominance of the hegemonic patriarchal order. The close reading shows how *Petals of Blood* characters, mainly Munira, Karega, Wanja, and Abdulla are shaped by and, in some cases, question these ideological pressures. This study follows the cultural, social, and political trajectory of the novel. The novel criticizes the betrayal of the aspirations of independence and shows the way postcolonial regimes reproduce colonial structures of control through cultural and ideological domination. Postcolonial theorizing also contributes to this exploration by outlining the ways identity, language, and cultural practices constitute vehicles for challenge and struggle since the departure of colonial powers. Ultimately, this study contends that *Petals of Blood* not only reflects the mechanisms of the repressive and visible apparatus of political power but also reveals the more insidious and pervasive ideological edifices that regulate the mind and the body. By bridging Gramsci and Althusser with postcolonial critique, the monograph shows how issues of cultural domination work simultaneously at structural and ideological levels, making it possible to capture at once domination and resistance in postcolonial African literatures. The novel is, then, a powerful condemnation of the lingering consequences of colonialism and the internalized dogmas still determining post-independence African social orders.

Keywords: Domination, Ideology, Hegemony, Mechanisms, Postcolonial.



آليات السيطرة الثقافية: الهيمنة الأيديولوجية في رواية نغوجي وا ثيونغو بتلات الدم

الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة ديناميكيات السيطرة الثقافية في رواية "بتلات الدم" للكاتب نغوجي وا ثيونغو، وذلك في ضوء تفاعل الهيمنة والأيديولوجيا كما عبّر عنها أنطونيو غرامشي ولويس ألتوسير، وبالرجوع أيضاً إلى نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار. تُعدّ كينيا ما بعد الاستقلال، حيث تدور أحداث الرواية، بيئة مناسبة لاستكشاف استمرار هيمنة الثقافة والبرمجة الأيديولوجية (التي نرى أنها تسير جنباً إلى جنب مع الهيمنة الثقافية)، في أعقاب إنهاء الاستعمار رسمياً. يُفسّر مفهوم غرامشي للهيمنة الثقافية كيف تُهيمن الطبقة المهيمنة على الطبقة المضطهدة من خلال الرضا، مُشكّلةً بذلك معايير وقيم المجتمع التي تُعيد إنتاج عدم المساواة وتُفعم المعارضة. في الوقت نفسه، يمكن استخدام مفاهيم ألتوسير عن أجهزة الدولة الأيديولوجية لتفسير كيفية انخراط مؤسسات مثل التعليم والدين والإعلام في الرواية في تشكيل السكان لصالح هيكل السلطة الرأسمالية والاستعمارية الجديدة، وبالتالي المساهمة في هيمنة النظام الأبوي المهيمن. تُظهر القراءة المتأنية كيف تتشكل شخصيات رواية "بتلات الدم"، ولا سيما منيرة وكاريغا ووانجا وعبد الله، بفعل هذه الضغوط الأيديولوجية، بل وتشكك فيها في بعض الحالات. تتتبع هذه الدراسة المسار الثقافي والاجتماعي والسياسي للرواية، التي تنتقد خيانة تطلعات الاستقلال، وتُبين كيف تُعيد الأنظمة ما بعد الاستعمارية إنتاج هيكل السيطرة الاستعمارية من خلال الهيمنة الثقافية والأيديولوجية. كما تُسهم النظريات ما بعد الاستعمارية في هذا الاستكشاف من خلال توضيح كيف تُشكل الهوية واللغة والممارسات الثقافية أدوات للتحدي والنضال منذ رحيل القوى الاستعمارية. تُجادل هذه الدراسة، في جوهرها، بأن رواية "بتلات الدم" لا تعكس فقط آليات القمع الظاهرة للسلطة السياسية، بل تكشف أيضاً عن البنى الأيديولوجية الأكثر خبثاً وانتشاراً التي تُسيطر على العقل والجسد. ومن خلال الربط بين غرامشي وألتوسير والنقد ما بعد الاستعماري، تُبين هذه الدراسة كيف تعمل قضايا الهيمنة الثقافية في أن واحد على المستويين البنيوي والأيديولوجي، مما يُتيح رصد الهيمنة والمقاومة معاً في الأدب الأفريقي ما بعد الاستعماري. وبذلك، تُشكل الرواية إدانة قوية للأثار المتبقية للاستعمار وللعقائد المُستبظنة التي لا تزال تُهيمن على النظم الاجتماعية الأفريقية ما بعد الاستقلال.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الهيمنة، الأيديولوجيا، السيطرة، الآليات، ما بعد الاستعمار.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

One of the most forceful literary statements against neo-colonial Kenya after independence, however, is Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* (1977). which dares to attack from numerous fronts the social, political, ideological and economic mechanisms which reproduce oppression, like Onyambo with a tripod face, the signifier of a "nation-machine", and elitism/capitalism, and which shows people like Wayaki, Karega, Abdulla and Wanja painfully striving hard to distinguish between what they need to do, because it's the best way to go, and what they shouldn't do.. Josef Gugler underscores the importance of this work as a testimony of Kenyan experience, "Petals of Blood gives us one of modern African literature's great epics that reconstruct a nation's history from precolonial times to the betrayals of independence. In the lives of numerous characters and the experiences." (330). This novel not only examines the deficiencies and pitfalls of the post-inde-pendent African state, but also unveils a variety of covert and



overt mechanisms that are used to conserve and justify their power. At the core of the analysis of domination in the novel is an investigation of cultural domination, notably from the perspectives of hegemony and ideology. These two ideas, elaborated most influentially by theorists such as Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser, offer a critical way to think about how ruling classes win consent and reproduce their dominance not by guns alone, but through cultural, educational, religious and ideological institutions.

The present study is specifically aimed at explaining the workings of cultural control in *Petals of Blood* by demonstrating how hegemony and ideology work to control the mind, forge an identity, and perpetuate practices of exploitation. Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony claims that the ruling class remains in power, not just through state coercion, but also through the institutions and moral leadership, which creates the consent of the subjugated. In this way we can understand Gramsci's notion of the ruling group as ensuring rule over others; this group performs, he contends, "The leading ruling force may also be: that which exercises real hegemony over the other groups, Other ruling groups may or may not exercise their hegemony". (57). The novel demonstrates this through perversion of national values, control of history and education, and commercial preemption of indigenous culture under neocolonial capitalist penetration. For its part, Althusser's notion of the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) can be seen in how the church, the school, and the media have each served to police unquestioned norms' that reinforce the hegemonic and to 'conceal conflict' (manifest in declarations of endless progress and development).

In the present novel Ngũgĩ enacts the disillusionments of the Kenyan people as they come to see how their own expectations of what independence would bring have been betrayed. Its main actors—Munira, Karega, Wanja, and Abdulla—personify the agony of the shipwrecked whose lot is to escape, to question, or to be caught in the intricate network of ideologies constructed by the post-colonial elite. Their stories demonstrate how language, narratives, education, religion and particularly culture are weaponized to discipline minds, bodies, manufacture consent, and silence if not destroy the other. Ngũgĩ's portrayal of the post-colonial state is based on its role as an instrument facilitator of a global capitalist system, rather than a liberator of its people. Cultural hegemony is used to distort the image of any power or group with revolutionary intentions.

Postcolonial theory expands upon the ideas of Gramsci and Althusser, particularly its focus on the lingering effects and ideological consequences of colonialism after formal independence. Ngũgĩ's campaign for African languages and cultural liberation from colonialism, along with his political and intellectual views, exemplifies this. Local elites, embracing colonial values in the *Petals of Blood* (a metaphor for a specific historical context), played a crucial role in entrenching the



dynamics of cultural imperialism by modernizing and adapting its tools to keep pace with developments, rather than simply clinging to outdated colonial formulas. The result is colonial oppression and persecution, albeit in different forms. Modernity, with its emphasis on education and Christianity, represented a kind of alienation and separation of the population from their customs, heritage, and cultures.

Therefore, the present study aims to reveal the ideological thread that connects the *Petals of Blood*, meaning how social institutions and discourses function as instruments of domination. The study seeks to demonstrate the complex path and methods employed by Ngũgĩ in his critique not only of the political and economic mechanisms and systems in post-independence Kenya, but also of the ideological and cultural tactics and methods that support those systems. All of this is achieved by utilizing the ideas of both Gramsci and Althusser in a critical postcolonial discourse. This analysis allows us to understand the revolutionary impact of the addressed novel and its significance for researchers in the field of postcolonial studies and the themes of resistance and liberation.

1.2 Research Objectives

1-To examine the points that illustrate the mechanisms and tools of cultural and colonial hegemony embodied in *Petals of Blood* in Kenya.

2-To investigate how the novel problematizes the neocolonial structures and the elite exercise of power in a Gramscian sense of hegemony.

-3-To examine how ideology is institutionalized in the work, in education, religion, and the media.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study discloses the manner in which *Petals of Blood* subverts the dominance of cultural hegemony and ideology in postcolonial Kenya. It demonstrates how the ruling elites use education, religion and media to keep the grip over the subjugated people. The analysis contributes to knowledge on Ngũgĩ's literary defiance of neocolonial oppression and the ideological reform/production of inequalities.

1.4 Research Questions

1-How is cultural domination manifested as a mode of control in postcolonial) Kenya in *Petals of Blood*?



2- What are the ideological stakes, and how is the play between ideology related to politics and the economy in *Petals of Blood*?

3-How characters in *Petals of Blood* resist or accept these hegemonic forces?

1.5 Theoretical Framework

1-Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony: To analyze, how the ruling class exercises power not only through force, but by influencing the internalization of norms and values.

2-Althusser's theory of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs): To examine the mechanisms by which such institutions (for example, schools, churches, or mass media) reproduce ideology.

3-Postcolonial theory (Frantz Fanon, Edward Said): In order to explain the colonial heritage and culture alienation.

1.6 Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative, descriptive textual analysis of the novel *Petals of Blood* with an analysis of the data which focuses on narrative, character, language and symbol. The analysis is complemented by critiques of the discourse relating to language and ideological control. It demands the choice of some passages or chapters in which cultural hegemony and resistance are quite clearly played out.

2-Literature Review

2.1 Critical Background on *Petals of Blood*

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's 1977 novel, *Petals of Blood*, garnered widespread attention from critics and scholars for its exploration of neo-colonial ideologies, politics, and the capitalist system in post-colonial Kenya. Critics were particularly interested in Ngũgĩ's Marxist ideas, which challenged Western liberalism and highlighted critical issues such as financial corruption, class conflict, and the betrayal of the revolutionary ideals by the people. J.D. Kellam and Simon Gikandi have discussed Ngũgĩ's use of his four main characters—Munira, Abdullah, Wanja, and Karega—to represent the realities and diverse social and ideological situations that emerged in post-colonial Kenya.

The novel's critique of imperialism and postcolonialism is also often emphasized, and critics are interested in the way in which Ngũgĩ illuminates the sense in which colonial and neocolonial systems are continuous. The educational system, the



church and the state are shown to be ideological state apparatuses which perpetuate hegemonic control, a move which has invited readings through an Althusserian and Gramscian lens. Postcolonial critics like Elleke Boehmer and Patrick Williams have examined the ways that the novel rescues indigenous identity and memory by stressing the importance of orality, myth and history.

Feminist criticisms have also explored the gender politics in the novel, the figure of Wanja in particular representing the intersectional oppressions of class, gender and sexuality. Recent criticism has shifted to ecological and decolonial readings, emphasizing how the novel speaks to land dispossession and the degradation of the natural world, in addition to culture itself, as a mode of exploitation.

On the whole, *Petals of Blood* has been read as the radical political novel par excellence 1 which deploys literary form and allegory to disrupt nineteenth century narratives of hegemony and to picture alternatives to power and ways of resistance and transformation in postcolonial Africa.

2.2 Studies on Hegemony and Ideology in African Fiction

The issues of hegemony and ideology have been quite central to African literature, particularly in the postcolonial era when African writers have often reflected on the persistent influence of colonial authority and on the rise of new imperial power institutions. As Aijaz Ahmad explains in regard to the priority concerns of Third World and the colonized African countries: “Third World literatures are not created out of some essential cultural difference between the Third World and the imperial centre, but out of certain specific histories of colonialism, class formation, and resistance. (95). Using the theoretical frameworks of Antonio Gramsci’s theory of cultural hegemony and Louis Althusser’s theory of ISA, African literary critic and scholars have examined the ways in which literature simultaneously mirrors and refracts the ideals of dominant ideologies. These examinations demonstrate literature as the terrain on which cultural, political, and economic power are fought over.

Chinua Achebe’s responsive critical creative work to colonial discourse, particularly in his novel *Things Fall Apart*, is one of the earliest and most powerful of such studies in this area. In the wake of Achebe and other—like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o—scholars have interrogated the role colonial education, language, and religion played in the oppression of cultures. 11 *Decolonising the Mind* (1986) by Ngũgĩ Ngũgĩ’s *Decolonising the Mind* is an establishment text in the field of African literary criticism, emphasizing the instrumental aspect of language in perpetuating colonial dominance. His advocacy for African literature in the mother tongue is a direct affront to the hegemony of the language and world view of the colonizer.



In more contemporary literature, focus has turned on the way that post-independence African governments have themselves repeated hegemonic processes through nationalism, state propaganda and ideological manipulation. And with this return to Western hegemony even for those who had once been under it, whether through liberation or other means, Evan Mwangi writes that “Black writing frequently negotiates with the hegemonic discourses it encounters through a subversive engagement that re-centers African identities in their own terms.” (42). Such novels as Ayi Kwei Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and Ngũgĩ’s *Petals of Blood* are often read for their indictment of the venal post-colonial elite and their use of ideology to sustain power. These works all portray the betrayal of revolutionary aspirations and the use of education, the media and religion as agents for ideological domination.

On the whole, where the analysis of hegemony and ideology in African literature is concerned, the genre concerns itself not merely with the exposure of systems of domination but with the imagining of ways for resisting them. Literature becomes a battleground for ideology, dominant narratives are contested, and alternate models of society collude on the printed page.

2.3 Theoretical Contribution of Gramsci, Althusser, and Fanon in Cultural and Ideological Hegemony

Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser and Frantz Fanon have influenced the understanding and meaning of cultural and ideological hegemony, (respectively, yet all interconnected in how they view power beyond political and economic management). The concept of cultural hegemony was first proposed by Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci, he argued that the ruling class exercises hegemony not only through the institutions of capitalism and the state but also by winning the consent of those being ruled. This is done, directed by Gramsci, by institutions as schools, religion and the media, who form the thinking of the people through the publication of the ruling ideas and enforcing the bourgeoisie values. Of the idea of hegemony, Brennan writes, “Hegemony in the Gramscian sense is not just domination but the securing of consent by cultural means itself.” (64). Cultural hegemony, consequently, is a gradual and subtle process that sets norms and common sense, making the current structures of power seem just natural and unchallenged.

Louis Althusser took Marx’s theory and added a structuralist twist by proposing his idea of the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). Whereas RSAs (e.g., police or army) give a physical presence to repression, ISAs—schools, churches, and other cultural institutions—operate by means of ideology. The subject is hailed by ideology; it is the ideology that wishes the subject good day, only for the subject to respond with the ritualized response of ideology. In the work where he



explains ideology and its function, Althusser states that "ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence." (162). Though he does not directly use the word "hegemony" (as it was developed by Gramsci), his notion of the ISAs works in a similar way, as the means by which ruling classes hold sway over subjects not only by force but by consent and internalized ideology – a concept which is difficult to disassociate from cultural hegemony. This is to secure the reproduction of the conditions upon which capitalism rests, to indigenize the dominance capital enjoys in routine social actions.

In a post-colonial and psychoanalytic context, Frantz Fanon also further saw about ideological domination in the situation of colonialism. In *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon examined the ways that colonized subjects come to feel and accept the cultural superiority of the colonizer, which result in psychic alienation and identity disfiguration. In his view, colonial power is not just an affair of physical control, but that colonialism prevailed through forcing the colonized to repress their language, values, culture, and make them as an inferior. On the above notion, Fanon writes:

The settler makes history and is aware of making it. Moreover, since he repeatedly recalls the past of his motherland, he obviously shows that he himself is the continuation of that motherland." And the history which he is writing is not the history of the country which he is plundering, but of his own nation with regard to all of which she rakes from the surface of the earth, which she defiles and which she starves. (51)

Between them, Gramsci, Althusser, and Fanon offer a strong academic paradigm for the cultural and ideological hegemony. Their analysis shows how power seeps into cultural and mental life, functioning through institutions, ideas, and identities to perpetuate relations of domination and to undermine agents of resistance.

The Cultural Tools of Control in *Petals of Blood*

3.1 Education, religion, and the media as ideological apparatuses

In *Petals of Blood*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o investigates the processes of cultural domination through interrelated ideological apparatus of education, religion, and media to expose how these institutions have been manipulated to maintain capitalist and neocolonial dominance in independent Kenya. Each of these places serves as what the philosopher Louis Althusser has called an "Ideological State Apparatus" (ISA for short), subtly reinforcing existing ideologies under the cover of neutrality or goodwill. On that note, so can language be as well used for enforcing a cultural sovereignty, Ngũgĩ writes, "The usurpation of a people's language by the languages of the colonising nations was fundamental to their



occupation of the mental universe of the colonised.” (16). This quotation sums up Ngũgĩ’s main argument as to the nature of language as an instrument of cultural and ideological domination. She states, ‘That was how a section of us became language slaves’ -ii Language as a Tool of Imperial Domination in His 'Cultural Struggles' Ngũgĩ’s line of argument about the nature of language as an instrument of cultural and ideological domination is central to his linking of cultural hegemony in postcolonial societies, particularly former British colonies.

Education, in the novel, is depicted as an instrument of social reproduction, rather than liberation. "If the school does not free the consciousness of the students to develop new relationships between students — a starting point for critical thinking, or a return to indigenous knowledge and values — then education colonialism has only prepared a generation of students that do not value their own heritage, but instead, idolize (for example) the values of Western civilization or the success of capitalist competition. On the nature of the educational methods that were imposed on the people we read, “The colonial state imposed a hegemonic version of history that legitimized European domination while at the same time effacing indigenous stories...” (136). Characters like Munira embody the contradictions established by the system. Instead of fostering the country’s local values and cultures, citizens are indoctrinated with outdated colonial cultures, pushing them toward policies they previously rejected and condemned. These curricula adopted foreign histories and colonial cultures instead of local histories, and presented the idea of social hierarchies as a natural structure of society instead of condemning and rejecting them.

The church's demand for the people to submit and endure suffering clarifies the role of Christianity in justifying colonial policies, both before and after colonization. The use of religion, specifically Christianity, as a tool to reinforce domination and legitimize its policies becomes apparent. Instead of encouraging resistance to these policies and striving for individual liberation, these religious institutions advocate for enduring violence, economic exploitation, and class hierarchy. Reverend Jerrod and his church embody a symbol of surrender and submission, encouraging coexistence with the status quo and opposing any rebellion against it.

Biased media outlets are used to distort fair public opinion and portray opposition or any rebellion against hegemony as demonic ideas or subversive groups, thus discrediting them and discouraging engagement. This is what the *Petals of Blood* allude to: a systematic ideological indoctrination aimed at maintaining the dominance of the ruling classes. The media acts as an arm of the corrupt ruling elite, fabricating and disseminating false and distorted news about those who oppose this corruption and the capitalist system. The goal is to control public



consciousness, suppress any attempt to rebel against these authorities, and prevent any positive, radical transformation.

Neutral institutions such as educational, media, and religious institutions are used in *Petals of Blood* to perpetuate social classism and political hegemony, serving as biased tools and defenders of the regime's policies instead of spreading social awareness to oppose them. They legitimize policies that seek to suppress any rebellion and demonize any efforts aimed at uprooting these corrupt figures and their dominant systems.

3.2 Economic dominance by emerging post-colonial groups

The novel offers a scathing critique of those groups that continued the same capitalist economic hegemony in running the country despite the end of colonialism, a concept common in Fanon's work on post-colonial hegemony. According to Fanon, the fact of formal colonial rule coming to an end does not automatically free a people from the structures of oppression; on the contrary, former colonizers are frequently replaced with local elites who perpetuate the same forms of exploitation in the name of independence. On this view Florence Stratton comments: "This was the society they [the Colonists] were creating: ... in which a black few, the freed, linked with other interests on the continent, would go on playing the colonial game of ripping the labor out of the many, the slave, the skunking negative drab you see us as, denying people the right to flower to fullest bloom in air and light. (348–349). The road of post-political-independence: a new elite continues to collaborate with former colonizers in the economic domination of society and exploitation of citizens. Focusing on the enduring production of •the colonial game– In post-independence Kenya, Florence demonstrates how Ngũgĩ counter-poses the critique of decolonial illusion and the further power relations of domination and hegemony. It is dramatically contrasted in the novel by the base betrayal of the revolutionary vision by the Kenyan bourgeoisie, which collaborates with mnemofirms and foreign governments in their own interests.

The metamorphosis of Ilmorog, from a destitute village to a site of capitalist extraction, appears to reflect the arc of imbecilic elite capture of national consciousness that Fanon (in *The Wretched of the Earth*) imagines. These elitists—embodied in people such as Kimera and rich businessmen—grab resources of land, labor, and nation to feed their greed and disenfranchise the poor and working people. Ngũgĩ describes them not as part of an anti-colonialist struggle but as enforcers of a new kind of exploitation that links economic greed with cultural estrangement. Their rhetoric of economics has pretended to build a narrative of progress while the subtext reveals greater dependency on the capitalist world market.



Without a revolutionary reorganization of the economy and the cultural institutions, the decolonized nation remains a myth. In *Petals of Blood*, Ngũgĩ enacts this betrayal and reveals how the dream of liberation sags beneath the burden of neocolonial complicity. The novel is now a sweeping literary expression of Fanon's thesis: the post-independence class replicates colonial power, which leave the society economically oppressed and culturally humiliated. In this sense, the novel examines the mirage of sovereignty in postcolonial Africa, revealing the tentacles of hegemony that lie beneath the surface of formal independence.

3.3 Western Influences and Cultural Domination

In *Petals of Blood*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o represents the destructive effects of West and on postcolonial Kenyan society most importantly through practices of cultural domination. Writing on the part of western people in forcing their culture, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o states:

The missionary had crossed the seas, the jungles, bearing the love of money which was his religion, his light, and the gun which was his protection. The Bible was in the man's hand, the gun was with the soldier, and the money was the administrator and the planter's occupation. Christianity, Commerce and Civilisation: The Bible, the Coin and the Gun: The Holy Trinity. (88)

About these mechanisms, Ashcroft et al. write "It must be recognized that the colonizing process virtually always involved the domination of indigenous cultures through the imposition of European norms and values, and the portrayal of colonized peoples as culturally inferior." (2). Guided by Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony, the novel elucidates how the colonized people remain subdued not only through political and economic might, but also by absorbing alien values the hegemony of Western dogmas. Gramsci believes hegemony is achieved when the ruling class's ideology, world view is adopted as the cultural identity and in *Petals of Blood* this is seen as the imposition of Western education, religion and capitalist principles that has reshaped the Kenyan subjectivity.

The characters in the book, most notably those from the town of Ilmorog, are also caught in a cultural shift as traditional African morals begin to be dismantled by western ways of thinking. On the role of local elites as promoters of Western hegemony, Lazarus has written, "Postcolonial hegemony is not merely imposed by external forces but often mediated through local elites who embrace and reproduce dominant global ideologies." (134). Students are being educated in colonial history and language that is not theirs and this is causing disconnection. This resonates with Gramsci idea of ideological consent, when the oppressed are indoctrinated to believe that foreign rule is a natural or superior form of rule. The



Missionary School for instance is an agency of deculturation and sublimates the colonial mentality of perpetuating the wicked cause of making the youth see nothing good in their culture but everything positive in the trying to be an object for the growth of the colonial territory.

Western capitalism also remakes social relations, and brings about consumerist wants that replace a sense of community. It is a metaphor of cultural conquest by western thinking that Ilmorog turned from a traditional village to a neo-colonial town, controlled by beneficiary elites. Ngũgĩ demonstrates how this excess is not rejected with violence but embraced as modernization—as a sign of hegemonic mastery.

Indeed, Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony provides the framework for understanding the way in which *Petals of Blood* critiques Western hegemony that continues to operate despite the apparent end of colonialism in the continent. Western hegemony ingrains in postcolonial African identity forms of cultural, intellectual, educational and economic subjugation and domination through language use and education.

4. Resistance and Counter-Hegemony

4.1 Character-agents of resistance

In *Petals of Blood*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o portrays his characters not as victims of neocolonial subjugation but as its perpetrators too, however contested, or active resisters and counter-hegemonic personae. By means of figures like Karega and Munira, Ngũgĩ dramatizes the intellectual and moral awakening that would confront the ruling ideology of post-independence Kenya—a society still mired in capitalist exploitation and cultural subjection bequeathed by colonial power. Regarding resistance to hegemony, Benita Parry clarifies mechanisms for counter-hegemony, 106 she writes: "To assert the worth of indigenous culture is not to essentialize it, but to contest the hierarchies and exclusions established by colonial cultural hegemony." (180). Karega, the most explicitly political one of the lot, is the spirit of revolutionary resistance. A teacher and an ex-underground militant, he's explicitly opposed to the ruling class narrative of progress and development, which is basically what Capital personified as a human would say to you about how the world works - a veil for the system of structural inequality. Asked about the role of Karega in resisting colonialism and their heritage, he added, "We refuse to be instruments of imperialism. We need a new Kenya, a new society where we shall live as men, and not as shadows of Europe." (254). As a critic of alienated structures as well as an advocate of working-class consciousness, he is close to Gramsci's definition of the organic intellectual, who comes from the oppressed class and reflects their complaints against the hegemonic power. Ideologies are not fixed and can be altered and changed



through education built upon that and the power of the people who strive for change. The transformation of Karega into a politically active teacher is evidence of this.

Munira began her life as a teacher, initially supportive of colonialism. However, her support gradually waned as she witnessed the cruelty and exploitation in the Ilmorog region, particularly after its transformation into a monstrous city. Therefore, Munira's shift towards resistance was somewhat ambiguous and contradictory. She was initially passive and hesitant, given her position within the intellectual elite, a group torn apart by internal conflicts. Even her eventual collapse was a positive one, reflecting her critique of the prevailing corruption and the dominance of the corrupt. Her departure from her former institution exemplified this critique. As to his turning from advocating the values of colonialism to opposing them, he said, "Was it not time we freed ourselves from the colonizers' grip, stop worshipping the West and all its empty promises?" (253). This reflects Munira's loss of faith in the influence of the West and his inner turmoil about the legacies of colonisation.

Both figures, while taking different paths, fit into the larger theme of counterhegemony. By opposing the ideological state apparatuses of religion, education, and media and by challenging the legitimacy of the new ruling class, they are contributing to a language of collective resistance. In their struggles, Ngũgĩ finds a call for revolutionary reimagining of postcolonial identity—one created from the will of the people rather than imposed from above. Through such personae, *Petals of Blood* assumes the role of a literary manifesto for cultural and political decolonisation.

4.2 The significance of collective memory, oral tradition, and indigenous culture

In *Petals of Blood*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o foregrounds collective remembrance, oral tradition, and indigenous culture as powerful forces for counter-hegemony, resonating with Frantz Fanon's anticolonial methodology. Fanon insists on the fact that cultural resistance is a prerequisite for political liberation, for before national liberation must come cultural re-definition, through culture the colonized can "reappropriate" their identity, history, culture and thus their "own" territory. In *Petals of Blood*, as a stash of indigenous knowledge and histories repressed and deformed by colonialist discourse and post-independence elitism, collective memory and oral testimonies are tapped. Through figures such as Nyakinyua, Ngũgĩ brings to life traditional songs, stories and rituals that tie Ilmorog's community to its pre-colonial heritage. The oral histories told by Nyakinyua protest against the version of history imposed from the colonial centre and for positive survival: for resistance to hunger, to colonial control, and to commodification of indigenous knowledge.



Fanon claims in *The Wretched of the Earth* that adopting a culture of the colonizer ambitious role is a crucial step in decolonization, because the colonised has been disqualified of their own value, their own past. Ngũgĩ reflects this notion by demonstrating how both colonial education and Christianity oppress the native selves in order to adopt a shape of being compliant with the Western values. But the return to orature leaves characters like Karega to reimagine a future founded in African socialism and solidarity, rather than the Western capitalism that relegates him to a hearse one last time. The historical and cultural memory had taken root in the community that made possible the critique of neocolonialism and the construction of collective political consciousness. In affirmation of Fanon's idea that a cultural renaissance is prior to or precipitates revolutionary transformation, Ngũgĩ's narrative is centered on indigenous culture and the spoken word, not the written. So *Petals of Blood* turns collective memory not into nostalgia but into resistance—a subversive act of reappropriation of identity and phase in the struggle against ideological hegemony.

4.3 *Petals of Blood* and the anti-cultural hegemony stance

In *Petals of Blood*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o underscores collective memory and oral history, native, culture as the affectively powerful weapons of counter-hegemony, strongly in keeping with Frantz Fanon's anti-colonial framework. Cultural resistance is for Fanon prior to political liberation; the people subjugated by a colonial power must first struggle to reclaim their national identity, history, and cultural independence before struggling to take back their land. In *Petals of Blood*, collective memory and oral archives are repositories of indigenous knowledge and histories wiped out/distorted by colonial discourses and the post-independence elite. With characters that include Nyakinyua, Ngũgĩ revives traditional songs, stories and rituals that keep the community of Ilmorog anchored to its pre-colonial root. Nyakinyua's oral accounts confront the imposed eurocentric narrations to become the embodied memory of resistance, famine, survival, and indigenous wisdom.

Fanon writes in *The Wretched of the Earth* that the "re-cognition" of culture is an essential part of the decolonization process, because one's settlement on the land comes as a destroyer of the native's "ontological security," a blot on the "landscape" of the collective memory of a people. Returning to Ngũgĩ, the following analysis explains Ngũgĩ's response to the oppression of Kenyan identity, who is an example of the resistance of culture and Western culture about how oppressive they are to the local culture by the means of colonial education and Christianity which develop of suppressed local identities at the account of western values. But the return to orality also enables figures like Karega to dream of a future founded on African socialism and solidarity, not Western capitalism. These customs and memories of the local community can be used to construct a



criticism of neocolonialism and a desire for the collective awareness of a political self. By privileging indigenous culture and oral knowledge, Ngũgĩ thus reaffirms Fanon's claim that cultural rebirth must precede revolutionary transformation. So, in *Petals of Blood*, collective memory serves not nostalgia but resistance, a subversive repossession of identity and a tool of ideological resistance.

Conclusion

The present study concludes that the novel *Petals of Blood* condemns the policies pursued by the Kenyan regime, policies that, since the beginning of colonialism, have deliberately reproduced the outdated structures of imperial and colonial policies based on cultural and economic dependency that prevailed before liberation. Through an analysis of the roles of the main characters in the novel, the study reveals that educational, religious, and media institutions, which are supposed to be independent, have been exploited and turned into tools by the ruling power to support its colonial ideologies, justify its suppression of dissenting thought, and legitimize the use of violence against them. By adopting the views of Gramsci and Althusser, the study finds that the ruling power is able to maintain its hegemony not only through the use of force but also through soft power, which implicitly ensures public acceptance of its policies by manipulating people's thoughts and attitudes. Institutions that are supposed to liberate minds and raise awareness, such as schools and churches, have been exploited to justify the denial of equality among the people instead of demanding justice, and to portray exploitation as progress. The study also found that the "*Petals of Blood*" is a sincere call for revolutionary renewal, a rejection of hybrid and alien cultures, and a clear condemnation of the corruption of the ruling power, which has reformulated colonial policies to serve its own grip on power. The characters, especially Munira, embody the resistance of individuals within society, particularly the elite, to these colonial policies, especially when those in power failed to fulfill their promises to liberate the people from the remnants of colonialism and establish justice. Finally, the study found that the interconnectedness of colonial ideologies with the economic, social, and political affairs of post-colonial authorities plays a role in enabling those in power to cling to their positions. These ideologies have allowed them to justify their criminal acts against opponents and to tarnish their image to prevent greater public support.

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