



doi 10.5281/zenodo.7821457

Vol. 06 Issue 04 April - 2023

Manuscript ID: #0815

A THEMATICX-RAY OF NGUGI WA THIONGO'S "DEVIL ON THE CROSS" : A PANACEA FOR TACKLING IDENTIFIED SOCIETAL ISSUES

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ABSTRACT

Ngugi has presented himself not as an individual but as a voice for the voiceless in society. The novel allows one to understand and fight against neo-colonialism and capitalism. This work thematically x-rayed among other things Corruption; Economic, Moral, and Political Corruption and Exploitation; Economic and Sexual exploitation. The novel portrays the class struggle between the poor and the rich. Ngugi elucidates the capitalist exploitative treatment against the poor. It depicts Wariinga as a poor girl who was a victim of sexual exploitation by bosses throughout the novel. Ngugi was deeply engulfed in the Mau Mau Uprising of Kenya. He is convinced that capitalism is a systematic robbery of peasants and workers by the elites and the capitalists. It is a robbery protected by the government on the one hand and religion on the other. Ngugi places two different classes in contrast; the preliterate (the peasants, students, and workers) and the exploiters (wealthy people, the elites, and the upper class) upon whom the destiny of the whole society depends. Through the character of Wariinga, who was exploited several times Ngugi clearly elucidates the Capitalism and imperialism that are prevailing in Kenyan society. Ngugi believes in a classless society where everybody will be treated equally.



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INTRODUCTION

Ngugi WaThiong, a Kenyan, penned the novel in 1980. He first wrote the novel in Gikuyu, his native tongue, and then translated it into English in 1982. So, it's safe to presume that the novel's target demographic consists of Kenyans. The work is unique because it is not designed to satisfy, pacify, or appeal to the sensibilities of a primarily Western audience, but rather to a native audience. The Devil on the Cross is a devastating fictional attack against modern capitalist ideology. The story depicts the economic exploitation of Kenya by Western capitalists. Regarding this novel Ngugi says:

Free thoughts on toilet papers! I had deliberately given myself to difficult task ... the Kenyan people's struggles against the neo-colonial form and stage of imperialism (Ngugi 1981).

As a writer with sensitivity, Ngugi is troubled by the pervasive corruption and exploitation in Postcolonial Kenya. His literary rebuttal to neocolonialism, *Devil on the Cross*, was written at the time of its genesis. It is not animosity that motivates Ngugi's critique of neocolonial Kenya; rather, it is a critique of a country exploited and abandoned by a corrupt and parasitical national bourgeoisie. He believes that capitalists steal from workers and farmers on a massive scale. It's a theft sanctioned by the state and blessed by the church. The exploiters and their close partners are pitted against the exploited workers, students, and farmers in Ngugi's novel. Even though they make up a very small percentage of the population, the affluent exploiters ultimately control the fate of the entire community. They truly are the chosen few. The meeting in the cave is for the competitive selection of the best native thieves who will represent the colonisers, revealing that these elite members are the chosen of the white imperialists. Ngugi calls these prominent African politicians the "local watch dogs" of the European colonisers.

The plot construction and the development of the novel are fantastic. The novel paints the society which is full of women exploitation, abuse, brutality, corruption, theft, robbery, and social injustices. It explores economic exploitation, different forms of abuses perpetrated by the intellectuals and the liberals. It deals with the postcolonial national aspirations and the impact of colonial legacies on the postcolonial nation. Especially how, even after the colonizers left, the post-colonials still remain dependent upon the international economic order that is still controlled by the West. Furthermore, the colonizers also left native elites whose sympathies are more with the colonizers and international forces than with the natives of the postcolonial nation. The Devil is a personification of international/colonial capital and the disciples are the native elites who, even after the "Devil" has left still rely on the exploitative practices introduced and mastered by the colonisers. It highlights the role of national elites in oppressing their own people in league with their international masters/collaborators. It provides an interesting critique of the neocolonialism by exposing its exploitative and corrupt practices. And, most importantly, it provides a Marxist narrative of self-actualization for Wariinga, the lead female character, through politics and lateral solidarity rather than through a romantic form of self-reliance.

Overview:

The novel *Devil on the Cross* tells the tragic story of a long suffering young Kenyan woman Jacinta Wariinga, whose name "Wariinga" means "Woman in chains". Her parents are arrested and detained while she is still two. Then, she is taken by her aunt as caregiver, but the latter's husband, because of capitalism, becomes Wariinga's executioner and defiler together with the Old Rich man from Ngorika. This old man makes her pregnant and consequently she drops out of school and gets

deprived from the chance to study, her only hope to fight corruption in the society. Wariinga starts pondering over her misfortune very early and the scary possibility of the end of her studies looms large in her mind to the extent that she becomes traumatized. Having been traumatised, she thinks that suicide would be a solution to her plight as she notices that her desire would not be actualised. But in order to earn her living, Wariinga moves ahead to learn typewriting and shorthand. She relocates from a rural Kenyan town to the capital city Nairobi, only to be exploited and be requested sexual offer by her boss Kihara so as to safeguard her job. As she refuses to be lured into sex, she is dismissed. Her lover John Kimwana instead of comforting her rather dumps her, as she can no longer earn anything. The next day, her landlord fires her out after having increased the rent. Wariinga is therefore overwhelmed by series of mishaps, and attempts to commit suicide for the second time. Fortunately, she is saved as this quote reveals:

A city bus came speeding towards her. Wariinga shut her eyes. Her body shuddered. She swallowed a lump, and her heart began to beat as if to the rhythm of a prayer in times of troubles, do not O Father look the other way. Do not hide your face from me at this time of tears... Now... receive me... Suddenly Wariinga heard a voice within her: why are you trying to kill yourself again? Who instructed you that your work on earth is finished? Who has told you that your time is up? (Pg. 12).

Wariinga then decides to journey back home, but not knowing what to do and from where to start. Fortunately, on her way home she meets a helper Wangarii who confronts her with "the black short man and his white boss for raising their awareness about neo-colonialism, capitalism and their practices as the scourge of all the fellowmen and women and the need to engage in the fight against such practices. They therefore gather masses of peasants, workers and students. But Wariinga passively watches their process towards the cave to fight against the devil and his followers for she does not find it worth to take active part in the struggle while she has not been groomed on self-reliance, courage and endurance. As the masses' struggle, they only succeeded in scattering the private businessmen which resulted to the killings of the marching people. Yet it constitutes a shed of light on Wariinga's way to the total victory of the devil. This makes her to think more on how to dismantle the devil.

Her story and the struggle she faces is illustrative of post-colonial state, the story of Kenya's proletariat, a story of victimisation of filthy and sexist politics. She grows from a traditional local girl to become an engineer. The main part of the novel is concerned with speeches of the local and foreign exploiters who meet in Ilmorog for Devil Feast organized to choose some experts in theft and robbery. At the feast, the explicated started speeches about the bravery of theft and robbery. All these exploiters were interested to snatch the wealth of the poor people, as every speaker says about how many cars he owns, how many wives, who may suggest girls and how much property they have. Wariinga faces from the very beginning a lot of problems, she was worried about his shabby figure as mentioned in the novel "That which is born black will never be white" (Pg. 11).

Investigating the theme of corruption

As Wariinga was heading back to Ilmorog, she received an invitation The Devil's feast where corrupt people are gathered to compete over the best one of them. The thieves presented in the novels are the representative of those who support colonizers and help them to control the natives by all means. The character of Gitutu portrays the theme of corruption in the novel; Gitutu became like his father, a loyalist who "grabbed other people's land without fear", "the young of a goat steals like its mother"

(Ngugi, 101). Gitutu was following his father's words literally until he mastered how man eats a man in the society. The father was teaching the son that "A career of theft and robbery is the only one for anybody who calls himself an adult" (Ngugi, 102). Following his fathers' ideology, Gitutu became landowner and billionaire. He proudly relates how he has taken over vast estates from the white settlers, subdivided into plot and sold them at high prices to the citizens. He accepts without any hesitation. He states that "the land wasn't mine and the money with which I had paid for wasn't mine,...the land...belonging to people and the money with which I bought is from the people" (Ngugi, 106). The above confession shows the grabbing of the lands of the poor peasants by the black imperialists like Gitutu. Hence, Gitutu represents the exploitative nature of the ruling class in post-colonial state. He believes that "cunning was more profitable than to hard work" (Ngugi, 103). Gitutu exploits workers' and peasants' to enrich himself.

The corrupt practices of the postcolonial Kenyans are classified into three types; **Economic corruption:** which occurs in the greedy plans of the thieves and cunning project. **Moral corruption:** through portraying the sexual abuse of women at the work setting. **Political corruption:** as putting of man-eater systems which the children will be taught only how to drink the human blood and to eat the human flesh by building schools that glorify only this system.

Moral corruption

Colonialism left many wounds on the oppressors' minds and bodies. Ngugi WaThiongo as a novelist presumably, depicts the reality and rebel against the neo-colonial practices. Devil on the Cross significant portrays the theme of corruption through portraying the sexual abuse on women. In Kenya, corruption becomes a reality that embodies the moral values. Ngugi WaThiongo depicted the corrupt moral values through the relationship between the bourgeoisie, who are the oppressors, and the peasants, who are the oppressed. The employers' demands of the body of the female workers shows how those men are eager to satisfy their desires and regardless the place of job or Christianity principle. The protagonist, Wariinga, got sacked from her job because of her "rejection of the advances of Boss Kihara, her employer" (Pg.10). Kihara as one of the characters who depicts the Devil's image wanted to exploit Wariinga for his satisfaction only and her rejection does not only picture the good moral of the worker, but also shows the Boss/worker exploitative relationship that the employers strive for. Corruption grows into the Kenyan society because of cultural acceptance and anomalous behaviour, lack of ethical leadership and support among others could easily encourage the increasing of the phenomenon. The neo-colonialism voice is seen clearly through Wariinga, the school girl who became the candy of The Old Rich Man, whose name remains unknown. Wariinga did not learn from her culture, as the effects of colonialism kept in the society, that being a sugar girl is immoral behaviour. She was happy with his sweet words, his enticements of money, riding in a Mercedes-Benz, and taking trips to hotels. She lost her resolve, believing in his lies that he would leave his wife for her (Ngugi, 143-147) After her uncle sold her to the Old Rich Man, she became pregnant. That shows her whom the Old Rich Man is and his true intentions. His intentions were not to marry her but to satisfy himself with her soft body. Later, Wariinga was a victim of another moral deficiency. When she lived in Illmorg, she loved the son of the Old Rich Man whom she was in a relationship with in the past. Ngugi WaThiongo depicts the moral corruption through The Old Rich Man from Ngoriki. Although he was a "man of the church" (Ngugi, 253) who indicates the moral example, reveals a bad treatment towards women in Illmorg. When Wariinga asked him for a pure relationship that is independence of marriage, he states that he does not necessary go for marriage, instead he states that he "will find (his) own ways to come and visit (her)" (Ngugi, 253). By this offer, he does not only betray his state of being a religious man, but he is also was stealing the woman

whom his son felt in love with. Ngugi WaThiong'o thus shows the double-faced man who is in Sundays "reads the bible in the alter ... and gives talks on wedding" (Ngugi,23-24) and then he seduces his son's beloved. The same as Kihara who is intending to rape Karende his secretary, an imaginary character created by Wariinga to enact her own story. Kihara is another representative of the moral corruption. He was hiring women to work in his state. As he dismissed Wariinga for her rejection of sleeping with him, the next that will come in her place will certainly do. Thus, the woman has money only through getting a job that permit Kihara and those who are like him to "paw (their) thighs" (Ngugi, 206). The boss uses sexual relationship to satisfy their sexual desire and exploit the women. In one way they become as the exploiters "real wives, but of course not the real wives" (Ngugi, 206). They become "nurture servants to meet the whims of foreigners" (Ngugi, 223) which is highly immoral. The women give their body freely to their exploiter in order to get job but Wriinga's refusal to adhere to the request. Her rejection indicates the abhorrence of sexual harassment and also the moral decadence in Kenya by those who are controllers. Hartmut asserts that many Kenyans suffered from poverty, deprivation and misery corruption and its impact can be underestimated because it has permeated the Kenyan society.

Mwaura, for example was ready to "sell (his) own mother if (he) thought she would fetch a good price" (Ngugi, 32). Further, he says: "Business is my temple and money is my God. I don't examine things too minutely.... Show me where money is and I'll take you there" (Ngugi, 56). He craves for money and would go to any length to get it. This makes him a money collector. This shows that the people are ready to sell their motherlands to neo-colonialism as portrayed. Furthermore, the exploitation and the ill treatment meted on the people are done because of their selfish interest and for love of money. They have no consideration for human life as portrayed by Gateru's speech, "...used to pull people by the beard until the hair and the skin of his victims came off in his hand (Ngugi, 104). Moreover, they have not any kind of sympathy towards the masses. They make the masses very weak to resist any ill-treatment by offering them "large bottles of whisky, vodka, brandy and gin, or whole cases of beer for each person" (Ngugi, 92) to make the masses morally weak and thus easy to control them. Also, those who works in favour of Gitutu are highly machines who "undertakes any mission I give it, including removing from the face of this Earth anybody who dares to middle in my thieving and robbing activities"(Ngugi, 119). They Collect all these monies, illegally or immorally, to enrich the belly of the devils. They do not hesitate to "never sell a piece of meat to anybody without throwing in a bit of offal" (Ngugi, 131). Stating clearly that the wealth that is originally come immorally from people are their own.

Economic corruption

Jin Wei assumed that the corruption hinders the development of the economy because it discourages and reduces foreign direct investments, and infrastructure maintenance toward less efficient public projects and shifts government spending away from education and health. Ngugi WaThiong'o Devil on the Cross, follows a group of characters who meet on a bus to attend the devil's feast in satirical capitalist account of business practices. The novel reveals that the capitalists succeed based on their ability to exploit. The economic exploitation that was going on is depicted in the novel through Mwireri's discussion with the passengers that "To banish theft and robbery from a country is to stifle progress" (Ngugi, 79). Thus, for a country to be progressive there must be robbery and the theft. The neo-colonialism are portrayed through Kimenderi's greedy nature and his outline for the modern theft and robbery; "Our drinking of the blood of the workers, our milking of their sweat, our devouring of their brains" (Ngugi, 187). The Kenyan wealth and economy ends in developing the western world investments and economy. Ngugi realizes that Kenya is poor, thus draws attention to the bourgeoisies

who is swallowing, eating, dominating, and are represented in the state of “ravenous greed” (Ngugi, 175).

The novel depicts the character of Gututi as an example of economic corruption. He believes that cunning is more profitable than hard work “Hunger x thirst = famine. Famine among the masses = wealth for a man of cunning” (Ngugi, 104). Gututi prefers to be lazy and depends on other people’s production. He spends more time eating than working. He does not stop selling the people’s tin and pot lands. He goes further to revoke the air from them so they will spend more to get it. Thus, increasing hunger and thirst in the land. This will create famine in the whole country, and the people will then raise top-grade tycoons (Ngugi, 107).

Political Corruption

Ngugi portrayed political corruption as one of the themes in the novel as it reflects the problems faced in the postcolonial period. The Kenyan society suffered from dictatorship from the government, politicians and the upper class. The politicians were busy grabbing properties, accumulating wealth through unethical arrangements. Government men misuse the public fund and use their power and authority to acquire personal benefits at the expense of the common good of the poor masses and Africans at large. The novel elucidates how politicians aided the western countries to exploit and benefit from the Kenyan raw material and the natural resources. This was portrayed in the character of Kihaahu who says in the following quotation that he will never stop pinching the public money to enrich himself. After manipulating the masses to gain the election, and promising them with a better future, he stated;

I hadn't shed a drop of sweat. All my money came from the very people who had voted for me. How? Because it was their tax that would go to pay back the money borrowed from foreign banks... I never stopped plucking it (Ngugi, 116)

The Kenyans and the African politicians of the postcolonial period present another kind of colonialism. We see that the poor masses trusted the wrong men to guide them to build their country. Power went to wrong hands, the politicians whose ambition is to colonise their fellow natives. The political corruption led the African countries to misery, poverty, marginalisation and conflict at all levels. The politicians embezzle public funds neglecting the poor masses. They travel to the western country at will, export the raw materials at a very low cost and also squander the money they looted from the public.

The level of poverty and marginalisation in Africa by their political leaders have made the natives ignorant of what is happening and have stripped them of their rights and vulnerable to manipulation. They were unable to speak or demand for their rights. This was portrayed in the novel, “That is why I am very grateful to the Kenyan people. For their blindness, their ignorance, their inability to demand their rights” (Ngugi, 116-117). The government men here were very grateful to the blindness and the inability of the Kenyan to demand for their rights. They put their future in the hands of corrupted politicians and remained unperturbed. The government and the politicians try to convince the poor masses that things are normal, whatever they are passing through is the reality in life and the whole society is encountering the same.

“Kîmeendeeri will also build schools in which the workers' children will be taught that the system of drinking human blood and eating human flesh... The children will be

allowed to read only those books that glorify the system of drinking human blood and eating human flesh.... They will sing only those songs and hymns and read only that literature that glorify the system of drinking human blood and eating human flesh" (Ngugi, 188-189).

The corrupted government seeks to make their system productive for themselves. It makes it easy for them to take the wealth and the rights of the citizens without resistance from them. In this way, corruption continues to increase in postcolonial Africa and Kenya, which leads to underdevelopment, poverty, and endless problems. Thus, Ngugi uses this novel to elucidate the corruption of rulers and reawaken in the citizens the consciousness to resist corruption and exploitation.

Ngugi not only speaks of the post-colonial state of Kenya but more of neo-colonial state, regardless of the independence of Kenya, the colonization is still prevalent in Kenyan society. Mentally, politically, economically, socially colonization is still in society, to decolonize the mind seems very crucial to Ngugi (Ahsan, U. M. 2020).

Economic exploitation

The novel shows where the five passengers and the driver were discussing about the social issues and economic conditions of the Kenyans society in which they live, especially the exploitation of the Kenyans by the bourgeoisie and their fellow Kenyans. On the other hand there are "the leaders of foreign delegation from the International Organization of Thieves and Robbers (IOTR)". These people have applied to become full members of IOTR. These representatives are neo-colonial powers indulging in the most atrocious corrupt practices and exploitation. They declare openly their criminality of grabbing the Kenyan economy which is for the common good of all and the greed to take away the Kenyans natural resources. They were also indulging in exploitation of the workers and the peasants. They were protected by the judiciary and the police so they were operating and exploiting the natives with impunity. Gitutu is a greedy man who enriches himself through exploitation. He arrogantly narrates his story of success of how he has taken over vast estates from the white settlers, sub-divided into plots and sold them at high prices to his fellow Kenyans. He relates his evil deeds openly:

The land wasn't mine and the money with which I had paid for wasn't mine and I hadn't added anything to the land, where did I get the 2,20,000 shilling? It was from the pockets of the people. Yes, because the land really belonged to people and the money with which I bought it came from the people (106)

Ngugi in the above excerpts depicts the ugly situation and the grabbing of the lands of the poor peasants by the black imperialist.

Gitutu Kihaaku is an agent of exploitation. He made a lot of money through the concept of no national languages, songs and names. The advertisement in the newspaper was given as follows:

Modern-day Nursery School. Experienced European Principal. Formerly for Europeans Only. Now Open to a Few Kenyans. Foreign Standard as Before National Languages, National Songs, National Names Banned. Foreign Languages, Foreign Songs, Foreign Toys etc. English Medium of Instruction Limited Places. Telephone or Call in Your Car Colour is no Bar: Money is the Bar Fees High (pg. 113).

One of the exploiters brags in the following way: I hadn't shed a drop of sweat. All my money came... I never stopped plucking it. I picked one fruit after another. The sweet juice would spill out the corners of my mouth before I learned to eat more decrepitly (Pg.116).

The exploitation of the poor by the elites was very obvious in the novel. They smugglegoods and hike the prices of essential commodities through black market. The whole narration exposes the exploitation of the Africans by the African imperialists. The elites demand that exploitation must be indigenous, free from foreigners. The story reaches its climax when each speaker claims the crown of social crime and gives a new scheme of exploitation. For example, Kihaaku thinks of deploying plastic puppets of white children in enticing local parents. Gitutu imagines about the class where plots of land will be sold instead of tiny toys and citizens queue up to buy them. He also thinks of selling the air to the workers in the airtight bottles. Nditika awards the market where the elite will purchase the human organs for transplants so as to live eternally and leave death for the poor. The capitalists tend to sell the very air to the workers in their own country and drain off their blood and sweat to sell them abroad for a profit. This is the peak of capitalistic tendency.

Ngugi portrays in the novel the African imperialistic quest for power, pursuit of wealth embezzlement of public fund, as the sad factors that has characterised our African society till date. Ngugi conveys the fact that these capitalist would go to any level to uphold their interest and have no moral ethics in their quest for money. They sold their motherland to the colonizers for their selfish interest and materialistic gain. It is for the same reason that they wanted a continuation in neo-colonialism just to maintain the status-quo. In Devil on the Cross, Ngugi conveys that the Devil is worshipped by the capitalist power. Satan exposes the precise methods of power of the elite and their sceptical exploitation of the religion. Ngugidepicts a true picture of what was going on in the neo-colonial Kenya. The cook is deprived of eating his tasty food, as he is not allowed to eat the pudding. In the same way, the peasants and the workers cannot enjoy resources they laboured for.

Sexual exploitation

Women were being exploited sexually by the capitalists to the extent that no job could be offered without having them abused sexually. Waringa struggles to get a job but to no avail. Getting a job was very difficult unless she surrenders herself completely. Whenever she gets a job she had been exploited by her bosses, at the cost of her beauty, the corruption in the society and women exploitation that is widespread in Kenya. "Women's thighs are the table on which contracts are signed" (p. 19). Her body was exploited to the extent of being raped by her bosses which resulted to pregnancy. Her boss who exploited her and made her pregnant denied and abandoned her to her faith. She tries to commit suicide a number of times in the novel because of ill-treatment.

As she struggles to survive, Wariinga begins to realize that her problems are only symptoms of a larger societal dissatisfaction and that of the misfortune stems from the Western, capitalist influences on her country (Karoui, M. and Gaid, H. 2018) Waringa, in her quest to survive and be independent became an engineer lives a free life where she became boss of her own. Wariinga's experiences of sexual abuse and exploitation as depicted in the novel show the prevailing women exploitation in Kenya and it is an attempt to expose and to put a stop to it. When Wariingabecame independent, she was brave enough to challenge the unjust treatment on women and to fight for her right. She could no longer tolerate the capitalist exploitative nature and the cruel system of the society where the poor are being trampled underfoot.

Wariingawore a new way of life, a life which is based on equality and freedom. She is being respected and honoured (Ahsan, U. M. 2020). At the end she killed her first sexual exploiter as she says in last pages of the novel:

You snatcher of other people's lives, do you remember the game you and I used to play, the game of hunter and hunted. Did you imagine that a day might come when the hunter would become hunted? What is done can't be undone... the man interrupted Wariinga.... My darling, my little fruit, my orange, my flower to brighten my old age! He went on, carried out by his words. Wariinga take out the pistol. Look out at me! Wariinga commanded, with the voice of a judge...his words suddenly ceased. The people outside heard the shots. (Ngugi,1980: P. 253)

Conclusion

In this Literary work, Ngugi states his ideology that there is no area of our life that has not been affected by the social, political and expansionist needs of European capitalism (Karoui, M.and Gaid, H. 2018) Devil on the Cross can be seen as representing Ngugi's Marxist ideology in favour of the Kenyan proletariat and against capitalist and corrupt African elites. Therefore, his socialist beliefs and their clear representations in his work make socialist readings most obvious. Undoubtedly and indisputably, Devil on the Cross represents capitalism as a social, political and economical phenomenon that is prevailing in African society. Colonialists and imperialists are still influentialpolitically, socially and economically despite Kenyan independence. That is why in the novel the presence of the colonial power is strongly felt. It is the effect of capitalism and the neo colonial stage of imperialism that is the source of all conflicts in the text.

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