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Title
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Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3dv8g15c

Journal
Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies, 20(2)

ISSN
0041-5715

Author
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Publication Date
1992

DOI
10.5070/F7202016764

Peer reviewed

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ORAL TRADITION AS AN INSTRUMENT OF REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE IN NGUGI WA THIONGO'S *DEVIL ON THE CROSS*

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Introduction

Ngugi wa Thiong'o started out as a cultural-cum-political nationalist as well as a deeply religious novelist. At the time he wrote his early novels, his loyalties were divided between his reverence for Christian religion and his desire to defend aspects of the Gikuyu cultural tradition and politics. For instance, in his portrayal of Christianity in ***The River Between*** (1965) Ngugi was both encouraged to see religion as positive, because it taught reconciliation and unity—his two main concerns in the story, and also as negative, because its champions attempted to wipe out aspects of the Gikuyu cultural tradition which he cherished as a cultural nationalist. It is an indication of his divided loyalty that, when Ngugi wrote ***Weep not, Child*** (1964), he was ambivalent towards the Mau Mau Movement. As a political nationalist, Ngugi felt the need to portray it as a freedom movement through which Kenyans were determined to achieve emancipation from colonial rule. But because of his deep Christian faith, Ngugi also saw the movement in negative terms because it involved bloodshed, which Christianity frowned at.[1] This is already apparent in the horrified responses of Njoroge, Ngugi's persona, to the scenes of violence in the novel.[2]

A Grain of Wheat (1967), Ngugi's middle-phase novel shows a peasant bias and a more positive view of violence (which had been seen as horrific in the early fiction, but is now seen as justified) was a clear indication of the radicalizing of his sensibility. ***Petals of Blood*** (1977) signalled Ngugi's transformation into a "proletarian" novelist. From then onwards, his prose fiction began to bear an unmistakable Marxist stamp.

Devil on the Cross (1982) on which this paper will focus, can, therefore, be seen as Marxist in nature, and appropriately comes under the category of "socialist art," in which "the writer is in fundamental agreement with the aims of the working class and the emergent socialist world."[3] Our discussion of ***Devil on the Cross*** here will reveal that Ngugi's novel belongs in this category of fiction.

The central argument of this paper is that in ***Devil on the Cross***, Ngugi has successfully employed aspects of Gikuyu oral tradition in order to reach the Kenyan peasants and workers, the sector which he feels duty-bound to mobilize into revolutionary action. It is

tempting to argue that although, by writing in the vernacular, Ngugi aims to reach all Kenya's dispossessed, "that 80% of the people . . . living below the bread-line standard,"[4] in reality, he can only reach those Kenyans who understand Gikuyu, just one out of the forty linguistic groups existing in Kenya. Arguing along this line would mean that Ngugi's message in Gikuyu can only reach members of his ethnic community or those Kenyans who have learned to speak the language.

However, the wide circulation of Ngugi's fictional message among the Kenyan peasants and workers would not be adversely affected, since Devil on the Cross has since been translated into Kiswahili, a language widely spoken and understood in Kenya. Neither would the potency of his message conveyed in Gikuyu orature be diminished, given the affinities existing in the motifs of African folktales from different linguistic communities.[5] Thus, the employment of elements of Gikuyu orature combined with the use of Gikuyu language make ***Devil on the Cross*** a story that can appeal to illiterate peasants and workers when it is read to them, as Ngugi reports happened in buses, in taxis, in bars, and in family compounds in contemporary Kenya.[6]

Ngugi's aim in carrying out a technical revolution as well as a linguistic one in ***Devil on the Cross*** is to sensitize Kenya's peasants and workers to the need for a revolutionary change in their country where, following political independence,

> a very visible minority of Kenyans had become wealthy, and a much larger minority had become prosperous but, as a rule, former freedom fighters were conspicuously absent from their ranks. It follows, therefore, that many of those who had fought the hardest for *Uhuru* had benefitted least from it. . . . In short, there was a glaring disparity in the distribution of the fruits of *Uhuru*.[7]

The disparity in the "distribution of the fruits of *Uhuru*" is likely to create what Robertson has called "widespread grievance,"[8] which, in the case of Kenya, would mean a total dissatisfaction of the underprivileged with the socio-political order which is discriminatory. Ian Robertson has cited this kind of dissatisfaction as a precondition of revolution,[9] which he had earlier on defined as

> the violent overthrow of an existing political or social system. Revolutions are among the most unusual and dramatic of all

> forms of social change, for they may bring about, often in a fairly short time, a radical reconstruction of the society.[10]

A radical reconstruction of society is what Ngugi would like to see in Kenya. This would involve a complete uprooting of the socio-political system which is built on social inequality and injustice perpetrated by the power elite with the support of foreigners. Since violence is a basic component of a revolution, he ensures that all aspects of the oral tradition he employs are either meant to glue the attention of his audience to his revolutionary story or carry in themselves revolutionary messages intended to alert ordinary Kenyans to the need and necessity for a political revolution.

Ngugi's ***Devil on the Cross*** is anti-capitalist and expresses the author's disenchantment with Kenya's political system. Through the story, Ngugi intends to alert the workers and peasants of Kenya to the need for a political revolution by revealing, and in effect condemning, the collusion of the local middle-class with their European partners in the exploitation of the poor. Taking his audience through the methods which the local elite employ to bamboozle the underprivileged, Ngugi eventually advocates violence as a means to eradicating the system.

One of the most important aspects of the oral tradition that Ngugi employs in ***Devil on the Cross*** so as to glue the attention of his audience to his revolutionary ideas is story-telling. Early in the story, Ngugi writes:

> Certain people in Ilmorog, our Ilmorog, told me that this story was too disgraceful, too shameful, that it should be concealed in the depths of ever lasting darkness. There were others who claimed that it should be suppressed so that we should not shed tears a second time. I asked them: How can we cover up pits in our courtyard with leaves or grass, saying to ourselves that because our eyes cannot see the holes, our children can prance about the yard as they like? (p. 7)

The above excerpt has a conversational style, characteristic of most of Devil on the Cross, a story which is essentially cast in the mode of an oral tale. The semblance of storytelling is further created by the narrator's use of direct address to the listeners, such as: "Let me tell you the lesson Wariinga taught that man" (p. 221), and at the climax of the story, before the Rich Old Man from Ngorika is formally introduced Wariinga, his prospective daughter-in-law who had been his mistress, the narrator directly tells his listeners, "You who were there, what more can I say?" (p. 246)

To crown the oral quality of ***Devil on the Cross***, Ngugi uses the variant of a *gicaandi* player to narrate the story. According to C. Cagnolo, in Gikuyu society, a *gicaandi* player is a professional raconteur who "goes round the country like a medieval storyteller [stopping at] markets and squares to sing his poem to the accompaniment of his bottle-gourd."[11] His expertise and mastery of what he narrates is such that he "challenges any other singer to know as many verses as he does."[12] Furthermore, his offering "may go on for a whole day"[13] for the benefit of an audience whose interest in the material would normally glue them to their seats listening to a story they might already have heard but would enjoy hearing over and over again depending on the skill of the raconteur.

The role of the Gikuyu *gicaandi* player is, in some respects, similar to that of the Malian *griot*, who performs multifarious roles. According to B. T. Kishani, a *griot* is "a narrator, singer or musician genealogist [and] historian."[14] Thus both a *griot* and *gicaandi* player tell stories that entertain as well as instruct. Also both are professional storytellers who can use the infinite resources and techniques at their disposal to sustain the interest in their audiences. In ***Devil on the Cross***, Ngugi uses the *gicaandi* player to tell a modern story which centers on the tribulations of Wariinga and the army of the dispossessed in Kenya. Adopting this narrative technique would, in Ngugi's view, ensure that the attention of his audience is throughout held and sustained. Adopting this narrative technique appears designed to ensure that the attention of his audience is throughout held and sustained.

One of the main reasons why Ngugi is determined to capture the attention of his audience is so as to drive home his message that the Kenyan middle-class elite engage in exploitation on a wide scale and, therefore, deserve condemnation from the Kenyan masses who are on the receiving end of an unjust socio-political system. The middle-class elite in the story are made to invite the wrath of the masses in two ways: through their physical appearance and through their pronouncements.

In Devil on the Cross, Ngugi employs pointed and carefully selected local images to physically describe some members of the middle-class elite. One of his intentions is to hammer home the point that neo-colonial capitalism has dehumanized its champions beyond redemption. One of them, Gitutu

> had a belly that protruded so far that it would have touched the ground had it not have been supported by the braces that held up his trousers. It seemed as if his belly had absorbed all his limbs and all the organs of his body. Gitutu had no neck—at least, his neck was not visible. His arms and legs were short stumps. His head had shrunk to the size of a fist (p. 99).

The above excerpt forcefully describes the physical and spiritual distortion of Gitutu's personality as a result of his alliance with a system that deprives the majority of Kenyans their right to a decent existence. The description reveals that as a result of Gitutu's obsession with materialism he has lost all his vital human faculties, including that of reasoning. The mouth of Gitutu's compeer, Imeendeeri wa Kinyuanjii

> is shaped like the beak of the red-billed ox-pecker, the tick bird. His cheeks are as smooth as a new-born baby's. His legs are huge and shapeless, like giant banana stems or the legs of someone who is suffering from elephantiasis. . . . His neck is formed from rolls of fat, like the skin of the hairy maggot (p. 186).

Kimeendeeri's conspicuous consumption is illustrated by his sheer physical size. But more important is Ngugi's choice of images to describe his disfigured personality. The author's selection could not be more effective in depicting a member of the "dependent class, a parasitic class in the *kupe* sense,"[15] who is incapable of standing on his own feet.

In order to draw attention to their predatory nature, wherever the middle-class are mentioned in the story emphasis is always laid on eating, swallowing, dominating, devouring, violation, and devastation. They are portrayed as sharks always in a state of "ravenous greed" (p. 175). They can never get enough of food or women. After having a breakfast of eggs, butter, milk, and bread and putting away a couple of pounds of cooked mutton at ten o'clock, at twelve o'clock, Gitutu "attack[s] four pounds of beef [fillet steak] dipped in wine and then nicely roasted over charcoal. . . . At six [he] nibble[s] at a piece of chicken, just to have something in the belly as a base for whisky, pending supper proper in the evening" (p. 100). In addition to his wife, and his enormous size notwithstanding, Gitutu has two "sugar" girls whom, in his own words, he can competently handle. (p. 100)

Although he has only one wife, Ndikita has numerous girlfriends: "I belong to them ears, horns and all. I suffer from two diseases: I can never get enough of that or of food. Good food makes for a fine, healthy body, and the smooth thighs of young girls make for a fine, healthy soul" (p. 176). Before he impregnates and, later, deserts her, the Rich Old Man from Ngorika often played with Wariinga, the game of hunter and the hunted. Whenever he and she are on a motor-boat ride at Lake Naivasha he often lectures her on "how the small fishes were used by men to trap bigger ones, and how the big fishes lived on the smaller ones. . . [and] swallow them whole" (p. 144).

Their high drive for food and women corresponds with their insatiable appetite for the material benefits they derive from the economic exploitation of the Kenyan masses. Since the exploitation is seen in terms of "drinking of blood of workers. . . milking of their sweat [and] devouring of their brains" (p. 187), it is no surprise that the Kenyan bourgeoisie should also be portrayed as "a class of man-eaters" (p. 186) who inflict physical and emotional wounds on the weak with impunity. For the creation of his ogre-like characters, Ngugi solely depended on the Gikuyu oral tradition, which is rich with stories in which ogres, known as ***Marimo*** in the "vernacular,"[16] feature prominently. In ***Agikuyu Folktales*** (1966), Ngumbu Njururi records several tales about "the one-legged, two-mouthed cannibalistic ogres of East African tales."[17] One of them is called "The girl and the Ogre."[18] It involves a two-mouthed ogre disguised as a Tutuolan "complete gentleman" who takes a beautiful girl into the forest, locks her up securely in his hut and goes to invite his fellow man-eaters to a feast. In her attempt to escape, the girl pushes a human skull down to the floor. The skull, one of the ogre's human victims, arranges the girl's escape. On her way home, the girl bypasses a group of ogres on their way to the feast and is nearly intercepted by a highly sensitive, multi-headed ogre. On her arrival home, she fulfills her promise to the human skull who had saved her life; she tells her father to invite the villagers to the ogres' den to wage a war and exterminate all of them.

"Konyeki and His Father the Ogre"[19] is horrific (its impact on me was comparable to watching a blood-curdling movie) as it involves the slaughtering and eating of a human victim that Konyeki and his father caught. When they finish their feast on a woman who was pregnant, Konyeki collects "the three babies he found in her womb, takes them to his mother and asks her to cook them for him. His mother, a human being married to Konyeki's father against her wish, cooks three mice instead and secretly brings up the three babies. She knew that the babies belonged to her sister who had been on her way back home when Konyeki spotted her on a tree and joined his father in killing her. The three babies grow up into men and later kill Konyeki and his father, thus giving the woman who had saved them the freedom she needs to escape back to her village.

In ***Devil on the Cross***, similarly, the Kenyan masses are asked to compare the middle-class elite with the "one-eyed ogres" (p. 37) in Gikuyu folktales. Once the comparison is made it would, then, be easy for Ngugi's audience to believe that the extermination of human beings who are as callous as ogres is not only justified as moral act, but also as their primary political task toward the fulfillment of their revolutionary ideal.

Another instance in the story when the figures are called upon by Ngugi to incur the wrath of his audience is during the competition in the cave before the International Organization of Thieves and Robbers. The debate which generously depends on the verbal wit of the contestants is, according to David Cook, "cast in the form of public discussion,"[20] which "recalls more closely a meeting of elders than it does a modern platform debate."[21] During the debate, Ngugi draws the attention of his audience to the fact that the world unfolding before their eyes is that of overturned values in which the middle-class elite seek applause by exposing their methods of exploitation. The figures appear to be testifying so as to impress, but in reality, they are making confessional statements which, since they are about exploitation and repression in neo-colonial Kenya, will certainly enrage Ngugi's audience. After all, it is they and their spokesmen who are at the receiving end of policies such as preventive detention and political murders.

Kihaahu wa Gatheeca talks about the threat posed by those who "want to awaken the masses" (p. 117) and the necessity of detaining them "just like the fellows you all know about" (p. 117). The character is here obviously referring to radical academicians who, like Ngugi himself, have been routinely detained by the Kenyatta and Moi regimes. Kihaahu further argues: "But I normally send my thugs round to those who are obstinate—after plying them, of course, with drugs and alcohol and money—and then they cart their bodies along to the hyenas on Ngong Hills" (p. 177). This, again, is a direct reference to the tragic fate of radical politicians, such as J. M. Kariuki, "the most outspoken critic of the government,"[22] who was murdered in March 1975 and whose "mangled corpse was later found in the foothills [of Ngong] near Nairobi."[23]

During the debate, Ngugi invites his audience to laugh at the figures who employ self-praise as a means of winning the coveted trophy of exploitation in this world of overturned values. One of the characters who resort to self-praise is Kihaahu wa Gatheeca, who delves into the store-house of Gikuyu orature, likening himself to "the cock that crows in the morning [silencing] all the others." He further tells the gathering:

> I am the lion that roars in the forest, making elephants urinate. I am the eagle that flies in the sky, forcing hawks to seek refuge in their nests. I am the wind that stills at breezes. I am the lightning that dazzles all light. I am the thunder that silences all noise. I am the sun in the heavens during the day. I am the moon, king of stars at night. I am the king of kings of modern theft and robbery (p. 109).

Some members of Ngugi's audience who are familiar with the rich world of Gikuyu proverbs will know that the author has an ironic intention in asking the figures to recommend themselves before the Visiting Robbers. This is because a Gikuyu proverb, one of several recorded by Cagnolo, reads: "self praise is no recommendation," a translation of the original *Kanyoti Kabariti Keminagera njoya.*[24]

Another aspect of the oral tradition (also related to communication) encountered in ***Devil on the Cross*** is the employment of proverbs. Ngugi's deployment of proverbs in the story is highly creative in the sense that it distinguishes members of the peasantry and working class from the members of the middle class elite, who are depicted mainly as types. The proverbs used by the first category of characters are plain and mostly refer to the flora and fauna of Gikuyuland.[25] On the other hand, the proverbs used by the second group of characters and their cohorts all carry violent images and make reference to their predatory nature, to which Ngugi aims to draw the attention of his peasant and working class audience. Talking about the competition among the local "robbers" as an opportunity for them to improve their skills in exploiting Kenya's poor, the Master of Ceremony opines that "a homestead with a whetstone at the gate never has a blunt knife" (p. 87). He also suggests that the less experienced should learn from the veterans of the trade because "the leopard did not know how to kill with his claws until he was taught by the herdsman" (p. 87). Mwaura, a member of the Devil's Angels, a professional hit squad used by the wealthy in neo-colonial Kenya, draws the attention of the passengers in his Ilmorog-bound *matatu* taxi to the fact that "the Mwaura you see has not been sharpened on one side only, like a matchet" (p. 33). Also the Master of Ceremonies, trying to re-introduce a sense of order into the competition when certain "less qualified" participants are threatened with expulsion from the cave, comments that "there is no hawk too small when it comes to hunting in the modern style" (p. 125).

Two other important aspects of the oral tradition employed in ***Devil on the Cross*** by Ngugi to serve his revolutionary ends are parables and songs. One of the parables used in the story is the one narrated by Wariinga early in the story. It records the tribulations of Mahua Kareendi, a prototype Kenyan girl whose ordeals at the hands of men are symptomatic of an uncaring society whose members have no feeling for one another except where money and/or sex are involved. Kareendi will not get a job until she is liberal with her sexual favors. When she rejects Boss Kihara's advances she is fired. Her boyfriend, who has been living off of her earnings jilts her after realizing that her source of income has dried up (p. 25). The parable ends with an observation:

> To the Kareendis of modern Kenya, isn't each day exactly the same as all the others? For the day on which they are born is the very day on which every part of their body is buried except one—they are left with a single organ. So when will the Kareendis of modern Kenya wipe the tears from their faces? When will they ever discover laughter? (p. 26).

Undoubtedly, the answer to this question is that it is only by resorting to violence that the Kareendis of modern Kenya might get over their predicament. Although the parable itself does not preach violence it alerts Wariinga to the corrupt nature of Kenya's socio-political and economic system. This realization and her later odyssey in neo-colonial Kenya culminate in her awareness, towards the end of the story, that only violence can be used to uproot the system.

Another parable used in the story is in connection with Gatuiria, an academic, whose transformation into a radical owes its origin to an inspiration he received from a parable narrated to him by the Old Man of Bahati. Gatuiria is earlier on engaged in academic research abroad where his syllabus comprised "the history of Western music from the time of J. Bach and Handel in the sixteenth century to the more recent times of Tchaikovsky and Igor Stravinsky" (p. 134).

On his return home, he begins research on African traditional music—using song to rewrite the history of Kenya, giving the ordinary people and local heroes, such as Waiyaki and Kotalel prominence. It is in the course of his research that he encounters the Old Man of Bahati.

The parable the old man narrates to him involves the experiences of Nding'uri, a good-natured man, generous, industrious, and contented with his meagre earnings and possessions. A pestilence which strikes the village destroys all Nding'uri's possessions including his livestock, an event which drives him into the wilderness in search of relief. He meets and mortgages his soul to an evil spirit for prosperity. From then onwards, Nding'uri becomes mean and insensitive to all, including his wife and children, seeing value only in material acquisitions (p. 64), to a point where his greed turns inordinate:

> His meanness protruded like the shoots of a sweet potato. When people were dying from famine, that was when Nding'uri was happiest because at such times people would dispose of their property as readily as they would give away their broken pots (pp. 64-65).

He refuses to listen to counsel from the villagers who are mortified by his sudden transformation. When he reveals that his new condition is caused by the removal of his soul, now possessed by an evil spirit, the

villagers realize that they have been harboring a parasite. They, therefore, decide to wrap "him up with dry banana leaves, and burned him and his house" (p. 66). Gatuiria's musical composition, like the story which inspired it, is revolutionary and advocates violence as a means to ending exploitation.

The first movement of the song is an evocation of a pristine traditional epoch when the Gikuyus danced, told stories and cultivated the land. Subsequent movements reveal the disruption of traditional life through land alienation and forced labor introduced by the colonial regime in the 1950s. Since the post-independence era brought more repression, this time by the local elite, the fifth movement of the song dwells on the resurgence of the ***Mau Mau***, announcing "sounds and voices of a new struggle/ to rescue the soul of the nation" (p. 229). Due to its content and message Gatuiria's song is what Ngugi, committed to political change in Kenya, would call a progressive one. Its message is similar in content to that of the songs chanted by the Njeruca peasants and workers as they chase the "robbers" from Ilmorog Golf Course in an attempt to start the process of dismantling the repressive political system.

In ***Devil on the Cross***, a story that sets out to arouse the anger of the peasantry and workers against the Kenyan middle class, songs have been used to maximum advantage. They are essentially functional in the sense that they are mainly made to carry Ngugi's revolutionary message.

By using songs, the author was employing a form very close to the heart of his audience. Historically, songs played an important role in Gikuyu society, where people used the form to convey their protest against land alienation, the imposition of hut tax and the ***kipande*** system.[26] The landless peasants also used work songs to lessen the psychological tension of forced labor on large tracts of the White Highlands belonging to their European employers. Quoting L. S. B. Leakey, Ruth Finnegan testifies to the effectiveness of the form in moulding public opinion at the onset of the ***Mau Mau*** war:

> The leaders of the *Mau Mau* movement . . . were quick to realize the very great opportunity which the Kikuyu love of hymn singing offered for propaganda purposes. In the first place propaganda in "hymn" form and set to well know tunes would be speedily learned by heart and sung over again and again and thus provide a most effective method of spreading the new ideas. The fact that such "hymns" would be learned by heart, by those who could read them, and then taught to others, meant that they would soon also become well-known to the illiterate members of the tribe. This was very important, for there were

> many who could not be reached by ordinary propaganda methods. . . . There is no doubt at all that these hymns, which were being sung at *K. A. U.* (Kenya African Union) meetings, at Independent Schools and Churches, in homes of thousands in the Kikuyu Reserve, in squatter villages and kitchens of European homes, were one of the most powerful propaganda weapons of the whole *Mau Mau* movement.[27]

When the dispossessed Gikuyu peasants moved into the forests to fight against the colonial administration, songs had contributed in strengthening their sense of unity and in boosting their morale.[28]

Ruth Finnegan has argued that "songs can be used to report and comment on affairs, for political pressure, for propaganda, and to reflect and mould public opinion."[29] Earlier on, Ngugi had successfully used songs in his Gikuyu play ***Ngaahika Ndeenda***, produced in 1977 and translated in 1982 as ***I will Marry When I Want***. By experimentation, Ngugi realized that the sense of identification of the audience with the performance would be stronger if recognizably local songs were used in a play. He therefore employed in his play traditional songs, such as the Gittiro, which his audience might know because it is the classic song performed at Gikuyu wedding ceremonies.[30] It was then easy for Ngugi to use traditional tunes to fit in the revolutionary songs in ***I Will Marry When I Want***. The songs carry explicit protest messages meant to stimulate political awareness and revolutionary action:

> We do not mind being jailed
> We do not mind being exiled
> For we shall never stop
> Agitating for and demanding back our lands
> For Kenya is an African people's country. . . .[31]

and

> The trumpet of the masses has been blown
> Let's preach to all our friends
> The trumpet of the masses has been blown
> We change to new songs
> For the revolution is near.[32]

The banning of the play by the Kenyan authorities in December 1977 and the official order stopping the rehearsals of ***Maitu Njugira (Mother Sing For Me)*** (1981), a vernacular dramatic musical evoking the response of Kenyan workers against the labor conditions of

the 1920s and 1930s show that oral forms can be used in drama to directly communicate with the masses; and in the hands of a radical writer like Ngugi they can prove dangerous as they can be collectively marshalled to serve as an instrument of public incitement.[33]

Songs which could have been modelled on traditional Gikuyu ones have been skillfully integrated into the structure of ***Devil on the Cross***. The predicament of the peasants and workers is, in the song below, attributed to the political elite:

Famine has increased in our land
But it has been given other names,
So that the people should not discover
Where all the food has been hidden.

Two bourgeois women
Ate the flesh of the children of the poor
They could not see the humanity of the children
Because their hearts were empty.

Many houses, and acres of land,
And mounds of stolen money—
These cannot bring peace to a person,
Because they have been taken from the poor (pp. 50-51).

Later in the story, when the peasants and workers of Njeruca march towards the Ilmorog Golf Course to confront the contestants for the exploitation trophy, song is used to reinforce the popular determination not to give up the struggle:

Come one and all,
And behold the wonderful sight
Of us chasing away the Devil
And all his disciples!
Come one and all! (p. 20).

This call ends in a violent attack on the political and business elite participating in the competition. (p. 207) When the foreign delegation is about to leave the Cave, "The people roared like a thousand angry lions whose cubs had been taken away from them, and they seized their sticks and clubs and iron rods and pressed forward towards the foreign thieves, who were surrounded by their local homeguards" (p. 208).

This change of community advocated by Ngugi in ***Devil on the Cross*** is championed by Muturi, a worker who mobilizes the

peasants and workers of Njeruca to attack the local and foreign "robbers" and contribute to ending the system. A member of the militant team, the student leader argues that all hands must be on deck to fight neo-colonial capitalism conceived in the story as "the drinking of human blood [and] the eating of human flesh." (p. 209)

In ***Devil on the Cross Ngugi*** deliberately avoids a simple solution showing that the attack of the peasants and workers on the middle class elite and the foreign "robbers" and Wariinga's elimination of the Rich Old Man mark the beginning of an arduous struggle that lies ahead. The masses have not overthrown the political system. Five of them have been killed in the confrontation. Wariinga has lost not only her fiancé but her future is also fraught with danger as "the forces of bourgeois law" are certain to catch up with and charge her with murder and unlawful possession of a lethal weapon.(p. 214) With such an ending, Ngugi will surprise his peasant and working class audience who are traditionally used to stories with happy endings. They would have expected an ending similar to the one in most ogre stories in which the beasts are eliminated or the ones in which young lovers get married and "lived happily thereafter," and not the one in ***Devil on the Cross*** in which Gatuiria is unable to marry his fiancée who kills his father and wounds an invited guest. Here Ngugi asks his audience to gird their loins for the numerous hurdles that lie ahead. The ending is in conformity with a basic tenet of "socialist art." According to Ernst Fischer

> The socialist artist believes man's potential for development to be unlimited, without, however, believing in an ultimate "paradise state"—without, indeed, even wanting the fruitful dialectic of contradiction ever to come to an end.[34]

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to argue that Ngugi's ***Devil on the Cross*** is an "experimental novel" in which the author attempted to communicate with Kenya's underprivileged majority. The main object of the study has been to prove that Ngugi successfully employed aspects of Gikuyu orature in the story so as to reach a mass audience. The author, being a Marxist radical when he wrote the story, therefore, found it an appropriate medium through which to convey his revolutionary message to the Kenyan masses.

NOTES

[1]See, for example, St. Matthew 15: 19-20, which reads, in part: "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man. . . ." ***The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*** (Oxford: Oxford University Press, n. d.), p. 26.

[2]See Ngugi wa Thiong'o, ***Weep Not Child*** (London: Heinemann, 1964), pp. 124; 128; 101-102.

[3]Ernst Fischer, ***The Necessity of Art: A Marxist Approach***, trans., Anna Bostock (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p. 108.

[4]Ngugi's response to Wole Soyinka's "The Writer in a Modern African State," in Per Wastberg, ed., ***The Writer in Modern Africa: African-Scandinavian Writers' Conference*** (Uppsala: The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1968), p. 25.

[5]For example, ***marimu***, the Gikuyu for "ogre," is ***dodo*** in Hausa (Nigeria) and ***debul*** in Krio (Sierra Leon). Also the Yoruba have ***abiku***, a child who falls sick and dies, and comes back to the world through its parents. The Hausa equivalent of that is ***danwabi***.

[6]See the chapter on "The Language of African Literature" in Ngugi wa Thiong'o, ***Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*** (London: James Currey, 1986).

[7]Christopher Leo, ***Land and Class in Kenya*** (London: University of Toronto Press, 1984), p. 157.

[8]Ian Robertson, ***Sociology*** (New York: Worth Publishers, Third Edition, 1977), p. 526.

[9]***Loc. Cit.***

[10]***Ibid.***, p. 525.

[11]C. Cagnolo, ***The Akikuyu: Their Customs, Traditions and Folklore*** (Nyeri, Kenya: The Mission Printing School, 1933), p. 166.

[12]***Loc. Cit.***

[13]***Loc. Cit.***

[14]Bongasu Tanla Kishani, "The Comparative Role of Orality and Writing," in ***Présence Africaine***, No. 136, 4th Quarterly, 1985, p. 78.

[15]Ngugi wa Thiong'o, ***Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*** (London: Heinemann, 1981), p. 56. ***Kupe*** means "tick."

[16]C. Cagnolo, "Kikuyu Tales," in ***African Studies***, Vol. 12, 1952-53, p. 64.

[17]Ruth Finnegan, ***Oral Literature in Africa*** (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 355.

[18]Ngumbu Njururi, ***Agikuyu Folktales*** (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 4-10.

[19]***Ibid.***, pp. 11-13.

[20]David Cook and Michael Okenimpke, ***Ngugi wa Thiong'o: An Exploration of His Writings*** (London: Heinemann, 1983), p. 128. I must

thank the authors of this book for sensitizing me to the presence of certain aspects of the oral tradition in ***Devil on the Cross***.

[21] ***Ibid***.

[22] M. Tamarkin, "The Roots of Political Stability in Kenya," in ***African Affairs***, No. 308, Vol. 77, July 1978, p. 303.

[23] M. Mlamali Adam, "Images of Africa," review of ***The Press of Africa: Persecution and Perseverance***, by Frank Barton, in ***Index on Censorship***, Vol. 9, No. 3, June 1980, p. 75.

[24] C. Cagnolo, ***Op. Cit.***, p. 216.

[25] See Gatuiria's description of Wariinga's charms: "Your dark eyes shine more brightly than the stars at night. Your cheeks are like two fruits riper than the blackberry" (p. 225) and Kareendi's statement that "The yam that one has dug for oneself has no mouldy patches." "The sugar cane that one has picked out has no unripe edges" (P. 22).

[26] See Waruhiu Itote, ***Mau Mau in Action*** (Nairobi: Trans Africa, 1979), p. 190.

[27] Ruth Finnegan, ***Op. Cit.***, p. 272.

[28] In ***Mau Mau From Within: An Analysis of Kenya's Peasant Revolt*** (London: Modern Reader, 1966), p. 79, Donald Barnet and Karari Njama cite one of the songs used to instigate Mau Mau militants to fight.

[29] Finnegan, ***Op. Cit.***, p. 272.

[30] C. Cagnolo, ***Op. Cit.***, p. 171.

[31] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, ***I will Marry When I Want*** (London: Heinemann, 1982), p. 26.

[32] ***Loc. Cit.***

[33] Ngugi was detained in 1977 by the Kenyan authorities probably because of his newly developed militancy, following the staging of his Gikuyu play, ***Ngaahika Ndeenda***. ***Matigari***, a Gikuyu novel, was banned in 1986 because the Kenyan establishment considered "the 'dangerous' consequences of Ngugi's placing his revolutionary writing directly in the hands of the oppressed." Kofi Anyidoho observes: "His earlier work, ***Petals of Blood***, is an even more direct incitement to rebellion against an unjust system, but it was actually launched by a top member of the government, the same government that later detained Ngugi for daring to use medium of Gikuyu language drama to mobilize peasants and workers for purposes of social transformation." See Kofi Anyidoho, "Language and Development in Pan-African Literary Experience," in ***Research in African Literatures***, Vol. 23, No. 1, Spring 1992, p. 53.

[34] Ernst Fischer, ***Op. Cit.*** p. 113.