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**Class Struggle, Elitism
and Social Collectivism
in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's
Devil on the Cross:
A Marxist Approach**

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Introduction

Secretly written on sheets of toilet paper while Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o was detained in prison, *Devil on the Cross* can be considered as both an insightful interpretation and a scathing critique of Kenyan politics and society during the period of neo-colonialism. Originally written in Ngũgĩ's native Gikuyu language under the title of *Caitani Mutharaba-ini*, *Devil on the Cross* contains many of the issues and concerns that are central to Ngũgĩ's views of postcolonial African politics and literature. In particular, Ngũgĩ uses Warĩinga's story of exploitation and social struggle, common to many young people in contemporary Kenya, to satirize and thus harshly criticize the political and social situation of postcolonial Kenya when faced with the so-called devil of capitalism, which Ngũgĩ himself considers as "the last vicious kick of a dying imperialism" (*Devil* 210).

First and foremost, Ngũgĩ's pungent satire is a fierce attack against the postcolonial African élite and new African leaders, that is, the so-called "local watchdogs" (*Devil* 97) who perpetuated Western domination and thus were nothing but pawns of the white man whose presence on the African continent was no longer endurable. Ngũgĩ, a man who has dedicated his life and work to the struggle for the liberation of Kenyan people, illustrates well this fact in *Devil on the Cross*, not only with regard to post-independence Kenyan society, but mainly in connection with the political and social reality of most contemporary African countries. Therefore, *Devil on the Cross*, despite the fact that it refers to Kenya in particular, depicts situations and problems that are common to almost all postcolonial African countries. Ngũgĩ's ultimate political goal is, therefore, to liberate Kenya and its people from the political, social and economic

legacy of the colonial era, that is, neo-colonialism, capitalism, and the corruption of local ruling élite. However, Ngũgĩ does not propose a solution to such a vast problem, but rather he strives for a political and cultural awakening of the people of Kenya so as to develop a strong national consciousness:

The solution lies with the people of Kenya . . . people must have that attitude of mind that is not only aware of the problems, but desire a solution. For Kenya a national culture embracing all can be developed . . . A dream? One has only to go to Kenya to know. All the people love her soil dearly. This is our common ground. Perhaps the soil . . . will unite them. In this lies the hope of Kenya. (*Homecoming* 25)

According to Marxist ideology, “literature can only be understood if its full context – historical, economic, social, cultural – is taken into account” (Rivkin and Ryan 644). Therefore, as literary works are rooted, to a large extent, in a precise setting, at a given time, in order to better understand and interpret them, we have to take into consideration the period and the political, cultural, and socio-economic background of the literary text. One major assumption of Marxists is that “culture [including literature] always is an expression of the prevailing social and economic situation” (Ryan 116), and most importantly, “functions to reproduce the class structure of society . . . [and always] reflects unproblematically the values and ideals of the class in dominance” (Rivkin and Ryan 644). These two concepts, which consider literature and culture as active agents within the social, political, and economic world, stem from Karl Marx’s theories of class

exploitation and class struggle in modern industrial capitalism. Viewed from the Marxist perspective, the literary works of a period would, then, reveal the state of the struggle between classes in a historical place and moment.

In many ways, Ngũgĩ's political commitment is reminiscent of Marxist ideology though he does not expressly state so in his literary essays contained in *Homecoming* (1972) and *Decolonizing the Mind* (1992). However, without any doubt, he has been influenced by Marxism and, above all, he displays his Marxist ideology in his fiction through his penetrating analysis of social facts, his rejection of capitalism, and his support for the popular masses in their struggle against the corrupt capitalist bourgeoisie and neo-colonialism. In this way, *Devil on the Cross* represents Ngũgĩ's most radical contribution to Kenyan, and perhaps African literature, as a whole. With its didactic and political overtones, *Devil on the Cross* is ultimately designed to educate the Kenyan working classes about the corrupt nature of capitalist society and support them in their political struggle for freedom and independence.

In his analysis of social facts, Ngũgĩ, following Marx's assumptions, always starts by focusing his attention on the economic conditions and the situation of the social classes that constitute the social structure of society; to use Marxist terminology, he always moves from the economic "base" to the ideological "superstructure" (Antonio 22). According to his Marxist ideology, Ngũgĩ sees capitalism as an unfair system where "the loss of the masses is the gain of the few" (*Devil* 105), a system that is the root cause of the political and economic problems that affect postcolonial African countries. He writes in *Homecoming*: "Today, in Africa, we are harvesting the bitter fruits of capitalist and colonialist policy of divide and rule, and those of the colonial legacy of an uneven

development . . . now there are only two tribes left in Africa: the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’” (xvii). Ngũgĩ is, therefore, fully aware of the social and economic struggle between the exploiters and the exploited, the élite and the masses, which is at the core of the capitalist system, and decides to line up with the masses in their struggle for liberation.

In his analysis of the impact of political independence on the Kenyan people, Ngũgĩ argues that this independence has been usurped by the African élite who took over power from the British but did not attempt to change the political and socio-economic structures of the colonial era. Moreover, this new ruling class has only used its position to gain more power and enrich itself at the expense of peasants and workers. According to Ngũgĩ, the African élite who took over the leadership when Kenya became independent have thus embraced capitalism, and this fact has left the country open to political oppression and economic exploitation by both Western countries and the local leaders. Throughout *Devil on the Cross*, we see how the power is concentrated into the hands of a corrupt minority whose strongest desire is to maintain its economic supremacy over the exploited majority, whose aspirations, on the contrary, are to be fulfilled socially, politically, and in the last resort, economically. Consequently, the novel represents Ngũgĩ's most convincing political commitment to the cause of the Kenyan lower classes.

According to the Marxist assumption that social classes exist because of the means of production, Ngũgĩ focus his attention on social stratification rather than racial division. In *Devil on the Cross*, therefore, the class struggle between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’ is basically related to economic issues and social conditions. At first glance, the novel shows that since postcolonial Kenya has embraced Western capitalism, there

will always be the struggle between the rich and the poor, the exploiter and the exploited, “the hunter and the hunted” (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 144): “If you look at this world you'll see that there are two types of human being in every country: the manager and the managed, the one who grabs and the one who hoped for leftovers, the man who gives and the man who waits to receive” (79). It is clear that class struggle occupies a prominent position in the novel as it portrays social tensions and violent clashes between the masses and the ruling élite.

Though Ngũgĩ's political ideology is strongly influenced by Marxist principles, at the same time he shows a nationalist and socialist vision that is essentially African: “My thesis, when we come to today's Africa, is then very simple: a completely socialized economy, collectively owned and controlled by the people, is necessary for a national culture: a complete and total liberation of the people, through the elimination of all exploitative forces, is necessary for a national culture” (*Homecoming* 13). He sees himself as a revolutionary and a radical writer, who should be relating to the exploited peasants, and therefore developing a “true national culture which can produce healthy ‘stubborn youths’, a culture that nurtures a society based on co-operation and not ruthless exploitation, ruthless grab-and-take, a culture that is born of a people's collective labour” (*Homecoming* 21-22). He also believes that “African intellectuals must align themselves with the struggle of the African masses for a meaningful national idea . . . for a form of social organization that will free the manacled spirit and energy of our people so we can build a new country” (50). It is in this sense that Ngũgĩ can be considered to be a writer who assigns a political and social function to literature.

Using a Marxist critical approach combined with aspects of Postcolonial criticism, this thesis will explore the relevance of the concepts of class struggle, elitism and social collectivism in *Devil on the Cross* as well as Ngugi's ideological and political commitment against capitalist and neo-colonial forces. In particular, this study will be organised in the following manner: the first section will attempt to define *Devil on the Cross* as a "national allegory", according to the theory of the American Marxist Fredric Jameson about the role of Third-World Literature in the era of modern capitalism. This introductory section will show how, after independence, African literature entered into a new phase and had become a medium of struggle mostly directed against the new African élite and characteristically took the form of a national and political allegory. The second and third parts of the study will deal with Ngũgĩ's acute analysis of postcolonial Kenyan society in *Devil on the Cross*, in terms of class exploitation, class struggle, and elitism. For these sections, Marxist theory will be used, as based on concepts developed by earlier theorists such as Marx himself, Friedrich Engels and György Lukács, and by contemporary theorists, more specifically Fredric Jameson and Terry Eagleton. Lastly, the fourth and final part of this thesis will explore the novel's particular ideological and political commitment as well as Ngũgĩ's effort to draw attention to how Kenya and Africa as a whole suffered from imperialism, neo-colonialism, and an increasingly corrupt and greedy capitalist society; this particular section will also focus on the importance of social collectivism in the struggle for liberation, as described by Ngũgĩ in *Devil on the Cross*.

Devil on the Cross as National Allegory

With *Devil on the Cross*, Ngũgĩ provides a detailed and exhaustive exploration of life in postcolonial Kenya. At the same time, he criticizes the neo-colonial stage of imperialism as well as the capitalist society that emerged in Kenya after independence, looking particularly at the effects that global capitalism has upon people. The novel is thematically concerned with how foreign companies and the corrupt local élite greedily exploit the workers, and peasants of Kenya. However, Ngũgĩ's criticism of neo-colonial Kenya is not based on hatred, but rather on a reasoned critique of a country exploited and betrayed by a corrupt and parasitical national bourgeoisie.

On the one hand, *Devil on the Cross* tells the tragic story of Warĩnga, a young Kenyan woman who emigrates from her small rural hometown to urban and modern Nairobi only to be subjected and exploited by a corrupt and greedy capitalist society. On the other hand, the novel follows a symbolic group of characters, Warĩnga included, who meet on a bus, each with their own dramatic story about social and economic exploitation. *Devil on the Cross* focuses therefore on the social and political contradictions of both capitalism and neo-colonialism. It is within these contradictions that the issues of elitism, class struggle and social collectivism are evident. These themes are an important component of Ngũgĩ's concern about the breakdown in Kenya's socio-political system. Community divisions, political corruption, and social revolution exist structurally in post-independence Kenya. Along these lines, Ngũgĩ historically documents, through allegorical characters and situations, the abuse of political privilege and power as well as the destructive ascent of the new Kenyan bourgeoisie.

As a critical text, *Devil on the Cross* delineates the historical, political, social, and economic circumstances that make it possible to analyse African literature dealing in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial stages of African history. Thus, it illuminates the various types of ideologies or mentalities that inform African literature. In addition, the text helps the African and Western reader determine if an African writer's portrayal of African history and society fully reflects its political arrangements, social relations, and economic factors. In *Homecoming*, Ngũgĩ claims that African literature exists in a historical and political continuum and that the neo-colonial stage of colonialism prevails today in Kenya because of the continuation after independence of the political, social and economic practices established by British colonisers.

Significantly, *Devil on the Cross* reflects Ngũgĩ's assumptions and shows how colonialism laid the roots of neo-colonialism in Kenya by creating the country's economic dependency on the international capitalist system. Indeed, the changes that the characters undergo in the course of the novel clearly parallel historical changes that were underway in postcolonial Kenya. Their personal experiences are linked with public events in their society in ways that make them a symbol of their society and also serve as a reminder that individuals always develop within specific historical, political and social contexts. Ngũgĩ suggests therefore that the life of the individual, especially in Africa, is closely related to the community: "In the African way, the community serves the individual. And the individual finds the fullest development of his personality when he is working in and for the community as a whole. Land, food and wealth is for the community" (*Homecoming* 25).

The combination of public and private perspectives in *Devil on the Cross* comes close to Fredric Jameson's notion of "national allegories" (69), that is, of the individual character in postcolonial literature whose life and experience embody that of a whole country as it emerges from the colonial era: "All third-world texts are necessarily . . . allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as . . . national allegories even when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel" (69). Seen in this light, the characters of third-world texts stand as representative of the whole nation as it struggle against colonial and imperial forces and their personal experience seems to reflect the one of the whole community. On the other hand, Jameson claims that the relation between the public or socio-political and the private or subjective is something wholly different in third-world cultural productions. While in Western cultural tradition what emerges is "a radical split between the private and the public, between the poetic and the political, between . . . the domain of sexuality and the unconscious and that of the public world of classes, of the economic, and of secular political power" (69), in a postcolonial text such as Ngũgĩ's *Devil on the Cross*, the two categories are closely related to each other and in particular, "the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society" (Jameson 69).

Significantly, Chinweizu et al., in their book *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature*, argue:

African Literature is an autonomous entity separate and apart from all other literatures. It has its own traditions, models and norms. Its

constituency is separate and radically different from that of the European or other literatures. And its historical and cultural imperatives impose upon it concerns and constraints quite different . . . to the European. (4)

This emphasis upon the general difference between Western and African literature seems to recall Jameson's assumption that third-world literary texts are always different from those produced in Western society.

Above all that Jameson's theory about Third-World literature is also one of the more influential and important attempts to theorize the relationship of cultural and literary production to the nation and to politics. As a postcolonial literary text, *Devil on the Cross* is particularly well suited to a Jamesonian discourse. Indeed, the essentialist revolutionary imprint of the novel emphasises the interconnectedness and uniqueness of African literary and political discourse. In the novel, the city of Ilmorog can stand for all of Kenya, and Kenya can stand for all of Africa. Kenya is transformed into a proto-capitalist society where exploitation, social inequality, corruption, and misery have divided Kenyans along class lines. In the novel, Ngũgĩ makes it clear that capitalism was brought to Kenya by imperialism and colonialism and most of all it has sought to change Kenyan society as well as Kenyan politics and economy. Ngũgĩ clearly conveys this fact through the description of Kenyan cities: "Nairobi is large, soulless and corrupt. The same is true of all the cities in every country that has recently slipped the noose of colonialism . . . they have been taught the principle and system of self-interest and have been told to forget the ancient songs that glorify the notion of collective good" (*Devil* 15).

As Jameson suggests, in postcolonial texts “the relationship between the libidinal and the political components of individual and social experience is radically different from what obtains in the west” (71). Accordingly, in African literature the characters’ personal experience “is to be read in primarily political and social terms” (72). In the novel, the descriptions of postcolonial Kenyan society are shaped by some specific circumstances and situations of Kenyan history: the centrality of land in Gikuyu society, the Mau-Mau war of independence, the introduction and development of Western capitalism, and the post-independence alienation and disillusionment of Kenyan people. In order to fully understand the novel's inner dynamics, we first have to look at Ngũgĩ's historical and political influences, which came from a number of different sources. The most obvious is the independence movement of the Land and Freedom Army, better known as ‘The Mau-Mau Movement’. The Mau-Mau revolutionary movement and its uprising in Kenya in the 1950s was an important factor not only in Kenyan colonial history, but also in Ngũgĩ's personal experience. In fact, his brother joined the Mau-Mau rebellion, and his parents and other members of his family were arrested and detained by the British Government (Booker 184). The history of Mau-Mau resistance against British imperialism was certainly influential for Ngũgĩ's moral attitude and didacticism as well as for his political and social commitment, and therefore it figures in several of his novels.¹

On the first page, Ngũgĩ points out that *Devil on the Cross* is primarily addressed “To all Kenyans struggling against the neo-colonial stage of imperialism” (1). It could be argued therefore that the novel constitutes a sort of socialist manifesto as it sympathizes with the Marxist idea of the world of workers and peasants. In all respects, Ngũgĩ

¹ On the Mau-Mau national movement of resistance and its part in Ngũgĩ's novels, see Odhiambo and Lonsdale (2003, 271-83).

considers Kenyan society as a complex in which economics, politics and culture are inextricably linked. As a result, *Devil on the Cross* provides a powerful historical, political and social perspective on contemporary Kenya, with the struggle against Western domination in its neo-colonial and capitalist forms as a constant theme. In this respect, the novel functions simultaneously as a stimulus for political and social change, as it is aimed at persuading the masses to support and promote a true and authentic national culture.

According to Booker, “*Devil on the Cross* is a didactic work designed to educate Kenyan peasants and workers in the true nature of capitalism, much in the way that proletarian novels of the 1930s sought to educate British and American workers” (177). The connection between particular historical or political events and literature is apparent, and Ngũgĩ himself describes this process aptly: “Literature does not grow or develop in a vacuum; it is given impetus, shape, direction and even area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society” (*Homecoming* xv). In particular, Ngũgĩ moves from a description of a single people’s experience to a national, even pan-African, perspective. In the process, he describes how Kenyan people’s lives are mediated by their cultural, social, political, and economic situations. According to Ngũgĩ’s perspective, it is impossible to study African literary texts without studying the particular historical, political, and social circumstances from which African writers draw their stories, styles and metaphors. He believes that, when it comes to African society and culture, “literature is of course primarily concerned with what any political and economic arrangement does to the spirit and the values governing human relationships” (*Homecoming* xvi).

In *Devil on the Cross*, Ngũgĩ's conception of Kenyan society is therefore of a complex reality in which politics, economics and culture are firmly connected. It is in this light, that Ngũgĩ's discourse seems to relate to Terry Eagleton's statement that "literary works are not mysteriously inspired, or explicable simply in terms of their authors' psychology [rather] they are forms of perception, particular ways of seeing the world" (6). To understand *Devil on the Cross*, involves therefore "understanding the total social process of which it is part . . . it is first of all to understand the complex, indirect relations between [the work] and the ideological worlds [the work] inhabit[s]" (Eagleton 6). This fact confirms that it is a deep-rooted Marxist ideology that forms the ideological and political context of *Devil on the Cross*.

That the novel is to be read as a "national allegory" is further supported by Jameson's statement that "in the third-world situation the intellectual is always in one-way or another a political intellectual" (74). Not only is *Devil on the Cross* a biting critique of contemporary Kenyan society as it struggles against neo-colonial and capitalist influences, it is also a fundamental text for understanding the situation of the postcolonial writer. In the novel, Ngũgĩ shows an African-centred consciousness and focuses his analysis on the importance of African culture and literature. As he suggests, in Africa "cultural liberation is an essential condition for political liberation" (*Homecoming* 11). Ngũgĩ believes that colonialism was not simply a phenomenon of physical force and exploitation. While, "the bullet was the means of physical subjugation . . . language was the means of the spiritual subjugation" (Ngũgĩ, *Decolonising* 32). In colonial Kenya, missionaries and colonial administrators controlled schools, universities, publishing houses, and even the content of books. In addition, Kenyans were forced to speak

English and forget their native languages. This put their lives more firmly in the control of the colonisers. As regards the colonial influence, Ngũgĩ argues:

The colonial system produced the kind of education which nurtured subservience, self-hatred, and mutual suspicion. It produced a people uprooted from the masses . . . It encouraged a slave mentality, with a reverent awe for the achievements of Europe. Europe was the centre of the universe. Africa was discovered by Europe: it was an extension of Europe. (*Homecoming* 14)

In other words, cultural imperialism is “part and parcel of the thorough system of economic and political oppression of the colonized people” (Ngũgĩ, *Decolonising* 28), and “the biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against the collective defiance is the cultural bomb” (3). In colonial Kenya, the effect of this cultural bomb on Kenyan people was extremely effective as culture works through “influencing emotions, the imagination, the consciousness of a people in a certain way; to make the coloniser see the world as seen, analysed, and defined by the artists and intellectuals of the Western ruling classes” (28).

To reject the colonial cultural process is the first step towards the creation of a national culture which is, thus, “not only a reflection of that’s people’s collective reality, collective experience, but also embodies that community’s way of looking at the world and its place in the making of that world” (Ngũgĩ, *Decolonising* 21). Ngũgĩ’s point is that the culture of the coloniser must be rejected only to be replaced by a national culture,

which embodies a “structure of values dialectically opposed to those of the ruling class of the oppressing race and nation” (39). In *Devil on the Cross*, Ngũgĩ puts into practice his own beliefs as he develops an African-centred approach not only to the content, but also to his style and the structure of the novel. The story is written in Gikuyu from a Gikuyu perspective and the wide use of traditional proverbs, songs and parables reveals the importance of African oral tradition as cultural and ideological background for the text. This innovative style is similar to an oral performance and provides intense social and political commentary which seems to reflect traditional African storytelling: “This story is an account of what I, Prophet of Justice, saw with these eyes and heard with these ears when I was born to the rooftop of the house” (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 7).

In the text, there are some direct allusions to the primary importance of African cultural tradition in the process of building a stronger sense of cultural identity and thus overcome the colonial oppression: “Our stories, our riddles, our songs, our customs, our traditions, everything about our national heritage has been lost . . . the roots of Kenyan national culture can be sought only in the traditions of all the nationalities of Kenya” (59). In order to overcome neo-colonial and capitalist forces, Kenyan workers and peasants must develop a national sense of culture or rather, “create a revolutionary culture which is not narrowly confined by the limitations of tribal traditions or national boundaries but looks outward to the Pan-African and the Third World, and the needs of man” (Ngũgĩ, *Homecoming* 19). However, traditional wisdom alone is not enough to guide contemporary Kenyan society: “the national, the Pan-African, and the Third World awareness must be transformed into a socialist programme” (19).

In *Devil on the Cross*, the most complex socialist character is Gatuĩria. He is an educated man who has renounced his heritage and rejected the capitalist system that rules contemporary Kenya, to join the working class in its struggle against foreign and national élites. Gatuĩria emerges as a most convincing moral spokesman whose commitment is to help the workers community in their struggle for social progress and independence. Like Ngũgĩ, Gatuĩria is convinced that literature is an important weapon in the struggle for national identity and represents the key towards the development of a national culture: “There is no difference between old and modern stories. Stories are stories. All stories are told. All stories are new. All stories belong to tomorrow . . . All stories are about human beings . . . Literature is a nation's treasure. Literature is the honey of a nation's soul, preserved for her children to taste forever, a little at a time!” (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 61-62). Gatuĩria’s national oratorio, which assembles “The Holy Trinity of the worker, the peasant, the patriot” (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 230), symbolizes what Jameson has described as the “cultural revolution in its strongest form, in the marxist tradition . . . the unity of theory and practice” (76). According to Booker, Gatuĩria functions as a representative of the new generation of Kenyan intellectuals as he “hopes to contribute to the development of a positive Kenyan national identity” (176). Indeed, he symbolizes that fringe of African intellectuals who “must align themselves with the struggle of the African masses for a meaningful national idea” (Ngũgĩ, *Homecoming* 50).

In addition, revolutionary views are illustrated by Warĩinga’s character. The structure of the novel is built on her symbolic journey towards an awareness of social progress and liberation. Warĩinga, in her movement from colonial subjugation and capitalist exploitation to postcolonial independence and socialist revolution is an

excellent example of Jameson's national allegory. Her personal experience of social and economic exploitation under capitalist and neo-colonial forces is representative of the general condition of post-independence Kenya. Besides, her personal struggle for liberation and independence mirrors the collective struggle and resistance of Kenyan proletariat against foreign and local capitalists: "It has certainly been said that there are two worlds . . . and there is a third, a revolutionary world" (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 184). On the other hand, Warĩnga's personal development recalls György Lukács's notion of "typicality" (122), that is, an individual whose "innermost being is determined by objective forces at work in society" (122). In relation to this perspective, Jameson's "process of allegorization" (69) is clearly relevant to *Devil on the Cross* and represents one possible interpretation of the novel. Ngũgĩ's characters mirror the historical, political and socio-cultural situation of neo-colonial Kenya, and the *Devil on the cross* represents the structuring symbol of the capitalist and neo-colonial dependence. Warĩnga, Gatuĩria, Mũturi, and Wangarĩ are "types who represent specific groups in Kenyan society" (Booker 176) and their characterization is therefore allegorical and comes close to Jameson's theory of national allegory. In other words, in *Devil on the Cross*, Ngũgĩ attempts to "connect one's personal experience to a 'collectivity' . . . combining the private and the public, and in some sense 'allegorizing' the individual experience [as well as] the *national* experience" (Ahmad 15).

Ngũgĩ's Class Analysis

One of the issues Ngũgĩ raises in *Devil on the Cross* is the class division characterizing neo-colonial Kenya. According to Booker, "Ngũgĩ's insistence on the class distinction

between workers and capitalists shows his acceptance of the Marxist vision of history as class warfare” (178). According to Marx and Engels, “The history of hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle” (“Manifesto” 12). In their critique of capitalism, they argue that modern society is made up of three different social classes, which are in constant struggle for political and economic power: the upper class, middle class, and lower class. Throughout history, these social layers have always “stood in contrast opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstruction of society, or in the common ruin of the contending classes” (12). However, it is under the shadow of modern capitalism that, “Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat” (12). For Marx, this division of society into separate social layers is a fundamental characteristic of modern capitalism, and its origins and applications are rooted in what he calls, “economic and social relations of productions” (“Preface to” 66), that is, the capitalist economic structure of work and property: “By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their actual material life . . . What they are, therefore coincides with their productions, both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce. The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production” (“The German” 653).

In his analysis of the neo-colonial capitalist system in Kenya, Ngũgĩ is aware of the existence of layers or gradations of power and wealth within society, as the country displays “a horizontal rift dividing the élite from the mass of the people” (*Homecoming* 24). He is also aware of social and cultural fractions within classes, painfully so in the

case of the proletariat to which characters such as Warĩnga, Wangarĩ and Mũturi belong. Hence, Ngũgĩ sees the complexity of class struggle as the hidden basis of the entire social structure of capitalism and therefore neo-colonial Kenya. As capitalism is a global and worldwide phenomenon, Ngũgĩ's depiction of postcolonial Kenyan society shows that also in a post-colonial environment such as Africa, class division, class struggle and social exploitation are what lead peoples' lives. Therefore, it is not surprising that in neo-colonial Kenya there is, "he who lives by his own sweat and he who lives by the sweat of others" (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 57). Ngũgĩ's social and moral schema is explicitly elaborated by one of the members of the working class, Mũturi, who argues:

Listen. Our lives are a battlefield on which is fought a continuous war between the forces that are pledged to confirm our humanity and those determined to dismantle it; those who strive to build a protective wall around it, and those who wish to pull it down; those who seek to mould it, and those committed to breaking it up; those whose aim is to open our eyes, to make us see the light and look to tomorrow, asking ourselves about the future of our children, and those who wish to lull us into closing our eyes, encouraging us to care only for our stomach today, without thinking about the tomorrow of our country. (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 53)

Knowingly, Mũturi is hinting at the complex segmentation of social classes as framed by Marx in his extensive analysis of modern capitalism. In *Devil on the Cross*, the capitalist class division and struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat is described allegorically

through the universal image of the conflict between Heaven and Hell, God and Satan, Evil and Good:

For each man is part of the forces that have been recruited for creating, building, making our humanity grow and blossom in order to nurture our human nature . . . these are the forces of the clan of producers; or he is part of the forces of destruction, of harassing and oppressing the builders and the creators, the forces that seek to suppress our humanity turning us into beasts . . . these are the forces of the clan of parasites. Each of the two forces builds a heart that reflects the nature of its clan. Therefore there are two hearts: the heart built by the clan of parasites, the evil heart; and the heart built by the clan of producers, the good heart. It is our actions that show which side we are on and therefore what kind of heart we are building. (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 53-54)

Hence, Ngũgĩ describes a country where the division between social layers is clear and recognizable. In the novel, Kenyan society has the misfortune of moving from one oppressive situation or regime (colonialism) to the post-independence despotic, semi-dictatorial, and corrupted rule of the new African élite, where social differentiation and economic inequality between classes is the norm. As a result, the division of the city of Ilmorog into two different sections or areas is not occasional and rather better supports Ngũgĩ's class analysis of post-independence Kenya:

The residential area is divided into two parts. The first is the *Ilmorog Golden Heights residential area* . . . The air there is good and clean, and that's where anyone who is anyone lives in Ilmorog. It contains the homes of the wealthy and the powerful . . . The other part of the residential area is called *New Jerusalem*, Njeruca. That's the residential area for the workers, the unemployed. These are the slums of Ilmorog . . . It's where the wretched of Kenya live. (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 130)

At the same time, Ngũgĩ shows the social division and the economic gap between the characters. On the one hand, we have Warĩnga, Wangarĩ and Mũturi who represent the proletariat, that is, the workers, peasants and students of Kenya. They are those who are oppressed and exploited by the capitalist social system imported in Africa unto the colonisers and that is now part of neo-colonial Kenyan society. On the other hand, there are the members of the local bourgeoisie who hold political and economic power and therefore rule the country. However, they represent a minority of the neo-colonial Kenyan society, while the exploited working class represents the majority. Among this minority we have the thieves and robbers of the Devil's Feast as well as Gatuĩria's father. Perhaps, he is the best example of the new class of the wealthy who pursue a multiplicity of economic and political interests and exploit the proletariat.

Ngũgĩ's class analysis shows that the division between "the 'haves' and the 'have nots'" (*Homecoming* xvii) mirrors that which existed between the coloniser and the colonised. In other words, post-independence Kenya displays the same social and economic divisions that characterized Kenyan society under colonialism. According to

Ngũgĩ, this is understandable in the sense that the Kenyan bourgeoisie is manufactured by the British, and form a social élite, African in blood and colour, but European in ideals, in opinions, in style and in taste. Their way of life comes from the training in the tradition of Western capitalism based on social exploitation, economic greed and political corruption. That is why they share the same conception and stereotypical views about the proletariat: “And where but in the sweat of workers and peasants can you find such fertile fields? . . . For a worker’s sweat is the source of all profit” (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 165-69). All in all, Ngũgĩ’s depicts a country in the hands of a wealthy bourgeoisie, which is fascinated by Western ways, and therefore blindly ape and imitate the colonisers’ ideals as well as customs, names and language.

Through the depiction of a Westernized and thus burlesque African bourgeoisie, Ngũgĩ seems to recall Homi Bhabha’s concept of mimicry. According to Bhabha, mimicry is the process by which the colonised subjects are reproduced as “almost the same, but not quite” as the colonisers (86). In *Devil on the Cross*, the thieves and robbers as well as Gatuĩria’s father are seen as copying the Europeans and in so doing both mimic them and menace themselves, “so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace” (86). They adopt Western behavior, customs and especially modes of speech, but often appear awkward and pathetic regarding social and cultural etiquettes that betray their African origins. For example, the Western way of organizing Gatuĩria and Warĩnga’s wedding ceremony by Gatuĩria’s father particularly reflects this fact. For example, the use of invitation cards that are addressed only to some people and demand a particular social and behavioral etiquette, such as the use of an appropriate dress or which shops to buy the presents to offer at the ceremony, is emblematic of the élites’ mimicry of the colonisers.

It is important to note that to Gatuñria such mimicry and aping of Western manners is shameful for Kenyans: “There is nothing as terrible as a people who have swallowed foreign customs whole without even chewing them, for such people become mere parrots” (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 247).

On the other hand, the wedding ceremony as presented further establishes a social and economic distinction between the rich and the poor, the élites and the masses, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. This upholds the idea of how *Devil on the Cross* fully adopts Marxist ideology to analyze the opposition of social classes in a post-colonial environment such as post-independence Kenya. However, even as the issue of class analysis as presented in the novel is reminiscent of Marxist ideology, it also embraces a post-colonial one. Informed by a solid grounding in Marxist and post-colonial theory, Ngũgĩ analyses the impact of imperialism and capitalism in his native Kenya: “Colonialism imposed its control of the social production of wealth through military conquest and subsequent political dictatorship. But its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relation to the world” (qtd. in Childs and Williams 61). In *Devil on the Cross*, Ngũgĩ intends therefore to reflect the plight of post-colonial Kenyan society as well as the manifestations of the inherited colonial heritage characterizing post-colonial Kenya, that is, neo-colonialism and a capitalist society based on political and economic inequality between social classes.

Elitism

The question of elitism constitutes a focal point in postcolonial African literature, which is often interested in political and social issues. At the same time, it is a relevant issue within the Marxist discourse of class analysis and struggle. In *Devil on the Cross*, the representation and description of élites represents therefore an important and illuminating method of class analysis. According to Ngũgĩ, the effect of the colonial power in Africa “was to create an élite who took on the tongue and adopted the style of the conquerors” (*Homecoming* 10). *Devil on the Cross* analyses contemporary Kenyan society in particular and African in general, much in the way that Marx and Engels sought to analyse modern capitalist society. The novel explores the destructive effects of capitalism and neo-colonialism, and reflects Ngũgĩ’s concern for the Kenyan working classes, who have been exploited by Western colonisers and by a local bourgeoisie who seized power after independence.

As Robert Hollinger points out “the standard objection of the Marxist and socialist writers is that liberal democracy depends too much on economic individualism, capitalism, and some version of elitism” (xi). According to Marxist ideology, all societies, democratic or not, are run by élites who, thanks to political and economic privileges, occupy very important positions within society. When it comes to African élites, the members of this ruling class are the elect of the European colonisers, those whom Ngũgĩ defines as “the imperialist watchdogs, the children of the Devil” (*Devil* 196). As a result, the African élite is introduced as a social category that received its education and political power directly from the British colonial administrators.

Ngũgĩ better expresses this point in *Decolonising the Mind* by quoting a phrase from Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*: "By introducing an aggressive money-economy, and new educational and religious systems, while denying the African the economic and political power by which he could control them, the European colonialist 'put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart'" (10, my italics). In *Devil on the Cross*, the members of this élite are those who have replaced the British imperialists and continue to oppress and exploit workers and peasants. They are those who became rich and powerful due to the capitalist system of economic and social exploitation imported during the colonial period and which represents an essential feature of the neo-colonial stage of imperialism. According to Ngũgĩ, the African ruling class is therefore composed of the most educated, rich, and powerful elements of society.

The representatives of such a social category are the thieves and robbers who perform at the Devil's Feast in Ilmorog; a sort of competition-conference where the best thieves and robbers of Kenya are assembled and tell their stories and parables to justify exploitation and criminal activities in neo-colonial Kenya: "Every competitor will mount the platform, and he will tell us how he first came to steal and rob and where he has stolen and robbed . . . You the listeners, will act as the judges, so you must clap each speaker to show how inspired you have been by his account of his earthly wiles" (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 87). In allegorical form, the Devil's Feast attests to the exploitation of Kenyan peasants and workers by foreign companies and a greedy Kenyan bourgeoisie. The "Competition to Choose the Seven Cleverest Modern Thieves and Robbers" of Kenya represents the climax of the novel as the narration is enriched with symbolism, religious language and a satirisation of capitalist rhetoric. The episode is extremely allegorical and

both the competitors and the onlookers are grotesque, “they absurdly exaggerate their exploits and their plans for the future” (Josef Gugler 335). According to Chijioke Uwasomba, “The creation of the Devil’s feast . . . provides Ngũgĩ with the space for enacting or deconstructing, through the grotesque and the obscene, the banality of power, in neo-colonial African society” (102). Hence, Ngũgĩ’s description of the Kenyan élite is clear-cut: the ruling class of neo-colonial Kenya is well represented by a corrupt, greedy and nasty bourgeoisie whose sole concern is the social and economic exploitation of the masses.

Wealth, obesity and opulence are often mentioned in the novel to describe these exploiters: For example, Gĩtutu wa Gataangũrũ, one of the thieves who performs at the Devil’s Feast is described as having a gigantic stomach that “protruded so far that it would have touched the ground had it not been supported by the braces that held up his trousers . . . [and that] It seemed as it had absorbed all his limbs and all the other organs of his body” (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 99). He is also said to be without a neck and with a head, which “had shrunk to the size of a fist” (99). Hereafter, the same competitor proudly describes his daily diet:

When I wake up in the morning, I swallow a few eggs on top of pieces of bread and butter and a glass of milk to chase them down. At ten o'clock or thereabouts I manage to put away a couple of pounds of cooked mutton. At twelve I attack four pound of beef (fillet steak) dipped in wine and then nicely roasted over charcoal, and I wash the beef down with a cool beer, one bottle. At six, I nibble at a piece of chicken, just to have something in

the belly as a base for whisky, pending supper proper in the evening.
(Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 100)

With this passage, Ngũgĩ obviously shows the voracity that characterizes the Kenyan capitalist bourgeoisie. Indeed, the master of ceremonies reminds the thieves and robbers of one of the main rules that govern the competition: “no one without a big belly and fat cheeks should bother to come up here to waste out time. Who could possibly argue the size of a man’s belly and cheeks is not the true measure of his wealth?” (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 96). In a similar way, Ngũgĩ describes another competitor: “Nditika wa Ngũnji was very fat. His head was huge, like a mountain. His belly hung over his belt, big and arrogant. His eyes were the size of two large red electric bulbs, and it looked as if they had been placed on his face by a Creator impatient to get on with another job” (*Devil* 176). Also Fathog Marura wa Kĩmeengemeenge, whose name itself hints at the greed and voracity that characterize the African élite, is depicted grotesquely as having an enormous belly that “was so huge that it almost bulged over his knees” (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 122). Symbolically, the thieves and robbers exhibit the physical traits characteristic of the devil in Warĩnga’s nightmare, which is described with a big belly that “sagged, as if it were about to give birth to all the evils of the world” (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 13) and the skin “red, like that of a pig” (13).

The lives of the competitors are committed to wealth and power and therefore property, land and money are what count. Under the protection of capitalism they start to believe in “the democracy of drinking the blood and eating the flesh of workers and peasants” (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 89). That post-independence Kenya is a land of exploitation,

greed and corruption is suggested by several stories and parables that Gatuñria tells in the *matatũ* as the characters go to attend the thieves' competition in Ilmorog. One is about an old man called Nding'ũri, who blinded by ambition and greed, sold his soul to an evil spirit:

From that day on, Nding'ũri began to fart property, to shit property, to sneeze property, to scratch property, to laugh property, to think property, to dream property, to talk property, to sweat property, to piss property. Property would fly from other people's hands to land in Nding'ũri's palms . . . He was always involved in lawsuits as he grabbed other people's land, extending the boundaries of his own property further and further. His meanness protruded like the shoots of a sweet potato. When people were dying from famine that was when Nding'ũri was happiest because at such times people would dispose of their property as readily as they would give away broken pots. (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 64)

Through the metaphor of the evil spirit, Ngũgĩ could be referring to the destructive nature of capitalism as described by Marx. Significantly, Ngũgĩ reminds us that in neo-colonial Kenya capitalism has "encouraged the growth of a class of eaters of other people's products . . . a class of man-eaters" (*Devil* 168). It is not surprising that in post-independence Kenya: "Property is the great creator and the great judge. Property turns disobedience into obedience, evil into good, ugliness into beauty, hate into love, cowardice into bravery, vice into virtue. Property changes bow legs into legs that are

fought over by the beauties of the land. Property sweetens evil smells, banishes rot” (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 65).

In *Devil on the Cross*, neo-colonial Kenyan society is described as mainly dominated by the local élite, whose actions and conduct are responsible for most social and economic changes. It is interesting to note that these “local watchdogs” (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 97) are divided into two different categories: those who have money and political power and those who have money but no political power. The first category is represented through the thieves and robbers who perform at the Devil’s Feast. They are those who have taken the political leadership of the country directly from the British colonisers. By and large, they are the representatives of the “vile class of men who are determined to oppress the whole land” (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 183) and have enriched themselves on “the sweat and blood of the workers” (187). It is mostly the testimony of Kĩhaahu wa Gatheeca that shows how local élites have gained political power and used it to increasingly exploit workers and peasants. Kĩhaahu not only saw that in neo-colonial Kenya, “as soon as people accumulated property, they all wanted to enter *Parliament*” (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 114), but that politics “was the basis of profit for the modern Kenyan bourgeois” (112). He uses his political power only to run his personal affairs and obtain more riches. All his political actions are directed on exploitation, corruption, and financial blackmail:

I hardly need to tell you that after two years, the millions that I’d invested in the election campaign had yielded quite a tidy sum. And, you will note, 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 the money borrowed from foreign banks. (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 116)

He is Ngũgĩ's prototype of the neo-colonial African élite, learning its skills from the Europeans and continuing to exploit the country. The passage above shows how the members of the political élite grab the political power they received from the colonisers for their own interests and use their political office for personal ends and benefits. On the contrary, the second category of "local watchdogs", that is, those who are moneyed but do not hold political power, is represented through the character of Mwĩreri wa Mũkĩraaĩ. Like all the other competitors, he is a member of the local bourgeoisie and strongly "believe[s] in the *ideology* of modern theft and robbery" (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 161):

My education has shown me that all the nations and countries that have made progress and have contributed to modern *civilization* have passed through the stage of exploitation. Among such nations, power has been taken away from the workers and peasants and given to the heroes of theft and robbery – in English, we might say – to those who have *capitalist business know-how* . . . I, Mwĩreri wa Mũkĩraaĩ, have studied thoroughly this system based on theft of the sweat and blood of workers and peasants – what in English we call *capitalism* . . . the masses cultivate; a select few (those with talents) harvest. (165-66)

However, he is also an educated nationalist who hardly accepts the leadership of foreign companies and upholds anti-European and imperialist positions. He believes only in national exploitation, that is, “the theft and robbery of nationals of a given country, who steal from their own people and consume the plunder right there, in the country itself” (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 166). In this way, Mwĩreri is representative of the new Kenyan bourgeoisie who keep the wealth of the country for themselves rather than cooperate with international companies who still want to “monopolize the whole field of the theft of the sweat of [Kenyan] workers” (170). According to Mwĩreri’s theory, the Kenyan bourgeoisie needs complete unity and agreement among its members in order “to build *true native capitalism*, free from *foreign ideologies*” (170).

Obviously, those who share their interests with the representatives of the international companies, that is, those “thieves and robbers of one country [that] go to another country and steal from the masses there and take the loot back to their own country” (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 165), do not agree with Mwĩreri’s theory and are horrified by such nationalist ideas. As a result, Mwĩreri is considered to be a dissident and an enemy of the system and is therefore eliminated by Robin Mwaũra, a member of the Devil’s Angels, a gang of criminals in the service of the corrupt *élite*: “Mwĩreri wa Mũkiraai stood up and asked for permission to defend himself against certain words that had been uttered by the master of ceremonies. He was not allowed to speak . . . This morning the Ilmorog radio station said that he was involved in a car accident at Kĩneeniĩ on his way to Nairobi” (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 198-214). This quotation shows that “the imperialist watchdogs” (196) tend to keep the power onto the system through political corruption and the use of violence. For example, the cops and soldiers who burst into the cave to arrest Wangarĩ are

clearly in the service of the thieves and robbers, as Wangarĩ herself states openly: “So you, the police force, are the servants of one class only? And to think that I stupidly went ahead and entrusted my love for my country to treacherous rats that love to devour patriotism!” (198).

In the final analysis, we can say that in *Devil on the Cross* elitism is a direct consequence of the colonial influence. During colonialism, the Europeans trained the local bourgeoisie according to the basic principle of modern capitalism, that is, “the sweat and the blood of the workers are the wellsprings of wealth” (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 187), and taught them that post-independence Kenya is a place where money, property and land are everything: “Today money is the ruler of all industry and commerce. Money is the *field marshal* of all forces of theft and robbery on Earth. *Money is supreme. Money rules the world*” (173). In a nutshell, with *Devil on the Cross*, Ngũgĩ wants to open Kenyan people’s minds to the corrupt and greedy nature of post-independence African élites and the destructive power of neo-colonialism and modern capitalism.

Social Collectivism and Socialist Revolution

Along with issues of class analysis and class struggle, in *Devil on the Cross* Ngũgĩ tends to concentrate on themes of resistance, revolution and national liberation against neo-colonial and capitalist oppression. Concurrently, he seems to confirm that it is only through the political and economic liberation of its people that the liberation of Kenya will be possible. Pointing out that “the voice of the people is the voice of God” (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 63), Ngũgĩ reminds us that the liberation of Kenyans is necessary and vital for the liberation of the country as a whole. In *Devil on the Cross* this liberation turns out to be

“a total immersion in the struggles of Kenyan workers and peasants for the liberation of the products of their labour for the benefit of Kenyans” (qtd. in Slaymaker 95).

Elleke Boehmer underscores how Ngũgĩ’s literary work follows a particular political commitment towards a total liberation of the country. Besides, she believes that “whereas in the early novels the concept of the nation was identified with a leader figure, a Kenyatta type of patriarch, it is now seen in terms of the ‘people’, bound together by their shared history and cultural traditions” (144). Significantly, Ngugi’s early nationalism or “populist nationalist programme for a new Kenya” (144), in *Devil on the Cross* has turned to be overtly revolutionary. According to Ngũgĩ’s Marxist ideology, the achievement of political and social liberation of Kenyan society lies therefore in the possibility of resistance and revolution by the masses. In *Devil on the Cross*, Ngũgĩ’s idea of proletarian revolution rests on a “complete and total liberation of the people completely socialized economy collectively owned and controlled by the people” (*Homecoming* 13). Nevertheless, the fulfillment of such a project relies on the unity and collective struggle of the masses as well as on collective and national consciousness. The common actions of the peasants and workers as they marched to the Devil’s Feast reflect the social collectivism that characterizes the proletarian struggle against capitalist forces. On the other hand, it represents an epitome of the necessary revolution and armed resistance of the masses. In other words, their actions symbolize what Marxists consider the terms of the capitalist struggle, an issue that Ngũgĩ well explains throughout his works:

Democracy and justice can only be achieved when the various interest groups voice their opposition and fight for them. Until democratic-minded Kenyans, workers, peasants, students, progressive intellectuals and others, unite on the most minimum basis of a patriotic opposition to imperialist foreign domination of our economy, politics and culture, things will get worse, no matter who sits on the throne of power. No country can consider itself politically independent for as long as foreign interests dominate its economy and culture. (Ngũgĩ, *Homecoming* 28)

In *Devil on the Cross*, the awakening of the masses against the capitalist forces lies in the spread of Marxist principles and values of common wealth and prosperity as well as of revolution and liberation: “The fruits of each worker’s labour went into his own pocket. But at the end of the month would contribute a fixed sum to a common pool . . . No one in the community of workers lived on the sweat of another. Everyone received according to his ability, his reputation and the quickness of his hands” (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 222). For instance, Mũturi tries to convince the people of Ilmorog of the fact that it is their right to react whenever the commonalty’s interests are threatened by part of the corrupt capitalist élite. All through the novel, he functions as an authentic revolutionary figure that heads and awakens “the great organization of the workers and peasants” (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 204) and tells them why they should stand up and fight:

As a worker, I know very well that the forces of law and order are on the side of those who rob the workers of the products of their sweat, of those

who steal food and land from the peasants. Let me tell you, I'm sure that the system of theft and robbery will never end in this country as long as people are scared of guns and clubs. We must struggle and fight against the culture of fear. And there is only one cure: a strong organization of the workers and peasants of the land, together with those whose eyes and ears are now open and alert. My friends, you should join us too. Bring your education to us, and don't turn your back on the people. That's the only way. (204-05)

The members of this organization are those who Ngũgĩ considers as the representatives of the holy trinity of the worker, the peasant and the student. Significantly, their unity has led to the chasing of the local and foreign capitalists away from the cave at the Devil's Feast. In these terms, the total liberation of Kenya as a whole becomes possible only if all Kenyans will listen to the "voices of rebirth and revolution" (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 230) that characterize their struggle against capitalism and neo-colonialism. However, these voices become effective and successful only because of the "revolutionary unity of workers and peasants" (230). Through the novel's essentiality revolutionary aesthetics, Ngũgĩ shows that the proletariat has undertaken a socialist awakening and a revolutionary movement which aim to overthrow modern capitalism and the rule of neo-colonial agents: "Come one and all, And behold the wonderful sight. Of us chasing away the Devil. And all his disciples. Come one and all!" (201)

Through the necessity of unity and collectivism in the struggle against capitalist forces, Ngũgĩ underscores the determination of the proletariat to liberate itself. The

revolution and resistance put up by the masses, their massive thirst for liberation, shows that workers, peasants and students of Kenya can determine their fate and future as they “all come from the same womb, the common womb of Kenya” (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 234). Class struggle and socialist revolution not only led to a new future of freedom and independence from capitalist and neo-colonial forces, but also to a new African national identity. According to Ngũgĩ, the union of the forces of the Kenyan masses will most certainly lead to a new future for both Kenyan and the Kenyans, a future where “the hunted would become the hunter and the hunter would become the hunted” (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 251).

Devil on the Cross does not only expose the plight of Kenyan workers and peasants as they face capitalist and neo-colonial exploitation, but it also shows that there is a possibility of progress and liberation. At the same time, Ngũgĩ reminds us that the achievement of freedom and independence is dependent on resistance, revolution and a collective struggle against the exploiters. As a didactic and proletarian novel, *Devil on the Cross* points out therefore that the union of the workers and peasants in a collective and socialist manner will contribute to their aim of total liberation.

Conclusion

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* has a strong allegorical and political value in that it shows and symbolises the plight of post-independence Kenyan society in its struggle against modern capitalism and neo-colonialism. The characters' personal and collective experience is allegorical and representative of the Kenyan proletariat, and the struggles they face are illustrative of a capitalist and neo-colonial state.

According to Ngũgĩ's ideology, there is no area of our lives that has not been affected "by the social, political and expansionist needs of European capitalism" (*Homecoming* xv). In these terms, Ngũgĩ is a self-professed Marxist and *Devil on the Cross* clearly represents his political position in favour of the Kenyan proletariat and against capitalist and corrupt African élites. Therefore, his Marxist beliefs and their clear representations in his work make Marxist readings most obvious. Indisputably, *Devil on the Cross* represents capitalism as a social, political and economic phenomenon directly inherited from the colonial experience and that is now an integral part of the neo-colonial stage of imperialism, that is, neo-colonialism. In the novel, regardless of the seeming independence of Kenyan society, the presence of the colonial power is still strongly felt. Politically, socially, and economically colonialists and imperialists are still influential though no longer dictatorial. Accordingly, to approach *Devil on the Cross* without discussing Marxism and colonialism is impossible; it is the effects of capitalism and the neo-colonial stage of imperialism that is the source of all conflicts in the text.

In *Devil on the Cross*, Ngũgĩ is therefore engaged in an intense analysis of neo-colonial Kenyan society that is shaped by a strong Marxist ideology. He celebrates the renewed capitalist struggle between the two social categories of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Kenyan workers and peasants who struggle against capitalist and neo-colonial forces of exploitation represent the first group. Conversely, the second group clusters local and foreign capitalists who ruthlessly and greedily oppress and exploit the masses. Throughout the novel, Ngũgĩ describes the social tension between these two mutually opposed categories in post-independence Kenya as well as the conflicting value systems alive in neo-colonial Kenyan society, that is, "the imperialist tradition on one

hand, and a resistance tradition on the other” (Ngũgĩ, *Decolonising* 2). Confronting and focusing on the analysis of two opposed social classes, *Devil on the Cross* conveys Ngũgĩ’s meditated, though pessimistic, vision about African elitism. In addition, Ngũgĩ shows the readers the greed and corrupted nature of African capitalists and their subjugation to the neo-colonial forces controlling Africa from abroad. Nevertheless, this pessimistic consideration Ngũgĩ has about the Kenyan bourgeoisie in particular and the African bourgeoisie in general finds its roots in the bourgeoisie’s relationship with the working classes and foreign capitalists, its cultural and social alienation and its attitude towards the proletariat’s resistance and socialist revolution.

Class division, class exploitation and class struggle represent thus the starting point for Ngũgĩ’s analysis of post-independence Kenya. At the same time, the question of African elitism and the role of African élite within the newly independent Kenyan society represents an important feature of its class consideration. Significantly, the idea that the members of the new African élites are pawns of the Western capitalists displays the complex nature of the relationship between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. This relationship recalls the one between the colonisers and the colonised and it is represented in the novel in these two terms: exploitation and resistance. However, Ngũgĩ makes it clear that independence and total liberation from capitalism and neo-colonialism will become possible only through a socialist revolution grounded on unity and social collectivism. It is not surprising therefore that the call for socialism and socialist revolution in Kenya comes from characters such as Mũturi, Gatũria and Warĩinga who believe that is “the unity of our sweat what makes us able to change the laws of nature, able to harness them to the needs for our lives, instead of our lives remaining slaves of

the laws of nature” (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 52). It is through these common and united actions of resistance that workers, peasants, and patriots of Kenya will struggle and overcome capitalist and neo-colonial forces of exploitation.

In the final act, it can be concluded that Mũturi, Warĩnga and Gatuĩria take up their active role in the national allegory. Their commitment towards a new life grounded on independence, freedom, and common wealth is validated and is tantamount to Ngũgĩ’s own political commitment to reforming and liberating Kenya and Africa as a whole from capitalism and neo-colonialism. In *Devil on the Cross*, the birth of an independent Kenya, however, is presented as tragic and problematic and the people of Kenya come to consciousness just as Mũturi awakes workers and peasants, Gatuĩria writes his national oratorio and Warĩnga kills her oppressor.

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