Wariinga's Got a Gun: Feminism and Revolution in *Devil on the Cross*

Senior Paper

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For a Degree Bachelor of Arts with
A Major in Literature at
The University of North Carolina at Asheville
Spring 2007

By *Emily Ann Brumley*

.

Gwen Ashburn
Thesis Director

Dr. Lorena Russell
Thesis Advisor

Wariinga's Got a Gun: Feminism and Revolution in *Devil on the Cross*

Alone, imprisoned by imperialist forces in a detention camp, held in solitary confinement, author and activist Ngugi wa Thiong'o begins to write the first novel published in the national language of Kenya, Gikuyu. This novel, written in secret originally on toilet paper, was an artist's exercise of freedom and resistance. Refusing to be broken by the colonial forces or the dehumanizing effects of prison, Ngugi clung to his identity as author and artist and penned the text *Devil on the Cross*, a novel of resistance and revolution against colonial oppression *(Detained).* In this text Ngugi's assertion that for the Kenyan artist,

> freedom is a total immersion in the struggles of Kenyan workers and peasants for the liberation of the products of their labor for the benefit of Kenyans. Imperialist foreign domination of a people's economy and culture is completely incompatible with freedom of the artist in the third world *(Barrel of a Pen* qtd in Slaymaker 95).

It is this freedom, the freedom of a people's economy and the mind of the artist in the third world, that Ngugi seeks to assert through his works of literature. Through the conceptualization of the woman Wariinga, "heroine of labor," Ngugi's radical sense of equality is demonstrated. The method for razing obstructions erected by the oppressor, be it capitalism, patriarchy, or religion, is revolution.

Postcolonial discourse has been a major area of focus and scholarship in the field of academia for the past decade. The issues readers and scholars have studied regarding identity, violation, religion, and culture find a forum for expression in post-colonial studies. The theoretical framework of Postcolonial studies allows for the creation of

meaning and understanding while maintaining that the issues faced in post colonial societies are complex and resist any single interpretation. One of the complexities of individual identity is that of gender, in this case heterogender-the expectations and roles associated with gender in a heterosexual individual. The issues attached to the roles men and women play in society and the constraints, benefits, and baggage that comprise sexuality open up many avenues for interpretation and the creation of meaning in a post-colonial text.

A narrowing of the broad framework of post-colonial discourse to a discussion of sexual politics within modern post-colonial literature allows exploration of the issues presented by this literature on a more meaningful and focused level, making concrete what was previously obtuse. In Ngugi wa Thiong'o's text *Devil on the* Cross, I have chosen to focus on the expression and function of gender and feminism through the examination of the main character Wariinga, whose name means "Woman in Chains." Her story is representative of the Kenyan proletariat; the struggles she faces are illustrative of a post-colonial state, but she also stands for the very separate and distinct state of victimization by sexist politics. The focus of my scholarship is not only the intricate question of feminism raised by Ngugi in *Devil on the Cross* but also his subversive technique of creating gender equality through the leveling act of revolution. Obiechina, in his article "Parables of Power and Powerlessness: Exploration in Anglophone African Fiction Today," places Ngugi's literary works in "the third phase" of African fiction, characterized by the reality that sole criticism of those in power is no longer sufficient, "It has become necessary to demand change. This phase embodies a revolutionary impulse that not only demands, but also imputes action to save the people"

(Obiechina 18). Ngugi's suggested methods of revolution are characterized in part by the feminization of Wariinga.

While extensive scholarship exists on Ngugi regarding his colonial education (led by biographer and scholar Carol Sicherman) the importance of landscape in his fiction, the oral African tradition, his concept of history, most of the scholarship available is not pertinent to this thesis (Loflin, Ogude, Sicherman, and Wise). Simon Gikandi touches on the problems encountered by the main character, Wariinga, regarding cultural expectation and the individual's desire, in his book *Ngugi wa Thiong'o;* while Patrick Williams, in his book also titled *Ngugi wa Thion 'o*, suggests Wariinga's story of sexual exploitation is an attempt to break down the power of patriarchy (Gikandi 220-21, Williams 108). Florence Stratton in *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* and Ebele Eko in "Changes in the Image of the African Woman: A Celebration" cite Ngugi as a groundbreaking example of the modern African male author's shift from portraying women as objects to that of subjects; Stratton also notes his engagement with women authors, "in a dialogue on gender" (Eko 212, Stratton 158). While Elleke Boehmer agrees in "The Master's Dance to the Master's Voice" that Ngugi is indeed engaged in a dialogue on gender, she disagrees with his depiction of Wariinga, implying that it is unrealistic.

Most Ngugi scholars include significant authorial intrusion in their works of criticism, citing Ngugi himself to support their arguments; they tend to view his novels as part of a political campaign rather than as autonomous texts with value in and of themselves. Partly, this tendency to allow authorial intrusion in criticism is based in the belief that, "African literature is traditionally didactic. The writer in modern-day Africa

has assumed the role of the conscience of the society, reminding readers and society of the high cultural ethos that must be upheld" (Ojaide 44). Recognition of didacticism in Ngugi compels critics to examine his personal experiences and opinions expressed in his non-fiction in order to accurately interpret the events and motifs occurring in his works of fiction. The difficulty with this approach arises in its exclusivity; the text cannot exist as an organic whole with meaning and implications unintended or not deliberate on behalf of the author. My approach does not depend on authorial interpretation but rather uses Materialist Feminism, as well as New Criticism and Postcolonial Criticism for the purpose of examining *Devil on the Cross* as a text first and foremost, not as a piece of political propaganda.

Ngugi is a self-professed Marxist and was intimately involved in the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya. His Marxist beliefs and their clear representations in his novels make Marxist readings most obvious, but in terms of the way Ngugi represents capitalism and its commoditization of sexuality directly relates to the way he portrays Wariinga and her sexuality as a commodity usurped by the men in her life. The interplay between Wariinga as worker and Wariinga as woman become one in her self-revolution; her labor and identity cease to be compartmentalized and meld into a whole human being. The practice of assigning qualities with an exchange value is a capitalist practice Marxism openly criticizes. The examination of gender and sexual politics and how they are affected by market economy appropriation is largely what comprises Materialist Feminism. The appropriation of Wariinga's sexuality makes her an excellent source of study from a Materialist Feminist perspective and aligns with Ngugi's Marxist view.

Before discussing the novel further there are some questions of semantics

regarding terminology: what exactly is the post-colonial, or in Ngugi's terms— the neo-colonial? Literally, post-colonial refers to a society which was previously controlled and exploited by outside, usually European, forces and has now gained independence from these forces. Societies which are no longer directly under foreign rule are post-colonial; the colonizer has vacated the premises. Ngugi does not speak of a post-colonial state in Kenya; he speaks of a neo-colonial state *(Decolonising the Mindxii).* The significance of this prefix and his refusal to comply with the label post-colonial is based in his belief that regardless of the seeming independence of Kenyan society, the presence of the colonizer is still strongly felt. Economically, politically, and socially the colonizer is still influential though no longer dictatorial. The neo-colonial state is transitional; it occurs between the exodus of the colonizer and the true emancipation of the colonized on cultural, economic, and political levels. Whether or not it is possible to completely eradicate the influence of a colonizer is not the issue, rather the residual influence is what characterizes the neo-colonial, not whether this state can be resolved. To approach *Devil on the Cross* without discussing colonization is impossible; it is the effects of colonization and the neo-colonial state that is the source of all conflict in the text.

National identity comprises a great deal of how an individual thinks about herself in relation to the world; the most obvious manifestation of what she knows as the world being the culture in which she lives. Ngugi describes the tension between the diametric value systems alive in Kenya as, "two mutually opposed forces in Africa today: and imperialist tradition on one hand, and a resistance tradition on the other" *(Decolonising* 2). Eventually Wariinga, through metamorphosis, is an embodiment of what Ngugi considers ideal Kenyan femininity to be. When the reader first encounters her in *Devil,*

she is confused by the message of what it means to be beautiful by European standards. Sadly out of touch with herself, confused, and living in a chaotic neo-colonial culture, Wariinga is alienated from the notion of herself as powerful in her own right.

The gicaandi player-improvisational street performer who sings and dances with an instrument, also called a gicaandi, made from a gourd-narrator describes Wariinga's mental despair and says:

> Wariinga was convinced that her appearance was the root cause of all her problems. Whenever she looked at herself in the mirror she thought herself very ugly. What she hated most was her blackness, so she would disfigure her body with skin-lightening creams like *Ambi* and *Snowfire,* forgetting the saying: That which is born black will never be white. Now her body was covered with light and dark spots like the guinea fowl. Her hair was splitting, and it had browned to the colour of moleskin because it had been straightened with red-hot iron combs. Wariinga also hated her teeth. They were a little stained; they were not as white as she would have liked them to be. She often tried to hide them, and she seldom laughed openly. (11)

The gicaandi player lets us know that Wariinga's hatred of her appearance is sadly misplaced; she has been listening to the voice of the colonizer and is misled by his definition of beauty:

> When Wariinga was happy and forgot to worry about the fading whiteness of her teeth and about the blackness of her skin and laughed with all her heart, her laughter completely disarmed people. Her voice was as smooth as perfume oil.

Her eyes shone like stars in the night. Her body was a feast for the eyes. Often, when she walked along the road without self-consciousness, her breasts swaying jauntily like two ripe fruits in a breeze, Wariinga stopped men in their tracks. (11) Wariinga's past experience at the hands of men has created a defeatist out of a once vibrant girl, full of promise and goals for her future.

When the reader meets her she has just been fired for refusing to sleep with her boss, Boss Kihara, evicted from her apartment by a group of thugs for refusing to pay an exorbitant amount of rent unexpectedly demanded of her, and dumped by her sweetheart at the University because he mistakenly and unfairly believed she was sleeping with her boss. The fact that Wariinga's sweetheart did not believe her protestations of innocence is another example of sexist politics. Jim Kimwana, her boyfriend, disbelieved her because the material gain associated with becoming a powerful man's "sugar girl" was thought to be irresistible to women, due to the fact that so many women succumbed to the temptation. In reality, this "temptation" was actually victimization; women like Wariinga who refused to sleep with their bosses were replaced with women who would. As Simon Gikandi states, "Wariinga's project is to break out of the prison house of self-hate and victimization and to assert her identity outside the culture and economy of arrested decolonization" (220). In order to break from her imprisoned identity, Wariinga must go on a quest for the identity she desires by rejecting the cultural voice that tells her she is ugly and weak and discover her power as a woman and an individual. Through a journey and adventure to her hometown of Ilmorog, Wariinga gradually changes and becomes impassioned with a nationalist spirit. Her experiences change the way she views herself and how she operates in her society; she becomes a feminist. The battlefield for her is

not only the reclamation of her sexuality, but also the rejection of what she has assumed to be true about her identity in terms of Christianity, the work force, and the war for national Uhuru (independence). Her role in Uhuru is equally as important as her feminization, the process of adopting feminist values. Indeed Ngugi suggests that the purpose of Wariinga's feminism is its use in propelling the nation to independence through the independence of the individual and her facility in the cooperative national effort. The equation of freedom on the individual level with that of the cultural level is one of the many ways in which Ngugi's Marxist theory is evident in the text; person and product are not separate.

Wariinga's sexuality is a major issue in the text that raises questions about her feelings of validity on an individual level, but also serves as a forum to illustrate the sexual oppression of women on a societal level. Succumbing to the neo-colonial voice as a schoolgirl, Wariinga became the sugar girl of a man whom the text refers to solely as the Rich Old Man from Ngorika. This man remains significantly nameless for two reasons; he is a symbolic representation of the Kenyan upper class who preys on the labor of poor workers and the sexuality of poor women, and because the text later reveals him as her fiancee's father. Her uncle, desiring a boon from the Rich Old Man, enabled the rendezvous between him and Wariinga for his personal gain. It took the Rich Old Man months to weaken Wariinga's resolve to be a good Christian schoolgirl, but when she fell prey to his enticements of money, riding in a Mercedes-Benz, and taking trips to hotels she lost her resolve, believing his lies that he would leave his wife for her *(Devil* 143-47). When she became pregnant Wariinga was awakened to the harshness of reality. Despairing her abandoned, pregnant state, Wariinga attempted to throw herself before a

train *(Devil* 152). The question that begins awakening Wariinga is the same question Ngugi is persistently, subtly posing from behind his pen, "But had she really chosen hell, or had the hell been forced on her?" (147). The men involved in Wariinga's life appropriated her sexuality and literally made it a commodity; her uncle essentially sold her to the Rich Old Man. Wariinga herself has not been taught by her culture that she has worth, or that her physical attributes are more than a commodity. The co-conspiracy between Wariinga's uncle and the Rich Old Man, bartering the flower of her youth and beauty for men's success and sexual satisfaction, is an example of cultural imprinting on the body-the process by which cultural norms, standards, or pressures express themselves in literature through the physical consequence, or manifestation of these ideas on the body of the individual. Wariinga's pregnancy is a result of intercourse, but what enabled that intercourse was male privilege in Kenyan society.

Two things Ngugi illustrates through Wariinga's hijacked sexuality are the direct literary correlation between Wariinga's body and the land of Kenya, and the incorporation of the oral tradition into the modern text, making Wariinga significant as a source of study in the text:

> The significance of Wariinga in the novel perhaps lies in the way she operates within and outside the national allegory. For a start, she appears to us not as the familiar woman in the national romance (the custodian of tradition) [.. .]She is introduced to us an individual in an acute state of crisis, contemplating suicide. She can then be described as a new kind of woman because she is not asked to perform a symbolic function in the national narrative: she is an individual (Gikandi219).

This speaks not only to the assertion that Wariinga is a symbol for the national narrative rather than a facet of it, and affirms Stratton's claim that Ngugi's female characters have taken on the role of subject.

What complicates Wariinga's individuality is her own identification with her society and the acute state of crisis so many single women are forced into. As Stratton suggests in "Archetypes of Female Experience," speaking of the integration of the theme of the female experience in African fiction,

> The other level of integration is symbolic in that a symbolizing analogy is frequently created between the condition of women and that of the state. While there is a degree of reciprocity between the two images which provides the works with a dual focus, the figure of women in the analogy functions predominantly as the subject of description or tenor that is embodied in the image of the state. (Stratton 144)

While Wariinga's quest for personal Uhuru does serve as a tenor embodied in the image of the state, she also functions on a highly individual and separate state as a feminist. This additional focus of Wariinga as a woman provokes examination of the questions raised by Gikandi in order to determine how her role in the national allegory exists concurrently with her individual identity. Gikandi poses the question, "Who is Wariinga? A unique female subject who defines herself against the nationalist narrative, or a symbolic figure in the national romance?" forcing an examination of Wariinga's gender (219). She is not a traditional woman in the national romance, nor is she antagonistic to the nationalist narrative; she is an embodiment of a new national narrative. The fact that she is female cannot be ignored as the treatment of women as heroic national figures has

not previously existed in male African authorship (Stratton 158). Wariinga is a prescriptive characterization of feminism; the changes in her life and mindset, against her cultural norms, result in personal freedom and some degree of financial success; she is a Kenyan woman other women would do well to emulate, a heroine. The opening lines of Ngugi's memoir *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* begin with what is essentially an invocation to the muse, "Wariinga ngatha wa ya wira" (Wariinga heroine of labor) indicates his position that Wariinga is an embodiment of cultural values *(Detained* 1). She represents what is worthy of emulation in Kenyan culture.

Feminist critic Elleke Boehmer finds issue with Ngugi's representation of women and Wariinga for the very fact that she is invested with the, "dignity of the ages or with an almost bionic power" an "erected heroine(s) of immense, if not impossible stature" (189). The idea of the woman as icon is not the only thing that Boehmer objects to, but also the ideas that these powerful female characters still function within a "male-ordered struggle" by his "maintaining relations of dominance in his portrayal of revolutionary forces" (189). Although Boehmer lauds Ngugi for creating strong, individual female characters that experience growth and occupy the main focus of texts and for imbuing their struggle against patriarchy with validity, her main criticism is that:

> We are led to assume that, in Ngugi's view, women's emancipation once again takes a second place to the national struggle against neocolonialism. The struggles cannot be seen as mutually reinforcing: in order to ensure the liberation of Kenya from the grip of neocolonial powers, women must either wait in the sidelines for the new social order, as structured by men, to emerge, or must usefully contribute to the struggle by fighting alongside their men, without at

thought for their own position once arms have been laid down (190). This stance, while it can be textually supported and effectively argued, is more negative in its criticism than the text warrants. Although Boehmer's criticism is harsh, Ngugi's overt use of Wariinga as heroine and model for Kenyan women does much to affirm Ojaide's earlier assertion that modern African fiction is typically didactic. In the case of *Devil,* Boehmer also states that Wariinga is clearly, "put in service of the didactic text" (195). *Devil on the Cross* does indeed operate as a didactic text in that Wariinga is suggested as a positive social model; but given the need for social revolution in modern Kenya, without an answer to the people's cry for true Uhuru, the novel would lack power and force. Wariinga is one of many answers to the neo-colonial issues plaguing Kenya.

Wariinga is a larger than life social hero; her powers to overcome her situational difficulties and the ideologies of men that restrict her seem "bionic" because so few women participate in the struggle for a feminist identity. Also, Wariinga is a heroine of the working class. She is uncommon, extraordinary, and successful; she would not be effective as a leader or heroine for women or society if she lacked the ability to distinguish herself. Furthermore, by making the main character of his novel female, and by characterizing her story with initial struggle, her troubles with Boss Kihara, Jim Kimwana, and the Rich Old Man, and then success, her graduation from the Polytechinc University, subsequent employment as a mechanic, and prowess at self defense, Ngugi is not compartmentalizing women in the quest for Uhuru but rather he is stating that Uhuru will never happen without the free willed independence of the individual *(Devil* 17-25, 138-47, 216-23). He is not even including Wariinga in a typically male endeavor; rather he is equalizing gender through the leveling act of revolution. The struggle is that of the

people of Kenya; if Kenyan women were to follow Wariinga's example there would be no room for patriarchal rule to flourish once Uhuru had been established-the revolution would be complete. It is for this reason that I disagree with Boehmer and argue that Wariinga is a positive and prescriptive female character. By taking Revolution out of the hands of men and into the hands of Wariinga, Ngugi is not privileging any gender-he is privileging the mother land. Without this ultimate freedom, the freedom of the individual from the neo-colonial influence will never be possible. Ngugi is not privileging the freedom of a nation over the freedom of women, rather he is equating national freedom with feminism. Through the association of the mother land, Kenya, and the body of Wariinga, the physical embodiment of the land, Ngugi leads the reader through ideas of gender, religion, economics, and culture in modern Kenya and ideal Kenya. Ngugi paints a picture of the more broad societal scope through his portrayal of the ways in which each of these ideas affects the individual.

While Wariinga's triumph over the Devil and her male oppressors is positive, there are some modes of expression in the text that become problematic when moved from the perspective of Material Feminism. Chrys Ingraham in "The Heterosexual Imaginary: Feminist Sociology and Theories of Gender" describes the heterosexual imaginary as, "that way of thinking which conceals the operation of heterosexuality in structuring gender and closes off any critical analysis of heterosexuality as an organizing institution" (Ingraham 203). While Wariinga is not made masculine by her orientation in the labor force, the depiction of the labor force is heteronormative. A possible explanation for the connection of, "institutionalized heterosexuality with the gender division of labor and the patriarchal relations of production" is the use of the master

narrative of Marxist theory (Ingraham 206). Marxist theory "conceptualizes in terms of social totalities, such as capitalism or patriarchy," and therefore has a "totalizing" effect on the text. Wariinga is presented as natural and good; she is not distinguished as hetero-gendered because heterogender is an accepted norm in the text (Ingraham 206). In this sense, despite Wariinga's revolution and Ngugi's subversion of traditional and Christian value structures, the society she participates in is still an unacknowledged patriarchy. For the purpose of revolution, the authority of Ngugi's political discourse is political. As Rosemary Hennessy points out in *Materialist Feminism and the Politics of Discourse*, "From this perspective, theories claim their truth on the basis of their explanatory power, that is, their effect on and intervention in the ideological construction of reality" (Hennessy 28). Heternormativity and Marxism are tools of Ngugi's politics; the reality he creates is explained by these terms for the purpose of furthering his political agenda: revolution.

Previously, when working for Boss Kihara, or as a schoolgirl in the clutches of the Rich Old Man, the natural union between Wariinga's labor and her person were corrupted by the sexist idea that her "true job" was on her back and her force in labor was aligned with her sexual availability and exploitation. The commodity fetishism of capitalist thinking caused Boss Kihara to view Wariinga's labor and sexuality as commodities. He did not see them as resources she owned and dispensed at will, rather he saw a land to colonize— commodities to steal and exploit at her expense. The critique of capitalism that is clearly enfolded in this tale is the pain, confusion, and alienation Wariinga experiences in the big city of Nairobi resulting in another attempted suicide. Commodity fetishism is equated with an inexorable pull towards a desire for death;

Wariinga does not desire to participate in the capitalist system and death seems her only means of escape.

Wariinga abandons the idea of herself as alone after meeting and talking with nationalist activists. The first stage of her personal revolution is the empathy she feels for her nation's struggle. By identifying herself as Kenyan she ties herself to the notion of Uhuru and begins to establish a foundation for thinking about her world in terms of freedom. She begins to see her labor and her body as intertwined. But rather than seeing them as re-appropriation of commodities, she sees them as unified in comprising her identity and with her nation.

After Wariinga attends the Devil's Feast, the dream like sequence in which capitalist "devils" expound on their personal exploits of the poor and rape of their mother land, the change in her view is vividly expressed when she states,

> We who work as clerks, copy typists and secretaries, which side are we on? We who type and take dictation from Boss Kihara and his kind, whose side are we on in this dance? Are we on the side of the workers, or on the side of the rich? Who are we? Who are we? Many a time I've heard women say: *"Our* firm does this and that", "In *our* firm we employ so many workers, who earn this much", *"Our* company made this much profit", and as they speak, they do not have a cent for their bus fare in the evening. Yes, I've often heard girls bragging about their bosses, and when you check carefully to see what they're bragging about, you can't find a thing. A few hundred shillings a month for a woman with children to feed, and we proudly call that a salary? And in exchange for so little we have sacrificed four things" *(Devil* 206).

The four "things" Wariinga goes on to discuss metaphorically are "our arms," "our brains," "our humanity," and "our humanity" *(Devil* 206). Arms are representative of the labor the women perform for their male bosses as, "our hand become their hands; our power becomes their power," while their brains are sacrificed because no boss wants an independent thinking woman in his employment, "the Boss is always right: hang your brain from your fingers or your thighs," their humanity is sacrificed in their office at the feet of the boss' fury; whatever personal frustration he experiences he vents on their shoulders and yet these women are expected to keep quiet and show no pain at his abuse because they are meant to be machines, useful only in their utilitarian functionality *(Devil* 206). Thighs are the last "things" on Wariinga's list of sacrifice because in order to keep their jobs, women must allow licentious behavior in their employers. She states that these office women are their bosses' real wives, but not their legal ones; the contrast she draws is between a "goat for slaughter and one for grazing;" the working women are of course represented by the animal consumed *(Devil* 206). Her final cry is the marked moment when what she has previously been inclined to accept becomes unacceptable, Who are *we?* Who are *we7* Who are we? Wariinga's heart beat in time to her question, raising her problems to which nobody could provide her with solutions because they concerned the decision she would have to make herself about the side she would choose in life's struggle *(Devil* 206).

Wariinga decides she is on the side of the workers and in so doing is feminized. Her freedom as a woman, her belief in her rights as a human being, and her reclamation of her body and labor are intimately associated with her rejection of capitalism. The dominant religion of capitalist society is Christianity; Christian imagery, Bible verses, and parables

run rampant in *Devil.* Loflin suggests that, "Biblical imagery is used to intensify Ngugi's own argument" and that Ngugi directs his narrative to a Gikuyu audience through the use of traditional proverbs, blending these with Christian imagery and rhetoric (87). The function of this amalgamation is "to show that traditional wisdom alone is not enough to guide contemporary African society; it can be called upon to support both African socialism and neo-colonial corruption" (Loflin 87). Taussig in his book *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism* makes the association between devil imagery and capitalism in pre-capitalist societies that have been proletized. In instances of economic change, from agriculturally based subsistence communities to capitalism, the creation of devil myths and stories is very common, though nonexistent in these communities in their pre-capitalist form (Taussig 13). The devil is a recurrent image in *Devil,* announced first in the title, and commonly associated with men who sell their souls to capitalist doctrine for personal gain at the expense of others. The belief that men sell their souls to the devil for financial gain is not a figment of Ngugi's imagination; the belief that this practice commonly takes place, and the equation of the white man with the devil, in capitalized societies is the crux of Taussig's argument (Taussig 96).

In terms of feminism, what is interesting about the Christian motif of *Devil* is the subversion of its imagery and doctrine. For example,

> The beatitudes of the rich and the imperialists go like this:
>
> Blessed is he who bites and soothes,/Because he will never be found out./Blessed is the man who bums down another man's house/And in the morning joins him in grief/For he shall be called merciful/Blessed is the man who robs another of five shillings/And then gives him back half a shilling for salt,/For he shall be called

generous." *(Devil* 210)

Over and over in the text, evil men claim their status as men of the church. Their religion furthers their material gain and justifies any means to acquire it, though women's acceptance of Christianity only enslaves them to men. Wariinga's Christianity as a girl is no solace to her when she finds she is pregnant, nor when she loses her lover and job; both times she turns to death as release. What Western societies have generally accepted as a text of love is shown in its manipulated form that allows men to justify crime and is further manipulated by Ngugi to call for revolution from the masses. His masterful act is to take the religion of the colonizer, a tool of oppression and control, and colonize it on behalf of the oppressed. He removes the tool of religion from the dominant and places it in the hands of the people. Uhuru crucified the white devil, but in Wariinga's dreams, Instead of Jesus on the cross, she would see the Devil, with skin as white as that of a very fat European she once saw near the Rift Valley Sports Club, being crucified by people in tattered clothes-like the ones she used to see in Bondeni-and after three days, when he was in the throes of death, he would be taken down from the Cross by black people in suits and ties, and, thus restored to life, he would mock Wariinga" (139).

Thus the motif of the resurrection is subverted and equated with evil; it is not until Wariinga is portrayed as Christ and kills her own devil, the Rich Old Man, that this disturbing imagery is resolved.

Ogude criticizes Ngugi depiction of religion stating that, "His presentation of religion is one-dimensional. For Ngugi, religion is a tool of oppression-a vehicle for lulling the poor and turning them away from the material reality of this world"

(Ogude 104). Ogude's issue with Ngugi is not in his representation of religion as a means of control, but rather that, "he fails to accept the church as an enduring form of popular organization in which 'the people' take the initiative in interpreting and integrating their world to gain some control over it" (104). Ngugi subverts Biblical stories and imagery through the unique way he reveals Christianity as a tool of oppression in the mantra of thieves and robbers, while powerfully illustrating Wariinga's redemption with Christ like imagery. This dichotomy demonstrates the ability of religion to exist on multiple levels, depending on individual interpretation; its value as a tool of oppression is no longer fixed. Also, Ngugi appropriates traditional parables as well as Christian parables; in the text both "the good guys" and "the bad guys" use both traditional and Christian teachings to justify or make sense of their surroundings.

As a literary technique, Gitahi Gititi describes the, "narrative structure *of Devil on the Cross* [as] under-girded by an interlacing network of genres-riddles, proverbs, songs, 'tales,' myths, and legends [...] Though no single genre is predominant, the proverb as a "condensing" narrative form is worth some attention" (220). Thus form follows function in *Devil;* varying narrative techniques coupled with varying perspectives create an atmosphere of mutability and possibility, opening the door for revolution. Ngugi's depiction of religion is an example of what Lazarus in "Great Expectations and After: The Politics of Postcolonialism in African Fiction" describes as Ngugi's, "Insistence upon the *transformability* of existing conditions" (Lazarus 62). The power of Christian parables and icons are hitched to the wagon of revolution, thereby presenting religion as a source of power that is not one-dimensional. Christopher Wise suggests that, "the novel's radically anti-Christian content, its anti-gospel or *bad news* for Kenya's

oppressed, may be complicated, if not wholly neutralized, by Ngugi's latently "Christian" and unexamined faith that the spoken word may be reborn after its death by writing" (Wise 139). I argue that Ngugi deliberately uses the idea of resurrection as a metaphor for Wariinga's transformation simultaneously with the reinstatement of the capitalist value structure after Uhuru. By using the same imagery to describe both events he is demonstrating the nature of theory; it can be applied in various ways to achieve various answers. When applied to Wariinga, the traditional patriarchal structure of Christianity is subverted and becomes a feminist tool. What is "Christian" in Ngugi is certainly intentional, hardly latent.

Wariinga's first call to her personal Uhuru, and subsequently the freedom of the nation (the two are inseparable), comes in the form of a dream. Many such dreams exist in the Bible where God or an angel visits a holy man or woman and teaches them truths, calls them to action, or delivers prophecy. What is different about this dream is the messenger and the message; Wariinga is visited by Satan. The dream sequence in which Wariinga is visited by the devil operates on several levels in the text. For one, through the description of the Devil of modern theft and robbery and the role of Christianity in these ventures the link between capitalism and Christianity is demonstrated. Also, through his eventual tempting of Wariinga the link between capitalism, Christianity, and oppression is unveiled. Finally, by examining the opposite of what is put forth by the Devil the true path to freedom is discovered, the freedom obtained through revolution. Important to note, this particular scene in the text takes place after Wariinga has attended the Devil's Feast in a cave in her hometown of Ilmorog; the feast was in honor of modern theft and robbery and also took the form of a competition. Kenyan businessmen regaled

the audience with tales of their exploitation for the benefit of the European businessmen attending. The prize for demonstrating exceptional prowess at oppression took the form of financial gain as well as personal prestige. The scene is highly allegorical in nature, equating labor with sweat and blood, oppression with the eating of flesh and drinking of blood, and exploitation of Kenya's resources as toying with their mothers' thighs. Confused, disturbed, and upset by all she has heard and witnessed, Wariinga leaves the cave for fresh air and begins drifting into sleep, contemplating all she has witnessed. It is not clear whether or not Wariinga is actually dreaming, or only half-asleep when the disembodied voice of the Devil approaches her. The Devil introduces himself as, "the roaming spirit who distributes the knowledge that enables men to tell the difference between good and evil," it is Wariinga who names him "The Tempter," identifying him as the Biblical figure of Satan.

Wariinga's questioning of the ability of the thieves to exploit Kenya without check causes the Devil to describe the nature of control through propaganda in religion, education, entertainment, alcohol, and the media. He speaks of the employment of priests in agricultural areas, "Every Sunday the workers will be read sermons that will instruct them that the system of milking human sweat, human blood and human brains-the system of the robbery of human labour power and human skills-is ordained by God, and that it has something to do with the eventual salvation of their souls" *(Devil* 188).

Though the Devil has linked the ideas of capitalism and Christianity, even equating the Eucharist with the symbolic flesh eating of capitalism and living off of another's sweat, his temptation of Wariinga is subtly different. A type of mock feminism

is what the Devil dangles before Wariinga. He charges her with not knowing who she is and desiring to "remain a delicate flower to decorate the lives of the class of Boss Kihara," then demands that she look at her youth and beauty objectively. This examination of self, the discovery of beauty and power from within and without is a key step in Wariinga's feminization, but the Devil's twist to this positive feminist endeavor is to tempt her into commoditizing her beauty and sexuality. The idea of controlling her "assets" to gain property, access to golf clubs, night clubs, and fast cars is attractive, though the requirement that she kneel before him and sing his praises is not. Considering, she asks his true name which he reveals as "Oppressor. Exploiter. Liar. Grabber. I am worshiped by those who love to dispose of goods that have been produced by others. Give me your soul, and I'll guard it for you" (192). The Devil pushes forward revealing more and more of the violence that will be done as a result of the Devil's Feast until eventually Wariinga, like Christ during his interlude with Satan in the desert, cries out, "No! No! Get thee behind me, Satan...." but not before he offered her a job in Ngorika. What is interesting to consider here is the foreshadowing of the eventual showdown between Wariinga and the Rich Old Man in Ngorika. Whether the Devil's job for Wariinga was to kill the Rich Old Man and deliver him to Hell, or if it was something totally different, this dream sequence in its identification of Wariinga as Christ follows chronologically the sequence of Christ's temptation then night in the Garden of Gethsemane. The difference here is that Wariinga will not be crucified, instead the Devil will be.

Perhaps Ngugi anticipated the criticism presented by Boehmer; perhaps he is making the case that capitalist feminists do not exist, for to be feminist in capitalist

society is to participate in a "man's game." In the conclusion of the text when Wariinga is faced with her fiancee's father and discovers him to be the Rich Old Man from Ngorika and subsequently the father of her child, his immediate response of grief and horror prompts him to kneel and request that they both pray to the Christian God. Wariinga remains standing, laughing and enjoying the irony of the situation. When the Rich Old Man's words turn to supplication, he mimics Christ in the garden of Gethsemane, "My happiness, my status, my faith, my property, my life, all these are now in your hands. *Only* take this burden from me!" but he is met only with her laughter, as he kneels and she stands (*Devil* 250). Wariinga is placed in the position of God, divine meter of justice, as he appeals to her mercy. The Rich Old Man's mind turns quickly from humility and supplication to manipulation, standing up and offering her a return to her place as his "sugar girl." He seeks to commoditize her body once again without regard to his son, his wife, or herself. When this tactic fails as well, he resorts to threats, speaking in terms of Lucifer's fall from heaven. Overcome by her beauty, the Rich Old Man falls again to his knees and begs her to save him. Wariinga remains in the god-like position of judge and savior and after his useless words of persuasion, she demands he face her, look her in the eye while he kneels before her, and then pulls her pistol from her purse and shoots him dead. In this final scene, when given the ultimate buying power, the Rich Old Man as her capital, she chooses to reject the enslavement of capitalism, maintain her purity as her own woman, and kill the symbol of the capitalist beast. There is no doubt that Wariinga's feminization is complete. Ngugi answers the question of the appropriateness of violence in the text when the Devil says to Wariinga, "Oh, it becomes violence only when a poor man demands the return of his eye or his tooth" *(Devil* 191).

The time for turning the other cheek has come to an end; now is the time for justice.

In this final act, Wariinga's commitment to her new way of life, a life based on freedom, equality, and honest labor is solidified and validated. The text ends with ellipses indicating that for Wariinga, the closure and freedom she gains by crucifying her devil signals a new beginning of her quest for Uhuru. She takes up her role in the national allegory and turns away to continue to fight as a feminist and an individual.

List of Works Cited

Boehmer, Elleke. "The Master's Dance to the Master's Voice: Revolutionary Nationalism and the Representation of Women in the Writing of Ngugi WaThiong'o." The Journal of Commonwealth Literature. 26(1991): 188-197.

Ebele, Eko. "Changes in the Image of the African Woman: A Celebration." Phylon 47 (1986): 210-218.

Gikandi, Simon. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 2000.

Gititi, Gitahi. "Recuperating a 'Disappearing' Art Form: Resonances of'Gicaandi' in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross"* Ed. Peter Nazareth. Critical Essays on Ngugi wa Thiong'o. New York: Twayne, 2000.

Hennessy, Rosemary. Materialist Feminism and the Politics of Discourse. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Ingraham, Chrys. "The Heterosexual Imaginary: Feminist Sociology and Theories of Gender." Sociological Theory. 12 (1994): 203-219.

Lazarus, Neil. "Great Expectations and after: The Politics of Postcolonialism in African Fiction." Social Text. 13 (1986): 49-63.

Loflin, Christine. "Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Visions of Africa." Research in African Literatures. 26 (1995): 76-93.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature.

—, Detained: A Writer's prison diary. Porstmouth: Heineman, 1981.

—, Devil on the Cross. Johannesburg: Heineman, 1982.

—, Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms. Portsmouth: Heineman,

1993.

Obiechina, Emmanuel. "Parables of Power and Powerlessness: Exploration in Anglophone African Fiction Today." Issue: A Journal of Opinion. 20 (1992): 17-25.

Ogude, James. "Ngugi's Concept of History and the Post-Colonial Discourses in Kenya."

Canadian Journal of African Studies. 31 (1997): 86-112.

Ojaide, Tanure. "Modern African Literature and Cultural Identity." African Studies Review. 35 (1992): 43-57.

Sicherman, Carol. Ngugi wa Thiong'o: The Making of a Rebel. New York: Hans Zell: 1990.

Slaymaker, William. "Mirrors and Centers: A Rortyan Reading of Ngugi's Liberation Aesthetics." Research in African Literatures 26 (1995): 94-103.

Stratton, Florence. Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender. London: Routledge, 1994.

—, "The Shallow Grave: Archetypes of Female Experience in African Fiction." Research

in African Literatures. 19 (1988): 143-169.

Taussig, Michael T. The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America.

Chapel Hill: UNCP, 1980.

Williams, Patrick. Ngugi wa Thiong'o. New York: Manchester U P, 1999.

Wise, Christopher. "Resurrecting the Devil: Notes on Ngugi's Theory of the Oral-Aural African Novel." Research in African Literatures. 28 (1997): 134-40.