

# Gerontocratic Betrayals: “Sugar Daddies” in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *Devil on the Cross*

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## Abstract

This paper investigates the question of gerontocratic betrayals represented as obstructions to romantic love in Ngũgĩ’s *Devil on the Cross*. It looks at how Ngũgĩ creates the relationship between “sugar daddies” and “sugar girls” as a perversion of modern love in *Devil on the Cross*. The heroine, Warĩnga enjoys her relationship with her “sugar daddy”, the Rich Old Man, who betrays her love after impregnating her, an affront that nearly causes her death. This article also explores how Ngũgĩ presents idyllic love between the hero and the heroine in *Devil on the Cross*. The paper juxtaposes romantic love between same-age partners with age-disparate relationships. It exposes the barriers to romantic love which take the form of betrayal, adultery and parental interference. The findings reveal that Ngũgĩ’s representation of love relationship between same-age partners parallels Mikhail Bakhtin’s discussion of the adventure chronotope in Greek romance. Also, the “Waigoko” of Ngũgĩ’s new Kenya lures young girls into love relationships and showers them with gifts, money and a deceptive form of “love” which symbolises the corrupt forms of love and the exploitation of young women, especially under neo-colonial capitalism.

**Keywords:** Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Devil on the Cross*, romantic love, gerontocratic betrayal, sugar daddies, age-disparate, adultery.

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## 1. Introduction

*Devil on the Cross* is well known in literary circles as the novel Ngũgĩ wrote on toilet paper when he was detained in prison. It was written in Gikũyũ and titled *Caitani Mũtharaba-inĩ*. The novel was later translated by Ngũgĩ into English as *Devil on the Cross*. *Devil on the Cross* is arguably the most interesting text in Ngũgĩ’s oeuvre since it crosses orality and literature in more than one way. The narrative takes the form of the oral prophecy of the traditional Gikũyũ figure of the Gĩcaandĩ Player. It was also widely read aloud in bars in Kenya and collectively performed in the period after its publication. The story is woven around the central figure of a young woman, Jacinta Warĩnga, a secretary, who has experienced a range of personal betrayals. Warĩnga, in the present time of the text, faces dismissal from her company, Champion Construction, for refusing the advances of her employer, Boss Kĩhara. Thereafter, Warĩnga is rejected by her beloved, a university student who not only ditches her but also accuses her of infidelity with her boss. The next day, her landlord evicts her from her rented apartment for refusing to pay an increment in her rent. Here, a corrupt form of romantic love, represented by Boss Kĩhara, is linked not with social ideals and aspirations, but with misfortune and downfall. Out of despair, Warĩnga attempts suicide, but she is saved by a Good Samaritan who assists her. The Good Samaritan invites her to a “Devil’s Feast” in the town of Ilmorog, to which she travels with him in a matatu (taxi). Out of frustration, Warĩnga recounts her story to the other occupants of the matatu by using a fictional character in the person of Kareendi. This semi-autobiographical narrative recounts Kareendi’s repeated betrayal in love by older male figures, to which I shall return later.

The other focus in the narrative centres on the Devil’s Feast, where the Modern Theft and Robbery organisation arranges a competition among Local Thieves and Robbers. The aim of the competition is to identify and crown the chief national thief and robber who will be able to join forces with the foreign partners most effectively to exploit the peasants and workers in the country.

An overview of scholarship of *Devil on the Cross* reveals three main areas of interest, all three of which will very briefly be considered here. These areas focus on questions of orality, analysis of neocolonialism presented in the novel, and representation of the female figure. Studies of orality in the novel highlight the frame narrative of the Gĩcaandĩ Player. Lovesey takes the Gĩcaandĩ Player at face value as “a traditional storyteller” (61) Gikandi interprets the figure as Jesus Christ in the wilderness (212). Mwangi similarly reads the Gĩcaandĩ Player as a prophet of justice (29). Cook and Okenimkpe turn their attention more to the specific oral genres used by the Gĩcaandĩ Player (121), as does M. Keith Booker (67); while Nicholls sees the Gĩcaandĩ Player as an accommodation of African cultural forms in the genre (161).

The focus on Ngũgĩ’s Marxist analyses of neo-colonialism emerges mainly from the Devil’s Feast strand of the narrative, which form part of the readings of scholars like Lovesey (63), Josef Gugler (336), Booker (66–67),

Ogude (56), F. Odun Balogun (76), and Harish Narang (121), among others. Some scholars foreground an analysis of the female character, Warĩnga. Cook and Okenimkpe interpret this female character as Ngũgĩ's symbol of justice (115). For Stratton, the novel could be considered a female *Bildungsroman* due to Warĩnga's development from a troubled girlhood to a fully socialised adulthood (159). Ogude views the portrayal as "an oversimplification of gender discrimination and the process of mental liberation that it requires" (116). Elleke Boehmer writes ironically about Warĩnga's resourcefulness and her ability to fit in a field of male characters. Nicholls describes Warĩnga as a "fallen woman" who develops into a heroine of Kenyan resistance, a reflection of Ngũgĩ's "larger metaphorical aspirations for Kenya" (160). Critics have been unconvinced by the representation of the central female character. I would like to depart from established scholarship on the novel by looking at the character of Warĩnga not in terms of stereotypes, but in the context of her significance in the love plot in the novel.

## 2.0 Methodology

This study provides an analysis of gerontocratic love and betrayals in Ngũgĩ's *Devil on the Cross*. Through the reader response approach, the study investigates love relationship between same-age partners and contrasts with love relationship between sugar daddies and young girls. With the novel, *Devil on the Cross* as the primary source, the study juxtaposes the romantic relationship between the hero and the heroine with Mikhail Bakhtin's description of the chronotope in his work, *The Dialogic Imagination*. The second part of the argument centres on gerontocratic love and betrayal which explores the sugar daddy phenomenon in *Devil on the Cross* with close reference to African scholarly works. As an anti-imperialist, anti-colonialist and a Marxist, Ngũgĩ presents the satire of the conference of thieves organised with the intention to exploit the masses.

## 3.0 Romantic Love between Same-Age Partners: *Devil on the Cross*

Looking at the complex nature of the narrative, I firstly want to separate the love story strand of the narrative from the satire of the conference of thieves. But thereafter I want to show how the love story strand and the political critique presented by the conference of thieves' narrative may be brought together in an unexpected way. The love story plot revolves around Jacinta Warĩnga and her intimate relations that are quite clearly offset from her other relationships, which act as a backdrop for the romantic attachments. The love story plot is told as a flashback where Warĩnga relates her experiences of betrayal by her lovers to the unnamed man who subsequently saves her from suicide. She tells her personal history in the form of a story, with fictional characters representing herself and the other parties. In the narrative, Warĩnga's dream of climbing educational heights gets shattered as a result of her involvement in a romance with a wealthy older man when she is just a girl. Her uncle lures her into falling in love with the rich man who abandons her after impregnating her. Warĩnga learns her lessons from her first love relationship and resolves to focus on her career. Eventually, Warĩnga falls in love again, this time with a university student, John Kimwana, who is of her generation. Warĩnga admits to John that she has a child at home and he calms her with kisses of love: "A child is not a leopard capable of wounding people. Besides giving birth is a proof that you're not a mule" (20). She pledges her loyalty to her newfound love, "[b]ecause I am lucky, and I have looked and found a Kamoongonye, a young man, with modern views, I Kareendi, will never anger him or argue with him over issues. I will never look at another" (20). There seems to be sincerity in Warĩnga's declaration, which expresses her deepest affection for John. Unfortunately for Warĩnga, her sweetheart, John Kimwana, accuses her of infidelity with her boss. As Warĩnga tells the "story":

He declares that he knows very well that Kareendi has rumbled Waigoko Kihara's bed, that Kihara is not even the first to eat from Kareendi's thighs ... A girl who starts going with men old enough to be her father while she is at school, to the extent of giving birth to babies when still a student, how can she stop herself? "Tell me this Kareendi of the easy thighs, if you had allowed Waigoko to rub off his soot on your thighs, would you come to tell me? No. You are spinning me this yarn only because Waigoko has refused to let you continue making his bed in hotels for modern love". (25)

The way in which the narrative represents John's reprimand of Warĩnga suggests a scenario that has played itself out and continues to play itself out repeatedly in the society described in the novel. Through John, the foolishness of young women who allow themselves to be manipulated by money into compromising themselves with treacherous older men is highlighted. Warĩnga, however, having learnt her lesson with the Rich Old Man, does not allow herself to be exploited again. When later asked by Gatuĩria whether she lost her job with Boss Kihara because she went on strike, Warĩnga replies that she lost her job because she "refused to be his *sugar girl*" (73). One of the other female passengers in the matatu adds: "She went on strike all right — against the tyranny of the Boss's bedroom" (73). The "sugar girl" phenomenon is referred to again in the novel in the presentations of the thieves at the Devil's Feast competition. The subsequent focalisation through Warĩnga in

the narrative, however, foregrounds the treachery of accusatory young men like John also. “Kareendi”, we are told, is “speechless” (25). “Tears flow down her cheeks” when she realises that the “sword is burned at both ends” (25) and that “she is back where she started”, (25) namely, with betrayal by a man. After this blow to her confidence, Warĩnga attempts suicide, but she is saved by an unknown man, where after she boards the matatu for her hometown of Ilomorog.

The matatu journey, which is the point at which the romance plot and the satirical Devil’s Feast plot coincide, is also the context in which Warĩnga meets the true love of her life, Gatuĩria. Here we see Mikhail Bakhtin’s description of the chronotope- “an alien world in time adventure time” in his work, *The Dialogic Imagination*. Bakhtin discusses the influence of the idea this time adventure in the Greek romance where the first meeting of the hero and heroine and the “sudden flare up of their passion for each other” (87) becomes the starting point of the plot movement while the successful union or relationship in marriage constitutes the end movement of the plot. The love relationship between Warĩnga and Gatuĩria is not in doubt from the very onset. Although their meeting happens at a time both seem desperately in search of answers to their struggles in life, they find each other as the solution to their problems, hence they complete each other. Following Bakhtin’s discussion on the Greek romance, the love between the hero and the heroine is “subject to no doubt, remain unchanged and their chastity is preserved until marriage” (89). It is clear that the narrative conceives of the relationship between Warĩnga and Gatuĩria as the Greek romance-time because the hero and the heroine meet at a marriageable age and agree to consummate their love after their marriage. Warĩnga and Gatuĩria’s meeting in the matatu is a case of love at first sight since there seems to be a chemistry between them that bonds them together. A good example is how they mingle in the cave during the lunch break of the competition for thief and robbers. Gatuĩria holds Warĩnga’s hand and requests that they go out for fresh air. While they were together, “their eyes spoke to each other. They laughed together. Warĩnga felt her heart lighten” (129). Warĩnga’s sorrows disappear while conversing with him. Gatuĩria and Warĩnga express deep affection for each other and seem able to cope with the horrors of what they hear at the Devil’s Feast only through supporting each other: “each feeling that were he or she to let go of the other’s hand, they would both drown in the darkness of the cave” (175). Gatuĩria and Warĩnga cling to each other since they can only overcome the exploitation, they are witness to in the cave together. The one cannot do without the other. Bakhtin describes such scene as “an extratemporal hiatus between two biological moments - the arousal of passion and its satisfaction” (90). For him, chronotope expresses the inseparability of time and space which work together to form a concrete whole (84).

Similarly, Gatuĩria and Warĩnga are only able to individually fulfil their potential when they discover each other. Like the Greek romance plot as described by Bakhtin, “there is a boy and a girl of marriageable age. Their lineage is unknown, mysterious... They are remarkable for their exceptional beauty. They are also exceptionally chaste. They meet each other unexpectedly usually during some festive holidays. A sudden and instantaneous passion flares up between them that is as irresistible as fate, like an incurable disease” (87). Gatuĩria and Warĩnga meet mysteriously and suddenly realise they share this other-fulfilled love that allows one to realise one’s self. Gatuĩria needs someone to love and fate brings them together “like an incurable disease”. Ironically, true love which is described as “an incurable disease” heals and reliefs Gatuĩria from the burden he carries in his heart. Gatuĩria’s burden is his unfulfilled desire to complete his musical artistic mission. The desire to compose a musical score that captures the spirit of the people is the personal dimension of his work as a junior research fellow in African culture. His inability to find the tune or the theme for his music stems from the fact that he has not yet found his inspiration since he is incomplete without his beloved: “[b]ut I have not yet found the tune or theme of the music of my dreams. Day and night I have searched for the tune and the theme, but in vain. You can’t know the pain I carry in my heart” (59). Gatuĩria’s incompleteness is revealed in his endless search for the tune or the theme of his music. He attends the Devil’s Feast to find “peace in his heart” (73) and Warĩnga also admits that she too has “a knot in [her] heart” (74).

Later, we witness Gatuĩria alluding to the feast, where their relationship develops and is cemented, while expressing his deep affection for Warĩnga romantically:

Since the Devil’s feast, it’s as if you have been transfigured, body and soul.  
Your skin has a depth of blackness that is softer and more tender than the  
most expensive perfume oil. Your dark eyes shine more brightly than the stars  
at night. Your cheeks are like two fruits riper than the blackberry. Your hair is  
so black and soft and smooth that all men feel like sheltering from the sun in its  
shade. Your voice is sweeter than the sound of a thousand and one musical  
instruments. Warĩnga, my love, you are the music of my soul. (225)

Gatuĩria highlights the fact that they are soulmates by referring to the transfiguration of “body and soul” which happens after their meeting. Gatuĩria confesses that Warĩnga is his happiness: “the music of my soul”. Ngũgĩ uses the imagery of the description of Warĩnga to symbolise African beauty. The metaphor of the “blackness” of the skin, the “dark eyes” which illumine, black hair, and sweet voice denote the ultimate beauty of an African woman. Thus, ironically, at the same time that Warĩnga is the unique individual that makes

Gatuĩria whole, she is also an allegory of the ideal beauty of an African woman, elegant and luminous. In Bakhtin's view, "the lovers are remarkable for their exceptional beauty" (87) which highlights the significance of beauty in love.

The beauty of the beloved is a mirror of the beauty of art. The beauty of art is reflected in Gatuĩria's musical composition which will be performed at their wedding: "an artistic composition should be inspired by love ... love of your country ... a love that inspires the composer to sing hymns of praise to the beauty" (132). Thus the beauty of Gatuĩria's art develops out of his appreciation of Warĩinga's beauty, which is the catalyst for love. He considers himself the luckiest person for two reasons: "I have composed the music that it has always been my ambition to compose. And now I have a special gift — a beauty of all beauties" (236). He plans to present his composition, which could be completed only because of their love, in the form of an "opera" to her on their wedding night: "Tomorrow would be the first stage towards the union of their hearts: during tomorrow's ceremony Gatuĩria intended to offer her the two hundred sheets of music, the fruits of two years of the labour of his heart" (226). The use of "two" is symbolic of their union. It connotes the power behind the unity of their love relationship. Gatuĩria's efficacy is found in Warĩinga's love, which culminates in love of country. He sincerely and fervently hopes that "his music will inspire people with patriotic love for Kenya" (227). For Lovesey, Gatuĩria's "commitment to the nation and his belief in his composition, like his love for Warĩinga, stops at the boundary of hatred, which must be, as Warĩinga, says, intertwined with true love" (66).

Love becomes the source of artistic inspiration for Gatuĩria, and it is the source of self-realisation for Warĩinga. He expresses his elation at the power of Warĩinga's love:

... there is music and *the* music; there is song and *the* song! In fact, if I hadn't met you and gazed into your eyes, and if love hadn't given my heart wings, I don't know if I could ever have completed this score. But when I locked myself away in my study, I could see your lovely face beckoning me, urging me, telling me: Finish it, my love, so that we can go away together. The gift that will be waiting for you when you have completed the task is very special ... (226)

Gatuĩria specifically distinguishes between the potency of pure idyllic love and ordinary love. He uses the definite article to specify "*the* music" and "*the* song" as against "music" and "song", which are mere generalisations. Unquestionably, Warĩinga's love serves an inspiration for Gatuĩria not just to compose "music" or "song" but "*the* music" and "*the* song". We can infer from the repetitive use of the conditional clauses: "if I hadn't", "if love hadn't", "if I could ever" that Gatuĩria's completion of the project is entirely dependent on Warĩinga's love: "But when I locked myself away in my study, I could see your lovely face beckoning me, urging me, telling me: Finish it, my love, so that we can go away together". Ngũgĩ uses their love to foreground unity in eros against oppression and exploitation of the masses. Bakhtin explains that the majority of adventures in Greek romance focus mainly on the trails of both the hero and heroine: "especially trails of their chastity and mutual fidelity. But other things may also be tested: their nobility, courage, strength, fearlessness, and – more rarely – their intelligence" (106). What makes Ngũgĩ's conception of love similar to the understanding of love in Bakhtin's Greek romance, is the fact that the Gatuĩria-Warĩinga's love endures the trials prescribed for the hero and heroine in Greek romance. For Ngũgĩ, love achieves its ultimate conquest in the conquest of societal oppression and exploitation.

For Warĩinga also, romantic love, for the first time now that she is with Gatuĩria, apparently is a perfect non-hierarchical, non-oppressive and non-exploitative love. This ideal love allows the self-development that also permits Warĩinga to become the consummate female revolutionary: "Today's Warĩinga has decided that she'll never allow herself to be a flower ... [t]he Warĩinga today has decided to be self-reliant all the time, to plunge into the middle of the arena of life's struggles in order to discover her real strength and realize her true humanity" (216). We discover that, fired by true love, Warĩinga's ambitions change to the extent that she enrolls in the Polytechnic to pursue a programme in mechanical engineering with specialisation in motor vehicles. She competes with male students, who ridicule her in class. We read that after their first results were released, and they realised she was a force to be reckoned with, the male students began to treat her as "one of their comrades in the journey's struggle" (219). She abandons being a secretary, one of the earliest "acceptable" female professions, so that she will not have to work as a subordinate to the "likes of Boss Kihara whose condition for employing girl is a meeting for five minutes of love after a hard drink" (218). Love, furthermore, allows the development of the Marxist revolutionary Warĩinga. Warĩinga's philosophy is captured by her self-exhortation, "Oh Warĩinga, work harder to develop our land!" (216). As an independent young woman, Warĩinga decides not to accept any financial assistance from Gatuĩria, who "offers to help with her fees and rent" (219). Thus through the personal empowerment generated by romantic love, Warĩinga is able to avoid being a "sugar girl", a phenomenon the narrative suggests is the specific form of the exploitation of young women by the elite under neo-colonial capitalism, as discussed above.

Despite the personal fulfilment achieved by each of the two lovers through the completion they experience in their love, the end of their relationship is ominously foreshadowed at its height. In the extract quoted above,

where Gatuĩria extols the pleasures of Warĩinga’s beauty on their trip to visit their parents to tell them they are to be married, Warĩinga responds with alarm to Gatuĩria’s praise: “His words suddenly startle Warĩinga. A shadow crosses her face and laughter disappears from her eyes. How can words she heard two years ago now spring from Gatuĩria’s own lips? Words spoken in a dream two years ago ...” (225–26). Warĩinga, if the reader casts back, heard these words in a dream-vision in an interlude at the Devil’s Feast. Unable to take the sordidness of what she hears in the cave, Warĩinga goes outside and falls asleep near a golf course. In a liminal state of consciousness, she enters into a dialogue with a “Voice” that ambiguously could be both Devil or Christ. Portentously Gatuĩria repeats in the same expressions, the praises of her beauty that the Voice had earlier proclaimed: “The blackness of your skin is smoother and more tender than the most expensive oils. Your dark eyes are brighter than the stars at night. Your cheeks are like two fruits riper than the blackberry. And your hair is so black and soft and smooth that all men must feel like sheltering from the sun in its shade” (192). The Voice had ominously gone on, however, to say “Now add to the power of youth and beauty the power of property, and you’ll rid your heart of all the troubles that poverty is heir to” (192). Gatuĩria’s declaration foreshadows the later discovery that Warĩinga’s beloved is the shadow, literally and figuratively, of Warĩinga’s nemesis, the Rich Old Man. Clearly, Bakhtin’s description of the Greek romance parallels the love relationship between Warĩinga and Gatuĩria in the sense that for the hero and the heroine in the Greek romance plot “the marriage cannot take place straightaway. They are confronted with obstacles that retard and delay their union. The lovers are parted ...” (87). Bakhtin cites “the absence of parental consent” as one of the obstacles and adventures of the lovers on the eve of the wedding. Similarly, in the conclusion of the narrative, we discover that Gatuĩria is the Rich Old Man’s son. The ideal romantic relationship is thus corrupted by the gerontocratic exploitation that turns young women into sugar girls. The potential of the love of Warĩinga and Gatuĩria is destroyed by exploitative, older, wealthy patriarchs, who are the central traitors in this novel. Gatuĩria’s father betrays their love in the most fundamental way imaginable.

#### 4.0 Understanding Gerontocratic Love in *Devil on the Cross*

The terms “gerontocratic love” and “sugar daddy” relationship can be used interchangeably to represent love relationship between older men and young women. The narrative charts the escapades of gerontocratic patriarchs in the New Kenya. Through flashback, Warĩinga recounts her experiences with these gerontocratic patriarchs who betray her in a remarkable way. Warĩinga’s first encounter with Gatuĩria’s father, the Rich Old Man, evinces initially as a form of arranged relationship between her aunt’s husband, Uncle and the man from Ngorika. Rich Old Man capitalises on his generosity towards the Uncle to demand love and sex from Warĩinga. Ignorantly, this young school girl befriends the Rich Old Man. Little did she know that she has been “sold” to the man by her uncle. Gradually, the Rich Old Man lures Warĩinga into a romantic love relationship and showers her with gifts, money and love. Warĩinga believes the soothing words from her Rich Old Man: “he said that she should never worry, that he was perfectly willing to divorce his first wife on account of Warĩinga’s thighs and breasts. Warĩinga was now constantly poised for flight” (143). Warĩinga becomes pregnant; however, the Rich Old Man denies the pregnancy and also accuses her of infidelity: “How could you possibly have conceived so soon if I were the only man who went with you? Go away and look for the young man who has got you into trouble...I thought all along that I was going with a clean schoolgirl...” (146). The Rich Old Man betrays Warĩinga and describes the blessing of pregnancy as “trouble”, insinuating the predicament that befalls the man at the end of the story. Symbolically, the hunter and the hunted game plays out in the sense that while the Rich Old Man hunts Warĩinga in the early stages, their roles change at the end where Warĩinga emerges as the hunter.

The narrative climaxes with the complexity of Warĩinga’s next meeting with the father of Warĩinga’s daughter, Wambũi, who doubles as Gatuĩria’s father. Suddenly, Warĩinga realises that her relationship with Gatuĩria has thus become inconceivable in terms of conventional moral norms. The father also manages their first unexpected meeting in such a way that he is left alone with Warĩinga. He implores Warĩinga to separate from the son: “I would like you to leave Gatuĩria. Go back to Nairobi together. When you get to Nairobi, tell him that your love affair is over. He’s only a child. He won’t feel a thing... Be mine. Remember you once belonged to me. I believe I am the man who changed you from a girl to a woman” (251). Clearly, Ngũgĩ presents a gerontocratic lover who is a traitor of his wife, of his family, of young women and the social cause. Again, the Rich Old Man denies his wife when Warĩinga asks him about his wife; his response confirms his disposition: “Jacinta, she does not count. No one applies old perfume that has lost its scent” (251). Metaphorically, the Rich Old Man compares his wife to an “old perfume” which is valueless. Underlining the link between the sugar daddy, the gerontocratic treacherous male lover, and neocapitalist exploitation of young women turning them into sugar girls, the father tries to persuade Warĩinga by tempting her materially:

*Please, my little lady, my fruit, listen to my words. Release me from this shame today. Be my woman and I will rent a house for you in Nairobi, Mombasa or wherever you choose. I will furnish the house with the kind of furniture and carpets you see in this house, and with mattresses and curtains and other things you see from abroad ... I will also buy you a shopping basket, a basket to take to market, like a*

*Toyota Corona ... Jacinta, my baby, my fruit, my orange, come back to me and solve the problems of your life, of my home and of my child!* (251)

The sheer excess of the consumer goods the father offers her emphasises the connection between gerontocratic betrayal and capitalist exploitation. On the part of Warĩnga, what the final betrayal does is to change her from a revolutionary inspired by love to a revolutionary driven by anger and hatred, which leads her to shoot the Rich Old Man in cold blood. The man dies as a result of his inconsistent and opportunistic life style.

We see that gerontocratic lovers share common characteristics which include oppression and exploitation on young girls and women's "thighs" to achieve their egotistic interest. A case in point is the mention of the Modern Love Bar and Lodging where "the main employment bureau for girls and women's thighs are the tables on which contracts are signed" (19). For these gerontocratic traitors, "[m]odern problems are resolved with the aid of thighs" (19). Girls and women could only secure job opportunities on condition that they are ready to "make beds". It is unsurprising that Boss Kĩhara, the managing director of Warĩnga's company terminates her employment for rejecting his proposal. Initially, Boss Kĩhara appears as a reasonable and highly respected Christian, married with two children. After unsuccessful attempts to invite Warĩnga to weekend trips and cocktail parties, Boss Kĩhara clandestinely lures Warĩnga with overtime work. He begs her to reciprocate his love: "flower of my heart, see how my love for you has weakened me" (21) and shows no recognition for his wife: "she doesn't count" (22). Like the Rich Old Man, Boss Kĩhara woos Warĩnga with soothing words: "little fruit of my heart, listen to me carefully ... I will rent a house for you ... I will have the place decorated with furniture ... I will buy you clothes, for I want you in the latest fashions ... I want everybody in Nairobi to turn round and whistle with envy, saying: That is Boss Kĩhara's sugar girl ... I will buy you a small basket for the market" (22). Stylistically, Ngũgĩ presents the same manner of enticing young girls adopted by these gerontocratic male lovers. We can read the pattern repetition in both the Rich Old Man and Boss Kĩhara promises. They both refer to Warĩnga as "little fruit" which symbolises a precious, profitable item or pleasure. There is also the syntactic repetition of "I will rent a house, I will furnish, I will buy a shopping or small basket". Semantically, Ngũgĩ attempts to foreground the perfidious and exploitative gerontocrats who engage in illusory form of love. Although Boss Kĩhara attempts to sexually abuse Warĩnga, she "frees herself from the man's grip" (23) but suffers the consequences of losing her job. Again, Warĩnga rejects the capitalist materialism offered by a gerontocratic patriarch.

The sugar daddy phenomenon is a well-researched area of African sociological study of intimate relationships. For example, Carmel Dinan's "Sugar Daddies and Gold-Diggers: The White-Collar Single Woman in Accra" explores the position of single, middle-class working women who prefer to maintain their status as single, rejecting the cultural prescription of marriage. Dinan emphasises that extramarital affairs between sugar daddies and sugar girls is a common practice in Ghana, where: "no emotional attachment was involved: they were a cultivated fashion by the girls" (346). Similarly, looking at the phenomenon from the perspective of the sugar daddies, Daniel Jordan Smith in "Managing Men, Marriage, and Modern Love: Women on Intimacy and Male Infidelity in Southeastern Nigeria" describes sugar daddy relationships with young girls as mostly "economically driven". Smith asserts married men prefer to engage in extramarital affairs with educated young women whose friendship provided the men with the possibility not only of fulfilling their physical needs, but also their lifestyle aspirations. Relationships with sugar girls fulfilled "the fantasy, of having more exciting, stylish, and modern sex" than what their wives give them (169). Mark Hunter considers the way the phenomenon has been impacted by the Aids pandemic. In "The Materiality of Everyday Sex: Thinking Beyond 'Prostitution'", Hunter examines Sundumbili Township in Kwa-Zulu Natal in South Africa, where young women regard themselves as more "civilised" for engaging in relations with older men. They enter these relationships with relative freedom and sometimes with support from their parents (113-14). Often schoolgirls engage with multiple sexual partners and enter into relationships with both sugar daddies and young men of their own age. Hunter's chapter on "Failing Men: Modern Masculinities amid Unemployment" in *Love in the Time of Aids: Inequality, Gender, and Rights in South Africa* (2010) examines the essential role wealth plays in securing girlfriends for richer men. He recounts the relationship between sugar daddies and girls from two dimensions: "on the one hand they [sugar daddies] can be chastised as exploiters of young women; yet on the other they can be positioned as respectable men who, unlike young men, provide for the women with whom they have relationships" (169). What Ngũgĩ shows, that these studies do not, is the link between the sugar daddy and the neo-colonial capitalist context, which makes the sugar daddy relationship more widespread than it had ever been in the past. It represents the ways in which young women and their families in contemporary African communities have had to adapt norms of intimate relationships. This is the lens through which Ngũgĩ views the sugar daddy, leading to the condemnation of this type of relationship.

The perversion of romantic love represented by age-disparate sexual relationship is suggested in the novel through adultery and exploitation in the new Kenya. Many studies reveal age-disparate sexual relationship as a major contributor to the spread of HIV (Mabaso et al, 2021; Harling et al, 2014; Maughan-Brown et al, 2016; Mwinnyaa et al, 2018); however, those who engage in such relationships do not care about the high risk of HIV

infection. Suzanne Leclerc-Madlala's "Age-disparate and intergenerational sex in southern Africa: the dynamics of hypervulnerability" defines age-disparate relationships as "those in which the age gap between partners is 5 years or more" (18). Her findings reveal that young women often place "a high prestige value on relationships with men who were well-known or well respected public figures" (Leclerc-Madlala 21). Harling et al describes age-disparate relationships as extramarital and "sugar daddy" relationships that "feature economic disparities and transfers of cash or in-kind gifts from the man to the woman" (448). According to Mabaso et al study, "Factors associated with age-disparate sexual partnerships among males and females in South Africa: a multinomial analysis of the 2012 national population-based household survey data", two types of age-disparate sexual relationships include between older females and younger male partners, and between older men and younger female partners. However, the most common age-disparate sexual partnerships are those between young women and older men influenced by "socioeconomic difficulties" and "socioeconomic stability" (Mabaso et al, 11). Ngũgĩ satirises age-disparate sexual relationships in which he presents the "Waigokos", rich old men with hairy chest, (20) as adulterous men who shower gifts and money on young girls and exchange sex with them. Ngũgĩ presents these men as Christians who perceive sexual act and extramarital affair as normal practice. A case in point is among the rules governing the competition for Modern Theft and Robbery: "Every competitor must reveal the number of women he has- wives and/ or mistresses. Every competitor must provide information about the car he drives, the model his wife drives and, the model driven by his girlfriend(s)" (98). Clearly, this competition empowers the men to hide behind romantic love to manipulate their female counterparts. By providing information on "the model cars driven by the girlfriends", the men are motivated to engage in adulterous relationships which buttress Ngũgĩ's depiction of contemporary patriarchy among political leaders. Bhasin defines the concept of patriarchy as "the power relationships by which men dominate women" (3). It is also seen as a system of social structures in which the men "dominate, oppress and exploit women" (Sultana, 3).

In the novel, we read about gerontocratic patriarchs who disguise as Christians to exploit women just to satisfy their egocentric interest. All the competitors in their submissions boast highly of their wives and their "sugar girls or mummies". The account given by the second contestant, Kīhaahu wa Gatheeca, exemplifies the insensitivity of political leaders who allow their greed and passion for adultery to overtake their conscience: "I like other people's wives... You know, don't you, that that's another kind of stealing? ... They only want one thing. Some are not satisfied with one or two shots - this is because their husbands are always at nightclubs with their girlfriends. ... I have baptised them Ready-to-Yield..." (110). We witness another type of gerontocratic betrayal where Kīhaahu engages in amorous relationship with other people's wives which he terms as "another kind of stealing". Ngũgĩ ridicules political leaders who do not only steal from the national coffers but also "steal" other people's wives. Metaphorically, Kīhaahu compares stealing "sex" from other people's wives to stealing from the nation's resources to enrich themselves. Kīhaahu reveals that those "other people's wives" seem discontent with their marriages because their husbands play the roles of "sugar daddies" who frequent nightclubs with "sugar girls". Ironically, Kīhaahu prohibits his wife from mingling with other men for fear that he would be paid in the same coin: "That's why I've always sworn that if I catch my wife loitering on the street corners, I'll make her begin to see through her arse!" (110). Although Kīhaahu threatens to maltreat his wife in case he catches her in an uncompromising position with other men, he refuses to behave as a distinct and faithful married man just like the other competitors. Similarly, another contestant, Gītutu wa Gataangūrū, refers to his wife as "the mother of [his] children" and his sugar girls as "two other things" (100). He brags about his gifts to the sugar girls: "I gave one sugar girl a Christmas gift of Toyota Corolla, and bought the other one a birthday present, a Datsun 1600 SS (100). Clearly, these sugar daddies create unhealthy competitions among themselves and their sugar girls. Also, the patriarchal system contributes to the plight of the women or the wives: "a system whereby women are kept subordinate in a number of ways" (Bhasin 2006: 3).

Throughout the novel, the focalisation through the gerontocratic patriarchs in the narrative centres on the male supremacy while the female counterpart largely plays the role of a second fiddle. Ngũgĩ presents the wives as no match for their husbands. A case in point is Nditika wa Nguunji who expresses extreme fury on hearing his wife communicating her elation about her intended plan to possess two female organs "When I heard her mention two female organs and say that she would be able to have two instead of one, I was horrified... I would not mind her having two mouths, two bellies... But to have two ... no, no! I told her to forget all that nonsense" (181). Although the men are adulterous, they still want to exercise absolute power over their wives. It is clear that the husbands desire to soil themselves with adultery by going after "sugar mummies" and "sugar girls" but dissuade their wives from doing same. African tradition enjoins men to practise polygyny which enable them to have more than one wife; however, we read that in the case of the New Kenya, the men express no interest in marrying multiple wives but prefer to engage in extramarital love affairs. They hide behind Christian beliefs and church wedding and commit adultery despite the consequences stipulated in the Bible. Tony Tanner's *Adultery in the novel: Contract and Transgression* discusses the concept of adultery and its impact on the individual and the society as a whole. He explores the relationship between marriage and society and cautions on the effects of the intrusion of adultery on the society as "the action of adultery portends the possible breakdown of all the

meditations on which society itself depends” (17). Tanner posits the repercussions of adultery in the Old Testament Law as, “the adulterous man or woman are almost without exception to be excluded from society, canceled even to the point of execution” (14). In the case of the Rich Old Man, his single act of adultery results in his “execution”. While his death affects his family and the society, Warĩnga’s ideal love relationship with Gatuĩria also suffers a breakdown. It is obvious that the worst perversion or affront is when romantic love involves sugar daddies and sugar girls.

We have also seen how the sugar daddy phenomenon encourages the relationships of young women with men old enough to be their fathers. But Mwangi alerts us to another perversion of romantic love which involves young men with women old enough to be their mothers. This is possibly the worst form of perversion since, as we have seen in *Weep Not, Child*, the relationship with the mother for Ngũgĩ is a hallowed relationship. Mwangi’s article “Romance in Times of Mega Corruption” explores the role of romantic love in the midst of corruption in *Devil on the Cross*. Mwangi examines the portrayal of corruption in *Devil on the Cross* as an illegal sexual act which depicts the bourgeoisie of the new nation esteeming their nation as “a mother”, “whose *ciero* (thighs) they should be left in peace to incestuously toy with” (1). He asserts that the issue of corruption has been pushed to the background by recent writers, unlike the writers during the 1970s and 1980s. It is in the novels like Ngũgĩ’s *Devil on the Cross* that “the brazenness of the thieving class was most openly laughed at” and that the spread of corruption among different classes was exposed (1). He foregrounds the correlation between romance and corrupt deals in Kenya when he describes corruption “as regular as a casual sexual act, in this hotbed of sleaze that we call our motherland” (1). Mwangi identifies one weakness of Ngũgĩ’s early writing on corruption as the situation where the wives of corrupt men are depicted as “an extension of their husbands” (1); however, Mwangi states that these changes in *Wizard of the Crow*, in which Rachael, the wife of the Ruler is highly critical of the mercenary exploitation conducted by her patriarchal, dictatorial husband. In *Devil on the Cross*, Ngũgĩ’s depiction of the female figure as a destitute mother of the nation is symbolic of the horror of the corruption and exploitation of Kenyan motherland by a corrupt generation of postcolonial sons.

## 5.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has unveiled the obstacles to true love and marriage in *Devil on the Cross* as not ethnic, religious or class barriers — the obstacle that is rolled in the path of the love-marriage of the optimistic young couple is the treacherous gerontocratic patriarch, who represents the capitalist postcolonial elite. In this novel, the materialism of the gerontocratic relationship is rejected by the heroine who struggles to change her situation in order to survive in the neocolonial Kenyan nation. The paper has discussed the “sugar daddy” phenomenon as an affront not only to love relationship but also undermines the development of the nation. This is because it promotes corruption, suppression and manipulation meted out to the unprivileged in the society. We see that the society is bedeviled through the focalisation of age-disparate relationships which results in adultery and exploitation of the female figure as a microcosm of the suffering of the masses.

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