

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Deployment of Orality and his Socialist Discourse in *Wizard of the Crow*

التقاليد الشفوية والخطاب الاشتراكي في رواية ساحر الغراب "ل"نقوقي واثنانقو"



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Abstract

This paper is chiefly intended to examine the ideological purposes behind which the internationally renown Kenyan novelist Ngugi wa Thiong'o deploys orature techniques in his tome book *Wizard of the Crow*. Rather than being merely regarded as part of the African writers' laudable quest for the attainment of literary independence, the politics of oralising the African novel in *Wizard of the Crow* enables the author to articulate his ideological pronouncements vis-à-vis the pathetic post-colonial condition in Africa and, more importantly, share his views with the masses who are hardly capable of understanding the literary discourse that is written in an elitist style. The oral features with which the novel in question is infused include also the author's frequent reference to magic and traditional dances which are carnalivresque in character in the sense of defying the autocratic power of the Ruler of Aburriria which is a fictional country where the main events of the novel are set. At the metaphorical level, the frequency of these popular in Ngugi's novel is to be construed as the author's symbolic means of imagining a nascent continent beyond its present dystopian condition marked by social stratification and abusive patriarchy. All in all, the Ngugi's noticeable deployment of the oral tradition in *Wizard of the Crow*, besides serving his self-appointed literary project of enabling the masses to "appropriate" the novel form, is his allegorical way of conveying his ideological message about the need to for the masses' revolution that is partly rooted in their local epistemology.

Keywords : Orature techniques, Cultural Identity, Socialist Discourse, Utopia, Postcolonial Literature, Ngugi wa Thiong'o.

Résumé

L'objectif de cet article est d'étudier les raisons idéologiques pour lesquelles l'écrivain kenyan Ngugi wa Thiong'o a fréquemment utilisé la tradition orale de son peuple Gikuyu dans son dernier roman *Wizard of the Crow*. La tradition orale, pour cet auteur, n'est pas uniquement un moyen d'exprimer l'identité culturelle des africains mais aussi fait part de son discours utopien concernant l'avenir de son continent. Plus précisément, en utilisant sa langue maternelle et les aspects de sa culture populaire, Ngugi, comme il a toujours expliqué, peut être la voix de son peuple. La culture populaire qui est composée des chansons et danses traditionnelles et actes de magie dans *Wizard of the Crow* fonctionnent comme des instruments symboliques qui défient le pouvoir et, par conséquence, sont considérées comme des outils qui mobilisent les masses populaires contre le système néocolonial. En conclusion, la tradition orale dans le roman de Ngugi ne contribue pas seulement à la création d'un discours essentialiste basé sur l'affirmation de l'identité culturelle mais elle est plus clairement un moyen d'imaginer un état socialiste pour l'Afrique.

Mots clés: tradition orale, identité culturelle, discours utopien, socialisme, littérature postcoloniale, Ngugi wa Thiong'o.

الملخص

يهدف هذا المقال إلى دراسة الدوافع الإيديولوجية للكاتب الكيني "نقوقي واثيانقو" من خلال إدراجه المتكرر للتقاليد الشفوية لثقافة شعبه "الكيكويو" في روايته الأخيرة "ساحر الغراب"، حيث أن اعتماد الكاتب على تلكم التقاليد لا يدل فقط على تبنيه لفكرة استرجاع هوية إفريقيا الثقافية بل يشير كذلك إلى خطاب ثوري يهدف إلى القضاء على الديكتاتوريات في عهد إفريقيا ما بعد الاستعمار و هذا من خلال استعمال الشخصيات الثورية في الرواية على الثقافة الشعبية في سبيل تحريض المجتمع المضطهد على النظام الرأسمالي المستبد و الفساد السياسي. وفي الأخير تجدر الإشارة إلى الدور الكبير التي تلعبه التقاليد الشفوية التي استعملها "نقوقي" من أجل توضيح خطابه و نظرتة لمجتمع عادل و مثالي في إفريقيا مستقبلا.

الكلمات الدالة: التقاليد الشفوية، الهوية الثقافية، النظرة المثالية، العدالة الاجتماعية، الأدب الإفريقي الثوري، نقوقي واثيانقو

Introduction

This paper is chiefly intended to examine the main reasons for which the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o inserts many aspects of the oral tradition in his latest novel *Wizard of the Crow* (2006). It must be pointed out this novel had been originally written in Gikuyu, which is the writer's native language, under the title of *Murogi wa Kagogo*. But the work was later translated by the author himself into English. After all, Ngugi is notorious for advocating the use of indigenous languages in African literature, but his frequent use of elements of orality- most notably proverbs, tales, dancing rituals and wizardry- in the aforementioned novel begs a number of questions. Indeed, the main question that this paper directly addresses is: why does Ngugi deploy several orature techniques in his so-called dictator novel *Wizard of the Crow*? In order to deal with question, a number of issues must not be lost sight of. For example, one might wonder whether the frequent use of orality is due to his use of Gikuyu as a medium of literary expression in the first place. Yet, it should be stressed that Ngugi is of the opinion that linguistic and cultural independence should not be the main aim of the political activists in post-independence Africa. He tends to emphasise the necessity of relating cultural discourses to the annulment of class and gender inequities that are rationalised by the existing power structures in African postcolonies.. Accordingly, Ngugi's deployment of orality in *Wizard of the Crow* might be read in connection to his ideological pronouncements about the neo-colonial situation in his continent. That viewed, this paper rests upon the assumption that Ngugi's ideology of oralising the novel genre in *Wizard of the Crow* is not only meant to achieve what has come to be called the decolonisation of African literature or just to express pride in the indigenous cultural traditions and mores of the Africans in general and the Kenyans in particular; rather, it is part and parcel of his utopian imagining of the possibility of creating an egalitarian order in a continent that is presently characterised by misrule, social maladies and masses' exploitation by the bourgeois class.

To cast light on the ideological messages that the oral aspects in *Wizard of the Crow* convey, we need to discuss the oral mode of writing in the novel as such and hence we see the essentialist discourse that this mode produces. Finally, a space is devoted to the discussion of the utopian vision of Africa's future that can be reached by the author's politics of orality in this novel.

The Oral Mode of Wizard of the Crow

In other words, orality in Ngugi's novel does not serve the essentialist discourse of asserting his country's pre-colonial cultural past but also as a means of expressing a utopian vision of his country's future. Indeed, *Wizard of the Crow* is Ngugi's creative work that confirms his famous views about the political function of African literature in the post-colonial period. His view about the inevitability of the involvement of the artist in class politics in contemporary Africa is summarised by his dictum that "every writer is a writer in politics" (Ngugi 1981). In his *Decolonizing the Mind*, too, Ngugi calls for the necessity of the African masses to appropriate the novel form. He is of the view that until literature is accessible to the peasants and the workers, literature cannot attain the subversive goal of challenging and hence changing the status quo. Moreover, while orality

can be deployed in the African novels as a means of making critical comments on the contemporary situation of Africa such as the case of Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, Ngugi deploys orature in *Wizard of the Crow* as part of his attempt at mobilising the subdued people against the despotic neo-colonial governments.

Also, there is good reason to believe that *Wizard of the Crow* is a response to many of Ngugi's critics who have insistently contended that Ngugi's artistic creativity in his oralised novels, namely, *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari*, is undermined by his espousal of radical political ideologies. Indeed, *Wizard of the Crow* has a sophisticated texture that is revelatory of the writer's artistic talent. Ngugi through the composition of *Wizard of the Crow* attacks the view the literary sophistication is hardly attainable through returning to orality. In this regard, Russell West-Pavlov avers that *Wizard of the Crow* is "an epic novel [that is] both highly literary and informed by oral traditions" (West-Pavlov 2018, p.3).

More importantly, he shows in this work that orature can be deployed in the discourse that attacks the ideology of globalisation. The use of orality has indeed the symbolic meaning of discrediting the official narratives of the state that, as will be seen later, normalise the West's global governance. In other words, orality does not only prove that the African people have a healthy cultural tradition but also shows that the Western civilizational paradigms have failed to create an effective social system in the African neocolonies.

Wizard of the Crow is usually read as a magical realist novel as its author resorts to the fantastic elements such as witchcraft in his depiction of a neo-colonial condition. As far as this point is concerned, Maria Muresan aptly contends that what is new in Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow* is that the author uses "the figures and performance of witchcraft (curses, dance, divination and incantations) to make a statement about development on the African continent after independence" (Muresan 2018, p. 99). It could be maintained that Ngugi's use of those fantastic elements indicates that the epistemological roots of the black people in Africa have not completely disappeared as a result of the integration of their continent into the globalised world. It is generally opined that the inclusion of the fantastic elements in the Postcolonial African works is partly motivated by the writers' belief in the continuing presence of these elements in the collective psyche of the Africans. That viewed, fantasy, which is an integral part of *Wizard of Crow*, "could easily be dismissed as the wild imaginings of a 'disconnected' author, unrelated to any known reality in Kenya" (Ndigirigi 2007, p. 68).

No less significantly, the employment of the orature techniques in this novel has often been examined by many critics in relation to its satirical mode of mocking the situation in the African postcolonies in general and the political leaders in particular (McLaren 2008). It must be pointed out that satire in Postcolonial African literature has been used in the discourse of asserting African cultural identity (the best example is without doubt Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino*) or the in the discourse of sharply denouncing the neo-colonial regimes (Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* are cases in point). *Wizard of the Crow*

has been described by Simon Gikandi as an epic satire for its emphasis on the absurdity of the situation in the fictional East African state of Aburiria run by nameless Ruler whose bodily functions such as urinating have become the official news in the media. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the grotesque tropes that abound in this novel.

In general, Ngugi is much reputed for his deployment of the Gikuyu oral traditions in his fictional works. Indeed, he is of the opinion that unless the writer uses the culture of his people, he can hardly be viewed to represent their voice. Therefore, Ngugi shows that by the use of orality that the African epistemology is capable of producing a rhetoric that articulates the aspirations of the downtrodden masses. In other words, the African tradition and lore do not only belong to Africa's bygone past but can be made use of in the process of imagining a utopian condition in the future. The masses are not simply the agents of social change but their mode of thought can inform a course of action that eventually subverts the unjust neo-colonial order.

Orality and the Politics of Cultural Self-Affirmation

It is commonplace among African critics that the use of the oral tradition in modern African fiction has as one of its main objectives the assertion of the African cultural identity (Andindilile, 2018). Ngugi does not lose sight of this objective when he decided to indigenise the novel form in his post-*Petals of Blood* novelistic production. But because of his Marxist leanings, the issue of affirming cultural identities that is raised in his works has been often overshadowed in the critical discussion of these works by his insistent call for class struggle. Even though the quest for an ideal society through the elimination of social stratification dominates Ngugi's thought in his later works, *Wizard of the Crow*, while inviting the masses to fight the neo-coloniser, does not hold the question of cultural self-assertion in abeyance.

It is indeed virtually impossible to find a recent African novel to be steeped in the oral tradition in the way *Wizard of the Crow* is. The frequent occurrence of oral cultural elements in this novel serves a number of aims and the rehabilitation of the African culture is certainly one of these aims. Ngugi is of the opinion that the African writer cannot be said to be a staunch defender of the African culture unless its importance is clearly shown in his works.

Nevertheless, it could be argued that the use of the oral tradition was inevitable since the work was originally written in Gikuyu. After all, the link between the language which is employed as a literary medium of express and the cultural worldview it represents is inextricable. Ngugi's use of Gikuyu enables him to draw from the traditional worldview that is set in opposition to the Western discourse of globalisation. Language for Ngugi, as clearly expounded in his famous *Decolonizing the Mind*, is not simply a medium of communication but, more importantly, a carrier of culture. That seen, using indigenous languages in indicting the Western project of globalisation is arguably more effective than using English. But what is remarkable is that even in the English version of *Wizard of the Crow* references to the epistemological roots of the Gikuyu people are many. This indicates that the novelist alludes a lot to the wisdom of his people in his political writings.

The importance of orality in Ngugi's novel lies also in the fact that the voice of the author in it is a woman activist called Grace Nyawira who does not only express pride in her belonging to the Gikuyu community but who also uses the community's culture in the service of her political agenda of ending the unjust capitalist and patriarchal system in Aburiria, which is a metonymy for neo-colonial Africa. As will be discussed subsequently, she uses magic, traditional dances and tales in her revolutionary programme of altering the deplorable status quo. For her; the westernised culture is firmly associated with the national bourgeoisie in Aburiria. It promotes the bad values of selfishness, materialism and self-denigration. Furthermore, she is accompanied by Kamiti, who is the country's famous sorcerer nicknamed wizard of the crow from which the title of the novel is taken. But before discussing the way in which traditional culture is used by Nyawira and Kamiti as part of their self-appointed task of going beyond the state of anomy characterised by moral degradation at both the personal and political levels, it might be apposite to shed light on the use of proverbs by the corrupt individuals as they try to display their loyalty to the Ruler's regime

Roughly speaking, Ngugi inserts some of the Kiswahili proverbs in this work in order to support a case or rationalise a course of action. He is not the first African writer to include proverbs in a novel that depicts a modern situation. As mentioned earlier, the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe is famous for his proverbial style in some of his novels. Since *Wizard of the Crow* is a dictator novel, the proverbs are used by the sycophantic ministers in order to justify the choices that they have made. We shall consider here one example for the purpose of illustration.

When he was accused of plotting with the women dancers against the Ruler, Titus Tajirika, who was appointed to the director of the government's project of building a huge monument that would be qualified within the superwonders of the world, uses the Kiswahili proverb "no man is a hero to his wife" (*Wizard of the Crow*, p. 240) so as to dismiss this charge. The government officials suspect Tajirika since he has employed Nyawira who is wanted by the police for her anti-government activities as his own secretary in his Construction Company. Nyawira and Tajirika's wife Vinjina happen to be close friends and this increases their suspicion that Vinjina is part of the Movement for the Voice of the People. In order to acquit himself from the possible charge of being complicit with the people's underground movement, he reminds the government officials of the above-mentioned Kiswahili proverb in a bid to tell them that the man and his wife should not necessarily hold the same position about different key issues in this world. But one has to make a difference between resorting to the oral culture to condone an unjust system or making use of the folk tradition in order to subvert it.

On the whole, the idea that the African folk culture can be used in the service of maintaining neo-colonial hegemony in Africa is not uncommon among African critics who warn their people against the leaders' resort to the local cultures for the sake of justifying a particular political situation or diverting the masses' attention from their deplorable condition (see Gikandi, 1987). On the other hand, Ngugi wants the local Africa culture to serve the cause of the downtrodden masses, and to this last point we now turn.

Orature and Ngugi's Utopian Vision of the Possibility of Eliminating Social Hierarchies

The term oral tradition is not used in this paper to only mean the spoken cultural forms such as tales or songs but also all the cultural practices that are typical to a given community. Thus, traditional dances are included within the category of the oral tradition that Ngugi uses in the novel at hand. Importantly, too, in this novel, dancing is a crucial strategy adopted by the active members Movement for the Voice of the People in their attempt at defying the government's massive project of building "heavenscrapers". As stated by M.S.C. Okolo, "[f]or the Movement, the Marching to Heaven Project symbolizes a corrupt, unresponsive state, a state dominated by power-interested bureaucrats and headed by a dictator with power" and for this reason "the protest movement takes upon itself to uphold the economic interests of the ordinary people, the moral-ideological values of the state, peace, justice, Aburirian dignity and pride" (Okolo 2009, p. 63).

The masses oppose the government colossal project of building a world super wonder despite the fact that it allows for the creation of many jobs because of its wastefulness. That is to say, this project does not lead to an everlasting social development. The queuing mania that results from the Ruler's announcement of this project reveals that people do not believe in the official narratives of their Ruler. Whilst it is presented in bright terms by the political leaders, this project gives rise to massive popular protest. Interestingly, also, the directors of the Global Bank are not convinced by the utility of the Aburirian Ruler's grand project of building a new Tower of Babel in his country.

The women's dance before the foreign dignitaries in the capital city of Eldares has a subversive function by virtue of its association with a traditional ritual that mocks the state's colossal project of building a huge modern monument. The women dancers succeed in reacting to and resisting the ceremonial rites imposed by the state and the Ruler. Their dance is further accompanied by the songs that show clearly their vehement opposition to the state's regime. They even call for the end of the patriarchal system that sanctifies the subjugation of Aburirian women including the Ruler's wife Racheal who has been a victim of a house arrest by her husband as a result of her rejection of his womanising activities.

The women's dance, though obscene it may appear to be, represents the popular opinion about the government's impending project of building a Modern Tower of Babel. The people are firmly opposed to this project and hence they use their own cultural means to voice their opposition. Since the media is tightly controlled by the state, the masses resort to popular medium such as dance in order challenge the Ruler's despotic regime. The folk culture thus provides them with a medium where they can express their ideological views about this government massive project.

Despite being a sign of popular opposition to the state, Machokali, one of the Ruler's Ministers, tries to appease the Ruler's indignation by telling him that the directors

of the Global Bank were extremely satisfied with women's dance. He says to the Ruler that

"Your Holiest and Mightiest Excellency, Beloved of the Whole World ...well, about the shameful acts in Eldares, I told them [the foreign delegation members], just as you had then tried to explain, that what they saw was a sacred Aburirian dance performed only before most honoured guests. (Wizard of the Crow, p. 242)

Machokali, thus, tries to exploit the traditional dance of women before the foreign dignitaries to his own advantage. In order to give further evidence of his self-placating assumption, he hires a group of children in order to sing in favour of this government project. This means that the sycophantic ministers use dances and songs which are part of the traditional culture to show to the Global Bank directors that the Aburirian people support strongly their government plans. In other words, they take advantage of the popular culture to present the Ruler as "the man of the people".

The second women's performance before the Global Bank directors was so shocking to the Ruler and his ministers and the only way to overcome his sense of disappointment following his complete failure to prove to the foreign delegation that his people firmly support him in all his projects is to remind himself that this performance could be interpreted as a "black humour from an ancient Aburirian ritual" (*Wizard of the Crow*, p. 252, emphasis original). Consequently, just as women dancers use their performance to unveil the people's resolute opposition to the dictatorial regime, the Ruler does everything he could to show that the women's dance is an indication that he has won his people's consent about his massive plan.

Besides the ritual of dancing, the leader of the people's underground movement Nyawira falls back on other aspects of the oral tradition to mobilise the masses against the tyrants of Aburiria. In effect, the inclusion of folk tales in *Wizard of the Crow* is not simply intended by the novelist to express pride in his traditional culture but also to convey some ideological messages that are inaccessible to the non-literate masses in Kenya otherwise. For instance, the old tales narrated by Nyawira to the children who happen to be her employer's son and daughter (Gacigua and Gaciru) are rich in their political content- that is to say, they are not just stories for fun.

It must be noted that Nyawira started singing and reciting poems to Tajirika's children before she moved to storytelling. The children were a bit annoyed by these songs and poems. This could be due to their young age because some children tend to prefer amusing stories rather than songs or poems. The following passage demonstrates why Nyawira shifted to narrating stories which are integral elements of the oral tradition, though she preferred the other aspects of her people's oral culture, namely, songs and poems:

Nyawira sang them [Tajirika's children] work songs and recited poems about weaverbirds and elephants. But the children wanted stories. Nyawira told them that stories were for evenings only at home by the fireside and not daytime in the

office by the phoneside. *Hakuna matata* [meaning in Swahili there is no problem]. Gaciru and Gacigua would pretend that it was evening and the office was home and all the people in the queue were listeners. (*Wizard of the Crow*, p. 153).

What is also interesting about the tales is that they are not narrated by Nyawira in the usual place and at the usual time. This means that the tales have been appropriated by the teller to yield meanings that are determined by the context of narration.

It has to be emphasised that Nyawira began to tell her story to the children by explaining to them what an ogre means. She is indeed fully aware that they cannot relate this story to the modern context unless they know who the ogre is. The narrator of the novel tells us how she proceeds to clarify the concept of the ogre to them in the following manner:

What are ogres? They now wanted to know, and Nyawira explained that marimus were humanlike creatures who sometimes fed on humans, including little children. The creatures had two mouths, one in front and the other at the back of their heads, and they ate files through the mouth at their back. (Wizard of the Crow, p. 154).

Significantly, too, the children were not just listening to Nyawira's story; they tried also to relate it to their present situation. For instance, when Nyawira said that the ogres used to have long hair, Gaciru stopped her by saying that their long hair makes them resemble her mother. If a child can relate an old story to his own environment let alone an adult.

The story, to be brief, is about a blacksmith, an ogre and a pregnant woman. The latter gave birth to two children but she was nursed by a humanlike ogre while her husband the blacksmith was away. He only knew about the danger facing his wife and his two children through a weaverbird, and it is only through the combined efforts of the family members that they could ultimately defeat the ogre. The morality of the story should be clear; the collective efforts of the people is the sole way of vanquishing their enemy. In other words, if the morality of the story is applied to the state of Aburiria, the oppressed masses cannot overthrow their despot unless they take a collective action.

More interestingly, Gaciru turned over the story of the ogre in her mind and came to the conclusion that the policemen are ogre-like figures by virtue of wearing hats that conceal both their mouth and their hair. She tells her mother and Nyawira that

"You know, I have been thinking about the story of the ogre, and I don't think that it was their hair alone that hid the mouth at the back. Both the mouth and the hair were hidden under the hats the ogres wore. Don't you think so? Hats can also hide the mouth, can't they? Like those worn by those policemen outside? Tell me, are policemen ogres?" (Wizard of the Crow, p. 156).

Her conclusion can be confirmed on many occasions in the novel by the brutal way in which the police officers question the suspects including Tajirika and Vinjinia. The police questioning turns out to be a sort of physical and mental torture that forces the suspects to

confess crimes that he did not commit. Unwarranted detention, secret arrests and forced confession which constitute violations of the civil liberties of the individuals aim at preventing any form of dissidence and thereby solidifying the autocratic power of the Ruler.

More generally, the use of orature techniques in this novel enables its writer to transcend the restrictions of time, space and form. These techniques are not only meant to create a variety in the novel's mode of writing but also look at the post-colonial reality from the perspective of the people who still uphold the traditional worldview. In addition, as remarkably pointed out by Oliver Lovesey, the orature techniques such as "oral stories provide key images" for the novelist (Oliver Lovesey 2012). Importantly, as we shall see below, comparing the leaders and the corrupt businesses to evil figures that are found in the oral stories is case in point

To begin with, Nyawira's choice of these two old tales are not gratuitous. Her tales are meant to teach some moral lesson to the two children. She wants these children to be utterly different from their father Tajirika who is a representative of the corrupt and exploitative businessmen in the country. She, in other words, does not want them to be socialised in a corrupt environment that naturalises moral decay. Interestingly, as stated previously, these children display a high level of intelligence by quickly comparing their parents to the ogres in Nyawira's stories.

Nyawira's folk tales reveal clearly that the rulers and the capitalists in neo-colonial Africa are ogre-like figures who dehumanise the African people through their shamelessly exploitative practices. They are thus described as the modern man-eaters who display no morality or religious scruple when their personal interests are at stake. They are so vicious to the point of being endowed by the author with grotesque qualities. For instance, the Ruler of Aburiria is shown by the novelist to embody dictatorial propensities, viciousness and rigidity. His ministers, too, try to develop abnormal shapes in their bodies like elongating their ears or their eyes in the hope that they would be his best servants. These physical abnormalities are typical to the evil creatures in the folk stories.

The tales that Nyawria narrates to Tajirika's children seem foreshadow the events that occur later. Gaciru is not wrong when she compares her father to an ogre in those tales as the biological change that Tajirika goes through leads to his bodily deformity. In this regard, Brendon Nicholls argues that "Tajirika undergoes plastic surgery as part of an unsuccessful attempt at biological race change and, as a result, comes to resemble the ogres of Gikuyu myth" (Nicholls 2010, p. 177). Thus, the folk tales are important in Ngugi's novel in that they serve to heighten the political consciousness of the readers about the extent of their abnormality at the bodily as well as the ethical level. In other words, these folk stories narrated by Nyawria aim, among other things, at underscoring the monstrosity of the political leaders and capitalists of the country. Furthermore, the folk stories have the obvious advantage of being easily understood by the non-literate masses. Using a sophisticated rhetoric to denounce the government actions may not serve the didactic function of teaching those masses about the harmful effects of neo-colonial capitalism.

Also, the exploiters in Aburiria are depicted by the novelist in the story as flat characters who are incapable of developing into figures with multi-dimensional traits. By contrast, Kamiti and Nyawira are described as rounded characters since their development into political maturity can be easily traced. Kamiti develops from the stage of being a wanderer to that of becoming the male companion of Nyawira. The latter, too, moves from the stage of working secretly in the Movement for the Voice of the People to that of openly challenging the state of Aburiria. In addition, Nyawira's ability to turn to wizardly, as will be analysed later, is seen by Brendon Nicholls as "an enabling capacity because it is consistent with her transformative impulses, her insurrectionary disguises and her vocation as an actress" (Nicholls 2010, p. 9).

Therefore, Nyawira does not only tell stories; she tries hard to act in accordance with the moral values that the stories evince. She appears to have learned much from the folk story of the blacksmith, the ogre and the pregnant woman since it celebrates the idea of the "combined strength" and presents it as the sole means of getting rid of monsters. She does not simply identify the ogre; together with the other members of the Movement of the Voice of the People she tries to defeat him. It seems as if the story of the ogre has inspired her towards taking the right action. She even created an informal women's court that tries every man who oppresses his wife through rape, beating or any other form of patriarchal power abuse, and the scene of kidnapping and physically punishing Tajirka by a group of women for beating his wife Vinjinia is a case in point.

It must be reiterated that heightening people's class consciousness and promoting their revolutionary agency are arguably the ultimate objectives behind which Ngugi deploys aspects of orality in many of his novels and in *Wizard of the Crow* more particularly. Nyawira is the author's mouthpiece in this novel since she takes advantage of the traditional culture in order to rid the nation of its ailments that include despotism, class oppression, ethnic violence and patriarchy.

Nonetheless, tales are not the most important elements of Gikuyu orality in Ngugi's presently discussed novel. Doubtlessly, many readers prefer to consider *Wizard of the Crow* as an African sorcery novel since much of its space is devoted to the description of the role of magic in the lives of the Aburirran people. Even more so, the political leaders seem to believe in the power of magic in running government affairs such as nipping popular rebellion in the bud or chasing criminals. Also, they tend to visit the wizard's shrine in the hope of increasing their wealth or protecting themselves against the plots of their political rivals.

Ngugi's evocation of magic in this work does not necessarily mean his departure from realism since magic is part and parcel of the lives of the Africans even in the age of neo-colonialism. But what is remarkable about this novel is that the author seems to exaggerate in his depiction of the function of magic in the lives of the individuals. In this vein, it has been stated that in this novel "Ngugi portrays society that, despite the influence of Western culture and development, believes in witchcraft, curses, evil spell, djinns and ogres" (Akin Odebunmi 2016, p. 417) Moreover, many people believe in the power of magic even if they claim the opposite. Indeed, the story of the priest shows that even the

religious zealots resort to witchcraft in order to meet their personal needs though they repeatedly say that witchcraft is an anti-Christian practice. The narrator of the novel tells us that "[a] priest who used to denounce sorcery every Sunday once came to him [Kamiti] at dawn, only to bump into one of his parishioners at the shrine" (*Wizard of the Crow*, p. 368). Too, the educated people, who consider witchcraft to be a primitive act; sometimes fall back on it for the sake of their own self-aggrandisement. Finally, even the Ruler of Aburiria seeks a cure for his strange disease by consulting the wizard of the crow, who happens to cooperate with the leader of the women's rebellion in the country. However, it must be noted that the Ruler is not made aware of the involvement of the sorcerer in the subversive project of Nyawira.

This being so, it will not be appropriate to discuss the oral dimension in Ngugi's tome book *Wizard of the Crow* without dwelling at some length on the analysis of its eponymous hero. Despite being a victim of the status quo for some time, especially during his long search for a job in Eldares, the capital of Aburiria, he quickly manages to become a well-known witch doctor in the whole land of Aburiria. This means that he possesses some miraculous powers that enable him to move from the state of being a homeless and miserable unemployed young man to the state of being one of the most important figure of the entire country. Indeed, his reputation indicates that colonial modernity has not completely taken the place of traditional culture in contemporary Africa.

The Wizard of the Crow, for that is his nickname, can be rightly considered as one of the trickster figure in the Postcolonial narratives who offer a fertile source for cultural reflection and critical reflexivity in their respective communities. The trickster in Postcolonial literature is often used by the authors to inculcate desirable behaviour and warn his people against the destructive ones, and this applies perfectly to Kamiti in Ngugi's presently discussed novel. Kamiti performs at once a moralising and subversive function in Ngugi's novel. His healing wisdom can serve the nation in a number of ways. More significantly, he seems to diagnose the ills of the neo-colonial society. For instance, he concludes that Tajirkia and his wife are suffering from a psychological troubles which he describes as "white-ache". By using his magical mirror, He allows his patients to reflect upon themselves and identify their health problems on their own. He is the of view that self-scrutiny is the most efficient method of diagnosing one's sickness and thereby finding remedy.

Kamiti could be viewed as the healer of the whole nation. Not only is he needed to heal the illnesses of people from the cross-section of the Aburirian society but he is also sent by the government to the USA in order to cure the Ruler's queer malady. But his therapeutic work indicates that the discourse of the state about the futility of people's culture and wisdom is false. That viewed, Kamiti functions as a trickster who "break[s] social borders erected by socially stratified societies" and hence he "artfully challenge[s] the myopic selfishness and insidious viciousness of totalitarian authorities" (Bala Ruma 2014, p. 201). Whether consciously or not, Kamiti dereifies the masses by his healing work. This argument is perfectly in tune with Maria Muresan's interesting observation that "the sorcerer's [Kamiti's] intervention catches everyone unaware and evades the Ruler's coercive power; precisely because it is not merely reactive and interpretive, but

essentially creative and productive in its ethical motivation and political imaginary” (Muresan 2018, p. 101).

Remarkably, the novelistic scene of treating the Ruler's disease which is characterised by the grotesque inflation of his belly by the “postcolonial witch-doctor” has a strong symbolic meaning. This scene indeed shows that the totalitarian regime which is epitomised by the Ruler can only be cured by returning to the healing wisdom which is learned via a thorough study of the popular cultures. Western doctors prove unable to cure the Ruler's strange disease. Worse still, they fall even short of providing a scientific and medical explanation to his ever-expanding belly. In addition, the work of Kamiti can be viewed to foreshadow the end of the totalitarian regime in Aburiria. It has the carnivalesque function of challenging what is official in the country. Here, the word “carnavalesque” is not used with its Bakhtinian sense; rather, it is employed in the way Ngugi uses it in his *Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams* where he states that every discourse that challenges the official narratives of the state can be categorised with the carnivalesque in Postcolonial African literature (Ngugi 1998, p. 27).

Despite having led a miserable life for a long period of time, Kamiti does not succumb to the sense of despair. He fights the neo-colonial condition in his own way. He seems to have inherited the spirit of fight from his grandfather who was the hero of the land during the anti-colonial struggle. Kamiti's father draws interesting parallels between Kamiti and his grandfather. Indeed, Kamiti's grandfather has become a legendary figure in the whole land of Aburiria. He used his wizardly powers in the service of the people's war against British colonialism. Kamiti at first was not aware of the true story of his grandfather, but Kamiti's father deems it wise to tell his son what happened to this legendary hero of whom he is fully proud. The following passage narrates the story of Kamiti's grandfather who used the traditional wisdom in the service of the people during the colonial period:

His [Kamiti's] grandfather, Kamiti wa Kienjeku, had been a holy seer, a spiritual leader working with forces fighting the British in the war of independence. “He lived with the fighters in the mountains, teaching them how to be at peace with one another, settling conflicts, leading units into battle, and cleansing them of evil after their engagement with the enemy. He knew every path, every plant, every living thing. (Wizard of the Crow, p. 294).

However unconscious he may appear to be, Kamiti seems to carry the mantle of his grandfather in his self-appointed task of fighting all evils that inhibit the Africans from leading a self-fulfilling existence. Kamiti's commitment to cleanse the nation of all its evils is strengthened by listening carefully to his grandfather's heroic story. Just as the traditional wisdom was used as part of the anti-colonial struggle, so it could be used now as part of the anti-neocolonialist combat. Like his grandfather who was a healer and a militant during the war of independence, Kamiti exhibits the combined qualities of spiritual leadership and social activism in the post-independence era. Kamiti does not simply act as a custodian of the traditional culture in Aburiria for he uses the traditional culture in his attempt at ridding the nation of its neo-colonial social ills. In other words, he

does not celebrate the traditional culture for its own sake. After all, he does not lead a hermetic life because of his active involvement in the socio-political condition of the post-colonial state. Basically, he is the male companion of the woman leader of the Movement for the Voice of the People in Aburiria.

Even Nyawria makes use of the magic in her attempt at subverting the status quo. She finds the shrine of the wizard of the crow to be the best hiding place from by the security forces of Aburiria. At times, she assumes the role of the sorcerer. Though she has learned many wizardly skills from Kamiti, she is principally presented in the novel as a revolutionary heroine who struggles to end gender-based and class-based injustices in her country. In other words, she uses her feigned personality as the wizard of the crow as part of revolutionary project of creating an egalitarian social order in Aburiria. By playing the role of the witch doctor, she appears to excel in the all skills that should be possessed by the advocates of the folk cultures in contemporary Africa. She proved earlier to be good at singing, dancing, reciting poems, and telling stories, and now she proves to be able to learn the wizardly skills from Kamiti.

Kamiti teaches Nyawria the skills of magic and she teaches him how to be involved in politics. Kamiti's socialist vision is partly promoted by his frequent contacts with Nyawira. At the beginning of the novel he appears to be primarily concerned with his own personal survival, but as the story unfolds his commitment to the communal uplift becomes so visible. The narrator of the novel makes us aware that Kamiti "felt lucky to have her [Nyawira] as his companion; she had bestowed on him a vision of the world" (*Wizard of the Crow*, p. 312). Hadn't Kamiti been a companion of Nyawira, it would not have been easy to see the politically subversive function of Kamiti's wizardry. Thus, it could be contended that Kamiti and Nyawira appear to be complementary to one another.

The discussion of Ngugi's deployment of the traditional cultural forms in his last novel to date cannot be comprehensive unless due attention is paid to his rumours in the development of the story. True, rumours must be distinguished from oral tales since they do not constitute part of the people's cultural heritage. Rumours, if put differently, are tied to a particular situation. Indeed, the major rumours that Ngugi's novel are based on are the popular theories about the Ruler's illness. Five different hypotheses have been put forward by the people to account for the Ruler's exceptionally expanding belly. It is beyond the scope of this paper to explain each hypothesis at some length. But what is remarkable about these hypothesis is that that are firmly grounded in the people's mythical imagination.

The existence of different interpretations in this novel has a symbolic function. It surely means that the single official narrative of the state could be challenged by popular opinions. In other words, the people no long have faith in the explication of different events made by the despotic state. Rumours help people establish their views about different key issues such as the dictator's bodily abnormality. Rumours, thus, allow them to create a democratic space in a dictatorial state. As interestingly remarked by Robert L. Colson, "[r]umour... is not simply a contradiction of the official version of stories foisted on the people, but instead is a vibrant discourse and site for debate as multiple versions are

debated in the climate of a free exchange of ideas” (Colson 2011, p. 141). It is therefore through these rumours that their voice is heard.

The use of the oral tradition in a novel that deals with the question of globalisation in Africa symbolically suggests that Ngugi is not in favour of the Western epistemic models of social development. Not only does Ngugi show that the people's culture in the age of post-independence is still rooted in the precolonial lore and tradition but also that the epistemological roots of the people can guide them in their quest for self-fulfilment at the personal level and guide those who place themselves at the vanguard of socialist revolution like Nyawira.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the deployment of orature techniques in Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow* serves a dual purpose as the foregoing discussion has shown. On the other hand, Ngugi's use of orality in this novel points to the fact that the African people have not fully lost their ancestral epistemology and thus the view that the project of colonial modernity and later globalisation have completely obliterated their identity has to be utterly rejected. On the other hand, the use of the oral tradition in this work shows how a socialist agenda of fighting neo-colonial capitalism in post-independence Africa can be informed by a full understanding of the traditional culture. All in all, not only does Ngugi manage to underscore the importance of cultural decolonisation in this novel through the adoption of the oral techniques but also demonstrates how cultural decolonisation is put in the service of creating a socialist utopia in post-independence Africa.

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