The Nairobi Journal of LITERATURE

The Journal of the Department of Literature, University of Nairobi

Number 10 (Special Issue) May, 2022

Eastern African Literature in the 21st Century: Achievements, Challenges and Perspectives

The Nairobi Journal of LITERATURE

The Journal of the Department of Literature

University of Nairobi

Number 10 (Special Issue) December, 2022

Eastern African Literature in the 21st Century: Achievements, Challenges and Perspectives

The Nairobi Journal of Literature
The Journal of the Department of Literature
University of Nairobi

ISSN 1814-1706-9
Key Title: The Nairobi Journal of Literature
Abbreviated Key Title: Nairobi j. lit.

The Nairobi Journal of Literature is a publication of the Department of Literature, University of Nairobi. It publishes scholarly work in English and Kiswahili. The views expressed in the contributions are not necessarily the views of *The Nairobi Journal of Literature* or the Department of Literature, University of Nairobi.

Acknowledgement: The articles published here were first presented at the Third International Annual Conference on the Role of Literature in a Global World, organized by the University of Nairobi's Department of Literature in November 2020 at the University of Nairobi, Kenya. The special theme of the Conference was “Eastern African Literatures in the 21st Century: Achievements, Challenges, and Perspectives”.

Type setting and design: Anna Petkova-Mwangi
Email: literature@uonbi.ac.ke
Telephone: 254(020)318262
Manuscript address:
The Nairobi Journal of Literature
The Journal of the Department of Literature
University of Nairobi
P O Box 30197, GPO Nairobi 00100,
Kenya

Contents

INTRODUCTION

Alina Rinkanya
University of Nairobi

The articles collected in this issue of the Journal are largely based on the presentations delivered at the Third International Annual Conference on the Role of Literature in a Global World, organized by the University of Nairobi's Department of Literature in November 2020. The special theme of the Conference was "Eastern African Literatures in the 21st Century: Achievements, Challenges, and Perspectives". In full accordance with the conference's special theme, its program featured presentations by about thirty participants from Africa and Europe. The fact that the Conference attracted participants from all over the world mirrored the importance of the issues raised by the gathering. The three days of the Conference were opened by keynote speakers, distinguished scholars and writers from Eastern Africa - Dominica Dipio from Makerere University, Mukoma wa Ngugi from Cornell University, Christopher Odhiambo from Moi University and Kithaka wa Mberia from the University of Nairobi.

The Conference participants were the leading specialists in Eastern African studies from such universities as Nairobi, Kenyatta, USIU, Meru and Chuka in Kenya, Makerere University in Uganda, universities of Humboldt, Hamburg and Bayreuth in Germany, the University of Ghent in Belgium, the University of Vienna in Austria, Institute for World Literature in Russia.

The panels of the Conference covered various aspects of the present state of literature and related subjects in Eastern Africa in an attempt to establish how the region's literatures have grown, deviated from, or otherwise changed from its variants of earlier times. For example, one of the panels discussed new readings of Eastern African classics, such as the works of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, as well as East African oral tradition. The themes of this panel are developed in this current issue of the Journal in the articles by Susanne Gehrmann, who offers a new comparative interpretation of Ngugi wa Thiongo and Binyavanga Wainaina's memoirs, and Inge Brinkman with "posthuman" interpretation of Gikuyu oral literature.

One of the panelists was engaging with topical issues of women's literature and introducing new names in Eastern African women's writing. This topic is reflected in the issue by Alina Rinkanya's article based on the works of one of the younger but renowned Kenyan author,

Moraa Gitaa. The researcher addresses issues relative to female perspectives as well as interrogates the cultural impediments to female agency.

Bearing in mind the growing importance of Swahili as a literary language in the East African region, Swahili literature was discussed in a separate panel. The general, or, as the author himself formulated it, "a bird's eye view" of the Swahili writing tradition is presented in this issue by the article of distinguished Kenyan writer and scholar of Swahili expression Kithaka wa Mberia. The article by Mikhail Gromov investigates how the problems of the younger generation are depicted in Kenyan Swahili women's prose in the current century.

One of the panels of the Conference was interrogating the issues related to the concept of identity, which demonstrates once again the importance of this notion in modern literary studies and, on a larger scale, humanities. The panel members discussed this concept in many aspects - investigating the contribution to the formation of identity of geographical spaces (for example, the Caribbean and Indian ocean), gender and nationhood, the acquisition of a new identity by East African writers of European origin, and the reflection of identity in traditional oral narratives. The findings of this discussion are formulated in this issue in the articles by Julius Mwangi Kanyari, who investigates the East African contribution to Caribbean identity, and Natalia Frolova, who traces the acquisition of Kenyan identity in the works of two distinguished Kenyan poets of European descent.

The participants of the panel on theatre and film presented theatrical and cinematic genres as part and parcel of literary and artistic space of the region, focusing on varied aspects, such as psychological aspects of drama, modern dramatic interpretations of folklore, theatre and film for justice and social development, popular comedy. A number of articles in this issue are based on these presentations - Wambua Kawive's research on the style of theatre for social justice in Kenya, Joseph Muleka's application of Freudian psychoanalysis to Kenyan drama and Pepetual Chiangong's analysis of *Lwanda Magere* by Kenyan playwright Okoiti Omtatah.

One of the most innovative contributions to the Conference's work was made by the participants of the panel on digital media. Eastern Africa is not an exception, and the participants of the panel are set to demonstrate these vibrant developments in the regional context, speaking about regional panels for digital literature, and various genres of digital writing in the region - from spoken word poetry (the article by Beatrice Ekesa) to online

comedy (analysed by Miriam Maranga Musonye) - examining the mutual role of the blogger and the reader as co-creators of digital literary works.

The editors of this issue of the Journal, who were also actively participating in the organization and the work of the Conference, express their hopes that such scientific forums prove their ultimate validity and importance for the purpose of researching and to a large extent guiding the literary processes in the region, which in the long run will seriously add up to its intellectual and social growth and prosperity. We hope that the articles published in this edition of the Journal will be captivating and inspiring for our readers.

Alina Rinkanya,

University of Nairobi

SWAHILI LITERATURE: A BIRD'S EYE VIEW

THE KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Kithaka wa Mberia
Department of Linguistics and Languages,
University of Nairobi

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to begin this address by contextualizing Kiswahili within the African linguistic terrain. Some linguists put the number of languages spoken in the world at about 7, 000. Roughly, a third of these languages is spoken in Africa, (See, for example, Gordon (2005)). The approximately 2,000 languages are grouped into four language families, namely, Niger-Congo, Nilo-Saharan, Afro-Asiatic and Khoisan (Greenberg, 1963).

One of the members of the Niger-Congo family is the Bantu sub-family. This is the sub-family to which Kiswahili belongs. Specifically, Kiswahili belongs to a group of Bantu languages called Sabaki due to their origin within the River Sabaki region. Other Sabaki languages, that is Kiswahili's closest sister languages, are Kipokomo and the Mijikenda languages. The long and short of what I have said so far is that, when we speak of Swahili literature, we are talking of the literature of an authentic African language. Kiswahili is not any less African than Akan, Bambara or Acholi. It is not any less Bantu than isiZulu, Chiluba or Kikamba. However, it is a unique African language in that, unlike all the other African languages, it has a staggering number of speakers. It is estimated to have between 100 million and 140 million speakers. It not only by far the largest language on the African continent but also one of the biggest in the world in terms of both the number of speakers as well as regional spread.

Talking about Kiswahili and its literature necessarily forces one to engage in debunking some misconceptions both explicit and implicit. One of the misconceptions is on its correct identity with which I have already dispensed. Another misconception is on its literature. In a *Sunday Nation* article titled "The Other Half of Our Writing That You are Probably Missing" Dr. Thomas Odhiambo makes an observation that, "If you asked a literary scholar from East Africa to tell you a brief history of the region's literature, they will invariably speak only of literature

in English. They will speak about the birth of East African literature as the moment when — I guess — Ngugi was Thiong'o published *The River Between*; or when some other author published an anthology of poetry or a play in English"

Dr. Odhiambo's observation brings to the fore the unfortunate lack of knowledge with regard to Kiswahili literature and its place in the East African literary landscape. Without batting an eye lid, we tell students in our secondary schools and universities that writers such as Ngugi wa Thiogo, Grace Ogot, Okot p'Tek and Taban lo Liyong' constitute the first generation of East African writers. Nothing can be farther from the truth.

By the time the above writers penned their works, written Swahili literature had been in existence for centuries. Ngugi wa thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child* was published in 1964. Arguably, the manuscript was not in existence much earlier than one or two years before the date of publication. It was therefore written more than three hundred years after the scripting of Hamziyya by Sayyid Aidarusi on the Lamu Island in 1652 (Knappert, 1972). Put differently, Swahili literature predates literature in English in East Africa by more than three hundred years.

Lest we mislead ourselves that the writing of Hamziyya was a one-off affair, let me to point out that classic Swahili poetry has been thriving since that early work. One of East Africa's early female writers, Saada Taji li Alifina wrote her poem in 1790 (Knappert, 1972). Mwana Lemba, another female poet also wrote quite early in the evolution of Swahili poetry. One of the best known female poets in Swahili poetry, (best known, of course by scholars and students of Swahili literature), is Mwana Kupona who wrote her hugely popular *Utenzi wa Mwana Kupona* in 1858 (J.W.T. Allen,1971). Therefore, to tell students in a university literature hall that Grace Ogot, Charity Waciuma and Martjorie Oludhe Macgoye are the earliest female writers in Kenya is to misinform them. Indeed, by the time Grace Ogot read her short story titled, "A Year of Sacrifice" at the well- known conference on African literature at Makerere University in 1962, Saada Taji li Alifina had written her poem translated as "Saada's Lament" more than one hundred and seventy years earlier (taking Knappert's dating of the poem's writing as valid).

There are many other prominent Swahili poets of yore. Among them are Sayyid Abdalla Ali Bin Nasir, the composer of the famous poem titled *Al-Inkishafi* (which happens to be one of my favourite East African poems). Muyaka bin Haji, the formidable Mombasa poet, who was born in 1776 and lived until 1840, was a prolific poet and he left us with a literary treasure

which was published posthumously as *Diwani ya Muyaka.* Some of his poems have been enthusiastically and ably critiqued by Mohamed Abdulaziz in his study titled *Muyaka: 19th Century Popular Poetry*. Other poets of the classical period in Swahili literature include Mwalimu Sikujua, Zahid Mghumi, Ahmed Al-Mambasi and Ahmad Basheikh Hussein. These poets wrote poetry that was not only socially relevant, deep in reflection but also aesthetically impressive. The poetry of these early poets, which was written using Arabic alphabet, is today available in the Roman alphabet and interested readers can access it without much difficulty.

After the introduction of the Western form of education in East Africa and with it the Roman alphabet, Swahili literature beat literature in English at the printing press by a whole three decades. James Mbotela's novel, *Uhuru wa Watumwa,* was published in 1934, exactly thirty years before the publication of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child* in 1964. And, it's not just in poetry and fiction where Swahili literature predates literature in English. The same is true of drama.

Many people are familiar with East African dramatists writing in English such as John Ruganda, Francis Imbuga, Robert Serumaga, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Austin Bukenya and David Mulwa. However, writing and publishing of drama in East African started, not with the English language but in Kiswahili. In 1957, Graham Hyslop published *Mgeni Karibu* and *Afadhali* Mchawi. 1957 was the same year that Henry Kuria published *Nakupenda Lakini*. In 1961, Gerishon Ngugi published *Nimerogwa Nisiwe na Mpenzi.* Ngugi wa Thiongo's first play, *The Black Hermit,* was published in1970, that is more than a decade after the publication of drama by Graham Hyslop and Henry Kuria.

I have demonstrated that (written) Swahili literature is about four centuries old or, to be precise, 370 years if we use Knappert's date of Hamziyya's birth. That is a long literary tradition. However, one can legitimately point out that longevity of a literary tradition is one thing and that the quality of the intellectual products thereof is a different matter. To address the issue of the quality of Swahili literature, let me deal with its thematic concerns and relevance before looking at its other aspects including aesthetic accomplishments. Among the themes found in classic Swahili poetry is faith, especially, Islam. One of poetic works with the theme of Islam is Hamziyya which I have already mentioned as the earliest known piece of written Swahili literature. Other works that deal with religious themes either wholly or in part include *Al-Inkishafi, Utenzi wa Tambuka, Utenzi wa Paa na Ngamia, Utenzi wa Mwana Kupona and Kasida ya Burudai.*

Regarding secular themes, it has often been stated that Muyaka Bin Haji Ghassaniy took Swahili poetry from the mosque to the marketplace. This claim, which has been put forward again and again, is erroneous. True, Muyaka wrote on political, economic and social issues. However, many of the secular themes with which he dealt had been handled by poets before him

Fumo Liyongo, who lived much earlier than Muyaka, composed virtually all his poems on secular issues including matters such as weddings, hunting and love. Compositions such as the "Wedding Song", "Song of Love", "The Song of Sada", "Ode to Mwana Munga" and "The Serenade to the Coconut Girl" are good illustrations of his secular poems.

Fumo Liyongo is also reputed to have composed powerful political poems. They revolved around his life and his contestation for power apparently with a king or a prince in Pate which in his days was already a main centre of political power. In "Wanji Wanji", we learn that Fumo Liyongo was a man who would choose to die rather than accept oppression and humiliation at home. He was the kind of person who was willing to fight for honour; a man against whom no scornful word would be uttered against him as long as he lived. He feared nothing but disgrace which would result from his enemies seeing his back as he is fled. Due to his firm stand against oppression and humiliation, we see both of his feet in shackles and an iron ring around his neck as a political prisoner. That's politics – very serious politics indeed!

Saada Taji li Alifina's poem, estimated to have been composed in 1790, is about challenges she has encountered in her marriage. In the composition, the persona, who also happens to be the poet herself, laments about her mistreatment by her husband. She was married, we learn, when both of her and her husband were young. She has done all that a wife is expected to do in the cultural context of her marriage. As a wife, she is expected to massage and caress her husband. She does as much. She has neither spoken to him a single word of contempt nor done anything that would be considered an act of rebellion. She has always been humble and obedient. In spite of all this compliance, the husband is very angry with her and he is suing for divorce. He has stopped going to her apartment and has gone as far as taking away her bride wealth as well as her regular sustenance. As a result of her husband's unprovoked and cruel behavior, she is hurting badly. The second to fourth stanzas of her "Lament" go as follows:

Naliozewe na mume
wa tangu utoto wetu
kwa idhini ya wamame

na baba na wangu watu
kame siino ni ngome
isiongiwa ni mtu
Kipata siku ya tatu
Kamwe kawa metukiwa

Sikwima, siwasilepo
kukanda na kupapasa
kwa mume siambilepo
neno iwi la kukusa
wala simtendilepo
la unashiza kabisa
Nali mwenye, ni mwangusa
Nimtiiye muowa

Sasa ali awiile
haji hapiti nyumbani
na mahari atwazile
hata poso za zamani
wambije sayu matule
yaniliza-mimoyoni
Si moja 'kaweka ndani
Si mawili 'katukuwa

Although *Al-Inkishafi* is considered a religious poem with some scholars going as far as seeing it as religious sermon (Hichens, 1972), it is quite revealing on the politics of Pate of the day. For instance, it shows how the politically powerful and materially well-to-do lived. For them life was smooth – very smooth! They had fame and honour. They were not only contented but also conceited. They walked with their heads slanted to one side. Their houses were lighted and glittered brightly. Nights went by like days. They had chinaware and engraved goblets. They slumbered in beds with pillows for both their heads and feet. Moreover, they had people

to message and fan them and beautiful, elegantly-dressed women who continuously sang soft, sweet songs as they retired to bed.

The poem mentions ministers and other big men who were guarded, yes guarded, by soldiers. The poem also mentions judges. However, in spite of their splendor and comfort, their lives come to naught. We read:

Kwalina Mabwana na Mawaziri
Wenda na makundi ya askari
Watamiwe nati za makaburi
Pingu za mauti ziwafundiye

Kwalina makadhi wamua haki,
Wahakiki zuo wakihakiki
Waongoza watu njema tariki
Wasewe kwa wote waitishiye

The earliest Swahili fictional work is the historical novel by James Mbotela which was published in 1934. Mbotela's work is on slavery and, arguably, the only literary work in East Africa on the subject. James Mbotela, the author, was a son to Mambo Mbotela who suffered the indignity of East African slave trade. Mambo Mbotela was captured as a slave and suffered and witnessed first hard the tribulations and humiliation that faced those who were unfortunate to be within reach of the captors. The senior Mbotela narrated to James Mbotela what he had gone through and what he had witnessed and James Mbotele added creativity to the narration to come up with the artistic work titled *Uhuru wa Watumwa*. Consequently, the novel become the first and the last East African literary work to deal with the theme of slavery.

In 1957, Graham Hyslop published two plays, namely, *Afadhali Mchawi* and *Mgeni Karibu*. *Afadhali Mchawi*, is the first literary work in East Africa to deal with the theme of corruption. In the play, Issa, one of the characters, is a nurse of the level of a "dresser", that is someone who dresses wounds in a medical establishment. Issa has access to medicines in his workplace. He tells Ali, another character that he, Issa, makes money on the sidelines over and above getting a salary. He makes the extra money by selling drugs meant for the medical facility's patients. Issa is, therefore, clearly engaged in acts of corruption (Mugambi, 1982). Corruption is essentially a moral issue. It is a manifestation of moral decay. Consequently, *Afadhali*

Mchawi is the first portrayal of moral decadence, a portrayal that is so prevalent in East African literature in both Kiswahili and English.

Shabaan Robert whose works became widely known in 1940s, 50s and 60s and whose works became mainstream reading texts thereafter, dealt with many themes including social issues, governance and values. In *Utubora Mkulima* the writer explores and advocates for "utu" a notion that in Southern Africa goes under the label "ubuntu" and which has become a major religious, philosophical and political concept seen as capable of addressing societal challenges not only in Southern Africa but also on the whole of the continent of Africa.

Decadence in society is one of the most widely and intensely dissected issues in Swahili literature. It has been explored by writers such as Shabaan Robert, Mohamed Suleiman Mohamed and Said Ahmed Mohamed. At the beginning of *Asali Chungu,* Said Ahmed Mohamed's novel, we encounter women seated on a bench in the District commissioner's waiting room. We learn of the dereliction of the duty of the occupier of the office. We are informed he enters the office, walks out for tea, gets back to the office, walks out to smoke, comes back and goes out again. He displays terrible indifference and insensitivity towards the people he is paid to serve. By the end of the day, he will have attended to only four people. And the four will not be just anybody. The lucky ones, if it can be called luck, are women endowed with attractive bodies. And there is much more than official business that goes on in the office. In the opening scene of the novel, after a multitude of women have spent an enormous amount of time waiting in the District Commissioner's reception, the person who has been in the office finally emerges. And as sure as the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, it is a young woman. She is described as someone soaked in pretentious embarrassment. Her eyes are blood-shot and her hair ruffled. That kind of appearance of a young woman who has been in a room with a man for hours, leaves little to the imagination of those who have been waiting on the bench!

Since the days of Fumo Liyongo's compositions, through Sayyid Abdallah Ali Nasir's *Al-Inkishafi* and Muyaka's poetry up to the present, political commentary has been a persistent feature in Swahili literature. In recent times, writers such as Abdillatif Abdalla, who authored *Sauti ya Dhiki (Voice of Agony)* while incarcerated by Kenyatta's government, have written biting pieces on unenviable political wilderness of their times. Other works with prominently political themes comprise *Kusadikika* and *Kufikirika* by Shabaan Robert, *Mafuta* and *Walenisi* by Katama Mkangi, *Kilio cha Haki* and *Chembe cha Moyo* by Al-Amin Mazrui, *Kinjeketile,*

Mashetani and *Harusi by* Ebrahim Hussein, *Kichwa Maji* and *Dunia Uwanja wa Fujo* by Euphrase Kezilahabi, *Kuli, Kasri ya Mwinyi Fuadi* and *Hatia* by Shafi Adamu Shafi, *Dunia Mti Mkavu, Sikate Tamaa* and *Kina cha Maisha* by Said Ahmed Mohamed and this presenter's poetry including *Mchezo wa Karata, Bara Jingine, Msimu wa Tisa and Mvumo wa Helikopta* as well as his drama such as *Kifo Kisimani* and *Maua Kwenye Jua la Asubuhi*.

By the time the Zanzibar revolution took place in 1964, the islands of Zanzibar and Pemba were already witnessing the development of a kind of later-day feudal system. It is that unequal social, political and economic set-up that created the fertile ground for the Okello-led uprising. The emergence of the feudal system and the economic and social ills it birthed is the subject of fictional works such as Mohamed Suleiman Mohamed's *Nyota ya Rehema*. The novel opens with peasants bringing harvest to a feudal lord who has allowed them to use his land on a share-cropping basis. The novel opens as follows:

> "Baba, baba, wakulima wamekuja". Salma alikuwa akipiga kelele huku akipanda vidaraja kuelekea ndani. Fuadi, kijana mmoja mrefu, mweupe, mwenye sharafa ya ndevu ndogo ndogo, aliyevaa kanzu nyepesi ya darizi, na kofia ya viua vya lasi, alichungulia dirishani, tabasamu ikatokeza katika uso wake wenye haiba.
> "Ah, vizuri", alisema kuwaambia wakulima wapatao darizeni walioleta gunia na vipeto vya mazao yao, zawadi kwa bwana shamba.

The earliest work of Swahili literature to engage the theme of gender and specifically women rights and emancipation was Shabaan Roberts' *Wasifu wa Siti binti Saad (The Biography of Siti binti Saad).* The biography celebrates the self-confidence, determination, focus and courage of Siti binti Saad, who rose from humble beginnings to become a famous taarab singer not only in Zanzibar but in the whole of East Africa and beyond. Siti was born of poor parents in the village of Fumba where, as a girl and a young woman, she made and sold pots, a practice she learnt from her mother who was a potter. Siti had neither physical attractiveness nor education. However, she discovered that she had a beautiful voice. She voluntarily moved to Zanzibar town to horn her singing skills and grow a career in taarab music. She succeeded in the twin dreams and ended up being a popular performer who entertained lovers of music far and wide including performances outside Africa. Through the biography, Shabaan Robert was able to demonstrate that a woman can succeed in life through her own determination and without having to bow down to men.

Other works that handle the theme of women's rights and dignity include *Kilio cha Haki* by Al-Amin Mazrui, the plays of Penina Muhando, poetry and fiction by Said Ahmed Mohamed,

and this presenter's play titled *Natala* as well as his numerous poems especially in an anthology titled *Bara Jingine* translated into English as *Another continent* as well.

Emerging themes such as the need for environmental protection have also found their way into Swahili literature. This presenter has published numerous poems on the advocacy of a healthy environment.

Finally, on the issue of themes in Swahili literature, there is the topical and vexing issue of human rights. Presumably, one of the world's longest poems on this subject is this presenter's 126-page composition titled *Doa* (*Blemish*) that dissects different aspects of human rights violations. The poem is inspired by actual life occurrences in a country which, in the poem, remains unnamed and which I still do not intend to name in this address.

Swahili poetry has been going through changes since its genesis in the days of *Hamziyya* in 1652. Some of the changes that have taken place have sparked controversies. I am aware that changes in the literatures and other art forms in other societies have sometimes led to controversies and that, therefore, controversies are nothing unusual in the arts. Be that as it may, controversies revolving around changes in the form of Swahili poetry have been intense and even emotive. It is, therefore, my considered view that to not address the twin issues of changes and controversies in the form of Swahili poetry would do the listeners of this address a disservice.

The repetitive, rigid and predictable rhyme and metre form in Swahili poetry was introduced into the Swahili community in mid-17th Century through the composition of *Hamziyya,* a composition that was modeled on an older poem written in Egypt by Abu Busiri in the 13th Century.

The original poem in Arabic by Abu Busiri had rhyme and metre in its four hundred stanzas on the biography of Prophet Mohamed. *Hamziyya* by Sayyid Aidarus bin Uthaima was modelled on the Arabic poem complete with similar rigid rhyme and metre. Due to the prestigious position of matters Islamic in the Swahili community and the popularity of *Hamziyya*, rhyme and metre become not only highly valued and fashionable but also entrenched in the higher echelons of society. Henceforth, the rigid rhyme and metre form became the benchmark to be adhered to by poets.

Many famous works of poetry were thereafter written using the rigid form. These works include long poems such as *Utenzi wa Inkishafi, Utenzi wa Mwana Kupona and Utenzi wa Paa na*

Ngamia. Poets composing short poems also used rhyme and metre. Among these poets are Zahid Mghumi, Mwengo bin Athman and Muyaka bin Haji.

In the 20th Century, the rigid rhyme scheme and metre poetry was exemplified by works of poets such as Mathias Munyapala, Shaaban Robert, Kaluta Amri Abedi, Saadan Kandoro, Ahmad Nassir (Juma Bhallo), Abdilatif Abdalla, Boukhet Amana and David Massamba. This form of poetry which has been referred to as "ushairi wa kimapokeo" or "ushairi jadi", that is, traditional poetry, has lines containing the same number of syllables per line, is rhymed in the middle and at end of the lines and stanzas have equal number of lines and each stanza is organically self-contained and, therefore, whole.

Beginning in the early 1970s, a new generation of poets represented by writers such as Euphrase Kezilahabi and Ibrahim Hussein started writing what is today called "ushairi wa kisasa" (modern poetry) or "ushairi huru" (free verse). Kezilahabi's *Kichomi* is a landmark anthology in this regard. So is Hussein's poem titled "Ngoma na Vailini" which is so well-known and popular that it is the name of a bi-annual literature conference at the University of Naples (L'Orientale) in Italy. Other poets who have written "ushairi wa kisasa" include M.M. Mulokozi and K.K. Kahigi, who co-authored *Ushairi wa Kisasa*, Al-Amin Mazrui who wrote *Chembe cha Moyo* and this presenter. The early 1980s saw the emergence of "Ushairi Picha" (Concrete Poetry) by this author. The poetry first made its appearance in published version in a literary magazine called *Mwamko* (Awakening) which was a platform of the Chama cha Kiswahili cha Chuo Kikuu cha Nairobi (CHAKINA), an organization of the University of Nairobi students especially those studying Kiswahili.

Later, "ushairi picha" was featured in a number of anthologies including *Mchezo wa Karata, Bara Jingine, Msimu wa Tisa* and *Rangi ya Anga* all by this presenter. During my trip to Dodoma, Tanzania in 2017 for a conference organized by Chama cha Kiswahili cha Afrika Mashariki (CHAKAMA), a young Tanzania poet, wearing a face bright with contentment, gave me an autographed copy of his "shairi picha" anthology. (It's such a shame that I cannot locate the copy in my study so as to mention the poet by his name).

"Ushairi picha" uses visual or graphic images as a device of composition. The poetry still uses other devices of language manipulation. In other words, just like other forms of poetry, it uses what is widely referred to as poetic language, that is, language that has been creatively manipulated for poetic effects. As we are aware, that language uses devices such as imagery, metaphors, similes, personification, paradox and rhetorical questions. Just as in the "ushairi wa

kimapokeo", "Ushairi wa kisasa" (modern poetry) and "Ushairi picha (concrete poetry) use compositional devices such as those that I have mentioned. In addition, "ushairi picha" uses visual graphic images as additional compositional devices. As a poet, I can confirm that a graphic image is a formidable foregrounding device.

The emergence of "ushairi wa kisasa" was strongly opposed and vilified by the "wanamapokeo", that is, the proponents of traditional Swahili poetry. Writers of "ushairi wa kisasa" and their supporters did not take the opposition and vilification lying down. They defended as valid the new form of poetry. The divergent and diametrically opposed views of the two groups, that is, those against "ushairi wa kiasa" and the proponents of the new form brought about, arguably, the biggest debate ever witnessed in the whole of Swahili literature.

The arguments advanced by the opponents of "ushairi wa kisasa" included the claims that, to be a Kiswahili poem, a composition must have:

- Rhyme scheme;
- The same metric measure per line;
- A complete and self-contained theme in every stanza;
- Equal number of lines in every stanza;
- Cohesion within the stanza and in the whole poem; and
- A form that can be chanted.

The "washairi wa kisasa" or "the modernists" argued that it was not necessary for a poem to have rhyme scheme and meter of the type found in traditional Swahili poetry. They also argued that the rigid rhyme and metre tradition did not emerge as local innovation as claimed by the traditionalists. It came from outside Swahili culture. The observation that the rhyme scheme and metre poetic form is not a local innovation is borne out by the fact that the terms used to talk about the "vina na mizani" (rhyme and metre) poetry are not Kiswahili. Terms such as tathnitha, tathlitha, tarbia, takhmisa and tasdisa that describe types of poems according to the number of lines per stanza do not to the Kiswahili lexicon of Bantu stock. Little wonder, then, that they do have cognates in Kiswahili's linguistic siblings inhabiting the lands extending from Cape Town in South Africa to Kitale in Kenya. The terms are all borrowed, that is, they have their origin outside the Swahili language and outside the African continent. With all due respect

to those who write "ushairi jadi", without batting an eye-lid, I dare say that the rhyme and metre as exhibited in their poetry is a fossil of a Euro-Arabic animal! Why Euro-Arabic? Because of this: Historically, at some point, the form of European poetry and that of the pre-Islamic Arabic poetry were joined at the hips. This reality is partly evidenced by sound-meaning correspondence between the English word "metre" and the Arabic word which entered Kiswahili as "mizani". Free verse Kiswahili poetry as composed by this writer and other like him is the authentic and non-imitative art form similar to what the Swahili language had before the arrival of the Arabs on the East African coast and the embracing by the Swahili people of "kustaarabika".

The traditionalists (where "tradition" is best understood in the distorted sense of the Arab influence on the East African coast) have been unable to stop proponents of the free verse (that is, non-imitative) poetry from creating in their preferred mode. Therefore, there has been a de facto victory for the modernists notwithstanding the fact that free verse is still frowned upon in some quarters. Indeed, Kiswahili free verse is yet to make it to some spaces including newspaper columns and television programmes. Those interested in my take on the form in Swahili poetry and in poetry in general can access my views in my two lengthy articles titled "Umbo la Mashairi" and "Utunzi wa Mashairi" at www.marimbapublications.co.ke.

I would like to state, for avoidance of doubt, that I am not saying that there our indigenous languages do not have poems (read songs) that have rhyme; they do. However, the rhyme in such songs is random, sporadic and unpredictable rather than what we find in "ushairi jadi".

Let me turn to the issue of standards in Swahili literature. In an interview with Oumah Otieno, he asked me what I thought of Dr. Siundu's claim that Swahili literature is an underdog on the East African literary scene. Most likely I had read Dr. Siundu's article but I could not remember the details of what I had read and certainly not the issue of Swahili literature being an underdog. However, being familiar with Dr. Siundu's intellectual depth which, I must admit, I admire, I couldn't see him making such a statement. So, I told Mr. Otieno that Dr. Siundu had made was not a claim but rather an observation on people's perception of Swahili literature.

Mr. Otieno's question and Dr. Siundu's observation which provoked the question, raise a fundamental issue of perception with regard to Swahili literature. Some decades ago, at the then Kenya Institute of Education, I was having a chat with a colleague, a literary scholar specializing in East African literature. He confidently told me that he does not read Swahili literature. He went on to say that Swahili literature had pipe-line plots. I did not inquire from

him why, if indeed, Swahili fiction and drama had pipe-line plots, he wasn't reading Swahili poetry!

Many years later, I attended an inaugural lecture by my late teacher, Prof Christopher Lukorito Wanjala at the University of Nairobi. The lecture was on East African Literature. In the lecture, my teacher didn't utter a single word on Swahili literature. In the audience was the late Ken Walibora, by then already a prominent Swahili author. At question time, Ken Walibora raised his hand and he was allowed to ask a question. He inquired from Prof. Wanjala why he had said nothing about Swahili literature. Prof. Wanjala responded casually that he was employed to teach literature in English. Well, I am not sure that letters appointing academic staff in the Department of Literature at the University of Nairobi specify their job description as teaching of literature in English. However, I won't say more on my teacher's lecture especially since he is not around to respond to what I might say.

It is by now clear that some people, including highly trained scholars of literature have, at best, serious doubts on the quality of Swahili literature and, at worst, total contempt for it. To address the issue of quality or complexity – however we want to frame it – of Swahili literature, let me begin with Al-Inkishafi which, as I have already indicated, is one of the oldest poems in the language. I have read substantial amount of East African poetry both in Kiswahili and English. *Al-Inkishafi* remains one of my favourite poems. Why? Because of its robust reflection on human life and its sterling use of language. Indeed, not many literary works in East Africa ascend to its aesthetic heights. In the introduction to the J. de V. Allen's translation of the long poem, Ali Mazrui observes that:

> Almost by definition, great poetry is untranslatable. Yet, paradoxically, only great poetry is worth *attempting* to translate. Since no two languages carry the same heritage of association and nuance, a poem inevitably loses a great deal of itself as it traverses a linguistic divide. But precisely because a work like *Al - Inkishafi* is a major artistic achievement, the effort to make it available in other tongues must continue.

On his part, J. de V. Allen states that:

> *Al-Inkishafi* is one of the finest poems in Swahili literature. Its worth has long been recognized among Kiswahili speakers. Some literary figures were never without a copy of it in their pockets – as, for example, sayyid Ali Bin Abdalla, uncle of Sayyid Saleh bin Alwi (better known as Habib saleh, the founder of the famous Riyadha Mosque College in Lamu). Others knew the entire poem by heart including Sayyid Masab bin Abdurrahman, also of Lamu, a major poet, jurist, and

> theologian in the early years of the twentieth century who, we are told, was "in the habit of reciting verses from it during conversations and lectures.

In *Al-Inkishafi*, Sayyid Abdallah bin Nasir illuminates the beguiling nature of life. He lays bare how we get deluded by material wealth and power. In those circumstances, we think we are better than other human beings. That's all an illusion. Sooner or later, we are pulled from cloud nine to the dusty ground. In sparkling images, the poet writes:

Uwene wangapi watu wakwasi
Walo wakiwaa kama shamsi
Wa muluku zana za adhurusi
Dhahabu na fedha wakhiziniye?

Nyumba zao mbake zikinawiri
kwa taa za kowa na za sufuri
masiku yakele kama nahari
haiba na jaha iwazingile

Pindi walalpo kwa masindizi
Wali na wakandi na wapepezi
Na wake wapambe watumbuizi
Wakitumbuiza wasinyamaye

In spite of their incredibly comfortable life in the past, reality has caught up with such individuals and truly humbled them. In one of the most spectacular hyperboles I have ever encountered in literature, the poet says:

Sasa walalaliye mji shubiri
pasipo zulia wala jodori
ikawa miwili kutaathari
dhiki ya kaburi iwakusiye

that is, they now dwell in a city the size of "shubiri" which is the length between the thumb and the first finger. That's how small they become!

Finally, savour the following extended metaphor:

> Suu ulimwengu bahari tesi
> Una matumbawe na mangi masi
> Aurakibuo juwa ni mwasi
> Kwa khulla khasara khasiriye

Yes! The world is metaphorically likened to a raging sea which the poet calls a quarrelsome sea. The sea in question has coral reefs and all manner of other dangers. My mind easily goes to creatures such as sharks, moray eels and sting rays. In the event of a ship getting wretched by the coral reefs, one tumbles into the water only to come into lethal contact with the creatures. The poet is talking of life in the sense of misguided over-indulgence in power and material wealth. We have a choice to board or not to board the ship of that life. The verb "aurakibuo" used in the third line of the stanza comes from the same root with the noun "merikebu" (ship). Whoever boards the ship is a rebel and every loss comes their way.

Let turn to turn to the quality of Swahili drama. To be honest, some of the early works of drama were of questionable quality. *Afadhali Mchawi* and *Mgeni Karibu*, both by Graham Hyslop, published in 1957, were weak in terms of themes, plot, storyline, characterization, and language use. In them, one even discerns a colonialist bent in the mind of the playwright (Mugambi, 1982). The characters were not well developed and, consequently, not very credible. The two plays lack the strong and well thought out cause-effect element that is a prerequisite for a convincing plot. However, 1957 also saw the publication of Henry Kuria's *Nakupenda Lakini*, a work that can stand its ground among other plays. Gerishon Ngugi's *Nimelogwa Nisiwe na Mpenzi*, whereas not as strong as *Nakupenda Lakini*, was of a much high quality than *Afadhali Mchawi* and *Mgeni Karibu*. After the publication of *Wakati Ukuta* containing two plays, namely, "Wakati Ukuta" and "Alikiona" by Ebrahim Hussein in 1967, the playwright published *Kinjekile*, a play which, its 50-page length notwithstanding, remains one of the finest East African works of drama. Ebrahim Hussein went on to write and publish other respectable plays including the politically and philosophically stimulating *Mashetani*. Since the late 1960s,

numerous playwrights working in Swahili have emerged. Some of them such as Penina Mlama, Al-Amin Mazrui, Said Ahmed Mohamed, Emmanuel Mbogo, Kyallo Wadi Wamitilla and Timothy Arege, have written plays that are worthy reading on account the issues they handle and how they handle them.

Let me turn to quality standards in fiction. Since the publication in 1960 of Muhammed Saleh Farsy's novel, *Kurwa na Doto,* which has been described as a minor classic, Muhammed Said Abdulla's *Mzimu wa Watu wa Kale* also published in 1960 and Faraj katalambulla's crime thriller titled *Simu ya Kifo,* Swahili fiction writers have done well in terms of the quality of their work. We can say without any fear of contradiction that the works of Faraj Katalambulla, Mohamed Suleiman Mohamed, Euphrase Kezilahabi, Said Ahmed Mohamed, Katama Mkangi, Shafi Adam Shafi, Kyallo Wadi Wamitila and Ken Walibora are valuable contributions to the East African fiction.

With the publication of Euphrase Kezilahabi's *Nagona* and *Mzingile* and then Said Mohamed's *Babu Alipofufuka* and Kyallo wamitila's *Bin-Adamu,* Swahili fiction has achieved a level of sophistication never before witnessed in the East African literary scene. The works bring together aspects of reality and elements of magic or the supernatural to inform the characters' existence and experience. In these works, critics using magical realism as a tool of criticism will have full hands. Looking at these novels, it would not be farfetched to aver that Swahili fiction has, at least in some respects, surged ahead of fiction in English (in East Africa).

Let me address myself to a claim made, rather casually, that Kiswahili literature is didactic. Whenever the claim has been made, there has not been any evidence that a systematic study has been carried out on the issue. Consequently, the claim is uttered as a verbalization of gut feeling rather than a statement emanating from objective analyses of texts. Be that as it may, let us interrogate the meaning of the adjective "didactic". In their book, *Literary Terms and Criticism,* Peck and Coyle, state that "In every day usage didactic means "teaching a lesson", (1984:131). Didactic may also be understood to mean "preaching" with the word "preaching" used in a metaphorical and secular sense. Consequently, when some people say that Kiswahili literature is didactic they most likely mean that writers in the language preach to their readers rather create their works in such a way as to allow the intelligent reader to evaluate what is presented by the writer so as to arrive at a conclusion on the validity, worth and acceptability of the writer's position. Let me respond. First, as I have already indicated, those who have

made the claim have not presented any evidence on research that has led to the claim. Second, the claim suffers from generalization. Below, I show why.

It is true that some Kiswahili literary works such as Mwanakupona's *Utenzi wa Mwana Kupona*, and Shaaban bin Roberts' *Adili na Nduguze* can be said to be didactic go the extent that they tend to either instruct the reader on what to do or present them with only one path to follow. However, that attribute of the mentioned and similar works should not and cannot be presented as the norm in Kiswahili literature. A lot of other works in the language do not tell you, the reader, or push you, so speak, in an explicitly prescribed direction. They present to you a reasoned position and let you decide how to proceed. Allow me to indulge you. Let me illustrate that Kiswahili literature is not necessarily didactic. Let us look at a composition on environment titled "Mimi, Mto Nairobi" which owes its existence to an interaction between the muse and this presenter's mind:

Mimi, Mto Nairobi

Wananitesa, hawa wajeuri

Majirani bila shukrani!

Wakazi wa jiji

Wananikaba koo

Wananiziba pumzi

Wananinyonga

Kwa mafuta

Kwa mkobo

Kwa tairi

Kwa talimbo

Na takataka bila ukoo

Wenda-wazimu

Wananiangamiza mimi ambaye

Kwa moyo mkunjufu

Niliwakaribisha

Na bila ujira

Bila kinyongo

Nikawahudumia

Kwa maji

Kwa uhai

Majuto

Yanitafuna moyo

Dhiki iliyoje

Tunaishi mtaa mmoja

Na majirani ambao

Asante yao

Ni mateke

Ya punda!

(Wa Mberia,2001:63)

Where, if I may ask, does the composer of this piece instruct the reader on what they so do about pollution of waterways? The composition begins and ends as a lamentation of a waterway. I suppose we hear not some authorial "preaching" but, rather, the anguished voice of the persona who happens to be The Nairobi River. Of course, the poem is not *l'art pour l'art.* It belongs to "engaged literature". However, I trust that members of the audience and I share the view that "didactic literature" is not a paraphrase for "engaged literature".

There many Kiswahili poems and works of other genres written with a similar distance between the author and the work. I see nothing that qualifies to be called didactic in works such as "Wanji Wanji" (whose authorship is debatable), Henry Kuria's *Napenda Lakini*, Mohamed Said Abdalla's *Kisima cha Giningi*, Ebrahim Hussein's *Mashetani* and *Kinjeketile,* Euphrase Kezilahabi's *Nagona* na *Mzingile,* as well as in some other recent prose works where authors have experimented with magical realism. The generalization that Kiswahili literature is didactic is invalid and, therefore, untenable.

If the quality of Swahili literature is as good as we have advanced, why then, do Kenyans including literary scholars, tend to assume that serious works and authors are a preserve of

literature in English? Why did my late teacher Prof. Christopher Lukorito Wanjala give an inaugural lecture on East African literature and fail to mention anything on Swahili literature? Why does Dr. Siundu get the impression that Kenyan readers consider Swahili literature an underdog as compared to its counterpart in English? Rather than attempting to answer these questions, I elect to ask: Could the answers to these questions be found in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's notion of colonized minds as per his excellent publication titled *Decolonising the Mind* (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986)? Could we, perhaps, be victims of the same colonization of minds that makes us assume, on a priori grounds, that pizza and pasta are more worthwhile of our bodies than the Dawida *kimanga,* the Kikuyu *mukimo* and the Kamba *muthokio* merely because the former have their origin in European and the latter are African dishes? Could the situation be informed by the "logic" that supports the view that associating Mount Sinai, God, Moses and the Ten Commandments is religion but factoring Mount Kenya in prayers by Kikuyus and Merus is foolish atheism? Isn't a fact, according to the colonized minds' "logic", that anything European or American is better than anything African? Consequently, isn't what is written in a Euro-American language inherently better than what is written in what our mass media refer to as local dialects buying into the racist usage of the otherwise innocent linguistic term "dialect"?

It could well be that Francis Imbuga's play titled *Betrayal in the City* is a more powerful portrayal of Kenya politics than this presenter's play called *Kifo Kisimani.* However, such superiority should not be based on the gut feeling deriving from an assumed ability of European languages to deliver better intellectual products than local languages such as Kiswahili. Perhaps, Okot p'Tek's poetry is more illuminating that that of Muyaka bin Haji or Shaban Robert. However, no one has systematically and objectively demonstrated the fact if, indeed, it is a fact. And if, as someone told me at the then Kenya Institute of Education, some people don't read Swahili fiction because it has pipeline plots, then the claim needs to validated using the fiction of writers such as Kyallo Wamitila, Kama Mkangi, Tom Olali, Mohamed Suleiman Mohamed, Said Ahmed Mohamed and Euphrase Kezilahabi. It just won't do to continue making disparaging statements on nothing else other the assumed superiority of things associated with Europe and America, in this case, English.

I have to end my address at this point and yet matters have somewhat thickened over the last couple of minutes. So, what is my parting shot? It is this: Either we embark on a systematic and objective comparative analysis between Swahili literature and its counterpart in English using transparent and verifiable parameters and then, if it be the case, pronounce the superiority

of literature in English vis-à-vis its Swahili counterpart or refrain from making comparative statements on Swahili literature on the one hand and literature in English on the other. Scholarship and decency demand of us no less.

Colleagues, ladies and gentleman, I beg to stop at this juncture. Thank you very much for giving me the audience.

ASANTENI SANA NA MUWE NA SIKU NJEMA.

Works Cited

Abdalla, A. *Sauti ya Dhiki.* Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1973.

Abdulaziz, M. H. *Muyaka: 29th Century Swahili Popular Poetry*. Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1979.

Abdulla, M.S. (1960) *Mzimu wa Watu wa Kale*. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1960

_____ *Kisima cha Giningi.* London: Evans Brothers, 1968

Abedi, K.A. *Sheria za Kutunga Mashairi na Diwani ya Amri*. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1954.

Aidarus, S. *Utenzi wa Hamziya*. Manuscript, 1749.

Allen, J.V.T. *Tendi.* Nairobi: Heinemann, 1971.

Gordon, R.G *Ethnologue: Fifteen Edition*. Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics International, 2005

Farsy, M.S. *Kurwa na Doto*. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1960

Greenberg, J. *Languages of Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963.

Hichens, W. *Al-Inkishafi: The Soul's Awakening*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press. 1972

Hussei, E. *Kinjeketile.* Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1969.

_____ *Mashetani.* Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1969.

_____ "Ngoma na Vailini". Contained in a paper titled "Modern Swahili Poetry" by F. Toupan. In *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, Vol. 37. No 1: In Memory of W.H. Whiteley.* London: Un iverity of London, 1974

_____ *Harusi*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1980

Hyslop, G. *Karibu Mgeni.* Kampala: Eagle Press, 1957

_____ *Afadhali Mchawi*. Kampala: Eagle Press, 957

Imbuga, F. *Betrayal in the City*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1976

Kahigi, K. K. and M.M. Mulokozi *Mashairi ya Kisasa*. Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House, 1973.

Katalambulla, F. *Simu ya Kifo*. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1973

Kezilahabi, E. *Kichomi.* London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1974.

_____ *Kichwa Maji*.Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1974.

_____ *Dunia Uwanja wa Fujo*. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1975.

_____ *Nagona.* Dar es Salaam University Press, 1990.

_____ *Mzingile.* Dar es Salaam University Press, 2011..

Knappert, J. *Four Centuries of Swahili Verse.* London: Heinemann, 1972.

Kuria, H. *Nakupenda Lakini.* Kampala: Eagle Press, 1957.

Mazrui, A. *Kilio cha Haki*. Nairobi: Longman Kenya, 1981

_____ *Chembe cha Moyo*. Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya Limited 1988,

Mbotela, J. *Uhuru wa Watumwa*. Nairobi: Nelson, 1934.

Mkangi, K. *Mafuta.* Nairobi: Heinemann, 984.

_____ *Walenisi.* Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 2003.

Mlama, P. "Tambueni Haki Zenu". In *Mulika.*

Mohamed, S. A. *Asali Chungu*. Nairobi: Shungwaya Publishers, 1978

_____ *Sikate Tamaa*. Nairobi: Longman Kenya, 1980.

_____ *Dunia Mti Mkavu*. Nairobi: Longman Kenya Limited, 1980.

_____ *Kina cha Maisha.* Nairobi: Longman Kenya, 1984.

_____ *Babu Alipofufuka*.Nairobi: Jomo Kenyatta Foundation, 2001.

Mohamed, S. M. *Nyota ya Rehema*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1976.

Mugambi, P.J.M. *Uhakiki wa Maudhui Katika Tamthilia za Kiswahili za Kikenya Zilizochapishwa*. Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Nairobi, 1982.

Mulokozi, M.M. and K.K. Kahigi *Mashairi ya Kisasa*. Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House, 1977.

Ghassaniy, M. H. and W.L. Hichens *Diwani ya Muyaka bin Haji Ghassaniy.* Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand, 1940.

Nasir, S. A. A. *Al-Inkishafi: Catechism of a Soul*. Nairobi: East African Educational Bureau, 1977.

Ngugi, G. *Nimelogwa nisiwe na Mpenzi*. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1961.

Roberts, S. *Adili na nduguze*. London and New York: Macmillan, 1952.

_____ *Wasifu wa Siti Binti Saad*. Nairobi: Nelson Brothers, 1967.

_____ *Utubora Mkulima.* Nairobi:Evans Brothers Limited, 1968.

_____ *Kufikirika.* Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968.

_____ *Kusadikika*. London: Nelson Brothers, 1969.

Shafi, A.S. *Kasri ya mwinyi Fuad*. Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House, 1978.

_____ *Kuli.* Dar es Salaam:Tanzania Publishing House, 1979.

_____ *Hatia.* Nairobi: Longhorn Publishers, 2003.

Wa Mberia, K. "Umbo la Mashairi" In *Mwamko: Jarida la Chama cha Chuo kikuu cha Nairobi*. University of Nairobi, 1987.

_____ Natala. Nairobi: Marimba Publications Ltd, 1997.

_____ *Mchezo wa Karata*. Nairobi: Marimba Publications Ltd, 1997.

_____*Kifo Kisimani*. Nairobi: Marimba Publications Ltd, 2001.

_____ *Bara Jingine.* Nairobi: Marimba Publications Ltd, 2001.

_____ *Msimu wa Tisa*. Nairobi: Marimba Publications Ltd, 2007.

_____ *Rangi ya Anga.* Nairobi: Marimba Publications Ltd, 2015.

_____ *Doa.* Nairobi: Marimba Publications Ltd, 2018.

_____ *Mvumo wa Helikopta*. Nairobi: Marimba Publications Ltd, 2020.

Wamitila, K. W. *Bin-Adamu*. Nairobi: Phoenix, 2002.

Wa Thiong'o, N. *Weep Not, Child*. Nairobi: Heinemann, 1964.

_____ *The River Between.* Nairobi: Heinemann, 1965.

_____ *The Black Hermit.* Nairobi: Heinemann, 1970.

_____ *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature.* London: James Currey, 1986.

FROM POSTCOLONIAL TO POST-POSTCOLONIAL KENYAN LIFE WRITING: A COMPARATIVE READING OF NGŨGĨ WA THIONG'O'S AND BINYAVANGA WAINAINA'S MEMOIRS

Susanne Gehrmann

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin,

The Institute for Asian and African Studies

Abstract

The publication of three volumes of memoirs by of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o between 2010 and 2016: Dreams in a Time of War, In the House of the Interpreter and Birth of a Dream Weaver, has been a major literary event for Kenyan and Eastern African literature. In his seventies, Ngũgĩ joins other postcolonial authors of the first and second generations who have preceded him, in publishing an autobiographical serial on childhood, identity formation and the issue of becoming a writer in colonial contexts and on the verge of formal decolonization. As representative of the Kwani generation of Kenyan writers, Binyavanga Wainaina, aged only 40, offers an early autobiographical text, One Day I will write about this Place in 2011, followed by its lost chapter "I am a homosexual, mum" in 2014. His was a major literary event, too. In my paper, I propose to examine the continuities and ruptures in life writing, and how the thematic, stylistic and ideological choices of Ngũgĩ's and Wainaina, who are both widely read global authors of the present, differ. As I go along the lines of language, class and Bildung; collective trauma and individual depression, the relation to the nation, pan-Africanist and hybrid culture as well as the issue of becoming a writer, I question whether Wainaina's narrative should still be termed postcolonial life writing in the same sense as Ngũgĩ's. By observing that in many ways, Wainaina's text moves away from Ngugi's classical postcolonial stance, I argue that he inaugurates what we can – by lack of a better term for now – momentarily name a post-postcolonial autobiography.

Key Words: life writing, autobiography, memoir, subjectivity, postcolonial, post-postcolonial

From Postcolonial to Post-postcolonial Life Writing?

The publications of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's (2010, 2012 and 2016)[1] and Binyavanga Wainaina's (2011) memoirs have been major events for Kenyan writing of the last decade. At about the

[1] In this text I will quote *Dreams in a Time of War* from the 2011 paperback edition, *In the House of the Interpreter* from the original 2012 hardback edition, and *Birth of a Dream Weaver* from the 2017 paperback

same time, the doyen of postcolonial Kenyan literature and the globally influential co-founder of the *Kwani?* magazine, Kwani festival, and Kwani publishing outlet in Kenya have settled down to look back at their lives and forge a narrative made of their personal memories, styled through the prism of their respective literary sensibilities. Born in 1938 and in 1971 respectively, they represent two different generations of writers who have lived through dramatically different historical periods and have been engaged in distinctive political struggles. Therefore, this article sets out to compare the life writing of both authors and considers the changes of paradigm in the style and scope of writing. However, this short essay will not allow me to go into all the details of these rich texts.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o grew up in a peasant family at the height of British settler colonialism in Kenya and started his career as a writer during the formal decolonization process of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Imprisoned as a political activist under the Kenyatta regime in 1977 and released by Moi in 1978, when Wainaina was still a school boy, Ngũgĩ's first autobiographical publication is in fact his prison diary *Detained*, published in Nairobi in 1981.[2] The author is most famous for his struggle for the promotion of African languages as literary languages.[3] His plays and novels in both Gikuyu and English and his essays are canonized texts of postcolonial literature. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986) contains impressive autobiographical passages on his experience as a boy in colonial school. Without doubt, due to his critical engagement with colonialism and its longue durée effects as well as his outstanding skills as a writer, Ngũgĩ counts – together with Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and Sembène Ousmane, to name but a few – among the finest representatives of the now classical generation of early postcolonial writers.[4]

Binyavanga Wainaina is a child of the postcolony, to use Abdourahman Waberi's expression (1998). Born into a middle class family in 1971, eight years after Kenya's independence, he grew up comfortably and unconcerned by political struggles. As co-founder of Kwani Trust and *Kwani?* magazine in 2003, he contributed to the successful renewal of the Kenyan literary

edition. I will quote Binyavanga Wainaina's *One Day I Will Write About This Place* that was first published in 2011 from the 2012 Granta paperback edition.

[2] The text has recently been revised and republished under the perhaps more marketable title for the US-book market: *Wrestling with the Devil* (2018).

[3] I will not retrace the well-known language debate here. Read the introduction and chapter one of Mukoma wa Ngũgĩ 's seminal book *The Rise of the African Novel* (2018) for an illuminating résumé.

[4] See Oliver Lovesey's recent monograph *The Postcolonial Intellectual. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in Context* (2015) among other appraisals, even though some critics consider Ngũgĩ to be an atypical postcolonial writer compared to others (Adesanmi 2012).

scene after 2000.[5] By criticizing the stereotyped image of Africa in Western writing and media, in his widely acclaimed satirical essay *How to write about Africa* (2005) he takes a deliberate postcolonial stance in the tradition of literary critical discourse analysis and 'writing back'. Kangsen Feka Wakai rightly mentions: "In fact, *How to Write about Africa* was a reincarnation of a tradition of writing back rooted in a bygone era but which somehow succeeds to cast a massive shadow in the sphere of contemporary literary imagination" (168), thereby alluding to the fact that after 2000 the writing back paradigm that was crucial for the first generation of African postcolonial writers is somewhat outdated. In this essay I argue that Wainaina's memoir transcends this paradigm, whereas Ngũgĩ's trilogy echoes it. After his coming out in 2014, Wainaina, who passed away in 2019, was best known for his struggle for the acceptance of LGBTQ+ communities in Africa. This is an issue that goes beyond the canonized topics of postcolonialism.

Kenyan Life Writing and Postcolonialism

Postcolonial African life writing unfolds in a multitude of forms, voices, and attitudes with regard to the relationship between the textual self, the historical subject and his/her affiliations with national, diasporic, gendered, ethnic or familial communities. The eminent political function of most postcolonial autobiographical texts has been aptly described by Aurĭlia Mouzet as follows:

> The question of identity at the core of autobiographical writing has never been as political as in postcolonial literature. Advocating one's singularity is indeed not only a way of healing the stigma left by colonization but also stands as an attempt to start a dialogue between the fringe and the center. It thus becomes an inherently committed act. The affirmation of the postcolonial self is indeed more urgent for it stands as an answer to oppression. (Mouzet 161)

Considering postcolonial writing as a critical examination of the immediate and long-term effects of colonization on societies, communities, and individual subjects and as a literary paradigm that emerged with the first generations of colonially trained writers, the general

[5] With regard to the question of postcolonial entanglements between former colonized and former colonizers, it is important to underline that the founding of Kwani Trust was an important step for Kenyan literature to overcome the pitfalls of the postcolonial publishing industry that is still largely, though not exclusively, centered in London, New York and Paris. Krishnan underlines that "Kwani Trust's beginnings is an attempt to think differently and to act differently, with a genealogy not based on the precepts of (post)coloniality, but rather on a trajectory and history of pan-African internationalist thought and public life which is not so easily assimilable, its range of claims towards the concept of being in the world themselves resistant to translation or transposition" (367).

question comes up whether at some point into the 21st century, bringing forth the third or fourth generation of writers, all African literature should continue to be considered forever as postcolonial .[6] With regard to autobiographical writing, the question then is if the construction of the self of the younger generation of writers is still primarily an answer to colonial oppression? And if not so, shouldn't we move beyond the postcolonial as an overarching reading paradigm and consider that something new is springing up in African writing, and in African life writing in particular, by a generation born after independence? It is with this overarching question in mind that I will approach Wainaina's *One Day I Will Write About This Place* in comparison with Ngũgĩ's trilogy of memoirs.

In an overview article, Jennifer Muchiri states: "Since 1963 Kenyans have written autobiographies which give insights into Kenyan postcolonial politics, public service, political economy, culture, social relations, education, and other aspects of Kenyan society over time" (Muchiri 84). Given Ngũgĩ's strong concern for- and identification with the struggle for independence which he continuously intertwines with his personal story, his autobiographical writing, though published much later, is to some extent[7] in line with the early Kenyan postcolonial life writing of the 1960s, such as Tom Mboya's (1963), JM Kariuki's (1963), Oginga Odinga's (1967) or Charity Waciuma's (1969). At the respectable age of 72, looking back in time from the position of an established and recognized intellectual, Ngũgĩ joins other famous postcolonial writers such as Wole Soyinka from Nigeria, Assia Djebar from Algeria or J.M. Coetzee from South Africa in writing a serial of three or more autobiographical texts.

Serial or fragmented writing has often been considered a feature of postcolonial autobiography in so far as postcolonial subjects tend not to write the one teleological and closed narrative that is typical for the Western canon of the genre. Rather, their complex identity construction that affiliates with different cultural influences, knowledge systems and political struggles often triggers narratives of the self that are fragmented, either structurally in one text or by need of several approaches to write the self in a series of different texts. In Ngũgĩ's case, the narrated time of his three memoirs so far covers the years 1938-1964[8] (birth to age 26), including

[6] The same question could be asked for the label of the postmodern that has been applied to literatures across the globe since the second half of the 20th century. However, I cannot discuss this issue in this essay.
[7] However, as Lovesey (143) rightly remarks, there are important stylistic and ideological differences between 'national autobiographies' of political leaders who embody the nation and the more personal and reflexive life narratives of the writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o.
[8] It is very possible, that this series of memoirs is not yet closed.

flashbacks into his relatives' lives that take the readers into an earlier historical period of the generation before Ngũgĩ himself, thereby elaborating a collective dimension of life writing through orally transmitted memories of his relatives. Ngũgĩ strives for historical accuracy[9] by inscribing his subjectivity into his larger family lineage and beyond these personal bonds into Kenyan history which he exposes at considerable length. Following conventions that date back to self-referential orality, both parents and other important family members to whom the autobiographer links himself are elaborately introduced with their own story and character in *Dreams in a Time of War*. In *Birth of a Dream Weaver*, this biographical pattern can also be observed with regard to his fellow students at Makerere University with whom the narrator forms a solidly united collective. As many autobiographies do, the text navigates between two narrators who represent Ngũgĩ at different stages of his life: the adult's writer's retrospective and the reconstructed perspective of the child/young adult can be distinguished as they alternate:

> The constructed self in *Dreams in a Time of War* is somewhat divided. The writer is both remembering and re-membering, or reassembling the anatomy of his past, but also simultaneously reliving this past. He shifts form narrative present tense, as if reliving events, to simple past, as if simply re-creating a past retrospectively. (Lovesey 159)

In this skilfully double layered narrative, the voice of the mature adult narrator prevails. Past tense is used most of the time, with selected passages switching to present tense when the immediacy of a particular event as lived by the narrated child/adolescent/young man is being put into focus.

In Binyavanga Wainaina's *One Day I will Write About This Place,* the narrated time covers the years 1978 - 2010 (age 7 to 39), with just one flashback on the earlier life of the writer's mother (chapter 25). Strikingly the narrator matures throughout the memoir that was published when the author was only 40 years old and already a recognized writer. Different from the position of a quasi omniscient narrator who reconstructs his life in a holistic way as Ngũgĩ does, Wainaina's autobiographical subjectivity is much more bound to the immediacy of a reconstructed childlike and adolescent-like perspective. The continuous use of the present tense and the focus on sensual perceptions contribute to the effect that the text reads as an „urgency of the now" (Wakai 170). The narrator develops from child to adult not only at the level of content, but also in his narrative voice that shifts from child naivety via a prolonged state of

[9] It must be underlined here that life writing does not reconstruct history in the same way as historical research strives to do. A personal memoir is not a history book, rather it is a rewriting of history from a personal standpoint based on selective memory. This notwithstanding, Ngũgĩ combines his personal life story with a lot of factual information on Kenya's colonial history.

self-centred desperate adolescence to the stance of a politically conscious writer. How the autobiographical subject matures throughout the narrative is thus reflected through the text's narrative style. Along this line, the narrative can be divided into three parts (childhood, identity crisis, becoming a writer), though structurally it is highly episodic and fragmented. Compared to Ngũgĩ's community-oriented approach, the text is also much more subject-centred and individualistic. Here, family and friends surround the protagonist, but remain flat characters, with perhaps the exception of his mother.[10]

In 2014, Wainaina published his coming out essay "I am a homosexual, mum" on the *Africa is a Country* online platform (reissued by *The Guardian* and *Chimurenga magazine*) as a lost chapter of his memoir, a timely piece in times when the oppression of LGBTQ+ communities in East Africa was growing. Indeed, the essay explains the blind spots on sexuality and more generally intimacy[11] in the former life narrative and has therefore to be considered as a follow-up to *One Day I Will Write About This Place*. Here, a sequel is needed for a very personal reason, the impossibility to come out in a society where homosexuality is tabooed, in particular while one's parents are still alive. "I am a homosexual, mum" is a chapter of Wainaina's life that has not taken place, it describes how it could have been had he dared to confess his queer identity to his dying mother and to his readers of the earlier memoir.[12]

Language, Class and *Bildung*

Ngũgĩ's memoirs are not explicitly about his later struggle for the promotion of African languages in African writing which may still be narrated in upcoming parts of the possibly unfinished serial. Interestingly, in his life narrative, the vision of the colonial schools he attends is less harsh than in his essays of the 1980s. Here, the world of *Bildung* which is a strictly English dominated world, is presented as a refuge from the harsh colonial conditions in rural Kenya: "I seek refuge in learning" (2011, 217); "Knowledge is our light" (224). Therefore, the question of language for the narrated autobiographical subject is all about the appropriation of

[10] Both Ngũgĩ and Wainaina share a special bond with their mothers.

[11] I share Wakai's feelings that the personality of the autobiographical subject that unfolds in *One Day* remains to some extent unseizable for the reader, because "In his memoir, Wainaina provides a detailed map of his trajectory as a writer, but the person behind the writer is not so easily revealed. Having shared with the reader, on numerous occasions throughout the story, moments of his sadness and joy, one would think a more revelatory portrait of Wainaina—the person—would emerge, but somehow that doesn't happen. Although Wainaina is mostly honest, outside his relationships with his family members, there are hardly any glimpses into the writer's friendships and heartbreaks" (175).

[12] On the disruptive use of temporalities used in this short piece that jumps between dates and ages of the narrator see Hoad (186). Remarkably, here Wainaina dates his earliest homosexual consciousness back to age 5, while the memoir starts at age 7 only.

the master's tool that allows for upward social mobility within a colonial society. Despite the obvious violence of the colonial language policy in school, "[t]he witch hunt for those speaking African languages in the school compound […], the consequence rising to bodily punishment in some cases. […] we were proud of our English proficiency and eager to practice the new language outside the school compound" (177).

In the second part of the trilogy, *In the House of the Interpreter*, Alliance High School, attended by Ngũgĩ between 1955 and 1958, is presented as a protected space:

> When I first stepped onto the grounds of Alliance High School on Thursday, January 20, 1955, I felt as if I had narrowly eluded pursuing bloodhounds in what had seemed a never-ending nightmare. Up to that moment, my life had been spent looking nervously over my shoulder. Since the declaration of the state of emergency in 1952, I lived in constant fear of falling victim to the gun-toting British forces that were everywhere, hunting down anticolonial Mau Mau guerillas, real or imagined. Now I was inside a sanctuary, but the hounds remained outside the gates, crouching, panting, waiting, biding their time. (2012, 8) [13]

Paradoxically, colonial High School – which was only accessible for a few chosen Africans – momentarily protects the future postcolonial elite from colonial violence. This does not mean that internal colonial structures of the education system are not criticized by Ngũgĩ. For instance, earlier on, when he is obliged to change primary school, the narrator reflects on the difference between the more liberal school he first attended (that hade been prohibited soon after and the conservative school with its settler colony syllabus that he had to join: "In the old school, Kenya was a black man's country. In the new school, Kenya, like South Africa, was represented as having been sparsely populated before the whites arrived, and so whites occupied the uninhabited areas" (2011, 168). This colonial representation runs counter to the experience of Ngũgĩ's own peasant family that was cheated and chased away from their land. On the one hand, school offers the only hope to overcome the social condition of the exploited peasantry; this explains Ngũgĩ's unconditional ambition sealed by a vow to his mother that he will always try his best. One the other hand, the colonial curriculum and unfairness due to a racist hierarchy challenge resistance and awaken the child's political consciousness early on. The ambivalent yet outstanding figure of Carey Francis, Anglican missionary and principal of Alliance High School, a firm believer in the Empire and discipline, has "a positive impact"

[13] Gĩchingiri Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ rightly points out: "The courage to dream of upward mobility even in a time of war is the core message in both *Dreams in a Time of War* and *In the House of the Interpreter*. The bloodhound trope effectively concretizes the existential terror Ngũgĩ faced, while the destruction of his home explains the melancholia that characterizes the second memoir in particular" (92).

(Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ 107) and further nourishes young Ngũgĩ's ambition as do the African teachers of the school who however, being part of the system, can teach resistance only in between the lines.

At the age of 19, Wainaina's autobiographical narrator reads Ngũgĩ's essay *Decolonising the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986). The expectation is that such a reading should definitely trigger his political consciousness as a postcolonial subject. However, Wainaina's momentary revolutionary determination to follow in Ngũgĩ's footsteps as a decolonized Gikuyu writer is immediately mingled with his ordinary dreams of a young middle-class man in the hilarious, self-ironic way that is characteristic for *One Day I Will Write About This Place*:

> I read *Decolonising the Mind* by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o a few week [sic!] ago. It is illegal and it was thrilling, and I had vowed to go back to my own language. English is the language of the colonizer. I will take Gikuyu classes, when I am done with diversiddy [sic!] and advertising, when I am driving a good car. I will go to the village and make plays in Gikuyu, in my good new car. I will make a very good decolonized advertisement for Coca-Cola. I will be cool and decolonized. An international guy. Like, like Youssou N'Dour. Even Ngũgĩ is in America. (Wainaina 2012, 92)

The quote shows, that the young man has difficulties to connect to Ngũgĩ's world of postcolonial struggle and that he does not have an African language at hand that he could use for writing. He would need to learn proper Gikuyu first. Middle-class aspirations for a good car and being cool in a globalized way with reference to the United States self-ironically superpose the vague plan to become a decolonial activist.

A few chapters later, when he comes back to Nairobi after a long stay as a student in South Africa, Wainaina shifts from the personal to the collective level by considering the issue of language in Nairobi's urban setting: "Urban Kenya is a split personality: authority, trajectory, international citizen in English; national brother in Kiswahili: and content villager or nostalgic urbanite in our mother tongues. […] Kiswahili is where we meet each other with brotherhood" (125). The buzzing multilinguality of Kenya, a token of cultural diversity, is a leitmotif throughout the book. The narrator is more often than not lost in this ocean of linguistic plurality: "There are so many, I get dizzy" (26). Clearly, Wainaina does not have a traumatic relationship with English as a colonial language: in his generation of middle-class children growing up in post-independent Kenya, it has just become an everyday tool of local and global communication. Obviously, the practice of language(s) in a multilingual country is not only a

personal issue, but also a matter of social class and of generation. Addressing his middle-class peer group, the narrator, in his persona of the eleven years old boy, states:

> If I visit you in your home and your mother speaks to you in your language while I am there, you will roll your eyes at me, and reply to her in English and Kiswahili, because we have agreed that parents are ridiculous that way. More than anything, we laugh at and dislike those kids who seem unable to escape their tribe. (34)

Wainaina's praise of Swahili as a pragmatic internethnic lingua franca in Kenya[14] – throughout the book – is very different from Ngũgĩ's famous rejection of English followed by his adoption of Gikuyu as his literary language.[15] As much as his autobiographical narrator loves Swahili, Wainaina never questions English as his language of writing. He does not even master Gikuyu and Kinyarwanda, the tongues of his parents who chose to speak English to their children. Clearly, when it comes to the issue of language, the postcolonial struggles of the generation of Ngũgĩ and today's struggles of Wainaina's *Kwani* generation are not the same anymore.

The privileged narrator-kid who takes it for granted to visit good schools, perceives the children from the disadvantaged classes as "kids who speak strange languages, who laugh if you speak English to them – they understand, but find it pretentious; kids who wear no shoes, kids who miss school a lot" (35). In Wainaina's narrative the fissures of today's Kenyan society are to be found in the internal clash of classes rather than in the confrontation with the ex-colonizer. However, with regard to placement at High School ethnicity comes in as a new factor of power relations. In spite of not having identified as Gikuyu before – "We are mixed-up people" (21) – the excellent narrator and his even more brilliant sister do not get admission into any of the elite high schools due to structural ethnic discrimination by the Moi regime. Adverse ethnicity as a result of the British divide and rule system is certainly an eminent political feature of the postcolony, yet the narration jots over this rather quickly in favour of typical boarding school anecdotes. Also, the family has a good network of relations that allows them to place their children in better places soon enough. It is only much later, in the politically more conscious third part of the memoir and under the Kibaki regime which privileges Gikuyus, that the

[14] "Kiswahili, the language of an old civilization, used to handling diverse people, full of rhetoric and manners […]. In Kiswahili we feel a brotherhood and we are in the habit of it" (209).

[15] Since the late 1970s, Ngũgĩ has published his fiction in Gikuyu, followed by English translations. As a scholar, he has continued to publish his academic work in English. Remarkably, the autobiographical trilogy was composed and published only in English and Ngũgĩ himself seems to consider the genre of memoir closer to his academic work than to fiction, when he states in an interview "I can tell you that since 1978, all my novels, plays, and poetry have been composed in Gikuyu. The only texts I write in English are either academic stuff or memoirs" (2020).

narrator makes a link between 'tribalism' and colonialism. Listening to an old man who repeats stereotypes about different ethnic groups in Kenya, he comments: "It completely escaped him that every skill coincided nearly perfectly with the first acts of labour division introduced by the British, that he was, in fact, affirming exactly how we were defined and given roles to play in colonial Kenya. These identities were, in his mind our permanent tribal personality" (210). Wainaina escapes the postcolonial condition of being tribalized in so far as he refuses to subscribe to an imposed Gikuyu identity. The Ugandan and Rwandan heritage form his mother's side including the name Binyavanga complicate his identity and perception by others as 'foreign'.

Collective Trauma, Personal Depression, and Being an Outsider

Ngũgĩ's memoirs are deeply affected by the melancholia[16] of the narrating subject as he recalls the lost world of an economically self-sustaining and culturally closely knitted oral community that is progressively destroyed by the invasion of colonialism. In *Dreams in a Time of War,* collective colonial traumata are exposed through the hardships of relatives who are activists in the resistance struggle of the Land and Freedom Army (vulgarised as Mau-Mau), his brother Good Wallace in particular. Muchiri rightly points out: "In this way, the stories of freedom fighters who did not get a chance to tell their stories find their way into Kenyan history" (88). Add to this the description of the many daily humiliations of the colonized in a segregated settler colony, such as different classes on trains and the young Ngũgĩ's arbitrary arrests. A climax of colonial violence occurs right at the beginning of *In the House of the Interpreter*, when the narrator returns to his home during school holidays only to find that the village has been erased and his family displaced. This shocking experience, a collective trauma for his community, is caught in the mode of present tense immediacy:

> [O]ur homestead is a rubble of burnt dry mud, splinters of wood, and grass. My mother's hut and my brother's on stilts have been razed to the ground. My home, from where I set out for Alliance only three months ago, is no more. Our pear tree is still standing, but like the ashy hedge, it's a silent witness. Casting my eyes beyond, I suddenly realize

[16] Gĩchingiri Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ's 2016 article offers an insightful reading of the memoirs informed by trauma theory and psychoanalysis. He identifies melancholia as a major feature of the memoirs and convincingly shows that they cannot be read as clinical trauma narratives with features of fragmentation or ellipsis: "A close reading of the memoirs clearly shows that the young Ngũgĩ was subjected to disorienting experience that he captures through vivid imagery of ruin, terror, and dislocation. But Ngũgĩ is not so affected that the experience resists narrativization. Indeed, the two memoirs develop fairly coherently and show little evidence that the memories are dissociated and resist voluntary control. There is a very strong tendency to emphasize causality, sequence, place, time, and the connection of events to a larger village community/national frame" (100).

> the whole village of homesteads has disappeared. The paths that crisscrossed the landscape, linking the scattered dwellings into a community, now lead from one mound of rubble to another, tombs of what has been. There is not a soul in sight. Even the birds flying above or chirping in the hedges emphasize the emptiness. Bewildered, I sit on my box under the pear tree, as if hoping it will share with me what it knows. The tree, at least, has defied the desolation, and I pick up a few ripe pears to eat in baffled silence. How could a whole village, its people, history, everything, vanish, just like that?" (Ngũgĩ 2012, 5).

Due to his status as an intern in the above mentioned 'sanctuary' of High School, Ngũgĩ himself does not live through the traumatizing events of destruction and displacement his family has faced. "Ngũgĩ's memoirs narrate frightening experiences during the wartime years that confirm his relative insulation from the really traumatic events" (Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ 92). Rather, by writing on the collective trauma, he acts as a secondary witness, breaking the silence of the symbolic pear tree, the silent direct witness. In *Dreams in a Time of War* the pear tree has been introduced as a symbol for the shelter of home, its fruits have been emergency food in times of hardship. Therefore, the gesture to pick up and eat those fruits in the state of shock symbolically binds the postcolonial outsider subject back to his community and their collective trauma. The tree is also associated with motherly caring for shelter and food, and significantly Ngũgĩ's mother was imprisoned for three months and could not speak out about this traumatic experience. "To his credit, Ngũgĩ does not pretend to understand that trauma or appropriate it as his own" (Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ 99), and yet through his literary witnessing he inscribes it into history.

By contrast, Wainaina, who as an adolescent and young man feels like an outsider who doesn't fit in anywhere, is all in all much more concerned with his complicated identity construction than with a critical evaluation of collective experience and social structures. Though he lives in South Africa during the transition from Apartheid to Post-Apartheid, he touches on politics only very superficially. Personal estrangement is the favored topic: "Something is wrong with me" (Wainaina 2011, 7); „I try hard to fit in" (64); „I am different, I am different" (76); are among the many remarks which construct an outsider's position of the subject who hardly identifies with collectives and who is "often uncomfortable in his body" (Lucas 306). The difficulty of identity construction turns into a clinical case of depression during his studies in South Africa, accompanied by heavy drinking. "I fell away from everything and everybody […]. I do not know what happened. All of a sudden, I was moving slower, attending class less, and now I am not leaving my room at all" (Wainaina 2012, 104). The deeper reason for his depression remains a riddle in *One Day I Will Write About This Place*, as the underlying

psychological conflict is not revealed. It is only the follow-up publication of the lost chapter by Wainaina that allows us as readers to get a sense of the state of suppressed queer sexuality and identity that might have led to the depression described in the memoir. Hence, critics have found the memoir to be "replete with cues and allusions to the ambivalent direction of his sexual desires and the volatility of his gender identifications" (Osinubi X). Yet in spite of the early scene of crossdressing in chapter two and the presence of homosexuality in the boarding school Wainaina attends in chapter eight[17], in my opinion, it was difficult to read queerness in between the lines before the coming out chapter was released. The narrator's own sexuality is explicit in terms of masturbation only. Thus, in *One Day I Will Write About This Place* an individual psychological instability that has to do with the unspoken sexual identity and its oppression haunts the narrative. This individual story cannot be identified as specifically postcolonial.[18]

Despite of the relational quality of his memoirs, the topic of being an outsider in one's community is also not absent from Ngũgĩ's texts. During childhood, the separation of his mother and father is followed by a momentarily rupture with his paternal relatives. Later, his experience as a colonial subject who has been the first in his family to go through higher British style *Bildung* conveys a particular position as privileged outsider to him. Thanks to his earlier education through orality, passed on mainly by Mzee Ngandi (an expert in history) and his father's first wife (a gifted storyteller), he is knowledgeable about local Gikuyu culture, values and collective memory. Meanwhile, the new knowledge acquired through the British educational system sets him apart from his family even as a child, leading into a feeling of estrangement early on (cf. Lovesey 158). In the last part of *In the House of the Interpreter* entitled "1959. A Tale of the Hounds at the Gate" (2012, 179-240) Ngũgĩ narrates, at length, his arbitrary arrest, imprisonment and trail for tax issues, when he was travelling home from his first post as an auxiliary teacher. Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ asserts: "Ngũgĩ was minimally involved in the major events in larger society and might have suffered survivor guilt, hence the amplification

[17] The assertion "I try hard to stay close to the line, keep myself inside myself, and be some public person who fits in" (64) just after the forced outing and social exclusion of an older student comes closest to hinting at the narrator's non-verbalized fear to be outed as queer.

[18] I am aware of the discourse that convincingly positions today's homophobic political discourse and juridical status in many African countries not as a consequence of homosexuality as a 'decadent import' from the global North as conservative voices like to put it, but rather as a follow-up to a colonial homophobic and juridical legacy (Muiga 2019) as well as Christian and Islamic imports of homophobia and binary gender systems into previously more diversified cultures (Epprecht/Nyeck 2013). In this sense, there is a postcolonial dimension to queer struggles in Africa. However, in my view, this is less important for the reading of Wainaina's memoir and 'lost chapter' as the author does not elaborate on this political dimension and presents his unease with his body and identity as well as his coming out confession strictly in terms of a personal trajectory.

of his own heroic act with bloodhounds at the end of *In the House*" (94). With regard to sexuality, intimate personal relationships and emotions, there are also blank spaces in Ngũgĩ's texts, but in a way of discretion that is rather common sense in most African life writing of his generation.

From Nation-Building to Post-Nation

Ngũgĩ's memoirs are closely interconnected with the political project of post-colonial nation-building. There is no doubt about the necessity of an engagement of intellectuals for building the independent nations in the 1950 and 1960s as explicated in chapter 12 "Working for the Nation" of *Birth of a Dream Weaver*. Therefore, the subject inscribes itself into history, yet the narrator's individual story is always closely connected to the concern of nation-building. However, most political autobiographies do not have a focus on childhood which is considered a politically unconscious time (Muchiri 2014: 87). While this holds certainly true for Wainaina's post-independence childhood, in the first part of his memoir, Ngũgĩ reconstructs a colonial childhood in which the political dimension cannot be overlooked:

> The 'dreams' Ngugi alludes to in the title of the autobiography refer to the hope that the colonial subjects lived with at the individual, community and national levels. […] The war he refers to denotes the different conflicts that existed at this time at individual, national and international levels. (Wachiri 2014, 87).

In the case of Wainaina's memoir, political aspirations in the postcolonial sense of conscious resistance to structures inherited from colonialism, political activism and explicit contribution to nation-building play a minor role. Rather it is striking, that the given existence of a post-colonial nation state – Kenya – whose passport the narrator is entitled to hold from childhood on, is put into question. When the childlike narrator comments on political leaders and regimes, clearly distinguishing a 'progressive' Kenya from dictatorial Uganda where his mother comes from, the naivety often reads as irony. Doubts about what Kenya actually is and means affect the perception of the nation. In the 1970s, the child repeats slogans such as: "Kenyatta is the father of our nation" (Wainaina 2012,13; 14) and "Kenya is a peace-loving nation (13)," only to naively "wonder whether Kenya was named after Kenyatta, or Kenyatta was named after Kenya" (14). The new president Daniel arap Moi is introduced as a TV star "clean, tall and sharp" (28). Looking back at the 1980s, under the Moi regime, the narrator reflects on Kenya as a place that is not yet a consolidated nation, rather it remains: "the home of the future, a not yet place called Kenya" (51). Although the narrator cherishes Kenya as a home and is affected by a severe case of nostalgia during his time in South Africa, Kenya as a state is presented as a

post-nation[19], a failed state even that loses its common ground during the 1990s: "We are children of the cold war. We came of age when it ended; we watched our countries crumple like paper" (106). At the end of the Moi era, he concurs: "Now that the state is failing, we are held together by small grace, by interpersonal relationships, by trusting body language" (195), while in the very last chapter of the book Kenya drowns in the post-2007-elections violence. The uncertainty of nationality as an identity marker is aptly caught in the image of the washed passport that almost impedes his travel back from Johannesburg to Nairobi: "My passport has a problem. It has swollen and his now a lumpy accordion – full of watermarks, corrugated pages, and slurring visa stamps. It spent a whole circle in a washing machine" (119). I argue that the state of the passport is not only a metaphor for the troubled identity of the autobiographical narrator, but as it is the official document of nationality, it also functions as a metonymy for the eventually failed postcolonial state that poses as a fragile post-nation, "that place still waiting impatiently to find its voice and tell its story as it struggles along the rocky terrain towards true nationhood" (Wakai 170/71).

Moreover, with regard to his musical choices, preferring contemporary American and African pop, from childhood on the autobiographical narrator explicitly dislikes the national Kenyan broadcast whose music he judges as retrograde, "undefined past sounds, and shapes and ideas, and it is inconvenient, if only because the Anglo-Kenyan garden does not look like this music sounds" (247). Thus, as Savannah Lucas points out, symbolically "Wainaina rejects the sounds that bind him to a solely national identity grounded in Kenya's history" (Lucas 308), favoring instead transcultural musical choices such as Black American and Congolese music. By contrast to Ngũgĩ's firm grounding in orality, here "traditional performance is presented as alienating, only appearing on television or at school" (Brinkman 127).[20] In the above quoted garden metaphor followed by the tongue-in-cheek statement "Maybe I am a little Anglo-

[19] I should mention that in his 1998 essay *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams: Towards a Critical Theory of the Arts and the State in Africa*, from his position as a writer in political exile Ngũgĩ advocates for the post-nation as a productive concept at this particular time in history (cf. Lovesey 187-189). However, this stance has nothing to do with the narrated time in his memoirs and does not interfere with the importance of nation-building in the years of formal decolonization.

[20] In her comparative 2018 article Inge Brinkman analyzes the representation and functions of oral performance, music and dance in Ngũgĩ's and Wainaina's memoirs in detail. In particular, she stresses the moments of resistance to colonialism through orality (mainly songs) in Ngũgĩ's writing. A further intermedial reading of *In the House of the Interpreter* and *Birth of a Dream Weaver* should consider the extensive use of photography in these volumes that, I suggest, goes beyond a simple "documentary quality" (Lovesey 161). I cannot elaborate on that in the context of this article.

Kenyan unable to appreciate *benga*" (251), the identity category of 'Anglo-Kenyan' does not refer to colonial complicity, but to contemporary cultural hybridity as further explicated in my next sub-section.

Pan-Africanism(s), Cultural Hybridity

Both autobiographical narrators can be considered as pan-Africanists, but in different ways. Ngũgĩ's pan-Africanism has its roots in the common struggle for independence of the African nations. He maps the anti-colonial resistance in Kenya in detail in part one and two of his memoirs and, as a logical follow-up, in the third volume *Birth of a Dream Weaver* he turns to pan-African alliances at Makerere University Uganda. Here, he studies among the African colonial elite who is about to venture towards independence and is going through a mental decolonization process. Ngũgĩ's political stance finds its expression in cultural practice. In a move of postcolonial appropriation, he adopts Shakespeare, for the very first time in African costumes, to the Makerere University theatre stage before becoming himself a successful playwright. Furthermore, the narrator memorizes his readings through the colonial archive and British canon in long essayistic passages, thereby elaborating classical 'writing back' chapters, followed by his display of unconditional admiration for the first postcolonial African writers. In this vein, chapter two "A Wounded Land" juxtaposes the lived colonial hardships with colonial discourse in English literature and chapter 7 "Black Dolls and Black Masks" reconsiders the reception of the Négritude poets in Eastern Africa. Ngũgĩ's cultural universe is first of all thoroughly Gikuyu, then Kenyan and African, but at the same time also British. As a postcolonial subject he knows and masters British culture as crammed into him by school, consequently through his writing he appropriates its expressive forms as a means of pan-African decolonization. Not least, English is important as a tool of transnational communication among (East)Africans of his generation.

Wainaina's post-nationalist pan-Africanism is less political and largely based on culture: music and dance in particular, but also celebrating football and sharing food as a means of transnational African solidarity: "This is how to become an African" (Wainaina 2012, 170). From childhood on, Wainaina's cultural references often stem from the globalised Anglo-American world; they include Michael Jackson as a pop-icon and popular TV formats imported from the UK and the US. He indulges in canonised and popular world literature from different parts of the globe alike.

> His is an existence of the Kenyan African middle class […] ; it is a rhapsody of discarded ideals, the skeletons of stripped down cars, Americanized accents, disco, rolling hills, ancient African beliefs and values, English and American novels, Levi jeans, two-car garages, golf balls, superstition, and bourgeois aspirations. It is a universe where mundane discoveries are made. (Wakai 169)

It's a cultural universe that is hybrid and globalized. His identification with Africa at large is mostly stimulated by music, less by politics. Wainaina writes about musical styles and musicians from different parts of the continent as being decisive for his personal development. For instance, his quasi physical reactions to Congolese music, "the sound of our times" (77), becomes a leitmotif, and Brenda Fassie's musical trajectory that pervades the text as a "haunting narrative" (Lucas 305) stands as an allegory for the ups and downs not only of South Africa, but the whole continent.[21] The narrator further embraces the African diaspora by appreciating Lionel Richie, Boney M., Jazz and Gospel; music of the Black Atlantic (Gilroy 1993) that has travelled back to Africa. In the third part of the memoir, the narrator has become a travel writer who visits Sudan, Nigeria, Ghana and Togo where he indulges in food, fête and transcultural African solidarities, using the verb "Pan-Africaning" (202) in a non-political way. Lucas suitably underlines that the "fragmented history of influences" (307) brought across by these multiple references contributes to his portrait as "a person continually in search of himself," (307) and who "resist[s] the risk of creating absolute identities for himself" (307).

By contrast, Ngũgĩ's early childhood memories feature a culture that is strictly local, in a space that will be progressively invaded by British power. The formation of postcolonial hybridity of the narrated subject through local, oral knowledge systems and cultural skills as superposed by colonial *Bildung* is at the heart of the narrative. The challenge of living in a colonial system that initiates a hierarchical contact zone between two cultures is exemplified in two consecutive chapters of *Dreams in a Time of War*. Whereas chapter 25 narrates the traditional circumcision rite Ngũgĩ underwent in 1953, the follow-up chapter 26 shows how closely this was followed by admission exams for high school recalled as „educational rites of passage" (Ngũgĩ 2011, 204). In *Birth of a Dream Weaver*, Makerere University College symbolises the shift from colonial oppression to post-colonial structures, as an institution on the verge of becoming progressively decolonized. And yet consciously Ngũgĩ, the Makerere graduate, identifies as "a

[21] Savannah Lucas (315-317) convincingly points out how Wainaina's Brenda Fassie's narrative, the story of a feminist and queer African musician with her ups and down in recognition, connects to the post-national, pan-African and hidden queer agenda of the memoir.

man who has been brought up in an educational system wholly colonial, with all its prejudices and intellectual slant from the West" (Ngũgĩ 2017, 214). His memoir thus closes on the declaration of his own need of decolonization as a postcolonial subject deeply affected by colonially imposed thinking.

Becoming a (Post-)Postcolonial Writer

Literary autobiographies typically deal with the dispositions and aspirations of becoming a writer and the texts that I have compared in this article are no exceptions. The *topos* of the early vocation so current in the genre is written into both texts. Ngũgĩ and Wainaina share their fascination for books and voracious appetite for reading from childhood on. Using hyperbole in his memoir, Wainaina declares that at the age of 9, he was "reading a new book every day" (2012, 27); at 11, he decided: "One day I will write books" (51), at 13, he "gobble[s] them like candy" (79). In his early twenties becoming an author is his only career option: "I am afraid. If I write, and fail at it, I cannot see what else I can do" (143).

Ngũgĩ is an avid reader early on, too, but with limited access to reading material and therefore less precocious. His access to literature via colonial school and its library (see chapter 50 and 51 of *In the House of the Interpreter* in particular) – where knowledge was generally abstracted from local reality (cf. 2012, 63) and literature strictly British – led to mixed feelings: "I could not escape the magic of literature, its endless ability to elicit laughter, tears, a whole range of emotions, but the fact that these emotions were exclusively rooted in the English experience of time and place could only add to my sense of dislocation" (66). Ngũgĩ is 16 years old when he first seriously plans to become a writer. The third memoir *Birth of a Dream Weaver. A Writer's Awakening* is primarily devoted to this existential becoming. Ngũgĩ chronicles his beginnings as a journalist, playwright, short story writer and novelist in detail, underlining his determination to write on collective colonial trauma and resistance right from the beginning. Here, in his Makerere student's immediate present tense voice, he declares: "My Limuru and Kenya remain a land from which I have escaped, but I want to write about it; want to make sense of it" (Ngũgĩ 2017, 85). While asserting his desire to testify on this "landscape of fear" (86), he underlines the resistance through *Bildung* that was triggered in his generation: "the dedication, the collective will. That's what I want to write about. The collective mania for education" (88).

Once again, the difference between Ngũgĩ's collective and Wainaina's more individualistic approach becomes visible. Wainaina grows up in Nakuru, in the same Rift Valley landscapes

that were once forcedly taken by the British settlers, but their re-appropriation by Kenyans is albeit taken for granted, as the laconic by the way utterance "here, where we live, used to be Europeans-only Nakuru," shows. (67). The upcoming writer in Wainaina's memoir writes less against social postcolonial structures at large, but above all against the anguish and void of not fitting into the scheme of a bourgeois career life as expected by his family. In his childhood, reading is a refuge from an often-overwhelming world for the unconfident boy. In his young adulthood, writing becomes a survival strategy in a personal crisis. Writing is an individual, even lonely endeavour: "I am on my own a lot. I am writing every day now. Sometimes I write through the night […] there must be some secret mission, something mystical" (Wainaina 2012, 165/166). Even later on, Wainaina does not pretend to be a political writer or to speak on behalf of a community. He openly aspires for the British based Caine Prize of African writing for the money, "fame and lots of commissioned work. […] I mine every sexy African theme I can think of" (184). Even at a politically more conscious state, when he distances himself from the British legacy of toxic ethnicity in Kenya that was further fostered by postcolonial leaders, his reaction is flight – "I can't wait to leave" (212) – into his travels and reportage writing instead of deeper analysis. Curiously, the making of his *How to Write About Africa* is not mentioned in the memoir, though chapter 27 in which his writing on South Sudan is censored by European donors clearly indicates how it was triggered. The founding of *Kwani?* is also only mentioned very briefly.

Wainaina's memoir as well as Ngũgĩ's third volume both close on the achievement of their intellectual aspiration: both have become recognised writers, a position that is at the same time a seminal marker for their identity formation. Ngũgĩ clearly frames this within the larger decolonization process: "I entered Makerere in the 1959 academic year, a colonial subject, and left in 1964, a citizen of independent Kenya. In those few years a writer was born" (Ngũgĩ 2017, 219).

Conclusion

If postcolonial life writing is meant to favour narrations about identity formation under the conditions of a social, political and economic situation affected by the consequences of colonialism, we may say that both memoirs that I have compared in this article can be considered as 'postcolonial' in a broad sense. However, the differences pointed out are obvious and allow me to put a sole postcolonial paradigm into question in the case of Wainaina. Here's a case that points to the post-postcolonial – an ugly term that I use in a transitional sense, by

lack of a clear-cut new concept for now, "at a time when the postcolonial imaginary progresses past its own "post" and rumors of its own demise, and as the task of the decolonization of the intellectual continues" (Lovesey 193).

The function of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's memoirs as a conscious inscription of the African subject into history and his testimony on resistance to colonialism make them a classic of postcolonial life writing. The autobiographical narrator poses as a postcolonial hybrid subject nourished by his local culture and colonial *Bildung* alike and with whose reconciliation as a writer who appropriates the master's tools he has to grapple. The same cannot be upheld in the case of Binyavanga Wainaina's memoir that traces above all his troubled personal identity formation, but also his success story as an African writer who uses as a matter of course English as a global language. His assertion right in the middle of his book "If I am not certain about anything else, I am certain that the world of my family is as solid as fiction" (2012, 127) reminds us about fictionality's impact on all life writing that coincides with the text's playfulness. The individualistic and often ironic perceptions of events, the focus on global culture rather than on politics and not least the self-centeredness of a queer subject who does not yet dare to speak its name, position Wainaina's memoir outside the realms of classical postcolonial critique.

Works Cited

Adesanmi, Pius. "Ngũgĩ and the Postcolonial." *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o*. Ed. Oliver Lovesey, New York: MLA Publications, 2012, 53-59.

Brinkman, Inge. "Representing Performance: Memories of Song, Music and Dance in the Autobiographical Writing of Ngũgĩ and Wainaina." *Music and Dance Research in East Africa*. Eds. Kahithe Kiiru and Maina Mutonya. Nairobi: IFRA and Twaweza Communications, 2018, 120-34.

Sexual Diversity in Africa. Politics, Theory, and Citizenship. Eds. Marc Epprecht, S.N.Nyeck. Montréal/Kingston, Ontario: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013.

Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Hood, Neville. "Afterword: Out of Place, Out of Time." *Research in African Literatures*, 47, no. 2, 186-191.

Kariuki, J.M. *Mau Mau Detainee*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963.

Krishnan, Madhu. "When is Biography Fiction? Life Writing, Epistemophilia, and the Limits of

Genre in Contemporary Kenyan Writing." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 55, no. 3, 2018, 361-375.

Lovesey, Oliver. *The Postcolonial Intellectual. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in Context*. Surrey/Burlington: Ashgate, 2015.

Lucas, Savannah. "Music Memoirs from Africa: Tracking Music in Binyavanga Wainaina's Memoir *One Day I Will Write About This Place*." *Social Dynamics*, 45, no. 2, 303-323.

Muiga, Kamau. "African homophobia and the colonial roots of African conservatism." *Africa is a Country* 20.06.2019. https://africasacountry.com/2019/06/african-homophobia-and-the-colonial-intervention-of-african-conservatism (accessed 29 October 2021).

Mouzet, Aurélia. "The Postcolonial Autobiography: Force Majeure?" *Autobiography as a Writing Strategy in Postcolonial Literature*. Ed. Benaouda Lebdai. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars' Publishing, 2015, 161-176.

Muchiri, Jennifer. *The Intersection of the Self and History in Kenyan Autobiographies*. Eastern African Literary and Cultural Studies, 1, no. 1&2, 2014, 83-93.

Mboya, Tom. *Freedom and After*. London: Andre Deutsch, 1967.

Mukoma wa Ngũgĩ. *The Rise of the African Novel. Politics of Language, Identity, and Ownership.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018.

Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ, Gĩchingiri. *Bloodhounds at the Gate: Trauma, Narrative Memory, and Melancholia in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's Memoirs of Wartime.* Research in African Literatures, 47, no. 4, 2016, 91-111.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. *Detained. A Writer's Prison Diary.* Nairobi: Heinemann, 1981; reissued as *Wrestling with the Devil: A Prison Memoir.* London: Vintage, 2018.

----------. *Decolonising the Mind. The Politics of Language in African Literature.* Oxford: James Currey, 1986.

----------.. *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams: Towards a Critical Theory of the Arts and the State in Africa.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.

----------.. *Dreams in a Time of War. A Childhood Memoir*. London: Vintage Books, 2011.

----------.. *In the House of the Interpreter. A Memoir.* London: Harvill Secker: 2012.

----------.. *Birth of a Dream Weaver. A Writer's Awakening*. London: Vintage Books, 2017.

----------.. "Anyone Living in a Colonial Society Can Relate to Black Lives Matter. Interview." *Jacobin Magazine*, September 2020,

https://www.jacobinmag.com/2020/09/ngugi-wa-thiongo-black-lives-matter-colonialism-kenya (accessed 24 October 2021).

Odinga, Oginga. *Not Yet Uhuru*. London: Heinemann, 1967.

Osinubi, Taiwo Adetunji. "Queer Prolepsis and the Sexual Commons: an Introduction." *Research in African Literatures*, 47, no. 2, VII-XXIII.

Waberi, Abdourahman A. "Les enfants de la postcolonie : esquisse d'une nouvelle génération d'écrivains francophones d'Afrique noire." *Notre Librairie*, 135, 1998, 8-15.

Wainaina, Binyavanga. *How to Write About Africa*. Nairobi: Kwani Trust, 2008.

----------. *One Day I Will Write About This Place. A Memoir*. London: Granta, 2012.

----------. "I am a homosexual, mum." *Africa is a Country*, 29 January 2014, https://africasacountry.com/2014/01/i-am-a-homosexual-mum/ (accessed 9 February 2021).

Wakai, Kangsen Feka. "Benga Benga. A review of Binyavanga Wainana's *One Day I Will Write About this Place*." *Transition*, 111, 2013, 167-175.

WHO IS AT THE CENTRE? GIKUYU OGRES, ORAL NARRATIVE AND POSTHUMAN THINKING

Inge Brinkman
African Studies, Ghent University, Belgium

Abstract
In this contribution I would like to offer an interpretation on ogres and humans in Gikuyu oral narratives, focusing on the earliest records of such stories in the colonial era. Gikuyu oral narratives have been recorded since the early twentieth century, albeit often rendered only in summarised form, in English translation, and evaluated from a racist and paternalistic stance. Despite these serious drawbacks, the collections can serve to reconstruct a preliminary Gikuyu ogre history of the early colonial period, thereby contributing to the sociocultural history of the imaginary in a more general sense. The focus here will be on the social relations between monsters and humans, in connection to ecological concerns in the narratives, based on textual analysis.

In my view a historical perspective on oral literature can offer theoretical insights into the recent debates on (East) African popular culture and the post-human turn in literary studies. Many studies in popular culture are strongly connected to urbanity and new ICT, and the posthuman, ecocritical turn is a relatively new approach in academia and gaining momentum only recently in (East-)African literary studies.

This 'newness' should not stand in the way of appreciating older philosophical traditions: Gikuyu people have, through their oral narratives, long reflected on the relations between humans and other creatures, between culture, nature and preternature. Studying such historical reflections may indeed help to qualify our concepts in literary criticism.

Keywords*: Monster Studies; Gikuyu oral narrative; Ecocriticism*

Introduction: 'Newness' in Academia

Viewing literature and popular culture from a historical perspective is not *à la mode*: the emphasis is nearly invariably on 'the new'. Studies in popular culture, an established field in African studies at least since the 1990s (cf Barber 1997), often revolve around recent urban developments, 'modernity' as a concept, and new ICT. Also the latest frameworks in literary criticism stress 'newness': the nonhuman turn and posthumanism, including queer studies, animal studies, new materialism, new media theory, ecocriticism, etc. (Grusin 2015; Braidotti 2013) emphasise newness, up to the point of leading to a 'turn-fatigue' (Grusin 2015: ix). While

initially, some of these approaches were criticised by African scholars (Slaymaker 2007: 683-685), as of the turn of the century we also see an increased scholarship in posthuman, ecocritical and queer approaches in (East-)African literary criticism (Quayson & Olaniyan 2007: 681-764).

Also in the humanities, there is an emphasis on such new approaches, on citing the latest publications and a constant invention of new vocabulary; leading to – as Grace Musila (2019) points out – a homogenisation in a mono-epistemic, largely Northern-directed academic space. 'The fetish of the new' (Musila 2019: 289) is standing in the way of studying older debates and philosophical traditions that may not merely be 'helpful' to our current understandings, but can also potentially lead to qualifying our concepts in literary criticism and a broadening of our academic epistemic range. This is not to say that we should discard innovation and new approaches nor to imply that we should refrain from studying recent developments; my aim with this historical approach is to try and open up the space for conceptualisation, while at the same time pointing to possible trajectories for studying the history of imagination.

As a case-study for this paper, I would like to make a preliminary attempt to reason from Gikuyu oral narratives from the beginning of the twentieth century, as they reflect on the relations between humans and other creatures, and on culture, nature and preternature. My focus will be on ecology and the social relations between ogres (*irimũ*, pl. *marimũ*) and humans in ogre narratives. While my argument may be useful for other types of monsters, the case study deals with ogres that feature in Gikuyu fictional oral storytelling.

The Anthropocene and Ecocritical Traditions

Climate change, environmental degradation, and ecological disaster form an enormous global problem. It may seem silly, perverse even, to focus on ogres while the world is facing such tremendous problems. Yet it is my firm belief that ogres, and monsters more broadly speaking, can help us in our reflections on ecology. Often the ecological crisis is related to the Anthropocene. We may view the Anthropocene – a term that became popular in academia since about 2000 – as 'the era that began when humans developed capabilities to alter geologically significant conditions and processes' (Mwangi 2019: 19). While humans have always changed their environment, through practice and discourse, now (when precisely is a matter of debate) humanity can potentially alter geological conditions and this is precisely what is happening. The Anthropocene may be regarded as a consequence of extreme anthropocentrism, whereby

human interests have been consistently viewed as more important than and superior to everything else, and whereby 'nature' is viewed in opposition to 'culture' and utilised as a mere resource.

At the same time, anthropocentrism has a second range of implications. It may also mean that humans are viewed as a unique species and the sole producers of morality, thus opening up a more positive space for anthropocentrism. While taking human interests as the standard has indeed led to destruction of the planet earth and beyond, this second hallmark of anthropocentrism can also lead to a focus on humanity's moral duties towards 'nature'. In order to survive, humans must protect nature and ensure the care of animals and natural resources. This realisation has led to Environmentalism, indeed advocating the preservation, restoration and improvement of the natural environment.

Concurrent with the developments during the Anthropocene, with its detrimental consequences for biodiversity, climate, geomorphology, etc., there is a growing concern for ecology in academia. In literary studies, ecocriticism has been developed as a tool for analysing literary and cultural forms in their relation to the environment. This approach addresses the current ecological crisis, and establishes how literature imagines environmental problems, as it discusses the relations between humans, animals and plants from a holistic perspective. For example, ecocriticism proposes to 'speak with' instead of 'speak about', in an attempt to do away with hierarchical procedures of categorisation.

Usually ecocriticism is regarded as a new approach. Only few studies exist that focus on philosophical traditions in which storytelling or other literary practices are historically used to reflect on ecological issues. It is problematic, however, to view the current attempts in literary studies to overcome anthropocentrism as 'new': as we will see, also in this case, these literary reflections have remained outside academia, but that does not mean they did not exist.

Sources

Ng'ano cia marimũ (ogre narratives) form a widespread fictional genre in Gikuyu oral literature, and have been recorded since the early twentieth century. Often the narratives were rendered only in summarised form, or just an English translation was offered, and/or they were evaluated from a racist and paternalistic stance. To underscore my point it suffices to refer to

the title of the first published ethnographic study of the Gikuyu by W.S. and K. Routledge of 1910, entitled: *With a Prehistoric People*. Such labels were used to dismiss the relevance of the philosophical and ethical concerns that speak from the gathered materials, and justified an exoticising approach. Despite these serious drawbacks, these early collections can serve to reconstruct a preliminary Gikuyu monster history of the early colonial period, thereby contributing to the sociocultural history of the imaginary in a more general sense.

The sources consist of small reports made by the British military, such as captain Barrett, colonial administrators like C.W. Hobley, early missionaries like Church Missionary Society Reverend Leonard J. Beecher and Consolata father Cagnolo and the book by anthropologist couple Routledge, who set up a camp near Fort Hall (Murang'a). Later sources, such as Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya,* Mũriũki's historical study, and various publications on Gikuyu oral narratives of later date were also consulted. Fieldwork carried out in the early 1990s provided additional insights.

Monsters' Cultural Work

Firstly, we will explore the 'cultural work' (Mittman 2013: 1) that monsters do. Precisely because monsters belong to the imaginative sphere, they matter. Monsters embody the opposite of human culture in their uncanniness: they are 'difference made flesh' (Cohen 2020: 41). In this, they form a warning against 'abnormal' behaviour. Leisure activities, such as oral storytelling are not 'innocent': they are meant to be educational and productive of social norms. Thus it is no coincidence that Antonio Gramsci explicitly mentioned folktales in his theorizing on hegemonic models (Gencerella 2010), and Pierre Bourdieu (1977) frequently takes oral narratives as examples to drive home his points about habitus and generative schemes: both relate these examples to societal hierarchies. Oral narratives are all about normativity and processes of socializing, rendering horror stories more than fun: they are formative at the same time.

The interesting thing is, however, that ogre narratives may also provide a way out of and a means to resist existing hierarchical patterns. Ogres, like all monsters in oral storytelling are ambivalent, and therefore attractive. They constantly escape our modes of categorisation, they never fit and as soon as we start defining or describing them, their hybridity thwarts our attempts. Their point is precisely to not fit: 'monsters are the harbingers of category crisis' (Cohen 2020, 40). In this manner, narratives with monsters may also formulate alternatives to

societal inequalities and undo rigid classifications. It has been pointed out that in stories, the small animal may win, the poor can marry the rich, the less powerful can become king, etc. This 'liberating potential of the fantastic' (Zipes 2006) has so far not been brought into connection with the 'promise of monsters' (Cohen 2013). Yet, the point of monsters is also to question categorisation, to consider alternative discourses and behaviour through fiction.

In their ambivalence ogres are profoundly posthuman. On the one hand, they reinforce the boundaries of humanity by pointing to 'difference', but at the same time they straddle these boundaries, rendering the categories of humans, monsters, animals questionable. In her article 'Posthuman teratology', Patricia MacCornack's explains that posthumanism interrogates the category 'human'. So it follows, as she (2013: 294) explains, that: 'we are all, and *must* be, monsters because none are template humans.' The category 'human' is an ideal that is established 'through what deviates from it.' Asa Mittman (2013: 8) points out that 'the monstrous is that which creates this sense of vertigo, that which calls into question our (theirs, anyone's) epistemological worldview, highlights its fragmentary and inadequate nature, and thereby asks us […] to acknowledge the failure of our systems of categorization.'

Ogres Versus Humans

Gikuyu ogres cannot be reduced to one single dimension or assessment as they point into various directions. In a way, they indeed form the Gikuyu Other. They are indeed the opposite of what humankind ought to be, and in terms of abode, food, body and sexuality they entirely contravene the normative order. Thus while to make a home it is essential to clear the forest, and to live where other people live, ogres – and anti-social human beings such as sorcerers and thieves – transgress these rules and live in the wild, in the forest, mostly on their own. In this, the opposition is not made between 'nature' and 'culture': it is rather between 'spaces inhabited by humans' and 'uninhabited spaces'. The latter – 'wilderness' if you like – is denoted with the word *werũ*. *Werũ* could bring people good things (for example through hunting), but ogre narratives form a caution that such places are to be treated with respect and awe: humans have to be careful there.

Not only do ogres choose abnormal dwelling places, they also eat the 'wrong' food as they eat human flesh. Ogres are greedy creatures; many of them possess two mouths: one in the front and one in the nape with which they catch flies. Again, such anti-social and greedy behaviour

coupled with cannibalistic tendencies may be related to witchcraft, transgressing the normative order. Furthermore, all ogres have deformed bodies: apart from having two mouths, ogres may have only one leg, others miss half of their body. There are hardly any ogres without eye problems: they are wall-eyed, cross-eyed, one-eyed, or they have a third eye in the middle of their forehead, etc. These deformities again reinforce their abnormal nature.

So we can think of ogres being in opposition to humans: with their abnormal characteristics, ogres can be described as the ultimate Gikuyu Other. They must be distinguished from Gikuyu human beings: in the words of one storyteller: 'And that woman lived just like a Gikuyu person, she did not become an ogre' (Kabĩra and Mũtahi 1988: 90).

Ogres and Ambivalence

Apart from this 'difference made flesh', *marimũ* are also ambivalent, as they do not fit any mode of categorisation. They escape us as soon as we start describing them. This liminality of *marimũ* is established in various ways.

As we saw, ogres live in the wilderness, but they construct homesteads, and even an entire village life in the bush. In this, they create parallel dwelling-places in the bush, and with that destabilise the categories of uninhabited and habited spaces. Furthermore from their dwelling places in the wilderness, they may come to visit human dwelling places.

I indicated the deformed bodies of ogres as a sign of their Otherness, but it is important to keep in mind that through shape-shifting ogres can appear as seemingly friendly old ladies or as handsome young men, thus questioning the boundary between 'normal' and 'abnormal'. We established ogres as anthropophagic, and they also eat flies (with their second mouth), but *marimũ* also have a 'normal' mouth, they can speak like humans and often they can cook, thereby questioning the boundaries between 'humans', 'animals' and 'monsters'. The gender of ogres is often not stated, and it remains unclear whether they are male or female. Yet we do find examples of ogres married to Gikuyu women, while they may be found pounding grain, a typically female task, thereby questioning the boundary between 'man' and 'woman'.

Ogres form a link between the underworld and this world, they may be seen as *ando ago* (people with knowledge that is accessible only if you can cross the boundaries between this

world and other worlds), and even the word *marimũ* is etymologically related to spirits and ancestors (Bastin e.a. 2002), thus questioning the boundary between 'life' and 'death'.

With this liminality ogres pose a threat to society's order. The shape-shifting of ogres renders them extra-difficult to assess, as they may easily escape human's capabilities of evaluation. This deceives humankind and is potentially destructive and potentially powerful at the same time. In other words, *marimũ* at once establish and problematize the category of 'humanity'.

Ogres' Perspectives

Reasoning from the perspective of monsters may help to further nuance our view of liminal creatures. Literary analysis generally follows the views, focalisation and actions of the human protagonists in monster literature and film, but it is worthwhile to trace the monster's experience in narratives. How are events viewed from the ogres' eyes (however many they may be)? Let us look into matters with monster eyes and reason from the stance of Gikuyu ogres in the narratives.

As indicated, ogres may deceive people through shape shifting. Yet far more often in the narratives, it is humans who deceive monsters. Thus in one narrative, a group of *marimũ* is tricked by a man who promises to teach them a dance (Barrett 1913: 74), and in another a captured girl removes her ornaments and puts on a smelling substance so that the ogres could no longer recognise her as a human being (Routledge 1910: 321-324). Because ogres are so easily deceived, they are often evaluated as 'stupid'. Yet humans may also be deceived by ogres, hence acting in similarly 'stupid' ways. Thus a girl consents to marry an ogre and only finds out about his true nature after he eats their child (Routledge 2010).

Furthermore, in many cases humans are warned not to reveal what happened to them when meeting an ogre, but still they tell their secret, with all the consequences thereof (Barrett 1912: 112-114; 1913: 10-11). Or, alternatively, humans stubbornly refuse to negotiate with the ogre and then have to face the consequences (Routledge 1910: 309-311).

So ogres and humans may be said to be equally deceitful. Yet, while humans stand a lot to gain from contact with ogres, ogres generally do not benefit from contact with humans. In most stories, the human characters ultimately escape from being captive at an ogre's place, and very often, especially when it concerns young men, they gain in wealth and status. Ogres, on the other hand, hardly ever win from their contact with humans. Sometimes they manage to marry

a girl, capture a victim or eat people, but more often than not they later have to give up their bounty again. In the final instance, the narrative often concludes with the ogres' death.

We can conclude that ogres and humans, when it comes to deception, bad intentions, betrayal, reasoning, marrying, eating and killing, etc. have a far more complex relation than is usually assumed. Viewed from the stance of the human characters in the narratives, ogres pose a threat, but usually the negative consequences do not last. For ogres, humans are regarded as a potential benefit, but in most cases the advantage does not last and the contact is fatal for the ogres.

Conclusions

Monsters are often thought to be bad. And indeed in their relations to humans, ogres may be harmful: they often approach people with false pretence and they may eat them. Yet, from the perspective of ogres, it is often humans who are deceptive and treacherous. Many stories relate how people deceive ogres, betray them and in most cases kill them. Oftentimes, this leads to rewards for these humans: not only do they escape, often – especially when it concerns young men – they gain in prestige and in material wealth. For ogres, the consequences of their contact with humans, on the other hand, is often fatal.

What then is the 'strange news' that Gikuyu ogres bring? In my view, the 'promise of monsters' (cf Cohen 2013: 449-464) in this case points in various directions, several of which have clear relevance for studying present-day developments in literature and popular culture. Firstly our present monsters are informed by the past. As Cohen (2013: 451) points out, 'monsters are drawn from a shared vocabulary' and they arrive 'in the present yearning to impart an old story, a narrative from the deep past'. Also in East Africa's popular culture, 'history is a tangle, full of loops and doublings-back' (Ibid.). Hence studying monster imaginations in the past may help us to understand current monster making, related indeed to urbanity, technology and new media (eg Ogude and Nyairo, 2007), but at the same time engaging with the past. There is no popular culture without history.

Furthermore, in my view early Gikuyu reflections on monsters can also potentially contribute to the recent debates on the nonhuman, the posthuman, ecocritical approaches and queer studies. After all, ogres and other monsters are, by nature, betwixt and between: as explained, they point to a 'category crisis'. In this they directly refer to the ideas in queer and posthuman studies: the stories reflect a sharp awareness of the problems of delineating human and non-

human, men and women, this world and the underworld, etc. The current debates on nonhuman and posthuman notions are related indeed to crises: crises not only in category, but also in ecology, climate and pandemic. These early stories indicate how these crises are historical problem.

Ogres are important. Precisely because they are deemed so trivial. Narratives of global warming, ecosystems and tsunami's have been proposed instead of the spectacular aims of saving ice bears and mountain gorillas, and instead of the focus on the big five in vast national parks. Yet, also these grand narratives can become abstract to the extent of becoming meaningless. Ogres in oral narrative materialise the relations between humans and non-humans. Indeed, ogres do create a sense of vertigo, as the grand ecological and conservationalist narratives do, but ogres become so palpable in these narratives that the abstraction is overcome, and we can experience our attractions and fears for them. These narratives are deeply philosophical and playful at the same time.

Through ogre narratives, Gikuyu were debating the crisis of humanity in relation to 'environment' already around 1900. The stories reveal a sharp awareness of the dangers of tampering with forces that humans cannot manage. Ogres invite people to view their position in relational terms, and to treat spaces uninhabited by people with caution and due respect. In this, as I indicated, nature and culture are not opposed: the approach is rather more ecological.

Gikuyu ogres tell us about the limits of humans' control over their environment, while at the same questioning the very notion of 'environment'. They beg the question: who is environed, surrounded, who is at the centre of the circle if other forces are so powerful? Gikuyu around 1900 already well understood that a less anthropocentric logic was a more prudent option. Long before Timothy Morton (2007), Gikuyu ogre narratives were proposing an 'ecology without nature'.

Ultimately these narratives pose the unsettling question, if monsters and people are equally good and bad, why indeed distinguish between them? Why do we have categories at all? Who is the Other for whom? Who is whose monster?

Works Cited

Ambler, Charles H. *Kenyan Communities in the Age of Imperialism: the Central Region in the Late Nineteenth Century.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.

Readings in African Popular Culture. Ed. Karin Barber. Bloomington: Indiana University Press; Oxford: James Currey, 1997.

Barrett, W.E.H. "A-Kikuyu Fairy Tales (Rogano)." *Man,* 12, 1912, 41-42; 112-114; 183-185; 13, 1913, 10-11; 24-25; 73-76.

Bastin Yvonne. *Bantu Lexical Reconstructions 3/Reconstructions Lexicales Bantoues 3*. Tervuren : RMAC 2002 (Thanks to Koen Bostoen for this reference): https://www.africamuseum.be/en/research/discover/human_sciences/culture_society/blr.

Beecher, Leonard J. "The Stories of the Kikuyu." *Africa,* 1, No. 1, 1938, 80-87.
----------. "Kikuyu." *Africa,* 8, No. 4, 1935, 516-524.
Bernault, Florence. *Colonial Transactions: Imaginaries, Bodies, and Histories in Gabon*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Outline of a Theory of Practice.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1977.

Braidotti, Rosi. *The Posthuman.* Cambridge: Polity, 2013.

Brinkman, Inge. "Monsters and Bodies in Oral Narratives from Lilyan Kesteloot's Collections." Unpublished Paper for Valedictory Lilyan Kesteloot, June 2020.

Cagnolo, C. "Kikuyu Tales." *African Studies,*11, No. 1, 1952, 1-15; 11, No. 3, 1952, 123-135; 12, No. 1, 1953, 10-21; 12, No. 1, 1953, 62-71; 12, No. 3, 1953, 122-131.

Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. "Postscript: The Promise of Monsters." *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous.* Ed. Asa Simon Mittman, with Peter J. Dendle. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2013, 449-464.

----------. "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)." *The Monster Theory Reader*. Ed. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2020, 37-56.

Drewal, Henrey John. "Beautiful Beast: The Water Deity Mami Wata in Africa." *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous.* Ed. Asa Simon Mittman, with Peter J. Dendle. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2013, 77-102.

Gencerella, Stephen Olbrys. "Gramsci, Good Sense, and Critical Folklore Studies." *Journal of Folklore Studies*, 47, No. 3, 2010, 259-264.

The Nonhuman Turn. Ed. Richardt Grusin. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

Herman, David. "Narratology beyond the Human." *Diegesis,* 3, No. 2, 2014, 131-143.

Hobley, C.W. "Further Researches into Kikuyu and Kamba Religious Beliefs and Customs." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 41, 1911, 406-457.

----------. 'On Some Unidentified Beasts." *East African Geographical Review*, 3, No. 6, 1913, 48-52.

James, Erin. "The Value of 'Old' Stories: A Response to Marco Caracciolo's "Negotiating Stories in the Anthropocene." *Diegesis,* 9, No. 2, 2020.

Kabĩra, Wanjikũ Mũkabi & Karega wa Mũtahi. *Gĩkũyũ Oral Literature.* Nairobi: Heinemann: 1988.

Kenyatta, Jomo. *Facing Mount Kenya.* London: Secker & Warburg, 1938.

MacCornack, Patricia. "Posthuman Teratology". *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous.* Ed. Asa Simon Mittman, with Peter J. Dendle. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2013, 293-310.

McNally, David. *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires and Global Capitalism.* Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2011.

Mitter, Partha, Asa Simon Mittman & Peter Dendle. "Postcolonial Monsters: a Conversation with Partha Mitter." *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous.* Ed. Asa Simon Mittman, with Peter J. Dendle. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2013, 329-341.

Mittman, Asa Simon. "Introduction; the Impact of Monsters and Monster Studies." *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*. Ed. Asa Simon Mittman, with Peter J. Dendle. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2013, 1-14.

Morton, Timothy. *Ecology without Nature.* Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2007.

Mũriũki, Godfrey. *A History of the Kikuyu 1500-1900*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974.

Musila, Grace. "Against Collaboration – or the Native who Wanders off." *Journal of Cultural African Studies,* 31, No. 3, 2019, 286-293.

Mwangi, Evan Maina. *The Postcolonial Animal. African Literature and Posthuman Ethics*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019.

Urban Legends, Colonial Myths. Popular Culture and Literature in East Africa. Ed. Ogude, James & Joyce Nyairo. Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 2007.

African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory. Ed. Quayson, Ato & Tejumola Olaniyan. Malden, etc.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007.

Routledge, W. S. & K. *With a Prehistoric People: The Akikuyu of British East Africa*. London: Frank Cass, [1910] 1968.

Scott, James C. *Seeing like a State. How Certain Schemes to improve the Human Condition have failed.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

Slaymaker, William. "Ecoing the Other(s): The Call of Global Green and Black African Responses." *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory.* Ed. Ato Quayson & Tejumola Olaniyan. Malden, etc.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007.

Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo. "Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute,* 4, No. 3, 1998, 469-488.

The Monster Theory Reader. Ed. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2020.

THE PROBLEMS OF KENYAN FEMALE YOUTH IN THE NOVELS OF MORAA GITAA

Alina Rinkanya

University of Nairobi

Abstract

Moraa Gitaa is one of the most prolific and well-known Kenyan women authors of the new generation. Born and raised in Mombasa, she has worked for more than 15 years with various organizations, among them the British Council, Aga Khan Foundation and PEN Kenya Centre. Gitaa won First Prize in the National Book Development Council of Kenya Adult Fiction literary award in 2008, was nominated for the 2010 Penguin Prize for African Writing, and was one of the Kenya Chapter winners of the 2014 Burt Award for African Literature.

In her fictional works, which include four novels, a number of stories and a secondary school reader, she manages to treat a wide range of issues topical for modern Kenyan society, and especially for the younger generation, focusing on the challenges that haunt young females. Among the problems treated in her works are drug addiction, human trafficking, sexual abuse, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, gender discrimination, inter-generational and ethnic tensions, economic marginalization, HIV and AIDS, corruption and transnational crime. All these concerns are tackled by the author in the setting of her native Coastal province, – but the setting is also symbolically used as a microcosm for the whole country. The paper analyses the four novels of Gitaa - Crucible for Silver and Furnace for Gold (2008), Shifting Sands (2012), Hila (2014) and Shark Attack (2017). The paper concludes that Gitaa's works are notable not only as an example of social criticism in literature, but also as inspirational texts for young readers.

Key words: *Kenyan women's literature, social criticism, gender criticism, youth*

Introduction

Moraa Gitaa is one of the most prolific and well-known Kenyan women authors of the new generation. Born and raised in Mombasa, she has worked for more than 15 years with various organizations, among them the British Council, Aga Khan Foundation and PEN Kenya Centre.

Gitaa won First Prize in the National Book Development Council of Kenya Adult Fiction literary award in 2008, was nominated for the 2010 Penguin Prize for African Writing, and was one of the Kenya Chapter winners of the 2014 Burt Award for African Literature.

In her fictional works, which include four novels, a number of stories and a secondary school reader, she manages to treat a wide range of issues topical for modern Kenyan society, and especially for the younger generation, focusing on the challenges that haunt young females.

Among the problems treated in her works are drug addiction, human trafficking, sexual abuse, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, gender discrimination, inter-generational and ethnic tensions, economic marginalization, HIV and AIDS, corruption and transnational crime. All these concerns are tackled by the author in the setting of her native Coastal Province, – but the setting is also symbolically used as a microcosm for the whole country (and maybe, on a wider scale, the whole of the continent). In an interview the author confessed: "I grew up at the Coast and all my novels are set there. I feel that the Coast is under-represented in Kenyan literature. The themes explored in my novels, like drug abuse and trafficking, domestic terrorism, homegrown extremism and child prostitution on our beaches, are everyday realities of people living there" (Oneya 2016).

Gitaa began her writing career with the novel *Crucible for Silver and Furnace for Gold* (2008) – a moving story of a young Kenyan artist Lavina Kante, saved from impending death by the love of her Italian sweetheart Giorgio Santini. In this book, which demonstrates literary qualities that levels it with the best samples of Western romance writing, the author seems to pursue two main objectives – to capture the readers' hearts with a well-written romance story (which she apparently succeeds in), and to inform a presumably foreign audience (the book, in fact, was published in Canada) about the attractions of Kenya (hence, the book includes a lot of historical and ethnographic material, sometimes written in a guide-book style). Because of that, the social problems that haunt the country are touched in Gitaa's first novel not as deeply as in her subsequent ones. Her later novels, however, focus on social criticism and the analysis of the topical problems of modern Kenya, from the ones affecting the entire society – such as poverty, corruption, terrorism, dependency on foreign powers, corruption and injustices of the legal system – to specific female-related problems;

Shifting Sands (2012) investigates the ills of modern Kenyan society through the lives of four female characters. Although their lives are intertwined from the childhood years, they all bear different backgrounds – Kemu and Myra are Kenyan Africans, while Shilpa is third-generation

Kenyan-Indian, and Latifah is third-generation Kenyan-Arab. Despite their close friendship during their school years in Mombasa, in the end they go separate ways – Kemu, a divorced single mother, makes her living from odd jobs; Shilpa, after an unsuccessful love affair with a Kenyan navy officer of an African origin, is hastily married off to India; Latifah, after the imprisonment of her husband on accusation of being a terrorist, flees to oblivion on Lamu; Myra prefers her training as a marine biologist to drag trafficking and finally dies of AIDS.

Hila (2014) tells the story of the eponymous main character, who, judging by her name (which in Swahili means "trickery, machination"), may well be suspected to be the villainous figure in the story. But contrary to that, Hila is rather a victim – she is in fact a young single mother, who works for a meager salary of a cashier in a Mombasa casino, desperately struggling to make ends meet. Her boyfriend and occasional "sponsor", a petty crook called Njoroo, one day offers her to participate in "something real" – an organized bank robbery, which, if successful, will end her poverty for good. The plan proves to be effective – the gang manages to steal sixty million shillings and get away with it. This, however, does not bring Hila the enormous riches that she was dreaming of; she is awarded, according to her understanding, in a higher manner – a young bank teller Richard, who also partook in the plan, becomes her prospective husband.

The short novel *Shark Attack* (2017) speaks about the trying time in the life of three Mombasa youngsters, Kadzo, Kenga and Issa, who are hired by the local drug dealer as couriers, which puts their lives into danger, but they are spared through the intervention of their relatives and friends assisted by the state bodies. Kadzo and her brother Kenga, who were driven into drug-trafficking by poverty, later join their efforts with the police force in fighting the drug peddling. At the same time, Issa, who comes from a rich and affluent family – his father is a medical doctor, and his mother a lawyer – does not give up the ruinous habit, and ends up in drug rehab

.

As noted above, Gitaa's novels highlight a lot of problems that torment Kenyan society in general, and Kenyan females, especially young ones, in particular. The latter problems, as reflected by Moraa Gitaa, will be analyzed in this paper, using the material from the four novels of hers. This analysis will largely be informed by the sociological approach to literature, with its regard of the writer as both a creature and a creator of society, and literature as both a social product and a social force, which reflects and at the same time influences the socio-cultural milieu – and thus may and does enhance changes in the social mentality and practice.

Female genital mutilation

This "rite of passage", which the author describes as an "injustice society metes out on individuals", ruins a lot of female lives at a very early stage. Kemunto, the heroine of *Shifting Sands,* is no exception. One of the first chapters of the novel features a heart-rending description of excruciating pain that the girl goes through, as well as other aspects of the infamous ceremony, which, as it turns out, will have a profound impact on Kemu's entire life. "In later years I came to learn that what I have undergone was called Female Genital Mutilation, or FGM… Only later would I reflect on this event and realize the profound effect it was going to have on my life, starting from my schoolwork… I had always been a vivacious, daring and outgoing girl, but something had now happened to me. I was different. Changed. Withdrawn" (27-8). Later, FGM also contributes greatly to ruining Kemu's marriage to a young man named Maxi: "In the end, I decided to be totally honest with Maxi, and told him that sexually I felt nothing because of the FGM I had undergone To me, FGM is an injustice society metes out on individuals while presenting the injuries as beneficial to the victim. How have I profited when a pleasure-giving and joy-receiving part of my body was cut from between my legs and buried in a tea plantation? […] After my confession, things were never the same between me and my daughter's dad" (66-7). Eventually, their marriage ends in separation, introducing Kemu to the "joys" of single motherhood.

In her debut novel, Gitaa does not indicate how Lavina, the heroine, managed to avoid FGM (bearing in mind that she, as Kemu in *Shifting Sands*, comes from a rather typical Kericho family) – but apparently this very lucky occurrence in her life gives a powerful boost to her love relationship with Giorgio. "He was taking her to heaven and beyond. […] If she thought she had seen heaven before, she now knew she had only glimpsed a far horizon, because with him, for the first time in her life, she felt a complete woman […] With him, each time was like their first time together. Rediscovering over and over again" (217). As put by Japeth Muindu, "the novel […] graphically depicts sex as what love entails. Lavina falls in love and rediscovers her sexuality" (44)**.** Had Lavina, as her unfortunate sister heroine in *Shifting Sands*, fallen victim to genital mutilation, such rebirth of her love and sexuality would have hardly been possible.

Male dominance in the family

The age-old tradition of putting the father figure as an unquestionable authority – in fact, the owner of the fates and sometimes even lives of other family members – had also exerted a

profound effect on the heroines in Gitaa's novels, starting from her debut one, in which Lavina suffers the first blow in her young life when her father interdicts her from home after becoming aware of Lavina's love affair with a local businessman of Indian origin. As Lavina confesses, "my family was very disappointed with the relationship and my dad actually cut me off from his will and said that I was persona-non-grata in any of the family residences and farms" (194). Fortunately, in the end Lavina reconciles with her indignant parent. "Her father strolled out and stared at her for a long while. They had not talked for over a year now, let alone meet face to face! Lavina took the first diffident step and stretched her hands towards him. "My baby! I'm sorry for being such an idiot." […] Lavina could not believe that her father has just apologized to her for shunning her and ostracizing her from the family" (232).

The role of father in the lives of the heroines of *Shifting Sands* was even less inspiring. Kemunto, the main character and the narrator of the novel, spent her adolescent years in constant stress due to the strife between her parents. "I was twelve years old, and I did not know what the fights were about, but I soon learned [...] Our father had a mistress. He was supporting her, and they even had a child. My life became hell [...] listening for Dad's car in the driveway and then waiting for the fight to start" (51-3). Kemu's stress grew to the point when mother even had to take her to psychiatrist, which proved a failure. "How could I tell him how I averted a dozen fatal tragedies in as many formative years? I looked at the doctor, and the tears slowly streamed down my cheeks. I never told him anything, and he eventually gave up" (56).

Myra, Kemu's best friend, in her parental home faced a similar situation. "Myra grew up seeing her Meru father – who was jobless most of the time – put down her civil servant mother, who toiled hard as a copy typist. Not in many words but by show of proverbs, especially when he was drunk. [...] Sometimes I would be present when Myra's drunken papa would tell her mama that "the neck cannot come above the head" or "women are destructive", despite Myra's mama being the sole bread winner at times. As we grew older, we were to notice how men would use such proverbs in the subjugation of women or to portray women as people with no identity. [...] Just like in my family in my formative years, Myra's parents did not go to church and were always fighting. It got worse when her mama discovered that her husband had another wife at his rural home" (34-5).

Latifah, Kemu's and Myra's friend from a Muslim family, soaked the idea of male superiority through her very upbringing. "Every time we were at their place, it always seemed like Latifah

was being taught to be submissive. [...] Her ma and shangazis taught here that girls are supposed to get married and have babies. [...] Her elder shangazi on her ma's side never ceased to tell her that a wife is to be submissive to her husband in all aspects. She constantly told her that brimstone and hell fire will consume her if she did not follow the directives. [...] Latifah once shared with us that all the women in her life hid their emotions behind the veil [...] She was taught to lead an obscure life. She could not talk. She was only to be seen, not heard. She was taught that men were supposed to only see the clothes she mended, food she cooked and sons she bore. And never any mention of bearing daughters, as if it was an abomination! [...] She grew up avoiding normal things that girls of other fates had. [...] I wondered if Latifah's baba would ever allow her to pursue the dentistry course she so dreamed of" (46-7). In the footnote, however, the author makes a reservation that "this type of behaviour is not an Islamic view, but more of a culture influenced mind-set specific to most Muslim families in Mombasa" (46). In any case, this "culture influenced mind-set" finally ruined Latifah's life – being married off by the choice of her father, and never even thinking of putting questions to her spouse, she became involved in a terrorist plot, which led to her husband's life imprisonment. "I could not help but feel that we lost Latifah psychologically. I was proven right months later when she became withdrawn, disappeared to Lamu and forgot all about pursuing her dentistry course" (247).

Father of Shilpa, the Indian-origin classmate and friend of Kemu, Myra and Latifah, also played a destructive role in his daughter's life; but his decision to marry his daughter off to India was, as in Lavina's case, driven by another potent social ill – ethnic intolerance, which we will discuss in the section below.

Father figures in *Shark Attack* are also far from being ideal – although they are not interfering directly into the lives of their children, they also do nothing to protect them from the evils surrounding them. As was put by one of the positive characters in the book, Dr. Otieno, "most families are enablers and supporters. [...] They enable their children's addictions by pretending that there is nothing wrong with them. An example is when a parent who is not well-off does not question the kids when they come home with expensive toys" (15). That was exactly the case of the families described in the novel – a poor fisherman Karisa, father of Kadzo and Kenga, comforted himself with thoughts that his children bought the expensive speed-boat (which they used for drug trafficking) for the money that they earned working as bait boy and girl for a rich Italian. Likewise, Dr. Abdul, father of Issa, confesses to his son: "I really blame

myself because your sister tried to warn us that you were not yourself but we wouldn't listen to her" (23).

Male dominance in the workplace

As fathers are depicted in Gitaa's novels as sole rulers of their children's lives at home, the same role is played by male bosses of her characters in the workplace. The only bright figure in this row of villains is the character of Tom in Gitaa's first novel. Occupying the high post of the mayor of Mombasa, Tom is the person of upright morals, he dearly loves his European wife and mixed-race daughter, helps Lavina up to the level of giving her shelter in their home, and sides with her sweetheart Giorgio in joint effort to improve the life of the local community.

Male boss figures in other novels look as if they were made using the same gauge – they are lustful, cruel, mean and sometimes stupid tyrants. The episodes featuring these characters in the novels look almost similar – they are treating their female subordinates nearly as slaves, demanding favours (primarily sexual) for any "good office" on their part or even without it. Kemu from *Shifting Sands* had several male bosses in her life, of different origins – both Africans and expatriates – but with almost identical behaviour.

The first one, Mr. Kamwanthe, a senior bank manager, lured her to a post of the office assistant, which soon started to mean personal services. "The following day he asked me to serve him. Then he was at it again the next day, and the next. 'I like it when you serve me. It is an African thing for a lady to do. That is the problem with you ladies of this generation' (98). Soon he declares his feelings to her: "I asked him, 'Do you need anything more, sir?' 'Just you, Kemu. I fell in love with you the minute I saw you.' It became a refrain, like a scratched CD. I could not avoid or escape that" (99). He starts to follow her home, knowing that this involves no penalty ("I had tried talking to the ladies who had gone through such experiences. I found out that most succumbed to the pressure or quit their jobs [...] My take on the whole issue is that in Kenya, sexual harassment is not recognized explicitly" – 106-7). It all ended up in open sexual assault: "The next minute he grabbed me by the waist and turned me around. I struggled but only burned my hand on the electric hotplate which I had earlier switched on, as he was trying to kiss me forcefully. In the process, we knocked over one of the china cups from the shelf, and it crashed on the table in smithereens [...] A piece of broken china cut into my arm, and the blood gushed out. I kicked at his shins and kneed him in the groin. He let go and crashed headlong into the door. Patrick, the junior officer, came to check, as the door crashed open.

When he saw Mr.Kamwanthe picking himself from the pieces of china on the floor, Patrick pretended to come for a glass of water. I walked past both of them and told Rupti that I had hurt myself and was going to the hospital" (107). Some time later, Kemuntho resigned.

Two other bosses of Kemu were not much different from Mr.Kamwanthe. "[Should I tell] How we had gotten a worse 'expat' security manager, who would not increase my salary after I refused to go out with him, [...] and then tried to force himself on me sexually? Should I tell how I had to put my foot out, jamming the door and screaming for the security personnel? How he then started to hate me and refused to give me my increment, [...] and stated deducting money from my salary every month, claiming my computer entries showed shortage of money? The same trick he had used to land me in police custody. [...] Or how I walked out of a new job after the first two months because the married boss started talking of trips and that I was supposed to accompany him? How I kept breaking into tears by the end of a temporary job with no other in sight?" (159).

Kemu's last male superior, an expatriate of Swedish origin, was only "larger in scale" in terms of his crimes and riches – but demonstrated the same staggish behaviour. "I was openly being asked to cook up figures that would convince external auditors that my boss' firm was clean. [...] Whenever I refused to cook figures, others would do the boss' bidding" (300). "From asking me to cook figures, my boss degenerated into a worse pastime of pestering me to become his woman" (305). Making a sexual advance at her in his home – where he lured her on the pretext of "helping in inventarisation" – was the last drop. "I stared at him and replied as always. "And I have told you time and again that I do not want you," infuriating him further" (307). "Once back in the office he fired me [...] In his office on that last day, he looked at me and said that he would give me a hard tine with labour officials if I dare take him to court and charge with wrongful dismissal. [...] He said that he was about to become a citizen and that I had dare not ruin that chance for him. He told me that my intelligence would not get me anywhere in Kenya, and ordered me to leave the premises [...] He gave me my summary dismissal letter. Barely two hours later, he went to the bank to withdraw his millions. He usually kept the money in a safe in his office to use as bribes on the police and government officials seeking handouts. As usual, he went to the golf club with his briefcase in the trunk of his four-wheel gazzler. Gangsters struck at the club brandishing guns. They only targeted him and took his keys from him, and drove off with his car, his briefcase of money and his original documents. [...] It looked like God's hand at play. Earlier he had fired me, did not pay me my dues, but lost much more in the robbery. He later said that he had never been robbed in the

twenty years that he had been in Kenya and that it was like God telling him that he had been unfair to me. He called me and asked me to go back to work for him, but I refused. What a pervert" (309-10). Kemu becomes even more assured of divine intervention when some years later she learns about his bankruptcy and untimely death. "Some people say it was a cocaine overdose, others – a heart attack, and even AIDS" (311).

Poor young casino teller Hila, the main character of the eponymous novel, faced the same fate. "Her long promised, long-overdue increment has been delayed for months. When she went to talk to her immediate boss about it, all she got was lewd sexual advances and threats. One morning he had called her to his office to collect the day's float and had tried to come on to her, even going as far as touching her breasts. She had put her foot in the doorway, jamming it and screaming for security personnel. She knew there was no point in reporting it as an attempted rape case. Everyone knew what happened in the courts. The victim became the accused. Of course her boss started to hate her from that day. She never got the increment. Newer employees were promoted over her, all of whom, of course, were female [...] Hila realised that unless she gives in to his demands, there would be no increment, no promotion, nothing. All because she tried to stand for herself. [...] She was being frustrated by her boss because she wanted to follow an honest path" (5-6).

Ethnic intolerance in various aspects

Ethnic and racial intolerance in various spheres and on various levels are dealt with in every novel by Gitaa, starting with her debut one. In fact, the very plot of *Crucible for Silver and Furnace for Gold* revolves around the love relationship between an African woman and European man – the relationship which, already complicated by Lavina's illness (which fortunately is cured in the end), was further aggravated by the resistance of the lovers' relatives. Lavina's father already, as was mentioned above, ostracized her from the family because of her previous love affair with an Indian businessman Rawal; it is worth noticing that Rawal, on his part, declines Lavina's marriage proposal on the pretext that his Asian family will never agree with him marrying an African. In the case of Giorgio, he suspects that his Italian relatives would also not be fascinated with his prospective marriage to a Kenyan girl. "He thought of his mother back in Italy. What would she think if she knew that he was contemplating marrying a foreigner? For that matter an African? A Kenyan? He mentally pictured his old *madre*'s face as she ticked on her fingers asking in rapid Italian, 'My good child! Is she of good breeding?

Good behaviour? Good Christian? Good character? Good citizen? Good disposition? Good influence on you?" (34). His suspicions turn out to be not too rootless – in one of the most passionate episodes in the novel, when Giorgio and Lavina are trying to sort out their relationship, he reminds her of the difficulties that he had with his home-folk. "My family back in Italy are still in shock, they still don't believe that I've finally made up my mind to marry and settle down here… they call me a *lunatico*, that the tropical winds of this *paradiso* have gone to my head [...] and that I'll soon get over it. They thought that I would marry Gabriella, [...] but I've disappointed them. Are you still question my love…?" (215). Quite fortunately, in the end the case is settled happily – which can hardly be said about the heroines of other Gitaa's novels, whose lives are deeply influenced, and sometimes ruined, by ethnic and racial conflicts.

The heroines of *Shifting Sands* were faced with ethnic strife from the early childhood, even within the families. One of the reasons why Myra's parents are constantly fighting is that "Her parents were from different ethnic communities, Her mama was a Kikuyu and very hardworking despite her [Meru] husband's lack of support" (34).

Shilpa, the Indian-origin member of the quartet, is the one to suffer from racial intolerance most bitterly. At a party she meets a young naval officer Victor, a Kenyan of African origin. The young people fall in love, and decide to get married. However, Shilpa's parents harshly oppose her choice. Her father "was so shocked that he even forbade her to see Victor. He told Shilpa that she, being their only child, had disappointed him and had dishonoured her family by dating Victor. Shilpa, in turn, told her papaji that his attitude towards Vic was a kind of xenophobia dishonouring mankind! She asked him why he was applying double standards in judging Vic, yet they had taught her that a passage in the Bhagavad Gita instructs them to know the people around them? [...] The majority of customers in their fabric and spices shop in the Old town were black Africans. She could not understand their hypocrisy " (199). Characteristic are the comments given by the members of the local Indian community: "Her other Indian friends gave her mother the 'we told you so' look, which said albeit silently, 'look what her African and Arab girlfriends have gotten her into!" (200).

When Victor, with the last desperate hope to save the situation, comes to Shilpa's home to talk with her parents, the things get even worse. "One day we went to pick her up at her home, and Victor decided to accompany us in order to try and break the ice with her parents. Her mamaji [...] had screamed at Victor to get out and not to shame her daughter [...] Shilpa's papaji had

shouted that his daughter will marry an African man over his dead body. He had screamed that he did not want chotara grandchildren, [...] and asked him not to ever come to their house again, because his presence was certainly not welcome. He instructed the watchman never to open the gate for him [...] I think it was the first time Shilpa encountered racial perceptions and racial prejudice as a reality and not a myth" (200). In the end, her architecture course is cut short, and she is sent to her relatives in Mumbai, where her aunt would arrange for her the marriage "to a nice Indian guy with no stains, whose generation they will investigate to their second generation" (215). The chapter ends with Shilpa's letter, which she sends to her friends from India, full of bitter comments and lamentations: "Between me and you, I could not care less what colour, creed, caste or race my husband comes from so long as I am in love… For Victor and me, tradition cut away the frayed hope of a hopeless love that tied us together" (215-17).

Elizabeth Mukutu in her dissertation notes that in Gitaa's novels the characters (at least try to – AR) "establish these cross ethnic/racial relationships based on mutual consent, romance and intimacy. They consciously seek friendship with people from different communities rather than those from their own community." However, her study also "suggests that these relationships still have problems because politics, gender relationships, cultural stereotypes and sociological boundaries arising from historical forces indirectly influence the perception about these relationships". Nevertheless, Mukutu concludes that "despite these problems contemporary postcolonial Kenya is moving towards becoming more tolerant and accommodating to people who are regarded as different" (i). We tend to concur with the researcher – although the above described problems are really difficult to uproot, but the tendency towards the tolerance is nevertheless obvious.

HIV/AIDS

This problem can definitely not be defined as "specifically female", for it is gnawing the entire Kenyan society (and, in fact, it is one of the burning issues in contemporary world). However, Gitaa's novels demonstrate the societal attitude to the females with regard to the disease – and it can be seen that women are usually given a negative role, sometimes as "initiators" or "spreaders", and almost inevitably are treated as "disposable material". Lavina in *Crucible for Silver and Furnace for Gold* contracts HIV as a result of her love affair with Rawal. She finds it out incidentally, for at the hospital where she works the personnel is subjected to regular mandatory tests. "From then on, every aspect of my life took a downhill turn, and I decided to

confront Rawal at his office. When I informed him that he had infected me with the virus, his coolly impolite and impersonal countenance proved that my accusation was justified. He neither accepted nor denied my allegations. He ordered me out of his office and told the security officers that I should never be allowed to step into the premises again. I was reeling with shock, but I knew hat there was nothing I could do. I would have said that I was going to sue him at the court, but still I would need proof" (198).

Kemu in *Shifting Sands* tells an even more terrifying story about a man who were pressing sexual favours from women, being aware of his positive HIV status – if he is going to die, at least he would take his pleasure, and women's life does not matter. " I remember how a neighbour friend had lost her receptionist job. […] One evening she came to my place and told me that she had gotten a job offer as a telephonist, but she was not very comfortable with it, since the salary […] was almost double a regular rate! So she told me to go check out the prospective employer and ask for a job and then […] give her feedback.

The following morning I went to the bureau. On the wall there was a sticker that proclaimed "no job without sex". I thought it was a sick joke. I found that Indian gentleman. He looked sick, he had sores all over the face. I enquired about the telephonist vacancy, he interviewed me and offered me a job. […] Then he said I would have to work odd hours. His next comment started the warning bells ringing in my head. "I don't want to hear about children. You said you stay alone but with your child, how then will I get other favours?" […] I did not even answer him. I picked up my papers hurriedly and tumbled out of the bureau. […] Later, I linked up with my friend. She shocked me saying, "So she tried that on you too? I just wanted a confirmation". […]

After a month my neighbour moved out and we lost contact, meeting two years later in the streets of Mombasa. […] I could barely recognize her, because she had lost so much weight […] She did not have a job again […] She was coughing terribly, but would insist she was not sick. […] All I said was, "Oh, my God! After we parted ways, did you go and work at that Indian's telephone bureau?" She looked at me with tears in her eyes and nodded barely noticeably. That was the last time I saw her" (161-3).

In the same novel, another case of the same disaster befalls Myra, one of the primary characters. An educated and prosperous woman, she meets a rich German businessman, they become a married couple, he seems to love Myra as much as buying a personal island for her – until one day she discovers that she is HIV-positive, and the only source pf the contamination could be

her dear husband. Symbolically, Myra perishes of AIDS – but her husband, who is allegedly only the bearer of the virus, attends her funeral in a good health condition. We believe that this also confirms our above statement – women, no matter how educated and refined, are still treated as disposable material by the males, to whom female lives do not matter.

Drug trafficking and addiction

This, again, is a burning problem not only for Kenyan women, and not only for Kenya. However, as it is known, and emphasized by the author in an interview, the coastal region of the country is especially known for drug abuse and trafficking. It would be difficult to say that drug-related problems have different effects on men and women – they are equally destructive for everyone. All Gitaa's novels touch upon this issue in this or that way, but in two of them she gives picturesque examples how drugs ruined the lives of women characters – moreover, the characters coming from very different, in fact opposite, social backgrounds.

As mentioned above, drug-related problems are the main focus in *Shark Attack*, where the author traces their ruinous effects on the lives of the three Mombasa youths. However, of the three it is the girl Kadzo who suffers most – during their escape from the boat of their drug boss, known as Big Man, she is attacked by a shark and loses her leg. Later in the hospital she confesses to the police inspector: " Despite the fact that being a top girl in my class guarantees me a bursary from our community, that does not provide pocket money or sanitary pads for me. So isn't Big Man's quick and easy money better than spending a whole Saturday with Baba from dawn to dusk, trying to fish, which rarely brings success?" (38). Kadzo's case, though, is a happy one – Kadzo, her brother Kenga and Inspector Korir join forces against the drug cartel, Kadzo is awarded the Head of State Commendation, and has a chance to read her essay on effects of drugs entitled "The Kenya I do not want to live in".

A somewhat opposite example is given by Myra, one of the four primary characters in *Shifting Sands*. According to Kemu, the narrator, "because she loved the sea so much, she wanted to be a marine biologist […] She believed the profession was one of the best paying and would get her in the world of the elite" (35). Following her dream, Myra indeed managed to complete her marine biology course, and when after a period of parting Kemu meets her on a Mombasa street, the fact that she successfully made her way to the world of the elite leaves no doubt – Myra drives a luxurious car and throws for their lunch at a restaurant an amount equal to Kemu's salary. As it turns out, Myra obtained her prosperity not in the scientific field, but as a

member of a drug trafficking syndicate, which she offers Kemu to join. Appalled, Kemu asks: "Myra, do you ever stop to think of what these drugs have done to the Kenyan youth?" To which Myra replies cynically: "Listen to you, Kemu! Will you please stop being silly? Stop focusing on other people and start thinking about yourself and your child for a change […] You better think twice, and please do not start on me with that guilt-trip staff! If you continue behaving this way, you'll remain poor in Kenya for the rest of your life" (288-9). Kemu resolutely refuses, and with the last desperate thought – "Who was this stranger in my friend's body?" – leaves her, only to meet her again during the last months of Myra's life, and nurse her way to the deathbed and beyond.

The above stories of the two characters, given in two novels of Gitaa, lift only slightly the veil over the complicated issue of drug-related problems in the country. On the one hand, millions of youth of poor backgrounds, like Kadzo and her brother, are brought into the drug industry by raving poverty and their youthful unstable and inexperienced minds. On the other – educated people, like Myra, are seeking for quick riches and a luxurious life, consciously disregarding the harm that they inflict on their people. The result largely is one – they are used by their drug bosses, and face an ignominious end – unless, as in Kadzo's case, they listen to the voice of reason. That seems to be the message that Gitaa tries to put into her reader's minds.

Conclusion

Wanjiku Kabira, a prominent Kenyan female scholar and writer, in her foreword to *Shifting Sands* wrote: "Gitaa walks on the path of all those women writers who are redefining the women's space, naming the world for themselves and their societies" [1: xvi]. Gitaa is really trying to redefine the existing social relationship and the place of women in the society, by painting the picture of the trials and tribulations that most of the Kenyan women have to face, and by sharing with the reader her own views how these problems could potentially – or even actually – be solved, and provoking the readers towards their own contemplations of these problems. It should be pointed out especially, that Gitaa's works are notable not only as an example of social criticism in literature, but also as inspirational texts for young readers, since the problems they tackle are typical of the lives of many young Kenyan females. By dealing with these problems, and showing certain solutions, Gitaa is telling her readers – and especially young females - that an independent, self-reliant and equal status of women is also achievable against all odds, although the obstacles on that path are many, from obsolete cultural practices

to modernity-generated ills. The works of this type, which are currently forming a tangible trend in Kenyan women's literature – suffice it to recall the novels of Florence Mbaya, shorter texts by Renatta Chepkoskei, Florence Kirianki, Diana Gitau, Kingwa Kamencu, Pasomi Mucha, Carol Kairo and other authors – are readily accepted by the young readers (some of them are used by schools as set books), and, quoting the words of Kemu from *Shifting Sands*, will surely "contribute to the betterment of our country".

Works Cited

Gitaa, Moraa. *Crucible for Silver and Furnace for Gold.* Oakville: Nsemia Publishers, 2008

Gitaa, Moraa. *Shifting Sands.* Oakville: Nsemia Publishers, 2012

Gitaa, Moraa. *Hila.* Nairobi: Storymoja, 2014

Gitaa, Moraa. *Shark Attack.* Nairobi: Moran Publishers, 2017

Muindu, Japheth Peter. "Liminality and regeneration in Wahome Mutahi's *The House of Doom*, Francis Imbuga's *Miracle of Remera* and Moraa Gitaa's *The Crucible for Silver and Furnace for Gold*". - European Journal of English Language and Literature Studies Vol.4, No.4, pp.39-45, June 2016

Mukutu, Elizabeth Jumba. *A Critique of Friendship Across Race and Tribe in two Kenyan Novels*. MA thesis, University of Nairobi, 2010

Oneya, Faith. "Gitaa: I wrote my best-selling book while stuck in city traffic". Daily Nation, 9/7/2016

DEPICTION OF THE YOUNGER GENERATION IN KENYAN SWAHILI WOMEN'S PROSE IN THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY

Mikhail Gromov
United States International University – Africa

Abstract

The article analyzes how the problems of Kenyan younger generation are depicted in the recently emerged women's literature in Swahili, giving an overview of both larger prosaic genres, such as novel, and shorter prose, which is currently favored by the majority of Kenyan women authors of Swahili expression. Using the works of both well-established and aspiring writers, the article shows how they outline the host of problems facing the young Kenyans – such as the abuse of the girl child's rights, drug addiction, adolescent crime, etc. – thus sensitizing their readers, especially younger ones, to these social ills, and proposing certain ways to mitigate them.

Keywords*: Kenyan literature, Swahili literature, women's literature, younger generation*

This article, as reflected in its title, deals with a rather special stratum of contemporary Kenyan writing – women's literature in Swahili. This literature is notable for several reasons. First, it emerged as a trend only in this century – in the previous decades, Kenyan Swahili writing featured only two women authors, playwrights Ari Katini Mwachofi and Sarah Mwangudza (each wrote one play). Second, while the current century has presented a larger number of women writers of Swahili expression, most of these authors demonstrate the preference for smaller prosaic forms, such as the short story and the novella. Novel writing in Kenyan women's literature in Swahili is currently represented by only a few texts, namely *Tumaini* (2006) and *Nakuruto* (2009) by Clara Momanyi, *Dago wa Munje* (2008) by Sheila Ryanga, and *Chozi la heri* (2014) by Assumpta Matei. Three of these novels (with the exception of *Nakuruto,* which is a historical-allegorical novel) deal to a varied extent with problems of the younger generation; this theme is also one of the main preferences in Swahili short stories by

women writers. Thus, the depiction of these problems in the works of female Swahili-medium authors from Kenya was chosen as the topic for this paper.

The most remarkable text among the ones listed above is *Tumaini* (Hope, 2006) by Clara Momanyi. The novel is set in the coastal area of Kenya and centers on a young girl, Tumaini. "Her father, Mzee Masumbuko, wants her married off while still at primary school rather than seeing her continue with her education; her mother, Bi. Amina, seems resigned to the patriarchal ethos symbolized by her irrational and selfish husband. Tumaini, however, does not want to give in to her father's wishes. She runs away from home to her aunt's place. Her aunt, Bi. Halima has devoted her life to agitating for change and to liberating young girls from the shackles of tradition and demeaning rites like female circumcision. This puts her on a collision course with Masumbuko, who is prepared to do anything to satisfy his egoistic desires. Bi Halima and her husband are however determined to support young Tumaini in her education. Tumaini excels in her primary exams and wins a government scholarship, despite attempts by her father and the vengeful local Chief Andrea, who sides with her father, to deny her the award. Chief Andrea's wish for revenge stems from the time when Tumaini, briefly employed by him as a house-help, rejected his lecherous advances; and also, during the same period, the Chief's son, Majuto, a miscreant and a delinquent, attempted to rape Tumaini. His father initially succeeds in saving him from arrest, but Majuto is eventually imprisoned. Chief Andrea has been entrusted with the task of compiling a list of needy children in his area, which he tries to manipulate, maliciously eradicating Tumaini's name. However, Tumaini courageously confronts the vetting board headed by the District Commissioner, who overturns Chief Andrea's short list. The story ends with Tumaini going to university to pursue a medical degree, and realize her dream, allegorically captured by her name" (Bertoncini et al. 2009:460).

As could be seen even from this brief narration of the plot, the central theme of the novel is empowerment, especially that of the girl child. Two central characters – Tumaini and her aunt Halima – stand as two equally powerful embodiments of the feministic ideas of the book. They in fact epithomise two generations of feminists, and thus, despite their difference in age and life experience, hold very similar views on the issues related to the rearing and the future of a girl child, and women's choices and perspectives. This is how Bi Halima formulates her vision of Tumaini's life:

> Mama mdogo wake alimshika kwa bega na kumwambia, "Nafahamu una wasiwasi mwingi kuhusu hatua atakayochukua babako. Nataka kukujulisha kuwa hapa ni kwenu pia. Utaishi na kusoma ukiwa hapa. Hutalazimishwa kutahiriwa wala kuolewa ukiwa hapa. Mimi na babako mdogo tuliyazingumza haya hapo awali. Tuliafikiana kuwa endapo babako atakufukuza nyumbani kutokana na msimamo wako, utakaa hapa nasi. Tutakusomesha kama tulivyomsomesha binti yetu Riziki, na hutapungukiwa na chochote hapa. Mimi mamako mdogo nakuhakikishia haya, kwa hivyo usihofu vitisho vya babako (30).
>
> "Her aunt held her by the shoulder and told her, "I know you have a lot of worries about the steps that your father took. I would like to inform you that here is your place as well. You will study while you are here. You will not be forced to get circumcised or married while you are here. Me and your uncle have already discussed this before. We agreed that if your father expels you from home because of your stand, you will stay here with us. We will educate you, as we are educating our daughter Riziki, and you will not be denied anything here. I, your aunt, am assuring you of this, so do not fear threats of your father" (*all translations from Swahili are mine – MG*).

The views of Bi Halima, who at one point was even the member of the delegation of Kenyan women to the International Women's Congress in Beijing, all throughout the novel are echoed by her niece Tumaini. As an example, Tumaini tries to inspire her female classmates:

> Tumaini aliwatazama wenziwe na bila kuwaficha, alitamka, "Mwajua babangu mdogo aliniambia kuwa wanafunzi wa kike kama kawaida hawapendi masomo ya sayansi. Lakini akaniambia pia kuwa sio ati hawawezi kufaulu, bali wanaamini tu kamba hawatafaulu kabisa. Hivi ndivyo nyinyi sasa mnavyodhania. Mkiamini kuwa masomo haya ni ya wavulana peke yao, ndivyo itakavyokuwa. Lakini mkiamini kwa dhati kuwa sayansi siyo masomo yaliyotengwa wavulana pekee, bila shaka mtafaulu. Hivi nivyo ninavyoamini (24).
>
> "Tumaini looked at her friends and without concealing, told them: "You know my uncle told me that female students usually do not like lessons of science. But he also told me that it is not as if they can not succeed, only they believe that they will not succeed no matter what. This is exactly what you think. If you believe that these lessons are for boys only, it will be so. But if you believe sincerely that sciences are not reserved only for boys, no doubt you will succeed. That is what I believe in" (24).

As also could be seen from the passage above, the male characters of the novel are supported in their feministic stand by their male counterparts – Halima by her husband, Tumaini's uncle

Shabani, and Tumaini herself by her classmate Sifa. However, when Sifa after their school graduation comes to woo Tumaini, she also straightforwardly declares her views on marriage:

> *No,* Sifa, *I am sorry*. Tuzidi kuwa marafiki kama kawaida, lakini kwangu mimi ndoa si mwisho wa kila kitu. […] Mimi nataka muda zaidi ili nijijue mimi ni nani, na uwezo wangu maishani ni upi. Sipendi kuwategemea watu wengine waniamulie hatima zangu. *I want to shape my own destiny* (136).

> "No, Sifa, I am sorry. Let us remain friends as usual, but for me marriage is not the end of everything. […] I want more time so as I know who I am, and what my ability in life is. I do not like other people to make conclusions for me. I want to shape my own destiny."

In the novel's last chapter, Tumaini has a dream, in which she is climbing a big mountain, on whose top there is a forest full of trees with fruits. There are two groups of people at the mountain's bottom, one group encourages her, the other curses her. In the end, she makes it to the top.

In a rather similar way, the problems of the Kenyan youth – especially young girls – are depicted in the debut novel by Sheila Ryanga, titled *Dago wa Munje* (2008). The novel is centred on the story of a male character, a school boy Dago from the small village of Munje in the coastal Kenya, who in the course of the book grows from a lazy and scatter-brained boy into a person of courage and concentration. However, a prominent place in the novel is taken by the characters of his sisters - Nchimoni and Swafiya.

Nchimoni is the family's role-model – she joined the school one year late, and generally it was a lucky chance for her, for in their community the education of a girl child was traditionally considered useless, but the parents took heed of her thirst to study. Nchimoni, an exemplary student and a girl of high moral standards, after getting the best results at the final exams got a place at the secondary school – but because of parents being unable to pay the fees, she joined the courses of nursery school teachers, paid by the county government, and became a teacher at a nursery school in Mombasa; she supports her family and the education of her junior siblings.

Nchimoni's junior sister Swafiya, a quiet, focused and hardworking girl, had nevertheless become a family's headache – she got expelled from school because of pregnancy. However, her parents do not see it as an impediment – after delivery they are determined to send her back

to school. All the successes and hopes that permeate the lives of the children in Dago's family became possible because of the firm stand of their mother, which she vocalises in relation to her second daughter's pregnancy:

> Kama Swafiya hakukata tamaa ya kusoma na kumaliza shule, hata mimi sitakata tamaa kwamba siku moja msichana huyu ataiinua familia yetu. Dadake pia atamsaidia kupata nafasi ya kuendelea na kozi mbalimbali. [...] Ni nani aliyesema wasichana si watoto? Anayemzaa mvulana ndiye anayemzaa msichana." Alijiruhusu kudadisi mila za jamii zinazopitisha mbele thamani ya watoto wavulana. […] "Lau kama mwanangu wa kiume angejibidisha kama dada zake. Mafanikio yetu yangekuwa makubwa si haba! (112-13).
>
> "If Swafiya did not give up the idea of studying and finishing school, even I will not give up [the hope] that one day this girl will evolve our family. Her sister also will assist her to get a chance to go on with different courses. [...] Who said that girls are not children? Who gives birth to a boy is the same one who gives birth to a girl." She even allowed herself to question society's traditions which valued the male children more. [...] "If only my son were as diligent as his sisters. Our achievements would be great!"

It is also notable that in her efforts she is fully supported by her husband, a petty labourer, who also encourages his children to put more effort in their studies, in order to improve their lives, their family and their community.

It could rather easily be noticed, that in these books the authors paint an ideal picture of an ideal behaviour of the characters in the described situations – how the problems addressed should by treated from the humanistic viewpoint, thus giving an example of such an ideal behaviour to the readers. However, in real life people more frequently behave in a different way. A realistic and critical picture of such behaviour is given in the third novel that I would like to mention – *Chozi la Heri* (Teardrop of luck, 2014) by Assumpta Matei. This novel, set in an unnamed African country, which is suffering from the aftermath of a civil war, depicts the various situations in a more realistic manner. In this book, for example, a schoolgirl Zohala after getting pregnant in Form Two is expelled from school and thrown out of her family's house by her parents, and becomes a street kid, roaming the streets of the capital city and sniffing glue for self-comfort. Likewise, a househelp Sauna, after the death of her employer, a single father who was raising three kids, steals the orphaned children and sells them to drug traffickers. However, even in such dehumanizing situations the author gives her characters – and the readers – some hope: Zohala is saved by charitable nuns, and even sent to school, and

the stolen twins manage to set themselves free from the claws of the drug lord and establish their own successful trading business.

It appears that in the novels discussed above the authors pursue two main aims – to inform the readers about the problems described and to provide them with guidelines about dealing with these problems. It may also be assumed that Swahili literature has a very high potential in fulfilling those tasks, since it is used very widely in the Kenyan educational system. All the novels discussed in this paper were in different periods used as set books in Kenyan schools – to my knowledge, *Tumaini* and *Chozi la heri* are still in the school curriculum. Thus, the younger generation of Kenyans is being explicitly informed about those issues that their age mates and even their own future descendants may face – and are given comprehensive guidance on solving those issues.

A more diverse picture is painted in short stories. It must be noted, that of the three authors mentioned above, only Clara Momanyi maintains equal prominence as the short story writer – she has written about a dozen stories, published in several collections. Other outstanding authors in this field are Rayya Timammy, Rebecca Nandwa and Pauline Kea Kyovi; however, the list of Kenyan female short story writers of Swahili expression includes more than twenty names of other authors, who so far published one or two pieces. The stories by various authors, mentioned below, are taken from seventeen collections published in the period from 2004 to 2017. In their stories, Kenyan female writers of Swahili expression have undertaken the same main task – to sensitize their readers (presumably female and young, since many of these collections and texts are used in the school curriculum) to the problems and challenges bedeviling Kenyan youth, forming at the same time a modern social mentality with the younger generation of Kenyans.

An illustrative example can be found in the theme of school pregnancy, which remains one of the topical gender-related issues in present-day Kenyan society, and therefore is frequently treated in the works of Kenyan women writers. Highlighting different scenarios, the authors appear to share one common stand: the solution to the problem is not the stigmatization, but understanding and tolerance. Pregnant schoolgirls, more frequently than not, should be regarded not as the abusers of social morality, but rather as victims of the existent social order.

The negative consequences of social stigmatization of a pregnant schoolchild are vividly shown in a short story *Hadaa ya Mapenzi* (Trouble of love, 2015) by Brigid Simiyu. The heroine, a schoolgirl named Natasha, is impregnated by her boyfriend, a carefree and lustful university student named Sidi. Since Natasha's school has strict rules about pregnancy, after being disclosed Natasha gets expelled. She runs to Sidi, and, contrary to a typical scenario, the young people marry. But even marriage does not offer a solution – soon after the birth of the child, a boy named Levi, Sidi starts drinking heavily, frequently disappears from home, drops out of the university, and when his wife reproaches him, he beats her. She, nevertheless, has to put up, for "since she already dropped her education, she had to turn her heart to all the hardships of marriage" (131). However, one day she is brought to the end of her tether and explains to her husband that she can bear it no more; infuriated Sidi chases her with a panga. This in fact is the story's finale – hiding in the bush not far from her house, Natasha bemoans her ruined past and her nondescript future. Marriage based on an unwanted pregnancy brings no solutions – this is the idea that the author seems to be putting across. Even after the wedding, Sidi does not give up his character of an irresponsible womanizer and drunkard ("a male is always right"); Natasha, on her part, has no alternative in life. Had she been allowed to continue with her education – most likely, her life's journey would have taken a different turn.

An opposite approach, illustrating the advantages of tolerance and understanding, is shown in she short story *Jinamizi ya Maisha* (Nightmare of life, 2007) by Catherine Ndungo. Katini, a girl from a poor family, due to her diligence and determination receives a scholarship to a prestigious high school, which, among other things, is very liberal about the boy-girl friendship. "As we arrived at school, we were told that the male students of the school close to us were our brothers. We were asked to cooperate with them in every way" (49). Katini is befriended by Wekesa, "a dream of all the girls around" (in fact, a teenage version of Sidi from the previously discussed story). Her fascination with Wekesa soon leads to pregnancy, which Wekesa claims no responsibility for. Fortunately, their "friendship" had been closely watched by Bi Rehema, the head teacher of Katini's school, who, suspecting the result, invites the girl to her house and offers her the solution – Katini will return home, after delivery leave the baby in the custody of her mother, and return to school to complete the course. What is said is done, after the birth of a girl child Katini studies with double diligence, gets a scholarship to the university, becomes a doctor at their county hospital and one day meets her abuser Wekesa, who is pulling a *mkokoteni*.

The story features another remarkable subplot, which in fact closely resembles the previously mentioned story by Brigid Simiyu. When Katini comes home to report to her mother about her mistake, her mother's tears are those of grief – about her daughters pregnancy, but also of joy – about her chance to go back to school. It turns out that in her teens her mum also got pregnant, was expelled from school, her abuser was forced to marry her, but soon disappeared, "and since that day I was in torture for all my life" (54). By comparing in her story the two approaches, the author offers her readers to decide, which one is better – that of stigmatization or that of tolerance. Of course the authors stand the farthest possible from encouraging teenage pregnancies – contrary to this, by describing various scenarios of irresponsible behavior of their teenage characters (both male and female) the authors warn their readers from falling into the same trap (suffice it to recall the titles – the teenage pregnancy is called "trouble of love" and "nightmare of life"). But their stories also convey the message that this mistake, bad as it is, is yet not the end of life – provided that the society treats every case with lenience and empathy.

Generally, the theme of school-age sexual relationship is rather widely treated by the short story authors – and however different the cases could be, the negative consequences are inevitable. Rebecca Nandwa in *Ningali Hai* (I am still alive, 2015) laments about the lax attitude of some young schoolgirls to their chastity. A schoolgirl Melissa, being incited by her volage friend Nina (who persuades her – "part with your elder ones, their matters of analogue era do not fit into the modern digital age… this is our time" – 168), starts her sexual life at seventeen – only to find herself in a hospital ward, sick with AIDS, abandoned by most of her friends and condemned by most of her family.

Girl characters from other stories get similar blow in their lives for more serious reasons. Tabu in Violet Atieno's *Dawa ya Deni* (Medicine of debt, 2017) gets pregnant from her schoolteacher Fasiki – she co-habits with him for money and food, for her parents are abjectly poor. Stella from Betty Kiruja's *Mapenzi Chungu* (Bitter love, 2011) is adopted by her uncle's family after her father's death – and, mistreated by her aunt and harassed by her uncle, she finds shelter only in an IDP camp, where she poses herself for a refugee in order not to return to the uncle's home.

The situations, described in the mentioned stories, are hard to solve in real life – thus the authors, probably not willing to discourage their readers, fully utilize their "right to poetic justice", and salvage their characters through the miraculous interference. Melissa is nearly

cured through the effort of diligent and charitable doctor Rogo and her sympathetic friend Chausiku (to the surprise of her relatives, who have almost buried her). Tabu's father happens to be a friend of the local senator Zuri (an example of an ideal politician), who, hearing about Tabu's trouble, not only manages to put Fasiki into prison, but, mobilizing child-protection organizations, pushes local authorities into organizing the aid project for the poor families' children – Tabu returns to school, and her younger sister is given a scholarship. Stella is delivered from the IDP camp by a sudden coming of her long-lost brother, who, leading a delinquent life as a youth, after changing his ways became an official of an international aid organization, and his appearance on the camp in this capacity leaves Stella with "a lot of thanks to God – thanks and hope" (84).

Closely related to the above-outlined theme is that of underage prostitution, namely the seduction of the young girls into it. Clara Momanyi dedicates to this topic two of her stories (*Mtandao wa ufasiki* – Network of prostitution, and *Mtumbwi wa maskini* – Canoe of a poor), published in 2011 in two different collections, with an almost similar plot – young girls and women from impoverished urban areas (in the first story – two school graduates, who sell peanuts in the streets, in the second – a young single mother), lured by the envoys (in both stories – well-off and "respectable" women) under the pretext of "good employment" into brothels on the coast or even trafficked abroad. The author clearly indicates that the main reason of the girls' credulity is their flagrant poverty, which does not leave them many chances in life, stressing at the same time the positive role of state organs (the victims in both stories are rescued by the police), and the author's belief in human virtues (on their way to salvation the heroines of both stores are helped by "good Samaritans" – the taxi driver and the fishermen respectively). Notable also is the similarity between the stories' villain figures, with a difference in gender – in the first story, the international trafficking network is headed by a cunning woman nicknamed Mama Dola (mother of dollars), in the second – a male scoundrel known as Baba Fedha (father of money).

Drug addiction and trafficking, and their influence on a younger generation, is the theme recurrent in modern Kenyan writing, including women's literature (suffice it to recall the works of Moraa Gitaa). Depicting the heart-rending consequences of the destructive habit, the authors are trying at the same time to dig down to the reasons of this plague – and these, according to the writers, are to a high extent related to the personal circumstances of the characters, mostly the children from relatively well-off stock.

Zigu from Hannah Mwaliwa's story *Peremende* (Sweets, 2007) is driven by his home-related complexes – his mother died, and father brought a new wife, who neglects Zigu – and thus Zigu decides to "pay revenge" on his classmates from more stable families. He lures two girls from his class, Migo and Resa, into tasting "very delicious sweets" stuffed with drugs (the author does not indicate where he gets the substance from), and then tries to pull the girls' unconscious bodies into the nearby bush – at which moment Resa's mother, worried by her daughter's long absence, discovers him with the help of the local chief; Zigu faces the court and gets five years of imprisonment. The message of the story is summarized in its last phrase: "Zigu's punishment was a big lesson for the youngsters who involve themselves in drugs" (106).

A similar situation, but with an even more tragic outcome, is shown by Rebecca Nandwa in *Balaa bin Belua* (Utmost calamity, 2011). Sudi, the son of a solvent single mother (who is a tailoress and a *mitumba* seller), still is depressed by his fatherless childhood; thus he starts finding consolation in chemicals, after trying (at the bidding of his mother and uncle) to receive a treatment gets threats from the drug dealers, and, fearing a torturous death at their hands, commits suicide.

Rayya Timammy in *Kuwa Mume* (To be a man, 2011) presents a much happier ending – a well-to-do family child Hemedi starts taking drugs due to peer pressure, trying to show to his schoolmates that he is willing "to be a man". The ruinous addiction demands money – and after stealing his mother's necklace Hemedi realizes, that this is the end of the road; he contemplates suicide, but then decides that "to be a man" means sharing his troubles with his loved ones.

Pauline Kyovi in *Njugu Karanga* (Peanuts, 2011) makes an attempt to paint a portrait of a drug dealer – who also turns out to be a victim of sorts. Roda, after losing her husband in a "tribal war caused by political differences" (2), was at a young age left with three children (the last one resulting from a rape) and with no source of income. In total desperation, she tries different trades – from fruits and food to illicit brew – but this does not lift her from poverty, until certain people, nicknamed "the Swahili from Pemba", persuade her to sell what they call "njugu spesheli" – peanuts stuffed with drugs – to the students of local schools (which leads to several cases of suicide and insanity among these youngsters). The trade goes lively, the living standards of Roda and her children are swiftly rising, but the inevitable end comes – out of an accident she is apprehended by the police and goes to prison.

In their treatment of this lamentably recurrent topic, the authors are trying to attract the attention of the readers to the factors that contribute to the spread of drugs both on the personal level (the problems in family relations, school environment), as well as on the level of major societal ills, such as poverty and ethnic conflicts.

Ethnic conflicts, mentioned above as one of the factors contributing to poverty and related social maladies, are also treated as a separate topic in women's short stories – for the younger people are usually among the first and foremost innocent victims of such conflicts. In their texts, the authors depict both the reasons of the conflicts – mostly caused by the rivaling politicians – and the consequences of these conflicts for those who become involved in them against their will. The lead is again taken by Clara Momanyi, who highlights this, again, lamentably topical issue in two of her stories. In *Kilinge cha Matata* (Vale of troubles, 2007) she delineates the plight of a young boy Mbaji, whose village was burned and parents (allegedly) killed during one of the ethnic incidents. Orphaned Mbaji reaches Nairobi, where he manages to escape from the modern slave traders, finds a short-lived shelter in the roadside kiosk (whose lady owner later accused him of theft, and he was nearly "necklaced" by the crowd), another one – in the home of a seemingly charitable man (who later turned him into a serf); afterwards Mbaji joins a *chokora* street gang in Parklands, that lives from theft and burglary. After long chain of other troubles, Mbaji finds his long-lost mother, who is blind and begging in the street; through the lucky interference of state bodies, she is compensated for her losses, Mbaji goes to school (the state has announced free primary education), and dreams of becoming a doctor and bring back her mother's eyesight. The story's moral lesson is formulated in the phrase "if we do not agree to bear our fellow's cross, there will be no peace in this world" (75).

In *Tafrani Kambini* (Hardships in the camp, 2012) Momanyi tells a story with a similar troubled beginning and similar happy ending. The main character, a schoolgirl Nangima, also survives the burning of her village and alleged death of her father and brother, after which she and her mum remain in an improvised IDP on the village ruins. Nangima is sustained through all the horrors of camp life – shortage of food, hunger, robbery, malversations of the local officials – by the need to help her mother and the orphaned girl, whom they adapted, and even more so – by her burning desire to continue her schooling (symbolically, fleeing from their burning home, of all her belongings she cares only of her school bag with books). She manages to organize other camp dwellers of her age, and during the visit of the division commissioner handles him their collective petition. The commissioner praises their initiative, the school equipment is

delivered to the camp on the next day, parallel to this the bodies of local self-rule are organized, and the crowning of Nangima's victory comes at the school opening festivity, when in the crowd of newcomers she recognizes her lost relatives. Again, the author sums up the story's lesson in a well-known saying "penye nia pana njia" – where there is a will, there is a way.

A much more tragic outcome of ethnic-based violence is shown by Sheila Ambuka in *Moyo Unalia* (Heart is crying, 2015). The campus of a provincial university is attacked by the terrorists, who claim that they are defending the local indigenous people of Wanyuni against the "newcomers" Wachenza. All the students of the "wrong origin" are mercilessly killed, among them the girl Zawadi, the sweetheart of the story's main character, the male student Bili. The terrorists are demolished by security forces, but after attending Zawadi's funeral in her native village Bili nearly loses his mind. The story apparently alludes to the recent attacks on universities in several African countries, such as Kenya and Nigeria, and this seems to be a reason why the author calls the terrorists and their victims by imaginary names, hinting that such horrible events may potentially occur in any country of the continent.

Forced marriage and female circumcision (also known as female genital mutilation - FGM) are, alas, not total anachronisms in the Kenyan society of the twenty-first century, but are rather customs practiced by certain communities, despite the serious governmental efforts to do away with them. Choosing these customs as topics for their works, the writers almost unanimously depict them as the topmost form of gender discrimination, showing the negative consequences not only for the victims (who are mostly subjected to these without their consent), but also to their family members.

An extremely tragic story is told by Doreen Otinga in *Maridhia Mama* (Amiable mother, 2015). The tribulations of Saida, the story's main character, start when her father forces his wife, Saida's mother, out of his house because of her claims that she wants to send their daughter to school. Afterwards, several other misfortunes befall Saida. She is forcibly circumcised and given to an old man, Mzee Iringa, as his sixth (!) wife; accompanied by her faithful friend Maria, Saida manages to escape to the "sanctuary for the circumcision and forced marriage victims, run by a European lady Mrs. Anderson" (39). The sanctuary is attacked by the "defenders of custom", Mrs. Anderson perishes, but the girls manage to escape again and find shelter in an UN-managed organization, which sends them abroad for studies. They pursue medicine, but their promising careers are ruined – the UN office is assaulted by local thugs, the

payment stops, and both girls, armed with sufficient professional education, decide to return home, where Saida learns about the tragic fate of her younger sister Ushindi, who was given by their father to Mzee Iringa as a compensation. Ushindi fled to another girls' sanctuary, the case was pursued by the law, father and mzee were imprisoned for one year, and after release Mzee Iringa stabbed Ushindi to death and then committed suicide. Father, old and miserable, is now left under the care of his remaining daughter Zelia – and, on Saida's return, he tearfully repents; "father was moved by my story. The beastly heart left him, and he became humane" (45), confesses Saida in the letter to her mother at the end of the story. After all this chain of miseries, in which so many people died, Saida's future is still uncertain – and her only vague hope again is the hand of her fellow woman, as she dreams that her mother's return may straighten things up. "Dear Mum, everyone is missing you, and there is nothing that can not be forgiven. I pray that you come back as soon as this letter reaches you" (45).

Other writers, who treat the same theme in their works, seem to be more merciful to their heroines. In Hannah Mwaliwa's story *Kutiwa Jando* (To get circumcised, 2010) the schoolgirl Masi is largely put into the same situation as Saida in the story above – she is to be circumcised, married to an old man and "give birth for as long as she is able" (82); like Saida, she escapes, finds temporary shelter in the girls' sanctuary (this time run by the local woman Bi Mshenga, "one of those who were lucky to escape the knife" – 88), then joins the government education program, finishes high school, makes it to the university and studies medicine; in the end of the story she, like Saida, returns home. However, the author prepares for Masi a happier lot compared to poor Saida – Masi wisely flees her father's house before circumcision rites (owing to the influence of her beloved schoolteacher Sofia, and her own fear that she will have to leave school), in her struggle to continue education she gets the support of the district commissioner, and later comes home only to visit her parents – she feels a certain guilt for having left them once. It is interesting to note that, contrary to however belatedly repentful father in the previous story, Masi's *baba* retains his aggressive demeanor – on seeing his lost daughter, he tries to hit her with his hunting spear, and after failing the attempt turns his rage on his wife, ousting her from the house. But for both Masi and her mother this is a lucky turn – they, as it could be guessed, now leave the house of the stubborn old man for good.

In Leah Muchemi's story *Noti ya Bahati* (The note of luck, 2011), a young mother and wife is kiced out of her husband's house at the demand of his relatives, who even tried to kill her – all because at an adolescent age she "rebelled against our customs" (124) by refusing to get

circumcised. However, after an array of trials the woman and her daughter are awarded – her husband is imprisoned for his deed, and one of the charity organizations, named Zinduko la Hawa – "The Rise of Eve", is trying to restore their rights.

Forced (or arranged) marriage at an early age, sounding as almost a "sister" custom to circumcision, is however treated differently by authors, which apparently depends to a considerable extent on their cultural orientations. Clara Momanyi in *Ngome ya nafsi* (Fortress of self, 2004) renders to her heroine Naseko almost the same lucky fate as met Masi in the previously discussed story – she escapes from the house of the old man, to whom she is betrothed, and hides in the sanctuary "for the girls who fled home because of torture", which is run, again, by a local lady Bi Tesi; the story's finale is a passionate speech by Bi Tesi about the benefits of girls' education. Education for female children is also an important theme in Rayya Timammy's story *Haki Yangu Naidai* (I demand my rights, 2011), and here it is also obviously counterposed with early marriage – but the writer gives the problem a different treatment. The heroine Rehema, a girl from a coastal community (it should also be noted that Timammy sets nearly all her stories on her native coast, which in itself comprises a valuable first-hand account of the local life), is eager to study, and has the best exam results in the entire province; however, her father, who does not believe in girls education, is determined to get his daughter married to an elderly neighbor. The solution comes in the figure of Mzee Omari, father of Rehema's school friend Mwanaisha, who manages to persuade loving, but stubborn father of Rehema not to deprive the intelligent girl of her chance; and "let her suitor, if he really loves her, wait until she finishes her studies" (39), concludes Mzee Omari to everyone's consent. Apparently, the more important marriage that the story is dealing with is the marriage between tradition and modernity, and the author gives an inspiring example of it. Reading her stories, one would notice that this constructive relationship between traditional and modern values is one of the author's lasting concerns.

Since the girls education has already been mentioned in the texts discussed above, it must surely be noted that it is one of the recurrent and important topics in the stories by Kenyan women writers – and, to end this brief surveys on a slightly more optimistic note, the authors who undertake this topic as the main one in their works, almost unanimously write in favor of female child schooling, and lead their heroines to a satisfying outcome. Clara Momanyi in *Harubu za Zuhura* (Zuhura's conflicts, 2015) shows that a child's success in education may cause even a mortal envy. Zuhura, like Rehema in the above-mentioned story, has passed the

exams with flying colors, and now is bound to the university. Her father's second wife Pili, whose daughter Riziki failed the exams, out of grudge tries to kill Zuhura – thrice, like in the tale about the jealous stepmother. Pili's schemes are disclosed, and she herself perishes of poison which she wanted to give Zuhura – thus the ending also fully complies to that of the tale; but the fact that the whole conflict is revolving around a very modern asset – namely girl's education – apparently gives an old story a new character.

The education of his daughter is also a stumbling block in the conflict between Sudi and his relatives and village-mates in Mary Mbii's story *Mafiga* (Hearth stones, 2015). Sudi's daughter, diligent and intelligent Kigwagu, also, like the heroines of the stories above, successfully passes the exams, and her father, supporting the girl's dream, is ready to send her to the university – which is harshly opposed by the elder Dhabina, who secretly dreams of taking her for his third wife, and especially her uncle, Sudi's brother Swalala, who is an adept of "good old customs". The conflict between Sudi and Swalala even results in manhandling – but in the end, against all odds, Kigwagu's and her father's dream comes to pass.

Success at the exams is crucial for the modern youngsters of both genders – which is confirmed in the story *Mtihani wa Maisha* (Examination of life, 2016) by Eunice Kimaliro. The school graduate Samueli failed the exams, and is now stabbed by the fear of his father's rage, but even more so – of shame before his girlfriend, an excellent pupil Nina, and especially before his two elder sisters, who are taking their higher education. Unable to think of anything better but suicide, Samueli tries to drown himself in the village swamp, only to be rescued and shamed by the villagers headed by his disconsolate father – his only son shamed his name. The support and consolation come, expectedly, from the boy's mum, who leads him home, on the way gently admonishing him that "even if you have failed the school exams, try now not to fail the exam of life" (140).

Passing some concluding remarks to the survey above, it may be stated that generally the Kenyan women writers of Swahili expression pursue the same aims as Kenyan and, on a wider scale, East African women's literature at large – as formulated by Lennox Odiemo-Munara: "These writers, through the women figures in the texts, subvert, actively resist, and engage with power/authority and, in the process, manage to re-evaluate the dominant zeitgeist, oppositionally establishing the East African woman as an active and speaking subject in the

ongoing re-imagining and re-writing of the East African post-colonies" (1). From the stories highlighted above it is obvious, that their authors are mainly concerned with problems of female youth – an it is quite natural, for, after all, I would concur with a popular definition of women's literature as the one "by women, about women and for women." The authors apparently target mainly a school audience, and not only female, for the ideas and orientations outlined in their stories contribute to the formation of new mentality in all the young members of modern Kenyan society. The authors are consistently trying to sensitize the readers about this society's social ills, showing them as serious, but curable, and also are presenting their visions of constructive social values. They praise mutual care and support, advocate positive role of social and government institutions, confirm the validity in the modern context of many old guidelines, such as those of family and religion, and, of course, affirm the benefits brought by modernity – such as education, equality of society members, free choice – and reveal the harmful nature of ruinous "innovations", such as drugs or commercial sex. The very fact that many of these texts, as mentioned, are school-oriented, considerably increases their social potential, and, as it was assumed above, substantially assists the formation of the new mindset in the younger generations – the builders of the country's future.

Works Cited

Ambuka, Sheila. "Moyo Unalia". *Safari ya ahadi na hadithi nyingine*. Ed. Jeff Mandila and Ben Mkota. Nairobi: One Planet Publishers, 2015

Atieno, Violet. "Dawa ya Deni". *Orodha gani na hadithi nyingine*. Ed. *Edison Wanga.* Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 2017

Bertoncini, Elena, Mikhail Gromov, Kyallo Wadi Wamitila, Said Ahmed Mohamed Khamis. *Outline of Swahili literature*. Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2009.

Kimaliro, Eunice. "Mtihani wa Maisha". *Tumbo lisiloshiba na hadithi nyingine*. Ed. Alifa Chokocho na Dumu Kayanda. Nairobi: Longhorn Publishers, 2016

Kiruja, Betty. "Mapenzi Chungu." *Kunani Marekani na hadithi nyingine*. Ed. P.I.Iribemwangi. Nairobi: Target Publications Limited, 2011.

Kyovi, Pauline. "Njugu Karanga". *Gitaa na hadithi nyingine*. Ed. Timothy Arege. Nairobi: Sasa Sema – Longhorn, 2011.

Matei, Assumpta. *Chozi la heri.* Nairobi: One Planet, 2014.

Mbii, Mary. "Mafiga". *Safari ya ahadi na hadithi nyingine*. Ed. Jeff Mandila and Ben Mkota. Nairobi: One Planet Publishers, 2015

Momanyi, Clara. "Ngome ya nafsi." *Mayai waziri wa maradhi na hadithi nyingine*. Ed. K.W. Wamitila. Nairobi: Focus Publishers, 2004.

----------. *Tumaini*. Nairobi: Vide-Muwa, 2006.

----------. "Kilinge cha Matata". *Likizo ya mauti na hadithi nyingine*. Ed. Kitula King'ei and John Kobia. Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 2007.

----------. "Mtandao wa ufasiki". *Gitaa na hadithi nyingine*. Ed. Timothy Arege. Nairobi: Sasa Sema – Longhorn, 2011.

----------. "Mtumbwi wa Maskini". *Takrima nono na hadithi nyingine*. Ed. Clara Momanyi and Rayya Timammy. Nairobi: Longman Kenya, 2011.

----------. "Tafrani Kambini". *Maskini milionea na hadithi nyingine*. Ed. Ken Walibora. Nairobi: Oxford, 2012,

----------. "Harubu za Zuhura". *Safari ya ahadi na hadithi nyingine*. Ed. Jeff Mandila and Ben Mkota. Nairobi: One Planet Publishers, 2015

Muchemi, Leah. "Noti ya bahati." *Gitaa na hadithi nyingine*. Ed. Timothy Arege. Nairobi: Sasa Sema – Longhorn, 2011.

Mwaliwa, Hannah. "Kutiwa jando." *Mizungu ya manabii na hadithi nyingine*. Ed. J. H. Habwe. Nairobi: Phoenix Publishers, 2008.

----------. "Peremende". *Kurudi nyumbani na hadithi nyingine*. Ed. Mwenda Mbatiah. Nairobi: Focus Publishers, 2007.

Nandwa, Rebecca. "Ningali hai." *Safari ya ahadi na hadithi nyingine*. Ed. Jeff Mandila and Ben Mkota. Nairobi: One Planet Publishers, 2015.

----------. "Balaa bin Belua". *Sina zaidi na hadithi nyingine*. Ed. Ken Walibora and P.I.Iribemwangi. Nairobi: Target Publications, 2011.

Ndungo, Catherine. "Jinamizi ya maisha." *Likizo ya mauti na hadithi nyingine*. Ed. Kitula King'ei and John Kobia. Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 2007.

Otinga, Doreen. "Maridhia mama." *Safari ya ahadi na hadithi nyingine*. Ed. Jeff Mandila and Ben Mkota. Nairobi: One Planet Publishers, 2015.

Ryanga, Sheila. *Dago wa Munje*. Nairobi: The Jomo Kenyatta Foundation, 2008.

Simiyu, Brigid. "Hadaa ya mapenzi." *Homa ya nyumbani na hadithi nyingine*. Ed. Ken Walibora and Said A. Mohamed. Nairobi: Phoenix Publishers, 2015.

Timammy, Rayya. "Haki yangu naidai". *Takrima nono na hadithi nyingine*. Ed. Clara Momanyi and Rayya Timammy. Nairobi: Longman Kenya, 2011.

----------. "Kuwa Mume". *Mwavyaji wa roho na hadithi nyingine*. Ed. Leonard Sanja. Nairobi: Focus Publishers, 2011.

EASTERN AFRICA AND THE CARIBBEAN SPACE AND IDENTITIES: RETHINKING THE AFRICAN PRESENCE IN THE CARIBBEAN

Julius Kanyari, Unversity of Nairobi

Ciarunji Chesaina, Unversity of Nairobi

Joseph Muleka, Unversity of Nairobi

Abstract

Studies on African presence in Caribbean amplify the centrality of West African literature and history on the formation of the political, social, cultural and religious identities in the Caribbean. However, literary studies tracing the Caribbean-Africa connection have been conducted in West Africa. Although West Africa plays a major role in the formation of the Caribbean consciousness, this approach has led to a misrepresentation of facts about the contribution of other African regions towards the formation of the contemporary Caribbean space and identities. Tentatively, such literary studies are based on the assumption that the African presence in the Caribbean has everything to do with slavery; hence the connection between Africa and Caribbean is premised on slavery. This paper posits that the creation of the Caribbean social, cultural and religious realities is a continuous process that outlived the abolition of slave trade and slavery both in the Caribbean and Africa. Consequently, the study amplifies the role of Ethiopia in the formation of the Rastafarian Movement in Caribbean literature, the influence of the Mau Mau Uprising on Caribbean literature, and the significance of Edward Brathwaite adopting an African name. Ultimately, the paper argues that the Eastern Africa is a major influence in the formation of the contemporary Caribbean consciousness.

Key Words: *African Presence, Rastafarian, Eastern Africa, Identities, Space, Slavery.*

Introduction

The African presence in the Caribbean is mainly a product of slavery which led to mass dislocation and relocation of Africans from Africa to the New World. Indeed, the Middle Passage particularly accounts for the formation of amorphous spaces and identities in the Caribbean since the abolition of slave trade and slavery led to the establishment of a black race in the Caribbean, which has retained a close connection with Africa for centuries. There are, therefore, identifiable traditional African social, political, religious and cultural retentions in

the Caribbean which have also been captured in Caribbean literary works. The African presence in Caribbean literature is therefore an important issue.

Although different regions in Africa have contributed differently towards the manifestation of the African presence in the Caribbean, some regions have been sidelined in literary studies. Notably, a majority of studies have been conducted in the Western African region at the expense of other regions. This study is premised on the need for specific studies on the role of Eastern Africa played in the creation of Caribbean literature. The study addresses an existing gap on the role Eastern Africa towards the growth of literature in the Caribbean. Indeed, the study foregrounds the Eastern African region as a key contributor to the theme of African presence in the Caribbean. The paper is divided into three main sections namely: Ethiopia, Rastafarianism and Caribbean Literature, the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya and Caribbean literature and the Naming of Edward Kamau Brathwaite in Kenya.

Ethiopia, Rastafarianism and Caribbean Literature

The Rastafarian religious group in Jamaica adopts African cultural and religious beliefs and practices. Africa takes the centre stage towards the conceptualization and performance of the various religious activities by the Rastafarians. In particular, the Rastafarian movement is inspired by the life of a former Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie. Haile Selassie was the Emperor of Ethiopia from the 1930 to 1974. During his reign, Ethiopia engaged in national and international battles, specifically with the Italians, and came out victorious. It was during his time that Ethiopia became the first black country to join the League of Nations. Haile Selassie was therefore seen, especially in the Caribbean, as a symbol of black emancipation and the rise of Africa. His trip to Jamaica in 1966 is testament to the influence of Ethiopian political, social and cultural practices in the Caribbean.

Members of the Rastafarian group believe in Selassie, who was initially known as Ras Tafari Makonnen before ascending to power. They viewed him as their god. Haile Selassie claimed descent from King Solomon and Queen Sheba mentioned in the Bible, and this made him the best symbol of strength and endurance among Africans in the diaspora. His rise to prominence was also attributable to the biblical prophecy that foretold the victory of Ethiopians against the Italians during the battle of Adowa saying that a "princess shall come out of Egypt, Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hands unto God," (Psalms 68:31). Selassie was a symbol of hope for many Caribbeans who desired to go back to Africa as a result of the constricted spaces they

occupied in the Caribbean. These Rastafarian ideologies, according to Murrel in "The Rastafari Chant", originated from messianic hope held by Blacks in diaspora that a king would be born in Africa to deliver all Blacks from bondage. Murrel goes ahead to highlight the teachings of a Jamaican prophet Alexander Bedward who "foretold of a millennium in which Ethiopians will be specifically favoured by an African messiah," (288). This prophecy was supported by James Lowe on the one hand who wrote about the "Revealed Secret of the Hamitic Race" in Ethiopia and James Webb on the other who argued that the "king" or messiah would liberate Jamaicans from British imperialism. Indeed, the coronation of the Emperor Haile Selassie set the stage for the publication of multiple Pro-Ethiopian texts in the diaspora including *The Holy Piby* (1924), *A Blackman Will Be the Coming Universal King, Proven by Biblical History* (1924), and *The Royal Parchment Scroll of Black Supremacy* (1926).

Rastafarianism is employed in Caribbean literary works as a symbol of blackness. Indeed, Caribbean fictional writers either represent Rastafarianism to depict blackness or to question the perceptions of the 'other' towards blackness. Sam Selvon, for instance, in his trilogy *The Lonely Londoners, Moses Ascending* and *Moses Migrating* represents the perception of both Blacks and Whites towards the imagined character of Caribbean Blacks which alludes to the universal image of a Rastafarian. Moses, the main character in the three novels by Selvon, observes that white girls idealize and prefer dating Caribbean Blacks who embody the image of the inhabitants of the African jungle which by extension is a representation of Rastafarianism within and beyond the Caribbean islands. From London whites' perspective, a typical black man as represented in Selvon's works, wears a rough outlook and is ill-mannered. Universally, members of the Rastafari movement are known to wear dreadlocks as well as to adopt African traditional modes of dressing.

These attitudes of white characters about Africa and blackness subject black characters in Caribbean works to multiple forms of oppression. For instance, Selvon employs the characters of Harris and Bart to shed light on the liminality of black characters regarded as incomplete with regard to blackness either due to their multiple ancestries or their desire to be identified as white by their fellow blacks as well as White characters. On the one hand Bart is isolated from the mainstream black community by both whites as well as his black counterparts due to his black and white ancestries while on the other hand Harris who aspires to act and be identified as a white man, despite being black, is ridiculed by fellow Blacks as well as despised by white girls who opt for more authentic Caribbean black men. White girls in Selvon's novels prefer hanging out with irresponsible black Caribbean male characters like Cap who don't

work, have no income and are homeless to descent and hardworking black men like Harris. This might explain why most of Caribbean black male characters in Selvon novels lead self-destructive and reckless lifestyles in order to match the expectations of the mainstream London dwellers towards an authentic black man.

Rastafarianism in Caribbean literature also encapsulates the power of being black. Indeed, Haile Selassie is the key figure or image of blackness in the Caribbean literary world, and by extension a symbol of black power. The celebration of a black figure in Caribbean literature sought to uplift the image of a black person within universal cultural, social and political spaces. This is a stark contrast to the powerless black character represented by white writers, for instance Joseph Conrad in *Heart of* Darkness, in African and Caribbean fictional works. The achievements of Haile Selassie put to question the representation of Blacks as the inferior race in African and Caribbean literary works. Unfortunately and ironically, the latter days of Haile Selassie emperorship offer a glimpse into the excesses and dictatorial tendencies of African and black Caribbean top leadership as represented in Maaza Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* and Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* and *The Dew Breaker.*

There exists a clear-cut difference between the figure of Emperor Haile Selassie mythologized by members of the Rastafarian religious and cultural outfit as opposed to the image represented in Ethiopian novels by Mengiste and Dinaw Mengestu. In the novels, Selassie is represented as a tyrannical figure that disregards the suffering of his subjects in his desire to maintain the status quo. While the majority of ordinary and innocent Ethiopian characters are maimed or killed, the Emperor is focused on consolidating more power and in the process punishes and even kills all his political dissenters. As the Emperor, he has unchecked or excessive powers to condemn his subjects to death beyond any form of reproach. Ironically, the same guns used to terrorize his subjects are turned against him during the revolution. Characters who happen to be members of the Derg, a military faction, punish and later kill the character of Selassie as represented in Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze.* This definitely not the image of the Emperor Selassie we find presented during the conceptualization and practice of the Rastafarian religion.

Sam Selvon, on the other hand, in *The Lonely Londoners*, *Moses Ascending* and *Moses Migrating* questions black solidarity by poking holes into black leadership. Using the character of B.P and Galahad, Selvon sheds light on the exploitation of blacks by fellow blacks in the name of black solidarity. B.P who happens to be a member of the American Black Panther

Movement, for instance, steals party funds from members of the London branch before fleeing back to the United States of America. Galahad on the other hand uses party funds for personal needs. Galahad and his top leadership are always hosting meetings for fellow Caribbean Blacks with alcohol being the agenda in the guise for black empowerment. Instead of helping Moses to travel back to London after concluding his trip to Trinidad, Galahad is excited that the former would be barred from travelling back to London as a result of changes in policies on immigration of Blacks from the Caribbean so that he can take over the ownership of Moses's apartment.

These excesses and dictatorial tendencies of African and Caribbean political leadership subject ordinary Blacks to either live under deplorable conditions at home or to flee into exile as represented in Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker* and Dinaw Mengestu's (Ethiopian novelist) *Children of the Revolution*. Caribbean Blacks are presented as outcasts in *Babylon* (exile) who long to escape from exile. This depiction of black characters in the Caribbean novel complicates the status of ordinary African and Caribbean Blacks both in the hands of the white and black political elite. Blacks are represented as victims as opposed to members of dictatorial regimes who are the victimizer. The Rastafarian movement is therefore a protest to both white imperialism as well black dictatorial regimes. In addition, according to Eric Doumerc in "Rastafarians in Post-Independence Caribbean Poetry in English (the 1960s and the 1970s): from Pariahs to Cultural Creators", the rise of Rastafarianism in Caribbean coincided with the birth of black aesthetics in Caribbean literature:

> The Rastafarians with their striking hairstyle, Bible-inspired code language and general detachment from "Babylon", appealed to West Indian writers, who were trying to find their own voice at the time. These writers saw a similarity between the Rastas' status as Pariahs and the writer's lone search for a West Indian aesthetics. (1)

The "search for a West Indian aesthetics" had such great influence on Caribbean writings to the extent that some writers who were not biologically black, including Sam Selvon who happens to be of Scottish and Indian descent, felt the need to represent the impact of blackness in their works. This search for black Caribbean aesthetics culminated in the problematization of blackness in Caribbean literature whereby writers as well as critics became more critical of the presentation of Blacks as the inferior, incomplete and of undesirable racial orientation. Interestingly, even when being black is considered desirable, for instance white girl prefer to date black men to their white counterparts, it still leads to destruction. Therefore, the

problematization of blackness or African presence in Caribbean literary works has a bearing on the impact of Emperor Haile Selassie on Ethiopian and Black Diasporic literature.

Ethiopian fictional works problematize the African presence in the Caribbean by providing contradicting images of Emperor Haile Selassie who happens to be the hero and the symbol of power for most Caribbean Blacks. It is also a testament to the inevitability of cultural mutations on traditional African cultures towards the formation the contemporary Caribbean cultures. The novels offer an African perspective to the African presence in the Caribbean. Whereas Haile Selassie is presented as the ultimate hero in the Caribbean mythologies and culture, he is represented as the villain in the Mengiste's and Mengestu's novels.

The imagery of drought and famine represented in Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* contrasts the presentation of Emperor Haile Selassie by Rastafarian as a universal provider, a god. Selassie subjects his people to suffering and death through political killings and starvation. The lion which according to the Rastafarinism symbolizes the invincibility of Selassie, the 'King of Kings', is ironically represented as the symbol of fear and death. Ordinary citizens and political dissenters are on the one hand subjected to death by being thrown into Lion's den, and on the other prevented from accessing their Emperor since the palace is surrounded by lions. This leads to a powerful wave of discontent and opposition among the ordinary Ethiopians, hence the overthrow of the Emperor.

Mau Mau Uprising and Caribbean Literature

The Mau Mau Uprising in Kenya provided materials for consolidation of black power as well as celebration of blackness in Caribbean literature. A number of Caribbean novelists as well as poets used the Mau Mau experience to exhibit the suffering of black men in the Caribbean and Africa as a result of imperialism and colonialism. Blacks in the Caribbean are discriminated against just like their fellow Blacks in Africa. These racialized forms of oppression towards black characters is represented in their works whereby Caribbean writers and poets advocate for more accommodating spaces as well as better appreciation of the black identity within the Caribbean as well as African contexts. Therefore, the choice of African settings in Caribbean literary works testifies to the interconnectedness between Caribbean and African literature; hence the African presence in the Caribbean.

Derek Walcott in "A Far Cry from Africa" presents the Mau Mau experience as a universal black experience. Kikuyu, like all other Africans, are discriminated against based on their blackness. The suffering of the Mau Mau in the hands of white colonialists is, therefore, representative of the suffering and status of black people in Africa and the Caribbean in particular and the whole world in general. Blacks are "expendable as Jews". Mau mau fighters are labeled terrorists based on the colour of their skin despite the fact that they are resisting White colonial intruders who seek to forcefully dispossess and dominate over members of the Kikuyu community. The Whites employ different strategies aimed at justifying their entitlement to the highlands which were formally owned by members of the Kikuyu communities which include discrediting black humanity against the backdrop of towering white supremacy. Apparently, the death of countless Mau Mau warriors and members of the Kikuyu community is nothing as compared to the death of a white child who is killed by the Mau Mau while in bed.

The flies symbolize the Kikuyu in particular and the Blacks in general. Although they are unwanted, flies have adapted to different environments such that they are present everywhere throughout the globe. They easily adapt to different environmental conditions despite being hated by many people because they feed on rotten things, prefer dirty surfaces and are known to spread many diseases. The Kikuyu are perceived as intruders in the 'White Highlands' just like flies, hence the killings. Just like the flies, they are unwanted and the owner of these spaces is obliged to eradicate them to restore hygiene and peace to these civilized spaces. This symbolism of the flies illuminates on the liminality of Blacks world over. Blacks are victimized at home and in exile.

A majority of Blacks adopt imagined identities to escape the reality of the harrowing memories of violence and trauma meted out against them by the 'other', including the Black elite in Africa and the Caribbean. Ironically, the Mau Mau freedom fighters are fighting for their land which has been taken by the British colonialists. They stand no chance because the latter employ the help of both Whites and Blacks from all over the world. In a way, the suffering of Blacks in the hands of colonial Whites and Black elite particularly during the decolonization process not only connects but also seeks to liberate Blacks in Africa and the Caribbean. Caribbean Blacks, especially members of mixed race, are torn between supporting the Whites or the Blacks who are being killed in large numbers. For them, Africa is their original homeland, their 'paradise' which is their ancestral home as members of the Black community from different parts of the

globe. This branding of Blacks in Africa as beasts implicates the Caribbean which is a product of Africa.

One way of interpreting this analogy would be to assume that the speaker is member of both white and black races, but is also possible to devise a different perspective which depicts the speaker as representative of the Caribbean. The Caribbean is a product of both the European and African historical realities. Some Caribbean nations opted to retain their attachment to their European colonial masters after independence. The speaker compares himself to a "drunken officer of British rule" who is tasked with choosing between "Africa and the English tongue" that he loves.

This relates to the story of Nebu, in *The Leopard* by Victor Reid, which illuminates on challenges of mixed ancestry. The story is set in Mombasa during the struggle for independence in Kenya. Nebu, an African, kills a white man who happens to be the husband of a white woman he had previously had sexual contact with. The murdered white man is in the company of a "half-bwana (of mixed ancestry)" who turns out to be Nebu's son. When Nebu is pursued by a leopard the liminality of the young boy is highlighted having in mind that his white father is dead and his black father is in danger. To imagine the boy as Blacks in the Diaspora is to problematize the space and identities of the Caribbean as a result of the African presence. The boy wishes to cling to his dead white 'father' not knowing that the black man who has killed him and is being pursued by a leopard is his biological father. Indeed, this calls for change of attitudes towards Africa by the Caribbean. Africa with all its shortcomings holds the key to understanding Caribbean space and identities.

The Naming of Edward Kamau Brathwaite in Kenya

Brathwaite is undoubtedly one of the most vocal literary scholars with regard to identities and spaces occupied by black characters in the Caribbean literary world, especially with regard to the interconnectedness between Africa and the Caribbean. Indeed, Brathwaite employs literary works to reconnect the Caribbean and Africa, arguing that the Caribbean spaces and identities cannot be understood in the absence of an in-depth appreciation of the close-knit relationship between the Caribbean and Africa. The Caribbean, just like Africa, exhibits an intimate relationship between history, land, space and identities; hence the African presence in the Caribbean. Consequently, Westernized theories and approaches are inadequate tools of

analysis of the African presence in the Caribbean, which is heavily influenced by history of slavery and allocation of space for Blacks in Africa and the Caribbean.

Brathwaite was concerned about the status of the social and cultural fabric in post-independence Caribbean nations which according to Eric Doumerc in "Rastafarian in Post-Independence Caribbean Poetry in English (the late 1960s and the 1970s) from Pariahs to Cultural Creators" were "unable to provide their citizens with a sense of purpose and shared identity" (5). For Brathwaite, Africa was the ultimate shared identity. In his landmark seminar paper, "The African Presence in the Caribbean", Brathwaite identifies African seasons in the Caribbean. Brathwaite argues that the season winds which used to propel slave ships from Africa to the Caribbean and back continued blowing to date, hence the intimate and continuous interaction and interdependence between Africa and the Caribbean. It was on this vein that Brathwaite proclaimed that Caribbean was going through a period of "Post-Independence depression" (Brathwaite 5-9). Just like Ngugi wa Thiong'o throughout his vast literary underpinnings, Brathwaite blamed the Caribbean education system which was commonly based on the study of European or American classics. Indeed, Brathwaite together with Andrew Salkey, Gordon Rohler, Wilson Harris and Orland Patterson spearheaded the movement towards the formation of a Caribbean aesthetic. His ideological stand might have drawn him closer to Ngugi wa Thiong'o who was also pushing for the Africanisation the literature at the University of Nairobi in Kenya. It is no coincidence that Brathwaite looked East in his search of true Caribbean black identity, in the presence of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, by adopting an African name—Kamau.

Therefore, it is interesting to find out how and why Brathwaite, a renowned scholar on Caribbean identity and space, decided to adopt a Kenyan name instead of Ghanaian one. Having been a postcolonial critic and a vocal advocate for decolonization of Black literature it is also clear that Brathwaite was aware of the power of naming or renaming. It is clear, however, that through the adoption of the name Brathwaite endorses the centrality of African presence in the Caribbean. The fact that he decided to adopt a name in Kenya during a period when he was being hosted at the University of Nairobi by a department which was metamorphosing from English Department to the Department of Literature also attests to an ideological shift on his side. The department of literature was prioritizing orature at the expense of Westernized curriculum which was also obviously a major ideological shift. It was against this backdrop of a changing host department that Brathwaite decided to adopt a new Kenyan name—Kamau.

Although Edward Kamau Brathwaite might have embraced the name Kamau as an act of goodwill towards the people of Limuru who had showered him with love, kindness and generosity of the highest order, it is also an acknowledgement of the interconnectedness between the East Africa and the Caribbean. Brathwaite spent more time in Ghana than in Kenya yet this did not stop him from adopting a Kenyan name rather than a Ghanaian one. The adoption of a new Kenyan name impacted on his future as a poet, literary scholar as well as a self proclaimed African in the diaspora. If the relationship between Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Kamau Brathwaite is anything to go by, the adoption of a new name by the latter was a clear indication of an ideological shift. During the celebration of the birth of Ngugi's daughter, Mumbi, Ngugi acknowledges the high level of orality demonstrated by Brathwaite during the invocation of the word Mumbi which depicted the latter as an African. Indeed, the East African experience heavily influenced Brathwaite as an acclaimed Caribbean poet and scholar as presented by Anne Walmsley in *The Caribbean Artists Movement*:

> Edward Kamau Brathwaite thought that the function of the West Indian writer was to reach out to the people and to produce a type of poetry which would be based on their culture and traditions. Brathwaite saw the writer as an integral part of the nation's culture and as the one who would reveal to the people the value of its culture. (260-261)

These people that Caribbean writers needed to reach out to included both African and Caribbean masses which would act as an endorsement of the interconnectedness between Africa and Caribbean people, their cultures as well as literatures. Brathwaite opted to Africanize his name at the same time the Department of Literature at the University of Nairobi was also Africanizing its curriculum as well faculty members which also points to the interconnectedness between Caribbean and African literatures. The fact that he was also in the company of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, one of the most celebrated scholars and critics of the decolonization process in Africa and the Black Diaspora, also adds weight to his action. The adoption of a new name symbolizes and endorses the African presence in the Caribbean. According to Eric Doumerc, "Brathwaite defended the idea of a West Indian aesthetic based on popular traditions and orality", (6).

Conclusion

This paper sought to open new grounds for multiple studies on the influence of Eastern Africa on the contemporary Caribbean literary imaginings. A number of studies have attempted to connect Caribbean and Africa but most of them have concentrated more on other regions

outside Eastern Africa. The paper not only affirms the African presence in the Caribbean but also the place of Eastern Africa in the formation of the Caribbean social, cultural and religious formations. In particular, the influence of Eastern African traditional figures has been brought out through an examination of both the Kenyan, Ethiopian and Jamaican political, cultural and religious practices in Caribbean literature.

Works Cited

Brathwaite, Edward Kamau. "The African Presence in Caribbean Literature". 1972.

Doumerc, Eric. "Rastafarians in Post-Independence Caribbean Poetry in English (the 1960s and the 1970s): from Pariahs to Cultural Creators". Miranda, vol. 4, 2011.

Edwidge Danticat. *The Dew Breaker.* Vintage, 2004.

---*The Farming of Bones.* Soho Press, 1998.

Mengestu, Dinaw. *Children of the Revolution.* Vintage, 2008.

Mengiste, Maaza. *Beneath the Lion's Gaze.* W.W Norton, 2011.

Murrel, Nathaniel Samuel. "The Rastafari Chant". *Afro-Caribbean Religions: An Introduction to their Historical, Cultural and Sacred Traditions.* Temple University Press, 2010.

Reid, Victor Stafford. *The Leopard.* Heinemann, 1958.

Selvon, Sam. *Moses Ascending.* Davis-Poynter, 1975.

---*Moses Migrating.* Longman, 1983.

---*The Lonely Londoners.* Longman, 1956.

Walcott, Derek. "A Far Cry from Africa". 1962.

Walmsley, Anne. *The Caribbean Artists Movement.* London: Faber and Faber, 1992.

The Bible. Authorized King James' Version.

MARRIED TO AFRICA: IMMIGRANT POETRY BY MARJORIE MACGOYE AND STEPHEN PARTINGTON

Natalia Frolova

The Gorky Institute of World Literatures

Russian Academy of Sciences

Abstract

The poetry of Kenyan writers Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye and Stephen Derwent Partington cannot be called typical for East African literature. Both Macgoye and Partington are ethnic British, who, each at own time, moved to Kenya and devoted themselves to literature. Their verses depict a sincere love for the land, which has become their home, pain for the hardships of Africans, an interpretation of African reality through the eyes of a European. The paper compares two views of British-born Kenyan poets, to the life and people of Kenya, and two kinds of attitudes to the portrait of Europeans through the prism of their own experience.

Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye (1928-2015), English-born writer, author of famous "Song of Nyarloka" (1977) has earned the nickname "mother of Kenyan literature." Macgoye's poetic work is imbued with pain and compassion for the Kenyan people, who became her family – she proudly calls herself a Kenyan writer. Macgoye mourns any tormented, absurdly killed or unfairly treated human being, whether it is little girl Atieno who has to work instead of going to school, or children stampeded during the visit of President Jomo Kenyatta, or slum dwellers whose homes were knocked down by the order of the Nairobi authorities. Despite the frequent sad mood of Macgoy's poetry, it is worth noting the main positive component of her poems – a sincere love for Kenya, admiration for Africa, black people, original African nature, diverse cultures. Finally her immigrant view at Africa looks paternalistic and missionary in a whole.

The representative of English-language Kenyan poetry of the 2000s, British-born Stephen Partington in his verses demonstrates an ironic attitude to the reality; suffering and pain are not in the focus of his attention, especially in poems on racial relationships. His irony often touches his non-African origin, a misunderstanding of things that are obvious to the indigenous people of Kenya.

The poetry of both authors is a brilliant example of how the interaction of cultures among the European intelligentsia, who immigrated to Africa, forms a request for literary expression in the context of integration into a foreign cultural society. On the other hand, we see how the attitude towards the topic of Africa and African people transforms historically. The very landscape of problems changes from decolonization of consciousness in the McGoy's poetry and its obvious paternalistic notes to Partington's another modernistic «agenda».

***Key words**: East African literature, Kenyan poetry in English, immigrant poetry, Marjorie Macgoye, Stephen Partington*

English-language poetry in Kenya emerges and begins to develop in 1970s, a decade later than the Ugandan one. It was at this time that the first truly brilliant examples of poetic work appeared – these are poems of Jared Angira and Micere Githae Mugo, who later became classics of Kenyan literature, whose work characterizes the two main directions of Kenyan English-language poetry of the second half of the 20th century – critical-realistic and philosophical-mystical (Frolova 75–90). Studying the English-language poetry of Kenya draws attention to such an interesting phenomenon as the Kenyan poetry of expatriate writers. These are the creative work of Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye and Stephen Partington, whose creative work cannot be called typical of East African literature. Both Macgoye and Partington are ethnic British, who moved, each at their own time, to Kenya and devoted themselves to literature, and, what is most important, who called Kenya their homeland and themselves Kenyans. In their poems, one can feel sincere love for the land, which has become their home, pain for Africans who suffer social injustice, and huge efforts to understand African reality through the eyes of a European. The report compares two views of British-born Kenyan poets to Kenya and its people, the two portraits of Europeans through the prism of their own experience, showing the identity as a shifting and fluid construct. Macgoye came to Kenya in 1950s, during the height of the struggle for Independence.

Kenyan writer Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye (1928–2015), a native of Great Britain, author of several novels and two collections of poetry – *The Song of Nyarloka*[1] (1977) and *Make it Sing* (1998) rightfully earned the nickname “mother of Kenyan literature”. Née Marjorie King first came to Kenya in 1954 as a missionary, right in the midst of the struggle for Independence (in 1952 the Mau Mau uprising began). Ten years later she received citizenship and got married. After getting married, she deeply immersed herself in the study of the culture of the Luo people, to which her husband's family belonged.

Song is a key concept in Marjorie Macgoye's poetry, and not only because the words "song" and "sing" are constantly featured in her poems: thanks to the rhythm and clear tempo that demonstrate expression akin to a piece of music, these poems are really meant to be sung.

Macgoye's poems are full of folklore elements, many of them are stylized folk songs with typical repetitions, interjections, etcetera. Meanwhile, the poetic work of Marjorie Macgoye largely demonstrates the author's close connection to British culture, on the one hand, and active involvement in the culture and the socio-political reality of East Africa, on the other

hand. This symbiosis is noticeable even at the formal level: for example, she uses traditional form of Swahili verse in the English-language poem *Shairi la Ukombozi*[2].

One of the main themes of her poetry is social injustice, life of the poor, of common people. Macgoye is sensitive to freedom issues, it is extremely important for her to be free, it is an indicator of the individuality of human being that characterizes any nation (remember the times she came to the country, it was during struggle for independence, in other words for freedom). In the poem *Song of Freedom* of the same name the reader meets unhappy girl named Atieno, a composite character, which depicts all unfortunate Kenyan (and African as a whole) children deprived of childhood, children who are forced to work instead of going to school, who have to work about the house, sell food in the market all day long. In this extremely sad poem, the poet raises the question of the unfair exploitation of the young nation.

Atieno washes dishes,
Atieno plucks the chicken,
Atieno gets up early,
beds her sacks down in the kitchen,
    Atieno eight years old,
    Atieno – yo. (Macgoye 73)

The fate of a teenage girl in Africa is a foregone conclusion, the death of Atieno after difficult delivery – that's the usual ending of many of her peers, as the poet tells us.

Atieno's had a baby
so we know that she is bad
Fifty-fifty it may live
to repeat the life she had,
    ending in post-partum bleeding
    Atieno – yo.

Atieno's soon replaced.
Meat and sugar more than all
she ate in such a narrow life
were lavished on her funeral.
    Atieno's gone to glory,
    Atieno – yo. (Macgoye 74)

Even talking about composite character, this does not mean that Macgoye prefers a kind of literary generalization. On the contrary, one can feel her incredibly personal approach to the problems existing in post-colonial Kenyan society. It is important for Macgoye to call the

victim by name, to leave a memory about this victim, also for those who are complicit in the tragedy of this victim. Even unwittingly.

Macgoye mourns any absurdly killed or unfairly treated human being, whether it is little girl Atieno, or children trampled during the visit to the city of Kisumu by President Jomo Kenyatta in 1969:

> Sleep, Alnoor, my son.
> Lie quietly, My baby Ochieng',
> Hush, they may hear you fidget
> as though those little graves did not content you.
> Rest quietly, now the big men are counting
> the living, not the dead.
> (*Song of Kisumu*, Macgoye 13)

Marjorie mourns slum dwellers whose homes were knocked down by the order of the Nairobi authorities in the poem *Muoroto*:

> …machines like hippos' open jaws
> shredding a doll's house world,
> scattering kids and clothes,
> battering heads and bloody limbs
> near drowning among polythene islands[3]. (Macgoye 82)

Indignantly condemning the hypocrisy and cruelty of the Nairobi authorities, Macgoye deliberately cites fragment from *the Weekly Review* magazine as an epigraph to the poem: "Life is slowly returning to normal in Nairobi's Muoroto shanty village two weeks after it was razed to the ground by Nairobi City Commission bulldozers and baton-wielding askaris in an operation remembered for its brutality" (Macgoye 82).

This is how Marjorie Macgoye completes history – even the most insignificant events cannot be hushed up in it. Thus, the arrival of the president becomes known in her poems by the fact of killed kids, and the demolition of the slums disfiguring the capital's appearance – by the barbarously ruined lives.

Despite the frequent minor moods of Marjorie Macgoye's poetry, it is worth noting the main positive feature characteristic of her poems – her enormous love for Kenya, the country she

came to as a missionary, which she wanted to become useful for and which has become her second homeland.

The extremely brilliant introduction to the *Make it Sing* collection by Philo Ikonya says: "Marjorie breathes the life of the nation into all her poems… Most of her poems celebrate Kenya – its people, great and small". (Macgoye viii). And further: "Right from the beginning, she became a true daughter of her people, the Luo… She tried to fully understand the life of the people she had become a part of, and knew how far she was going to adopt to their customs" (xi). Admiration for Africa, black skin color, original African nature, culture, clothing gives Marjorie the right to complain about the loss of African identity, especially in such a metropolis as Nairobi:

> Never has there been more fashion-consciousness
> Then ours in Africa,
> Always eclectic,
> Always ambitious . . .
> But today I saw a *moran*[4]
> Wearing blanket and ear-rings,
> Orange socks and *lada*[5] from Bata.
> (*African city*, Macgoye 21)

It is impossible not to notice the paternalistic notes of Marjorie Macgoye's poetry, which is not surprising, since young Marjorie King arrived in Kenya as a missionary bookseller, while already in Nairobi she opened a bookstore, around which a kind of literary saloon was formed, which gave all the reasons for her contemporaries to give her the above-mentioned nickname "mother of Kenyan literature". She partially embodied the goal of her mission in such poems as *Jesus*, *Easter Eve* and other.

Macgoye writes much in mid 1960s–70s, her famous *Song of Nyarloka* came to life in 1977. It was the time of development of the newly formed independent African countries, including Kenya, a time when the memory of colonial subjugation was still very fresh, but already quite clearly revealed themselves as ulcers of post-colonial African reality – poverty and lack of rights of the common people, huge social problems, the hypocrisy of the former fighters for independence. Being integrated into this vortex of changes, living and working in it, Macgoye is still not completely African, Kenyan, she sincerely and with all enthusiasm assesses this life as if from the outside, acting as a kind of ambassador of peace and justice, representing a developed European power, which is undoubtedly Great Britain. It is no coincidence that at the

peak of her creative, social and political activity, Marjorie communicates with many historical figures, devoting a significant place to addressing them in her poems. Among them writers Okot p'Bitek and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the politician Tom Mboya, whose memory Macgoye dedicates a poem full of pain and despair:

> The grass is trampled,
> Only vultures overhead
> swoop, rend and darken,
> All else is down.
> the buffalo is down,
> elephant fallen,
> lion torn and unmanned.
> (*To Tom,* Macgoye 31)

The poetry of Marjorie Macgoye is a kind of encyclopedia of Kenyan life of those times, at least thanks to her creative work, including poetry, one can compose a picture of cultural, social and political life of the 60-80s of the 20th century, history of Kenya and East Africa as a whole. Macgoye's work is literature for the intellectually prepared reader, who understands all the allusions, images and metaphors she uses in her books.

Perhaps therefore, her mourning for the girl Atieno in a kind of a Kipling's way, or her motherly condescending complaint about Maasai wearing European shoes look somehow patronizing. It is not without reason that the word "mother" is the reference word in the above-mentioned nickname of Macgoye, to say broadly "parent". That, we will repeat, is not surprising, since for that time, the cultural gap was still too big and perhaps at that time even seemed insurmountable. That is why seems so tangible the contrast between Macgoye's immigrant poetry of the second half of XX century and the creative work of the Kenyan poet Stephen Partington, also British by birth, who writes today.

The representative of English-language Kenyan poetry of the 2000s, British-born Stephen Partington in his verses mostly demonstrates an ironic attitude to the reality, suffering and pain are not in the focus of his attention.

Partington's collection with remarkable title *SMS & Face to Face* (2003) is divided into chapters, each of which is devoted to a particular topic – interracial communication, culture, religion, social issues. For instance, he writes about love, which can be different: "It's a broad

theme, Love, that doesn't restrict itself to the Valentine-rose relationship between woman and man. There's the love of close friendship, parental love, sexual love, romantic love, marital love, religious love…" (Partington 19). Taking a philosophical discourse on love issue, Partington doesn't mean to be pathetic, or romanticize love, writing about 'love for sale' in the poem *Malaya*[5]:

> Don't pity her unwashed plastic braids
> or the tattered designer fakes she wears,
> her wasting slimline hunger, or her AIDS.
> …
> And do not pity her lack of self-respect,
> her loose morality, or frown *She-just-ain't African*
> or *Christ-says-this-and-that*!
> Who, with a fat post-coital fag between
> fat finger and fat thumb, has discs of silver
> in his palm? Whose, then, the purchase;
> whose the act? Excuse the whore
> and loathe the rat.
> (Partington, 21)

And right there, on the opposite page of the book, in confirmation of his words about different love a reader finds lyrical love poem *No English Rose* – the uncovered allusion to Shakespearean *Romeo and Juliet* ("What's in a name? That which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet"[6]) – addressed to his beloved black-skinned African woman:

> In British verse, your sort's not celebrated anywhere.
> And so I will discover you, like Thompson, Krapf or
> Livingstone,
> those arrogants who wrote about this continent as if it
> hadn't been before they came. I share their need to
> name –
> not lakes and hills and falls, but you, your beauty.
> It is wrong, some folk will say, and clearly racist. So?
> I love you, so I'll sing you and I'll praise you. It is
> wrong,
> some folk will say, and clearly sexist. Still I'll sing you
> for I love you; love your ploughed-field hair, your sanded
> hardwood cheeks, your lips as dusky as the fabled
> tents of Kedar, and your eyes like polished baobab seeds…
> (Partington 20)

The hero of Partington's poem cannot stop calling rose by its name and tries not to pay attention to all these contemporary modern-world prejudice.

In his poems the fair-skinned European Partington could not help touching on the theme of the relationship between representatives of the white and black races. Partington is often ironic about his own non-African origins, his lack of understanding of many things that are so obvious to the natives of Kenya. Thus, in the poem *It's a Funny Thing, Culture* he makes fun of his own ignorance (more precisely, too serious European-like perception) of some customs of Kenyan ethnic groups:

> Because my future wife's Akamba[6]
> I have bought myself a longbow
> and a quiverful of arrows.
> For a laugh, you understand.
> Still, I would like to learn the recipe
> the old Akambas used to tip
> these funny-looking weapons –
> I am told that it could kill you in
> an instant. What a laugh! I'd
> love to make it. Maybe venom from
> a cobra? Just don't know. But
> I'm excited, for my Kamba watch-
> men tell me they will show me
> just how strong it is…someday,
> some future pay-day. Someday soon.
> I cannot fathom why their offer
> makes them double-up with laughter.
> (Partington 30)

The theme of the comic dissimilarity of whites and blacks is developed by the poet in poem *Communication,* where he describes the method of conversation via SMS and e-mail, which Europeans can easily replace real talk with and which African people adopt easily. And here is how Partington describes a mzungu-European who recklessly decided to sunbathe under the scorching African sun:

> It is sleeping in agony: sheets rub like
> emery…
> …Is peeling and sloughing
> like snakes…Is

to look like a bloody flamingo, a traffic-
light, strawberry-lollipop-red-headed geek.
(*Sunburn for a Mzungu*, Partington 52)

Elaborating on issues of interracial and intercultural communication, Partington dethrones the vulgar stereotypes that prevent people from seeing people behind ethnic, gender, racial restrictions, stereotypes that give rise to stupidity and enmity.

Our children will be… sepia.
Like all daguerreotypes,
but snapshots of the future…

They'll chat in Sheng.
they'll grow, in time, to eat ugali
with hint-of-light-crisp-lemon-
luscious Chardonnay.

No doubt they'll translate Ngugi
into English as a near Shakespearean
Sonnet sequence. Surely they'll be
multi-skilful *Ubermenschen*,

fluent in a thousand tongues or…
Cut the crap! Our children
will be children. Simply that. For
when the shit's all said and done

they'll be, not pioneers nor symbols,
but our daughters and our sons.
('*Miscegenation'*, Partington 53)

Here one cannot help noticing that the poet talks about his own prejudice, as if he's trying to get rid of stereotypes in himself, because he feels them as a general human being.

The poetry of both authors is a brilliant example of how the interaction of cultures among the European intelligentsia, who immigrated to Africa, forms a request for literary expression in the context of integration into a foreign cultural society. On the other hand, we see how the attitude towards the topic of Africa and African people transforms historically. The very

landscape of problems changes from decolonization of consciousness in the Macgoye's poetry and its obvious paternalistic notes to Partington's another modernistic "agenda" of present day and his huge quest for uncompromising truth especially when talking about such issues like interracial and intercultural communication in modern world.

Since the lyric character of Macgoye poems historically clearly carries the proverbial 'white man's burden', somehow overcoming it, Partington lives and works at the same time with us, in the era of the latest technological advances, which he and the Maasai grazing cattle equally use (not without reason on the cover of his book «SMS & Face to Face» we see Maasai in national dress who is carrying mobile phone). Partington speaks with his second homeland and its people as equal to them, trying to understand the nature of stereotypes, that have developed due to intercultural and interracial relationships in order to overcome them, including stereotypes in himself. He tries to understand problems of a social nature, while not condemning anyone, but trying to think and analize.

Partington lives in a fundamentally different Africa, different from the one observed by Macgoye, although in their poetry you can find a lot of intersections – for example, both are enthusiastic about the beautiful African nature, they touch on pressing social problems. Finally, they both think and write of themselves as of Africans, they are Kenyan people and writers, which proves the thought that identity is a shifting and fluid construct.

Notes

1. As endnote in the book says, "Nyarloka is Luo term of address for a woman who was born overseas (as in the poet's case) or on the other side of the lake from where she is married" (Macgoye 8)
2. 'Liberation' in Swahili
3. A hint of cluttering the slums of Nairobi with plastic bags, this big environmental problem throughout African and many other countries.
4. Young Maasai warrior
5. Corrupted English word 'leather'
6. 'Prostitute' in Swahili
7. Wikipedia: bit.ly/3okACpe
8. The Kamba or Akamba people are a Bantu ethnic group who predominantly live in the area of Kenya stretching from Nairobi to Tsavo and north to Embu, in the southern part of the former Eastern Province. (Wikipedia: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kamba_people)

Works Cited

Frolova, Natalia S. "Stolknovenie Vostoka i Zapada: vostochnoafrikanskii vzgliad" [The Clash of East and West: An East African View]. "Angloiazychnaia lirika Dzhareda Angiry i poeziia protesta Misere Mugo [English lyrics of Jared Angira and protest poetry of Micere Mugo] // *Vstrecha Vostoka i Zapada. Vzaimodeistvie literatur i traditsii* [Meeting of East and West. Interaction of literature and tradition]. Moscow: IMLI RAS, 2020. P. 75–90 (In Russian)

Ikonya Philo. *Introduction* / *Macgoye M. Make it Sing and other poems*.

Nairobi, 1998. P. vii-xii.

Macgoye, Marjorie O. *Song of Nyarloka and other poems*. Oxford University Press, 1977.

----------. *Make it sing and other songs*. Nairobi, 1998.

Partington, Stephen. *SMS & Face to Face*. Nairobi, 2003.

TRANSPARENT NARRATIVES: A CRITIQUE OF STYLE OF THEATRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE IN KENYA

Wambua Kawive, University of Nairobi

Alina Rinkanya, University of Nairobi

Masumi Odari, University of Nairobi

Abstract

Literary genres and intra-genre typologies have particular stylistic features that define them. Theatre for social justice bespeaks of a theatre programmed to achieve certain goals. I hypothesise that its special purpose has a bearing on the style it employs to accentuate its intent and affects its artistic merit. I will analyse Wakanyote Njuguna's Before the Storm, Kithaka Wa Mberia's Maua Kwenye Jua la Asubuhi and Kivutha Kibwana's Kanzala and interrogate their unique stylistic endowments and performative peculiarities. I investigate whether these texts of theatre for social justice have infractions, what their nature is and what linguistic and extralinguistic forms have been infused in the theatre to advance its purpose and appraise the impact these have on the theatre.

Key words: *theatre, social justice, style, stylistic infractions*

Introduction

Style in literature refers to the way writers manipulate words, movement and vocalisation to create meaning, mood and nuance in their writing or production. Style is critical as it is one of two key blocks of literary analysis. It speaks to how meaning is constructed, structured and conveyed. When focussing on appreciation of style in theatre for social justice, I will examine how the stylistic devices are integrated in performance for audiences to fully appreciate the art. The stylistic nuances and theatrical presentations will be critically appraised in regard to whether and how they enhance the purpose for which the plays were written.

The three plays under discussion were commissioned by organisations doing civic education in Kenya the 1990s. Kithaka wa Mberia's *Maua Kwenye Jua la Asubuhi* was commissioned by the International Commission of the Red Cross (ICRC) so as to popularize the Geneva conventions in a region/country torn by ethnic strife. Kivutha Kibwana's *Kanzala* was funded by the Centre for Law and Research International (CLARION) in order to popularize education on leadership and political participation. Wakanyote Njuguna's *Before the Storm* was funded by the United States agency for International Development (USAID) to educate people on the rights to assembly and voting. The three plays were authored by theatre artists engaged in traditional/proscenium theatre practice. The three playwrights were prominent theatre artists in the 1980's and 1990's in Kenya and were considered political theatre activists. Political theatre has a long history and is descriptive as a term. Kirkby argues as follows:

> Theatre is political if it is *concerned with* the state or *takes sides* in politics. This allows us to define "political theatre" in a way that distinguishes it from other forms of theatre: it is a performance that is intentionally concerned with government, that is intentionally engaged in or consciously takes sides in politics (129)

He further argues that it is intellectual since it deals with "political ideas and concepts usually in an attempt to support or to attack a particular political position" and literary because it "production elements are subservient to, support, and reinforce the symbolic meanings" (130). To him, the politicality of theatre is interpretational and depends on the person reading it or producing it. *Oedipus* and *Hamlet* are political in this nature and they are explicit in pointing out "the institutions and aspects of government that should change; it often describes and supports the exact nature of these changes." (131). According to him, theatre scholars are concerned with how "the content … relates to particular theatrical devices and techniques. He is concerned with the functional relationships between style and expression, between performance and audience" (132). He posits that the Teatro Experimental de Cali - theatre in Colombo that popularised the Colombian guerrilla war - or the play *La Muette* that fermented the Belgian revolution in 1845 (Kirby 1985: 133) are examples of practical political theatre. He says that all theatre that attempts to send a message to the masses has a binary orientation – an analysis of what is wrong and a prescription of what should be done – something he traces back to Horacian times (p134)

In analysing the three plays, I will be aware of the ambivalence of "political theatre" both as a literary terminology and a stylistic predisposition as has been argued above. I will base my analysis around five broad stylistic choices that, in my view, are made in theatre for social

justice. The first stylistic choice is the creation of fluid scripts that are indicative as opposed to prescriptive. These scripts could be a storyline with "bare" or skeletal characters (for example a beautiful girl) who are fleshed out by the audience from name to character. The conflict is also conjured and its actual generation is developed with the community during performance. This style is most common with Theatre in Education, Theatre for Development and Theatre for Health Education. In this case the performances from community to community vary in detail while maintaining a thematic precept – hence alternative scripts sprout in each community of performance.

A second choice is the creation of theatre pieces and performance as a "safe space". In this style the theatre consists of theatrical scripts that are "cheap" with slapstick humour and little or no literary depth. An example of this is what Madhawa Palihapitiya, writing about the use of theatre in the Sri Lanka violence that peaked between 1985 and 1992, posits that even though the theatre produced what was considered "cheap thrills" by critics who looked down upon satire,

> ... Using the resources of their aesthetic form, they were able to be subversive in a climate of repression, without appearing to those in power as a threat. And by attending performances, average citizens could participate in that subversion in a relatively safe way. (75-78)

The "oasis" he referred to is the "safe space" of performance and audience participation. The participation of audiences gives them a sense of power - whether temporary or just symbolic. In Sri Lanka, unlike in Kenya, the warring government and guerrilla groups did not hinder performances, they even financially supported them. He argues that the groups and artists were using local forms of performance and theatre such as ritual, song and dance as a "way for the community to see and to reflect on itself" (81). He argues that since rituals especially are "a deeply embedded form of entertainment, meaning-making and sacred understanding" in the world of the warring communities, the performances were a powerful resource for bridging differences, correcting misperceptions and "helping the country find peace" (82)

The third stylistic choice is the use of the presentational method. This is whereby the theatre is non-fictional and there is a thin veil from the reality. Prendergast and Saxton argue that this theatre

> …is more interested in presenting non-fictional material within thinly disguised fictions of authentic contemporary reality. The actor in presentational theatre is less hidden behind the mask of the character and is close to being him or herself – although still

> protected by the safety of the role – thus enabling the actor to present a character who lives in the world of the audience as well as in the world of the play (12-13)

Social justice theatre practitioners may therefore adopt a style of linguistic choices and character development that mirror the "undramatic" reality in the society it is set in.

The fourth stylistic choice is one of roles assigned to the artists and the audience. Augusto Boal (1995) developed the concept of "spect-actor" in Forum Theatre whereby the audience become participants in the drama – directing it to different resolutions or contributing to the action. The use of the "joker" is integral to this stylistic choice as it recreates *metaxis* (a space in-between the world of the play and the reality) and enables *praxis* (continuous dialectic of reflection and action design). (43) This choice is in a way the best exemplification of the difference of theatre for social justice and other traditional theatre in that the actor-teachers and the audience-actors/spect-actors are engaged in a learning process and the theatre just serves to create a medium for interaction.

The fifth stylistic choice is the role assigned to stories and storytelling. Theatre for social justice mainstreams and integrates the narrative in theatre – storytelling is at the core of popular theatre. The theatre piece may be developed as a narrative that is drawn from the lore of the community and fleshed out to reflect the realities of the community of performance. Alternatively, the unfolding of the drama may be punctuated by a narrator who employs such forms as opening formulas, welcoming the participants to the story and pauses at times to interpret or to discuss with the audience the happenings. Another form maybe where the drama is structured in the oral narrative style – either adopting archetypes of plot and characterisation, or using styles such as *in medias res.* The struggle between what Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984) refers to as "metanarratives" (such as the myth of progress and the idea of one true religion), and "micronarratives" where "people act out and exchange many different ways of understanding rather than relying on one overarching truth" (Fortier: 176) is pre-eminent in theatre for social justice in that characters are concerned with evaluating values in the social milieu and how these relate to their lives.

These stylistic choices are not prescriptive, but rather descriptive and are by no means exhaustive. They represent my reading of the generic forms theatre for social justice adopts. In this paper, I will analyse how the three plays pander to and employ the stylistic choices and what these choices do to their development.

***Maua Kwenye Jua la Asubuhi*: A Narrative Enacted**

*Maua Kwenye Jua la Asubuhi (*further referred to as *Maua)* is a play written for the proscenium performance. The stage directions and presentation speak to a "formal" theatre setting. The pre-eminent style in is the use of the oral narrative. *Maua* adopts the narrative form exemplified in *in media res*. The play opens with the narratives by Nyagachi and Gachono about their predicament as a result of the ethnic conflict. The immediacy of destitution, war, pain and suffering that one meets at the opening of the book is sustained throughout the play. *Maua* is a narrative enacted: the characters are always telling others stories of what happened to them. Indeed apart from the sixth scene where Nali confronts her father about the stockpiling of weapons (pg 58-63), the rest of the play consists of characters relating what happened to them, what they did or what they plan to do.

The second aspect of the use of the narrative is that the author employs stream of consciousness in Chebwe's and Walila's minds. It is used as a contestation in the present time – of social values and current scenarios. One of the key conceptual frameworks of narratives is the reflection of the thoughts of characters when they are faced with difficult situations that they have to mull over or make decisions on. In the play, the stream of consciousness, the retelling of the narrative, is presented in a number of ways. A key one is remembrance, for example where Tungai remembers his days in the military (pp 15, 41). Another is dramatic "projection" – a form of stream of consciousness where a character is not involved in what his stream of consciousness has been used to present. This is seen in Kabitho's reliving of the Watange training to kill his people (17-19). I call it projection because Kabitho was married to a Watange wife – Cheptero – who supposedly left him due to his infidelity. The impression created is that Kabitho's hatred for the Watange is the only reason he imagines and recreates this.

It is this same character, Kabitho, in whose mind the training of Watange young men happens. It is ironical that in this play the name of Wandiku is not mentioned as the target by the Watange warriors. It is notable that the remembrance does not happen in the mind of either Toiche or Chebwe. The two have been given saving graces: Toiche has discovered the lie about land traded by Chebwe as the reason to fight, and Chebwe has his wife Neche and daughter Nali who constantly undermine and check his evil. Kabitho on the other hand is alone (his wife and children are away) and thus his excesses of virulence are unchecked. That is maybe why he is using his seniority with his relatives, Waito and Tungai, to advance the anti-Watange agenda. Another presentation of the stream of consciousness is the dramatization of internal conflict as

seen in the tussle between Chebwe's "good spirit" and "evil spirit" on his role in the violence (pp 31 - 32). The preponderance of flashbacks and stream of consciousness presented in the form of play-in-a-play is a significant stylistic feature in the play.

The third aspect of the use of the narrative is the transposition to narratives of poesy and theatre artistry due to strife in the case of Nali and Waito. One gets the impression that the narrative subverts the dramatic: in what is supposed to be the "love scene" Waito and Nali are instead telling each other stories about the devastation of war – both in Lolomo and South Sudan. The place of poesy of love – relived through a flashback of their meeting (ironically in the dark after the bus they were travelling in broke down) – is overshadowed by the reality of their predicament. This is the exemplification of the how conflict is treated in the play. The urgency of portrayal of the impact of conflict, the destruction of life, the dismembering of persons is so great that the poet (Waito) is unable to share with Nali and he argues that he will have to finish writing a poem so that he can later explain. We can argue that Waito lacks the language, indeed the phraseology, to describe the *jinamizi* (horror) that he witnessed. We learn in this same scene that Nali, who is a performing artist, is unable to enjoy acting because of the trauma of seeing victims of ethnic clashes dumped in river Gera. (p52)

A second aspect of style in the play is how the characters are presented. As opposed to a representational mode, the characters in the play are flat. The characters are types and the depth of their lives is hidden from us by "purpose" for which they are intended by the author. The characters that have an inkling of humanity and/or positivity (Tungai, Waito and Nali) are consumed by mindless war and carnage that controls their lives.

Thirdly, the play's main conflict happens before it begins. The play opens with the denouement and/or tragic suffering of persons who have already been affected by the central conflict of the play – ethnic violence. It opens with characters already in an Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camp. We get the feel that the worst has passed (and indeed it has) and now they are left with the pain and reminiscences of the past. Consequently, there is nothing new that happens in the play. One finds that the play and the conflict is spent at the beginning and the characters just relive their dreams and horrors or in some cases, the extension of similar problems: the government ordering the IDP camp closed is a parallel to their being evicted out of their homes; the running away from the lorry taking them to Mikuyu province is parallel to their running away from the attackers at their homes.

Enrolling the audience does not happen in the text. In the one instance when Kabitho turns to the audience, he is the personification of a deracinated man fighting for his sanity. He is in a soliloquy after listening to the radio and he is bitter with the use of the radio and TV to lie about the status of the country and therefore turns to point at "someone in the audience" not to interact with them, but to rant about the state's use of media to spread lies on non-existent peace (p6). The sarcasm in his vitriolic remarks is evident and that can be said to be the only reason he turned to the audience – to create difference and to signal the shift in the otherwise straightforward language of the play. In this utterance, Kabitho does not want to influence the audience or to seek their concurrence or negation of what he is saying. He instead is drumming to them that the situation is hopeless; indeed he is annoyed that they may be listening to the radio – which is the other character on stage – and not believing him. As such, the audience is not participating, it is observing, and being overwhelmed by the dire situation that the people of Lolomo North are visited with. By and large *Maua* is not different, in terms of dramatic presentation, from the traditional plays for the proscenium theatre.

Kanzala – A Contestation of Narratives

A critical reading of *Kanzala* unearths a presentational characterisation. My finding is that the characters are not necessarily unique people, but types. Kanzala is a parody of "Councillor" a powerful grassroots civic post in the Kenya of the 1990s. The character of Mama and her predicament in trying to wrest power from Kanzala is reminiscent of the struggle by women to get involved in politics against a patriarchal setup. Sweetie is a stereotype of a barmaid of the period who is treated by customers as part of the goods on sale. The elders and pastors are also presentational in refusing to bulge to the whims of the Kanzala on principle – drawn from their culture and religion respectively. Indeed in the play, everyone behaves their part and there are no surprises.

The play employs the narrator/facilitator/joker method of the Boalian Forum Theatre. The narrator is a talented person who introduces the narrative, the characters and some scenes. At the opening, the narrator, like the chorus in proscenium theatre, introduces the theme through a poem dedicated to Mother Africa, the land of black people that has been raped by colonialism and post-independence corruption and dictatorship. This sets the tempo for the narrative he tells to the audience about the public announcement by the leader of Zoza who declares that the ruling party, Our People's Own Party (OPOP), would rule for a hundred years whereas the

people of the country were yearning for change. The story is soon transformed into a role play by members of the audience who play children and parents/visitors on Kanzala's visit to a school named after him. In the role play, there is a clear subversion of civic education through the reframing of democracy as "obey and do as instructed". This becomes an "authoritative" meaning of democracy for the party (OPOP) and the audience, reduced to docile minions and hapless children, clap for the elucidation by the leader. The narrator is quick to assert his role by saying "Mimi ndiye mwalimu wa tamthilia" (I am the drama teacher) (p6) – a double edged statement that means he is the drama teacher in the school but also he is the "facilitator educator" in the theatre. He goes on to present a poem titled "democracy" in whose enactment, the "teaching" by Kanzala is debunked and exposed for the lie it is. The poem is about the search for freedom: the freedom to fly, the freedom for voice, the freedom to be free and how the search for freedom has been curtailed by the powerful elite – like Kanzala (p.7). In this way, the narrator becomes the owner of the narrative, the owner of the dramatic expose that would follow.

Having introduced the evil that bestrides Zoza, the narrator next gives a rendition of the hope in the love of the new generation characters – Joe and Winnie – whose love ultimately conquers the diabolical political contest between evil (as represented by Kanzala, the Ruler and OPOP) and positive social change (as represented by Mama). This is the last time we meet the narrator. So his role in the play is to introduce the context, the main characters and the conflict. In this case, the conflict is between hate and love.

Kanzala can be summed up as a contestation of narratives. The first contestation is of the narrative of power and conquest as presented by Kanzala (rich, powerful) versus the narratives of humane existence presented by Sweetie (poor, vulnerable). In their conversation, Sweetie represents the reasonable woman, self-respecting even when she is doing a hazardous and demeaning job. She asserts her humanity against the raw power of Kanzala and his henchmen and declares that no man would touch her without her willing it – despite the fact that she was a bar maid (p18). Throughout the play, Sweetie resists his advances and instead is in love with Mwalimu, the perceived weak and deranged teacher who is also the antithesis of Kanzala. Secondly, where Kanzala has sown hatred and plans to prevent the wedding of his son to Mama's daughter, Sweetie is the go to person for the fruition of their affair.

The second contestation is the family narratives of Kanzala (divorce and hatred) and that of Mama (love beyond death). When accosted by the church elder and the pastor about a reunion

with his wife, he threatens them with dire consequences and even rejects their blessings (p48). He also threatens to disown his son upon realising that he wants to marry Mama's daughter (p64). Mama on the other hand, though single, lost her husband through death, has kept the vow and opted to live with the memories of the love rather than marry another man who may disappoint her (p27). Her daughter is her family, and she would do anything to make her happy. When Winnie tells her that she is in love with Joe, she refuses to judge the boy by the standards of the evil wrought by his father. Instead, she wishes Winnie well and advises her to be careful and be sure of her heart.

The third narrative is the campaign narrative of Kanzala (power defeats challengers) and the campaign narrative of Mama (the good must guard against exploitation). The campaign slogan of Kanzala is the snake, complete with its poise to strike the opponent. In the scene where the two go to campaign in the field, they both tell stories to the audience. The stories take the narrative performance form in African culture: the declaration of the story, the opening formula and the adoption of archetypes from lore.

Kanzala weaves the story of how the party and the Ruler defeated the tunnel digging people who wanted to overthrow the government by clever means – emerging at statehouse. He narrates how ostensibly, God brought to them confusion (here alluding to the Tower of Babel story). This is ridicule to the political opposition by the ruling party. In the same breathe he ridicules the search for positions of leadership by women by appropriating the patriarchal narrative that, in Africa, women belong in the kitchen. Mama on the other hand narrates an adaptation of the story of unsuspecting merciful person (woman) who helps a stranded "good-looking" man cross a flooded river, not knowing that the person was an ogre and would refuse to dismount and stick his ogre nails on her neck. The counter narrative by Mama rests on the chthonic essence of womanhood: woman is the mother of man, the caregiver, the abused saviour of the "ogre-man". She debunks the "prostitution" tag put on women who seek leadership. Kanzala's narrative is denigrating while Mama's narrative is humanising.

The play also employs the stream of consciousness as a technique for futuristic pitching of consequences of present action. In the scene – which appropriately happens in Sweetie's bar – Kanzala is visited in his waking dream by a being who shows him the future (p65-68). This future is a fruition of the bloodbath that the party has visited on the opposition in order to retain power. Kanzala hails this as the way of crushing the opposition and is happy that even if a blood river runs through the country, he and his ilk can go to live abroad. He is impervious to

the irony of this predicament. The future also shows a change in the running of government preceded by a national reconciliation dialogue conference, where revenge is abandoned and a new ethic of value based leadership instituted. Kanzala is shocked that the Ruler seems to have sanctioned such a thing and he gets unsettled. His world is hinged on the dictum of the Ruler, and the absence of the Ruler in the dream is unimaginable. At the end of the dream, he thinks that his "heart has stopped" and he is dead. It is after this dream that a bit of his humanity creeps back: he treats Sweetie like a human being and professes not to sexually assault her.

Symbolism in the text is at the level of representational characterisation. The play is set in a fictional country – Zoza – which is Kiswahili for "bring chaos". As earlier stated, Kanzala parodies a councillor, and he is the child of "Matata" meaning chaos/suffering. Sweetie, the barmaid, is a parody of a loose woman. Mama represents women as well as social grounding, respectability and resilience. Joseph and Winnie are known by their English names as was trendy at the time – to signify their "cosmopolitan" nature and as young people who belong to a new age. The other characters are given role names: the Chief, the Pastor, the church elder, the community elders and the teacher.

Notwithstanding these features, the play is wordy with little or no "play". In the first place, characters are talking about the presence or absence of civic values but, except for Kanzala, none demonstrate the necessary action to foment conflict and thus necessitate a resolution. The introduction of "kiumbe" (an apparition) in the dream of Kanzala, is a lazy way of creating an internal conflict for Kanzala (who has hitherto been plain evil) and thus forcing a change of heart and a semblance of social deliverance for him. After this, he attends the wedding, is remorseful about how he treated his wife and even Sweetie is seeing him as a nice human being worth of considering for a visit to her "statehouse". (p77).

Secondly, the play pays little attention to the dramatisation if conflict. The opportunities for enhancement of conflict – the bar scene when Mwalimu calls Kanzala out, the scene when Sweetie flatly rejects Kanzala, the scene when the elders refuse to support Kanzala over Mama, the scene when the Pastor and church elder refuse to give blessings to Kanzala or even when Mama and Kanzala face each other in the campaigns – are wasted in civility and empty (inconsequential) and undramatic dialogues.

***Before the Storm:* A Narrative Untold**

In respect to the basis for analysis set out, the play can be said not to employ storytelling. It also has a cast dialogue that is assigned to characters and thus textual fluidity is in doubt. We

note thought that the seven scenes are organized like sketches of dramatic action which are enacted out by the characters in role. Although this is a methodology of theatre creation for community theatre, there is no evidence of this as the play was written as opposed to being workshopped.

In terms of presentational methodology, the conflicts are socially untenable and unjusticeable. The conflict between Mama and Dada, between Baba and Sani, between Baba and the Chief, and between Baba and Jerusha are built on flimsy grounds and are exaggerated and abandoned without sufficient depth. What starts as a reprimand by a father to a son who is staying out too late turns to a shouting match during which the father, ironically, storms out (p11). The son, when left talking to his mother, conjures images of blood thirsty devils and declares they have no home but a den of devil worship (p12). Dada and Sani join the group formed by Jerusha and take part in the plan to burn their own house for reasons that are untenable – more like the Raskolnikovian imperative in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* where the character became a victim of adopting nihilistic "incomplete" ideas "floating" in the air to murder an old woman (Mochulsky, p272). Dada accuses Mama, her mother, of extortion, theft, war mongering and other things (p41) without as much as an iota of evidence. Her vitriolic hate and accusations of devil worship to Mama have no merit whatsoever. The chief and Baba have been friends for long and their fall out is unmerited. Baba has even helped the chief's son to go to college abroad (p45). If we take it for granted that the Chief and Baba were supporting different political sides, or just that the Chief is doing his work as detailed by government, what justifies him to join a gang and don balaclava to go burn Baba's house when he is in the Chief's own jail?

Whereas I note that the conflicts are untenable, I also argue that the senselessness of the conflict, and its abandonment at critical times, inversely foregrounds the social justice agenda. As the audience, we are left with the hangover of wars unfought and conflicts unattended that make the social justice agenda more urgent. I am also contending that this may have been an unintended outcome of the theatre.

Although *Before the Storm's* form bespeaks a proscenium presentation, the play, like most improvisational drama, has minimal stage directions and/or dramatisation of the action. The play is full of "preaching" by characters. Though talking to others, their speeches take the form of soliloquies – the characters talk for long without interruption as though they are advancing a thesis or proffering an argument. This robs the play of essential theatricity. What complicates

this is that some of the passages are actually regurgitations of "civic education modules" on social analysis (pp17-18) the rights to assembly, (p37) the right to participation (pp35-36), voter registration (pp30-31), the precepts of democracy (pp33-34), the right to property (pp43-45), and the respect for diversity (p48). This decreases the tempo of the play and style is sacrificed at the altar of messagism. The dialogue is "untheatrical" – plain, direct and pedagogic.

We note also that the entry and exit of characters is dramatically unmotivated – characters bump on each by accident and start or participate in conversations that are out of sync with their character and setting. The first line is a classic example. Baba and Mama are in the sitting room and from the blue, Baba says: "My dear, you look as good as new…", (1). This statement is completely unmotivated and out of context since we have hardly met them and we do not know their ages or their status in life. Still in the first scene, when the daughter enters – coming from town/post office, Mama asks about the mail and in the same breathe brings up the story of chief's son (Dada's fiancé) (p4). This story has just been discussed between Mama and Baba and Dada was neither aware of nor does she get prepared for it by the mother. Most of the dialogue is structured this way and one feels that the characters are fleeting in and out of the dramatic space like phantoms. During the quarrel with his son in Scene 2, Baba storms out at the height of it and waltzes back in as Sani talks to Mama declaring that they have something to talk about and the son should start "shooting straight away" (p13). When Sani says that he has nothing to say, the topic dies and Baba starts a conversation with Mama about the prophetess. By the time they all exit, the father-son talk has been abandoned and there is no hint of what nature it was. This kind of barging in and out of the dramatic space purposelessly weakens the play tremendously.

Naming, like is characteristic of theatre for social justice where role referencing is the *modus oprandi,* reflects representational characterisation. Mama (mother) Baba (father) Dada (sister) Sani (son) Mtu (person), Kijana (boy), Man (a man) and Chief (chief) are used both as proper nouns as well as adjectival referents. Apart from the prophetess named Jerusha (a biblical allusion to the daughter of Zadok, the priest – and the mother of King Jotham whose father, Uzziah, had been struck with leprosy for daring burn incense at the alter whereas he was not a priest), and Dada – whose real name is Nehanda (p56) – an allusion of the royal "mudzimu" – a "female" spirit among the Shona of Zimbabwe, all the other characters have no symbolic or other depth.

The play therefore realizes little theatrical merit since conflicts are unmotivated and superficial – a narrative untold. Those that are genuine are abandoned by characters exiting when the action "is about to begin". What grips the reader of the play is the fact that there is no storm: this is a powerful symbol which is, in a way, a misplaced hyperbole. The image presupposes strong winds – maybe a whirlwind, gathered clouds, a dark hue over the earth and a heavy downpour that drenches the land unexpectedly. None of these things are present in the play – literally. The ending also seems contrived and one gets a feel that the issues that have been raised have not been addressed but the characters have to hug to get the final bow, the conflicts or betrayals that have been hinted on or have been "betrayed", are left unattended.

Conclusion

The three plays may not fit in the definitive categorisations of the theatre. They are neither tragedies nor comedies or any of the in-between typologies of proscenium theatre, nor are they community theatre pieces. They are the products of the practitioners of one tradition "forced" to pander to the dynamics of another. Structurally, all three have a linear structure: a fallout of parents over non personal issues (politics and ethnic bigotry); the weak development of conflict – none of the supposed protagonists has a socially meritable case; violence – or the threat of it – is ever present and the love and eventual marriage (or supposition in the case of *Before the Storm*) of the children is the form of "conflict resolution" adopted. Whereas we agree that they are largely proscenium theatrical pieces, popular and community theatre forms such as storytelling, use of facilitator, audience participation etc are employed as techniques. There is centrality of presentational narratives and stories. The plays are also overly didactic – educating us on human rights, international protocols, constitutionalism, civic responsibility and peace. We conclude that their exigency has compromised their style and theatrical potency.

Works Cited

Fortier, Mark. *Theory/Theatre: An Introduction.* London: Routledge, 1997

Kibwana, Kivutha. *Kanzala.* Claripress Limited. Nairobi. 1999.

Kirby, Michael. "On Political Theatre." *The Drama Review: TDR*, vol. 19, no. 2, 1975, pp. 129–135. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/1144954. Accessed 17 Oct. 2020.

Kruger, Loren. "'Africa Thina'? Xenophobic and Cosmopolitan Agency in Johannesburg's

Film and Television Drama." *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2009, pp. 237–252. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/40283225. Accessed 17 Oct. 2020.

Mberia. Kithaka wa. *Maua Kwenye Jua la Asubuhi*. 3rd Edition. Marimba Publications Limited. Nairobi, 2016.

Mochulsky, Konstantin. *Dostoevsky: His life and Work.* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University press, 1967.

Njuguna, Wakanyote. *Before the Storm.* Claripress Limited. Nairobi. 1998

Palihapitiya, Madhawa. "The Created Space: Peace Building and Performance in Sri Lanka". Cohen C. E et al (eds) *Acting Together: Performance and the Creative Transformation of Conflict.* Vol 1: *Resistance and Reconciliation in Regions of Violence.* New Village Press, Oakland, CA, 2011. 73 - 96

INSEPARABILITY OF FREUD'S PSYCHOANALYSIS FROM AFRICAN LITERATURE: INTERPRETING EAST AFRICAN SOCIAL VISION THROUGH DRAMATIC TRIPARTITE PSYCHE

Joseph Muleka,

Department of Literature, University of Nairobi

Abstract

Uzoma Esonwanne, in the article ***"The 'Crisis of the Soul': Psychoanalysis and African Literature,"*** *argues that psychoanalysis and African literature have long maintained a studious, if not wary, distance from each other (140). The interpretation of this is that psychoanalysis as a theoretical approach does not, or cannot apply to African literature; a claim which – in the view of this paper – can only be the consequence of a misreading of African literary works, whether deliberate or not. Of course, many literary works by African writers can be subjected to a psychoanalytic determination. The aim of this paper is to disabuse Esonwanne's claim by demonstrating that, and how, in fact psychoanalytic approach is core and inescapable in the full understanding of the motivation of some of the actions by a majority of the characters in African literary works. We are bound to turn to psychoanalysis as we attempt to unearth the social vision that the characters represent and, in particular, what drives them. The paper carries out this task using selected works by some of the leading East African playwrights; namely Imbuga and Ruganda, as a case study. The paper endeavours to apply the psychoanalytic "tripartite psyche" to interrogate four of some of the most prevalent concerns of East African drama, namely: abuse of power, amassing wealth, social injustice and sycophancy cum betrayal. Through the application of the tripartite psyche, the paper discusses the four identified vices, arguing that indeed these are part of the motivators for the rampant destructive instincts witnessed in the works, including murder, corruption, incarceration of perceived dissidents, clinging to power and ethnic cleansing, among others. The paper relies on textual analysis, employing qualitative descriptive and comparative research designs.*

Key words: *African literature, East African drama, psychoanalysis, tripartite psyche, character motivation and drive, social vision***.**

Introduction

As I purpose to apply psychoanalysis in this paper, I remain alive to the criticisms that have been directed towards it as a theoretical approach and some of the objections to its application.

For instance, Kohut, 1971, in his analysis of the narcissistic character dismisses psychoanalysis as incapable of bringing together his interests in neurology and literature. Meanwhile, Eagle in his 2003 and 2007 critiques on psychoanalysis, draws a long list of scholars who argue that what the theory stands for may have been true years ago, but the thinking has since changed. But though

Eagle himself differs with Freud on a number of the latter' s claims, he nonetheless refuses to agree with the scholars' argument that the thinking has changed and no longer favours psychoanalysis. Indeed in an observation that appears to give psychoanalysis the benefit of the doubt, Eagle points out that perhaps the primary division in either supporting psychoanalysis, or opposing it, may all have to do with the different paradigms, or different world views. He particularly acknowledges the fact that psychoanalysis is adaptable to different disciplines and this can greatly determine its admissibility, or rejection. Apparently the strongest opposition to the theory appears to be on the basis of its lack of empirical evidence which arguably is the reason many modern psychologists are unable to reconcile it with certain modern situations.

However, the objections to psychoanalysis notwithstanding, the voices for the theory are equally loud. One notable voice, for example, is Nobel laureate, Eric Richard Kandel, who, in his 2016 publication argues that psychoanalytic theory offers the most comprehensive understanding of the mind. Kandel illustrates how science, through the process of reduction can inform the way we experience a work of art and seek to understand its meaning, and in particular how we may relate to emotions such as fear, anger, guilt, curiosity, anxiety, self-preservation and the like. Indeed the said emotions have often been evidently expressed through art, literature, music and dance, a fact that attracts me, in this paper to employ psychoanalysis as a vehicle that could explain the emotions that drive the characters in my selected works for analysis to behave the way they do. I specifically employ the psychoanalytic strand of tripartite psyche to analyze how the characters in the works relate to the emotions of fear, anger and guilt.

The tripartite psyche involves the interaction between the id, ego and superego, as stipulated in Sigmund Freud's 1923 personality theory as the three parts of the psyche. Freud presents the id as representing our instinctual dark desires basically targeting the individual's pleasures without regard to consequences. The super-ego on the other hand assumes the criticizing and ethicizing role, while the ego is the coordinated, pragmatic bit that intercedes between the

demands of the id and the super-ego, thereby serving as the individual's conscience. Defined within the confines of the philosophy of African socialism, the African superego (i.e. what represents moral and virtue in the African context), in a traditional African way demands for a sharing of economic resources in a manner that empowers all, while ensuring a democratic and brotherly coexistence. The rationale of this, we may say, is to help build a sense of a cohesive society anchored on societal togetherness. If the African philosophy stands as it does then, what is it that brings about some of the representative antithetical actions that have often been portrayed by some African playwrights? In other words, if the said African philosophy is anything to go by, then the situations as portrayed in a majority of the plays by African playwrights are a travesty of African socialism, a philosophy which as pointed out emphasizes equal sharing, brotherly coexistence and societal togetherness. This then raises the question of why matters may be as they are, as reflected in the plays sampled in this paper.

East African playwrights – represented in this paper by Francis Imbuga and John Ruganda – address many subjects, some unique to the individual writers, or individual texts, while some appear to be shared concerns. In the attempt to demonstrate the applicability of psychoanalysis to African literature, contrary to Uzoma Esonwanne's claim above, this paper deals with some of the issues that appear to be common to plays by the two leading playwrights. The themes singled out for discussion in this paper are: abuse of power, amassing wealth, social injustice and sycophancy cum betrayal.

Theatre in East Africa and Reality

Mugubi (2003) argues that literature and society have an intimate relationship, while as Wa Thiong'o (1978) had earlier put it, literature results from the conscious acts of men in society, which assertion is interpreted to mean that literature reflects the society that produces it. This being the case, we can logically posit that the plays written by East African playwrights are in fact a drama of the situation in the region. We could explain this by visiting some of the prevalent concerns of East African drama listed earlier as abuse of power, amassing wealth, social injustice and sycophancy cum betrayal, then relate this to what is on record about actual occurrences in the East African region, initially Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, but now including Rwanda, Burundi and South Sudan, with DRC Congo having applied to be incorporated.

Abuse of power, for example, is a prominent theme in the plays from the post-colonial East African context, of course as in many other African regions. One type of abuse of power is monopolizing power, or clinging to power as is commonly referred to. This theme perhaps targets to reflect what has been a common practice in a majority of the East African countries. Kenya, for example, started with Jomo Kenyatta who died in office when he was already in his sixteenth year in office, while his successor, Moi, ruled for twenty-four years. Tanzania's Julius Nyerere, a man considered to be quite liberal and democratically minded, still ruled for twenty-one years, while Milton Obote and Idi Amin Dada in the neighbouring Uganda, had both to be forced out of office. Yoweri Museveni who took up the reigns in 1986 still remains in office to the time of this paper. By the time the term he secured in 2021 ends, he will have served forty years in office and there are no indications yet that he will not be running again. Paul Kagame of Rwanda, having taken over power in 2000, is now twenty-one years in office and nobody is talking of his possible retirement. Mobutu Sese Seko of Congo Kinshasa ruled for thirty-two years, while Omar al-Bashir of Sudan (which later gave birth to South Sudan, a member of the East African Community) ruled from 1989 until he was overthrown in 2019. Meanwhile, Pierre Nkurunziza of Burumbi, pushed himself in 2015 to run for a third term against the provisions of the country's constitution. He had already served the first and second terms totaling the ten years that the constitution allowed.The above is evidence of the leaders in the East African countries trying to hold on to power. This is perhaps the situation that is often reflected in the works of some East African playwrights. For instance, Boss in Imbuga's *Betrayal in the City* and later *Man of Kafira*, represents leaders who consider themselves the only people in their countries who can lead. These leaders, therefore, cannot allow the position of leadership go to someone else. Similarly, the head of state in Ruganda's *The Floods* (also referred to as Boss) and the German rulers in Hussein's *Kinjeketile,* reflect leaders unwilling to cede power. They instead, want to cling onto power and use their positions to amass wealth (another concern of the East African playwrights), while denying their subjects social justice (yet another theme). In a majority of cases, the leaders become dictators who attempt to work themselves towards absolute power. To do this, they use nepotism to bring in their people, whom they put in strategic positions to safeguard their interests while being sure of total allegiance. They can then loot the country's economy through their well placed lieutenants. Boss in Imbuga's *Betrayal in the City*, for example, uses his cousin, Mulili, to get anything he wants, while Bwogo in Ruganda's *The Floods* also serves as the Boss' right hand man, prepared to do the latter's dirty work which may include silencing those that appear to be anti-establishment, the

way Adika in *Betrayal in the City* is killed in cold blood for demonstrating against Boss' government.

Since the rulers have their people everywhere, they can then oppress and exploit their subjects at will without fear of reprisal or resistance. Besides, for the rulers to make sure they achieve total success in their oppression and exploitation of the masses, they create a culture of sycophancy and betrayal in a way that their followers will do anything in the name of their rulers. The sycophants are prepared to steal on behalf of their bosses, though also doing so for their own sakes. Meanwhile, the sycophants will be falling over each other as they struggle to be the ones to catch the benevolent eye of the boss. In this regard betrayal plays a key role because the boss wants information on possible saboteurs of his/her schemes. For instance, Odie's betrayal of his brother Wak, in Ruganda's *Shreds of Tenderness*, to the bosses is considered an act of patriotism because the latter (Wak) is seen as a threat to the establishment. Of course the act is actually self serving, just like when Mulili, in Imbuga's *Betrayal in the City* betrays Kabito to Boss so as to get the milk tender.

The Manifestation of the Tripartite Psyche in East African Drama

Before I can demonstrate how the tripartite psyche is reflected in the drama of the selected playwrights from East Africa, it is perhaps necessary to shed more light on how it operates. In *The Ego and The Id*, Freud postulates that mental life is dependent on three drives: the id, the ego and the superego. While the id is explained in terms of unorganized, often unreasonable instinctual trends, the superego assumes the criticizing and often stifling, restrictive ethicizing role, as the ego remains the coordinated, pragmatic bit that mediates between the demands of the id and the superego. Meanwhile, in *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud asserts that the id is a very powerful drive, because it represents the 'pleasure principle' which is the programme that decides the purpose of life. Indeed the very preoccupation of humanity is to seek pleasure and preservation of life. Of course the id's pleasure principle can be overwhelming if the programmes of the ego and superego, represented by the 'reality principle' and the 'morality principle', respectively, were to be ignored. This implies that the id, ego, and superego, though all domiciled in the same individual, mostly operate in conflict.

I wish to demonstrate the reflection of the drives above in selected works of drama: *Betrayal in the City* and *Man of Kafira* by Francis Imbuga and *The Floods* and *Shreds of Tenderness* by John Ruganda. I will base my demonstration on the conflicts as exerted by the characters in the works. In particular, I want to focus on how inclusively conflicts impinge on the lives of the characters in terms of the social, political and psychological identities. The conflicts appear at the internal and external levels. At the internal conflict level, I explore aspects of internalized anger, fear and guilt; while at the external conflict level I interrogate revenge as a manifestation of overindulgence in pursuit of justice and rebellion as a reaction to political repression.

Tripartite Psyche and Internalized Fear

I wish to argue that the aspect of internalized fear plays a major role in driving id's programme of pleasure principle. The character fears that lack will impinge their access to pleasure and self-preservation, thereby poking the death instincts. To avoid death and preserve oneself the character must do all it takes to ensure safety: the safety that comes with dominating power and protecting control, as well as having enough wealth, of course always fearing in case what one has gets depleted. I submit that Boss' uncontrollable desire to dominate others and to cow his critics (in both *Betrayal in the City* and *Man of Kafira*) is the genesis of tyranny and injustices in Kafira. His repressive tendencies can be seen as driven by his id, the part of the mind that Freud in *The Ego and the Id,* posits as using every means to avoid pain and to seek pleasure. Boss' id-ridden fear turns him into a despot and a tyrant. Of tyrants, Socrates once observed: "Once a tyrant has attained a position of power, he must guard it jealously. He must live in fear of everyone, having behaved unjustly to everyone. His domination becomes a prison in which he himself is bound." (Hall, 45). Of course domination goes hand in hand with economic, social and political power.

Indeed the dominant theme in the selected works is the desire for wealth and domination by those in power, which turn out to be the root cause of injustice in society. The id, and in particular its programme of the pleasure principle is the underlying drive for the said desire for wealth and domination. In the absence of the superego to filter socially unacceptable urges, the ego of the regimes in power are defenseless against the demands of the id. In Imbuga's *Betrayal in the City* and *Man of Kafira*, for example, the government officials are depicted as selfish and

manipulative graft lords whose dishonest and corrupt dealings have not only degraded the social values but also dehumanized the masses. Boss in *Betrayal in the City* is depicted as a character out of control, whose personality, we may argue is overridden by the uncoordinated demands of the id. His uncontrolled desire to impress his foreign visitor makes him become ready to sacrifice not only the country's meager resources but also the lives of the citizens. He deals ruthlessly with the students who try to demonstrate against his dalliance with foreigners/expatriates at the expense of the citizens. Similarly, driven by the pleasure principle, Boss throws all care to the winds in his sexual pursuits; his desire for Regina blinds him to the fact that he is first a human being, a husband and also a respected head of state. He attempts to rape her in total disregard of decorum and the lady's own feelings, leave alone what everyone else would say. This portrays not only the degradation of social values but also dehumanization of the people, women in particular. It is indeed the very selfish interest and lack of consideration for the feelings of others that leads Boss in *Man of Kafira* to have Regina kidnapped and forcefully taken to him in his exile in Abiara.

Boss' associates are not any better. Driven by the id of self-gain, Mulili, for example, plans Kabito's death because the latter is standing between him and the milk tender. Mulili, whose very place in government is due to nepotism – Boss is his cousin – peddles every kind of falsehood against his colleagues so as to win the favour and trust of his cousin. The cousin himself, conceited, self-serving and keen to stay in power at all costs, his ineptness not withstanding, believes his (Mulili's) propaganda. He then uses this to justify the oppression of the people and the necessity to stash the looted cash in overseas accounts – perhaps to cushion himself against scarcity in future, thus, a threat to his pleasure. Meanwhile, out of the need for self-preservation, Mulili too does not hesitate to betray his cousin when he realizes that he could be shot during the botched rehearsal.

John Ruganda, too, presents id driven characters in *The Floods* and *Shreds of Tenderness*. Bwogo in *The Floods* kills in the name of the Boss and the ruling party. He will in turn be promoted and become the head of National Research Bureau, a murderous arm of the government. In order to win accolades from his boss, Bwogo becomes ruthless. He is prepared to liquidate the entire population in a well choreographed impending danger in the form of floods. Incidentally, Nankya, a supposed intellectual upon whom the people's redemption depends, also

appears to sometimes act in dalliance with Bwogo, perhaps for self preservation, or perhaps due to forces beyond her. Meanwhile, the id of pleasure and self-gain pushes Odie in *Shreds of Tenderness* to betray his brother Wak to the agents of the country's tyrannical government. Making it look like a patriotic gesture of helping the government deal with dissidents, it later turns out that in fact it was simply a self-serving attempt to get rid of his brother so as to remain the sole heir to his father's wealth, a sure way of enjoying the life of plenty in future.

What comes out from the few instances highlighted here, of course out of the numerous similar occurrences in the selected works is that fear, driven by the id programme of the pleasure principle leads the characters to wanting to sacrifice others for their own self-preservation, which psychoanalysis views as the fear of death. Boss's fear of his critics and by extension losing power, leads him in *Betrayal in the City* and *Man of Kafira*, to tyranny, murder, corruption, nepotism, embezzlement of funds, incarceration of dissidents and other ills against humanity, perhaps as a way of trying to assuage the fear of his own fall. He becomes delusional after experiencing bouts of fear and resorts to silencing anyone who dares to criticize him. The labeled dissidents - Jusper, Jere, Mosese, Lum Lum, Regina, Kabito, Tumbo and others, are all made to suffer different afflictions, including death for some, on account of Boss's fear of the threat to his desire to remain in power. On the other hand, the dissidents' passion for liberty and justice is mocked and turned into humiliation by those controlling the power structures.

Tripartite Psyche and Internalized Anger

The lead characters in the works under reference, for instance, Bwogo and Nankya in *The Floods*; Odie in *Shreds of Tenderness*; Jusper, Boss and Regina in *Betrayal in the City* and *Man of Kafira*, are depicted as being mentally deranged. The derangement in all the cases appear to come as a result of overindulgence: if not being drunk with power (Boss and Bwogo), it could be overzealous desire to please the bosses (Bwogo, and Mulili in *Betrayal in the City*), or the greed of owning/amassing wealth (Odie, Boss, Mulili). Derangement could also be caused by great anger due to injustices in society, which then leads to unbridled passion for revenge (Jusper and Regina). In the latter case, for example, Jusper suffers derangement due to the repressed anger and bitterness. He appears to suffer from acute distress. His condition worsens when Boss wipes out his entire family and as his late brother, Adika's ghost appears to ask for revenge. Besides, Jusper is already hurting at the fact that his girlfriend Regina has been taken by Boss, who later murders his associates such as Mosese. Jusper is, therefore, on the verge of total madness. His anger and bitterness appear to take away his very humanity and his consciousness.

Discussing anger from the Freudian world of id, ego and superego, it is my view that the instinct (anger) is an id, ego and superego at the same time. As a superego, anger could be said to be a criticism, or disapproval of what appears to be a travesty of the acceptable norms. It is perhaps a reaction that attempts to draw attention to the fact that a character is transgressing, or tampering with the rights of others. It is the accumulation of displeasure about what the conscience disapproves. So anger serves as the voice of reason that demands for a change of the status quo. It is a kind of protest that seems to shout, "I am not happy."

Jusper, for example, is angry with Boss and his entire government because the establishment is insensitive to human suffering and keeps trampling on the rights of the people. The people are not permitted to mourn their dead (who have in fact been murdered by the very establishment). Adika's parents cannot perform burial rights for their loved one while Regina is prohibited from attending her brother's funeral. Meanwhile, anger could also be an id that serves the pleasure principle. Anger, for instance, tempts one, urging them to revenge so as to get even. Apparently, Jusper's main preoccupation is to take revenge on Boss. His (Jusper's) psychic redemption appears to reside in the possibility of assassinating Boss. Boss has become his id whom his superego in the form of his late brother's ghost demands must be eliminated. Bwogo too in *The Floods* tries to revenge on Nankya and her mother. What he touts as impending floods is merely a hoax deliberately planned to be used to execute the murder plot. Revenge is indeed for self-gratification, meaning that it goes to serve one's id. Of course the one planning revenge often tries to justify the action by positing it as serving the greater good. Jusper, for example, sees revenge against Boss as justice for the citizens of Kafira. The truth, however, is that Jusper himself carries much personal grudge against Boss and the latter's fall would serve greater gratification for him (Jusper) himself. It is the latter's id that would actually benefit from such an eventuality.Incidentally while anger at id level (pleasure principle) desires revenge and the superego (morality principle) appeals to guilt to institute reparation, the ego's reality principle disillusions the actors on the prevailing circumstances. For instance, Jusper's intense desire to bring Boss and his regime down comes face to face with the reality of the futility of hoping to fight the tyrannical system empty handed, moreover, perhaps alone. In Ruganda's *The Floods,* Bwogo too, finds himself confronted with the fact that his plan to kill Nankya has to deal with the love he feels for the latter. On the other hand, Nankya's own dislike for what Bwogo does has to reconcile itself with her very desire to be with him; to partake of what he is able to offer; to love him; and so on – perhaps a typical case of the ego mediating between the id and the superego.

Jusper is also angry at the number of deaths that have occurred under Boss' regime. Lamenting the latter's atrocities in *Man of Kafira*, Jusper counts on his fingers the people killed: Mosese, Tumbo, Archbishop Lum Lum, my parents, Chief Chenyisa and Zozi, he killed them all. Yes, Boss killed the cream among our people," (64). Such senseless killings of people dear to one are indeed enough to make anyone go mad. What, however, hurts even more is the fact that, other than get angry, one can do nothing else about it. The helplessness that Jusper in *Betrayal in the City* suffers when his girlfriend is taken by Boss and the inability to act in any way is not only dehumanizing but also emasculating to the man. So, anger as a superego is in a way saying, "that is wrong. I don't like it".

Tripartite Psyche and Internalized Guilt,

Guilt is a consequence. In *The Ego and the Id,* Freud contends that "the tension between the demands of the conscience and the actual performances of the ego is experienced as a sense of guilt" (37). In *Man of Kafira,* for example, Boss experiences psychological turmoil because he contradicted moral codes during his leadership in Kafira, where he killed to assert personal supremacy over his life and to affirm his resolution, identity and power. In his rage, he spares no one: peasants like Doga and Nina, to members of his cabinet; nemesis to friends; students to intellectuals. Although Boss manages to suppress or disguise his guilt all this time, his gods appear to desert him when he murders his friend Archbishop Lum Lum. As it turns out the guilt of Lum Lum's murder comes to haunt him to the point of "becoming unable to perform". He encounters absolute ignominy and masculine frailty. The haunting guilt confines him to squashing paranoia, a state that makes him unable to sleep. His wives have to lull him like a baby before he can fall into sleep, albeit with frightening dreams.

Apparently, Boss' behaviour conforms to Freud's assertion that guilt (which the victims often try to suppress from the conscious mind), surfaces in unconscious symptoms such as nightmares and madness, (Gay 582). Gay further argues that although a person may repress his conscience, the guilt is merely displaced to another part of the mind and must return. I may in this connection argue that the ghost of Lum Lum represents Boss' superego, i.e. the moral anxiety that he must experience for contradicting the moral code. It is a revelation of his inner struggle with guilt for his crimes against humanity. One catches this in Boss' words during the dream: "Thank you, Archbishop; your visit brings me much comfort to my troubled heart. I wish others would understand too… What can I do to prove to them that I am a changed man?" (*Man of Kafira,* 45-46). It looks like guilt brings Boss to regret his past.

The retribution of guilt on him makes him yearn for atonement of his sins. Perhaps this is what guilt does to someone. We see a similar reaction in *Shreds of Tenderness*. Unable to face himself and unable to forgive himself for his past atrocities against his brother, Odie surrenders himself to any retribution that will come his way. In a tone of self-surrender he says: "Let me do my penance, if need be. If the forces that be are rounding up all SRB spies, so be it. Let them. I'm not scared of the law. I will serve my term and keep my dignity" (134). From the conversation that precedes his giving up himself for punishment, one realizes that Odie in fact wishes for some sort of retribution against him. Perhaps that is the way he can come face to face with himself and possibly forgive himself; only then can the tension between the demands of his conscience (superego) be reconciled with the actual performances of his ego which is experienced as a sense of guilt of betraying his own brother.

Psychoanalysis and African Literature

Having identified abuse of power, amassing wealth, social injustice and sycophancy and betrayal as among the concerns of East African playwrights, one understands the concerns of the region, for as already mentioned, literature mirrors society. It is then the work of the playwright to artistically articulate the very identified concerns to reflect what we come to perceive as the region's social vision. Leading dramatists, Imbuga and Ruganda, have done this, perhaps choosing to craft the vision by engaging the psyches of the characters involved. This way, it helps the reader to decide, not only how the social vision is executed but also what drives the abuse of power, amassing wealth, social injustice and sycophancy and betrayal as among the concerns of East African players involved in the very execution. Specifically, the playwrights help the reader to enter into and interrogate the moral fabric based on the philosophy of African socialism. The playwrights through their writing take us through this expectation, while according us the opportunity to adjudicate society's conscience. By exposing us to characters such as Boss, Mulili, Jusper, Regina, Bwogo, Nankya, Odie and Wak, among others, the playwrights manage to empower us, not only to socialize with the characters but to also appraise their performance in relation to the identified social vision and pitted against the society's superego. To this end, there would have been no better tool of measurement than the tripartite psyche. The tool of the tripartite psyche has helped us understand what drives the characters in the execution of the society's vision. We can perceive their hopes, fears, aspirations, perceptions and even their struggles. On the part of the playwrights, they have constructed for us the characters through whom they execute

the society's vision as they perceive it, but in a way that allows us to make our own judgment.

We are now able to ask ourselves questions of whether the constructed characters represent our own hopes, fears, aspirations, perceptions and struggles. Where do we, as members of the real world converge with the psychological characters in the world constructed in the selected works by the two playwrights?

Conclusion

The thesis of this paper was to disabuse the claim that psychoanalysis as a theory is not applicable to African literature. Such claims as propagated by scholars such as Uzoma Esonwanne (2007), when he asserts that "psychoanalysis and African literature have long maintained a studious, if not wary, distance from each other," are misleading because African literature like every other literature is open to such theoretical interpretation. The paper has attempted to unveil the application of the tripartite psyche of the id, ego and superego in the works of two playwrights' crafting of their social vision. The paper explains how the drives of the id lead characters into selfish actions such as corruption, misrule, violence against fellow human beings and other social ills. Meanwhile, the superego serves to check society's excesses, though if overindulged can be as oppressive as the id, because it could also encourage oppression in its bid for reparation. Meanwhile the ego mediates between the excesses of the id and the restricting morality of the superego so as to create a more realistic world. Discussing leading characters in Ruganda's *The Floods* and *Shreds of Tenderness* and Imbuga's *Betrayal in the City* and *Man of Kafira*, the paper has attempted to unravel the playwrights' perception of our world as presented and represented in their dramatic works. The final voice is that psychoanalysis is as much applicable to African literature as any other and the theory should be more regularly applied so as to better understand the psyche of African literature in general and East African literature in particular.

Works Cited

Primary Texts

Imbuga, Francis. *Betrayal in the City*. Nairobi. East African Educational Publishers. 1976 print.

---------- *Man of Kafira*. Nairobi. East African Educational Publishers. 1984 print.

Ruganda, John. *The Floods*. Nairobi. East African Publishing house Ltd. 1980 print.

---------- *Shreds of Tenderness*. Nairobi. Oxford University Press. 2004 print.

Other references

en.wikipedia.org › wiki › African_socialism

Esonwanne, Uzoma. "The Crisis of the Soul: Psychoanalysis and African literature." Research in African Literatures, vol 38, no. 2, summer, 2007 print.

Freud, S. *Civilization and its Discontents* German 390/Comp. Lit. 396/Engl 363/CHID 498/JSIS 488/Lit 298 German. *1930.*

Freud, Sigmund. *The Ego and the Id*. The Standard Edition of Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume X1X. Trans by Joan Riviere, London: Hogarth. 1927 print.

Freud, Sigmund and Peter Gay. *The Freud Reader*. New York. W.W. Norton. 1989 print.

Hall, Cheryl. *The Trouble with Passion: Political Theory beyond the Reign of Reason*. Taylor & Francis Group. 2013 print.

Mugubi, J.G.O. "The Child Character in Adult Literature: A Study of Six selected Caribbean Novels." A Ph.D Thesis, Kenyatta University. 2003.

Ruganda, John. *Telling the Truth Laughingly*. Nairobi. East African Educational Publishers. 1992 print.

Wa Thiong'o, Ngugi. "Literature and Society" in *Teaching of African Literature in Schools*. Eds. E. Gachukia and S. K. Akiv

SYMBOLISING ORATURE, HEROISM AND GENDER RELATIONS IN OKOITI'S OMTATAH LWANDA MAGERE

Pepetual Mforbe Chiangong

Humboldt University, Berlin

Abstract

Folklore in most African contexts conveys age-old traditions, societal values, and the history of communities. It also communicates the state of social interactions, particularly those associated with formations of gender. Besides its historical content, legends for instance hold community together. Orature in drama, therefore, employs symbolic codes and sign systems, through which processes of signification and communication contribute to the dramatic logic. This paper will first of all explore a Luo legend that captures the heroic achievements of Lwanda Magere in Okoiti Omatatah's eponymous play. Focusing on the character of Lwanda Magere, perceived as ambiguous, the paper investigates the notion of duality in order to portray how traditional systems contest heroism and disparages womanhood. Equally projecting masculinity as nuanced, the paper interrogates how Lwanda Magere mediates cultural norms and societal expectation. Embedded in the said codes and systems, my analysis will help clarify how the materiality of folklore, character, and linguistic units could possibly affect the functioning of, supposedly, grounded traditional institutions. Finally, discussing how relevant Omatatah's drama is to postcolonial African drama as a whole, the semiotisation processes will offer new meanings to what Isaiah U. Ilo calls a "post indiginist" (2013) understanding of modern African drama in a postcolonial context.

Introduction

The dual formation conferred on non-linguistic and linguistic units creates meanings from how these elements are employed in specific cultural environments. Meaning-making in dramatic arts is partly embedded in symbols, explored here to lend an understanding to the social, political and cultural life of characters in a play. Anna Maria Lorusso's book on cultural semiotics offers an exploration of space in which symbols, an important element of semiotics, could potentially offer multiple layers of meaning to specific actions and material objects embodied in a performance text. When one considers how a belief system operates in a specific cultural environment, the susceptibility associated with societal transformation is imagined, particularly when such change is dependent on specific actions taken by community members.

This study reflects on symbolic elements embodied in storytelling and ritual to explore the role and identity of important characters in a play as they are centralized in the gender and masculinity debate. Focusing on *Lwanda Magere*, a contemporary play by Okoiti Omtatah, that is based on a well-known legend of the Luo people of Western Kenya, the discussion in this paper concentrates on the symbolic elements as the analysis benefits from an enlivening dramatic piece to explore important codes associated with the predominant characters of the play vis; Lwanda Magere, his first wife Mikayi, the elderly Story-Teller, and the Lang'o Princess.

Observing the cultural environment in which these characters operate, one reverts to Lorusso's take on culture and symbolism when she states that:

> I rather think that culture is a profoundly malleable and relative entity, whose meaning changes depending on the subject that observes and inter-defines it; it is something that is differential. Semiosis, in fact, lives through relationships and differences, and the specificity of the semiotic point of view lies in its capacity to capture and analyze the network of relationships and differences in which meaning is given (p.6).

In embedding symbols in a critical social and political content like in *Lwanda Magere*, Lorusso's study of semiotics of culture further allows us to examine "'meaning in action'" (2015: 2) that enables an engagement with what she "… calls first-order analysis: [which is] the analysis of codes and structures that lie at the root of all meaningful exchanges" (4) and which submits to the power of interpreting specific contents.

The symbolic meaning of folklore, ancestral worship and the relevance of symbols embedded in *Lwanda Magere* has equally been a subject of debate in African theatre and performance studies for a long time now. As well as being a relevant subject in critical discourses, it is significant for the restoration of society's history (see Okpewho 2009). In this light, Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo writes that the performance of orature enables the invisible to become visible, signaling here the mimetic bond between nature, the supernatural, nurture and the human (2007: 4 & 6). Employing them to underscore the functionality of orature as a core component of community life and history in the play, we equally gain crucial knowledge of key elements embedded in Kenyan national culture.

Lwanda Magere provides the readers with a play that is captured in complex poetic and proverbial language that Omtatah employs to valorize and uphold the importance of ritual as religion, but also as a unifying factor capable of illuminating the resilience of a people in the

face of an adversary. Through an exploration of specific symbols, a critique of the dominant political class in the play is underscored. In what follows, the debate considers ritual performance as a portal to history and to the political class, justifying why the component of culture and ritual performance in the play unravels subordinate categories visible in gender relations and which deserve a critical analysis.

Orature and the Construction of Heroism

Kenyans just like other communities across Africa still relate to their age-old traditions, rendered through varied forms of verbal art and visual culture resonated in Omtatah's play by the epic narrative of Story-Teller who recounts the legendary life of Lwanda Magere to an audience whom he designates as his grandchildren. Genres of orature are generally passed on from one generation to another, mainly orally, but also through different forms of media today (see also Omanga 2016), as a way of archiving the community's past. Such art forms serve to recollect important historical events and experiences of individuals (see also Mugo 1991). Characterized by creative forms of verbal arts, ingenuity in speech orature that include the use of metaphors and idiomatic expressions, oral narratives are "traditions (oral, customary, or material) expressed in the form of an artistic communication used as operational culture by a group within the large society (primarily to provide group identity and homogeneity" (Peek &Yankah 2004: xi). With regards to the art of speech or "verbal art" and its purpose in African cultural life, Peek and Yankah further note that "African life starts with naming traditions and prayers and continues through greetings and songs, libations and lullabies, praise names and insults and funeral orations and spirit possession. Informal gossip and formal oratory, individual speech and epics of empires—the scope of artful speech is endless" (xii). These emblematic uses of language are associated with specific symbols of identity that enable us to conceive *Lwanda Magere* as a cultural document embodying not only the life of Lwanda Magere and his legendary activities, but also the cultural texture of indigenous life of Luo community before colonial invasion.

Partitioned into six scenes, Omtatah's drama, which falls within the category of what Isidore Okpewho calls an "oral epic" (2009: 113) introduces and ends the play with "Sowing" and "Reaping," respectively. Analogous to the prologue and the epilogue in classical drama, "Sowing" narrates the life of servitude of the Luo people under the Lang'o and also introduces the birth of a warrior who will lead the Luo to freedom. The epilogue summarizes the life of the warrior, but underscores the consequences of a flaw in his character that result in his death

and eventual transformation into a rock. Before they launch a successful crippling battle on the Luo, the Lang'o trick him into revealing the secret of his power, strength, and invisibility. In "Sowing," we are introduced to Story-Teller, "a stooping old man" (1991:1), who narrates the legend of Lwanda Magere to his "grandchildren," sharing with them the tribulations that are plaguing the Luo community. Story-Teller makes important references to the mysterious circumstances surrounding the birth of Lwanda Magere through the performance of storytelling:

> Dear grandchildren,
>
> Before you retire to your beds tonight,
>
> Am going to narrate to you
>
> The Legend of the Great Lwanda Magere…
>
> In the legendary times of legends
>
> In the land of the Luo
>
> People's heart sorrowed,
>
> The Lang'o, the victors at the time
>
> Ruled the vanquished Luo with
>
> An iron hand.
>
> They killed many and enslaved many more…
>
> Hope in prayer to
>
> Their ever-mindful ancestors,
>
> For salvation.
>
> *(Enter the Luo led by the tall balding priest. They solemnly approach the totem, bow to it and proceed to offer sacrifices in silence.)*
>
> They sacrificed,
>
> Praying to their ancestors for salvation.
>
> Day in, day out, they prayed…
>
> Then one day, it was the day
>
> The Infallible Oracle of the ancestors spoke
>
> Out of the heavens rung the Mighty Voice….
>
> **Voice:** My people the great sons of the lake,

Oracle of your ancestors says:

Seen your sufferings,

Heard your prayers…

Tonight …

A woman

Truly barren will conceive

Nine months and your savior

Lwanda, son of Magere,

Will be born among you…your liberator,

Pure rock his body,

A rock, yet mortal (1991: 1, 2, & 3)

The character of the elderly storyteller underscores the cultural, political and social relevance of recounting the legend of Lwanda Magere in the preceding sequence. Endearing his audience, by calling them his grandchildren, draws attention to the importance attached to the role that elders play in the preservation of culture and history in the society (Chiangong 2021a and 2021b). He is the competent authority trained in bequeathing ancestral knowledge to the younger generation whom he addresses as his grandchildren. The children are not categorized in a specific age or gender group, thereby embracing every member of the community. Moreover the non-specification of membership also implies the grandchildren do not share any filial relations with Story-Teller, informing on the value of respect accorded storytellers across time and importantly the principal duty of listening to them; a motif that Omtatah seems to convey through his drama. The Luo child is taught "… how to listen, how to pay attention, and how to receive, retain, and later on recount, in the equal detail as that in which we had received" (Masolo 1976: 60). In a modelled storytelling tradition where the participation of the audience and "call and response" mark many storytelling events, Omtatah does not provide a platform on which the voice of the grandchildren could be heard during this event, underscoring its sacredness, the reverence accorded Lwanda Magere's memory as a spiritual figure and also the importance of listening to his legendary and heroic activities, coordinated by an overall uninterrupted religious presence.

Echoing Ngugi above, the sacredness of this epic narrative event is underscored by an immediate live performance of a ritual offered to the Oracle led by *"the tall balding priest"*

who leads the Luo people in sacrifice to the gods and ancestors requesting the birth of a liberator. Positing that ritual and performance have the potential for peacebuilding across communities in Kenya, Magak et al reiterate that ritual embedded in Kenyan orature "… plays one of the most important roles in the social organization of indigenous societies." They consider "ritual as symbol- in- action," to be endowed with a "transformative power … which is inherent in its occurrence in special social settings away from everyday life, its transcendental symbolic communication, and its power to confirm and change worldviews, identities, and relationships…" (2015: 20). Following Magak et al, one imagines that the audience, the grandchildren, on stage is entranced by the epic narrative that describes the mystical strength of Magere. They simultaneously undertake an analeptic journey to the past to encounter the priest and the Luo people in their moment of distress. And they listen to the voice of the Oracle prophesying the hope that "A woman Truly barren will conceive," Lwanda Magere after nine months. Through a play-within-a play technique, the performance of the ritual, materializes this journey to the past as a moment of witnessing history and it significantly registers the rise and fall of Lwanda Magere, which begins with his mysterious birth. This symbolic journey furnishes storytelling time and ritual performance with a vigor that enables encoding, remembering and preserving the collective identity of the Luo community. Further, a parallelism associated with the identity of Story-Teller and that of the balding priest is noted as an important symbolic continuity captured through both their personalities and role in the society. Overall, how the performance space of storytelling and ritual space of sacrifice both function in defining the relationship between the storyteller and his audience and the priest and the Luo people are important to the religion and history of present-day contribution to peacebuilding in Kenya as demonstrated below. The utterances of Story-Teller above link the current generation, the grandchildren, to their historical and ancestral past, positioning memory as a space for recollecting individual and the community's account of history.

The time at which Story-Teller narrates the epic of Lwanda Magere is symbolically revealing. One may argue that the elderly Story-Teller and the audience are living through a rite of passage enabled by the performance space and the epic narrative. The time of the performance, the evening, is important as it not only substantively and symbolically demarcates the transition to a new day, but also metaphorically transforms the grandchildren into knowledgeable beings. Retiring to bed after the storytelling session could be perceived as a period of reflection about the life of Lwanda Magere that could possibly engender thoughts about a reconstruction of the

epic to reflect the culture and politics of contemporary society at a time we might call dawn. Dawn here could be associated with the unceasing visitation of the Lwanda Magere legend in contemporary Western Kenya during peace building events organized, for instance, by the "Kipsigis [Kalenjin subgroup] and Luo elders. The meeting was held to resolve the clashes that erupted out of cross-border cattle rustling" (24) and "one of the Kipsigis elders told of the story of Lwanda Magere" (25). Returning to Lorusso who at the beginning intimated that the meanings acquired through symbols function to underscore the malleability of culture but also to capture complex human relations, in many ways relate to Omtatah's retelling of the legend in the 20th century through a drama piece and importantly the presentation of women in the epic that one might assume has shaped gender discourses in the Luo community today when it comes to how women are perceived.

Therefore the role of storytelling in rendering and performing legends enables us to concur with Okpewho who states that "[t]he tales often have a basis of social or political history to them and may represent a crucial point of transition in a society's life" (2009: 113). This proposition is particularly important based on where Isidore Okpewho locates the storyteller in African communities more generally when he underscores that their composition necessitates "intricate artistry that required years of focused and carefully guided training" (111). This artistic value is alive in Story-Teller's age, his use of specific paradigms of expressions such as "legendary times of legends," "Day in, day out, they prayed," and "An iron hand," to illustrate the hopelessness of the Luo people vis-à-vis the Lang'o warriors, but also the expressions he employs to capture the valour and status of Lwanda Magere as a valiant, yet imprudent warrior in the society.

Other specific symbols from the excerpt above that are relevant to our discussion are voice, silence, and totem. Symbols are associated with the construction of meaning in performances and dramatic texts. Often, symbolic meanings are culturally-determined and drawn from our understanding of specific utterances, gestures and objects. According to Elam Keir (1990), (see also Umberto Eco 1986), theatre and drama as whole offer a plethora of semiotic spaces in which utterances, gestures and objects signify and communicate different meanings to the spectators. The element of communality that marks the storytelling and performance event speaks to the composition and function of indigenous community, allowing our judgement of the use of specific objects to be equally important. The totem of the Luo people conveys the importance that the Luo accord their religion, cultural values and cultural practices that are materialized through the Voice of the oracle. There is a complex organic relationship between

the people, their totem and the oracle that is mediated by the elderly priest. The pain and suffering of the people are externalized in prayer, dedication and belief in ancestral powers that demand their connection with these ritual objects to ensure peace and stability. The totem of the people is the foundation of their livelihood, which means that a separation of a community from its totem erases continuity as the community is believed to fall apart. The totem therefore becomes the point of contact between the people and Oracle. The voice of the Oracle is a response to the silence of the people enslaved by the Lang'o people for many years. Further, the silence of the people when they offer sacrifices to the community's totem speaks to the solemnity of the event and also communicates a nuanced uncertainty as they hope for an affirmative response from the supernatural world. Eventually, the prophecy of the Oracle results in the birth of Lwanda Magere. Alluding to the spiritual and historical importance of epic narratives, Okpewho reveals that "the origins of a people's religious, cultural, or cosmological traditions; or wars between peoples led by men of unusual qualities and powers" (111) are indeed serious accounts that offer undisputed knowledge about a community. Story-Teller's use of "An iron hand" to illustrate the brutality with which the Lang'o ruled the Luo after a battle, also allows him to acknowledge the resilience of the Luo as they were persistently "Praying to their ancestors for salvation. Day in, day out, they prayed… (1991: 2). The binarity here is to emphasize that the Luo were determined, steadfast, and dedicated to their gods and ancestors as "one day, it was the day The Infallible Oracle of the ancestors spoke Out of the heavens rung the Mighty Voice ..." (2) revealing that their constant prayers led by the elderly Chiefs and Priests of the land resulted in the birth of a hero whose supernatural powers and competence in battle reinstate, albeit momentarily, the pride of the Luo.

It is important to note that the gender motif raised through the Voice of the Oracle is, in many ways, crucial to the gender debate discussed in this study. Initially associating the identity of Lwanda Magere's mother to "barrenness" or infertility is quite remarkable. Across Africa, women without children have often paid the price of childlessness in most families and within the broader community. In East Africa for instance, Woodall and Kramer (2018: 1137) note that infertility "… has serious social consequences for women, including divorce, stigma, socioeconomic burden, and pre-sumption of infidelity/sexually transmitted infections (STIs) as the cause" (see also Boerma and Mgalla 1999). Since a woman's body as opposed to that of a man is central to the visibility of conception, childbirth, and motherhood, it is noteworthy that it is through such a conceptualisation of the stigmatised body that the liberator of a supressed people is born. Considering that Omtatah exonerates the female body from the status of

"barrenness" and anchors it with spiritual strength, fertility, childbirth and motherhood, on the contrary, affirms the continuity of a patriarchal order rather than recognition of women's resilience, status and contribution to nationhood. In this circumstance, therefore, the body of Lwanda Magere's mother is employed in the context of the epic narrative to reproduce male power, dominance, and other masculine possibilities. Interestingly, in the context of feminisms in Africa, the reproductive female body is explored as an important component of femininity and women's self-assertion, yet in the context of the play, it promotes and reproduces stereotypes of the nurturing female body relevant for the construction of and nostalgia for the nation and its territorial borders, particularly so because the mother of Lwanda Magere is mentioned only through the prophecy of the Oracle and not formulated as a dialogical character in the rest of the epic and the play. Although, he is born under such mysterious circumstances, the nature of Lwanda Magere's upbringing and his military exploits on the battle field are therefore not associated with his mother. Instead we are confronted with an emergence of a dominant masculine character that alienates, denigrates and suppresses women and the political structure of his society. This enables us to propose that perhaps the role of the mother in raising the hero would have served as a foundation of discipline to keep in check the flaw in his character, which the Lang'o exploited to, once again, subjugate the Luo Kingdom.

Who is Omtatah's Lwanda Magere?

In her study of masculinities across the African continent, Egodi Uchendu explores the peculiarities of Ancient Egyptian masculinity during the Pharaonic era stating that when it came to boys and men, the state laid emphasis on rigorous learning and education as "[s]chools and training centres for boys existed to train achievers to become high government officials. The aim of learning was to acquire wisdom and therefore perfection" (2008: 12). Acquiring education, she maintains, served as a blueprint to moral, spiritual, intellectual and scientific strength, that eventually provided Ancient Egyptian men with wealth and political power. Therefore, Ancient Egyptian masculinity was constructed more on discipline and intellectual aptitude than on martial power which marked Zulu masculinity before British colonial invasion in the 19th century. While respect formed part of the training of Zulu boys, Uchendu states that "Zulu masculine subjects were praised for their 'unremitting discipline' manifested in honesty, wisdom, bravery and respect for authority. These qualities were not intrinsic but learned. In other words, the Zulu society during its pre-colonial period had articulated its ideas on masculinity and set in motion informal and formal structures, the most important being the family, to transfer, through learning and practice, these qualities to every male child"(14).

In paying a critical attention to the structure of political power in *Lwanda Magere*, and particularly the principles surrounding the narration of the birth and life of its eponymous hero, one instantly discerns that the Luo community was not dissimilar from Ancient Egypt and precolonial Natal in South Africa. According to Chimaraoke Izugbara et al (2013), central to Luo masculinity, as for most communities across Africa, is men's control over land, recognition of their role as the head of the family and most especially, expectations to obey traditional customs, otherwise it is believed that disobedience might invite ill luck on the individual. In their joint research on "ethnic self- identity" and the health of men of Luo ethnicity based in two Nairobi Slums, Izugbara et al provide critical responses from their respondents who accentuate the worth of tradition to their masculinity. The respondents, the authors underscored, noted that disregard of Luo customs and traditional practices may have devastating consequences including death on Luo men or on members of their family (2013: 489).

Lwanda Magere's masculinity is constructed along the lines of troubled relations with the authorities of the land, with women, and with his masculine identity. His character as delineated by the Oracle (un)consciously enforces peculiar traits of manliness which are at par with Luo's norms of masculinity. This puts him at odds with the patriarchal institutions that led prayers and sacrifices for his birth. Therefore the Oracle underlines that Lwanda Magere's mission:

> … is to obey the ancestors always
> And his people he will free
> And his greatness will last.
> Lwanda Magere will live
> Not for himself but
> For the tribe
> His people to free
> Take note:
> Alcohol is forbidden him.
> He should never take alcohol
> The humbler of men
> Take note:
> The great secret of Lwanda Magere…

Will reside in his obedience.

His life will be in a riddle

That will make him a rock…

Nurture him into the secret of his life.

When he falls ill you will

In secret doctor him, withTribal marks you will, in secret,

With your own hands tattoo him ... (pp. 9 &10).

Portraying Lwanda Magere as a supernatural hero reveals a contradiction as the Oracle employs an oxymoronic twist to prophesy that; "…your liberator, Pure rock his body, A rock, yet mortal" (3). Equating his body to a rock informs us on the supernatural qualities bestowed on him by the ancestors, which will make him invincible in all the battles against the Lang'o people. The Oracle's repetition of "Take note" reinforces the laws that Lwanda Magere must be adhered to, in order to maintain his invincibility. One of the laws is to abstain from the consumption of alcohol, which is perceived as "The Humbler of men." While the Oracle seeks to secure Luo borders through the spiritual strength of Lwanda Magere, which must not be tainted with human follies, Lwanda Magere, instead, vies to dominate everyone around him. Besides, the tattoos that will be inscribed on his body should he fall sick will serve as a reminder of his duty to his people and are also markers of identification and belonging to his land. In guarding the riddle that keeps the secret of his power, Lwanda Magere is fully aware of the magnitude of his strength. If preserved, he would be respecting the regulations outlined by the Oracle but importantly, he will be embodying discipline that is associated with African masculinity in general and with the Luo male, in particular.

Embodied with ancestral power, Lwanda Magere unites his people and together they lead successful battles against the Lang'o. However, the ambiguity that marks his character as designed by the Oracle conveys the need for him to not only depend on his supernatural strength, but also to strive for human virtues. Should the restrictions enforced by the Oracle be judged as a test of Lwanda Magere's masculinity? What presumably can he as a Luo male offer his people, without the intervention of the Oracle? Strictly cautioned by the Oracle to adhere to specific behavioral norms that will not lure him into losing his supernatural powers and consequently put his community at the risk of invasion and enslavement by the Lang'o, Lwanda Magere instead breaches the rules by engaging in frivolity, disrespect, consumption of

alcohol, and disobedience of the Oracle. For instance, Lwanda Magere marries 25 women; a record which the Priest, alarmed, admits had never been broken by any Luo elder:

> At his tender age
> He already has twenty-five wives,
> A thing even great elders here
> Have not been able to do (68).

Lwanda Magere's excess love for women is echoed in one of the battles against the Lang'o warriors when in celebrating their victory, he encourages his fellow warriors to implement the following orders:

> Let's go and crown
> The son of our lace king.
> Let's go and restore order
> Into our society so that with ease,
> The tortoise may carry his own shell.
> For the unmarried
> Like Lwanda Magere,
> It's time to take up wives
> And register our manhood.
> The home of Lwanda Magere
> Must choke with wives. To mark my success
> As a man with an inner will. (*Raises a war song and they dance off.)* (15)

While he encourages his co-warriors to marry, he simultaneously projects women as the prize for their military achievements, upholding virility as a masculine trophy. Claiming that marrying many wives is the "inner will" of a Luo warrior, one may add that it is a masculine performance that risks engendering toxic arrogance, particularly as seen in the relationship with Mikayi, his first wife.

Obedience is a fundamental value involved in parenting in most communities across Africa and Kenya is no exception In the context of human development, children and other younger members of the communities are expected to follow the rules and behavioral guidelines put in place by parents and elderly members of the community. Contrary to Luo guidelines

established by the King, the Elders and the Priest, Lwanda Magere, without consulting the latter, marries a Lang'o Princess, a woman who hails from the enemy kingdom. Considering that integrating a Lang'o kinswoman in their kingdom is bait proffered by the Lang'o to lure Lwanda Magere into revealing the secret of his strength, the Luo Elders express their shock and disgust at his behavior in the following manner:

Priest: …those who obey live,
Those who disobey, die!
Man must make the choice in freedom
King: How can Lwanda Magere, groping
Decide on his own accord.
Without consulting us elders,
The custodians of traditional values
In this land? He should have
Consulted the elders for advice (p.36)

Lwanda Magere rejects the Elders' advice against marrying the princess by, superciliously, retorting that:

A river does not
Flow higher than
Its source! I value not
Your bald [heads] and grey hairs.
Trusting the infallible Oracle
I will go ahead and
Marry this woman.
I will take her
And anything else
The Lang'o offer (66 &67)

Tricking Lwanda Magere into consuming alcohol, which has been forbidden by the gods, he, in this state, discloses the secret of his strength to the Lang'o Princess. He informs her that his strength is concealed in his shadow, which explains why he engages all his battles at night in

order to protect his shadow from being attacked. The Lang'o Princess subsequently informs her people about the source of Lwanda Magere's strength. Consequently, the Lang'o attack the Luo in the day and Lwanda Magere's shadow is shot with an arrow. Magere dies and transforms into a rock, which the Luo people believe is still sitting in their land, serving as a testimony to their history.

One may argue that the presence of the rock reminds the Luo people not only of their hero who fought for their freedom, but it probably symbolizes the importance of respect for elderhood and customs of the land, thereby cautioning that disobedience, as said earlier, comes with grave consequences. The priest who had strictly warned Lwanda Magere about his behavior is seemingly not astounded by the aftermath of his disobedience:

> **Priest:** When a greedy hyena
> Comes across a chunk of poisoned meat.
> Left in its way by the hunter,
> He doesn't go looking for
> The owl that may have watched
> In secret as the trap was laid.
> Lwanda Magere's lust for women
> Like a curse from birth
> Gives no place to prudence (p. 36).

Omtatah's presentation of the contribution of the women to the life and eventually the tragedy that befalls Lwanda Magere, as seen above, allows us to investigate gender concerns in the play.

The Positionality of Mikayi and the Lang'o Princess

Evidently, women in some communities in Kenya hold decision making power; nevertheless, patriarchy remains a dominant factor in gender relations, a phenomenon that in many ways objectifies women. Actively involved in precolonial and anti-colonial resistances in Kenya, women, according to Lenoox Odiemo-Munara, "from early on in East African history, engaged in various forms of resistance through the written and spoken word to seek to collapse the 'the triple custodial role' …. that ensures the woman's limited participation in the public space"

(2010: 3; see also Njambi and O'Brien 2005). In the context of postcolonial feminism, Mikhail Gromov posits that "Kenyan females are faced with on routine level … by a violent (physically, sexually, and/or psychologically) domination of males over their women counterparts – relatives, colleagues, etc. – rooted in patriarchal notion of a woman as inferior and ever-subordinate 'human commodity' of her male commandants" (2016: 66 & 67). Positioning the female body in an African feminist context more generally, corporeality is underscored, which is at the centre of dominant discourses associated with gender and class. Arguing that the positionality of the female body particularly in Western culture offers it a rationality of its own, Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí critiques the materiality of the body as a metonymy of "… a person's beliefs and social position or lack of thereof." (2005:3). Gendering the female body in the context in which Oyěwùmí speaks, that body emerges as a paramount discourse in a social construct that "is always *in* view and *on* view. As such, it [the female body] invites a *gaze*, a gaze of difference, a gaze of differentiation—the most historically constant being the gendered gaze" (4; emphasis in the original). While the body contributes to the formation of othering in a racially-defined social reality, it becomes a symbol of difference in a patriarchal setting of a homogenous ethnic composition.

The establishment of gender roles that are determined by hierarchy with the men at the apex of the social order and political power means that the women's body in its material and symbolic form is espoused as a site of play, ultimately framed as an attendant negotiating object to assuage and stabilize conflicting dominant masculinities. Although Oyěwùmí speaks to specific Yoruba and Africa Diaspora contexts, one concurs with her, by looking at the Kenyan reality, about the biological specificities that subject the female body to scrutiny, inviting gendered gazes that eschews conviviality, self-determination and participation.

In the 1990s African feminist theorists engaged in vigorous debates about the status of African women, vis-à-vis patriarchal alienation, racism, and empowerment. Reflecting on the rudiments of these debates, particularly as they hint on gender dynamics in *Lwanda Magere,* interesting views emerged on the subject of polygamy in Africa, which speaks to how the family unit in the play is structured. Buchi Emecheta, a Nigerian novelist and critic, made it clear in her famous article, "Feminism with a small'f'," in which she calls herself a feminist with a small "f" that she actually advocates for a polygamous marriage perceiving it as an enabling environment for women to achieve their career objectives. She states that:

> In many cases polygamy can be liberating to the woman, rather than inhibiting her, especially if she is educated. The husband has no reason for stopping her from

> attending international conferences like this one, from going back to University and updating her career or even getting another degree. Polygamy encourages her to value herself as a person and look outside her family for friends. It gives her freedom from having to worry about her husband most of the time and each time he comes to her , he has to be sure that he is in a good mood and that he is washed , and clean and ready for the wife, because the wife has now become so sophisticated herself that she has no time for a dirty , moody husband . And this in a strange way , makes them enjoy each other (1988: 178 &179).

Given that African feminists like Emecheta have challenged androcentric normativity that have opened hegemonic cracks for women to fall through, these feminists underscored that gender equality on the continent is a collaborative project with the men (Ogunyemi 1996, Makuchi 1997, Naemeka 2003, Nkealah 2006, Jacobs 2011). On that note Emecheta states "… I love men and good men are the salt of the earth. But to tell me that we should abolish marriage like the capital "F" (Feminism) woman who says women should live together and all that, I say NO! Personally I'd like to see the ideal, happy marriage. But if it doesn't work, for goodness sake, call it off (qtd in Nfah-Abbenyi 1997:7). Although women's integrity and worth in the society are recognized in an androcentric space, full appreciation is yet to be a spin-off. Omtatah raises the thematic of polygamy in a traditional setting to emphasize its place in Kenyan culture. Its existence in the play informs us on the responsibilities of the women involved in it. The first wife is usually perceived as the mother of the home, a space which could create liberating and empowering corridors as the one described by Emecheta above. In *Lwanda Magere*, Mikayi together with her 25 co-wives are in a polygamous arrangement in which each wife has a responsibility towards the family and the man. However, there is an overbearing patriarchal presence deeply entrenched in the status and character of Lwanda Magere who is their joint husband.

Mikayi is the first wife of Lwanda Magere and The Lang'o Princess, as discussed earlier, is soon to be his 26th wife. Although the first wife, generally has more authority over the other wives, the Princess is Lwanda Magere's favourite, a status bestowed on her by her youthful body. Although the Princess is favoured by Lwanda Magere, Mikayi still obeys her husband and addresses him as her master. She bows while talking to him and dutifully obeys his orders that include carrying his stool. Given her status as first wife, Lwanda Magere invites her to discuss the events in the land. Occupying the stool, Lwanda Magere orders her to "… take your place on the floor" (44). Obliged to that sitting position by gender norms, Lwanda Magere informs her of his intentions of marrying the Lang'o Princess and therefore requests her to advise him on his desire. The interaction of the male and female bodies in this scene informs

on a dominant masculinity and therefore a seeming lack of conviviality between the two characters. Although Mikayi's worth as a woman and first wife in the family circle is recognized, it is only lamely appreciated by her husband. Her perspective on Lwanda Magere's marriage to a Lang'o Princess is crucial to her identity as the first wife, to his status as the head of his family and to his overall identity as an important Luo warrior. Mikayi's sentiments resonate with that of the Elders of the land who, as discussed, are clearly scandalized by Magere's decision to marry a Lang'o woman, perceived as an enemy who will eventually betray the Luo people and expose them to defeat and ridicule. While Lwanda Magere sees his decision as a symbol of greatness, arguing that the Lang'o are mainly placating him with a prize, Mikayi is clear in her stance as she stresses: "… my Lord, But I think there is a trap. This woman is on a mission. The Lang'o are out to kill you. My heart is gripped in fear… My lord… be careful and in wisdom Look before you leap. Do not court early death.!" (47). While Lwanda Magere sees Mikayi's warning as vindictiveness and cowardice, the Lang'o Elders had indeed commissioned the Princess to use her body to entice Lwanda Magere, what Mikayi and the elders foresaw, into revealing the source of his unrivaled strength as a warrior. The Lang'o Chiefs had provided succinct guidelines on the quality of the woman eligible of alluring Lwanda Magere who is known in the kingdom and its environs as "the lover of women ..." (25). Therefore the Lang'o woman:

> … Must be
>
> A daughter of our land
>
> Who stands gracefully,
>
> Shoulders above others in charm (26).

Insisting on the perfection of her body, the Chiefs consider it a suitable bait to accomplish the mission that involves knowing the secret of Lwanda Magere's power. The Lango's woman in question is eventually described by the Lang'o political structure as "chunks of good meat" capable of enticing and entrapping a "hyena" (26) to its death. The Luo elders equally describe her as "a chunk of poisoned meat" which a greedy hyena comes across (36), a "cobra that is inside his precious gourd," and termites that destroy a home (36). These animal metaphors project her body and role as vile, yet they are necessary for the advancement of the Lang'o political game. One imagines that the Princess' political role and success in her task enables her body and identity as a woman to be viewed allegorically by the Kings, Priests and Chiefs of both kingdoms as a polluted site, necessary but redundant in any future male dominated politics. The female body assumes a shifting identity that is sporadically transformed to serve

the needs of a patriarchal status quo and in that state, it is conceptualized as predatory. The "consumption" of the Princess' body metaphorically by state and through physical encounter with Lwanda Magere emerges as an important trope in gender discourses as it has contributed to contemporary theorization of feminisms in Africa in which the woman's body is central to the debates.

It is important to accentuate that the Lang'o Queen's contribution to the subjugation of women in her kingdom is worth noting. She initially orchestrated the plan to use a female body as a bait to defeat the Luo when she told the Lang'o authorities to

> … give one of the land's worthy daughters
>
> To wife Lwanda Magere – with a mission,
>
> Her mission to get his secret (25)

Clearly, the Lang'o Queen is benefitting from a dominant male leadership. Her interest in participating in the politics of the state allows her to conceptualize the body of a less influential woman as a political pawn. Her strategy, one may argue, is not liberating to the woman, but instead it maintains her status as a queen that (in)directly consolidates the power of the men. However, her gesture uncovers masculine vulnerability as her Kingdom embraces her strategy to unmask the character flaw of a, presumably, powerful male opponent. In appreciation of her suggestion, the King employs the following stereotypical gender imagery to respond to her plan:

> whoever said that women and children share the same brains
>
> Did us much wrong! Why?
>
> Why didn't any of my wise men,
>
> The bald heads and grey beards, think that up? (25)

The Lang'o Queen employs her intelligence, equated with that of children, to submit to an androcentric culture, which accords her a space to bask in patriarchal privileges. Her argument that the involvement of women in battle, a historical reality in several kingdoms of Africa, is important. But the involvement of women in battle is initially judged by the Lang'o Elders as preposterous particularly if the reactions of the King and 2nd Chief are foregrounded; "[t]he dance we were dancing was an all-male dance" and "when we talk about war and about our well-being women have no place in it" (22 & 23). In a similar light, the victorious return of the

Lang'o Princess to the Kingdom is acknowledged but not recognized as she is summarily dismissed from the gathering of male Elders to reoccupy her assigned gendered space:

> **King:** …You have done this land
>
> A great service. The elders
>
> Have heard your story
>
> You may take leave now.
>
> What follows is a dance for men only (92).

The contribution of the women to the formation of the Lang'o and Luo Kingdoms, eventually the nation in a postcolonial context, is quite interesting. Although the relations between the men and women are define along the lines of gender, we equally see that the same women are given very challenging and complex tasks to accomplish, which of course serves the interest of the male dominated kingdoms. But women in this play and other African plays— that include Bole Butake's *The Rape of Michelle*, Femi Osofisan's *Women of Owu,* and Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are not to Blame*—have been projected as the foundation of conflict, war, and pain in the society.

Conclusion

The timelessness of legends makes it particularly helpful for the consideration of postcolonial nation building. The contribution of women to the process of national building has been represented in drama and in many ways revealing the rate at which armed conflicts and ethnic divisions have continued to put the African continent in political and social disarray; the contribution of the Takumbeng women to contemporary politics in Cameroon in the 1990s is well-known. Besides, the political narrative of safeguarding borders is an important act in the formation of the nation, as seen in the legend of Lwanda Magere. At the turn of the 20th century, a return to extant forms of African orature, most especially in the context of (post)colonialism has been employed as a strategy to dismantle colonially-imposed cultures and gain insight into the wealth of indigenous cultures. Although Omtatah's play is based on an orally transmitted epic narrative that is today conveyed in a drama format in order to archive and communicate the Luo legend across the globe, the context and modes of expression in the play are traditional and are entrenched, interestingly, not in expressions of common people, but in that of the elite class which includes Kings, Priests and Elders, informing on the political environment that

nurtured the masculine identity of Lwanda Magere as a Luo male and warrior. In addition, the life of Lwanda Magere has been unraveled to enable an investigation of the status of African women in history. Underscoring their contribution to African feminist discourses, our attention is, also, drawn to important masculinity debates. How all of these associations entangle with one another inform us on the complexity of power and social constructions of gender as they are conveyed through relevant symbols.

Works Cited

Boerma, J. Ties and Zaida Mgalla. 1999. "Women and infertility in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Reproductive Health Matters* 7:13, 183-18.

Chiangong, Pepetual Mforbe (ed). 2021a. *Old Age in African Literary and Cultural Contexts*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Chiangong, Pepetual Mforbe. 2021b. "'Transgressing' Wisdom and Elderhood in Times of War? The Shifting Identity of the Elderly Queen in the Performance of Women of Owu." In *Under Construction: Performing Critical Identity*. Marie-Anne Kohl (ed), Basel: MDPI. 85-106.

Eco, Umberto. 1986. *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Emecheta, Buchi. 1988. "Feminism with a small 'f'." In *Criticism and Ideology: Second African Writers' Conference*. Kirsten Holst Petersen (ed). Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies. 173-185.

Gromov, D. Mikhail. 2016. "Kenyan Women's Literature from Postcolonial Feminist Perspective: Six Stories by Storymoja Writers," *Journal of Language, Technology & Entrepreneurship in Africa,* 7: 7, 63-71.

Izugbara, Chimaraoke et al. 2013. "Ethnicity, Livelihoods, Masculinity, and Health among Luo Men in the Slums of Nairobi, Kenya," *Ethnicity & Health*, 18:5, 483-498.

Jacobs, L. Becky. 2011. "Unbound by Theory and Naming: Survival Feminism and the Women of the South African Victoria Mxenge Housing and Development Association," *26 Berkeley J. Gender L. & Just* 19, 19-77.

Keir, Elam. 1990. *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*. Routledge: London.

Lorusso, Anna Maria. 2015. *Cultural Semiotics: For a Cultural Perspective in Semiotics*. Hampshire Palgrave Macmillan.

Magak, Kitche et al. 2015. "The Place and Prospects of Indigenous Theatrical Performances in Peacebuilding in Kenya," *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review*, 5:1, 18-40.

Masolo, A. Dismas. 1976. "Towards Authentic African Literature: Luo Oral Literature," *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente* , 31 :1, 57-72.

Mugo, G. Micere. *African Orature and Human Rights*. Lesotho: Institute of South African Studies. 1991.

Nfah-Abbenyi, Juliana Makuchi. 1997. "Introduction." Gender in African Women's Writing: Identity, Sexuality, and Difference. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. 1-15.

Ngũgĩ, Wa Thiong'o. 2007. "Notes towards a Performance Theory of Orature," *Performance Research,* 12:3, 4-7.

Nkealah, N. Naomi. 2006. "Conceptualizing Feminism(s) in Africa: The challenges

Facing African Women Writers and Critics," *English Academy Review: Southern African Journal of English Studies*, 23:1, 133-141.

Nnaemeka, Obioma. 2003. "Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and *Pruning* Africa's Way"*, 29 SIGNS: J. WOMEN IN CULTURE & Soc'Y*, 357, 378 (2003).

Odiemo-Munara, Lennox. 2010. "Women Engagement with Power and Authority in Re-writing East Africa," *Africa Development / Afrique et Développement*, 35:4,1-18.

Ogunyemi, Chikwenye Okonjo. 1996. *Africa Wo/man Palava: The Nigerian Novel by Women*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Okpewho, Isidore. 2009. "Storytelling in the African World," *Journal of the African*

Literature Association, 3:2, 110-122.

Omanga, Duncan. 2016. "'Akokhan Returns': Kenyan Newspaper Comics and the Making of an 'African' Superhero," *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 28: 3, 262-274.

Omtatah, Okoiti. 1991. *Lwanda Magere: A Play*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd.

Oyěwùmí, Oyèrónké. 2005. "Visualizing the Body: Western Theories and African Subjects." In *African Gender Studies: A Reader*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 3-22.

Peek, M. Philip and Kwesi Yankah. 2004. "Introduction: The Continent of Africa." *African Folklore: An Encyclopedia.* Peek, M. Philip and Kwesi Yankah (eds). New York: Routledge. viii-xvii.

Uchendu, Egodi. 2008. "Introduction: Are African Males Men: Sketching African Masculinities in Contemporary Africa?" In *Masculinities in Contemporary Africa*. Egodi Uchendu (ed). Senegal: CODESRIA. 1-17.

Woodall, A. Patricia and Michael R. Kramer. 2018. "Schistosomiasis and Infertility in East Africa," *Am J Trop Med Hyg,* 98:4, 1137–1144.

SPOKEN WORD POETRY IN KENYA: AN EMERGING GENRE OF ORAL LITERATURE IN SOCIAL MEDIA SPACES

Beatrice Ekesa, University of Nairobi
Alina Rinkanya, University of Nairobi
Kimingichi Wabende, University of Nairobi

Abstract
Spoken word poetry is an emerging genre of oral poetry in Kenya. This genre is a demonstration of the transition that has taken place in the field of performance poetry. Spoken word poetry began from the theatrical spaces, moved to print media, and now we are experiencing it in the virtual spaces due to its adaptation to the technological advancement in society today. Social media networks like YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, have been instrumental in popularizing spoken word poetry. This genre started with real theatrical performances in various platforms in Kenya but has since occupied the social media as an alternative space for their performances. These new spaces have seen the rise of many poets in this genre due to the availability of a ready audience, as well as the ease in which poets have when sharing their poems with the virtual audience. The social media saves these poets the financial burden that comes with publishing a book, or the complexity of getting a media house to air their performances. This paper seeks to draw connections between theatrical performances of the traditional oral poetry and the virtual performances of the contemporary oral poetry, particularly spoken word poetry. The study evaluates ways in which the social media is transforming the performance of oral poetry by offering an alternative space for the performance of spoken word poetry in Kenya.

Key Words: *spoken word, performance poetry, social media, virtual space, oral poetry, orality, auriture, technauriture*

Introduction

Spoken word poetry is a contemporary genre of oral poetry that has similar characteristics with hip-hop, dub poetry and jazz. They all have their roots in the African oral tradition (Ekesa 2016, p. 59). Before the invention of the print media, narratives, poems, and other forms of oral literature were handed down by word of mouth from one generation to the next. These literary forms were heard and told "without the intervention of writing" (Centre for Hellenistic Studies,

Harvard University). The introduction of the print media brought about changes in the way in which oral literature was passed down from generation to generation. Amin Sweeney, in his study of the relationship between the oral and written Malay traditions states that the print media was viewed as a "displacement" of orality to a great extent, even though traces of the oral tradition prevailed in "written compositions." He observes that the written versions were meant for "aural consumption" and had to be tailored for the sake of a "reading audience." He concludes that the print media robbed these classical works their traditional touch (Sweeney, 1991).

Ruth Finnegan lays emphasis on the key characteristics of oral literature that distinguishes it from written literature. These characteristics include performance, audience and occasion. She argues that the aesthetic experience of the performer and the audience can only be fulfilled through actual performances, which cannot be realized fully through the print media. She classifies oral literature as a type of literature that is characterized by "particular features to do with performance, transmission, and social context" (Finnegan,2012).

As the society embraces technology as an alternative media for oral literature content, it is important to examine this new mode of transmission of oral literature from one generation to the next. The print media attempted to retain some features of orality in oral literature content, but the digital media technology is overtaking the print media in the preservation of orality for future generations. Angelus Mnenuka asserts that a "broader categorization of literary genres" should be adopted to cater for emerging genres of literature, such as "online literature," which transcend the traditional forms. She argues that the continued classification of literature as either oral or written "alienates" online literature which contains a combination of both (Mnenuka, 2019). This paper is particularly interested in the social media as an alternative space for the transmission of spoken word poetry in Kenya. In the paper we examine how spoken word poetry transmitted through the social media exhibits the key characteristics of orality, which include performance, audience and occasion as advanced by Finnegan. John Miles Foley argues that there is a similarity between the old and new technologies of communication. He compares the internet technology to the oral tradition in relation to how information travels fast within and between communities "mimicking the practice of collective rituals" (Foley, 2018). He observes that both the oral and digital platforms promote co-creation and participation during transmission of information. Through the social media technology both the oral and aural features of oral literature are retained for a listening audience as well as a reading audience for generations to come. The social media technology will ensure that

contemporary oral literature content like spoken word poetry reaches the future generations without losing any of the oral or aural features.

From Auriture to "Technauriture": The Development of Spoken Word Poetry in Kenya

As stories are retold from one generation to the next it is possible for them to lose their original meaning. "Technology and technauriture" ensure that such stories are recorded more accurately for future generations. "Orality and technology are now integrally intertwined" (Kaschula, 2017). Coplan coined the term "auriture" to include the oral, the written and the aural aspects of literature (Coplan, 1994). The term "technauriture" was coined to reflect the intersection between orality and technology. According to Kaschula "techn" stands for technology, "auri" for 'auriture', and "ture" for literature. Thus, technauriture is defined as "an attempt to capture the modalities associated with the three-way dialectic between primary orality, literacy and technology" (Kaschula, 2017). The term technauriture encompasses all forms of literature transmitted through the word of mouth or print media using technology. Therefore, spoken word poetry transmitted through the social media spaces can be classified as technauriture. The social media is a simulacrum of the oral tradition. Information spreads out fast from one person to the next using the share button, making the social media an ideal space for the dissemination of oral literature material to the audience.

Spoken word is a contemporary oral poetry genre in Kenya that emerged at the beginning of the 21st century with the Kwani? Movement at Club Sounds. The "Rhythm and Spoken Word" event at the Daas Restaurant in Nairobi led to the popularity of this genre among residents of the city. After that other physical spaces for the performance of spoken word poetry emerged in various places in Nairobi. This included platforms such as the Fatuma's Voice, Kwani? Open Mic, and Poetry After Lunch, hosted by Kennet B. at the Kenya Cultural Centre (Ekesa, 2016). As the genre continued to gain popularity, the mainstream media began to invite these poets to entertain their audience. The Kenya Television Network (KTN), NTV Kenya and K24 TV, were among the television channels that gave these poets space to perform their poetry. Meanwhile the spoken word poets themselves started posting their performances on YouTube and sharing on other social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. The television channels too started streaming these performances on YouTube as the genre became more and more popular. What started as a genre that was mostly performed to the residents of Nairobi in designated physical spaces, started to spread to other parts of the country and the world at large through the mainstream media and the social media. Today, spoken word poetry in Kenya is still performed in physical spaces such as Alliance Francaise, Goethe Institute,

Michael Joseph Centre, Kenya Cultural Centre and the Kenya National Theatre, but such performances receive a lot of viewership when shared on social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. This is evident in the number of views, likes, comments and shares witnessed.

The advent of the social media technology has brought about transformations in the performance of spoken word poetry in Kenya. This has given rise to the virtual space as an alternative to the physical spaces in such performances. These virtual spaces are a simulation of the physical spaces. They allow the interaction between the poet and the audience as well as interaction amongst members of the audience. Spoken word poetry in social media spaces is presented in the form of written texts, video poems, recorded live performances and virtual live performances. All these forms of spoken word poetry contain some elements of orality. The virtual live performances will be examined to establish the extent to which they exhibit the three key characteristics of oral literature: performance, audience and occasion.

Spoken Word Poetry as a Virtual "Live" Performance through Facebook Watch Party

The Facebook Watch Party feature allows oral literature content to be recorded live in its original form. This feature was invented to promote a "shared viewing experience" on social media. The content creators may choose to upload a video or do a live performance for their audience to watch and react in real time (D'Cruze, 2018). The reactions of the audience are also recorded, and it can be viewed in the comment section and/or the likes section. Spoken word poets in Kenya are increasingly making use of this Facebook watch party feature to present their poetry to the audience. Most of them upload their prerecorded videos while others choose to perform live to their audience in real time. These poets include Brigeddia General formerly Brigeddia Poet, Dorphan, Kennet B., Mufasa Poet, Namatsi Lukoye, Raya Wambui and Teardrops. Spoken word poetry presented live to the audience using the Facebook Watch party feature is what is referred to as a virtual live performance. This kind of a performance brings back the visual aspect of oral literature that was lost when the print media was the only source of recording such content. When oral literature is written out the visual aspect of a performance is lost, and the readers are only left with 1.the printed word alone to analyze the work of art. Sweeney observes that the visual aspects of a performance cannot be captured in a written composition (Sweeney, 1991). It is "misleading" to concentrate on "words" and exclude the most important features of a performance (Finnegan, 2012). Spoken word poetry

on social media not only contains the oral and aural features, but also the visual aspects of a performance. Live television performances give a similar experience, but they lack in the interaction between audience to poet and audience to audience while the performance is going on.

Performance

The actual performance is essential in oral literature. It is the "first and most basic characteristic of oral literature" that is often neglected by scholars (Finnegan, 2012). The aesthetic experience of the performer and the audience can only be fulfilled through the actual performances. The Facebook Watch Party live is an attempt at keeping an accurate record of an actual performance to the audience in real time for future generations. The effectiveness of a performance depends on how well an artist makes use of aspects such as the "expressiveness of tone, gesture, facial expression, dramatic use of pause and rhythm, the interplay of passion, dignity or humour, receptivity to the reactions of the audience." (Finnegan, 2012). All these aspects can be recorded in a Facebook Watch Party since the actions of the poet and the audience are captured in real time.

Mufasa Poet, a spoken word poet from Kenya, held a Facebook Watch Party live event on 7th June 2020. The event was called "Mufasa Live In Concert," and it was a virtual performance in which only the poet and his crew were physically present to each other, but the audience participated live through the internet. The whole event was recorded live and is available on his Facebook page. Watching the recording of the event gives one the feeling that it is live because the comments keep popping up the way they did during the time of the actual performance where they appeared in real time. Mufasa, performs several poems in this concert. He starts off with a self-reflective piece in which he voices out the challenges facing artists in the contemporary society where the number of followers and likes on social media is equated to success without considering the content of a work of art. He believes he has more to tell the world and the number of likes is not a measure of his worth as a spoken word poet.

> See I always wanted my art to be about what I know,
>
> But people keep making it about how many people know me,
>
> How many directions I have to take,
>
> Before I am as famous as one direction
>
> I know my name every alphabet,
>
> But you ask me to prove myself numerically?

Anyway, numbers won't count me out.

During the performance he says these lines with increased tempo. He also brings both his hands to his chest when he says *See I always wanted my art to be about what I know,* before releasing them when he says the next line. He moves each of his hands in a different direction when saying *How many directions I have to take,* before lifting up his left index finger when saying *But you ask me to prove myself numerically?* Afterwards Mufasa looks straight into the camera as he nods his head when saying *Anyway, numbers won't count me out*. All these add to the meaning and aesthetic appeal of the poem. The look on his face when he says the last line is an affirmation to his audience that he will not allow himself to be defined by the number of likes he gets for his performances because he knows his real worth. He then drops his eye contact with the audience when he picks up the next line.

The "musical setting" of this poem also contributes to the general mood and atmosphere. As Mufasa begins to recite the lines quoted above, the musical instruments become louder than before as if to draw the attention of the audience to the importance of those lines. However, the voice of the poet remains above that of the musical instruments allowing the audience to get what is being recited. The element of musical accompaniment is common in the performance of spoken word poetry in Kenya. Dorphan has made use of it in some of his poems like "Najua", "Mashujaa" and "Nyota Yangu", while Kennet B. in his poems like "Silent River", "Amani" and "Green Talk." Namatsi Lukoye has also made use of musical accompaniment in her poems like "Queen", "Tomorrow" and "Words", while Brigeddia General in his poems "Mheshimiwa" and "Lizzi Mammu." All these poems are available on their YouTube channels and some have even been shared on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. This is in line with Finnegan's observation that "Much of what is normally classed as poetry in African oral literature is designed to be performed in a musical setting, and the musical and the verbal elements are thus interdependent" (Finnegan, 2012). Such forms may have a soloist who may be accompanied by a chorus and musical instruments which is common with most of Dorphan's spoken word poems. The feature of musical accompaniment is experienced throughout Mufasa's Live In Concert. There is a vocalist for every poem recited by Mufasa as well as instrumentalists. The songs are used to heighten the mood of the poem as well as complement the message.

The other visual elements of a performance like the costumes and accoutrements are also important in creating the general atmosphere in African oral literature (Finnegan, 2012). During the entire performance, Mufasa is adorned in a yellow, black and grey African print

regalia over a pair of black trousers and a black round neck shirt with two long beaded necklaces hanging on his chest. The yellow in the regalia represents the title in Mufasa's spoken word poetry anthology, *Raising a Sun*. He uses the concert to advertise his newly released poetry anthology. "The title looks at a new dawn of Africa, a hopeful Africa with her youthful population steering the way, but in retrospect, things are not that easy as it were." (Okach, 2020). He also has his signature black beret on his head and black and white sports shoes. The black colour is dominant in his costume which may be taken to represent the race of the people whose plight he explores in his poetry. The décor has an image of a person's face with tears rolling down one eye. This is in line with the objective of the concert which is aimed at sensitizing the public about police brutality and violation of human rights in Kenya.

Audience

In African oral literature the audience is usually actively involved in the creation of a work of art. "An audience of some kind is normally an essential part of the whole literary situation" (Finnegan, 2012). Spoken word poetry performed virtually through the Facebook Watch Party feature allows the interaction between the poet and the audience in real time. Members of the audience show their reaction to the performance by leaving a comment in the comments, liking or sharing the post with their social media friends. The like button allows members of the audience to use emojis, GIFS, or Avatars to show their reaction to the performance. During the "Mufasa Live In Concert" held on 7th June 2020 there were at least 13,000 Facebook users who watched the performance as indicated in the number of views recorded. Their reaction to the performance was recorded and can still be accessed to date. One of Mufasa's top fan writes "One day, one day a poet will get a million live viewers." This is in response to Mufasa's lament that sometimes people rate his poetry based on the number of likes/views on social media. Another member of the audience says "We can't forget the band the music at the background *iko freshi* kabisa👌💖💖💖🎼🎼🎵🎷🎺🎺🎺". This can be loosely translated as "We cannot forget the band. The music in the background is awesome." This member of the audience uses emojis to show how much she appreciates the musical accompaniment used in Mufasa's spoken word poetry. Therefore, it is important to take the entire performance into consideration during analysis rather than just concentrating on what the poet says. All the aspects of the performance contribute to the aesthetic appeal and how the message is understood by members of the audience. Below are some of the comments that can help us gain insights into how the spoken word poem was experienced by members of the audience who were mostly virtual. These comments together with the entire performance will

be handed down from one generation to the next and will affect to a great extent how other viewers will react to the poem in future.

> "Mufasa Kibet yours isn't just poetry but an outpouring of your soul... It's transcendent & beautiful 😭"
> "We must change it for our children, women, men for everyone."
> "Oyess n I love how they express themselves n the message that they are sharing to us ....n big up to them n will support continuously"
> "Snap snap snap cheers 🥂 great work buddy"
> "The saxophonist is on 🔥 and all the band guys are 👌👌"
> "Are we the generation that could not generate the power to be unslaved? Eeeish! 🔥🔥🔥"
> "huyo jamaa wa saxa apewe delmonte kwa bill yangu" – Translation: The guy playing the saxophone should be given Delmonte (juice from Delmonte company) on my bill.
> "The melody is speaking. Have we failed as a generation?"
> "That piece my boys are dying has hit home very differently 👐 👐 Thank you Mufasa Kibet. Also the dress code iko tu sawaaa. I like it." – Translation: Also the dress code is just okay. I like it.

As witnessed in the comments the members of the audience are not only responding to the words in the poem, but to all aspects of the performance including the musical accompaniment. Throughout the performance Mufasa is heard encouraging his virtual audience to keep writing the comments and tagging their friends. Members of the audience also react to the performance by sharing it with others or tagging their friends along. You can tag someone to watch/read a Facebook post by simply writing their Facebook name in the comment section and the person will be alerted that their attention is required. All these comments are part of the performance and should not be left out in analysis. Mufasa takes his interaction with the virtual audience a notch higher when performing the love poem. He asks how lovers are handling kissing with masks on due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This acts as a comic relief. The previous poem about the plight of young artists was emotionally charged and Mufasa skillfully debriefs the audience from that mood to prepare them for a love poem which he delivers effectively. At the end of the performance Mufasa joins the band in dancing and celebrating the success of the event.

Occasion

The actual occasion is important in the analysis of African oral literature. The occasion can "directly affect the detailed content and form of the piece being performed" (Finnegan, 2012). Some oral pieces are designed for and arise from specific occasions. Mufasa Live In Concert

was specifically designed for a virtual audience because it came at a time when the Covid-19 pandemic was at its peak globally. Due to social distancing rules artists were not allowed to perform in physical spaces that would require many people to converge in one place as this would increase the risk of infection. The concert was organized with the aim of addressing some of the social injustices experienced in Kenya in time of the Covid-19 pandemic. Before Mufasa begins his performances, Lizzie Kiama, the managing trustee of "This Ability Trust" talks about the challenges faced by persons with disability in times of the Covid-19 pandemic. The next speaker on stage is Michael Hjelmaker, the acting ambassador and deputy head of mission, Embassy of Sweden – Kenya. He says human rights is the foundation of any civilized society. He talks of how the core democratic values are being "scaled back" and "infringed upon" during the Covid-19 pandemic. He emphasizes the importance of engaging in conversations about "human rights, democracy, rule of law," which he says the concert is aimed at addressing. These two speakers set the stage for what should be expected in the performance. Mufasa recites a total of five poems in this concert. Four of the poems are packed with tension as the poet addresses challenges facing the marginalized in the society including young artists, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. Before Mufasa performs his second poem he makes a short speech which helps us understand the context of the performance.

> Now it is a weird time. No one saw this time coming. Like I said it is a challenging time.
> I mean I was thinking to myself like no one downloaded skype thinking that he would use it to bury their loved ones in the future. And so much is coming out like there is this person, Maina, the guy who was beaten up by police for being late. It was like seven and he was beaten up and I realized one thing that most of us are desensitized from issues that do not affect us. Like I remember one of the questions someone was asking on Twitter was "What was he doing at that time?" And you know that question comes from a point of privilege like you were in the house you were safe, so you don't really care much about someone. You question the situation. And there are other people as well that won't feel as long as we are not them. As long as we cannot see those people who are in slums and where people are struggling, people who don't have savings and stuff, we have distanced ourselves from them.

This speech and any other in that event is part of the performance. In the speech Mufasa talks about the isolation that has been brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. Gatherings even at funerals are prohibited forcing people to bury their loved ones virtually. He addresses the challenges facing the poor people living in informal settlements where they are forced to go out and do manual jobs to afford a day's meal. During the pandemic, such individuals found

themselves in trouble with the police when they could not beat the curfew leading them to be clobbered to death in some cases. It is such injustices that form most of Mufasa's poetry in this concert. The speeches provide the context for his poetry. Before Mufasa begins the recitation of his second poem he ushers in a singer whom he refers to as Ashley. The song by Ashley is very emotional and is characterized by repetition and tonal variation. The lines below are repeated several times but each time the singer uses a different kind of stress and intonation to create a pensive mood.

We need to find a way to change tomorrow today

We need to find a way to change tomorrow today

Change it for the children

Change it for the women

Change it for the men

Mufasa then comes in with his poem. In the poem he addresses the Covid-19 situation and how the poor have been affected by it. Anyone reading the poem years after the pandemic might never understand why Mufasa uses the metaphor of the mask as a silencing tool. During the pandemic it was a requirement for people to wear masks in public places and defying this order would land one in a serious problem. The mask is supposed to cover a person's nose and mouth to prevent the rapid spread of Covid-19. This interferes with communication among people. The persona in Mufasa's poem feels that the police should not silence people from voicing out their concerns just because there is a pandemic in their midst. He observes that the poor are struggling to make ends meet while the police unleash all their wrath on them in the name of enforcing curfews. He states that whenever a country is going through a crisis the poor people living in informal settlements are usually the casualties. They experience the crisis firsthand by suffering in the hands of those who are charged with the responsibility of protecting them. The song is like a response to the poem, and the two must be analyzed side by side. Working towards change for a better tomorrow is what will ensure the wellbeing of children, women, men and the society at large. This message is emphasized throughout the concert. In fact, at the end of the concert one of the speakers sums up the main message of the day, "We need to find a way to change today for a better tomorrow for everyone." Her name is Catherine Khamali, Programme Manager, Forum SYD. She explains that her organization is geared towards supporting artists like Mufasa and that that is one way of changing the future of the people. She talks about the role of artists in fighting social injustices and promoting democracy in our society.

Just because they cover their mouth

Doesn't mean the masks are supposed to silence us

This Covid situation is unreal

But police brutality and people's struggles are real

I have realized

Every time the country is burning

People in slums get third degree burns

They walk around with scars and scars are not like plastics

They can't be burnt

They are free to land on any part of your body

As stated before, spoken word poetry in social media spaces is a simulacrum of the oral tradition. The poems are spread widely from one person to the next through sharing and tagging friends. In non-literate societies stories and songs/poems were shared from one generation to the next by word of mouth. Today, the social media is creating a transition into how oral literature is transmitted. The like, comment and share buttons on social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter are replacing the real physical movement of people from one place to another to transmit oral literature content. The introduction of the print media as an alternative way of preserving oral literature for future generations, has been a subject of debate for decades as some scholars believe that some features of orality are lost in the written versions of oral literature. The Facebook Watch Party feature allows oral literature performances to be streamed live to the audience in real time. This creates a virtual performance that meets the key characteristics of African oral literature where performance, audience and the actual occasion are all witnessed. Therefore, spoken word poetry in social media spaces is one way in which oral literature can be transmitted from one generation to the next and still retain the original content.

Works Cited

D'Cruze, Danny**.** *Facebook's Watch Party Feature is Live and Here's How You can Use it*. *Business Today*. 2018, www.businesstoday.in/technology/news/facebooks-watch-party-feature-live-how-you-can-use-it/story/280727.html

Ekesa, B.J. *Heterogeneity and Performance of Spoken Word in Kenya*. Master's Project,

University of Nairobi, Kenya, 2016.
www.erepository.uonbi.ac.ke/handle/11295/97474

Finnegan, R. *The 'Oral' Nature of African Unwritten Literature*. Oral Literature in Africa, 1st Edition, vol.1, Open Book Publishers, Cambridge, UK, 2012, pp. 3-28).

Foley, J.M. *Oral Traditions and the Internet: Pathways of the Mind.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017.

Kaschula, Russell H. *Technauriture as a Platform to Create an Inclusive Environment for the Sharing of Research*. Searching for Sharing: Heritage and Multimedia in Africa, edited by Daniela Merolla and Mark Turin, 1st ed., vol. 7, Open book Publishers, Cambridge, UK, 2017, pp. 41-60.

Mnenuka, A. *Online Performance of Swahili Orature: The Need for a New Category?* East African Literary and Cultural Studies, 2019 vol. 5 no. 3-4, pp. 274-297.

Okach, Musungu. *Mufasa's Cosmos: Kenyan Poet Raises A Sun In His New Book*, Afroway www.afrowayent.com/kenyan-poet-mufasa-is-raising-a-sun-in-his-new-book/

Sweeney, A. "*Literacy and the Epic in the Malay World*." Boundaries of the Text: Epic Performances in South and South Eastern Asia, edited by Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger and Laurie J. Sears, University of Michigan press, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1991, pp.17- 30.

"The Nature and Kinds of Oral Literature." Centre for Hellenistic Studies, Harvard University. www.chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/6272.1-the-nature-and-kinds-of-oral-literature

POWER PERFORMANCE IN THE DIGITAL SPACE: AN ANALYSIS OF KENYAN ONLINE COMEDY

Miriam Maranga-Musonye,
Department of Literature,
University of Nairobi

Abstract

The widespread global usage of various social media platforms has had a significant impact on life in general. This form of social interaction has also impacted significantly on the field of artistic creativity in terms of production, performance, circulation and engagement with artistic material. One key way in which digitization has impacted on life is that it has availed platforms for young users of digital technology to express their creativity in a manner that was largely not possible in the past. In Kenya, and in other countries as well, one observes that young people are now creating careers out of short performances on social media platforms such as Youtube, Tiktok and Instagram. In this context, my paper focuses on two separate comedy texts, namely Flaqo Raz aka flaqo411 and The Mama Njeri Show that debut the moniker Plesident Kingston. These two are performed by two Kenyan young people and circulated on Instagram and Youtube. The two comedies are set in family contexts and they mainly parody parent-youth relationships. My main focus of analysis is the portrayal of the parent figure in these texts against the portrayal of the same in traditional oral narratives and in newer but non-digital forms such as Mchongoano. This will be geared towards attempting to see how current popular Kenyan literature looks in relation to its variants of earlier times. Further to this, the paper hopes to investigate the question of power contest in artistic and digital spaces.

Introduction

The widespread global usage of various social media platforms has had a significant impact on artistic creativity in terms of production, performance, circulation and engagement with artistic material. A key impact of the digitization of communication is the availability of various platforms for youthful end-users of digital technology to express their creativity in ways that were largely not possible in the past. In Kenya, as elsewhere in the world, young people are now creating careers out of short performances on social media platforms such as You Tube, Tik Tok and Instagram.

In this context, my paper focuses on two separate comedy texts namely, *Flaqo Raz* (also called *Flaqo 411* and *The Mama Njeri Show*. The two are performed by two young Kenyan artists, Erastus Ayieko Otieno and Brenda Jons, respectively. Both are set in family contexts and

mainly portray parent-youth relationships. My main focus of analysis is how these digital art forms dramatize the contest for power and control between parents as a social institution and the youth as subjects of parental control. While focusing on digital comedies, this paper takes cognizance of older art forms in the Kenyan context, in particular, folktales and *mchongoano,* a Kenyan short oral art form. Bearing in mind that these earlier forms engaged and continue to engage with the question of power, my paper looks at how contemporary digital art forms deal with similar issues in the context of open and wide-spread digital media communication. I engage the question of power performance by using Michel Foucault's theory of the Panopticon to analyze the power matrix between parents and youthful children and to go further to interpret this as a metaphor for power relations within society. Basing my analysis on the two online dramatic comedies, I read parental authority as a panopticon used by parents to control the youth, and which the youth, in their turn, constantly attempt to challenge and dismantle.

The Principle of the Panopticon in Literature

Michel Foucaut's theory of the panopticon is based on Jeremy Bentham's watch tower concept within the prison architecture which is reputed as the ultimate in controlling inmates by keeping them under constant surveillance (Bentham p.137). Foucault analyzes the watch tower closely in his text *Surveiller et punir* (1975). In the quotation below, we see a description of the panopticon which Foucault reads as a metaphor for various mechanisms of control in the nineteenth century and beyond:

> … at the periphery, an annular building; at the center, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy. By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery. They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible. The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately (Foucault 2008, p.5).

Through the above description, Foucault clearly demonstrates how visibility is used as a trap. He argues further that in the 19th century, Bentham's concept of the physical prison architecture

based on the principle of isolation, exclusion and control was extended to the general population as the exercise of power proper. He explains the power of visibility by pointing to its capability to create self-regulation, as he argues that "he who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power" (2008, p.7).

In my analysis of the relationship between parents and children in the selected comedy shows, I seek to find out how parents execute surveillance as a means of exercising power and how the youth respond to this surveillance and thus use this to have a glimpse at the power matrix between institutions of authority and the subjects of that authority. I am interested in the comedy shows as works of art and how the dramatic strategies they employ can be read to understand the dynamics of this power play between the two categories. In a larger sense, this analysis does give cognizance to the fact that these comedies are disseminated within digital space which itself is a significant factor in the sense of the youthful audiences that are likely to dominate this space.

Creative literature utilizes the motif of surveillance as a way of engaging with varied issues including power, guilt and fear among others. A classic example is George Orwell's dystopic novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) in which surveillance is taken to extreme limits, mainly through the portrayal of the telescreen, a gadget in every house in Oceania, which watches everyone and transmits what it "sees" and "hears" to the government authorities. In African literature some examples include Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow* (2007) in which the author satirizes state surveillance as embodied in the symbolically named characters such as Macho Kali "sharp eyes" and Sikio Kuu "top ear". In Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones are not yet Born* (1968), the nameless main protagonist is constantly aware of being watched and seen which is understood as a sense of inverted guilt due to his poverty and social impotence occasioned by his choice of the barren path of personal integrity in a society where most people enrich themselves through corrupt means.

Ensiech Shabanirad & Mahtab Dadkhan have examined the themes of surveillance and subversion in George Orwell's novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Martin Scorsese's film, *Shutter Island.* They argue that expected behaviour is achieved not through total surveillance, but by panoptic discipline and inducing a population to conform by the internalization of this reality (p.3). They also engage with the question whether there is a possibility for meaningful resistance and independent agency in the face of the all-pervasive disciplinary power.

They arrive at the conclusion that although state machinery ultimately triumphs, throughout Orwell's novel, there are a number of actions which amount to resistance, however minute. One example is the fact that Winston, the main protagonist in *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* "kept his back turned to the telescreen. It was safer; though, as he well knew, even a back can be revealing" (Orwell 3). Another case of resistance is that while facing the telescreen, Winston wore a particular expression: "He had set his features into the expression of quiet optimism which it was advisable to wear when facing the telescreen" (Orwell 4). Keeping a diary is yet another act of resistance on the part of Winston. Later we see more "radical" resistance when he accepts to engage in an illicit sexual liaison with Julia who is deliberately using her femininity and sexuality as tools of resistance against the party. While the ultimate benefit of Winston's resistance may remain nebulous, the fact remains that through his story, Orwell presents the role of literature in confronting the exercise of absolute power.

Art Attack: A Growing Boldness in Kenyan Artistic Performances

Admittedly, art has always been used to comment on the question of power relations in general and the relationship between parents and children (older vs younger generation) in particular. Various art forms perform this function in different ways. Folktales, for instance, primarily use symbolism and anthropomorphism and generally point out parental ills without the use of ridicule. In the case of *mchongoano,* the Kenyan verbal teaser, one observes the extensive use of humour and caricature to ridicule various authority figures including fathers, grandparents and teachers. It is notable, however, that *mchongoano* is hardly used to ridicule mothers as observed by various researchers including Wangari Mwai, Charles Kebaya & David Kimongo (2018), Musonye (2014) and Simon Peter Otieno (2006).

Traditional African oral narratives engage with the question of the relationship between parents and children through the use of human and non-human characters. A number of stories point out parental idiosyncrasies and criticize excesses of parental authority mainly through the use symbolism and anthropomorphism. One Kenyan oral narrative, *Simbi & Nashikufu,* will suffice in illustrating this. This narrative is native to the Luhya community of Kenya and the particular rendition used for this analysis was recorded and transcribed by Kavetsa Adagala & Wanjiku Kabira (1985).

In *Simbi & Nashikufu,* the two sisters, Simbi and Nashikufu receive differential treatment from their parents: while Simbi is loved and pampered because she is very beautiful, Nashikufu is

hated and ill-treated because she is ugly and hunch-backed. As a result of their different upbringing and treatment, Simbi grows up to be a snobbish and badly behaved young woman while Nashikufu grows up to be a well behaved and wise woman. Simbi rejects all the suitors who flock her father's compound because, according to her, none of them is good enough. Eventually, she declares that she would only accept to be married by a man who did not shit- a man without an anus! Consequently, she is tricked into getting married to an ogre but is rescued by her "ugly" sister who is able to see through the deception of the ogres who came transformed into handsome young men (without that offending part of the anatomy). Although the story deals with the folly of adults which eventually brings trouble to the children, the parents are not caricatured or directly ridiculed. Their folly is highlighted through their narrow self-interest which propels them to open hatred for their daughter, Nashikufu, who, according to them, has no prospects of bringing wealth while they are openly partial towards Simbi whose beauty, they expect, will bring in a lot of bride wealth.

Meaning in this narrative is communicated through the use of counter-balanced elements such as beauty vs ugliness, ogres vs humans and intelligence vs folly. The narrative also employs counter-balanced characters, for example, Simbi vs Nashikufu, the mother vs the grandmother and the old woman vs the toad. Ogres are immediately recognizable as symbols of evil which is often deceptively attractive to undiscerning humans. Simbi's parents' undiscerning nature is compounded by their materialistic ambitions which lead them to support their daughter in her abhorrent project of seeking a kind of husband who, by nature, cannot exist.

In this and many other traditional oral narratives anthropomorphism and symbolism are used to make social commentary. When humans contravene a critical social norm, the consequence is often in the form of slipping from the human world to the world of ogres. In this story the gullible humans are rescued from the ogre world by the ingenuity and intelligence of Nashikufu, the ugly and hated girl. During their escape back home, they are helped by the anthropomorphic toad who swallows them and carries them across the river which separates human land and ogre land.

Oral narratives such as this one engage with the question of power between parents and children in a subtle way, using minimal or no ridicule or sardonic humour. Instead, they employ mystery, wonder and imagery –aspects that tend to hold the attention by the sheer enchanted and peculiar nature of the fictional world they present. A combination of symbolism and poetic

justice is used to dramatize the detrimental effects of insensitive and over-bearing parental power. Compared to oral narratives, *mchongoano* appears to be more direct and bold in its social commentary.

Peter Githinji describes *mchongoano* as "verbal duel" (90), but it should be noted that this dueling is in jest so perhaps a more apt term of referring to *mchongoano* is "verbal teaser". Its performance involves at least two participants where the first participant makes a teasing statement directed to the second who could be alone or part of a group which also forms the audience. The verbal teasers are formulaic in structure and their performance involves turn-taking. They consist of a two-part structure separated by the word "*hadi*" or "*mpaka*" (until/that). The structure itself is a syllogism with the first part acting as the premise and the second as the conclusion, as illustrated in the examples below:

> *Ati nasikia uko na kichwa kuubwa **mpaka** ukikuja shule watoto wanakuita, 'headboy'.*
> *(I hear you have such a big head **that** when you go to school the children call you 'headboy').*
>
> *Paka yenu ni mzee **mpaka** iko karibu kuwa dogi.*
>
> (*Your cat is so old **that** it is about to turn into a dog).*
>
> *Budako ni muoga **hadi** analala kama amekunja ngumi.*
>
> *(Your father is so fearful **that** he sleeps with his hands folded into fists).*
>
> *Ati budako ako na deni nyingi **hadi** anaitwa Denis.*
>
> *(I hear your Father has so many debts **that** he is called Denis).*
>
> *Ati budako ni mzee **hadi** anatafuta death certificate.*
>
> *(I hear your father is so old **that** he is looking for a death certificate).*

Mchongoano mainly uses humour to ridicule social failings, lack of exposure and physical appearance among others. The key devices employed in the teasers include reversal, absurdity and exaggeration as can be observed in the above examples. *Mchongoano*, being a

youth/children genre, is employed to challenge adults and other institutions of power either by making fun of characteristics such as lack of intelligence or exposure, advanced age and physical frailty. Although direct and often crude, these teasers have an underlying flippancy and lightheartedness which enable the criticisms they embody to be endured without undue fear of moral or psychological injury.

Godwin Ikyer discusses joke performance in the context of post-modernity among the Tiv people of North-Central Nigeria. He argues that there is a shift in the "texts and contexts of performance of jokes as a result of the cross-cultural experiences, interactions and identities resulting from urbanization and post-modern value configurations" (p.114). In the Kenyan context, the analysis of the two online comedies under discussion reveals a further shift as these comedies push the boundaries even more than earlier joke performances such as *mchongoano.* *The Mama Njeri Show* which consists of roughly three-minute skits posted on You Tube, is set in the home and the content reflects domestic or family themes. The show features three main characters: Mama Njeri (the main character) and her son, Kingston (a university student), and daughter, Njeri (a high school student). Though she is married, Mama Njeri is practically a single mother because her husband lives out of the country. She is an uneducated woman who makes a living through "hustling", which in the Kenyan popular lingo is understood to mean engaging in small scale, informal and difficult economic activities.

The show mainly revolves around conflicts between her and her children, mostly her son, whom she sarcastically calls Plesident Kingston, a parody of the title "president". This is a nick-name she has given him because, in her opinion, he behaves like a boss, doing little work and expecting to be served. Many of the episodes in the show feature only the main character, Mama Njeri, who is played by the young lady, Brenda Jons. The children are mostly outside of the frame so the audience neither sees them nor hears their voices, but their words and actions can be implied from Mama Njeri's one-sided "dialogue".

Flaqo 411/Flaqo Raz also consists of roughly three-minute skits which are posted mainly on Instagram and You Tube. Similar to *The Mama Njeri Show*, most of the skits are set in the home and deal with domestic or family themes. The show features four main characters: Otis (the main character), his sister, Akoth, and their parents. Otis is a university student while Akoth is in high school. Otis' father is educated and likes to display his intellectual prowess through speaking impeccable English, reading the newspaper and explaining everything from

a gaudy if phony intellectual perspective. The mother, on the other hand, is uneducated and speaks ordinary Kiswahili. The show mainly revolves around conflicts between Otis and his parents. All the characters are played by Erastus Ayieko Otieno, and are put together through editing.

Focus will now be directed at the conflicts dramatized in the comedy shows and how the dialogue, casting, costume and other dramatic strategies demonstrate the artistic boldness in these dramatic forms. I read the two shows as the youth's attempt to challenge institutional power by caricaturing parental surveillance. The conflicts in the comedy shows are mostly about mundane aspects of domestic life such as failure to perform house-hold chores, breaching time management expectations by waking up late or coming home late and taking too much time on the phone among other domestic squabbles. One episode from each show will be used for illustration.

In the selected episode from *Flaqo 411,* the conflict is about Otis breaching the daily routine as delineated in a timetable. For ease of reference I will refer to this episode as "Timetable". The episode presents Akoth studying when the mother walks in and inquires where Otis is and Akoth replies that he is in his bedroom, asleep. The mother decides to go to Otis' bedroom to "check what the problem with this child is". Shortly after, the father walks into the bedroom and sits down and the two parents begin talking. From their conversation, we learn that Akoth woke up at 5.00 am, did her morning chores and is now studying. As the parents enumerate his mistakes, Otis wakes up, but they order him to go back to sleep and pretend he does not know what is going on. The mother reports that Otis uses his phone during study time and that he spends most of his time either on YouTube or on the phone talking to a girl called Liza. The episode ends with the father ordering him to follow the study timetable and daily routine and consequently his phone is confiscated by the mother.

In the selected *The Mama Njeri Show* episode, the conflict is between Kigstone and the mother over his use of the phone. I shall refer to this episode as "Phone". The episode starts with the mother shouting at Kingstone to answer his phone without walking away. From her words and manner, the audience can infer what is going on even without seeing it - (Kingstone's phone rings and he receives it, saying "Hello" as he walks away from the mother's ear shot). The mother orders him back and tells him to talk in her hearing. She gives him a dressing down about poor phone etiquette and says that the reason he is going to talk from a distance is because

he wants to gossip about her. The episode ends with an inference on the part of the audience that Kingstone has complied with the mother's demands.

In both cases the parents are presented as overbearing and unreasonable while the children are docile and, in many cases, mute. One difference between *Flaqo 411* and *The Mama Njeri Show* is that in the former, the young person (Otis) talks (or at least attempts to talk) and we hear his responses to the parents' diatribes, but Kingstone is usually outside of the frame and the audience never hears him talk, though can infer his words from the mother's simulated dialogue. While the dramatized conflicts could be motivated by a variety of causes, one observes that a fundamental feature of the conflicts is the contest for power and control. I therefore examine the element of surveillance as an overarching strategy used by parents to exercise power over children. Several strategies of surveillance can be observed in the mundane domestic foibles that are dramatized in the skits.

Summoning of the youngsters by the parents especially the mother is a dominant characteristic. In both shows there are many instances when the parents call the youth mostly from their bedrooms and summon them to a common living space such as the lounge/living room. In a number of cases, there is nothing in particular that the youth are being summoned to do. This indicates a sort of deprivation of private space and private time. "Phone" presents a particular variant of summoning in which the young person is summoned even before he actually leaves. The episode begins with an up close shot of the mother as she talks to Kigstone. She begins with the words "hiyo 'hello' semea hapa/ Say that 'hello' from here" and follows closely with the question, "Ni wapi unaenda?/ Where are you going?" From these two lines of "dialogue", the audience immediately infers that the youngster is walking away from the presence of the mother in order to go and hold his phone conversation privately, but she summons him back. The mother demands that the young man stays within visibility and audibility, basic components of surveillance. The episode ends with a command by the mother, "rudi hapa!/come back here!".

Calling the youth on their mobile phones is yet another form of summoning which sends the message that they are always under the monitoring "eye" or ear of the parent. Commenting on surveillance in media space, Kristin Ronzi (2014) points out that in *current times, the panopticon takes mainly the form of technology. She argues that people's knowledge that they are being watched makes them modify behaviour even though not necessarily in positive or desirable*

ways. She gives the example of TV shows such *The Big Brother Show* and *Quiet: We Live in Public* as an indication of the notion of surveillance both in public and private spaces. She views the panopticon as a metaphor for being observed by a larger entity such as God or government.

In the case of the online comedies under analysis, the watching/controlling larger entity is the parent. As we see in the two episodes, one key way of accomplishing this is controlling the use of the mobile phone. In the above example, the mother wants to monitor the son's phone conversations and in "Timetable", the parents want to control the son's overall usage of the phone by imposing a timetable and eventually confiscating the phone. In the current age of information and technological development, the phone is not simply a device for communication, but a symbol of individuality and power. Both the parents and their children know that this gadget confers immense power especially to the youth, which then transforms it into an object of contestation. According to Foucault, the panopticon is built on a mechanism that allows the reduction of the number of those who exercise power while increasing the number of those on whom power is exercised (p.9). In controlling the use of the phone, the parents in "Timetable" and "Phone" not only manage to control and exercise power on their children, but also others whose communication with the children is curtailed.

Questioning is yet another invasive phase observed in the online comedies and it seems to naturally follow the summons. The youth could be questioned either directly or indirectly about any number of unrelated issues such as what s/he is doing, where s/he has been or who s/he was with. The questioning is almost always laced with sarcasm. In "Timetable", Otis is asked a series of incisive and sarcastic questions, for example, "Kwa nini hufanyi kama Akoth?/ Why can't you behave like Akoth?", "Kuna kitu ngumu kufuata kwa hii timetable?/ Is there anything difficult to follow in this timetable?" "Sasa tuongee kwa nguvu usikie?/ So we should now speak loudly so that you can hear?" Otis' mother asks this particular question in response to Otis' attempt to explain why he has overslept by making the plea that he is not feeling well. Otis says in Kiswahili, "sisikii vizuri" which literally translates to "I am not hearing well". Of course, the mother knows he means "I am not feeling well", but she sarcastically asks him whether they should talk more loudly so that he can hear. From the manner in which the questions are asked, it is clear that he is not expected to answer; the questions are simply meant as sarcastic jabs. At one point, Otis attempts to interject, but he is quickly shut down by the father with the words, "Kulizz! Have some respect for grown up conversation. Act oblivious of this conversation".

In "Phone", we observe a similar pattern with the mother asking many questions which she does not necessarily expect Kingstone to answer: "Ni wapi unaenda?/ Where is it that you are going?", "Inakuabisha nini?/ Why does it (the phone call) embarrass you?" All these incisive questions point to the young person's denial of privacy through the wielding of parental power. According to Foucault, one reason why the idea of the panopticon makes it possible to perfect the exercise of power is that it enables the person exercising power to intervene at any moment (p.9). In this episode, we see the mother's panopitical gaze giving her the power to intervene in an instant to curtail the son's freedom of receiving the phone call. The mother is aware that the phone conveys a sense of power and control and so if she cannot stop it from ringing, she does the next best thing which is to demand that Kingstone speaks in her hearing. By so doing, she is attempting to perform a kind of supervision over his use of the phone and more specifically monitor the conversation, a kind of inspection.

Inspecting is yet another level of surveillance that can be observed in the comedy shows. By virtue of being more mature and occupying a position of authority, parents usually assume the right to supervise their children. Phillipe Copeland, Ruth G. Dean & Stephanie P. Wladkowski examine supervision using insights from Michel Foucault and argue that supervision is an activity filled with ethical dilemmas related to the power held by the supervisor. They argue that supervision is often simply veiled inspection (p.27). In the online comedies under analysis, parents as institutions of power, exercise supervision in a manner that presents it as inspection. It takes various forms including walking around or looking around the children's bedrooms and spying by eavesdropping. This brings to our focus the supervisory role played by parents as dramatized in the online comedies. In "Timetable" and "Phone" we see the parents supervising the children in various spheres such as studies, time-management, use of the mobile phones among others. Parental supervision is exaggerated to the point of being caricatured, making the comedies a satirical portrayal of overbearing and power-wielding parents.

A simple tool like the study timetable designed by Otis' family operates within the frame of a powerful surveillance mechanism. According to the father who refers to himself as an intellectual professor, the contents of this piece of paper have the power to solve many problems and set the youngsters on the path to success. The diction he uses indicates the power he associates with following of the timetable. He reminds Otis that the whole family sat down and *designed* a study timetable which Otis is now *breaching.* The timetable can therefore be

read as a panoptical tool through which "the gaze of the parent is alert everywhere" (Foucault, 1).

This is reminiscent of a similar situation in the novel, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), by Chimamanda Adichie in which the two youngsters, Jaja and Kambili, who are visiting their auntie in a city far from their home, still feel the gaze of their father, Eugene, upon them because he has given them a timetable to follow while away from home. The timetable as a surveillance tool can be clearly understood by making reference to Foucault's argument that the concept of the panopticon makes it possible to perfect the exercise of power because its constant pressure acts even before offences, mistakes or crimes are committed (p.9). Due to the pressure exerted by the timetable, Akoth acts according to her parents' expectations without them having to remind her. On the other hand, Otis' behaviour can be read as a case of resistance against surveillance which, of course, has unpleasant repercussions, leading to a power contest, a matter to which I will pay attention next.

Subversion and Resistance in the Online Comedies

Foucault argues that the pervasive disciplinary power exercised by institutions of authority also ironically produces resistance because not all will subserviently subject themselves to this power manipulation. The analysis of the two online comedies seems to suggest that the texts under study can be read as an exercise in resistance against institutionalized power represented by overbearing parental authority. The resistance is staged mainly through dramatic strategies which will be considered next, noting also that these strategies make the skits appealing in their capacity as artistic performances.

Caricature of the parent figure is predominant in both shows and it is executed through various strategies such as exaggeration, stereotyping and eccentricity. In both shows, the parents are presented as eccentric figures and this is brought out in their manner of dress, their behaviour mannerisms and language among other elements. The two mothers, for example, always wear curios-looking headscarves and shawls, an aspect of costuming which is used to create a stereotypical figure of a provincial, iuneducated mother. The father in *Flaqo Raz* is presented in the mold of an eccentric professor/ intellectual who dresses formally but in old-fashioned nearly worn out clothes.

Language and diction are also used for characterization and to create stereotypical figures. The two mothers speak in Kiswahili and occasionally in ungrammatical English, while the father

speaks only in lofty and impeccable English. The father's lofty speech and intellectualism are used to create a character who is detached from the realities that his son is experiencing and this becomes an artistic dramatization of the gulf between the two by presenting the son in a perpetually misunderstood position. His father typically talks down to him without really listening. This is a caricature of the father who, despite his vast knowledge and grand ideas, is still very ignorant in matters relating to a real understanding of his son. This highlights a weakness of the center of power by exposing the ignorance and lack of empathy enshrined in the exercise of power, a kind of twist which gives the youth power despite their inferior position. This twist is emphasized further by the employment of reversal as will be demonstrated below.

Reversal of roles is apparent through the fact that the two comedy shows are created and acted by young people, who play the role of the parents (Brenda Jons plays the role of the nosy mother; Erastus Ayieko Otieno plays the role of the eccentric parents). In both cases a young artist mimics "old" parents, a reversal which gives young people the chance to hold a mirror to parents and show them how they look. Through art, the youth get a chance to dramatize the excesses of adults and parents in particular which means that the artistic medium gives them the power and platform to do what they cannot do in real life.

The young people may not get a chance to speak back to power either in real life or in their artistic role in the skits as children, but they still speak back through the meta-reality created through the comedy shows. Ultimately, what the creators of the comedies present to the audience is a grand picture of the exercise of power which amounts to a kind of resistance or subversion of power because it holds it up for scrutiny. The exercise of scrutiny becomes more productive as a subversive device when one considers the play of irony.

Irony plays out in the apparent discrepancy between the position of power held by parents on the one hand and children on the other. Parents are portrayed as not only possessing power and authority, but also as extremely overbearing. The youth on the other hand are portrayed as humble, meek and in most cases "mute" because they hardly speak back to authority. At face value the texts seem to affirm parental totalitarianism, but the dramatization of power imbalance is an ironic device by the creators to indirectly draw the audience's attention to this anomalous situation. Irony is emphasized through the use of *posturing* on the part of the children. As pointed out above, the children in these domestic dramas are mostly silent in the

face of authority. The dialogue, conflict and plot of the dramas are presented in such a way that the unreasonable demands of the parents are set in bold relief.

In "Timetable", Otis at one point tries to respond to the parents and is immediately shut down: "Otis lala na ujifanye hujui chenye kinaendelea hapa/ Otis sleep and make sure you don't know what is going on here." The young people know that the parents generally expect them to be silent and so they indulge them by being silent and appearing subservient. That the children are mostly quiet under the circumstances is a form of performing subservience; a kind of resistance by posturing reminiscent of Smith Winston in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* who always wears an expression of calm optimism whenever he is in front of the telescreen.

Some may argue that the portrayal of parents in the comedies is too harsh and gross in its boldness, but such a fear is mitigated by the fact that the grossness in couched in apparent flippancy and hilarity. This creates a kind of balance that enables the comedy shows to point out the excesses while at the same time presenting what is desirable in the institution of parenting. The comedy shows thrive on an ironic platform whereby they point out the extremes of parents, especially mothers, while at the same time, celebrating the sheer grit of mothers.

Conclusion

The analysis of the online comedies in the context of earlier performing art forms, reveals a trend of growing boldness in artistic expression in dealing with social issues especially in confronting power. Folktales criticize the folly and excesses of power in a manner that does not present institutions of power such as parents as completely ludicrous. *Mchongoano* not only criticizes, but openly ridicules the failings of institutions of power including fathers, police, the rich among others. The online comedies, on other hand, not only openly ridicule excessive power, but also create artistic space for the youth to indirectly express themselves and challenge parental totalitarianism as an embodiment of power. A significant indication of the growing boldness in the online comedies is the direct focus on the mother figure as an object of comedy. This shift in the portrayal of the mother figure could hint at a change in the dynamics of relationships between parents and children, but this a matter that may require further inquiry.

Related to the growing boldness, one also observes a shifting of power from adults to the youth. While in earlier forms such as folktales, the adult (usually the grandmother) was the "owner" of the tale, in later forms we see the youth owning the tale. *Mchongoano* for example is a youth genre in every sense. This shift of power is even more visible in the online comedies where the genre is not only owned by the youth but it directly targets parents as symbols of authoritarian power. This is enabled by the development in technology and the growing spaces availed by continued development of social media platforms and mobile applications which continue to create new avenues for artistic expression. The youth, being more adept at the uptake of technological innovations, are more likely to benefit from this expansion.

The analysis of the online comedies in the context of earlier forms of artistic performances brings us to the conclusion that irony is a key strategy of subversion and resistance. Since irony creates meaning by exploiting the discrepancy between appearance and reality, it renders itself easily as an insidious tool of subversive posturing. Parents use irony as well, but in a different way; they mostly employ verbal irony through sarcastic language with the aim of jabbing and jolting the youth into conforming to parental and social requirements. The youth, on the other hand, use a higher irony through mannerism such as silence, expressionless faces and apparent subservience. One could argue further that the power relations dramatized in these comedies could be used as a lens to read other power relationships in society including teachers vis-a-vis students or even government authorities vis-a-vis the citizenry.

Works Cited

Adagala, Kavetsa & Wanjiku Kabira. *Kenyan Oral Narratives.* Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1985. Print.

Adichie, Chimamanda. *Purple Hibiscus.* Algonquin Books, 2003. Print.

Armah, Ayi Kwei. *The Beautyful ones are not yet Born.* Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1968. Print.

Bentham, Jeremy. Bentham Papers 119a/119. UCL Press. p. 137. Online.

Copeland, Phillipe, Ruth G. Dean & Stephanie P. Wladkowski. "The Power Dynamics of

Supervision: Ethical Dilemmas." *Smith College Studies in Social Work*. Vol. 81, issue 1. 2011. pp 26-40. Online. Accessed September 20, 2020.

Foucault, Michel. *Surveiller et Punir*. Gallimard, 1975. Online.

----------. "Panopticism" from *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts, Vol 2, No. 1, Autumn 2008, pp. 1-12 Indiana University Press. Online. Accessed October 3, 2020.

Githinji, Peter. Mchongoano Verbal Duels: Risky Discourse and Socio-cultural Commentary. in *Cultural Production and Social Change in Kenya: Building Bridges*. Ed. Kimani Njogu & G. Oluoch-Olunya, 89-109. Nairobi: Twaweza Communications. 2008. Print.

Ikyer, Godwin Aondofa. Joke-Performance and the Tiv Cultural Context of Satirizing and Appraising Postmodernity. in *Joke Performance in Africa: Mode, Media and Meaning.* Ed. Ignatius Chukwuma, 102-117. London & New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018.

Musonye, Miriam Maranga. Literary Insurgency: Mchongoano and the Popular Art Scene in Nairobi. in *Popular Culture in Africa: The Episteme of the Everyday.* Ed. Stephanie Newell & Onookome Okome, 195-217. New York & London: Taylor & Francis Group. 2014. Print.

Mwai Wangari, Charles Kebaya & David Kimongo. (Con)text and Performance of Mchongoano,
an Urban Youth Joke Genre in Kenya. in *Joke Performance in Africa: Mode, Media and Meaning.* Ed. Ignatius Chukwuma, 133-153. London & New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018. Print.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *Wizard of the Crow.* Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 2007. Print.

Orwell, George. *Nineteen Eight Four.* London: Secker and Warburg, 1949. Print.

Otieno, "Simon Peter. The Urban Semiotic Practice and Social Evaluation in Neocultural Environment." in *Our Landscapes Our Narratives: Proceedings of the Conference on E.African Oral Literature*. Eds. Henry Indandangasi et al. Nairobi: Kenya Oral Literature
Association. Department of Literature, University of Nairobi, 2006. Print.

Ronzi, Kristin. Panopticons in Literature: Psychological Effects and Societal Allegories. *The Artifice.* https://the-artifice.com/panopticons-in-literature/ May 2014. Online. Accessed September 20, 2020

Shabanirad, Ensiech & Mahtab Dadkhan. Utopian Nightmares: Disciplinary Power and Panoptic Society in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four* and Martin Scorsese's *Shutter Island* pp. 79-84. in *Cinema and its Representations: Poetics and Politics*. Eds. Keramatfar, Hossein & Maryam Beyad. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020. Online. Accessed 29 September 2020.

Appendix i

Flaqo Ras/ Flaqo 411

Episode:	***Timetable***
	…
Mother:	(*"Late" morning. Mother goes into Otis' bedroom and finds him asleep. She sits on a stool*).
Father:	*(Enters Otis' bedroom and sits on a stool).* He is breaching the routine we all agreed upon.
Mother:	(*whispering*). He does not listen; you see! Akoth woke up and washed the dishes but (*Otis wakes up. Mother suddenly raises her voice to shouting level*) BUT THE EYEWITNESSS, THE EYEWITNESSS…
Father:	Kijana (Boy) just go back to sleep.
Mother:	Pretend that we are not here. Don't even peek.
Father:	We put a routine we all agreed upon…
Mother:	They use their phones while they are studying and when I enter the study room, they hide them.
Otis:	(*protesting*)Eey Mum!
Father:	Kulizz! Have some respect for grown up conversation. Act oblivious of this conversation.
Mother:	Otis sleep! And make sure you don't know what is going on here. (*Otis covers his head*). …
Father:	Ee? During study time they are using phones?! (*Otis looks at his father in shock*). Boy close your eyes and enjoy sleep. (*He covers his head*). …
Father:	Boy wake up and sit up!
Mother:	(*shouting*)WAKE UP AND SIT UP! (*he sits up quickly*).
Father:	It is quarantine time; school is closed; learning not in progress. We all sat down together with your sister and mother and designed a study timetable.
Mother:	Why can't you behave like Akoth?
Otis:	Mum sisikii vizuri (I am not feeling well)
Mother:	So we should now speak loudly so that you can hear? (*joke lost in translation)
Otis:	No, not like that. My health is what is not good. ….

Mother: His work is to sit with his phone saying "WELCOME TO YOU TUBE CHANNEL'' and his brain has left him. It's in reverse. …
Father: Your work is just internet alone…. My son, you boy…
Boy, following a routine worked for me into becoming an intellectual professor. (*with a sense of pride*) Surprise!
Mother: Is there really something hard to follow in this time table?
Otis: No…
Father: Follow in the footsteps of your sister…
Mother: Bring your phone here.
Father: Yes
Mother: BRING IT!

Appendix ii

The Mama Njeri Show
Episode: Phone

Mother: (*miming holding a phone to the ear and bending over. Addressing Kingstone*) Say that "Hallo" from here!
Where is it that you are going? (*dramatizing*)Receiving your phone call bent over like a sheep? (*mimicking*) "Hallo. Hallo".
Hallo what? Say that "Hallo" from here.
Those are the phone calls you take in your bedrooms gossiping about me. Saying that your mother is a fool. Saying "Ooh my Mum nags and disturbs so much"
[*Joke lost in translation]
Saying things like "Ohh my Mum is such a nag and a dummy" in my hearing!
You have all lost respect for me in this house.
It's like no one can take a phone call in front of me.
Do you see me taking my phone calls from the bedroom and saying "Hallo Hallo" (*says this with her head bent and shoulders hunched*).
That "Hallo" should be said here!
Why does it embarrass you?
If that person wants to speak to you let them come and visit. Let them come we see them.
What is?!You'll just be on your phones saying (*imitating a foreign accent*) "Ooh yesterday"
Yesterday what?!
Don't tell me! Mum what?! I don't want to hear that!
Phone calls should be taken from here… You just sit in the sitting room… Where are you going? (*Shouting*)COME BACK HERE!

The Nairobi Journal of Literature

Number 10 (Special Issue) May, 2022

Eastern African Literature in the 21st Century: Achievements, Challenges and Perspectives

Department of Literature

University of Nairobi

P O Box 30197

GPO Nairobi 00100, Kenya

literature@uonbi.ac.ke