

**TOWARDS INDIGENOUS POETICS: ORALITY AND STYLISTIC NUANCES  
IN NGUGI WA THIONG'O'S GĪKŪYŪ FICTION**

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## DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for examination in any other university.

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## **DEDICATION**

Dedicated to my children Muhia and Wambui.

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I have completed this work under the shadow of my mother's tragic passing, eleven years

after my father had taken his final bow – this work is for you, mum for your embalming love and unceasing prayers, dad for your commitment to the education of your children –  
“Mũromama kuuraga.”

## ABSTRACT

This study is a stylistic investigation of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Gikuyu fiction. Its purpose is to interrogate the use of orature and the aesthetic value it has given to his Gikuyu creative writings. The use of vernacular languages in literary creation and the inherent challenges opened an avenue that had not been explored in African literature. Earlier works that had laid the basis of African literature, and especially in Ngugi's case, were short stories as opposed to the novelistic discourse. These languages, which had not been used in creating long literary discourses, need to be examined as to how they were moulded for literary creation. The study has attempted to show that orature does not only have aesthetic appeal but it is also a growing body of art that is able to adapt to changes in the society through space and time. The study has evaluated how Ngugi has appropriated Gikuyu language and oral tradition to achieve aesthetic effect. It has also analyzed Ngugi's adaptation of motifs and images of oral tradition in a changing, contemporary society and its use in projecting social and ideological vision. Based on eclectic but carefully selected theoretical framework and methodological orientation, the study has taken advantage of postcolonial, stylistics and semiotic theory (including some postulations from semiotic theoreticians like Foucault, Bakhtin and Althusser). From semiotic theory the study has taken cognizance of the importance of signs in all cultures, this has guided the study in interrogating the growth and adaptability of oral forms (which are treated as individual signs) through time. The enquiry has also taken advantage of Saussure's concept of langue and parole, and has approached oral tradition as a system from which African creative writers' use in their construction of a work of art. Postcolonial theory has been crucial to the study, especially in the light of Ngugi's change of language, and more because language is an important component in the questions of identity, power and representation. The study's conclusion is that Ngugi employs orature as a textual strategy in consciously subverting and deconstructing colonial and neo-colonial practices. It has also been used as a process of reclaiming and recovering the previously occluded indigenous histories and tradition. The recuperated oral forms have in turn been employed as models or templates in representing contemporary postcolonial reality. In the studied works therefore, orature emerges as a

weapon of resistance against all forms of social injustices, its constituents which include oral narratives, proverbs, songs and riddles are some of the locales from which differing ideologies are discussed, contested and subverted.



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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the Study

The modern African writer is to his indigenous oral tradition as a snail is to its shell; even in foreign habitat a snail never leaves its shell behind (Iyasere: 1975, 107).

Ever since the 1959 Second Congress of Black Writers and Artists and the 1962 Conference of African Writers of English Expression in Kampala, the debate on the language and definition of African literature has continued to elicit heated debate among literary scholars. This position was later buttressed by Wali who in 1963 in an article entitled “The Dead End of African Literature” questioned the fatalistic acceptance of European languages as movers of African literature. This became the model which the likes of Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1981) and Chinweizu et al (1980) took when they started theorising about the language and composition of African literature. The place of orality came to be seen as a foundational and indeed a fundamental feature in defining African literature. In many instances, as Mazrui posits, the debate on African literature, particularly orality, came to “carry the entire weight of African civilization and its historical longevity. In some instances it came to help define the very soul of a preconceived Africanity”. Its evidence in written texts “became part of the quest for an authentically African literature” (1995: 160). This view has been corroborated by Eileen Julien, who looks at orality as an “idiom out of which writers write,” (1992: 142)

Many critics, especially of African descent, point out that African literature is heavily punctuated by images and tropes of traditional oral cultures. The authenticity of the African novel is specifically linked to its relationship to genres of oral literature. African novelists have in their writing tried to retrieve what is most noble and artistic in African oral forms and have shown how these attributes have been crucial to the formation of modern African literature. It is in the same vein that the current study sought to investigate the oral influence in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Gikũyũ* texts and how he has used it to represent the images of the contemporary African society. We have therefore interrogated whether this influence has contributed to further understanding of African

literature. The analysis of oral art forms as used in these writings has helped affirming that African languages are indeed fluid and dynamic and have disclaimed Ward's assertion that they are not , "static repositories of ancient and unchanging traditions" (116). Finegan (1977: 3) refutes this claim by pointing out that "constricting oral art forms to anthropology or oral residues denies intellectual and artistic ability of the people from the said community."

The notion of oral genres as growing art forms have in many instances has been very controversial. Ong (1982: 24) has contested the views which have tended to doubt the growth of oral forms by positing that oral people cannot think or act originally because they are "trapped in an endless cycle of repetition." Such views refute the existence of authentic changes in oral forms due to their repetitiveness. Analyses of Ngugi's fiction contained in the current study of his works have helped in showing that indeed the oral genres do change with time.

The choice of African languages as tools of literary creativity has always been a difficult issue to many African writers. In many instances, writers who create in their mother tongue do so experimentally because they are normally among the first ones to do so and especially where novels are concerned. Mlama (2002: 11) says that writing in African languages is a choice of writers who are "willing to take a risk, writers who respond to challenges posed by the realities of our African society today." It is also "a choice for obscurity and a renunciation of the international limelight that writing in English, French and Portuguese could offer a writer" (Mlama, 2002:2). If languages are carriers of culture, writing in them means propagating and developing those cultures. Writing in African languages is therefore a risk that African writers should take.

On the other hand, it would be prudent to study how oral tradition as entrenched in African languages has succeeded in exploring the changes that have taken place in the political, social and economic spheres. A study of Ngugi's vernacular writing has helped answer questions about their "innovation and creativity, about new genres and how they come into being; about the innumerable, protean ways in which orality combines with

literacy; about the changing constitution of public spheres and imagined communities; about cultural nationalism and forms of imagination ... about the self-conception and representation of the individual through writing” (Furniss and Barber, 2006:1) and that, for instance, Ngugi has developed an indigenous literary tradition that is capable, as Furniss and Barber (2006: 3) would say, “of resisting the insidious hegemonic effects of linguistic colonization by English and French, rejoicing in the wealth of verbal resources inherited from oral traditions.”

The emergence of a postcolonial regime that was deaf to the problems that the people were facing also became a daunting challenge to African creative writers. Formerly, they were grappling with colonial reality and the quest of revalorizing the cultures of the African people. When independence was achieved, the desire for meaningful freedom that the masses had so longingly looked forward to became a distant dream. African writers had to look for ways with which to respond to the conflicts arising from a betrayed independent promise. The recourse to traditional genres became one of the pathways that African writers employed “in search of the image that would capture the reality of a neo-colony” (Ngugi: 1981: 77). These writers advocated a return to the African traditional aesthetics and oral forms as a quest of meaningfully representing the postcolonial individual. This study, through a careful analysis of Ngugi’s *Gĩkũyũ* fiction, has established that oral art forms have been reclaimed and remodeled in addressing the problems of neo-colonial societies. It has also ascertained that orality as used in Ngugi’s *Gĩkũyũ* fiction has been freed from narrow ethnic concerns into embracing a nationalistic agenda.

In conclusion, suffice it to say that African literature has been given impetus by the conscious inclusion in oral literary materials as a part of its structure. These genres have continued to enrich the universal human understanding; enhancing the resilience of African traditional knowledge in the face of modern global capitalism. Oral literature has therefore become a literary medium that is being used in countering many of the challenges that face Africa and her peoples. This creative trend, especially in African vernacular literature, has called for a serious critical attention in order to ascertain their

value or otherwise, something that this study has addressed.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Even though orality has been hailed as the central feature in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Gĩkũyũ fiction, little has been done to analyse the influence it has on these writings. This study interrogates the literary significance of orality in Ngugi's Gĩkũyũ fiction and how he has used it to indigenize his writing. The study also examines the use of oral literature in the contemporary Ngugi's Gĩkũyũ fiction and also evaluates its growth and vibrancy.

## **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

1. To examine how Ngugi wa Thiong'o has appropriated the motifs and images of oral traditions in his contemporary Gĩkũyũ fiction.
2. To examine how Ngugi has used orality to shape an African literary tradition in vernacular literatures.
3. To evaluate the use of orature in projecting social and ideological vision.

## **1.4 Research Premises and Assumptions:**

1. Ngugi wa Thiong'o's use of oral literary motifs and images in his Gĩkũyũ works is revision, an attempt at representing the present society.
2. Oral literature has helped shape an authentic literary tradition in Ngugi's contemporary fiction and drama.
3. Orature is a useful tool in projecting social and ideological vision.

## **1.5 Justification of the Study**

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's creative writing has attracted a lot of critical attention globally. His choice of mother tongue as the language of his literary creativity has served to heighten the debate on the language of African literature. Having written extensively both in English and in his indigenous language, Ngugi becomes an appropriate choice of our study, especially when interrogating language as a medium of artistic value.

Scholars who have attempted to interrogate the use of oral genres in Ngugi's fiction have

overly concentrated on the Gicaandi verse (Gititi: 1995 and Njogu: 1999). A need therefore arises of addressing the complex interlinkages between Ngugi's Gikuyu fiction and other oral genres. The use of oral tradition as a textual strategy has not been given serious consideration and where it has been studied concentration has been on his translated works (Kasanga and Mambo: 1996 and Mwangi: 2002). The study's choice of a textual interrogation, as far as orature (in the vernacular) is concerned, has been a useful contribution to literary scholarship.

Ngugi, in *Decolonizing the Mind*, opines that language is the carrier of culture, and culture is almost indistinguishable from the language that makes possible its genesis and growth. If this is true, the most appropriate language to study then would be the artist's own. This has helped in examining the growth and vibrancy of oral forms as captured in vernacular literatures.

Ngugi's Gĩkũyũ fiction makes a radical departure from the Eurocentric orientation that he uses in his works written in English is attributable to the language change and the heavy borrowing from the oral tradition. There is a need to establish the effect of this change and the real value it has given to Ngugi's latter fiction. When the world has continued to venerate African literature written in foreign tongues, this study has brought to the fore the importance of literature written in African languages which have for a long time been relegated to the periphery both in terms of their aesthetic appeal and oral orientation. This has, therefore, helped in establishing their intellectual and scholarly place in literature. It has also assisted in validating oral literature as a form of traditional African epistemology that continues to effect meaningful change in the present society.

### **1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study**

This study has focused on Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Gĩkũyũ fiction. Even though these works have been translated into many world languages, the study has limited itself to the author's Gĩkũyũ prose fiction which has served as the representational sample owing to the study's choice of topic. Although the study has focused only on Ngugi, we have tried to access the writings of other Gĩkũyũ writers to establish a sound base of our enquiry.



Works by major Gĩkũyũ writers like Gikaara wa Njau have also been read as the background to Gĩkũyũ writings. One of the major limitations of the study has been the change of orthography especially in *Murogi wa Kagogo* and the use of English words which have been reappropriated to fit within Gĩkũyũ phonology which has made the text difficult to read.

### **1.7 Definitions of Terms**

**Indigenous poetics:** This phrase refers in a general sense to the conscious appropriation of African traditional genres and African languages as a representation experience, history and their place in the contemporary society.

**Orality/ Orature/ Oral literature:** Aware of course of the ambiguity inherent in the term oral literature, this research uses these three terms interchangeably to refer to all orally derived genres.

**Stylistic nuances:** the phrase refers to the formalistic roles that oral genres play in the texts under study and show that they are used not as ornamental devices but to also communicate particular issues/meaning.

**Hybridity:** the term is used in the study to refer the novels ability to co-opt various forms without compromising its generic form. But it is specifically used here to point to African creative writer's conscious employment of oral genres within the novel, something to that authenticates and foregrounds these genres as important forms of Africa's epistemology.

**Decolonisation:** this is explained as the various ways/practices used by African creative writers in decentring European-based reading and through it giving the novel in Africa an indigenous appeal and definition. Some of theses are what have been defined above: orality, hybridity etc.

## **1.8 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

This section presents the literature review by discussing the trends and issues in African oral literature and in particular oral-textual usage. It also reviews the debates that have discussed the language of Africa literature. The review is based on critical examination of books and articles that are closely related to the present study.

The question about the creative nature of African oral literature has elicited a lot of controversy. This controversy dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century; the time when missionaries collected African oral materials for preservation. According to Alembi, “European study of oral literature in Africa by this time was characterized by prejudice, ignorance and the various theories that saw Africans as still in the early stages of evolution” (2002: 26). These theories had one thing in common: they failed to recognize the creative nature of African oral arts.

Alembi (2002: 28) recognizes the period between 1960 and 1980 as one of the most important in the growth of African oral literature. It was a period of nationalism in Africa, and Africans started taking a lot of interest in their folklore. Some of the foremost scholars in Kenya at this time included Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Taban Lo Liyong, Okot p’ Bitek, and Owour Anyumba. During this time literature written by Africans, including oral literature was taught in the university as part of English literature, something that the likes of Ngugi felt denied African literature its due relevance. According to Ngugi, “the primary duty of any literature department is to illuminate the spirit animating a people, to show how it meets its challenges, and to investigate possible areas of development and involvement” (1972: 146). This period laid the basis of future study of African oral

literature by recognizing, as Alembi posits, “African oral literature as a field worthy of study, as a subject in its own right,” (2002: 30)

The more recent period in the study of oral literature in Africa stretches from 1980 to the present. This period, according to Alembi, differs from the other two periods because it has been “characterized by field work in an effort to understand oral material” (2002: 31). One thing that has been clear in most of these studies is the dynamic nature of Africa oral forms and their importance in understanding the nature of African people and their society.

The present-day scholars of African oral literature acknowledge the creative potential of these arts. This, indeed, is the reason why the literary scholars give attention to the oral forms. Nandwa and Bukenya define oral literature as, “those utterances, whether spoken, recited or sung, whose composition and performance exhibit to an appreciable degree the artistic characteristics of accurate observation, vivid imagination and ingenious expression” (1983: 1), (also Okpewho, 1983: 4). They continue to say that African oral forms qualify to be literature because, ‘like all literature, they use language as their medium of communication’ (1983: 1). Okot p’ Bitek defines oral literature as “all creative works of man...whether ...sung, spoken or written down” (1973: 20). Finally, even though there has not been a clear-cut distinction between spoken and written literature, one thing that stands out is the central role that language plays in the two types of literatures. The second part of this review focuses on the debate of the language of African literature and works which have analyzed the use of oral forms in written texts.

### **The Question of Language in African Literature**

Any interrogation that attempts an analysis of Ngugi’s vernacular literature must take cognizance of the issues raised in the continuous debates on the languages of African literature. The 1962 Conference of “African Writers of English Expression “ held in Makerere University discussed as one of its core topics the question of language of African literature. The conference reached a consensus that sounded a death-knell to

African literatures written in indigenous language. One of the participants, Ezekiel Mphahlele, proclaimed, “It is better for the African writer to think and feel in his own language and then look for an English translation approximating the original” (Wali, 1963: 14). Chinua Achebe puts it even more candidly, saying: “I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience” (2000:433).

Ngugi reacted strongly to the above suppositions, and wondered why one would promote other languages while killing his/ her own. In *Decolonising the Mind* he asks:

Why, we may ask, should an African writer or any writer become so obsessed by taking from his mother-tongue to enrich other tongues? [W]e never ask ourselves: how can we enrich our languages? How can we ‘prey’ on the rich humanist democratic heritage in the struggles of other peoples in other times and other places to enrich our own? Why not have Balzac, Tolstoy, and Sholokhov, Aristotle and Plato in African languages? And why not create literary monuments in our own languages? (1986: 8)

Ngugi’s point is valid because languages grow if the users of the said language make deliberate attempts to use them in their daily communications. Indeed, as noted elsewhere in this study, the so-called European languages began to break from the yoke of Latin after the writers made conscious decisions of creating works of art using these languages (Howatson and Ian, 1993: 470-74). To Ngugi, “Language, any language, has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture” (1981:13). He also adds that language, especially through orature, and literature, carries the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. Language, therefore, is at the centre of all socio-political interaction and is thus inseparable from human beings. Supporting this contention, Hebert (1995: 260) explains that “we attempt to remember, to recall, to recreate using images from our culture, from codes in our languages, to imagine the unfamiliar.” Language therefore reflects and promotes the key issues that concern society including issues of power politics, class struggles, culture and domination. These two positions point to the centrality of language in literary creativity

and has reinforced this study's aim while interrogating Ngugi's Gikuyu fiction and how it has been used to appropriate present images and other concerns.

Achebe does not see any problem in using a foreign language in articulating Africans' concerns. According to him, "African writers write out of an African experience and of commitment to an African destiny" (1987: 50). But the question that arises from Achebe's rationale is that these foreign languages cannot be accessed by many of the African people (a majority of whom are illiterate). This, then, means that this literature becomes limited in terms of its audience: only foreigners and the elite can access it, thereby alienating the majority of the people. Despite this Achebe explains that these languages can in many instances be considered equally African when he asserts:

There has been an impassioned controversy about African literature in non-African languages. But what is a non-African language? English and French certainly. But what about Arabic? What about Swahili even? Is it then a question of how long the language has been present on African soil? If so how many years should constitute effective occupation? For me it is again a pragmatic matter. A language spoken by Africans, a language in which Africans write justifies itself. (1987: 63)

V. Y. Mudimbe disagrees with Achebe's views. To Mudimbe "each human language is particular and expresses in an original way types of contact that exist between man (producer of culture) and his environment (nature). Thus each language delineates in its own manner concepts, systems of classifications, and knowledge" (1988: 30). Mudimbe's argument has illuminated our interrogation, especially when questioning how Ngugi has attempted to appropriate African traditional discourses and history which have for long been misrepresented in the Western canonical writing and has in the word of Foucault (1973: 229), questioned the Western "will to truth" thereby restoring to African discourse its "character as an event" and abolished "the sovereignty of the signifier." Where the signifier has always been the western discourse.

Graham Furniss and Karin Barber (2006:1) posit that, “African-language writing is a field of intense creative experimentation.” This is especially true when one is studying Ngugi’s Gikuyu fiction and his experimenting with the oral genres in his works. To them also “African languages are repositories of cultural values and of peoples’ most intimate and formative experiences: they must be released from the colonial stigma, rebuilt, rediscovered, further developed through the production of new literary works” (Furniss and Barber, 2006: 2). Following this argument, therefore, it becomes a prerogative of the African literary scholar to interrogate creative writing from his/her language in order to verify its development and use in new contexts.

Central to Ngugi’s switch to Gĩkũyũ was what most scholars have referred to as a quest for relevance and a need to address the mass of Gĩkũyũ workers and peasants and by extension the oppressed of the world. This has called for new ways of presentation, ways in which he could appropriately express his people’s yearning and the existing social reality. Ngugi was thus forced to change the language of his creative writing, in his re-adaptation of his art to make it embrace the totality of his people’s needs, a language that was readily available to the mass of Gĩkũyũ workers and peasants both in terms of its oral orientation and cultural undertones. This re-energized his art by making it a people-based literature which, according to Roa Bastos, can only happen “when [it is] produced at the center of a community’s social energy and [is] drawn from the essence of its life, reality, history, and those social and national myths which fertilize the creative subjectivity of poets, novelists, and artists” (1987: 301).

Language was therefore a tool that Ngugi sought in freeing African cultures from colonial legacies and to re-energizing the cultures of Africa. In his own words, it was a “struggle to move the centre of our literary engagements from European languages to a multiplicity of locations in our languages” (1993: xvi).

### **African Novels and Oral Tradition**

Ngugi’s evocation of his oral tradition was an attempt at meaningfully interacting with his audience and what Eileen Julien calls the use of orality as “a radical reassessment of

history and social relations through the telling of stories” (1992:153). This recourse to oral tradition and new audience fell within the Fanonist conviction of what brings about national literature, that it is only “When the focus on a new audience has taken root, can national literature be said to have come to being” (1963). Fanon also saw the use of orature as a progressive step, which writers from formerly colonized states undertook in order to address their own people. He writes:

The oral tradition – stories, epics and songs of the people – which formerly were filed as set pieces are now beginning to change. The storytellers who used to relate inert episodes now bring them alive and introduce into them modifications which are increasingly fundamental. There is a tendency to bring conflicts up to date and to modernize the kinds of struggle which the stories evoke, together with the names of heroes and types of weapons. (1963: 193)

This kind of writings took place after the departure of the colonialist, when the militant writers in formerly colonized states who directly addressed the oppressors changed “to one who progressively takes on the habit of addressing his own” (Fanon, 1963:193). This change was precipitated by the conditions that had set in immediately after independence. Griffiths (2000: 172) explains that the new order that took over after colonialism caused a lot of opposition and this was to finally percolate to the creative writings. That this opposition was directed outwardly against the external forces of neo-colonialism, and inwardly against the governments and social processes of the post-independence regimes, many of whom have been accused of acting simply as agents for those external forces. This opposition brought a new orientation in third world literature, as Fredrick Jameson says:

Third world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic, necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled public Third World culture and

society. (1986: 69)

Biersteker (1995:143) also reads *Matigari* (Ngugi, 1986) as “an allegory in which the surviving memory of the struggle that has become individualized confronts contemporary social reproduction and workers’ struggle.” She also sees it as a revision of the history of resistance that looks for new ways to revisit historical events in order to address important present-day issues. Biersteker voices Ngugi’s own confession, that it was a hostile contemporary reality that forced him as an African writer to adopt a new form of writing. Biersteker’s views benefit this enquiry as it has expored how Gikuyu oral tradition has been remodeled to capture the existing neo-colonial reality.

Chinweizu et al, explain the use of orature in the African novel as the artist’s attempt of decolonising it. To them:

African orature is important to this enterprise of decolonizing African literature, for the important reason that it is the incontestable reservoir of the values, sensibilities, aesthetics, and achievements of traditional African thought and imagination outside the plastic arts. Thus, it must serve as the ultimate foundation, guidepost, and point of departure for a modern African literature. It is the root from which modern African literature must draw sustenance. (1980:2)

Though Chinweizu et al, look at orality in the African novel, they have largely restricted themselves to the West African novel. This study has furthered their research by analyzing Ngugi, a prominent East African novelist.

Kofi Anyidoho (1996: 5) looks at the African oral poets and their relevance in African literature. He focuses on performance and its centrality in African literature by pointing out that “a great deal of the vitality of oral literature in performance is due to its ability to update the past, to make the past alive and relevant to the present, and to its ability to project the present into the future.” Anyidoho’s suppositions have benefited this study as



it questions the relevance of performance in Ngugi's play *Ngahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want)* and *Maitu Njugira (Mother Sing for Me - a musical presentation)*.

Meehan and Abdul have done a comparative study on the use of storytelling in the African-American slave narratives and Ngugi's novel, *Matigari*. To them storytelling armed the communities (African-America and Gikuyu) with knowledge that helped them in "constructing of a resistance community adequate to the conditions of oppression and the tasks of liberation struggle" (1995: 249). This meant that new ways of literary creativity had to be sought in order to fashion language as a liberatory tool in the struggle of the African societies. Meehan and Karim's findings are important to this study, as we try to understand the role that orature has played in politics of resistance and liberation, particularly whether orature can be used "as a liberatory tool in the struggle to decolonize" (1995: 255).

Kimani Njogu sees storytelling in Ngugi's narratives as a strategy of remembering what has been dis-membered, building alliances, foreshadowing and keeping hope alive through active engagement. It is for him a way of creating spaces through which alternative voices long suppressed through the colonial experience may find expression. He also looks at it as "a strategy of propelling the narrative voice forward, a further oralization, and collectivization of Ngugi's creative energies that constitutes a major postcolonial intervention in our understanding of the novel genre" (1995: 346). Njogu's work reinforces this study in our interrogation of the evolution and adaptation of the oral art forms in the cotemporary African novel.

The ideals of freedom and justice occupy a central place in *Matigari*. Biersteker sees it as a novel that:

Reinvigorates links between past and present insistence upon truth and justice by revitalizing, restoring, and critiquing revolutionary and resistance voices and language that have been and are being silenced when they demand liberation. (1995:152)

Balogun defends Ngugi's language shift as an attempt at borrowing from his peoples'

rich oral philosophy, thereby liberating his “art from the constraints of Western tradition and broadening its scope by situating it within primary control of less exclusivist and more accommodating aesthetic philosophy of oral tradition” (1995:187). This means that Ngugi parodies from the Great Tradition to enrich his mother language. Balogun concludes that in Ngugi’s latter fiction “oral tradition does not, as in the past, serve, but rather, it is served by, the Western novelistic tradition” (1995:188). Balogun’s privileging of oral tradition in respect of *Matigari* is of import to this study even though it interrogates the translated work. This study has analysed the impact orality has had on Ngugi’s Gĩkũyũ novels.

Maurice Taonezvi Vambe has studied the oral story-telling tradition in the Zimbabwean novel in English. In this illuminating study he looks at orality as “a stylistic strategy that African writers employ, to give a stamp of African authenticity to their works of art” (2002: 2). Vambe presents orality not “as a cultural site where the values of the black people are totally distorted by colonialism but as a cultural space where authentic black identities are indisputably formed” (2002: 2). His study offers to this research a model for interrogating the relationship between orality and writing in the Kenyan vernacular fiction. This study, like Vambe’s work, seeks to interrogate whether oral tradition can be used in “recuperating viable values from the past in order to forge new relations between people in the present” (Ibid: 7).

In his essay “Gender, Unreliable Oral Narration and the Untranslated Preface in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Devil on the Cross*,” Evan Mwangi interrogates the *Gicaandi* singer in the novel through whom some of the events in the novel are focalized. He concludes that the narrator is unreliable and is “incompetent in language use and acquires a clownish disposition as the story unfolds...that he “falls short of an ideal *gicaandi* performer, a role that readers are left to complete” (2007: 29). From Mwangi’s analysis it is obvious that an in-depth study of the *Gicaandi* genre needs to be undertaken especially in Ngugi’s Gikuyu novels. This will ascertain the flexibility of the genre or otherwise. Furthermore there is, in the words of Mwangi, a need to investigate whether the *Gicaandi* genre can be “transformed to express contemporary realities,” (Ibid: 33).

In his study of African oral literature, Isidore Okpewho insists on the importance of studying oral literature in its original language if we have to fully appreciate it. He looks at the groundbreaking study in oral literature fieldwork by African scholars and concludes that the breakthrough came when native scholars undertook research of their people's oral tradition. This is because the scholars "understood perfectly well what constitutes a beautiful expression in their own tongues and took the trouble to explain the meaning and effectiveness of various techniques in the original texts which gave them their artistic qualities" (1992:12). Okpewho's suggestion captures the aspiration of this study in its endeavor to study oral art forms and their relevance in the present society.

The writer, as Roland Barthes notes, inherits a social language that goes a long way in defining his thematic concerns and the mode of signification. This means that the text when written becomes a "a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture." To Barthes, therefore, writers can only "imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original" (1998: 149). Barthes's argument is in line with Saussure's structuralist concept of *langue* and *parole*, where *langue* is a system of values and forms the basis of all languages. This existing system is what a creative writer uses in constructing works of art. This view relates to our study, as it treats the Gĩkũyũ language and its inherent oral tradition as a system from which Ngugi makes certain choices as a basis of his artistic articulation. This study looks at oral art forms as some of these choices.

The treatment of language as a site of social struggle interests our research given Ngugi's ideological leaning. With this in mind, Bakhtin's sociological poetics and his contemporary Volosinov's views become a useful tool in our analysis. To Bakhtin, language is "essentially social and is rooted in the struggle and ambiguities of everyday life" (Maybin, 2001: 64-5). Thus, "meanings of words are derived not from fixed relationships between abstract signs, but from the accumulated dynamic social use of language in different contexts and for different and sometimes conflicting positions" (2001: 65). If specific genres are treated as individual signs, then they can be analysed to test whether in different contexts and times they capture the existing social struggle and other pertinent issues in the society. The prose writer, as Bakhtin says, "Makes use of words that are already populated with social intentions of others and compels them to

serve his own intentions, to serve a second master” (1989: 677). It becomes important to this study to interrogate the role that the oral forms serve in the postcolonial society. At the heart of Bakhtin and Volosinov’s position, literary works are fundamentally and undeniably social phenomena that can only be understood as utterance through a process of social evaluation.

### **1.9 Theoretical Framework**

This study has used an eclectic theoretical approach in its analysis of Ngugi’s *Gikūyū* creative works. The theories include postcolonial theory, semiotics and stylistics. According to Venn, postcolonial critique encompasses “anti-colonial struggle as well as the struggles that contest economic, religious, ethnic, and gender forms of oppression, on the principal that it is possible to create more equal, convivial and just societies” (2006:35). Attempts at analysing African literature must therefore take into consideration the effects and aftermath of colonialism and imperialism. Postcolonial theory becomes important here as it focuses on the literatures of the formerly colonized states, and the lasting effects that this historical phenomenon has continued to impact on Africa’s social, political and economic affairs.

Postcolonial writers, as Terry Delly says, “attempts to show and / or deconstruct the colonial/neocolonial structures of power that “interpellate” the colonial subject, leading to a “free acceptance” of subjugation. There are immediate, material aims to these deconstructive acts: to reveal the complicity between economic and cultural imperialism and at the same time, to provide models for resistance”. This then means that postcolonial theory pays attention to the textual strategies which the writer uses to subvert the colonialist or dominant discourse. Postcolonial theory also aims at dismantling the master narratives in order that it might foreground the African images and traditions. Postcolonial writers are also involved in the “search for new ideals of beauty and an aesthetic-expressive register in which to re-inscribe what it means to be black or African

or postcolonial” (Venn, 2006:118-119).

The research has also embraced the notion of hybridity as conceptualised in post-colonial studies and also as formulated by Mikhail Bakhtin’s book *The Dialogic Imagination*. In postcolonial discourse, hybridity refers “to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization,” (Ashcroft et al, 2000: 108). From Bakhtin’s theory of the novel, this research has taken the novel’s ability to make use of disparate forms without compromising itself as a process novelistic hybridisation. As a received genre, the novel in Africa has embraced the oral literary genres in its body, allowing them to give it a setting that is indigenous to Africa. It is hybrid notion that this research has embraced.

Tied to hybridity is the concept of decolonisation, a postcolonial term which according Ashcroft et al (2000: 56) denotes “the process of revealing and dismantling colonialist power in all its forms. This includes dismantling the hidden aspects of those institutional and cultural forces that had maintained the colonialist power and that remain even after political independence is achieved.” This concept has benefitted this study because it is under its influence that Ngugi abandons the use of English as the language of his creative writing in favour of his vernacular language, Gikuyu in his endeavour at “developing indigenous literary (novel) capable of resisting the insidious hegemonic effects of linguistic colonization by English,” (Barber, 2006: 3).

Ngugi sees the use of African languages as a process of decolonising the minds of the African which he calls “an ever-continuing struggle to seize back their creative initiative in history through a real control of all means of communal self-definition in time and space,” (1986: 10). It also included a conscious occlusion of “Eurocentric cultural models” (Ashcroft et al., 2000: 57) in favour indigenous one which had been replaced through colonialism. There was also an open advocacy in use of oral literary models recuperated from African oral tradition. The use of orality is also as decolonisation process that disavows writing as the only way through which experience is represented. The use of orality is the central feature in this research and its importance is such that it continues to provide an “imaginative background and often, the structural model for the

appropriation of the novel genre by African writers,” (Irele, 2009: 1). The two concepts, decolonisation and orality therefore serve to reinforce the notion of hybridity because their usage call for bringing together of disparate ideas and genres that support and contradict each in the process of decentring dominant discourses. The overriding issue in postcolonial theory is its ability to interrogate colonialism and how it has led to admixture of cultures and identities and their effect on the postcolonial subjects and nations.

This study also takes advantage of semiotics, a theory that studies signs, how they come into being, their coding and social function and the importance attached to them. John Sturrock defines semiotics as “the study of signs or systems of signs and which represents the largest possible extension of structuralist ideas into investigation of human culture” (1986:73). Semiotics has helped this study because of the fundamental role that oral forms (signs) play in Ngugi’s *Gĩkũyũ* works, especially in what Seldon terms “the transferability of signifiers...that even a signifier of such awesome power can in a new context, be assigned a new signified,”( 1989: 80). Eileen Julien supports this when she says that “repeating an utterance is not, in fact, to repeat it but it is rather, to speak in a new utterance” (1992: 47). This has helped us in assessing the many adaptations and changes that oral forms have undergone through time and especially in Ngugi’s *Gĩkũyũ* fiction. Semiotics has resonated well with postcolonial theory, because they both take the whole of culture as their central domain. Semiotics is also profoundly social in nature and its study of signs is at the centre of this study. Signs in general play a very “fundamental role in every moment of human life and of our interaction in society” (Sturrock, 1993: 73). This study has approached individual oral forms as signs used in standing for lived experiences or things in the material world, because as Chandler (2002: 59) observes “reality always involves representation and signs are involved in the construction of reality.” The piercean semiotic model of iconicity and indexicality has also been instrumental to this research especially in expounding on how different signs imitate or infer other things in their pursuit of representation.

The study has also employed Stylistics as it other critical approach. Wellek and Warren (1949: 176-7), explain that “a purely literary and aesthetic use of stylistics is the study of a work of art or a group of works which are to be described in terms of their aesthetic

function and meaning”. Katie Wales in the *Dictionary of Stylistics* sees the goal of stylistics as not only charged with aesthetic appreciation but with other functions as well. She notes:

The goal of stylistics is not simply to describe the formal features of the text for their own sake, but in order to show their functional significance for the interpretation; or in order to relate literary effects to linguistic ‘causes’ where these are felt to be relevant. (1989: 438)

Literary works make use of language resources to uniquely create aesthetic effect. Indangasi supports this view when he says that a literary critic interrogates a work of art in order to see “how a writer has idiosyncratically manipulated language to achieve aesthetic effect in a literary text” (1988: 8).

In using stylistic theory to read literary texts, readers can according to Mills, be made “aware of aspects of texts, for example, grammatical choices or lexical choices, which skew the interpretation of a text” (1995: 7). By using this theory, this research has explored how Ngugi has appropriated from the oral tradition to add aesthetic value to his Gikuyu works and evaluated the functional importance of oral art forms in a changing, cosmopolitan society. Furthermore, Stylistics has been helpful in determining meaning of the texts in their social contexts.

## 1.10 METHODOLOGY

The study has examined factors informing the use of oral poetics in Ngugi's Gĩkũyũ fiction, namely *Caĩtaani Mutharabainĩ*, *Matigari ma Njirũũngi*, *Mrogi wa Kagogo: Mbuku ya Mbere na ya Keri*, *Murogi wa Kagogo: Mbuku ya Gatatu*, *Mũrogi wa Kagogo: Mbuku ya Kana*, *Gatano na Gatandatũ*, *Ngahika Ndeenda*, and *Maitũ Njugĩra*. Theoretical works touching on the topic under analysis have been read and reviewed.

The study's source of data is divided into two: prose-fiction and drama. The two categories have served as our representational sample in interrogating how each appropriates orality. This sample captures Ngugi's creative engagement in vernacular writing, in exclusion of his childrens' literature. The analysis has taken into consideration the usage of various oral genres as used in the texts under study. They include songs/oral poetry, oral narratives, riddles, and proverbs. These genres have been examined so as to see how they have been reclaimed to suit the contemporary postcolonial society. This has also gone a long way in ascertaining Venn's (2006:12) assertions that "the present inscribes and is conditioned by the historical past in the very material reality of the everyday world in the accretion of meanings attaching to its every aspect."

The study has used purposive sampling in its choice of the texts to study. Purposive sampling is appropriate because as, Kombo and Tromp point out it helps in "selecting information rich cases for in-depth analysis related to the central issues of the study"



(2006: 82). The texts were selected chiefly because of their use of Gĩkũyũ language and therefore the understanding that translated works may not necessarily capture all the nuances of the original language. The images and symbols which may be exclusive to a particular language and culture can also be compromised by translation. Therefore, the study of Ngugi's Gĩkũyũ fiction in exclusion of his English works becomes important to the study especially because of his conscious use of oral tradition. This view is supported by Julien when she posits that:

A closer examination of Ngugi's progression becomes clear that his first works are not derived instinctively from the oral tradition but that his reference to that tradition is more recent and quite conscious. Aspects of oral tradition, as of prose tradition, are not simply given, they are chosen. (1992:142)

This preference of oral art forms is particularly apparent in the Gĩkũyũ fiction. It has become appropriate therefore to examine these works and especially due to their oral orientation.

Other methods of data collection include archival and library research. The two have been used in reviewing and examining literature that is closely associated with the study. Archival records have been important in understanding the socio-cultural lifestyle of the Gĩkũyũ people before and during colonialism. This has helped the researcher in evaluating the changes and adaptations that the oral genres have gone through. With this in mind, The Kenya National Archives and Documentation Service have been utilised. Libraries that hold critical works on Ngugi's creative writing have been visited; they include Egerton University, University of Nairobi, and Kenyatta University among others. Foreign institutes based in Kenya which contain relevant information crucial to the study have also been visited; they include The French Institute of Research in Africa (IFRA) and The British Institute in Eastern Africa.

The study has traced the many changes that African oral genres have undergone within the interstices of Ngugi' Gĩkũyũ fiction. Orality is also looked at as a stylistic strategy that African writers use in representing the contemporary reality. The analysis, which is basically a textual analysis has drawn from postcolonial theory in assessing how the use of language, whether African or foreign, has shaped a distinct African literature both in definition and how Ngugi has used language to serve the needs of the people. How, for example, they have incorporated culturally specific details and the models of pre-colonial texts in their bid of decentering the European-based reading. Postcolonial theory has also helped in assessing how the use of language, whether African or foreign, has aided in shaping a distinct African literature both in definition and how Ngugi has used language to serve the needs of the people. Semiotics, an offshoot of Stylistics, has been employed in investigating the changes that the oral genres have undergone through time. Theoretical formulations from scholars who have drawn a lot of their discussions from the semiotic practices such as Bakhtin, Foucault and Althusser have also illuminated his study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### NGUGI WA THIONG'O: AN INTRODUCTION TO HIS GĪKŪYŪ WRITING

#### 2.1 Introduction

The chapter traces Ngugi's literary development from writing in English language to Gĩkũyũ. It also traces the growth of Gĩkũyũ writing by examining briefly works from earlier writers. It also critically seeks to examine how Ngugi's vision of creating an African novel that is rooted in oral tradition has fared so far. This will help us assess the importance of writing in an African language.

#### 2.2 The Nature of Gikuyu Language and the Politics of Gikuyu Orthography

Benson (1964: xv) identifies Gĩkũyũ as a "tone language," positing that the form of "a lexical item has to be stated not only in terms of its constituent vowels and consonants but also in terms of the pitch features which characterize it in speech, since items of otherwise identical structure may be differentiated in this way alone." Pitch, in this case, is used as a part of speech and can change the meanings of words. The use of diacritical marks helps in distinguishing words which have similar sounds but different meanings. The doubling of vowel sounds also helps in eliminating confusion in words which have almost identical sounds. It is this kind of writing that Ngugi was paying homage to when he started his project of writing in Gĩkũyũ.

Since the introduction of Gĩkũyũ orthography, the issue of Gĩkũyũ language writing has been an area of great contestation. The basis of this contest can be traced to its foundational ideology. According to Peterson (2000: 211), "Gikuyu writing was fiercely debated between the different factions of colonial power, between Catholics and Protestant missionaries and government officials." Added to these were Gĩkũyũ elites and writers' (though they came later) attempt at employing the written language as a tool of decolonisation. All these factors and others which will be explained laid the foundation of the said contest.

The Protestants missionaries, according to Peterson (2000: 211), hoped that reading would lead converts to the word, that texts alone would bear the full weight of discipline to far-flung Christian communities. They thus developed a vowel system that was governed by the spoken nature of the Gĩkũyũ language. The mediating impulse that shaped Protestant orthography, as Peterson (2000: 213) says, was the relationship between the written and the spoken word pronounced by the Agĩkũyũ. This is because it was meant to be phonetic and therefore proceed from distinct letters and phonemes. To the English vowel system the Protestants added two vowels – ‘‘i’’ and ‘‘u’’ – with diacritical marks to differentiate between close-sounding words. In a way, therefore, it can be concluded that this type of writing tried to take cognizance of the tonal nature of Gĩkũyũ language. An examination of the present-day Gĩkũyũ shows that this has been the largely accepted orthography as it continues to be used to the by the majority of Gĩkũyũ writers and therefore readers.

In contrast, the Catholic orthography was largely geared into turning Gĩkũyũ speakers into hearers of the word rather than readers. Reading, they realised, would radicalize the Gĩkũyũ, who would start questioning some of the received Christian practices. Opposing the Protestant’s stance of turning natives into readers of the Bible, Cagnolo (1933: 281) points out that:

Protestant missionaries of every denomination are all anxious to place the Bible in the hands of the natives. Therefore they hastened to teach the Akikuyu reading and writing as if in that consisted the training of the new man, and attend of their training, they are dismissed with the magic book in their hands, with freedom on interpretation as the only rule, no matter if they chose for their example, the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ, or the sin of David, or even the polygamy of Solomon.

For Catholics, ‘‘the ear, not the eye, was the privileged zone of exchange: in confession, in the Eucharist, in the recitation of the Rosary and catechism, converts were ushered into the church through the vocal proclamation of the word’’ (Peterson, 2000: 225). They

stuck to English vowels – A E I O U – which did not take care of Gĩkũyũ tonality. As illustrated, it is possible to see the agendas that laid the fundamentals for the opposing orthographies, which meant that most words took a kind of English pronunciation and sometimes spelling. For example, in this form of writing the name “Kĩariĩ” (denoting wide), with the second and last vowels taking diacritical marks, took the form of ‘Kiarie’, totally deviating from the proper tonation by taking the English “e” instead of Gĩkũyũ “ĩ” with diacritical marks. The use of the two orthographies would definitely lead to confusion because of their use of different vowel sounds on similar words.

To add on top of the two orthographies was the colonial government’s introduction “of a new phonetic system of writing that brought the language into line with tens of other African languages ... officials hoped that the new orthography ... would make inscrutable vernaculars into scientific vehicles of progress and enlightenment” (Peterson, 2000: 211-212). But this type of official orthography was vehemently opposed by Gĩkũyũ readers. This meant that the Catholic and the Protestant orthography prevailed but with the latter becoming more widely embraced than the former.

The two systems can be credited for being the principal basis from which Gĩkũyũ language writing emerged. The future writers, whether or not they opposed this received orthography, used it as the basis of their opposition and appropriation. It is from this breed that Gakaara wa Wanjau, the formative Gĩkũyũ fictional writer, originates. In 1980 Ngũgi wa Thiong’o undertook the process of revising the Gĩkũyũ orthography in a bid to writing in unadulterated Gĩkũyũ. Indeed in an interview by Wilkinson (2006: 204) Ngũgi confirmed his initial difficulty of writing in Gĩkũyũ to have had an orthographical angle, posting that “the orthography is not often very fixed so you find that there may be one or two or even three ways of writing the same word.” This would seem to have been the basis of his meeting with Gakaara and others to clarify the question of orthography. In the introduction to his booklets *Mwandikire wa Gikuyu Karing’a* (On Writing in Pure) Gĩkũyũ, Gakaara points out that:

In 1980 some Gikuyu (sic) writers, and myself among them, discovered that there were differences, which should not exist, in the way they wrote words in their language ... and so formed a small group of other Gikuyu speakers... to correct the Gikuyu orthography ... The generous Professor Karega Mutahi ... explained to us the rules which are followed in writing all the languages of the world. The most important rule is to write the words according to the way the native speakers themselves pronounce them. This shows that Gikuyu words must be written according the way the pure Gikuyu pronounces it. (Qtd. In Pugliese, 1995: 92)

In Gakaara's words, therefore, the orthography was revised to rid Gĩkũyũ of foreign influences, especially in cases where the borrowed words had familiar Gĩkũyũ words. Such words, as noted by Pugliese (1995: 96), include Gĩkũyũ corruption of the English words "to change" to "gucenjia," which should not be the case because there is a good word for it: "kugarura." For Gakaara, this is not a case of borrowing or addition of new words but of forgetting one's mother tongue. He also explained it as an example of continued colonial influence, of "the disease of speaking English when it is unnecessary," and of using the image of "the colonialist's rooster" which they "left behind on leaving Kenya" (qtd. In Pugliese, 1995: 97-98). The revision, it can further be claimed, fitted within both Gakaara and Ngugi's political and literary campaign of using language as a tool of decolonisation.

The concern with the orthography of the Gĩkũyũ language and the inherent debates it elicited since its colonial beginnings is to show the differing interests that each contesting group hoped to achieve. It is also notable that orthography was a central cog in the triple mission of evangelism, colonialism and later decolonisation.

### **2.3 Ngugi's Gĩkũyũ Literary Antecedent**

The earliest forms of Gĩkũyũ writings can be traced to the beginnings of 19<sup>th</sup> century. These were basically Christian writings and especially biblical translations carried out by the missionaries in order to facilitate the easier spreading of the Gospel. The other writings, still a religious type, included hymn books and Catechism, translated in Gĩkũyũ

as “gategithimo”. But this was not all, for according to Pugliese (1995:22), the missionaries helped in “establishing the first Gikuyu grammars and dictionaries.” Furthermore, with the help of Gĩkũyũ converts, they also transcribed, translated and collected traditional folktales, proverbs and songs in the course of spreading the Gospel.” But these translations were heavily vetted in a bid to make them conform to the Christian ideology. According to Pugliese (1995: 25), the missionaries collected these traditional genres “with an aim of showing essential similarities between Christianity and Gĩkũyũ traditional religion.”

But there was an exception to the above and as far as literary compositions were concerned. The *gicaandi*, a form of traditional Gĩkũyũ oral poetry, which Father V. Ghilardi (qtd. by Pick, 1973: 149) defines as:

A poem of very high poetry, in which the singer spaces freely, passing from one field to another. He touches on all lightmotifs (sic) more or less at length. He passes from merriment to the darkest sadness, from comical to tragical and from lyrical to gruesome or even apocalyptic expressions.

It was a spontaneous challenge between two poets who proposed riddles or fables couched in high sounding words and proverbs. The competing poet was expected to solve the riddle failure to which he relinquished the “gicaandi” instrument to the winning poet. Notice therefore that *gicaandi* was both the name of the genre and the instrument that was being competed for. The earliest written version of this genre can be traced back to 1930 to Mr. John Kahora, who wrote at the request of Father Ghilardi (Pick, 151). From the greetings to the conclusion, this genre is filled with enigmas which must be unraveled for the competition to continue. For example, in the first stanza:

- a) Mwana nĩ ageithio, ngeithie: akorũo atageithagio, njĩrũo, nyite njĩra ya thama yatemirũo nĩ ngwa, amu ndiuma mũgeni wayo: nĩ karukuma kandehete ka ngeithi ĩgĩtũmwo rũũĩ, ndoiga ndĩtũmĩre ciakwa.
- b) Mwana ndarĩ mũgiro gwitũ.

- a) The child is being greeted, let him too: but if he is not greeted, let him know, so that I may take the way of migration which was traced by the lightening. I am indeed no stranger to it. I have been brought here by a log of greetings which were sent to the stream. I said I will send there mine too.
- b) A child brings no taboo to us.

Even though there are some translation mismatches, the version captures the challenge inherent in the gicaandi introduction. The first poet is challenging his fellow poet to a verbal duel, using the image of a child and the greetings as a metaphor. Traditionally, a child was never turned away from any homestead for people believed that he/she carried no ill omen: in short it was not a taboo welcoming a child. The answer to the introduction insinuates an acceptance to both the greetings and the duel. Kahora's text is therefore the earliest recorded creative endeavour in Gĩkũyũ language writing.

The other one in 1934 (Pugliese, 1995: 33) though not a creative piece, was when Stanley Kiama Gathigira (a Gĩkũyũ convert) published *Miikarire ya Agikuyu* (The Customs of the Gĩkũyũ), that the first publication by a native speaker became a reality. Gathigira was therefore to become the trailblazer in the uncertain world of Gĩkũyũ writing and publishing. The other types of writings that came up later were newspapers, political pamphlets and books about Gĩkũyũ traditions and customs.

But it was Gakaara wa Wanjau and his Gakaara press, based in Karatina, who really revolutionized vernacular publishing. Even though the existing evidence shows that the press largely published his own works, it is credible to call it the crucible of vernacular publishing in Kenya, with all the inherent challenges. Born in 1921, Gakaara spent his formative years in a religious set up, his father being a minister with the Scotland Mission. Later, he attended Alliance High School for his O-level education. The fact of growing up in a Christian environment and later a school managed by a religious mission can explain the biblical influence in his writings. Indeed, in an interview with Enekwe (2006:142), Ngugi agrees that the Bible has had tremendous influence on African writers, including himself: “about biblical influences in my works, this is not accidental, because



for a long time as a child, the Bible was my only literature. The Bible is the one which is available in nearly all the African languages. It is a common literary heritage.’’

Perhaps one of the most lasting legacies of the European missionaries in Africa was the translation of the Bible into local languages. Even though the Bible has been derided for the role it played in colonizing Africa, it was at its feet that the fundamentals of formal education, as we know it, arose. Most schools arose out of the missionaries’ zeal of spreading the word; knowledge of the written word was therefore an essential factor in the understanding of the Bible. It also formed a trajectory through which the future resistance to colonial establishment was concretized. The allusion to the Israelites’ bondage in Egypt and their later emancipation became an important motif in many artistic works, inspiring the people to fight for freedom (Muhia, 2003: 20-21).

Gakaara was also influenced by his own desire of perpetuating Gĩkũyũ culture and customs, which he felt was threatened by foreign culture. He felt that this could only be done by using Gĩkũyũ as a means of communication. As early as 1974 he had started writing about the dangers of linguistic alienation. In his book *Ugwati wa Muthungu Muiru* (The Danger of the Black European), Gakaara champions linguistic decolonization by calling for the abandonment of English words in the general body of the Gĩkũyũ language and especially if those words have clear vernacular equivalents. Indeed much of Ngugi’s language theory seems to have had Gakaara’s influence. In 1978, one year after the staging of Ngũgi’s *Ngahika Ndeenda* (I Will Marry When I Want), Gakaara was to explain “‘how linguistic domination is part and parcel of economic and political domination’’ (Pugliese, 1995: 102). Ngũgi has conclusively elaborated on this point in his seminal text *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986: 4, 9, 12).

Although Gakaara has written about many issues and topics, it is his creative writing that this study is primarily concerned with. This concern is informed by the contention that he is central to any discussion that attempts to locate the growth of Gikuyu writing and, more specifically, the novel. The first fictional work Gakaara composed is a short story entitled *Ngwenda Unjurage* (I Want You to Kill Me), first published in 1946 under the

title *Uhoru wa Ugurani* (The Marriage Procedures). The story revolves around two young people (a man and a woman) who are planning to get married. But their nuptial union is scuttled by the insatiable greed of the young woman's father. When it becomes totally impossible to persuade the father to let her get married, she commits suicide and leaves behind a letter to her young lover. The story, in a nutshell, is a critique of the abuse of the dowry tradition by greedy parents in Gĩkũyũ land.

Other Gakaara stories include *Ni Nii Ndina Nyarwimbo* (Nyarwimbo is With Me), *Ungihonoka no Tuhikanie* (If You Get Saved We'll Get Married), *Ihu ni Riau* (Who is Responsible For the Pregnancy), *Murata wa Mwene* (A Bosom Friend), *O Kirima Ngagua* (To Whichever Destination) and a series of narratives which were published in *Gikuyu na Mumbi* magazine in 1985 entitled *Wa-Nduuta*. All the narratives have Wa-Nduuta as the protagonist. The first four short stories carry the marriage motif as their thematic foci. Interestingly, even the popular music of the day carried a similar motif, of young people complaining about the high bride price and the subsequent elopements for example "Ngahika Ndeenda" by D.K. wa Wanja. The title of D.K's song is later borrowed by Ngũgĩ when he writes his first Gĩkũyũ play.

It is clear from the aforementioned that Ngugi was not the first creative writer in Gikuyu language and was therefore writing within an already established tradition. But it is to his credit that the Gĩkũyũ language was brought into the global limelight. His abandonment of English as the language of his creative writing for Gikuyu raised an intense debate about the language of African literature. The later publication of the widely circulated *Decolonizing the Mind* helped clarify his thinking about the importance of writing in vernacular languages. Thus said, it is on the shoulders of Gakaara and other earlier writers that Ngugi's growth as a Gikuyu creative writer stands. This is also why Ngugi sought Gakaara's advice before immersing himself fully in the world of vernacular writing (Pugliese, 1995: 91).

## 2.4 Living the Promise: Ngugi and the Growth of Gikuyu Language

Ngugi started writing in Gĩkũyũ language in 1977 with the publication of the play *Ngahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want)*. But it was while he was in detention that he officially quit using English as his language of literary creativity. He looked at his writing in Gĩkũyũ as “part and parcel of the anti-imperialist struggles of Kenyan and African peoples.” He also saw it as his “contribution towards the restoration of the harmony between all the aspects and divisions of language so as to restore the Kenyan child to his environment” (Ngugi: 1981: 28). The novel *Caitani Mutharabaini (Devil on the Cross)* is Ngugi’s first major Gĩkũyũ work. Crafted as an oral narration, the novel pays homage to the African story-telling tradition due to the manner in which the story is rendered. The narrator prefigures the existence of a live audience and therefore uses the Gĩkũyũ formula of opening oral narration “ugai iitha” (say iitha); the audience is then expected to allow the narrator to tell the story, and this is again used both in *Matigari ma Njiruugi* and *Murogi wa Kagogo*. The novels, from their beginning, are therefore firmly anchored in African oral tradition.

But in all the three of Ngũgi vernacular novels, *Caitani Mutharaba-ini* remains the most beautifully rendered story in the Gĩkũyũ language mainly because of its language use, humor and aesthetics. The language used is easily understandable to the Gĩkũyũ reading public; Ngugi has also endeavored to use images that are readily available and appealing to the Gĩkũyũ reader. In the competition of thieves and robbers in Ilmorog, the malpractices that most multi-nationals are involved in are discussed in the novel using very accessible language. He alludes to the biblical parable of the talents to explain the relationship between the former colonizer and their neo-colonial agents. The parable resonates well with the majority poor, only that this time it exposes the oppressive nature of post-independent leadership. Ngugi also uses an orthography that fully agrees with the tonality of his language. Most of the words are written in double vowel sounds, something that makes the reading process more accessible and meaningful. The consistent usage of alliterating words and assonance, despite making reading a humorous activity, also convey meaning more fully. A good example is when Muturi, who is travelling to Ilmorog in Matatu Matata Matamu, asks Mwaura to tell them the side of the

struggle to which he belongs. Mwaura replies:

Nĩ gũtirĩ itainaga. O na ũmũũthĩ gũtirĩ nĩ itainaga. Njugaga atĩrĩ: thĩno nĩ gĩthiũrũrĩ. Yeera mwena ũyũ, ngeereerania nayo. Yaatirũka mwena ũngĩ, ngatirũkania nayo. Yainamana, ngainamania nayo. Yeehaanda, ngeehaandania nayo. Yaaruruma, ngarurumania nayo. Yaakira, ngakirania nayo...Ndakora akũrinũ, ngakũrinũhithania nao; ahonoki, ngahonokithania na o; aithiramu ngathirimithania na o; piigani, ngapiigithania nao. (*Caिताani*: 42)

As for me, there was no song I wouldn't have sung then. Even today there's no song that I can't sing. I say that the world is round. If it leans that way, I lean that way with it. If it stumbles, I stumble with it. If it bends, I bend with it. If it stays upright, I stay upright with it. If it growls, I growl with it. If it is silent, I am silent too...if I find myself among members of the Akurinu sect, I become one of them; when I'm with those who have been saved, I too am saved; when I'm with Muslims, I embrace Islam; when I'm among pagans, I too become pagan. (*Devil*: 42)

The answer sounds more of a tongue twister, with its many different alliterating sounds. The words also point to the performative nature of the novel, and one can see Mwaura turning his body or trying to stand up depending on the differing situations he finds himself in the world. It would be interesting to listen to a person reading those words, especially because of their musical nature, and this may have contributed to the many open readings that *Caिताani Mutharaba-ini* was exposed to when it was published. The major contribution of *Caिताani Mutharaba-ini* in the development of language is that it was the first major creative work in Gĩkũyũ. That Ngugi was able to sustain such a long narrative in a vernacular tongue is an unmistakable achievement.

*Matigari*, like its predecessor *Caिताani*, was anchored in the African oral tradition, though it went a step further, as earlier noted, by moving away from the European novelistic tradition. But one thing that stands out in Ngugi's initial writings in Gĩkũyũ, ranging from

*Ngahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want)* to *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini (Devil on the Cross)* and *Matigari ma Njiruungi*, is their unique use of Gĩkũyũ language. All these texts use the language that resonates well with the people, both in their choice of idioms and their use of common images and metaphors and popular songs. The songs employed are familiar to most people, hailing from the Gĩkũyũ rural land. They are basically religious and traditional songs which he re-appropriates to capture the conditions of postcolonial Kenya. The language and its various nuances is therefore accessible to the majority of Gikuyu peasants and workers because it is everyday language. This would also explain their popularity in terms of readership.

The inception of the *Mutiiri* (a Gikuyu literary journal) was a brave attempt by Ngugi of further developing Gĩkũyũ as a language. The Journal publishes poems and critical articles. His children's books (*Njamba Nene* series) were also a welcome addition to the general body of Gĩkũyũ writings, especially in their use of language. Ngugi, in the children's stories, tries to introduce the young ones to the heroic past of the independence struggle.

But while this can be said about the earlier Gĩkũyũ fiction, it cannot be said of *Murogi wa Kagogo (Wizard of the Crow)*. The novel makes a radical departure from the other two novels in its use of Gĩkũyũ language. The language used is largely inaccessible to the general stock of workers and peasants and to some extent even the intellectuals. Indeed, Mwangi (2006:256) is right when he posits the following about Ngugi and this text:

Despite his spirited campaign to conserve African languages from the hegemony of English, Ngugi's original is so much haunted by English that his Gikuyu readers would have to be competent in English to comprehend the novel in their own mother tongue.

Ngugi's initial quest of writing in an African language was his desire for relevance. His second objective, as noted elsewhere in this study, was his desire to decolonize African languages by making them carry Africans' aspiration. As he put it in *Decolonizing the*

*Mind*, African writers should prey on the great humanist languages as a way of enriching their own languages, instead of preying on their own to enrich other peoples' language. If this was the hallmark of Ngugi's ambition in writing in an African tongue, then it seems to have failed where *Murogi* is concerned. Indeed, it would be prudent, as I will illustrate in due course, to conclude that *Murogi* pays homage more to the English language than to Gĩkũyũ.

The novel is littered with words and phrases that are more English than Gĩkũyũ only that there is an attempt to give them vernacular pronunciation. A sample of these words include "kumboeka" (get bored), "baconi" (fashion), "mangabana" (governors), "unjiniaciini" (ingeniusness), "raundithibika" (loudspeaker) "bathi thibeco" (special pass), "thiori" (theory), "king'I" (king), "pawa" (power), "kobi" (copy), and "mining'I" (meaning), among a myriad other words of this nature. The question one poses when confronted with all these foreign words is why Ngugi found it fitting to use them even when most of them have clear Gĩkũyũ equivalents. Does this, then, reflect the growth of Gĩkũyũ as a language or is it a sign of retrogression?

Languages over time have grown by borrowing from other languages. Borrowing is necessitated by various concerns as noted by Arlotto (1981). First is the need-filling motive, which is done in order to fill a gap in the borrowing language and to express concepts borrowed from other languages. Second is the desire for prestige, presumably to put the borrower on a higher pedestal because the language used is perceived to be superior to his/her own. According to Arlotto, therefore, one can only borrow from another language if one's own lacks words or concepts that can adequately communicate a particular issue. The best example in the contemporary world is the use of scientific terms.

The introduction of new words in Ngugi's novel at times makes reading it a very difficult enterprise, especially when one approaches it as a Gĩkũyũ novel only to be confronted by a myriad of strange terminologies, both in spelling and pronunciation. For example, the words "karenda yarĩ ya otomatiki," (*Mũrogi*: 8), translated would be "the calendar was

automatic.” The use of the word “automatic” is not only strange but confusing to the lay Gĩkũyũ reader, especially because the meaning is not easily available but the pronunciation is also strange. This would appear, as Mwangi (2006: 256) opines, as if Ngugi is “backtracking in the novelistic form from his hard-line 1986 position against Europhone literature.” This would make one draw the conclusion that Ngugi may have forgotten the nuances of his first language because of his being in exile for so long. Therefore, unlike Ngugi’s first novels, *Mũrogi* does not fulfill in its totality the desires of the Gĩkũyũ reader, and thus its Gĩkũyũ cannot be called a hallmark of a vernacular publication.

Despite this, it is necessary to say that Ngugi has remained faithful to African oral tradition in the whole of his Gĩkũyũ oeuvre. Indeed, according to Gikandi (2006:156), the latest Gĩkũyũ works has been a “culmination of a long process by the novelist to simulate the art of the storyteller in writing and thus overcome the ostensible gap between orality and writing”. This, in fact, is Ngugi’s contribution to the process of redefining the novel by giving it an African sensibility. Commenting about the *Wizard of the Crow*, Gikandi (2006: 157) observes that:

The genius of *Wizard of the Crow* is to be found in Ngugi’s unforced ability to draw on the multiple oral traditions of his cultures and experiences to create and sustain the illusion that this is a story being passed from mouth to mouth.

Ngugi has, therefore, consistently paid homage to orality not only in *Murogi* but also in his other Gĩkũyũ works as well. In spite of this, his latest publication of a childhood memoir, *Dreams in a Time of War*, puts into question his determination to continue writing in Gĩkũyũ all the way. The book has been written in English and not Gĩkũyũ. The question one would pose is whether Ngugi is going to translate the book into Gĩkũyũ or whether his avowal to write in vernacular affected only his fiction works. If not, can it be said that he has reneged on his promise of being faithful to the Gĩkũyũ language? Or has the project of writing in Gĩkũyũ become difficult now that he seems to have reverted back to English?

## **2.5 The Future of Gĩkũyũ /Vernacular Language(s) under Ngugi’s Tutelage**

It would be important to delve into how Ngugi’s experimentation in writing in vernacular has fared so far in Africa, but especially in Kenya. The question that begs answers is whether Ngugi’s move has boosted the interest in not only Gikuyu but other vernacular languages in Kenya. It is only then that we can appreciate Ngugi’s dream of the flowering and conversation of the worlds’ languages on equal footing.

The greatest beneficiary of Ngugi’s move seems to have been drama. Although the trend was not immediate, the 1990s, as Ndigirigi (1999: 86) says, saw “an upsurge of plays in Kenyan languages, most of them in Gĩkũyũ, which gives the impression that Kenyan theatre is flowering in local languages.” But the Gĩkũyũ theatre grew outside the restrictions of the performing theatre to more restricted spaces in bars and hotel halls. The very idea of performance in an African language can be credited to Ngugi’s Kamirithu initiative. Explaining about these phenomena Ndigirigi (1999: 87) observes:

In the 1990s vernacular plays have been picked up, especially in Gikuyu. With the exception of Tero Buru and Limenya, which were performed at Kenya Cultural Centre auditorium and Kenya National Theatre respectively ...the plays have been predominantly in Gikuyu. These plays have been performed in converted halls in some big hotels like Sportsview – Kasarani, Blue Post, and Thika ... with some much poorer skits being performed by upcoming comedians in some smaller hotels.

The major promoter of this form of theatre was Weru Munyoro, who also translated various foreign plays for local viewership. But he also acted in original plays, such as *Wangu wa Makeri*, scripted by Justus Nderitu. The play is about a legendary Gikuyu female ruler who was famous for her mistreatment of men. Another important contributor was Wahome Mutahi, the journalist and creative writer. Wa Mungai (2005 137) sees “Mutahi’s practice as a worthy successor to Kamirithu. Being chiefly a protest against the restrictions imposed upon performance by conventional theatre.” This is because it



was taken closer to the people.

Another interesting observation about Wahome's theatre was that it was able to cross the linguistic divide by connecting to audience from many Kenyan communities even though the performances were largely staged in Gĩkũyũ. To wa Mungai:

The cosmopolitan nature of such audiences casts aspersions upon the idea of language in a multi-ethnic setting such as Kenya's necessarily promotes social fractures. The phenomenon of Dholuo, Kamba and Kisii speakers coming together to watch a performance based on considerations other than language, testifies to the startling nature of human interactions in the urban centres. (2005:137)

Even though the above claim was restricted to theatrical performances, it would be prudent to point out that if used in the right way all languages can play unification roles in all communities. The success of Wahome's theatre can also be credited to Ngugi's push to use African Languages in creating literature. Other notable inclusions in the general body of vernacular literature included Oby Obyero Odiambo's *Kit Mikaye*, *Lwanda Magere* and *Tero Buru*, all of which were Luo performances. Grace Ogot's *Miaha*, later translated by Okoth Okombo as *A Strange Bride*, would be another major contribution to vernacular literature, especially in novelistic discourse.

The popular rise of vernacular FM stations and movies can also be termed as a positive trend that arose after Ngugi started championing local languages, even though the other factors like commerce, government policy and the rise of political pluralism at the beginning of 1990s should also be considered. The then government-owned Voice of Kenya, the only major broadcasting station in Kenya used to air vernacular broadcasts but only during the evenings, between 7pm to 11pm. But the 1990s saw an upsurge in vernacular broadcasting in almost all major Kenyan languages. Kameme FM, which airs its programmes in Gĩkũyũ, was among the first to be incepted. Others were to follow, and with them a general interest in Kenyan languages was revived. But a visit to some of these stations reveals a lack of a clear framework that can monitor the growth of local

languages. Issues to do with translation and how they are carried out are also unclear.

There is a need to develop a translation model that can be used to guide the general translation of other languages into Gĩkũyũ. For instance, the word that FM stations have adopted for the concept democracy is the Gikuyu word “uiganania” which means “a level playing ground.” This is a good attempt, but more needs to be done to include the plethora of alien terms which continue to haunt the everyday Gikuyu language.

One thing that needs to be mentioned about the FM stations is that they have managed to popularize local languages. They have a huge following, both in the rural areas and in urban centres. Much as there have not been new publications in vernacular languages, the broadcasting technology has impacted positively on the development of local tongues. Many artists, such as Githingithia and others have produced humorous skits which are broadcasted live by FM stations. There has also been a progressive rise in movie production using local languages but mostly in Swahili and Gikuyu. Even though these movies are made up of simple, predictable plots, and even though they are largely comedies, it is a worthy development and one that has given relevance to local languages. It also serves to keep these languages in circulation, ensuring their survival and growth.

In the scholarly world, Ngugi’s initiative has not been fully embraced, but of note is Gatua wa Mbugua’s scientific research which was undertaken in Gikuyu. His Msc by the title *Nditi ya Urimi wa Mbayotethibu Kenya Kuri Magetha ma Thukuma na Mauni Thiinii wa Cio (The Impact of Biointensive Cropping on Yields and Nutrients of Collard Greens in Kenya)*, while his Ph.D dissertation goes by the title *Mitugo Miagiriru Makiria ya Wambiriria wa Medicago Rigidula Maweruini ma Iguru ma Gatagatiini (Optimum Establishment Practices for Medicago Rigidula in the Central Highlands)*. He did his MSC at the University of Cornell, New York and the Ph.D at the University of Wyoming. Both were written in Gĩkũyũ language and later translated into English. Gatua’s achievement can be traced back to Ngugi. Gatua has also initiated the writing of an on-line Gĩkũyũ poetry journal: *Njaranda ya Marebeta ma Gĩgĩkũyũ (The Journal of Gikuyu Poetry)* and he has also released poetry recitals in Gikuyu which can be accessed direct from the internet. This can be credited as a positive step of making vernacular languages

embrace technological advancements.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

The chapter has endeavored to trace the growth of the Gikuyu language and Ngugi's novelistic achievement in vernacular. It is notable that it has not been a smooth sailing for Ngugi, especially when viewed from the prism of his latest two publications. This is because *Murogi* reads more like English than a Gikũyũ text, and his memoir is an English publication. But a notable thing is that Gikuyu and other vernacular languages in Kenya have been embraced to a certain extent after Ngugi started his vernacular drive, but mostly in theatre and broadcast media. Orality, as employed in his works, has also served Ngugi well in revolutionizing the African novel in vernacular. The next chapter gives attention to Ngugi's first Gikuyu novel, *Caitani Mutharaba-ini* and interrogates how some of the oral forms (oral narratives and riddles) have been used in presenting postcolonial reality.

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**RE-CONFIGURARION OF ORAL GENRES IN NGUGI'S *CAAITANI***  
***MUTHARABA-INI***

African languages are repositories of cultural values and of people's most intimate and formative experiences: they must be released from colonial stigma, rebuilt, rediscovered, and further developed through the production of new literary works. (Furniss and Barber, 2006: 1)

**3.1 Introduction**

The appropriateness of African oral genres must be interrogated in regard to their ability to mirror the present reality even as they “remain open to the recognition of a heritage, or roots” (Venn, 2006: 114). In a Bakhtinian sense we must evaluate how the writer “makes use of words that are already populated with the social intentions of others and compels them to serve his own new intentions” (1989: 299-300). This is helpful if we are to appreciate the continued relevance of African traditional art forms. It is with this in mind that this chapter analyses the adaptability of African traditional forms and their ability of mapping the contemporary reality. They are approached as intertexts, taken from the past, but pertinently exploring how they have been shaped to accommodate and represent new situations. The ways in which Ngugi uses them to represent and counter the many challenges of the postcolony are also evaluated.

The dawn of new states in Africa after the exit of the colonizers was romanticized as one that heralded a new beginning for Africa and Africans. The whole of Africa rose in jubilation whenever each one of the states got independence. It was indeed a time of hope and rebirth, after a past of pain and destitution. However, the euphoria had not died down before a sense of trepidation arose across the whole continent. What had been seen as the break of a new dawn became a painful reality. The Africa that David Diop had seen rising while shedding the bitter fruits of slavery and colonialism and blooming with the sweet fruits of liberty, was set on a quick descent. This sense of loss, disappointment and confusion pervaded the continent.

The writers' confusion was due to their preoccupation with writings that valorized Africa's pre-colonial past at the expense of what was happening in their various societies. In Obiechina's (1990: 122) words, this "preoccupation with the past provided a cover for post-independence elites to carry on irresponsibly and corruptly." They had therefore failed to give direction to the people at a time when they needed it most. Soyinka (1969: 17) explains that the writer failed to heed the warnings which openly indicated that the society was slowly lapsing into misrule and decay brought about by bad governance and dictatorship. The writers were busy valorizing the African traditional past and had forgotten to deal with the pressing issues of the present. He observes:

In the movement towards chaos in Africa, the writer did not anticipate. The understanding language of the outside world, "birth pains," that near-fatal euphemism for death throes, absolved him from responsibility. He was content to turn his eyes backwards in time and prospect in archaic fields for forgotten gems which would dazzle and distract the present. But never inwards, never truly into the present, never into the obvious symptoms of the niggling, warning, predictable present, from which alone lay the salvation of ideas.

To Soyinka, therefore, it was a case of misplaced obsession that lacked any present relevance. His feeling is that the writer, any discerning writer, should have anticipated the turn of events by responding to the political moment of his society (Soyinka: 16). This would have averted the disillusionment the writer found himself in after the betrayal of the independence promise.

Ngugi also aptly captures the writers' confusion and disillusionment during this period when he, in *Decolonizing the Mind* (1981: 80), asks:

How does a writer, a novelist, shock his readers by telling them that these (heads of states who collaborate with imperialist powers) are neo-slaves when they themselves, the neo-slaves, are openly announcing the fact on the rooftops? How

do you shock your readers by pointing out that these are mass murderers, looters, robbers, thieves, when they, the perpetrators of these anti-people crimes, are not attempting to hide the fact? When in some cases they are actually and proudly celebrating their massacre of children, the theft and robbing of the nation? How do you satirise their utterances and claims when their own words beat all fictional exaggerations?

For Ngugi, and for the most of the writers in the continent, the answer lay in African oral tradition. It became the model through which to communicate the present state of affairs. In Venn's (2006: 111) words, "the models or plots or scripts that one uses to make sense of one's experiences exists as given in the culture; we do not invent them from scratch or choose them as 'free,' autonomous agents, though clearly new models and emplotments are constantly generated." So that the past, in this case, was not an idealized past but one which the writer goes back to in order to see how best it can be manipulated in communicating present concerns. It was in this way that traditional art forms found their way into the creative works that formed the core of the African literary canon.

African writers used these verbal forms as the basis of their social discourse especially because most of these forms are at the centre of the people's everyday dialogue. This view is supported by Bakhtin (1981: 276) in his espousal of the centrality of verbal utterance:

The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around a given object of utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue.

Oral art forms as a part of the living traditions of a people – even though ridden with historical influence – were revised and appropriated in order to participate meaningfully in the prevailing social dialogue. Indeed, what the writers were attempting to do was,

according to Ngugi (1981: 22), already happening outside the literary canon: “The peasantry and urban working class sang the old songs or composed new ones incorporating the new experiences renewing and reinvigorating them and in generally expanding their capacity to incorporate new happenings in Africa and the world.” As the writers wallowed in their indecision of how to better capture the prevailing conditions, the masses had already started making sense of the perplexing times using the rich mores of their oral tradition. The writers were therefore forced to attune their works to what was happening in the present. What came out, as Appiah (1991:353) explains, was a direct commentary about the postcolonial state:

Far from being a celebration of the nation, then, the novels of the second, postcolonial, stage are novels of delegitimation: they reject not only the western *imperium* but also the nationalist project of the postcolonial national bourgeoisie. And so it seems to me, the basis for that project of delegitimation cannot be the postmodernist one: rather it is grounded in an appeal to an ethical universal. Indeed it is based, as an intellectual response to the oppression in Africa are largely based, in an appeal to a certain simple respect for human suffering, a fundamental revolt against the endless misery of the last thirty years.

In Appiah’s words, the prevailing conditions in the postcolony forced the writers to take a different stance, especially in their creative works. The recourse to traditional genres was one of these ways. Pointing to the germane role that oral arts have continued to play in Africa, Irele (2001: 11) explains:

[T]he tradition of orality remains predominant and serves as a central paradigm for various kinds of expression on the continent. The literary component of this tradition, in both its expressive modes and with respect to its social significance, provides the formal and normative background for imaginative expression. In this primary sense, orality functions as the matrix of an African mode of discourse, and where literature is concerned, the griot is its embodiment in every sense of the word. In other words, oral literature represents the basic intertext of the African

imagination.

As such, African oral art forms continue to imprint themselves indelibly in the creative works of African writers, “illuminating the changing situations in Africa, and sometimes criticizing the very pre-colonial order from which the materials are borrowed” (Mwangi, 2009: 111).

### **3.2 The Ogre and the Trickster in the African Oral Tradition and their Modern Manifestation**

Besides the hare, the hyena, and the tortoise, the ogre is another predominant figure in African oral literature. It is an imaginary being which is neither human nor animal; it is known to live on the margins of the society, oscillating between human and non-human realms. In most narratives, ogres are depicted as evil human-eating giants, devoid of human compassion or sympathy. Their sole existence is to unleash terror on the hapless human beings, who are both food and sport for them. On the whole, as Nandwa and Bukenya explain, ogres are endowed with extra-ordinary powers unlike human beings in terms of strength and physical prowess, and are able to know secrets that human beings harbor without being told. In other words:

Ogres are ubiquitous and malicious. People are afraid of them. They kill and eat people. They sometimes swallow them whole. They have greater powers than human beings and can work and run faster. The Taita say they run as fast as wind. They discover human secrets readily, and can eat large quantities of food. It is very hard for human beings to kill them. Among the Abaluhya special spears must be forged by the hero from the heavens in order to kill them. They do miraculous things like raising the dead and emitting fire. (Nandwa and Bukenya, 1983: 55)

Among the Gĩkũyũ, ogres are purported to have two mouths: one in the front the other one at the back of the head. Clearly, the devil’s description at the beginning of *Caaitaani Mutharaba-ini (Devil on the Cross)* fits within the Gĩkũyũ understanding of the ogre: “Kĩongo-inĩ aarĩ na hĩa mũgwanja iria ciarĩ na tũrumbeta mũgwanja [a]arĩ na tunua twĩrĩ:



kamwe thiithi na kau kaangĩ igoti-inĩ” /He had seven horns and each of them had a trumpet and he also had two mouths: one on the fore head and the other at the back of his head (7). Although the description also alludes to the beast in the bible as described by John in the book of Revelation, the inclusion of two mouths fits well within the African conception of the ogre. In traditional tales, ogres can take any form they deem necessary as long as it helps them ensnare humans. They thus personify evil in the world in all its manifestations (cannibalism, kidnapping, greed, and craftiness) and are said to oppress their human victims, whom they turn into slaves, especially if the victims are beautiful girls. Their very mention instills fear in people, especially the young, forcing them to conform to particular codes of behavior as espoused by their community.

In a semiotic sense, ogre tales can be taken as signs whose mention sends a particular meaning to members of the community in which they are told. Chandler (2002: 27), observes that “as a part of its social use within a sign-system, every sign acquires a history and connotations of its own which are familiar to members of the sign-users’ culture.” It is within this thinking that through time ogres have come to connote evil-like manifestations in human societies.

The novel *Caitani Mutharaba-ini* and its reconstruction of monster narratives can be traced to Gatuiria’s story about the poor farmer and the ogre. This is because the Agĩkũyũ story that Ngugi apparently borrows talks about a young man but not a farmer and the ogre that had disguised itself into a very old woman. The ogre waylaid travelers next to a foot bridge across a big river. Using its old age as a trick, the ogre would appeal to the young people’s sense of respect for the aged and plead to be helped cross the river. This way it would jump on the back of anyone who hearkened to its plea and sink its long nails into the victim’s back, sucking the blood of the victim until he/she died.

Gatuiria’s narrative departs slightly from this story:

Mũthuuri ucio akĩamba kũũng’anĩra rũgano rwa mũrĩmi ũmwe watũuraga akuuite irimũ na ng’oong’o wake. Irimũ rĩu rĩatonyeetie ndwara ndaihu mũno ngiingo-inĩ

na ciande-inĩ cia mũrĩmi ucio. Mũrĩmi ucio ni we wathiiaga mũgũũnda kũmaatha irio, ni we wathiiaga mũkuru gũtaha maaĩ, ni we wathiiaga mũtītũ kuuna ngu, na ni we warugaga. Wira wa Irimũ warĩ o wa kũrĩa na kũng'orota toro ng'oon'go-inĩ wa mũrĩmi. O ũrĩa mũrĩmi aathiiaga na mbere kũhinyara mwĩrĩ na kũnyamaara ngoro, no guo Irimũ na rĩo rĩathiiaga na mbere kwarama mwĩrĩ na gũthera ngoro nginya rĩo rĩinage nyiimbo cĩa kwĩra mũrĩmi oomĩrĩrie amu nĩ akaahuurũka igũrũ.  
(56)

The old man narrated the story of the farmer who for many years had carried an ogre on his back. The ogre had sunk its long nails into the neck and the back of the farmer. It was the farmer who did everything: going to the garden to look for food, fetching water, fetching firewood, and cooking. The only thing that the ogre did was eat and snore while resting on the farmers back. As the farmer continued to weaken and suffer, the ogre continued to fatten and gladden in the heart to the extent of singing songs encouraging the farmer to persevere because he/she will rest in heaven.

In the reconstructed tale, even when the ogre remains the same as in the old tale, the introduction of the farmer/peasant elements adds a contemporary twist to the tale. If in the past the ogre symbolized evil in its entire dimension in the society, it did not point to any one section of the society as the apotheosis of evil. But Ngugi's reconstituted tale directly identifies the rich and the ruling class as the personification of evil in the society, and mostly in their dealings with the peasantry – they are therefore the reincarnated ogres of the modern age. The narrative also subtly parodies the Beatitudes in Matthew chapter five where those who are persecuted on earth are promised heavenly bliss as a reward of their suffering. In the same vein Ngugi underscores the plight of the masses as the reality that truthfully mirrors the whole of Africa's post-colonial age. The enactment that is later played out on the floor of the cave (*Caaitani*, 77-124) in the thieves and robbers' competition. The competition is patterned along the above narrative by exploring the tensions that exist among the rulers and the ruled in the postcolony.

Kabaji (2005), in his study of Maragoli folktale holds, that:

[O]gre-centered tales among the Maragoli explore moral ambiguities of social life and examine the themes of bravery and cowardice, loyalty and deceit, generosity and greed, kinship and individual male ambition. In all the relationships in which the ogre appear, the element of evil increases disharmony and hence its symbolic significance as a villain who is always ready to commit evil. (108)

In their symbolic frame therefore, ogre tales represent the destructive and evil forces that are inherent in human societies. But one thing that stands out is that most ogres prey on women (especially gullible and innocent girls) and “can only be fought and killed by male characters” (Kabaji, 2005: 111). It is within this framework that I want to argue that Ngugi in *Caaitani Mutharaba-ini* reconstructs the traditional ogre narrative in his attempt to mirror the postcolonial condition. At the beginning he uses Wariinga to conform to the traditional plot of the young innocent girl and her entrapment by a human ogre but in the end it is she who kills her ogre-tormentor.

The relationship between the old man from Ngorika and Wariinga is skewed in favour of the latter. It is a clear image of the relationships that ogres in the oral narratives had with their human female victims. If the ogres used disguise to trap their prey, the modern ones use their material possessions to trap innocent girls, especially those from poor backgrounds. Boss Kihara (16-18) uses his position and riches as bait in his attempt to have a sexual escapade with Wariinga. This is also what the old man had done to her earlier, with devastating consequences. Like the ogre, the old man from Ngorika devours Wariinga, the innocent school girl. Symbolically, this can also be read as a narrative of patriarchal exploitation in the postcolonial state and a form of hegemonic masculinity, which Connell (1995: 77) defines as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and subordination of women.” The rich old

man from Ngorika and boss Kihara use their position of superiority to establish and maintain domination over Wariinga and in extension over the masses of the Kenyan poor. It is this tendency that makes them fit within our delineation of an ogre in the modern sense. This reading conforms to Okpewho's observations regarding orality's central place in African creative writings, where writers use it:

as a basis for writing original works that reflect, from a more or less modern perspective, some of the major concerns of today to demonstrate that traditional African culture is not obsolete but relevant for the articulation of contemporary needs and goals. (1983: 294)

In the novel's own confession Wariinga is the hunted, and as happens in any hunting expedition, the hunted is always at the mercy of the hunter. The traditional schema that guided relationships between males and females even when it allowed polygamous alliances revered the children who were born out of such liaisons. Indeed, and in most cases, such women were married following traditionally laid out procedures. But the modern capitalistic and religious hypocrisy does not allow the relationship such as the old man's and Wariinga's. In the end the innocent young victim ( like the ogre's in traditional tales) is left to her own devices in order to survive, a hapless victim of human evil that panders towards that of the traditional ogres.

If the relationship between Wariinga and her old man is a reincarnation of the ogre narrative in the modern sphere; it is in the cave where the thieves and robbers are meeting that the real narrative is played out. In the cave, the monster narratives are remodeled along the colonial/postcolonial framework to capture the nature of the two systems as bordering on the monstrosity (*Caaitani*: 80-81). It is also in the cave where the discourse of hegemonic masculinity is extended to what Scheper-Hughes (1998:14-17) calls "neo-cannibalism": this is a phenomenon where the first world or developed countries turn to third world countries for healthy body parts. The rich and wealthy of these countries entice the poor majority from the third world to sell their body parts for money. This is the same scheme that one of the thieves (Nditiku wa Nguunji) in the cave is proposing.

His desire to have more than one mouth, two reproductive organs (in order to maximally exploit young girls sexually) is an ogre-like tendency (*Caitani*, 180-181). Like his rich counterparts from the West, Nditiku wants to trade in spare body parts so that those who have money can live longer and get maximum satisfaction from life. The postcolonial state is thus symbolically depicted as cannibalising on its own citizenry.

In the interpretation of the thieves and robbers in the cave, this section is guided by the Piercean semiotic model of iconicity, the “mode in which the signifier is perceived as resembling or imitating the signified (recognizably looking, sounding, feeling, tasting or smelling like it) – being similar in possessing some of its qualities” (Chandler, 37). In this case I discuss the players in the cave by the way in which they resemble or imitate the ogres in traditional narratives. The other important concept I borrow from semiotics is the Piercean idea of index/indexicality –

“a mode in which the signifier is not arbitrary but is directly connected in some way (physically or casually) to the signified (regardless of the intention) – this link can be, observed or inferred e.g. ‘natural signs, (smoke, thunder, footprints, echoes, non-synthetic odours and flavours). (Chandler, 2002: 37)

The two models guide this study as we try to look at the physical, the behavioral and the perceived mental conditions that the characters and the ogres have in common. In this way, it would in a stylistic sense, mean that the ogre motif is only a form that Ngugi appropriates in order to make sense of an alien postcolonial order.

The delegation that is representing the foreign thieves and robbers in the competition fits within the above two models. In their physical description, and in their own words, the foreign delegates are a replica of monsters alluded to in the traditional narratives. The head of the delegation gives a historical survey of their presence in the meeting by alluding to the West’s colonizing mission from America to Africa and encouraging the local thieves and robbers to fit in their shoes without fear. This is the only way that can assure them of eternal wealth and riches. In his own words:

Thakame ya andũ aanyũ ni yo yaakinyirie Rũraaya na Ameerika hau rĩu tũri ũmũũthi ...Toondũ aa maithe maitũ matietigĩrire gwĩthamba na thakame ya aruti-a-wĩra na arĩmĩ-anyiinyi a kwao, o na a mabũrũri maangĩ. Rĩu ithuĩ ũmũũthi twĩtĩkanĩtie na ndemokiracia ya ngwatanĩro ya ũici na, ũtuunyani, ũnyui hakame, na ũrĩ nyama cia aruti-a- wĩra. Na ĩnyuĩ mwenda kuhana ta ithuĩ, cuuriai ngoro ya tha mĩtĩ igũrũ. (84-85)

It is the blood of your people that has made the Western countries and America prosper the way they are today ... also because our fore fathers were not afraid of the blood of workers and peasants from their countries and others around the world. That is why we believe in the democratic union of thieves, robbers and drinkers and eaters of human flesh. If you aspire to become like us, you must crucify any iota of human compassion or mercy on the cross.

Coming as a preamble to the competition, the above introduction sets the pace and qualification of the would-be-competitors. They must be ones who are lacking in human kindness, those who are blind to the suffering of the masses, and deaf to the cries of the oppressed majority. The foreign agents are on a higher plane than their local black agents because of their personal and inherited experience through the years. What appears ironical is that even among thieves, there are those who are considered superior to others. This also explains the unequal relationship between the developed and the developing countries. The relationship is decided by the foreigners, who many times get more profits than the locals. In extension, the chief agent's words starkly elucidate on the neo-colonial relationship between the Western powers and formerly colonized countries.

The speech as delivered by the head of the foreign delegation is also replete with images of blood and cruelty. Just as the ogres left a trail of destruction and desolation in the societies they came across, the history of the foreign delegates' sojourn across many societies in time (from the Americas to Asia and Africa) reeks of human woe and misery.

In reconstructing an oral tale and making it carry the weight of the present state of affairs in Africa, Ngugi makes orality bear the universal themes of imperialism and neo-colonialism as a way of rescuing African oral traditions from their marginal existence and bringing them to the centre of being. According to Furniss and Gunner (1995:1), this “represents a move towards an appreciation of the role that oral literature plays as a dynamic discourse about society and about relationships between individuals, groups and classes in society.”

Modern ogres, as depicted in the novel, surpass the ones depicted in the traditional tales in that they do not only (but in a symbolic sense) feed on their human victims but they also intend to control even the air that their victims breathe. This would seem to be more severe than the death of ogre victims, which was immediate, as opposed to the slow death that the modern ones are envisioning for their victims. Gitutu wa Gitaanguru, one of the participants in the thieves and robbers’ competition, has a vision of selling air to the masses for money. His physical description closely resembles the ogre’s:

Gitutu aarĩ na nda nene yacuhĩite ota kũũndũ iingĩahuutĩtie thĩ tiga yaanyiiĩriirwo nĩ mĩkwa ya abiriingi. Nda ĩyo yamerũkĩtie ciĩga iria ingĩ ciothe cia mwĩrĩ. Gitutu ndarĩ na ngiingo – kana tuuge ngiingo yaake ndĩonekaga. Tũgũrũ na tuoko twarĩ tũtuunguru tũkuhi. Kamũtwe gaake kaiganaga nguundi. (Ngugi: 1980, 95).

Gitutu had a belly that protruded to a point of touching the ground had it not been supported by the suspenders. It seemed to have swallowed all the other parts of the body. Gitutu did not have a neck – or let us say that it could not be seen. His arms and legs were short and looked like thick stumps. His small head looked like a fist.

The monstrous nature of his body is akin to the ogres’ big physical build. Ogude (1999) sees Gitutu’s appearance as “a typical grotesque hyperbole” (58). Quoting Bakhtin, Ogude explains that the grotesque body “outgrows its own self, transgressing its own

body, in which it conceives a new, second body: the bowels and the phallus'' (58).

Ithe wa Mbooi, another character in the den, conceives the idea of manufacturing human organs for the rich, ensuring that they live fully, especially to the satisfaction given by their material status. Gitutu, despite being equated to a jigger, has all manifestations of an ogre also – especially in his feeding habits (*Caaitani*: 95).

By making reference to both the jigger and the ogre, Ngugi is describing in stark terms the nature of the postcolonial relationship, especially between the rulers and the ruled. In Ogude's words:

Gitutu's name within the context of the Agikuyu readership helps to concretise the grotesque image of Gitutu's body. There are clear grounds for comparison in which the physical features of Gitutu – 'pot belly', 'short-limbs' and 'tiny head' are placed in stark juxtaposition to the physical features of a jigger. But more importantly, these features underscore the parasitic nature of jiggers and in extension the parasitism of the ruling class in the postcolonial state that Gitutu represents or parallels. As a parasite, Gitutu finds his host in the lives of the workers and peasants he exploits. (59)

Like the ogre, Gitutu's relationship with the poor majority is skewed to his favour, and his thinking and vision is geared towards the total emasculation of the masses. He plans to sell soil and air in small containers to the masses for profit. This way, the rich will be able to contain and control the masses by minimizing the air they breathe, especially when they complain:

Andũ aitũ teeciriei mũno ũhoro ũcio... Aruti-a-wĩra na arĩmi anyinyi maareehe nyokonyoko, na maarema manjeeci, tũkamathimĩra rĩera rĩa kũhĩhia ngĩnya maturie maru! Arutwo a Yunibaaciti moiga kunu, tũkamaima rĩera! Mũingĩ woiga nugunugu tũkauma rĩera! Andũ maarega kũiywo na gũtuunywo tũkamahiingĩra rĩera... (104)



Our people think about what I have said... when workers and peasants resist our exploitation and our armies cannot contain them, we deny them air until they kneel before us. When university students complain even a little, we deny them air! When the masses complain, we also deny them the air!

In comparison the modern ogres are more cruel and have perfected their oppressive techniques. From Gitutu to Kihaahu, to Nditika to Kimeenderi, the gospel is the same: the masses must be exploited to the advancement of the rich. Their ogre-like philosophy is captured in Kihaahũ's personal motto:

..nĩ nĩ njaamba ĩrĩa ikũgaga kĩrooko iria ingĩ igakira ki.  
Nĩ nĩ mũrũũthi ũria ũraramaga mũtitũ njogu igeethugumĩra iriuko-ini.  
Nĩ nĩ nderi iria ireraga rĩera-inĩ hũũngũ ikoorira itara-inĩ.  
Nĩ nĩ rũhuho rũria rũhuuhũraga rũria rũũngĩ.  
Nĩ nĩ rũheni rũria rũhenũraga rũrĩa rũũngĩ.  
Nĩ nĩ ngwa ĩrĩa ikiragia iria ingĩ.  
Nĩ nĩ riũa matuinĩ mũthenya: nĩ nĩ mweri king'i wa njata ũtukũ.  
Nĩ nĩ king'i wa making'i ma ũici na ũtunyani maamboreo. (105)

I am the cock that crows in the morning and silences all the others.  
I am the lion that roars in the forest making the elephant urinate on itself.  
I am the vulture that soars in the air making hawks run to their nests.  
I am the wind that outdoes other winds.  
I am the lightening that scares all others.  
I am the thunder that silences all others  
I am the sun during the day: I am the moon the king of stars.  
I am the king of kings of today's thieves and robbers.

The omni-present nature of these modern ogres is encapsulated within the above motto.

They are everywhere, and their mission is clear: they must at all costs ensure the continued total exploitation of the masses. It is this thirst that Gaturia sees in the den, making him flee for his dear life. Suddenly the competitors in the cave seem ready to devour him, led by Mwaura: “Gaturia akĩona Mwaũra ta aramũrora na maitho me na tamaa ya kũmũrũma. Agĩcooka akĩona atĩ ti Mwaũra wiki wamũroraga na njĩra ya kweenda kũmeeria mũũndũ. Nĩ andũ arĩa oothe maamũthiurũrũkĩirie ... tiitherũ aya nĩ arĩ a mũĩrĩ ya andũ...”/“Gaturia saw Mwaũra look at him with ravenous eyes making him feel as if Mwaura wanted to devour him. But on a close look, he saw that it was not only Mwaura who was looking at him that way but all those who were around him, for sure these were eaters of human flesh”(175) The unequal and unjust treatment with which the rich treat the poor is symbolic of the treatment that the ogres meted on human beings. Gaturia’s feeling in the cave exemplifies the foreign leaders’ call to their Third World counterparts: they are not afraid to oppress the masses of their countries even to a point of death if only to ensure their continued prosperity.

A notable thing in Ngugi’s reconceptualisation of the ogre is the conscious Christian influence that runs not only around the ogre’s physical description but also in its naming. The ogre from the traditional Gikuyu folklore is said to have two mouths: one in front and the other one at the back of the head, it is also a gigantic creature which is able to change into any form it desires. The devil in the text as seen by Waringa is wearing a suit and has a walking stick, has seven horns and each has a trumpet, two mouths, and a sagging stomach. (*Caitani*, 7). This description has a resounding resemblance with the dragon described by John in Revelation chapter twelve. The name that the ogre is given is a phonological adaptation of the English word Satan which reads as “caitani” in Gikuyu. The judeo-Christian influence runs across the body of the novel sometimes in form of paraphrase and echoes but other times in form of direct quotations from the bible. The act of the devil’s crucifixion is parodied from the death of Jesus on the cross.

While some of the devil’s description falls within the mythological convolution of both the Gĩkũyũ ogre and the Christian Satan, there is an allegorical twist in the whole description. First the people who are crucifying the devil are wearing worn-out and

tattered clothes and therefore included to represent the masses, who due to poverty and exploitation cannot afford to dress in good clothes. The devil on the other hand fits within the image of a rich man, whose wealth can afford him all the comforts of life, he is also given a walking stick to symbolize his position of leadership in the contemporary society. Ngugi's devil is therefore a composite creation from the two cultures meant to communicate particularities of the events and happenings in the postcolonial Kenya and mostly the relationship between the Haves and Have nots. One notices a continuous motif of the Marxian influence in this novel as in Ngugi's other works, especially the schisms existing between various classes in the society.

The above serves to affirm that Ngugi's crafting of the devil is an allegorical representation. He does this in his attempt at constructing the relationship alluded to in the above paragraph. Ogude (1999: 44) observes that allegory in Ngugi's narratives "acquires a transformative capacity in its attempt to subvert or challenge the imperial myths and codes that make up colonised people's notions of received history." This helps him in producing "new ways of seeing history, new ways of 'reading' the world," (Slemon, 1988: 164). Allegory then seems to be a process through which Ngugi tries not rewrite history *par se*, but purely as an attempt of presenting the complexities inherent in the postcolonial society by retracing the historical process that has produced the contemporary individual against the expectation of the same individual in the present society. Wariinga and Wangari's predicament in the hands of the neo-colonial agents exemplifies this relationship.

A careful examination of the devil that Wariinga sees as pointed out earlier captures both a historical understanding of the ogre in a traditional sense and also ways in which we can interpret him/her in the present besides alluding to Judeo-Christian mythology. The oppressive and exploitative nature of the leadership (allegorized as the devil or ogre) is what the masses are crucifying, so that both the devil and the act of his crucifixion are symbolic acts. There is a striking resemblance between the characters who are taking part in the competition of thieves and robbers and the devil especially by their mode of dressing and sagging tummies. According to Ogude (1999: 57), Ngugi's creation of the

cave and competing contestants provides him “space for erecting or deconstructing, through the grotesque and the obscene, the banality of power in the postcolony.” He continues to say that:

Ngugi uses the Bakhtinian notion of the grotesque and obscenity by turning the rulers of postcolony into objects of ridicule and in the process transcends the limitations Bakhtin imposes on the two terms by suggesting that the grotesque and the obscene are not simply confined to the province of the ruled, but could be extended to rulers. It is to the local comprador bourgeoisie, who boast about their cleverness and their cunning on how to steal from people as well as how to bow to foreign control... he does this by exposing how state power, represented by local comprador, dramatizes its own magnificence through an absurd ceremonial display of their wealth as spectacles worthy of emulation by the ruled. It is in this feast that Ngugi erects the monstrous image of capitalism as a fetish.

Both the local thieves and international ones are not defined as ogres because of their body appearances and sizes alone but also because of their amorous behavior, greed for both food and property. Through these ogre-like beings Ngugi allegorically captures the exploitation and corruption that is inherent in Kenya’s postcolonial society.

There is also an open attempt, on the part of the author, at making the Christian narratives read like a part of the people’s contemporary lore not only in *Caitani* but also in *Matigari* and *Murogi* continuously. Gikandi (2000: 213), advises readers to be aware of:

The intermixture and interplay of different genres and traditions, and the author’s self-conscious decision to switch from one idiom to another regardless of the temporal setting of his novel. For what Ngugi seems to recognize, after several works built on Manichean oppositions, is the difficulty of making distinctions between oral traditions derived from Gikuyu culture and the biblical traditions imposed during colonial rule. Indeed, in many cases, there appears to be an important affinity between Gikuyu oral culture and the narratives of the Old Testament: the incantations, voices, and visions of the Gicaandi prophet are

similar to those of biblical prophets.

The above would seem to be Ngugi's way of acknowledging the dialogic relationship existing between contemporary genres in the postcolony or what Gikandi calls "the complexity of the politics of everyday life in the postcolony," and that this "mixture of idioms shows how the culture of the postcolonial state can no longer be seen in terms of the opposition between tradition and modernity." The multiple sources of *Caitani's* creative materials also mirror the indebtedness that the postcolonial being owes to both his/her traditional heritage and colonialism. It would therefore be naïve to represent the African culture in its purity because the truth is that so much has happened to influence the way it is presently. Ngugi's quest for indigenous poetics is therefore anchored in the understanding that the contemporary African is a product of multiple cultures, all of which compete and contest in our attempt at defining his/her identity. It is also opens the novel by making it more representative of African voices by using not only one of their languages but by making it more recipient to traditional literary forms.

In addition to the ogre motif that runs across the surface of the text there is the apparent archetype of the trickster figure. A common figure in African oral narratives, it normally pits smaller animals like the chameleon, hare, antelope, tortoise, and monkey against bigger, stronger and fierce animals like the lion, elephant, hippopotamus, crocodile, and hyena, among others. It is noteworthy to mention that the trickster is not restricted to African narratives only but he/she is actually found in stories of almost all communities in the world. Though crafted as clever and witty, he mostly involves himself in things that are prohibited in society, for example stealing, conmanship, cheating for sport and other annoying vices. Hynes' (1993: 34-35) sees him as an "out person" occupying the marginal and liminal realms of the society:

[H]is activities are often outlawish, outlandish, outrageous, out-of-bounds, and out-of-order. No borders are sacrosanct, be they religious, cultural, linguistic, epistemological, or metaphysical. Breaking down division lines, the trickster

characteristically moves swiftly and impulsively back and forth across all borders with virtual impunity. Visitor everywhere, especially to those places that are off limits, the trickster seems to dwell in no single place but to be in continual transit through all realms marginal and liminal.

In Hynes' words, it is hard to pin down the trickster to a particular standing because he is forever shifting sometimes helping humanity solve problems that bedevil it and other times inflicting harm on the same humanity. This duality of nature is especially apparent in most African oral narratives but on the whole it is the trickster's cheating and conniving nature that is almost always foregrounded. Confirming this assertion, Hynes (1993:35) explains:

In many cultures and religions, the trickster acts as the *prima causa* of disruptions and disorders, misfortunes and improprieties. All semblances of truth and falsity are subject to his rapid alchemy: His lying, cheating, tricking, and deceiving may derive from the trickster being simply an unconscious numbskull, or at other times, from being a malicious spoiler.

The trickster emerges as a congenital and diabolical liar, one who is never governed by any moral ordinance. It is from this backdrop that Ngugi uses in creating characters who pander towards tricksterism. Characters who, even when they differ in size and demeanour, exhibit similar or most characteristics found in the trickster figures. Even though this archetype runs across *Caitani Mutharaba-ini*, the study will only refer to two of the most prominent examples where the trickster traits appear more visibly

The thieves and robbers' competition is founded on the basis of trickery and deceit: one who has been able to use his wit and cunning in amassing wealth will emerge the winner of this great contest. I hope to interrogate how the characters fall under trickster figures and the different points of departure and assess the factors that have necessitated these changes. Hynes (1993: 34) has identified six traits that are manifested in the trickster figure: "(1) the fundamentally ambiguous and anomalous personality of the trickster.

Flowing from these are features such as the (2) deceiver/ trick-player, (3) shape-shifter, (4) situation invertor, (5) message/ imitator of the gods, and (6) sacred lewd/ bricoleur.’’

Nearly all trickster characters display all or some of the above traits. Kihaahu wa Gatheeca, in the competition, explains his change of fortunes from a poor teacher to a rich owner of schools (Caitaani: 108). This can be equated to a situation invertor, but it is the way he does it that illustrates his sense of trickery and deceitfulness. He explains how he started a nursery school founded on the principles of black aesthetics (black color, language and traditional philosophies), but the venture miserably failed in spite of advertising it as the school of choice for African children (see *Caitaani*, 108). After a thorough investigation he came to what was an enlightening realization and very crucial in his change of fortunes:

Ngĩtuiria ũrĩa kũrathiĩ. Ngĩona aĩ Mũũkenya wĩiiguite aagĩa na mũgũũnda mũnene, ndaangĩandĩka Mũũkenya meenenja, no aandĩkire Mũgeni Mũũcomba: Mũũkenya wiiiguite, aagĩa na mbiacara nene, ndaangĩandĩka Mũũkenya atuike meenenja kana mutari wa kĩgĩĩna, no aandĩkire Mũgeni Mũũcomba kana Mũgeni Mũũhĩindĩ. Rĩrĩa Mũũkenya maraaria marĩ eeri, matiingĩarĩa thiomĩ cia bũrũri no cia ageni. [N]gĩtara, ngĩtara ngĩnya ngĩracuka maitho. [N]gĩcooka o ho beengi itanambĩrĩria kũũndeng’eria. Ngĩgarũra rĩitwa rĩa Naatharĩ ĩyo. Ngĩmibatithia: MODERN DAY NURSERY SCHOOL. Ngĩcooka ngĩetha mũtumia mũthũũngũ atuĩke *principal*. Kwa mbahati ngĩona mwe na ihenya. Aarĩ mũkũru ũũ aĩ ona ndoonaga wega, niingĩ aaiguuaga na hinya, na aaikaraga agicũũngaga. No hari ithuĩ andũ airũ, Mũthũũngũ no Mũthũũngũ ona atarĩ na magũrũ. Na toondũ ũyũ wakwa ndarĩ ũndũ eekaga mũcii, agiitĩkĩra gũũka gũcũũngagĩra thukuru-inĩ yaakwa. Ngĩcooka rĩu ngĩthĩĩ Nairobi matuka-inĩ, Ngigũra twana twa athũũngũ a riumba – thanamu iria icuragio nguo ndirica-inĩ – ngĩtũhumbithia nguo njega mũno, na ngituongererehithia wigi nduune ta mwaki, ngĩcooka ngĩtwĩkĩrithia tumacini twa thitima nda na ngĩtwĩkĩrithia tũgaragari magũrũ-inĩ. Ndaagwatia switch twana tuu twa riumba tukambĩrĩria gũceera kũu nyũũmba-inĩ thiinĩ. Ndirica ici nene cia gicicio nĩ ciarekaga mũũndũ arĩ o njira-inĩ oone thanamu icio cia coomba igĩceera. (108-109)

I sought to know why my business did not pick up. I realized that any well-to-do Kenyan after acquiring a big plantation only employed a foreign manager and particularly a European. That any well-to-do Kenyan after opening a big business can only employ a European or an Indian manager and accountant. Whenever two Kenyans talk, they can only converse in foreign languages. This was an eye-opening revelation. I rushed back to the bank before my loan interest got very high. I changed the name of the Nursery school to MODERN DAY NURSERY SCHOOL. Then I sourced for an old white woman to be the school's principal. She was really old and could neither see nor hear properly and was always sleeping. But for us black people all white people are the same world over. And because this woman was doing nothing at home, she agreed to come and while away her time in my school. After that, I went to Nairobi and bought dummies, which were white in colour, used in displaying clothes, I dressed them smartly and also put on red wigs on their heads, motors were fixed on their feet which made them move around the room each time they were switched on. I made sure that passer-bys could see the white dummies moving through the big glass windows put all around the classrooms.

The rich Kenyans flock into the school believing that they were going to get the best education for their children. On his part, Kīhaahū makes pockets of money out of this trickery, to the disbelief and infuriation of fellow competitors that he can dare make money out of cheating his rich colleagues. One of the participants, Ithe wa Mbooi, is particularly angry because all along his wife has been insinuating that those children seen in Kīhaahū's school did not look like real white kids. He tells the chairman that it would be alright if Kīhaahū has been stealing from the poor but stealing and lying to the rich is not forgivable (*Caitaani*, 118). Kīhaahū's confession makes him lose his rich customers and friends, an ending that echoes that of most trickster figures. Kīhaahū's trickery, it is important to note, is geared towards self-enrichment without due regard of the quality of education that pupils in his schools are getting.



His pursuit of materialism makes him manipulate everybody and every available opportunity without a sense of remorse. Commenting on the nature of the African trickster Susan Fieldman (qtd. in De Souza, 2003: 342) explains that he can be viewed as an “anomic, presocialized individual, who has not yet matured to a sense of responsibility. Suave, urbane and calculating, he acts with premeditation, always in control of the situation; though self-seeking, his social sense is sufficiently developed to enable him be manipulate others to his advantage.” To Kīhaahū, the white woman is useful for as long as her presence ensures a steady stream of pupils from rich Kenyan parents and therefore profit for him.

But Kīhaahū is not done yet; the new structures of power in postcolonial society make him think of other ways of making more money. He wonders what is so important in politics that makes people sell their property in its pursuit. This also shows the metamorphosing nature of the trickster figure, especially in the face of the changing contemporary society. In his article “Modern Scheming Giants: Satire and the Trickster in Wole Soyinka’s Drama,” Olorunto (1988: 298) points to the re-appropriation of the trickster motif in the present by insisting that even though the trickster may “embody most of the traditional traits ascribed to his ancestors, he goes a step further to metamorphose from them into new tricks, appropriate to modern conditions of politics, pursuits of power, and rapacious desire for materialism.” The changing landscape makes him go back to his bags of tricks in order to make more money and protect his already acquired riches.

Politics, both for parliamentary seats and local councils, have become the new front where modern tricksters waylay their victims: the masses. To succeed in his new venture, Kihahu must eliminate his political competitors through threats and intimidation. He confesses that: “gutiri undu o na umwe itaageririe o hamwe na kugura *votes*. Ndahuthirire ciriingi miirioni igiri/ I did everything possible to win including buying votes. I used two million shillings” (113). When he finally becomes the councilor of

Ruuwa-ini location, he uses the post to repay himself the money he had used during the campaign. This he does through the sale of council houses:

Nyũũmba ciakĩĩika nĩ guo biiu ndoonĩre kĩrĩa ndeethaga. Mũũndu wothe wakoragwo akĩenda nyũũmba ya kaanjũ, aangũragĩra gĩkombe gĩa caai wa ngiri igĩrĩ o nyũũmba. Ngwenda kũmwrĩa atĩ thuutha wa mĩaka ĩrĩ miirioni iria ciakwa ndaitangĩte na githuurano nĩ ciairĩkĩtie kũũnjarĩra gakundi. Na hĩĩndĩ ĩno ndithithinĩite. Mbeca ciakwa ciomaga o kwĩ mũingĩ ũria wanjikĩirie kura. / I got what I wanted after the completion of council houses. Anybody who wanted a house would buy a cup of tea worthy two thousand shillings. After only two years, the two million I used for campaign had given me a lot more. Surprisingly the money was coming from the same people who had voted for me” (113).

The modern-day trickster uses every available opportunity to amass wealth, as is the case of Kihahu. Like his traditional counterpart, the modern trickster revels at the success of his trickery by celebrating “his cleverness and victory, laughs at the dull-wit of his victims, but remains ever contemptible” (Olorouto, 1988: 298). Kihahu goes further and thanks the masses of Kenya for their continued gullibility: “Nii ni kio umuuthi njookagiria muingi wa Kenya iitu ngatho. Tondū utumuumu wao, kurigwo kwao, na wagi wao wa kuruumbuuyanagia na haki ciao.” /I always thank the Kenyan masses because of their blindness and ignorance about their own rights” (113). In short, he knows the weakness of his victims and utilizes this knowledge to his own selfish end. It is clear, therefore, that the trickster has evolved with the times; he is no longer the small, weak animal that pesters the bigger animals for sport but one who employs his antics to impoverish and exploit. He is, in Olorouto’s view (1988: 308), “no longer the little animal that outwits its gigantic opponents and stays aloof somewhere, giggling and taunting them for new tricks and grotesque advantages. Instead, the modern trickster manifests himself in modern politics, economics, art, and modern education. He is a materialist and a pragmatist.”

### **3.3 I Have a Riddle: Riddling in the Era of Postcolonialism**

Among the two major short oral forms, the riddle and the proverb, the former is the most

versatile. The riddle's versatility can be attributed to the nature of its function, especially that of instructing the young and teaching them about their environment. They challenge children's observation skills about what is happening in their surroundings. The riddle is, therefore, a genre that is based on close observation of natural life.

As societies change and develop, the riddle's flexible nature aids in incorporating the said changes. That way, even when it retains some traces of its traditional matrix, it is able to borrow from the present and recreate itself anew in the midst of constant change, thus maintaining its life of entertainment and instruction (Noss: 2006, 34). Riddles are chiefly associated with children, and more often they are used as a source of entertainment during play time. Noss (2006:34) looks at them as a game that challenges the intellectual adroitness of the riddler's peers and as a metaphor that confronts the apparently impossible with what is.

In his book on Gĩkũyũ riddles and the gicandi genre, Pick (1973: 26) explains that the riddles' subject matter confines itself to the environment which the Gĩkũyũ people inhabit and also things and images that litter their world of everyday activities:

The ndai have as a subject, in most cases, matters and objects which belong to the environment in which the Kikuyu live and which they know in all details and circumstances: the hut and the homestead, the village, the members of the family, the domestic animals and their habits, the birds, the field, the crops, the forest, the different kinds of trees, the waste plains, - the whole nature with which a Kikuyu is unendingly in contact.

From Merlo's exposition it is clear that the topics covered in the riddle were certainly meant to impart in children the knowledge of the world they lived in. Even though riddles are a domain of children, grown-ups also engage in riddling, especially in drinking parties or communal activities, where they find themselves in groups. Riddles, therefore, go beyond instruction of children to encompass other roles, as stated for example by Awedoba (2000: 35):

Riddles have significant social roles which may be latent or overt. They include roles that may be described as cultural, educative, intellectual, ideological, cosmological and political. While some studies dismiss riddles as a genre lacking the capacity to improve the mind ... riddles do indeed exercise the intellect more actively than the mere recollections of responses. Riddles teach logic, they compel audiences to engage in the contemplation of a variety of paradoxes and enigmas, they teach about the social and cultural environment, about social norms, about history and biology and much more. They can also be said to play a role in the formation of the intuitions that people acquire about their languages and social structures.

Before we delve into the ways in which riddles are used in the novel, it is important to interrogate one of the most elaborate of Gĩkũyũ art forms known as *gicaandi* because of its use of not only riddles but other genres as well. According to Njogu (2004: 153) *gicaandi* is a “riddle-like dialogue poem and poetic exchange. This dialogue poetry seems to epitomize the simultaneity of cooperative competitiveness, a test of wits, problem posing a problem solving.” It involved two artists who, using a series coded language and a combination of riddles and proverbs, competed for the instrument which carried the same name as the genre. In their survey of Gikuyu oral literature Kabira and Mutahi, as quoted by Njogu (2004: 153) explain that:

*Gicandi* is characterized by the predominance of coded messages involving all aspects of Gikuyu life. These messages are decoded by contesting poets and the failure to decode a message may lead to a poet forfeiting the rattle, the *gicandi* musical instrument. The defeated poet hands over the instruments as a sign of defeat. The poet would need to retrieve it in order to perform because without the instrument necessary in the performance, one cannot perform *gicaandi* in public.

It is the above genre that Ngugi appropriates in narrating the events in *Caitani*

*Mutharabai-ini*, through seemingly through a reluctant *gicaandi* singer. The gravity of the events in question forces Ngugi to revert to the coded language of the *gicaandi* genre in order to escape the wrath of the ruling class now that the text was written in prison and published just before he went to exile. Wariinga's mother begs the singer to reveal the secrets of her daughter's ordeal "muini wa gicaandi, hithuria uria muhithe/ *gicaandi* singer reveal all secrets" (1). To which the singer responds "Ngiamba kuhiindahiinda ngiiyuuragia atiri: nii ni nii u, kanua weriire? Githi gutierirwo ndithuire mumioni ta mumianiriri? / I asked myself this question: who am I, the mouth which ate itself? Wasn't said that the antelope hates one who shouts at it but not the one who lets it pass in silence? (1). The singer's answer then points to the gravity of what he is being asked to do, characteristic of the genre's ability to employ multiple forms, he employs a proverb to underscore the enormity of the quest before him and the dangers involved.

Even though *gicaandi*'s enactment involved two competing poets, it was also possible for the poets involved to engage the audience as the competition progressed, as noted by Njogu (2004: 165). This is what Ngugi does in the novel when he digresses from engaging the textual audience to include the reader as apart of his general audience. The *gicaandi* singer invites the reader/audience, who he addresss as a friend: "Uka/ Uka muraata/ Uka twaranirie! / Come/ Come my friend/ Let us talk to one another" (3). The reader is not only invited to listen and particpate as the *gicaandi* singer reveals the things that ail the nation but to also think about the solution to the problems. According to Gititi (1995: 118), the singer, masquarading as the prophet of justice, "will henceforth discharge the office of diviner/priest, investigator, philosopher, counsellor, comforter, the voice of conscience, validating once more the multi-purpose function of *gicaandi*." The reader also becomes the core poet in the competation for the *gicaandi* instrument.

The novel thus begins with the *gicaandi* narrator firmly in control, but as the story progresses, the characters in the novel take over from the narrator, for example Muturi, Wangari and Gaturia. They take over the contest and, taking the advantage of the genre's ability to employ a diversity of other oral forms (riddles, proverbs, songs and narratives), push the competition further. Using these forms, they comment on the socio-

economic/cultural issues taking place in the present society. While Mwangi (2007: 29) looks at the narrator as unreliable, we point out that the narrator, like any other *gicaandi* singer, must at some point relinquish the control of the rendition to the participating poet. This gives the competing poet a chance to answer and to pose his own challenge, and it may also give room for audience participation. Our reading of the riddles in *Caitaani Mutharaba-ini* is thus situated within the broader category of the *gicaandi* genre.

Written in detention, Ngugi's novel critiques the relationship that exists between the rich and the poor in Africa. The riddling session in the text takes place in a Matatu that is headed for Ilmorog, a fictitious town outside the city of Nairobi. The session takes place at night, fitting within the traditional expectation of when riddles should be told. The matatu occupants, according to Williams (1999: 102), represent the whole domain of Kenyan society, from the peasant, to the worker, and the professional. They are:

[R]epresentative cross-section of modern Kenyan society – the driver, Robin Mwaura, self-seeking and materialistic; Wangari, a country woman who fought in Mau Mau movement; the young intellectual Gatuiria who is in the process of discovering his cultural roots; the politicised Muturi; the educated businessman Mweri (*sic*) wa Mukiraai; Wariinga, a secretary and 'modern' young woman. Their life histories up to that point are representative fragments of the post-colonial nation-state.

Their discussion in the matatu captures the problems affecting the masses in post-colonial societies, and it is within their talk that they use riddles to bring out some of these prevailing conditions.

The first riddle is posed by Muturi to Wangari, who takes it as an opportunity to explain the changes that the present society has undergone, especially in the area of land ownership. The riddle goes like this:

... wũũi tũũrĩa ĩ?

Tũrigũ twiru! Wangari akiamukiria ...

wũũĩ tũũngĩ- ĩ! Muturi akiuga.

Tũũĩ twĩ ngurunga yeene, Wangari akĩamũkĩria o rĩĩngĩ.

Ooooh those ones!

Some ripe bananas! Wangari replied ...

Ooooh some other ones! Muturi asked.

Water in a cave that belongs to somebody else, Wangari replied once again.

While Wangari gives the correct answer, she adds a twist to the second part of the riddle. The answer should have been “water in a cave,” but she adds “that belongs to somebody else”. The informing idea behind the alteration in the riddle is anchored in the Gĩkũyũ oral tradition about land and farming. Because of the abundance of land in traditional Gĩkũyũ society, land was not restricted. One only needed to take a piece of land that was not cultivated, clear it before farming and therefore make the part of land his or hers. The whole tradition can be recollected in the Gĩkũyũ proverb ‘itininagira nyeki’ (herds do not eat all grass), chiefly because there would always be an empty place to herd.

The onset of colonialism and the division of land sounded a death knell to the above traditional practice. After independence this phenomenon was to continue, something that made only the elite few get the best of the lands, leaving the poor with small portions of land. It is the above experience that Wangari refers to when she re-appropriates the answer to the riddle. She is, in fact, a victim of the unjust land laws in post-colonial Kenya.

In the second riddle, Muturi refutes the answer that Wangari gives even though it is the traditionally expected one. The riddling session follows the correct formula (call and response) as formulated in oral tradition:

Gwata ndaĩ ngũgwatie cĩa kĩrũ ...

Ndaathii ũũ ndaathiĩ uu! Muturi akiuga.

Njĩra cia ategi, Wangari akiugĩra Wariinga.

Aaca!

Oya kīgacwa.  
Njīra cīa aturī! Gwata rīngī !  
Ndagwaata.  
Ndaathiĩ ũũ ndaathiĩ ũũ!  
Njīra cia aturi.  
Aaca. Reehe kīgacwa.  
Oya.  
Njīra cia aruti-a-wīra. Gwata o rīngī  
Ndagwaata.  
Ndaathiĩ ũũ ndaathiĩ ũũ indoreete gwa ituīka.  
Njīra cīa aruti-a-wīra.  
Ĩĩ, na aaca. Rehe kīgacwa na ndiigūkūgaca nĩ wamenyamenya.  
Oya!  
Njīra cīa aregi ... na no cio cia aruti-a-wira.

I have a riddle, but it is a modern one.  
I go this way and that way! Muturi said.  
The ways of hunters, Wangari replied on behalf of Wariinga.  
No!  
Take a gift.  
The ways of blacksmiths! I have another one!  
I go this way and that way!  
The ways of blacksmiths.  
No. Give me a gift.  
Take.  
The ways of workers. I have another riddle.  
Ask.  
I go this way and that way towards a generational transition.  
The ways of workers.  
Yes and no. Give me a gift but I will not insist so much because you are half right.  
Take!



The ways of protesters ... and they are also the ways of the workers.

The above riddle is directly adapted from the Gĩkũyũ oral tradition, but Muturi reconstructs the answer to suit the modern situation, especially the prevailing capitalistic economy. Wangari's answer to the riddle as the ways of hunters is indeed the correct answer. But the nature of the riddle allows for several answers, particularly it refers to those who take many routes in the search of their daily bread. Traditionally, hunters spent a lot of time in the wild searching for game; at times they would cover great distances in their pursuit of game. The hunting expedition would sometimes take several days or weeks before returning home. The black smiths, too, travelled long distances in their search for ore with which to make their wares, a feat which, like hunting, took many days.

The Gĩkũyũ oral narrative about the woman who is assisted by the ogre to give birth takes place against the backdrop of her husband's departure in search for ore. The husband takes many days and months until the wife gives birth in his absence, hence the ogre's intervention. Wangari's second answer is also right because of the similarities that are inherent in the lives of hunters and blacksmiths. The observation in the above is that riddles can have more than one answer.

Having said that, it is important to note the prevailing conditions which inform Muturi's answers to the riddle. Even though the riddle is clearly borrowed from the oral tradition, Muturi's answer is far from the traditional expectation. What he does is to move away from the historical configurations of work and traditional occupation and capture a changing occupational landscape in modern times. While occupations such as hunting and black smithery were respected in traditional Africa, their place in today's society has seriously been jeopardized, mostly by new forms of economic pursuits.

The modern capitalistic economy has had a negative influence on people's way of life and has brought a tremendous change to the traditional conceptualization of work. Millions of peasants and workers cover long distances in their search for jobs away from

their homes and countries. This is a clear reminiscence of ways of hunters and black smiths in traditional Africa. In Muturi's answer, therefore, a traditional riddle is deconstructed and made to bear the weight of present experiences. In the riddle, as Hamnett (1967: 388) has suggested, "new and alien ideas appear to be re-classified through a transformation that brings it into relationship with familiar experience or traditional knowledge." It also offers Muturi the chance to subtly question the skewed relationship that exists in the post-colony, which also conforms, as had been pointed out earlier, to Bakhtin's view of the novel as a genre that continuously questions dominant ideologies and official discourses through its deployment of a range of different voices and discourses.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

From the above argument, it is clear that Ngugi uses traditional art forms to articulate his concerns. He has been able to use the existing oral forms to counter tyranny, oppression and neo-colonialism in post-independence Africa – by unmasking the unequal relationship between the rulers and the ruled. In contrast to the past, when ogres represented evil as it existed in the society, humans have since taken over completely to the extent of overshadowing the ogres. This has been possible because, according to Irele (2001: 29-30), African writers have been able to borrow from traditional culture in making sense of existing reality, making orality relevant and vital to the needs of contemporary society. Thus:

[T]he best among our modern African writers have had to undertake a resourcing of their material and their modes of expression in the traditional culture. Because the traditional culture has been able to maintain itself as a contemporary reality and thus to offer itself as a living resource, the modern literature strives to establish and strengthen its connection with a legacy that, though associated with the past, remains available as a constant reference for the African imagination. The oral tradition has thus come to be implicated in the process of transformation of the function of literature and in the preoccupation with the formal means of giving voice to the African assertion.

The motifs found in oral narratives, in our case ogre and trickster, have been reconstructed and have been used in critiquing the universal themes of imperialism and neo-colonialism. The trickster figure has taken the form of the present-day politician manipulating the masses of the Third World for self-enrichment, glorifying him/herself in their own gullibility and blindness. The existing riddles have been opened up in order to better capture novel experiences especially those that question the present forms of labour relations and ownership. The product is a literature that is firmly anchored in the African traditional heritage. It is the kind of oral literary insertions that this research is referring to as “indigenous poetics.” It is indigenous because the cadences of oral tradition reverberate across the surface of Ngugi’s *Caitani Mutharabaini*.

In the next chapter, we will analyse the proverb, another genre of oral literature, with the hope of examining how it has been used in resisting the many forms of neo-colonial oppression and projecting a vision of a better society. We also briefly argue that Ngugi, in *Matigari ma Njiruungi*, is subtly involved in a mythmaking enterprise through the main character, Matigari.

**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**VISIONS OF A BETTER WORLD: PROVERBS AND RESISTANCE IN**  
**MATIGARI MA NJIRUUNGI**

The past always pursues us and lives with us in the present. (Pauline Chiziane, qtd. in Padilha, 2007: 115)

**4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter approaches *Matigari ma Njiruungi* from an oral-poetic aesthetic perspective, examining the way in which it deploys proverbs in interrogating postcolonial reality. Special attention is given to the resistance stance inhered in the chosen proverbs and the vision they project for the future African society. In the end the chapter argues that proverbs are crucial in countering the challenges of the present African society and, in Ogude's (1999:105) words, they can be approached as "primary sites for testing the reconciliation of ethnicity and the nation, tradition and modernity, betrayal and hope and, indeed, the possibility of rebirth."

The foundational principle behind postcolonial studies was geared towards decentering the unequal relationship that existed between the colonizer and the colonized. In the words of Gadhi (1998, 4), postcolonialism is "a theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath. It is a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past." But suffice it to say that the said project had started before many colonized countries got their independence. Writers like Chinua Achebe had set in motion a literary agenda through which the colonizers could get answers to some of the mis-informed assumptions that guided their understanding of the colonized. On their part, the colonized were made to see some of the underlying weaknesses that had made colonial subjugation easier. Achebe's program fell within Ashcroft's et al, (1989: 2) range in what they say was the founding premise of postcolonial literatures, especially in its attempt at "foregrounding the tension with imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial power."

But if opposition to colonialism was at the heart of postcolonial literature, it was the state of the postcolony that was to prove daunting for the African writer. Captured vividly in Fanon's seminal text *The Wretched of the Earth*, the national middle class that took over from colonial power brought with them a gross-national stasis, where development programmes ground into a halt as the leaders clamoured to fill their pockets with money looted from the national treasury. In the process, the expected progress after independence was arrested and nabbed even before it had begun. Instead of cultivating an all-embracing consciousness that would have propelled the nation forward, the young states were, according to Fanon (1963:119), Balkanized along tribal lines:

National consciousness, instead of being the all-embracing crystallization of the innermost hopes of the whole people, instead of being the immediate and most obvious result of the mobilization of the people, will be in any case just an empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what it might have been. The faults which we find in it are quite sufficient explanation of the facility with which, when dealing with young and independent nations, the nation is passed over for the race, and the tribe is preferred to the state. These are the cracks in the edifice which show the process of retrogression that is so harmful and prejudicial to national effort and national unity.

What should have been a moment of arrival at the onset of independence, as the new countries geared for a better future after the darkness of colonialism, becomes a celebration for only a few. This state of dystopia is best captured by Memmi (1968: 88) which he says was spent waiting for the emergence of the new man after independence. The rejoinder to Memmi is whether the new man even materializes, or are we still waiting for his coming. This new tide saw creative writers change their critique of the colonialist project; besides rejecting the Western imperium; they started rejecting the nationalist project of the postcolonial bourgeoisie (Appiah, 1992: 152)

It is at the heart of the postcolonial betrayal that Ngugi pens his novel *Matigari ma Njiruungi*. Biersteker (1995:143) perceives it as “an allegory in which the surviving memory of the struggle that has become individualized confronts contemporary social reproduction and workers’ struggle, and becomes the source that informs a revolutionary quest for truth and justice.” The motif of betrayal that informs these text runs across Ngugi’s novels starting from *A Grain of Wheat*, *Petals of Blood*, and *Devil on the Cross* and is later extended to his last novel *Wizard of the Crow*. A simple oral tale is deliberately stretched in Ngugi’s attempt at confronting a contemporary phenomenon that is bent on further emasculating the masses of the postcolony. Ngugi, through Matigari, the main character, is also involved in a pedagogical duty of informing the masses about the reality of their existence and thereby enabling them to take charge of their lives. Educating the masses, to Fanon (1963, 161), “is to make the totality of the nation a reality to each citizen. It is to make the history of the nation part of the personal experience of each of its citizens.”

Matigari, therefore, instantiates the questioning and deconstruction of the notions of truth and justice, in a bid to understanding what really constitutes truth and justice within colonial/postcolonial power relations. Ngugi borrows from the wisdom of an oral tale to rationalize the ideals of truth and justice. In a way, indigenous epistemology is called upon to dismantle a received practice about property ownership and labour. Biersteker (1995, 166) sums this up as the novel’s ability to reawaken “the spirit of the people’s oral history,” because what Ngugi sought to represent “existed primarily in the oral mold.”

The tale is about Thiiru, a medicine man, who sets out one morning to prepare his garden for planting. The first day he digs and digs but leaves a big portion uncultivated. It is then that a bird comes and completes digging the part that had been left. When Thiiru returns to the field the following morning he finds that all the land has been cleared and dug. He therefore sets out to plant, but as usual he does not finish. The bird comes and completes the remaining portion, to the greater amazement of the medicine man. After the plants have grown, he sets out to weed the garden but it being a difficult task he does not

complete. The bird comes and weeds the remaining part, to the further consternation of Thiiru. When the time of harvesting comes and the medicine man has done his share, the bird comes for its share of harvest, to the annoyance of the latter. Angry that someone is stealing his crops, Thiiru sets up a trap to catch the thief. Late during the day, he sees a bird hopping from one maize stalk to another, harvesting the dry ones. He gets hold of the bird and demands to know why it is stealing his maize. But the bird tells him that he is only taking a portion of what he had cultivated. He keeps the bird in a cage to stop him from harvesting his maize. The question of the truth/justice dichotomy arises here as to really who deserves to harvest the produce: Thiiru, the owner of the land, or the bird, which has been involved in the land preparation, planting and weeding.

The tale is made to carry the dialectics inherent in colonial/postcolonial notions of property ownership and labor relations. The question that begs an answer is: who is the rightful owner of the house: Matigari, the builder and the original owner of the land or Juma Mbooi, who has bought it from the former colonizer, who had taken it from Matigari by force? Or, do the workers in the leather factory have a say in the way the profit of the company is to be divided now that the company does not belong to them but they have had a hand in the generation of the said profit? The answer to these questions would inform the rationale behind Matigari's quest for truth and justice.

#### **4.2 Matigari as a Mythologised Hero**

An apparent issue that confronts the reader of the novel, *Matigari ma Njiruungi*, is Ngugi's jettisoning of realistic modes of presentation as etched in his earlier novels. But it is important to say that this abandonment of realism began in *Caitani Mutharaba-ini* and culminates in his latest novel *Murogi wa Kagogo* (the subject of the next chapter). By invoking an existing folktale, Ngugi as Nkosi (1995: 201) posits "relies on miracles or supernatural aids as transformative devices of the plot," in his attempt at representing the contemporary reality in Kenyan society. These devices serve to reinforce Matigari's characterization as a mythical figure first as Jesus Christ, later as the apotheosis of returning Mau Mau heroes bent on saving the society from postcolonial betrayal. His rise is also discussed in cross reference to Karl Marx, Lenin and Mao, with one of the local

party chairman urging the government to revoke the work permits of the three men who are poisoning the minds of the university students. These serves to display the mythical paradigm that Matigari's sojourn inspires on the part of the masses: to the masses, he is a symbol of salvation and freedom and to the students he is a symbol of equality and a class free society as envisioned in the Marxian philosophy.

The novel is also an attempt at mythmaking, where the author borrows from myths to create a character who panders towards some contemporary wishes and thinking of a people whose hope of a better society has been betrayed. Myth, as Vambe (2004: 47) puts forward, "gives symbolic meaning to the relationship between people and the natural environment in which human beings participate consciously to transform that nature and their social condition so that these move towards a desired goal." The crafting of Matigari, as a mythical figure, seems to agree with Vambe's view and mostly in the prevailing conditions in the postcolony which demand total overhaul and transformation. This state of affairs prevails upon Ngugi's appeal to the mythmaking process as a way of galvanising the people in resisting tyranny and oppression. The heroes of the liberation struggle and those who existed before the colonial intrusion are therefore resurrected in order to give hope to a disillusioned populace.

Commenting on the influence that myths have had on the creative writing of African writers during the struggle for independence and after, Vambe (2004: 48) demonstrates that:

Black novelist's appropriated African ancestral myths of origin to contest the hegemony of white settler discourse. Using mythologies of their own people and the mythopoeses that they constructed black novelists projected images of a proud and confident African people struggling to restore their dignity and identity that had been undermined by settler values. African writers drew inspiration from past mythic narratives that celebrated the heroic resistance to colonialism by their own ancestors.



In spite of drawing from existing myth, they also turned to mythmaking and their main goal was “to create, renew, sustain, or radically reenvision a group identity,” (Berg, 2005: 688). Matigari identifies himself with the part of the population whose hope has been dashed including the street children, workers both in the factories and in the large tea and coffee plantations, farmers and peasants and women like Guthera. Indeed, these are the ones who rejoice in his actions of courage and bravery. The very action of challenging and questioning the authority of the police and the Minister of Truth and Justice convinces them that a saviour has finally come and that their tribulation in the hands of the postcolonial leadership is nearing its end. Mythmaking in the novel can therefore be summed as a process through which a person or a group of people imagine for themselves a better future away from the debilitating present or some kind of wish fulfillment as observed and that mythical imagination helps people in focusing:

On *actualities* past or present and endeavours progressively to derive from them certain essences which liberate them from the bond of time; on the other hand it grapples with *mysteries* by seeking to explain them in terms of observable reality without however destroying their supra-empirical quality. The mythic imagination is able to achieve this balance because it employs the medium of affectivity to dual effect: first, the fanciful characters of the tale are treated with human behavioural characteristics so that we are led to identify with their extraordinary objectives; and secondly, by virtue of both their supra-humanness and of the didactic messages which the narrator frequently draws from their actions we are made conscious of the essentially symbolic level toward which the drama of the tale strains. (Okpewho, 1983: 114)

As a matter of fact, Matigari’s quest is based on real issues: the need to get back the home that has been taken away from him, his land and a dignifying pay for the labour of his hands – all these things resonate well with the people. Therefore, even when Matigari’s actions border on the surreal and extraordinary, people believe them because his quest is based on the reality of their existence. The credence of his actions is also illuminated by his ability to mingle freely with the people, conversing and telling them

candidly what ails them and their society and in the end offers them a possible solution. This mythical aura helps in making people believe in the possibility of a better society.

The name symbolism in the text, beginning with Matigari, is also a process of mythmaking. Firstly, it is the name of the main character in the text and also a collective name of all those who survived the British onslaught as they sought to exterminate Mau Mau fighters. Biersteker (1995: 147) sees the name as “symbolic both of the people who were destroyed by colonial conquest and neo-colonial conquest and oppression and who survived and continue to resist.” It also lays claim to a historical process of resistance that has existed in African society since time immemorial, this explains why Matigari says that he is as old as the earth and that he was there before the dawn of colonialism. This invokes in the people the memory of the history of struggle and resistance which has always existed in their society thereby giving them impetus to continue pressing for a better society as their forebears. Gikandi (1991: 164) supports this view when he states that Matigari, the novel, “represented an attempt to celebrate the once unmentioned “Mau Mau” and to introduce it into the political vocabulary of Kenya.”

Matigari also traces the history of independence betrayal in the Kenya and the treatment meted on the heroes of independence by subsequent postcolonial governments. This is captured through the plight that the masses go through on the hands of those in power and their neo-colonial masters. Ngugi creates a myth around Matigari’s return because of what Gikandi (1991: 162) calls the masses’ “discontent with politics of neocolonialism.” This made the masses dream of a saviour or leader who would like the Mau Mau help them realize “the fulfillment of Waiyaki’s prophesy,” now that independence had become “an incomplete project.” Matigari’s or the remnants can therefore be defined as the group of those who remained in the forest to keep the fire of independence burning. Their return is therefore immanent now that the independence dream has been betrayed. Matigari’s myth is weaved through a hybrid ideal of Christ’s second coming and the Mau Mau returnees plus a coterie of global personalities like Marx, Lenin, and Mao.

This may be why Matigari cannot be pinned down to any particular time frame and indeed remains unknown to the people to the end. People can only speculate about his identity and origin, something that serves to mythologize him further. The question that persists on the narrator's mouth is: who was Matigari? He claims to have been there before the Portuguese explorers, before the Arabs and even the British colonizers found him here:

Njugire atĩa? Ndirĩ wa ira. Ndaarikuo ona mbere ya Wareno. Ndaarĩ kuo hĩĩndĩ ya Mwarabu, ndaarĩ kuo hĩĩndĩ ya Ngeretha. Ndĩ mũkũrũ ta thĩĩno. No niingĩ ndĩ mwĩthĩ ta mbeũ ĩrĩ ihũainĩ rĩraacanũka./ What did I say? I was there before the Portugese. When the Arabs came they found me here, I was there when the British came. I am as old as the world. Yet I am also very young, as the seed of a flower that is blossoming. (*Matigari Ma Njiruungi*, 101)

He is therefore a symbolic character, whose emergence is based on a historical recollection. Ngugi in *Matigari* goes back to myths to present the possibility of rebirth and regeneration and in the words of Mack (as qtd. by Berg, 2005: 701), to expand “the horizons of time and space beyond the limits of the perceived world within which people live, to the practices and structures of determination in a society, lending legitimacy to certain configurations of power and fostering their reproduction.” The people, in this sense, have the power to decide how to make their lives better, democratically (as Matigari attempts at the beginning) or through the force of arms. Mythmaking, to summarize, has offered Ngugi – and indeed all the oppressed people – an alternative form of resistance. Guthera (translated to mean the clean/holy or the pure one) and Muriuki (the resurrected one) are symbolically the vanguard generation that must take the helm of the revolution, ensuring that the fire of independence continues burning even after the demise of Matigari. The element of resistance and struggle carried in Matigari (the mythical hero) is also inherited in the proverbs used in the text, as will be discussed in the next subsection.

### **4.3 Proverbs and Resistance**

Proverbs fall within a people's ethnophilosophy importantly because they reflect people's experience over time and are preserved as part of their philosophy of life. Matereke and Mapara (2009: 199) define ethnophilosophy as "a reflective philosophical enterprise rooted in a people's culture." As a part of a people's ethnophilosophy proverbs are defined as:

General statements that summarize situations. They are normally given with the intention of evaluating and affecting human behavior. Proverbial lore, as oral literature, forms an undeniable part of a people's cultural heritage and present a totality of the experiences of a people. The preservation of proverbs in oral discourse allows them to be flexibly applied to a number of varying contexts; thus, the proverbs remain relevant to a variety of contexts and situations. (Matereke and Mapara, 2009: 208)

In the process of understanding their world, human beings formulate stories, riddles, proverbs and other forms of art as a way of coming to terms with the mystery of life and their surrounding.

The flexible nature of the proverb genre makes them an apt choice in mirroring different situations and contexts over varied time frames. That is, for example, where a past experience is appropriated to capture a present concern using the philosophy couched in a particular proverb. Supporting this view, the above quoted authors posit that "the relevance of the proverb lies in the application of the collective experiences of the past generations to present lived realities and situations. The transmitted word seeks to draw from the past some lessons to address present concerns" (209). Therefore, the past becomes not only a purveyor of the lived realities of the present society but also a kind of historical memory bank of the people:

The collective experience of the past continue to inspire and give guidance to the present, and as the sender of the proverb is appealing to tradition, there is a sense

in which the sender reminds the receiver that tradition continues to be relevant in the present as something that has stood the test of time, hence the special force and weight of the proverb. (Materike and Mapara, 2009: 209)

The above view can be enjoined to D' Angelo (1977: 367) when he points out: "One important value of proverbs, not to be overlooked, is that they embody habits of thought, customs, and moral values. They are a kind of consensus of opinions, manifest truths that may be useful in the conduct of life." They therefore can be used in validating and supporting arguments as they present time-tested truths among a particular community of people.

Proverbs, from a semiotic point of view, can be approached as signs which are infested with varied social meanings and interpretations and whose invocation depends on a particular situation. Thus they can be used in validating and supporting a speaker's angle in an argument, persuading people to look at things in their own ways and in drawing analogy between similar experiences, among other things. For example, one of the proverbs used twice in the novel, "Gutiri muucii wi kahii utakarigwo mutwe/ a family that has a boy child will one day slaughter a goat" (65), draws from a particular historical experience (which will be explained later in the chapter) even though this experience does not limit its usage to a particular time and place. The proverb explains the importance of children the world over and the expectations that many families, especially the poor, attach to them. It has therefore been transposed from a distant past to address a present concern.

In spoken discourse, proverbs can be invoked to make listeners reflect on particular experiences in life and to thereby clarify their attitudes towards the said experiences. Those who have mastered the art of oratory use proverbs to make those who are listening to them reflect on some past experience while relating that experience to a present occurrence. In so doing the past is appropriated in mirroring the present condition while still pointing forward to the future.

“Gūtīrī ūtukū ūtakīa/ there is no night that does not give way to daylight” (3). Matigari uses this proverb immediately after emerging out of the forest, when he recalls the difficult past of the liberation struggle. The proverb, therefore, unites the past and the present, the past agony giving way to the joyful present. Symbolically also, the past is metaphorised as a dark night and the dawn of independence as the light of day. The two still have meaning in the present, as Matigari is soon to realise both from the State radio and what he is to encounter. Matigari’s later realisation can be approached from Gadhi’s (1998: 5) perspective when she points to the ambivalent nature of the postcolonial society, which after independence, is “marked by the range of ambivalent cultural moods and formations which accompany periods of transition and translation. It is, in the first place, a celebrated moment of arrival – charged with the rhetoric of independence.” The jubilant mood of positive expectation and hopes for renewed existence buoys Matigari as he lays down his weapons, but he later realises this as a mistake and a misplaced celebration echoing Fanon’s (1963, 163) conviction that the “magnificent song that had made the people rise against their oppressors, stops short, falters and dies away on the day that independence is proclaimed.”

The proverb “there is no night that does not give way to daylight” can be invoked by Guthera, the factory workers and the street children – who go through all manner of problems in their search for their daily bread. This is true especially on the arrival of Matigari, whose presence becomes a symbol of hope to all those he comes into contact with. Indeed, the proverb in a way projects a future, and a time when the desolate state in the postcolony will give way to the light of freedom and prosperity. When Matigari reminisces about the bitter past he consoles himself that: “Gutiri kiega kiumaga heega/ good things do not come easily” (10).

“Guoya mūnene ūtūūragia ūkīa būrūri/ great fear keeps the nation poor” (28). The word “family” has been replaced with the word “nation”. This is appropriate because Ngugi has the national audience in mind; they are the people who are watching in laughter as the two police men threaten Guthera with the police dog. In a courageous feat Matigari

confronts them and reasons “Mũndũ ni wakĩ aangĩkorwo ndangĩhota kũgitĩra ciana ciake / what use is one if he cannot protect his children?” (27). He therefore orders them to leave her alone and rebukes the onlookers and castigates them for their fear: “Kai guoya wamũingĩrire toombo na mahĩĩndĩ? Guoya mũingĩ nĩ gikuũ kĩa muoyo/ Why have you allowed fear in your brains and bone marrow? Great fear is death of the soul?” (28). The proverb in this case serves to warn the people about the dangers of fear. To develop or progress humanity must shun fear. This is more important to the Third World peoples, who are dogged by myriad problems, ranging from corrupt leaders to compromised police forces.

Speaking about the appropriateness of proverbs in literary discourse, Abrahams and Babcock (1977: 416) opine that:

Oral proverb usage usually involves an attempt by the speaker to “name” and suggest an attitude towards a recurrent social situation and a negotiation between participants in which the productive competence, of the proverb speaker is an important factor in judging its appropriateness. Applicability and appropriateness of proverb use also involves such factors as who is speaking to whom, in front of whom else, in what place, at what stage of interaction, and so forth.

That people can look on permissively as one of their own is brutalised by only two police men illustrates the appropriateness of the choice of the proverb. Matigari also uses the above proverb (about the need of banishing fear) in explaining the reasons which led to the struggle for independence. The masses during the struggle for freedom had to dispense with fear for them to face the colonisers in the armed combat even with their relatively inferior weapons. The oppression and exploitation that the masses were going through gave them much-needed impetus to undertake the struggle. This is what he tells Gũthera:

Akĩhe Gũthera rũgano rwa ũrĩa oinire gĩthaka; ũrĩa arimire na akĩhanda; ũrĩa acookire agĩaka nyũmba. Na hĩĩndĩ ĩyo yothe Kabuurũ Williams aikĩtie mooko

mũhuko, ahuhage mirũri kana rĩngĩ oorotage haaha na harĩa. No nyũmba yaarĩika Kabuurũ Williams akĩmĩhĩmbiria. Igaanda taguo. Matigari agaciarithia, Kabuurũ akagaya maciaro Mũrimĩ agũuage thĩ nĩ ngaragu. Mwaki akomage nja. Mũtuminguo athiige njaga. Ndereba ithiige na magũrũ. Kwahoteka atia uguo. (34)

He told Guthera how he gathered firewood; how he tilled the land, planted crops; how he built the house. At all this time Kabuuru Williams's hands were in his pockets, the only thing he did was whistle and at times point at various directions. But when the house was complete he made it his own. He did the same with the factories, Matigari made the profit but Kabuuru took it all. The farmer collapses because of hunger, the builder sleeps outside, and the tailor walks about naked. Why should these be so?

For the above reasons the patriots started agitating for freedom, while taking refuge in the wisdom of the proverb that great fear entrenches poverty in the society and the nation at large.

This proverb is tied with two others which are used to show that in the society people live in fear of detention, jail or assassination. In the jail scene even the murderer, who should have nothing to fear because he is facing a murder charge and is already in jail, warns Matigari about the dangers of speaking openly: “Meetumi maguunirwo ni gwĩtuma. Reke naaniĩ ngwĩre amu mũthamaki ũteerwo ũndũ ti mũthamaki. Mũtitũ ũriĩ ngoro rĩ, ndunagwo ngũ ũgatherio o gũthera/ The quiet were saved because of their silence. Let me also tell you that a king who is never corrected is no king at all. The forest of the heart is not cleared of all its firewood” (56). Matigari finds a country of silenced people. Spies, both self-made and under the government payroll criss-cross the country looking for known and unknown enemies of the state. The people are therefore afraid of saying anything for fear of being imprisoned; silence has become the best weapon for survival. The proverbs underscore the kind of suppression that Matigari finds in his society when he comes back, a complete negation of his expectation. He is soon to



find out that his house has new occupants, not the colonisers this time but the children of the colonial collaborators and who are also at the helm of the country's leadership.

In his confrontation with the policemen, Matigari invokes another proverb: “Kĩrĩ ngoro gitihootanaga/ A word hidden in the heart can never help you win an argument” (27). This is when he realises that unless he confronts the two, Guthera will always be on their mercy and by extension the whole citizenry. The proverb emphasises the need to speak out even at the threat of death because your courage may help save a grave situation. This proverb can be used in other instances like during a court case where one is urged to reveal all he/she knows if they are to win the case at all. Another instance would be while urging young men not to shy away when approaching a woman because this may be what the woman was waiting for in the first place.

Matigari's action and words at this crucial moment engender hope and a vision of a better and a freer society. The people are encouraged and their fear-filled hearts uplifted with hope that the present state will soon end: “Ngai witũ, githĩ na ma guoya nĩ ũgathira bũrũriinĩ andũ matigage gũthiĩ mainamĩtie maitho kana gũthiĩ makĩaragia na miheehu bũrũriinĩ wao/ My God, it is true that fear will cease to be in this country, so that people can once more walk with their heads held high instead of walking with bowed heads and speaking in whispers in their own country” (69). Matigari's arrival therefore heralds a new dawn, and people find solace in the prophetic words of the ancient proverb that “Gũtirĩ mũciĩ wĩ kahii ũtakarigwo mũtwe/ a family that has a boy child will one day slaughter a goat” (65).

In the past the Gikuyu young men used to raid cattle from the neighbouring communities predominated by the Maasai. Riches in the past were counted in terms of the number of cattle one had, and one of the ways these animals were acquired was through organising raids. They were also the means through which property was bought; to marry, young men had to have them, as they had to be given to the bride's family in form of dowry. Young men from poor homes were, therefore, disadvantaged and had to organise for cattle raids. It is from this background that the above proverb arose. In the contemporary society, and in the absence of cattle raids, the proverb is used to internalise hope among

the families of the poor, that as long as they have boys there is a chance that their economic condition will improve. Education is one of the ways that the poor use in order to improve their livelihood. This is what Matigari is referring to when he is talking to Juma Mbooi. The masses had organised a fundraising to take him abroad for further studies but he later betrays them by joining the camp of the former oppressors:

Wee nĩ we kahii karĩa twatũmire rūraya? Kahii karĩa twahothanirie wa teeni wa ndururu,tukĩinaga gaaka ni gaitũ ti karia keene twarumagĩrwo. Kahii karĩa twainagĩra aĩ gũtirĩ ñĩ Kahii itakarigwo mũtwe amu gaaka nĩ gagacooka gatherie itũũra riiĩtũ, gatuonie njĩra ya kuuma ũkoombo-inĩ? Kahii karĩa tuoimagaririe aĩ nĩ ita ria gĩthoomo gathiĩ, tũkiugaga mwana ti wa mũndũ ũmwe, aĩ mwana ni ithaga rĩa rũrĩrĩ. (42-43)

Are you the boy we sent abroad? The boy we educated through fundraising, while singing in jubilation that this is our own child. The boy for whom we sang that *a family with a son must one day slaughter a goat*, reasoning that this one will come back to enlighten our society and show us a path out of colonial oppression. The boy we took to the airport because he was going to an educational war, believing that a child belongs to the community, that it is the pride of the nation.

If in the earlier section the above italicized proverb served to edify hope, in the quoted section it is used to bemoan the loss of the same hope. It pinpoints the people's expectation of their educated leaders, the belief in the ideals of traditional Africa's sense of communalism where children belonged to the whole community. But the elites have forgotten their solemn promise to their own people and have turned against them. Subtly, the above is a critic of postcolonial leadership and a question of their relevance in the development of their particular societies. In it Ngugi seems to be furthering his argument in *Caitani Mutharaba –ini*, where the elites of the Third World oppress their people on behalf of their neocolonial masters “as watchdogs of multinational interests”(Simatei, 2001: 62). In Fanonist terms the the national middle class fail to take advantage of its intellectual capability in furthering the progress of its people but choose to remain

subservient to the former colonisers:

In an under-developed country an authentic national middle class ought to consider as its bounden duty not to betray the calling fate has marked out for it, and put itself to school with the people: in other words to put at the people's disposal the intellectual and technical capital that it has snatched when going through the colonial universities. But unhappily we shall see that very often the national middle class does not follow this heroic, positive, fruitful and just path; rather, it disappears with its soul set at peace into shocking ways – shocking because anti-national – of a traditional bourgeoisie, of a bourgeoisie which is stupidly, contemptibly, cynically bourgeois. (1963: 20-21)

As the representation of the middle class, Juma Mbooi pays homage more to the colonising culture than he does his own. The proverb's choice therefore undermines its own premise because the return of the educated children proves to be the death of the people's very hope.

In a similar vein Ngugi after the assassination of J.M Kariuki reminiscences on the unchanged condition of the African peasant as he drives from Limuru to Nairobi “passing through the tracts of tea and coffee plantations formerly owned by British settlers but now owned by African individual landlords farming from their offices in the city. I looked at the workers picking tea leaves, huge baskets on their plastic covered bodies and I remembered that they were doing the same in the 1940s” (1981: 84). The owner of these farms could as well be the fictional Juma Mbooi Jnr. The coloniser may have gone but the conditions of Africa's poor remain largely unchanged. The hope inherited in the proverb remains just that: hope.

If Matigari is moaning the betrayal of the people by their leaders, Juma Mbooi Jnr is celebrating individualism by using a proverb to justify his selfish actions “Wa Mũingĩ ũkuagwo na magoto kana na kĩondo kĩrĩmahoro /that what belongs to the masses must be taken very lightly” (43). He completely plays down the role that the masses had in his

education (which according to the proverb should not be taken seriously) and tells Matigari to produce the evidence showing how much they spent on him so that he can pay back the money. He also proceeds to explain to Matigari the importance of individualism as opposed to Africa's communalism:

Thikĩrĩria mũthee ũyũ ngwĩre. [B]ũrũri ũyũ witũ ũtũragandumainĩ ni ũndũ wa andũ aitũ kũrigwo ni bata wa *individual*, bata wa mũndũ kĩumbe haandũ ha masses, mũingĩ. Athũũngũ mathiite na mbere nĩ ũndũ wa kũmenya na kũmenyerera kiugo kũu na kwoguo magatũũgĩria mũno *freedom of the individual*, ũguo nĩ kuuga wĩyaathi wao. Mũndũ binafsi kũrora haake. [N]o inyui andũ airũ? Ni gũthĩ mũgucaniitie ta aya oohanie na nyororo cia nyũmba, mbarĩ, mũhĩrĩga, rũũriri, bũrũri, mũingĩ . (43)

Listen old man. Our country remains in the darkness because our people are yet to understand the meaning of individualism, the importance of the individual person instead of the masses. The Whites have progressed because of knowing and protecting the individual, to them there is nothing more important than the freedom of the individual. Everyone taking care of himself. But for you Black people, you hold on to one another like people who have been chained to families, clan, lineage, communities, nation and masses.

Education instead of fostering pride in one's culture serves to estrange the elites of Africa away from their time tested traditions. Their choice of oral tradition is only when it serves to justify their exploitative practices. This is a pointer to the fact that oral traditional knowledge can also be used in justifying tyranny.

It is for the above reason that workers from ANGLO-AMERIKA LEATHER AND PLASTIC WORKS(63) in which Juma Mbooi is a director are agitating for better working conditions and salary. According to the workers, his era as one of the directors of the company is one of the most oppressive. They have therefore planned to go on a strike and have taken courage from the proverb: ‘‘Ni twarega gutuika nyungu iria irugaga

na ndirie/ We have refused to be like the pot that cooks but does not eat” (53). Like the pot, the workers mint profit for the company but get only a miserly pay for their sweat. The profit of their hands does not benefit them as the one of the workers confesses in jail, that he had all along refused to take part in anything that could jeopardise his employment only to realise that he is about to go for retirement and was still very poor. He explains his patience using a proverb “Munyaka wi mbere ya kahiinga/ luck lies ahead of a small bush/thicket (52). The proverb used by hunters in the belief that in the bush ahead lies the game they are looking for. This is why a hunting expedition would take many days. Unlike the hunter who will come back with the game even after many days, the workers as exemplified by the jailed old man, have nothing to show for their sweat even after many years of labour.

The company’s treatment of the workers is a reflection of what is happening in the whole country. In tandem with this, Matigari uses the proverb “ūtamerithĩtie ndatigaga kūhaanda/ One whose seeds refuse to germinate does not stop planting” (78). In other words, the masses of the third world must continue agitating for a better and meaningful existence. This is for as long as what they fought for remains in the hands of only a handful:

No o na ndanooga atĩa, ndigaatiga gũkinyira ma ciakwa na kĩhoto nĩ rĩ: ndahoota atĩa gwĩtikĩria Mbooi, mbarĩ ya-kuunda-ngũtũme, marĩ na Kabuurũ- mbarĩ-ya karĩanĩme mahĩmbĩrie mũciĩ ndaakire na maya, marigie na mũciĩ ndaitiire thakame? ũtoonga wakwa ũtũũre mookoinĩ ma mbarĩ ya nyakeeru karĩanĩme mbarĩ ya nyakairu kuunda-ngũtũme. (79-80)

However tired I will be, I will never stop agitating for truth and justice. For how can I let the black collaborators and their colonial masters take the home I built with my own hands and even for which my blood was shed? Why should I let the white oppressors and their black supporters remain with my riches forever?

The seeds for which the blood of the patriots was shed have not germinated; the people

must go back to the forest and once more clear the ground for planting. They must do this again and again until these seeds grow to maturity. This is only possible if we stop, according to Matigari, heaping praises on those who oppress us and confront them without fear. For, as the old adage goes, “Ngoma njii ñaanagio ñĩ gũthĩnjĩrwo/ A thieving spirit is entertained by sacrifice” (82). In Mateke and Mapara’s (2009: 209) understanding, the use of a particular proverb assumes that both the speaker and the hearer share some basic understanding on past or present knowledge and experience, which aids in the comprehension of the given proverb.

The proverb requires that the receiver and the sender share the same epistemic frame within which the proverb gets its full meaning and application. The proverbs address human experiences with yet another set of experiences drawn from the past; there is an assumed continuity between the past and the present in proverbs. The collective experience of the past continue to inspire and give guidance to the present, and as the sender of the proverb is appealing to tradition, there is a sense in which the sender reminds the receiver that tradition continues to be vibrant in the present as something that has stood the test of time, hence the special force and weight of the proverb.

In Matigari’s case, most of the proverbs he uses draw from his past experience and the present. When he says that a thieving spirit is entertained by sacrifice, he is drawing from his refusal to entertain Settler Williams and his black assistants, which saw him and others take part in the war of independence. In the same way, he is using the proverb to encourage the masses to, like him, protest and not entertain an oppressive regime. The masses can draw experience from the past (alluded in the proverb) and use it in correcting their present predicament.

The reality of the postcolonial condition is one that befuddles and perplexes Matigari, especially after his reminiscences about the struggle for freedom. The fear that seems to have enveloped the whole society is in stark contrast to the heroic past. In his search for truth and justice, he is appalled at his realisation that even the champions of justice have

given up due to the violence meted on them by the government. The university students and their teachers have given up protest in order to save their lives. This is what the teacher tells Matigari: “Rĩu ni kĩhũ ngwatĩro/ The firebrand is burning on the handle” (82). The proverb points to the prevailing oppressive reality that has transformed the former fighters into silent observers: pressed from every side, under the threat of death, detention and imprisonment, silence becomes the best option. Like the thief had said in the prison, the teacher realises that “meetumi magunirwo nĩ gwĩtuma/ the quiet were saved by silence” (82). The cruel clamp down on peaceful protesters has brought the masses into the proverbial realisation “Nyonĩ ĩrĩ kũhũma gũtirĩ mũtĩ ĩtoomba/ A tired bird perches on anything it comes across” (85).

In the meeting presided over by the Minister for Truth and Justice, the show of might is preeminent as the masses are turned into silent onlookers. Indeed there is truth in the Minister’s invocation of the proverb: “Ciunagwo rũkomo kĩmenyi akamenya/ We speak in proverbs for the wise to unravel” (92). The proverb was used in the past to show that proverbs were a preserve of the wise but in the Minister’s case; the masses, if they were wise, would know without being told the government’s expectations of them. This is true both in deeds and words as the Minister spells out in broad daylight the measures the government is taking to curb strikes and students’ protests. The people’s sense of docility can be explained using Althusser’s argument about subject formation where the governments by use of ideological state apparatuses turn citizens into subjects. Althusser explains that “ideology interpellates individuals as subjects” (1989: 244). Surrounded by a heavily armed police force, the masses look on in muffled silence. When a chance to ask questions is given, those who ask are immediately handcuffed. Clearly, the police force, one of the ideological state apparatus, is employed to keep the masses quiet and submissive. In Simatei’s (2001: 15) words, “the nation state is portrayed as an organ that is not only alien to the people, but one which also demonstrates this alienness through coerced allegiance.”

Matigari, after getting a chance to speak, employs a narrative proverb to explain the relationship between the rulers and the ruled. Narrative proverbs, according to Obiechina

(1993:124), are “embedded stories which perform organic and structural functions of proverbs in oral speech and in creative literature.” These “stories function as proverbs in conversation and oral discourse in African traditional societies and are so readily assimilated within an extended written narrative form like the novel which explores life in terms of its functional and ethical values” (126).

The first narrative proverb alludes to the story about the ogre and the blacksmith’s wife. It is used in the jail scene when Matigari gives food to his fellow prisoners. It is brought about by the thief’s selfish behavior, which makes others almost vomit thereby leaving all the food to him. This makes one of his fellow prisoners ask him: “Kai wee arĩ irimũ rĩrĩa rĩahiũhagĩria mũciarĩ? [K]ana ũrĩ ũmwe wa maya marahiuhĩria bũrũri ũyũ?/ Are you the ogre which was helping the blacksmith’s wife after she had given birth. Or are you like the ones which are serving this nation”? (49). In spite of recalling a past oral story, this narrative proverb likens the nature of the present crop of neocolonial leaders to the ogre alluded to in the story. In the narrative, the ogre pretends to be helping the mother but in essence it is only serving its own selfish needs, to the detriment of the mother. In a similar manner, the leaders in postcolonial Africa deceptively proclaim their call to serve their people but in actual sense they are serving their own needs. As the state of the masses deteriorate, the leaders’ progress to heights of material prosperity, as espoused by Juma Mbooi’s present status both as a large property owner and a director of many companies.

The same narrative is invoked again in foregrounding the sense of renewed hope after Matigari’s confrontation with the two policemen. In the narrative the climax comes after the return of the blacksmith; the mother’s hope is revived now that the days of the oppressive ogre are numbered. It comes to pass when the ogre is killed by the blacksmith, giving the woman a chance to enjoy once more the freedom of her home. When people hear of Matigari’s courageous feat, they invoke the hopeful ending of the narrative: “Anga arĩa mathiire ũturi ni magacoka! / Those that went to the smithery have come back” (53). Indeed the oppressive leaders have a course to be very, very afraid as the pay back time nears.



In this case, the use of an embedded story is not an intrusion but the result of careful observation of the relationship that exists between the masses of the postcolony and their leaders. The narrative proverb that is later employed by Matigari is also organically entwined with the events happening in the novel. In it he elucidates the reason why the masses are silent and unable to raise their voices. He borrows his answer from a narrative proverb about the leopard and the hare. The leopard is wondering why the hare rejects his invitation for a visitation all the time. The narrative is narrated thus:

Kwīgita ti guoya. Ngarī yooriirie wakarūbūkū atīrī: I nī kīi wathiomō ūregaga gūūka kūūnjerera gwakwa mūciī? Wakarūbūkū agicookia atīrī: ndanoona andū aingī makīngīra gwaku no ndirī ndoona o na ūmwe akiumīra. (100)

The leopard asked the hare one day: My friend, why is it that you refuse to visit my home even when I have invited you. The hare replied: I have seen many enter your house but I have never seen any one of them come out.

Like the leopard, the government detains all those who question its actions. This is better exemplified by the arrest of both Ngaruro and Matigari in the Minister's meeting even though they had been allowed to ask questions. Matigari, in Ndigirigi's (2007:13) views, shows that "folklore can serve as a weapon of agitation."

Matigari, in the above case, can be equated to Gayatri Spivak's 'the speaking subaltern,' who stands on an elevated ground both as an actual participant in the struggle for emancipation and as one who leads the other oppressed classes in challenging the owners of capital. Here, multinational companies invest their capital in the Third World and partner with indigenous capitalists who ensure cheap labour for the factories and industries (Spivak, 1988: 83). The workers, who form the bulk of subaltern classes, in this arrangement, remain in subordinated position through labour exploitation: a position that the state is bent on maintaining. Hence, the use of the narrative proverb as an

empowering strategy and an attempt to keep the oppressed vigilant and ready to resist the skewed labour relations.

The actions that take place in the meeting lay the ground for what is to happen later in the text. The actions of the police enrage the masses and serve to awaken their consciousness. The awakening is summarised by Matigari as resulting from the force that the police force has employed: “Mũingatwo na ciugo ndacookaga, no mũingatwo na njũgũma nĩ acookaga/ one who is justly evicted does not come back but one who is evicted by force comes back” (124). The government’s highhandedness and cruelty precipitates the uprising, authenticating the truth inhered in the quoted proverb. This proverb is tied to the one Matigari has been using: “Kĩhooto kiunaga ũta mũgeete/ Justice breaks a tightened bow”, which he later remodifies after his experience both in prison and in the meeting to: “Kihooto kiumaga uta mugeete/ Justice comes from a tightened bow” (125).

Another proverb that Matigari uses to indicate the need for armed resistance occurs when Guthera raises the issue of storing something in times of plenty for a rainy day. Matigari’s rejoinder is that the condition of the Third World poor is so desperate that what they store for the future ends up benefitting the ruling elite. Unless the oppressed masses wake up to the realisation that the fruits of their labour only benefit the rich then their pathetic conditions of life will always be a nightmare:

No uru nĩ ati bũũthi wa mooko maingi urigagia na nyakarĩanĩme. Makeendia irio cia mũingĩ makaiga mũthithũ wa mbeeca ciao. Wa kĩrimũ wiritimagia na mũũgi (127) /What is worse is that the sweat of many ends up in the hands of very few. They sell what has been produced by the masses and store them in form of money in banks. The fools walking stake benefits the wise.

Matigari’s determination to live peacefully after independence is thereby violated, and he has to go back and unearth his buried weapons, so that justice can again be restored in the land. In the end Matigari’s sojourn concretises a vision and a promise of a better society free from fear and oppressive silence. It also echoes Gikandi’s (1991: 162) summation( as noted earlier in the chapter) of the masses’ disillusionment with the neo-colonial

leadership and their hope for second liberation:

By 1960s, when there was a lot of discontent with the politics of neocolonialism, popular notions of independence were also being transformed: from being the apotheosis of national consciousness, or – as the legends would have it – the fulfillment of Waiyaki’s prophecy, independence was now represented as an incomplete project, a project awaiting a future time when the “Matigaris” would return from the forest to reverse the betrayal of independence.

Matigari’s return gives the people a new hope for a better tomorrow away from the present neocolonial oppression. When he comes from the forest he dreams of a new house, a new paradise on earth for him and all his wives and children (15). This is the same revelation that comes back at the end of the text as Matigari and Guthera are washed down the flooded river, their blood trickling into the ground, foregrounding their final reunion with the earth, at whose behest they and their fellow patriots have paid the ultimate prize. The rain that falls at the end of the text is also symbolic of that vision, the vision of a better world: “Na o hĩndĩ ĩyo matu makĩambĩrĩria kũruruma, gũkĩgĩa heni nyiingĩ, mbura ĩgitaata, ĩgitaata, rĩrĩ rĩingĩ ikĩambĩrĩria kuura/ The rain clouds started to gather accompanied by lightning and thunderstorms, raindrops started falling one after another, suddenly the rain came down in torrents” (155).

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

The chapter set out to analyse the use of proverbs in *Matigari ma Njiruungi* especially those which are used in edifying resistance and hope. The resultant conclusion is that proverbs’ ability to be applied in many situations makes them a versatile genre: one which can be used to appropriate varied experiences and situations. We have also seen that the novel employs most of these proverbs to edify notions of resistance and confront an oppressive system. This also explains, in Vambe’s (2004: 15) terms “orality’s inherent elasticity, its capability to be stretched in different directions, to be framed, to capture and represent different meanings, at the same time, suggesting that oral forms can be used and even manipulated to author alternative narratives of

resistance.’’

The chapter has also briefly referred to the novel as Ngugi’s attempt at mythmaking and has noted that myths offer hope through helping the people imagine for themselves an existence that is better and more meaningful. They have used them to internalise the values of sacrifice, and unity of purpose, virtues will help the people for a united force which will be instrumental in confronting things and forces which oppress them. Myths also help the society draw from the past models (historical or imagined) in addressing present concerns. In Ngugi’s novel orality comes out as an alternative discourse, which is frowned upon by those in power, but which resonates well with the majority of the populace, and which indeed, is used by the latter in fostering resistance and change.

The next chapter continues to interrogate forms of resistance as inherited in Ngugi’s *Murogi wa Kagogo*, but it centers on the use of myth and fantasy. It fronts an argument that Ngugi takes recourse to myth and magic in his attempt at revealing the cruelty and madness of a dictatorial and despotic ruling class in postcolonial Africa.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE MYTHIC AND FANTASTIC: REPRESENTATION IN NGUGI'S *MUROGI WA KAGOGO*

The past should be preserved in a living, dynamic form not by going back to it, but by recreating it into new and lovelier forms. (Dhlomo, in Yao-Kun Liu, 60)

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to further Lewis Nkosi's (1995: 197), argument regarding Ngugi's gradual relinquishing of realistic representation for the world of fairy tale and daydream. It will examine how magic and fantasy (treated as offshoots of myth) are employed in *Murogi* as a means of resisting tyranny, and also the way that the novel conflates the neocolonial dilemma by use of existing myths.

The confluence between magical realism and myth leans heavily upon the latter, with the former drawing heavily from the precepts of mythology. The two part ways because of the latter's union with realism. Hume (1984: 20) sees magic realism as being a product of "two traditional impulses at the heart of literature" (Benito et al: 2009: 38). He sees mimesis and fantasy as the key components of magic realism and explains:

Mimesis, felt as the desire to imitate, to describe events, people, situations and objects with which such verisimilitude that others can share your experience; and *fantasy*, the desire to change givens and alter reality – out of boredom, play, vision, longing for something lacking, or need for metaphoric images that will bypass the audience's verbal defenses.

The fantastic notion in magical realism is in essence an embodiment of myth; it is a quality found predominantly in myths across all cultures. In his definition of myth, Okpewho (1983: 69) explicates that "myth ... is simply that quality of fancy which informs the creative or configurative powers of the human mind in varying degrees of intensity. In that sense we are free to call any narrative of oral tradition a myth, so long as it gives due emphasis to fanciful play." For Hume the recourse to fantasy is a desire to

change givens and alter reality; to Okpewho (262) ‘fantasy is essentially a flight from the constraints of time-bound, objective reality in the search for something more fulfilling or reassuring.’” The two views merge especially because they both seek for explanation and answers away from existing reality. Both suppositions also point to the playful notion that is ensconced both in myth and magic realism.

Magical realism, as a later development, seems therefore to have borrowed considerably from mythology. *The Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Culture* defines magical realism as follows:

Fiction that does not distinguish between realistic and non-realistic events, fiction in which the supernatural, the mythical, or implausible are assimilated to the cognitive structure of reality without a perceptive break in the narrator’s or character’s consciousness. (Standish, 1995: 156-57)

What is true of magical realism, and mostly in its overuse of supernatural motifs, is in reality true of all myths. If myths attempt to explain notions which are outside human understanding, magic realism attempts to bring to the fore the absurdities found in human nature and real lives. Benito et al, (2009: 44) observe that “magical realism assumes the indivisible unity of reality and rejects the artificial distinction between what is empirically verifiable and what is not. At the same time, it proposes the existence of another reality that supplements the one we see.” This statement is true of all myths and mostly so because the issues they raise defeat any logical explanation and cannot be scientifically proven.

Kamiti’s (one of the protagonists in *Murogi wa Kagogo*) ability to leave his body and soar in the air freely defeats any logical explanation. Inhered in Kamiti’s act is his own painful experience, his desire to escape his present suffering. History, and especially biblical history, is replete with exploits of characters who had the ability of flying but never to return. Christians the world over do not question the veracity of these narratives; they are believed to have been true occurrences. Spindler, (as qtd by Benito et al, (2009:

56), explains that in magical realism “the supernatural is presented in a matter-of fact way as if it did not contradict reason.” The meeting point between these two concepts is necessitated by the ambivalent nature of the latter: on one hand, magic realism is based on the rational view and on the other acceptance of the supernatural as the commonplace reality. The over-bearing presence of the supernatural is a thing that foregrounds the importance of myth to the magic realists. The fusion between myth and fantasy is the window through which they approach reality.

Wole Ogundele (2002:125) explains the impact that the marvelous or fantastic realism has brought to the postcolonial African novel. He traces this influence to the cultural hybridity and African oral mythic-narratives and the displacement of history by myth. This is what has given rise to magical realism in the new novels. The rise can be attributed to the attempts by African writers at constructing an idiom of postcolonial resistance. Postcolonial societies saw the rise of an oppressive ruling class solely bent on its own enrichment and preservation; creative writers were therefore faced with a challenge of grappling with this new phenomenon after independence. They, therefore, revised existing oral texts as a way of mirroring the present reality.

The birth of magical realism as a literary movement was given impetus by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, who had borrowed it from the artists of the 1920's, led by Franz Roh. Gabriel Garcia Marquez employs magical realism in depicting the lives of the inhabitants of the town of Macondo in his first novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The novel is littered with surreal and fantastic scenes, like the flying carpet and the trickle of Joseph Arcadio's blood after he is shot dead. The infusion of the bizarre happenings in the text is so real that the Macondians' come to accept them as an integral part of their lives. In the *Autumn of the Patriarch*, Marquez presents the circus of a ruling class gone mad with the quest for political invincibility, along with a drugged populace that has succumbed to the cruelty of a despotic regime.

In the African context this mode of writing was embraced especially by West African writers, among them Ben Okri. As a mode of writing, magic realism is characterized by

mingling and juxtaposition of the realistic and the fantastic, the bizarre and skillful time shifts, and miscellaneous use of dreams, myths and fairy stories, and expressionistic and even surrealistic description. Postcolonial societies, characterized by unjust systems of leadership, tend to seize on some of the tenets of magic realism to express a genuinely Third World consciousness. These writers sought for new ways of representing the realities of the postcolonial societies.

The chaotic story of Africa's post-independence states is captured vividly in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*. Okri's narrative is focalized through Azro, a child narrator, and Abiku (a spiritual child), who restlessly oscillates between the human and spiritual realms but whose love for his mother makes him abandon the promise of returning to the spiritual world. It is through Azro's vision that the hybrid being (half human and half spirit) who frequent Madam Koto's bar are revealed to us. This is symbolic of how far the leaders are willing to go in order to get rich, including using witchcraft and magic, if only to maintain their hold on the positions of power in their various societies. Ben Okri's road is symbolic of the nation's path after independence and the betrayal of the people's hopes and dreams of prosperity. Immediately after freedom sets in, the road becomes famished, beset by hunger and poverty. The road has negated the proverbial hyena, which despite its greed never eats its own children, but this road has, unlike the greedy hyena, turned against its own.

The mythical aura that surrounds African presidents is also clearly illustrated by Ngugi in his novel *Murogi wa Kagogo*. The stature of Mwathani, the president of Aburiria, rises to that of a god. In fact, he is referred to as "Mtukufu," which means "holy" in Kiswahili. Mwathani's portrayal reads like that of the General in Marquez's *Autumn of the Patriarch*. These two characters are given god-like statuses and elicit awe and great respect from their subjects. Patricio Aragonés is said to have been born of a virgin; the school texts record of the president's mother's "miracle of having conceived him without recourse to any male and of having received in a dream the hermetical keys to messianic destiny" (39). The people of Aburiria believe in the mythical configuration that surrounds the president and in the magical acts of Murogi wa Kagogo, even though the information



about them is spun through rumours. In depicting these two characters, Ngugi heavily borrows from African oral-mythic tradition.

Ngugi in *Murogi* embraces the art of magical realism to interrogate Mwathani's despotic rule. The name Aburiria can be loosely translated to mean "to disappear," a prophetic desire by the writer of a time when dictatorship and oppressive leadership will completely disappear, and when the people of Africa and the world will finally dispense with all the forces of repression, to be replaced by meaningful freedom and goodwill. The text treats a litany of themes, prominent among them being the hold that dictatorship has had on the African continent. It is also through Kamiti, the main character, which Ngugi expounds on the place that the traditional beliefs systems should occupy in the core of African people's values. Poverty, gender discrimination, inequality, unemployment, and corruption are interrogated, especially through Kamiti and Nyawira, the two protagonists.

Magical realism in Ngugi's text is not as entrenched as that of Marquez and Okri. It is only utilized in instances where the writer wants to go beneath the surface of the truth and reveal to us the workings of the dictatorial ruling class which masquerades as Omni-benevolent to the people. The postcolonial elite is sketched as a hybrid being, one caught in the middle of African and Western values. Mwathani's two faithful ministers are examples of Africa's cultural hybrids. Markus Machokali and Silver Sikokuu would on one hand want to show the people their respect for the traditional lore but their taste for Western comfort and language unmasks their preference for the latter. Their education is a disgrace because they use it not to help their people but only themselves. The two ministers are a representation of the 1980s political landscape that characterized Kenya in the 1980s, when ministers, members of parliament, and other leaders would do anything to win the president's confidence. Most politicians educated or not, benefited from over praising the president and betraying each other to him. Mwathani's stature towers over everything in the text; his hold over everyone and everything in the text reads like Marquez's Patricio Aragonés. He is the only subject in the nation's newspapers, television and radio. He is the teacher number one, the doctor number one, and agriculturist number one, among everything else. Through him Ngugi explores the myth

of African despots and the roles they have played in stifling the continent's growth.

## **5.2 Mwathani: The Personification of Evil through Myth**

Before venturing into discussing how Mwathani is modelled along an existing Gikuyu myth, it is important to situate him within a political system from which he owes his creation by the author. His characterisation, action and stature fits within an existing political system of dictatorial regimes which were fashionable in Africa after independence, but which had been given a fictional representation in Latin American literature in form of dictator novels. Ndigirigi (2007: 189) looks at Murogi as an allegory of “Moi's Kenya, Amin's Uganda, Bokassa's Central Africa Republic, Mobutu's Zaire, Mugabe's Zimbabwe, Kamuzu Banda's Malawi, Abacha's Nigeria, Saddam's Iraq, Pinochet's Chile, and so on.” Unlike Matigari which is national allegory, *Murogi* according to McLaren (2008: 151) extends its limit “to that of a continental or global,” allegory. All the mentioned leaders were dictators and the masses of their country, just like the one in the fictional Aburiria, suffered from their tyrannical leadership.

Colson (2011: 138) in his bid to define the dictator novels quotes Carlos Pacheco who has given some of the parameters we can use in arriving at the meaning of these types of novels, he advises us to “consider as part of the system only those works of narrative prose whose principle theme is the figure of the dictator (even if he is not necessarily the protagonist) or the dictatorial regime.” Boyers (2005: 179) on his part says that the “the dictator in these novels is a composite portrait modelled on various originals, with the result that the character is larger than life, so awesome in the range of his brutalities that he is less a person than he is a force of nature.” This would explain Ndigirigi's explanation of Mwathani as an allegorical portrayal of the world's renowned dictators. It is because of the author's attempt to bring out the composite nature of the Aburirian dictator that he takes recourse to magic realism both as formulated by the Latin America novelists but more importantly as projected in his Gikuyu mythical lore.

The creation of Mwathani as a mythical/surrealistic figure is a culmination of the process that Ngugi began in *Caitani Mutharaba- ini* and extended in *Matigari ma Njiruungi*. Suffice it to say that it was the conditions and realities of his society that made him abandon the realistic modes of presentation in favour magic and fantasy. Cooper (1998:

15-16) traces the birth of magical realism as a result of the Third World confrontation with Western modernity but not just for the love of fantasy and surrealism:

At the heart of the emergence of magical realism in the Third World is the fact that the countries encountered Western capitalism, technology and education haphazardly. Communication - road and rail - were set up where raw materials required transportation; elsewhere areas remained isolated and only indirectly transformed by economies. Cities grew wildly from rural origins, and families were divided between members who were Western educated and those remained inserted in pre-colonial economies and ways of seeing the world, with any number of positions in between extremes. This social patchwork, dizzying in its cacophony of design, is the cloth from which the fictional magical carpet is cut, mapping not the limitless vistas of fantasy, but rather the new historical realities of those patchwork societies.

Ilmorog, the fictional city in *Caitani* is one such society. The characters taking part in thieves and robbers competition are rooted in the realities of modern postcolonial societies where business owners and investors compete for profit using any means imaginable. The city is a dichotomy of posh neighbourhoods juxtaposed with slums: Golden Heights (a residential area for the rich) and New Jerusalem/ Jerusha (where the poor live). It is the relationship between the two classes that the author seeks to explain by taking recourse to magical realism; it is a relationship that borders on the unreal. The first class, as pointed out in chapter three, are metaphorised as ogres of the modern age. The author in the novel exploits existing mythology to demonstrate, a capitalistic system that borders on monstrosity especially in its dealing with the masses. Ngugi uses indigenous beliefs in his attempt at making the people understand or rather come into terms with an alien postcolonial order: what Jameson (1986: 302) says is the “kind of narrative raw material derived essentially from the peasants society, drawing in sophisticated ways on the world of the village or even tribal myth.”

*Matigari* is also given a similar trajectory, where children whose parents died in the struggle for freedom are now living in grave yards of abandoned vehicles scavenging in garbage sites during the day in search of their daily bread. The conflict in the novel is between the owners of capital and workers, the new reality in postcolonial states. It is these conflict that the lead character in the novel joins after laying down his weapons, in the belief that the struggle is over, only to be confronted by an unjust and repressive system. In an apparent recourse to magical realism and myth Ngugi resurrects Matigari from a distant past before the coming of the colonizer, an affirmation of the role that history plays in the definition of this mode of writing. Matigari, the protagonist, as explained in the previous chapter is a mythological being drawn from the memory of the independence struggle and the people's visions of a better society.

The above is also clearer when *Matigari* is placed within the African oral epic tradition as ably discussed by Balogun (1995: 132), when she explains that:

Matigari, the main character whose name provides the title for the narration, is the epic hero par excellence, a fact made more than evident by his physical, ethical, and moral traits, his relationship with fellow human beings, nature and the supernatural, as well as by the character of his inscrutable destiny. The birth, childhood, and teenage years of Matigari are not presented; he comes into the tale as a man of indeterminate age who has the mysterious capacity to look old, complete with wrinkles, one minute, and young and fresh the next. On several occasions he mystifies his onlookers by visibly changing before their eyes from old age to youthfulness.

The epicism inhered in Matigari's rise is also later reflected in Kamiti, one of the major characters in *Murogi wa Kagogo*. This seamless change from old age to young age and other supernatural occurrences in the text serves to illuminate Ngugi's appeal to magic realism.

Even though Caitani does not fit within the definition of dictator novels, it is easy to see the linkages it has with these types of novels. Clearly the experiences that that characters like Wariinga, Wangari, Muturi and others go through serve to reflect their similarity to

the characters in dictator novels especially on the hands of the police and others who work on behalf of those in power. As for *Matigari ma Njiruungi*, there is visible character continuity between Mugaathe (referred in translated version as Ole Excellence) and Mwathani in *Murogi*. Even though we do not meet personally, news of his exploits are broadcast daily via radio and other forms of communication, his wishes and orders are announced by his ministers. The general state of suppression in the country is a testament of his dictatorial tendencies and practice. But what is not brought out in *Matigari* as far as the dictator figure concerned is perfected in *Murogi* through the character of the Aburirian dictator, Mwathani. His characterisation is an ensemble of traditional mythology, supernatural and open parody of dictators (throughout the world) who have lived before him.

The mysterious happenings that surround Mwathani's presidency seem to have been drawn from the Gikuyu oral narrative about the man whose swollen knee produced three children. A part of the story goes like this: a long, long, time ago in the Gikuyu country, there lived an old man who had been unable to sire children of his own. Many visits to the diviners yielded nothing. But one day, he noticed that his knee was swollen, really swollen. It continued swelling and swelling until he could not hold himself anymore due to the pain emanating from it. And so he went to the medicine man, who incised the knee with a very sharp knife. When the knee was cut open, to the surprise of both the old man and the medicine man, there came out three children. He called one Njiru, the other one Nyamatuathenge and the third one Nyamathiriti. (Mwangi, 1970: 123-127).

The ancients in all societies throughout the world embraced mythology as a way of coming to terms with concepts which defied logical explanation. Creation myths attempt to explain the origin of the universe and humanity at large and in most cases even when they appear irrational these myths are not questioned but are believed to be true accounts. In his erudite study of African myths, Ford (1999: 5) explains the importance of myths as follows:

Mythology is interested in the timeless questions of humanity: What is the relationship of human life to the great mystery of being behind all life? How are

we to understand our relationship to the earth we inhabit and to the cosmos in which we find ourselves? Mythology, then, was traditionally a means of healing self and society by helping people bring the circumstances of their lives into harmony with these larger, more abiding concerns.

Africa and her people have in the last century gone through several traumatic experiences, which have left them bewildered and confused. Slavery and its twin evil colonialism left an indelible mark on the soul of Africa and her people. The era that came after the two evil phases was supposed to herald a new dawn for Africa and the African but, to the chagrin of many, this was never to be. In order to come to terms with this new reality, most African writers sought answers in the wisdom of Africans' traditional mores, and specifically in the oral tradition. In a way, they were, according to Coupe (1997: 204), advocating for the recuperation of the traditional knowledge as the answer to the contemporary world's problems. Or, in what Okpewho (1983: 263) sees as the writer's attempts at grappling with the ugly facts of contemporary African society and politics, they were projecting backwards to a structure of values already defined by a traditional body of fictive lore or else forwards into a more hopeful social order.

It is in this regard that the myths found their way into modern African literature but were reformulated to communicate present concerns. Ford (1999: viii-ix) explains:

Myths help us manage the inevitable passage of our lives, and give us templates for our relationship with the societies in which we live and for the relationship of these societies to the earth we share with all life. When trauma confronts us, individually or collectively, myths are a way of re-establishing harmony in the wake of chaos.

The anarchic story of postcolonial leadership in Africa is at the heart of Ngugi's Gikuyu novel *Murogi wa Kagogo*. In it the writer tries to come to terms with a leadership that is characterised by greed and evil of insurmountable proportions. The answer lies in resurrected mythology, which attempts to go to the roots and explain the nature of this

evil that has diseased Africa's leadership. This fits within the postmodern ideal, in which texts borrow from one another but with an aim of creating new models that can be used to foster change. According to Castle (2007: 146), it is:

A strategy of repetition and appropriation; texts cite each other not with the intent of invoking an authority or showing indebtedness but with the desire to create new expressive connections, new opportunities for enunciation and articulation, new models of cultural productions and social action.

The narrative about the old man whose swollen knee produces three children is appropriated from Gikuyu mythology and is purposely chosen because of the similarity that its events have with Mwathani's strange bodily swelling. The old man is unable to sire children of his own and is therefore destined to spend his old age in loneliness. In Gikuyu traditional mores, children formed a central pillar, especially in the continuation of the family name and lineage. A person who did not have children was therefore not respected and was despised by most members of the society. It is therefore easy to empathise with the old man's predicament. But the swelling of his knee and the subsequent birth of his three daughters aligns him within the paradigm of respected men in the society even though the coming of his children is both unnatural and abnormal. This also certifies the idea that magic as a way of representation has existed in African folktale tradition since time immemorial negating the view that this form of unconventional realism is overly borrowed from Marquez and other Latin American writers.

The narrative also mirrors the existence of evil in the society in the form of ogres, which abduct the old man's three children, reversing his newly earned status. In many ways Ngugi's construction of Mwathani's character seems to have been remodelled along that of the old man in the narrative and that of ogres. His swelling and gigantic inflation of the body later bursts, spewing out a reeking smell, which envelopes the whole country. He also gives birth to Baby D, a fulfilment of Kamiti's prophetic pronouncement to Machokali that "bururi wina ihu. Kiria uriciara gituiuo." (The country is pregnant.

Nobody knows what it will give birth to) (*Mbuku ya Kana na Gatano na Gatandatu*: 49). Mwathani's strange disease can be traced to his sojourn in America, where he had gone to plead with the Global Bank on the need of funding his "Matheca Itu" complex (Touching the Sky), rumoured to be a model of the modern day Tower of Babel. When the messengers' of the bank arrive with news that the Global Bank would not fund his monolithic structure, his anger and disappointment knew no bounds. His body started swelling as if air was being pumped into it. Amazingly he also loses the ability to speak:

Nĩ rĩo o rĩmwe moonire cĩga cia Mwathani ta nda na makai ciambĩrĩria kũimba. O na matekwenda gwĩka ũguo, othe makĩrorana. No ningĩ makĩona ti makai na nda ciki, nĩ mwĩrĩ wothe. ((*Mbuku ya Kana na Gatano na Gatandatu*: 23)

Suddenly, Mwathani's body parts like the stomach and cheeks started swelling involuntarily. All those who had attended the meeting looked at one another in wonderment. They realized that it was not only the stomach and cheeks which were swelling but the whole body.

Modern medical practitioners from the West are unable to diagnose the nature of Mwathani's illness. It is only later, after Murogi wa Kagogo arrives, that Mwathani is able to find his voice. His anger and disappointment at being denied the loan in front of his ministers is what had led to his present status. He rationalizes that had he been a white man they would not have denied him the loan.

Mwathani's inflated body is recreated along the Gikuyu concept of a monster: a being that is neither human nor animal but whose sole existence is to spread woe on a hapless humanity. The monster is the apotheosis of evil in the world. In the novel Mwathani is, in Scott's (2007: 4) words, a "monster and agent of horror." His joy is when his ministers fight each other in competition for his favours, and when they mutilate their bodies in order to become more useful to him. He reasons that "Mũndũ ũkwananga mwĩrĩ wake nĩ ũndũ wakwa ndangĩkorwo akĩigua thithi akĩananga thũ ciakwa" (*Mbuku ya Mbere na Keri*: 15) (Anyone who can mutilate his body for my sake cannot feel pity when



destroying my enemies). After the two ministers undergo surgical operations to enlarge the ears and eyes, their very description fits those of beings from the underworld or the extraterrestrial realm. That Mwathani can be happy about Sikiokuu and Machokali's grotesque appearance helps underscore his evil nature.

Like the invisible man in Ralph Ellison's novel (who undergoes a brain operation to make him conform to what society requires of him (Gregon, 2004: 77), Mwathani's ministers undergo an unusual operation. In this connection, Mwathani desires that all his subjects avail themselves body and mind not for the good of the nation but for his own selfish motives. All the ministers in Mwathani's government fit within the Foucauldian schema, which is a form of subjection common in capitalistic systems where the human body is seen as a space for profit and political manipulation. According to Foucault:

The body is also directly involved in a political field They invest it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. This political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination The body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body. (Foucault, 1977: 25-26)

The ministers are useful instruments in Mwathani's scheme of perpetuating himself in power. They serve to assure his longevity in power by eliminating those who are a threat to his survival. His continued stay in Aburiria's seat of power means that he controls all the means of production in the country and therefore the country's riches are at his disposal. When Machokali ceases to be productive in Mwathani's scheme of things, and the Western countries see him as the most suitable successor to Mwathani, he is eliminated.

When Rakeri, Mwathani's wife, questions him about the rumour mills in the country, especially about his sexual escapades with school girls, he puts her under house arrest.

Everything in the house where Rakeri is kept is choreographed in such a way that it replays the time and hour of Rakeri's blasphemous behaviour. He forgets that the woman he has imprisoned is the mother to his children, and the country's demand that he frees his wife falls on deaf ears. His ministers use their wives to appease him; no woman is too far from his amorous hands. Writing on human beings' propensity to evil, Scott (2007: 205) opines: "The predisposition to animality – where human as a living being is capable of evil by behaving according to what Kant says are vices grafted on savagery, those bestial vices of gluttony, lust and wild lawlessness," can be seen in Mwathani. His later swelling serves to define his final transformation into a monster/animal both in his physical appearance and in his actions.

If in his bodily inflation Mwathani appeals to mythological conceptualization of evil as envisaged in traditional monster narratives, his ability to float freely in the air is an appeal to magic realism. It also appeals to Bakhtin's notion of the grotesque where the body:

Is in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body. [T]his is why the essential role belongs to those parts of the grotesque body in which it outgrows its own self, transgressing its own body, in which it conceives a new, second body: the bowels and the phallus. These two areas play the leading role in the grotesque image, and it is precisely for this reason that they are predominantly subject to positive exaggeration, to hyperbolization; they can even detach themselves from the body and lead an independent life [next to the bowels and the genital organs is the mouth, through which enters the world to be swallowed up. And next is the anus. All these convexities and orifices have a common characteristic; it is within them that the confines between bodies and between the body and world are overcome. (Bakhtin, 1984: 317)

Mwathani's body, in many instances, exemplifies Bakhtin's demarcation of the grotesque in its process of becoming a form that defies human nature and expectation. In this Ngugi is actually exploring the irrationality of leadership in Africa. Mbembe (2001: 102) looks

at it as a characteristic of the postcolonial writers “distinctive style of political improvisation, by a tendency to excess and lack of proportion, as well as by distinctive ways identities are multiplied, transformed, and put into circulation.” The body of Mwathani in its many transformations captures the convolutions of power in the postcolony and actions whose surreality defies belief. This grotesquerie is also closely related to magic, which according to Bowers (2004: 19), refers to “any extraordinary occurrence and particularly to anything spiritual or unaccountable by rational science.” Mwathani cannot come to terms with the Global Bank’s leaking of the news denying him funds to build “Matheca Itu” (Touching the Sky) to the news media before informing him. Upon his arrival in the State House after being summoned by Mwathani, Tajirika hears the voice of the president but cannot see him. He later realises that Mwathani is freely floating in the air:

‘Ndĩ haha,’ akĩigua mũgambo wa Mwathani no mwene guo aarĩha? Tajirika akĩrora thiring’ini. Kĩrĩa kĩa mbire kũmũtũnga nĩ ndira na makinya ma Mwathani ... Ndeetĩkagia maitho make. Magũrũ ma Mwathani maacuhite rĩerainĩ. No ningĩ arora wega akĩona hatiarĩ mũhĩndo ngingo na kĩongo kĩa Mwathani ni kĩa hutitie thiring’i. (*Mbuku ya Kana, Gatano na Gatandatu*: 208)

‘I am here,’ he heard Mwathani speak but did not know where the voice was coming from. What he first saw were Mwathani’s heels and feet ... he could not believe his eyes. Mwathani’s legs were hanging in the air. On further scrutiny, he realised that there was no rope around his neck and his head was touching the ceiling.

Mwathani’s ability to levitate and self-inflate follows a set pattern. This condition seems to be recurring every time his authority is challenged by Western powers, something unheard of in Aburiria, where no one can even dream of opposing him because he is known to even determine the way Aburirians’ dream. This reveals his underlying fear: the fear that his supposed political and physical invincibility rests on a lie and that soon the people may realise and challenge his authority. The knowledge that there is nothing

he can do to avenge himself against this Western aggression is not only a source of great anger and frustration but also considerably annoying – in the futility of his inaction he loses control of his body, and it floats freely in the air.

Even though the image of the president floating in the air looks more magical than real, Ngugi seems to have borrowed this idea from his people's daily speech, where great anger is loosely termed as a "swelling." If one looks very angry, he/she is jokingly asked, 'Nĩkĩ waimba ũũ?' (Why do you look so swollen?) We can therefore conclude that Mwathani's swelling and levitation originates from anger that is bottled up inside him. In his anger and fear of losing his power, he orders the assassination of his once trusted minister, Machokali – his remains probably end up in Mwathani's private museum of human skeletons to be mocked and laughed at during his leisure time.

Mwathani's evil nature infects those who are around, and their bodies start mutating in line with that of their leader. Among them is Tajirika, who has an overriding desire to become a white man. His obsession is similar to that of Makak, the protagonist in Derek Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, where Makak finds salvation through self acceptance. Tajirika fails and opts for plastic surgery that goes hay-wire, leaving his body half white and half black. When his daughter Gaciru sees him naked, she runs away screaming because he resembles the ogres of the stories that Nyawira used to narrate to them:

No rĩrĩa oonire ithe e njaga Tajirika agithii mbabu gũcinjia nguo, Gaciru oonire tarĩ irimũ arona, atĩ o na mogarũrũku marĩa oonete he nyina o rĩmwe makĩgĩa na mining'i ingĩ. Rĩu ndangĩorĩre kwĩ nyina nĩ guoya ati ndagakorwo arorĩra irimũ rĩa mũndũrũme agwe mokoinĩ ma rĩa mũtumia. No gũkorwo marimũ maya maameretie mĩrĩ ya ithe na nyina ta ũrĩa marimũ meekaga ng'anoini tiga atĩ rũrũ rũtiarĩ rũgano. (*Mbuku ya Kana, Gatano na Gatandatu: 208*)

When she saw her father going to the bathroom to change clothes, Gaciru thought she was seeing an ogre; the changes she had seen on her mother began to make sense to her. She could not run to her mother for help as she was afraid of running

from a male ogre to the hands of a female one. Could it be that these ogres had swallowed the bodies of her parents like those in the oral narratives used to do?

The circulating rumours to the effect that Tajirika was growing a third mouth at the back of his neck, something that Vinjinia (his wife) vehemently denies, is a pointer to the dehumanisation process and his preparation for Aburiria's leadership as Mwathani's clone. When he finally takes control of the government and becomes the new ruler, his transformation has gone a full circle. Tajirika is now Mwathani's evil incarnate, the chosen one, who will carry on the legacy of the one who has disappeared – his transformation as a human monster is now complete.

Before Mwathani leaves the scene he has already given birth to Baby D. The events leading to the birth are cataclysmic. As he awaits Murogi wa Kagogo's confession in public, his body becomes so inflated that it fills the whole room, accompanied with great pain from his stomach. Suddenly the whole Country is engulfed by a series of seven thunderstorms and lightening, even though it is not raining:

Ngwa ya keru na ya gatatũ, ya kana, ya gatano, ya gatandatũ naya mũgwanja iria ciokire irũmanĩĩre ... Kĩĩĩ kĩamamakirie, o hamwe na thigari, nĩ ndogo ndumanu yahanaga maicũrũ kana maburi, ĩĩĩ yokire thutha wa ngwa icio mũgwanja. (Mbuku ya Kana, Gatano na Gatandatu: 254)

Seven thunderclaps came in close succession. What surprised everybody, including the soldiers, was the thick smoke that followed after the successive thunders.

Later a foul smell and great smog fill the whole country and plunge it into darkness. It is later that Mwathani announces the birth of Baby D in the country's parliament. The great cataclysmic happenings were heralding the birth of the baby, as the ballooned stomach of the Ruler spewed out its content. Like the old man in the narrative, Mwathani (a man) has given birth. This occurrence follows Bakhtin's (1984: 62) summary of the end result of

the grotesque body, whose essence “is precisely to represent a contradictory and double-faced fullness of life. Negation and destruction (death of the old) are included as an essential phase, inseparable from affirmation of the birth of something new and better.” The child symbolises the birth of democracy in Aburiria, even though it is a deceptive form of democracy, one meant to hoodwink the West into releasing the funds to enable the construction of *Matheca Itu* (*Touching the Sky*). But this democracy entrenches the status quo, and Mwathani and his followers remain firmly on the Aburirian seat of power, which is later bequeathed to Tajirika. They, in Ford’s (1999: 78) words, “represent the highest, though corrupted ideals of material society: avarice and the desire for power.” The much awaited rebirth and regeneration after the degradation and decay of the ruler’s grotesque body does not happen; rather it opens the way for a newer form of democratic pluralism driven by the same old leaders.

Mwathani’s reign in Aburiria is one of terror, in which the blood of the innocent is spilt ceaselessly – to appease his thirst for power and wealth. While the myth in the beginning underpins the import of children in the society, Mwathani’s sojourn negates this entrenched belief and uses their innocence to quench his debauchery. Nothing is spared in his evil march, not even his newly born baby, who is used as bait in his journey towards self perpetuation. Existing mythology is thus recreated in order to explain the selfish leadership that exists in a postcolonial African country: Aburiria. But the myth also holds the promise of rebirth and regeneration: the old man is finally reunited with his children, just like the prophetic name of this fictional country, which means “to disappear”. The promise about the end to the tribulations of Aburirians and the birth of a new dawn is concretised in the committed struggle of the people’s movement, *Mugambo wa Muingi* (*The Voice of the People*), under the progressive leadership of Nyawira and Kamiti.

### **5.3 Kamiti and the Revivification of Traditional African Shamanism in the Age of Postcolonialism**

Kĩroto kĩa Mbaratha ya ngai cia Abirika gitinainĩ kĩa Mukuyu gũcira cia kũhonokia ngoro ya Abirika,” (*Murogi wa Kagogo’s: Mbuku ya Mbere na ya Keri*: 323) (It was a dream about the gathering of the African Gods under a Mukuyu tree, deliberating on what to do

so as to save the soul of Africa).

Kamiti, like most main characters in Ngugi's other novels, has extraordinary powers. But while others spearhead the struggle to emancipate their people through armed struggle, he wages his own from the point of view of mental decolonisation and physical healing. He tells Nyawira that "Nĩ ndĩ mũgo wa ngoro. No ũrĩa rĩu njũĩ nĩ atĩ ma ngoro na mwĩrĩ nĩ inyitaine... Ngoro ñna abiya ni ñrenda mwĩrĩ wĩ na abiya." (I am a healer of human hearts and soul. But I know that the soul and the body are one. A strong soul requires a healthy body) (*Mbuku ya Mbere na ya Keri*: 320). He also preaches the gospel of environmental conservation in an effort to save his people from self destruction. He is both a traditional healer and an ecopsychologist. In his desire to reconcile the masses to their degraded natural environment, he has to educate them about the need of conserving the environment. According to Roszak (2001: 320), the goal of ecopsychology:

Is to awaken the inherent sense of environmental reciprocity that lies within ecological unconsciousness. Other therapies seek to heal the alienation between person and person, person and family, person and society. Ecopsychology seeks to heal the more fundamental alienation between the person and the natural environment.

The postcolonial subject is faced with new and daunting challenges, ranging from bad governance and environmental problems brought about by the destruction of the natural vegetation to diseases and ailments emanating from changing lifestyles, among others. They, therefore, require novel solutions in tackling the many obstacles that threaten their very survival. Kamiti, masquerading as the wizard of the crowd, is Ngugi's answer – the antidote that the postcolonial subject needs in order to heal his/her body and soul, as they prepare for the physical confrontation spearheaded by Nyawira. This is what he tells Nyawira when he says: "Inyuĩ mũrũmbũyanie na cia mũrĩ na nĩ na cia ngoro." (You and your people will deal with the matters of the body and I will take care of the spiritual needs) (320).

But before Nyawira goes on with her business, Kamiti has to teach her how to heal the body by use of traditional herbal knowledge. She is therefore taken through rigorous training in the forest as Kamiti explains to her the healing powers hidden in different tree species found in the forest and the importance of environmental conservation:

Kīu nī kīo kīarī kīambīrīria gīa Thukuru ya Mutitu ya Ndawa na mītī. Mūthenya mūgima matindire makiūrūra o hau hakuhi na gīthūnū na matiaithiririe mīmea īrīa yarī hau. Nyawīra ndarī eciria atī kahumbu kanini ūguo kahota gūkorwo na maugi maingī ūguo... O mūti kana mūmea ūri indo inya: mīri, magoko, mathangū, na mahūa, na indo icio ciothe nī cio ikuwīte kīhonia kīa mīoyo ya andū... Mūnūhi mītī o ūguo ni mūnūhi wa muoyo. Kūmenyerera macigiriria maitū nī kīambīrīria kīa gūcaria na kūmenya njūra itu. (*Mbuku ya Mbere na ya Keri: 321*)

That was the beginning of Forest School of Herbal Medicine. They spent a whole day near their habitation and did not exhaust the plants which were there. Nyawira could not imagine that such a small area could have so much knowledge on herbal medicine... Every tree or any plant has four important things which have healing abilities: roots, barks, leaves and flowers. To destroy trees is to destroy human life... our identity as a people is tied to the care and concern we give to our environment.

Any struggle to emancipate the people either from hunger, disease or bad governance must be tied to environmental conservation. There is a direct relationship between the world of nature and humanity, especially because human beings in their entirety depend on nature for their livelihood. Roszak (qtd by Coupe, 1997: 202), believed that, given the damage we are doing to external nature, we will eventually have to come to terms with the damage that is thereby being done to our own internal nature. We must recognize the link between the soul and earth. This is the link that Kamiti alludes to, the relationship between nature and man is symbiotic, but humanity has everything to lose in destroying nature.



It is this image, one of a destroyed ecosystem, which confronts Nyawira as she goes to search for Kamiti:

Tene tene werũ ũrĩa ũthiũrũrũkĩirie Eldares wakoragwo ũrĩ kimamo kĩa nyamũ mĩthemba mĩngĩ ta huria, njogu o na nguũ. Hĩndĩ iyo mũndũ nũ angiakorire ngari na ngatia ikomete manyekiini ciohetie irio cia cio, [N]dũiga na maroro ma cio nĩ cĩonekaga itacũkĩte kũu kana rĩngĩ cinamĩriirie ngingo cia cio igũrũ rĩa mĩrĩrcua, na cio njagĩ na mĩcoro ya cio cihenagie ĩrĩ o kũnene. [N]o rĩu nĩ kwagarũrũkĩte muno. Nyamũ nĩ ciathamĩire mĩena ĩngĩ. Maĩ matigire kũrera tene na nguũ igĩthira. Nyeki ndĩraihaga mũno, na nĩ yũmaga rĩrĩa kũrĩ riũa, na cio mbũri na ng'ombe ikoimiria mbaru. [G]ũtuĩkania werũini ũcio warĩ ũhoru wa mũthenya mũgima. Nyawĩra aambĩrĩirie rũgendo kĩroko na aakinyaga ndereinĩ riũa rĩgĩthua. (*Mbuku ya Mbere na Keri*, 238-39)

Long ago the forest that surrounded Eldares city was the home to animals of all kinds like buffaloes, elephants and hippotamus. During those times, it was common for travellers to find leopards and cheetahs waylaying their prey inside the long grass, Giraffes with their colourful skins could be seen bending their long necks on top of acacia trees and zebras with their white-coated skins feeding from a distance. But now things have changed. The animals have since disappeared. Pools of stagnant waters are no more and so the hippos have disappeared. The grass no longer grows tall and constantly dries up during the hot season which makes the cattle lack food. Walking through this dry perch was a torturous ordeal and therefore Nyawira had to start her journey very early in the morning.

Human activities such as agriculture, habitation, poaching and cutting down of trees have led to the shrinking of forests and death of wild animals. It is this reality that Kamiti wishes to reverse.

Creation myths, the Gikuyu one included, narrate of the state that the universe was in at the very beginning. They speak of thick forests full of trees of all kinds, huge rivers

brimming with fishes and other marine life, plains teeming with wild animals and mountains, and other beautiful features captivating to the eye. Against such abundance and plenty, wars were few and varied and conflicts between wild animals and human beings were minimal. But the modern destruction of the natural environment has led to the proliferation of the said conflicts. In advocating for the conservation of the environment, Kamiti wants to take humanity towards the better world they have lost through the selfish pursuit of materialism. This view is reinforced by Vambe (2004: 47) when he explains that “myth is a narrative that gives symbolic meaning to the relationship between people and the natural environment in which human beings participate consciously to transform that nature and the social so that they move towards a desired goal.”

Kamiti is remodelled along the lineage of the Great Gikuyu seers and prophets of old, who had the welfare of the community at heart and who used their divine gifts not for self-enrichment but for the greater good of the society. His father tells him “Mũndũ mũgo ndahũthagĩra kĩheyo kũ gwĩtongia, tĩga nguo cia mwĩrĩ, irio, na nyũmba ya gũkoma.” (Medicine men or prophets do not use their gift in enriching themselves except for the bare essentials like food, clothing and shelter. (Mbuku ya Gatatu: 27)

But Kamiti takes long before hearkening to his life’s calling, unbeknown to him his life of tribulation serves to ground him into the nature of his calling. His ability in fleeing from his body momentarily makes him understand fully both the beauty and the ugly side of Aburiria and indeed the whole world:

... eyona e kanyoni rĩerainĩ na akaigua mwago akĩhurutwo mathagu nĩ heho ... Rĩerainĩ nĩ bũrũri ũngĩ na arerete kũu igũrũ gũtirĩ handũ ona ha atonaga mĩena yothe na kwa ndũrĩrĩ cia Aburĩria. O na aikari a mĩena na mĩena nĩ matigani te mĩarĩrienĩ, mwĩhumbĩreinĩ na mĩmathĩreinĩ ya ciaki cia muoyo... aakoraga mbica o ta ĩyo mwĩrĩ wake warĩ: hũta na nyota na wagi nguo. Mataũninĩ marĩa manene, ithũnũ cia makatoni kana mathikirebu ma mĩtoka nĩ yo yaarĩ mĩciĩ ya ciana na andũ agima... Macambainĩ na kuo no taguo. Tũmigũnda tũhunyũku

tũkang'ethanĩra na ngũndũ nduru macani, igwa, kahũwa na mbamba. Macamba maiyũire ngiri na ngiri cia ng'ombe iracuhia nyondo ni iria. (Mbuku ya Mbere nay a Keri: 43-44).

He was soaring in the air like a bird, enjoying as the wind beat against his wings. From the sky, he could see all the corners of Aburiria inhabited by the various communities. They spoke different languages and their dressing style and ways of earning their daily bread were not the same. In the larger cities, the majority lived in shanties and ghettos. In the rural areas he could see the differences between the rich and the poor, the latter had small unproductive pieces of land juxtaposed by tea, coffee and cotton plantations.

In his ethereal sojourn, Kamiti realises that he is not alone. He is in the company of a majority of Aburirians whose existence, like his, is a painful experience. He now knows what ails his people and can help them find a lasting cure. He is, in Coupe's (1997: 197) view, brought close to the figure of a shaman, since it is the shaman who knows how to enter into the spirit of nature on behalf of the tribe. He has to go back to the beginning, to the history of his people's traditions and unearth the discarded but still valuable lore to aid in the recovery of the nation. He must, therefore, become a prophet of the new age "advocating a recovery of archaic spirituality as the answer to the contemporary world's problems" (Coupe: 202).

Kamiti is born with innate knowledge of divination. In traditional Gikuyu society, those who were destined to become diviners and medicine men were born with a special mark, and sacrifices had to be performed to welcome them to the world and to anoint them for their calling. According to an existing Gikuyu myth, such personalities were born holding a nut (mbugu), which the diviners used in foretelling ailments and other calamities. Kamiti, like his great grand father before him, was born clutching a cowry in his hand, but his father wanted to differ this calling, which he perceived was not of any benefit to his son as it meant free service to the society at the expense of his own material prosperity.

Even though Kamiti is destined to be a shaman with great ability to heal people, the beginning of his practice is utterly coincidental. When one of the two policemen who were chasing them (after the abortive demonstration) approaches Nyawira's house in the slums of Santalucia, Kamiti remembers that as young children they used to scare people by pretending to be wizards. They would look for dead lizards, frogs and wild poisonous fruits, tie them together and then hung them on the side of the road. They would wait by the bushes to see the reaction of passers by and to their amusement, even grown ups would be scared away. This is what he did to scare away the policeman: “agĩcaria na nduma nginya akiona kahĩndĩ agĩcoka akiungania tũtangari akimũnengera hamwe na kĩratathi gĩa gĩkatoni [A]gĩcoka akĩandika na ndemwo nene: WIMENYERERE GUKU NI KWA MUROGI WA KAGOGO URIA UGOGORAGA (sic) MAGOGO RIERAINI NA MAITHO TU. HUTIA MURANGO UYU WONE NGANGA MBUTE”/in the darkness he found some bones, and then picked some pieces of tattered clothes and a piece of carton. He then wrote in bold letters: BE WARNED THIS HOUSE BELONGS TO THE WIZARD OF THE CROW ONE WHO MAKES THE CROWS FALL FROM THE AIR AND DIE BY USING HIS EYES ONLY. DARE TOUCH THIS DOOR AND SEE WHAT WILL BEFALL YOU (*Mbuku ya Mbere na keri*, 86),” who upon reading the notice announcing the presence of Murogi wa Kagogo/ Wizard of the Crow actually flees in fear. But AG comes back very early the following morning this time dressed as a civilian.

After his encounter with AG, his work begins in earnest. Through AG's oral rendition of Murogi wa Kagogo's exploits, his fame grows like bushfire, and all, from ministers to senior people in the government, the poor and the rich, come to him for healing and divination. Tajirika is happy when his strange ailment (his inability to speak but grunt incoherent sounds) is treated that he gives out the three sacks of money he had received as bribes. The circulating rumours were that: “... gũtirĩ mũrimũ o na ũrĩkũ wakũũragĩra Mũrogi wa Kagogo maitho tondũ mũrimũ wagwa mwena ũyũ, akagũithania nago.” (there was neither disease nor ailment that was too difficult or strange for Murogi wa Kagogo.” Any one who visited Kamiti's practice went home healed (*Mbuku ya Gatatu*: 3).

All those who visit Murogi, apart from receiving herbal medication, are advised to undertake an inward journey in order to find spiritual healing as a supplement to the physical wellbeing. AG is advised to respect everybody and to always treat others well so that his heart can find lasting peace:

[K]uma ũmũthĩ roraga ciĩko ciaku. Ndũkaneke mũhoyi, mũragũri, mũndũ mũgo o wothe, ũru rĩ kana rĩ. Ungikameka ũru ũrogi ũcio nĩ ugagũcokerera na ũgũtunya kĩrĩa gĩothe ũhetwo hamwe na thayũ wa ngoro. Thiĩ rĩu. Ciĩko ciaku nĩ cio gicicio kĩa muoyo waku/ from today henceforth be vigilant of your own actions. Be careful not to harm others for if you do all what you have will be taken from you and you will never have peace. Go now. Yours actions are the mirror to your soul. (*Mbuku ya Mbere na ya Keri*, 139)

But as the representation of the greedy postcolonial individual AG does not heed the warning; he uses the information gained from the wizard for his own benefit. Indeed, the rest of the patients who visit the wizard are driven by selfish motives to the costernation of Kamiti. They want the wizard to help them eliminate their enemies, who they perceive as business competitors. The clamour, especially to supply materials for the construction of Matheca Itu (Touching the Sky), brings a lot of clients to the wizard's shrine. Most are driven by the need of ensuring that they become more visible to the Chairman than their would-be competitors. One of the clients tells the wizard:

Tua thũ ciakwa rũhuho. Kana haithuru ũmamuunde cindano ya guoya wa ũtheri wa riũa rĩkĩratha getha magerage ndumainĩ ya ũtuku ũrahurutana rũhuho rwa heho theri getha mathiĩ kũmũgeithia na kũmwarĩria Tajirika aigue moko mao maheha gũkĩra mbarafu, [N]a o uguo egukorwo amaigĩte kũraya mũno nake. (*Mbuku ya Mbere na ya Keri*, 175)

Turn my enemies into wind. Or inject them with the fear of daylight so that they only come out during nights filled with cold winds; make their hands colder than

ice that Tajirika (the chairman of Touching the Sky) will want nothing to do with them.

Kamiti is repelled and disgusted by the wishes of this class of clients and the smell of their money. The majority are the leaders of postcolonial African states, whose only goal is self enrichment. He feels that helping them in their schemes makes him an accomplice and therefore not better than them. (*Mbuku ya Mbere na ya Keri*, 250). This makes him seek the solace of the forest in order to escape the new scheme of things which is dragging him towards spiritual decay.

When Kamiti escapes into the confines of the forest he is also undertaking a journey of spiritual renewal. He tells Nyawira that they must stay in the forest for some time in order to understand themselves better before going back:

Reke tũikare gũkũ tũthikĩrĩrie ũrĩa mĩtĩ na nyamũ igũtwĩra, tũmenye hitho cia werũ ũyũ. [R]eke twambe tũhithũrĩrio hitho nĩ njata na riũa. Reke twambe twĩmenye, tumenye ngoro citu, tũmenye hinya ũcio uratindika mĩoyo itu umĩte kũ, ũhana atĩa, ũturoretie kũ. Let us stay for a while in the forest so that we can tap the knowledge hidden in the forest. Let its secrets be revealed to us. Let us search and know ourselves better, so that we can understand where the power that is pushing our souls comes from. (*Mbuku ya Mbere na Keri*, 256).

Kamiti's flight into the forest is also geared towards self understanding and discovery, a process of finding his life's purpose before he could embark on healing others.

In the forests he regains his artistic prowess in sculpture. Under the shades of a Mukuyu tree, Kamiti starts resurrecting the gods of the African people: "Kiroto kia Mbaratha ya ngai cia Abirika gitinaini kia Mukuyu gucira cia kuhonokia ngoro ya Abirika," (It was a dream about the gathering of the African Gods under a Mukuyu tree, deliberating on what to do so as to save the heart of Africa) (*Mbuku ya Mbere na ya Keri*: 323). His retreat into the forest and caves of Aburiria is similar to the withdrawal common to all

mythical/epical heroes, a time when their strength and commitment to struggles ahead is tested.

This pursuit of greed and ill-will towards others is among the things that make Kamiti seek hermitage in the wild. His thinking, as he later explains to Nyawira was that the individuals who were visiting his shrine would see the detriment of their selfish and egocentric ways and change for the better. But he was disturbed that all they wanted was to get richer through the extamination of their known and unknown competitors. In this, Kamiti saw the futility of his healing mission, as it would not save his society from decay but sink it further into avarice. The return to this age-tested traditional practice of healing through divination and herbs is to Kamiti an attempt at correcting the ills entrenched in the present society. That is why when he realises that it is being misused; he buries the rotten wealth and runs to the forest in search of spiritual renewal.

A notable inclusion in Kamiti's divination discourse is its leaning towards Freudian psychoanalysis. Most interesting is how he guides Tajirika and later Mwathani into disclosing their underlying problems. The two characters have unfulfilled desires whose suppression leads to the loss of speech. After taking away the mirror (which he uses as his divination instrument) from the patients, Kamiti encourages them to talk freely about their buried desires as he tries to give these desires words which the patients join into a coherent whole. On his part Tajirika has always desired to be white: "Korwo ... gĩkonde gĩakwa... ti ... kīrũ... Narĩ korwo gĩkonde gĩakwa nĩ kīrũ" (*Mbuku ya Mbere*: 213)/ If only my skin is not black. I wish my skin was white." Like the black man in Fanon's *Black Skins White Masks*, whose ultimate desire is to become white (1970:162), Tajirika feels that he final accomplishment in his journey to greatness is to become white, a desire which is impossible to attain.

Kamiti, in trying to diagnose his two important patients, employs a fusion of a traditional healing mechanism with a modern medical practice. Like a psychoanalyst he sets out to understand the behavioural pattern of his patients, but employs the mirror to see the reaction of his patients when they come face to face with themselves. The mirror then

replaces the traditional beads used by diviners. According to Kamiti, Tajirika desires to be white, especially as he now believes he will be the richest man in Africa and the only thing that will distinguish him from his fellow Africans is a white skin. For Mwathani, the realisation that he cannot secure the loan from the Global Bank because he is black becomes a source of great fury, hence the automatic swelling of his body. The characters are suffering from an identity disorder brought by the reality of their skin colour. Tajirika's tries to erase his colour by unconsciously scrapping of the skin but when he realises the futility of his actions he ends up crying bitterly.

The notion of black inferiorisation can be traced to the Western contact with Africa and the ensuing historical processes of slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism. Fanon (1970: 80) sees it as a calculated process entrenched in the speech and behaviour of the Whites: "my body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recoloured, clad in mourning in that white winter day. The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly; the little boy is trembling because he is afraid of the nigger." The years of this kind of bombardment internalised a self hatred and a desire to abandon this hated colour – no wonder many years after the end of colonialism being white remains a dream of many Africans as epitomised by Mwathani and Tajirika. This disorder, according to Kamiti, can only be countered by use of time tested practices hence his choice of traditional divination practice.

Kamiti can also be analysed both as a product of cultural hybridity and globalisation. His cultural consciousness is built on the edifice of his own Gikuyu culture, his interaction with ancient religions, especially Buddhism and his education, as an economic graduate from a University in India. But it is from his people's mythology that Kamiti's Shamanic characterisation is moulded, in fact this seems to be the basis upon which his interaction with other cultures and especially the Orient follows. In embracing some principles of other religious philosophies and beliefs, Kamiti instantiates a dialogue or introduces a dais upon which the religions of the world can dialogue and interact. Ngugi (1993: 9) theorises Kamiti's experience as a process through which people understand themselves and others from multiple centres or "a pluralism of cultures." Thus, while Kamiti retains



his identity as an African he also embraces knowledge from multiple centres around the globe.

The composite heritage inherited in Kamiti is also a product of inherited colonial discourses of knowledge on one hand and of mercantile tendencies which privilege capital/ riches over education. His encounter with Tajirika when he is looking for a job is the latter encounter, where education and its advantages have lost sway in the postcolonial city at the behest of corruption and nepotism. His Masters degree is laughed at by Tajirika especially because it is from India. This represents the colonised individual's disrespect for things whether education or others coming from other colonised places. But notice that it is in India where Kamiti besides receiving an Economics degree comes face to face with the religions of India and their philosophical leanings.

Kamiti's is culturally an unstable character whose formational consciousness resists particularities of place. His instability is not a weakness but an understanding that there is no one culture superior to another and that is why he does not privilege one over the other. In his portrayal he seems to question the existence of cultural purity and therefore celebrates cultural hybridity. Even when the genealogy of his family and the memory of growing up explain his communal identity, his education and exposure to other cultures and places serve to give him a global appeal. There is also a visible confluence between his tribal identity which his father reveals to him (*Mbuku ya Gatatu*, 24) and that of the Indian religious heroes, Drona and Ekalaiwan (124) especially their ability to use arrows like his own "Athi" (24) people, who were expert hunters. From Ekalaiwan, Kamiti acquires the knowledge of sculpture which he employs in resurrecting the god of Africa. What Ngugi seems to bring out here is the modern man's relationship with the global culture, which he explains should be used in the welfare of all in the world.

Ashcroft et al. (2000: 100) define globalization as a "process whereby individual lives and local communities are affected by economic and cultural forces that operate world-wide. In effect it is the process of the world becoming a single place." It can also, especially in the light of Kamiti's experience, be seen as a transcultural process not necessarily one of dominance but an appropriation where particular beliefs from varied

cultures are taken in order to enrich or empower local communities. This is closely related to Giddens (1990:64) where he looks at globalisation as “intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away.” In our case we can appropriate Giddens views by pointing out Kamiti’s project as that of linking positive belief systems from multiple cultures in order to better his own because since time immemorial cultures have grown by borrowing and appropriating from one another. It may also be Ngugi’s way of showing the importance of non-Western epistemologies in the global sphere. These forms of knowledge from the Orient and elsewhere have shaped the thinking of Western Knowledge but the same has not benefitted Africans mode of thought. It is therefore imperative for citizens of Africa to learn from other cultures outside the Western influence. This is further theorised in his book *Globalectics* (2012: 43) when he talks about the reciprocal relationship between the coloniser and the colonised:

In their struggle, the imperial lord and the colonial bondsman leave marks on each other, but with the difference that the bondsman can appropriate the best of the imperial input and combine it with the best of his own into a new synthesis that assumes the “globe theatre.” The post-colonial embodies this synthesis. While having its own particularity, like all other tributaries to the human, the post-colonial is an integral part of the intellectual history of the modern world because its very coloniality is a history of interpretation of different peoples, cultures and knowledge.

It is a part of the above project that Kamiti advances in the novel *Murogi wa Kagogo* even though his appropriation this time is borrowed from his interaction with different cultures of India. In the end, we can conclude that like all mythical heroes found in African mythology, Kamiti’s birth is extraordinary. He is born holding a nut firmly in his hand as a mark of his annointment. In *The Mwindo Epic* of central Africa, the hero, Mwindo, is born wearing a little bag of the spirit Kahindo, the goddess of good fortune, slung across the left side of his back (See Ford, 1999: 72). Sundiata of Old Mali has his birth foretold by a hunter, and the occasion of his birth is accompanied by cataclysmic

happenings, which announce the coming of the hero. Kamiti is therefore placed within the larger paradigm of great heroes ensconced in African traditional mythology.

#### **5.4 The Female as the Vehicle of Change: Nyawira and the Nine Daughters of Mumbi**

Myths provide the imaginative frameworks within which to conceive the possibilities of originating new forms of life and organisations. (Vambe, 2004: 47)

Before delving into the myths that Ngugi appropriates in giving agency to female characters in the novel under discussion, it is of import to briefly look at the development of these characters especially in the novels that interrogate the entrenchment of neo-colonialism in Kenya as a postcolony. Even though Ngugi had started using female characters to represent the notion of postcolonial disillusionment and societal degeneration in some of his short stories, it was in *Petals of Blood* that he crafted Wanja as a proper “archetypal victim of neo-colonial *polis*” (Gikandi, 2000:130), a thing that continued in his later two novels, *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari* through Wariinga and Guthera respectively.

It was through *Petals of Blood*, according to Gikandi (2000:156) that Ngugi:

Began to think about the potential represented by women as agents of political transformation. He seemed to believe that since men dominated the neo-colonial *polis*, women represented certain forces that could be harnessed and turned into agents of subverting the bourgeois order. It is within this context that women such as Wanja come to stand for both absolute marginalization and radical subversion in Ngugi’s later novels.

But if women represented the above possibility, Ngugi has been criticised for overly representing those women heroines through the male sexual gaze, where women like Wanja and later Wariinga lack their own ideological leaning with which to carry out the said sociopolitical transformation rather than one which is dictated by male characters. Wanja is presented as a prostitute and at most a temptress who uses her feminine power

to beguile the hearts of men who she knows are very weak before her body (Ngugi, 1977: 56). This kind of presentation denies Wanja the kind of agency required in spearheading a political uprising – by lowering her to the level of a chattel that changes hands from one male owner to another. Instead of giving her a strong base within which to project her vision, the author turns her into a “stereotypical Jezebel, plotting her revenge on the men who have ravaged her for years” (Gikandi, 2000: 157).

The motif of female victimage does not end with Wanja but is continued by Wariinga in *Caitani Mutharaba-ini/Devil on the Cross*. A lot of time is spent in the novel on Wariinga’s narration of her ordeal at the hands of The Rich Old Man from Ngorika, Boss Kihara and her University boyfriend. This lamentation, even when it serves to prepare for her future transformation, gives her a negative portrayal. As an individual struggling to make a living in an impersonal city, she seems to be a little different from Wanja’s perpetual imbroglio with men now that she cuts herself completely away from any male relation, at least before she meets Gatuiria. But this is soon watered down by her own confession and self-representation as a victim of men in the postcolony – a pawn in their games as they struggle for power.

The question that begs a lot of answers is whether Ngugi, through Wariinga, manages to come up with a new woman different from his portrayal of Wanja. Gikandi (2000: 220) is of the opinion that Wariinga stands above all previous Ngugi’s female heroines because she refuses to give in to the malevolent forces of men around her and instead undertakes a journey aimed at finding “a new language of self and a new relationship to her community” and in the end be able to “break out of the prison-house of self-hate and victimization and to assert her identity outside the culture and economy of arrested decolonization.” That Wariinga has to go through all these challenges to become a totally liberated woman leaves a lot of questions about her being the new woman capable of overturning the overriding prejudices harboured by men about women. When she becomes a mechanic, she must first prove herself as good as men for her to be given a chance to practice (*Caitani*: 225). In the end, when she kills The Old Man from Ngorika, it seems to be more out of a desire for revenge than a clear liberatory stance now that the

meeting between them is more of a coincidence than a pre-planned one.

Wariinga can be said to have been one of Ngugi's best attempts at creating a formidable female character, whose rise above the victim status is worth recognition. But this cannot be said of Guthera, the female protagonist in *Matigari ma Njiruungi*, who at the very beginning is forced to make a difficult choice: serving her heavenly father through a virtuous living or using her body to rescue her earthly father (*ma Njiruungi*, 32). The name Guthera, when translated into English means the clean one or the one who is holy, which agrees with her earlier kind of living, but when her father dies at the hands of the colonial government because of assisting the Mau Mau fighters she starts peddling her body in order to feed her siblings. Like Wanja, she becomes a prostitute out of poverty and frustration, and it is at this state that Matigari finds her. Gone are the days of virtue and selfless pursuit of holiness, and in their place is a woman who can sleep with young boys, if they can pay for it, and old men without a sense of remorse. In Guthera, Ngugi fails to create a female figure who can stand on her own without leaning on men like Matigari, whose heroic act makes her abandon her immoral lifestyle in pursuit of a more meaningful existence.

Although Guthera does not fit fully into a victim status, her role as a prostitute is demeaning and degrading, and one wonders why Ngugi's female figures must first have such debasing roles before finding their own paths to individual salvation – even when we understand the circumstances that push them to those roles. Even though she is more mature and wiser than Muriuki (a mere boy), it is clear, from the beginning, that he is the one that Matigari has chosen to carry on the struggle. The concern raised in this regard is the dilemma with which she is confronted in the text – whether to expose the corrupt regime both in the colonial era and the postcolony or to die while escaping to the forest or to assist Matigari light the fire of the second liberation struggle (*ma Njiruungi*, 153), – a peripheral role when compared to that of Muriuki. Her coming into the text only helps in highlighting Matigari's heroism and adding to the rumours that are spreading in the country about who he really is.

If Wariinga is Ngugi's first attempt at creating a new woman heroine, but which falters in *Matigari ma Njiruungi*, it is in Nyawira in *Murogi wa Kagogo* that he finally realises his dream. Created along the paradigm of black women heroes like Sojourner Truth, Nyawira mirrors the real revolutionary spirit that had previously been enshrined in male protagonists like Kihika, Karega and Matigari. A graduate from the University of Aburiria, she walks out of her matrimonial home and relationship with Kaniuru, which she deems to have been based on the latter's greed for social mobility but not love. She is also the leader of the underground movement that is bent on overthrowing Mwathani's dictatorial regime. Ndigirigi (2007:191) looks at the idea of putting a female character at the helm of a revolutionary group as one that "coordinates national politics and women's politics in an equal and dialogic relationship of mutual responsibility." The woman is no longer only a symbol of the nation but a pivotal ingredient in the liberation of the nation from all fronts. The changing roles that Nyawira plays in the text are a clear testament to this fact. She, according to Ndigirigi (2007:191):

Presides over an inclusive comradeship of men and women fighting to retake their country and nation from the grips of global capital. That remapping of the national also goes hand in hand with a destabilization of gender roles, with Nyawira playing both male and female roles as circumstances demand. Likewise, in the ideal union that she and her mate create, Kamiti is forced to take on female roles. For a time, the notion of man-the-provider is overturned and Kamiti is the dependant. While Aburiria's men seek to compradize the country for their own benefit, Nyawira and her group nurture that territory, and guard it from being further indebted to global capital.

Due to may be her level of eduction, Nyawira is drawn as a person who is more aware of the events at the global arena and their repercussions on the people in the developing countries. That is why she leads women in soiling the field that is to be annointed for the construction of Matheca Itu/Touching the Sky and later baring their nakedness to the leaders and invited guests, aware that the loan that will fund this behemoth will be paid

by the same poor and oppressed populace. This was an act considered in Gĩkũyũ lore as a curse and a form of protest by women and it was greatly feared. Reminiscent of Wangari Maathai's struggle against the Moi government when it wanted to construct what had been touted to be the highest building in Kenya at Uhuru Park, Nyawira and her organisation stop Mwathani's government from constructing the proposed building. This makes her and her fellow women leaders on their own right without turning to men for protection. Under her wing, a group of nine women mete out justice in homes of men who resort to violence in solving domestic dispute – violence is countered with violence as Tajirika comes to realise. In Nyawira Ngugi's dream of creating an all-round female protagonist is finally realised.

The activities of women in *Murogi wa Kagogo* are anchored around two major myths: The Gikuyu creation myth and that of Wangu wa Makeri, the famous female leader. The leading female protagonist, Nyawira, is cast as an agent of change, whose activities are a greater departure from Ngugi's female characters in other novels. Her sense of agency revolves around the need to change the consciousness of fellow country women and men into fighting for a more just and fair society, both for the family and the nation. This Gikuyu myth of creation posits that: Ngai created the first human being, a male, who he named Gikuyu and then the female and named her Mumbi. From his holy dwelling on top of Mount Kirinyaga, he showed Gikuyu and Mumbi the splendour of the land below, a land that never lacked rain or water, rich for farming and herding: this He allocated as their home. They were blessed with nine daughters, who make the nine clans of the Agikuyu.

The name Mumbi, given to the first female by Ngai, means “creator,” which, in a sense, casts the female as a co-creator with God, mostly in her ability to carry and nurture life in her womb. In gender relations, the first man and woman are to be partners in creation with neither being subordinate to the other. It is this original order that Nyawira and her group seek for their society – reclaiming the philosophy inherited in the ancient myths in solving the problems faced by the present generation.

When Tajirika is detained by Sikiokuu and Kaniaru, Vinjina, his wife, seeks the help of Nyawira, now masquerading as the helper to the Wizard. Nyawira organizes a group of women who are to sing for Sikiokuu, but they use the occasion to demand to know the whereabouts of Tajirika. Vinjina is at this time surrounded by several policemen while she is shouting at the top of her voice to be told whether her husband is alive or dead. When Kaniaru beckons that the women start singing, they tell him to first help Vinjina, and the soloist starts a defiant song to the consternation of Sikiokuu:

Ambai mūhingīrie mūtumia ūyū bata wake  
Nĩ ngūkaga kūina rwĩmbo rwa gūkūngũira mūgeni  
Ndikūi atĩ ndĩroka mūciĩ ūrĩ ngūĩ  
Tondu rwĩmbo rwahota gūthata  
O na nĩ wanyona ngĩina  
Nĩ ndĩ mūthuri na ciana  
Na ndingĩenda itigwo itarĩ wagūcimathĩra  
Amu mūciĩ nĩ wa itugĩ ithatũ: mūthuri, mūtumia, kaana. (*Mbuku ya Gatatu*:  
42)

Help that woman who is complaining before I can sing  
I came here to welcome the visitor  
I did not know I was coming to a house that was at war  
I do not sing in such houses  
For I may lose the words of the song  
Or the voice in my throat  
For even though you see me singing  
I have a husband and children  
I would not want my children to lose their breadwinner  
For a home has three posts: father, mother and a child.

Immediately after the song, Sikiokuu clarifies that Tajirika is in the hands of the government security forces and is helping them in searching for Nyawira, as his former



employer. With this, Vinjina is able to save her husband's life, especially because the Minister for Security has acknowledged in public that his forces are holding Tajirika. But for her effort she is paid by being thoroughly beaten not once but on consecutive days. It is this bitterness that drives Vinjina back to the shrine of the Wizard. This time she desires the death of her husband because of his lack of gratitude and cruelty.

The wizard sends elders to warn Tajirika against beating his wife. They get hold of him one evening when he is coming from Mars Café and take him to an undisclosed destination. He becomes very angry when he realises that his captors are all women – a great insult to his male ego:

Rĩrĩa mũicoini gĩtambaya kĩohorirwo eyonire aikarĩre gĩtĩ, athiurũrũkĩirio nĩ andũ kenda ... akĩigua hinya wamũthira mwĩrĩ ... Ta kĩmenye kĩgegearo gĩake rĩrĩa oonire othe kenda maarĩ atumia! Akĩigua uruu wake ta wanyihio na kũhũthio. Kũnyitwo mateka nĩ atumia. Akĩigua atĩ we ndangĩkirio hinya ni atumia, o na maarĩ kenda. (*Mbuku ya Gatatu*: 183)

When at last the handkerchief was removed from his eyes, he found himself sitting down surrounded by nine people ... he felt his strength leave him ... just imagine his surprise when he saw that all the nine people were women! He felt his manhood belittled and humiliated by being held captive by women. He told himself that he cannot be defeated by women if even if they were nine.

They tell him that they are the new council of elders of modern women and that he has been brought before them to answer charges on inflicting physical harm on the person of his wife. Tajirika refuses to answer any question and in defiance insults the women, telling himself that he can outdo any number of women when it comes to physical conflict. His tears are tears of humiliation and inability to defend himself against women, something he had earlier thought possible. His experience at the hands of these women serves to prove that women can be able to defend their interests, using violence if the need arises, something that the male gender has always taken for granted.

The original myth conceives the female and male as partners in the work of creation and symbolically everything that is beneficial to the welfare of the human race. But the progression of time has seen man arrogate himself the role of being the master and the one in charge of everything. In this process the woman has been relegated to a subordinated position. Violence is one of the measures that man has taken to force women adhere to this prescribed role negating the reality as encapsulated in the original order. The new council of women, drawn along the matrix of Gikuyu creation myth, acts as both the societal and moral police in their belief that it is possible to have a better society based on equality and justice. This is what Nyawira tells Vinjina:

Thĩ ñno nĩ nyinamu. Wĩ hinya akahinyiriria ũrĩa mũhinyiririe handu ha kũmũhinyĩria mathina. Mũndũrũme arumagie ũrũme wake na kũrumia mũtumia na ciana handũ ha kũrumũria thũ cia mũciĩ wake... Mũrimũ ũyũ wa ngundi mĩrĩni ya atumia nĩ urimũ ũrimũhĩire mũciĩ mũĩngĩ... ñno thĩ ... ĩkwenda kũinamũrwo nĩ ene yo nĩ getha mũndũrũme arũmagie ũmũndũ wake na wa mũtumia na ciana nake mũtumia atumũrage maria mooru me make kana me ma mũthuriwe, tutumberie mũciĩ handũ ha kũmĩtumbũra. Mũndũrũme na mũtumia matuike itugĩ igĩrĩ cia gwaka handũ ciana ingĩyua riũa na mbura mũciĩ ũtuike wao othe. (*Mbuku ya Gatatu: 179-180*)

This world is upside down. The mighty oppress the weak instead of making their life bearable. A man uses his manhood into physically assaulting his wife and children instead of using it against the enemies of his family... physical abuse on women is a problem found in many families... men and women need to do something in solving this problem, so that man can use his humanity for the benefit of his wife and children and women use it in revealing all that ails the family, this will benefit the family instead of destroying it. In this way both of them will build a better foundation for the future of their children.

Together men and women must work harmoniously in ensuring that the society develops positively for the welfare of all.

It is this same philosophy that is guiding the party that is agitating for change in Aburiria. Led by Nyawira, the party is inclusive of both men and women who are working together in peaceful coexistence. In their belief that they can use their traditional knowledge for the benefit of the present society:

No kuma ūteneinĩ ūcio nĩ andũ mathuthurie maundũ marĩa mega mamakũrie no marĩa moru mamaikie kĩarainĩ kĩa hithitũrĩ mahũthire umenyo wa tene gwaka mĩikarĩre ya kĩrĩu na mũthingi wa rũciu no ti matuике ngombo ya ũndũire. (*Mbuku ya Kana na Gatano na Gatandatu*, 295)

Let the people choose the best practices from their traditional heritage and throw away the rest into the dustbin of history. Let them use the knowledge from their past into building a better foundation for the present and the future instead of becoming slaves of their traditional practices.

With the knowledge of some of these practices, Nyawira has led the party members in reviving the growing of traditional African foods which are more nutritious to the people and well adapted to the climatic conditions. This is what Kamiti finds after being reunited with Nyawira: “Mambire kũmũtwara tũmigũndainĩ tũria maakũragia mwere, ugĩmbĩ, ndũma, ngwacĩ, ndare, nyeni, irio cia kĩenyenji, iria tiri wamenyerete tene, makĩmwĩra, tiga ciokire kweherio nĩ iria ng’eni.”/ They took him to their small gardens where they had planted sorghum, millet, arrow roots, sweet potatoes, wild vegetables and other traditional foods, which the soils had adapted to before they were replaced by exotic ones” (334). Under Nyawira’s leadership and guidance, the African society has found a pathway that will lead to its salvation. The library and hospital in the cave (335-336) are some of the new initiatives that meld African traditional knowledge to its Western counterpart.

The second myth, about Wangu wa Makeri, a great Gikuyu female ruler, was in the past narrated in order to justify the position of women in the society. Ngugi borrows from this myth in order to bring into the limelight the existence of great women leaders that the

African society has had from the past but which present societies have sought to suppress. He also projects the thesis that both genders can use their positive attributes in building a better society instead of fighting and justifying gender supremacy.

The following is the summary of the narrative:

A long, long time ago in the Gikuyu country there lived a famous woman leader, Wangu wa Makeri. During this time women were the rulers in this community. But her reign was infamous for the cruelty with which she treated men who were part of her subjects. She used men both as the means of transport and seats. Any time she wanted to travel, she would order four strong men to carry her to her destination. Upon arrival one man would kneel on all fours and she would seat on his back. Men complained bitterly about this inhuman treatment but Wangu with the cabal of her women leaders continued with their oppressive behaviour. When men could not take it any more, they held a secret meeting and decided to impregnate their wives. After they had done this, they waited till the women were heavy with children and they beat them into submission. Since then men took over the leadership of the community.

From the above narrative the unjust treatment that is meted by men to their womenfolk is explained and rationalised. Nyawira's philosophy negates the principles of this myth by showing that men and women can work together. This she does by readily working with Kamiti, even when it is obvious that she displays qualities of leadership and bravery far better than those of Kamiti. But their roles do not conflict because all of them are useful in making their lives better. If in the narrative women use their position to oppress men, in the text as exemplified by Nyawira they use it to maintain a peaceful coexistence in the society.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

In their struggle against the many challenges facing postcolonial Africa, writers like

Ngugi have had to turn back to oral tradition in their quest for apt representation. In *Murogi wa Kagogo*, Ngugi has recuperated traditional art forms and has re-energised them as way of representing reality. The Agĩkũyũ myths of the old have been used both as means of resisting tyranny and offering a society that is more humane and tolerant. This is a credible revelation about the importance of oral tradition in the present African society. Mythology comes out as a powerful medium whose archetypal motifs remain relevant in contemporary postcolonial society.

Through Kamiti, Ngugi explains the need for humanity to journey back to the past, especially that one that revered nature by taking care of the natural ecosystem so that in turn it can take care of humanity. The myths of origin crafted the human individual as a friend of nature; their relationship was symbiotic and mutually beneficial, ensuring survival for humanity and continuous renewal for the natural environment. It is from these past ideal that humanity must once again embrace and by the use orature – riddle, proverb, tale, myth, and the epic recognize the need for the earth, for society, for the individual, and even for the gods to seek renewal as the the conditions for growth and life (Harrow: 1994: 109).

In the next chapter we focus on the song genre and in particular interrogate the notions of identities and ideology as enshrined in the songs used in *Ngahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want)* and *Maitu Njugira (Mother Sing for Me)*. These songs are viewed as alternative forms which people employ in their struggles of every day living. The fronted argument is that different groups in society and especially the down-trodden masses and the rich display differing patterns of identities and ideologies which can be traced in the songs they sing.

## CHAPTER 6

### SONGS AND IDEOLOGY: PERFORMING IDENTITIES IN NGUGI'S GIKUYU DRAMA

Ithare riaguka hacokaga mugumo (sic)/ an ithare tree is uprooted only for a fig tree to grow in its place. Gikuyu proverb (Ngaahika Ndeenda, 26)

#### 6.1 Introduction

The present chapter analyses the use of the song genre, seeking to see how it has been appropriated in demarcating group identities in *Ngaahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want)* and *Maitu Njugira (Mother, Sing for Me)* and also the formational ideologies that exist in some of these groupings. This is particularly important because the setting of the two plays is postcolonial Kenya, and it is important to see how older songs mirror the various contemporary relationships and present conditions of existence. The chapter is therefore brings out the fundamental role that songs have continued to play in helping the people understand their place in the postcolonial state.

Ideology, from Althusser's point of view, "is a system of ideas and representation which dominate the mind of man or a social group," (qtd. In Benett and Nicholas, 1995: 172). It signifies the imaginary ways in which human beings experience their real world (Eagleton, 1989: 16) and values that dominate their existence, including the factors that contribute to the internalisation of the said values. There is an inherent relationship between ideology and identity especially when viewed from Althusser's quotation above, in that when particular ideas and values (positive or negative) are continuously enacted or played out by particular groupings in the society they in the long run become part of their belief system. The danger in this is that when negative images are let to proliferate, they can lead to the suppression of a group's ability to raise its own consciousness and therefore fall prey to the dominant group in the society or may on the other hand edify instances of resistance, which would be positive in this case. This is especially true in class-based societies.

For our case, the relevant question in this chapter about ideology would be how it has been appropriated by various groupings in maintaining the status quo or subverting it by the use of songs. It would also help us clarify the nature of identities formed by particular ideologies and the distinct identity markers found in various societal groupings. According to Foucault (in Venn, 2000: 98):

Subjects act according to a formation, that is, they act as subject endowed with specific skills, dispositions, values, orientations (e.g. numeracy, 'masculine' characteristics, modern etc) that they have acquired as a result of their construction and normalization as specific subjects positioned in relation to specific practices, and who position themselves as subjects of power, that is, subjects to it and exercising it to varying degrees.

If we were to agree with Foucault, we can also say that even as subjects internalise the ideals of their own subjection they also have the ability to use it in exercising their own power against those of their group or against those who control the instruments of subjection. They can also, as a conjecture, result in armed resistance or turn to alternative practices in voicing their dissatisfaction. In this case, the song genre offers immense possibility for the subjected classes in subtly expressing their concerns and raising awareness as to the conditions of their lives. We can therefore conclude that these subjected groups have found a common ground or ideal within which to coalesce as an identifiable assemblage.

Identity, as Rummens (2001: 3) summarises, may be looked at as:

The distinctive character belonging to any given individual, or shared by all members of a particular social category or group. The term comes from the French word *identité* which finds its linguistic roots in the Latin noun *identitas*, -*tatis*, itself a derivation of the Latin adjective *idem* meaning "the same." The term is thus essentially comparative in nature, as it emphasizes the sharing of a degree of sameness or oneness with others in a particular area or on a given point.

The above definition can also be used to allude to the nuanced nature of the term identity, to include the ways in which a group of people, not necessarily from the same community, share distinct characteristics emanating from how they view themselves or are viewed by others. This would then meld ideology to identity, by bringing the former into the “heart of personal identity, of how we conceive ourselves as subjects in the world and all that this involves,” (Bennet and Nicholas: 1995, 173).

As a performed genre, oral poetry remains one of the most powerful areas that continue to play multiple functions in the society ranging from identity formation, resistance and opposition, social mobilization and education. As forms of social expression, songs are invested with subtle nuances which disrupt and indeed subvert the existing power relationships without drawing the wrath from the wielders of power. A good example is the choice of the title *Ngaahika Ndeenda/ I Will Marry When I Want* for the play drawn from an existing popular song. Even though the song offers a commentary on the young people’s view of marriage expectations from their parents, it is easy to read the defiance and protest in the song which can be played out in other areas of societal concern and especially politics.

As a performed genre, songs unlike other forms call for a more inclusive participation between the artist and the audience. Its inclusion in the dramatic genre helps make the play being enacted become a powerful medium of social commentary as it invites the audience to both sing along and listen to the actors at the same time. Drama carried performance/or action as one of its core tenet and most of the practices in African traditional societies revolved around ritualistic enactments. Ngugi (1986, 36) argues that:

Drama has origins in human struggles with nature and with others. In pre-colonial Kenya, the peasants in the various nationalities cleared the forests, planted crops, tended them to ripeness and harvest – out of one seed buried in the ground came many more seeds. Out of death life sprouted, and this through the mediation of human hand and the tools it held. So there were rites to bless the magic power of tools. There were other mysteries: of cows and goats and other animals and birds



mating – like human beings – and out came life that helped sustain human life. So fertility rites and ceremonies to celebrate life oozing from the earth, or between the thighs of human and animals. Human life itself was a mystery: birth, growing up and death, but through many stages. So were the rituals and ceremonies to celebrate and mark birth, circumcision or initiation into different stages of growth and responsibility, marriages and the burial of the dead.

Ngugi, in the above quotation, places drama at the nascent of African epistemology and indeed describes it as a fundamental feature in the life of the African person. In the many rituals performed in these societies, he alludes to the centrality of song and dance as being part and parcel of all attending practices, that both were principal “to nearly all the rituals celebrating rain, birth, the second birth, circumcision, marriage, funerals or to all ordinary ceremonies” (2000: 45). In the Bakhtinian sense, there is a dialogic relationship between song and being in the traditional African individual, in that the existence of one meant the existence of the other and that the two play complimentary roles, where the African is able to see and make sense of his entire universe using songs.

There is also a visible semiotic correlation between songs, if viewed as signs, and the people or ideas they represent, or the reality they construct. But we go beyond the simple reduction that signs merely represent objects in the physical world to the notion that they can also refer to abstractions and objects which are not found in our external world (Chandler: 2007, 62). This is important when interrogating the internal workings of the human mind and the various sensibilities that accrue in their dealings with others and mostly as encapsulated in songs.

It is of import to mention that the foundational base upon which the two plays were staged was not based on a theatrical prism but rather on an adult literacy programme. As Ndigirigi (2007: 137) rightly puts it Ngugi was not an initial member of the committee that had been designated with running the Kamirithu Community Education and Cultural Center, the center which give birth to the Gikuyu plays. As an intellectual “Ngugi had played a leading role in popularizing Kenya’s history of resistance. He had written protest

letters and articles in the print media against the monopoly position held by foreign culture in Kenya. For Ngugi, Kamiriithu was a continuation of a struggle he had waged elsewhere, but it was not his idea (137).” Ngugi then used the center as his template in actualising some of the issues he had been protesting about this time performatively. What this, then, means is that the plays were largely based on the lives of their initial audiences and whose realities they sought to dramatise. According to Ndigirigi (168), one of the committee headed by Ngugi wa Mirii (the co-author of the play, *Ngahika Ndeenda*) dubbed the Literacy Committee tried to analyse the “causes of unemployment, landlessness, low wages, poor transport, lack of water and medical facilities,” issues which were to later form the thematic foci of the staged plays.

## **6.2 Ideology Enhancing Images, Identity Markers and Invented Traditions**

This section is guided by the semiotic notion that “Any individual sign gains its meaning from its value in the system of signs and that signs invariably invoke other signs,” (Thwaites, Davis and Mules, 2002: 48) and therefore the view that particular signs serve to concretise certain ideas which in turn lead to the formation of specific/distinct group/individual identities. Anchoring the analysis on the plays in question, we discuss how images used in the texts serve to edify certain ideological leanings and in the process mark out various classes in the society. I use the phrase invented tradition in a two pronged way – first as a received practice that the colonisers bequeathed the African bourgeoisie at the end of the colonial period (Ranger, 1983: 212) and secondly, as an attempt by African subaltern classes in forging novel identities, in the face of newer forms of exploitation and oppression, in their pursuit of social salvation.

From the outset *Ngahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want)* is replete with images which serve to separate the groups in the text. The two dominant groups include the poor workers, peasants and farmers who are the majority, and the other comprises wealthy land owners, factory owners, and the upcoming petty Bourgeoisie as exemplified by Ndigire and his wife (49). Their different living styles and habits help in entrenching their separate identities.

As the play opens, Kiguunda's house, in its shape and appearance, represents the kind of housing that the majority of the poor inhabit:

Nyũmba ya koonā. Ithiingĩitwo na ndoro na ikahakwo mũũnyũ. Mwena-inĩ ũmwe nĩ tuukuona ũrĩrĩ wa Kĩgũũnda na mũtumia wake ti Wangeci. Mwena-inĩ ũyũ ũngĩ nihekuoneka ndaangari gakuundi. Nĩ cio ũrĩrĩ wa Gathoni. [R]ũthiingo-inĩ hacuuriitio Taitondii ya iĩka imwe na nuthu na nĩ njikire bureemu. [O] kũu rũthiingo-inĩ nĩ kuo gũcuurĩtio kabuuti ka Wangeci mwena ũmwe, na ga Kĩgũũnda mwena ũrĩa ũngĩ. Tuothe nĩ tubuuti tuceehuũkangu twĩ na iraka nyiingĩ. The house is square. It is built with mud and smeared with white ochre. Inside the house, we can see Kiguunda's bed on one side and on the other pieces of rugged clothing's which serve as Gathoni's bed. Hanged on the wall is a framed title deed of one and a half acre of land. There are also two long coats on wall, one belonging to Wangeci and the other one Kiguunda. Both are badly torn and have patches all over. (11)

What stands out in the above quotation is the abject poverty evidenced by space and the bare essentials. The title deed, the symbol of land ownership, is probably the only precious possession that the Kĩgũũnda's have. On the whole, this class can be identified along the line of their basic possessions and the kind of value they attach to them and the way they dress. Later in the play, when Wangeci is preparing food for the visitors, she realises that there is no salt and sends Gathoni to borrow some from Njooki, Gĩcaamba's wife (26). Salt is a cheap commodity, is very basic and in terms of usage very little is needed for spicing food. This makes it last for a longer period in most homes as opposed to other basic commodities. That a home can be without it illustrates the degree of poverty and lack that such a home goes through.

This also draws attention to the culinary composition as it exists in homes of different groupings with those of the poor having foods that have more starch than say proteins and vitamins. This may be because the first type is cheap and readily available as opposed to the other two. Wangeci can therefore only afford to cook rice for the rich

visitors (51), something that the Kii's don't seem to appreciate. The images that predominate the lives of the workers and peasants delineate them as a class/group that lives within the margins of the society. They can be summed up to include the type of houses, clothing, food and their basic lifestyle.

On the other hand, the Kĩoi's – as the representation of the wealthy class – have different set of images which stand in stark contrast to those of Kiguunda and his ilk:

Gwa Kĩoi mucii. Ni kĩhwai-nĩ. Nyũmba njega. Ĩ na sofa, “radiogram” nene, T.V, mahũa ma buraacitiki meetha-inĩ. Nĩ kũrĩ thitima. Rũthiingo-inĩ kwĩ na mbica mũhari. [M]eetha-inĩ heena irio cia hwai-inĩ. Meetha-inĩ heena indo nyiingĩ. Ona maaĩ ma kũnyua me ho. *Inside Kioi's house in the evening.* A good house. Has sofa sets, a big radiogram, a T.V. set, and plastic flowers placed on the table. There lines of photographs on the wall. Many varieties of foods have been placed on the table for supper. There is even drinking water. (81)

The above description of Kĩoi's house, its furniture and the many types of food served sets them apart from those who come from the lower strata of the society. These images even as they put a visible divide between people of this society, subtly foreground this as the reality, with both groups accepting their fates as given. This ability of images to make particular lifestyle and way of doing things appear real is decried by Mitchell (qtd. In Mitchell, 1986: 8) as deceptive and distorting and only a process of ideological mystification. That Ndugĩre and his wife are clamouring to become like Kĩoi and his wife means that they believe that the things that make up the latter's world are the ones to have, these images feed into the ideology that explain and justify various groups in this society. Physical images are powerful forms of conformity especially in their daily interaction with human beings; this is because they help in internalising particular perceptions as given or natural. In this case the poor and rich classes tend to believe most of the images that litter the entire spectrum of their being and use them in forming their different identities.

Songs are also alternative means of constructing identities. The play *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (*I Will Marry When I Want*) is replete with songs whose meanings serve to reinforce the particularities of the singer's identity. These songs are taken from the traditional genres and mainstream Christian contemporary hymns. There are those which were sung for their entertainment value alone, but on the other hand, there are those which in the process of entertainment allow diverse commentary to seep through. One of the song that massages the text throughout is the popular song referred to in the title "Ngarua Ndeenda" sang by D. K, which signified youth rebellion in the 70's. The song falls under popular culture especially because of the appeal it carried among the youth, even beyond the the 70s. It is discussed here within the framework of what Ong (1982: 135) calls "secondary orality" a form of orality that dependes on print and electronic media for its oral transmission. Of course one sees Ong's bias of the written text over the oral but as Ngugi (1998: 108-09) has clearly pointed out the literary has always "fed on the living memory of the oral" and that the written sign is only "a mediation between orality aurality."

The song tells the story of a guy called wa Maria, whose where about the singer is enquiring. The opening stanza makes the enquiry and explains that wa Maria is in the company of two girls who are carrying his bag for him. They arrive at a hotel and he tells them to put the bag down so that they can take a cup of tea. The girls decline but tell him to instead give them the shilling so that they can share it among themselves. Wa Maria offers to give them two shillings which he thinks will be enough for them. After which the singer introduces the chorus saying that he will get circumcised when he wants because even Luos (who traditionally did not have genital cirmscision) still live, that he will marry when he wants because the priest (Catholic) still live and he not get married because there are women who never get married but still exist. In the second stanza, the thre have arrived at wa Maria's cube (a small cubical house for young men) who invites them in and tells requests them to take off their clothes so ntha that hey sleep. Upon which the girls look at each and laugh as they proceed to get inside the cube. The wa Maria sees his friend Ng'ang'a wa Wagio and invites him to come and greet his visitors before they sleep. Of course Ng'ang'a readily complies because he simply being invited

to take one one of the girls.

The subtext of the song captures the sense of rebelliousness inherent in the society with the youth going against the expected societal behaviour. Sexual immorality is subtly alluded to, behaviour which the society did not condone but which the youth engaged in with abandon. While the song as used does not talk about this form of rebelliousness, it is the resistance and protest that the song alludes to it that the authors of the play seize in order to inform some of the issues happening in the play. Kiguunda and Gicaamba are protesting against the relationship that exists upon the workers and their employers. It against the reverberations of this song that Gicaamba models the last song in which he rebelliously calls for the unity of peasants and workers.

The other song is the “mūcung’wa” that Kīgũũnda claims to have been an expert during his heydays was chiefly performed for entertainment and it was sang and danced by young men and women. The beginning of the song talks about male/female romantic relations and specifically about a young man’s exploits in the course of his courtship. But towards the end of the song the soloist takes the advantage of the generic versatility inhered in songs to comment about contemporary issues. We are therefore able to learn about his station in life:

Nĩ nĩ ndoiriirwo nĩ mbura

Kĩrĩma kĩa mũitĩrĩrĩ,  
Kĩrĩma kĩa mũitĩrĩrĩ  
Ngĩambata na ngĩikũrũka!!  
    Ĩ hũũi humae...  
    ... hae haiya

Nĩ nĩ ndoiriirwo nĩ mbura  
Kĩrĩma kĩa mũitĩrĩrĩ,  
Kĩrĩma kĩa mũitĩrĩrĩ  
Ngĩambata na ngĩikũrũka!

Ndaatukĩrirwo Gĩkũyũ  
Hũi, kĩrĩrĩ kĩa mbũiya,  
Maitũ akiuga nĩ njookerwo,  
Baaba akiuga ndiĩcokerwo  
    Ĩ hũũi humae...  
    ... hae haiya

Mũriitu ngwatia makubu  
Naaniĩ ngũgwatie gituugio  
Na gituugio ngũgũtũgia

Hũi ũrĩre mbaru-ĩ,  
Wone worĩra mbaru-inĩ  
Hũi ndũgacoka kuonwo!  
    Ĩ hũũi humae...  
    ... hae haiya

Gũũkũ nũ kũ ngwanĩrĩra  
Kũũndũ maitũ aareganire,  
Kũũndũ maitũ aareganire  
Naaniĩ ngithuguma ũrĩrĩ!  
    Ĩ hũũi humae...  
    ... hae haiya

Maitũ oimire njaũ ya ita,  
Yaatuungatĩirwo nĩ aanake,  
Yaatuungatĩirwo nĩ aanake,  
Kamũingĩ kooyaga ndirĩ  
    Ĩ hũũi humae...  
    ... hae haiya

I was rained on  
In the mountain of muitiriri,  
In the mountain of muitiriri  
As I ascended and descended!  
I huui humae...  
... hae haiya

Darkness found me away from home  
Inside a the girls' bedroom,

Maitũ yũũyũ njugĩrĩria,  
Ndaaga gukua nĩ ngaataha!  
Magĩrĩ marĩ kũnene  
Ndaaga gukua ni ngaataha!  
    Ĩ hũũi humae...  
    ... hae haiya

Ngeereni ituunywo ahahami  
    Ĩnengerwo njaamba ĩrĩ hinya!  
    Ĩnengerwo njaamba iri hinya!  
Ta ituungati cia Kĩmathi!  
    Ĩ hũũi humae...  
    ... hae haiya

Ngeereni ituunywo ahahami  
    Ĩnengerwo njaamba ĩrĩ hinya  
Ta Kĩgũũnda wa Gathoni...  
    Ĩnengerwo njaamba ĩrĩ hinya.  
(18-21)

Inside a the girls' bedroom,  
As I ascended and descended

I huui humae...  
... hae haiya

Darkness found me away from home  
Inside a the girls' bedroom,  
My mother begged for my search'  
But my father said no

Young woman, lend me your breasts,  
And I will lend you my sword!  
It is a sword I will give you  
Till you disappear under my breast,  
And when you disappear,  
You will never be seen again!

I huui humae...  
... hae haiya

Which place is this where I can shout  
these much Where my mother refused to  
get married, Where my mother refused  
to get married, And I urinated on the  
bed!

I huui humae...  
... hae haiya

My mother's dowry was a calf from a

raid, Which had been grazed by young  
men, Which had been grazed by young  
men, Masses make a difficult job seem  
easy,

I huui humae...  
... hae haiya

Mother, here I am, ululate for me  
If I do not die I will bring wealth to this  
home, Luck seems far away  
If I do not die I will bring wealth to this  
home!

Take the jingles from the oppressors  
Give it to a stronger person!  
Give it to a stronger person,  
Like Kimaathi's patriots!

I huui humae...  
... hae haiya

Take the jingles from the oppressors  
Give it to a stronger person!  
Like Kiguunda son of Gathoni.

Mucung'wa was sung by young men and women basically for entertainment, but this did not restrict them from commenting on varied issues in the society. In the song above, Kiguunda looks back at the past and reminiscences on the famous raids that young men took part in. The warriors returning from the battle were praised with songs and



celebrations, mostly when the battle was successful and accompanied with lots of cattle and goats. Poor parents, especially mothers, awaited the return of their sons with anticipation knowing that this could well be the end of their poverty. When such a son turned up with herds of cattle, goats and sheep, the proud mother would give several trills to the son.

But times have changed, and raids are no longer the source of wealth among most communities as it used to be. The introduction of the money economy during colonialism and individual ownership of land profoundly disrupted the economic set up as it existed in pre-colonial days. After independence, the process through which people acquired land favoured those who collaborated with the colonial government. In Central Kenya, the elites and home guards benefited more than any other groups. This is what Wangeci, Kĩgũũnda's wife, satirically alludes to at the close of the song when Kĩgũũnda refers to himself as a hero:

|  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| Aaa! Ikara thĩ!                        | Aaa! Sit down!                        |
| Njoorua ĩraakura ndĩrĩ mwĩroreri!      | An aging hero has no admirers!        |
| [W]ee nũũ wakũgiririe wendie bũrũri?   | [W]ho stopped you from betraying your |
| Tũtiingĩraakuona gũũkũ                 | country. We would be seeing you       |
| Na mĩondoro ya maciindiici             | Driving around in Mercedes Benz       |
| Na mahiũ ma wereere                    | Owning herds of cattle                |
| Na mĩgũũnda na ng'ongo inyanya         | Many plots of land                    |
| Na ngoombo cia gũtabarĩra indo ciaku   | And servants to tender your wealth    |
| Ĩĩ, ta arũme tũreenyoonera gũũkũ. (21) | Like some men we are seeing around!   |

Clearly, Wangeci spells out for us her husband's economic status and social identity and that the song as sung does not alleviate the status but rather serves to enforce it. The past's definition of heroism (when one was recognized because of the number of cows he had, his prowess in cattle raids or number of wives and children) is no longer in vogue.

Nobody can any more recognize the role that the masses played and contributed to the freedom of their society least of all when they are so deficient in material resources, the present marker of societal heroism. This is what Wangeci is telling her husband, who in comparison to Kĩoi and others is very poor in spite of having been very famous in the past.

The song Kĩgũũnda sings strives to capture the present condition of the society, something that foregrounds the versatility of the song genre and indeed oral literature's continued relevance in the contemporary world. Independence helped in entrenching and legitimising the classes that existed during the colonial period. That is why Kĩgũũnda towards the end of the song alludes to the betrayal of the independent promise, and calls for an end to the present exploitation and oppression of the masses by the ruling elite and the rich. The mantle should once more be given to the patriots who fought side by side with Kimathi, so that that they can steer the country back to its founding principles of justice and equality to all. The proverb that is used in the song “Ndaaga gũkua ni ngaataha/ if I do not die I bring wealth to this home” points to not only to the poverty that Kĩgũũnda and his class lives under but also their dream of a more just and humane social order. We can conclusively say that the song, even as it clearly demarcates the existing class identities, explains the various mind sets that characterise especially the lower strata while yet foregrounding their hopes and longing.

The other song that is closely related to the one we have been interrogating is sang by Gĩcaamba inside Kĩgũũnda's house while they wait for Kĩoi and his wife. They are talking about the relationship between the workers and the owners of capital. He points out to the disproportionate ideal inhered in the sale of labour by the workers and the profit that labour brings, and terms it unfair and imbalanced: “Korwo twendagia hinya witũ, na rĩo itũũra rĩkagunĩka. Igĩtuunywo mwana iikagĩrio mũũngũ! Korwo ũtoonga wa mooko maitũ/ũcokaga gũũkũ-rĩ, nĩ kĩĩ tũtangĩrĩ nakĩo itũũra rĩrĩ rĩothe? If we sell our labour and benefit our society as a result, that would be another thing. In order to take the monkey's baby you must give it something in its place! If the sweat of our labour was to remain in our country, what couldn't for the nation? (43-44). But because the pay is so

meagre, with the biggest percentage getting out of the country, it has ensured that the workers remain on the lowest financial strata, which has turned them into habitual robots day in, day out (40-42). This also led to the breakdown of many families from this class of the society because as he points out:

|                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Rūciini ukainūka                   | You come from work early in the morning |
| Wī mūrīu nī toro.                  | after a night shift. Drank with sleep   |
| Mūtumia nī athiire mūgūūnda.       | To find your wife off to the farm       |
| Ūgacaria harīa gatheri gakunīkīrwo | You look for the food                   |
| Ūkīruma makai meerī, wī toro.      | But even before you've eaten two        |
| [H}wai inī ūyū!                    | mouthfuls, you fall asleep              |
| Mūgacemania na mūtumia akiuma      | Come evening                            |
| mūgūūnda.                          | You meet with your wife as she's coming |
| Mbaaimbaai                         | from the farm.                          |
| Ūkamwīra ūteng'ereete macini-inī   | You wave her goodbye                    |
| Thithino.                          | While running to your place of work.    |
| Bootinaiti                         | Sweat, a lot of sweat                   |
| Tūgana twīrī.                      | A fortnight's pay                       |
| Ke!                                | For a miserly two hundred shillings     |
| Icio ingī, Rūraaya                 | The rest is shipped abroad.             |
| Hīndī ūyo wendeetie                | Despite selling your body's labour;     |
| Mwīrī waku;                        | Your blood;                             |
| Thakame yaaku;                     | Your wife;                              |
| Mūtumia waku;                      | Even your own children!                 |
| O na ciana ciaku!                  | Yes, because you scarcely see them      |
| Ĩ toondu ndūkīmoonaga! (41-42)     |   |

Gīcaamba paints the workers' time as a habitual rigmarole of hard labour with meagre returns, which leaves little time for their family and relations. In the process the worker has to live at the mercy of his employer and risk losing his family. Ideally, the Kenyan worker is torn between his loyalty to the family and the employer. It is then out of the

workers condition that Gicaamba refashions and re-appropriates a traditional song to capture their present plight:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| ĩ gũũkũ kwa wa Gathoni ĩ                  | iregi ĩ tũgithiĩ kũgiirima.                  |
| Ngũraara na ndiinde                       | Ĩ ndirithagia... .. baaba, ĩ na rũthaanju... |
| Ĩ ngaiyirwo na marua.                     | ... Rwa iregi, ĩ tũgithii kũgiirima. (48)    |
| Ĩ gũũkũ kwa..... wa Gathoni               |  |
| Ĩ ngũraara.....na ndiinde                 | I will spend the day at Wa Gathoni's         |
| Ĩ ngaiyirwo na marũa.                     | home   |
|   | And sleep here even                          |
| Ĩ ngwaria cia aruti-a-wĩra                | Until am told to leave                       |
| Ĩ na arĩmi-anyiinyi                       |  |
| Marĩ nduundu matiũraga.                   | I speak about workers                        |
| Ĩ ngwaria cia...Ĩ ngwaria cia..           | And peasant farmers                          |
| ... aruti-a-wĩra, ĩ na arĩmi...           | Those who are united don't fail.             |
| ... anyiinyi, Marũ nduundu matiũraga.     |  |
|   | All the foreign imperialists in Kenya        |
| Ĩ ageni mariĩKenya i                      | Pack your luggage                            |
| Marutirwo mĩrigo                          | For the owners of the house have             |
| Eene mũciĩ meegukinya.                    | arrived.                                     |
| Ĩ ageni... .. marĩ Kenya ĩ marutĩrwo..... |  |
| mĩrigo Eene mũciĩ meegukinya.             | I follow my father                           |
|   | Holding the shepherd's stick                 |
| Ndirithagia baaba ĩ Na rũthaanju rwa      | When tailing/docking sheep.                  |

The above song was sung by elderly men. It was a defiance song known as Njaama, and was sang while a group of men as they moved from various homes eating and dining and sometimes took part in some unspoken practices. The themes of the song, therefore, revolved around the activities that these men were performing then. But what is necessary in the above song, are the issues which Gicaamba introduces as the song goes on.

He talks about the importance of unity among the workers and peasant farmers, the group that has suffered more in the hands of rich factory and land owners and as Kong (1995: 448) says, the song acts “as a rallying call to others so as to establish and reinforce group identity, and to voice dissatisfaction with society, including social norms and political conditions.” Poignantly, he blames the foreign imperialists for their miserable conditions of existence. The unity of workers and peasants will ensure the departure of this oppressive class. In the song it is only the first and the last stanzas which echo the song’s traditional wording; the rest of the song digresses deeply even though the tempo and rhythm is not compromised.

The tone of defiance is transposed, as it was in the past, to mostly galvanise the workers and peasants together. This will make them agitate for better working conditions and demand for better pay for their labour and ensure themselves a dignifying existence. In dualistic way, the song entertains and also criticises the members of the ruling elite for the role they have played in oppressing the workers and peasants. It is also used in inculcating and perpetuating resistance ideology. During an interview by Bjorkman (2006: 175) Ngugi explained the central place that songs played in lives of the peasants:

The peasants often expressed themselves through song. Their songs were functional. They sang during their work, when they were digging the earth, harvesting, building the railway, and so on. If you look at the struggles of Kenya, you will find that the revolt of the people has often been expressed through their cultural assertions, especially through song.

This means that songs which on the superficial level seem harmless entertainment are interpellated with subtle notions of resistance becoming in words of Furniss and Gunner (1995: 4) a prism from which:

Expressions of resistance or alternative views are articulated. In some circumstances, the distinction between supportive and subversive may correspond with genre boundaries; in others even the most narrowly circumscribed of genres

may intrinsically be double-edged-praise song may be, in an instant, transformed into innuendo or vilification.

The song, as sung by Gicaamba, castigates the owners of capital, but at the same time it champions a creation of collective identity of all the exploited classes, who can then, in unity, be able to wrestle their way out of their present circumstance.

The last song we interrogate attempts to forge a united front among workers and peasants as they prepare to face their oppressors. In the song they are asked to candidly choose the side they want to belong to in the struggle for meaningful existence. The song revisits, in an allusive way, the motif of the struggle for independence and calls for the same conviction against the postcolonial exploiters and oppressors. It also casts the society as divided along economic/material identities, with the exploited classes cohering around the ideals of equality and justice. The trumpet has been blown and the patriots are once again being called to answer the call of a nation in pain:

Coro wa aruti wira nĩ mũhuuhe  
Nduungata ciothe twarahũke  
Arĩmi oothe twarahũke  
Athĩni oothe twarahũke.

Coro wa athĩni ni mũhuuhe,  
Tũhuunjirie araata aitũ  
Coro wa athĩni ni mũhuuhe  
Tũgarurire nyiimbo ciitũ  
Nĩ amu ituĩka rĩ hakuhi.

Coro wa aruti wira ni mũhuuhe  
Nĩ tunogeetio nĩ ũtuunyani  
Nĩ tũnogeetio nĩ ũhahami  
Ūhahami wa mĩgũũnda

Utajiri na ukombo  
O na ũhooi na ũrumani.

Coro wa aruti wira nĩ mũhuuhe,  
Tũnyitane ngwatanĩro  
Ta ya gĩkwa na mũkũngũgũ  
Ngwatanĩro nĩ yo njũgũma  
Ngwatanĩro nĩ yo rūhiũ  
Ngwatanĩro nĩ yo mũcinga  
Ngwatanĩro n yo ngo iitũ  
Ngwatanĩro nĩ yo njĩra  
Ngwatanĩro nĩ yo hinya  
Ngwatanĩro nĩ yo ũtheri  
Ngwatanĩro nĩ yo ũtoonga

Coro wa athĩĩni wira nĩ mũhuuhe  
 Wa aruti wĩra nĩ mũhuuhe  
 Ngwatanĩro nĩ igĩrĩ  
 Ya aruti a wĩra naya itoonga  
 Wee ũgakorwo wĩ mwena ũrikũ. (118-  
 119)  
 The trumpet of workers has been blown  
 All patriots must arise  
 All peasants must arise  
 And the poor must arise too.  
  
 The trumpet of the poor has been blown  
 Lets us tell all our friends  
 That the trumpet has sounded  
 Let us refashion our songs  
 For the change of leadership is at hand.  
  
 The trumpet of the poor has been blown  
 We are tired of oppression  
 We are tired of exploitation  
 Exploitation of our land

Of riches and slavery  
 Of begging and slander.  
  
 The trumpet of the poor has been blown  
 Let us all come together  
 Like the yam and its supporting tree  
 Unity is our weapon  
 Unity is our sword  
 Unity is our gun  
 Unity is our shield  
 Unity is our way  
 Unity is our strength  
 Unity is our light  
 Unity is our source of riches  
  
 The trumpet of the poor has been blown  
 Even for the workers  
 There are two types of union  
 One for the workers and one for the rich  
 Which one do you belong to?

The above song seems to be propagating a specific socio-ideological agenda to the masses of all oppressed peoples of Kenya – the need to build a coalition of oneness under the common banner of unity. This is basic to all those who have been subjected to peripheral existence in their various societies. The song does not only offer an entertainment platform but becomes a tool of societal mobilisation and criticism. The various songs we have been analysing are sung by the bulk of Kenyan workers and peasants and therefore confine themselves to revealing their own understanding of the world and the fundamental ideas around which they form their own identity. We also need to interrogate the songs sang by the other classes in order to see the ideologies that

explain their world.

The foundational ideology and identity of the Black upper middle class who are mainly the clergy, elites and rich land owners can be traced to the development of Christian theology and doctrine, as well as colonial tradition in Africa. This is the group that took over the control of the newly independent African countries after the colonialists' departure. This is because of their close proximity with the White missionaries and educationists enabled them to become more acculturated into colonial tradition and mannerism. Supporting this view, Ranger (1983: 226) quotes Ali Mazrui in explaining how black soldiers were moulded into becoming replicas of English army officers with "all the signs of colonial conditioning" where they were made to instantly adhere to the strict codes of "obedience, fierce regimental pride, reverence towards Britain and the British." On the other hand, "many mission-educated Africans were taken into the lower ranks of bureaucratic hierarchy. African clerks came to value the rubber stamps and the row of pens in the breast pocket; African dance societies made use of purloined rubber stamps to authenticate their correspondence with each other, and danced in full bureaucratic as well as military array" (Ranger, 1983: 226). This was replicated in all spheres of their life as the most realistic way of living and being. Those who became priests were indoctrinated into abandoning their traditional religions in favour of Christianity and "were trained to perform the invented and re-invented rituals of nineteenth-century European ecclesiology" (1983: 226).

It is in the above received tradition that Joshua (in Ngugi's *The River Between*) and his family falls. In Nyambura's words to her sister Muthoni, they are "now wise in the ways of the white people" (1965: 25), hence the need to shun all practices associated with traditional religion and practice. During initiation ceremonies sacrifices were made and initiates "went from house to house, singing and dancing the ritual songs, the same that had been sung from old times, when Demi were on the land" (39). To Joshua this was the height of heathenism and a source of great vexation to his now purified soul.

The above reference helps in developing the basis within which the ruling classes



shunned traditional songs and dances and courted Christian ones. The traditional songs were viewed as sites of pagan ritual and associated with the lower classes. Peterson (2000: 159-60) elucidates on how some of these traditions propelled the newly converted Africans into positions of power within their various societies. In especially among the Gĩkũyũ of Central Kenya, the new converts felt ignored in the great generational succession of “Itiuka” and borrowed overwhelmingly from the biblical rhetoric in foregrounding their own visibility as capable leaders. Peterson (2000: 159-60) explains this further:

The Bible was rhetoric of ethnic debate, translating readers’ into a vocabulary of generational protest. Brought together by a common sense of unrequited merit, spurned for their soap and cotton clothing, readers found in the word a set of stories with which to launch claims on Gikuyu power. They translated Christians categories of self-ness into a Gikuyu platform of speech, finding in “conscience” and “soul” ways suited of proving themselves worthy of hearing. Claiming the right to speak, they argued that their knowledge of foreign ways suited them for leadership in Gikuyu common weal.

This group, as observed earlier, was to form the bulk from which the future leaders of independent Kenya were drawn. In their hands the Bible, as Ngugi has vividly captured in *Caaitani* (1980:77), was to become a powerful tool in supporting their capitalistic tendencies. Their manner of dressing as pointed by Peterson above, their manner of singing and behaviour was to continue well after independence and was to become the hallmark of their group identity as we hope to show from the songs sang in *Ngahika Ndeenda*.

In the first place, the language that Kĩoi uses to introduce Ndugĩre serves to separate the two from Kĩgũũnda and Gĩcaamba’s family: “Ũyũ nĩ mũrakĩmũmenya/Nĩ mũrũwa ithe witũ /I bet you know that this is my brother in Christ” (52). In short the two of them are followers of Christ therefore different from Kĩgũũnda and Gĩcaamba and that they have been saved from a past of sinful living to more decent and holy existence. Ndugĩre (52-

53) narrates his past as a cruel home guard and a grabber of people's property until he got the call from Christ:

Mbere ïo ndarĩ ngaati njũru mũno  
Ndaarĩaga indo ciene,  
O hamwe na kũũragana,  
Na maũũndũ maangĩ maingĩ,  
[N]o Mwathani nĩ aakĩnjĩtĩre hĩĩndĩ ïyo,  
mwaka wa 1963,  
Kwarĩ ũtukũ gatagati,  
Nditheemba ikũmi na igĩrĩ,  
Akĩnjĩra:  
Ndugĩre... Uhuru mwega nĩ wa ngoro.  
Tiga mũtego waku na thuutha,  
Nũmĩrĩra rĩu,  
Na nĩ ngagutua mũtegi andũ.  
(Maine:)

*Nĩ ngagutua mũtegi andũ,  
Mũtegi andũ, mutegi anduũ,  
Nĩ ngagũtua mũtegi andũ,  
Wanũmĩrĩra,  
Wanũmĩrĩra,  
Wanũmĩrĩra,  
Ni ngagutua mutegi andu  
Wanũmĩrĩra.*

Who took other people's property,  
I even used to kill others  
And many other cruel things,  
But God called me on the midnight of  
12<sup>th</sup> December, 1963,  
And told me:  
Ndugire... it is better to have freedom in  
one's heart.  
Leave your snares behind,  
And follow me,  
And I will make you a fisher of human  
beings.  
(Kioi, Ndugire and their wives break  
into a song :)  
*I will make you a fisher of human  
beings,  
A fisher of human beings, a fisher of  
human beings I will make you a fisher of  
human beings,  
If you follow me,  
If you follow me,  
If you follow me,  
I will make you a fisher of human beings  
If you follow me.*

I used to be a very cruel home guard.

The song explains the beginning of his present status and chiefly affirms that his wealth is a blessing from God after he accepted to become His follower and repenting his sins. But unlike the disciples of old who went about saving souls for Christ, Ndugire uses his new found status to enrich himself contrary to the song's meaning. The song is followed by another one that praises God for what he has done in Ndugire's life, for having given him wealth (in form of businesses, land, cattle) as result of his acknowledging Him (53-54).

According to Viljoen (2008: 83) "a dominant power may legitimate itself by promoting beliefs and values congenial to it; naturalizing and universalizing search beliefs so as to render them self evident." Imperatively, it is notable that the choice of songs paints Kioi and Ndugire as more holy and better than the poorer classes therefore more deserving of material prosperity. This is despite the confession that he did not give anything to the bank in order to get the loan, his rich friends supported him: "Ngai nĩ aratuonitie kamũgũnda kaniini/ Na kũũrĩa ceetũrũndi iiria/Mwathani no we ũraacokire/ Araatũtwara beengi/ Araatuonera rũũni ya gũgikagũra/ Nĩ uukuona ndiinaruta ndururu mũhuko/ God enabled us find a piece of land in one of the settlement schemes. He also helped us get a bank loan and I did not spend any coin (53). And so they sing with a sense of accomplishment for what their identity has helped them achieve:

Ngũkinyũkia o kahora,  
 Njerekeire ya matu-inĩ  
 Na nĩ njũũi ngaakinya  
 Ngahuurũke na arĩa atheru.  
 Nĩ wega Ngai mũtoongoria  
 Naake Njĩicu nĩ mũgate  
 Roho waku mũnyootokia  
 Ndĩkaahũũta kana nyote.

Nyamũ njũru na mirimũ

O na thĩna itiingĩnyiita  
 Cionaga ngĩakana mwaki  
 Nĩ kũhuumbwo riiri wa Ngai.  
 (54)

I will march on confidently,  
 On my way to heaven  
 And I know I will finally reach my  
 destination

And rest with rest with the saints.  
Thank God our leader  
And Jesus is the bread  
Your Holy Spirit satisfies me  
I will never hunger nor thirst.

Even poverty cannot get at me  
They are confronted by a flaming  
fire  
Given me by the grace of God.

Evil things and diseases

It is easy to decipher the sense of entitlement and accomplishment that this class has about itself. Basking in the glory of their own material prosperity, nothing, not even diseases, can harm them. Singing it out joyfully inside the house of a poor peasant tells clearly of their perception about the poorer classes. Poverty is a form of curse for those who have not fully accepted Christianity and the ways of those who helped entrench it. The song casts them as a special group that fully deserves God's protection down here and a place of eternal bliss in the world to come. Ideologically, the Christian values and beliefs afford them some normative and legitimating force with which to view and treat the lower classes of the society as represented by Kiguunda and Gicaamba. The differing identity exhibited by the two groups is aptly summed up by Bjorkman (1989: 49) by words of an interviewee:

The culture of the upper classes is inherited from the colonial power. They identify with foreign rulers; they don't even speak their national language – they speak English. Their culture is not genuine; in our country it is foreign, artificial, sterile. Thus, there are two cultures in Kenya: the foreign one of the minority which is the rulers' culture, and the indigenous one of the majority, which is the culture of peasants and workers. Culture is class-based and forms an integral part of the class struggle in our society.

### **6.3 Ideology and Resistance in *Maitu Njugira/Mother, Sing For Me***

In this section we look at how songs in the play are used in subverting colonialist ideology in order to foster resistance and hope. The play's relevance in the contemporary postcolonial state is interrogated now that most of the action takes place in the past before Kenya acquires her independence. Brown (1999: 68) posits that the play "set in the 30's,

was a thinly veiled allegory – so thinly veiled that, as in a Brechtian parable, this veiling is itself an impudence – of the betrayal of independence by the new ruling class.” The events take place in a colonial farm owned by a colonial settler nicknamed Kanoru and the whole history about colonial conquest is played out and the many laws which were set to control and subdue the Africans. Africans have been socialised to believe in the near divine supremacy and the Omni-presence of the white man. Kariuki (55) is unable to hide the piece of paper he found in Kangethe’s overall because of the fear that the white man will find out even though he is just alone. The play represents the quintessential journey that Africa has gone through from slavery, colonialism and post colonialism.

The abolition of slavery towards the close of 1800 opened the doors to the colonisation of Africa. Even though it had been a cruel system where human beings had been turned into merchandise for sale to serve as domestic and farm hands without pay, colonialism was no better. The fundamentals of slavery were systematised and legitimised by the use of laws that justified forced labour:

THE COLONIAL PHILOSOPHY OF FORCE: FORCE AND THE PRESTIGE WHICH RESTS ON A BELIEF IN FORCE ARE THE ONLY WAY YOU CAN DO ANYTHING WITH THIS PEOPLE... THESE PEOPLE MUST LEARN SUBMISSION BY BULLETS – IT’S THE ONLY SCHOOL... HARDINGE, APRIL 25, 1897. (7)

To entrench the above philosophy, a set of laws were passed under the title of “LABOUR ORDINANCES 1896 – 1919” (8), which included “VAGRANCY LAW and NATIVE PASS ORDINANCE, 1900” (8). Other laws included those which defined the relationship between the master and servants or essentially the colonial leadership and the Africans. These were some of the ideological measures that the colonial administration took to enforce its hegemony over the colonised.

Ngugi, in the play, borrows heavily from Brecht’s concept of epic theatre but blends it with Picastor’s latter development of the epic form (qtd in Boal, 1979: 71) where, “for

the first time in a theatrical spectacle, Piscator used motion pictures, slides, graphics, in short, all the mechanisms or resources that can help to explain the reality present in the text of a work. This absolute freedom of form, with the inclusion of any element until then unusual, was called by Piscator ‘epic’ form.’’ In many places Ngugi recommends the use of slides in illuminating some aspects in the play (*Maitu*, 3) and bringing into sharp focus the specific events as they were in the historic past which the play is re-enacting.

Brecht’s concept of the epic theatre rests on the Marxian premise of literature’s role in societal transformation and change where the writer or the artist is expected to “‘promote the movement toward national liberation and toward the liberation of the classes oppressed by capital’’ (Boal, 1979: 87). The play centres on the Africans desire for dignifying labour relations amidst the White man’s voracity and pursuit of profit without any regard for the latter’s sense of humanity. The ensuing struggle is, therefore, anchored on the need to transform an existing order that is exploitative and oppressive plus all its justifying ideology. The workers then use songs as a mobilization strategy and also to preserve and articulate their own African identity. Ndigirigi (2007: 164-169) sees this as Ngugi’s way of:

Rethinking the poetics of cultural production in postcolony. It forced him to take oral traditions and popular culture seriously and to seek ways of incorporating them seriously into his aesthetic ideology. Drama had become important for Ngugi at precisely the moment he seemed unsure about the capacity of the novel to effect social change.

In *Maitu Njugira*, he specifically courted the use of traditional songs to talk about what was happening in his own society and also to resist the emerging postcolonial tyranny. The play is anchored on a traditional celebration song sung by young men returning from a successful cattle raid. Though the song is only inferred to from the title, it has a close and symbolic reference to the successful struggle of independence. The song is a son’s call to his mother to trill for him because he has returned from the raid alive and victorious. During the raid, the son says that he was met by the screams of Maasai

women. It is important to point that historically the Maasai, being the Gikuyu neighbours, were always involved with raiding conflicts with Gikuyu because the latter were and still are predominantly a pastoralist community whose main economic way of life is cattle keeping. The song forms the proverbial background discussed in the fourth chapter “Gũtirĩ mũciĩ wĩ kahii ũtakarigwo mũtwe/ a family that has a boy child will one day slaughter a goat” (*Matigari*, 65).

Most of the other songs sung in the play would fall under work songs since we encounter them when the workers are in the farm, even though they might be borrowed from other song types. Commenting on the genre of work poetry, Johnson (1995:111) explains that “in the case of work poetry, the message may not even be related to the work being conducted, the work only lending itself as a convenient activity during which to facilitate communication on very sensitive issue by individuals otherwise excluded from the main power structure of the society.” The songs comment on diverse issues taking place in the society in spite of the fact that they are sang when people are working. An important observation is how Ngugi attempts a dialogue between Kenyan languages by placing songs from different communities side by side. This would appear to be an answer to Gatuiria’s quest in *Caitani* (55) of creating a song out of the many Kenyan languages: “ngwĩka atĩa rĩu nduunge rwĩmbo rĩmwe rwa bũrĩri witũ Kenya, rwĩmbo rĩũgũtwarana na mũtukanio wa inaanda cia ndũrĩrĩ ciitu cia Kenya tũinage mũgambo ũmwe uumĩite mũgaambo-inĩ mũngĩ? Harmony in polyphony./ what will I do in order to compose a song about our country Kenya, a song that will include all the languages of Kenyan people and their instruments, so that we can sing one song blended with the many voices from the Kenyan people. Harmony in polyphony.”

The opening song from the Kamba community and indeed all others from the Luo, Luhya and Giriama communities are Ngugi’s homage to the idea about the conversation and dialogue between languages or what Ndigirigi (2007: 87) explains as Ngugi’s experimentation “with expressive forms like the more universal mime, song and dance that are more multi-ethnic. An attempt to collect together emblems of a national community.” The song like others in the play captures the sense of disillusionment that

the Kenyan masses were suffering at the hands of the White land owners and their black supervisors. It revisits the motif of slavery and the people's desire for freedom:

|                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Ngulsaye Kaleso                  | Kaleso, I keep on asking myself this    |
| Wathi nititwe mwendwa            | question                                |
| Witumy'o komoni                  | About this song they keep on telling me |
| Kuna koo musukano?               | to sing, my love                        |
|                                  | Will it rescue us from slavery?         |
| Thina wa Kaleso                  | Or is mere nonsense.                    |
| Wathi nititwe mwendwa            |   |
| Witumy'o komoni                  | When I was told to sing I said          |
| Kuna koo musukano?               | How can I sing in my enslaved state?    |
|                                  | But when things were explained to me    |
| Neewa nine ngasya                | I decided to sing.                      |
| Ukomboni ndinaa                  |   |
| Na natawa ndeto ngaina           | I must go home now                      |
| Yu ni ngwinuka na musyi          | Even though it is far                   |
| Kwitu ni kuasa                   | I can't persevere these problems any    |
| Na thiino sio ti kumiisya. (1-2) | longer.                                 |

The song is being sang by workers while busy doing manual labour in Settler Kanoru's land. The scene as described (*Maitu*, 2) reminds one of the stories of cruelty during slavery. Workers both young and old, tied together in chains, are forced to work in plantations as the overseers walk around beating those who are tired and wish to rest. These are the conditions that the song captures and expresses these workers' hope and yearning. The other song closely related to this one narrates of similar experience but goes further to question the presence of a caring God. The dual experience of slavery and colonialism has been described by many African scholars as process which saw the death



of the African God due to unprecedented cruelty that was visited on them by foreigners in their own societies. The song also implores the workers to endure in the face of this great suffering:

Ūūi ndooneire ūūru tĩri ūyũ  
Nĩ guo atĩ ngaũrekia,  
Twĩyũmĩrĩrie.

Ūūi I have suffered greatly for this land  
Being forced to disown it  
Let's encourage ourselves.

Twĩyũmĩrĩrie  
Njũũthĩrĩrie gwa Kanoru  
Ūcio ni mũthũngũ wa kĩboko  
Na gũcũunga nũ gũkũura ithukĩ.

Let's encourage ourselves  
As we work in Kanoru's farm  
The white man with the whip  
As we uproot stumps from his farm.

Ūūi kĩrĩro kĩngĩ ndooneirio kuo  
Ngai witũ athiĩte ūgeni  
Twĩyũmĩrĩrie. (13)

Ūūi we have suffered greatly  
May be our God had gone for a visit  
Let's encourage ourselves.

The other part of the song repeats the same words as an emphasis to the anguished experience that these workers are going through. These songs re-enacted many years after the colonial experience serve to remind the people of the experience that their forebears went through lest the present generation forget. Commenting about these songs as used in the play *Ndigirigi* (2007: 101) says that through the songs “the workers reinscribe the colonial text with their past of suffering at the hands of a “humanistic” colonial force, they stage their past as symbol, memory and history, they reiterate this past formulaically as a subversive lesson for the present and in the process unmask the depravity of the “modernizing colonizers.” Through some of these songs people were given a chance of knowing what their past compatriots thought about issues to do with oppression and exploitation. These songs according Bjorkman (1989: 77) were also “given new meanings, enabling the younger generations to learn about colonial history from the

people's view point in a dramatic and moving way.''

The other songs that follow trace the waking consciousness among the African workers especially after the First World War. They also express the ungrateful nature of the white man: while the white soldiers were rewarded for their efforts in the war Africans were brutalised instead:

Mbara nene ya 1918

Ndetwarire na kwiyendera

Na wanjĩrĩra kĩheeo

Ndianakiona kana ngaheeo:

Tiga kĩbandi na iboko

Gũtwarwo kware ndiregeete

Gũtwarwo njeera ndiregeete

Kĩndũ iteekwenda no kĩheeo

Ngaatho yanyu nĩ igooti-inĩ

Na kĩbandi kĩ ngingo ta mbugi

Nyakeeru kaĩ wĩ mũnyaka atĩa

Andũ airũ makũgitagĩre

Twara ũhahami waku rũraaya

Ndigaagukurira rĩngĩ

Kĩheeo gĩaku ndiikwenda

Ūkoombo wanyu nĩ tũkũiga thĩ

Mũtukuue o na ithuĩ tũrĩ andũ

Ūtuunyani na ũhahami

Na ũici wanyu na ũkombo

Macio moothe nĩ tũkuiga thĩ. (21)

I took part the great war of 1918

Out of my own volition

You promised me a reward

But I never got it

You gave me a passbook and whipped me instead

You can force me to work in your quarry

You can take me to prison even

But I will not take your reward

Because instead of showing me gratitude you took me to court instead

And you forced me wear a passbook around my neck like a bell

How lucky do you think you are white man?

That black people must do everything for you

Take your oppression back to Europe

I will not work for you again  
I refuse to take your gifts.

We refuse your enslavement

You must treat us like human beings  
Exploitation and oppression  
Robbery and enslavement  
All of them must be shunned.

The song unmasks the white man as a liar but also reveals the ignorance that they had about the black man's experience in the First World War. The war served to open the eyes of the black people as to the vulnerability of the white man and shed out the idealised image of the white man as all knowing and invincible. The song prepares the African for struggle that is to come; neither prison nor forced labour can stop it, as they are now more aware of the white man's strength and weakness. In its own merit, this song can be said to have been at the nascent in the growth of African nationalism and the basis through which future African struggle for liberation was formed. Firmly anchored on a historical reality, Ngugi's play and mostly through the use of songs serve to propagate resistance ideology. The message is that they too can rebel, as their forebears did with the colonizers, against their present black exploiters. Indeed, it was easy as Bjorkman (1989: 90) explains to see:

The parallel between the 1930's colonial regime and the contemporary domestic regime Suggested in the text; the performance elucidated this parallel. The audience correctly interpreted the author's intentions by perceiving the association between what was enacted and a particular period of Kenya's historical experience and their own experiences of the contemporary economic, political, social and cultural oppression. In short, the play and its characters served as metaphors were, as Ngugi intended, seized upon in their contemporary aspect.

The ideas encapsulated in the song, therefore, despite being based on the colonial past, candidly relay the conditions people are living in and the parallels they have with that

past.

The other song is a re-adaptation of the muthuu song which was sang by boys during their leisure time. They sang of their boyhood experiences and foregrounded their expectations as future warriors or brave men by quoting stories of bravery from famous heroes from the traditional past. They sang holding fake swords made from wood and swung them around as they danced. The next song we look at castigates fear among the people and decries the entrenchment of selfishness as the two vices which helped the white man embed himself in African societies. Fear also deters people from fighting for their emancipation. Kariuki, as trained mechanic has been working under Kang'ethe (now dead after being shot by a firing squad for leading the workers in the burning of the passbooks), has been chosen to carry the mantle of leadership but fear stops him from partaking this position. The song serves to strengthen his resolve and finally lead the people into the struggle for emancipation. From a boy's leisure song, this song is refashioned as one that mobilises people into shunning away fear and selfishness and helps in restoring the dignity of black people:

Kĩremberembe nyũngũ ãrĩ gũkua  
Ngiuma rithaabu ndioĩ kana  
Nĩ ngaciara mwana ũgwĩtwo  
Nyakĩguoya.

Nĩ mwanonera mũthũngũ mũirũ  
[M]ũthuũngũ mũirũ ũũkũnyua thigara  
[N]a atemeete roori gatagati.

Ngiuma rithaabu ndioĩ kana  
Nĩ ngaciara mwana ũgwĩtwo  
Nyakĩguoya.

Na ihua ituune kagooti-inĩ  
[N]a tai. Ya rũrigi ngingo-inĩ  
[Na] rĩitwa rĩake eegwĩtwo mwendanda.

**At this juncture the song changes and  
Nyathira takes over.**

Nĩ ngũkuũũria kũũria  
Ĩ ng'we ng'we ĩ ng'we

Ĩ nyakeeru ookiire ku. Hũyũĩ maigoya  
Ĩ ng'we ng'we ĩ ng'we

Ookĩire iria-inĩ

Iria-inĩ akĩgerera kwa Waiyaki  
Hũyũĩ maigoya

Nĩ ngũkũũria kĩngĩ  
Ĩ ng'we ng'we ĩ ng'we

Nyakeeruĩ ni kanyoni mũthemba ũ?  
Hũyũĩ maigoya

Mbari ya thũkũmũ  
Thũkũmũ yaaninĩra kairũ tĩri  
Hũyũĩ maigoya

Mbarĩ ya thũkũmũ ĩ yaakaga kũ?  
Hũyũĩ maigoya  
Ĩ yaakaga mĩiri-inĩ  
Ya arimi anyinyi na aruti-a-wĩra  
Hũyũĩ maigoya. Nĩ ngũkũũria kĩngĩ  
Ĩ kĩngĩ riu na ithui tũgwĩka atĩa?  
Hũyũĩ maigoya. (57-61)

Kiremberembe the pot has broken  
When I left my home  
I never thought I would give birth  
To a coward

Have yo ever seen a black European?  
One who smokes

Whose hair has a row in the middle.  
And a red flower on his coat  
And a tie around his neck.

And his name is gluttony

When I left my home  
I never thought I would give birth  
To a coward

**At this juncture the song changes and  
Nyathira takes over.**

I will ask you a question  
I ng'we ng'we I ng'we  
A question  
How did the white man get here?  
Huyui maigoya.

He came by sea  
And passed through Waiyaki's home  
Huyui maigoya.

I will ask you another one  
I ng'we ng'we I ng'we  
What kind of a bird is the white man?  
Huyui maigoya.

The clan of oppressors'  
The one who took all of the black  
people's land  
Huyui maigoya.

I will ask you another one  
Where do the white oppressors build?  
Huyui maigoya

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>They build on bodies of others<br/>I ng'we ng'we I ng'we<br/>Like those of workers and peasants</p> | <p>I will ask you another one<br/>What are we going to do?<br/>Huyui maigoya.</p> |
|--|---|

The first song despite castigating cowardly behaviour also talks about those who desert their traditions for foreign ones. They are the one who sell and betray their people for a mess of pottage. It also prepares Kariuki for his future role as the leader of the revolution after Kangethe has been killed. He and others are castigated for their fear; those who have partaken the ways of the White man's are also chided. This song is immediately followed by another one which uses a question and answer technique and it seeks to help people unravel the identity of the white man. It was not unusual in the Gikuyu traditional society to sing several different songs in one setting. One soloist after getting tired would give a chance to another one to continue with the same song or introduce a different song. This way many diverse issues would be brought out in the process. The colonial ideology of forced labour is examined by use of vibrant traditional episteme that questions the place of the colonial master in African society and the possibilities of a future without this oppressive regime.

The song departs widely from its traditional counterpart but only retains its introductory sentence; all the other lines have been placed for Ngugi's own ideological reasons. Speaking to Choru wa Muiruri, who played Ahab Kioi in *Ngahika Ndeenda* and Kang'ethe in *Maitu Njugira*, he explained to me that most of the songs were sang the way Ngugi had crafted them but for others the cast changed some of the wordings and phrases and other times changed the arrangement of the stanzas. His take was that the fact that Ngugi allowed them to do that made them identify with the play and indeed made them own it. Fundamentally, the changes that Ngugi had placed in the various songs in the play made them learn about: The need for unity and what a unified people can achieve, the importance of courage and why fear is detrimental, the rights we have as human beings, importance of asking questions about the conditions of our lives, the role of leaders and our relationship with them etc., culture as a unifying force and resistance as a pathway to

freedom.

In short, the things that Ngugi intended to pass to the audience were internalised by both the actors and the audience according to Choru Muiruri. At the heart of the many changes found in the songs or the cultural adaptations was Ngugi's ideological agenda: making the people understand their place in the postcolonial society and the role they can and should play in shaping their lives and therefore their whole existence.

Choru's views are corroborated by Bjorkman (1989: 85-86):

*Mother, Sing for Me* involved singing, dancing, dialogue and action. All this has to do with drama which has a way of penetrating the language barrier that prose and poetry does not. The audience is not with cold print, but with action and speech. Changes in tone and stress communicate meaning in themselves. The design of costumes and décor add to the visual image. Gestures, facial expressions and movement all contribute toward communicating meaning. The non-Gikuyu audience may not be familiar with the language but the difference between a sad song and a victorious one, between laughter and a groan of pain, between wooing a girl, picking tea leaves, fashioning a rifle and killing a man are obvious to all. These different things are enlivened, enacted, sometimes in a heightened manner, so that whereas they may escape her/him in real life, here they are, larger than life and unmistakable. The decisive factor for their understanding was that the events on-stage were recognized by all as part of their reality. The events were common and the stereotyped characters who were well known... *“This is how we made our guns.” “This is how we were cheated out of our lands.” “Those are the qualities you must possess if you are to be born again.” “That is what happened to KCA.” “This is how we live today.”* These were constantly recurring comments in the interviews, which demonstrated how closely some episodes in *Mother, Sing for Me* resembled real life experiences of the people. (Italics mine)

The italicised words meld in a way to Choru's own conclusion about the play and the

impact it had on him as a person and the members of the audience. The reference to KCA reiterates the importance of history in people's lives. The words as used in the play and the action helped in suggesting what the people must do so as to rescue themselves from the present quagmire.

The songs reject the present post-colonial order, which is indeed a colonial legacy, by reliving the same unjust past in order to point the way forward. The rhetorical question that the soloist asks at the close of the song is supposed to provoke the audience into critically examining their present predicament. Ngugi in the words of Okpewho (1983: 204) "continues to revere that tradition and to use it as the basis for his recommendations on the contemporary African and his proposals for contemporary action." What was supposed to be a boys' leisure song is radically remodelled into questioning the matrix of colonialism and its resultant heritage of neo-colonialism. We can, therefore, appreciate Ngugi's choice of oral poetry tradition as a relevant schema that seeks to not only educate the masses about ways used by the ruling classes to edify exploitation and oppression but also in suggesting the way out of the present quagmire. These songs also make *Maitu Njugira* fall under social protest theatre which according to Ndigirigi (2007: 133) is a form that "has an explicit social purpose and directs audiences to social action." Quoting Harry Elam, he points out that this theatre traces "its base solely among marginalized peoples and oppositional struggles. That such protest performances, function as counterhegemonic strategies through which underrepresented groups challenge the dominant social order and agitate for change."

Brown (1999: 69-70) on his part defines this type of theatre as a learning theatre, one that not only seeks social transformation but also educates the audience about the contradictions of bourgeois ideology. He continues to explain that:

The governing trope of the learning theatre is not the exposure of the theatre apparatus as it is but rather its transformation. Its social goal is to expose a bourgeois audience to the contradictions of its own ideology, but to also create a new ideology, the New in a utopian sense, this goal is figured in the goal of



learning itself, which takes on a radically new form or content of the final “product,” which is finally not so much a performance as an experience of group praxis and a new historical self-consciousness. The original rift in the Marxist narrative of capitalist production – the alienation of the workers from the product of his or her labor – is metaphorically bridged by the unity of audience and performer. This is radicalized in the theatre of Ngugi, where the totally reified social apparatus of the Nairobi theatre is replaced by the Kamiriithu project, where the village that built the theatre, that wrote the songs, that acted the parts, and whom the performance was designed to reach – and who, in some cases, had lived the history, fought the revolution, and experienced its betrayal – are all identical. It is a constructive theatre, one truly at home only in an historical moment when one can imagine a radically transformed world as a concrete possibility. It is, in other words, a utopian theatre. Even if what is presented is a dystopic present, the relations of theatrical production all suggest that the deepest content of Ngugi’s learning plays is a utopian future where producers, consumer, and the owner of means of production are all identical.

Most of the other songs espouse on the struggle for freedom while praising the heroes of independence and rebuking those who supported the white man in oppressing their own people. They cut a clear division between the masses of exploited workers and peasants on one hand and the colonisers and their black collaborators. The latter use oppressive laws and force to subjugate the masses, and religion is described as one of ideological apparatuses that were used into putting the final nail in the colonising mission and imperialism. Nyathira (*Maitu*, 68), tells the preacher off as they did not question Kanoru’s, the apotheosis of colonial order, act of rape. Rape here is both physical and symbolic, where the preacher looks the other way as people are oppressed and the land taken away from them and also preaches obedience and humility amidst acts of horror and inhumanity.

Towards the end of the play when the struggle has been fought and won, the masses gather to celebrate the newly found freedom and look forward to a bright future (*Maitu*,

131). But in their joy, they forget the role that the corroborators had played in ensuring the continued suffering by allowing them to be part of the delegate that is discussing the question of leadership of the new nation. These turncoats take over the leadership of the country and we are back to where we started. The song at the beginning is replayed, the structures are the same but players are different. The patriots are the new enemies of the independent state as symbolised by Kariuki's predicament at the hands of the police:

Nĩ mũkuona ũria ahaana?

Ndarĩ mooko,

Ndarĩ rũrĩmĩ.

Nĩ kĩ?

Nĩ ũndũ wa kũmenya mũno.

Baruuthi akiuga ũyũ atuike kionereria

Kĩa ũrĩa mbarĩ kamenyi marĩkagwo.

Mũndũ ta ũyũ, utooi 'ĩ' kane 'e'

Kwĩgĩrĩra ũturi wa micinga?

Ũrendaga kuonia mbarĩ ya Nyakairũ

atĩa?

Ririkanai:

Kĩguoya ainũkĩire nyina.

Agĩtiga gĩcamba kĩaaro. (139)

Can you see how he looks like?

He has no hands

And has no tongue.

Why?

Because of being a know it all

He had to an example

Of what happens to those who know too much

A person who can't read or write

And is making guns

What did you want to show the black race?

Remember:

The coward went home safely to his mother

And left the hero in the field.

And there we are back to the beginning and the song is the same. The farm now belongs to a black man; the workers are still poor and complaining. Kariuki serves as an example of what will happen to those who dare question the new structures of power. It is on the basis of the new postcolonial structures that the play resonates with the past acting as the template on which the contemporary conditions are placed. The songs bring out the nature of the oppressing classes and the many ways they employ to ensure submission. The songs help the people unmask the oppressors which will in the long run aid them in

resisting.

#### **6.4 Conclusion**

From the aforementioned examples a visible divide appears when one interrogates the songs sung by the two dominant groups in the play *Ngaahika Ndeenda/I Will Marry When I Want*. On one hand the masses sing about the conditions they live in while borrowing overwhelmingly from traditional songs which they transform and re-appropriate. The songs paint a picture of a group that is shackled and oppressed by their black counterparts who control the means of production. They use the songs to not only underscore a sense of loss and social degeneration that is wont to their class but to also redefine themselves in readiness for the struggle of a more humane and just society.

On the other hand, the rich land owners borrow from existing Christian songs in justifying their place in the post-independent African society. These songs candidly articulate their closeness to God as opposed to their poorer and less-deserving brothers. *Maitu Njugira/ Mother, Sing for Me*, like its counter part, brings out two differing groups but from a historical perspective mirroring the colonial class and its collaborating group of black supervisors and overseers. On other hand, the majority of the workers and peasants have been forced to work on the white men's land for free. The white people used the power of arms and religion to enforce their ideas on the black workers. The songs sung served to propel the oppressed forward making them resist the White rule with all its justificatory ideology. In the end the songs, as has been the thrust of our argument, are a powerful medium through which people imagine themselves, shape, contest, and even justify their particular identities.

The chapter that follows gives a general conclusion of the study by assessing the success of Ngugi's experimentation with oral tradition. It also traces the changes that the novel as a genre has undergone in the hands of African creative writers in accommodating their own sensibilities and concerns.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### TOWARDS INDIGENOUS POETICS: A CONCLUSION

The death of the novel has often been announced and part of the secret of its obstinate vitality must be its capacity for growth, adaptation and self-renewal and self-transformation: like some vigorous organism in a speeded-up Darwinism ecosystem, it adapts itself quickly to a changing world. (Bell, 1993: xi)

The study set out to interrogate the use of oral genres in Ngugi's Gikuyu fiction and drama in order to determine how well they reflect the contemporary society, their impact on the African literary tradition in vernacular literature and their ability in projecting a social vision for the future of African societies. In general the study has examined this fiction and especially the use of orality and the mark it has had. These works include novels and plays written in Gikũyũ and after their author abandoned English as the language of his literary creativity. The analysis has looked at specific oral genres in *Caitani Mutharaba-ini (Devil on the Cross)* the use of oral narratives and especially the ogre and trickster motifs, riddles as subsumed in the *gicandi* genre have been given prominence. In *Matigari ma Njiruungi*, we have analysed the notion of mythmaking and proverbs and more appropriately the resistance stance inhered both in the process of mythmaking and the proverbs used. In *Murogi wa Kagogo (Wizard of the Crow)*, the use of myth and its modern appropriation has been interrogated and finally an assessment of the song genre has been the focus in *Ngahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want)* and *Maitu Njugira (Mother, Sing for Me)*.

The analysis used an eclectic theoretical approach in its interpretation. They include semiotic, postcolonial, stylistic and theoretical postulations borrowed from Bakhtin, Althusser and Foucault. Semiotic theory has been especially illuminating as most genres would fall under a sign system which people use to make sense of their lives and communicate their concerns. These genres have been interrogated as signs which are heavily loaded with meanings and interpretations capable of affecting the way people view themselves and others in the world. The study has also been open to the intertextual

and contextual information in its analysis of the oral genres.

The allusion to the traditional ogre narrative is a conscious revisionism on the part of Ngugi as he tries to capture the prevailing reality. The whole of *Caitani Mutharaba-ini* is anchored on the ogre motif. The story of an innocent young woman, Wariinga follows the schema that at a closer analysis reveals a striking similarity between it and the monster narratives. The reversal and, therefore, revision comes at the end when she kills her ogre tormenter contrary to the traditional plot where the victims (mostly young women) were always rescued by brave young men. Ngugi in this deconstructs the notion of hegemonic masculinity that informed these tales thereby upsetting the society's power relations to the advantage of women.

This is also replicated in other specific instances in the novel especially in the story of the farmer and the ogre. It is clear in Ngugi's writing that the farmer represents the masses/peasants as the most oppressed members of the society. In its symbolic level therefore this story clearly interrogates the dialectical relationship that exists between the poor and the rich. But beyond this, as Gikandi (2000: 192) says is an attempt to make the readers "have a grasp of their increasingly complex world." It also in a very open way places the text within a paradigm that is both oral and literate at the same time.

The competition at the cave extends the ogre image to global proportions even as it explores the inherent tensions that exist between the rulers and the ruled in the postcolonial society. Imperialism and neo-colonialism are metaphorised as processes where the Western nations and their allies in postcolonial Africa symbolically cannibalise the poor masses. The entrenchment of neo-cannibalism, a global trade in human body parts is discussed in tandem with exploitation and oppression of the poor as both of them culminate in death. The ogre imperative is used as a shifting pattern that covers even mercantile forces especially when they are used to disadvantage others and mostly when they edify suffering and loss. The existing relation between the third world leaders and their first world counterparts is skewed to the advantage of the latter and is therefore framed along the ogre/victim axis and especially when it is stretched to cover the effect of this relationship on the third worlds' poor.

Tricksterism, an oral narrative concern, is one of the ways which the politicians in the postcolonial states employ in deceiving the masses. While elections give the masses a chance to choose their own political leaders, the leaders use to trick the masses into benefiting themselves. The politicians are, therefore, framed along the trickster figure found in the traditional oral narratives who manipulate others for their selfish gain. Politics is, therefore, seen as the space in which the contemporary trickster operates away from the traditional spaces of the wild and margin. Democracy, epitomised by political elections, is a form of social contract which is subverted by politicians for their own material gain. Suffice it to say that the trickster oscillates along the continuum of good and evil, sometimes as the hero, as suggested by Boas who is quoted by Basso (1988: 292), “who makes the world safe and secure for human life, and the “selfish buffoon,” who ludicrously and compulsively acts in violation of the most fundamental social values.”

The trickster figures range from economic to political but both are joined together in their obsessive tendency of taking advantage of the masses’ gullibility. It is the economic cum business trickster who later graduates to take the helm of leadership as exemplified by Kīhaahū. Indeed many characters found in Ngugi’s others work from *Petals of Blood*: Kimeria, Chui, Mzigo; *I Will Marry When I Want*: Kioi and Ndugire, and many others fit within the trickster paradigm as far as their action are concerned. In cheating the masses out of their meager earnings, the economic tricksters create an imbalance in the society where a few grow extremely rich. Along the way most people become poor and desperate, this is the group that Nditiku brags that he pays as little as seventy five shillings per month. If they attempt to agitate for better pay, he sacks all of them and goes to the slums and employs others the same day (*Caitani*: 177). This state creates an environment that can precipitate violence, leading to anarchy and disharmony. The economic trickster is, therefore, a danger to himself and the society at large.

The riddles have been placed within the broader category of *gicaandi*, a Gikuyu genre that predominantly uses riddles to communicate. The *gicaandi*, a multi-generic form, is Ngugi’s attempt at addressing the multifarious issues confounding the postcolonial individual. The riddling competition that takes place in the a matatu comprises

individuals who cut across the whole spectrum of Kenyan society and the topics covered range from social, political, to economic spheres. Even though some of the riddles posed follow the same traditional pattern in terms of wording, the realization is that the answers change as the challengers and respondents are now dealing with a different set of socioeconomic/political landscape away from the traditional past from which the riddles had been set. The conclusion, therefore, is that, the riddle is a flexible genre that adapts and evolves to the changing circumstances that the African societies find themselves in. In a highly globalised and technologised world, we can still seek the counsel of ancient wisdom in understanding our place in the world.

Mythmaking is way in which people create myths that help them come to terms with conditions which confound them and seem unreal. In postcolonial societies the continued suppression of the people after independence is something that stands in stark contradiction to the earlier expectation of freedom and prosperity. Through mythmaking, the people imagine for themselves a saviour who will help them overthrow the present order. They go back to the heroic anti-colonial struggle and resurrect the heroes of independence. It is hoped that these resurrected heroes, symbolised by Matigari, will galvanise the people and therefore propel them into resisting tyranny. Mythmaking has been dissected as an ongoing process that exists especially in societies where the majority of the population suffer from an unjust leadership. It is an alternative form of resistance as it serves to prepare the people for the struggle ahead and also instils in them a hope of freer tomorrow.

Mythmaking has also been understood as a process through which people go back to history as a way of understanding themselves better and to lay claim to a historical identity. History is, therefore, reinterpreted as people's attempt to define and redefine themselves anew based on what is happening in the present. This as has been shown is exemplified by the situation that Matigari finds the people in when he comes back from the forest where his confrontation with the colonizer had taken place. The blazing sun that is alluded to at the beginning of the novel is symbolic of the strife and despair that the people are going through. Bowed with challenges that seem insurmountable, it is proper to look at the rear view mirror in order to assess the lessons of history and make

sense of the daunting issues bedevilling the society. Ngugi, it can be said, reverts to mythmaking as a search for the cure of an ailing nation and, therefore, places mythology at the confluence of resistance and change. This also explains the reason why he creates Matigari (a mythical character) from the ashes of a fading historical struggle in order to help the people decide the way out of the current predicament. The underlying importance of mythmaking is that it pushes humanity towards a world of possibilities – it is this tone of possibility that marks the end of the novel.

Tied to mythmaking is the resistance stance inhered in the proverbs used in the novel *Matigari Ma Njiruungi*. Proverbs have been hailed as a genre that embellishes spoken language and is a mark of oratorical sophistication. Proverbs can be used in addressing similar situations across time without being changed. They are transferrable in nature, and can be used in talking about issues taking place in the contemporary society and still help us in looking forward into the future. The revelation is that proverbs, as forms of traditional knowledge systems, can be used, to paraphrase Bhola (2002: 3-4), in remaking individual identities and human societies in a self-conscious way, which would in turn translate to “the self-conscious, self-confident, assertive, and aggressive use of knowledge for making behavioral and social interventions” capable of transforming “economies, societies, politics and cultures.”

Most of the proverbs address the state of suppression found in formerly colonised states. They point to the irony of independence as a concretisation of freedom, truth and justice away from the evils of colonialism. Fear and suspicion that was there during the war of independence has been extended as the leaders try their best to entrench themselves in power. The masses stand at the opposite end of the political spectrum as spectators: their land has not been restored to them, the majority live in slums as their children forage with scavengers on the city’s garbage sites for food, joblessness and myriad other vices lead to endemic poverty – all this are the issues that the proverbs address both as a castigation and a call for their elimination. The proverbs become a rallying call to the masses to fight for the restoration of their dignity as the true beneficiaries of independence. In a way, therefore, Ngugi seeks the wisdom of the traditional philosophy in helping the reader understand the nature of postcolonial society and its entire leadership.



Myth, an oral narrative subgenre, is used by people in their attempt at understanding the world which they inhabit with all its mystery and complexity. A clear understanding of society would help humanity find solution to the problems and, therefore, ensure a better relationship between them and their world and also help in healing the many rifts that exist among the inhabitants of the earth. The quality of fancy that is found in myths is explained as a way in which human beings take flight from the realities of everyday in order to better understand themselves. It is true to say that myths, therefore, forms the basis of a people's creative imagination and enable them to actualise their full potential, be it in the world of arts or science.

Ngugi employs magic realism in his portrayal of Mwathani, one of the main characters in *Murogi wa Kagogo/Wizard of the Crow*. Even though magic realism is discussed as a received theoretical postulation, the contention is that African oral narratives, especially the ogre/monster narratives, are replete with examples of the fusion between myth and magic mostly in their portrayal of characters. Borrowing heavily from myths, magic realists writers insist on helping the readers understand the absurdities inherent in peoples lived experiences. The only way to understand Mwathani's is recourse to magic and fantasy, his behaviour and mannerisms border on the surreal – a quintessential dictator who tries all things in his attempt to cling to power. Framed along a character borrowed from a Gikuyu oral narrative, Ngugi uses Mwathani to interrogate the themes of greed, corruption and dictatorship. The two characters Mwathani and his surrogate from the oral tale suffer from involuntary body swelling – the strange swelling mirror the diseased body of the postcolonial state.

Revisited, is the near forgotten tradition of divination, a profession which was restricted to shamans who drew their expertise from their fathers, as this was an inherited tradition and passed through family lineage. This practice was rampant in Africa before colonialism and before the entrenchment of western forms of medicine which dislodged the people's belief in their own indigenous forms of medicine. The traditional shamans were the societal doctors and used their knowledge of herbal cures to treat the many ailments which existed then. Besides this, they consulted with deities on behalf of the people mostly during wars, epidemics, droughts/famine and other natural catastrophes.

The symbolic importance behind the resurrection of the traditional medicine man is Ngugi's belief that it is time Africa started searching for solutions from its own indigenous sources. The only way to move forward is through improving indigenous systems of knowledge and reassess what is important instead of borrowing wholesale from the western models. To count hunger African societies must go back to the traditional crops which were drought resistant, the traditional herbal knowledge must be given serious attention in fighting diseases and epidemics. In short, Africa must find indigenous solutions to the existing problems even as it benefits from external sources. The shaman becomes a symbolic trajectory in Africa's attempt at revamping existing knowledge using a prism of traditional lore and practices.

The relationship between myth and gender has been an important area of study especially for feminist scholars. The patriarchal society has been explained as one that creates myths that help in keeping women in subordinated position thereby excluding them from positions of power and influence. Contrary to the Christian myth about the origin of humanity where man is created first, the Gikuyu myth of creation places the male and female on an equal footing in terms of creation – both of them appear at the same time negating the notion that one is superior to the other. Ngugi uses this logic to show that women can be better than men in many areas just like men can in other areas. The nine daughters of Mumbi (an allusion to the Gĩkũyũ creation myth) are given roles in the council of elders, hitherto unheard of, upsetting the traditional power relations that excluded women from leadership. They are used in keeping the balance of power in a society that oppresses women thereby deconstructing the masculine ideal that views men as stronger and more fearless than women. The image of the woman as fragile and weak is renegotiated through Nyawira who is crafted as more robust and sturdy, an excellent organiser and mobiliser, and more decisive than most men in the text.

The oral poetry/song genre is an important purveyor of ideology. Songs also help in internalising group identities and, therefore, can be used in pinpointing the place where individuals stand in the societal hierarchy. This happens mostly in class based societies where individual value is measured against material prosperity, something that serves to entrench inequality and can therefore instantiate acts of resistance. The two sets of songs

which have been considered by the study are those sung by the oppressed classes and those sung by the rich classes. The poor stick to the traditional songs, which they change to suit their present predicament but these songs are derided by the rich as barbaric. The rich turn to Christian songs as they praise God for their status which they explain as divine blessing because of their humility and their acceptance of the Christian notion of salvation. The two groups then coalesce around identities which reveal particular ideological leanings depending on which side they belong.

The generic versatility found in songs give them a greater advantage over other genres mostly in giving commentary in almost everything that goes on the society. Kiguunda and Gĩcaamba in *Ngahika Ndeenda* take advantage of this generic versatility to question why the home guards were allowed to take almost everything even though they had opposed the freedom struggle only for new leaders to legitimise their place in the independent society at the expense of the patriots. Gĩcaamba interrogates the place of the worker in the new dispensation. By appropriating a traditional song, he calls upon the workers to unite in their search for better remuneration of their labour. The result is that songs are once employed in perpetuating resistance ideology while still pointing out what is wrong in the society. In the end these songs become alternative forms of resistance by creating the awareness of the said inequality and subjection. The masses are given suggestions as to how they can wiggle out of their subjected status.

The songs in *Maitu Njugira* are used in subverting the colonist ideology and in extension that of the black ruling class after independence. Based on Brecht's concept of epic theatre, the play seeks to transform society by liberating the greater majority of the citizenry who are oppressed by capitalism's drive for profit without regard of the workers' human dignity. Most of the songs are sung in the farm as the people work, they thus fall under work songs though on closer scrutiny they are not used to make the work easier per se but to decry the inhuman working conditions and the cruel treatment the workers go through at the hands of supervisors. By re-enacting the songs sung by the people during colonial times, Ngugi seeks to make the people assess their present situation and decide for themselves the way they want to live especially when the same conditions that their forbears were going through seem to have continued after

independence. The song genre has therefore contributed greatly in helping the reader understand the colonial past and the present conditions in the postcolonial state. This is crucial as it will help the masses form opinions on what is to be done as they clamour to counter the challenges of an oppressive order.

It is this conscious appropriation of African traditional epistemology that this study has called indigenous poetics. It refers to a body of work that uses an African language as a representation of experience, history and its place in the contemporary society. In the case of Ngugi, Gikuyu language is a symbolic trajectory that he uses in espousing Africa's historical experience and in projecting a vision of a better society. These writings also overwhelmingly embrace images and tropes taken from oral literature. To Irele (2001: 11) oral literature remains a basic ingredient of the African imagination and:

Stands as the fundamental reference of discourse and of the imaginative mode in Africa. Despite the undoubted impact of print culture on African experience and its role in the determination of new cultural modes, the tradition of orality remains predominant and serves as central paradigm for various kinds of expression on the continent. The literary component of this tradition, in both expressive modes and with respect to its social significance, provides the formal and normative background for imaginative expression. In this primary sense, orality functions as the matrix of an African mode of discourse, and where literature is concerned, the griot is its embodiment in every sense of the word. In other words, *oral literature represents the basic intertext of the African imagination.* (Italics in the original)

The term indigenous in this case also has to do with the transference of a people's core values and practices encapsulated in their culture and traditions. Indigenous perspectives as we have seen are important because they are time-tested and can therefore be used in giving alternative ways of representation. Like Ngugi, society can seek guidance of indigenous knowledge as we try to respond to contemporary economic and political realities in the postcolony. A good example that the study has cited is in *Murogi*, when the Kamiti and Nyawira rejuvenate the knowledge of plants in order to cure ailments. Plant lore is an important indigenous tradition that Africans discarded in favor of Western

medicine. They have also been encouraging the planting and consumption of traditional food crops.

It is important to point out the departure that Ngugi takes from the European novel in his attempt to give the novel genre in Africa an indigenous identity. The novel in Africa grew out of a conscious desire to give back to the black people a sense of belief in their own cultures and in Achebe's (1988: 30) wisdom help the African society "regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement." By willfully creating their stories within the ambit of their own traditional forms of knowledge and using African languages, they were sending a clear message that these forms and languages were and are still relevant and should be used in empowering their society towards a better future. The use of written vernacular languages as Dathome (qtd. in Eme, 2011: 120) rightly observes "provides an imaginative link and essential link with unwritten indigenous literature; this literature indicates the adaptability of oral tradition in that through the written vernacular literature the oral tradition expresses its versatility and diversity."

The European novel, on the other hand, had grown from very different conditions when compared to the novel in Africa. Ian Watt, in his book *The Rise of the Novel*, points to four major factors that made this rise possible. The reasons were the increased demand for realism in fictional writings, the growing increase of individualism as people moved into urban centers, the change in the intellectual and psychological nature of readers, the rise of the middle class, and the increased numbers of women readers. These factors are also corroborated by Anderson (1983), who also points to the rise of the books printed in vernacular languages as having had an immense impact on the growth of the novel. These included books written in English, French, and German, among others, replacing Latin, which had before this been the academic language of Europe.

During the eighteenth century, realism was to become one of the most influential literary trends. It rose as an opposition to the earlier Romantic Movement, with the goal of faithfully representing life as lived, with its ordinary everyday events and portraying human beings as they really were – with all their strengths and weaknesses. But realism's

claim to comprehensive representation of reality was challenged. The claim to truthful representation was laughed at as a masquerade with critics questioning this assertion and claiming that realism could not profess truthful depiction while still spinning dreams and fables. But the greatest attacks against Realism came from Modernists.

The sense of individualism that had held sway in the age of realism became indelibly entrenched. The fabric that held community together broke as people were loosely thrown into the enlarging metropolis – the sense of communalism was weakened. Writers in this movement, thus, see the world as split and fragmented, where chaos and decay reign supreme. Snipp-Walmsly (2006: 409) sees the Modern condition as epitomized by:

alienation, of being constantly bombarded with noise, information, and hazard. The sense of purpose and continuity that had previously held sway was ruptured and fragmented. *Modernism was an artistic attempt to capture this sense of fragmentation and alienation.* (Italics mine)

Modernism in literature was characterized by mourning and loss, and the artist's role was therefore laid out: restoring a sense of order and harmony which had been obliterated by modern living. But these very tenets of modernism were vehemently opposed by postmodernism; instead of lamentation postmodernists celebrated human beings' creative spirit and progress. It was, according to Snipp-Wamsly, "an impulse of negation and unmasking, a celebration of silence and otherness that was always present, though always repressed, within Western culture" (2006: 406). It rejected the wretched images and cynicism inherent in modernist art. The analysis has treated the tendency towards indigenizing African literature as a postmodern trend, what Lyotard (1984: 81) defines as a trend "which puts the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the concerns of a taste which would make it possible to share collecting the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impact a stronger sense of the unrepresentable." This is especially true in the use of vernacular language and conscious inclusion of oral genres these writings.

Lyotard (qtd in Snipp, 2006: 412) also refers to postmodernism as the proclivity towards metanarratives. He saw them as narratives that “give credibility to a society and justify its actions and visions of the future”. On her part Waugh (1984: 2) saw them as stories which self-consciously and systematically draw attention to their status as artifacts in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. She continues to claim that such works attempt to create alternative linguistic structures of fiction which merely imply the old forms by encompassing the reader to draw on his/her knowledge of traditional literary convention when struggling to construct a meaning for the new text.

Waugh’s assertions points to the experimental nature of postmodern artists. Faced with new forms of experience and knowledge, these artists do not shy away from these new realities. Rather, they give fiction a free reign in searching for its own representational pathway. This indeed reflects the many adaptations that the novelistic genre has undergone, and as Bell (1993: xi) opines, the novel:

Has also shown an extraordinary capacity to find new forms and techniques to accommodate new ideas and conceptions of human nature and human experience, and even take up new positions on the nature of fiction itself.

The above is true especially in cultures where the novelistic tradition is a recent phenomenon. It is this later group of writers to which most African creative artists belong. Faced with new challenges and realities, the postcolonial writers had to seek new ways of representing this reality. Still, the languages in which they were communicating their concerns were largely unfamiliar and out of reach to the bulk of the people who formed the core of their audience (Ngugi, 1981: 26-28). This indeed, as Ngugi put it, was a key dilemma that he experienced before he started writing in Gikuyu.

This meant that Ngugi had to formulate ways in which he would bend a language that had never before been used in fictional writing, in carrying out his creative endeavor. Even though Ngugi’s decision to write in vernacular has been derided as action in futility, it

would also be important to say that what Ngugi was doing had been done before. Earlier on, the so-called European languages only played second fiddle to Latin; it was the language of the day both in intellectual circles and religion. Artists and writers from this, then vernacular tongues, initiated the growth by willfully creating in them, and slowly and surely the place of Latin in Europe faded away and the majestic walk of these languages became unstoppable (Howatson and Ian, 1993: 470-74, Long, 1988: 2&3).

In Ngugi's case, the desire to show that there is more than one way, in which communication can be effected, makes him borrow from the African oral narrative tradition consciously. This is exemplified by his conscious use of the narrative opening formula "ugai itha" both in *Caitani Mutharaba-ini* and *Matigari ma Njiruungi*. This formula invites audience into the world of fiction and also sets the novel's plot to read as an orally delivered text by establishing its oral mode. This also points to an important departure from the European novel: the conscious inclusion of the audience in the narration of the story. If the European novel is written with an individual in mind, Ngugi's novel takes the whole group of workers and peasants as its intended listeners. Gikandi (2000: 211) sees this as "an occasion to institute a relationship between the novelist (read Ngugi) and his audience." He continues:

The language used in this overture seeks to establish intimacy between the writer and audience by invoking a common grammar and set of values. This is the intimacy evoked by the language of proverbs and the aura surrounding them, and the storyteller's final invocation for the reader to give in to the spell of the story, to overcome the distance between the narrator and the reader.

This conscious placement of the reader at the heart of narration and the unfolding of the events in the story can only be summed up as a move that gives his writing an indigenous thrust. Gikandi (2006, 156) looks at it as "the culmination of a long process by the novelist to simulate the art of the oral storyteller in writing, and thus overcome the ostensible gap between orality and writing". According to Walter Benjamin, (qtd in Gikandi, 2006: 156), the novel represents the graveyard of the story as the mark and



bearer of a profound human experience. But Ngugi has given the story genre a new lease of life. In his hands the African novel has fused orality and literacy by letting the novels take an oral tone and including an array of oral forms. But in *Murogi* he goes farther by drawing ‘on multiple oral traditions of his cultures and experiences to create and sustain the illusion that this is a story being passed from mouth to mouth’ (Gikandi, 2006: 157). In this way the African novel as Obiechina (1990: 5) contends ‘‘is mediated by communal consciousness and impulses arising from group sensibilities’’, this is different from the European novel that tends to privilege individual consciousness. The final product is a novelistic tradition firmly anchored on African autochthonous tradition. These traditions, especially the oral forms of knowledge, became the templates upon which the African novelistic tradition is framed.

Even though orality has been hailed by some critics as the distinguishing feature of African literature, an explanation for this influence can be associated to the age of the continent’s literature. Most of the written literature came into being at the dawn of independence and after. The only relevant or closer tradition they had was their oral tradition. The writers then had no choice but to use what they had in communicating their concerns. But the use of oral texts, as has been exemplified, has not been a verbatim or word-for-word borrowing; these texts have been modified to suit the writers’ scheme. What appears at the end is ‘‘a hybrid discourse that is at once oral and literate’’ (Mwangi, 2009: 111).

The use of various oral genres in Ngugi’s vernacular fiction is done in a way that conforms to scenes in actual rendition. The riddles which appear in *Caitani* conform to actual riddling sessions complete with the performer and the respondents. The riddles follow the riddling formula to the letter to include persuading the poser of the riddle with gifts. A good example would be the one in *Caitani*:

Ndira thithino yaayo; ndiira thithino yeene: ndai I hau oya kigacwa ututaurire  
ndeto amu urooneka ta ari we muthomangu mabuku... Ngukagaca na ndikugace  
muno wi wa ndugu...(52)

It eats its own sweat: it eats the sweat of others: there is the riddle take a gift and unravel it for us because you seem more educated than us...

From the above, there is basically no difference between an actual rendition of the riddle and its written counter-part because everything that pertains to its rendition is present. The only missing link is the audience but there are verbal pointers which help in our seeing the imagined audience.

Appiah (1992: 150-152), sees this as a way of resuscitating an African universe. It is also a postmodern use of intertextuality as “raised by the novel’s persistent massaging of one text after another into the surface of its own body.” In this way the African novel is made to carry African sensibility. There is also an open attempt to make the written language read like an oral rendition. This is especially true of *Caitani Mutharaba-ini*, where the narrator openly communicates to what can be interpreted as a live audience: “uhoro uyu ni uria nii murathi wa kihooto ndonire na maya, na ngiugua na maya” (2). “these are the things which me, the prophet of justice saw with these eyes and heard with these ears.” The use of “these eyes” and “these ears” intimates the presence of an actual audience, and the narrator is gesticulating by openly showing, or pointing, to the said organs. This fits within postmodern’s espousal of plurality in bringing together incompatible forms, styles, and textures within a particular structure. Ngugi’s Gikuyu fiction is therefore replete with conscious borrowings from his oral tradition and the Bible, and in *Murogi wa Kagogo* he goes further by including verbatim quotations from ancient religious texts such as Hindu and Confucius.

In *Caitani* Ngugi employs an interplay of sounds that makes it very interesting to read. One is tempted to read the words loudly as they sound more oral than written. A good example is what tke place inside Mwaura’s vehicle when he becomes suspicious of Muturi and Wangari’s talk and asks himself, “nda ndaakuiga kinenena-ini wanuma?/ lice, why have you bitten me yet I have given me a home in my private part? A question that inquires about the ungrateful nature of the pubic lice, to be given a home and yet bite its benefactor. The repetition of the first-syllable sounds in the first two words sounds alliterative. In an interview with Martin, Anna and Kirsten Holst in 1980 Ngugi

confessed that in writing *Caitani* he found himself playing with sequences of sound patterns for the sheer kick of it. He also pointed out that sound patterns and nuances depend on certain cultural assumptions in a community. This technique in a way makes the reader to also pay close attention to the sound, the phrase “*ndoonga ndongoria*” translated to mean “the rich man who leads” brings several meanings in the Gikuyu novel. One is at the level of satire, in ridiculing the rich and also explaining the place they hold in postcolonial society, where the rich assume positions of leadership chiefly because they are wealthy. The use of sound therefore becomes an aid to textual understanding by alluding to the several shades of meaning.

But if in *Caitani* Ngugi places the reader at the center of the narration; it is in *Matigari* where he makes a clean break from the European novel. First, this particular novel as discussed in the study is in a conscious way framed along a Gikuyu folktale, though with some bits of re-appropriation. This is what Gikandi (2000: 223) calls “Ngugi’s appropriation of Gikuyu oral narratives” in a bid to constituting “a significant move away from the tradition of the European novel.” This would seem to be a clear embrace of postmodern experimentation, with new ways and forms of writing, a thing that firmly defines Ngugi’s novel as an attempt of indigenizing the novel in Africa. Commenting on *Matigari*’s postmodern espousal, Gikandi (2000: 224) explains: “*Matigari* seems to be a novel that simultaneously falls back on the most traditional notions of storytelling (it seeks to recreate the aura of communicative exchange between the storyteller and his or her listeners).” The novel re-adapts the story of Thiiru, the medicineman who is aided by a bird in the preparation of the land, planting and weeding, but who refuses to give the bird the harvest. The bird keeps on perturbing him to give him the fruits of his labour, just like *Matigari* demands of settler Williams.

Written at a time when the Kenyan citizens were facing hardships at the hands of a repressive regime, *Matigari* purports to give them a voice. This is anchored in the traditional belief that “*Kwaria ni kwendana*” a Gikuyu proverb that says “to speak is to love each other.” It is in free speech, where warring sides find peace. It is this voice that *Matigari* wants to return to the people, so that they can question the meaning of their

oppressed existence. When Guthera is being teased with dogs by the police men, people look on with fear and cannot question them even if they know that what is happening to her is unfair and unjust.

The many oral forms used in the text have without doubt helped in illuminating the importance of traditional epistemology and ideology in the present African society. The choice of some proverbs in *Matigari* alludes to the traditional practice of communalism as opposed to the Western's individualism. Juma Boy is educated by the masses, using the philosophical premise that a child is owned by the community, but when he comes back he scoffs at this practice in favor of individualism, a practice he picks abroad. Two differing ideologies are dichotomized for us to gauge the positive or negative attributes of each. In a nutshell, indigenous poetics has helped this treatise lay claim to an appropriation, albeit selectively, of traditional forms of knowledge as couched in songs, proverbs, riddles and oral narratives with an aim to suggesting alternative ways of addressing Africa's postcolonial challenges. They are used in unmasking and deconstructing oppressive ideologies as entrenched in the contemporary society. These forms have also helped anchor the novel, a foreign genre, within a tradition that unites the African reader with his/ her traditional thought system and in Okpewho's (1992: 294) observation it is also a way of showing that "traditional African culture is not obsolete but relevant for the articulation of contemporary needs and goals."

The quest for an indigenous poetics illustrates the ways in which the resources of orature are used in making the novel, a foreign genre, carry African sensibilities. The use of vernacular language and conscious inclusion of oral texts is a process of decolonisation of African literature and also, as Rodrigues (2011: 14) explains, a form of subversion of "the Western literary tradition in order to incorporate elements and a narrative structure closer to Gĩkũyũ oral tradition". It is also an attempt to make it stand on its own as a sui generis, in terms of language, images, and style, one that according to Chinweizu et al (1980: 4) "has its own traditions, models and norms."

The realisation on the part of Ngugi is that for a work of art to sincerely reflect African society, it must go beyond a mere matter of including oral forms in texts written in languages of Europe but make a genuine effort in using African languages in articulating

the continent's interest grounded in theory and practice. If in theory the literature in Africa would be defined by inclusion of oral forms, writers must go further by employing these languages as they are closer and more accessible to the peoples of Africa. This is advantageous because it encourages the growth of these languages to encompass the changes taking place in the socioeconomic, cultural and scientific/technological spheres. Indigenous poetic, therefore, presumes a literature that describes the world view of Africans and their own understanding of themselves and their place in the world through taking advantage of vernacular languages and use of oral literary templates.

However, a major weakness as far as Ngugi's quest of decolonization is concerned comes in his use of language in *Murogi*. The whole text uses a language which cannot be said to be Gikuyu but English which is only given Gikuyu pronunciation or tonality. Kaigai (2010: 107) is correct when he observes that "while indigenous lexis has aided Ngugi's objective of decolonization, the ambiguous nature of indigenous lexis has also undermined the project they were deployed to enhance. In so far as foreign words have denied the reader of the Gikuyu version an opportunity to decode meaning, they have proved to be powerful codes which in the long run dominate Gikuyu language in *Murogi*." The net effect of Ngugi's over-use of English words in the novel masquerading as Gikuyu has served to make the text inaccessible to the reader who does not understand English language. This also largely undermines the project of indigenisation as the text gives credence to English in the process weakening the language that Ngugi (1981: 34) symbolically theorises as the language of African literature. But that said, it is important to say that this has not denied Ngugi the ability of using oral texts as purveyors of meaning in the text.

Language, especially after the banning of Ngugi's plays proved to be a powerful tool at conscientising the masses something that the government realized thereby prohibiting the performance of the plays in the Kenya National Theater and there after destroying the community center at Kamirithu. What this shows is that, languages and especially African ones can be saved from extinction by not only writing in them but through creating theatrical performances that resonates well with the masses. This goes beyond the theoretical postulates of writing to imbibing the language of real life through drama

and theater. A significant area that this study opens is the need to interrogate how the younger generations of African writers have continued to benefit from oral traditions and the various ways they are using in projecting their generation's identity.

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