THE JOURNEY MOTIF AND THE RE-READING OF NGUGI WA THIONG'O: *DEVIL ON THE CROSS, MATIGARI AND WIZARD OF THE CROW*, A GIKUYU TRILOGY

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Abstract

This essay employs the journey motif to re-read three novels by Ngugi wa Thiong'o: Devil on the Cross, Matigari and Wizard of the Crow. It is argued here that these three novels form Ngugi's era of Gikuyu fiction; they are chosen to represent his celebrated decision to freely tap from Gikuyu orature. Ngugi's use of indigenous language in these novels bridges the historical and chronological gaps separating the three narratives; they constitute a trilogy that retells Ngugi's parable about postcolonial Kenya and Independent Africa more generally. By exploring the different physical, metaphorical and psychological journeys that permeate the atmosphere of all three novels, this interpretation enhances their value in light of Ngugi's broader political and social agenda.[78]

Key words: *Ngugi wa Thiong'o, journey motif, postcolonial literature, Gikuyu orature, Kenyan critical theory*

Introduction

> *What is the purpose of a journey from one place to another? Clearly, in fiction as in life, people sometimes travel for different reasons*. (Mortimer 1991: 169)

Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross*, *Matigari* and *Wizard of the Crow* are stories about postcolonial Kenya. These novels justify an argument forwarded by Okolo (1997: 101) that Ngugi's ideal for African literature was that it be teleological, in the sense that it should assertively commit to transforming human lives, especially by correcting the imbalance in relations between the West and Africa. Ngugi's engagement with Africa's history through his experiences as a Kenyan has provided all his stories with this thematic

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[78] ['Ngugi' reflects the surname given to Ngugi wa Thiong'o at birth, James Thiong'o Ngugi. – Ed.]

concern. His mastery in handling his ancestral Gikuyu oralature provides his narratives a unique style whereby orality and writing complement each other.

These features of Ngugi's corpus are widely recognised by literary critics. For example, writing about *Devil on the Cross*, Gikandi (as cited in Cantalupo 1995) frames the novel as borrowing and extending Amilcar Cabral's ideological concept of returning to the source; therefore, the structure of *Devil on the Cross* is involves many genres, including riddles, proverbs, songs, tales, myths, common sayings, and legends (Gikandi 165).

The three novels discussed here were originally written and published in Gikuyu and they represent Ngugi's decision to use what he believes are oral narrative strategies and authentic oral forms of the Gikuyu. As Ogude (1997: 73) asserts,

> this in done ". . . with hopes to transcend his own literary reification, and, more importantly, to use his art as a tool for political pedagogy [and] to appropriate those elements of popular forms that lend themselves to didactic writing [in order] to capture the postcolonial experience in Kenya.

Ngugi's use of his indigenous language has successfully bridged chronological gaps separating these three narratives, presenting them as a trilogy that share a postcolonial theme.

The journey motif as a common narrative technique in Ngugi's Gikuyu and Anglophone narratives has also been observed and analysed by various scholars. For example Ogude (1997) studies the use of journey motif in *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari,* and he acknowledges Ngugi as having employed oral elements, including the motifs of journey and quest, "with a deliberate aesthetic intent . . . to develop his characters as the allegorical symbols of the dominant discourse" (1997: 74).

Different kinds of journey take place in these three novels: physical, metaphorical and psychological. As Mortimer observes (1991: 169): ". . . the voyage holds out a promise of transformation, of broader horizons and deeper knowledge." Through this motif one can appreciate Ngugi's development and sustenance of plot, characters, and political themes in these narratives. The three novels reverberate this repeated theme, and by demonstrating how this is done, (Freedman, 1971) one can demonstrate how the trope enhances the value of the work and "become[s] a part of the total perspective, pervading the book's atmosphere and becoming an important thread in the fabric of the work" (Friedman 1971: 125). Further, as Elma (2010) has argued, reading one of these novels, e.g. *Devil on the Cross*, is enhanced by reading all three, thereby combining their outlooks and examining what is written, how it is

written and why it is written the way it is; in this way one can come to understand any one of the texts properly.

Journeys rendered in fiction

Jive (2011) traces the beginning of human journeys in Adamic days when Adam and Eve departed the paradise in anguish and despair: "[E]ver since mankind has been making short and long journeys for various reasons" (2011: 1), journeys have been means for seeking knowledge, wealth or adventures; and they have resulted in discoveries and advancements. That is why Abbeele (1991) considers a journey to presuppose a movement away from home or complacency for the individual; and a movement of human beings from one place of significance along several dimensions of experience to another.

Since the beginning of literary criticism, the journey motif has been a central point of interest for many scholars. Through the millennia of written story-telling, the epic narratives of great voyage have been studied as tales of discovery that hold a central position in a variety of cultural traditions, allowing readers to move with heroic characters travelling to far places and making discoveries. Garry (2005) claims that the journey motif is a recurrent traditional narrative unit in folklore that has gained a significant position in prose fiction. Arguing along the same line, (Mung'aya, 2018: 2) observes that,

> Since there is a dialectical relationship between literature and society, the journey in the text has influenced writers in their narratives to enter social-cultural and political spaces . . . In this way, writers use this allegory of journey in creating characters that move in space in order to interrogate the dynamics of human conditions . . .

Mortimer (1991) observes that journey motif is rooted in Africa's oral narrative but it is also central to the European novel. Jive (2011) stresses that a journey may be a voyage in the physical sense or in figurative terms. That is, a character may be involved either in physical movement from one place to another or there could be mental and spiritual voyages of characters transpiring metaphorically: "physical journey can also be used as a symbol of metaphorical journeys in characters' lives" (Jive 2011: 21). For instance, Nnolim (1976: 183) has studied Mongo Beti's *Mission to Kala* and observed that "[it is] a novel in which the journey motif (physical and metaphorical) shapes the novelistic form."

Journeys begin in *Devil on the Cross*

Devil on the Cross is the first novel in the trilogy of Ngugi's postcolonial parable. It was initially written in Gikuyu and published in1980; the author translated it into English two years later. The story is narrated by "the voice of the people" or the "Prophet of Justice," a narrator who represents a renowned traditional storyteller in Gikuyu orature – Gikaandi player – who, according to Waita (2014: 83) "has to be goaded, almost beseeched by the audience before [he] agreed to tell a story."

Devil on the Cross is part of Ngugi's sustained agenda of writing Kenyan history (cf. Lema 2015: 66). The novel describes the present in connection to the past and looks at the future in the light of the present as it portrays imperialism to be well institutionalised in postcolonial Kenya and operating smoothly with the aid of local African leaders and the rich. The story revolves around a girl protagonist, Jacinta Wariing'a, who lives in the city of Nairobi. This heroine is drawn as having undergone emotional and physical hardships which daily spawn further hardships, such that she eventually plans to return to her home village.

Being in a moment of crisis, Wariing'a involuntarily goes through self-interrogation as depicted in the story (Ngugi 1982: 11): "Why should it always be me? Poor Wariing'a, where can you turn now?" Such questions are answered in the form of a decision to embark on a journey back home; and from that point her life is gradually exposed through constant and recurring journeys. When these journeys begin, Wariing'a is exposed to unbearable psychological pain and total isolation; the extremity of her alienation can be inferred from the fact that she was once impregnated and abandoned. She had been sexually harassed by her employer before being fired from her job; then she was abandoned by her boyfriend who accused her of being her boss's mistress; this happened at the time of her greatest need for someone to stand by her side.

Wariing'a begins a physical journey which takes her from her hut located in Ofafa Jericho in Nairobi. Her mission is to get back to the village, Ilmorog, where she believes she will have peace of mind and find refuge from these misfortunes. It is at this point in her quest for peace and redemption that Ngugi launches Wariing'a on a metaphorical journey. We get reassurance in the story from the young man who rescues Wariing'a from being run over by a car, that her mind indeed had travelled: the rescuer tells Wariinga: "Since then I've been standing by idly, waiting for you to return from whichever land you'd been transported to by the trials of the heart," (Ngugi 1982: 15). This metaphorical journey in Wariinga's mind commences after she feels dizziness. While in the depths of darkness, Wariing'a is revisited by a

nightmare she used to have when she was a student. It is during this journey through nightmare that Ngugi foreshadows what will happen next in the story, the crucifixion of the devil. The nightmare as a metaphorical journey is crucial and it is used several times by Ngugi to foretell what will happen later in the story.

After Wariing'a involvement in her metaphorical journey, Ngugi orchestrates the narrative through a physical journey, as Wariing'a sets off to Ilmorog, her home village. Although Wariing'a initially embarks on a personal journey, she later joins up with other passengers in one *matatu* heading to Ilmorog,[79] a locale hypothetically representing remote Kenya.

Then a turning point is reached in the story, which can be seen in Ngugi's use of journey motif. The scale of the journey shifts from personal to national, as Ngugi brings on board other characters as passengers who share the same *matatu* and expedition, heading to the same place. It is at this point that the journey as a narrative technique binds individual traumas, stories and concerns into one inclusive story about a group of expeditors with the same destination. It is at this point in the narrative that the passengers assume the role of collective hero/heroine, one of the eight characters suggested by Propp (1965).

The plot of the story develops further as the journey brings on board the *matatu* five crucial characters, providing them a forum for the events to come in which they are collectively embroiled. A typical journey to a typical remote village location, Ilmorog, brings about a transformative effect on these characters as they engage in a long conversation about the postcolonial situation in Kenya. The journey itself harbours the soul of the story, as the journey carries and fulfills Ngugi's reformist agenda. The journey represents life; its passengers represent every Kenyan who travels through their lives in a country ransacked by both local and foreign imperialists. This is articulated by Ngugi (1982: 31) through the vividly drawn image of Mwaura's *matatu* in his description of the vehicle itself: ". . . the engine would growl, then cough as if a piece of metal were stuck in its throat, then it rasped as if it had asthma . . . "

It is not surprising, therefore, that Ngugi gives a name to Mwaura's *matatu* which is featured in a journey "Matatu Matata Matamu," because in Swahili this literally means "sweet troubles" and connotes that in Independent Kenya, the majority continues to endure troubles and great hardship. Ngugi's mission is to bring his fellow Kenyans on board through a journey motif, to

[79] 'Matatu' is the local name for the public passenger bus used with greatest frequency by the majority of non-elites in Kenya.

move with him in a mission to be realised through voyages which assign Kenyans the task of engaging the exploration of ideas, through fruitful debates about their country, through airing their grievances and shared burdens, and eventually forging a collective route through their obstacles to arrive at a true Independence. This reading is supported by the view presented by Mortimer (1991: 171):

> Physical voyage [in fiction] represents an intellectual and emotional initiation to maturity; [the] voyager's goal is to acquire the knowledge and/or power that will allow him or her to rejoin the community and to enjoy a heightened status.

I propose, further, that the public forum created through this journey introduces the idea of the public sphere – a concept associated with the teachings of Jürgen Habermas and developed by a whole literature that includes the influential work of Charles Taylor (2002: 83) who elaborates the concept as "a common space in which the members of society are deemed to meet through a variety of media: print, electronic, and also face-to-face encounters; to discuss matters of common interest; and thus to be able to form a common mind about these."

Taylor further claims that the public sphere is an intellectual commons, so central and essential to the self-recognition of a modern society that even when it is suppressed or manipulated, its persistence has to be faked. Ngugi fakes the public sphere in this narrative, to demonstrate the need for space for the majority of ordinary citizens of Independent Kenya.

Discussions held in the *matatu* revolve around issues to do with the Mau Mau violent uprising and post Independent Kenya. For example, Ngugi uses the passengers to voice his views about *Harambee* and the importance he places upon other socio-political concerns.[80] Passengers engage in several discussions during the journey, including controversies about the true meaning of *Harambee*, about land disputes, and joblessness in postcolonial Kenya. The longer they travel together, the more these debates and controversies and story-telling unfold; and we witness how characters' decisions and attitudes and ultimately their actions are shaped by the very stories, opinions, and disputes they share.

Through the physical movement from one point to another geographically, the story depicts that through their expression of ideas with each other, the characters are shaped in their inner and abstract qualities; as Collins (2008: 22) points out: "the physical change of environment is

[80] *Harambee* conventionally refers to any shared intention or agreement to initiate collectively a constructive activity, such as bringing in a harvest together.

intrinsically valuable to the characters." Returning to the original protagonist Wariing'a, for example – now just one of many on the bus – now depicted as a socially marginalised, naïve and mentally enslaved girl running away from her adversities in the city, is motivated through the journey's collective expression of the country's shared struggles. Through the telling, these stories transform her into an invigorated and strong girl travelling to Ilmorog to put an end to her adversity by conquering her own enemies as well as the enemies of the nation. This transformation is depicted explicitly by Ngugi telling the story (1982: 254):

> . . . And suddenly, remembering Wangari and Muturi and the student leader – the people who had roused her from mental slavery – she felt an anger she had not felt as she killed Gitahi.

Corroborating this interpretation, Jive (2011: 66) acknowledges that "[t]he experience at the Devil's feast changes [Wariing'a] from a spectator to a participant in the struggle."

Wariing'a's ultimate sign of transformation, which occurs during the journey, can been seen in her confrontation and killing of her enemies, the Rich Old Man, Kihaahu and Gitutu. Together with other robbers and thieves, these are the villains who, according to Proppian study of folktale, provoke the hero.

The original protagonist's transformation results from her growth during the journey, which has led to her personal discovery of her abilities to take on challenges, and more importantly the righteous killing. This ultimate display of decisive and lethal action not only speaks of personal revenge but more of communal retribution and the attainment of retributive justice. Thus Wariing'a's physical journey can also be viewed as a symbol of her spiritual journey, of her homecoming and reunion with her roots. And of course this resolution is not just of one lonely, abused, abandoned girl of lowly social station, but of the whole common majority of Independent Kenya's people.

Living in the city of Nairobi which had lured Wariing'a when desperate for a better life, proved overwhelmingly difficult and heart-breaking; so much so, that the only choice she had was to go back home. Spiritually, Wariing'a had to go back to her point of exit – her home village – taking proper measure of her situation, and to consider her options from there. The physical journey back home, therefore, depicted the need to return to Ilmorog, the place of her beginning, her ancestral roots, her original identity. This physical journey was on a deeper level a spiritual healing, depicted as her only recourse: to close the saddest chapter of Wariing'a's life

by leaving the city for good, returning home to open a new beginning for Wariing'a, and of course for the nation in general.

The other characters such as Wangari, a small scale farmer, Muturi, a manual worker, and Gatuiria, a research fellow, seem to undergo personality development during the journey as well, through the stories and testimonies they share. This is depicted in the way each character is introduced with personal missions; but as the story unfolds, each one's sense of self-centred purposefulness melts away, and nationhood blankets all of them.

The journey motif is therefore used by Ngugi as a technique to forward his agenda of instilling a collective spirit among Kenyans, a condition which he sees as leading every Kenyan to the heart of their political and national mission: i.e., to chase away permanently the foreign imperialists and their local imperialist allies. The narrative ends with a confrontation in the cave, and with Wariing'a's killing of the Rich Old Man, Kihaahu and Gitutu, in the *Devil on the Cross.* But these events do not end Ngugi's narrative for the nation; rather they take the story to its next stage, with the journey still at the core of that narrative, in the next novel.

Wariing'a's journey continues in *Matigari*

Matigari is the second novel in what I interpret as the trilogy of Ngugi's parable about postcolonial Kenya and Africa in general. Gikandi (1991) opines that *Matigari* is a novel that draws heavily upon Kenyan popular culture while Waita (2014) agrees that the novel is an oral narrative partly based on an oral story about a man seeking a cure for his illness.

These interpretations of this novel exhibit Ngugi's skills in uniting the previous story in *Devil on the Cross* to this story in *Matigari*. Regardless of time and varying experiences separating the novels, still it is safe to regard *Matigari* as a continuation of Wariinga's story in *Devil on the Cross* (Lema 2015: 97). I propose this because when Wariinga's story comes to an end, she is presented as holding a gun and killing all those who had made her life miserable ". . . [and yet, as] she walks on after fulfilling her mission," the narrator (Ngugi 1984: 254) says: "But she knew with all her heart that the hardest struggle of her life's journey lay ahead." In this passage, one may interpret the ending of one story as a prologue for the next. This alludes to a performative technique shared among indigenous African oral children's story teller traditions.

The narrative in *Matigari* begins with the main character, Matigari, returning home from the forest holding his gun; this scene can be interpreted as a return after accomplishing the hardest struggle anticipated by Wariinga in *Devil on the Cross* victory in the war to end the 'sweet troubles' that

Kenyans experienced in Mwaura's *Matatu Matata Matamu*. Such a beginning sets Matigari on a journey whose exposition leads him to meet with characters that reflect Ngugi's continued reliance upon Gikuyu folkloric materials. Balogun (1997: 80) views Matigari as ". . . the epic hero par excellence . . . by his physical, ethical, and moral traits . . ."

The novel opens with Matigari's journey from the forest where he has buried his gun under a *mugumo* tree.[81] Then he replaces his belt of war with one of peace; and from that point he embarks on another journey to reclaim his home, metaphorically representing his country. This is affirmed by Matigari's declaring that, "I shall go back to my house and rebuild my home" (Ngugi 1987: 12). The journey from the forest transforms Matigari from a mere national hero to a modern national political hero, a move that leads Balogun (1997: 83) to explain that Matigari is "classified with Christ rather than with David." Ngugi continues with his reformist agenda in *Matigari* as suggested by Ofalayan (1999: 59) who characterises Matigiri as "an archetypical blue print of revolution."

Gikandi (1991a) observes Ngugui displaying his ability to relocate himself within Gikuyu oral narrative tradition while giving equal respect to western literary conventions. Ngugi puts the agenda in the hands of a traveller who acknowledges he is on a vital journey when he says: "What trials one had to endure on this earthly journey! But there was no arrival without the effort of moving feet" (Ngugi 1987: 2). Like in *Devil on the Cross*, Matigari is not to travel alone as he asks:

> How can I return home all alone? How can I cross the threshold of my house all alone. What makes a home? It is the men, women and children – the entire family. I must rise up now and go to all the public places, blowing the horn of patriotic service and the trumpet of patriotic victory, and call up my – people – my parents, my wives, my children. We shall all gather, go home together, light the fire together and build our home together (Ngugi 1987: 13).

Therefore Ngugi provides Matigari with co-travellers with whom he embarks on a journey to create a public sphere and quest for truth and justice in the country. These co-travellers are invited into the story as characters by Ngugi, but as family members by Matigari.

Through the journeys that Matigari embarks upon with the other characters, the story is extended and its theme develops from one event to the

[81] 'Mugumo' is the Gikuyu name for fig tree.

next. For example, when Matigari, Muriuki and Ngaruro wa Kiiro are moving from the factory gate to the restaurant, crucial information about the Mau Mau war is shared. Matigari and Ngaruro share what they know about the war, and in that way disclose that it was through the Mau Mau rebellion that the nation fought their enemies.

Matigari uses his story allegations against Settler Williams to represent the history of the entire nation in a fight against colonialists. The journey also transports readers into episodes of war which are not directly presented in the narrative. The journey transports the characters to times in the distant past when the clashing of warriors' bows and spears shook trees and mountains to their roots (Ngugi 1987: 23). Through the journey, changes brought by Independence to Kenyans are ironically disclosed. The picture contradicts what Mau Mau fighters like Matigari and majority of Kenyans expected as the fruits of independence.

Matigari learns a lot about the new Kenya through journeys which also continue to fulfil the role of feeding Matigari with information and shaping his character as well. Matigari learns about street children and how they struggled to survive (11-12). Matigari is presented to be moving from one place to the other as, "He went to shopping centres. Everywhere (72) . . . Matigari walked into the restaurant and sat down (74) . . . He went to the crossroads (75) . . . He went to the law courts . . . (80) . . . He went in search of the wise who taught and studied modern stars . . . [the teacher, the student, the priest] (88-90, 93). And in each place he visited, Matigari was seeking truth and justice. During these journeys he overhears news over the car radio and learns about his home that workers are boycotting to demand wage raise, the President has banned all gatherings of people and opposition party claiming the existing government to be of the people (7-9).

Reading the story through these journeys reveals the development of Ngugi's views about Independent Kenya. The journeys that Matigari makes fulfil Ngugi's reformist agenda which requires collective action. This is illuminated by Matigari's response to Guthera's question about why he has chosen to move around instead of going back home: ". . . So I will have to go to all the market-places, to all the shopping centres and to all the meeting places, and blow the trumpet to call together the family of all the patriots who survived" (38). As it has been reported about *Devil on the Cross*, the journeys Matigari makes in this second novel of the trilogy display the need and the role of a public sphere for the commoners to take collective action.

Matigari's news and the discovery are crucial to the larger political agenda in the same way they are meant to be crucial to Matigari's transformation. In an African context, a journey is the source and medium of

enlightenment, of gaining information. As Senkoro (2010) acknowledges, the physical adventure of a hero or heroine in the Zanzibari fairy and folktale is significant: "The traveller's goal [is] to achieve or acquire the knowledge and/or power that will allow him or her to rejoin the community and enjoy [a] heightened status in it" (2010: 12). Matigari, being on such a journey, gets access to information.

Matigari's return from the forest and his burying of the gun symbolise the end of struggle and a peaceful return to his home as he tells his fellow inmates that, "I have come back to the people girded with a belt of peace. A farmer whose seeds have not germinated does not give up planting . . . My house is my house. I am only after what I have built with my own hands. Tomorrow belongs to me" (64).

The story continues to unfold; and through his journeys across the country, Matigari undergoes inner development as he visits people including the priest, the student and the teachers and meets keepers of truth and justice in the court of law. In these meetings he realises that words alone cannot bring him victory over his enemies, and that "[o]ne had to have the right words; but these words had to be strengthened by the force of arms. In the pursuit of truth and justice one had to be armed with armed words" (Ngugi 1987: 131).

This realisation by Matigari provokes a change in him; eventually he makes a U-turn in his mission. This U-turn in Matigari's journey can be looked at as the onset of achieving his homecoming and mission. When he walked out of the forest, he hoped to go back home and begin a new journey of re-building his home which symbolises at a national level the re-building of the country. But after he realised that the Independence they fought for was far from achieved, he saw the need to go back and retrieve his AK 47 from where he had hidden it in the forest: "I will retrace my steps to where I went astray and resume my journey from there" (139). This represents the decision to go back to a radical approach as a way of regain land stolen through the imperialist colonialism. This resolve is embellished by two characters, John boy Junior and Robert William, who are villain characters. According to Propp (1968: 30) they assume the role of disturbing "the peace of a happy family, to cause some form of misfortune, damage, or harm" – and in that way to advance the movement of the tale by complicating the narrative.

Matigari exposes once again Ngugi's Marxist stance on the necessity of revolution, and in particular Frantz Fanon's (1965: 2) confessed ideals of militant Marxism: "Having a gun is the only chance you still have of giving a meaning to your death." Okolo (2007) has proposed, along with other critics, that Ngugi's social philosophy is influenced by Fanon and that he has

simultaneously been creating works that practically illustrate the main features of Fanon's aesthetics.

The journeys develop the story by providing it with many characters that meet in conversation about Matigari, extending the plot of the story. They give the narration of the story to a collective of third parties; in this way the story about Matigari becomes a matter of common knowledge or folklore as the plot. So the journey motif not only extends the plot through symbolism but it also serves as a modernistic device to expose the reader to more narrators of the same story. Those people Matigari meets at cross roads and at business centres are all reported to be in conversations which are actually narrations about Matigari – providing a kind of hall of mirrors effect that amplifies the significance of Matigari's epic journey. They too are on the move as they share the story. Thus movement is crucial in the narrative along several axes: it provides the story with as many narrators as possible, which gives the story a sense of communal ownership, drawing it along the continuum closer to truth than to mere story telling, as conveyed in the intellectual cultures of African knowledge.

As already noted, once Matigari realises that his quest cannot be achieved while wearing the belt of peace, he retraces his steps back to where he had hidden his gun. At this point we also witness the introduction of fully armed police officers who also assume the role of the villain in the narrative. This introduction of a collective villain affects the hero's journey in several ways: by employing the means of coercion meant to deceive him. At this point Matigari, in his uncertainty and anxiety, is engaged in a circular journey which is essentially a rite of passage (cf. Mortimer 1991) which leads him, via trials and purification, to a new life which ends where it began: in his home.

Unfortunately, when Matigari finally falls in the villain's trap, his desire to return where his journey began is unfulfilled. But he is presented as still believing that the journey has to go on. Someone else from his family, Muriuki, has to take over and take charge of the long journey ahead. The ending of the narrative in *Matigari* suggests that the quest Matigari and all the Mau Mau fighters who fought in the forest before him, has to continue with Matigari's brother. Thus victory depends on Muriuki's success in crossing the river – another significantly biblical image – as Matigari makes the mandate clear to him:

> 'Muriuki, cross the river, and bring me my AK47 from under the *mugumo* tree. Try to do your very best to get back to me.' Muriuki took off. He ran in a zigzag manner. At times he fell,

> and rolled over, but he still got up and ran, heading in the direction of the river. He crossed it. (Ngugi, 1987: 173)

The narrative in *Matigari* ends like that in the *Devil on the Cross*. Each story concludes with main character embarking upon an as yet untold future which is said to be the hardest struggle ahead. Unlike Wariinga, Matigari's life is cut short but he manages to pass on the fire of hope, leaving it burning behind him in a young boy, Muriuki, who manages to follow the hero's instruction to cross the river and now holds Matigari's gun. While Muriuki's replacement for Matigari happens at the end of the narrative in *Matigari*, the intensity of the action of Muriuki crossing the river suggests that the journey in search of truth and justice has not come to an end, has not diminished; but rather it has just been complicated and inspired further by an act of villainy. Thus the fire of revolution, the will to overcome evil is passed on from generation to generation, from hero to hero of the same blood. It is this fecund complication that takes the narrative into the third novel of the triad.

Muriuki and Wariing'a's journey in *Wizard of the Crow*

According to Slaymaker (2011: 9) *Wizard of the Crow* "stylistically, replicates at greater length the oral storytelling techniques found in *Devil on the Cross* (1982) and *Matigari* (1987)." This view is developed by Gikandi (2008: 160) as well, who claims that the novel *Crow* is "saturated with Gikuyu folktales, often told and retold by narrators and characters or set up as scenarios in the narrative."

In *Wizard of the Crow,* the finale in the triad of novels, Wariinga and Matigari's struggles seem to continue; but this time around they face another national problem, a dictatorship regime. In *Wizard of the Crow* Muriuki and Wariing'a meet each other; and one can see them in the personalities of Kamiti and Nyawira, two characters who meet and get forced by the reality of dictatorship to forge an alliance that leads a nationwide mission to overthrow Ruler's regime in Aburiria, a setting which Ossaji (2010) recognises as Kenya in the 1980s. This widely appreciated historical continuity of narrative themes is reinforces the view of the three novels constituting a related triad in Ngugi's continuous parable of struggle in postcolonial Kenya.

These two characters meet in a fashionable way. Nyawira, member of the stealthily anti-government association and Kamiti, a jobless graduate who has turned into a beggar, find themselves being chased by three police officers after they have taken part in an anti-Marching to Heaven project campaign. They have been protesting a meeting that their government convened to request Global Bank for financial support. They eventually engage in a journey which started as a life-saving voyage but ends up being a journey to

forge this revolutionary alliance, under the spiritual cover of the shrine of wizard of the crow.

The shrine these characters forge following their journey becomes a public sphere Ngugi creates in the narrative. It is this magical public sphere that Ngugi uses as an antithesis of the prevailing administrative and religious systems which Ngugi condemns. The public sphere also provides a platform for the commoners to ridicule the Ruler's regime and to offer righteous alternative solutions to save the country from its maladies.

A journey, which is again a leit-motif in this novel, involves the central characters Kamiti, Nyawira, the Ruler, Constable Arigaigai Gathere (alias AG), ministers and other narrators. Each journey made by these characters can be seen to accomplish specific missions, and gradually exposes the narrative's thematic concern. Kamiti and Nyawira bond as a couple of young Kenyans determined to put an end to the Ruler's dictatorship regime. However, their involvement in the narrative and their association and eventual meeting with the Ruler are bound up inextricably with a journey which is again central to the narrative. Kamiti and Nyawira's popularity under the umbrella of wizard of the crow begins when they are initially introduced in the tale as ordinary common people of no great consequence or mission. But in the course of the narrative they turn out to be a hero and a heroine who respond to the supreme demand for a national cure, called for by no less than the Ruler and other leaders, as well as by the common people. According to Proff (1968) their popularity turns them into seekers who are required to take care of the victim in the narrative.

Like in other novels, journey in *Wizard of the Crow* (2006) is central, both physically and metaphorically. Kamiti who is portrayed to be wandering the city looking for employment, feels so weak that he falls on the ground (2006: 38). While lying on a garbage hill, we are told by the narrator that Kamiti can see his own body lying there as if he has departed from that body. It is at this point a metaphorical journey is introduced when the narrator says, "He decided to let his body lie there in the sun, and free of the body, he wandered Aburiria . . . " (Ngugi 2006: 38).

During the ensuing astral (metaphorical) journey, Kamiti travels to all corners of Aburirira and he sees men and women hungry, thirsty, and in rags, engaging in productive works like farming and animal husbandry on exhausted strips of land which lie adjacent to huge, lush plantations of cash crops: coffee, tea, cocoa, cotton, sisal and rubber, cultivated by an elite few foreign investors. He also sees and reports in the story the presence of shacks standing side by side mansions owned by a few very rich people. Although it is not true that Kamiti's soul left its body, this account shows the narrator

putting Kamiti on a metaphorical journey which takes him around the entire country of Aburiria. This journey is significant, as it gives Ngugi a free mind and soul that he uses to expose the postcolonial situation in Kenya. The image that is created by Kamiti as a disembodied witness is that of purity. Kimiti in his astral journey was in a state of physical detachment, an impartial witness capable of supernaturally objective moral judgment, a detachment which Matigari in his bodily travails could not have. Ngugi uses this device to create the picture of antithesis of a normative sense of decency and justice, with the present reality which he is condemning as grotesquely unjust.

Physical journeys in *Wizard of the Crow* can be seen to be guided by two issues: personal tribulations and wishes for gains and greed. Mariko and Maritha form a couple presented to be famous in their church and neighbourhood of Santalucia. The two are regular church goers and every time they go to church, they circulate scary stories of how Satan always tempts them to fall into sin. Ngugi uses the couple which represents lunatic Christians to continue his attack on the Christian faith for failing to attend to people's genuine worldly needs.

AG and other policemen, as well as Vinjinia and her husband Tajirika, routinely visit the shrine of the wizard of the crow looking for cures for different maladies as well as magical powers for sheer survival. The journeys that these customers make to the shrine of the wizard of the crow are important in the narrative because they significantly promote Ngugi's portrayal of Christianity as a colonial and postcolonial institution which ties people to false promises. On the other hand, the shrine of the wizard is Ngugi's way of justifying his blame to the church and use sorcery to suggest the need for practical solution to people's problems.

For example, the advice AG, Maritha and Mariko, Kaniuru, Tajirika and Vinjinia are given has nothing to do with witchcraft rather good conduct. For example, the wizard of the crow tells Constable AG (Ngugi 2006: 117-118):

> Listen very carefully . . .Close your eyes and then empty your head of all thoughts . . . From today on, never molest a beggar, a diviner, a healer, a wizard, or a witch . . .

Similar advice is also given to Kaniuru who has gone to the wizard looking for magic power to protect his newly acquired wealth (359-360):

> Are you looking at the mirror directly?
>
> Yes, yes.

> Say after me: Remove from me the enemy of life; the days of thieves and robbers are numbered.
>
> I want you to chant that seven times.
>
> Is that all? Kaniuru asked.
>
> That's all, said the Wizard of the Crow…
>
> Yours is a malady of riches and property, and the medicine for that resides in the heart . . .

Such advice is given by the wizard of the crow and it seems to portray the motivation of journeys that some characters make to the shrine. Ngugi intends to present the postcolonial situation in Kenya to be the cause of two great maladies, which are poverty and greed. This situation is well translated in the picture of journeys made by the poor and the rich, both to the church and the shrine of the wizard, destinations which are not represented by Ngugi as places of protection and healing. In Ngugi's narratives, the church is used to ridicule religion, and also to condemn the government for failing to look after its people, to the point where they turn into lunatic followers of religious fanaticism. Furthermore, the shrine of the wizard is not meant to replace the church; rather it represents the people's will, their collective voice and efforts to build a new and truly Independent Kenya. This is well represented by the advice the wizard gives his customers, especially the rich and the greedy ones, that their maladies arise from their riches and excess property, and that their cure resides in their hearts.

Furthermore, the Ruler and some cabinet ministers travel to the United States on what is described to be a government visit meant to convince the World Bank to finance the Ruler's 'Marching to heaven' scheme. The journey is crafted to sarcastically expose and condemn the Ruler's selfish, phony mission which is a representation of what some African leaders do to line their own pockets in the guise of helping their people. The Ruler falls ill while in the United States, and the wizard of the crow is eventually forced to travel to New York to cure him. His journey serves two purposes. Firstly, it brings the hero and the villain together and in this way justifies what Gikandi (2008) considers to be the struggle between the wizard and his associates on one hand, and the dictatorship on the other hand. Secondly, it is a culmination of Ngugi's vision that only ordinary citizens' voices can eliminate poverty and greed in postcolonial Africa. Kamiti, who is the wizard of the crow, represents common Kenyans who see true problems of Kenya and who can administer proper cure for their ruler and the nation. For, as Kamiti writes in a short note he addresses to Minister Machokali: "The country is pregnant. What it will give birth to, nobody knows" (2006: 504)

Looking at the last physical journey in the story, that of AG and others who are given the role of narrators, AG is presented to be a travelling narrator from the beginning to the end of the story. This is another common practice in African story telling traditions. An orally transmitted story is handed down and shared among a group of people seated, or amidst a group of listening travellers. The significance of the narrator moving from one place to the other is twofold. Firstly, it takes the narrative to its people; and secondly, a story being narrated in the course of a journey gives a narrator access to many other people's knowledge of the same sequence of events, thus giving the narrative a chance for embellishment with more first-hand testimonial viewpoints. This sharing provides a sense of communal ownership as well as strengthening of the story. For example, when AG is unveiled in the text (2006: 11) he says, "Let me say as the narrator that I cannot confirm the truth or falsity of the existence of the chamber . . ." No one narrator can claim ownership of the story nor can any single narrator claim to possess all the facts; so the story has to travel, to allow other narrators to participate in its telling.

Apart from AG there are other narrators who are not transparent as is AG; but they are identified through implication in several instances. The presence of a crowd of witnesses is always intimated, lending credence through their numbers that what is being reported is true, corroborated by consensus. For example, early in the story (29) the narrator is reporting: "Those in attendance say they felt something like wind whirl through the air and the next minute they heard the iron bars of one of the windows creak . . ." This serves as an assurance that there are other narrators apart from AG who are informing about story events. These other narrators are also identified amid AG narration: "You mean to tell us that you did not even see him jump over the hedge?" some would ask him. "No I didn't." "True, *Haki ya Mungu*" (97). These narrators appear in the story frequently and impromptu. They indicate that the main narrator AG, who is on the move, is always meeting new people who happen to form his audience and become co-narrators of the same story; their ears are fresh; his credibility is always being tested. Sometimes his listeners challenge the authenticity of the story AG is narrating; sometimes they add information about what they know concerning the narrative. As noted earlier, this public sphere where information is shared freely and openly is a theatrical fiction created by Ngugi, but it serves the purpose he intends.

Conclusion

It has been stated since the beginning of this essay that Ngugi's three novels form a trilogy to illuminate the long postcolonial situation in Kenya. What makes the three stories separated by time form a trilogy is the use of

indigenous language, Ngugi's harnessing of Gikuyu orature. The journey motif, which is present and a common narrative strategy throughout the novels, reveals the points of the narratives: through these journeys Ngugi introduces, develops and sustains the stories and the characters. Moreover, through these journeys postcolonial human experiences are shared as characters get mobility and platforms through which they can forge alliances in their attempt to interrogate the dynamics of human conditions, to address postcolonial challenges and injustices, and to pledge themselves to the search for lasting solutions.

The re-reading of the narratives through a journey motif has exposed the technique to underpin not only the structural organisation of the text but also the thematic organisation repeated through all three narratives.

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