

ORALITY AND NARRATIVE REVOLUTION IN NGUGI WA THIONG'O'S *DEVIL ON THE CROSS*

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Abstract

Orality preserves the sociological and historical relevance of developing societies; especially in the Global South; as an instrument with which oral culture is handed over across generations. Concerted efforts are explored in literary discourses to ensure that orality as depicted by the exigency of storytelling in Africa evolves and still retains its traditional flavour in a technological world. While writers like Chinua Achebe and Ayi Kwei Armah revolutionize orality through the voice of the writer, Ngugi wa Thiongo'o adopts the Narrator through whom he expresses a reformed African oral culture. Ngugi wa Thiongo'o's novel, *Devil on the Cross* depicts a modernized orality that magnifies, embellishes and remodels the role of the traditional narrator, the major actor in the oral culture, who is a gicaandi player. Ngugi achieves this by conferring on the Narrator the aesthetic roles that resonate with and appeal to the sensibility of the younger generation. This ensures that the Agikuyu orality remains relevant in the modernist era. This work attempts to recognize that many other oral cultures are becoming extinct in the presentation of orality because it no longer fits into the technological age. Ngugi leverages on the role of the narrator to project a story on capitalism and brutality of the citizenry which reflect the postcolonial reality of the Kenyan people and by extension Africans; while remodeling the Agikuyu orality to retain its significance across all generations. Using textual analysis research approach, the paper introduces magical realism in the Agikuyu oral culture through the narrator to depict an important component of the spiritual worldview of Africans. Through a postcolonial prism, the paper also validates the supernatural elements as the legitimate depiction of African beliefs and practices in contemporary times.

Keywords: Orality, Narrative Revolution, Agikuyu, Magical Realism, Narrator

Introduction

The claim that literature emerged in Africa only in the eighteenth century undermines the long-standing existence of African oral traditions which predates Africa's contact with Europeans in the 15th century. Apart from the use of spoken word of historians and griots, ancient Egypt employed hieroglyphs from around 3000 BCE to record politics, mythology, genealogy and religion. Furthermore, another evidence points to the partially deciphered Meroitic scripts between

3000 BCE and 400 BCE". (African Literature Hub, 2). Oral literature existed in the traditional societies of Africa, also referred to as the oral cultures, in the form of myths, legendary tales, anecdotes, epics, songs, folktales, and so on; and were preserved and transmitted as oral tradition. Oral culture of African origin preserves traditional African stories that ensures that these are still told even in the present through the use of intergenerational systems. These systems include tales shared in communal setups, chants, poetry,

folk tales, digital platforms, griots and music; in fact, “Griots, or traditional storytellers were the custodians of these histories” (Alaedu, 2).

In the African traditional oral culture, the narrator holds the oratorical role and other traditional roles. Reverting to the employment of the traditional narrative style within a postcolonial premise, Ngugi discredits the scourge of capitalism which is alien to Africa. To wholly achieve this aim, Ngugi redefines the traditional roles of the narrator to include the role of the revolutionary, magical realist, and judge which are explored in the paper. Most oral cultures and traditional communicative apparatuses, including Agikuyu (also called Gikuyu or Kikuyu), where Ngugi wa Thiong’o comes from, are based on orality. What this signifies is that both verbal communication and oral tradition of all cultures bear relevance on the knowledge that is consequently, transmitted. Within this orbit, is also the relevance of myths and mythopoeic elements, folklore, anecdotes, customary rites, genealogies, praise songs, cultural hymns, and many others.

The most remarkable legacy of orality in the Agikuyu culture is the narrator, like in most oral cultures. Ngugi chooses the gicaandi player as the custodian of Agikuyu orality. The outstanding artistry of Ngugi’s work being reviewed can be achieved only through the employment of orality sautéed in magical realism. *Devil on the Cross* demonstrates the richness associated with exigencies which only African narratives; and also, those from Latin-America can afford. By vividly detailing the sordid experiences of Wariinga; a character who sinks in individual depression as a result of societal solecism, Ngugi explores the profundity of orality resulting in *orature* which Ngugi devised from his wealth of writing.

Orature is a coinage invented by Ngugi wa Thiong’o, first used in a paper which he presented at “The Wellek Library Lectures in Critical Theory” which held at the University of California in May 2010 (Treacy, 1). Ngugi expounded the concept of orature in his book of four essays revealing the global connection relating them. Ngugi names these ‘globalectics’ in an attempt to combine the theories of globalization and Hegelian

dialectics. Ngugi conceptualizes his coinage, orature as “... an alternative to the oxymoron [‘oral literature’] ... a counter to the assumed inferiority of the oral to the literary arts’ (Ngugi 72).

He further attempts to analyze the combination of literature and oral tradition as losing relevance and content in the face of technological developments especially in the rendition of music, dance, jokes, traditional tales, and traditionally-based ‘aphorisms’. At this point, he posits that the internet “... is neither pure speech no pure writing ... it is orality mediated by writing ... cyborality.” (Ngugi 84). The discussion of the application of orature in Ngugi’s work in this paper, is poised to resurrect the postcolonial fever which Ngugi’s postcolonial work, *Devil on the Cross* prods. His work generally, ricochets the essentiality of colonial studies as contributive to African’s intellectual capacity. By his intense grip of the nascent evolution of the indigenous languages in literature, Ngugi posits a globalized orality which will be regarded as the vehicle for a new literary revolution. Greatly influenced by Caribbean writers like V. S. Naipaul, Claude McKay, George Lamming, C.L.R. James etc., Ngugi’s post-colonial disposition is honed.

Against this background, Kenya’s foremost writer and critic, Ngugi wa Thiong’o not too long ago, sealed this lacuna existing between oral tradition and literature with a blend which he christens ‘orature’ in his collection of essays. In this collection, *Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing*, he exposes a smidgen of impact of Caribbean and black African Literature, whose connection, according to Shaw, prompts Ngugi to question the assumptions that portray European literature as superior belonging to the western canon. Ngugi “...combines the global and the dialectical to describe a mutually affecting dialogue, or multi-logue, in the phenomena of nature and nurture in a global space that’s rapidly transcending that of the artificially bounded, as nation and region.” (Ngugi 8).

The crux of Ngugi’s book is to demonstrate that “... there has always been continuous literarization of the oral and oralization of the literary ...” (Ngugi 84). Within the purview

of the oral culture of the Agikuyu, this paper attempts to establish the globalization of oral cultures/narrative forms using the Postcolonial critical theory. Oral traditional narrations have been revolutionized over time, and in the African literary orbit, many transformations accentuate this radical transformation.

Synopsis

Devil on the Cross is a postcolonial novel that critiques the complicity of the African elites and leaders in the furtherance of capitalism and exploitation in Africa's Kenya. Originally written in Gikuyu language in 1980 as *Caitaani Mutharabaini*, it was further translated to English in 1982. A political satire and an expose of indirect exploitation of the colonized after independence by the colonizer, the narrator in the text who is a gicaandi player begins with the story of Jacinta Wariinga, a young woman and the heroine of the narrative.

The narrator portrays her as a typical African female devastated by a series of tragedy that happens to her in Nairobi including, loss of job for rejecting the sexual advances of her boss, Boss Kihara; ejection from her accommodation at Ofada Jericho, rejection by her lover, John Kimwana, and a childhood trauma emanating from a thorough exploitation by the Rich Man of Ngorika that resulted in a girl child. These push her to attempt suicide but she is rescued. She decides to relocate to her family house in Ilmorog and boards a matatu (mini bus) where she meets some commuters that are symbolic personalities through whom Ngugi uncovers what is wrong with Kenya. In the matatu are Mwaura, the driver of the matatu, Mũturi; Wangarĩ, an old lady; Gatuiria, a university researcher; and Mwireri wa Mukiraai. Many of the commuters were attending an occasion, the 'Devil's Feast' hosted at the Cave by the International Organization of Thieves and Robbers whose members participate in a competition where they divulge ridiculous, capitalist and exploitative business ideas. Among the competitors is Kĩhaahu wa Gatheeca, who also goes by the name, Lord Gabriel Bloodwell-Stuart-Jones.

During the competition, Wangari who had been arrested for vagrancy in Nairobi and granted bail on the condition that she must present corrupt

Kenyans and the student leader, Mwireri lead a protest to the Cave; and the protesters are arrested. Moving on, Wariinga and Gatuiria become an item, as Wariinga acquires engineering skills and becomes confident in herself and earns her wages. Gatuiria travels with Wariinga to introduce her to his parents as his wife-to-be, Wariinga realizes Gatuiria's father, The Rich Old Man of Ngorika, is the man that exploited her, fathered her child and abandoned her. She pulls a gun which Gatuiria keeps in her custody, and kills The Rich Old Man of Ngorika and some of his corrupt associates she met at his home.

Methodology

The methodology adopted in the analysis is a qualitative textual analysis of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross*, using close reading as the primary method. The analysis focuses on narrative structure, oral features such as proverbs, songs, and storytelling techniques, and the representation of the traditional narrator among the Agikuyu. The primary data is the text, which is complimented by relevant secondary scholarly sources. The analytical procedure involves identifying, categorising, and interpreting relevant textual excerpts in relation to African orality and decolonisation.

Theoretical Explanation

Postcolonialism is believed to have drawn its emergence from Edward Said's 1978 work, *Orientalism* which emphasizes on malevolent fabrication that establishes a binary opposition between the civilized and the primitive, by the West. Said therefore, is considered the 'father of postcolonialism'. Said attempt to place the 'primitive' which he refers to as Orient (the East) as inferior to the 'civilized' which he refers to as Occident (West) in order to authenticate and preserve colonial supremacy. "At its core, the theory seeks to challenge and disrupt the dominant narratives established by colonial powers, emphasizing the importance of understanding diverse perspectives and the voices of those historically marginalized" (EBSCO, 1). Raja rightly observes thus:

It deals with the postcolonial national aspirations and the impact of vestigial colonial legacies on the

postcolonial nation-states. Especially how, even after the colonizers leave, the postcolonies still remain dependent upon the international economic order that is still controlled by the West... (5).

Postcolonial theorists attempt to establish the complicity between the colonizers under the guise of capitalist interests and the colonized who fail to accept that independence that has been attained is only a paradox. They therefore, dedicate their exertions on analyzing the spill-over of colonialism into post-independent Africa through some African leaders who can be considered dealing with short-memory syndrome. Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, and other works by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Michel Foucault, Homi K. Bhabha, and Jaques Derrida all examine how writers of colonized nations express and honour their cultural identities which they also, make efforts to salvage.

Citing Mambrol Nasrullah (2016), Onwugbufor avers that post-colonialism "... recognizes colonial understandings in literature and replaces the colonial metanarratives with counter-narratives of resistance by rewriting history and asserting cultural identities through strategies such as separatism, nativism, cultural syncretism, hybridity, mimicry, active participation and assimilation. ..." (168). Not too far from Said's sentiments is Bhabha's impression revealed in his book, *The Location of Culture* in which he expounds the space between the colonized and the colonizer in terms of the value system, emotional disposition and politics.

This work is adopted as one of the preeminent critiques of the Kenyan elite faction who relies on Western economic experts to further defraud the people of post-independent Kenya. Here, orality serves as a postcolonial strategy of resistance and cultural recovery. Through *Devil on the Cross*, Ngugi indicates legitimate paradigms in which oral forms become cultural and political instruments beyond mere aesthetic mechanisms. In Africa, oral traditions are often related to political concerns – either as motivations during wars and military operations, or as a psychological tool for mobilization against oppression or as a tool for

resistance or rebuttal. Oral histories of African enclaves suppressed by colonialism are revived. Ngugi using orality, restores erased and distorted histories of Kenyans by his employment of storytelling patterns, chants, reconstruction and retelling of myths and also, other narratives to offer a voice to the marginalized Agikuyu people.

The relevance of postcolonial theory to this study is that Ngugi upturns this hierarchy by embedding African oral structures in *Devil on the Cross*; thereby, reasserting the authority and pre-eminence of African knowledge systems. In Africa, oral traditions are often related to political concerns – either as motivations during wars and military operations, or as a psychological tool for mobilization against oppression or as a tool for resistance or rebuttal. Oral histories of African enclaves suppressed by colonialism are revived. Ngugi using orality, restores erased and distorted histories of Kenyans by his employment of storytelling patterns, chants, reconstruction and retelling of myths and also, other narratives to offer a voice to the marginalized Agikuyu people.

In his work, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, Ngugi insists that language carries culture, memory, and identity. In other words, language shapes the identity of a person. This inspires his choice to write in his native language before translating to other languages, especially the Western language. This he experiments with *Devil on the Cross* and this can be regarded as a postcolonial certitude. His work affirms that oral traditions are deeply connected to indigenous languages because music/songs and proverbs usually lose meaning when disconnected from their cultural context. Therefore, Ngugi in his work adduce the reclamation of oral forms as reclamation of African consciousness from colonial impact.

Conceptual Framework

Orality

Oral Tradition and Orality, which is interconnected with orality is the communication and storage of information through the word of mouth. It "... refers to a dynamic and highly diverse oral-aural medium for evolving, storing, and transmitting knowledge, art, and ideas." (Folley, 1). It is a way in which many nations and

generations have preserved their histories and knowledge. Oral tradition (oral culture or oral lore) is "... the transmission of cultural material through vocal utterance ... As an academic discipline, it refers both to a set of objects of study and a method by which they are studied ..." (New World Encyclopedia, 1), The agents of orality include kings, folklorists, bards, praise singers, oral historians, religious leaders, etc. However, the accomplishment of self-identification brings home the traditional narrative methods portrayed in the literatures emanating from these cultures.

Aside body language, orality is the act of communication of thought by comprehensible lingo which is typical of humans, in contrast with animals with sounds as a major means of communication. What is thought out and communicated by means of a lingo can be further transmitted and actually recorded for posterity by the act of scripting. However, orality still attracts appreciable interest as a concept sustaining interdisciplinary researches.

Magical Realism

Magical realism simply means, an aspect of reality that consists of magical elements that cannot be explained using commonsense. It is alternative reality. At its best, magical realism has been employed as a catalyst for portraying the sensitivities of the lower class struggles in the society. According to Rave, Carpentier and other critics theorize that magical realism: "Can be seen as a combination of reality, myth, magic, and fantasy, terms that Latin Americans often identify with because all of these terms are important elements in the diverse but unique cultures created by the sudden juxtaposition of the primitive cultures with those of modern society." (3).

Magical realism as a concept, is still realism and is marked by illogicality. It portrays normal stories on the one hand; and presenting these normal stories paradoxically on the other. Finding its root in realism, magical realism seeks to demonstrate the opposite of the real world by portraying life as being strange at other times. Basing its logic on the magic of humans forming from a tiny cell, it is believed that anything is possible in human life. If the spirituality of man can be defined to extend to other realms of

existence, it is, therefore, pretty much possible that phantasmagoria exists, and that the otherworldly factor counts.

Magical realism therefore, affords the lower class of the society the escapist disposition which enables them to overcome their hardships, battered pride and emotions and takes their minds away from their plight. This is the reason magical realism is mostly embedded in themes of living dead and ghosts, magical appearances and disappearances, discolored visuals, and other ethereal elements. It is the mode of appearing and disappearing.

Agikuyu

Also, called Kikuyu or Gikuyu, it is the largest Bantu ethnic group located in Kenya close the highlands near Mount Kenya. Between the 17th and the 19th century, they moved to their current territory in the villages by the British colonial government due to the Mau Mau rebellion in the 1950s, where they are living in exclusive homesteads, family by family with a hedge enclosing each hut in the compound including the huts for each wife in a household. (Britannica). The Gikuyu produced the first political elites in Kenya, which was instrumental to Kenya's attainment of political independence; being the first Kenyan ethnic group to embark on anticolonial agitation in the 1920s and 1930s. The Gikuyu vehemently resented the occupation of their highlands by European settlers and capitalists. The Gikuyu ethnic group make up twenty percent of Kenya's population and relied mainly on agriculture as their source of living. Also, cultural practices such as storytelling, music and dance are integral to Kikuyu culture. They have a strong oral tradition, with stories and proverbs being used to pass down wisdom and knowledge from one generation to another. The Kikuyu people represent Kenya's rich cultural diversity and history." (Qiraat Africa).

Narrative Revolution

This a hybrid of two words – narrative and revolution. Narrative refers to a story or point of view; an account of events that is usually communicated by a narrator or narrators who can also, be a writer or writers. Such accounts are mostly, communicated directly to the reader or

listener. Nordquist describes a narrative as “a type of writing that tells a story and it is one of four classical rhetorical modes or ways that writers use to present information.” On the other hand, a revolution refers to sudden change from an old order to a new and progressive one. Nandaniya therefore, establishes that narrative revolution is characterized by the introduction of “stream of consciousness, interior monologues, fragmented plots, and subjective perspectives, emphasizing psychological depth and human consciousness”

Narrator

The narrator in literature, is usually the character or voice telling a story, or communicating information or commentaries in literature or film. The role of narrators is traditional to story-telling from the ancient societies; telling and chronicling stories. “All literature, from the ancient epics of Homer to the world’s religious creation tales to modern-day novels, have employed some form of narration to convey ideas to readers” (Dziak, 3). Narrators act as a guide in the comprehension of the narrative and shapes the audience’s perception. There are different ways of categorizing narrators in literature: by point of view and by narrative voice. There are basically three types of narrator-point of view in fiction – the first-person who is a character in the narrative, and mostly uses the pronouns ‘I’ and ‘We’; the second-person, who addresses the reader directly and uses the pronoun ‘You’, ‘Your’ and ‘Yours’; and the third-person who is an observer and not a character in the story.

There are five types of narrator-narrative voice in fiction – the Limited narrator who has knowledge of a particular character; the Omniscient narrator who knows everything about the narrative and the characters; the multiple narrator where different characters present different perspectives, tone and views to make the story complicated; the Intrusive narrator who tells a story; pauses regularly to inject his or her own feelings on the theme, or give the reader an exclusive information especially in unravelling moral messages as fiction; and also, the Epistolary narrator that tells a story through diary entries, letters, documentaries, etc., and the Unreliable narrator whose credibility is compromised due to lack of

knowledge, prejudice or mental instability.

Data Analysis

Oral narratives in Ngugi’s *Devil on the Cross* function as both literary techniques and political approaches, through which Ngugi sustains African cultural traditions and resists colonial forms of knowledge and representation. Oral tradition thus becomes an instrument for postcolonial identity formation, social criticism, and cultural recovery. Proverbs, chants and songs, repetition and rhythm, storytelling method, multiple voices and collective memory are transformed by Ngugi to function beyond mere techniques, but as vehicles of cultural preservation and transmission. Oral traditional narrations have been revolutionized by notable writers like Ngugi, and in the African literary orbit, many transformations accentuate this radical transformation. Significantly, the modern narrative form (writing) is a phenomenon that accompanied colonization, and tampered with traditional narrative forms of indigenous peoples of Africa. This is brought about by the inception of hieroglyphics which comes with many limitations. Most of the history of African nations is preserved using oral tradition recited or sang, mostly by the narrator.

Postcolonial theory usually contends that colonial systems altered or obliterated colonized histories. However, oral traditions reserve memories and practices that may not be contained in recorded spaces. Thus, Ngugi employs these oral narratives to recapture histories that have been suppressed in order to ensure that marginalized groups workers and peasants; and children and women have a voice that must be heard. In Ngugi’s novels, orality serves as a postcolonial approach to cultural revival and resistance.

In portraying the colonial control of foreign powers who are ruling former colonies indirectly through the African elites, the continued exploitation and economic domination, the class inequality, Western capitalism and the disintegration of cultural identity, resistance, corruption of African elite, and neo-colonialism, Ngugi employs postcolonial perspectives through his employment of reformed narrative techniques

including songs/music which talks about an event, narrator who is also a performer and audience myth which is also a story and a conclusion; and also, language which is the medium of communication. Ikapi (2024) observes that Ngugi also, incorporates satirical and socio-political perceptions into the structure of African storytelling. (5710). By incorporating myth, proverbs, songs, storytelling traditions, and indigenous linguistic patterns, Ngugi refutes the Western dominance of African culture and identity. In a publication by The Guardian in 2025, Aminatta Forna avers in the introduction of a writeup by Ngugi thus:

Ngugi established himself as a writer and later, by reclaiming his kikuyu identity as an activist, began a process of decolonization that he would explore in one of his most famous works, Decolonising the Mind (1986) which challenged the dominance of European languages in African education and literature.

The significance of postcolonial elements lies not only in the story, but also, in how the novel was produced. Ngugi originally wrote *Devil on the Cross* in Gikuyu rather than English as an act of resistance against linguistic imperialism. He believed colonial languages often functioned as tools of cultural domination and that African literature should reconnect with indigenous languages and experiences. Ngugi pushed an ideology that did not make either literature or oral tradition more superior than the other, and this he expressed as "...assumed inferiority of the oral to the literary arts." (Ngugi 72). Even in technological innovations in writing, an attempt to chase oral tradition and literature into obscurity, is ongoing yet these innovations are helplessly dependent on them. It is against the backdrop of this summation that Ngugi creates another hybrid of arts which he calls 'cyborality' (Ngugi 84). – a combination of cyber and orality, to represent all forms of technological writing including Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Telegram, Instagram, and so on. This is further expounded under the concept of 'Cyborature'.

The study positions orality as central to

African cultural preservation despite the increasing dominance of literacy and the merits of literacy. Regarding widespread acceptance of writing, Folley further insists: "... oral tradition remains the dominant mode of communication in the 21st century, despite increasing rates of literacy." (par. 2). Observably, the Agikuyu oral tradition is based on retelling of folklores which are spoken by oral tellers or narrators who leverage on myths. This is basically what Ngugi did with *Devil on the Cross*, where the narrator begins to tell Wariinga's story from the beginning. The length and breadth of Ngugi's 1980 Agikuyu novel is saturated with condensations of Agikuyu oral tradition which is based on the Agikuyu myths, beliefs and worldview. The Agikuyu tale structure begins most of Ngugi's works; especially his late fiction.

In theorizing the postcolonial experience among the Agikuyus, Ngugi leverages on the medium which his audience is compliant with – oral tradition, with the intervention of the narrator, and immerses this in developing the literature that is to be strictly known as Agikuyu orature – a foremost literary effort towards narrative revolution. The postcolonial experience is such that cannot be described in casual terms; thus, Ngugi's art is believed to conform to Njogu's avowal: "The reader is conceived as a listener and the formula prepares the reader for the long flight into fantasy. Immediately after the formula, the novelist however indicates that the story he is about to tell is 'a modern story' as is the case in *Devil on the Cross* ..." (Ngugi 83). The narrator is usually the teller who has an audience, but Ngugi chooses to be the narrator in *Devil on the Cross*, which is innovative.

Because orality denotes the use of speech rather than writing, to communicate information; especially to a non-literate audience, literatures from African background easily identified as 'primary oral cultures' employ orality by transliterating into written forms, otherwise termed orature. As a result, in citing Walter J. Ong, Nordquist affirms that people from such cultures express themselves, using proverbs as "... convenient vehicles for conveying simple beliefs and cultural attitudes." Due to the unfamiliarity

with the technologies of literacy, societies who practice oral cultures rely on orality for communication.

It is remarkable to recognize that oral traditions of Latin America and Africa are quite similar; and disparities are almost insignificant; especially in the roles of the traditional narrator as seen in Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Paramo*, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate*, and many other literary publications by Latin American writers. This may be attributed to the socio-cultural and/or political background from which they evolve. In the African oral cultural societies, traditional narrators are grounded in recalling myths. Ngugi's incorporation of biblical myths in his works is insightful and contributes to the narrative revolution which he initiated. Notably, Ngugi through his 1980 work, makes a prognosis of the future of magical realism which mostly gives credence to orature with which he furthers his idea of decolonization. Basically, decolonization never takes place unnoticed, for it influences individuals and modifies them fundamentally. Furthermore:

It transforms spectators crushed with their inessentiality into privileged actors, with the grandiose glare of history's floodlights upon them. It brings a natural rhythm into existence, introduced by new men, and with it a new language and a new humanity. Decolonization is the veritable creation of new men ... (Fanon 36).

Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* and Edward Said's *Orientalism* published in 1961 and 1978 respectively, shaped the concept of the blend of decolonization and neocolonization literarily referred to postcolonialism by researchers and literary aesthetes. This constitutes the premise on which most African writings after political independence are based. These writings are nostalgic outlets of the traditional cultures and identities that have been decimated by colonialization, and given a final burial by neocolonization. However,

Focusing on the omnipresent power struggles between cultures and the

intersection of cultures which results in multiculturalism and poly-valency of culture, Postcolonialism analyses the metaphysical, ethical and political concerns about cultural identity, gender, nationality, race, ethnicity, subjectivity, language and power.” (Mambrol, 1).

This is the focus of post-colonialism. Against this backdrop, literatures from the 20th century, retrace their narrative techniques to embody the orality of their societies; thereby reconciling the lacuna that exists between oral traditions and literatures possible only through orature. On the basis of this reconnection, Ngugi in his late fiction present narrators who take up the onus to revolt against structures and narratives that undermine the traditional and cultural set up in the ecology.

Discussion

In the Agikuyu tradition, one of the most popular narrative forms is the gicaandi which is a special poem performed by two contending poets/performers only, in the form of duet; and epithets are generously applied. Kimani describes it as “... a competitive, yet cooperative, riddle-like dialogue poem and poetic exchange.” (47). What is unique about Ngugi's gicaandi player and who is the contesting poet? The narrator seems to be the first poet and 'presumed' gicaandi player. Ngugi is the narrator, and consequently, the first poet, while he leaves the contesting position to be the readers of his work who should decipher the interpretation of the riddles in his poetic narratives, else the readers lose their gicaandi instrument (rattle).

In this context, the significance of the rattle when applied to the subject of Ngugi's narrative and the urgency of the gicaandi player's role in the Agikuyu socio-cultural structure is better captured in the narrator's confession, “And then Wariinga's mother came to me when dawn was breaking, and in tears she beseeched me: gicaandi player, tell the story of the child I loved so dearly. Cast light upon all that happened, so that each may pass judgment only when he knows the whole truth. gicaandi player, reveal all that is hidden.” (Ngugi 7).

Artistically, Ngugi shapes the narrative approach and thematic concept of *Devil on the*

Cross using the indigenous Kikuyu oral tradition by demonstrating the role of folklore in the communication and interrogation of the novel realities of globalization to his audience. Kammampool in a research work reveals thus:

how Ngugi wa Thiong'o has resorted to the African oral traditional paradigm of storytelling as a linguistic challenge in the context of postcolonialism to get his peculiar message across. These types of oral narrative techniques, used in African traditional societies, have shaped the narration of events as well as moments in his fictional works. In fact, his novels are steeped in oral tradition as multilayered texts with didactic and sometimes revolutionary functions.

(65).

With the portrayal of the role of Ngugi's narrator, the polyphonic rendition does not entail many performers as such, but the performance of one performer with the capacity to speak in different capacities, for diverse roles. In polyphony, the reference is necessary not to "...the number of voices as such but to the plurality of an individual utterance, that is the ability of an utterance to encapsulate someone else's utterance, thus creating a dialogic relation between the voice of the self and the voice of that other." (Kimani 47). Remarkably, the Agikuyu oral rendition is typically recognized by its polyphonic attribute. This refers to the oral presentation of a lore using two or more voices:

*To bathe is to strip off all clothes.
To swim is to plunge into the river.
It is good so ...Come,
Come, my friend,
Come and let us reason together.
Come and let us reason together now.
Come and let us reason together about
Jacinta Wariinga before you pass judgment
on our children... (Ngugi 8-9).*

The title of Ngugi's novel reviewed in this work, is actually a biblical reference drawn from the crucifixion of the greatest prophet of the Christians, Jesus Christ, who was made sin by being hung on the tree. Evident right from the first section of the introductory chapter, the Sermon on the Mount, by Jesus Christ is vividly captured,

"Happy is the man who is able to discern the pitfalls in his path; for he can avoid them. Happy is the traveler who is able to see the tree stumps in his way, for he can pull them up and walk around them so that they do not make him stumble ..." (Ngugi 7). The prophetic introduction of *Caitaani Mutharabaini* translated to *Devil on the Cross*, by the gicaandi player in riddles set the pace of the plot, thus:

Happy is the man who is able to discern the pitfalls in his path, for he can avoid them./ Happy is the traveler who is able to see the tree stumps in his way, for he can pull them up or walk around them so that they do not make him stumble./The Devil, who would lead us into the blindness of the heart and into the deafness of the mind, should be crucified, and care should be taken that his acolytes do not lift him down from the Cross ... (Ngugi 7).

The readers will come to decipher the import of Ngugi's reference to the gicaandi player as the 'Prophet of Justice' who will 'reveal what now lies concealed in darkness'. (Ngugi 8). This revelation is most astutely encapsulated in the Devil's Feast at Ilmorog. The allusion begins in the next chapter; and subsequently, through the entire work. Again, the conversation between Wariinga and 'the Tempter' (Ngugi 184-194); the longest conversation in the narrative as moderated by the narrator ends with a biblical allusion, "Get thee behind me, Satan." (194). These are the exact words of the greatest prophet in the Christian bible, Jesus Christ. Rave (42) reflects that the Latin-American story contains elements including legends, myths, oral story telling culture, folklore, etc.

The gicaandi musical instrument is the rattle. In fact, the gicaandi by Agikuyu musical conception is meant to be a competitive poetry in which poets contest by deciphering the messages relayed in the poetry. Kabira and Mutahi aver that the gicaandi is characterized by coded messages which represent the entirety of the life of the Gikuyus. Remarkably, "The defeated poet hands over his instrument as a sign of defeat. He would need to retrieve it in order to perform because

without the instrument of his trade he cannot perform in public.” (Kimani 48) Against the backdrop of the characteristic covertness of the message of the gicaandi, Ngugi’s late fiction are narrated in the fashion of poetic exigency.

It can be equally asserted that Ngugi positions the extreme opposing characters in his narrative as the two contesting poets – whereby, the Narrator, Wangari, Wariinga, the university students and their leader; and also, the workers and peasants, are the good forces posing riddles which the evil forces represented by Mwaura, Mwireri, the experts in thefts and robbery at the Devil’s feast, the Ilmorog police, the Rich Old Man of Ngorika, and others. The revolutions in *Devil on the Cross* were either introduced or recounted by the narrator. From the beginning of the narrative in page 7, the narrator makes it obvious that a decisive revolution is imminent, “The Devil, who would lead us into the blindness of the heart and into the deafness of the mind, should be crucified, and care should be taken that his acolytes do not lift him down from the Cross to pursue the task of building Hell for the people on Earth ...” (Ngugi 7).

The preservation of ancestral and national histories in the forms of poems/epics, songs, lyrics, praise-singing, ritual chants, love songs, dance dramas, speaking drums, bard performances, folklore, dirges, traditional songs, and others, inform the significance of the narrator (gicaandi player) and myths mentioned in Ngugi’s work, “... Gicaandi Player, tell the story of the child I love so dearly. Cast light upon all that happened, so that each may pass judgment only when he knows the whole truth. gicaandi player, reveal all that is hidden.” (Ngugi 7). With these providing an informative background, these works are easily comprehensible.

Ngugi’s most significant artistic achievement is the conception of the myth of the Devil which remains the best application of magical realism reflected in the Devil’s feast which takes most part of the narrative (Ngugi 82-181) and its invitation card (68, 76); the title of the

book, the Devil’s angels (10), and other extravagant allusions throughout the work. Mukutu rightly observes thus: Ngugi also uses African mythology, songs, and imitates the spoken in his written works in ways that suggest that he borrows heavily from an African orature. His inclusion of stories that reflect the culture of the people, songs proverbs, myths and parables reflect the oral in his personal writing which gives authenticity to his experiences. (21).

Conclusion

Ngugi by his works between 1978 and 2018 validates the prior existence of oral literature in Africa and this is the narrative he pushes through in his post-Marxist fiction. *Devil on the Cross* is localized both in form and content using the traditional way of narration. For Ngugi, the place of orality in literature is undeniably life-giving, as he brings alive the African oral culture through the role of the narrator so that the reader can almost touch it. Embracing Gikuyu folkloric components which greatly depends on orality and alternative realism is, therefore, employed by Ngugi wa Thiong’o as a baseline to establish a paradigm shift in revolutionary writing, especially after the demise of Marxism. Ngugi refines the role of the narrator in his text under study, to authenticate the African voice while preserving the collective memory of the Gikuyu oral culture. Ngugi therefore, embarks on a deliberate revolution in evolving a distinct kind of narrative technique that is owned by him, and will be emulated by upcoming postcolonial writers. While Ngugi reforms the narrative fabric of African storytelling, he incorporates indigenous language and expression all of which sum up his defiant rejection of the European political and cultural subjugation. The narrative exigencies which characterizes Ngugi’s 1980 novel is positioned by this study, as a reproduction of its Latin-American contemporaries. Ngugi’s Narrator in his late fiction functions as the mirror which reveals what needs to be adjudged, and by the reflection, the reader remains the only judge.

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