

ARCHITECTURAL UTOPIA AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN NGUGI WA THIANG'O'S *WIZARD OF THE CROW*

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Abstract.

This paper explores the intersection of landscape, architectural design, political violence and Literature. It specifically focuses on the stimulating influence of landscape and architectural designs on the imaginative faculty of Ngugi in his 2007 novel *Wizard of the Crow*. The paper critically examines his employment of architectural tropes to shape a gripping narrative about corruption, greed, violence and wastefulness in the fictional African nation of Aburiria; a prototype of most African nations. The paper also examines how Ngugi explores the dysfunctional nature of most African cities especially in matters of hygiene, waste management, and environmental conservation/destruction. The paper concludes that there is a very close connection between building / construction business, environmental destruction, political violence and corruption in the Aburirian nation, as complexly depicted in the novel. This is very disturbing because it reminds us of the painful fact that whereas elsewhere in the world buildings and other architectural masterpieces are signs of progress and development, in Africa they are conduits for siphoning funds often sourced through dubious loans by those in positions of leadership as demonstrated in *Wizard of the Crow*.

Key Words: architectural utopia, political violence; corruption, resource mismanagement, dictatorship

Introduction

One of the qualities of master-novelists, as enumerated by Edward Barnaby, is their ability to:

[R]ender lived experience with authentic social complexity and psychological depth, portraying the convergence of multiple individual perspectives against the context of the societal, political and economic conditions that would lead them to intersect in a particular manner. (2)

This is the manner in which Ngugi wa Thiong'o's power to narrate stories that reflects the African predicament is once again demonstrated in his 2007 magnum opus, *Wizard of the Crow* (henceforth referred to as *WoC*). In this novel, Ngugi has time and again displayed a penetrating awareness of Africa's social problems of corruption, dictatorship, resource mismanagement, and violence through the medium of fiction. The story in this novel is that of the dysfunctional "Free Republic of Aburiria", a nation under the iron grip of a megalomaniac

dictator bent on sabotaging the will and wish of his people. This "eternal Ruler" (*WoC* 17) vehemently denies the citizens the opportunity to exercise their democratic rights of determining who will be their leader. He does this by presenting to the nation a bogus political contraption called "BABY D" (*WoC* 698). The operational parameters of "Baby Democracy" (*WoC* 698) enunciated by the Ruler are the obverse and reverse of genuine democracy. Central to "BABY D" is the revelation that though Aburiria under "His Mighty Excellency" will operate as a multi-party nation, the Ruler is nonetheless "the nominal head of all political parties" (*WoC* 699). A logical corollary to this is that "whichever party wins the election will have the Ruler as its *de jure* leader" (Bala Ruma 71). Consequently, democracy is never allowed to operate let alone function in Aburiria. Instead, what we witnessed in Aburiria is a series of violence generated from conflicts occasioned by this absence of free democratic space as well as power tussles between various political players. These conflicts and political intrigues

consequently permeated the politscape of Aburiria thereby rendering it completely maladaptive in all aspects of governance and administration. This further helps in worsening even the physical outlook of Aburirian land and city-scapes by turning most of it into an environmental wasteland with heaps of garbage colonising large tracts of lands even in the capital, Eldares. In this regard, the omniscient narrator told us that:

There were days when instead of being lined with trees the streets of Eldares were lined on either side with mountains of garbage. Some shop owners paid private garbage collectors to clear access to their premises, so that here and there particularly in the central business zone, there were some clean patches. In many other streets there was nothing but flies, worms, and the stench of rot. (WoC 36)

This environmental neglect is further reflected in the seeming poverty of the citizens of Aburiria most especially in the area of homes and places of dwellings. The narrator informs us that, “In most towns, shelters made out of cardboard, scrap metal, old tires, and plastic were home to hundreds of children and adults” (WoC 39). In Santalucia, a suburb of Eldares, the miasma is most often very offensive because, “The sewage pipes were always clogged and there was a permanent stench in the air that was particularly nauseating on a hot day” (WoC 75).

Similarly, the neglect is also seen in the conditions of the roads within and outside Eldares. For instance, we are told that in the streets of Eldares, “sleek Mercedes-Benzes, donkey-carts, and hand-pulled carriages competed for space and the right of way in *pot-holed* roads...” (added emphasis, WoC 36).

In the Aburirian state of “His Mighty Excellency”, environmental degradation in form of forest clearing is very common. The ruthless exploitation of the green environment for profit under the supervision of the state becomes the norm. In this respect, we see how:

When it came to forests, indeed to any natural resource, the Aburirian State and big American, European, and Japanese companies, in alliance with

the local African, Indian, and European rich, were all united by one slogan: *A loot-a continua*. They knew how to take but not how to give back to the soil. (original emphasis, WoC 201)

And when this environmental despoliation coalesced with power play and political machinations among the ruling class, the destruction could only be imagined.

The story is also about a utopian architectural project derisively called the “Marching to Heaven Project”. It is a building whose purpose, we are told in the text, is to allow The Ruler to ascend to heaven so that he can have a direct conversation with God whenever he deems fit. It is a building that will beat the Biblical Tower of Babel in all ramifications. A grand architectural project that becomes a semiotic index of crisis and corruption in the world of the text.

One of the things that makes the Marching to Heaven a utopia is that it is specifically conceived as a “fantasy bribe” (Vermeulen and Robin 144) to be presented to the Ruler of the Free Republic of Abururia as a birthday gift from one of his diabolical Ministers. This is a project that is conceived with the dual purpose of both ego-massaging and self-aggrandisement. Seen in this sense, it is conceived by Foreign Minister in the Ruler’s government to appeal to the grandiose delusions of His Excellency, who sees himself as a kind of a demiurgic figure as it were. It yet, at the same time, becomes an avenue for colossal corruption in that the funds needed to facilitate its construction will come from a dubious loan to be granted the Aburirian Republic by the Global Bank. In short, the Marching to Heaven Project is a sort of a ‘machine’ whose utopian conception and design is primed and intended for the extraction of the surplus value attached to its symbolic meaning as a government project to be funded by a dubious financial scheme from the exploitative capitalist machine of loans, profits, and interest rates. Thus, in Marching to Heaven, we see the commercialisation of an architectural imprint even before it leaves the drawing board. Consequently, it becomes a site of fierce power struggle between the people responsible for its implementation. This power conflict subsequently

engenders violence and class struggle between the various dramatis personae in the text.

We witnessed all these in *Wizard of the Crow* as the omniscient narrator, alongside the *flâneur*-protagonist, Kamiti alias Wizard of the Crow report about events as they unfold in the “Free Republic of Aburiria”. Kamiti in particular, is a participant as well as a spectatorial figure that reports events in real-time. Thus, in the narrative configuration of the text, he is a character through whom we most of the time see and hear about the politscape and the built environment of the Aburirian capital, Eldares. In short, he offers a sharp-eyed critique of the social and political landscape of Aburiria. A jobless, Master of Business Administration Degree holder, Kamiti is inadvertently caught in the web of violence and destruction that engulfs his nation as he traverses its capital looking for an apparently non-existing office job.

Theoretical Framework: Classical Marxism

The discussion that will follow in the subsequent sections will, as much as possible, be framed within the template of classical Marxist social cum literary theory. In this regard, ideas and concepts from Marxism will be implicitly if not explicitly appropriated to guide the discussion and analysis.

The Marxist approach to social analysis of Karl Marx is built on the concept of “dialectics” a term he borrowed from the work of the German philosopher Fredrich Hegel. The dialectical method is built on the interplay and competition between two opposing forces in a particular condition or situation that is best mirrored in the class conflict that Marx foresee between the bourgeoisies and the proletariats. He believes that this conflict will ultimately engineer social change in the society. Even more, this change is brought forth by internal tensions or contradictions within societies. As aptly noted by Sam Porter, “A dialectical process involves a contradiction between two forces and the resolution that develops as a result of their clash” (36). Viewed in this way, dialectics is not simply about determining cause and effect of events but involves interaction as “both contradictory forces affect each other” thereby generating a change that will profoundly disturbs the status quo (ibid).

Even more, at the root of this conflict between classes is the overarching influence of opposing ideologies which guide the different interpretations of ‘reality’ by the two groups. Thus, as a result of their differing social and economic positioning, the possibility of having a common ground for understanding social reality is untenable. In fact, we see this scenario playing out again and again in the world of *Wizard of the Crow*. The Aburirian society is made up of two major groups that consist of those in position of power and authority like the Ruler, Tajirika and his wife Vinjina, Kaniuri, Machokali and other ministers. The subaltern and oppressed group on the other hand consist of people like Kamiti wa Kamiti alias Wizard of the Crow, Grace Nyawira, members of the “Movement for the Voice of the People” and the teeming masses that made up the Aburirian society. As we shall see in the following sections, it is this class structure that fuels the ensuing conflicts in the world of the text.

The “Marching to Heaven Project” as a metonym for Corruption

The Marching to Heaven Project is akin to what Edwin Relph (1976) described as a “futurised subtopia”, a kind of non-place in which no human interaction will possibly take place. It is a building that will at once produce “a sense of disorientation, wonder and amazement in trying to simulate...aspects of ...futuristic...fantasies” (Featherstone, cited in Ng 2012). It is a good example of what De Temmerman and Demoen describes as an “Object...overlaid with symbolic meanings” (180). For instance, the project holds different meaning and significance for the ministers in the Ruler’s government on the one hand, and the members of the opposition “Movement for the Voice of the People” on the other hand. In this respect, whereas the former sees it as an avenue to gratify the over-bloated ego of the Ruler, the latter views it as an instrument of exploitation and corruption.

Even more, whereas the initiators of the Marching to Heaven project are driven by personal greed for power and wealth, their counter-force, in form of the opposition “Movement for the Voice of the People” are motivated by patriotic instincts. Consequently, the rank and file of the Movement sees in “Marching to Heaven” a debt and death trap

that will, if allowed to materialise, “swallow our land” as Nyawīra tells Kamūtī alias Wizard of the Crow (*WoC* 209). She further reveals the evil intentions of this ill-conceived project:

It will snatch water from the mouth of the thirsty and food from the mouth of the hungry. Skeletons will people our country. How shall we get back the body, the mind, and the soul of the nation? Where shall we take shelter from the sun and rain? (*WoC* 209)

The ludicrous idea to erect a magnificent building for the Ruler to daily commune with God is conceived by Foreign Minister Machokali as a national gift to the Ruler on the occasion of his birthday. However, as is normal in *officialise* statements, the presentation is made in the name of the nation. Consequently, a decision that was taken by few Ministers of the State is made to look and sound as if it is the outcome of a wide, national consensus. It is in line with this that Machokali claims:

The whole country...had decided unanimously to erect a building such as had never been attempted in history except once by the children of Israel, and even they had failed miserably to complete the House of Babel. Aburīria would now do what the Israelites could not do: raise a building to the very gates of Heaven so that the Ruler could call on God daily to say good morning or good evening or simply how was your day today, God? (*WoC* 16)

This building project surreally named “Marching to Heaven” is to be coordinated by a “National Building Committee” under a trusted aide of the Ruler (*WoC* 16). As absurd as this proposal might sound, the idea of erecting such a magnificent building using the state’s resources has very serious implication for the citizens of Aburīria. For one, the “Marching to Heaven” project becomes a lexicalisation of corruption in the Free Republic of Aburiria. Its funding is to be entirely carried out through a dubious loan to be sourced from the “Global Bank” (*WOC* 19). As the narrative progresses, we are told how officials of the “Global Bank” are invited to come to Eldares, the capital of Aburīria for talks and negotiation

about the funding of this important national project. The officials arrive as scheduled and the government decided to organise a cultural performance in their honour. Local women are invited to display Aburīrian dance steps to impress the august visitors. The performance however ends in a fiasco after members of the Movement for the Voice of the People infiltrated its rank:

The women, Nyawīra now among them, walked in pairs into the arena from every direction, dressed no different from the crowd. Nothing in fact stood out except their disciplined formations and dignified entrance. They were silent, sombre, as if in a funeral procession. (*WoC* 249-250)

Having ranged themselves in this formation, the women enacted the most bizarre performance in front of the Ruler and his dignitaries. They first demand for the release of Rachael, the Ruler’s wife that has been confined to a house-arrest for daring to advise him to keep off girls that are the age of his grandchildren. This is an unforgivable offence to a Ruler whose words are law in Aburiria. They also proceed to enact their *coup de théâtre* when suddenly all of them turned their backs to the platform, facing the multitude crowd and shielding those on the high table with their backs. Nyawīra told Kamūtī alias the Wizard of the Crow that the women decide to embarrass the Ruler through a macabre dance:

All together we lifted our skirts and exposed our butts to those on the platform, and squatted as if about to shit en masse in the arena....There were two or three women who forgot that this was only a simulation...they urinated and farted loudly. (*WoC* 250)

Soon after this show of shame, members of the Global Bank delegation decide to leave Eldares without any conclusive agreement on the Marching to Heaven loan with the Ruler’s government. They however extend an invitation to the Ruler to visit them at their headquarters in New York whenever he happens to be in the U.S. for further talks. Thereafter the Ruler ordered his secret police, the M5 to hunt down the women and bring them to him, dead or alive.

It is my contention that the Marching to Heaven Project is an African cultural code à la Roland Barthes. Many African leaders have used building projects to secure foreign loans that are in the main siphoned back to foreign bank accounts of government officials. More often than not, these buildings never go beyond their architectural plans or designs. This is what we see with Marching to Heaven in *Wizard of the Crow*. It is never meant to be built. It is simply a utopian desire created to massage the ego of a dictator as well as an avenue to make dubious money. Viewed as an icon, it is the thread that joins all the dramatis personae in this monumental tale of terror and corruption.

It therefore becomes the instrument of making money for most especially the Ruler, Kaniürü, and Tajirika. For instance, both Tajirika and Kaniürü are closely connected to this project in their positions as chairman and deputy chairman of the Marching to Heaven Project, respectively. Soon after their appointments, contractors started visiting their offices with calling cards containing “thousand of Burĩ” (*WoC* 105), trying to establish an *entente cordiale* with officials in charge of this project. By this token, the people involved with this project have already started benefitting from its largess even before it leaves the drawing board. For example, Titus Tajirika, “the first chairman of the Marching to Heaven Building Committee” (*WoC* 103) receives this kind of visits from contractors who come with “their visiting cards” soon after his appointment (*WoC* 104). By the time Nyawĩra and her boss Tajirika close their office the very first day, “Nyawira spotted, in one corner of the room, three sacks full of Burĩ” (*WoC* 105). This ritual of the contractors coming with their “calling cards” becomes a routine for several days. As we are told by Tajirika’s wife, Vinjinia the prospects that his appointment guarantees pushes Tajirika to the fringe of madness:

He came back last night with three sacks full of Burĩ notes. Throughout the evening he kept muttering things to himself, calculating I don’t know what. Even when he... heeded my call to come to bed, he did not fall asleep but continued working things in his mind. From the few words that I could make out, he seemed to be calculating the

impact of Marching to Heaven on our lives. (*WoC* 143)

Vinjinia further narrates that her husband kept muttering “If only” all night. This muttering continues in the morning as well. Tajirika is consequently believed to be afflicted with the “*If only*” (*WoC* 143) malady and is eventually taken to the shrine of Wizard of the Crow by Vinjinia for cure. She told Wizard of the Crow that she found her husband “staring at himself in the mirror, repeating the word *if*” (*WoC* 173). In the course of his therapy with the Wizard of the Crow, Tajirika is able to voice his complete thought: “If...my...skin...were...not...black! Oh, if only my skin were white!” Tajirika said in the triumphant tone of a child who for the first time has read a sentence without stumbling” (*WoC* 179). This sickness is later diagnosed by Wizard of the Crow as “white-ache” (*WoC* 180).

This desire to be white makes Tajirika to go all the way to America to undergo a skin surgery that will turn him into a white man. He and Vinjinia undergo plastic surgeries that eventually saw Tajirika becoming “a man in transition, with a white left leg and a white right arm” (*WoC* 742). As the narrative progresses, we see how Tajirika changes positions from being the chairman of the Marching to Heaven to the Governor of Central Bank on account of his greed and wily behaviour. He is later made the Defense Minister on the strength of his brutal character. Having acquired this new identity of a ‘black and white’ personality, and being the Ruler’s Defense Minister, Tajirika started thinking of overthrowing the government of the Ruler. He is handed over the opportunity by the Ruler when he instructs him to oversee the execution of the four “masked riders” (*WoC* 752). He, instead, plans the execution of Ruler by employing the services of the masked riders. He arranged a meeting between the masked riders and the Ruler. He thereafter, orders them to “conceal weapons under their hair when they went to meet with the Ruler at the State House” (*WoC* 752). The masked men executed their mandate by killing the Ruler and his mistress “the official hostess, Yunique Immaculate Mackenzie” (*WoC* 753). Soon after this, an announcement is made on the Aburĩrian national television that before his “premeditated SID...the Ruler had ceded all his

powers to the new ruler of Aburīria, Emperor Titus Flavius Vespasianus Whitehead” (*WoC* 753). With the Ruler’s eventual execution, the first cycle of violence becomes closed only to be followed by a new wave of senseless carnage in Tajirika’s regime.

In short, this “infernal cycle of violence” (Bala Ruma 80) continues in Emperor Titus Flavius’ regime. In a planned sweet revenge, the new ruler of Aburīria orders the four spirits to kill and dump the bodies of his former torturers Njoya, Kahiga, and Kaniūrū in the Red River now renamed the “Imperial River” (*WoC* 755).

From the discussion so far, it is easy to observe that there is an indexical relationship between foreign loans political corruption, and violence. The Marching to Heaven is an evil project that eventually consumes the life of its conceivers. All the people connected to it, with the exception of Titus Tajirika lost their lives on its account. Perhaps, with this observation, it will not be off the mark to suggest that the no matter how wicked and violent elites of a nation might be, they will always in the end pay for their misdeeds.

Political Violence in *Wizard of the Crow*

The violence in Aburīria affects both the mighty and the low; ministers and ordinary citizens. However, violence as a tool for political control is more ferociously used by the Ruler against those in position of authority. He most especially employs violence through the use of the regime’s secret police (M5) to terrorise and coerce his ambitious ministers to submit to his authority. For instance, Foreign Minister in the Ruler’s government, Markus Machokali vanishes into oblivion after the American ambassador to Aburīria Mr Gabriel Gemstone supports him as a young, potential successor to the octogenarian leader:

You have youthful ministers who love you and share your vision. They said as much in front of us. We are wondering, and I was told to stress that this is only a suggestion from friends, why you don’t take things easy and cede the presidency to one of these young men so they can relieve you of the daily stress? (*WoC* 582)

This veiled suggestion that the Ruler should vacate

the seat of power for one of his ministers makes him to be seething with anger, but he tactfully control his emotions and pretend to magnanimously welcome the suggestion. However, he is curious to know who among his ministers is anointed by the Americans to take his place. He therefore cunningly goads the ambassador to reveal their choice by politely retorting:

“I should say thank you, for you have spoken the truth. We rulers are vain, and we never realise when age has knocked at the door and lodged snugly within us. But believe me, I have often thought of getting rid of this burden of leadership so I can have time to enjoy my grandchildren. The problem is in really knowing which of the young men around me I should trust to steer the nation in the right direction.” (*WoC* 583)

Ambassador Gemstone is ecstatic that the Ruler is reasoning in their direction and he quickly mentions the name of Foreign Minister Machokali as a good replacement for the Ruler. He proceeds to mention some of the leadership qualities that Machokali possess:

“He is young and seems quick on his feet. He is devoted to your philosophy. He reasons more than he emotes, and we in the West can certainly do business with him...” (*WoC* 583)

Soon after these remarks by the ambassador, Machokali is never seen in public again. When the news of his disappearance becomes public knowledge, Aburīrians are shocked:

In all Aburīria, people were asking themselves: How can a cabinet minister disappear, like a goat or a child, without trace? A Minister for Foreign Affairs, who had so ably represented the Ruler in the courts of the great all over the world—how could he just vanish like that? (*WoC* 605)

Afraid of the backlash that the rumour of Machokali’s disappearance might generate, the government issued a terse statement accusing the

minister of committing *lese majesty*. The statement further avers that “the minister might have fled to a foreign country to hide his shame or might even have committed suicide...” after he is “implicated in a plot to overthrow the legal government of the Republic of Aburiria” (WoC 606).

A similar fate befalls Silver Sikoukuu, “Minister of State in charge of spying on the citizenry” in the Ruler’s government (WoC 14). He too is framed and subsequently “arrested and...held to account for the disappearance of Machokali.” This information comes from the mouth of Minister of Information, Big Ben Mambo in a televised statement he issued “atop one of the armoured vehicles” intentionally mobilised to intimidate Aburirian citizens agitating for a free democratic space (WoC 644). Sikoukuu is perpetually detained without trial. He is only released after the Ruler’s government is overthrown by Emperor Titus Tajirika. In fact, Emperor Titus Tajirika is magnanimous by appointing Sikiokuu as “Minister for Toilets and Cleanliness in Public Places” (WoC 754) in the new Imperial government.

In a twist of fate, Julius Ceaser Big Ben Mambo, Minister of Information courts the anger of the Ruler when he was suspected to have an affair with “Dr, Yunique Immaculate Mackenzie, Official National Hostess” in the Ruler’s State House (WoC 696). He is also implicated in a phantom coup plot *a lâ* Machokali and is subsequently executed via firing squad: “It is said that as he faced the firing squad the blindfolded Julius Ceaser Big Ben Mambo found his tongue at the very last minute” trying to enlist the services of Wizard of the Crow to save him. He thus intoned “Crow...protective...if...but the first bullet did not let him complete the sentence” (original emphasis, WoC 720). Again and again we see this choreographed scenario of violence playing out severally in *Wizard of the Crow*. Most of the time, this violence is triggered as a result of power play among ministers and other notable figures in the Ruler’s government. In fact, the Ruler himself has a propensity for generating conflict, suspicion, and disagreement among key figures in his regime. For instance, we can see in the text where the dictator’s survival instincts make him to over the years-built a, “[...] a reputation for making minister plot

against minister, region rise against region, and community against community [...]” (WoC 231). In short, the Ruler is cast in the mould of the Machiavellian Prince that can go to any extent to secure his position. It is my contention that the Ruler is a modern African dictator par excellence. He is cast in the mould of what David Michael Levin calls “the modern self...moved by the will to dominate” friends and foes (20).

This urge to dominate is perhaps at the root of the violence that persistently bedevils and beleaguers modern nations despite their claim to being civilisationally more refined than their predecessors. In these societies what the philosopher Slavoj Žižek (2008) calls “subjective violence” (10) holds sway, destroying persons and communities through the actions of “evil individuals, disciplined repressive apparatuses” and “fanatical crowds” (ibid) that are always ready to unleash terror at the slightest provocation. In fact, the “death-dealing will” (Eagleton 108) of the actors in most political conflicts across the globe has resulted in the loss of innumerable lives of mostly innocent people that have little to gain in the political power-game of the elites. We see this pattern severally in play throughout *Wizard of the Crow*. For example, the Ruler is portrayed as a person that is stupendously corrupt in all aspects of governance. Consequently, he is “baffled by anyone not motivated by greed”, and finds it difficult to “understand the type who talked of collective salvation instead of personal survival” (WoC 235).

In short, the narrative in *Wizard of the Crow* is a gory dramatisation of “violent conflicts” (Conteh-Morgan 1) between groups competing for political and economic power. Unarguably, a vital contributory factor to the commonplaceness of violence in modern societies is the ego-logical disposition of the so-called modern self. In fact, the modern person is an “ego-logical subject” (Levin 20) that is moved by the will to dominate both his/her environment and co-inhabitants. Connected to this is the contention that the average modern person is a self-centred, conscious personality that is ready to withdraw into the comfort zone of their race, ethnicity, nationality, or organisation with a view to exploit primordial kinship for the purpose of dominating the

perceived 'other'. This is the import of Carolyn Nordstrom's observation that more often than not in conflicts involving different political interests, "Violence is employed to create political acquiescence" as well as to institute "hierarchies of domination and submission based on the control of force" (61). In line with this observation, Vincenzo Ruggiero avers that "Political violence . . . is an attempt to give hostile out-bursts an organizational structure and a rational, calculable trend, so that uncoordinated hostility is slowly turned into military action . . . towards a predictable end" (105). This much could be seen in *Wizard of the Crow* where violence is unleashed on people opposed to the Ruler's intention to perpetuate himself in power. Thus in Aburiria, violence is employed as a tool of domination, coercion, submission and/or annihilation. Violence for the Ruler becomes a tool employed for asserting a unique leadership style through the annihilation of people considered very close to him. Through this process, the Ruler is able to create a brash and brutal identity that is aimed at instilling fear among his adversaries.

Similarly, the Ruler through this process is able to create a binary between himself (and those who share his ideology like Tajirika) and his enemies like the emblematic Wizard of the Crow, Nyawira, and members of the Movement for the Voice of the People. This is the sense in which Vigdis Broch-Due argues that "violence" is central to people's "quest for identity, not only as a matter of categorical grouping but as a *process* of identification and differentiation" (original italics 17). Viewed in this light, violence is an important instrument for group cleavages as well as for exclusion of the perceived moral, political, economic, and social 'other' especially in the struggle for political control of nations. We witness this gory display of needless violence based on "identification and differentiation" severally in this novel. What is worthy of note is that violence in this novel is generated and sustained by political actors bent on remaining in power at the expense of ordinary citizens. In short, the vast majority of the Aburirian citizens are mere

pawns in the political power-game of the ruling elites. Consequently, their welfare and happiness can be sacrificed on the altar of elite resentment.

Conclusion

This paper looked at how architectural utopia generates corruption and political violence occasioned by intense power struggle between elites and the dispossessed and powerless subaltern groups in the world of *Wizard of the Crow*. We have seen how the Marching to Heaven project becomes an index of power play, conflict and corruption. Admittedly, the merit of any architectural master piece is supposed to be found in its pragmatic and symbolic role as a sign of progress and development. When viewed in this perspective, the Marching to Heaven project is an abysmal failure as it continually fails to transit the design stage and materialise or morph into a physical structure. It is therefore an architectural utopia conjured to gratify the grandiose political delusions of a despotic and selfish political class. At yet another level, this utopian project is an obtuse object capable of inducing fear in its adversaries and rejectors who see it as an instrument of corrupt practices and elitist power play.

It is this performativity or display of power that subsequently lays the ground for the endless cycle of violence we see in the world of the text. Seen this way, the Marching to Heaven project is a structure of domination and exploitation. The instant fetishisation of the image of Marching to Heaven has a double-bind significance for the two opposing groups of the oppressors and the oppressed based on a scale of economic polarisation. In this regard, it acts as a symbol of resistance in the way it gingers and unites those that oppose the despotic tendencies of the Ruler's government on the one hand. Conversely, it can be seen as a fetish commodity manipulated and used by the elites to accumulate illicit wealth. In the end, we see how most of those that are closely associated with this romantic utopia are destroyed by its symbolic hailing through a needless violence generated by intense political intrigues.

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