INTERTEXTUAL STRATEGIES IN AFRICAN AND CARIBBEAN FICTIONS:
DISCOURSES OF POST-INDEPENDENCE PROBLEM-SPACE IN SYLVIA
WYNTER, GEORGE LAMMING, GRACE OGOT, AND NGUGI WA THIONGO

by

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“Intertextual Strategies in African and Caribbean Fictions” is concerned with modes of narrative emplotment in post-independence writing in Africa and the Caribbean. In the two regions, anti-colonial narratives have been dominant for some time. These self-determination narratives construct what David Scott calls a “space of experience” where the present has triumphed over the oppression of the past and looks toward a “horizon of expectation” in the post-independence period. These Romance narratives, the work argues along with Scott, have lost their explanatory value. This is because questions that those in the post-liberation period ask have changed, and so the Romance narratives no longer provide answers. The dissertation pays close attention to primary texts and authors. The discussion also includes theoretical and critical texts from both Africa and the Caribbean. It uses Sylvia Wynter’s *The Hills of Hebron* (1962), George Lamming’s *Water with Berries* (1971), Grace Ogot’ *The Strange Bride* (1989), and Ngugi wa Thiongo’s *Matigari* (1987) to show that the Romance narrative mode of emploting the movement of history is inconsistent with the issues which concern post-independence problem-space. In its consideration of these works, it argues that the problem-space of anti-colonial nationalists should not be taken as a
monument entrenched in stone that is designed by its creators to have a fixed meaning. Of course, the connection between anti-colonial nationalists and autonomy is vital; but the novels examined here show that the end of colonial rule also produced significant changes in the consideration of historical form and mode of narrative emplotment. The work argues that the transition from colonial rule to independence demands the emplotment mode of tragedy. It highlights the role of tragedy in historical change at the same time as it demonstrates that the novels discussed here call for a re-imagination in the post-independence problem-space.
Dedication

To my grandfather,
Enock Aloo Okech (Bura Oloi),
before whose court I submit this testimony.
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Introduction

From the Caribbean to Africa: The Background of Anti-colonial Resistance

Provoked by Italy’s 1935 invasion of Ethiopia--the only Independent African country at the time--C.L.R James, along with a small team of Caribbean intellectuals and future leaders of post-independence Africa, including George Padmore, Jomo Kenyatta, Kwame Nkrumah and others, developed a specific mode of Pan-Africanism that sought not only to map out the contours of Black oppression, but also to help defeat colonial tyranny. It is also during this period (starting with Cuba in 1933) that riots materialized in every island in the West Indies. These historical events, one could argue, set in motion James’ interest in Haiti’s colonial past, specifically its slave revolution of the late 18th century. In 1938 James published The Black Jacobins. In this work, he interfaced Black history, anti-colonialism, and revolutionary politics. Conceptualizing the plantation as a space for revolution, James argued that historians had hitherto ignored the critical role that slaves played in overcoming the institution of slavery. Slavery came to an end in Haiti, James implied, not merely as a result of reformist movements or official decrees of colonial authorities, but through the collective organizing of slaves. He argued that it was the visible danger of similar revolts that forced Europe finally to abolish slavery.

In James’ Preface to The Black Jacobins, he stated that the historical argument of the work was completely framed by contemporary violent conflicts from “Franco’s heavy artillery” to “the rattle of Stalin’s firing squads” (xi). He claims that the “fever and the fret” (xi) of “our age enable our practiced vision to see into the very bones of previous revolutions more easily than heretofore” (xi). Thus, he represents the Haitian revolution

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as a model and encouragement for revolutionaries to dismantle the chains of colonial oppression. Indeed, *The Black Jacobins* was a call to arms that re-imagined the slave past in new ways through a thorough exploration of the interface between history and revolutionary politics. I argue that the novels that I examine here—Sylvia Wynter’s *The Hills of Hebron* (1962), George Lamming’s *Water with Berries* (1971), Grace Ogot’s *The Strange Bride* (1989), and Ngugi wa Thiongo’s *Matigari* (1987)—are similarly beginning “another work of re-imagining other futures […] to anticipate” (Scott 45). These works re-imagine post-liberation futures by introducing a sense of instability in post-independence problem-space and by asking new questions. In doing so, they differ from the first edition of *The Black Jacobins* which was a “war cry” meant to enable and to ignite anti-colonial imaginings. James had hoped that by showing the process of reclaiming the agency and volition of the colonial subject as the principal actor in fighting colonial oppression and in forging a political system, he could force his readers to re-assess their understanding of a political struggle. He has said in an interview: “Now, what did I have in mind when I wrote [*The Black Jacobins*]. I had in mind writing about the San Domingo revolution as the preparation for the revolution that George Padmore and all of us were interested in, that is, the revolution in Africa” (“Why I wrote *The Black Jacobins*” 72).

Crucial here, therefore, is the figure of the hero itself. This partly explains why *The Black Jacobins* is germane to this discussion. When James relates the story of Toussaint—the hero of the Haitian Revolution—to the issues of his time, he is in a way asking “us to connect Toussaint to the vital stories of our own time” (Scott 10). Toussaint
had “mythologized himself as ‘L’Ouverture,’ the Opening” (Scott 10). It is he “who gave vision to the heroic struggle for liberty” (Scott 10).

In *Nanny, Sam Sharpe and the Struggle for People’s Liberation*, Kamau Brathwaite characterizes Jamaican history in terms of popular struggle against plantation system. The struggles, according to Barry Higman, pushed the island through a series of historical cycles, culminating in the final demolition of plantation system and in independence. In the Caribbean, anti-colonial nationalist was the “symbol of this transformation” (Brathwaite 3), which explains why he or she was the hero-figure.

Brathwaite writes:

> The National Hero is not therefore (cannot be) a political declaration (marker or icon of the struggle); he/she is also (and has to be, essentially) a folk figure: an expression of the collective memory of the people. Bogle, Gordon, Garvey, Manley, Busta, each in his different way, projects the protean quality; each in his way helps us define ourselves as self and nation. (4)

In other words, the Caribbean anti-colonial nationalists (heroes) make tangible the “historical conceptions or narrative lines of liberation” which provide the newly independent countries with “part of their collective sense of identity” (Cubitt 18).

In defining the cultural constructions of the heroic, Geoffrey Cubitt writes that:

> What resonates is not the life as lived, but the life as made sense of, the life imaginatively reconstructed and rendered significant. The lives of heroes become playgrounds of the imagination […] inviting terrains for ideological projection and mythical speculation. Whatever relationship
they may bear to the details of an individual life, heroic reputations are products of the imaginative labor through which societies and groups define and articulate their values and assumptions, and through which individuals within those societies or groups establish their participation in larger social or cultural identities. (3)

He notes some interesting ambiguities in the traditional conceptions of the heroic that can be traced back to Greek mythology, in which heroes occupy an indistinct place between gods and men. This element of ambiguity makes “heroes appear sometimes as figures of radiant excellence, effortlessly superior to other mortals; sometimes as common men and women writ large, with whose struggles and triumphs others can identify” (Cubitt 8).

Post-independence problem-space portrayed in the works of Wynter, Lamming, Ogot, and Ngugi is markedly different and temporally distant from C.L.R James’ anti-colonial overcoming of the 1930s. In James’ time the Romance hero was vital to the process of anti-colonial resistance. Brathwaite shows the relevance of the hero when he writes that he or she was

a participant in the struggle for freedom at a particular moment of crisis but an expression beyond this, of an entire movement of history; so that anchored in a specific period of history, he or she illuminated the meaning of the whole, establishing correspondences with each step and stage of the past, and linking these through his or her individual achievement with our sense of nationhood. (3-4)

It is important to note here that, similarly to the narrative of Romance where the hero overcomes all the obstacles placed before him, the process described by Braithwaite
also places expectations on the figure of the hero. This is why it is important to ask whether the pasts of colonial resistance in Africa and the Caribbean continue to be relevant in the post-liberation period; are the happy endings that are visualized through the Romance narratives still applicable in the post-independence present? Scott argues that beginning from the 1960s, the postcolonial period has witnessed the erosion of narratives of Romance. He bases his discussion on the fact that when C.L.R James wrote *The Black Jacobins* in the 1930s, he largely saw the story of Toussaint L’Ouverture and the Haitian revolution as a Romance narrative of “redemption” and “overcoming” while when he revised it in the 1963 edition he represented it as a tragedy. When in 1971 James discussed why he wrote *The Black Jacobins*, he noted that it would have been a different book had he written it 1971. He would have placed less emphasis on the heroism displayed by Toussaint and instead highlighted the Revolution. Scott, therefore, thinks that such adjustments would have diluted the elitism and Euro-centrism in the narrative though he also notes that James portrays Toussaint “as a conscript—rather than a resisting agent—of modernity” (107). He sees the conditions in the slave plantation as also shaping “the way in which language, religion, kinship and so on were reconstituted,” and thus making communities within such a regime “conscripts of that structure of power” (115).

For Scott, it is significant to understand that “what is at stake here […] is not whether the colonized accommodated or resisted but how colonial power transformed the ground on which accommodation or resistance was possible in the first place, how colonial power reshaped or reorganized the conceptual and institutional conditions of possibility of social action and its understanding” (119). Scott, like James, sees the
Caribbean as “shaped almost entirely by that founding experience” of colonial encounter (126). For slaves “there was no before to return to […] The choice […] was not between modernity and something else, but within modernity” (164 Emphasis in original). This is why “Toussaint like Hamlet embodies a social crisis, the collision of embattled and irreconcilable social forces” (163). What tragedy suggests, therefore, is that “we should give up the consoling idea that past, present, and future can be plotted in a determinate casual sequence” (Scott 167). Scott pays close attention to the questions James framed and the anti-imperial struggle that James presented as a preface to thinking about a postcolonial Caribbean. It is in contextualizing the two moments of James’ writing—the nineteen thirties on the one hand, and the nineteen sixties on the other—that Scott assesses the utility of the different modes of emplotment, and considers how James’ choices are useful in understanding the relations between pasts, presents, and futures.

In *The Hills of Hebron*, the way Prophet Moses is seen by the residents of the hills of Hebron is what Higman calls “myth-making in the cause of nationalism” (209-210). According to the narrator,

Moses Barton came to Cockpit center as a prophet of the castaways, a cavalier of the impossible, seeing visions, dreaming dreams, and the town was never the same after his coming. He came to Cockpit center when it was a cruel town, a place where stinking hovels crowded close together, where multitudes were packed on sharks to live and die like grass […] He had come to break the neck of cowardice and slavery, to lead the people of Cockpit center out of Bondage and into the Promised Land. (115-116)
It is precisely this myth-making process that *The Hills of Hebron* condemns. The representation of Moses, I argue, is meant to highlight what Higman says when he suggests that the hero concept in the post-independence period “maybe interpreted as a system of social control based on the power to grant and manipulate prestige” (210). In *The Hills of Hebron*, Wynter sees the system of creating heroes as an instrument that in the neocolonial state could be deployed to suppress the people. This relates to Cubitt’s observation when he writes that:

> The celebration of heroes as influential historical individuals becomes increasingly connected with the maintenance of a sense of national community. People, in short, are encouraged to develop a sense of kinship or imaginative identification with heroes of history, and thus, potentially at least, to see the existence of the latter as bearers of ethical meaning relevant to their own lives. (19)

This is the attitude that I argue *The Hills of Hebron* rejects. When the reader comes to the end of the novel, he or she realizes that Prophet Moses has been reduced to a caricature, a hero whose Romance story is not critical to the post-independence presents of the community of the hills of Hebron.

With decolonization, the creation of heroes has been a noticeable characteristic in both Africa and the Caribbean. In Jamaica, for example, a system of National Heroes was introduced in 1962. In 1965, Paul Bogle and George William Gordon were crowned National Heroes of Jamaica for the role they played in 1865 Morant Bay rebellion. I argue that this is partly why *The Hills of Hebron* is concerned with the ideological function of Moses, the hero of anti-colonial Romance narrative. The novel suggests that
though Jamaica has been able to identify her heroes of anti-colonial resistance, the country should not assume and impute a fixed meaning to their roles. All of the novels that I examine here similarly expose tensions between anti-colonial socio-political order and the post-independence political dynamic. In my analysis, they suggest that while Romance may have been the convenient narrative mode for anti-colonialism, it is no longer relevant.

In *Against Normalization*, Anthony O’Brien also makes a related observation in the case of South Africa. He quotes Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*:

‘It is not enough to try to get back to the people in that past out of which they have already emerged; rather we must join them in the fluctuating movement which they are just giving shape to, and which, as soon as it is started, will be the signal for everything to be called into question. Let there be no mistake, it is this zone of occult instability where the people dwell that we must come.’ (39)

He immediately follows this by also quoting Njabullo Ndebele’s “Beyond Protest”:

The greatest challenge of the South African is in the search for new ways of thinking, ways of perception, that will help to break down the closed epistemological structures of South African oppression. The challenge is to free the entire social imagination of the oppressed from the laws of perception that have characterized apartheid society. For writers this means freeing the creative process itself from those very laws of perception […] The operative principle of composition in post-protest literature is that it should […] reveal new worlds where it was thought
they did not exist, and reveal process and movement where they were hidden. (39)

Though juxtaposing Fanon’s theory of critical resistance—of the anti-colonial period--with Ndebele’s discussion on “post-protest literature” raises some questions, it can help us understand Ngugi’s *Matigari*.

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon contends that nationalist ideological consciousness is integral to the project of reversing the political, economic, and cultural dominance and debasement of colonized people by colonial powers. This is crucial for understanding a novel like *Matigari*, in which Ngugi represents struggles of the post-liberation period at the same time as he reconstructs the relationship to anti-colonial consciousness. This is evident, for example, when Matigari accused John Boy Junior of collaborating with colonialist and the capitalist system of colonization.

When Ngugi recalls historical consciousness of anti-colonial resistance at the same time as he writes about the post-independence problem space, is he suggesting that the Kenyan nationalist narratives of liberation, for example, through which the process of liberation was carried out, are also capable of representing neocolonial oppression? In my reading, *Matigari* seems to suggest that post-independence period should wake up “from the deep sleep of many years” *(Matigari* 21). The novel proposes that post-independence present should engage the “newly found dignity that comes from having the scales of a thousand years fall from one’s eyes” *(Matigari* 22). This is because in colonial setting the polarization is simple and straightforward—colonal authority, on the one hand, and colonial subject on the other. In post-independence present the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed is indistinct. This is made evident when Matigari’s attempt
to drive Settler Williams away and reclaim his “house” is actually thwarted by his fellow “citizen.” Though Settler Williams is obviously an imperialist, and an imposter come to exploit, his servant, John Boy, and Matigari are both Kenyans. In showing that it is John Boy who knocks Matigari to the ground so that Settler Williams could recover, Matigari problematizes the relations in post-independence period. This has gone beyond the Manichean division between the colonizer and the colonized. In other words, John Boy’s son (John Boy Junior), I would argue, is an example of leaders in post-independence Africa who use the history of anti-colonial resistance to crown themselves as national heroes. The story of John Boy Junior shows the disturbing evolution of the nationalist politician. Their abuse of popular culture in order to legitimize their positions is well documented.

In Africa, for example, popular culture artists through their performance indicate new possibilities in post-independence problem-space. The works of performance artists like Kenya’s Dan Owino Misiani—especially their oral poetry (songs) on pre-colonial heroes—are similar to what we find in the works of Ogot and Ngugi. In his lyrical poetry, Misiani keeps the memory of pre-colonial heroes alive the same way that Ngugi does with the oral story of old man Ndiiro, the same dynamic that is evident in Ogot’s heroine, Nyawir. Lyrical poetry is part of oral literature genre that both Ogot and Ngugi draw from. I want, therefore, to briefly turn to performance of lyrical poetry in East Africa to show how neo-colonial leaders (anti-colonial nationalists) exploit oral performance in order to continue receiving the benefits associated with anti-colonial Romance narratives.
Politics of Popular Performance

Writing about “Social Features of Popular Music in Kenya,” D.A Masolo argues that because performance of lyrical poetry--songs--is vital in “political visibility and dignitarism” (368), its significance in popular and political dynamics is generally accepted. In the process of carrying out its role as a form of entertainment, performance of lyrical poetry enhances and legitimates “socially and political coveted statuses and role[s]” (368) and thus “become[s] signifier of social and political hierarchizations” (Masolo 368). It is indeed true that the traditional settings that Masolo writes about are the wellsprings of social knowledge. Through their personal stories and those of other personalities, the artists in their performance indicate the required social, moral, and leadership qualities. During a Luo performance, for example, the audience or artists recite praises of other people. The praises, “pakruok (virtue-boasting) […] define the peak of a Luo performance. It is an incantation of one’s own or another person’s praises by members of the audience in turns and between songs” (Masolo 369):

Pakruok is part of chamo nyadhi (display of self-virtues), a poetic form of self-identification usually framed in idioms usually punctuated by proverbial irony. Parkin (1978) argues that in the early 1960s pakruok provided a unique forum for the Luo to define their political response to the rivalry between the modernism and traditionalism in the context of Kenyan politics. This rivalry, embodied in the public and the political rivalry between the modernist Tom Mboya and the traditionalist Oginga Odinga, their foremost leaders at the time, was their way of defining their
identity, terms, and interests in the national politics of neo-independent Kenya. (369)

This way of performing anti-colonial resistance in the 1960s, “the complex multibiographical approach to the politics of social performance in traditional cultural contexts is obviously and powerfully abused in the contemporary political instrumentalization of music” (Masolo 69). To illustrate this, Masolo provides the example of *mouvement d’animation* that was visibly present everywhere in Mobutu’s Zaire in the early 1970s, in the mass choir frenzy that rocked Kenya in the years between 1978 and 1992, and in the Kamuzu Banda’s Women’s Voices in the 1980s Malawi. While these examples might have been intended by their creators to reproduce the “multibiographical” style in the traditional performance, they remarkably deviated from them in their abuse of mass compositions that were performed to deify political figures. This means that to the extent that the creation of the National Hero in the Caribbean is “based on the power to grant and manipulate prestige” (Higman 210), one could argue that it shares some characteristics with what we observe in the manipulation of traditional performance by post-independence leaders in Africa. In Africa, the creation of the hero is evident when, for example,

The singing and the dancing youth of the *mouvement d’animation* in Mobutu’s Zaire performed a deification of Mobutu by enacting a descent of his image onto the dancing field in front of a large audience through a screen of cloud-like smoke separating the up-above origins of the image from the world of cheering and the adoring mortal human below. (Masolo 370)
Though all these were happening at a time when it was generally suspected that Mobutu was involved in the death of Patrice Lumumba, Mobutu canonized himself by appealing to revolutionary anti-imperialist slogans. The same process was evident in Kenya when the massed choirs of school children, college students, and government employees were organized throughout the country by orders of the Kenya government and forced to openly proclaim, through their performance in song and dance, that Arap Moi had a divine right to rule the country. Similar to Mobutu, Moi sought to be seen as the “Prince of Peace.”

In *Matigari*, Ngugi offers a critique of this mindset. The narrator refers to the “songs of parrots” that are sung by “loyalist professors and all holders of Ph.ds in Parratology” (103) saying that, “The permanent professor, the Ph.d holder and the newspaper editor stood up and sang three verses from *songs of a Parrot*. After they had finished they sat down, still holding the song-book tightly” (*Matigari* 106). “Moi Tawala Kenya,” ([President] Moi rule Kenya), composed by school teacher Thomas Wasonga, and “Fimbo ya Nyayo” (Moi’s [traditional] fighting club or stick), by Kenyatta university lecturer Arthur Kemoli, are actual examples of mass choirs that were constituted by professors, to borrow from Ngugi, of “parratology” and their students.

These imitations—abuses rather—of popular performance to legitimize politicians are countered by other anti-establishment discourses in local linguistic idioms. The discourses carry ironic and ambivalent moral connotations which serve as hidden critiques of the agenda of post-independence leaders like Moi. In *Matigari*, for example, Ngugi reworks the oral qualities of the story of old man Ndiiro and overcomes the government ban placed on his works. On her part, Ogot uses the traditional stories to cast

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2 Peter Oloo Aringo, a member of Moi’s cabinet, once referred to Moi as the “Prince of Peace.”
3 The reference to university professors here is also a comment on those who attempted to erase or re-write some aspects of the history of Kenya’s anti-colonial resistance.
severe criticism on Kenya’s post-independence present. What the *Strange Bride* does is similar to what we see in ceremony of souls in *Water with Berries*, and as well as in the story of old man Ndiro in *Matigari*: they “[presence] the past at the same time that [they] familiarize the new present” (Masolo 372). In *The Strange Bride*, Ogot is acting much like performance artists who, in Masolo’s terms, present the “consciousness of the local as past at the center of the national present” (372). Masolo’s analysis of performance of lyrical poetry in Misiani’s work shows that what both Ogot and Ngugi do in their novels is also part of oral literature.

Misiani, for example, reworked the classical text of Luo legends, *Thuond Luo* (Luo heroes), and left his own imprint on it. *Thuond Luo* was in the 1950s already committed to writing for use in primary schools during colonial times. It was stabilized on the page. In re-working it, Misiani “re-oralizes an originally oral text” (Masolo 384) and in doing so transposes its use from colonial to post-colonial. Not only does he perform it “as a lesson in the history of geography of Luo people; he chooses to do so in musical form [lyrical poetry]” as the direct route to access the current generation of Luo youth who are no longer deeply competent in the Luo language, but still listen to his irresistible performance. Masolo translates Owino’s *Thuond Luo* thus:

Daniel Owino Misiani and the Shirati Band:

Political Genealogies and the Modern State (Recorded late 1979)

I Owino the gentleman
In my usual notoriety
The descendant of the Owiti clan
Of the ancestry of my fathers
And of Wagasi and Aloo clans
Of the ancestry of my mothers
Trace the historiography of my people
To remind of the heroes and warriors
For their leadership brought us forth
For heroism is a virtue
Heroes to be remembered even in good times
Presently, a buffalo is grazing upstream

Gor the son of Ogada son of Ogalo
Was our spiritual leader and diviner
With his medicines we conquered many lands
And subdued many peoples
Even as he becomes a legend
We owe our knowledge and customs to him

Obada son of Nyangile from the Ugenya clan
Was a well-known hero and warrior
He subdued many enemies
Leaving nothing in his trails
Oh it is virtues to be hero
It is virtues to fight for your people

Okore son of Ogonda of the Kisumu clan
Was a great hero
His expeditions are well known
To all our people
And you all know too
Ogola son of Oyieke of ka Rateng’ sub-clan of Kisumu
He too fought many battles

Ng’ong’a son of Odima
The great son of Alego people
Man of justice and power
Was praised by the colonial whites

Magere the legendary son of Kano people
Was the undefeatable hero of all times
He wiped out the Kipsigis

Do not all the Luo remember
Omolo Mumbo’s religious movement
How he saved the culture of our people
By transforming Christianity into Luo divination

Ogot the son of Tawo of the Alego people
Was our warrior well into colonial times

Lala son of Obada of the Ugenya clan
Odera son of Akang’o of gem
Major Owuor Ali
Are our warriors too
Crowned by the colonial whites
And recorded by colonial history. (383-384)

A thorough grasp of Misiani’s performance is useful in a discussion of *The Strange Bride*. I argue that the name of the heroine, Nyawir, was an apt choice. The root (morpheme) “wir” (wiro) means to return, while the prefix “nya” indicates a female. In other words, Nyawir is a girl/woman who returns. Like Misiani, Ogot returns to the pre-colonial presents of the Luo in order to critique Kenya’s post-independence present. Masolo argues that when Misiani lists heroes from all major Luo clans he highlights the political invention of the Luo as a cohesive and historically close group, whose successes hitherto were the work of heroes of the past. We can put Nyawir among that group of heroes and heroines of the past.

In singing praises to Luo heroes and warriors, Misiani (in the part that Masolo leaves out) includes anti-colonial nationalists not only of Luo background but from other communities in Kenya as well. He praises them “for their central roles in the creation of postcolonial Kenya” (Masolo 385). Of course, there is always a subtext in Misiani’s songs. In this case, Misiani draws the attention of his audience to the ironic contrast between what he understands as the community’s “pivotal roles—in the struggle for independence on the one hand, and its marginalization from the benefits of post-colonial development on the other hand” (385). My point is that to understand *The Strange Bride*, the reader must be familiar with Ogot’s textual tradition in much the same way one has to pay attention to the sub-text in Misiani’s lyrical poetry. To better appreciate Misiani, the
listener/audience must be familiar with his sophisticated and “proverbial use of Luo language” (Masolo 385).

For example, the proverbial phrase “jowi oluwo aora” (there is a buffalo upstream) is meant to alert people of danger at the same time as it is a statement to a “hidden social text” that demands “keen listening of the oral text” (Masolo 385). The phrase is also “a war cry; in the traditional rendering, it would be both an announcement that the community had been exposed to the threat of invasion” (Masolo 385) and a suggestion that the community should take up arms and ward off the aggression. Both Ogot and Owino use their texts as critiques of post-independence leadership at the same time as they call on their community’s leadership to take action with boldness as they consider and revive the greatness of past heroes. Both works are “evocation[s] and provocation[s] to political action” (Masolo 385). The reworking of the Luo myth in *The Strange Bride*, the ceremony of souls in *Water with Berries*, and the story of old man Ndiiro in *Matigari* are all representations of historical experiences.

Johanness Fabian makes a similar point when he writes that:

‘Things ancestral’ point to a rural past that is distinct from life in the cities but nevertheless present or coexistent, much as the dead are experienced as coexistent with the living. The village and the bush, hunting and fishing, political structures and ritual life are not just remembered nostalgically; they are invoked as the foundations on which present life and consciousness grow, or should grow. (198)

The common people that one supposes constitute the majority of Ogot’s readership and the common readership of Ngugi are outsiders—marginalized and not
forming part of the center of Kenya’s post-independence politics. For example, in *Matigari* the narrator says that when Matigari “had cultivated and sowed; and […] had built a house […] Settler Williams had grabbed it” (38). Such people as Matigari, therefore, can take the opportunities presented by texts like *Matigari* to organize in opposition to what appears a threat to them as a group. The texts help the common people to assert and demonstrate their political unity and opposition to nationalist ideology which they helped construct in the first place but from which they have become separated. In other words, *The Strange Bride, The Hills of Hebron, Matigari,* and *Water with Berries* express a countervailing power structure to that of neocolonial hegemony. Like the narrative form of tragedy which “transgresses the now conventional Romance of revolutionary overcoming and offer[s] us the elements of a critical story of our postcolonial time” (Scott 14), the works I discuss here indicate to the post-independence problem-space that

> Our futures […] take undetermined and unpredictable turns, the functions of the complex processes of their own times. The present is the rapturous point between yesterday and tomorrow. The self is the vehicle for transgressing the boundaries of time and […] the embodiment of contradictions; it is where the past and the present, rural and urban, and village and city are made to co-exist in a complex truce of plurality and contemporaneity” (Masolo 399).

The poetics of the novels discussed here separate at the same time as they keep close the past and the present. This is why, for Scott, the tragic narrative is the most appropriate in post-independence problem-space: because its “rhythm is more tentative, its direction
less determinative, more recursive, and its meaning less transparent” (Scott 135).

Misiani’s performance, like Ogot’s and Ngugi’s, is an example of Anthony O’Brien’s concept of “historical grafting of African rural orature […]” (35) into post-independence problem-space. The African works seek their “heroes” not in anti-colonial resistance, but from Africa’s pre-colonial past.

**Intertextuality**

Criticism on intertextual strategies in African and Caribbean fictions mostly focuses on the re-writing relationships between the Black works and their colonial predecessors. Of course, the writings are mostly responding to acts of European expansion. European conquest provided material to European writers who from the fifteenth to the early part of the twentieth centuries were engaged in acts of writing the colonized world for their domestic readership. Observing and experiencing the destructive effects of colonial works, African and Caribbean writers pushed back by seizing upon the possibilities offered by intertextuality. Needless to say, the re-writings that they produced were not without controversy. Susan Bassnett argues that, “writing does not happen in a vacuum, it happens in a context and the process of translating texts from one cultural system into another is not a neutral, innocent, transparent activity” (160-1).

Similarly in *Caribbean-English Passages*, Tobias Döring writes that intertextuality, among other things, “is not an innocent concept, no matter how widely it has come to be used […] To follow intertextual traces is a highly charged adventure. When we set out to discover intertexts, we engage in a field of conflicting forces that
involve the politics of reading no less than the history of culture” (14). It should not be surprising, then, that Black writers “charged” onto this “field of conflicting forces,” especially on European colonial literatures, to do work more useful to their own points of view. They were involved in re-writing, as it were, the west’s warped, should we say, “translations” of earlier colonial relationships into literary canonicity. This is a point that has been shown in the many re-writings of European classics such as Shakespeare’s The Tempest, Charlotte Bronte’s Jane Eyre, Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe, Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness and many others. I suggest that this is the literary form seen in postcolonial fictions that Döring discusses in Caribbean-Passages. He notes that his “study of the Caribbean-English writing in a postcolonial tradition therefore goes in search of the resilient and resistant meanings such may lie buried there” (5). His book investigates the “Caribbean literature for English traces and thus proceeds from one particular position” (5). He further notes that the book takes “the texts as literary excavation sites which contain cultural shards from English literature” (5).

Instead of searching for “English traces” or “cultural shards from English literature” in the works I discuss, I take the colonial period, along with conversations and activities that it experienced as one text and the post-independence period as a different text. These are the two texts that are in conversation in this project. I take intertextuality to include a “context of argument” where “old paths between questions and answers do not necessarily disappear,” where “cognitive connections” remain detectible and understandable as the “norm or convention” (Scott 4). At the same time I note that those old paths now lead “nowhere because the stakes involved in walking them have

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dissolved” (Scott 4). In other words, my task in the chapters that follow is to show how the works I discuss represent the questions that “animate” post-independence “problem-space.” To put it in a different way, to what extent was colonial problem-space relevant to Africa of the 1960s and to the Caribbean of the same period? What was the significance of nationalist anti-colonial movements and did their relevance endure into the post-independence period?

In chapter one I discuss Sylvia Wynter’s *The Hills of Hebron*. In the novel, Wynter narrates the story of Jamaica’s colonial past from the post-independence present. In my discussion, I focus on the way that the novel represents the link between the two periods—the two texts. The chapter also shows the ways that Wynter re-imagines different futures in the post-independence period.

George Lamming’s *Water with Berries* is the focus of the second chapter. In this chapter, I discuss the “paradox of enlightenment” as it was manifested in the colonies. The chapter shows the ways in which Lamming re-writes Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* at the same time as it examines what the re-writing means for the post-independence present. In *Water with Berries*, Lamming clearly works within the British literary tradition. I view the period that Shakespeare wrote *The Tempest* as a text that is separate from the post-independence context of Lamming’s writing.

In chapter three I discuss the cultural elements of development in Ogot’s *The Strange Bride*. In *The Strange Bride*, Ogot travels back to the mythological past of the Luo in order to critique the post-independence period in Kenya. In this chapter, I focus on the link between traditional orature and development. I argue that in her fiction Ogot shows that creativity is central to development.
Ngugi wa Thiongo’s *Matigari* is the topic of chapter four. Here, I focus on the politics of the post-independence period and also explain that though the themes of the novel are the usual topics that are evident in Ngugi’s other works, Ngugi gives them a different focus. I show that *Matigari* embraces anti-colonial narratives in order to reconsider the continued relevance of the conceptual lenses that framed anti-colonial imaginings.
Chapter One

Sylvia Wynter: Re-Imagining Other Futures in The Hills of Hebron

In The Hills of Hebron, Sylvia Wynter re-engages political discourses from Jamaica’s pre-independence past to its post-independence present. In doing so, the author illuminates the relationship between the country’s colonial past and the postcolonial period. Wynter’s work is similar to David Scott’s conceptualization of the relationship between the past and the present. In this chapter, I use Scott’s analysis in Conscripts of Modernity to frame the discussion of Wynter’s novel. According to Scott, the relationship that a given present has to a given past is informed by “experience,” on the one hand and “expectation” on the other. He sees the past as a “space of experience” (43) that is gathered in its entirety and the present as the “horizon of expectation,” the “future-made-present,” and the time when “the hopes, fears, curiosities, and desires” (42) all speak of a time to come. The relationship between the two periods reflects my central focus in this chapter as well as in the entire project. In other words, I ask: If in The Hills of Hebron Wynter tells a story about Jamaica’s colonial past from post-independence present, in what ways does the novel represent the links between the country’s “space of experience” and its “horizon of expectation?”

The Hills of Hebron was published in 1962, the year that Jamaica shook off the last remnants of colonial rule and donned the garb of a newly independent nation-state, becoming the first nation established in the western hemisphere since Panama in 1903. Consequently, in the novel, Wynter responds to the changing expectations that

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5 Subsequent references will be noted HH in parenthesis.
accompany independence. She achieves this task by showing the ceiling of anti-colonial nationalist discourses in the emergent nation. She explores the New Believers’ idea of an autonomous political state, an independent outfit located on the hills of Hebron. While its publication underscores the socio-political victories that coincide with political realignment and recognition in the post-independence period, the novel works to de-emphasize that celebratory moment of political and institutional triumph. Consequently, I argue that it opens with a crucial predicament that endangers the very survival of the New Believers.  

After the ludicrous crucifixion of Moses Barton, the congregation becomes torn in matters of succession. Some believe that its members should adopt the order of succession proclaimed by Moses and confirm Brother Hugh, Obadiah Brown’s second in command, as their leader. Others believe that the congregation should wait for Isaac, Moses’ son, who has been away at college. Underscoring the political stalemate, the village faces a serious drought that has dried up the waters in the hills of Hebron. To prove his ability to lead, Obadiah has made a “singular vow […] a covenant with God” not to be intimate with his wife, Rose, until the drought ends (HH 17). This decision suggests that the dangers that the community faces reflect a catastrophe “meshed up in the flesh of a woman” (HH 43-44). Interestingly, Gatha Randall, the widow of Moses Barton, leads the decision to remove Obadiah from the position of leadership. Further, through Gatha’s curious relationship with the patriarchal leadership of her dead husband’s religious organization, the author paints a picture of the dialectic between the

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7 It should be noted that the beginning of the novel is a portrayal of events about 15 years after the establishment of the community of the hills of Hebron.
ideal and the oppressive in the story of emergence of Moses and the founding of the New Believers order.

While Wynter offers a sympathetic portrayal of Moses as a hero whose (re)vision of Black pride and self-empowerment preceded the emergence of the so-called educated nationalists, she also presents limitations and shortcomings of “hero-worship” that accompanies the Romance notion of nationalism. She uses the voice of the narrator to assert that:

For as far back as they could remember they had never been their own masters. Always behind them there had been a “boss” and behind the “boss” a government, and behind the government, the white governor, and behind him the King of England with the power of ships and guns and myths and distances of wide seas; and behind the King of England there was, white like him, God. (HH 72)

Moses too had “set himself above them, made them believe that behind him there was a God, black and made in their image” (HH 72). In my interpretation, the author is maintaining that colonial power relationships were dependent upon hierarchy and authoritarianism. Further, re-establishing those values of anti-colonial nationalists such as Moses might not be prudent in post-independence Jamaica. In other words, through Gatha’s complex remembering of Moses—the intertextual relationship with the pre-independence discourses—Moses comes across as a hypocritical tyrant whose prophetic mission lies mostly in his role as a sexual predator. He was seen by women followers as “a most lusty stallion” (HH 38) who conquers women adherents “through the flesh rather than the spirit” (HH 196). Ironically, the actualization and realization of the “dream” to
find a location for the New Believers, the hills of Hebron, was made possible by the unfortunate circumstances of the birth of Rose, the character whose pregnant body now threatens the survival of the community. Thus, Wynter uses stories of sexual subjugation and exploitation of women to argue that oppositional tactics of characters such as Moses are irrelevant in the post-independence moment. The circumstances that surround Rose’s birth offer an alternative way to frame the founding of the community of Hebron while recognizing anti-colonial hangovers that the community needs to discard in its post-independence period.

Rose’s teenage mother Gloria was a young girl whose Chinese father made sure that she avoided Black people. Gloria became a housekeeper to an English minister, the Reverent Richard Brooke, who raped and impregnated her. Moses uses the abused body of Gloria as a bargaining leverage to negotiate with the Reverent Brooke in order to be granted the crown land upon which the Hebron community is located. Moses uses this secret deal to realize his messianic vision of Black empowerment—“God is Black.” He tells Brooke that “if I may make bold enough to tell you of my one worry, sir, it is this—that what the Lord granted to me, Caesar may deny” (HH 205). In Brooke’s eyes, “it is better to give him [Moses] a few barren acres on a hilltop than to have him ask for the whole island” (HH 206). Thus, the fact that the counter-community of Hebron was founded through Moses Barton’s complicity in covering up a rape of a young girl who had been a member of his congregation is significant. Early in the narrative, the followers saw Moses as a “most lusty stallion” (HH 38), a description that obviously suggests that he took his women followers as his “property.” This anticipates what he does when he is told of Gloria’s circumstances. Gloria’s body is represented as the territory upon which
the community is built and Hebron’s counter-discourse is merely a new hierarchizing structure. Thus, to position *The Hills of Hebron* as a Jamaican novel is to imply that that Jamaica is erected on Gloria’s body; Gloria’s body provides the history.

This is why Scott’s reading of C.L.R. James’ *The Black Jacobins* is useful. In *Conscripts of Modernity*, Scott takes *The Black Jacobins* as a “revolutionary epic” and also as text of exemplary “self-consciousness with which James connects the story of Toussaint L’Ouverture to the vital stories of his— that is James’s time. Doing so, he urges us to connect Toussaint to the vital stories of our own [author’s emphasis] time” (10). Thus, the story of Toussaint L’Ouverture represents not a Romance narrative but rather a tragedy in the postcolonial present. Subsequently, Wynter’s essays are useful for understanding *The Hills of Hebron*, especially her discussion of C.L.R James’ “pluri-conceptual framework.” Her essays and Scott’s *Conscripts of Modernity* are critical to my discussion in this chapter. I also take the postcolonial to be “our present after the collapse of the social and political hopes that went into the anti-colonial imagining and postcolonial making of national sovereignties” (Scott 1). As such, in this discussion I posit the postcolonial as a new “problem-space” that calls for different questions if other futures are to be re-imagined. Thus, in my interrogation of the representation of the relationship between the “space of experience” and “horizon of expectation,” I see both moments as different texts that are intertextually linked in Wynter’s novel.

**Disbanding Romantic Nationalism**

Although proposals for constitutional changes to grant Jamaica political advancement toward self-government were frequently presented in the early 1920s, the
1960s political independence has its immediate origins in the disturbances of 1937 and 1938. During that period in Jamaica, poverty and unemployment were widespread, causing a discontent that helped to ignite the turmoil that spread throughout the island and came to a head during May 1938 in Kingston. In the ensuing chaos, colonial authorities were forced to deal with leaders who achieved their position not by occupying any formal offices but rather by their influence over the people and their assertion that they represented the majority of Jamaicans.

Wynter says in an interview with David Scott that “the whole idea of the legend of Prophet Bedward” is one of the issues with which The Hills of Hebron grapples (Scott, David. “The Re-Enchantment of Humanism: An Interview with Sylvia Wynter,” Small Axe 134). She states in the interview that she “saw the ‘prophetic’ movements of a Bedward and Jordan as the precursor movements to the anticolonial movement that had opened into” her immediate political horizon (“Re-Enchantment” 137). However, Wynter’s comments about Bedward and Jordan demonstrate that while the narrative of The Hills of Hebron proceeds into the post-independence period, it reflects the limitations of Romantic nationalism by revisiting earlier Jamaican experiences. The portrayal of Moses recalls the figure of Bedward who, according to legend, received a “special call” and began preaching, while baptizing and dispensing the Mona River water. Bedward became famous overnight when many were reportedly “cured” after drinking the Mona water. However, his movement was watched closely by colonial authorities who arrested

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8 People who claim religious power are occurrences which are not unique to the Caribbean: it is not unheard of in colonial Africa. In Kenya, for example, John Owalo, in 1910 started his own Nomia Luo Mission and proclaimed himself a Prophet by denying the divinity of Christ. In 1913, Onyango Dunde formed his Cult of Mumbo. The God Mumbo claimed that the “Christian religion is rotten […] All Europeans are your enemies […]” These examples show, as Wynter points out, that the history of anticolonial nationalism must be traced back to some of these movements which began before the First World War.
him and charged him with sedition. Like Moses, Bedward was declared insane and sent to a lunatic asylum. By drawing a relationship between the two moments, the author captures Jamaica’s space of experience. In this case, she depicts anti-colonial nationalists and their struggle to bring about a sovereign nation. The narrator says:

The Commissioner of Police in Kingston had received a report on Prophet Moses. In the report the Prophet was described as a political agitator and a lunatic. The Commissioner was a conscientious administrator of justice. But he had been long conditioned to follow the book of rules rather than to think for himself, and had come to use words like “duty,” “law and order” to cover up lack of imagination. He had Moses arrested, bundled into a truck and transported to Kingston. There the Prophet was tried, on a charge of lunacy, convicted and sent to the mental hospital which sprawled its assortment of shacks, green lawns and trees between the hills and the sea—a fortress for lunatics erected by a society which regarded madness as a contagious disease, which equated stupidity with sanity, social justice with law and order. (HH 130-31)

This followed Moses’ end-of-year project to get to the top of a tree in order to fly to heaven. His attempts ended in a disaster; he had broken bones to show for his failure.

Further, during colonial rule, words such as “madness” and “disease” worked to encode a language with hidden, subversive meanings that linguistically enacted one of the thematic focuses of the novel. Through Obadiah, Wynter demonstrates performative dimensions of using the word “mad” in the novel. The fact that the “mad” Obadiah shares his creative

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9 See Brennan “A nation as an entity, is seen by some postcolonial critics as a “discursive formation”—not simply an allegory or imaginative vision, but a gestative political structure” (46-50).
activity with his fellow citizens confuses attempts by others to label such practices as mad and strange. He is redeemed from “madness” by a symbolic regenerative power that creativity signifies. In other words, Obadiah resists the destructive process that marginalizes the community as his creativity tramples the defective social vision of the normative. Taking Hebron as a parody of the so-called rational, Wynter sets out to normalize their experiences by exposing the inconsistencies of the socio-political world that dismisses them. As a result, the author showcases the relationships between the two modes of seeing. In this way, a pre-independence logic is transported into a post-independence problem-space.

Scott writes that the mere grasp of the sense and reference of words is not always sufficient to understand a work. For him, reconstructing what a writer was doing in putting forward a particular argument is necessary. One has to understand a work’s “linguistic action in a determinate linguistic or discursive context” (Scott 53). Scott thus treats C.L.R. James’ *The Black Jacobins* “as a piece of linguistic action, as an ideological maneuver that takes up a position and puts forward a move in a particular historico-discursive context of argument” (53). I argue that the representation of madness in *The Hills of Hebron* is also a textual move, a linguistic action that magnifies the drama of madness as opposed to sanity. In this drama, the concept of madness throws doubt on finality of fact by holding the social and the political world open to alternatives. In other words, Wynter presents a situation that pits madness and sanity against each other. She not only questions the validity of a binary logic that defines colonized groups in terms of lack and irrationality, but also foregrounds the relevant features of the historico-political problem-space of *The Hills of Hebron*. 
Using Aunt Kate and Obadiah, Wynter shows that the alternative knowledge that “mad” people articulate puts the normative public discourse at “risk.” Their alternative versions of reality stand in opposition to fixed socio-political assumptions of such concepts as normality and rationality. In their cases, they also demonstrate that colonial authorities conceived attempts to question their power as symptoms of irrationality, upon which they acted swiftly to eradicate. By placing “mad” characters at the center of the narrative, Wynter enables them to present alternative perspectives that challenge colonial logic. Using “mad” characters as the mouthpiece of anti-colonial discourse is a deeply ironic and political act that reappraises the logic through which the colonial subject is marginalized. By constantly juxtaposing competing logics between the normal and the abnormal, and colonial and post-colonial, the author shows that the so-called madness is no worse than the normative. She thus highlights the need to dismantle the fixity and superiority of one way of seeing over another.

Apart from Bedward, one of those who captured public imagination as a charismatic leader was Alexander Bustamante. M.G. Smith writes that Bustamante had a magnetic appeal that flowed to the masses:

From his impressive physical stature, his use of oratorical pyrotechnics to arouse his listeners to a pitch of emotional frenzy, his earthiness which seemed but a larger projection of his followers, his physical courage in times of stress and his shrewdness in sensing and mastering a particular tide. There was, too, his overweening self-confidence in manipulating his followers, expressed in the boast that they would vote for a dog if he so directed […]
Bustamante was the messiah of the enfranchised, the unemployed, the underemployed and the underpaid. His followers were the great majority of Jamaican people who before then had only known representative leadership and organization in the apocalypse of Bedward or the tragic escapism of Garvey’s United Negro Movement Association […] the leaderless had for a long time looked for a leader; but whereas Bedward had offered to lead them to Heaven via August Town, and Marcus Garvey had offered to take them to Africa via Harlem, Bustamante led them along the streets of Kingston and through the sugar estates, and his offer was their demand, a better life, here and now, in a country of which they formed the majority, but from whose society they had hitherto been actively excluded.¹⁰ (Bell 16-17)

*The Hills of Hebron*’s narrator notes that “one of the things she [Gatha] admired about Moses was his ability to lift the magic of the words from the printed pages of the Bible” (88). She characterizes Moses as a “supreme actor [who] had created this community [Hebron] in his own image” (*HH* 13). The above description of Bustamante has a close resemblance to Prophet Moses. As such, I interrogate the extent to which anti-colonial utopias, Romantic nationalism represented in Bedward, Bustamante, and the fictional character Moses are still relevant in an independent Jamaica. I further ask whether colonial questions to which Bedward’s leadership was an answer are pertinent in an independent Jamaica.

The Hills of Hebron is Wynter’s “narrative of disruption of the nation” (Toland-Dix 68). In it, she not only “disenchants colonialist discourse,” but also warns against “the danger and allure of charismatic leaders” (Toland-Dix 61). She does this by tracing Jamaica’s challenges from its colonial to neo-colonial periods. Wynter portrays a Caribbean history which, in the words of Nathaniel Mackey, “has resulted in the continuation of patterns of dependency established with the inception of plantation system three centuries ago” (165). In the Caribbean, this dependency syndrome works to undercut any possibility of history. Discussing Wilson Harris’ essay “The Unresolved Constitution,” Mackey writes that Wilson “mentions two writers who exemplify this [dependency] tendency, Jamaican novelist and sociologist Orlando Patterson and Trinidadian novelist V.S. Naipaul. In their works, a litany of such terms as ‘historylessness,’ ‘rootlessness,’ and ‘chaos’ have to do with presumed lack of cultural traditions native to the Caribbean” (166). The point that Harris makes and Mackey highlights is that a “native control of imaginative response to cultural dislocation or ‘historylessness’ does in fact exist and that this tradition provides models and cues for the Caribbean artist.” Using Mackey’s logic, like Harris, Wynter’s “act of memory,” “consists of reassessing the Caribbean past and the present, prefigures or seeks to prefigure the future” (Mackey 168).

Transition: Gender Imperative

In her essay “Beyond the Category of the Master Conception: The Counter Doctrine of the Jamesian Poiesis,” Wynter provides a window through which to understand her novel. She offers a perceptive analysis of C.L.R. James’ re-working and
expansion of Marxist thought. The essay begins with the assertion of the pivotal place of the “pluri-conceptual framework,” the piezza framework that James utilizes. Wynter observes that in this framework:

The dynamics of multiple modes of domination arising from such factions as gender, color, race, class, and education are non-dogmatically integrated […] Against these various faces of domination, James pits the creative determination of women, workers, dominated races, and other groups to resist and affirm themselves. (63)

In the “Re-Enchantment” interview with Scott, Wynter explains that when the British imperial flag was lowered in 1962 and the Jamaican flag went up, the University of West Indies, founded in 1948, occupied the “hegemonic place that the British Raj had just vacated” (159). In other words, if before 1962 Jamaica had experienced a “hands-on direct political and military enforced imperialism” partly complimented by the “curricula of the elementary and secondary school system,” after 1962 it became a properly “epistemological imperialism” (“Re-Enchantment” 159). In order to effect change, therefore, Wynter demonstrates in her novel that “it must take place both in the conception and in the pattern of relations” (“Beyond” 67). For example, a poiesis is necessary that demonstrates a sense of flexibility, and thus highlights features like C.L.R James’ “piezza framework.” Wynter also refers to the “piezza framework” as the “pluri-consciousness of the Jamesian identity”:

A Negro yet British, a colonial native yet culturally a part of the public school code, attached to the cause of the proletariat yet a member of the middle class, a Marxian yet a Puritan, an intellectual who plays cricket, of
African descent yet western, a Trotskyist and Pan-Africanist, a Marxist yet a supporter of black studies, a west-Indian majority black yet an American minority black—it was evident that the Negro question, and the figure of Mathew Bondsman that lurked behind it, could not be solved by an either/or—that is, by either race or class, proletariat or bondsman labor, or damnes de la terre, Pan-African nationalism or labor internationalism. The quest for a frame to contain them all come to constitute the Jamesian Poiesis. (“Beyond” 69)

Wynter writes that James “was one of the first to see the significance of the great Orphic heresy of the Rastafarians, to understand that Bondsman today would be a Rastafarian […] He was among the first to grasp that they were re-inventing the imaginaire social, refusing that of Babylon, and creating a new vision” (85-86). Of course, in The Hills of Hebron, she offers a reinvention of the world, a counter-imaginaire. In her non-fiction writings, Wynter has persistently pointed out the dangers that occur when colonialism as a system is reconstituted in other organized orthodoxies. According to Paget Henry, Wynter’s central intellectual concern deals with explaining the ways in which Caribbean historical projects:

Produce more blindness than insights, more error than truth, more destruction than growth, and more repression than liberation. Her point of departure is the poetics of knowing, the semiotic and mythopoetic processes that establish our categories of knowing […] her answers to the above concerns focus more on the error—processes of the cultural
categories and discursive strategies with which our historical projects are reconstituted. (124)

In “On Disenchanting Discourse: ‘Minority’ Literary Criticism and Beyond,” Wynter writes that Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* “attaches the ironic metaphor of *blindness* to the characters who embody the three differing variants of the contemporary order of discourse” (215). Liberal positivism is one of the three discourses, and those who practice it are “concerned” liberals “for whom ‘poor Blacks’ are a means by which to realize [their] liberal ‘concern,’ just like Don Quixote needed the many distressed and needy to “succor in order to realize his knight-errantry”(216). She also mentions Marxism-Leninism and “the leadership of Brotherhood, and the Black variant of the discourse of ‘Romantic Nationalism’ which is embodied in *Ras*, the functional projection of Marcus Garvey and his movement” (216). She argues that the differing “-isms” that prevailed in the sixties and seventies all took the “ontological ‘facts’ of ethnicity (non-white and white) as well as gender, sexuality and culture as if these were things in themselves, rather than ‘totemic’ signifiers […] in an overall system of resemblances and differences” (217).

In other words, Wynter warns of the dangers of the quest for a Black identity that is mostly “imitative—the mere negation of ‘white power.’” She is concerned about a state in which power acquires a black appearance, a situation in which the “status quo of privilege and injustice is not to be changed, only the masters” (“Beyond” 13), a kind of process that opens way for a new totalizing system. This means that Prophet Moses’ activities were merely a reaction to the mistaken notion of white superiority that projected the New Believers as God’s Chosen People and himself as the Black God.
Subsequently, in order to reject the discourse that he represents, Wynter in *The Hills of Hebron* suggests the necessity for a “piezza framework” (Beyond 63). She does so by staging the need for new questions in the different political reality. In other words, “no mono-conceptual framework—no pure revolutionary subject […] no single ‘correct’ line” (“Beyond” 69). Consequently, in “On Disenchanting Discourse,” Wynter quotes C.L.R James’ *Minty Alley* at length in order to disapprove of the legitimization of dichotomies that correspond to colonially established oppositions that privilege one group over another or one gender over another.

Despite the fact that in her critical work Wynter resists asserting that gender is part of the “pluri-conceptual framework,” she reveals its centrality in *The Hills of Hebron*. Caribbean feminist writing has shown that Caribbean nationalist movements did not foreground gender as a key conceptual category in anti-colonial discourse. Carol Boyce Davis and Elaine Savory Fido write that despite the inaugural qualities of *The Hills of Hebron*, Wynter “did not have the political context and support in which to raise, theoretically, questions about women, although by her work, her presence, her articulations, the issue was raised” (112). They also point out that during anti-colonial resistance, Caribbean feminism was subdued by the nationalist cause because “at that time the politics of decolonization was more critical to our existence than was women’s emancipation” (12). Thus, feminists hoped that once decolonization was achieved, gender imbalance would disappear as a matter of course.

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11 Moses says that in the Kingdom of Heaven to which he intends to lead his followers, tables will be turn as “masters would be slaves and slave masters” (120). Though this is a reference to the Sermon on the Mountain, Moses still held the idea that leaders will change and not the structure.

12 See Mohammed, 19–37 and Reddick, 61-81.
These issues manifest in different ways in *The Hills of Hebron*. First, Gatha was pivotal in facilitating Moses’s mission. Her tenure as the Elder of Hebron was not only outstanding, but also exhibited a knack for the day-to-day proceedings of the community that her predecessors, Moses and Obadiah, never had. Her story is meant to evoke the subordination of women in anti-colonial campaigns and Gatha’s character recalls the indispensable contribution of women. Thus, Wynter seems to argue that the Caribbean nationalist movement in the newly independent Jamaica might have avoided seeing feminist identity politics as threatening to its foundational aims and agendas. If none of the nationalist movements made “gender” a key organizing framework in their anti-colonial resistance discourse, she suggests that the post-independence “problem-space” demands that that question should be addressed.

Feminist scholars like Reddick and Mohammed do not argue that the ideological scope of Caribbean nationalist movement categorically excluded women or women’s concern from its terrain of action. They say that women were encouraged to participate in the mobilization efforts. However, as Mohammed has noted, nationalism’s benefit to women was an unintended consequence, not a result of the system put in place. In an afterword to *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women Literature*, Wynter uses William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* to show that European colonialism and its expansion into the New World initiated an epistemological shift in hierarchical structure erasing gender as the primary signal of human difference.\(^{13}\) The gendered differences in the hierarchy shown by the Prospero and Miranda relationship exists purely as a pre-colonial mode of power relationships that Caliban’s monstrous body replaces. “For the first time in history [difference] was no longer *primarily* encoded in the male/female division as it been

\(^{13}\) “Afterword: Beyond Miranda’s Meanings: Unsilencing the ‘Demonic Ground’ of Caliban’s ‘Woman’”
hitherto in the symbolic template of all traditional and religiously based human orders, but now in the cultural-physiognomic variations between the dominant expanding European civilization and the non-western people’ that, encountering, it would now stigmatize as ‘natives’ (“Beyond Miranda’s Meanings” 358).

Liberating the country before establishing gender equality does not seem to offer any possibilities without a conceptualization of feminist concerns. If problems such as drought were present at the founding of Hebron—at the country’s independence--then Wynter suggests that the young nation of Jamaica should take note. She further amplifies this point by beginning the novel with the story of Aunt Kate. Through Aunt Kate’s story, mourning replaces the idea of nation-building in which the “patriotic vision” of Moses intertwines with her unresolved trauma.

However, in this instance, intertextuality works to rethink the heroic narrative that forms the basis of the “foundations of a new empire, a new religion [where] black men would be no longer strangers to their God” (HH 206). In other words, the newly independent nation of Jamaica needs to ask new questions about the role of women in an independent nation. The author also suggests that the independent Jamaica depends on the very same methods of hierarchy and subjugation as the previous colonial institutions. Consequently, its independence is problematic from the beginning because the socio-political objective aims of the nationalist movement, the central driving force of the New Believers and their goal to establish a “black heaven,” do not seem to take everybody (read: women) into account (HH 179). The author clearly suggests that the success of the independent Jamaica is dependent on its women. When the New Believers ask Gatha to
become their Elder until Isaac comes back from college, this becomes the first time that a woman is considered part of the ruling class:

Miss Gatha, you know our position. We have neither food nor water. The people in Cockpit Center say that if we want either, we will have to pay cash. And the little money that we had is now all gone. You are the only one of us who have money saved up…. money that you are keeping safe….Without your money there won’t be any Hebron for anybody to be elder over! (57)

When she finally agrees to be their leader, she tells them, “I am your Elder now” (HH 59). The narrator immediately draws a distinction saying: “Her way would never be like that of Moses. She would never drug them with dreams of glory. She would spur them to work. She spoke to them with a harsh clarity” (59). She is elevated to a position of leadership at the moment that Obadiah Brown is going through a personal turbulence and a time when drought threatens the existence of the community. Because Gatha is the only person with money (read: ability), they appeal to her to save them. The narrator says:

She was a tall woman when she drew herself to her full height. No one in the congregation quite remembered when she started carrying a stick, crouching over it as if to concentrate the integrity of her purpose. All they knew was that this stern spare woman who hovered behind Prophet Moses had, at some time after his death, emerged from her anonymity, stamped herself upon their consciousness. While her husband was alive she had been something of a specter at a feast, someone whose inability to laugh
made them uneasy. But they had taken no more positive notice of her than a man takes of his shadow. Then all at once she was there, enforcing respect. (21)

This intertextual move is interesting because while the residents of Hebron are begging for her assistance, the narrator evokes a curious history, one marked by the fact that Gatha has always been seen as “a specter at a feast.” This history evokes the interesting relationship between nationalist discourses and gender issues. In this relationship, gender affairs were not only subordinate to nationalist concerns, but they were seen as a drawback to the much needed progress toward independence.

Postcolonial Present

David Scott correctly observes that one of the interesting things about The Hills of Hebron is its temporal setting because the author gets deep into the story before she reveals “a temporal marker showing that the story takes place in 1920s” (“Re-Enchantment” 137). Consequently, the juxtaposition of the stories of Moses and Isaac works to highlight intertextual relationship between the past and the 1960s Jamaica. Thus, the relationships that Isaac had with his head-teachers at the schools he attended echo intertextual relationship between the past and the present political discourses. Isaac’s time with the two head-teachers focused on teaching and learning; as such, by juxtaposing his story to that of his father and all his countrymen who came before him in anti-colonial struggles, the author alludes to an intertextual relationship that she is developing. By juxtaposing Isaac’s story to his father’s story as the antecedent, the author represents the work of conventionalization or authentication. In other words, Isaac’s story
is an act of symbolic reconstruction that hints at the continuity that ties his actions to past discourses. In effect, his story contains all antecedent discourses.

For example, the narrator says that, as Isaac was “working toward” becoming a “product of colonial education,” it was “rumored that [he] was touched in the head,” and that “the same mannerisms that had seemed divine inspirations in his father marked him out as a crazy simpleton” (*HH* 251). In this instance, the narrator links the past and the present. This connection is interesting because it implies that Moses did not live long enough to raise his son. Instead, Obadiah “had stood as godfather at his christening […] and when the child started to ask questions, it was he who first answered them” (*HH* 23). In other words, Moses did not rule Hebron for long, though his presence was still felt. However, when the narrator says that Isaac was becoming “like blinkered horses who could see the wide path before them but could not relate it to wider horizons” (251), and that he felt that “Hebron was small” and “No one in Hebron could help him” (249), the narrator is referencing the 1960s Jamaica.

Though I understand Jamaica’s colonial past and its post-independent present as different texts that are intertextually present in *The Hills of Hebron*, I should point out that the work is written in metropolitan literary tradition while it simultaneously works in subtle ways to undercut this tradition. Wynter recalls Euro-American classics in order to fold them within its pages. For example, while Isaac found refuge in such books as *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, The Pilgrims Progress, The Complete Works of John Milton, The Bible, Moby Dick* etc, “it was through […] reading that Isaac first became shamefully conscious of being black” (*HH* 253). Though these books provided him with a safe haven, his examiners “were puzzled and disturbed by his unorthodox
views on English Literature‖ (*HH* 262). I read these moments as indications that the author is building intertextual relationship not only to European classics, but also between Jamaica’s colonial past and its post-independence present. In fact, European classics played a critical role in the colonial project. Thus, by using those works that form part of metropolitan canon as a sanctuary and a refuge, Isaac evokes the Caribbean of the 1930s.

In “Discovering Literature in Trinidad: The Nineteen Thirties,” C.L.R. James writes that it is in study of western literature, western philosophy, and western history that he became knowledgeable about issues in non-western countries. James implies that in reading European classics he came to learn about the representation of marginalized communities in Western scholarship.

This issue is interesting because in the essay, James writes about Jacob Thomas, a Black schoolmaster who wrote a book titled *Froudacity, West Indian Fables Explained*. The work was a response to James Anthony Froude, an English historian who visited the Caribbean and wrote a book about it on his return to England. The Englishman’s book did not get a positive reception in the Caribbean. In his admiration of Thomas’ book, James comments that though they all had European training and wrote in the tradition of the English literature, Thomas wrote with a West-Indian frame of mind. This anecdote about Jacob Thomas’s book demonstrates that as much as postcolonial fictions appear to adopt metropolitan literary traditions, a close reading that attends to forms of intertextual relationships reveals that in most cases postcolonial fictions adopt and embrace European literary traditions in order to contain and enclose them.
In dealing with both the past and the present discourses in *The Hills of Hebron*, Wynter attempts to reach toward wholeness; however, this wholeness suggests a sundering or what Mackey calls a “play of contrasts” (117). For example, this sundering is evident when the narrator says of Isaac:

> But nothing in Hebron was like he had imagined it. For several days he wrestled with his writing. Then one day he asked himself, “For whom am I writing? And why?” For a people who could not read, he told himself. And the few who could, so suborned by the false coin of shallow dreams that they would deny Moses and his visions. And to the strangers outside he could speak across only great distances. In order to explain his present he would have to tell them of the submerged past; and in the clamor of their own chauvinistic misconceptions he himself would be seduced into distortions, and the bare truth that might have spanned the centuries and the differences would vanish, leaving only lost echoes. (270)

The narrator says in the above excerpt that in order for Isaac “to explain his present, he would have to tell them of the submerged past” (*HH*). The issue of writing brings up interesting questions like the ones that trouble Isaac: “For whom am I writing? And Why?” (*HH* 270). These questions also emerge in Ngugi’s *Matigari*. What form(s), therefore, should the representation of the submerged past take?

**Multiple Discourses**

Wynter first wrote *The Hills of Hebron* as a play, which is evident in the novel’s dramatization of multiple discourses. Because in *The Hills of Hebron* she wants to
change political discourse in post-independence Jamaica, she represents divergent voices as a dramatization that works to challenge the absolute authority that seeks to “rally” and “organize” a nation. This is seen in the novel’s dramatization of ideological conflict between Comrade Bellows and Prophet Moses. In their decentralizing, centrifugal roles, divergent voices speak subversively in response to authority, and their dramatization is a clear manifestation of polyphonic consciousness. Though Bellows and Moses both opposed and worked to resist colonial rule, they represented contradictory points of view about their circumstances. The confrontation between them upsets the “one manism” and the strong personality tradition of the “hero” and his “crowd.” The dramatization of the confrontation is important for a society like Jamaica with a propensity for a populist and a messianic rhetoric, a characteristic that is attributable to its long-standing religiosity and its tradition of respect for the figure of the preacher.14 In other words, one way that the author demonstrates the need for multiple points of view is through her dramatization of the ideological conflict:

“Comrades,” he said, “no hymns, let us not sing hymns. This is not a church. We want nothing to do with churches they will deceive you, will tell you it is wrong to strike, will tell you that God won’t like it, that it’s a sin. Now, when they tell you that, ask them one thing. Ask them to show you this God so that you yourself can ask Him if it’s wrong. And if they can’t show you Him, tell them that the only religion you believe in is the religion of man!” […]

14 I am here thinking of the tradition of Jamaica’s official “national heroes” that have been canonized: The legendry Nanny, a leading figure in the resistance to the British in the eighteenth century by the maroons, the slave leader Sam Sharpe who lead a major revolt in 1831, George William Gordon, and the Christian deacon Paul Bogle, heroes of the Morant Bay rebellion of 1865, Marcus Garvey, and Alexander Bustamante.
Moses felt charged with power and pointed an accusing finger at his rival. “And there is Judas!” he said. The reaction of the crowd was hostile but Moses kept on: “For thirty pieces of silver from the white man, this black Iscariot has come to tell you, to deceive you that there is no God! And you know why the white man paid him to do this? Because now that the white man found out that God is black, he is sending his spies to deny Him!”

The crowd quieted and looked to the man for a reply.

“Speak, comrade,” the man asked Moses, “this black God of ours, where did he hide Himself all these years of our bondage? Tell us that!”

*(HH 228-9)*

In this debate, Wynter uses terms and expressions such as “comrade,” “bondage,” and “thirty pieces of silver,” as well as references to biblical figures such as “Judas.” These words and references individually recall different histories, discourses, and traditions. These words trigger the process of making discourse authoritative. Thus, I am suggesting that *The Hills of Hebron* is suspended between post-independence issues, on the one hand, and colonial past, on the other. It is a story published at the dawn of Jamaica’s independence and not during the country’s colonial occupation. Consequently, ideologies such as socialism or Black theology that are evident in the Moses-Bellow confrontation were anti-colonial answers to colonial questions that come from the past. In an interview with Daryl Cumber Dance, Wynter comments on Bellows thus:

I was touching on what has become a central concern—the distinction between the Marxist approach to revolution and what I see as a Black
approach—some of it cultural nationalist but, but it’s not only cultural nationalist, popular perhaps, I think it’s a different approach to a different kind of transformation. As you notice, this chap Bellows comes, and he speaks, but in the end it is Obadiah who somehow carries whatever it is through. It was a vague positioning of the distinction, but not really sorted out. (280)

Thus, as proponents of ideologies, Moses and Bellows do not speak on their own behalf but rather on behalf of specific ideological structures. They are placed in positions of authority, but their authority derives from the temporally prior discourses that they relay. In recalling or reproducing those prior discourses, Bellows and Moses are involved in an act of discursive submission, the subordination of Jamaica’s post-independence discourses to discourses that predate its nationhood, issues that no longer animate its “problem-space.” Though the dramatization of ideological battles allows for a re-visiting of past authoritative discourses and allows intertextual relationships between Jamaica’s colonial past and its post-independence presents, the confrontation has the corresponding effect on the rhetorical versatility of The Hills of Hebron.

This ideological debate works to reinforce and endow The Hills of Hebron with authority. What happens between Moses and Bellows has the potential to undermine the different ideologies they represent because it opens the door to The Hills of Hebron and enables it to stamp its authority on those discourses. This process has the potential to provide the space that The Hills of Hebron needs to infiltrate the discourses that the two men represent. The encounter works to stultify the authority of those ideologies by questioning their relevancy. This means that the authority of those earlier discourses can
only be stabilized if the novel strictly adheres to their premises. Such conformity, though not evident in *The Hills of Hebron*, would work to support the argument about the germaneness of anti-colonial answers in post-independence Jamaica.

The confrontation works to construct a framework within which the author places prior discourses, the two forms of ideology, in relation to each other in an intensified and self-reflexive way. The transformation that occurs when the two characters challenge each other’s position shows the irrelevancy of those anti-colonial answers at the same time that those answers become a means of deploring the power of conventionalized authority. This challenge renders the authoritative word less dominant. For example, through the portrayal of the characters and their lives, the author suggests that the characters do not learn about class from Marxist ideology; rather, they learn about it through lived experience. The debate also demonstrates the possibility that after attaining political independence, Jamaica could have a petite-bourgeoisie class that hopes to structure society according to a European model encountered through books, whose structure was incorporated casually. For example, Bellows and the Black lawyers who participated in Moses’ legal case found models and texts that they embraced and about which they preached without critical evaluation. The narrative confirms that the colonial experience was deeper than simply the appropriation of people’s material resources; it was, as many have observed, an appropriation of a peoples’ minds. Therefore, the resistance struggle was harnessed toward the recovery of that faculty.
**Creative Space**

The community of Hebron offers a creative space for its residents by unlocking their memories in the process of guiding them to self-realization. The creative space that is Hebron leads to self-realization, which is evident in Obadiah who “in searching for the adulterer, had found himself” (*HH* 286). In this search, Obadiah decided that “he would seek work” (*HH* 286) in the Cockpit Center. However, as he sat waiting to embark on this next step of his life, he took up a fragment of wood and carved idly, thinking of making a toy for the child. Then as he shaped the rough outline of a doll, he began to concentrate. For the first time in his life he created consciously, trying to embody in his carving his new awareness of himself and Hebron [...] From time to time he touched the doll as if it were fetish. For carving the doll, Obadiah had stumbled upon God. (*HH* 288)

After the police shooting “into the belly of the crowd following the chaos that occurred at the labor office, Obadiah found himself at the market place (*HH* 294). Here at the market, he approached “an old woman who sat behind a basket of mangoes” (*HH* 294). Upon telling her that he was hungry, the woman offered him a mango. And then, “He sat down beside her. She watched him tear into the overripe fruit, then hesitate […] Then he picked up a piece of dried banana leaf from the trash on the ground, and wrapped the remainder of the mango. He answered the inquiry in her eyes. “‘I am taking this for my wife. She is going to have a baby’” (*HH* 295).
When the old woman gave Obadiah three more mangoes, he felt the wooden doll in his pocket and held it out to her. She looked at it then shook her head. “What am I to do with a dolly? One son I had to my name and he didn’t bless my old age with a grandchild. Only wander all over the world to where the earth end, searching for what I can’t tell, only finding trouble to bring back to me, and his sick dying self. So what am I to do with a dolly” (*HH* 295)?

This same dolly made Obadiah appear reluctant when the anthropologist stranger asked to look at it. He was hesitant:

> to put the thing that he had created into the man’s hand [because it] would expose his naked heart to a stranger. For creating the doll, Obadiah knew he had been saved from despair, from madness […] carving the doll out of a piece of Mahoe, he had felt himself reprieved from a long exile, had left a wilderness and entered a cool watering place […] this object which had been dredged out of his anguish, his search for a sense of being, had become an extension, not only of his body, but of Hebron. (*HH* 303)

According to the narrator, various ideas raced through Obadiah’s mind when the stranger asked to see his carved doll. While placing the carving in the man’s hand would expose Obadiah’s naked heart to the stranger, the carving simultaneously functions to bridge the gap between the stranger and Obadiah. The uses of this doll are therefore multiple. On the one hand, it had far reaching significance for Obadiah than it did to the old woman who had given him mangoes; on the other, it brought back memories of her son, Bellows, who had travelled all over the world only to come back home to die.
In responding to the stranger’s question about who had taught him to make the carving, Obadiah said, “Nobody.” When asked whether he lives in this town, he answered, “No [...] I live in the hills [...] up there.” He turned and pointed “up in the hills [...] of Hebron.” The stranger nodded slowly. “The Hills of Hebron [...] where I was born there are hills too [...] many hills. My parents lived on one that was steep and barren...that was a country far away from here [...] Tell me, what legend did you carve this doll from?” (HH 304) Wynter is here linking Jamaican colonial struggles to other struggles elsewhere:

You see this carving looks like ones that I saw in Africa...when I was there. I write books about sculpture ...carvings like this. I make too, myself, but in marble, not in wood ... like you ... like they do in Africa, where your ancestors came from. And there they carve from father to son, and they carve out stories of their tribe, and their beliefs, their dogs and devils [...] they made this out of the belief that each man has four souls—one given to him by an ancestor, one, his own, the third, the small bit of the creator that lives in each man, the last one, that which joins him to others in his group. That is why I ask, what belief did you carve this doll from? (304-5)

This doll is the objet d’art and it enables communication between the artist and his audience. In other words, like all catalysts, until the objet d’art is observed by the audience, there remains no contact made between the artist and the audience. However, in this case there is an established relationship established between Obadiah and his audience. I suggest that through his artistic work, Obadiah is involved in an interactive
process in which he attempts to change and modify his audience’s environment. Communication between the artist and the audience, as Ramenga Osotsi writes, “is ideally an active two way process [emphasis in original]” (8). This same dynamic emerges in *The Hills of Hebron*, a “two way process” that uses pre-independence discourses to point to the post-independence problem-space. In other words, the mediating agency, the questions that bring people together, will always change, and will always be new and different depending on the socio-political moment. According to the representation in *The Hills of Hebron*, the challenge for Jamaica in 1962 was to recognize the new catalysts without falling into traps that insist on remaining faithful to the hierarchical vision that was dominant in the colonial era.

**Conclusion**

What is the outcome of the imagination of the interaction between the earlier text and the later text in *The Hills of Hebron*? In “The Re-Enchantment” interview, Wynter says that she realized upon leaving Guyana:

> That there is something more important that cannot be explained, either in the liberal-humanist or in the Marxist paradigms. So there is trepidation, it’s a season of adventure, you are sailing outside those limits, you are trying to find something else […] Because I saw all the Rastafari paintings on the street, I saw this blossoming. I saw the Rastafari creating their own imaginary. (153)

But, what is this “something more important,” that seemed crucial and could not be explained, “either in the liberal-humanist or in Marxist paradigms?” The narrator in *The Hills of Hebron* explains:

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15 The point I am making about Obadia’s doll draws from Osotsi’s essay.
And thus, with his death, Prophet Moses made all the New Believers accomplice in his legend. Their belief became necessity, was magnified into myth. The wooden cross on the Prophet’s grave was the tangible symbol of their faith. There was no room for doubt—to doubt would be to question the validity of the crucifixion, of a God black like themselves, of Hebron. Moses alone had died, but Hebron, its past, present and future were entombed with him, awaiting his resurrection. The life led by the New Believers after his death was an epilogue, a ritual dance, ossified by repetition now that its original impulse had been forgotten. (248)

The narrator notes in the above excerpt that, “There was no room for doubt—to doubt would be to question the validity of the crucifixion” (HH). Yet moments earlier, the narrator notes that Aloysius doubted the motive behind the crucifixion:

Aloysius stumbled down toward his house. Sleep still clouded his eyes and his limbs were stiff. He yawned and felt a sharp stab of pain between his ribs. He was too old for all this nonsense, he thought with resentment. He would have to sit out on the hillside another day and another night, and for what? Just so that Moses Baton could fool himself that he was God. (HH 241)

In the “Vow” chapter, Miss Gatha declined to take part in a silent prayer because “the scene that had just been enacted was nothing more or less than Obadiah’s unconscious imitation of her husband Moses; unconscious because it had paralleled, more closely than anything planning could have done, the sweep and urgency with which Moses had told his barefaced lies” (HH 34). The narrator also says that Gee and Eufemia
“were the new generation born and brought up in Hebron and without the memories of the town from which their parents had made a triumphant exodus […] they had been reared under the shadow of Prophet Moses’ sacrifice, his crucifixion. And they were still young enough to reject, unconsciously, the constant worship of wooden cross [emphasis added], and of death” (HH 49). These excerpts demonstrate that the author moves from the worldview held by anti-colonial nationalist like Moses at the beginning of the novel to a different place at the end of the narrative. The New Believers shook off the language and copycat categories of the colonizer and genuinely imagined new futures.

This transformation is exemplified through the Black lawyer, Baker, who ensured that Isaac was not failed in the exam and “had exulted in Isaac’s opinions. This is it, he had thought, here was a black man for the first time really using the white bastard’s language to fling the truth in their faces and kick them in the teeth with it as he would have liked to have done so many times, when they had used him and abused him, insulted and mocked him” (HH 264). The question remains open as to whether Isaac’s eloquence and academic excellence manifested in his essays “On the Rise of the British Empire” and “The Glorious Reign of Queen Victoria,” is in the thought system of the colonizer.

Anthony Holland, Isaac’s headmaster at the teacher training college in Kingston “had told the new students that he was one of them” (HH 254). The students respected him because “his scholastic attainments were legendary. [He] was a former Rhodes scholar. After a first class honors degree at Oxford he studied law at the Inns of Court, then a Bachelor of Science degree at University College, London” (254). When Isaac returned to the dormitory from an invitation to tea at the Headmaster’s house, an invitation that had followed the first one at the headmaster’s “musical evening,” the boys
asked questions. However, failing to get any answer from Isaac, “their talk […] drifted first to their future careers, then politics” (260). The author explains:

They never discussed how they would grapple with the problems of the future, how they would feed the hungry, provide jobs for the jobless, wipe out three hundred years of malnutrition and mental atrophy that was the legacy of colonial rule. Instead they argued heatedly over the proper constitutional procedures to be adopted after independence. And always, the high point of their discussion was English constitutional law and practice. They spoke glibly of freedom and democracy but were incapable of understanding their meaning. They came from the generation of slaves on whose toiling backs the noble slogans of democracy had been conceived. And they were ready to die defending concepts which could have no meaning for them. (HH 260)

Therefore, Wynter does not end with these types of orientations because she seems to emphasize “search” as an activity in which the post-independence Jamaica should be engaged.\footnote{She searched the faces of the men…” (70), “He would have to explain to them that he was searching” (72), “So as your elder I charge you know, search out the…” “For in searching for the adulterer, he stumbled upon himself” (80), “It had taken the drought to stop Beatrice from chasing the young men, to search for food instead” (96), “She watched sister Beatrice in vain search…” (96), “The unbeliever inured to watching the neighbors try to escape from the circus of destitution into which they had all been born, to search for the gods…” (126), “This was the true way, the only way for the lost ones, the disinherited in search of God…” (129), “He answered his searching for the question” (142), “the Prophet of the New Believers took a journey in search of a new Canaan” (152), “At first they spun out fantasies around the promised kingdom in which they were soon to enter like men, newborn….restless like the wind, they had searched for” (155), “soon he would have to climb in search of security…” (186), “It was when the Prophet was away searching for the Kingdom in the hill” (192), “And he had come flying back to Hebron, in search of refuge, of the god whose existence had been denied him” (219), “He would win the scholarship, Isaac vowed, and go in search of new worlds,” “Early that morning, after Obadiah, searching for the adulterer, he had found himself and returned to Rose…” (286), “only wander all over the world to where the earth end, searching for what I can’t tell, only find trouble to bring back to me…” (295), “his
yet to come. However, in *The Hills of Hebron*, Wynter searches for the past of the Hebronites. That search seems to go back beyond the colonial period. In other words, through Obadiah’s carving doll, the author attempts to bridge gaps in all directions including an African past that nameless African ancestor represented in the doll.

In *The Hills of Hebron*, Wynter develops a strategy that enables her to explore alternative points of view and ask different questions in the post-independence present. The use of intertextuality reflects the novel’s goal of establishing dialogism and shows the ability of intertextuality to expand the horizon of expectation. In other words, the intertextual strategy in *The Hills of Hebron* emphasizes dialogue at the same time as it broadens the frame of reference. In making the inhabitants of the hills of Hebron central to the story, Wynter also suggests that historical meaning is conveyed precisely in the depiction of characters that are not found in historical archives, those who cannot be tracked through the usual methods of History. In other words, the reasons that major changes occur is through the invisibles, the so-called residues of society because the smallest beats begin with them.

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*search* for a sense of being, had become an extension, not only of his living body, but of Hebron” (303), “so he told the man the story of Hebron, of their *search* for God, for it was out of this, the dream and the reality, that he had carved the doll” (305).
Chapter Two

Water with Berries: The Paradox of “Colonial Enlightenment”

In *Conscripts of Modernity*, David Scott interrogates the problem of colonial and postcolonial histories that evoke the narrative of “anti-colonial Romance” in which colonial domination is resisted in a long struggle that ends in independence. He argues that post-independence disappointments in formerly colonized countries have left those regions with little hope for the future. According to Scott, this means that anti-colonial perspectives no longer provide useful conceptual apparatuses for explaining the complex globalized world. He does not argue that anti-colonial Romance narrative was poorly-conceived. Instead, he suggests that the temporal structure of the Romance narrative is dated. He establishes his arguments about narrative and temporality mostly through a reappraisal of C.L.R. James’s account of the Haitian revolution. In *The Black Jacobins*, James draws a portrait of Toussaint Louverture in order to demonstrate the possibilities and disappointments of Toussaint’s vision.

According to Scott, the representation of Toussaint in *The Black Jacobins* inaugurates “a new kind of individual, the modern colonial intellectual,” whose tragedy evokes the immediate cultural and political conditions that produced him. To use Scott’s phrase, this is the “paradox [author’s emphasis] of enlightenment” as it played out in the colonies (21). Scott employs the term “paradox” in his analysis, in order to move away from “Enlightenment/anti-Enlightenment binaries” that are seen in “recent […] postcolonial debates” (Scott 20). In this chapter, I demonstrate the ways in which George
Lamming captures this “paradox” in *Water with Berries*, which, according to Scott, is a “tragedy of colonial enlightenment” and a “permanent legacy” that “demands constant renegotiation and readjustment” (21).

Most analyses of *Water with Berries* focus on the relationship between the novel and William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. Critics argue that the meaning and the success of the discourse that Lamming portrays in *Water with Berries* is dependent on the recognition of the intertextual moments between the novel and Shakespeare’s play. Indeed, in *Water with Berries*, the intertextual moments are rhetorically oppositional and ideologically in conflict with *The Tempest*. Lamming subverts Shakespeare’s play in order to create a space that allows him to insert himself and build a competing perspective on the discourse of *The Tempest*. He clearly works within the metropolitan literary traditions, and the intertextuality between his novel and Shakespeare’s play provides him with multiple ways to show resistance. I argue that *Water with Berries* contains elements of anti-colonial romance narrative while simultaneously working as “a […] meditation on tragedy” (Scott 7). In other words, I look at Lamming’s re-writing of Shakespeare as an example of “Romance” narrative, the privileged form of articulation of anti-colonial desire that shaped the temporality of anti-colonial narrative, as well as its sense of past, present, and future (Scott 7). The romance narrative focuses on “overcoming, often narratives of vindication [that] tell stories of salvation and redemption” (Scott 8). I suggest that this narrative of anti-colonial romance in *Water with Berries* clears the path for “a […] meditation on tragedy” (Scott 7).

*Water with Berries* falls into this category partly because the narrative deals with issues that are specific to San Cristobal, and crisscrosses and oscillates between colonial
and post-independence periods. All of the three artists, Teeton (the painter), Roger (the musician), and Derek (the actor), are Caliban, but Calibans from later centuries. They are conscious of their predecessors and the temporal distance that separates them. I argue that the representation of the three artists anticipates the argument that Scott makes in *Conscript of Modernity*. Because revolutionary anti-colonialism is a prerequisite for postcolonial possibility, the teleology of nation formation in James’ representation of Toussaint is far less relevant for the post-independence period of the three artists. They still face the problem of economic disparity, but their stories show that the revolutionary teleology imagined by James appears to be lost because the San Cristobal “present […] does not ring with the strong cadences of the revolutionary anticipation” (Scott 97). Instead, Lamming inspires “a profound skepticism about the teleologies of nationalist and socialist liberation in which those cadences rang” (Scott 97). In other words, Scott portrays the possibilities and disappointments that characterized the intellectual and political climate of James’s 1930s in order to make the point that:

> Today nation and socialism do not name visionary horizons of new beginnings any of us can look forward to as though they were fresh thresholds of aspiration and achievement to be fought for and progressively arrived at; to the contrary they name forms of existing social and political reality whose normative limits we now live as the tangible ruins of our present, the congealing context of our postcolonial time. (29)

Thus, the three artists represent the crisis of the independence period and have left their native San Cristobal for a prolonged exile in London. Prospero has passed on and the empire emerges in the Old Dowager, Mrs. Gore-Brittain. How does Lamming
represent the crisis that characterizes transition from colonial domination, the boundary that separates and simultaneously unites Caliban and Prospero? I first focus on anti-colonial Romance before turning to the meditation on tragedy in *Water with Berries*.

**Anti-Colonial Desire**

In *The Pleasures of Exile*, George Lamming describes three important events in the British Caribbean history. “The first event is the discovery. That began, like most other discoveries, with a journey; a journey inside, or a journey outside and across” (36). In the Introduction he quotes Richard Hakluyt’s story on John Haukins’ 1562 and 1564.  

Lamming says in “Caribbean Novelist” thus:

Haklyut’s presents these voyages tremendously, in each page of the nine volumes, as an example of splendor, the glory, the indescribable achievements of ‘our sons.’ In a sense, what he is doing at the particular time is saying, ‘Look, it would be a terrible thing if this generation of Englishmen did not take up from where this marvelous work has gone on.’ This is the irony: when it comes to questions of Black studies, sometimes there are few sources that are more rewarding for understanding the ways in which Black men saw whites than in the reports of whites about what whites thought was actually happening. Quite often a Hakluyt, or any of those men reported those voyages, never realized how ironic that exercise would be to a later reader” (13).

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He continues to write in *The Pleasures of Exile* that the second event “is the abolition of slavery and the arrival of the East—India and China—in the Caribbean seas” (37). The third important event was “the discovery of the novel by West Indians” (37). This third event was expected to serve “as a way of restoring [poor] lives […] to make their reality the supreme concern of total society” (*In the Castle of My Skin* xxxvii).

According to Lamming, the Caribbean novel played a significant role in giving voice to peasant struggles that challenged colonial hegemony and that helped to interrupt intended strategy of dominance by Western history. He sees the “novelists as the first builders of what will become a tradition of West Indian imaginative writing” (38). He highlights the “fundamental significance of peasant life in any story about the island” (Dance 38). He does this in order to trace a definite connection between resistance to colonialism embodied in peasant uprisings and the fictional writing that was inspired by these struggles. In other words, Lamming insists on the rural poor as a defining impetus of the organic ideal of his work (Dance 35). Gordon Rohlehr writes that “long before the advent of the West Indian novelist, the peasant was visibly working against tremendous odds towards an essential independence” (29). Thus, the work of Caribbean writers reflected “an awareness which had been there for some time; they could neither create nor restore what was already present in creative struggles, rebellion and movement of the West Indian people” (Rohlehr 29).

On the one hand, Lamming argues that the work of representation is significant for the political task of the novel: “It is the West Indian novel that has restored the West Indian peasant to his true and original status of personality” (*Pleasures* 39). On the other hand, Rohlehr indicates that Caribbean peasants were already working to achieve
independence. This comment by Rohlehr suggests that the peasants were conscious of their conditions before the advent of the Caribbean novel. This begs the question: what impact could the novel have that the works of peasants had not done? I argue, along with critics such as Frederic Jameson, that the novel is singularly placed to illustrate and express the operations of ideology more than most other cultural forms.\footnote{Jameson says that the novel is “the privileged instrument of analysis of reality” (p195). See \textit{Marxism and Form}: Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1971.} In \textit{Writing in Limbo}, Simon Gikandi argues that the novel appeals to Lamming because “narrative offered a form and strategy for restoring West Indian characters to history” (67). Gikandi also observes elsewhere that, “what made the novel an inaugural moment in the Caribbean was its newness, the fact that it had emerged where ‘there was no previous national tradition to draw on.’ It is in the place where the lack of a national tradition meets the prison house of colonialism that a narrative of colonialism emerges” (\textit{Back to the Future} 189).

Lamming sees the novel as a discovery, the third important event that “disciplines and troubles the complacency of the first” (Nair 3). By viewing the novel as a discovery, Lamming recalls several middle passages, the middle passage by which Africans were transported into slavery, the middle passage by which Indians arrived in the Caribbean, and the ongoing “reverse passage” by which Caribbean and other former colonial subjects are attracted to the capitals of the West. “Passage” is an interesting word which, according to Tobias Döring, provides “a heuristic principle of reading” (7). Döring also sees “passage” as “a principle of multiple creative movements” that has “temporal and textual meaning” (7). He explains that a passage works as “a figure of connectedness of transport and traversing. It signifies movement across space and consequently refers to
the power of voyaging and maritime exploration that has made New World history since the Columbian discovery” (7). Döring’s observations are useful in discussing Lamming’s work because Lamming has been “concerned with the contemporary legacy of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and has traced and retraced what must be seen as the foremost and most consequential Caribbean-English passages of all times” (Döring 7).

Lamming echoes this idea in “Caribbean Novelist” when he says about his novel *Natives of My Person*:

> In this stage of the book, where the men have reached the African coast, in a normal conventional way what might have happened next is that the narrative would have continued with the Middle Passage, that is, with the passage of Africans being taken over. Now I depart from that in order to suggest that the European had a middle passage, too, one that is going to be seen on the interior [author’s emphasis] of their lives […] In a sense you can say that what I have done is to leave the Middle Passage of the blacks as a known factor which is already part of our historical experience and imagination, and to provide what I think had not been covered before—the symbolic middle passage of the European man involved in that journey from the Coast to the Isle of Black Rock. (10)

In *Natives of My Person*, Lamming provides a “symbolic middle passage of the Europeans.” However, one could argue that Caribbean authors that attempt to highlight what “had not been covered before” in order to open “the interior of [a people’s] lives,” take their lead from C. L. R. James’ *The Black Jacobins*. In *The Pleasures of Exile*, Lamming writes that, “C. L. R. James shows us Caliban as Prospero had never known him: a slave who was a great soldier in battle, an incomparable administrator in public affairs; full of paradox but never without compassion, a humane leader of men” (119).
Thus, I suggest that in *The Pleasures of Exile*, when Lamming pays homage to James, he relates his counter-discursive projects to James’ narrative of anti-colonial romance in *The Black Jacobins*. James’ work is a documentation of Caliban’s experiences. In *Conversations II* Lamming says:

James *Black Jacobins* or Dubois’ *Souls of Black Folk* and *Black Reconstruction in America 1860 – 1880* are initiators of the inventory of folk whose humanity had not been validated, and whose agency in the transformation and expansion of freedom remain seriously contested. Here our debt to the Haitian people is illuminated by the Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier on the meaning of the Haitian Revolution. (3)

He goes ahead to quote Carpentier thus:

‘When we take the great encyclopedia edited by Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau, in the middle of the 18th century in France, and whose ideas had such an influence over the leaders of our Independence Wars, we find that in this great encyclopedia, the concept of independence has a value which is still purely philosophical. One says independence, yes, independence vis-à-vis the concept of God, vis-à-vis the concept of monarchy, free-will, up to which point man’s individual freedom reaches, but one does not speak of political independence. On the other hand, what the Blacks of Haiti demanded—those who were the forerunner of all our independence—was political independence, total emancipation’ *(Conversations II 3).*
Lamming was the first Caribbean writer to highlight the character of Caliban in *The Pleasures of Exile*, a book that moves and shifts between textual criticism, autobiography, and the nature of confrontation between the colonizer and the colonized.  

His approach to *The Tempest* “was more internal in the sense that he developed his reading out of an engagement with the play as part of his colonial education, alongside a reading of early colonial history.” (Hulme 222 Reading From Elsewhere). However, *The Tempest* has also received other critical attention throughout the postcolonial world. In addition to Lamming’s “A Monster, A Child, A Slave,” the other significant re-readings of *The Tempest* are Aimé Césaire’s play *Une Tempête*, and Roberto Fernandez Retamar’s essay “Caliban Revisited.” However, Octave Mannoni’s 1950s book, *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization* precedes the work of these three writers.

Mannoni builds up his version of the psychological condition of colonialism through an opposition between Prospero (inferiority complex) and Caliban (dependency complex). He argues that colonial relation served both “dependency complex” of the native and the need of the colonizer to dominate in order to conquer his own inferiority complex. The Prospero-type is the kind of colonizer “whose grave lack of sociability combined with a pathological urge to dominate” drives him to look for situations that will not present any vigorous competition, places where his inferior skills assume an aspect of authority (Mannoni 102). On the other hand, according to Mannoni, the Malagasy exhibited a Caliban complex, a dependence on authority, supposedly evident in people

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who are driven out of a sheltered “tribal” society and taken to a place where they feel vulnerable. Mannoni argues that colonialism revealed that Malagasy was a dependent individual who responded negatively to the likelihood that the colonial master would desert him. In constructing his argument, Mannoni starts from the problematic premise that there were no competitions whatsoever in “tribal societies.” He asserts that the Malagasy rebellion was ignited less by the need to end the master-servant relationship than by the anger of the native who feared that the colonizer might disengage from the relationship that provided them with protections. In other words, the colonial subject wanted sheltered dependence rather than an autonomous sovereignty. This leads one to ask: What would Mannoni say about post-independence conditions? Would he say that those who are disappointed in the post-colonial leaders feel that the new father-figures have let them down?

According to Mannoni, The Tempest dramatizes the disappointments of both the colonizer and the colonial subject. The words that link them as such are uttered by Caliban and are worth quoting in their entirety because they form the core of narrative of Romance in the work of Lamming:

When thou camest first,
Thou strokest me, and made much of me; wouldst give me
Water with Berries in’t; and teach me how
To name the bigger light, and how the less,
That burn by day and night: and then I lov’d thee
And show’d thee all the qualities o’ th’ isle,
The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place, and fertile:
Curse be I that did so!—All the charms

Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats, light on you!

For I am all the subjects that you have,

Which first was mine own king: and here you sty me

In this hard rock, while you do keep from me

the rest o’ the’ island (The Tempest, Act 1, Scene II)

Mannoni conveniently avoids the line: “This island is mine by Sycorax my mother/ Which though tak’st from me.” Nevertheless, he uses the above excerpt to argue that “Caliban does not complain of being exploited; he complains of being betrayed.” Further, Caliban exhibits “resentment which succeeds the breakdown of dependence” (106). Such readings infuriated Caribbean and African scholars who were beginning to witness the fight for newly independent nations in the 1950s. The idea that Caliban was not ready for self-rule propelled these scholars to launch their own interpretations of the play and thus restored Caliban back to a heroic figure, fighting to remove Prospero from the island. In his response to Mannoni in Black Skin, White Masks, Frantz Fanon asks, “What about economic consequences? It’s colonization that needs to be put on trial!” (77). Mannoni clearly ignores the economic exploitation of the colonial subject. Fanon also rejects any suggestion of inherited racial characteristics and instead emphasizes social origins of racism and racial discrimination. On his part, Césaire not only takes issue with Mannoni’s interpretation in Discourse on Colonialism, but also in his play A Tempest. According to Hulme, “Césaire’s adaptation [Un Tempête] may have been provoked by the passages in Mannoni’s that offer the figure of Prospero and Caliban as exemplars of the dependency complexes” (Hulme 220). In fact, Césaire reworks
Shakespeare’s play in significant ways. He moves the center of consciousness from the charge of Prospero to the emerging identity of Caliban.

The interpretation of *The Tempest* as colonial metaphor was first recorded in a 1904 staging of *The Tempest* when a member of the audience connected the action on stage to events surrounding the Matabele uprising in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). The audience member was reported to have said that:

> When the man-monster, brutalized by long continued torture, begins, “This island’s mine, by Sycorax my mother, which thou takest from me’, we have the whole case of the aboriginal against aggressive civilization dramatized before us. I confess I felt a sting of conscience—vicariously suffered for my Rhodesia friends, notably Dr. Jameson—when Caliban proceeded to unfold a similar case to that of Matabele. It might have been the double of old King Lobengula rehearsing the blandishments which led to his doom: ‘When though camest first/ Though stok’dst me, and mad’st much of me; would’st give me’—all that was promised by the Chattered Company to secure the Charter. (Griffiths 170)

The act of reading or watching a play places the audience member into a network of textual relations. He or she interprets *The Tempest*, discovers its meaning, and subsequently relates it to Matabele land. This example demonstrates that in their readings, people shift between texts and the result in this case, is an instance of intertextuality when: “Caliban proceeded to unfold a similar case to that of Matabele: “‘When though camest first/ Thou stok’dst me, and mad’st much of me; would’st give me’—all that was promised by the Chattered Company to secure the Charter.’’”
According to Döring, when texts are networked intertextually and “when their meanings, at least in part, are constructed through references from other texts their reading must resort to identifiable and shared tradition in which such traces are interpretable” (14). He sees intertextuality, “as a constant weaving of connections in and between texts, intertextuality both generates and retraces a web of tradition, both activates and reinscribes the recollections shared in the interpretative community” (14). Intertextuality is also, “the metaphor of memory and shared tradition [operating] in the reverse […] in a colonial and postcolonial context, intertextual memories are displaced and perform displacing functions” (Döring 14).

Intertextuality is also evident in the use of drama in *Water with Berries*. In the novel, the use of collective plural voice is significant as members of the Secret Gathering get carried away, transported, and transformed into a theatrical past, evoking *The Tempest*. Their theatrical performance creatively indexes transformation of their consciousness into that historical past. Having a mixed genre enhances Lamming’s options for effective intertextual connections. The question of drama is also important because it demonstrates the influence that Lamming had on writers like Ngugi wa Thiongo. In “Sovereignty of Imagination,” Lamming recalls that when he was in the Barbados Workers Union in the 1960s, he directed a play in which they reconstructed the riots of 1937. The audience at the rehearsal continually interrupted them to say that some of their representations were not accurate. The people who intervened had witnessed the riots. This is not different from what Ngugi later experienced with the Kamirithu Theatre. In my subsequent discussion of *Matigari*, I show that the idea of involving people, the
audience, reader, or listener, and moving them towards action is significantly present in Ngugi’s art.

According to Hulme, when “George Lamming came to write about *The Tempest*, he did so with a clear sense that he was blaspheming; it had not previously been the place of the West Indian to offer anything other than the most orthodox and respectful comments on canonical writers” (Reading from Elsewhere 220). Lamming is aware of this, writing in *The Pleasures of Exile* that: “Naturally, I anticipate from various quarters the obvious charge of blasphemy; yet there are occasions when blasphemy must be seen as one privilege of the excluded Caliban. Such is this occasion, and I am determined to tell you why” (9). Nadi Edwards writes that, “For Lamming, the conceptual metaphor is that of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*; hence, the conflict between Prospero the colonizer, and Caliban the native becomes paradigmatic of the major historical opposition and the overarching dialectic of Caribbean society” (60).

Lamming’s works makes Jose David Saldivar to refer to him as “The supreme commentator, the one author from our America” who articulately merges the Old World colonialist and New World writing (29). With a political theme relayed in a realist mode, the earlier works of Lamming, published between 1953 and 1960, speak of childhood experiences and move through the political and cultural life of 1950s West Indies: *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953), *The Emigrants* (1954), *Of Age of Innocence* (1958), *Season of Adventure* (1960). The novels cover such subjects as education, struggle, migration, and prejudice. In a statement generalizable to all of the novels in this period, Lamming says that *In the Castle of My Skin* does not follow “the norms and established conventions of the novel:”
And this is deliberate. When you look at Castle, nearly all forms, all genres, are involved. There is a straight narrative; Castle will move into the dramatic dialogue, as Between Ma and Pa and so on. And quite often a lot of school scenes could be taken from there onto the stage. So you get the play at work in Castle. You get what would normally be the novel, that narrative at work. But you also get, and this is going to come up in all the other books also, you’re going to get a diary, some poems […] It is also a form that is going to include the variety of all these forms, each of which could be examined on its own. So you could have diaries, you could have plays, you could have straight narrative. You could have interior monologue […] The authorial note, which seems a strange invention, could be the author’s diary. (“Sovereignty of Imagination” 196)

Published only one year apart, both Natives of My Person and Water with Berries represent a complete reflection on The Tempest. Natives of My Person is a historical novel and is distinctively historical in its 16th century setting. The characters in the novel are named after their tasks as if to suggest that they are the kind of Europeans who would participate in the colonial project. Lamming says that “the colonial experience is not just the experience of colonized people, but a very deep psychic experience of the colonizer himself. And the colonizer is imprisoned in that experience no less than the colonized” (Caribbean Novelist 11). Women are the most compelling characters in Natives of My Person. They are represented by “Lady of the House, daughter of Master Cecil, ex-mistress of the Commandant, and wife of Lord Treasurer.” The wife of Lord Treasurer
had accompanied her father in an earlier voyage to the Demon Coast of San Cristobal, where she observed the brutalities that characterize the colonial mining.

Fisherman Marcel writes in an “extract from his voyages” that she “went mad with living so near the blasphemies of the savage Tribes under her father’s command” (Natives 38). This “carnage” stayed with her and she recalled it years later when the Commandant brought a necklace made from grains of rubies left behind by the tribes at San Souci “after they fled underground” (Natives 64). When the Commandant told her that, “‘This little jewel is from the Demon Coast,’ […] ‘Souvenirs for you’” (Natives 63), his voice pushed away “every cry of the mines from her memory” (Natives 65). This did not last long because he broke his promise by accepting command of another voyage; thus, she was reminded of what she saw on the trip with her father. This experience made her question what the Commandant meant by “work”:

‘Work, you call it. You will sail again, I know. So tell me, answer me now. What will you kill when all the mines are empty, when every offspring of the Tribes is dead and buried? Tell me. You will sail, I know. So answer me now. Whose women will you murder next? Tell me, answer me before you sail. Whose children will you strangle next?’ […] ‘A murder’ he hear her repeat, ‘a murder’s work? […] ‘Sail,’ she said. ‘You must sail again. Go feed on your human. That’s your work. Like the vultures over the Demon Coast, you feed on humans. You must sail to your work’ […] Name any monster! She cried, and he is no match for you. He will never be. A human-eater is what you are.’ (78-9)
Lamming argues that she is telling him: “you are making a choice between being a murderer which your work demands—and being a part of me that I want you to be, which indeed, is the very opposite in terms of human experience, as it entails being a part of the love that holds us together. Which do you choose?” (Caribbean Novelist 9) Thus, in Hakluyt’s voyages the natives are portrayed as cannibals; however, in Natives of My Person Lamming reworks this representation by branding the colonizers as merchants of death and exterminators of the island tribes. Using a woman character to point out what the Commandant and his type are involved in somewhat modifies the “figure of woman in the colonial text” (Sharpe). However, Jonathan Goldberg does not concur with Hulme and Sandra Paquet that the end of Natives of My Person is “hearteningly feminist in its impulse” (157). He correctly notes that in the narrative “men and women are entirely separate, the men on the other neo-colonial voyage never arrive at San Cristobal, and the women remain there forever as a future that men need to discover […] ‘a future they must learn’” (157). In other words, if the “women [here] function for the sake of men,” then, according to Abena Busia, the women characters “are absent from the drama on stage and are identifiable only by their relationship to the males present” (86).

Natives of My Person represents parallels between the Commandant and Shakespeare’s portrayals of the island native. According to Paquet, “Lamming’s special success in Natives of My Person is the degree to which the novel transcends the limitations of its fictional setting as a prehistory of the present, linking the bias of power in the sixteenth-century Europe with the problems of the modern world” (114). In Goldberg’s words, “Natives of My Person reads doubly, at once an account of the original
colonial venture and the present neo-colonial situation of economic domination of the Caribbean” (157).

An “account of the original colonial venture” presents a sense of the past, which is vital because as history the past provides a vital psychosocial foundation for societies fighting their way out of colonial rule. History places society in a present reality within the temporal flow from the past through the present and the future. In other words, by unveiling future possibilities to a community defined by slavery, it is important to remember that slavery took something away. Assessing that which is taken away is necessary in order to draw an itinerary for retrieval and regeneration. According to Charles Taylor, this means that the “challenge of liberating narrative is to transform the socio-political totality so that the lived history becomes open possibility. This is the challenge of Lamming’s novels” (189).

The title of Lamming’s novel, Water with Berries, comes from Caliban’s speech: “Thou strok’st me, and made much of me, wouldst give me/ water with berries in’t, and teach me how/ To name the bigger light.”’ This move works to transport the reader into the historical moment that necessitated Caliban’s speech. Using a phrase by Caliban in the title also highlights intertextuality; as Water with Berries is read, The Tempest obstructs the reader’s concentration that it is importantly and simultaneously present to one’s consciousness. Lamming summons The Tempest through this quotation, which is an echo of an earlier time, and serves as a signal that directs the attention of the reader to imperial history. The title is a phrase that is heavily laden with social and economic meanings; when Lamming appropriates it, he demonstrates the way that Shakespeare should have written his story. The intertextual relations in the novel work to reinforce the
importance of the novel. They speak to a prior conversation and thus demonstrate associational linkages while simultaneously working as a counter-discourse, as an element of anti-colonial narrative.

Lamming uses the authoritative word, phrases in metropolitan canon, in order to indicate his subversive actions, anti-colonial Romance narrative in *Water with Berries*. In other words, by giving prominence to the title, Lamming shows anti-colonial desire as he claims the right to rework Shakespeare’s story. He decontextualizes *The Tempest* only to recontextualize it in the current discursive medium. Thus, Lamming invests *Water with Berries* with European canonical authority, but uses his individual creativity and innovation in order to displace the reality represented by *The Tempest*.

Further, because Lamming’s title comes from the same excerpt that Mannoni emphasized; because “water with berries” is what Prospero gave Caliban, one should not be tempted to read this as dependency complex and as an “unintended” concurrence between Lamming and Mannoni (Hulme 20 Profit and Language). Rather, Lamming borrows the phrase in order to displace its original implication. He uses Caliban’s words to control the intertextual distance between the two narratives and does so by simultaneously marrying and divorcing the two works. Lamming knows that the place to begin his counter-discursive work is in the field of language. He writes in *The Pleasures of Exile* that “The old blackmail of language simply won’t work any longer. For the language of modern politics is no longer Prospero’s exclusive vocabulary. It is Caliban’s as well […] Caliban is at liberty to choose the meaning of this moment” (158). Here, he alludes to the counter-discursive strategy in his work. His statement recalls that of Fanon who had previously argued that, “All colonized people—in other words, people in whom
an inferiority has taken root, whose local cultural originality has been omitted to the
grate—position themselves in relation to the civilizing language: i.e., the metropolitan
culture” (*Black Skin, White Masks* 2). Lamming is aware of this and he highlights the
intertextual moments between the two works in order to bring into focus the portrayal of
Caliban by Shakespeare and to showcase the heroic Caliban in his novels. The
intertextual moments between the two works produce some activity that reinterprets and
re-represents Caliban.

Another way to understand the intertextual associations is to use Nathaniel
Mackey’s discussion of “the tradition of black liberties taken with language” (272).
Mackey touches on the move from noun to verb, a relocation that suggests action and the
ability for Caliban to determine his own life. He makes reference to Kamau Brathwaite’s
*The Arrivants*, arguing that Brathwaite wraps up the second to last poem with the lines,
“So on this ground./ write;/ […] on this ground/ on this broken ground” (272). He goes
on to write:

> Nation-language, what some would call broken English, partakes of that
ground. ‘Calibalization’ insists that in West Indian folk speech English is
not so much broken as broken into, that a struggle for turf is taking place
in language. ‘It was in language,’ Brathwaite has written, ‘that the slave
was perhaps most successfully imprisoned by his master, and it was in his
(mis-)use of it that he perhaps most effectively rebelled. Within the folk
tradition, language was (and is) a creative act in itself.’ This tradition of
black liberties taken with language informs *Mother Poem, Sun Poem*, and
*X/self* with the weight of a history of anti-imperial struggle, a weight felt
in so small a thing as the word. As in the anagrammatic ‘derangement’
Shakespeare had recourse to in fashioning *Caliban* from *cannibal*, the
puns, malapropisms, odd spellings, neologisms, and strained meanings
Brathwaite resorts to speak of disturbances outside as well as inside the
language, social disruptions the word is thus made to register. (272)

Here, Mackey is discussing movement in semantic space, a kind of movement that is
evident in *Water with Berries*. The transition from cannibal to Caliban, is similar to when
Zora Neale Hurston “elides the last syllable of conqueror [and] changes conqueror to
conquer, noun to verb.” This process is related to taking the noun phrase “water with
berries” and to demonstrate that Caliban does not depend on a hand-out—a move from
noun to verb. 22

The move from noun to verb is also related to the elements of drama in *Water
with Berries*. In *Water with Berries*, Lamming moves simultaneously into colonial
hegemony and post-independence dialogue. He suppresses the intertextual distance by
providing more prominence to Caliban’s speech in the dyadic parallelism in the title. In
fact, reading the whole novel as Caliban’s speech makes one to assume the role of the
audience in the play. Additionally, in sections of the narrative in which Lamming
suddenly shifts to drama, he does so not just to push back at a rigid system of literary
genre, but also to underscore the fact that he is simultaneously dealing with the historical
period when *The Tempest* was written as well as the contemporary moment. Lamming
argues that his novels do not follow “the norms and established conventions of the novel”
(“Sovereignty of Imagination” 106). In fact, some of the scenes in his novels could easily

22 The move to verb, to use Mackey’s argument, suggests action and ability to determine one’s life. This is what
the three exile artists in *Water with Berries* attempt to do. It is also one of the ways in which *Water with Berries*
reverses the journey of *The Tempest*. 
be put on stage. Lamming has also maintained that he often sees his novels as “dramatic poems rather than novels in the conventional sense of the novel” (“Sovereignty of Imagination,” 106).

Lamming’s idiosyncratic take on the novel gives the reader the task of continually monitoring the deployment of this innovation in different parts of the narrative. Readers of Lamming should constantly seek to notice and understand those moments when the intertextual relations are too close to ignore. They should ask why at some moments the connections are extremely close while at other moments the two works are far apart. For example, Goldberg writes that “Dependency is Teeton’s condition. He lives in Mrs. Gore-Brittain’s house in London suburbs, and as the novel opens, we are told, ‘he loved his room’” (32). Indeed, the Old Dowager rescued Teeton when she provided him with a place to rent. She appeared suddenly and unexpectedly and in doing so recalls Caliban’s words in *The Tempest*: “When thou cam’st first, / Thou strok’st me, and made much of me, would’st give me/ Water with berries in’t.” Therefore, her entry into Teeton’s life is like time segments that are introduced, according to Bakhtin, by specific link-words such as ‘suddenly’ and ‘at just that moment’ (92). These link-words characterize “those places where normal, pragmatic and premeditated course of events is interrupted” (Bakhtin 92). In *Water with Berries*, “suddenly” and “at just that moment” (the Old Dowager’s sudden appearance to help Teeton) enables the close intertextual relations between *The Tempest* and *Water with Berries*. This situation is similar to that which Helen Tiffin refers when she writes that the “Colonizer and colonized are bound in a blood knot” (49). However, “the seduction of this latter-day Caliban is […] a much more subtle process than was Prospero’s wooing and eventual sovereignty” (Tiffin 48).
Invoking a canonical writer such as Shakespeare provides Lamming with a powerful strategy for building what Benedict Anderson calls an “imagined community.” Thus, in *Water with Berries* he gains access into that imagined community in order to subvert it. Once decontextualized from one historical period, Shakespeare’s imperial narrative is recontextualized in the contemporary moment. As a series of actions, decontextualization represents an attempt to reconstitute the socio-political topography while simultaneously presenting a struggle in which agents of two or more systems are engaged with each other.

**Permanent Legacy of Colonialism**

The close relationship that Teeton and the Old Dowager have developed is expressed in some rules that apparently guide their “friendship.” This occurs when Teeton was discouraged from offering or giving the Old Dowager anything, suggesting that his role was to receive, to be dependent on her goodwill. For example, the narrator says that:

> It was not the list of favors which she was prepared to accept. This code was complex. Once he had bought her a large bar of chocolate which she refused. No argument would make her change her mind. She thought it was a great extravagance: and she couldn’t accept because that would have been a form of encouragement. But she had surprised him by taking a single peppermint from a pack which he had bought for himself. When he offered the rest, she took a second as though it was enough to confirm him in his right to give; but that was the limit. (*WWB* 31)
The Old Dowager understands that the process of transforming old structures (the colonial system) is not productive for her. Attempts by Teeton to change this almost created a crisis. According to Tiffin, Teeton “has two possible avenues of escape from his past: his painting and his political activity. Yet neither is proof against his growing relationship with the old Dowager, an insidious ‘colonial’ relationship which inevitably ends in tragedy” (47).

Only in the last sections of *Water with Berries* does Teeton notify the Old Dowager that he intends to return to San Cristobal. When he finally tells her that he is going back to his native country, she is “All crushed up inside, can hardly recognize herself” (*WWB* 224). This begs the question of dependency in this relationship. Is it Teeton really--the immigrant who is “anxious to keep his appointment with a San Cristobal future, [but] is borne back instead to the past by the Old Dowager”—that is dependent on this relationship? (Tiffin page) This is the post-independence problem-space, paradox of colonial enlightenment, and a “permanent legacy” that “demands constant renegotiation and readjustment” (Scott 21). In *The Pleasures of Exile*, Lamming writes that, “To be colonial is to be in a state of exile. And the exile is always colonial by circumstance” (229). He also observes that “To be colonial is to be […] in a certain relation; and this relation is an example of exile” (*TPE* 156). The relationship between Teeton and the Old Dowager is about a power struggle. What transpires between them is a delicate power struggle that is characterized by reciprocal cruelty. The tension demonstrates the link between past and present. Tiffin writes that this post-independence problem space “is gentle and subtle, yet it has its underlying mutual tyrannies. Almost
without recognizing it, Teetoon has become enslaved to the Old Dowager’s moods while she has become enamored of him” (48).

By emphasizing the inseparable unity of past and present (in the title), Lamming explores and interrogates the range of possibilities available to those at the periphery. These moments foreground the close intertextual relationship to *The Tempest*; thus, Lamming reflects on the political and social contexts of the experiences of his characters. Because the novel is a distinct genre that is associated with order, the adjustment of intertextual relationships between the novel and the play, which are at times too close to ignore, should be considered a political move, and subsequently a subversive act. The ability to regulate intertextual connections provides space for resistance and establishes textual resistance in which former colonial territories could locate their post-independence fictions. In other words, *Water with Berries* is located at an interpretive moment of mediation between the marginalized and the dominant. As a work, it traffics in multiple stylistic interfaces and invites a search for traces rather than binaries. The power to regulate and determine the points of intertextual contacts between the two works accomplishes formal and epistemological resistance aims of the novel.

*The Tempest* represents experiences of the past historical period. Lamming re-writes that experience when he transforms *The Tempest* into an intertextualized historical artifact. For example, I argue that the phrase “water with berries” is used here as a preface to a crossing. As such, because the story that Lamming tells in *Water with Berries* was not possible in the 16th century, he uses the phrase to lay the foundation for pushing back at Shakespeare. Thus, the crossing reflects multiple composites, an ostensible past that becomes a vehicle for portraying current experiences and frustrations.
Those moments of intertextual links in *Water with Berries* push the reader to imagine other regions and places. The narrative is set in London, a city it paints as damp and murky as if to recall the African jungle that Marlow describes in *Heart of Darkness*. As the plot of *Water with Berries* unfolds, Lamming deploys a sense of uncertainty reminiscent of cultural translation through skillfully positioned imagery.

The heath lay black and dead under a purple shadow which came from the city lights […] The trees wore a soft red veil […] The grass was damp […] He had been repelled by the thought of other bodies which have sojourned here on the grass. The moister stung his hands. For he was sure this dew was diluted with urine. How many pints had rained down this acre of grass […] Bladders from all parts of the world and every sex must have made an ocean over this acre of grass. (My emphasis 106 WWB)

These negative attributes form the outline of the “veil” and envelope the glamour of the city lights. Teeton, a former colonial subject is walking through London in the night, a place that is now “diluted with urine […] bladders from all parts of the world.” This picture of London draws attention to the setting of *The Tempest*, a location that is now reversed to London. The scene at the heath, the wasteland, brings to light all of the ontological effects of colonialism, the deep homelessness that is felt in both the colonies and the imperial capital from which one would suppose the meaning and logic of the colonies emanates. The heath scene points to global flows that have now turned to haunt and fracture the English sense of identity. England comes across as a place like any

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other. Instead of a land that can offer the immigrants a better life that they had hoped for, it bears a resemblance to the plantation economies they left behind. The scene partly indicates that these Caribbean immigrants feel as if they gave up too much for comparatively little in return. Ironically, to take Water with Berries as a metaphoric deictic of the present is also to take into account that it indexes the constructed space-time of the past in The Tempest. I suggest that this is an innovative transformation that is performatively grounded because the potential for intertextuality to induce historical trace provides an example of the move from mere presupposing, as Erwin Goffman would say, to creative indexicality. These methods that suppress or highlight intertextual linkages connect to analyses of complex social processes that entail the construction of history, tradition, authenticity, and identity.24

The flight to the desolate island in the North Sea, an escape necessitated by Nichol’s death,25 is significant because the island is the site of numerous revelations including the Old Dowager’s life story. On this journey the storm was always looming. It seems to recall the three storms in Odyssey. The storm as a literary trope (topos) entered the Renaissance rhetoric not only from Virgil but also from Ovid and Achilles Tatius, to name only a few. Importantly, the literary storm was a recognized literary intertextual trope that pointed almost exclusively to the world of fiction. The storms point to narratives about sea voyages. They refer to Aeneid and to Middle Passage and the New World. The emphasis on the voyage is significant. The intertextuality that it enables

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25 The dead body secretly buried in their backyard is significant. According to Nair, Nicole is a character who, “tries to mediate between races, genders, and nationalists” (72). However, the author does not explain if her interment under the remains of a tree trunk in the yard indicates the failure of mediation and thus anticipates the disasters at the end of the novel, or, whether her final resting place forms and lays a foundation for a mediation role.
becomes an evocative instrument that makes *Water with Berries* part of European tradition. It is revealed on this flight that the pilot has an interesting relationship with the Old Dowager; he is her brother-in law and also the father to her daughter, Myra. In other words, Fernando is similar to Prospero. The author also discloses that Fernando is guilty of killing the Old Dowager’s husband. Fernando had also lied about Myra having disappeared in a storm. Further, Myra’s rape by the servants was a copycat of actions that the servants had seen when the Old Dowager’s husband set the dogs on their women.

According to Hulme, these revelations work like Césaire’s play, a deliberate reworking of *The Tempest*. By providing the scene on the island, Lamming closely embraces *The Tempest* in order to subvert it. The scene is significant because it simultaneously narrows and widens intertextual links between the two texts.

Fernando calls his brother a “monster,” but qualifies it by saying, “of a different breed.” In this instance, Lamming refers to a word used numerous times in *The Tempest* in order to characterize Caliban. Fernando’s quote also speaks to Lamming’s commentary in “A Monster, A Child, A Slave” in *The Pleasures of Exile*, where Lamming too sees Prospero as an “obscene, and selfish monster” (102); an “imperialist by circumstance, a sadist by disease; and, above all, an old man in whom envy and revenge are equally matched” (112). For these reasons, the narrator should be taken seriously when he says that Teeton’s guard “would not let him recognize the history that the man was struggling to revive” (227). Fernando summarizes this history:

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The word is used thirty four times in *The Tempest*. In *Othello* it appears six times. This is interesting because *Othello* has ignited and attracted critical attention to issues of race. Shakespeare uses the word in *Othello* at times to describe the perceived monster in Othello’s mind. Sometimes he uses it to characterize Iago’s plot, or Desdemona’s unfaithfulness, and by extension, female sexuality. Importantly, in that play Iago shares the “monstrous” qualities with Othello.
‘I may not be long for this world,’ he said, as though the mist had 
darkened his vision again, ‘but I know what I have learnt. That experiment 
in ruling over your kind. It was a curse. The wealth it fetched was a curse. 
The power it brought was a curse. That’s why my brother found it to his 
liking. He knew it could deform whatever nature it touched. A curse I tell 
you. A curse! And it will come back to plague my race until one of us 
dies. That curse will always come back. Like how you have come here.’ 
(WWB 229)

The prose in this confrontation between Teeton and Fernando is an example of the 
ways in which The Tempest is contained, thus accomplishing Lamming’s counter-
discursive work. Because he directly refers to that “experiment in ruling over your 
people,” he narrows the intertextual links in order to contain the play’s imperial 
imagination. Consequently, the entire play is dramatized in the confrontation between the 
two men. Lamming thus encloses a canonically powerful play within the novel’s prose 
and that confirms that the Old Dowager’s and Teeton’s pasts are intertwined. The novel 
also enfolds The Tempest because Teeton, a marginal figure, is the authoritative character 
who dominates the encounter with Fernando. He does so not as much by what he says, 
but rather by his demeanor.

Lamming portrays a situation in which Teeton is confronted with a hostile “host,” 
but in which he gains complete control: “His guard kept the man’s voice where it should 
be” (29). Here, Lamming creates a narrative context for reporting what goes on in The 
Tempest, a post-colonial reading of The Tempest. He decontextualizes The Tempest while 
contextualizing Water with Berries. Consequently, in the confrontation the play becomes
formally and functionally subordinate to the novel. Thus, the focus is not simply the kinds of intertextual links being established by the author, but is rather that a former colonial subject (Lamming) gets to control and direct the process. In an attempt to achieve symbolic unification with *The Tempest*’s Caliban, Lamming moves as close as possible to *The Tempest*. He does so by erasing the opposition between signifier and signified, merging the experiences of Teeton and those of Caliban. The control of intertextuality is evident in the prose that describes the confrontation, which affords Teeton an immense authority and possibly, superior power.

Thus, Lamming suggests that the arrival of the three artists in London demands a redrawing of a new map. They challenge the boundaries where British culture falls and threaten what defines British identity in the eyes of Fernando. Fernando’s conduct indicates that to the English, the history of the empire produces an air of discomfort and shame. The imperial history dismisses and refutes the past rather than addressing it because the Old Dowager’s past emerges only in the last sections of the novel; the imperial mistakes are overlooked in the historical memory of the country. The Old Dowager’s solitary lifestyle shows the extent to which Britain is incapacitated by its inability to admit or confront the different states of affairs that followed the end of its empire and the subsequent loss of imperial prestige. Denying certain aspects of imperial history is toxic enough to ignite a “disaster,” which is evident in Fernando’s outburst that blames Teeton not only for who he is but also for getting on a boat and sailing into Britain.

The effect of Fernando’s xenophobia is revealed in his hostility toward immigrants. In portraying former colonial subjects whose presence in the metropolitan
centers of the West speaks to the changing social and cultural map, Lamming signifies an imperial history (that is what *The Tempest* is about) and calls upon imperial powers to acknowledge their brutal colonial history. The violence that Fernando shows is an example of some of the brutal aspects of imperial and colonial governance. Lamming uses Fernando’s attitude to challenge the colonizer’s logic that assumes that colonial objectives were always positive, and its barbaric methods for seeing them through were appropriate. Fernando shows a complicity in the colonial project, which makes him view Teeton as a member of an invading army. At this point, Lamming almost erases the distance between *The Tempest* and *Water with Berries*. This is because Fernando was part of the raiding army in *The Tempest* and was the first to overrun Teeton’s island. While Teeton evokes Fernando’s memory of a defeated empire, he is a visual reminder not only of its disintegration, but also of the unpleasant reputation of the violence that characterized its operation. I argue that Fernando’s rage is an effort to sanitize and wipe away the cultural heterogeneity in Britain. His rampage reaffirms that violence is part of his heritage. In *The Tempest*, Prospero assumes some pseudo-super-natural-like functions; he raises the storm, thus mirroring the role of Zeus or Poseidon in Greek mythology. In *Water with Berries*, Lamming shows that Fernando (a Prospero) shares with his forebears a wish for vengeance and a desire to thrash their perceived enemies. While Fernando attempts to project the empire as the aggrieved party rather than the victim of its own practices, he fails to succeed because Lamming has enclosed that imperial narrative within the book’s pages.

In conflating the past and the present, Lamming partly disorganizes hegemony. This is exemplified through the Old Dowager’s discomfort with sections: “I don’t like
sections […] neither cross-sections, intersections, or any kind of section. That is the trouble, isn’t it? Mona bar is nothing but a section. When it isn’t a section of this, it is a section of the other, and a section of the next. It is a rare sight to come across anything while at Mona” (WWB 22). The open public placeness of the Mona bar complements its liminal qualities. This liminal place that Lamming interrogates represents what Bhabha calls the “beyond” when he writes:

    Being in the ‘beyond,’ then, is to inhabit an intervening space, as any dictionary will tell you. But to dwell in the ‘beyond” is also […] to be part of revisionary time, a return to the present to describe our cultural contemporaneity; to re-inscribe our human, historic commonality; to touch the future its hither side. In that sense, the intervening space ‘beyond’ becomes a space of intervention in here and now. (Bhabha 10)

In this respect, Mona is important because it occupies a position as a passageway, a midpoint between two places. This place paradoxically earned the Old Dowager the nickname, “the Wednesday evening visitor.” The Old Dowager continues to explain that:

    ‘You were not likely to be attacked for a loan on Wednesday because it was the day that fell […] bang in the middle of two extremities: of receiving and disposing. That is—she would explain to Teeton, schooling him in every contingency which Mona might spring on an innocent passer-by having what you want and having it not. “Half-way,” Teeton was teasing her. “Halfway between two extremities.’ (20-2)

The transformative potential of interstitial ambiguity, “halfway between two extremities,” which the Mona bar signifies, means that Water with Berries emerges from
a historical necessity that insists on the contradictory capacities that the Caribbean novel is bound to explore. This point is exemplified by a reading of *The Black Jacobins* through the lenses of Scott’s analysis. Scott suggests that James sees tragedy as both a mode of subject constitution during historical crisis as well as meditation upon such crisis.

According to Scott:

> Tragedy sets before us the image of a man or woman obliged to act in a world in which values are unstable and ambiguous. And consequently, for tragedy the relation between the past, present, and future is never a Romantic one in which history rides a triumphant and seamless progressive rhythm, but broken series of paradoxes and reversals in which human action is ever open to accountable contingencies—and luck. (13)

Though in *The Tempest* Prospero was always reluctant to converse with Caliban, the conversation between Teeton and the Old Dowager about certain aspects of the Mona bar is Caliban’s conversation with England. I get this reading in Hulme when he writes that: “The dialogue with England, in England is about the nature of English society, culture and history. But, as *The Tempest* shows, Prospero always refuses dialogue with Caliban: slaves learn and obey, they do not converse, and so the descendants of Caliban cannot take it for granted that Prospero will even hear the remarks he makes” (226).

When Teeton teases the Old Dowager by saying “half-way,” he is actually mocking England’s imperial imagination of other places. In other words, “half-way” obstructs one from viewing all places as one’s own backyard. Because the location of the island on which Shakespeare’s play takes place is not known, the author gives an impression of an “everywhere.” The “everywhere” and the “anyplace” did not place any limits; instead,
they translated into England colonizing most of the world. Equally interesting is that Lamming takes the conversation not back to the island in *The Tempest* but rather to the place the play was first performed. This represents an example of the mutual construction of time and space because the concern with England is a move in which distance is collapsed.

**The Past in the Present: Multiple Functions of Ceremony of Souls**

These intertextual moments are also relevant because for a long time those in the Caribbean were offered the self-projections of their enslavers and colonizers with the intentions of keeping them away from knowledge of their pre-slavery past. The enslavers offered them their gods, their narratives, and their history as the best ideal. The image of Caliban became symbols of everything negative. His past was caricatured so that he could embrace values developed to control him. Because in the absence of knowledge of historical self toxic values can seem emancipatory, Lamming’s attempt to counter *The Tempest* is also a statement about the nature of Caribbean cultural heritage. Edward Said writes that, “Resistance, far from being merely a reaction to colonialism is an alternative way of conceiving history” (1993, p.216). This history needs to be informative. Supriya Nair writes that as in anthropology, contemporary methods of historical research are informed through Western encounter with the “other,” who usually comes across as lacking history. These contemporary methods of doing history are challenged by other forms of discourses, “including fiction, that perversely appropriates the act of writing to claim historicity” (Supriya 10). In the Introduction to Edouard Glissant’s *Caribbean Discourse*, Michael Dash writes that:
Because no truly total history (in all its diversity) is possible, what History attempts to do is to fix reality in terms of a rigid, hierarchical discourse. In order to keep the unintelligible realm of historical diversity at bay, History as system attempts to systematize the world through ethnocultural hierarchy and chronological progression. Consequently, a predictable narrative is established, with a beginning, middle, and end. History then becomes, because of this almost theological Trinitarian structure, providential fable or salvational myth [...] History ultimately emerges as a fantasy peculiar to the Western imagination in its pursuit of a discourse that legitimizes its power and condemns other cultures to the periphery.

(xxix)

Therefore, to Glissant, “one of the most disturbing consequences of colonization could well be this notion of a single History, and therefore of power, which has been imposed on others by the West” (Caribbean Discourse 93). He argues that the Caribbean folktale captures a deficiency in history—“the site of deactivated word” (83). Further, unlike myth, folktales “proceed to approximations, by going back and forth. The Caribbean tales outlines a landscape that is not possessed: it is anti-History” (85). In “The Muse of History,” Derek Walcott argues that New World poets should see the “classic style” as “historical degradation, rejecting it as the language of the master” (371). These comments show an attempt in the Caribbean to dismantle the notion of a single History. Lamming confirms this when he says in an interview that, “I have always been interested in that whole period of the late 16th century to early 17th century [because] it is a period which contains all the stresses that go with an emergent nationalism” (14). Gikandi
observes that Lamming is drawn to this period, “not [...] by the imperial ideas that
dominated the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but by their corollary—nationalism
and national identity” (Writing in Limbo 8). Commenting on Michel de Certeau, Gikandi
explains that clarity in Western historiography depends upon its relation with the other,
and the analysis of that history relies on “silencing the other.” He writes that, “In effect,
Western historiography needs the other, but this other only has the value when it is
silenced [...] Therefore, in order to rewrite colonial discourse in reverse, Lamming is
compelled to question the structure of Western historiography” (Writing in Limbo 59-
60). These excerpts confirm “a permanent legacy that [...] demands constant
renegotiation and readjustment” (Scott 21).

When Caribbean nationalists produced enabling anti-colonial discourse, those
discourses also guided their understanding of the problem of colonialism. This is why
Scott suggests the importance of historicizing the idiom of anti-colonial projects not only
to demonstrate their failures but also to re-imagine the particular hurdles that the problem
of colonialism posed to anti-colonial nationalists. This is evident in Water with Berries
when Lamming shows the journey to the past in the representation of the ceremony of
souls.

The journey to the past in the novel does not exclude the present but forms part of
a character’s “nowness.” This is evident in the way Lamming inserts the description of
Ceremony of Souls into Water with Berries:

His eyes were stalking through the marble images of the family graves. He
was standing there, under the sobbing illumination of the candles,
mourning the villages of his childhood.
Every year they would come: these mourners who by native custom had to settle their final account with the dead. The cemetery was a parable of leaves and water. It was familiar as the sun at morning: this annual parliament of the dead. Saragasso. The name was bread and wine to his childhood. A faith that could make the mountains of San Cristobal crumble at the whisper of a voice coming from these graves. It was here the living came to submit their charges; to hear the dead answer in forgiveness or rebuke. (107)

In the middle of a seemingly straight-forward narrative, Lamming skillfully inserts the above scene as if to make a point about the entanglement of contemporary society with the past. In making this move, Lamming derives from the past principles that are both resistant to simple appropriation by the present and also meaningfully germane to it. Unlike the literary tradition to which Lamming is heir—a tradition with a beginning, middle, and an end structure—Water with Berries does not follow a one-way flow of time. According to Walcott,

The vision of progress is the rational madness of history seen as sequential time, of dominated future. Its imagery is absurd. In the history books the discoverer sets a shod foot in virgin sand, kneels, and the savage also kneels from his bushes in awe. Such images are stamped on the colonial memory, such heresy as the world’s becoming holy from Crusoe’s footprint or the imprint of Columbus knee. These blasphemous images fade, because these hieroglyphs of progress are basically comic. And if the idea of the New and the Old becomes increasingly absurd, what must
happen to our sense of time, what else can happen to history itself, but that it too is becoming absurd? (Walcott, 373)

This is a move against linear, progressive, and teleological structures of standard history writing. This explains those passages in the novels of Lamming that disintegrate from the narrative without any prior indication. It happens in *The Emigrants* when living things turn into objects and characters find themselves changed into mere things. The ceremony of souls interferes with conventional concept of history, and when inserted into the middle of a straightforward narrative plot, it suggests a multiplicity that inheres in the present, a diversity that fragments a totalization of the now.27

Commenting on *Water with Berries* in an interview, Lamming said:

The colonial situation is a matter of historical record. What I am saying is that the colonial experience is a *lived* experience in the *consciousness* of these people. And just because the so called colonial situation and its institutions may have been transferred into something else, it is a fallacy to think that the human-lived content of those situations are automatically transferred into something else too. The experience is a continuing *psychic* experience that has to be dealt with long after the colonial situation formerly “ends.” [authors emphases] (91-2)

Lamming’s move in *Water with Berries* alludes to the fact that the physical space to which his narrative refers is simultaneously heterogeneous and constrained, rather than continuous and unlimited. His portrayal of the ceremony of souls also suggests that physical space and linear chronological time are not the only spatio-temporal components

27 One could argue that this makes the reader understand Lamming when he writes in *The Pleasures of Exile* that “Different as they may be in their present state of existence, those alive and now Dead—their ambitions point to a similar end” (9-10).
of the world in *Water with Berries*, but that they also intersect with the spatio-temporal dimension of ritual. The narrative’s interrogation of the past gestures towards the ethical when the narrator writes that, “it was here the Living came to submit their charges; to hear the Dead answer in forgiveness or rebuke.”

However, the ethical moment at this point is a prologue of the past. The narrator says:

> The Dead need not speak if they are going to enter that eternity which will be their last and Permanent Future. The Living demand to hear whether there is any need for forgiveness, for redemption; whether, in fact, there may be any guide which may help them towards reforming their present condition. Different as they may be in their present state of existence, those alive and now Dead—their ambitions point to a similar end. They are interested in the future. (*WWB* 9-10)

In Lamming’s portrayal of the ceremony of souls, “the Dead” are not actually dead; they are merely in a different “state of existence.” The living and the Dead, who represent the past, both have a common interest in the future. I suggest that the ceremony of souls marks the shift from a Romantic narrative to meditation on tragedy.

In *Water with Berries*, the past and future merge with the present in a ritual that summons, accesses, and gives voice to the spirit of the dead. As Lamming says in an interview: “the symbolic function of the ceremony for me as an artist within Caribbean

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28 Peter Hulme writes that Lamming imagines a trial and “introduces the familiar theatre of the law but, confusingly, the roles of the accused, prosecutor, witness and judge shifts constantly, along with the personal pronouns ‘I’ and ‘You’ and the position of the characters Prospero and Caliban, both of whom seem at different moments to be on trial. The witness who arrives, “claiming extraordinary privileges would seem to be the author.” *Reading from Elsewhere: George Lamming and the Paradox of Exile in The Tempest and its Travels*. Ed Peter Hulme and H. Sherman. University of Pensylvania Press. Philadelphia. 2000.

29 Chronotope helps explain the management of time in ceremony of souls. This is because ceremony helps create visions of the past, but enacts them in the present.
situation, is the necessity of reconciling the past with each moment of our conscious living” (A Visit to Carriacou 25). The ceremony of souls, a practice outlawed by colonial authorities, commands the dead back to life and in doing so places colonial rule under a microscope as the dead victims of colonial brutality give testimony through their living descendants. A vivid and concrete presence embodies particular pasts. To borrow from Michael Lambek, it offers a “synecdochic relationship to the past” (119). Lambek sees spirit possession in terms of the capacity of its poetic forms to mobilize contrasting chronotopes during ritual events and thereby provides what he calls “poiesis of history,” the creative construction of the past through forms of historicizing practice. The ritual elements in the ceremony of souls telescope particular pasts into the present; this works to enable the dead colonial subjects to speak through the pages of the book. Like David Bradley in The Channeysville Incident, Lamming seems to propose unconventional approaches for collecting historical data. In other words, Water with Berries represents the beginning of re-imagination of the problems that colonialism posed to nationalists.

In an effort to pull the past into the present, the narrative succeeds in producing fragmented presents. Through the ceremony of souls, Lamming puts multiple individual pasts and presents into a single narrative, which means that multiple contradictory voices are collapsed into a single structural supposition. Although Water with Berries appears to be ordered and coordinated, this does not necessarily mean that there is a harmonious and unambiguously clear voice in it. The British and American editions of Water with Berries have different endings, which highlights the point that like the ceremony of souls, each edition and each performance carries its own mode of ritual production. Thus, within a

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seemingly seamless narrative are points both of continuity and difference. Writing about Lamming, Taylor notes that “Every ending is a new beginning, and it is essentially in the reader’s hands that the new beginning lies” (202). Taylor also observes that, “The future is open; the imperative is to recover the past in a movement toward a freely chosen future in which liberation from oppression is the primary concern. This is a story that has no end, a process in which persons constantly recreate their history” (211-212). This is a testimony to the fact that Water with Berries is a novel with a diversity of addresses. I suggest that this diversity is stirred by the concerns about the past and the place of literature in a fragmented present. Lamming frames the narrative within remembered pasts, imagined futures, and the need to fulfill responsibilities of the present. This is why the metaphoric assertion of journeying (voyaging) illustrates the novel’s “biographical” past and at the same time influences the circuits of its use. In other words, the intertextuality between Water with Berries and The Tempest is worked out simultaneously with the reader’s relationship with Lamming’s narrative.

If repetition is a rhetorical means through which the transformative nature of performance is highlighted, it is equally a way of drawing attention to intertextual moments between Water with Berries and The Tempest. The movements between important points (Mona bar, San Cristobal, Saragaso, The Gathering, and Ceremony of Souls) in Water with Berries suggest a back-and-forth constant motion that runs

1973, there is an extra page to the novel that is not included in the American edition. This last page is chapter thirteen and consists of four short sentences, each of which forms a separate paragraph: ‘The publican of the Mona died two days later after the remains of the Old Dowager’s were found. Derek Alone escaped the charge of murder. But the Gathering defied the nation with their furious arguing that Teeton was innocent. They were all waiting for the trial to begin.’ Lamming explains the omission as an oversight (unpublished interview, 6 March 1980) (pp. 98).
throughout the novel. Indeed, this brings about the link between Teeton’s location in the fictional world of the novel and the space outside of it.

Metaphorically speaking, the ceremony of souls, a conversation about forgiveness that paves way for the future, began when Teeton went through it soon after he learnt of Randa’s death. The overall performative effect of the ceremony of souls is heightened with the deaths of Nicole, the Old Dowager, and Fernando. I argue that the reader’s engagement and participation is reinforced by the fact that Water with Berries is history talking to the reader, the present trying to understand the problems of the past, which affects the present moment. Commenting on the representation of the ceremony of souls in Season of Adventure, Taylor writes that:

In Season of Adventure the ceremony becomes the point of departure for what Chiki calls ‘backward glance.’ Like other members of the dependent bourgeoisie, Fola has repressed her cultural origins, the national culture of the people of San Cristobal. Her past is a dead past, like a corpse in need of resurrection. When she witnesses an actual ceremony, however, this repressed culture threatens to erupt in her as she finds herself virtually possessed by a spirit. This is the beginning of her encounter with her past. She is no longer an outsider witnessing the ceremony, like her white teacher and friend Charlot. She has become a participant. Lamming lifts the ceremony of souls out of its ritual context to make of it a symbol of the need for reconciliation in Fola’s life and in the life of the society as a whole…According to Lamming the wound that the past has inflicted can be healed only through a “continuing dialogue between the living and the
dead.” Fola’s backward glance opens her eyes to the possibilities that are in herself. (210)

In pointing to what separates Caliban and Prospero, the ceremony of souls indicates the indistinct boundary between the past and present. In a sense, the ritual displays a plurality of times existing side by side. This simultaneity, which is also an interruption of the present, transforms the past into an ever-visible possibility that punctuates the present. If something lingers on in the ceremony of souls, it is between what is visible and what is invisible; it is about the location of a boundary, a borderline. In the distinction between the two worlds—the past and the present, Europe and Caribbean—the ceremony would be a marker that indicates the difference. Because difference separates and simultaneously unites, the ceremony of souls amplifies the fact that the present exists alongside the past even at the limit or border of the practices that define the present. Therefore, the ceremony of souls is a signpost for this border.

The elements of anti-colonial Romance narrative in Water with Berries represent, in the words of Gikandi, a “narrative strategy and counter-discourse [against] conventional modes of representation associated with colonial domination and colonizing structures” (Writing in Limbo 5). However, the ending of the voyages of the three artists best captures the tragic form of the story that James tells in The Black Jacobins. Like the story James tells, the stories of the three artists carry within them vital implications for the post-independence problem-space. This is because the uncertain course of tragedy denies the post-independence subject the “the consoling idea that the past, the present, and the future can be plotted in a determinate casual sequence” (Scott 167). According to Taylor, “Lamming’s vision is more political […] He uses the novelistic form to explore
the actual process of nation building. Yet, what remains fundamental in Lamming’s work is not this process in itself but the leap to history of which it is a manifestation. For Lamming, the process is open, indeterminate, and art can, indeed, it must, bring us into this realm of indeterminacy” (225).

This is important because it “comports better with a time of postcolonial crisis in which old horizons have collapsed or evaporated and new ones have not yet taken shape” (Scott 168). To acknowledge this critical insight is to work toward a politics that “depends less on heroism of the sovereign revolutionary subject and the renewal of humanity that it promises to initiate, and more on the receptivity to the paradoxical reversals that can unmake and corrupt our most cherished ideals” (Scott 190). This is the tragic element in the stories of the three artists.
Chapter Three

The Cultural Dimensions of Development in The Strange Bride

*The Strange Bride* is an interpretation of a Luo myth. In the novel, Grace Ogot shows the agency of women in societal transformation at the same time as she underscores the cultural aspects of development. Indeed, with political independence, Kenya, like most African countries, engaged the question of modernization and development of a new nation. However, as a process and a goal, Kenya translated development in the period following her independence to mean modernization (Bethwell Ogot 1999). In other words, the newly independent Kenya approached development largely in economic terms. The emphasis on economic growth meant that culture was not seen as the anvil that shapes development. As such, in this chapter I explore the ways Ogot frames her argument when she intervenes in this post-independence discourse in Kenya. If development implies progression and movement toward something better, if it suggests improvement toward the material and non-material components of a people, then it calls for action. In other words, if a society that is undergoing development is one in motion, then, in *The Strange Bride*, Ogot portrays a people who are not only in search of societal-improvement, but a people committed to development through their own
efforts. For Ogot, Nyawir, the heroine of *The Strange Bride*, is the transformative character that is instrumental in this post-independence discourse. Indeed, Ogot projects herself into the post-independence discourse when she re-writes one of her community’s myths. What is in this mythic past that was invaluable to the new nation that Kenya was trying to build and in what way is the myth a vital tool for Ogot? Before this analysis, I give an overview of the critical reception of her writing in order to situate her work within the post-independence period.

**Critical Reception**

Ogot was drawn to the power of narration during her childhood orientation in storytelling sessions with her grandmother. She would later reflect upon this legacy when the manager of the East African Literature Bureau “could not understand how a Christian woman could write such stories involved with sacrifices, traditional medicine and all, instead of writing about salvation and Christianity” (Lindfors 124). *The Strange Bride* is one of those stories that do not deal with the theme of Christian salvation. According to Gloria Chukukere, Ogot’s literary development is particularly significant in “consolidating her grandmother’s literary influence and establishing, once more, the much acclaimed role of women in her sphere of oral narrative” (218).

Like Gabriel Garcia Marquez, the stories that Ogot heard from her grandmother somewhat ignited and influenced her creativity as a writer. “Garcia Marquez has said many times that he writes stories the way his grandmother told them” (Nazareth 100). However, this does not mean that both Marquez and Ogot do not shape their art. “But whereas Gabriel Garcia Marquez makes the real world magical, Ogot makes the magical real” (Nazareth 113). Similarly, ancestral sources are everywhere in Ogot’s works as they
are in the works of Ngugi wa Thiongo. In Ogot’s Luo community, stories were told in the Siwindhe. Adrian Ruscoe writes that, “Here in the Siwindhe, in the home of a woman who could talk freely about all subjects, Luo boys and girls gathered together to be taught the ways of thinking of their people. Siwindhe might well be called the ‘Luo Institute for Cultural and Social Preparation’ and its medium of preparation was the story” (23). I argue that this figure of the grandmother is important in Ogot’s works, specifically in *The Strange Bride*.

Ogot has said that, “If a story emerges from, say, Kikuyuland or Luoland or Kambaland, people want to read it because it helps us learn about one another” (Lindfors 129). Nazareth writes that her strength is not merely based on re-telling traditional stories. “Like Ngugi wa Thiongo, she uses her people as a base for dealing with the world. In breadth and technique, she can compete with sophisticated moderns” (Nazareth 106). However, by emphasizing Ogot’s ancestral sources, I am not endorsing Brenda Berrian’s view that she will be “remembered for her meticulous documentation of Luo customs, legends, and society” (184-87). Nazareth writes that, “such a summation may only be the result of the fact that there has not been much analysis of Ogot’s works as literary art” (101). Critics of Ogot’s works have focused generally on content while ignoring issues of style. “In spite of [Ogot’s] contributions to the growth of African literature,” Chukukere writes that “it is regrettable that […] she […] suffers from limitation in the attention paid to her writings” (217). She adds that “At best, the criticism of her work, pass as mere comments of a sketchy and disjointed nature, especially in their value judgments” (217).

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31 Siwindhe is a house of a widowed grandmother.
Ogot was one of the first women writers to be published in Africa. Her 1966 work *The Promised Land* was the first novel by a female to be published by the East African Publishing House. In that same year Flora Nwapa published *Efuru*, the first novel by a woman in the Heinemann African Writers Series. Even with her achievement as one of the two first published female writers in Africa, she has faced several feminist critiques. Stratton writes that, “with no reference to Ogot’s *The Promised Land*, critics have assigned paradigmatic status to Nwapa’s text” (58). Thus, according to Susan Andrade, “*Efuru* [is] the first published novel by an African woman and the text that inaugurates an African woman’s literary history” (Stratton 97). This oversight partly explains why “Ogot is the most forgotten of women […] writers” (Stratton 58). However, readers such as Florence Stratton write that in *The Strange Bride*, Ogot combats one of the major orthodoxies of male literature, “the interpretation of women as outside history” (64). Other critics, “like Gerald Moore have patronizingly advised her to abandon the novel in favor of the short story” (Chukukere 217). Chukukere takes issue with David Cook’s review of *The Promised Land*, observing that, “Cook notes that it is ‘naïve and bizarre […] ludicrous […] alarming’ strong statements that may not always be critically justified” (217). Even Lloyd Brown in *Women Writers in Black Africa* does not give due attention to East African female writers. Brown dismisses Ogot as a “minor writer” of a non-protest tradition (25-6). In his reading of *The Promised Land*, Charles Larson writes that it is “one of the most disappointing African novels in a long time” (Larson 44).

In her essay, “The Conception of Ideal Womanhood: The Example of Bessie Head and Grace Ogot,” Achufusi comments that in Ogot and Bessie Head’s novels and short stories, the authors are troubled by the fact that many women live “in a society
organized according to male world views and concerns” (87). Their handling of women subjects demonstrate a commitment “to the task of bringing feminine perspectives into issues which have usually been interpreted through male perspectives” (Achufusi 87). Despite their “unabashed literary activism on behalf of womanhood,” both Ogot and Head examine women’s experiences within an intricate “context of power relationships among different groups that make up a human society” (Achufusi, 87-88). In other words, the methods they both employ in portraying certain aspects of society are bound to provoke some reactions. Achufusi concludes that their work is “bound to be controversial in its own way” (87). Maryse Conde offers a further example:

It would be easy to dismiss Grace Ogot and say she has no talent. On the contrary Grace Ogot lacks neither talent nor imagination. But her talents are totally wasted. She is blinded by her respect for the Europeans’ codes of behavior, so confused as to the place of her traditional beliefs, that her female characters possess neither coherence nor credibility. Through badly digested Christianity and western values, she sinks down to the level of cheap European literature and other sub-products of the consumer society. She may believe that she is an emancipated woman but what she offers her fellow countrywomen is a dangerous picture of alienation and enslavement. One feels tempted to advise her to join some Women’s Lib. Movement to see how European females question the code of values and behaviors imposed upon them and to replace her bible by Germaine Greer’s book. In a word, Grace Ogot is a sub-product of the west and the solution of her problems will only be found when she comes to terms with
them. When she no longer looks at the West as a child in awe of an adult, but as a critic and judge. (142–3)

Advancing this brand of criticism, Femi-Ojo-Ade categorizes Ogot with writers such as Efua Sutherland, Ama Ata Aidoo, and Flora Nwapa. These writers, she argues, constitute the “old guard” and are stuck in traditions of the land (72). She writes that they complain of their conditions as subjects of male masters at the same time as they seek solace in a society that calls woman the mother. However, to Achufusi, those critiques by Maryse Conde and Femi-Ojo-Ade “are in fact censuring Ogot for pursuing a brand of feminism that is broadly accommodating of traditional values, Christian values, and the reality of man-woman symbiotic needs in society” (89). She writes that these critics “additionally suggest that this kind of ‘accommodating’ feminism (what we may, borrowing a terminology from political parlance, call ‘liberal feminism’) exerts a negative influence on Ogot’s art, especially in the matter of characterization” (88). Also responding to Maryse Conde’s comments, Stratton says that in criticizing Ogot, it is Conde who ignores cultural and historical specificity of western feminism which she represents as universal. “Indeed, it would seem to be Conde herself who is ‘blinded by her respect for European codes of behavior.’ For at the same time as she condemns Ogot for adhering to western values […] she urges her to take western feminism as her model” (Stratton 61).32

Writing on Ogot, Ruscoe argues that inspiration from traditions of her Luo people are critical to her work and that in her short story collection Land Without Thunder, stories such “The Rain Came” and “Bamboo Hut” mirror tradition. Furthermore, her

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grisly story “Tekayo,” set in southern Sudan and exploring taboo on cannibalism, “stands as one of the most powerful re-workings of an oral tale yet achieved” (25). According to Achufusi, a comprehensive review of Ogot’s characters shows that to an enormous extent she fights to get the “African womanhood out of the kitchen and onto the public stage, to transform womanhood from object to subject” (“Conceptions of Ideal Womanhood: The Example of Bessie Head and Grace Ogot” 89). Whether her characters have agency or are objectified, they have “dignity, intelligence, and articulateness. In fact, the vast majority of Ogot’s protagonists are women, and nearly all of them are cast in the heroic mold or at least in a favorable light” (Achufusi 89). Achufusi argues that in Ogot’s work she “values marriage as much as she values the dignity of woman, and may even be said to see marriage as part of that dignity of woman, provided the husband recognizes the woman’s rights and respects her feelings” (89). According to Stratton, if the main ideological thrust of Ogot’s work is to counter patriarchal ideology by attempting a reversal of the initial terms of the sexual allegory, “such an inversion—female-male, good-evil, subject and object—does not resolve the problems of gender, but it is, nonetheless, a subversive maneuver” (62).

Writing The Promised Land in the 1960s—a time that most African countries were in the process of gaining political independence--Ogot captures social and political hopes of anti-colonial imaginings. The story reconstructs the 1930s colonial period in Kenya. In the novel’s structure, the “normative male subject is displaced and replaced by a female subject” (Stratton 67). I argue that by doing this, Ogot anticipates The Strange Bride where Nyawir overwhelms male characters. Actually, Nyawir’s husband owes his leadership position to her advocacy. In other words, by privileging the female voice in
The Promised Land, Ogot not only anticipates The Strange Bride where Nyawir’s intellect dominates, but with Nyawir she sets the standard. This idea is reinforced when one realizes that Nyapol’s questions in The Promised Land foregrounds some of Nyawir’s actions in The Strange Bride.

When Charles Larson writes that the end of The Promised Land “destroys the mood of what could have been an idyllic memoir of African agrarian life” (44), the “mood” that is “destroyed” does not come at the end of the novel, but rather at the beginning when Nyapol questions male-oriented “agrarian life.” Larson also dismisses the novel because its plot is too mobile in that it makes a circuit that begins in Kenya, goes to Tanganyika, and then comes back to Kenya. As Sally Frank Moore observes, communities studied by anthropologists need to be “small to be treated as closed systems” (3). James Clifford makes a related point when he writes that in anthropology, villages “have long served as habitable, mapable unit [which] offered a way to centralize a research practice, and at the same time […] served as a synecdoche, as a point of focus, or part, through which one could represent the cultural whole” (21). As such, in The Promised Land with its emphasis on migration within Africa, Ogot denies the anthropologist such comfort. Larson’s comment resounds in Anthony Appiah’s words when Appiah writes in In My Father’s House that Western critics have “been all too eager to attend to the ethnographic dimension of African literature” (68).

Therefore, one of the problematic in which I am interested is why Ogot writes The Promised Land in 1960s but sets it in 1930s colonial Kenya. Yet, writing in the 1980s, she sets The Strange Bride in the mythological past of the Luo. To answer this it is necessary to recollect some aspects of the myth of the Dark Continent.
In tracing the genealogy of the myth of the Dark Continent, Patrick Brantlinger points out that the myth “developed during the transition from the main British campaign against the slave trade […] to the imperialist partitioning of Africa […]” (185). He references Eric Williams’ thesis in *Capitalism and Slavery*, which states that “abolition was not purely altruistic but was as economically conditioned as Britain’s later empire building in Africa […]” (186). According to Brantlinger, Williams argues that “Britain could afford to legislate against the slave trade only after the trade had helped to provide the surplus capital necessary for industrial ‘take-off’” (186). Williams points out that Britain was weakened after American Revolution that disposed it of its slave-owning territory. “As the leading industrial power in the world, Britain found in abolition away to work against the interests of its rivals who were still heavily involved in colonial slavery and a plantation economy” (Brantlinger 186).

It followed that by the mid-19th century, accomplishments of the abolition movement, influence of Victorian explorers, and “merger of the racist and evolutionary doctrines in the social sciences had combined to give the British public a widely shared view of Africa that demanded imperialization on moral, religious, and scientific grounds” (Williams 186-187). This is the myth of the Dark Continent. In imagining Africans enjoying free and happy lives without interference of Europeans, the Romantics succeeded in painting the “image of noble savages living in pastoral freedom and innocence” (Brantlinger 189). It was the Romantics that led to the satiric tradition that is evident in Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko; or, the Royal Slave* (1688). It was also anti-slavery figures such as John Fowell Buxton who in their works anticipated many later writers who sought to demonstrate the necessity of European intervention in Africa. This effort
was led by both explorers and missionaries. Their non-fictional writings sought for “romances in which the hero-author[s] struggle through enchanted or bedeviled lands toward a goal, ostensibly the discovery of the Nile’s sources or the conversion of the cannibals.” Explorers usually portrayed Africans as “amusing or dangerous obstacles or as subjects of curiosity, while missionaries usually (mis)represented them as “weak, pitiable, inferior mortals who need to be shown the light. Center stage is occupied not by Africa or Africans but by a Livingstone or Stanley, a Baker or a Burton—Victorian Saint Georges Battling the armies of the night” (Brantlinger 197). These issues are reinforced in The Philosophy of History where Hegel provides a Eurocentric view of the African.

It is these concerns that African writers like Chinua Achebe in West Africa, and later Okot P’bitek in East Africa encountered in Britain. Achebe captures the (mis)representation of Africa in Things Fall Apart when the District Commissioner attempts to understand the local community’s response to Okonkwo’s suicide. In that instance in Things Fall Apart, Achebe captures centuries of (mis)representation of Africa, particularly in the desire by the District Officer to discount the usefulness of the go-between, and to rearrange details in support of a subjective European opinion of Africa. In African Religions in Western Scholarship, Okot P’bitek makes a related point when he writes that “throughout the long history of western scholarship, African religions have never been the objects of study in their own right (102). He continues to write that the “aim of the study of African religions should be to understand the religious beliefs and practices of African people, rather than to discover the Christian God in Africa” (111).

While these African writers saw that “in the imperialist discourse the voices of the dominated are represented almost entirely by their silence, their absence” (Brantlinger
186), we should note that the myth of the Dark Continent was not just about the misrepresentation of Africa. It was a Victorian creation that helped form a bigger discourse about empire. It was framed by political and economic pressures. My point is that economic demands that pushed Europe into the imperial project see their “second coming” in neo-liberal processes. After the Second World War, when Britain agreed reluctantly to decolonization, it still continued to project a neocolonial presence throughout what had been its empire. This means that neocolonial structures of commercial exploitation were sharpened rather than eliminated. David Harvey writes that when entrepreneurs in developing countries borrow money from abroad, for example, the requirement that their own state should have sufficient foreign exchange reserves to cover their borrowings translates into states having to invest in, say, US Treasury bonds. The difference between the interest on the money borrowed (for example 12 per cent) and the money deposited as collateral in US Treasuries in Washington (for example 4 per cent) yields a strong net financial flow to the imperial center at the expense of the developing country.(74)

In other words, if anti-colonial theorists like Frantz Fanon had responded in the initial round of economic exploitation and (mis)representation of Africa, then post-liberation writers like Grace Ogot are responding to the “second-coming” that is seen in neo-liberal project.

In his analysis of the impact of colonial history upon cultural identity in the African diaspora, Stuart Hall writes that, “where Africa was a case of the unspoken, Europe was a case of that which is endlessly speaking—endlessly speaking us”
Hall was explaining the representation of Africa by people of African descent in the midst of the continued presence of Europe as a key manufacturer of identities, ideas, and images. In the above sentence, he provides an interesting grammatical maneuver which dismantles the binary opposition between silence and speech. The past tense describes Africa’s silence while the present tense describes Europe’s speech, concluding with a timeless present tense that captures the contemporary conditions: Africa got the language but is not able to prevent Europe from “endlessly speaking us.” Though open colonial rule has ended in Africa, Hall’s line seems to imply that the absence/silence once imposed by colonial discourse still continues to overwhelm African self-representations. Therefore, Ogot’s interpretation of an African traditional story, as if she is responding to Hall’s grammatical operation on the “eternal present” tense, highlights the ways in which post-independence Africa responds to the “second-coming” in neo-liberal processes. The Strange Bride raises the question: what kinds of imaginative horizons open up in the post-independence problem-space? In going back to a pre-colonial Africa—the silenced and forgotten Africa—The Strange Bride seems to suggest that Africa needs to ask new questions by re-imagining and putting some older (pre-colonial) concepts to use again.

Tragedy: Normatively African

In Culture and Imperialism, Edward Said writes that it should be “acknowledge[ed] that […] opposition to [power is] articulated together on a largely common although disputed terrain provided by culture” (200). For writers like Ogot

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to achieve recognition for [her misrepresented society she has] to rechart and then occupy the place in the imperial cultural forms reserved for subordination, to occupy it self-consciously, fighting for it on the very same territory once ruled by a consciousness that assumed the subordination of a designated inferior Other. Hence, *reinscription*. The irony is that Hegel’s dialectic is Hegel’s, after all: he was there first, just as Marxist dialectic of subject and object had been there before Fanon of Les Damnés used it to explain the struggle between colonizer and colonized (Said 210 Emphasis in the original).

What I am pointing out here is that in *The Strange Bride*, Ogot stages tragedy as normatively African and in doing so echoes the re-inscription comment by Said. She inscribes the language of literary modernity in order that her representation of an African voice will have conventional authority and legitimacy. To demonstrate and gain authoritative legitimacy, to borrow from Said, African writers such as Ogot must work with the conventional categories that authorize literary modernity. In this connection, therefore, Ogot merges what Wole Soyinka would call “the recreation of a pre-colonial African world-view with eliciting its transposable elements into modern potential” (115). She does so, I argue, using the emplotment mode of tragedy. Ogot provides tragedy an African face. She knows that in history, tragic art occurs during periods of crucial change. Aeschylus fought in two wars, and Shakespeare lived during quite astonishing succession of fears. Both stand at a kind of curious turning points in the history of their civilizations. I argue that in using the emplotment mode of tragedy, Ogot reminds the
reader about the role of tragedy in historical change at the same time as she calls for re-
imagination in the post-independence problem-space.

When one looks at the movement of ideas in the two separate periods in which
Aeschylus and Shakespeare wrote, including the tragic works that were produced in those
times, there is one persistent factor. Both periods mark a switch from forms of cosmic
thoughts that rely on notions of divinity and holiness to forms inspired by individualistic
rationalist ideas. The movement from Aeschylus to Euripides can be seen as the
development from pre-Socratic thinkers to Socrates himself.34 Similarly from
Shakespeare to Corneille we go from a world of dark and mysterious forces to the
universe of individual values affirmed and maintained by human will and reason. What is
interesting about the tragic age, however, is that man seems to free himself from an older
form of civilization only to find that he has broken away from it without yet having a new
form that satisfies him.35 Ogot aims for this, I argue, because the post-independence
problems-space requires new questions, a new horizon of expectations.

Tragedy comes out of the opposition between light and darkness and rises from
the struggle between them. While in religious drama the problem has already been
solved, in ideal tragedy it is just the opposite, it has not been solved. Nyawir, the heroine,
rebels and rejects the divine order that her people trusted. The divine power (Were
Nyakalaga) affirms himself exactly to the extent that He is denied. But, Nyawir’s revolt is
not enough to make tragedy. Neither is the affirmation of divine (Were Nyakalaga) order.
Both revolt and order are necessary, the one supporting the other, and each reinforcing
the other with its own strength. Just like there is no Oedipus without the destiny summed

34 Socrates was scornful of tragedy but made an exception for Euripides.
35 See Albert Camus, The myth of Sisyphus .
up by the oracle, there is no Nyawir not only without the foreshadowing that is in her mysterious disappearance “between the time of her early childhood and the time she reached maturity” (Bride 6), but also without her intransigent insistence to go against Were Nyakalaga’s command. Nyawir denies the order that eventually kills her, and Were Nyakalaga strikes because he is denied. Both the heroine and the divine assert their existence at the very moment when this existence is called into question.

When Nyawir hits the ground with the metal hoe—a move against divine commandment—“a voice like that of the wind gave her a stern warning, saying: ‘Don’t, don’t, Nyawir don’t touch the soil with that hoe. Don’t violate a taboo on that soil. You will bring a curse upon the land!’” (Bride 84) This warning notwithstanding, Nyawir went ahead and violated the divine commandment. It is a reminder that tragedy occurs when woman or man, through pride or stupidity enters into conflict with the divine order. And the more justified the rebel’s revolt and the more necessary this order, the greater that tragedy that stems from the conflict. When Nyawir violates the order, the voice told her:

You have broken the commandment of Were Nyakalaga and our ancestors. You’ve sinned, you have sinned, you’ve sinned […] but we warned you […]

Your obstinacy has now brought a curse upon the whole of the earth.

The voice that talks to Nyawir here is equivalent to the chorus in the Greek mythology. We have to remember that when Thespis started drama, it was a kind of monologue, there was only one person, one actor. It is Aeschylus who added the second actor and thus began a dialogue on stage. In American Civilization, C.L.R James writes that because
Aeschylus recognized that the new moral, social, and political realities in Greece demanded a new style to voice it, he added another character to the one who led the chorus. The chorus he kept to perform its role as a commentator on the drama.

Dialogue is important because of the need in democracy for divergent opinions. In democracy one has to tone down one’s monologue in order to listen to the other, and the other too has to listen back.

Immediately Oedipus becomes blind, he says that “All is well.” After Nyawir is told by the voice (chorus) that “[f]rom this day/ That curse will be on your head/ ever and ever” (87). She wondered, “What did that mean? What was supposed to be the effect of the curse on her? Was she going to die, or was she going to lose her mind?” (87). Then, “All over sudden, Nyawir realized that her eyes had opened miraculously. Then she said at once: “Tho! Ayaye. My eyes are open” (88)

Oedipus knows that “All is well” although he never sees again. Both Oedipus and Nyawir’s darkness are filled with light, and their eyes shine bright with the highest lesson of tragic world. It is not just eyes of the individual tragic heroes but the eyes of their societies. Raymond Williams points out that it is an error to “think of tragedy as what happens to the hero.” According to C.L.R James, “part of the value of the story-form of tragedy for our present, then, is not merely that it raises a profound challenge to the hubris of the revolutionary and (modernists) longing for total revolution, but that it does so in a way that reopens a path to formulating a criticism of the present” (135). We have tragic art, C.L.R James says quoting Charles Segal,

So “that we not forget the dimensions of life that our structures cannot encompass […] Without that paradoxically pleasurable pain of tragedy,
our order and our structures would become sterile, self-enclosed, solipsistic, arrogant with the hybris of their own intellectual power.

Nyawir lived the collision of alternatives: Either she lives within the parameters provided by her Luo culture, or adopt change and forget about her culture which provides her with a sense of identity, a sense of history. In this post-colonial moment, Nyawir’s story suggests that “we should give up the consoling idea that past, present, and future can be plotted in a determinate casual sequence. The contingent relationship between character, action, and circumstances always leaves us open to the possible incursion of tragedy” (Scott 167). This is because as strategies of critical illumination, some modes of emplotment work better than others with the histories they seek to construct. That is to say, that if “the mode of Romance answered anti-colonial demand,” if [i]t comported well with a historical present in which transformative horizons were still visible—and not only visible, but plausible” (Scott 168), then it is tragedy that helps us better to “cope with so unyielding a postcolonial present of our own” (Scott 169).

Building On the Indigenous

The myth of the Dark Continent persists—albeit in other forms—even after the end of colonial rule. In their book Africa Works, Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Deloz cite some unfavorable essays written by Africans in which the writers “attempt to understand the internal [authors’ emphasis] grounds for the state of affairs” in Africa (127). They also refer to Axel Kabou, a Cameroonian, who “writes incisively about the ‘myth of the African will for development’ that too often is a way of obscuring local
incompetence by reference to the so-called international neo-colonial plot” (127). They write that Kabou states:

[one] cannot but be struck by the deliberate manner in which Africans refuse any rational approach to organization […] She refers to a deadly ‘conformism,’ ‘unacceptable signs of backwardness,’ as well as ‘a complete lack of critical stance in respect of local values […] Elsewhere she writes that it is ‘indeed striking how backward attitudes, considered unacceptable elsewhere in the world, continue to prevail on all levels of society in Africa, thus making worse the already precarious situation and preventing much needed changes. (127-8)

Chabal and Deloz also say that “What is noteworthy is the importance given by these African authors to cultural features as determinants of development” (128). They believe that this is because those African writers “focus attention upon the need for analysis based on the study of mentalities” (Africa Works 128). Chabal and Deloz also refer to Daniel Etounga-Manguele who thinks that Africa is in need of a “cultural adjustment program” (Africa Works 128). To Etounga-Manguele, the underlying reason why sub-Saharan Africa has “deviated” away from a familiar development path is “‘African culture,’ the ‘common core’ of which includes apathy” (128). In other words, Chabal and Deloz quote African writers in order to show the “self-critical approach rejecting the habitual exculpating explanations of Africa’s predicament and focusing attention both on the putative incompatibility of African culture(s) with modern economic development and on the hitherto virtually taboo question of mentalities” (Africa Works 129).
The question about culture is important. Bethwell Ogot writes that “generally speaking, the culture of a society consists of three distinct elements.” *(Reintroducing Man* 320). These elements include ideas, aesthetic forms, and values. Ideas, he writes, “give rise to habits and beliefs, which are concretized in social institutions which provide stability” *(Reintroducing Man* 320). Aesthetic forms “reflect the artistic expressions of a culture in its visual arts, music and poetry as well as the sense of beauty manifested in the day-to-day living of individual and social groups.” Lastly, the values of a culture are products of “the interaction between the ideas and aesthetic forms and provide norms of conduct, standards of behavior, sources of faith and vision” *(Reintroducing Man* 320). Of these three elements, “values have the most important role: to develop wisdom and discrimination in a specific culture and provide the dynamism for action and change, as well as imparting vitality and quality to the life of the people. Culture thus embraces the humanities and the sciences and the relationship between them. [It is] the linchpin of a people’s identity” *(Reintroducing Man* 320). In other words, what Bethwell Ogot suggests here is that development is a continuing and an ongoing process that is intricately connected to the cultural values of individual communities. He points out in *Building On the Indigenous* that

People do not live only by economics, public order or science and technology. Before these, they have concepts and beliefs […] have value systems which define priorities and qualities of social relations; they have their attitudes, aspirations, hopes, fears, expressions and manifestations of ethical and traditional codes of conduct […] Identity of “culture” within a
group, on the basis of language, history, religions, values, hopes, fears, is
the founding stone of society. (138)

I argue that in *The Strange Bride*, as a myth that marks the past while calling for
change, Ogot evokes Kwame Gyekye’s observations in *Tradition and Modernity*. He
writes that:

Philosophy—that intellectual enterprise concerned with raising
fundamental questions about human experience—is indeed widely
believed to be essentially a cultural phenomenon. The reason is that the
human experience is mostly directly felt within some specific social or
cultural context; also, philosophical thought is never worked out within a
cultural or historical vacuum. (viii)

Using this schema, when Ogot places Nyawir, the character who signifies both
custom and change, to advocate for change in a transformation that eventually enabled
the people of Got Owaga to embrace the technology of fishing, she shows the
significance of considering indigenous cultural traditions. In other words, *The Strange
Bride* is an intervention in the debate about post-independence discourses. As such, by
interpreting a traditional myth, Ogot calls for a closer look at the development issues of
the post-independence period. This is possibly why scholars like Bethwell Ogot asks, “Is
there, for example, a cultural dimension that has been missing in this experience? Have
the development processes […] ignored that ensemble of ideas, mechanism, institutions,
and artifacts that have explicitly guided the behavior of the African people in a given
group, region or country?” (*Building on the Indigenous* 139). I suggest that in *The
Strange Bride*, Ogot dismisses the argument that the social and economic life in Africa is
unchanging. I read the author as suggesting that to describe a system as static in a particular point in history ignores the fact that changes must have occurred. In other words, by approaching modernization exclusively in economic terms, the post-independence period failed to take into consideration the cultural dimensions of development.

Thus, Nyawir does not underestimate the value of culture in development. Indeed, she makes her argument for transformation within her culture. She pushes for change saying that, “if people of Got Owaga can agree so that every family gets their own hoe, they can till large pieces of land and have bigger harvests than we have nowadays” (TSB, 72). At the same time, she also tells Owiny, “Look, I also love our parents and I have faith in our forefathers” (122). She is doing what Atieno Odhiambo, following both Bethwell Ogot and Claude Ake, calls “building on the indigenous” (12). The novel is a commentary on the argument that sees “African culture as a problem of development” (Odhiambo 2). Ogot uses the metal hoe that God gave the people of Got Owaga, an item in a traditional myth, as a comment on the purported Africa’s dependency status.

It is known that the Africa of the early 1970s was supposed to be the beginning of the realization of the social and political hopes that had gone into its anti-colonial imaginings. Most African countries had just attained political independence. However the more than fifty countries in Africa have different histories, cultures, and religious beliefs. As such, the poor economic showing is ironically one of the ties that bind them together, which begs the question as to why the continent of Africa the only one that seems unable to develop. Dambisa Moyo writes that:
In the past forty years at least a dozen developing countries have experienced phenomenal economic growth. Many of these, mostly Asian, countries have grown by almost 10 percent of GDP per year [...] By some estimates star-emerging-market performers such as Brazil, Russia, India and China are projected to exceed the economic growth of nearly all industrialized economies by the year 2050. Yet, over the same period, as many as thirty other developing countries, mainly [...] in sub-Saharan Africa, have failed to generate consistent economic growth, and have regressed. (29)

Of course, some think “that the problem with Africa is Africans—that culturally, mentally, and physically Africans are innately different” (Moyo 31). In this argument, Africa is somehow unable to “improve [its] their lot in life without foreign guidance and help” (Moyo 31). Different versions of this argument have been repeated in different venues, including the 2001 Labour party conference. Tony Blair, The British Prime Minister at the time stated that the “state of Africa is a scar on the conscience of the world” (Moyo xviii) and that the west should provide more aid.

However, in a 2007 interview with Time magazine, Rwanda’s President Paul Kagame had this to say:

Now, the question for our donors and partners: having spent much money, what difference did it make? In the last fifty years, you’ve spent US$ 400 billion in aid to Africa. But what is there to show for it? And the donors should ask: what are we doing wrong, or, what are the people we are
helping doing wrong? Obviously somebody is not getting something right.

With these examples one begins to appreciate the significance of the metal hoe that Were Nyakalaga had given the people of Got Owaga. In other words, I argue that Ogot in the 1980s was countering statements that position Africa as needy of “more aid.” This suggests that in *The Strange Bride* as a story, Ogot strives to address the imagined post-independence “dependency syndrome” that implies that former colonies depend on their once colonial masters. Making a related point, Gaston Kabore writes that “the real problem of Africa comes from the inability of those in authority to make the right choice and firm commitment to cultural matters because they underestimate the value of culture in development […] we need to consolidate our historical [heritage] and to have access to our myths and legends” (Quoted in Odhiambo “The Cultural Dimension of Development in Africa”).

As a young bride, Nyawir, the heroine in *The Strange Bride*, was troubled by the laid-back lifestyle in Got Owaga to the extent that she broached the issue of what people were “supposed to do with tremendous energy which Were Nyakalaga had given [them]” (*TSB* 74). She was barely settled in her husband’s village when she convinced Lwak, her mother-in-law, to give her the sacred “automatic metal hoe” to take to the farm (*TSB* 1). This is the hoe that their God, Were Nyakalaga, had given the people of Got Owaga to “do all the cultivation they needed as long as they kept God’s commandments governing the use of that hoe” (*TSB* 1). She was instructed to take the hoe to the farm and not use it. However, with the metal hoe in her hand, Nyawir proceeded to ignore the rules that determine the tradition of taking the hoe to the farm. Moments before she hit the ground

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36 Also quoted in *Dead Aid*
with the hoe, a violation of the commandment, she reflects that, “If a mere hoe can cultivate all these farms on its own, what wonderful piece of work would be done on these farms if this metal hoe was controlled by human hands! Ee, and there would be a great harvest, such as has never been seen in the whole of these land of Got Owaga (TSB 84). Nyawir said that:

There is something wrong with the idea of taking the metal-headed hoe to the farms and leaving it to till the land. But I feel that as the world changes, and people reproduce and multiply here in Got Owaga, it might be a good idea if people tried to till the land, using their hands. That is when there would be wealth on the earth. That’s the kind of change we need. We cannot keep doing this by our ancestors’ old method of leaving a hoe in the farms and waiting for it to till for them. If people of Got Owaga can agree so that every family gets their own hoe, they can till large pieces of land and have bigger harvests than we have now days. (71-72)

Ogot appropriates a traditional myth in order to counter those arguments that try to show that the “unchanging traditions” in Africa are what hinder development. She makes this point through Nyawir, the transformative character in this Luo myth. Nyawir’s disappearance and return from the land of the dead indicates a form of metamorphosis that is present in the land of Got Owaga. As such, Ogot is not advocating for the total dismissal of everything that is foreign to the community of Got Owaga. Nyawir’s story is a commentary on border crossings, a lens through which the people visualize the space outside of their immediate social and geographical borders. Because she was taken away by her dead grandmother to the “world below” and then brought back, Nyawir carries a
narrative that is pulled toward interstices and traces rather than binaries. Further, the narrative's use of a rhetoric that allows the author to cut both ways enables a translation into the present. Through Nyawir, Ogot locates the border between custom and change and personifies both the mythic past and the transformation of that past to the present.

The assumed dependency syndrome, however, is not an isolated issue in *The Strange Bride*; in Kenya it constituted part of post-independence discourse as it did in most of Africa. I argue this in part because dependency syndrome is a sub-text in Tsitsi Ndangarembga’s novel, *Nervous Conditions*. *Miaha* (original) was published in 1983 and was not translated (*The Strange Bride*) until 1989. *Nervous Conditions* was published in 1988. While Ndangarembga approaches the same concern using contemporary value systems, Ogot looks to the past to show that through their myths, African societies are averse to dependency. In *Nervous Conditions*, the narrator Tambudzai dismisses her father’s over dependence on her uncle: “Money was found, I expect through begging since this was something that my father had developed an aptitude for, having had to do it often. He was very good at it at that time” (31). Because her brother was male, he was privileged and sent to school. When Tambu “understood that there was not enough money for my fees […] Yes, I did understand why I could not go back to school, but I loved going to school and I was good at it. Therefore, my circumstances affected me badly” (15). She tells her father that: “I will earn the fees,’ I reassured him, laying out my plans for him as I had laid it out in my own mind. ‘if you will give me some seed, I will clear my own field and grow my own maize” (17).

In *The Strange Bride*, Nyawir hopes that each individual in Got Owaga will prepare his or her own field in order to grow crops. In *Nervous Conditions*, Tambu
actually grows her own maize so that she can get money to go to school. This demonstrated sense of independence also characterizes The Promised Land. In an effort to discourage Ochola from emigrating, a member of his extended family told him that when his father dies the ownership of the land will transfer to him. However he still left for Tanganyika. Before he got sick in Tanganyika, the narrator says, “he had the biggest harvest he had ever known. Some of the maize cobs were so huge that a child could not eat a whole one by herself. The millet was fat and the beans were plentiful” (66). In my analysis, the move to Tanganyika is not about the Luo colonizing that part of Tanganyika; instead, it anticipates the same kind of transformations that are in The Strange Bride. Ogot is writing that African communities did not encourage dependency. She was pushing back against the idea that takes Africa to be dependent on “aid” long before Chabal and Deloz erroneously wrote that “[…] it seems clear that dependence is a structural condition of African countries and that it has become an integral part of the workings of their economic and political systems” (110). Ogot’s work confirms that, if “dependence [has become] a structural condition of African countries,” then, it is not imposed from within.

The Cultural Turn?

I contend that culture has a large place in development. However, though culture is “the way society expresses itself,” a discussion that draws on African culture is sometimes referred to as “nativist nostalgia.” Atieno Odhiambo writes that, “It has
become a condition of our postcoloniality to critique this line of presentation by labeling it a culturalist discourse” (8). For example, scholars such as Paul Hountdonji dismiss the concept of ethno-philosophy, arguing that it presupposes the existence of an essential African philosophy that corresponds to African traditional world views. According to Atieno Odhiambo, Hountondji argues that “ethno-philosophy does not counter, but rather reaffirms, European influence. In his view, postulating ‘Africa’ and the ‘west’ as generic entities, and positioning them as opposites, copies the logic of colonial discourse with its […] culturalist dichotomies” (8). In other words, according to Hountondji, the African practice of ethno-philosophy amplifies European “stereotypes.”

Because *The Strange Bride* is an interpretation of a Luo myth, one of the lenses through which scholars have previously approached the world it represents is captured in the conversation between Lawino and Ocol in Okot P’bitek’s *Song of Lawino*. Tracing the debate about the cultural turn back to *Song of Lawino* is useful. Lawino’s central argument in the conversation is contained in the proverb, “The pumpkin in the old homestead/ Must not be uprooted!” She says:

Listen, Ocol, my old friend,
The ways of your ancestors
Are good,
Their customs are solid
And not hollow
They are not thin, not easily breakable
They cannot be blown away
By the winds
Because their roots reach deep into the soil.

I do not understand

The way of foreigners

But I do not despise their customs.

Why should you despise yours?

Listen, my husband,

The Pumpkin in the old homestead

Must not be uprooted! (41)

I suggest that in *The Strange Bride*, Ogot revises this representation of an African culture.

When Nyawir and her husband are banished from the community following the so-called Nyawir’s “unorthodox” actions, she tells Owiny:

But look, Owiny, the people of Got Owaga have a saying that generations replace one another in the enjoyment of the pleasures of life. In my own mind, the saying means there must be change in the world. Meaning that when our elders’ days are finished and they die, then those who are born after them become elders and take their places; and the youth also go the various stages of growth until they become adults and assume leadership.’ ‘Now if these growing children only follow the practices of their forefathers, without bringing any changes, how can the world develop, if man does not use the intelligence that Were Nyakalaga gave him? Didn’t Were Nyakalaga give man intelligence and strength to use for his own good? (120)
In other words, for Lawino, “The Pumpkin in the old homestead/ must not be uprooted,” but for Nyawir, “there must be change in the world.” Nyawir’s statement is a testimony to the fact that in *The Strange Bride*, Ogot attempts a transformation of the culture of Got Owaga. By emphasizing change but using the language of mythology, Ogot relies on specific details of transformation in order to discredit ideas about ethnographic present. She argues for change not simply by evoking the memories of the mythical Got Owaga, but by reflecting upon the transformations that helped shape that mythic past. The actions of Nyawir propelled her society to change and provided it with a new way of life. Of course, I argue that Ogot employs tragedy as a mode of emplotment in *The Strange Bride*. She, however, does not represent the Got Owaga culture in relation to European cultures. Unlike *Song of Lawino*, which, arguably, “anthropologizes” the Acoli culture, Ogot travels back to a mythological past not only to remind the present of its ancestry, but also to use that past as a stimulus for the descendants of Owiny to read the world and understand for themselves the nature of change in their midst. She seems to argue that Africans have always been in History.

Ogot successfully positions her story in relation to *Song of Lawino*. In explaining Acoli concept of time, Lawino says:

I do not know
How to keep the white man’s time.
My mother taught me
The way of Acoli
And nobody should
Shout at me
Because I know
The customs of our people;
When the baby cries
Let him suck milk
From the breast
There is no fixed time
for breast feeding. (36)

She refers to Acoli concept of time by saying what it is not: “the white man’s time.” In
*The Strange Bride*, Ogot does not make reference to the white man’s sense of time. She
deals with this concept by playing the past and the present against each other. In
explaining how she disappeared, Nyawir tells her parents that her grandmother “who […]
died a long time ago” had taken her away (24). Here, Ogot works against the
misrepresentation of African understanding of time, which maintains that Africans only
divide time into two parts, the past and the present or “Zamani” and “Sasa” periods. She
portrays a way of perceiving time as moving at once backward or forward, a folding and
collapsing of both the past and present into each other. I am thinking of J.S. Mbiti in this
debate. He writes that:

In traditional African thought, there is no concept of history moving
“forward” towards a future climax, or towards end of the world. Since
the future does not exist beyond a few months, the future cannot be
expected to usher in a golden age, or a radically different state of affairs
from what is in the Sasa or Zamani. The notion of a messianic, or of final
destruction of the world, has no place in the traditional concept of history.
So African people have no ‘belief in progress: the idea that the
development of human activities and achievements move from a low to a
higher degree. The people neither plan for the distant future nor built
castles in the air.” (23)

Mbiti’s view necessitated a sharp response from Ayi Kwei Armah who said that:

Mbiti claims that the Kiswahili time scale splits into two periods, Sasa
being present, Zamani being the past. Now if Mbiti had learned Kiswahili
even at an introductory level, he would have known that in fact the
Kiswahili times scale differentiates at the very least between seven periods
namely: Zamani; juzi; jana, Sasa (with sasa hii and Leo as intensive
forms) Kesho; kesho kutwa; and milele. Mbiti has taken a seven part
scheme, obliterated five, and presented the remaining two as if they were
all there could be. It could be added that the seven part Kiswahili time
scale is only a minimal schematization of a normal Kiswahili presentation
of time […] He slices over 70% of the data he claims to be evaluating, and
then calls 30% left the whole of African time scale.” (Armah 64)

That Nyawir was taken away by her dead grandmother and then brought back
gives the impression of a multi-directional time. In this view, the difference between past
and future is eliminated. In other words, Ogot tacitly works against the model provided
by Leopold Senghor that, “analogizes woman to the heritage of African value and
unchanging African essence” (Stratton 56)37.

According to Stratton, when Ogot puts the achievement of change in the hands of
a young girl, she inverts traditional role assignments. Ogot identifies men with tradition

37 See also 42, 43
but provides agency to a girl, Nyawir. In fact, Owiny’s argument is similar to that of Lawino. Owinya argues thus:

Now, if our generation begins to change the laws with which our grandfathers established the world, it will look as if we are rejecting our forefathers. It will appear as if we are belittling all the good deeds which our forefathers performed here in Got Owaga, so that our children may forget them.

And if our children forget their forefathers, or if we make them despise the good things their forefathers did here, we’ll be like people who are slowly cutting the roots of a tree. Since our childhood, we’ve known that a community is like a big fig tree. The roots of that tree are our forefathers [my emphasis]; our parents are its stem; and our generation is its branches which bear fruits when it rains tomorrow. (TSB 120-21)

Ogot also revises her community’s concept of beauty. Lawino says: “Ask me what beauty is / To the Acoli / And I will tell you; / I will show it to you/ If you give me a chance” (51). She continues:

Listen,
Ostrich plumes differ
From Chicken feathers,
A monkey’s tail
Is different from that of the giraffe
The crocodile skin
Is not like the guinea fowls
And the hippo is naked, and hairless.

The hair of Acoli

Is different from that of Arabs;

The Indian’s hair

Resembles that of the horse;

It is like sisal strings

And need to be cut

With scissors

It is black,

And is different from that of white women. (48)

Unlike *Song of Lawino*, in *The Strange Bride* Ogot discusses the Luo concept of beauty without the comparisons that Lawino expresses above. Fortunately, for Ogot the community’s concept of beauty is not static but rather continually changing and varying.

The narrator states:

Nyawir […] was the queen of beauty. Everyone marveled at her lovely features. The slim-waisted girl was exceptionally brown and her body was proportionally built. She had beautifully-shaped legs, a neck with natural rings, and a natural gap between the front two of her snow-white teeth.

Her hair was combed out in long strands, decorated with cowries. (6)

In fact, when she came back with “a unique hairstyle which made her look like a stranger among the people of Got Owaga,” she had a heated argument with her mother (29).

Because women in Got Owaga kept their hair short, her mother, Awino, told her that, “I feel that Min Ogisa should cut down your long hair to give it a chance to grow a fresh so
that you can trim it and look like your peers” (29). This sparked an interesting exchange between them because when Nyawir replied that her hairstyle is part of her nature and the basis of her beauty, arguing that “forcing me to cut [it] is like killing me,” her mother responded sharply:

Who are you to try change the ways of the world? All our grandmothers and mothers used to trim their hair short; and that is the custom that we are all following. And it will appear as if you are teaching your peers to abandon our traditional practices and despise our ancestors. (29)

Owiny’s mother, Lwak, also protested to her husband before Owiny got married to Nyawir: “And look at the way she has introduced a new hairstyle to the girls of this mountain […] Mischievous behavior which will alter the customs that our ancestors left us” (37). However, Nyawir’s call for change does not disrespect ancestral wishes or deviate from the past; rather, the past was always evolving. Far from being seen as failing to conform to a rigid tradition, Nyawir’s unique hairstyle works to demonstrate the emphasis that Ogot in *The Strange Bride* places on transformation. Precisely during times of change does a society call into question its own distinctiveness and thus subject it to modification. Lawino’s sense of beauty includes “vigorous and healthy hair/ Curly, springy and thick/ That glistens in the sunshine” and depends in part on the logic of distinction and classification; to Ogot, Nyawir’s hair does not refer to external societies but to her own.

What matters, therefore, is not so much who is a cultural essentialist and who is not. Instead, the significance is in the fact that literature demonstrates that a different cultural tradition can show the worth of another different tradition, and would desire at
least to appropriate (freely) some aspects of it. In *The Strange Bride* and *Song of Lawino*, both Ogot and P’Bitek show two possible templates that organize the production of knowledge about Africa. The first refers to the institutions of learning where according to Lawino, Ocol communes with “dead” men’s ideas in the library; the second occurs among the peasants as seen in the character of Lawino. The “peasant intellectuals,” the Lawinos, and the influential locals determine meanings in the villages. According to Atieno Odhiambo, they are the “movers and shakers of meanings in the country and brokers of both academic cultures and the republics of popular discourse to the rural populace” (10). Like Lawino, the peasant intellectuals “normatively process how authoritative and authorial knowledge ought to be handled at the grassroots level” (Atieno 10). In other words, through intertextual relations with the orature, in *The Strange Bride* Ogot evaluates development from above by conceptualizing development that works within a cultural context of development from below. The conversation between Nyawir and Owiny is not as much about preservation of the Got Owaga culture or renouncing it totally as it is about the mistaken idea that custom and tradition are heavy burdens that Africa must carry.

Further, the debates between Nyawir and Owiny and between Lawino and Ocol are not about cultural preservation; rather, they are about creativity. Nyawir tells Owiny: why don’t you realize that if man is not willing to use his intelligence which Were Nyakalaga gave him, one day Were Nyakalaga may take that intelligence away from him? Personally, I think that it is when we help ourselves, instead of waiting for Were Nyakalaga to do everything for us, that we also help him; and that is when knowledge can increase in the
world. The people of Got Owaga have a saying that ‘Were Nyakalaga helps he who runs away from danger.’ Doesn’t that support what I am trying to tell you Owiny? If some changes don’t occur so that the people of Got Owaga have new ways of doing things, then one day Were Nyakalaga will get tired of them, and he will scatter them all over the world and leave them to fend for themselves. (121)

_The Strange Bride_ is not a means of reconstructing the past or what Manthia Diawara in _In Search of Africa_ refers to as keeping “Africans in a retrograde position, to make us respond to a feeling that we have not changed in seven hundred years” (116). Instead, the author offers a basis for fresh creative possibilities, including creativity in development.

**Beyond Those Hills**

In Ogot’s work, people “move to alien places” (Nazareth 116), and “she has an old immigrant consciousness” (Nazareth 116) that gives her the ability to understand “different cultures, to recognize the subjectivity of different world views, to feel at home in strange lands” (Nazareth 116). This is ostensibly inconsistent with her “rooted[ness] in tradition” but I argue that it is “only an apparent paradox” (Nazareth 116). Lack of total vision is actually one of Ogot’s strengths, and as Atieno Odhiambo writes, “there is a cultural history of Africa, part of social history, specific approach to social reality, based on the lived experiences of the communities in Africa and derived from the culture of the Africans” (10). As such, it is possible to have a sense of “the lived experiences” of the Luo in Ogot’s work, particularly in _The Strange Bride_. 
This notion is supported in Ruscoe’s comment on *siwindhe*, the place where Luo children were told stories. Further, in the Luo community children used to sleep in an old woman’s house. Thus, the figure of grandmother plays an important part in storytelling sessions in *siwindhe* and her “modest literary practice” (stories) may have influenced some of the children under her charge to become writers. When Nyawir was re-united with her parents, they first turned to Min Ogisa (Ogisa’s mother--this is an old woman in the village). The narrator says that, “From that day Nyawir lived normally with her mother; but each day, by sunset, she went to sleep in Min Ogisa’s house” (*TSB* 27). The author describes Nyawir’s grandmother as “an old woman who had lost quite a number of teeth and was using a reed as a walking stick” (23). Though Nyawir’s grandmother had long been dead, during Nyawir’s sojourn with her in the “world below,” she presumably learnt a lot.

David Cohen writes that on one of his research trips to Kenya, both Grace Ogot and Bethwell Ogot suggested that he research several sites in the area of Alego, in western Kenya. In their discussion, Grace Ogot encouraged him to pay attention to what the “cultural and social formation of children might clarify about past childhood” (229). The education that took place in *siwindhe* was under the supervision and guidance of “Pim.” According to Cohen, Pim came to a Luo home in the period of her “transition from marriage to infirmity” (191). She came to a Luo household from a considerable social and geographical distance:

She lived with and nurtured the young girls and boys of the household, the compound or enclosure, and sometimes the neighborhood. Boys stayed with Pim for several years, leaving her charge when it was seen they were
too old to sleep among young girls. Girls stayed much longer, often going from Pim’s care directly into marriage. (Cohen 191)

Within the *siwindhe*, “much of the essential social intelligence of the Luo world [was] imparted by Pim to those with little experience and knowledge of the world” (Cohen 192). She imparted to them their history, and as she drew upon her wisdom, “they learned about groups and settlements around them. They learned a geography of succor and a geography of danger” (Cohen 192). Ruscoe writes that, “So crucial was the siwindhe and story-telling tradition to a Luo’s formation that there arose a favorite saying for those who behaved stupidly: ‘Inin’ ka ngama ne ok onindo e siwindhe:’ “you are eneducated [ignorant] like one who never slept in the siwindhe” (23). Pim trained the young people and connected them to the wider world. The knowledge and material she brought from outside the enclosure or neighborhood “provided the young with an array of referents extending far […] and gave the young the elements of an intimate understanding of a complex and physically remote social universe” (Cohen 192). I argue that there is need to understand why an African writer rooted in tradition manifests an “old immigrant consciousness—the sensibility of a people who had long been on the move.”

In other words, the knowledge and experience of this invisible and defenseless figure “[…] pierced the fences of the enclosure and the walls of the siwindhe and transformed the social intelligence of the young from that of the enclosure to […] adulthood and many associations, alliances, dangers, and opportunities lying beyond the enclosure” (Cohen 193). The education that took place in the *siwindhe* made writers such as Ogot manifest the “sensibility of people who had long been on the move.” In fact, this
explains why “Ogot’s plots tend to be resolved through a smoothing of tensions and an erection of structures or reconciliation in between individuals” (Achufuzi 19).

Therefore, Nyawir’s story speaks to the relations beyond the Luo community. This girl was nurtured by her grandmother in the “world below.” In imagining the world of the dead, the narrative is actually speaking of a world beyond the geographical location of Got Owaga. Cohen writes that, the “circulation of social knowledge from pim through the siwindhe literally extended the horizon of young Luo speakers and made it possible to meet various contingencies […] over much greater distances” (193). As in The Promised Land, migration is a dominant motif in Ogot’s works. Learning in the siwindhe “produced an invaluable basis for individual and household migrations and for settlements of new areas” (Cohen 193). For example, when Owiny came back from the “world below” with cattle and gifts, including knowledge of fishery and boat-making, Ogot demonstrates that borrowing from other places and other sources can provide opportunity for revitalization of one’s own culture. In other words, that which Owiny brought back confirms that going beyond one’s culture is a characteristic of cultural history in all societies. This is something that Edward Said has commented on:

A confused and limiting notion of priority allows that only the original proponents of an idea can understand and use it. But the history of all cultures is the history of cultural borrowings. Cultures are not impermeable; […] Culture is never just a matter of ownership, of borrowing and lending with absolute debtors and creditors, but rather of appropriations, common experiences, and interdependencies of all kinds among different cultures. This is a universal norm. (217)
Pim’s instructions cultivated different and extra itinerant activities that expanded knowledge for the young. “Given the importance of social knowledge in the construction of middle-distance and long-distance relations in western Kenya, the role of childhood socialization—the work of pim—in the generation of a regional consciousness and corporateness is pivotal” (Cohen, 193). Nazareth writes that in contrast to her fellow Kenyan writer Ngugi, Ogot does not have “a total vision of society, that is total in time and space into which all details fit. To put it another way, she does not have an ideology (a set of ideas fitting into abstract framework) of the movement of society, and therefore she is not, in this sense, an ideological writer” (115). Achufusi writes in “Varieties of Apartness” that:

In her advocacy of universal harmony or brotherhood, [Bessie] Head strike the same theme as Ogot. This kinship is certainly interesting because it is arrived at through different routes. Ogot looks at questions of social organization and power relationships from a more limited angle, as problems of particular characters […] Conversely, Head is interested in great patterns of human history” (19).

Nazareth argues that as opposed to Ngugi, Ogot does not see a connection between corrupt leaders in Kenya and processes external to the country. Further, “The absence of ideological vision reflected in [Ogot’s] work explains the paucity, even lack of criticism of her work.” He argues that critics, “generally find it easier to analyze works which have a clear ideology because they can easily identify and trace patterns, growth and development” (115-16). This supposed distinction between Ogot and Ngugi is interesting because if that “total vision” is a western ideological construct, then Ogot
would hardly qualify. If “ideological vision” speaks to Marxist aesthetics, then Nazareth is correct that Ogot “lacks vision.”

But if “lack of total vision,” as Nazareth points out, is Ogot’s “strength,” then “total vision” is obviously a weakness in the argument that states that because Ogot sets *The Strange Bride* in a pre-colonial period the Luo community, she does not deal with relationship between culture and development, a theme that touches on “great patterns of human history” (Nazareth 115). Nyawir says that “if those growing children only follow the practices of their forefathers, without bringing any new changes, how can the world develop, if man doesn’t use the intelligence that Were Nyakalaga gave him?” (*TSB*120).
She rationalizes the agency in development and tells Owiny: “That, Owiny, is what development involves; and that is the increase in knowledge which builds a nation” (*TSB* 122). She asks Owiny if “the people of Got Owaga do not till land with [their] hands” (69). He responds by saying that “we should not talk about such important matters which touch on the very existence [my emphasis - of our community]” (70). Owiny’s reply shows that for the people of Got Owaga, the value of land is not based on the physiognomy of the terrain but on something more—existence.38

I take the figure of Pim here not merely as a pointer to the interior structure of the Got Owaga people, but as a reminder that in saying that Ogot lacks “total vision,” that she “looks at relationships in a more limited angle,” or is not interested in “great patterns of human history.” By doing this, the critics dash too quickly towards an agenda that deals with relations of larger processes and vast constructions. In doing so, they overlook those immediate areas of social and cultural life in which people deal with real conflicts and ambiguities. In other words, Ogot’s work, like Pim’s instructions and the experiences

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38 See Cohen and Atieno Odhiambo, *Siaya*. 

of the inhabitants of the hills of Hebron in Wynter’s novel, exemplifies the “critical areas in the shadows, critical silences in the social life we study” (Cohen 195). Ruscoe writes that:

Skeptics on the modern relevance of oral tradition might examine the researches of the Canadian scholar Albert Damica, who has firmly tied the question of oral literature to Africa’s liberation struggles. An essay of his in the Pan African Journal suggests that the will to dislodge the colonial presence has often been related to the possession of a body of myths about land tenure. He cites the classic case of Kenyan struggle which was fired, fueled, and sustained because the Agikuyu possessed and cherished a body of myths which said that their land was God-given, sacred, and theirs for eternity no matter how powerful the forces that might, from time to time, try to steal it. Myth and freedom. Legend and Uhuru. These are not fanciful combinations. And the work of Ngugi supports Damica’s thesis, for in his paper oral tradition and modern protests meet when peasants, singing freedom songs and buoyed up with the spirit of their past fall before the colonial guns in the streets of Nairobi with the sacred of Gikuyu land clutched in their fists” (22).

Ogot is, as Oladele Taiwo writes, “a highly motivated writer” who “comes from a family of story-tellers” (129). Taiwo also observes that The Strange Bride “came originally from her grandmother […] although she had had to modernize the contents and change a few minor details” (130). The stories that her grandmother told her including “The Rain Came” and the story of Oganda made her resolve that “If one day I can write I
shall write the story of Oganda so that other people can see how she was sacrificed for the welfare of her people” (130). Thus, the circulation of social knowledge in Ogot’s works emanates from the figure of the grandmother. This is illustrated by characters like Min Ogisa, Nyawir’s grandmother, and Oganda’s grandmother in “The Rain Came.” The grandmother extended horizon of girls such as Nyawir and made it possible for them to meet various contingencies.

For example, Oganda’s story in “The Rain Came” speaks to that space beyond the Luo community. It is not merely a story about a beautiful young girl who was “sacrificed” by her community for its own survival; it speaks to the everyday expensive sacrifices that women make on behalf of their own societies. According to Balogun, it is rare that in African short stories ritual murder or suicide is given a negative representation. In “The Rain Came,” the ritual sacrifice is efficacious, having produced a heavy downpour of rainfall […] is an indication of the author’s sanction of the chief’s model act of patriotism. The reason for such a sanction is most evident in today’s Africa, where most rulers sacrifice the interests of their [citizens], and not their own, to assure comfort for themselves (Balodun 15).

What Oganda does is similar to the actions of Nyawir who, on the day she “disappeared we saw a miracle. We suddenly realized that the fog which had been covering the top of Got Owaga had disappeared, and so had the rainbow” (TSB 147). The fog here is symbolic. It points to what inhibited the people of Got Owaga from embracing change. Nyawir is instrumental in making them see the possibilities that lie beyond the fog.
The Strange Bride is a collective voice of the Luo society and bears witness to the movement of history and in textual terms is a formulation of the functions of the Luo story-teller. Consequently, through it the author shows that the figure of the grandmother, the individual who seemingly enjoys less social power due to gender and age, draws her influence from the power of story-telling. In The Strange Bride, the author suggests reading the “unconscious” records of the past from it. In using a story to explain why “the descendants of Owiny never stay away from the lake or river, [and why] they are still fishing up to today”, Ogot links storytelling to issues of development (152). In doing so, she opens up a transformative space and shows the ways in which ordinary lives are linked to world capitalism.

Further, the fact that the people of Got Owaga “never stay away from the lake or river” speaks to the significance that the community attaches to water. According to Obenga, “The thinking of black Africa is a way of perceiving and understanding the world, original and coherent in itself. Dating back to pharaonic Egypt, this philosophy begins by positing the existence of a body of primal waters” (48). He adds:

Whether it is called Nwn, Tan, or Nomma, the concept of water […] is a logical outflow from the lived experience of the African environment. For her the environment bears the imprint of water coming from spring rain, sea and lake, rivers great and small […]

The flow of Africa’s rivers—the Nile, the Niger, the Senegal and Congo, the Zambezi with its rainbows and eternal waterfall—all this derives from Nwn, the liquid energy flowing from the continent’s inner depth. The agrarian societies of black Africa, as far back as their peak time
in antiquity, have through their conception of the Great Waters, inhabited a cosmic dimension of reality where water is the drought-ending energy that clears the way for the active life, season after season, day after vital day, in a tireless circle. In such a universe, Nwn is not a simple mythic name for some inert, primal abyss. Nwn flows across space and time. The Great Waters are constantly revived and new life born out of their quickening flow. In a sense, here we enter a world of recurrence, a world of continuous creation. (49)

Thus, when Ogot writes that the people of Got Owaga are “still fishing up to today,” she not only links the art of story-telling to issues of development, but also reinforces a narrative wherein water [lake, river etc.] supports the Got Owaga community as a structural concept and a vehicle of progress.

This is relevant because part of the knowledge acquired by the young in the siwindhe makes them imagine remote locations where they would get marriage partners and establish new settlements (as in The Promised Land); that knowledge partly encouraged migrations. As such, that knowledge cannot be different from contemporary-inspired migration tales of economic opportunities in metropolitan centers of the western world. In other words, in The Strange Bride, Ogot shows the past-present continuum using rhetoric that opens a window through which the reader can observe pre-colonial pasts that shaped and continues to shape Luo presents. She uses the power of storytelling in order to discuss pre-colonial occupations of the Luo and their ancient strategies for coping with different contingencies. Through Nyawir’s journey, she demonstrates the ways in which she overcame and revolutionized the Luo culture. Her agency in social,
cultural, and political change highlights the roles that women play in societal transformation. If Nyawir’s journey is a spirited attempt to push the Got Owaga people beyond their comfort zone, then, Ogot uses it as a commentary on the skewed idea that Africa is dependent on foreign aid (symbolized by the metal hoe). Through Nyawir, Ogot demonstrates the place of myth as the bearer of collective memory. In her use of Luo oral tradition as the source for her work and in her blending of oral and written forms, Ogot effectively narrativizes female agency.
Chapter Four

Ngugi wa Thiongo: Post-Independence Politics in Matigari

In Matigari, Ngugi wa Thiongo deals with issues that he represented with equal intensity in his earlier works. The 1987 novel centers on exploitative relations between post-independence leaders and the people represented by Matigari’s mythical hero. Most critics of Matigari read the work as one that returns to Ngugi’s cherished themes. However, in this chapter I argue that those familiar themes work in the novel to mark a different problem-space. I show that the novel embraces anti-colonial narratives in order to reconsider the relevance of the conceptual lenses that framed anti-colonial imaginings. I show that Ngugi stresses the need to identify the difference between, on the one hand, anti-colonial questions that informed the former presents of Matigari, and on the other hand questions that concern the post-independence problem-space of the country to which he returns. My examination of the representation of the post-independence problem-space in Matigari is prompted by the fact that Matigaris’s attempts to reclaim his “house” are negotiated through recollection of nationalist narratives of liberation.

David Scott writes in Conscripts of Modernity that what needs to be addressed in the post-independence period are not answers but questions. By this, he is referring to the “acute paralysis of will and sheer vacancy of imagination […] the instrumental self-interest and showy self-congratulation” that are manifestations of a “project [that] has run out of vital sources for creativity […] vision” and has turned into a “nightmare” (2). Though ideologies such as “Fanonian Liberationisms” informed the liberation struggles, Scott argues that “after the Bandung” is marked by “tragic times,” that “in Hamlet’s
memorable phrase [...] is out of joint.’” This is because “our sense of time and possibility have altered so significantly that it is hard to continue to live in the present [post-independence period] as though it were a transitory moment in an assured momentum from a wounded past to a future salvation.” Scott continues, writing that this period is “distressingly off kilter in the specific sense that the critical languages in which we wagered our moral reason and our political hope [...] are no longer commensurate with the world they were meant to understand, engage, and overcome” (210). Consequently, I argue that this is obvious when Matigari “buried his weapons” and in the process comments that “it’s good that I have now laid down my arms” (5). Further, Matigari deals with themes that are familiar to Ngugi’s readership while the author uses them to point to a different problem-space, suggesting that the ideological frameworks that informed anti-colonial struggles might not be valuable in the post-independence moment.

Though Matigari suggests a different strategy in Ngugi’s radical writings, it is similar to Ngugi’s earlier works that provoked the ire of Kenya’s security authorities. In his oeuvre, the plays have put him at odds with the establishment in his native country. In “Enactments of Power: The Politics of Performance Space,” Ngugi discusses the significance of power struggle in performance. He writes about the opening night of the production of the play The Trial of Dedan Kimathi at the Kenya National Theater:

As the actors performed their last song and dance through the middle aisle of the auditorium, they were joined by the audience. They all went outside the theater building, still dancing. What had been confined to the stage had spilled out to the open air, and there was no longer any distinction between actors and audience. It had become a procession, and they weaved their
way towards the historic Norfolk Hotel, towards the terraces where in 1922 the settlers had sat and helped the police in their massacre […] As the procession was about to cross the road, the group was met by a contingent of police who now told them, politely but firmly, to return back […] it was as if the cast and the audience were trying to create an open space all around the Kenya National Theater building, a space that would allow them to communicate better with the spirits of those who had died in 1922.

Ngugi’s treatment of his plays is reminiscent of Augusto Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed*. The elimination spectator-actor binary is a defining feature of Boal’s practice. Desai Guarav writes that, “in Boalian theatrical practice the spectator plays an important part in the action and takes over the stage at various points in the process of theatrical constitution” (81). This explains why after the production of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* in 1976, Ngugi seems to have realized that “as a revolutionary writer, one committed to evoking a discourse of resistance, he could operate only within those parameters defined by the state. [He also understood that] his rhetoric of resistance signified the distance between his enunciation and its intended audience; most of the people whose experiences he writes about were not literate in English, the language in which he wrote” (Gikandi “Third World Quarterly” 154). After the production of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, Ngugi took his crusade to the peasants in the village of Kamiriithu.39

In the Boalian *Forum Theater*, a group of people might impulsively perform a scene about and around a social or political issue. In the impromptu scene, any individual

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39 These peasants could be linked to revolutionary peasants in different parts of the world. They create irresistible appeal in post-colonial countries where failures of earlier nationalists are all too apparent.
member of a group or an audience may suggest an alternative move in the dramatic events. This is an action that bridges the gap between the actors and the audience and also erases the binary opposition between them. Ngugi writes about Kamiriithu Theater in *Decolonizing the Mind*, saying that, “the participants were most particular about the representation of history, their history. And that they were quick to point out and argue against any incorrect positioning and representation of the various forces—even the enemy forces at work in the struggle against imperialism” (54). Most importantly, “some people in fact had intervened to show how such and such a character should be portrayed” (57). This kind of theater works and succeeds when the people participate in the actions. Consequently, the state views it as a danger and a political tool that can be turned against it. The state also sees it as an activity that could potentially translate into political action or as something that could ignite an uprising. Guarav continues to observe that:

> Psychologically this was an empowering experience in which actions were not prescribed by a given authority, that of the written text, but were negotiated between the performed and the written texts. The actors controlled their own historical representation and subjectivity and the metonymic contiguity between actors and the characters they portrayed enriched the psychodramatic experience. (83)

Ngugi was arrested following the productions of both *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and *I Will Marry When I Want*.\(^4^0\) When he was released from detention a year later, the government barred him from resuming his teaching duties at the university. The production of the plays and his eventual arrest were for him more confirmation of the

\(^{40}\) This was in 1977.
significance of culture as a tool in his literary endeavors. In other words, the plays marked a turning point for Ngugi. They gave him an “epistemological break” ([*Decolonizing the Mind*](#) 44), and an experience in which “he was one with the people” ([*Detained*](#) 78). They are also a testimony to the popularity of his Gikuyu works, especially [*I will Marry When I Want*](#). Writing about Ngugi’s experiences while in exile, Gikandi says that “the very moment he has rediscovered his individual utterance is also the moment at which he is furthest removed from the people for and about whom he writes” ([Gikandi “Culture and the State: The Writings of Ngugi wa Thiongo”](#) 156).

Gikandi also writes that:

> Both the *Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and *Ngahika Ndenda* (published in translation as *I will Marry when I Want*) have nothing to recommend them as aesthetic products, for Ngugi has never been a master of dramatic form; neither is there anything memorable about their ideology. Both plays had treated themes already exhausted in Ngugi’s earlier works with tireless reductionism. And yet, *Ngahiika Ndenda* adds a totally new dimension to Ngugi’s notions of literary engagement. For a play touching on Kenya’s most recent past, a play about displacement, dispossession, and betrayal, to be written in a local language and acted by the very peasants who had lived these themes every day since 1920s—this was a unique event in Kenya’s cultural history. (―Culture and the State‖ 154)

I continue to use David Scott’s work to frame the discussion in this chapter.

Ngugi’s critical essays are also relevant in the examination of the dynamics at work in *Matigari*. Though Frantz Fanon’s *A Dying Colonialism* is about anti-colonial resistance
that I argue *Matigari* reconsiders, I use the chapter, “The Voice of Fighting Algeria,” to discuss the role rumors play in *Matigari*.

**Who (What) is Matigari?**

Interestingly, Ngugi’s novel concludes without providing an answer to the central question that the work is preoccupied with: “Who is Matigari ma Njiruugi?” In an attempt to understand who or what Matigari is, some critics write that he is a prototype of Elijah Masinde, the leader of Dini ya Msambwa. These critics point to Masinde because he is one of those who were viewed in Kenya as a “symbol of resistance to the alien invaders” (Maughan-Brown, *Matigari* 178-79). They also point to him possibly because ten years before *Matigari* was published, Audrey Wipper did a study in which Masinde, like Matigari who “miraculously” got out of jail, was said to have the power to “leave jail though locked in” (Wipper 156). Wipper writes—as if anticipating Matigari who “traveled the length and breadth of this country” (*M* 89)—that Masinde, could also “travel rapidly from place to place regardless of distance” (156). Wipper notes that though Masinde was “advanced in age he appeared young” (167). This is similar to Matigari who, the narrator says, “the courage of truth had once again transformed [and] wiped age off his face making him look extremely youthful” (*M* 31). On his supposed escape from the police who were tracking him down, Matigari “seemed to be protected by some magic power for the bullets did not hit him […] It was as if on reaching him

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41 *Matigari* is portrayed in the novel as a Christ-like figure: “‘Of course miracles happen… ‘Don’t you know the bible says he shall come back again?’ ‘Do you mean to say he’s the One prophesied about? The Son of Man’” (80). The reader knows how Matigari got out of jail, but the characters in the book, except Muruki and Guthera, do not know.

42 Matigari’s eyes, we are also told, “shone brightly. All creases on his face had gone and youth had once again returned” (43).
they turned into water” (M 173). This is a reference to the Maji Maji Rebellion of 1905-1907, an African resistance in which “magic” was believed to have turned bullets into water (majì in Swahili). G.C.K Gwassa writes that Africans used magic as a unifying force during the Maji Maji Rebellion:

At Ngarambe pool, where [Kinjikitile] preached the message, he provided a unitary ideology which cut across clan and ethnic boundaries and which in fact discouraged these boundaries. Majì was a war medicine which was not to be of or for any single group, clan or ethnic identity, but for all people; his was a universal medicine having a universal appeal. (204)

The allusion to the Maji Maji Rebellion, an anti-colonial movement, suggests that the answer to the interrogative: “Who is Matigari?” is not easily perceivable because it refers to questions that anti-colonial nationalists such as Matigari encountered. I am not arguing that anti-colonial resistance should be incomprehensible in the post-independence moment. Instead, I contend that Ngugi believes that questions that confronted anti-colonial nationalists are different from those that the post-independence moment faces. He does not identify Matigari with certainty because his problem-space is not necessarily the one that the post-independence moment inhabits. Simon Gikandi writes that “‘Matigari’ seems to have emerged from its etymological and generic use—as a reference to leftovers of food or dreg in drinks—to become a signifier of ‘Mau Mau’ and to function, on a higher discursive level, as a trope mediating the colonial past and

43 “Maji Maji was a movement waged by Africans against German colonial rule in what was then German East Africa. It lasted from July 1905 to August 1907 and covered over 100,000 square miles of the southern third of what is now mainland Tanzania. It involved over twenty differing ethnic groups. In its organizational scale and its ethnic variety Maji Maji was a movement and more complex than earlier reactions and resistance to imposition of colonial rule, for the latter had usually been confined within ethnic boundaries. By comparison with the past Maji Maji was a revolutionary movement creating fundamental changes in traditional organizational scale” (202, Gwassa).
the postcolonial moment” (“Epistemology” 161). The word is used in the novel to negotiate the relationship between the colonial period and the post-independence problem-space.

According to Ann Biersteker:

Matigari is to some readers [and listeners] Jesus, General Mathenge, Elijah Masinde, Superman, The Terminator, and Ngugi writing as a prophet. Karl Marx, Frantz Fanon, and Dedan Kimathi might as well be suggested. Bertolt Brecht, Shaaba Robert, Muyaka bin Haji, Martin Luther King Jr., Abdallatif Abdalla, Gakaara wa Wanjau, and Ngugi writing as a socialist and gicaandu player are additional possibilities. (142)

Though Matigari tells Ngaruro that “a name can have more than one claimant” (M 24), Biersteker’s list is interestingly mostly composed of figures that come from the period of anti-colonial resistance. In an interview with Jane Wilkinson, Ngugi says: “In a sense both the woman and the boy are really different aspects of Matigari, and Matigari is different aspects of the woman and the boy. They are all part of one another. You could say that Guthera is Matigari, and Matigari is Guthera, and Guthera is Ngaruro wa Kiriro or Muruiki, any way you like” (Ngugi wa Thiongo Speaks 11). In a separate interview, Ngugi says that:

It is also quite clear that people started talking about Matigari as though he were a living person, and perhaps the banning of the novel was prompted by the extent to which people were talking about this individual, Matigari—some of them even calling him ‘mzee’ as a term of respect. He has actually become quite a character: someone rang me, trying, I think, to
find out about the English translation of the novel. Speaking in clandestine language that Kenyans are used to, he asked: ‘How is the old man?’ For a time I did not understand, but then he continued. ‘We hear that the old man has learnt English, and that he might be going for an examination on the thirty-first of May.’ Then it clicked, since that was the date of the UK publication, and we started having a conversation about Matigari. (Third World Quarterly 249)

According to Odun Balogun, the “myth of Matigari textually inscribes its own textual and historical premise” (122). She writes that the myth, “sprang up, developed, and spread so quickly and potently because the society was ready for it, waiting for it” (122). The desire for a character like Matigari is relevant in framing the post-independence problem-space because of “A state of anomie which has characterized many African nations since post-independence era.” This supplies “thematic subjects for such classics as Ayi Kwei Armah’s The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born, Wole Soyinka’s Season of Anomy” (Balogun 122), and makes people “enthusiastically welcome a savior, particularly one like Matigari” (Balogun 122). As such, the works that Balogun mentions also represent a new problem-space and the need to ask new questions. This point is reinforced by the fact that “the title of the Gikuyu edition does not refer to a character but to an event” (Gikandi 165). Gikandi writes that it is:

an event which links Gikuyu readers to the legends of Matigari […] The identity of Ngugi’s novel as an event that questions and creates its conditions of possibility is further augmented by the illustration on the cover: the figure of ‘Mau Mau’ fighter in dreadlocks ascending a hill with
an assault rifle represents the ultimate nightmare of the Kenyan political establishment. The physical presence of this text is audacious—it gestures toward an undeniable discursive oppositionality. (“Epistemology” 165)\textsuperscript{44}

\textit{Matigari} is “a novel that draws heavily upon Kenyan popular culture” (Epistemology 163). It “is indeed a confirmation of Johannes Fabian’s famous assertion that popular culture does not come about ‘merely in response to questions and conditions; it asks questions and \textit{creates} conditions’” [Emphasis in original] (Epistemology 63). Therefore, the answer to the question: “Who is Matigari?” is elusive, I argue, because it is a question that is meant to challenge the post-independence period to generate its own questions. This means that the question that Matigari asks: “Where can one find Truth and Justice?” is one that animated the period of Matigari’s anti-colonial resistance. Consequently, in Matigari both questions work to produce dissonance that drives the narrative forward. In turn, the dissonances that both questions produce generate new questions. According to Christine Timm, “The two question motifs function in a similar but conflicting manner; Matigari does not provide a desirable response to the community nor does the community to him” (9).

These two conflicting questions are crucial because they help frame dissonance in the novel. The dissonance emerges in the rhetorical question that Matigari asks in the early parts of the novel: “Could I have forgotten so soon the song we used to sing?” This question magnifies the gap between anti-colonial hopes and neo-colonial disappointments. Atieno Odhiambo makes a related observation when he writes that in the case of Kenya, transactions that were negotiated during independence talks included a

\textsuperscript{44} Derek Wright writes that “if only an unfinished event left over for another generation to complete, and thus signifies not a name but the eventual translation of words into deeds” (64).
land resettlement arrangement for squatters and landless Gikuyu in the rural areas. This arrangement included “Kenya’s ‘big men’ in [Kenyatta’s] cabinet, in the civil service, and the armed forces as well” (157). When the “big people” acquired intact “the estates of the former settlers […] The new inheritors and successors to the British settler assumed their squirerarchy of the vast estates […] with gusto, serenaded by the Voice of Kenya’s sundowner program to the tune of English country garden” (157). This means that the “urban sans cullutes, the Gikuyu propertyless, the descamicados or shirtless ones in Latin American literature, known in Gikuyu parlance as the mitarukire,” were forced into the space at the bottom of class pyramid. Even worse, their number had increased tremendously since 1930s when the Kenya Land Commission that was set up to address the land issue failed to do so. According to Atieno Odhiambo, Jomo Kenyatta referred to these people as those:

Who wanted free things such as education, land, hospitals. They were known in Muranga as Andu a Muthotho, rumor mongers, generally known as dangerous to the good government of Kenya and banned by the Attorney General Charles Njonjo in February 1972. They referred to themselves as Matigari, the remainder of Mau Mau bullets. Ngugi’s novel Matigari is a resurrection of their spirit. (162)

The disappointments that Atieno Odhiambo writes about led to disharmony. Ngugi portrays this discord when he lets Matigari recount to Ngaruro wa Kiriro the oral history of the struggle for independence. Matigari tells it as a traditional story-teller who wants the audience to join and become engaged in story-telling process. But something has changed from the way that people used to embrace a story-teller’s performance. This

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45 The first President of Kenya.
accounts for the discord and the question, “could I have forgotten so soon the song we used to sing?” The narrative emphasizes dissonance by providing instances in which Matigari is seen to be out of “sync.” Some characters see him as the one who calls the wrong tune—the forgotten tune—and as one who is not familiar with the “modern,” more “progressive” melody. For example, the scene in which the shopkeeper and his customers are pre-occupied with the tale of Matigari, he appears and asks them: “Kindly tell me this, my friends. Where can one find truth and justice in this society? They felt silent and just stared at the stranger as if he had struck the wrong chord of a popular melody. They started talking to one another and complaining about the man who had spoilt the song” (73).

The people are impressed by the echoes of Matigari’s song because it reminds them of anti-colonial resistance. However, they have problems translating the lyrics and its meaning for the post-independence period. In the song that the people of Trampville composed for Matigari ma Njiruungi, people became captivated by the heroic tales of Matigari, but they struggled to understand the substance of the message for the post-independence period:

Show me the way to a man
Whose name is Matigari ma Njiruungi
Who stamps his feet to the rhythm of bells.
And the bullets jingle.
And the bullets jingle. (71)

This also occurs in the scene at the crossroads in which Matigari encounters women exchanging tales about him. Discord is also noticeable when Matigari is in police
custody. His cellmates had forgotten the folk songs: “What did we used to sing?” (55), Matigari asked them, but “His words seemed to remind them of things long forgotten, carrying them back to dreams they had had long before” (56). The teacher also reminds him that he is out of tune: “‘Sssssshhh, stop talking so loudly,’ the teacher cautioned him” (92). All of these examples of dissonance come together to make a raucous noise in the scene in which Matigari is arrested for the second time, the parrot scene that features Matigari’s song, “Show me the way to a man whose name is Matigari” and “Songs of a Parrot” (M 119). There are competing voices between the approved parrot song, the student composition, and the priest’s twelve commandments. The dissonance and the polyphony of sounds in this “semi-kangaroo court” scene anticipate the events at the end of the novel.

Dissonance generated by rumors employed to confront and drown unpleasant echoes of the Voice of Truth is also clearly evident in Matigari. In presenting his readers with a text, Ngugi also offers them a radio receiver. While radio is used here to control citizens, rumors contribute to a collective understanding of the post-independence problem-space. In other words, while the Voice of Truth has a definite audience and destination and encourages a simple act of consumption, rumor is a relay and a tactical activity. In Matigari, rumors work to defy the “unifying” voice of “His Excellency Ole Excellence.”

**Culture and Agency**

Radio has always served the interest of colonial ambition. It was an instrument of control. However, in *A Dying Colonialism*, Frantz Fanon carefully shows that the act of
listening (to the radio) became a tool that served anti-colonial cause. Since the eighteenth century, colonists from Spain, France, and England set about defining their identities and the identities of their subjects by investing in certain cultural instruments. In Africa, the Caribbean, and India they constructed cricket and soccer pitches and even staged Shakespeare (the English). However, the colonial subject was not subdued by these tools; he or she instead worked to appropriate them. Adolfo Gilly notes in the Introduction to Frantz Fanon’s *A Dying Colonialism* that people usually “resist and fight in a thousand ways, not only with arms in hand” (3). Although work on African resistance somewhat ignores the role of radio and sports, both came to represent a crucial point for expressions of African solidarity and political protest against European rule. The same way Christianity was used to justify the colonial project, radio and team sports such as soccer and cricket were tools that also formed part of colonialist arsenal before the colonial subject appropriated them and used them as tools to resist colonization. What was the precise connection between radio and the sense of nationalism and resistance that accelerated African independence? I want to address this question in order to further demonstrate the significance of dissonance generated by the two questions: “Who is Matigari?” and “Where can one find truth and justice?”

Listening to the radio intensified anti-colonial resistance. This fact could possibly explain why the number of Algerians who owned radio jumped by ninety-five percent between 1945 and 1955, according to Fanon. In *A Dying Colonialism*, Fanon writes that, “From the first month of the Revolution the Algerian, with a view of self-protection and in order to escape what he considers to be the occupier’s lying maneuvers found himself having to acquire his own source of information” (76). Every Algerian either owned or
had access to a radio. This phenomenon of a sudden turn to radio, an appropriation of the master’s tools by colonial subjects, interests Fanon in “This is the Voice of Algeria” Chapter. For example, before the Voice of Fighting Algeria was formed, tuning in to the radio amounted to accepting domination. However, when the Voice of Fighting Algeria came into existence, “every Algerian felt himself to be called upon and wanted to become a reverberating element of the vast network of meanings born of the liberating combat” (94). In other words, “the occupier’s voice was stripped of its authority” and radio “became an expression of defiance towards the state and of independence from their colonial oppressors” (95).

In other words, before the colonial subject turned the tables on the colonist, the attentiveness with which French colonists listened to Radio-Alger had caught Fanon’s attention. He sets out to understand why radio listening proved to have been so important to the French and in time to their Algerian subjects. He writes:

> On the farms, the radio reminds the settler of the reality of colonial power and, by its very existence, dispenses safety, serenity. Radio-Alger is a confirmation of the settler’s right and strengthens his certainty in the historic continuity of the conquest, hence of his farm. The Paris music, extracts from the metropolitan press, the French government crises, constitute a coherent background from which colonial society draws its density and its justification. Radio-Alger sustains the occupants culture, marks it off from the non-culture, from the nature of the occupied. (A Dying Colonialism 71)
Listening to radio works as a daily ritual that allows the “immigrant-settler” to connect not only with France but also with his fellow “immigrant-settlers.” This is similar to the imagined community of newspaper readers in Benedict Anderson’s discussion of nationalism. Listening to Radio-Alger gave the settlers who were scattered all over the colony a sense of unity, defined their territory of belonging, and afforded them “the feeling that colonial society is a living and palpating reality” (Fanon 71). To listen to Radio-Alger was to confirm one’s Frenchness, to claim an identity. In Anderson’s Imagined Community, the community is composed of readers. In A Dying Colonialism, the community was one of listeners, and in Matigari the community is brought together mostly by rumors.

During the Algerian revolution, the local media outlets, though known for their accurate reporting, withheld information and important news reports. Their action led to a feeling of “incompleteness, of sketchiness, even of betrayal in the realm of news” (Fanon 77). In Matigari, this occurs when citizens began to doubt newspaper reports saying: “But this newspaper has omitted a lot of details” (80). How could Algerians keep score with incomplete news? How could they “measure centimeter by centimeter the progressive shrinking of the occupying power?” (A Dying Colonialism 77). What followed explains this question in Matigari:

Reactions occurred at that time which were so disproportionate to objective reality that to an observer they assumed a pathological character.

In the first months of 1955 there were rumors in Constantine to the effect that Algiers, for example, was in the hands of the nationalists, or in
Algiers, the Algerian flag was hoisted over Constantine, Philippeville, Batna. (*A Dying Colonialism* 77-78)

Here, rumors are treated as news in ways that are similar to the rumors about Matigari’s impending visit to Boy’s house when an attendant at a gas station asks Matigari: “Do you mean to say you really haven’t heard the news?” (159). In other words, rumor as news is something that creates and maintains a sense of collective consciousness. The significance that rumors acquire is also demonstrated in the fact that the Algerian “pejorative expression, the Arab Telephone” got a new meaning. Fanon writes that:

> In the Maghreb country, the Europeans use the term *Arab Telephone* in speaking of the relative speed with which news travels by word of mouth in the native society. Never at any time was the expression intended to mean something else. But in 1955 Europeans and even Algerians, could be heard to refer confidentially, and as though revealing a state of secret, to a technique of long distance communication that vaguely recalled some such system of signaling, like the tom-tom, as is found in certain regions of Africa. The Algerians gave the isolated European the impression of being in permanent contact with the revolutionary high command. (78)

Rumor is the technique described here as the Arab telephone. This is also evident in the Maji Maji rebellion that we refer to above. Gwassa writes of Kinjikitile Ngwale thus:

> Report of Kinjikile’s experience and his teaching spread through a movement called variously Njawiywila, Jujila or Mtemela. Literary Njwiywila was a whispering campaign spreading the message of Kinjikitile. Njawiywila meant a secret communication such as at a secret
meeting. At the time if you listened to Njawiywila you paid once *pice*.

Another authority put it more aptly: ‘Then through the whole country is sprang. A man met another, stopped him and said, “I have a message, a special word to tell you […] Bring your ear closer”; and said he should not tell any anybody, it was a secret. We all continued whispering behind their [Germans] backs. Njawiywila was not meant to reach Germans ears or nose of their representatives. […] The message in Njawiywila was this: ‘This year was a year of war, for there is man in Ngarambe who has been possessed. He has Lilungu. Why? Because we are suffering like this and because […] we are oppressed by the *akidas*. We work without payment. There is an expert at Ngarambe to help us. How? There is *Jumbe* Hongo.’ In the message of Njwiywila there was also information that those who went to Ngarambe would see their dead ancestors. Then people began going to Ngarambe to see for themselves.” (212)

And though the technique (rumors) is dependent in its transmission upon human voices, it is not easy to manipulate because it deals with the voices of hearsay that refer to other unnamed narrators who are not present. In other words, in the background of the conversations in which the “voice” in the telephone speaks, there is a chain of unknown speakers that begin in an uncertain location and lead to no specific place. This virtual network of speakers provides rumors with a strange authority that is difficult to challenge. For example, the construction “people are saying” as in “people are saying that there was thunder and lightning for about an hour” (*M* 80), is difficult to refute. And so, all those who hear and pass on what “people are saying” weave the social network of
rumors. Hans-Joachim writes that, “‘people are saying’ or ‘there’s a rumor going round’ are the keys with which rumors gain entry to ears and hearts” (1). Consequently, rumors can engulf everyone and create a meaningful pattern, a sequence that explains why on “the level of news, the Algerian was to find himself caught in a network strictly confined in space. In a village everyone is informed as to the numerical size and the equipment of the national Army of Liberation […] No one, of course, can give the source of such information, but the reliability is unchallengeable” (Fanon 79).

Rumor was a form of resistance to false information peddled by Radio-Algers.46 According to Fanon, the Algerians’ decision to embrace the technology of radio was an important part of that resistance. In the mid-1950s, when the Algerian Revolution was an important factor in the Algerian life and when local newspapers seldom carried news of the war, the only source of news was the liberal Parisian newspapers that did carry information about the war. However, to buy the Parisian paper was to invite arrest because it was “considered to be a nationalist act. Hence it quickly became a dangerous act” (81). In 1956, FLN established a radio station in Cairo and The Voice of Fighting Algeria began to broadcast:

The radio set was no longer a part of the occupier’s arsenal of cultural oppression. In making the radio a primary means of resisting the increasingly overwhelming psychological and military pressures of the occupant, Algerian society made an autonomous decision to embrace the

46 Vincent-Champion sees rumors as narratives that interpret and explain disturbing aspects of the world—aspects that are explained in unsatisfactory ways. He claims that rumors constitute a “folk social science.” (“From Evil Others to Evil Elites” in Rumor Mills, ed. G.A. Fine, V. Champion-Vincent and C. Heath, New Brunswick. Aldine Transaction. To the extent that they challenge hegemonic paradigms and interpretations made by powerful groups, they may also be seen as forms of resistance. See D. Samper’s “Cannibalizing Kinds: Rumor and Resistance in Latin America.” Journal of Folklore Research. 39 1-32 2002.
new technique and thus tune itself in on the new signaling systems brought into being by the Revolution. (A Dying Colonialism 84)

Word about the new station and details of its broadcast schedule quietly circulated (rumored) among Algerians. When French authorities became aware of the existence of The Voice of Fighting Algeria (the Voice) and attempted to jam its transmissions, they found themselves in “sound-wave warfare” (A Dying Colonialism 84). Sound-wave warfare does not reveal the strategies of the combatants, but rather the Algerian non-combatants’ fight to tap into the frequency of the Voice of Fighting Algeria: “The programs were […] systematically jammed, and the Voice of Fighting Algeria […] became inaudible” (85). The non-combatants, the listeners enlisted into the “battle of waves” because they had “to figure out the tactics of the enemy” (85) and establish contact with the official voice of the Revolution. Their effort in doing so became as important and valuable as supplying weapons to the combatants.47 Below is the performance of a scene that repeats in the homes of the non-combatants:

Very often the operator, his ear glued to the receiver, had the unhoped-for opportunity of hearing the Voice. The Algerians present in the room would receive the echo of this voice through the privileged interpreter who, at the end of the broadcast, was literally besieged. Specific questions would then be asked of this incarnated voice. Those present wanted to know about a particular battle mentioned in the French press in the last twenty four hours, and the interpreter, embarrassed, feeling guilty, would sometimes have to admit that the voice had not mentioned it.

47 See A Dying Colonialism 85.
But by common consent, after the exchange of views, it would be decided that the *Voice* had in fact spoken of these events, but that the interpreter had not caught the transmitted information. A real task of reconstruction would then begin. Everyone would participate, and the battles of yesterday and the day before would be re-fought in accordance with the deep aspirations and the unshakable faith of the group. The listener would compensate for the fragmentary nature of the news by an autonomous creation of information. (Fanon 86)

Fanon shows that listening is not simply an auditory act but is rather a productive activity. Algerians come together not so much to acquire information but rather to cooperatively and willingly participate in a collective practice. The debates and conversations that follow the radio broadcast demonstrate that listening is about reconstruction, and Fanon’s listeners grow into what Ayi Kwei Armah calls in *Osiris Rising*, “skilled producers of [what is transmitted to them]” (257). They are tacticians of the everyday and people who continuously reproduce what they consume. According to Gikandi, when Muruiki tells the other street boys the story of Matigari, he “acquires the very agency the state has tried to deny him; in listening to the resulting narrative, the dispossessed become active players in the politics of everyday life” (*Ngugi wa Thiongo* 232).

Listening is “to be at once with the nation in its struggle” (Fanon 86). The broken voice of the broadcast in the Algerian Revolution enabled a collective agency because the homes of the non-combatants were turned into spaces of struggle. Algerians “enrolled in

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the battle of waves, [re-enacted] for the benefit of the citizen the armed clash of his people and colonialism” (88). Metaphorically, the disabled, fractured, and broken Voice transmitted and reflected the echoes of the crushing of bodies in the frontline. As in “The Voice of Fighting Algeria,” in which radio did substitute for the trigger, in Matigari rumor does the work for which the gun that Matigari buried under the Mugumo tree was meant. In Fanon, agency shifted from the Voice to the listener who “reconstructed” what s/he did not hear or what s/he thought that s/he heard. Similarly, rumors in Matigari broadcast Matigari’s quest and are simultaneously the sign and the factor of the event, the post-independence problem-space. When Matigari tells Ngaruro wa Kiriro to “spread the message: Settler Williams is dead. John Boy is dead,” Ngaruro “sprung up as if new strength and confidence had been instilled in him by his brief contact with Matigari” (M 2-4). He was propelled forward by the news. Another character calls this rumor: “Rumor has it that they have come back with flaming swords in their hands” (M 72). In other words, as Hans-Joachim writes, “whoever hears a rumor and passes it on joins the […] ‘people’ who constitute the ‘they’, the agents of collective speech” (4).

Mikhail Bakhtin writes that, “Understanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually condition each other; [that] one is impossible without the other” (282). He does not mean that action or response is only possible when one completely understands what is being communicated. Rather, Bakhtin writes that the person who originates a conversation (speaker) always anticipates both consonance and discord. Therefore, the speaker’s orientation is “toward the specific world of the listener; it introduces totally new elements into his discourse […] The speaker breaks through the alien territory, against his, the listener’s apperceptive background” (282). In other words,
though the willingness of a responsive listener is vital to this relationship of human interchange, there is always an expectation of discord or misunderstanding. Similarly in *Matigari* Ngugi is saying that listening to others, even those with differences, is indispensable for a new understanding in the post-independence problem-space. Further, in the process of suspending assumptions of easy signification, a listener can effect political change. Consequently, the gaps created by the rumors in *Matigari* do not signify disintegration and chaos; instead, in trying to make sense of them, citizens in that “unnamed” country undermine the culture of control propagated through the *Voice of Truth*.

In *Matigari*, rumors are a major tool that provides the insights into that society as well as the object of their discussions. The characters in the narrative pass their spare time in conversations and most of their talk is in the form of rumors. In contrast to elite perspectives that are broadcast on the *Voice of Truth*, the rumors in *Matigari* move between people and complicate the elite discourse. Rumors are an ideal form for reproducing what one has heard and pushing an idea without being accountable. The narrator says that when Muruiki told the street children how Matigari saved Guthera from the police dog, he “added salt to his story” (69). Because no one claimed to have observed the activities of Matigari, those who passed on the “news” were simply repeating what they had heard from others. This is rumor at its most productive phase. As Hans-Joachim writes, rumor is “mediated, dependent talk, the citation of a citation. For these reasons denials are not given any easy ride” (4). When one of the characters was informed that “Those who went have come back,” and he responded by asking, “Which ones?” he was told, “Must you really have everything spelled out” (*M* 72). The tone of
the response suggests that this particular citizen had asked a foolish question. Thus, rumors become a powerful force that prevents anything from becoming secret. By spreading (broadcasting) rumors about Matigari, the community participates in a political discourse. This is the process that Atieno Odhiambo has in mind when he writes:

The linkage between moral economy—‘what people argue about between themselves in the unequal spheres of property, labour, gender and exchange’—and the Mau Mau struggle has become a key plank in Kenya’s historiography, providing both the rationale for the justness of the cause and the expectations of the many futures among Kenyans. (156)

In an environment narrated in Matigari in which individuals fear repercussions for political resistance, rumors allow citizens to speak out against the government of His Excellence Ole Excellence without putting themselves at risk. Through rumors, difference is marked out and constructed. To ignore the constructions of everyday conversations is to disregard the call for political change. This can lead to an uprising as is evident at the end of Matigari. I suggest that the rumors in Matigari are a type of “folk-science” (Champion-Vincent) or “hidden transcripts” (Scott) because citizens in that society use them to make sense of the troubled situation in which power structures are problematic and appear dangerous to confront. Rumors should be read as open defiance and political resistance that actively challenge the official paradigm. In Matigari, rumors form part of a well-stocked political resistance toolbox that citizens use to challenge political trends that they view as dangerous and threatening.

However, Matigari is different from that about which Fanon writes in Black Skin, White Masks. In “The Lived Experience of the Black Man,” the black man on the street is
not in control of what he hears; rather, he receives drifted utterances that he does not seek to hear: Snippets of “voices,” fragments of dialogues from Jean-Paul Sartre *The Respectful Prostitute*, and the poetry of Aime Cesaire and Leopold Senghor. In other words, in the Algerian Revolution, people chose to listen to “piercing, excruciating din of the jamming” and in that “imagine not only words, but concrete battles” (Fanon 88). In Algeria, radio became a technique and a “fighting instrument for people” (Fanon 89). In *Matigari*, the excruciating din of jamming, the experience of static is represented in the two opposed but persistent questions: “Who is Matigari?” and “Where can one find truth and justice?” The two questions frame a productive dissonance. The disharmony, the fact that they follow two divergent paths that never reconcile, not only contributes to the mystery of Matigari but also helps to fuel the circulation of rumors.

This constant search for information (rumors) about Matigari is analogous to the passion for listening to the *Voice of Fighting Algeria*. It is an “inner need to be at one with the nation in its struggle (Fanon 86). Through rumor in *Matigari*, the diverse communities scattered across the world could imagine themselves to be united by their act of participation. However, what distinguishes the rumors in *Matigari* from the *Voice of Truth* is the fractured, broken nature of rumors, which is not an obstacle to unity, but rather what enables it. Rumor is an emergence and circulation of a collective interpretation (Kapferer 1990) and trying to limit its work has the opposite effect:

Now listen to me carefully. I have banned that song from now onwards.

No song, no story or play or riddle or proverbs, mentioning Matigari ma Njiruungi will be tolerated [...] Let us forget that such people as Matigari ma
Njiruungi ever existed. Let us with one accord, like loyal parrots, agree that Matigari ma Njiruungi was just a bad dream. That bit of history was just a bad dream, a nightmare in fact. (M 118)

We know that the citizens did not heed this warning issued by the Minister for Truth and Justice. In the scene quoted above, dissonance is at its most prolific phase in the novel. When the student shouts to the people to “heed the riddle told by Matigari” (M 121), the narrator says, “Everybody went silent. So the rumor that fifty students were killed was true” (M 121). In other words, the minister’s attempt to “jam” circulation routes of rumors achieved the unintended reverse of the desired aim. Rather than attenuate the circulation of rumors about Matigari, the minister, including his appendage the Voice of Truth, transformed the population into activists. Despite the fact that the action of the minister for Truth and Justice was an attempt to reproduce a culture of silence, it succeeded in promoting a sense of speculation in the post-independence moment. Speculation and search for information are central to what the novel is promoting. The connection between a culture of silence and the post-independence disappointments allow Ngugi to advocate for a different orientation to be deployed against neo-colonial abuses. Like the Algerian listeners, rumor-peddlers in Matigari affiliate themselves with one another not by passing for one another but by commonly consuming and differentially reproducing echoes of rumors. This is why the narrator claims that “Their voices were partly drowned by the juke-box blaring out a song: ‘Shauri Yako’” (Kiswahili: That is Your Problem 25). For one’s voice to be drowned by a song is not to erase one’s individuality or commit one to passivity. Instead, it suggests that in the
post-independence moment, an individual has the responsibility to listen actively, critically, and tactically in order to gain agency.

Gikandi states that the word “Matigari” is a signifier of Mau Mau, the Kenyan liberation outfit. In Matigari, Ngugi seems to argue that though anti-colonial stories cannot and should not be forgotten, the country is in a different problem-space. Ngugi goes back to the traditional oral tales, a time-tested memory resource, in order to signal the need to adopt new questions. In turning to the Gikuyu oral story of old man Ndiiro looking for a cure, Ngugi is turning to the community poets who keep society’s memories. From memories, personal histories, and cultural lore, the world emerges in new critical lights.

Prefacing Post-Independence

Unsurprisingly, in his writings beginning with Devil on the Cross and going forward, Ngugi aims for what Gikuyu theater was in the past, what he calls “part of the collective festival” (Decolonizing 57). His argument that “The reception of a given piece of art is part of the work itself” (Decolonizing 82), bears out in the reception of Devil on the Cross among the Gikuyu, which was like that of an oral text “in the age old tradition of storytelling around fireside” (83 Decolonizing). Devil on the Cross was read in families. “A family would get together every evening and one of their literate would read it for them. Workers would also gather in groups, particularly during lunch break; and they would get one of them to read the book. It was read in buses; it was read in taxis, it was read in public bars” (Decolonizing 83). These kinds of responses led Ngugi to believe that by sidestepping the usual reception of bourgeois novels of realism, and by
“quitting” writing in the English language, he would overcome “barriers” separating him from his audience, the peasantry (Decolonizing 45). In other words, the connection between Devil on the Cross and Matigari exists in the effect they both have aurally on the listener. Of course, it is arguable whether discussion of Matigari as an English text (because of translation) defeats the primacy of the Gikuyu text and weakens Ngugi’s decision to write in his native language.49

Ogun Balodun suggests that Ngugi’s address to the “reader/listener” is an idea that emerged from the reception of Devil on The Cross. She writes:

After witnessing this unique ‘appropriation of the novel into the oral tradition’ through a process of a ‘group reception of art’ that ‘used to be the norm’ in Africa (Decolonising 82-85), Ngugi naturally created his second Gikuyu novel, Matigari, primarily for oral reception, a fact that explains why the prefatory notes to the novel are addressed to the reader/listener […] Ngugi believes that since the ruling political and intellectual elites of Kenya have compromised themselves by collaborating with foreign neo-colonial forces to undermine Kenyan independence the only groups capable of reinstating true independence are those constituting the illiterate, uncontaminated majority population of peasants and workers. It is to dialogue with these hitherto neglected classes. (78-79)50

However, Timm sees the address to the “reader/listener” as an invitational gesture to the audience to join in the performance. This means that Matigari should not only be read or

49 See Gikandi’s comment in “Epistemology.”
50 Ngugi also went back to the peasants because, as in Petals of Blood, he sees academic historians as failing to give due credit to Mau Mau. In Matigari these are the professors of Parratology.
listened to but also performed. Timm argues that Ngugi’s suggestion that the
reader/listener be at liberty to choose the country (place) of the story, “its time reference,
‘space,’ and the duration of its action” (6), is a call to the reader to become involved in
the process of constructing the story. It is a welcome gesture to the community to
participate in the story, similar to the way an oral story teller would enlist the help of
his/her audience. This is also comparable to the way that a lead singer would signal the
chorus to join him or her in a performance. In fact, the preface sets up the narrator as an
oral story-teller (performer) who is interacting with the reader/listener. This move
suggests the integrative potential of teamwork not only in story-telling but also in team
sports.

Kofi Anyidoho’s call for revision of “our understanding of the concept of
‘publication’ to include the act of performing poetry in public” is a comment on the
interaction between the story-teller and the audience (reader/listener). He asks, “How can
we otherwise account for the fact that even poets who have already appeared in print
nevertheless insist on further publicizing their printed poetry through public
performance?”(262). Mazizi Kunene echoes the same point when he writes that, “Zulu
poetry being communal, requires a special method of presentation. The poet does not just
recite his poetry but acts it, uses variation of pitch, and aims at communicating his poem
through the stimulation of all the senses. He produces at one level a symptomatic chant,
at another, drama, and still another, dance” (12). In other words, the use of voice, the
various pauses in performance/reading, tempo, gestures, and other paralinguistic features
animate the written word and connect it to an audience that may enhance it through their
participation. According to Kamau Brathwaite, “Reading is an isolated, individualistic
expression. The oral tradition on the other hand demands not only the griot but the audience to complete the community” (18). Walter Ong sees the condition of words on a text as:

Quite different from their condition in spoken discourse. Although they refer to sound and are meaningless unless they can be related—externally or in the imagination—to the sounds, or more precisely, the phonemes they encode, written words are isolated from the fuller context in which spoken words come into being. The word in its natural, oral habitat is a part of the real, existential present. (101)

Thomas Brückner also writes that “the institution of the individual author— as it came into being at the point of transition from oral art to the written one—provides, roughly speaking, for two points options of further development” (154). The first of these two involves combining the local artistic tradition with the foreign one. The second is the harmonization of the foreign into the local tradition. According to Brückner, both options have been part of the literary development of Africa: “The history of the rise and development of literature in Africa thus proves to be a synthetic or syncretistic process” (154–55). In Matigari, Ngugi uses authentic local forms at the same time that he emphasizes the process of cross-cultural exchange. The authenticity that Ngugi portrays in Matigari begins with his emphasis on the cross-cultural processes of hybridization. These cross-cultural exchanges and hybrid combinations are also evident in Ngugi’s other literary projects. For example, Ngugi has advocated for the hybridization of genres in order to allow for the creation of “an authentically” African novel. He has argued that the novel traces its roots both to African folk tales and the classical European epic:
The social history of the world before the advent of Victorian socialism was the continued appropriation of the results and the genius of the labor of millions by the idle classes. Why should not the African peasantry and the working class appropriate the novel? [...] In any case the novel itself was an outgrowth from an earlier tradition of oral tales and of epic poetic narratives like those of Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* or those of Liyongo in Swahili literature [...] The African novel as an extended narrative in written form had antecedents in African oral literature. The most essential element in the oral tale as in that of the novel is still the story, the element of what happens next. The artistry lies in the various devices for maintaining the story. (*Decolonizing* 68-69)

In the Prefatory Note, Ngugi begins to weave what he calls for in the above excerpt. The involvement that the prefatory address requires is not different from the “African performance [in which] the audience is less a silent spectator than an essential participant in the action” (Timm 5). Also, team sports emphasize the collective, and because Ngugi’s literary project is to bring people together, he uses punctuation in the preface to indicate the active nature of the performance (group activity) that *Matigari* explores. The last line of the stanza and the last line of the final quasi-couplet in “To the Reader/listener” all end with exclamation marks that drive and push the action into the succeeding verses. These kinds of moves show that *Matigari* is a narrative that depends on its audience. They help to emphasize that the reader/listener should not only hear the text’s message, but should also participate in order for a complete understanding to occur.
Ngugi states in *Moving the Center* that, “For whom a writer writes is a question which has not been satisfactorily resolved in a neo-colonial state” (73).

The participation that the Prefatory Note calls for is a longing for a collective ritual of oral performance and a return to the pre-colonial Gikuyu festivals (*Decolonizing* 81). However, it also indicates that Ngugi longs for the immobilized word in his novels, the spoken word engraved on a paper to be resuscitated within a community setting with an audience able to decode and translate its meaning. This is similar to dynamics of the performative space. For Ngugi, issues of space did not begin with his work in exile. His first story *Mugumo*, like *Matigari*, his first novel in exile, concludes with a ritual-like act at the Mugumo tree. All of his novels refer to Mt. Kenya. *The River Between* (which was written first but published second) deals with the spatial and ideological rift within the Gikuyu community in the early colonial period during the circumcision row of 1929-32. In his first essay collection *Homecoming*, he discusses issues of a return to Africa in African diasporic writing. In *Moving the Center* (1993), written in exile in the intensity of economic and cultural globalization, he re-examines the international divide in political and economic power between the centre and the periphery. In *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams* (1998), he extends the notion of empty space (a revision of *Decolonizing the Mind*) in order to encompass performative space for reflection and action.

The fact that *Matigari* takes place in a “country with no name” reflects one of the significant steps in Ngugi’s consideration of space. *Matigari* is a collective critical conscience, a collective critical model, and a marker of a different post-independence problem-space. In it, he shows the responsibility that the artist has to define the new

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51 In *Weep Not, Child*, Ngugi links the mugumo tree to Gikuyu creation myth, a move that was meant to assert Gikuyu ownership rights to the land that had been taken away by white settlers like Williams.
problem-space. He demonstrates the ways in which to speak simultaneously about the pull of the particular is also to speak about the push of the universal.

**The Global Landscape in the Preface:**

*Matigari* is the first novel that Ngugi wrote in exile and it brings attention to the ways he negotiates space in the narrative. The novel represents “the exiled artist’s alienation […] which he tries to overcome by occupying ‘the global space’” (Gikandi 208). Although the novel is set in Kenya, Ngugi moves to erase that fact when he uses the Prefatory Note to urge his readers/listeners to locate the story in a place of their own choice. Though he presents a frame of reference that is no longer, “the nation-state, but a broader entity—a continent, or the world […] as a whole,” (Gikandi) no reading of *Matigari* would be “complete without an engagement with the nation-state, its history, its fundamental mythologies, and its quotidian experiences”(Gikandi 632). If *Matigari* is a Kenyan narrative—and indeed there is plentiful of evidence for such a claim—Kenya, to paraphrase W.E. B. Dubois, only represents a “local phase” of a much greater crisis. As Steven Tobias writes, it is “not the story of one isolated country but a schematized documentation of the entire postcolonial experience” (164).

The Prefatory Note also suggests that the issues that Ngugi deals with in *Matigari* go beyond the bounded nation-state. The novel works within postcolonial theory and its disavowal of “any national or nativist pedagogy that sets up the relations of third world in a binary structure of opposition” (Gikandi 631). It speaks to Appadurai’s point when he writes that, “a variety of complex, postnational social formations […] are now organized around principles of finance, recruitment, coordination, communication and
reproduction that are fundamentally postnational and not just multinational or international. They are more diverse, more fluid, more ad hoc [...] less organized, and simply less implicated in the comparative advantage of the nation-state” (Appadurai 167).

A “disorganized capitalism” (Appadurai 206) networks the west and the rest of the world and generates global flows in trade, people, and knowledge. However, this overlapping and disjunctive order that does away with the center-periphery model and the bounded nation-state presents a problem. Mike Featherstone argues that the process “opens up another space, onto which can be inscribed speculative theorizations, thin histories and the detritus of the exotic spectacular” (Featherstone 2). Appadurai also acknowledges that what he calls a global culture is fluid and heavily “inflected by the historical, linguistic and political situatedness of different actors: nation-states, multinationals and diasporic communities.” (Appadurai 296) Subsequently in the Prefatory Note, Ngugi endeavors to cope with the shifting world of people in the global landscape. Because it straddles the diverse contexts of postcolonial and global, it reflects Ngugi’s attempt to offer insights into changing relationships between nation and narrative in the post-independence period. In other words, the Prefatory Note underscores a global theme and a new shape for the post-independence.

In *Ngugi wa Thiongo*, Gikandi writes that, “Matigari is much a novel about alienation and exile as it is about retour and Heimat.” He further argues that Ngugi was “never in doubt about the conjunction between notions of home and return, and those of alienation and exile” (227). Ngugi foregrounds the theme of exile when he writes that the novel was “Written largely in exile in the quietness of my one-bedroom flat in Noel Road, Islington, London” (*Matigari*). In other words, the Prefatory Note also works to
prepare the reader for an entry into a narrative that explores the idea that though people
may be bound to a worldview into which they were born, they are not constrained by it.

Matigari, the narrator says: “looked across the river, as he had often done over
many years, across many hills and valleys, in the four corners of the globe” (3). The
narrator also says that Guthera thought to herself: “This man has indeed spent a long time
in the forest […] He should first go home and sleep the fatigue of many years” (40).
Accompanied by Guthera and Muriuki, Matigari attempts to enter the gates of the
“house/home” on top of the hill and tells John Boy that he wants to let himself into the
house because: “I have wandered for far too many years in far too many places over the
earth” (44). These journeys are part of Matigari’s political growth. In them, he acquires
knowledge and power necessary for him to rejoin but as well as to help raise new
questions in the post-independence problem-space.

His “exile” recalls that of Sundiata and Shaka who were forced by hostile states of
affairs into temporary exile from which they were not certain when (if ever) there would
be a safe homecoming.52 Like Matigari, Sundiata understood his journey because his
brother Dankaran Touman had seized the throne. Setting out in uncertainty and anxiety,
Sundiata’s journey was essentially a rite of passage that led to a new life and ended where
it began, at home. Following a period of time spent in a place of foreign sojourn,
Sundiata fulfilled the promise to liberate Mali from the grip of Soumaoro Kante and
established himself as a powerful leader whose reign established a new order. In fact, the
portrayal of Matigari recalls that of Sundiata returning from war and exile to the ruins of
his native Niani: “From the top of the hill Djata looked on Niani, which looked like a

52 When Sundiata told his brother Dankaran Touman that he will return, he replied that “you know that you
are going away, but you do not know if you will come back” (Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali 27).
dead city. He saw the plain of Sounkarani, and he also saw the site of the young baobab tree” (Sundiata 80). Commenting on Sundiata, Manthia Diawara writes that:

*Sundiata: An epic of Old Mali* is carefully crafted to include the hero’s departure or exile from Mande, and his triumphant return or restoration to the culture. Because the role of the hero is often rarefied and beyond the reach of the poor and the handicapped, exile is often necessary for the individual to transform himself into a new type of hero. Sundiata had to leave Mande for Wagada, the capital of old Ghana […] His exile was necessary because it enabled him to train himself in war and to become a war leader. Since hunting was the only occupation available to him in Mande, he needed to exile himself to know the world, to learn from other cultures, and to return with enough resources to transform Mande from a collection of hunter clans and smith into empire of warriors. (116-17)

In *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel*, Percy Adams states that the “real” traveler seeking health becomes a “questor,” regardless of whether he or she began as one. He continues thus: the traveler “engaged in contests that were more or less frightening descended into physical or mental hells, and finally underwent rebirth or resurrection to make the ascent or return journey on the river, across the ocean or through the wilderness” (160). Matigari’s return points to an awareness of a new problem-space, a society working towards a post-independence political consciousness. As Derek Wright writes: “As Ngugi’s introductory note to the translation indicates, the narrator is modeled on the popular oral quest motif of the hero’s search whether in the next town or country
or (as in Tutuola’s dream-narratives) in the next world for a cure for an illness or disease—in this case a moral disease that afflicts a whole society” (63).

The narrator says that Matigari “went to many market-places in search of truth and justice” (71). “He went to shopping centers” (72), “He visited many eating places” (74), “He went to the crossroads” (75), “He wandered across the farmlands” (78), “He went to the law courts” (80), “He traveled on foot. He rode on donkey carts. He got lifts on bicycles. He traveled on matatus, buses and lorries. He traveled by train. He went to all places where people were likely to gather. And in all the places he asked the one question: How and where can a person girded with a belt of piece find truth and justice?” (84-85). Matigari said that, “I have traveled the length and breadth of this country looking for truth and justice…Let me start my journey a fresh” (89). He “went in search of the wise who taught and studied modern stars” (89). He also said that “I have wandered all over the country looking for somebody who can tell me where a person who has girded himself with a belt of piece can find truth and justice. In the wilderness, I met a woman who said to me: Go to those who teach modern wisdom” (92). In the presence of his assembled fellow citizens, he says, “I will put a question to the minister for Truth and Justice. For I have spent the whole day roving around the country, looking for somebody who could give me an answer to my question. Yes, I have walked and traveled by matatu and by all sorts of vehicles. I have spoken to medicine men, students, teachers and the wise men of modern stars” (112-13).

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53 Traveling, especially by “matatu,” speaks of bus stops, places from which people (dis)embark to different destinations. Characteristically, bus stops are places which are full of news because those who return from a journey almost always have a story to tell. And so, are those who witness the arrival and chat with travelers. In other words, as we have seen with rumors above, it can be argued that every matatu is a rumor—a message.
I argue that these locations allow the reader to take note of boundary crossings and conversations in the narrative. Ngugi highlights boundary crossing in order to allow the reader/listener to understand that some arguments are compelling beyond the confines of home. He thus transnationalizes the problems in *Matigari*. In doing so, he puts an individual country, post-independence Kenya, in a global arena. The reality of exile is such that Ngugi had to use his strong attachment to Gikuyu culture—“local sources”—in order to imagine “a universal narrative on oppression and the search for freedom” (*Ngugi wa Thiongo* 227). It also enables Ngugi to position Gikuyu culture as the controlling engine of the narrative at the same time as it avoids limiting Gikuyu creativity to a national origin. The “everywhere and everyplace” nature of *Matigari* also enables Ngugi to rethink “the terms of identity” (*Ngugi wa Thiongo* 228). In exile and traveling between London and New York but always away from Kenya allowed Ngugi certain unpredictable kinds of boundary crossings and encounters.

During the shuttle between Manhatten and London, one thing that Ngugi did not have was a household. In a footnote on this point, Gikandi writes that in “the Gikuyu edition, *Matigari* is looking for a Nyumba which is more than a house, it is a homestead, a family and a community” (*Ngugi wa Thiongo*). Interestingly, even in the English edition *Matigari* seems to be looking for something more than a house. When he meets John Boy at the gates of the house at the center of the story he tells him that he wants, “‘The keys to this house…this home!’” (44). The ellipsis here indicates that it is not merely a house, but something more, a homeland. This idea about a home speaks to what David Cohen and Atieno Odhiambo call one’s “landscape.” In their book *Siaya*, this

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54 This is an interesting point to discuss together with Gikandi’s point that “[…] the eloquent English translation of *Matigari Ma Njiruungi* defeats Ngugi’s intention of restoring the primacy of the African language as the mediator of an African experience” (166).
concept is not a “reference to the physiognomy of the terrain,” but one that “evokes the possibilities and limitations of space: encompassing the physical land, and the people on it, and the culture through which people work the possibilities of land.” Landscape, according to the community they discuss in their book, “means existence” (9). Because Ngugi asks the reader/listener to locate the story in a place of his or her own choice, the “house” can be a metaphor that encompasses elements of land, territory, home ground, and reproductive soil. All of them are “interwoven into a fine seamless text […] and draws together into one meaningful assemblage […]” (Cohen and Odhiambo 9) the dispersed and diverse postcolonial world. This also reflects Stuart Hall and Homi Bhaba’s theories of the postcolonial as a transnational and trans-cultural global process.

The Prefatory Note on the English edition also works to mark the transnational journey out of the nation space. It shows that a transnational project is necessary in order to engage the new problem-space of the post-independence period. It is a textual border that simultaneously uses and eludes the national frame as it imagines the universal. It also does not provide the excitement of access to the world of the Gikuyu, but the risk of incomprehension. According to Gikandi, “the description of Matigari as a simple novel raises a more fundamental question: do Ngugi’s Gikuyu readers consider the novel simple, is simplicity the defense mechanism of metropolitan readers who are condemned to read it in relation to their modernist standards?” (Gikandi 165) The Note does not necessarily offer a “door or frontier;” rather, as Brent Edwards would say, it is a kind of “parodic hinge both opening and closing an ‘impossible text.’” The Prefatory Note cannot be detached from the text. Edwards writes:

55 Interestingly, Ngugi writes in A Note on the English Edition that ,“the story is simple and direct”
A preface is always early or late, always a mask or coda. It conditions the protocols of reception for the documents it presents. It purports to strike a path, to point the reader through the door or over a horizon, but paradoxically is usually written only after the text has been assembled. If the preface functions as a frame, we should recall that a frame in the etymological sense (as in the phrase “to frame an idea”) refers both to the materiality of the limits or the edges of an object and to the interior force that gives it shape, that gives it life—not just the skin but also the blood or the skeleton. As a formal device, the preface speaks double in this way: it is outside, it marks what is not within the book, it precedes the book’s “speaking,” but it is also the very force that animates the book, that opens it for us and shows its contents. The preface therefore is a frame not always easily separable from the artifact itself, even as it rhetorically holds itself to be distinct from and prior to what it introduces. (45)

**Engaged Listener/Participant**

Repetition in *Matigari* works to evoke colonial cruelty and at the same time calls attention to the post-independence problem-space. This means that the two repeated but opposing questions that reverberate through the novel are in the post-independence moment a “revolutionary implement as powerful as the gun” (Fanon 7). Constant and insistent repetition of the two questions reflects the reader’s encounter. For example, in chapter two of the novel, most of the paragraphs and sentences begin with the pronoun “He:”
He climbed up and down yet other hills and mountains; [...] He took off his coat, carried it over his right shoulder and strode on the sun shining directly into his face. But he still did not move or look back…He was sweating […] He tried to visualize his home…his home on top of the hill! […] His feet felt heavy. He tried to rest for a while. He laid his coat on the ground and sat on it in the shade, leaning back against a tree. He removed his hat […] His hair was a fine mixture of black and grey. His brow had creased with fatigue. He yawned drowsily […] He dozed off […] His thoughts took flight […] He started and woke up. He put on his hat and picked up his coat, which he once again carried over his right shoulder […] He had made up his mind. He would go first in search of his people […] He crossed one more field. [Emphasis added] (5-6)

Through repetition of initial consonants, Matigari promotes engaged listening, constant vigilance as a tool, and thus an active form of resistance to neocolonial exploitation.

Odun Balodun writes that, “instead of a mixture of simple, complex, and compound sentences [the above excerpt] consists primarily of a succession of simple sentences that begin with the third-person masculine personal pronoun either in the subjective form ‘he’ or in the possessive ‘his’” (98). The pattern of sound that the rhythmical structure creates is significant in Matigari because of what it suggests. For example, in the initial pages of the novel the narrator says that Matigari “stopped and looked first to the right, then to the left. Parked on the other side of the road was a black Mercedez-Benz with its aerial up. A voice drifted to where he stood” (6). Further, “These voices, bits and pieces of news still floated after him” (7). These are overheard voices that crowd Matigari’s consciousness as
he walks through the streets. The “bits and pieces of news” are heard on the Voice of Truth. Paradoxically, rumors about Matigari work to weaken the power of toxic lies told on the Voice of Truth. That the citizens will get a chance to relay their truth is suggested earlier when a street boy shouts with excitement that “I’ve found a radio! I’ve found a radio!” (11). Opposition to the Voice of Truth began at the moment the boy found the radio, which represents the people’s voice. The influence of nation-language explains the connection between sound and resistance. Nation-language is

based as much on sound as it is on song. That is to say, the noise that it makes is part of the meaning and if you ignore the noise (or what you think of as noise, shall I say, then you lose part of the meaning […] I want you to get the sound of it, rather than the sight of it. (Kamau Brathwaite 271)

In other words, the power of listening as opposed to the semantic meaning of what is said can produce new forms of being in the world. Not only is listening to what is said important, but the practice of doing so can change political circumstances. The person who is conscious of the aural plays a vital role in the interactions. Ngugi emphasizes the pronouns “he,” “me,” and “we” as evident in the excerpt: “he did not….He quickened his pace […] His heart beat wildly. Let me hurry […] Let me tell them […] We shall go home together. We shall light the fire together […] (M 10), and moves from the personal to the plural pronouns. The passage moves from the personal pronouns “he” and “me” to the plural “we.” As such, Ngugi emphasizes the possibility of different voices to be brought together like the melodies of a counterpoint that simultaneously move in contrary directions while functioning in harmony with one
another. Thus in *Matigari*, Ngugi reveals the importance of the auditory to social and the political interaction. Traversing the many minds of the citizens, the narrative perceptively functions as the gramophone that repeats its phrase of individuality while insisting on harmony with other voices.

Furthermore, reading *Matigari* gives the impression of listening to a radio broadcast of a game such as soccer in which Matigari is a key player and the broadcaster’s voice relays his movements as he dribbles the ball toward a goal post—“He, he, he.” In other words, this repetition functions in *Matigari* to draw the reader/listener into the performance of the narrative. The rhythmical qualities of the repetition also summon the same reader/listener to embrace the narrative as a team effort.56 For example, the conversation between Matigari and Ngaruro wa Kiriro echoes the call and response format and has the main question reiterated in response as if to emphasize the interactive potential to which the novel aspires. “‘And who are you my son?’ He asked the man. ‘Who, me?’ the worker said. ‘My name is Ngaruro wa Kiriro.’ Ngaruro? Of the Kiriro clan? Thank you” (*M* 19). Ngugi shows that in call and response, solidarity involves listening and (re)transmitting. It is a form of communication that is able to (re)bounce between the two individuals and from them to the collective. In *Beyond A Boundary*, C.L.R James writes about the “fundamental relation of One and the Many” in cricket” (196). He writes that the “soccer forward and the goalkeeper may at certain rare moments find themselves sole representative of their sides” and that “the dramatist, the novelist, the choreographer must strive to make his individual character

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56 As in many communities in Africa the Gikuyu value “the collective method of working…When a family is engaged in the work of building a hut or huts the help of neighbors and friends is necessary in order to expedite the work. A man goes around asking his friends to help him… (*Facing Mt. Kenya*, Jomo Kenyatta, 75).
symbolical of a larger whole” (196). To borrow from Scott, “if tragic drama was the institutional form that enabled the integration of the individual and the community in democratic Athens, [and if] in the Caribbean […] a similar role fell to the institution of cricket, then in [most of Africa it fell to the institution of soccer]” (147).

During the course of the 1950s, Africa became embroiled in massive waves of global transformation that heralded the collapse of empires and emergence of a new world order. British imperial authority had diminished considerably in white dominions prior to the First World War; Canada, Australia, and New Zealand had achieved independence. In the face of continued colonial exploitation, the aspirations of Africans in the post-war period began to manifest a growing hunger for liberation from European exploitation. The historiography of this African resistance demonstrates that the response of Africans to colonial occupation and exploitation was multi-faceted and articulated using different tools including a range of diverse groups, associations, and organizations.57

A connection between soccer and the quest for independence was evident in most African countries. More recently, commenting on “Britain’s odd culture of sports spectatorship,” Paul Gilroy has said that “political language of sport remains important today” (106), and that “It matters […] because it is around sports that more habitable and [ ] more modern formations of national identity have been powerfully articulated” (106). For example, soccer in Algeria had long served as a site for the expression of resistance

against European control. The first Algerian soccer club, Mouloudia Chalia, was formed in 1920 in protest against European presence in the country. The tradition of drawing on sport for overtly political purposes became particularly obvious during the organization of resistance against the French, which came to prominence in the mid-1950s and eventually led to Algerian independence. One of the nationalist figures of the time, Ferhat Abbas, had a career in football administration before taking over the controls as President of Algeria’s Provisional Government (GRPA). He argued that through soccer, Algerians had symbolically demonstrated that they were capable of rising above myths of supposed European superiority: “‘They [the French] rule us with guns and machines. On a man to man basis, on the field of football, we can show them who is really superior’” (Versi, A. pp 9-15, “Striking Power: Arab Football Kicks Off.” The Middle East)

The campaign for Algerian independence was coordinated by the Front de Libération National (FNL) founded in 1951. Like their nationalist predecessors, the FLN drew on the mobilizing power of soccer in order to advance the cause of independence and in 1958 they introduced a “Revolutionary Eleven” team. The FLN XI was based in Tunisia and was largely comprised of Algerians who had been playing in France but who were unhappy with the colonial system back home and had returned to play their part in the drive for independence. This is a retour during anti-colonial resistance, and is different from the post-independence return in Matigari. I argue that because of this difference, Matigari calls anti-colonial forms of resistance “the song we used to sing.” I suggest that in Matigari, Ngugi seems to make the point that though the post-colonial subject should not forget about anti-colonial resistance, the post-independence period opens a different problem-space. This is partly why the novel states and re-states the
same point from the beginning to the end of the story. The call in the Prefatory Note for the reader’s involvement in the creation of the story is a call for a collective participation in the post-independence problem-space. The call resembles the ability of soccer to attract participation of the collective.

For example, in April 1958 the FLN expressed in a communiqué that: “As patriots seeking the liberation of their country above all else, our footballers have given the youth of Algeria an example of courage, rectitude and unselfishness.” Further, between 1958 and 1962, the FLN team, acting as a focus for anti-French feeling, toured fourteen countries in north Africa, eastern Europe, the Middle East, and China, playing fifty-three matches, winning thirty-nine, drawing ten, and losing four. All of these are spaces that not only show the transnational utility of soccer, but also elucidate the activities of a character such as Matigari who has traveled “over many years, across many hills and valleys, in the four corners of the globe” (M 3).

Soccer was an instrument of colonial culture meant to keep the Africans engaged so that they do not think of their oppression. This fact is significant in explaining Ngugi’s continuous reiteration of the methods used in resistance fights. The reiteration suggests the existence of a new problems-space. In speaking to the collective involvement in anti-colonial resistance, Ngugi channels Diawara who writes:

> Among the Mande, there is a traditional song called ‘Baninde,’ which means being in the mood to say no to oppression, to refuse categorically, to defy the oppressor. *Griot women sing this song to exhort young people*

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to resist injustice the way their forebears did, in order to make the world a better place. The songs keep returning to the refrain, ‘Ban ye dunya la dyala,’ or ‘Resistance brings joy to the world.’ Then comes the names of heroes whose resistance transformed Africa’s lives for better. [My Emphasis] (211-212)

However, in Matigari, the recollection of anti-colonial heroes is not meant to reinstall them in power. At the end of the novel, Matigari seems to pass the torch to the young Muruiki. The story is about a post-independence moment, and Matigari is an attempt to awaken a national consciousness to this new problem-space.
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