

The Utilization of Proverbial Wisdom in *Devil on the Cross*

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Abstract: Proverbs are wise sayings that touch on the nerve centre of society in any given context truthfully, objectively or subjectively. In Africa, particularly in the Kenyan culture, and more specifically among Agikuyu, proverbs are considered as the reliable vehicles for conveying messages effectively to their designated destinations. This paper seeks to investigate the usage of proverbial wisdom in Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o’s *Devil on the Cross*. This postcolonial novel has an imaginary geographical setting: Ilmorog. The novel sets out Ngũgĩ’s revolutionary tone of disillusionment with the Kenya postcolonial rulers. In the novel, Ngũgĩ underscores the plight of the Ilmorog workers and the peasants. This is perpetrated through connivance between the ruling African elite and the international capitalists from the business world to thwart any attempt of bringing meaningful change. In the text, Ngũgĩ panders the reader to various proverbs which are artistically chosen to explain the general feelings of discontent towards dictatorship and culture of impunity which characterize postcolonial Kenya. The study takes a qualitative approach and will be informed by poststructuralist theory. Although the text employs the proverbial wisdom of Agikuyu, the situations Ngũgĩ highlights can serve as a microcosm of other African postcolonial states. Data from the text are broken into quotations, analogies, metaphors and images to assist in the analysis. The findings of the study will contribute in the comprehension and appreciation of the role played by writers in creating awareness and highlighting the issues that affect society. Consequently, society will be motivated towards a positive reading culture. The results will also help researchers who may want to carry out similar or related scholarship in this or related disciplines.

Keywords: Proverbial wisdom, Devil on the Cross.

INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the utilization of proverbial wisdom in Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o’s *Devil on the Cross*. The novel was first published in Kikuyu Language in 1980 as *Caitani Mutharabaini* and the English version is therefore a translation. The text was first published in English in 1982. Since it was translated into English, it has had fourteen impressions. This perhaps explains why Ngũgĩ continued to write in English after even the 1962 Makerere Conference of African writers. During the discussions in the conference, Ngũgĩ had argued in favour of African Languages saying, “Writing in African Languages is a necessary step towards cultural identity and independence from European exploitation” [1]. According to Njogu [2] Ngũgĩ persisted to write in English to sell his creative works. However, the commercial aspect did not dim Ngũgĩ’s objective to promote cultural identity and freedom from European exploitation and oppression. He was able to do this by subscribing to Achebe’s ideology of using the English Language to express his peculiar African experience. In the Language debate Achebe insinuated that he would use the gift of the English Language and make it at once universal and able to carry his peculiar African

experience [3]. African encounters can vividly and/succinctly be communicated by utilization of African oral forms.

African oral forms comprise songs, myths, legends, riddles, narratives and proverbs among others. Ngũgĩ is deeply steeped in African orality and deftly deploys the African oral forms in his creative writings. In the literary texts, Ngũgĩ employs oral forms such as riddles, idioms, narratives, songs and proverbs among others. Nevertheless, the paper addresses only the use and application of proverbial wisdom in *Devil on the Cross*. In the novel, Ngũgĩ invents characters who narrate the situation that is encountered in postcolonial Kenya. Even in the names that he bequeaths to his characters, Ngũgĩ uses proverbial wisdom which points to the behaviour as well as the role played by the character in the novel. Further, Ngũgĩ’s characters use proverbs and proverbial songs to narrate the postcolonial Kenyan state which serves as a microcosm for other African postcolonial nations. Although Ngũgĩ draws the proverbs he uses for construction of the novel from the Gikũyũ repertoire the paper provides equivalent proverbs in Gikũyũ which are used to communicate the same message. This is based on the

characteristic nature of proverbs where meaning is contextual and flexible as well as multiple.

Using proverbs, proverbial names, and proverbial songs, Ngũgĩ creates awareness in the oppressed and exploited workers and peasants in Ilmorog. Conscious of their deprived condition, the workers, peasants and even women are disillusioned with their postcolonial administrators who they find to be worse than their erstwhile white predecessors are. This marginalized group earns and agitates for change as evidenced in the proverb, ‘Change seeds for the gourd contain more than one kind’ [4]. The Ilmorogans wanted change and meaningful change at that where they would be free to enjoy the fruits of independence in their own country and in their own right. As such, they are ready to fight any oppressive force that comes between them and their independence. This force rears its ugly head through capitalism whose perpetrators are the ruling postcolonial ruling African elite and the international capitalists from the business world. By employing dialogue, the oppressed and exploited masses endeavour to express their disillusionment with the ruling regime. Unfortunately, their efforts to reclaim their lost space, which they had enjoyed before colonization, were thwarted by further severe oppression and exploitation. When dialogue fails, the masses resort to a revolution as evidenced in the eradication of social oppressive forces. This culminates in the shooting of the Rich Old Man from Ngorika at the close of the novel.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The paper utilizes Poststructuralist literary theory in the analysis. This theory was advanced in the 1960s by Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault to demystify and contrast structuralism. This is necessitated by the fact that proverbs are contextual in nature. Poststructuralists argue that “meaning is multiple, flexible, dislocated, fragmented, unstable, decentralized and scattered along the chain of signifiers” [5]. According to Kabira and Mutahi [6] “proverbs are culturally and contextually bound.” Thus, the meaning of a proverb resides in the culture from which it is constructed as well as the context in which it appears. Consequently, one proverb enjoys multiple meanings when it is applied in different situations. In the novel *Devil on the Cross*, Ngũgĩ’s characters make use of the same proverb repeatedly to communicate varying messages in differing contexts. Further, the flexibility and fragmentation of the proverbs is displayed by use of various words in the expression of the same idea as exemplified in the following proverb; ‘*The fart of a rich man has no smell*’ [7]. The same idea is repeated in the proverb ‘*The wound of a rich man never produces pus*’ (p.63). Besides, proverbs are socially constructed through negotiations and dialogue after a consensus. These characteristics of proverbs

justify the suitability of Poststructuralism in their discussion.

METHOD OF STUDY

The study is carried out using the interpretivist paradigm. This approach focuses on the meaning attributed to attitudes, relationships and occurrences. Interpretivist method assumes that social phenomena are constructs that are negotiated and widely shared. According to Kirmani and Kirmani [8] meanings are sought within contexts because people construct meanings and associate their own subjective and inter-subjective meanings as they interact with the world around them. This can be realized by identifying and analyzing the proverbs in *Devil on the Cross*. Further, the interpretivist procedure works on the premise that meanings are not fixed or closed systems. Instead, “meanings are negotiated and constructed within certain contexts in the process of the researcher’s engagement with the texts or documents [9]. Thus, the identified proverbs are interpreted and their meanings sought within the contexts in which they occur. In the analysis of data, equivalent proverbs to those in the text are provided in other languages where possible.

PROVERBS IN *DEVIL ON THE CROSS*

Proverbs as a genre are short forms that do not occur by themselves but are found within other genres such as songs, narratives, myths, legends and novels among others. The proverbs under study are found within the novel *Devil on the Cross*. In this paper all references made to the primary text are made using only the page numbers. The publication used is the fourteenth impression of 2014.

“The forest of the heart is never cleared of all its trees. The secrets of the home are not for the ears of strangers.” (p.1). These two proverbs share the same message and are used by the Gicaandi Player who declares himself ‘the Prophet of Justice’. [Ngũgĩ has invented the Prophet of Justice who through monologue utters these proverbs as he narrates his role]. The Prophet of Justice feels the weight of the information that he has about the nation but is bound by his conscience not to reveal it. He thus employs the proverbs as a justification not to relieve himself of the burden that weighs so heavily on his heart. The proverbs are equivalent to the Kikuyu sayings ‘*Gatitu ka ngoro gatiunagwo and Kagutui ka mucii gatihakagwo ageni*’ [The grove of the heart is not laid bare and oilskin of the home is not for applying on strangers respectively] . These proverbs are normally used with the message that family or home affairs are not for public consumption and the insiders should guard them faithfully.

Consequently, the Prophet of Justice does not consider revealing what he knows about Waringa to her

mother not because it is top secret but simply because she is a woman. The Kikuyu society like many other African communities is patriarchal and does not consider women as able-bodied beings with a capacity to endure sad news or keep secrets as embodied in the proverb *muici na mundu muka akenaga akua*. The English version of the aforementioned proverb is 'he who steals in the company of a woman will lie in fear till she dies' "for a woman cannot keep a secret" [10]. Kikuyu women are also known for their intensive love for children and perhaps the narrator is apprehensive that Waringa's mother may break down on learning of the ills that have befallen her daughter.

Pondering on the implicature of telling Wariinga's mother what he knew about her child's situation, the Prophet of Justice asks himself rhetorical questions repeatedly in a monologue. "Who am I- the mouth that ate itself? Is it not said that an antelope hates less the one who sees it than the one who shouts to alert others of its presence?" (p.2). These proverbs are used in the novel as a precaution aimed at urging the narrator to desist from speaking his mind. In addition, they also remind him that should he consent to speak, and then he should be ready for the outcome, which may bring suffering. According to Khasandi, Wakoko, Mugo, Mahero and Ndegwa [11] "an old man sitting on a stool sees farther than a boy on top of a tree." Being an elder and a seer, the Gicaandi Player can fathom the repercussions of communing with a woman and is reluctant to involve himself. These two proverbs have their genesis in two Kikuyu fables.

The first deals with the proverb 'the mouth that ate itself'. The fable behind this proverb purports that once upon a time; the mouth got jealous of stomach's prosperity and convened a meeting for the other visible members of the body. Mouth praised the members for the indispensable services that they render to stomach feeding her while stomach does nothing other than grow fatter and fatter. The members comprising mouth, hands and legs went on strike. The brain however, participated neither in the debate nor in the strike but kept her cool. The legs refused to go in search of food, the hands refused to bring the food while the mouth refused to chew anything. Within a few days, the mouth started stinking, the legs were too weak to go anywhere while hands were unable to do anything. Meanwhile, the stomach though grumbling lay still. Brain that was still sober brought the other members to their senses and they realized the importance of working together. Consequently, mouth realized that whatever evil she committed, she did it unto herself, thus the saying; '*the mouth that ate itself*'. The proverb means that whatever the choice we make, we should be ready to face the consequences no matter how bizarre. In addition, mouth is used symbolically and metaphorically to warn,

admonish as well as discourage people who rejoice at causing disharmony in the community.

According to Ndambuki [12] metaphors are often used by the speakers in an attempt to get a grip of new events that are motivated by their personal experience as members of a cultural group." As a member of the Kikuyu cultural group and by extension an African, the Prophet of Justice also employs the metaphor of mouth pedagogically for people to emphasize the significance of teamwork and to show that no member of a given community is more important than others. The word eat as used in the proverb is also emblematic as the action of eating is naturally perceived as taking place in the mouth in which case there must be something that is being eaten. Thus eating as used in the proverb under discussion is construed to mean causing self-harm. It is normally used to comment about incitement, which rather than benefit anybody may result to the detriment of all including the inciter. A good example is the rampant burning of secondary schools premises in July and part of August 2016. The students who were planning and conducting the burning overlooked the fact that after lynching the schools' property it is their parents that would be called upon to rebuild them and not the school administration. For this reason, some students have to forgo some privileges to save for the damage charges. The Prophet of Justice is therefore taking precaution before he releases the story that the masses in the person of Waringa's mother wants to hear.

The second proverb is-'the antelope hates less the one who sees it than the one who shouts to alert others of its presence'. Among the Agikuyu it is said that a long time ago, women used to own property and hold important positions in the community. Indeed, the Kikuyu community was a matriarchal society until one of the most renowned female leaders became so full of herself that she forgot the traditional expectation of her. The legendary character; Wangũ Wa Makeri, violated the constitution as stipulated in the unwritten code of the Agikuyu penal code. She danced the '*kibata*' (kibata is a Kikuyu male dance that women should not indulge in) naked, an act that was considered abominable: indeed, it is equivalent to unmasking an ancestral spirit [13]. The act was the last straw that broke the camel's back, for before that, during meetings she had reduced men's backs into her chair (she never sat on a chair but on a man's back during meetings). Her irresponsible behaviour angered the men so much that they could condone her no more.

The men came together for they held the belief that unity is strength. United in their decision, they agreed that they had to tame the woman. To do so however, they had to disarm her by making her physically weak. Their weapon lay in their manhood,

which they resolved to utilize and make all their wives pregnant at the same time. When that was done and the women were almost delivering, the men staged their coup. In their condition, the women had no choice but to concede defeat. It is said that in the commotion the goats that belonged to the women fled into the wilderness. Those 'goats' are the antelopes. It is further insinuated that since the commotion that erupted when the men overthrew women, the latter are continually looking for their lost goats, which ran into the forest. According to the Agikuyu narrative, whenever an antelope is espied, there are always shouts of kau! kau...' [That! that] to alert the women: Boys and men go after the antelopes to redeem them for their desperate mothers and wives. Since the antelopes are too fast for the males, they desperately resort to using bows and arrows and kill the game for food. The proverb implies that the one who alerts others of the presence of the antelope occasions its death for if they do not know about it then it will be safe. The proverb thus means that as long as people remain silent about the social evils perpetrated by the postcolonial elite, then the rulers and bourgeoisies will be safe. Similarly, the exploitation and oppression will proceed and it will be assumed that all is well.

Next is the proverb; the voice of the people is the voice of God (p.2). This proverb is repeated on pages 60 and 62. Ngũgĩ uses these proverbs through the narrator to justify why the Gicaandi Player had to tell the story of the child that Waringa's mother loved so much. This proverb has the same implication as the proverb that says that 'service to humanity is service to God'. By consenting to man's wish the Gicaandi Player is obeying the will of God and thus doing his moral duty. The people sought the prophecy from the Prophet of Justice through Waringa's mother when she goes to the Prophet and says, 'Gicaandi Player, tell me the story of the child that I loved so dearly. Cast light upon all that happened, so that each may pass judgment only when he knows the whole truth. Gīcaandī player, reveal all that is hidden" (p.1). The Gicaandi Player meditates on the request for seven days [the number for completeness in religion] and gets an epiphany after a vision- that the prophecy is not his alone. He cries out loudly: I accept! I accept..I have accepted. I have accepted. The voice of the people is the voice of God. That is why I have accepted. That is why I have accepted (p.2). The repetitions emphasize the narrator's level of the struggle and fear that he underwent in the vision. He was threatened and admonished severely. Based on the trepidation, The Gicaandi Player summons the people and tells them the story of Jacinta Waringa so that they may make informed choices when passing judgment on Warĩnga.

Next are the proverbs 'to bathe one must strip off of all the clothes' and 'to swim one must plunge into

the river (p.3). The narrator, to point out his readiness to reveal the truth, uses these proverbs. He also wants to enlighten his imaginary audience that when one starts an activity, they should be ready to accomplish and not back out when the going gets tough. He urges them to join him and participate as he beckons, 'Come, Come my friend, Come and let us reason together. Come and let us reason about Jacinta Waringa before you pass judgment on our children'. (p.3). In this context Jacinta Waringa is used as a metonym for the youth. Ngũgĩ advises that before somebody accuses another person it is necessary to make investigations so as to make an informed choice. Research is therefore an essential step in life. The proverb can be utilised to comment on situations where people like judging others without taking time to understand what provoked their undesirable actions. Further reference can be made to the parable of the prodigal son in the Bible [14] whose brother dismisses summarily as being unworthy of his father's compassion. The elder brother failed to seek understanding of his brother's motivation and inclination to come back home and his father's motive for the celebration and condemned both of them unjustly. Through the proverb, Ngũgĩ discourages his readers from making a sweeping condemnation or commendation before finding out the motive or intention, which makes somebody behave the way they do. The proverbs are used to comment on situations where people face indecision. They are thus urged to decide and commit themselves. In the novel, the Ilmorogans are warned against making judgment on the youth who have gone to the city to look for greener pastures before they have understood the ordeals that have compelled them to leave the village for the city.

The above proverbs are followed by 'misfortune is faster than the swiftest spirit' and 'one trouble spawns another' (p.4). [The latter proverb is equivalent to the English proverb which says; calamities do not come singly. In the novel, these two proverbs are used to express the speed at which Warĩnga's problems erupted-they followed each other in quick succession as the narrator puts them saying:

Misfortune is swifter than the swiftest spirit, and one trouble spawns another. On Friday morning, Warĩnga was dismissed from her job for her sweetheart, John Kĩmwana after he had accused her of being Boss Kĩhara's mistress, abandoned rejecting the advances of Boss Kĩhara....That evening Warĩnga. On Saturday morning Warĩnga was visited by her landlord....The landlord told Warĩnga that he was increasing her rent. She refused to pay....Warĩnga's things were thrown out of the room; door was locked with a new padlock (4).

Warĩnga's woes are because of the emergence of the capitalist postcolonial elite whose greed is

unequaled by their erstwhile colonial masters. Boss Kihara's sexual demands on Warĩnga points to the level of moral decadence in postcolonial Kenya and by extension, other post colonies. Indeed, Warĩnga suffers because she had once fallen victim of the vice in the hands of the Rich Old Man from Ngorika. As the proverb goes 'once beaten twice shy or *wanaruona nĩwe anarũmenya* [he who has been through something knows its repercussions] Warĩnga would never indulge in such actions with a married man as this would be like giving to the hyena twice or *gũcokia kaara harĩa karũmĩrwo*. The English translation of the aforementioned proverb is- 'to return the finger where it was bitten'. Warĩnga already understood the appetizing language used by tycoons to woo their prey whom they ditch after devouring. She did not wish to succumb to their whimsical promises of wings to fly but in essence, the wings turn into enslaving chains. [From her relationship with the Rich Old Man from Ngorika Warĩnga 'harvested' a baby and she had to temporarily abandon her formal education at Nakuru Day Secondary School] (p.142). The pregnancy devastated her so much that she contemplated abortion then suicide (p.148-154) but none of these succeeded and she bore Wambũi out of wedlock. Boss Kihara's attitude towards Warĩnga also point at religious hypocrisy since Boss Kihara is an important member of the Church of Heaven (p.18). The two- the Rich Old Man from Ngorika and Boss Kihara- preach water but drink wine for both are prominent members of Christian churches who are usually regarded as opinion leaders and shapers.

The following proverbs- 'that which is black will never be white' (p.5) is used in reference to Warĩnga's contribution towards her problems. Further, the proverb lampoons Warĩnga's attempts to be white through the application of artificial skin-lightening creams. The proverb also satirises Warĩnga's concept of beauty and her futile efforts at actualizing it by looking like a European. Being an African woman, she had forgotten the adage that 'aping others cost the frog its buttocks' (p.6). The cosmetics she used distorted her natural beauty and as an impact, left her face with ugly light and dark spots like a guinea fowl (ibid). The imagery of frog is used analogically to comment on people who like copying others. Naturally, such characters lack initiative and self-direction and only do things because others are doing them without first bothering to know why they are doing them. The noun frog is used in place of human beings to render the proverb anonymity and absolve the user of any dire consequences should anyone complain. This is because proverbs are anonymous in authorship, representing a collective wisdom of human wisdom" [15]. Consequently, the user of the proverb by using the metaphor frog is able to admonish or warn against

aping and get out of the difficult situation of possible victimization without embarrassment.

The words black and white as used in the first proverb are used metonymically to represent Africans and Europeans respectively. The proverb is used to lampoon people who dwell on the face value of something little knowing that all that glitters is not gold. Indeed, it warns people not to judge a book by its cover but to open and read it and it is only then that they will be able to covet it or even commend or condemn it. Likewise not all that is white is good as some may cause afflictions and enduring effects like the ugly spots on Warĩnga's once beautiful visage. This serves as advice to those who are not contented with their 'Africanness' that no amount of cosmetics will make them Europeans since race and colour are not skin-deep but ontologically occurring. Perhaps the motivation to change skin colour is motivated by the superior position that the White colonizers held but the Africans overlooked the fact that not all Europeans held high office: some were even in the forest fighting the Mau Mau while their masters administered the colony. Thus instead of dwelling on such trivial issues like physical appearance people should work hard to achieve the superior status for beauty is not food" (p.27).

The imagery of food in the aforementioned proverb is used to symbolize a necessity in life. Without food, not all living things let alone human beings can survive. By using the analogy of food and comparing it with beauty, Ngũgĩ downplays the significance of physical beauty as well as exposing its futility. The proverb about beauty not being food is used to comment on the dangers of concentrating on trivialities such as physical beauty, which cannot satisfy essential human needs. Instead of wasting time with such petty issues, people should devote their efforts to attaining overall prosperity of an individual. In addition, the same ideology is articulated in the Ethiopian proverb that states; 'If you marry a beautiful woman you marry trouble' [16]. The English equivalent of the above mentioned proverb is 'beauty will buy no beef' while the Kiswahili version is *uzuri wa mke ni tabia* i.e. the beauty of a woman is her character. The philosophy behind these proverbs is that those who are wise will seek the hidden worth of something before indulging fully in it lest they be courting trouble. The proverb is also used to warn and castigate spendthrift behaviour and encourage people to be responsible. The proverb is also used to comment on men who judge women by their appearance and boast acquaintance with the most beautiful forgetting that beauty is a construct and not a universal concept. Furthermore, it only lies in the eyes of the beholder.

The proverb is also used pedagogically to inform, women who perceive themselves as beautiful that they have nothing to boast about for they cannot depend on their beauty for livelihood. The males are further reminded that *mke ni nguo* (any woman well adorned will look beautiful) but *nguo si mke* (clothes can't make a woman) (p.249) thus they should not covet other people's wives but simply provide theirs with the objects of their desire. After all beauty is like itching that is temporal and fades away with time. Likewise, the beauty we see today may not be there tomorrow if proper care is not taken to maintain it. However, physical pulchritude is not all that worthless for the same culture [Gikūyū] has a proverb that says; 'nobody is satisfied with just one glance at a beauty' (p.250). The word 'satisfied' shows that the Agikūyū value and esteem beauty and that is why they would spend time admiring beautiful women and artifacts. According to Stewart [17] proverbs offer insight into a people's philosophical thought, epistemology and world-view.

Further, Kabira and Mutahi [18] posit that proverbs summarise a cultural context or even an experience and that they are used to warn, advise, educate, inform and make clarifications." Hence, for the Gikūyū people to come up with a proverb philosophizing about beauty, they must have looked intrinsically at the merits and demerits ensuing from different world-views and their cultural ramifications. Thus to summarise the concept of 'beauty' they (Agikūyū) came up with the contradicting proverbs that: 'Beauty is not food', 'nobody is satisfied with just one glance at a beauty' and 'that beauty is an itching'. In the last proverb, Gikūyū warns, informs, and clarifies to the people that beauty like itching can neither be avoided nor concealed. However, it is [beauty] not a permanent situation and those who consider themselves ugly have nothing to worry about just as those who consider themselves beautiful have nothing to brag of.

Next to the proverbs on beauty, is one whose ideology is change. Since proverbs are culture markers [19] the proverbs use the objects found within the cultural environment in which they are constructed. Such objects are like gourd and seeds in the proverb, 'Change seeds for the gourd contains seeds of more than one kind'. Another proverb about change, which is used together with the aforementioned one, is; 'Change steps, for the song has more than one rhythm'. These proverbs have been used repeatedly on pages: 11, 48, 76,108 and 122 respectively. For Agikūyū people song and dance are synonymous and are therefore applied alternatively. In addition, the two proverbs also share the message of change with the proverbs: 'He who used to dance can now only watch' while 'he who used to jump over the stream can now only wade through it' (p.60 &76). However the idea of change is used in juxtaposition in the two sets in that in the former,

change is a requirement while in the latter change is inevitable and undesirable since it is seen as incapacitating.

The first duo points at change that is occasioned by the poor living conditions, which are from the scars left by the colonization process. Once the colonial masters left the empires, the Kenyans and by extension, postcolonial African nations are left to rule themselves but they have neither the resources nor the knowhow to administer themselves. The African resources such as land were raped by their fleeing colonial masters who now posed as landlords as seen in the White Highlands where some Kenyans live like squatters in their own country. This kind of scenario calls for change and that is what Kenyans through the Mau Mau had fought for. They were fighting to eradicate poverty, ignorance and disease but after the struggle, only a few of the Africans achieved these goals. These were the ruling elites and to the majority comprising workers and peasants, this was only a dream that existed in their imaginations.

It is then that they came up with the idea of agitating for change and meaningful change at that. That is when they realized that although they [Africans] had fought capitalists on one side, their fellow Africans who replaced the colonial masters were worse oppressors as well as exploiters than the departing masters. The peasants and workers then team up and campaign for change to fight the capitalist regime for they too want to enjoy the fruits of independence and urge each other to change for even the gourd though one does not contain seeds of one kind. Some bring forth calabashes, others medium gourds used for drawing water or putting gruel, others mature while others abort. Hence, the analogy of the seeds and steps requiring change serve as a revelation for the masses.

The second duo serves to warn that no condition is permanent e.g. being young only happens once. As a result, when old age creeps in youth fades away and with it energy also diminishes. As such, one is unable to partake of the activities they used to do with ease. In essence, for those undertakings, they will nostalgically only watch from afar or outside the ring as others do it. Consequently, this gives rise to the sayings that; he who used to dance can only watch and he who used to jump over the river can now only wade through it. Both jumping and dancing are activities that require agility and energy which are general attributes of youth. The proverbs are therefore used to comment on people who waste their time [youth] and energy with trivial things that do not promise a comfortable life in old age. Rather such people are advised that: 'Today is tomorrow's treasure' and that 'tomorrow is the harvest of what we plant today' (p.11). This being the case therefore, as people advance in age, they should not

waste time lamenting and reminiscing of what they used to do for nobody ever gained from 'moaning and groaning' (ibid). The solution lays in changing ways as the narrator advises saying, "Change seeds, for the gourd contains more than one kind of seed! Change steps, for the song has more than one rhythm!" (p.11).

Further advice is offered in the song that castigates the corrupt and selfish capitalist postcolonial administrator. Creating consciousness is also done through songs comprising proverbs and attacking capitalism as pointed out in the song:

That which pecks never pecks for another.
That which pinches never pinches for another.
That which journeys never journeys for another
Where is the seeker who seeks for another?
(p.10).

The song contains four proverbs that criticize capitalism and awaken the masses consciousness that each should mind their own welfare for none is perturbed by their deplorable conditions. They are reminded that no one works for another, pinches for another, journeys or even seeks for another. Similarly, when one endeavours to do something; they only do that to satisfy their selfish motives. They are further reminded that the wise can also be taught wisdom (ibid) for nobody has a monopoly of knowledge. This calls for dialogue as the narrator eulogizes Gikūyū for saying that 'talking is the way to loving' and that 'today is tomorrow's treasure' for 'tomorrow is the harvest of what we plant today (ibid). These proverbs are used to warn, educate and inform those that purport to know everything and tend to ignore advice especially if it comes from people who are not regarded highly in the community. Such people are poor, hold unenviable or low positions in society or the youth. Among Agikūyū age is highly revered as stipulated in the Gikūyū proverb '*harī mūthuri hatīttagwo maai* [in the presence of an elder, water is not poured] [20].

The proverbs also admonish those who brag of being of more consequence than others and also inform them that everyone is important in their own light for no one can live solely by themselves. The 'haves' need the 'have nots' and the reverse is true as embodied in the proverbs a "a single finger cannot kill a louse" and 'a single log cannot make fire last through the night' (p.48). This shows the importance of teamwork as stipulated in the proverb "many hands can lift a weight, however heavy" (p.48 & 63).

The next proverb under discussion is stated as a reminder as is evident in its intonation as quoted "Be on your guard from now on Kareendi. Do not forget that 'men have stings, vicious and corrosive, the poison of which never leaves their victims" (p.13). According

to Rutere and Samjumi [21] "proverbs are gentle words that contain wisdom of generations" ((p.3). The gentleness conceals the gravity of the matter in question and makes the unbearable bearable. Consequently, daughter and mother without embarrassment can discuss serious issues such as sex involvement and pregnancy out of wedlock on either party. The proverb is used by parents in offering advice to their daughters to warn them to be wary of men for any illicit relationship with them [men] leaves everlasting scars. This in the case of Kareendi [an invented name to symbolize a beautiful vulnerable young girl], an unexpected baby is born who turns into a burden for the girls relations or guardians.

The proverb is also used to comment on girls who enjoy keeping company with older men perhaps because they feel that the elderly are better endowed than young men and want to get their money in exchange for their bodies. Such girls are castigated and reminded that they should desist from such relationships. The proverb is stated analogically using the analogy of sting and Kareendi, which leaves room for ignorant girls to retort that they are not implicated because neither their names nor those of their sugar daddies are mentioned. Such females are oftentimes answered with the proverb that 'no one repents on account of another's sins' or 'there is no one who regrets the going as much as the returning' (p.13). This is because when one is returning, they have already experienced the phenomenon in question and may be suffered the consequences as well. The main idea behind these two proverbs is that 'experience is the best teacher'. Besides, he who has drunk from a calabash can gauge its size. Furthermore, he who has seen once knows thereafter. However, one does not have to burn a finger in order to know how it feels to get burnt. These proverbs are equivalent in their themes to the Kiswahili saying that '*majuto ni mjukuu*' and the English proverb 'once beaten twice shy'.

After leaving her child with her parents, the proverbial Kareendi goes back to school and since she has learnt her lesson from experience, she makes more effort in her studies and vows not to fall victim of men again. Her benefactors dig deep into their pockets and drain the family saving [the stick put in reserve in case they should meet a rat unexpectedly (p13)] to keep her in school and equip her with professional education. However, now Kareendi is wiser as she knows that 'to be smiled at is not to be loved' [ibid] and she rejects any advances of the prospective employers as she seeks a secretarial job after completing a course in typing and shorthand. This becomes very frustrating as all the male employers seem to be reading from the same script and appear to have composed a chorus to sing to young female job seekers. The anthem of these tycoons is

normally that of sexual exploitation as they sweet-talk their prey using proverbial wisdom coaxing:

Sister Kareendi, the case of a fool takes a long time. Sister Kareendi, every court session opens with feasting. Sister Kareendi, no man licks an empty hand. Take care of me, and I will take care of you. Modern problems are resolved with the aid of thighs. He who wishes to sleep is the one who is anxious to make the bed. (p.14)

The dialogue-cum monologue is aimed at inducting Kareendi to the epistemology of modern society whose slogan is 'give and take'. The community in question is capitalistic and immoral where no one cares for social values but rather what the person can get to satiate his selfish needs. This is done through a stream of proverbs in order to cushion the speaker from any blame as whatever he says is contained in the proverbial wisdom of the ancestors. According to Mundumulla (1995:18) a "proverb is a short saying in common use expressing a well-known truth or common fact ascertained by experience or observation." Hence by using the proverbs in relation to 'Sister Kareendi' and perhaps handing down to her what he himself endured to be where he is, the speaker is only perpetuating an already implemented policy. Briefly, the proverbs are used to expose the likes of Warĩnga to the corrupt postcolonial situation where to get a job one's morals are compromised. When Warĩnga rejects the advances made on her by the prospective employers, she finds herself out in the streets jobless until she comes to Boss Kĩhara who gives her a job without sexual demands. She considers him a godsend until he reveals his true colours. Her rejection earns her a sack.

The other proverb that is discussed in this paper is one that is stated in juxtaposition in a conversation between Warĩnga and the Rich Old Man from Ngorika. This takes place when Gatuĩria [the Rich Old Man's son and Warĩnga's fiancé] takes her to his home to make formal their engagement and as it happens, the father is the one to be the first to receive the bride to be. The Rich Old Man takes the opportunity to win Warĩnga back when he recognizes her and his greed of long ago is rekindled. Unfortunately, for him, she is no longer the naive Nakuru Day Secondary School girl she was and boldly answers him alluding to the Gĩkũyũ philosophy, "I am not as stupid as you think. Gĩkũyũ said that 'to hate a cow is to hate its hide. And now I say to you: to love a cow is to love its calf'" (p.259).

In the two proverbs, the young Warĩnga displays her cultural conversance. She attributes the first proverb to a third party by using the acceptable intonation of Gĩkũyũ proverbs when she quips: "Gĩkũyũ

said that to hate a cow is to hate its hide" (p.259). The desubjectivisation [22] bequeaths the proverb authority and neutrality as Gĩkũyũ is highly respected as the founding father of Agĩkũyũ people and to the dictates is law. By citing the proverb therefore, Warĩnga shares the proverbial wisdom of her ancestors as a true faithful daughter of Gĩkũyũ and Mũmbi and the Rich Old Man from Ngorika is astonished as well as challenged by her maturity over time especially when he remembers Jacinta Warĩnga as the 'naive sweet girl from Nakuru Day Secondary School' who had once played the hunted and him the hunter ending up in his chains of rearing Wambũ as a single mother.

Further, Jacinta Warĩnga demonstrates her independence from the chains of the ilk of the Rich Old Man from Ngorika and Boss Kĩhara by creating a proverb of her own to suit the meaning she wishes to appropriate to it. Rutere and Kirigia [23] observe, "knowledge of proverbs demonstrates linguistic prowess and wisdom" (p.35). Their observation is in communion with the famous Gĩkũyũ saying which states; *ciunagwo rũkomo kĩmenyi akamenya ikiunwo kĩrigo akarigo ikiunwo* (we speak in proverbs, those who are wise will understand and those who are not will not understand). Using two proverbs in quick succession Warĩnga not only shows her linguistic prowess and wisdom but also her creative ability.

Out of the existing repository of Gĩkũyũ proverbial wisdom, she is able to come up with her own composition in the second proverb as; 'to love a cow is to love its calf'. This sounds like 'playful blasphemy' [24] since the proverb is a corruption of the existing proverb which talks about hate whereas she speaks of love in hers. However, during their conversation, the Rich Old Man is so drunk with power that he does not acknowledge the progressive change in Warĩnga's intellect, exposure and independence but keeps on rambling to her of his exploits as before. He even boasts of his close acquaintance with Europe as he promises Warĩnga heaven and juxtaposes what is western with what is Kenyan. He attaches so much importance to what is European and denigrates what is African as he tells Jacinta Warĩnga, "I'd like you to take off this cloth and these necklaces and earrings made of dry maize stalks and put on clothes and jewellery made in Europe" (ibid). The privileging of artifacts from Europe over those from Kenya indicates that although Kenya is an independent nation his mind is still colonized [actually suffering from the worst state of colonization] [25].

The Rich Old Man is so immersed in his self-induced trance that he does not notice Warĩnga's change of countenance and disgust in her voice and when she inquired whether she could ask a question; he interprets that as an indicator of her attentiveness to his

significantly wise soothing words. This is depicted in his answer using a well-known Gikũyũ proverb; “Certainly. “No one is persecuted for asking questions” (p.260). Naturally, this proverb is used to encourage people to ask any questions to which they seek genuine answers or to questions that are difficult to them and whose answers they do not know. In this case, however, Warĩinga asks questions contemptuously knowing pretty well that Gatuĩria's father will not be at ease and would not like what she will ask. Further, she feels that he will not answer the questions truthfully after the way he had threatened her if she would not consent to his desire. In his ignorance, he mistakes her anger for fear and acceptance to his impulsive demands. Blinded by his pride, he does not detect the contempt in Warĩinga's speech as she makes scathing remarks reminding him of his wickedness rather he takes this as praise for his conquest and interrupts; ‘I knew you would agree...’ (p.261).

Consequently, he does not suspect that Warĩinga is capable of defending herself and when she commanded him to look at her his words froze when he saw the pistol and unlike Warĩinga who had an option of abortion or giving birth after he impregnated her, he had no choice but to die. Warĩinga shot him dead and fled without looking back. She did not care to be caught and rot in jail but was satisfied that by killing the Rich Old Man from Ngorika, she had freed many other vulnerable people whose lives would otherwise have been ruined by the likes of the Boss Kĩhara and the Old Man from Ngorika. Warĩinga's action can be read as an eradication of social oppression that thwart people driven progress and suppress their dreams. It is the freeing of women from male exploitation and other marginalized groups by their rulers and employer.

CONCLUSION

The paper has demonstrated that proverbial wisdom is a necessary aspect in the construction of African Literature. Further, Ngũgĩ has used proverbs to stimulate social, political and economic liberation in *Devil on the Cross*. Although proverbs as a genre is studied in Oral Literature, its significance and contribution to written literature is indispensable. Further, the study realizes that proverbs are liberating devices utilised by both the old and the young to pass important messages in a more gentle manner thus rendering the unbearable bearable. Besides, proverbs enable the user to negotiate sensitive matters without losing face as well as bearing responsibilities for their utterances in case their ideas do not work. The study further finds that proverbs are a means of passing knowledge and values in an appealing appropriate way. Hence, communities should preserve their proverbs as they are valuable not only in orality but also in literacy. Since proverbs are value laden social aspects, more studies should be carried on them.

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