

## Language and Ideology in Post-Colonial Kenyan Popular Literature Congruence of code Mixing and Ideology in David Mailu's without Kiinua Mgongo

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**Abstract:** This study carried out an analysis of David Mailu's work and his contributions in Kenyan popular literature. The study investigated new linguistic innovation of mixing English and Kiswahili the in East Africa popular literature and how the linguistic form matched the ideological subtext. The researcher portrayed the message of the novella and unraveled ideology hidden by the code mixed language. The study employed the qualitative approach which involved a textual analysis of the novel as well as library research. Data collection mainly involved library research and analyses of both primary and secondary sources. The data collected were presented in the form of descriptions, analyses and logical argument. The findings of the study, among other things; provide invaluable insights into the linguistic code mixing and code switching characteristic of typical Kenyans.

**Keywords:** Language, Ideology, David Mailu, Literature.

### INTRODUCTION

According to Simon Gikandi in East African Literature [1], East African novel has not been highly experimental form. Most novelist use borrowed style with occasional changes in shape and structure. He argues that this lack of experimentation with form has something to do with generic irrelativeness of the novel within East Africa. Simon argues that Okot p Bitek's songs rely on traditional African form and that's what made them imaginatively domestic.

Okot used Acoli lyrics and turned them in to contemporary forum for debate and discussions. Taban Lo Liyong in one of his many interviews once said that East African literature was lagging behind West Africa because of literary barrenness

Ngugi in Decolonizing the mind [2], argues that what many Kenyan writers produce in English is not African literature. He argues that it's Afro-saxon literature because it is produced in foreign languages. For Ngugi, to choose a language is to choose a world. Ngugi argues that a writer must be aware of who he or she is writing for so that he chooses the correct medium for expressing himself. This explains why Ngugi abandoned English as his vehicle of expression at some time because it carried the culture of the foreign world yet he wanted a language that could assume the culture of the Kenyan people and particularly peasants and workers

It is within this background that I wish to discuss David Mailu's linguistic innovation, the novel Without Kiinua Mgongo which is composed entirely in a mixture of Swahili and English. It is a historical artifact in Kenya literary history. The language of the novel is unprecedented in the region featuring code mixing that is reminiscent of Nairobi speech.

### Significance of the Study

Mixing of languages in Kenyan literature is not very common and is also unheard of save for other parts of the globe. Therefore, this study is set out to address the shortfall in research on the use of mixed languages. This study helps to stretch the boundaries of expressions beyond what Mailu previously conformed to. Most Kenyans are also bilingual especially those who live in the cities are able to read both English and Kiswahili fluently. This in a way has also made the readership narrower. This formal linguistic framework is closely analogous to the work's ideological framework which posits capitalistic relations and a restoration of wholeness both individually and communally, on a return to rather loosely indigenous cultural tradition with patriarchal family structures that has been fragmented and disrupted by external forces evident with the rapid growth of modern cities and changing gender relations.

### Definition of Key Terms

#### Urban Fiction/ Urban Literature

Urban Literature in the context of this study refers to popular literature produced in an urban or city setting in which characters from different socio-economic backgrounds are variously preoccupied with finding means to fit in urban or city life (McKeown1-4).

## Culture

Culture in the context of this study refers to a particular people's way of life including their language, dressing, food, family life, consciousness, and religious belief systems among others (John Fiske 1-7).

## Popular culture

This refers to a culture well-liked by many, considered inferior by the elite, yet made by the people for themselves as a kind of reaction to the dominant, elitist culture. This is manifested in such practices as in television programs like soap operas, fashion clothes, video games, slang language use, pop music, comics and pop literature (Fiske 7-12).

## Code-switching/Code-mixing

These terms according to Allwood et al, 2010 will be used interchangeably to refer to instances of complete and unaltered forms of another language (in particular English) that are used in discourses between two or more speakers of the same language. These will also be used to refer to expressions in which a mixture of IsiZulu language and lexical material from the English language is manifested. CS will connote code switching while CM will connote code mixing.

## DISCUSSION

According to Robert and Roger Kutz in African Popular Literature [4], for a long time, David was stigmatized and very unpopular within the scholarly circles because of the themes he addressed in his earlier works however, his willingness to innovate and stretch the boundaries of expression has earned him respect among his detractors. He has settle down to address more serious themes of East African experience. He argues that all east African novels have politics as their motive force. How politics affect the physical and psychological experience matters most because this determines ideology. This in his opinion has made critics revise their earlier stands for example Henry Indangasi.

Mailu's novel is fascinating because of the way the linguistic form matches the ideological subtext that is hegemony (dominance over another). Linguistic form and ideological content forge a remarkable marriage in this text.

According to Braj in The Alchemy of Language [6], mixing two languages is not very common in East African literature but it has its origin as an established technique in Indian literature. He argues that alteration of codes takes two forms that are code mixing and code switching.

Code switching according to Braj, K occurs when a speaker stays with the same code for an extended period. The sentence is the basic unit of switching that occurs at the boundaries. This is common

in West Africa where characters speak pidgin in addition to the language of the text.

Code Mixing in his view involves moving back and forth between two codes. The basic unit here is the morpheme rather than the whole sentence and switches are more frequent. For example, we have word internal switches in the novel like *alismoke*, *akaswallow* e.t.c. This illustrates how Swahili morphology dominates

David Mailu is exercising more of his multilingual code repertoire than would be if he wrote entirely in English or Swahili. This restricts the text readership to those who share the writer's multilingual code repertoire. This novel illustrates a creative use of code available to members of a speech community like that found in Kenyan urban areas where a significant population speaks both English and Swahili. According to Robert and Roger Kurtz, this formal linguistic framework is analogous to the work's ideological framework. They opined that David Mailu's ideology posits a restoration of wholeness both individually or communally on a return to rather a loosely defined indigenous cultural tradition. Tradition has been disrupted by external forces like urbanization and change of gender roles. To Mailu, in their opinion, all problems we currently have emanate from the city that is corrupt and the antidote is in the village that is still pure.

This ideology matches the linguistic structure employed throughout the novel. Code mixing dominated by Swahili base and inflectional framework to which English borrowing are appended: in the same way the thematic content of the work assumes that a society such as that of Kenya, proper cultural mixing occurs by way of selected foreign grafting on indigenous stock and not the other way round.

According to Abdul Jan Mohamed in Manichean Aesthetics [5], States that this kind of ideological subtext results to hegemonic literature that is literature that justifies the established ascendancy unlike non hegemonic texts which call social structures to question by attacking dominant groups. Hegemonic texts offer solutions to conflicts in ways that do not challenge the social status quo.

Without Kiinua Mgongo represents a unique style in east Africa because it is written in a combination of English and Kiswahili which is not very common. This sets Mailu apart from his peers because as Simon Gikandi argues that east African novels were not very experimental. Most novels from this region according to Gikandi were full of borrowed style with occasional change in structure and shape. Therefore, he holds the view that David Mailu's works provides a radical break up from European genres that have been produced before. Here is an example, the description of

Katherine's overweight mother who contrast with his scrawny husband

Lakini what Bwana Mbuta had lost in weight, alicompensatiwa na bibiye. Hilda extravagantly fleshy, alikuwa mnene, mwili wote nimacurve matupu commonly referred to hapa nyumbani as mummy mwenye silaha matiti na behind kubwa. Hivi iweakikuangukia, you are finished.

Wriggling about nyumbani kwake convincingly kwamba alikua a well eaten mkewa millionaire alipendelea kutoboka hukuna huko akiwa command amakuwa abusewa fanyikazi. Mwenye kupenda kuvaaki expensively kabisa. Ngozi yake ember yanga'ra kwani mali ilimkwaruza na kumsugua vyema. A woman of ma necklaces na ma earings ya kila aina na gharama

In this excerpt and even throughout the entire novel, there are frequent switches within each sentence and even within each word. This requires that both the narrator and reader be relatively conversant in English and Swahili. So this is actually code mixing but of what type? There are three ways of accounting for cases of mixing: pidginisation, borrowing and creation of new code. In Roger and Robert Kurtz opinions, none of these could account for David Mailu's case.

Pidginization according to the Kurtz's entailed a simplified grammatical structure usually not conforming closely to standard forms of the lexifier language. In Mailu's case, the grammar of both English and Kiswahili is standard and has no simplification. Furthermore the common domain of a pidgin is *lingua franca* used among speakers who do not share a common language. Mailu's audience would have been able to understand had he choose to write in Standard English or Kiswahili. This leads to the fact that *Without Kiinua Mgongo* cannot be described as a pidgin.

By the same token, Robert and Roger Kurtz argue that the language is not a version of sheng, the Nairobi street slang. Sheng has simplified grammar and serves as a common language for a diverse population borrowing from English, Swahili and other vernacular languages. Sheng is meant to exclude certain listeners especially the older group.

They are of the opinion that it is tempting to dismiss the second type of code mixing- borrowing because it involves isolated lexical items that fill a lexical gap in the debtor language. Mailu uses whole phrases in both languages that could be expressed in the entire book as English or Swahili. A person with limited proficiency could produce this type of mixture but Mailu prior works shows that this is not what he is doing. Thus the English and Swahili in *Without Kiinua Mgongo* is being borrowed to fill a lexical gap.

One might make a case for labeling this work Swahili with heavy English borrowing since where mixing occurs within words, Swahili morphology dominates as in (*alismoke*, *hukupursue*). English inflections for tense, case, number and gender are used on English words not on Swahili

In general, the usual pattern of borrowing from one language to another is such that the morphology of the donor language is replaced with that of the borrower language. Exceptions are usually limited to learn terms such as those occasionally found in English terms like alumni. This pattern does occur in the novella but not as often as it might if Mailu were truly in Swahili mode when writing. For example he writes *mtushortish* not *mtumshortish* which would agree in number and gender as required between Swahili nouns and their modifiers. Such untaken opportunities abound throughout the text. Thus borrowing is not an adequate label to explain what is happening.

Should we then credit Mailu with deploying the third type of mixing, a new code entirely, one that might be dubbed "swinglish"? I suggest not based on Roger and Robert Kurtz opinions. Inasmuch as there is more structural similarity than difference between a monolingual code repertoire and that of a multilingual, one can expect a multilingual to do the sort of register so as to adapt to the context of speech. Thus rather than using a new code, we might say Mailu is exercising more of linguistic code repertoire than he would be if he wrote entirely in English or Swahili.

Braj Kachru notes that multilingual writer particularly the ability to switch codes at once limits the text and extends it. Multilingual repertoire is wider than monolingual one hence expanding opportunities for creative expression. The multilingual writer must choose between restricting the text to include less than his or her full code repertoire or restricting the readership of the text to those who share the writer's multilingual code repertoire on the other hand.

In other words, by mixing English and Kiswahili, He potends that Mailu has undoubtedly given himself an opportunity for creative expressions beyond linguistic boundaries to which he had previously conformed. Without *Kiinua Mgongo* illustrates a creative use of code available to a multilingual speech community such as that found in Kenya where a significant population speaks both English and Kiswahili fluently. He has restricted the readership to those that understand both English and Kiswahili than if he had written monolingually.

This formal linguistic framework on its own becomes noteworthy because it is closely analogous to the work's ideological framework. Despite the apparent variety of Mailu's writing of which *Without Kiinua Mgongo* is an example, a close analysis reveals that in

both his popular and moralistic works in fiction and nonfiction alike shows that he is ideologically consistent. This ideology posits the restoration of wholeness both individually and communally, on a return to a rather loosely traditional culture. The tradition by this account has been fragmented and disrupted by external forces that are evident by growth of modern African city and changing gender roles. Mailu ideology manifested repeatedly in various writing suggest that wholeness can only come through return to traditional way of life and patriarchal family structure.

For Mailu, evils of the Kenyan society are concentrated in the cities while their antidote is in the countryside. All problems and pathologies in the text and also in Mailu's other works are located in Nairobi which is represented as alien and un-African. The millionaire Mbuta is corrupted because he is alienated from his roots. By contrast, the good characters Nzuki and his father Mwangangi are closely tied to their home in machakos. It is to his credit that even in his darkest hour, Mwangangi refuses to sell his plot of land in the country.

A key turning point in the story occurs when Mbuta hunts down Nzuki near Koola just before the desperate Nzuki can flee to Mombasa. When Mbuta shows up and asks, "did you think I would never find your home?" Nzuki assumes he is going to be punished further. In fact we see that Mbuta, despite his corruption in the city, has managed to return to his rural roots and from this point, things seems to be different. Mbuta realizes at this point that Nzuki is more smatter and hard working than his urbanized children and he begins the process of adopting Nzuki to his family.

Mailu's writing highlights patriarchy as a key traditional value. Initially, all gender relations Mbuta's family is wrong. Mbuta is weak, thin and suffers from hypertension while his wife and daughter are combative. When they fight, Mbuta get the worst of it. The language Mailu uses describes Mbuta in diminutive case (*Kamtukembamba*) while his wife is compared to a tractor (*tingatinga*)

*Bilashaka, Mbutamwenyewealimwogopa Hilda  
kummeet chest to chest. Mummy  
alikuakamatingatingaasichezewenamtukembambana  
frail kamambuta*

Things return to their rightful place only if men are restored back to authority and control. In rather contrived ending, the once combative Katherine becomes a properly docile wife, clean spirited and faithful, all thanks to the influence of Nzuki

**Akam changea kawa mkewa roho safi kabisa then mke faithful kamili**

In Mailu's stories, this is what constitutes a happy ending. Rural values and male authority are

restored and unquestioned. Whatever concessions are made to foreign influence like church wedding should only occur within the framework of this tradition.

This prescriptive ideology closely matches linguistic structure that has been employed throughout the text. Mailu multilingual repertoire makes use of a particular variety of code mixing dominated by Swahili base and inflections to which English borrowings are appended; in the same way the thematic content of the work assumes that in a society such as Kenya's, proper cultural mixing occurs by way of selected foreign grafting on to indigenous stock and not the other way around.

Borrowing from Abdul Jan Mohamed's terminology, we note that this type of ideological subtext results in hegemonic literature- that is a literature that justifies the established ascendancy. Unlike non hegemonic texts, which call social structures in to question either by attacking the dominant group or by raising the questions of the status of the subjugated group? Hegemonic texts like this one offer solution to conflict in ways that do not challenge the social status quo. Without Kiinua mgongo does not ask us how Mbuta got his wealth or how he got control over his servant's lives.

## CONCLUSION

It should be noted that the model of authentic indigenous culture on which Mailu works rely is based on a very specific interpretation of African traditional culture whose accuracy is open to question. Certainly, the literature shows that not all writers would concur with Mailu's account of traditional society functions or his precision of how culturally mixed society should be. The depictions of rural society in Grace Ogot's *Promised Land* or Ngugi's *River Between* only to mention two important works from Kenya, offer radically different perspective. Mailu's view of ideal African tradition is highly debatable.

Secondly, even though ideology and linguistic form complement each other in the text, there seems no necessary or inevitable correlation between the two. A writer's ideology need not necessarily lead to a particular form such as code mixing. While covert emotive structures may help to shape overt ideological discourse as Jan Mohamed would argue, linguistic patterns like code mixing are separable from those structures. Ngugi's use of Gikuyu and oral forms in his recent writing is ideologically motivated just like Mailu whose choice of code mixing is reflecting his ideology.

Finally, it seems surprising that this type of linguistic experiment represented in this novel has not caught on more in east Africa. To my knowledge, this is the only published works from Kenya apart from the second title that is out of print. It is hard to imagine that any stigma associated with reading non standard

language would be any more significant than the stigma attached to reading popular literature in general. Code mixing is a common thing in east African speech after all. Since it limits ones audience, this may account to the reluctance to emulate Mailu's example. This text was published by Mailu's own house production which suggests that other publishers were reluctant to gamble on this experiment which could have limited the readership of the text outside east Africa. This book has not been reprinted since 1989 which means that those publishers may have been prudent from a financial point of view.

Another reason is related to form. Sheng and other types of code mixing are seen as part of oral tradition appearing frequently in drama as well as poetry rather than in prose. But while this association of code mixing with oral forms seems logical, it is not inevitable and there should be no reason why other works featuring code mixing should not be forthcoming in East African writing

This technique has no precedent in post colonial Kenyan fiction which has always featured languages in their separate and standard form. Code mixing seems to be accurate description of Mailu's technique in *Without KiinuaMgongo*.

For an average intellectual in Europe and Africa, the theme of this text is not very exciting. In its content, the novel does not in any major way from other novels of popular literature. One novelty however is Mailu's text language which is complete and original mixture of English and Swahili. No making of discursive function can be perceived.

In the narrow sense of the term, Mailu does not employ code switching but code mixing. Though one repeatedly find text passages that can be heard in actual

and communicate the text language is composed as written language with a certain degree of artificiality. In his mixing of languages, Mailu can be regarded as subversive in his close adherence to standard registers of Swahili and English, however he must be viewed as a conservative.

Popular literature can have important functions beyond its everyday use. The really monumental works of art do not emerge out of nothing. They germinate out of the ferment of popular literature. If Franco Moretti is right that a master writer like Conan Doyle needed hundreds of detective novels before he wrote his *Masterwork*. Mailu's *Without Kiinua Mgongo* could end up in literature's slaughter house. But one day a writer might appear who employs bilingual language in form and subtle and masterly code switching yet finally; it will always be David Mailu who was the first in East Africa to have experimented with bilingual writing in the format described.

Researchers should keep an eye out for further instances of bilingual writing in east Africa. In his booklet [3] Mailu gives us another code of mixing function.

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