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Department of English.

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An Afro-centrist Perspective of Cultural Affirmation and Social Progress in p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol*, and Ngugi's *I Will Marry When I Want*.

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Supervised by: Professor M'hamed BENSEMMANE.
Submitted by: Boualem BOUCHERIFI.
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Boards of Examiners:

Chair: Dr/Prof , University of

Supervisor: Dr/Prof , University of

Examiners: Dr/Prof , University of

Déclaration sur l'honneur:

I hereby declare that the subsequence of this dissertation (thesis) is entirely the result of my investigation and that due reference or acknowledgment is made, whenever necessary, to the work of other researchers.

Date:
Signed:

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Abstract in English:
This dissertation studies the militant socio-cultural and political positions of Okot p'Bitek, as well as Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Mirii. The focus is on Okot's long poems *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol*, and on the Ngugi play *I Will Marry When I Want. S L* and *S O* truly epitomise Okot's philosophy of 'Africa's Cultural Revolution'. In *S L*, the poet charges his epic character, Lawino with the mission of presenting, interpreting and eventually defending the traditional aspects of her community. Equipped with a remarkable charisma, eloquent words and a lucid vision, Lawino expresses her sympathies and anxieties through describing Acoli food, dances, aesthetics, medicine, beliefs, rituals, religion and many other aspects. *S L* constitutes a solid argument centred on the idea of a 'search' for an African identity. As this dissertation suggests, Okot's cultural insights impress even non-Acoli readers, because of Lawino's particular use of figurative language, similes, metaphors, irony, mockery and satire. Its publication in 1966 inspired other African writers to evoke the richness and originality of their cultural heritage.

In his rejoinder *Song of Ocol*, Okot sketches Lawino's husband like an adamant figure embracing Western values, ideals and culture. If Lawino stands for traditionalism, Ocol represents the African educated 'élite' attracted by modernity and the European lifestyle. Ocol's stand point is hyperbolically dramatised by his negation of his own culture, his own people, his wife and even himself. The caricature is carried further when Ocol takes the advantage of his Western education to become a ruthless political leader striving for power and money. Instead of promoting justice and progress, Ocol shocks his audience by his indifference to poverty, disease and ignorance. By making him a symbol of Africa's cruellest dictators, Okot criticises the hypocrisy of Africa's national leaders and points at their failure to meet social aspirations.

I W M by the two Ngugis deals with the socio-economic reasons for the down fall of the Kiguunda family. In accordance with the 'people's theatre' or the 'theatre of the oppressed', the dramatists portray the life of the Kiguunda family who fail to pay back a bank loan. Their situation is complicated when their land is sold at auction, their daughter falls in prostitution and Kiguunda sinks into alcoholism. In fact, Ngugi is implicitly accusing the western capitalists and their local collaborators of impoverishing peasants and workers. Thus, the two Ngugis attempt to re-define the priorities of the national independence through their political activism in Kamiriithu theatre with peasants and workers. Adopting a socialist ideology, the dramatists describe a kind of *class struggle* between the Kiois and the Kiguundas, i.e., the bourgeois and the peasants. While Okot lays the stress on Uganda's need for a cultural revaluation, or indeed revolution, Ngugi is more concerned to consider culture as a basis on which to construct a just and democratic society in post independent Kenya.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

During the long and arduous process of decolonisation, the Africans have gradually sized up and internalised the debilitating effects of European colonialism on indigenous populations. If the departure of the European colonialist is justified, it left on field a chaotic reality, worsened by political mismanagement and difficulty for Africans to re-organise themselves politically, socially and culturally outside the conditions created by colonialists' paradigms of thought. Hence, the inheritance and practices of hegemonic habits under the umbrella of Western imperialism appear as pivotal subjects for exploration and examination in postcolonial studies. Most African writers and artists have taken upon themselves to react to issues like colonialism, neo-colonialism, imperialism, race and gender with the aim to raise the political consciousness of their compatriots so as to fight all forms of Western hegemony, and criticise the undemocratic practices and abuses of power in their countries. Among the outstanding literary figures who have taken up this mission we have the foremost Kenyan novelist and dramatist Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and the Ugandan poet and cultural critic Okot p'Bitek who both have devised their works for the rehabilitation of the African image, in terms of governance (especially Ngugi) and revival of Africa's indigenous cultures. Both belong to the Eastern part of Africa, once inappropriately described as a 'literary desert'. As will be shown, their importance is not only due to the literary quality of their cultural creativity, but also to the impact they have left along socio-cultural and ideological lines. Okot and Ngugi have used different literary genres, poetry and fiction for the former and fiction and drama for the latter. Still, they meet on the issue of cultural authentification and on the urgent need to revalue the traditional image of Africa.

In Okot's *Song of Lawino & Song of Ocol*[1] and in Ngugi's play *I Will Marry When I Want*[2] written with Ngugi wa Mirii, there is a constant concentration on the centrality and validity of African traditions which is coupled with a dire socio-economic reality under cruel dictatorial regimes such as Jomo Kenyatta's in Kenya and Idi Amin Dada's in Uganda. But culturally speaking, one should bear in mind the substantial efforts of both Okot and Ngugi to develop their national culture so as to counterweight the primacy and imposition of Western

[1]) *Song of Lawino* is written in the Luo language under the title *Wer Pa Lawino,* then translated by the author into English and published in 1966, but surprisingly the Acoli version was published in 1969. The present copy contains both *Song of Lawino & Song of Ocol*, Berkshire England, Heinemann 1984. Note that we use respectively the following acronyms: *S L* and *SO* to mention both songs.

[2]) *I Will Marry When I Want* was first published in Gikuyu under the title *Ngaahika Ndeenda* by Heinemann in 1980. Then later translated into English by the co-authors themselves: Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Mirii, and published for the first time in London, by Heinemann, 1982. The present copy was published in Harare by Zimbabwe Publishing House in 1986. We refer to the play by the following initials *I W M.*

culture over African culture. To begin with, let us start with Ngugi's definition of culture in the following:

> Culture, in its broadest sense, is a way of life fashioned by people in their collective endeavour to live and come to terms with their total environment. It is the sum of their art, their science and all their social institutions, including their systems of beliefs and rituals.[3]

Therefore culture is a way of life, an intrinsic concept of common values agreed upon to realize the aspiration of the African nations. It includes, as it were, a whole body of beliefs, rituals, customs and traditions which undoubtedly cemented African communities and provided their continuity for generations. In his analysis in *Homecoming* (1972), Ngugi stresses culture's paramount importance in bringing about harmony and unity to people and empowering them with will and courage notably during the hard years of Mau Mau insurgence in the early fifties. Besides, national culture functions as a vehicle to facilitate national cooperation as well as laying a solid basis for the future formulation of common principles and values indispensable for the building of the nation–state. One could particularly note the determining role of culture in the colonial period when fighters and people alike found refuge in popular songs and dances, thus gaining energy to carry on their fight. In this perspective, oral literature provided Ngugi's characters with songs, dances and mimes so as to spur up people for common actions and achieve the long awaited independence as we will show in the play.

The debate on national culture spurs us onward to consider Eurocentric mainstream discourses of some "European scholars" who have deliberately misrepresented, misread and misinterpreted Africa and Africans in their literary and artistic imaginary re-presentations. Such discourse formulates a framework of literature aiming to portray the natives as "barbaric" and "savage" beings in the form of fabricated stories for European consumption. Valentine Mudimbe is among the African philosophers and theorists who investigated the very roots of the fictitious image of Africa in the light of Michel de Montaigne's and Michel de Certeau's commentaries. Mudimbe observes their works as based on the theme and the insistent image of the African continent as a 'refused place' a remote piece of land on which pathetic beings live on roots and herbs. He maintains that the discovery of Africa, or say the "invention" of Africa began in the fifteenth and the sixteenth century, but the seventeenth century was the period of major discoveries and

[3]) Ngugi wa Thiong'o (James Ngugi). *Homecoming.* Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics. London, Heinemann Educational Books, 1972, p. 04.

explorations justified by papal missionaries, scientific expeditions or economic needs of Europe. However, immense problems arose:

> the eighteenth century as the moment of strategic articulation of the concepts of primitiveness and savagery … Information and descriptions about the newly discovered "savages" found their way into the European consciousness, which strives to assert its *Cogito* toward what "it" defines as radically different.[4]

In *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (1973), Abdel Ghaffar M. Ahmed noticed that approximately in the same period "some basic ideas held by some Europeans about the "natives" who came under their domination have remained in currency, e.g., that the European is a superior human being in relation to the "native" who is hardly human in every respect."[5]. This idea of difference, or Otherness, or alterity needs further discussion in the second chapter. Mudimbe considers the eighteenth century as a decisive phase in the history of Africa, thanks to the Enlightenment of a "science" of difference: anthropology which "invents" an idea of Africa. However, colonialism will elaborate upon this idea. The French philosopher and anthropologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss validates Mudimbe's finding in this apologetic stance "L'anthropologie ne se distingue pas des autres sciences humaines et sociales par un sujet d'étude qui lui serait propre. L'histoire a voulu qu'elle commençât par s'intéresser aux sociétés dites «sauvages» ou «primitives»."[6]. According to Lévi-Strauss social anthropology is an interesting discipline because it conflates between "cultural" and "social" notions which are hardly distinguishable. In fact, the notion of "culture" is British in this respect, according to the British philosopher, E. B. Tylor, who tried for the first time to define "culture" as: "That complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."[7]. Indeed, this factor among others creates what Mudimbe called "the colonial library" to perpetuate arrogant ideas and assumptions about indigenous cultures being worthless, archaic and backward modes of life.

In fact, the "literary barrenness" of Africa urged writers and artists to revise and re-reconsider European assumptions and misconceptions with a critical

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[4]) Valentine Mudimbe. *The Idea of Africa*. Oxford, James Currey, 2005, p. 28.

[5]) In "Some Remarks from the Third World on Anthropology and Colonialism: The Sudan" by Abed Ghaffar M. Ahmed. *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter***.** Talal Asad (Ed). New York, Humanity Books, 1973 , p. 261.

[6]) Claude Lévi-Strauss. *Anthropologie Structurale*. Paris, Librairie Plon, 1958, p. 378.

[7]) Ibid., p 389. This definition is cited by Lévi-Strauss from E. B. Tylor. *Primitive Culture*, London. (1871), vol. I p .1.) When discussing similarities and differences of social anthropology and cultural anthropology.

eye and through an Africanist discourse. Among the apostles who defended cultural and political interests of Africa is Frantz Fanon who pleads for the promotion of national culture through Marxist paradigms, i.e., attributing national culture a revolutionary signification. Fanon couldn't imagine Africa outside the framework of "literature of combat"; the following words bear witness to this sense:

> A national culture is not a folklore, nor an abstract populism that believes it can discover the people's true nature. It is not made up of the inert dregs of gratuitous actions, that is to say actions which are less and less attached to the ever-present reality of the people. A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence. A national culture in under-developed countries should therefore take its place at the very heart of the struggle for freedom which these countries are carrying on.[8]

In his book *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon definitely fuses national culture with resistance and spiritual revolutionary ideas. The Fanonian concept of culture reflects his personal involvement to fight French colonialism in Algeria as one of Africa's outstanding processes of decolonisation and liberation. This "prophet" of change predicted the failure of the colonialists' project, while reminding the colonized man of his responsibility in the process of "liberation" saying: "The colonized man (…) ought to use the past with the intention of opening the future, as an invitation to action and a basis for hope. But to ensure that hope and to give it form, he must take part in action and throw himself body and soul into the national struggle."[9]. This revolutionary aspect of culture is also apparent in Ngugi's play *I W M* in the sense that peasants and workers have to confront the imperialists' socio-political project through warning messages so as to achieve a total liberation from the clutches of neo-colonialism and its new form, imperialism. On the whole, all that Ngugi and Fanon wanted was a radical (revolutionary) change in Africa's social, economic, political and cultural status by means of resistance and struggle. Therefore, "revolution" in its Marxist sense is an ambitious project implying discipline, militancy, and commitment to societies. All those elements could help Africans to be reborn and head towards total "Liberation" in its fullest sense, as the editorialist of *Présence Africaine* of the mid sixties asserted when he reminded his readers of what the revolution meant:

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[8]) Frantz Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). Translated by Constance Farrington (1974). London, Penguin Books, 2001, p. 188.
[9]) Ibid., p. 187.

> «La révolution» signifie austérité, discipline, épreuve, labeur passionnément soutenu et remise en question de valeurs. Elle signifie qu'on meurt à soi pour renaître … Car la révolution du Tiers-Monde condamnerait l'hégémonie occidentale pour une démocratique des peuples et des cultures où l'Occident retrouverait progressivement sa véritable dimension.[10]

It is from this standpoint that both Ngugi and Okot attempt to raise their readers' consciousness of the need to come to terms with dilemmas and problems facing Africans. The focus here is on the postcolonial reality discussed in Okot p'Bitek's long dramatic monologues *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol,* and Ngugi's play *I W M.* These poems belong to a postcolonial heritage written by second generation writers, who have witnessed the devastating impact of European colonialism, and the social and political deterioration of their respective countries Uganda and Kenya. They endeavour to present a critical presentation of downtrodden societies through the experiences of victimised and impoverished characters, aiming at affording ambitious visions, or rather suggesting appropriate solutions to bridge the gap between African's social and political reality, and ideological approaches. Most importantly, we discuss Okot's and Ngugi's points of view in the Foucauldian sense of 'discourse'. Michel Foucault, the French philosopher considers that "discourse is constituted by a group of sequences of signs.". He adds further defining the *discursive formation* as "the principle of dispersion and redistribution, not of formations, not of sentences, not of propositions, but of statements.". Hence, he works on the complex notion of discourse to be the group of statements that belong to a single system of formation. In his illuminating book *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault discusses the intricate relation between knowledge and discourse. For him the discursive formation propels the process of the formation of ideas and thought; for the sake of clarification he considers that his intended discourse

> is made of a limited number of statements for which a group of conditions of existence can be defined. Discourse in this sense is not an ideal, timeless form that also passes a history; …., posing the problem of its own limits, its divisions, its transformations, the specific modes of its temporality rather than its sudden irruption in the midst of the complicities of time.[11]

Whether European or Africanist, discourse is to be considered as having power to influence people's ideas, perceptions and outlook. In this connection,

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[10]) "Révolution et Autorité Africaines" in *Présence Africaine*. Paris, First Quarter, 1964, n° 49, p. 07.
[11]) Michel Foucault. *Archaeology of Knowledge*. Translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith. London & New York, Routledge, 2009, p. 131.

we could read Okot's discourse as an unprecedented determination to assert African identity, culture, customs and traditions and their rightful place within an African setting. Valentine Mudimbe goes further in this sense, suggesting the notion of 'African genesis' to counter European anthropologists' discourse to "formulate hypotheses about the epistemological locus of Africa's invention and its meaning for discourses on Africa."[12]. Reacting to Foucault's notion of *discursive formation*, Mudimbe advances the idea of 'African *gnosis*' as a means through which he could "extend the notion of philosophy to African traditional systems of thought, considering them as dynamic processes in which concrete experiences are integrated into an order of concepts and discourses.". In the "Introduction" of *The Invention of Africa*, Mudimbe prefers to speak about African knowledge in terms of *gnosis* in the epistemological sense i.e., "seeking to know, inquiry, methods of knowing, investigation", therefore Mudimbe complies with the Foucauldian philosophical notion of 'discourse'.

For the time being one could consider the impact of European discourse on the African élite, and more interestingly the question of the élite's alienation from their own societies, and the underlying reasons for the intensification of westernisation in East Africa. In the first chapter we try to circumscribe the sensitive zones affected by the cultural encounter with Europe, we emphasise the search for a "cultural space" and the emergence of anthropology as an apparatus or a "discourse" to serve the colonial enterprise. Among the questions we try to answer is how far could Okot's traditionalism and "Cultural Revolution" constitute an alternative way to counter the perverse aspects to be seen as rewarding; and how far have African writers succeeded in correcting a derogatory image of Africa produced by Europe ? The second chapter will examine the impact of Western culture and paradigms of thought on religion and education. We will then shift to Ocol's and Lawino's conflicting views regarding development and social progress. The last chapter will be devoted to studying the ways in which both Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Mirii interpret the socio-economic reality of underprivileged classes. We try to examine the effectiveness with which Ngugi wa Thiong'o communicates his Marxist ideas through a social realist mode of writing.

[12]) Valentine Mudimbe. *The Invention of Africa*. Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge. London, James Currey, 1988, p. 16.

CHAPTER ONE

OKOT p'BITEK'S TRADITIONALIST DISCOURSE.

My age-mates have donned
White ostrich feathers,
They are singing a war.
I want to join them
In the wilderness
And chase Death away
From our village,
Drive him a thousand miles
Beyond the mountains
In the west,
Let him sink down
With the setting sun
And never rise again.

Okot p'Bitek, *Song of Prisoner*.

Africa of joyous peasants working in unison,
Africa of gold and diamonds,
Africa of serene, song-filled nights,
Hospitable Africa,
I am true to you.

Bernard B. Dadié, *Fidélité à l'Afrique*.

CHAPTER ONE: OKOT p'BITEK' S TRADITIONALIST DISCOURSE.

I. Tensions between Colonial Discourse and African Thought: the Struggle for a Cultural Space.

Analysts and observers consider that colonialism has engendered a number of misconceptions on Africa with disastrous effects stretched to social, economic and political domains. Following successive waves of decolonisation, African artists, writers, poets and playwrights have taken upon themselves to respond seriously to Eurocentric provocative discriminatory discourses. They have systematically rejected the process of distortion whose aim is belittling and undermining Africa's culture and way of life. In other words, African writers and artists rejected objectively what Homi Bhabha calls the 'evil gaze' of Europe's scholars. Professor Samuel Oluoche Imbo adopts this attitude when commenting on *Song of Lawino* which, in fact, suggests "authentic African traditions before their corruption by the Western gaze."[1]. In *The Invention of Africa*, Valentine Mudimbe welcomes the Africanist discourse as an apparatus "to separate the 'real' African from the westernized African and to rely strictly upon the first. Rejecting this myth of the 'man in the bush'"[2], Mudimbe's complex hypotheses are solely based on the inseparability of knowledge and power on Africa, therefore complying with the Foucauldian concept of power and Edward Said's thought about the complex issue of colonialism.

As a result of the "enterprise" of colonialism, Mudimbe formulates three complementary hypotheses to form what he called '*the colonizing structure*' composed of "the domination of physical space, the reformation of *natives'* minds, and the integration of local economic histories into the western perspective."[3]. According to him those three rudimentary factors are responsible for producing marginal societies, cultures and human beings. As a result, proliferating a complex system of binaries or dichotomies such as traditional versus modern, "primitive" versus civilized, "pagan" versus Christian, Self versus the "Other" and so on. It is in this context and as mentioned in the introduction that the promotion of national culture and social awareness among the African people seem to be the core body for African intellectuals to create a new tradition. Thus, *the African imagination* "is represented by the body of literature reproduced by, within and for the

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[1]) Samuel Oluoch Imbo. *Oral Traditions as Philosophy:* Okot p'Bitek's Legacy for African Philosophy. (place and Date not found) p. xii; www.books.google.com (25/10/2008).

[2]) Valentine Mudimbe. *The Invention of Africa*. Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge. London, James Currey, 1988, p. x.

[3]) Ibid., p. 02.

traditional societies and indigenous cultures of Africa."[4]. For Abiola Irele within the schemata of deconstruction and enunciation of the African imagination, one couldn't miss "the effort of evaluation of what has been called 'inferiority discourse', especially with regard to their literary aspects, which drive from particular forms of experience."[5]. Hence Irele's notion of *African imagination* consists in a survey for apprehending visions of various dimensions of the Black experience. The term '*African imagination'* rehabilitates the text as a suggestive discourse through aesthetic images, metaphors and mostly its symbolic mode of expression, therefore a workable and a serviceable means of expression which could be better comprehended in its (meta)textual and contextual enunciation.

Okot p'Bitek's long dramatic poems *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol*[6] constitute a case study to outline a kind of "African philosophy". As a poet and cultural critic, Okot tries to focus on a "genuine" cultural vision through a reconsideration of African culture as an appropriate way of life. Undoubtedly his effort lies in his serious attempt of inventing the tradition of presenting Africa's self-image in a different way from that presented in European fiction and anthropological accounts. He insists that there is no way to eliminate what Ngugi calls 'cultural imperialism' except by means of re-creating Africa's rich oral traditions. Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike positioned themselves in the favour of African writers who could positively participate in keeping with African traditions and needs. The three Nigerian critics advise strongly their counterparts in other parts of Africa to be committed to their societies' interests and to work from the standpoint of their local communities, since their social status equips them with the power of being influential public voices. The Chinweizu group adds further that the writer has a primordial duty to: "assume a responsibility to reflect public concerns in his writings."[7]. Hence in African literature the writer has a paramount role in foregrounding essential and vital issues in order to consolidate and accentuate Africa's most pressing needs such as the need of cultural and political liberation.

Among the debates which still generate a great deal of discussion prior to and following independence, is the promotion of national culture which could

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[4]) Abiola Irele. *The African Imagination :* Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 08.

[5]) Ibid., p. ix.

[6]) Okot p'Bitek .*Song of Lawino & Song of Ocol.* Oxford, Heinemann, 1984. Okot published first *Song of Lawino* in 1966, then his Acoli version *Wer pa Lawino* in 1969. But, *Song of Ocol* published in 1967, has been written in English and has no Acoli version.

[7]) Chinweizu Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike. *Towards the Decolonization of African Literature.* London, KPI Limited, 1985, p. 252.

not be dissociated from its original framework, i.e., its complicated and contradictory (discursive) order with Western culture. Edward Said describes this relationship of African and Western cultural encounter in terms of 'power of domination' and 'complex hegemony' which are signalling key words in Edward Said's and Antonio Gramsci's writings, especially in the political domain when European powers competed to 'colonise' Africa and extended their hegemony socially, economically and culturally through 'colonising the mind' of its people. Thus colonialism sows the very seeds of Africa's subjugation, inferiority and therefore unconditional subordination. Said explains the relationship *coloniser/colonised* in terms of domination or rather subordination and submission to the (European) Empire in the broadest sense of the words:

> There are Westerners, and there are Orientals [including Africans]. The former dominate; the latter must be dominated, which usually means having their land occupied, their internal affairs rigidly controlled, their blood and treasure put at the disposal of one or another Western power.[8]

In his book *Marxism and Literature*, Raymond Williams also follows the same pattern of ideas explaining the inexorable hegemonic practices to impair the 'Other', be he African, Caribbean, or Oriental. He dedicated a whole chapter to describe the irresistible European supremacy or 'hegemony' which might go beyond 'cultural' affinities or 'ideological' acclaims by its multi-dimensional features to end up in an ever-changing discourse:

> A lived hegemony is always a process. It is not, except analytically, a system or a structure… In practice, that is hegemony can never be singular. Its internal structures are highly complex… It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified.[9]

But Williams' Marxist accounts about the inescapable implication of hegemony on the peoples of the Third World where there is no dividing line between the practical and the abstract meaning of *the concept of hegemony*. In this regard, he prefers using more inclusive and contiguous terms, such as 'the hegemonic' rather than 'hegemony', and 'the dominant' rather than 'domination' because the hegemonic process deliberately damages cultural and political insights and limits the potentialities of the dominated *colonisé*. For this reason, he suggests that the writers' role is to be either 'aligned' to a point of view of his own people since "writing, like other practices, is an important sense always aligned: that is to say, that it variously, expresses, explicitly or

[8]) Edward Said. *Orientalism.* Harmonsworth, Penguin Books, 1995, p. 36.
[9]) Raymond Williams. *Marxism and Literature.* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 112.

implicitly, especially selected experience"[10]; or 'committed' seriously and solely to the tendencies of his society. We will come back to this point when we discuss commitment in Marxist thought in the third chapter.

Let us come back to Said's theoretical hypotheses which went beyond the superiority/inferiority dialectics defined earlier by hegemonic practices of the West. For he investigates the root-reasons of Western territorial greed from a historical perspective, where *the Orient* was an object of interest till the subsequent brutal intervention of white man into the Orient. Joseph Conrad is among the rare Western writers who witnessed and inscribed as well "the conquest of the earth" in his novella *Heart of Darkness* (1902) Conrad discloses explicitly Europe's excessive aggression as "robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a large scale."[11]. At any rate and away from blunt and falsified historical accounts about "subject races", Said's meditation on the process of subjugating the *Other* (the Orient) is in fact relevant, as it focuses on the subtle process by which some 'Western scholars' have 'invented' and 'commented' on Africa. In his evocative analytical accounts, Said rejects categorically the idea of Orientalism because by definition Orientalism appears as: "the discipline by which the Orient was (and is) approached systematically, as a topic of learning, discovery, and practice."[12]. In the light of Said's words one can say that the Orient is to be taken as a field of European experimentation and findings for European ill-intentioned and crippled imaginative theories. It is in this period and under those political and cultural circumstances that the West devised prejudices, assumptions and stereotypes about the Other, the Africans.

In his book *Culture and Imperialism*, Said enunciates further points related to the growth of European empires beyond geographical perspectives (struggle over territories) among European powers, notably after the Berlin Conference in 1884/85, a crucial moment which triggered off an unprecedented race known as the '*scramble for Africa*', a sombre chapter of horror and oppression in African history. Michel Foucault writes about this decisive period:

> They [Europeans] have been capable of the most stupefying violence … They invented a great many different political forms. It must be kept in mind that they alone evolved *a strange technology of power treating the vast majority of men as a flock with a few as shepherds*.

[10]) Ibid, p. 199.
[11]) Joseph Conrad. *Heart of Darkness*. London, Penguin Books, 1994, p. 10.
[12]) *Orientalism*., op cit., p. 73.

> They thus established between them a series of complex, continuous, and paradoxical relationships.[13]

As observed by Foucault, the West has used its *power* as a tool to subjugate the 'Other', i.e., the inferior, in a continuous, but complex process. Said is of the same mind, he squarely pinpoints the underlying nature of the European conquest of Africa as: "complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings."[14]. In order to formulate an appropriate explanation of the phenomenon of cultural imposition of the West, Said twins *knowledge* with *power* as a concept devised to generate a formidable process capable of containing and appropriating the 'Other' by means of "the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory,"[15]. In his discussion of some literary responses (of the colonised people), Said uses the term 'Orient silence' to be a sign of submission vis-à-vis the West's cultural domination in this context cultural hegemonic project. Said comments on what one can call 'cultural barrenness' and lack of creative imagination of the colonised in: "Such an Orient was silent, available to Europe (…) and unable to resist the projects, images, or more descriptions devised for it."[16]. At this level these words imply, in fact, the precarious nature of "culture" which "is a theme that is ultimately defined by a crisis of identity as profound as that fictionalized"[17] by African writers. As observed rightly by Abiola Irele there is a kind of "crisis" inside the mechanisms of the Third World's imagination. Consequently, the colonised man falls prey to the irresistible 'Western apparatus', to use Bhabha's word. In this context Said criticises Orientalists' intellectual tendencies and orientations: "when an Orientalist had to decide whether his loyalties and sympathies lay with the Orient or with the conquering West, he always chose the latter."[18] Hence African textuality has come to bridge this 'cultural gap' between the African artist and his reality, notably with its new images, forms, figures and findings in the form of *expression* or discourse.

In fact, Okot is among the rare poets who have undertaken to write literary texts to oppose what Bhabha calls 'Western cultural imposition', and inscribe himself in a literary current to counter Eurocentric mainstream and lay the grounds against anthropological theories established by European

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[13]) Lawrence Kritzman. (Ed).*Michel Foucault. Politics Philosophy Culture*: Interviews and other Writings of Michel Foucault 1977-1984. New York, Routledge, 1988, p. 63. (Italics mine).
[14]) Edward Said. *Culture and Imperialism.* New York, Vintage Books, 1994, p. 07.
[15]) Ibid., p. 09.
[16]) *Orientalism.*, op cit., p. 94.
[17]) Abiola Irele., op cit., p. 56.
[18]) *Orientalism.*, op cit., p. 80.

anthropologists like E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Godfrey Liendhardt's, Malinowski, Radcliffe-brown to name only a few. For this particular reason, at the beginning of *S L*, Okot declares his sole desire to destroy myths, falsities and presumptions:

> …Black People are primitive
> And their ways are utterly harmful,
> Their dances are mortal sins
> They are ignorant, poor and diseased! (p. 36)

Indeed, the idea of 'primitiveness' and 'backwardness' is among the myths fabricated or rather devised by the West as claimed by Mudimbe. These myths (among others) constitute a 'common knowledge' in European anthropological books and journals especially in the midst of the twentieth century. Indeed, such contemptuous attitudes formulate derogatory ideas and images discussed in Frantz Fanon's seminal book *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* (1952). Fanon criticizes stereotypical images labelled on natives as: "Les nègres sont des sauvages, des abrutis, des analphabètes. Mais moi, je savais que dans mon cas ces propositions étaient fausses. Il y avait un mythe du nègre qu'il fallait démolir…"[19]. The French analyst of colonialism Albert Memmi maintains this idea, arguing that the creation of those myths is solely to perpetuate Western hegemony and domination. In his book *Portrait du Colonisé*, Memmi writes: "l'existence du colonisateur appelle et impose une image du colonisé."[20]. In doing so, the coloniser legitimized the excessive violence of his police and army in the colonies. Moreover, Memmi describes the relationship coloniser/colonised as 'fractured', because of the creation of myths based on the incapacity of the colonized to cope with modernity and progress.

This line of thought takes the form of an ideology developed by a scientific discipline: anthropology whose aim is the study of 'other cultures'. At the end of *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*, Abdel Ghaffar Ahmed shows evidence concerning the complicity between social anthropology and the enterprise of colonialism, he writes about Sir Herald Mac Michael, an agent to British Empire in the Government of Sudan, who wrote a letter to the Foreign Office on 10th of January 1929 over the need to employ a 'professional' anthropologist, because "grave errors have been all too often made through ignorance of local beliefs and habits and insufficient understanding of savage ways of thought…our troubles with the Nuer, e.g., have been intensified by

[19]) Frantz Fanon. *Peau Noire Masques Blancs*. Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1952, p. 94.
[20]) Albert Memmi. *Portrait du Colonisé*: précédé de *Portrait du Colonisateur*. Paris, Gallimard, 1985, p. 101.

our lack of knowledge of the social structure of this people…"[21]. Perhaps Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard had fulfilled the mission. Now, it is quite obvious that social anthropology has played a major role in introducing to the colonial administration the native people for further domination and exploitation.

Analysing such derogatory discourse helps in consolidating Okot's imaginary "fiction" to present the 'other view' not only for the local consumption, but also for international audiences as well. The poet equips a village woman with an incredible mental capacity, eloquent words and above all charisma in order to refute the 'insulting' language, or 'dirty gossip' to use Okot's words, of her westernised husband Ocol, who is actually speaking on the behalf of the African élite imbibed with European knowledge, ideas, and ideology. Therefore, Okot's text deals with the phenomenon of westernisation of Africa's minds at the threshold of independence and the beginning of decisive social and political transformation. In *S L* the poet incorporates the body of traditional songs in his long monologue, he purposefully integrates songs of joy, pride, sorrow etc..., into an unusual literary genre, a long poem in the form of a 'Song'. But more importantly, Okot emphasises the originality and authenticity of traditional Acoli life as a synecdoche for the whole African culture, therefore wins a prestigious status in literature as a *traditionalist*. In his book *Oral Traditions as Philosophy,* Imbo identifies Okot's creative imagination as a way "to counter Western ethnography and put the Africans at the center of the discourse,"[22] because Africa's authentic image had been distorted beyond recognition as we have discussed above. Reverend John M'biti explains this line of thought in: "[Africans] have been despised, mocked and dismissed as primitive and underdeveloped. One needs only to look at the earlier titles and accounts to see the derogatory language used,"[23]. On a deeper level, Okot deploys considerable efforts in *S L* not only to challenge the Western conceptions and ideologies, but also to *redefine* and *rethink Africa's selfhood* as *possible creative and creating philosophy*. It is in this perspective that we try to understand Okot's philosophy and cultural vision of Africa in some detail.

Immediately after the publication of *Song of Lawino* in 1966, Okot was internationally recognised as a major poet in Africa. Albert S. Gérard considers that the poet "established his position as the most gifted writer to have

[21]) "Some Remarks from the Third World on Anthropology and Colonialism: The Sudan" by Abed Ghaffar M. Ahmed in: *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter***.** Talal Asad (Ed). New York, Humanity Books, 1973, p. 267.
[22]) *Oral Traditions as Philosophy*., op cit., p. 02.
[23]) John M'biti. *African Religions & Philosophy.* London, Heinemann, 1969, p. 10.

emerged in East Africa after Ngugi wa Thiong'o."[24]. The Malawian poet and critic David Rubadiri considers that "the [literary] explosion [in East Africa] came with Okot p'Bitek's publication of *Song of Lawino,*…The whole thing came to us like a bombshell."[25]. Rubadiri reads the underlying meaning of the whole song as "the search for liberation not only of the physical, the emotional and the spiritual, but also the search for an identity which had been lost or glossed over…(to us in a truly 'Acoli' way), searching for this lost identity, for a statement, to make a cultural assessment."[26]. Likewise, the American critic Bernth Lindfors appreciates the profound cultural manifestations carried by *S L* to become: "the first long poem in English to achieve a totally African identity."[27]. Ngugi himself praises Okot's song which has successfully established "a new mood of self-questioning and self examination."[28]. In the light of Ngugi's and Lindfors' words, time has come to rediscover a genuine 'new' African identity in the fullest sense of the word. In many regards, *S L* provides us with a new critical reading through Lawino's eloquent words and unambiguous cultural perceptions about the Acoli outlook of life. In fact, Lawino's cultural enunciations have revolutionised and inspired as well writers and poets like Okello Okuli whose feelings of pride and admiration are reported by Adrian Roscoe in:

> *Song of Lawino* touched exactly that nerve which we had been arguing. (…) He (Okot) confirmed this yearning we had for self-assertion, not only self in terms of ourselves, but self in the collective sense, what we felt was the African sense of assertion.[29]

For his part, Roscoe considers the oral medium of 'song' *per se* in its multiple forms as an effective tool for writers anxious to inscribe the collective memory of the people. As we have noted previously, Okot celebrates through the medium of *song* the originality of autochthonous culture characterised by cohesiveness and efficacy, and quasi-simplicity, three rudimentary parameters overlapping simultaneously throughout this study.

Okot's cultural pronouncement on Acoli life and society orients the reader towards Lawino's sympathies and loyalties to present objectively a realistic

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[24]) Albert Gérard. *African Language Literatures*. An Introduction to the Literary History of Sub-Saharan Africa. Essex, U.K, Longman, 1981, p. 305.
[25]) "The Development of Writing in East Africa", by David Rubadiri in: *Perspectives on African Literature,* Christopher Heywood (Ed). London , Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1982, p. 150.
[26]) Ibid, p. 153.
[27]) Bernth Lindfors "The Songs of Okot p'Bitek" in: *The Writing of East and Central Africa*. (Studies in Africa Literature). G.D. Killam (Ed). London, Heinemann, 1984, p. 144.
[28]) Ngugi wa Thiong'o (James Ngugi). *Homecoming*. Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics. London, Heinemann, 1972, p. 76.
[29]) Adrian Roscoe. *Uhuru's Fire*. London, Cambridge University Press, 1977, p. 33.

panoramic overview of Acoli society with its predominant needs, deep passions and inherent pride. The poet comments on almost every sensitive aspect of Acoli traditional life suggesting the vastness and richness of this community in East Africa before and after independence. His passionate traditionalism takes the form of what Bhabha prefers to call:

> The act of rememoration…[which] turns the present of narrative enunciation into the haunting memorial of what has been excluded, excised, evicted, and for that very reason becomes *unheimlich* space for the negotiation of identity and history. 'A void may be empty but it is not a vacuum'. [30]

Such fruitful efforts to participate or rather *negotiate* rather than *negate* a cultural meaning or space are solely workable in 'the recreation of popular memory,' of Africa and its past and present. Wole Soyinka refers to this meaning in "the poet appropriates the voice of the people and the full burden of their memory… It is usually to make them serve the agenda of peoples, to execute their judgment on history and minister to the pangs of their memory."[31]. Being a cultural specialist and anthropologist, Okot is highly aware of the dangers of cultural amnesia whose symptoms have been already shown in the African intelligentsia's conduct. Conversely, the 'legendary' figure of Lawino accentuates Okot's dexterity in perpetuating the cultural code of practice of the community in what Gayatri Spivak considers '*narrativisation*' of society, or more articulately through Bhabha's theory of enunciating the culture of the nation as a *narrative strategy* in order to become a cultural force. In many perspectives, Lawino's lament advances a cultural viewpoint to belie unfounded assumptions encapsulated in Hegel's denial of Africa's history and civilisation.

The poet in this respect is a man haunted by his own culture, a man who devotes all his life to serving his culture and nation. In his only and early novel *Lak Tar*, or white teeth in English (1953), Okot relates the story of an orphaned lad who desperately desires to raise a dowry to marry his sweetheart. But a misfortune strikes on his way back home, the lad is robbed and eventually returns home empty-handed. The story's underlying meaning lies in what is mentioned in the introduction to *Song of Lawino*, that Okot is scrutinizing the leading reasons for the breakdown of traditional structures, because in "the traditional society the poor orphan boy would have received help from his relatives in raising the dowry"; therefore, Okot underscores essential values of traditional life such as mutual solidarity and the concept of

[30]) Homi Bhabha. *The Location of Culture.* London & New York, Routledge, 1994, p. 284.
[31]) Wole Soyinka. *The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness.* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 21.

help among the members of Acoli families. The author of the introduction concludes that the lad's tragedy in *Lak Tar* symbolizes the tragedy of a whole continent cut from its cultural roots. Again, Okot's profound desire to rehabilitate African culture is ostensibly demonstrated in his booklet of folktales *Hare and Hornbill* (1978). His collection of tales embodies another integral component of oral literature, i.e., folktales, as essential element to illustrate the dynamic body of 'African Imagination' through allegorical provocative tales of the African universe by its animalistic landscapes and embodied wisdom. But for the time being, this chapter will deal with *S L* and examine the poet's sympathies and interests in using his persona Lawino as a representative of African 'traditionalism' against Ocol who stands for Western 'modernity'. To do so, it would be appropriate to consider the anthropological and philosophical dimensions without which Okot could not be possibly construct his cultural argument and his cultural assertion in the present chapter.

II- Okot's "Cultural Revolution" in *Song of Lawino.*

1. Anthropological Elements of the Acoli Community.

Okot p'Bitek charges himself with the responsibility of presenting a 'true' and 'authentic' image of Africa, its society and culture. The literary fund of Western anthropological knowledge and native culture of the Acoli provided him with adequate material to compose his poems. Quite plausibly, Okot describes the troubled relationship with his teachers when studying social anthropology at Oxford University in the preface of his book *African Religions in Western Scholarship*: "During the very first lecture in the Institute of Social Anthropology, the teacher kept referring to Africans or non-western people as barbarians, savages, primitive tribes etc. I protested; but to no avail!".[32] Indeed, feelings of revulsion generated by the content of the material studied at Oxford transmuted Okot's bitterness into pride and self-assertion as we will see in *S L*. Those cultural sentiments and sympathies found their way out in the eloquent words of Lawino. Thus Okot deals with the problem of cultural self-representation. But one has to put forth important questions such as what features would best represent Africa's self-image, how could the poet or the artist enunciate the cultural reality of his society? And using what disciplines to back his discourse of cultural assertion?

In the introduction of his book *The Invention of Africa*, the Congolese writer, philosopher and critic Valentine Mudimbe acknowledges the heavy

[32]) Cited in 'Introduction' of *Song of Lawino* by Okot p'Bitek**.** Nairobi, East African Educational Publishers, Ltd, 1989, p. 03. www.books.google.com (12/12/2009).

responsibility of writers and artists in defending their cultural heritage: "today Africans themselves read, challenge, rewrite these [European] discourses as a way of explicating and defining their culture, history, and being."[33]. Therefore, from an Afro-centric perspective, we could comprehend Okot's cultural affirmation. In his further investigation, Mudimbe associates 'Africanism' to the Foucauldian genealogical perception of knowledge as "discourses that African worlds have been established as realities for knowledge. And today Africans themselves read, challenge, focusing on the conditions of possibility of philosophy as part of the larger body of knowledge on Africa."[34]. Hence, Africanism is a discipline through which African artists and writers could present, illustrate, argue, and comment on their patterns of life. In his book *Myth, Literature and the African World*, the Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka refuses Western temptations to "perpetuate the external subjugation of the black continent", because of the specifity of the African universe in which "Man exists (…) in a comprehensive world of myth, history and mores; in such a total context, the African world, like any other 'world' is unique.".[35] According to Okot, the African 'world' is not shrouded in mystery and superstitions, but rather a wholesome world of beliefs, customs and mores. And in order to illuminate the seemingly ambiguous world, he creates the outspoken character of Lawino. In *S L* the poet employs the classical opposition of two formulations: 'tradition' versus 'modernity'. Pascal Boyer refers to this dichotomy as the 'Great Divide' being "understood as different types of societies or different mentalities", where mistakenly 'traditional' societies "can be roughly described as exotic, small-scale peasant or pastoral communities"[36] to be analogous or rather opposed to large empires or modern industrial societies.

Through concentrating on the prevalent cultural tension of 'modernity' and 'traditionalism', Lawino is Okot's appropriate agent in enunciating Africa's traditionalism so as to pinpoint fallacies and inconsistencies in Western anthropological discourses. Certainly displaying bluntly cultural facts or anthropological details is the surest way to inflict boredom to the poem. So the poet employs several rhetorical devices such as similes, metaphors, satire, irony, figurative language and other stylistic devices in order to describe the feelings of Lawino, who is scorned, abused and rejected by her husband, Ocol, an archetype of the educated élite who ruled post independence Africa. In this chapter, we try to examine objectively the main elements of African culture,

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[33]) *The Invention of Africa.*, op cit., p. xi.

[34]) Ibid., p. ix.

[35]) Wole Soyinka. *Myth, Literature and the African World*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. xii.

[36]) Pascal Boyer. *Tradition as Truth and Communication*: A Cognitive Description of Traditional Discourse. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 110.

concentrating on the aesthetic impact resulted from the encounter of Western modernity and African Traditionalism.

At the opening of her lament, Lawino deals with the open mistreatment and bitter scorn she received from her husband. To be more convincing, she adopts an effective strategy in her complaint by devoting the first section to describing her husband's bitter mouth sharpened by insults. At this early stage, Okot maintains the power of the spoken word in a society where "Words cut more painfully than sticks!"(p. 35). Hence, Lawino decides to perform her song publicly, so as to denounce Ocol's beliefs and ideas, and then ridicule his uncritical adoption of the Western way of life. In an article, Awuor Ayodo goes so far as to notice that "when all else has failed, the [Acoli] woman will call on the male community in a body to come to her aid" notably when she falls in distress. In general terms, the function of Acoli songs is often to "highlight the crisis around which the story revolves. They therefore serve the dual purpose of altering other(s) [views] …, and of soothing the emotions of the embattled singer."[37]. Isidore Okpewho classifies this kind of songs of abuse under the rubric of "lampoon poetry such as is found in abundance in the oral tradition."[38]. In the section "My Husband's Tongue is Bitter", Okot's persona expresses her scorched feelings by Ocol's verbal abuses and insults poured on her as in the subsequent complaint:

My clansman, I cry
Listen to my voice:
The insults of my man
Are painful beyond bearing.

My husband abuses me together with my parents;
He says terrible things about my mother
And I am so ashamed!

He abuses me in English
And he is so arrogant.

He says I am rubbish,
He no longer wants me! (p. 35)

This introductory passage illustrates the image of a scorned wife by her husband, a Makarere graduate who is newly acquainted with modernity in

[37])"Definitions of the Self in Luo Women's Orature" by Awuor Ayodo in: *Research in African Literatures Special Issue Women as Oral Artist*. Abiola Irele, at als (Eds). Indiana, Indiana University Press, 1994, Vol.25, No. 03, p. 125.
[38]) Isidore Okpewho. *The Heritage of African Poetry.* London, Longman Group Limited, 1985, p. 207.

metropolitan cities like Makarere and Kampala. In a previous passage, Lawino describes the source of her present predicament with her husband thus:

> You insult me
> You laugh at me
> You say I do not know the letter A
> Because I have not been to school
> And I have not been baptized (p. 34)

For Ocol, apparently, the source of their disagreement and 'ideological' dissension lies in Lawino's illiteracy and inability to cope with modern needs and requirements. In this regard, Ocol pins the label of 'primitiveness' to his wife who can neither read nor speak English properly. In fact, associating illiteracy with the concept of primitiveness could be found in Claude Lévi-Strauss's vocabulary when dealing with "les sociétés *non* civilisées, *sans* écriture, *pré* ou *non* mécanique,"[39]. This line of thought is obvious in his seminal book *Anthropologie Structurale* (1958) where he studies closely the social and parental systems of organizations of the peoples of central Brazil and other non-Western peoples. For him the task of social anthropologists can be recapitulated in the following:

> Nous étudions donc des sociétés «primitives». Mais qu'entendons-nous par là? En gros, l'expression est assez claire. Nous savons que «primitif» désigne un vaste ensemble de populations restées ignorantes de l'écriture et soustraites…touchées, à une date récente seulement, par l'expansion de la civilisation mécanique.[40]

If European anthropologists consider reading and writing as a standard to assess knowledge and intelligence, for Lawino using the coloniser's language is nothing but a sign of subordination and submission to the owners of the language. In the deployment of her ideas and beliefs in the oral mode, Lawino unambiguously considers her husband and the handful of educated élite as well-trained "dogs of white men"(p. 115), whose unique objective is pleasing their European "master", a reminiscent word of the dialogue between Robinson Crusoe and his servant Friday in *Robinson Crusoe*, where Crusoe insists: "I taught him to say "master," and then let him know that was to be my name."[41] The word is also suggestive to a lesser degree in the relationship between Prospero and Caliban in Shakespeare's the *Tempest*.

[39]) Claude Lévi-Strauss. *Anthropologie Structurale*. Paris, Librairie Plon, 1958, p. 400.
[40]) Ibid., p. 113.
[41]) Daniel Defoe. *Robinson Crusoe*. London, Penguin Books, 1994, p. 203.

The fact of devaluing the status of the élite and reducing them to the rank of the lowest animal (in Lawino's logic) operates ultimately as ironical mockery taking into consideration Ocol's traditional status, being the "son of the Chief", a highly respectable place in Acoli community. With an incredible will Lawino repeatedly pleads with him, calling upon his conscience: "Listen Ocol, you are the son of the Chief"(p. 34) or "The son of the Bull"(p. 92) sometimes she prefers to praise him: "A true son of his father"(p. 116). Such repetitions are part of Okot's rhetorical devices for more persuasion and appeasement. Purposefully, Lawino's tone becomes more impassioned and more appealing towards the end: "You are you/You are a man" and "You are a prince"(p. 116). The repetition of "son" and "man" functions as an interval refrain so as to highlight Ocol's rightful position in his community on the one hand, and to call upon his conscience to regain his lost dignity, on the other. Lawino employs the technique of addressing Ocol with different terms, such as "My friend"(p. 34) or "Brother "(p. 37). But occasionally when she feels the argument requires more power, she directly addresses her clansmen in the tone of an expert griot explaining, emphasising or provoking the feelings of the hearers on a specific point by using the expression "listen my clansmen"(p. 113) first.

In this connection, the role of the griot in traditional societies is not limited to transmitting news, but also to be an influential agent, a catalyst for change. In *S L*, the griot's words shake the very souls and hearts of people by his endless effort to reaffirm the cultural aspects of traditional communities. Abiola Irele underlines the role of griots as "masters of the word" or "fathers of the secret" in disseminating orality which "functions as the matrix of an African mode of discourse"[42]. The British anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard is not far from saying the same when assigning to traditional songs important roles in the Azande community: "defaming (the) enemies … denounce those who offended the public opinion…"[43]. He goes further than that by focusing on the social function of songs and dances in harmonizing and socialising feelings of individuals in traditional societies.

In her lament, Lawino informs us that her husband is actually in "love with a modern woman" called Clementine "Who speaks English"(p. 36) and behaves like white women. However, their relationship is shallow and perhaps insincere in terms of affection and love, since it is based on the capacity to 'ape' Western ways. Thus, Okot artistically invents Tina as a caricature, a foil, or anti-heroine to Lawino the epic character in the poem. In the same line of thought, Ngugi pinpoints the reason for Okot's recourse to an anti-heroine in the poem:

[42]) Abiola Irele., op cit., p. 11.
[43]) Evans-Prichard., op cit., p. 157. (Translation mine).

"Clementine, the symbol of his [Ocol's] new world, distorts her figure, straightens her hair, reddens her lips, bleaches her skin … in a feverish pursuit of a Western ideal of beauty and accomplishment."[44]. Henceforth, Lawino goes on describing and presenting Tina sarcastically, thus provoking gruesome feelings, notably when describing her Western make-up:

Her lips are red-hot
Like glowing charcoal,
She resembles the wild cat
That has dipped its mouth in blood,
…
Tina dusts powder on her face
And it looks so pale;
She resembles the wizard
Getting ready for the midnight dance. (p. 37)

Lawino's cluster of similes and metaphors aims at defamiliarising Tina's beauty and tarnishing the reputation of Western beauty. In this passage, Lawino compares Tina's red lips to "glowing charcoal" or to "open ulcer", even the powder on her face makes her appear "so pale" as to be compared to a nocturnal wizard dancer. Okot here uses a highly figurative language enabling Lawino to ridicule Western passion for beauty and aesthetics, and to stress its incongruity with the African social environment. The ongoing deliberate process of Tina's disfigurement continues throughout the chapter entitled "The Woman With Whom I Share My Husband"; but Tina's depiction reaches a climax of mockery in the following hyperbolic imagery:

Her body resembles
The ugly coat of the hyena;
Her neck and arms
Have real human skins!
She looks as if she has been struck
By lightning; (p. 37)

Indeed, at first sight we realize that the picture is more or less a gross exaggeration which makes the reader doubtful about Tina's portrait. Such a depiction creates an artistic flaw in the poem, as noted by Emmanuel Ngara who rejects categorically this kind of projection which is "far from being as effective as the [realistic] description of Clementine."[45]. Perhaps the poet unconsciously loses control over the character of Tina, because his feelings and

[44]).*Homecoming*., op cit., p. 76.
[45]) Emmanuel Ngara. *Ideology & Form in African Poetry:* Implications for Communication. Nairobi, Heinemann, (No date found), p. 74. www.books.google.com (12/07/2008).

tendencies have been channelled towards his protagonist character of Lawino. Aesthetically speaking, the metaphor of Tina's body compared to "the ugly coat of the hyena" "struck by lightening" is not only unconvincing, but also constituting one of the inconsistencies and weaknesses in the poem.

Lawino's assault reaches a crescendo of anger mixed with jealousy, especially when accusing her rival of breaching the moral values and code of behaviour of the community by killing her own babies: "perhaps she has thrown her twins/In the pit latrine!". Lawino persists in her report of Tina's presumed infanticidal comportment in: "perhaps she has aborted many,"(p.39), thus Okot reduces Tina to a monstrous whore. George Heron reads this serious offence as a "little more than scandal-mongering"(p.15). Still, we believe that Okot draws attention to the fierce capacity of the so-called 'modern' practices to destabilise Lawino's traditional universe in which, conventionally, babies and children are usually considered as blessings to their families, a point discussed by the British anthropologist Evans-Pritchard[46]. The poet makes purposefully oddities and anomalies such as Tina's presumed abortions and Lawino's divorce at the end of the poem pushing their way to destroy Acoli traditional life.

In opposition, Okot introduces traditional beauty and aesthetics in vivid stances through Lawino's imaginative ideas, giving the readers illusions of 'almost' prefect indigenous beauty. He advances his arguments in the second person point of view expressing the way Acoli women adorn themselves before taking part in ritual dances or rejoicing parties. In fact, the recourse to second person point of view instead of first or third person aims at provoking the reader's imagination, and probably making him a participating actor in the action rather than a passive observer as in the next passage:

> You adorn yourself for the dance,
> If your string-skirt
> Is ochre-red
> You do your hair
> With ochre,
> And you smear your body
> With red oil

[46]) Evans-Pritchard observes that when "a foreigner visits a primitive society he will notice that parents have as many possible children as they could. Rare infanticide and abortion practises in such societies. No woman remains voluntarily without children, and total sterility is actually, the worst of all misfortunes which can afflict on her… Primitive woman ignores totally contraceptive means. I am persuaded that if we talk to her about them, she would be strongly surprised to know that certain individuals limit the number of their children. On the contrary, she wishes to have as many possible children as she could, because the mother and the father of large families enjoy certain prestigious status…", contrary to Britain "where children constitute an important expense to their parents," Evans-Pritchard., op cit., pp. 39-40. (Translation mine).

And you are beautifully red all over! (p 52)

Fashioning Acoli beauty makes the poet employ typical traditional material which fits this merry occasion as "ochre" and "oil". But despite the simplicity of the material used, amazingly Okot succeeds in making his heroine extremely beautiful and worth admiring. On such occasions the diligent choice of colours reflects the Acoli taste. Because for a red string-skirt, red ochre on the hair would match the dancer and equally win the admiration of dancers and lovers alike. But instead of boastfully exposing her beauty, Lawino prefers to give us an exclusive description of her rival's hairstyle fashions in a comically figurative way in order to undermine Western aesthetics and beauty. Adopting a sarcastic tone, while describing Tina's external appearance, can be explained by the idea that Lawino appears deeply shocked by the widespread Western aesthetic practices among some women who shamelessly "cook their hair/With hot iron". Likewise, the use of satire turns the Western sense of beauty and aesthetics into a ridiculous, lifeless and inappropriate set of behaviours. Thus, our persona sees no reasonable sense in Western hairstyle fashions except as weird rituals of torture and punishment where Tina "cries aloud in sharp pain"(p. 54). In fact, the poet is seemingly endowing Acoli and non-Acoli readers with a capacity of observation with which to value the notion of local traditionalism.

Lawino foregrounds her vision of life by taking into consideration basic physical appearances and specificities of each people, for instance "the hair of the Acoli /Is different from that of the Arabs;" (p. 51). Nonetheless, her physical difference, i.e., her black skin and curly hair, do not prevent her from expressing feelings of pride and self-importance through inviting her husband to admire her beauty:

Ocol, my friend
Look at my skin
It is smooth and black.
…
I am proud of the hair
With which I was born
And as no white woman
Wishes to do her hair
Like mine,
…
I have no wish
To look like a white woman. (p. 56)

Basically in this particular stanza, Okot succinctly articulates Lawino's strong attachment to her community and pride of her physical appearance in the section "The Graceful Giraffe Cannot Become a Monkey", a very powerful allegory expressing the necessity to accept the selfhood. Bernth Lindfors illustrates this point, hinting to the underlying meaning of the whole song in spurring up Africans to "accept their Africanness and stop mimicking non-African customs, traditions, fashions and styles which are entirely inappropriate and even rather ridiculous in an African setting."[47]. Contrary to ephemeral beliefs and preposterous theses expressed in *Song of Ocol*, the best example of this lies in Ocol's delirious thought which reaches a crescendo of abhorrence and animosity to his origins in the following cry of anguish:

> Mother, mother,
> Why,
> Why was I born
> Black? (p. 126)

Indeed, this '*cri de coeur*' as described by Adrian Roscoe constitutes the climax of alienation and self-underestimation of African educated élite. Albert Memmi's following statement can be applied to Ocol: "Le refus de soi et l'amour de l'autre sont communs à tout candidat à l'assimilation… l'amour de colonisateur est sous-entendu d'un complexe de sentiments qui vont de la honte à la haine de soi."[48]. Indeed, this man's culture has been diminished, shattered and distorted beyond recognition by the culture of the coloniser. For Ocol, being Ugandan, African and black are a sum negative elements which, instead of shaping and consolidating his personality for further challenges, deepens his isolation and alienation from his people, and eventually he becomes the victim of his sham ideals. In the second chapter, we will study the profile personality of Ocol and his view regarding Acoli customs and traditions. On the ontological level, the protagonist in *S L* advances the incontrovertible argument that no one is able to defy or change the cosmic rules of the universe because "No leopard/ Would change into a hyena," similarly "The long-necked and graceful giraffe/Cannot become a monkey."(p. 56).

A closer look at these examples and others reveals an undeniable truth that is the impossibility of self-metamorphosis of the 'graceful giraffe' into a mere 'monkey'. Perhaps Mikhail Bakhtin's interpretation of metamorphosis would be of some importance, because "Metamorphosis serves as the basis for a method of portraying the whole of an individual's life in its more important

[47]) "The Songs of Okot p'Bitek" by Bernth Lindfors in: *The Writing of East and Central Africa*. (Studies in African Literature). G.D. Killam (Ed). London, Heinemann, 1984, p. 146.
[48]) Albert Memmi., op cit., p. 137.

moments of *crisis*: for showing *how an individual becomes other than he was.*"[49] Symbolically, the idea of metamorphosis or change into another being is rather erroneous and degrading to Lawino, 'the village belle' who refused to be severed from her African roots to 'ape' blindly Western aestheticism like Tina.

The fact of clinging tightly to autochthonous beliefs and customs of her society would probably lead some readers to think that Lawino is excessively radical or narrow-minded in her cultural insights. Perhaps this is plausible in some limited instances in the poem, but as a whole we can argue that Lawino is trying to justify her anxiety and deep concerns about the future of the Acoli world. Despite the prevailing ambiguity of Western aspects of modernity that she describes, Lawino still shows sympathy and respect to them. In addition, Lawino works closer on the democratic insight: 'live and let live' or "to each his own'.

As noticed previously, Okot attempts by means of vivid comparisons between animal species and physical differences between people to reinforce the argument of cultural difference and divergences. Homi Bhabha observes that cultural difference embodies: "the process of enunciation of culture as 'knowledgeable', authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification.". Whereas cultural diversity is "a category of comparative ethics, aesthetics or ethnology", it is also "the recognition of pre-given cultural contents and customs."[50]. In the light of Bhabha's definitions of both concepts, one notices that the poet is working profusely on cultural difference as a reliable structure of cultural identification, rather than archaic cultural diversity based on categorising ethnical elements or recognising customary relics of the past. However, being an incontestable representative of her traditional community, Lawino adopts a simple and straightforward style that turns progressively into a 'plea' defending the case of her people before a judge, 'the reader', who would sustain or overrule her case. In the midst of her cultural debate, Lawino pronounces the gist of her song which lies in the necessity of preserving cherished customs and traditions in this powerful argument:

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

[49]) Michael Holquist. (Ed). *The Dialogic Imagination.* Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Micheal Holquist. Austin, University of Texas Press, 2006, p. 115. (Italics original).
[50]) Homi Bhabha., op cit., p. 50.

They cannot be blown away
By the winds
Because their roots reach deep into the soil. (p. 41)

For his part Bernth Lindfors reads this stanza as truly encapsulating the theme of the entire song, because Lawino in this excerpt "is able to communicate her enthusiasm for the customs and practices of her people. She describes a civilization which is wholesome, coherent, deeply satisfying to those born into it, and therefore naturally resists fundamental change."[51]. The previous passage embodies the poet's cultural affirmation of Acoli culture, customs and traditions. Okot uses proverbs and popular sayings to sustain his emphasis on the centrality and invulnerability of traditional foundation of Acoli community notably in the outstanding proverb: "The pumpkin in the old homestead/Must not be uprooted!"(p.41). This is a suggestive proverb originally taken from "TE OKONO OBUR BONG' LUPUTU" which, actually, functions as a refrain in *Wer pa Lawino.* It is worth noting the cultural significance of the pumpkin to the Acoli. For instance, David Rubadiri emphasizes the cultural symbolism the plant embodies thus: "somehow it gives some kind of assurance to the homestead. It is a kind of anchor and usually it is planted with a lot of ceremony."[52]. Taban lo Liyong, Okot's best friend advances the underlying message of the proverb in: "Indigenous Cultures Are To Be Preserved" . Likewise, in his own translation of *Wer pa Lawino,* Taban echoes further Okot's original proverb of cultural affirmation as:

DON'T DESERT YOUR ANCIENT CULTURE;
ANCIENT CULTURES ARE NOT FOR DESERTION;
CULTURES ARE NOT FOR ABANDONING.[53]

But Taban lo Liyong thinks that Okot misses the philosophical meaning when leaving chapter 14 of *Wer pa Lawino* untranslated. Taban goes further in his translation making Lawino dramatically pleading with her husband not to destroy the old homestead by uproot the pumpkin in the old homestead. [54]

In *The Invention of Tradition*, Eric Hobsbawm defines 'invented traditions' as "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and

[51]) G. D Killam (Ed)., op cit., p. 149.
[52]) Christopher Heywood, op cit, p. 154.
[53]) Taban lo Liyong "On Translating the "Untranslated": Chapter 14 of Wer pa Lawino by Okot p'Bitek in: *Research in African Literatures*. (Ed) Abiola Irele at al. Indiana, Indiana University Press, 1993, Vol.24, No 3, p 89. (Topography original).
[54]) For further reading see the unabridged chapter 14, as translated by Taban lo Liyong in the annex (Ibid., p. 88).

norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past."[55]. In a suggestive observation, Hobsbawm notes the difference between 'old' and 'invented practices', while the former is "specific and strongly binding practice", the latter tend "to be quite unspecific and vague". Nonetheless, Lawino fears the disappearance of Acoli traditions and the emergence of new modern traditions. Terence Ranger discusses the power of European neo-tradition in changing people's lives notably in East Africa, where "Europeans sought to make use of their invented traditions to transform and modernize African thought and conduct."[56]. He maintains further that "all this might be made use of to create a clearly defined hierarchical society in which Europeans commanded and Africans accepted commands, but both within a shared framework of pride and loyalty"[57];therefore, European invented traditions further Africans' dependence and subordination on Europe, i.e., operating within the slave/master paradigm.

Concluding his research over 'the processes of neo-traditions and forms of socialisation of African culture', Ranger comes to the conclusion that invented traditions left two main 'ambiguous legacies' in Africa: first, "the body of invented traditions imported from Europe which in some parts of Africa still exercises an influence on people and their culture which has largely lost in Europe itself"; conversely "the second ambiguous legacy is that of "traditional African culture, the whole body of reified 'tradition' invented by colonial administration,"[58]. Ranger welcomes Ngugi's position regarding the question of invented traditions, because Ngugi refuses to embrace both colonial inventions and the bourgeois élite culture. For Ngugi the adequate solution lies in adapting and promoting "the tradition of Kenyan popular resistance to colonialism" and its neo-traditions, a point worth discussion in the third chapter.

Despite their divergences in cultural tendencies and ideological orientations, Okot successfully creates some romantic instances between Lawino and her husband through suggestive instances and powerful rhetorical language. From the mouth of Lawino that we know about Ocol's past admiration and preferences to Acoli way of life. Lawino recalls the old good days when Ocol used to admire her beauty as in this stance:

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[55]) Eric Hobsbawm "Introduction: Inventing Traditions" by Eric Hobsbwam in: *The Invention of Tradition*. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds). Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 01.

[56]) Ibid., "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa", by Terence Ranger, p 220.

[57]) Ibid., p 221.

[58]) Ibid., p 261.

You loved my giraffe-tail bangles,
My father bought them for me
From the Hills in the East.
…
You admired my sister's
Colourful ten-stringed lion beads;
My mother treaded them
And arranged them with care.
…
And you were very fond
Of the gap in my teeth!
My man, what are you talking?
My clansmen, I ask you:
What has become of my husband? (p. 48)

The use of flashback reflects Ocol's unexpected and sudden change. Moreover, we learn that the arrogant and abusive Ocol has "crawled on the floor!" and wept bitterly "like a hungry child"(p. 48) in order to win Lawino's love. In fact, those details reiterate Ocol's past conformity to Acoli and the traditional convention of Acoli community. But most importantly, using rhetorical questions about the real motive(s) of this sudden and abrupt change in Ocol's belief and behaviour, dramatize further the narrative. Again, Lawino is capable of surprising the reader through her own bewilderment of Ocol's estranged mannerisms. In fact, she couldn't believe that Ocol would be severed from his roots and become a mystery to her:

But only recently
We would sit close together, touching each other!
Only recently I would play
On my bow-harp
Singing praises to my beloved. (p. 36)

Those nostalgic and romantic moments, in fact, deepen her confusion and spur her up to investigate the reason of Ocol's newly contemptuous ideas and attitudes about his own culture and people. Undoubtedly, Okot in this context is underscoring the formidable capacity of Western culture and educational parameters to change and influence people's minds so drastically. This is a pivotal point which deserves to be fully covered in the following chapter.

As an anthropologist interested in people's manifestations of life, Okot offers the reader details of food and housing as basic elements upon which the traditional life is established. However, the poet prolifically employs

counterpoint as a counter-discourse to European anthropologists. The poet deliberately uses Lawino's tongue to complain about Ocol's new food mannerisms. Eloquently Lawino tells us about her westernised husband who is ashamed of her, because she neither knows how to use properly "the spoon and the fork" nor appreciates the "Whiteman's foods,"(p. 56). Besides, Ocol's outrage and anger is dramatically increased when Lawino publicly confesses her utter ignorance of the way white women prepare their foods, notably using modern primus stoves. Still, she suspects the device which might jeopardise her life, because only recently she learned that the 'dangerous', yet, enigmatic machine, has burnt a goat alive. Moreover, she is terribly seized by fear when told that a mysterious 'fire':

> Goes into the electric stove.
>
> If you touch it
> It runs through you
> And cuts the heart string
> As they cut the umbilical cord,
> And you stand there, dead,
> A standing corpse! (p. 58)

Indeed, Lawino's explicit horror of being electrocuted by the 'death machine' prepares the reader to comprehend Lawino's excuse: "I cannot cook anything well". Conversely, Lawino draws our attention to her utter satisfaction with her traditional charcoal stoves, even though her hands are always dirty with charcoal and "anything you touch/ Is blackened" (p. 57). As a defender of her ways, Lawino prefers the dirtiness of traditional charcoal rather than the hazardous risk of modern stoves.

Dealing with western foods and eating habits, Lawino serves as the poet's spokeswoman, expressing her dislike of Western taste and food preferences. As a strategy to underline his point, Okot usually introduces a piece of information to be discussed in-depth. One can mention Lawino's refusal to "eat chicken/And to drink raw eggs,"(p. 56) Lawino does not wait long to express her disgust and utter revulsion at eating Western food, because she is unfamiliar with white men's food, but also the sight of processed food provokes nausea in her. To her utter puzzlement, Ocol informs her that when he was in the West people used to "eat frogs and shells/And tortoise and snakes", as a matter of fact Lawino's "stomach rebels" (p. 56). Okot's rhetoric has the sole objective of discrediting Western food habits and perhaps attacking their gastronomic practices rendering them entirely strange and unacceptable to Acoli culture.

The white man's stoves
Are good for cooking
White men's food:
For cooking the tasteless
Bloodless meat of cows
That were killed many years ago
And left in the ice
To rot!
For frying an egg
Which when ready
Is slimy like mucus, (p. 58)

And yet, this description of white men's food being unnatural and tasteless is quite reasonable from the point of view of a wife who used to cook natural and fresh food brought either from nature or carefully produced by her clansmen. In this stanza, Okot uses purposefully similes to describe her repulsive response at the sight of scrambled eggs compared to slimy 'mucus'. To convey his message, the poet employs the second person point of view so as to make us share Lawino's misfortune with Western gastronomy, notably in eating boiled chicken which definitely gives the impression that "you are chewing paper!". Spontaneous humour is no exception in the poem, it operates as an efficient technique to ridicule and poke fun at Ocol's new life. Thus, in Lawino's logic there is no wonder in considering that warming up tinned fish or beef in modern stoves would solely suit "the toothless", "infants and invalids"(p. 58).

It is worth noting that matters concerning food and dress are culturally-related, i.e., what is appreciable in a particular culture is not necessarily appreciated in another. But for the sake of holding Lawino's ideas credible and homogeneous, Okot uses Acoli wisdom as usual to express Lawino's sense of 'democracy' in the following pronouncement:

My husband,
I do not complain
That you eat
White men's foods.
If you enjoy them
Go ahead!
Shall we just agree
To have freedom
To eat what one likes? (p. 63)

As far as freedom is concerned, Lawino asserts that adopting a particular food habit is a matter of personal choice. This idea carries in itself the freedom

to embrace ideals and perceptions. George Heron goes further in this sense by saying that "Lawino is not asking Ocol to cling to everything in his past, but rather not to destroy things for the sake of destroying them."(p. 07). Thus her vehement attack against Ocol can be understood as an effort to protect Acoli ways from inexorable winds of change. Lawino feels entirely satisfied with the Acoli way of cooking, therefore sees no need to learn foreign culinary skills, she rhetorically asks Ocol: "why should I know [them]?"(p. 62). At one moment Lawino belies Ocol's advice to eat "raw eggs" because "there is something in eggs/ which is good for the bones", by reassuring him "But my bones are strong/I can dance all night long."(p. 62).

Progressing through *S L*, Okot provides the reader with an overview of almost every Acoli aspect of life. Once in her mother's homestead, Lawino describes a typical Acoli house with its rigorous arrangement, perhaps the poet hints here to womanly Acoli accomplishments and skilfulness in domestic affairs. In fact, the strict order of house items could not be missed by the reader invited by Lawino in:

> Come, brother,
> Come into my mother's house!
> Pause a bit by the door,
> …
> Look up to the roof,
> You see the hangings?
> The string nets
> Are called *cel.*
> The beautiful long-necked jar
> On your left
> Is full of honey.
> That earthen dish
> Contains simsim paste; (p. 59)

The poet supplies us with detailed information of house objects such as millet grinding stones with varieties of traditional species and food ingredients highly appreciated by the Acoli as millet flour, dried peas and beans which are carefully sealed out, or preserved in jars and different gourds. She describes her mother's house in the tone of an expert housewife who knows exactly every single item in the house and its specific purpose. Like an anthropologist, Okot moves smoothly from one traditional element to another, the poet allows us to penetrate into the Acoli ways of life and get acquainted with their daily activities, preoccupations and anxieties. In the following example, Okot illustrates the image of a harmonious conjugal life based on mutual respect and intimacy between the members of the family.

During Acoli meals boys and girls have to conform rigorously to the family rules. As a child, Lawino remembers her earlier life in her mother's house:

We eat sitting on the earth
And not on trees
Like monkeys;
The young men
Sit cross legged
And a girl sits carefully
On one leg.
Father alone sits on the stool.
We all sit on skins
Or papyrus mats
On the earth. (pp. 61, 62)

Okot maintains the image of Lawino who appears very proud and happy in familial gatherings around meals, but Okot's presentation of this typical traditional family is to highlight traditional customs indoors. Here, Lawino describes for us a variety of seats with their appropriate functions and significations. Lawino recalls how members of the family used to sit on goat-skins or sat on papyrus mats, except her father who sits on his stool. Okot hints at the superior status fathers used to enjoy in traditional patriarchal communities. In another part of the poem, Lawino underlines the respect for fathers even if they are rude, one has to "say 'Thank you'/And never [dare] answer back"(p.99). Again the poet seizes this opportunity to ridicule Western ways of sitting in a humoristic tone, comparing white men to monkeys sitting on wooden chairs ironically called "trees". The succession of traditional manifestations continues in the poem to be stretched to table manners.

We wash our hands clean
And attack the loaf
From all sides.
You mould a spoon
And dip it in the gravy
And eat it up. (p. 62)

Indeed, Okot's previous description can be put in the context of a firm denial of Ocol 's accusations that "Black people's foods are primitive" prepared by "clumsy and dirty black women" to be improperly put in unhygienic "dirty containers"(p. 62). For this particular reason, Okot wants to make the reader witness measures of cleanness taken by the Acoli, especially their children who wash their hands before having meals and eat properly right-handedly. In an ultimate stroke to neutralise anthropologists' allegations

concerning food habits, Lawino concludes her demonstration by a rhetorical question: "what is backward about them?". In this section we have mainly emphasised Okot's treatment of concepts concerning aesthetics and food mannerisms to be samples of Lawino's cultural affirmation and sense of belonging in her community. This process needs further investigation through the philosophical aspect of time and issues related to the Acoli life as an integral part of African philosophy.

2. Okot p'Bitek's Treatment of African Philosophy and the Concept of Time among the Acoli.

As mentioned earlier, Okot's poems draw closer to the creation of African philosophy through images, ideas and logic of thought. The idea of 'African philosophy' is echoed in John M'biti's definitions as: "understanding attitude of mind, logic and perception behind the manner in which African peoples think, act or speak in different situations of life."[59]. It is of paramount importance that understanding the traditional system of life, state of mind and way of thinking of African peoples constitutes, in fact, the essential components to interpret and comprehend Lawino's vision of life. As far as African philosophy is concerned, Bruce Janz believes that this philosophy might have the form of "a journey of discovery" into the realm of culture as witnessed so far in *S L*, or could be likely the interpreter which translates what is significant in the claim of the other, and in the process discovers himself. But at any rate, Janz concludes that within the frame of hermeneutics:

> African philosophy is not just cast-off or recycled ideas from the West. It is the appropriated, the stitched-together, altered, and tie-dyed, Africa in a new dress that seems somehow familiar, or perhaps in old clothes that take on new appropriation (…) African philosophy is the repetition of Africa itself, and also the subversion of any simple recollection.[60]

However, dealing with African philosophy brings us to discuss alterity or the dialectics of Otherness in its deepest level. Janz clarifies an interesting point related to the process of interaction between the Self and the Other. In this quasi-contradiction, Africa has been made Europe's Other -that is inferior- by anthropologists and philosophers. In fact, Africa tries to (and must) affirm itself in making Europe the *Other*, i.e., the hostile oppressor according to Janz.

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[59]) John M'biti., op cit., p. 02.

[60]) "Alterity, Dialogue, and African Philosophy" by Bruce Janz in: *Postcolonial African Philosophy*: A Critical Reader. Chukwudi Eze, Emmanuel et al, (Ed). U S A, Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1997, p. 236.

In his discussion on the complex notion of otherness, Janz identifies alterity in different tropes each of which unveils its discursive or rather ambivalent nature in the following terms: *fascination, repulsion, desire, dependence, smugness, appropriation/subsumption, marginalization, horizon, domination, foil, mirror* and *body*. It would be useful to consider Janz's definitions as an effort to lift up the fog on some ambiguous concepts. To begin with, *fascination* is an attitude by which the Other could be perceived as exotic, or foreign or even an object of idle curiosity; *repulsion* that is the Other is put in the context of the 'leper' or 'outcast' to be avoided and left out. As for *desire* the Other here is the object to be eagerly owned or controlled; *dependence* is a state realization of one's self existence as the Otherness of God that is what the person is not, but makes his existence. *Smugness* means the Other is to be taken as 'primitive' with no culture of his own; *appropriation/subsumption* process in which the Other can be absorbed or assimilated to the Self, it is workable only if the Other gives up his own being, personality and culture. *Marginalization* is the approach of interpretation, understanding and consideration of the centre, the Other must be the periphery; *horizon* is squarely defined by Janz as "the Other might be that which holds the possibility of understanding the place where traditions and prejudice can be uncovered"[61]. *Domination* in terms of alterity is the 'slave', like Caliban in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, or the 'servant' in Daniel Defoe's sense, i.e., Friday who relieves Robinson Crusoe from routine drudgery. *Foil* or a measurement against which I test myself; *mirror* through which the alien becomes the familiar and vise versa, or a standard for self-identification and self-recognition. And last but not least, *body* that is the Other is an integral part of the Self, it could also be a thing for interpretation within the framework of complex and coherent interaction.

Relating this to Okot, one can argue that the poet is "moving the centre", i.e., speaking from the cultural position of the Self making Europe the absolute 'Other' through attacking Eurocentric assumptions and Western culture. Bruce Janz attributes this mission to Lawino who casts Europe as the Other, and in this way, she is able to bring her own tradition into sharp focus. In this context, *S L* operates through a purely traditional perspective to raise the intellectuals' consciousness about their cultural heritage. In doing so, the poet makes Lawino a dominant figure throughout the whole poem in space and time as a strategy to refocus on his favorite issue, 'traditionalism', and the need to develop local cultures. Besides, his persona is made to animate and represent the 'other view' excluded by the so-called 'enlightenment', *mission civilisatrice*, or the late modernistic thought. *Song of Ocol* confirms in Ocol's own words Lawino's cultural preoccupations, declaring an unnamed war against everything African, an attitude which deepens his alienation and

[61]) Ibid., p. 232.

severance from society and distances him further even from his close relatives. Still, the use of Clementine as an icon standing for Western-style beauty and aesthetics sustains also Lawino's argument on pertinent issues like the status of women, family stability and social organization. Fortunately, Tina disappears entirely from the scene leaving more space and time for Lawino to elaborate on further issues such as religion and politics, two issues worth discussing in the following chapter.

As far as time is concerned, Okot investigates in depth the Acoli concept of time and its significance to Lawino's community. Time to such an indigenous community is not a succession of natural events in the narrowest sense of the word, its value occupies an important place in people's lives. John M'biti discusses this issue and affirms that being an ontological phenomenon, all aspects of traditional life are centered on time. So time plays a paramount role in people's lives. On the contrary, time in Western parameters has another signification. Lawino points to this when she mentions her husband's anger and outrage, because she "cannot keep time", or recognize numbers on Ocol's large clock. For a traditional wife the clock which "goes tock-tock-tock-tock" and "rings a bell" is a source of pride and admiration. Yet, this is still a mystery to her because she can not decipher "the figures"(p. 63). The poet uses onomatopoeic tick sounds to render the Western notion of time monotonous and dull. In this context, one can cite M'biti's argument: "in western or technological society, time is a commodity which must be utilized."[62]. However, M'biti points out the importance of time for African communities: "time is meaningful at the point of the event and not at the mathematical moment."[63]. It seems that Okot works on this idea, his persona can not figure out how many days there are in the week or how many months there are in the year. But, she is able to explain this otherwise, by means of using natural phenomena as days, nights, seasons, etc… which are often associated with important 'events' such as hard work, hunt pleasure and son on. This particular time partition reflects the community's dogged determination to exploit and consume time thoroughly. Lawino is no exception, therefore she conforms positively and respects the subsequent social conventions:

The Acoli know
The Wet Season
And the Dry Season.
Wet Season means
Hard work in the fields,

[62]) John M'biti., op cit., p. 19.
[63]) Ibid., p. 19.

Sowing, weeding, harvesting.
It means waking up before dawn,
….
Dry Season means pleasures,
It means dancing,
It means hunting
In freshly burnt plains. (p. 71)

Obviously the Acoli understand very well the meaning of the endless succession of day and night not as recurring events in the vacuum, but as significant events to their lives. Therefore, they reckon time and appreciate it according to the events that mark its passage. In *S L* Okot indicates that the sun, the moon, rain etc…, or day components such as the dawn, morning, evening and midnight are not only time markers, but also signs of types of activities in the Acoli mind, "when the sun has grown up" it is time for "men hoeing/And of [the] women weeding or harvesting."(p. 64) Okot adds "When the sun/Has cooled off" this is an opportunity for some people to hunt animals, or hook fish, while the others repair their granaries or make baskets. Lawino unfolds further the underlying meaning of the moon which "climbs the hill/And falls down"(p. 70) to be taken as an undeniable sign of girls' puberty when first seeing the moon therefore, "The garden is ready/For sowing" a metaphor for girls' readiness for marriage and the establishment of new homesteads. Besides, in the Acoli mind midnight symbolises an introductory period of evil, a suitable time for thieves to look after "other men's daughters". Generally speaking, in traditional societies, people believe that night is not only a prelude for crimes and offences, but also time when evil spirits and wicked witches haunt public and deserted places, that is why:

No one moves at midnight
Except wizards covered in ashes
Dancing stark naked
Armed with disembowelled frogs
And dead lizards: (p. 64)

In addition, like other communities in East Africa Acoli names bear witness to the occurrence of specific events in Acoli which could be used as time markers corresponding with birth, death or marriage of some people. The best example of this lies in the birth of Okang, Lawino's son in "the beginning/Of the Dry season"(p.72), whereas Lawino's daughter Atoo was born after the spread of smallpox throughout Acoliland causing enormous deaths among people including Lawino's father. Now after drawing a broad picture of the concept of time in traditional societies, the poet uses his persona to discredit the Western notion of time, trivializing western clichés like "time is money".

By the same token, Okot furthers Ocol's sense of alienation, because Ocol has no time to spend with Lawino or even his own relatives. Lawino laughs and ridicules the way her husband has chosen, suggesting that Ocol's rigorous respect of time has turned him into a 'slave of time'. Lawino informs us that Ocol "never jokes /With any body"(p .67); such extremism blinds him to hospitality and generosity, and other values highly appreciated in his community. Likewise, Ocol forbids visitors to see him "because they bring dirt and house-flies" (p. 91), or "soil his chairs/ And bed sheets"(p. 92). Moreover, he accuses Lawino's relatives of being infected with "Leprosy and tuberculosis" which could contaminate his children. The prohibition applies even to his own mother. When visitors take him by surprise, his "face darkens" and he never asks them in, saying reluctantly: "What I can do for you?"(p. 68) Lawino bitterly observes all that in:

Time has become
My husband's master
It is my husband's husband. (p. 68).

Furthermore, the estranged Ocol puzzles Lawino by his mysterious way of telling the time, "When the sun is/Sweet to bask in" Ocol says "It is Eight" and when the wizards are ready for the midnight dance, Ocol says "It is Eleven"; after sun set he says "it is Seven"(p. 64). Moreover, he insists on special moments to have morning tea or coffee, lunch time, supper time etc… Thus Ocol depends entirely on his large clock. Conversely, Lawino prefers natural time references like looking at the position of the sun or hearing the cock crow to know about time. Then in a powerful comment, Lawino defies any one to show "her how to keep the white men's time",(p .68) because her mother had taught the traditional one as a sign of transmitting cultural values from one generation to the other. In order to undermine the Western concept of time, Lawino's philosophy is based on former logical experiences of ancestors; for instance, when a baby cries, instinctively the traditional woman offers her breasts to the baby, if he does not stop crying the medicine-man will have to be summoned immediately. The poet prepares us for the ultimate conclusion:

In the wisdom of the Acoli
Time is not stupidly split up
Into seconds and minutes,
…
… [time] is sucked
Until it is finished. (p. 69).

So far, exploring the anthropological and philosophical elements used by Okot has revealed a side of African culture, customs and traditions which are

worthy of reconsideration if not revaluation and rehabilitation. The choice to investigate some outstanding aspects of it is to display Okot's interest in culture as a powerful tool with which nations could affirm their identities. For Okot the process of revaluing and perpetuating traditionalism goes through criticising modernity, Christianity and colonialism as the sources of Africa's troubles. Adrian Roscoe reads *S L* through two major options: "first, a massive attack on westernism, and secondly a defence of the whole gamut of traditional beliefs and postures."[64]. It seems that Okot's anthropological research suggests an urgent and immediate effort to restore and redeem African cultures excluded and marginalized by educated élites represented by Ocol, a "modern" educated man who embodies *par excellence* the colonial mentality. Okot's cultural dialectics suggests an in-depth and wholesome socio-cultural vision for the Ugandan society, where the poet takes us to a journey to the traditional world of Uganda through their mind, aesthetics, food habits, dressing styles, customs, traditions, and way of life. *S L* is a valuable book translated from "a very deep, philosophical book in Acholi; a book of morals, religion, anthropology, and wisdom."[65].

[64]) Adrian Roscoe., op cit., p. 34.
[65]) Taban lo Liyong., op cit., p. 87.

CHAPTER TWO

THE IDEA OF PROGRESS IN OKOT p'BITEK'S POETRY.

I feel ridiculous
Among them an accomplice
Among them a pimp
Among them a murderer
My hands frightfully red
With the blood of their ci-vi-li-zation
"Houqet" by Léon Damas.

"Present structures of political, economic, educational and Church life unfortunately favour the continuation, if not the perpetuation, of this illusion. Here, then, lies the dilemma and the tragedy of the rapid change in Africa."

John M'biti, *African Religions & Philosophy*.

CHAPTER TWO: THE IDEA OF PROGRESS IN OKOT p'BITEK 'S POETRY.

I- Christianity and the Concept of Education in Okot's *Song of Lawino*.

Okot p'Bitek is among the poets whose treatment of Christianity reveals how deeply this religion is bound up with African culture. It goes without saying that Christianity played a primordial role in increasing the literacy rate in Africa. European missionaries profusely concentrated their efforts on spreading the Bible and its evangelical teachings by all means to 'enlighten' the peoples of Africa. In other words, the early missionaries considered their religious endeavours to Christianise Africa as part and parcel of Europe's *mission civilisatrice*, i.e., to open the mind of its 'primitive' or 'savage' people. John M'biti comments on the effects of assimilation of Western cultures by African people in Christian schools as follows: "they [missionary schools] sowed the Gospel (…) it is the young men and women in these schools who assimilated not only religion but science, politics, technology and so on; and the same young people are the ones who became detached from their tribal roots."[1]. As mentioned by M'biti the assimilationionist policy of spreading the Bible and Western education brought about a major change in Africa, especially on the educated élite and the bourgeois who uncritically assimilated Western patterns of thought leaving behind their cultures and traditions. In this context, Ngugi agrees with Okot in renouncing the Christian faith. In his *Homecoming*, Ngugi conspicuously denounces the Christian missionaries' practices as well as the Africans who knowingly or unknowingly had participated in the destruction of their traditional religion:

> Acceptance of Christian Church meant the outright rejection of all the African customs. It meant rejection of those values and rituals that held us together: it meant adopting what in effect was a debased European middle-class mode of living and behaviour. The European missionary had attacked the primitive rites of our people, had condemned our beautiful African dances, the images of our gods, recoiling from their suggestion of satanic sensuality. The early African convert did the same, often with greater zeal, for he had to prove how Christian he was through this rejection of his past and roots.[2]

In fact, Africans woke up to this harrowing reality, especially the élite who have been utterly severed from their own societies and their traditions. This

[1]) John M'biti. *African Religions & Philosophy*. London, Heinemann, 1969, p. 217.
[2]) Ngugi wa Thiong'o (James Ngugi). *Homecoming*. Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics. London, Heinemann, 1972, p. 32.

alarming situation urges Okot to charge Lawino with traditional religious beliefs to appear as faithful as possible to her traditional religion especially in the section "I Am Ignorant of the Word of the Clean Book". On the level of language, the poet deliberately employs literal translations of Christian idioms from the Acoli into English. There are numerous examples to reinforce this argument, for instance the Bible in the poem is given its equivalent in Acoli which is "the Clean Book", in *The Heritage of African Poetry*, Isidore Okpewho observes that the name "refers to the Bible, which is normally called the Holy Book. Lawino makes the mistake because she has not been educated enough to know the real name. But the error may be a deliberate jest."[3]. But the most striking and ambiguous translation is in using the word "Hunchback" for God, which is also the name of the ghost that causes tuberculosis of the spine in Acoli traditional religion. Moreover, Okot's evocative translations attempt to desecrate religious words from their holiness such as Heaven glossed into "Skyland", and "the Place Below" (p. 88) which must be Hell. Likewise, the use of Christian terms into African 'uniform' is a powerful technique to criticize the Whiteman's religion and ridicule its holiest notions and beliefs such as the belief in angels in *S L* "the beautiful men/With bird's wings"(p. 84). Hence, we can argue that Lawino is providing us with an *Africanized biblical version* which is more or less absurd and fun provoking rather than a holy inspiring Scripture.

In his book *Critique of Christianity in African Literature*, J. N. K. Mugambi unveils the secret of the almost secular presentation of the Christian God, to suggest that "there is no point of comparison between the Christian God and the African deities. In this view, the Christian God appears to Africans just as another deity, as a spirit within the belief system of a people."[4]. Okot's criticism of the Christian thought and values illustrates the belief that he is working from an atheist perspective so as to expose some Christian anomalies in a highly traditional religious society. In this respect, the poet attempts to criticize overtly Christianity favoring workable and serviceable traditional religions in Uganda. Thus the impact of Christianity on East African populations is not limited to alter *rites de passage,* or supernatural or metaphysical concerns, but broadly speaking Christianity operates as a fundamental tool with which to westernize Africa. On a personal level the poet renounced the Christian faith when he was a student of Social Anthropology at Oxford. He had the same attitude as Ngugi who openly renounced and criticized Christian missionary work before the Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, a point which needs further investigation when we examine Ngugi's religious perspective. At any rate, in

[3]) Isidore Okpewho. *The Heritage of African Poetry.* London, Longman Group Limited, 1985, p. 207.
[4]) J. N. K. Mugambi. *Critique of Christianity in African Literature*. Nairobi, East African Educational Publishers, 1992, p. 93. www.books.google. (06/01/2010).

one of his articles in *African Religions in Western Scholarship*, Okot condemns the complicity of Christian anthropologists with colonialism, and vehemently defends African deities: "The African deities of the books, clothed with the attributes of the Christian God, are, in the main, creations of the students of the religions. They are all beyond recognition to the ordinary African in the countryside."[5]. Hence, Lawino functions as an outlet through which he lucidly prompts African scholars to recreate their own gods in the image of the Christian's main God on the one hand, and expresses his desire to de-Christianize the Acoli or rather impair the power of the new religion on the other hand.

Okot echoes the contemptuous attitude of the African Christianized élite who despise their traditional religion and accuse their countrymen of paganism and backwardness. Lawino goes in this sense complaining bitterly and loudly:

My husband
Looks down upon me;
He says
I am a mere pagan,
I do not know
The way of God.
He says
I am ignorant
Of the good word
In the Clean Book
And I do not have
A Christian name. (p. 73)

Ocol's religious enthusiasm has been manifested in the firm rejection of his wife for her flagrant 'pagan' practices like offering prayers to ancestors, or visiting the diviner-priest like her mother. Ocol is a sample or prototype of the élite indoctrinated by Western religion and ideology. Mugambi considers that Ocol-like types symbolize a group of selfish individuals who "have come to look down upon their own heritage, upon their past. They have been taught to be ashamed of their [traditional] religion, culture, history and of their own people."[6]. Ocol's contempt and resentment of Acoli traditional names is due to their being 'pagan names', (p. 82) or they 'do not sound good' (p. 81) like Christian ones. For a "progressive" man like him, the Christian credence is the

[5]) Akadémilai Kiado. *European-Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa*: a Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages, V 2. Budapest, (No date found), p. 882. www.books.google. (08/15/2009).
[6]) J. N. K. Mugambi., op cit., p. 81.

unique way of deliverance out of the claws of ignorance and 'backwardness'. Ocol baptizes one of his daughters Maria, his first son 'Jakcon', the second 'Paraciko' and one of his illegitimate sons 'Tomcon'. Moreover, Ocol wishes to baptize Lawino 'Benedeta' a highly ironical name for a traditional woman who fervently clings to her own religious beliefs. On the contrary, Lawino maintains the belief of emptiness and hollowness of Christian names of any possible signification in the understated argument:

> Who understands
> The meaning of the Christian names?
> …
> That they give to children
> When they put water on their heads,
> What do they mean?
> To me
> They all sound
> Like empty tins, (pp. 83. 84)

For the sake of mystifying Christian names, Lawino suggests the enormous difficulty to utter unpronounceable ambiguous names like her husband's 'medikijedeki Gilirigoloyo' which is associated with "give the people more vegetables,…"(p. 82). However, Lawino shows her respect and admiration of Acoli names which are actually names "of great chiefs/And great men of war."(p. 82). The poet relates Lawino's pride of traditional appellations to the symbolic denotative signification of each name, and the variety and richness of this system as praise names, sorrow names etc... used properly by her people. To illustrate this, the Acoli name the first son 'Okang' (Lawino's first son) as an undeniable proof that "the woman is not barren", this newly born baby is highly respected "in the honour of his father"(p. 83). Okot continues the tradition of naming babies according to birth circumstances or the nature of delivery. But at any rate, those names are highly "feared and respected" since they connotatively carry meanings or commemorate significant events. E.E. Evans-Pritchard devotes an essay to describe Nuer names (Nilotic people inhabiting parts of Sudan) confirming that "commonly, every one knows the origin of his name. Here are some examples: *Reath*, drought; *Nhial*: rain; *Nyuot*, violent storm; *Pet,* a month name … (*Nya*) *puoy*, a pool; (*Nyu*) *pun*, wild rice …etc."[7].

Through *S L,* the poet suggests the meaninglessness of Christian prayers and invocations during ritual congregations conducted by local priests, to be one of the hypotheses upon which Lawino refuses the Christian cult as a workable religion in the African milieu. In *Facing Mount Kenya* (1938), Jomo

[7]) Evans-Pritchard., op cit, p. 186. (Translation mine).

Kenyatta suggests that the British had imposed Christianity on African nations (in this case the Kikuyu) regardless of their religious sensitivity. He writes: "those poor depraved souls [Europeans] wanted to root out bodies and spirits of ancient customs and old practices. Without asking themselves if their own faith suited the Africans."[8]. Perhaps this is the reason that makes J. N. K Mugambi deduce: "for Okot, Christianity is foreign to Africa"[9]. From this standpoint the poet tries to thrust the White man's religion in ambiguous tropes to be alien and irrelevant to the lives of traditional practitioners. Lawino maintains this sense in the Christians' mysterious worshipping supplications as in the following:

Maria the Clean Woman
Mother of the Hunchback
Pray for us
…
The things they shout
I do not understand,
They shout anyhow
They shout like mad people.
The padré shouts words,
You cannot understand, (p. 75)

In the same vein, Ngugi wa Thiong'o criticizes the historical role of the Church being the root-reason of "the misshaping of African souls and cultural alienation…What of drums and dances and even ceremonial drinking and forms of oath-taking? Can the core of Christian faith anchor in some of these symbols."[10]. In an unprecedented attack, and more than Ngugi's critique of Christianity (that we will see in the next chapter), Okot prefers to hit on a painful point, i.e., the moral degeneration and corruption of the representatives of both Catholic and Protestant Churches and the way their wives overexploit students. It is because of those unbearable humiliations that Lawino refuses to become the 'slave' to the wives of the teachers. She could not forget the amount of bitterness and sufferings her sister endured in order to buy the Christian name 'Erina'. What is more striking is the flagrant debauchery of teacher-priests whose sole aim is satisfying their sexual drives. Lawino remembers the image of the priest who under the vivid rhythm of Acoli 'music' abandons the Evening Speakers' Class to join the communal dance to 'hunt' girls. Lawino sarcastically portrays him as an ugly drunkard and adds: "the comb never touched his head"(p. 78). Shamelessly he tries to

[8]) Jomo Kenyatta. *Au pied du Mont Kenya*. Paris, François Maspero éditeur, 1960, p. 177. (Translation mine).
[9]) J. N.K. Mugambi., op cit., p. 81.
[10]) *Homecoming.,* op cit., p. 35.

seduce Lawino taking advantage of his position at the school. But unlike the girls who give in to satisfy the priest's desire, Lawino's charismatic personality appears verbally and physically as usual in the form of a resolute decision to abandon her formal education. When the priest approached Lawino, she pushed him hard declaring defiantly:

Don't touch me
You rough-skinned aged thing!
Who cares for your stupid shoutings
In the evening?
Let go my hand
Syphilis man! (pp. 80/81)

Indeed, Okot succeeds to baffle his readers when revealing immoral practices such as sexual harassment of "naïve" girls by Catholic and Protestant teacher-priests in the following observation:

And all the teachers
Are alike,
They have sharp eyes
For girls' full breasts;
Even the padrés
Who are not allowed
To marry (p 81)

The unexpected comportment of the representatives of Christian churches suggests the impossibility to tame sex and the lustful temptations of the priests. Michel Foucault insinuates this when speaking about the relation between the two major sins: fornication and greed: "They are two 'natural' vices, innate and hence very difficult to cure."[11] But in more general terms, the poet is constructing the argument of destructive or subversive nature of the Whiteman's religion in African setting. By extending this concept, Okot suggests the absurdity of Protestant worship rituals by placing Lawino at the heart of the Church. What Lawino is going to say deepens, in fact, the reader's anxiety and consolidates further her argument. She perceives "a big man" mumbling some ambiguous words then weirdly proceeds to bless people summoning them:

To come and eat
Human flesh!
…
Then he took a cup,

[11]) Paul Rabinow (Ed).Michel Foucault: *Ethics Subjectivity and Truth*. Translated by Robert Hurley and others. Volume One. London, Penguin Books, 2000, pp. 185-186.

He said
There was human blood
In the cup
And he gave it
To the people
To drink! (p. 75)

Out of revulsion and disgust Lawino escapes immediately from the place leaving the priest preach clumsily words that are hardly intelligible to his students. This moment is highly symbolical in the sense that the priest's behaviour affording 'human flesh' and 'human blood' to his followers reminds us of facile accusations of Africans being 'cannibals' or 'brutes'. Therefore, Lawino returns the blame and accuses overtly and explicitly the missionaries in: "O! Protestants eat people!/They are all wizards,"(p. 75). Pursuing her assault against Christianity in practice and in theory, Lawino wants to convince the reader of the uselessness and hollowness of Christian prayers ('shoutings') which could not resist the originality and meaningfulness of African songs and dances. Perhaps the former example is worth noting when the priest has been obliged (because of the desertion of the school) to give up his classes and join the dancers and singers in the dance arena. In fact, the poet repeatedly suggests the futile and fruitless efforts to Christianize the Acoli, giving us the allusion that all the Church's efforts are in vain at least in the eyes of Lawino and her community. This is why Lawino prefers the inspiring aura at the arena dance rather than the coldness of the missionaries' class. More importantly, Lawino seeks refuge in her 'real' world, much closer to her hopes and aspirations, an expressive world animated by meaningful and vivid songs. She explains those preferences in:

We joined the line of friends
And danced among our age-mates
And sang songs we understood,
Relevant and meaningful songs,
Songs about ourselves:
…
We danced with vigor
And sweat poured
Down our backs, (p. 79)

Thus, Lawino comes to abandon her formal education which is greatly modeled after Western thought. Here the poet is trying to advance the necessity to reread the oral heritage of Africa, and validate its songs, dances, proverbs and so on. In *The Hybrid Muse*, Jahan Ramazani makes this point clearer: "while Okot obviously favors the 'popular arts of the countryside' and disdains the 'aping' of Western song, he also concedes the growing influence

of western music, film, and other forms on Uganda's village youth."[12]. So the poet wants to raise the consciousness of youths so as not to 'ape' or imitate blindly the Western songs, dances, and other artistic features. Hence, the poet is operating as an authentic voice emerging from a 'silent' and 'silenced' continent expressing its cultural exigencies, anxieties and preoccupations.

Lawino's continuing acclamation of traditional religion has been sustained by demonstrations of the negative impact of Christianity on Acoli life and traditions. In the same context, the poet vehemently ridicules the priests' inability to satisfy Lawino's inquisitive and persistent questions:

> …our teachers
> Hated questions.
> Protestant and Catholic priests
> Are all the same-
> They do not like questions. (p. 84).

Indeed, the desire to ask questions reveals Lawino's pragmatism and desire to unveil the truth on the one hand, and to reflect on the enigmatic and mysteriousness of the Christian cult on the other. In this regard, Adrian Roscoe notices that in *S L* Okot elaborates the idea that: "Christianity is all alien mysteries"[13]. From all that we have discussed above, one can understand Lawino's attempt to "desacralise" society in George Balandier's sense: "la 'désacralisation' de la société existante et la dénonciation de ses valeurs. Ce qui domine, c'est le 'rejet global'," [14] of the religious established system, because of the orthodox function of religion as the sublimation of society and identification of social cohesion. According to Balandier a sense of contestation emerges which takes the form of religious or even social contestation. He goes far enough when saying "cette contestation, soit individuelle, soit collective, est plus au moins organisée sous la conduite d'une personnalité charismatique [Lawino]. Elle peut, l'exercer, soit contre une tradition dénoncée comme caduque ou aberrante…, soit contre des transformations estimées néfastes."[15]. Unlike, the Durkheimian hypothesis in which social and religious systems interact with each other, the character of Lawino comes to breach this correlation by means of what Balandier suggests as "contestation". Conversely, Okot suggests as a general rule in traditional religion that people are often provided with adequate explanations and reasonable justifications. Here one can argue that rules in traditional religion are to be explained so as to

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[12]) Jahan Ramazani. *Hybrid Muse*: The Postcolonial Poetry in English. Chicago, the University of Chicago Press, 2001, p. 144. www.books.google.com (*06*/01/2010).

[13]) Adrian Roscoe., op cit, p. 34.

[14]) George Balandier. *Anthropo-logiques*. Paris, Librairie Générale Française, 1985, p. 258.

[15]) Ibid., p. 261.

perpetuate or divinize certain religious notions against any possible profanation or abomination. For instance, Lawino warns her husband of the severe punishment to befall on transgressors of ancestral shrines:

When you took the axe
And threatened to cut the *Okango*
That grows on the ancestral shrine
You were threatening
To cut yourself loose,
To be tossed by the winds
This way and that way (pp. 119, 120)

Lawino eloquently explains the invincible power of deities and spirits expressed in the form of a titanic wrath. The poet portrays the traditional universe as highly haunted by wraths and curses that spare no transgressor. The Acoli believe that even the white man's medicines and drugs "are irrelevant and useless"(p. 99) to cure curses and maledictions. Lawino adds that "when you provoke your uncle's curse /you piss in your bed". This belief stems from the concept that "all misfortunes have a root"(p. 98) and the worst of all comes from the mother's curse which is more effective and devastating when:

She will strike the ash
Then you will get
Exactly what you asked for!

Your vitality will go,
You will behave
As if you were a half-wit,
Your manhood will disappear… (p. 99).

Apparently the arrogant Ocol has been plagued by "the curse of his own mother", because of her mistreatment and his refusal to receive her at home. But most importantly Ocol provokes the outrage of the gods and ancestors who cursed him with a blunt 'spur', i.e., their furious anger impinged on Ocol's potency and even turned him into "a woman". That is why before the curse Lawino has some hope in her husband who "had not yet become a woman", as far as he was still a black, a free man whose "heart was still his chief"(p. 113) meaning his own self. However, the terrible curse is cast by Lawino when she says: "My husband has become a woman!"(p. 116). The poet associates Ocol's impotency to taboos he has broken and to various abominations committed in the name of Christ or progress. In a parallel line, Lawino relates Ocol's impotency to literacy and Western education. In an obvious argument Lawino postulates the vulnerability and delicacy of the

élite's manhood which is likely to vanish and disappear in class-rooms stuffed with Western education, Lawino notices the danger and harm caused to the younger generation:

> ...all our young men
> Were finished in the forest,
> Their manhood was finished
> In the class-rooms, (p. 117)

As stated above, Ocol perpetrates an enormous abomination by provoking the deities' curse. As a caring wife about her husband's wellbeing, Lawino encourages her husband to beg forgiveness from deities and spirits. She requests him to increase measures of repentance from his past foolishness if he wanted to restore his damaged manhood and lost dignity. She urges him to:

> Go to the shrine of your fathers,
> Prepare a feast,
> Give blood to your ancestors,
> …
> Beg forgiveness from them
> And ask them to give you
> A new spear
> ….
> Ask them to restore your manhood!
> For I am sick
> Of sharing a bed with a woman!
> Ask them to forgive
> Your past stupidity, (p. 119)

Lawino's recommendations go further than spiritual invocations to herbal prescriptions as using some effective plants hoping to 'recuperate' her husband who is "not yet completely dead"(p. 117) since his "heart-string" has not been cut yet. In the section "Let Them Prepare the Malakwang Dish", Lawino advises strongly Ocol to chew the roots of *Omwombye* which will certainly clear his throat, even the bitter roots of *Lurono* would make his tongue loose. Likewise, a mixture of simsim oil would be effective in removing all the senseless jabber and dust collected from books and magazines, and wipe out his "stupid stubbornness"(p. 119).

In *S O* the westernized Ocol is entirely indifferent to Lawino's lament. On the contrary, he blames Lawino for being hyper superstitious, amalgamating

"matters of health and superstition"[16](p. 101). Purposefully Okot colours Ocol's diction with academic terms such as 'veins' and 'malarial parasites' when describing the case of a desperate child whose head is:

Heavy with malarial parasites
Raging through his veins,
The mad woman
Spits on the palms
Of his hands
…
Spills chicken blood
On his chest,
A gift to death!
…
The diviner pleads
With dread Malaria,
I give you blood,
Let this child live;
Here is your beer… (p. 127)

In this dramatically ironical tone, Ocol rails against the traditional way of practicing medicine through ridiculing the efforts of the "mad woman" to cure a helpless child who is about to die. In his book *La Mythologie Primitive* (1935) the French anthropologist, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl notices this widely accepted practice among aborigines in Australia and British New-Guinea, because such pronounced "formules [are essentially] pour faire fuir une maladie", then he tries to explain further the phenomenon thus: "puisque les mots prononcés à haute voix ou chantés sont des forces, surtout quand il s'agit de formules magiques, telles qu'elles sont récitées par un medicine-man qui y infuse son propre pouvoir."[17]. In fact, in his anthropological accounts, Lévy-Bruhl focuses on mystical aspects in the minds of indigenous people as an impediment to any kind of development or social progress:

> Quel que soit le développement de leur civilisation, l'idée de progrès ne les effleure même pas. Leur idéal, et leur désir profond,

[16]) Note that there is a dividing line between superstition and practicing traditional medicine. Evans-Pritchard mentioned that he attended personally some healing "sessions" or rituals performed by Azande witch-doctors either to chase away evil ghosts, or vengeful spirits or heal physical illnesses. He classifies three distinct groups. The first group is composed of traditional male and female (magicians) who "practice their activities by tossing in the air straps *(wari*) decorated by copper rings in which diverse animals are curved". The second group of healers is "mostly performed by women whose role is to cure illnesses … after determining the exact postion... medcine-women coat oil on the body of the patient…". The third group consists essentially of specialists in curing "illnesses resulted from vengeance of wiched spirits, *acieni*" Evans-Pritchard., op cit., p. 239. (Translation mine).

[17]) Lévi-Bruhl., op cit., p. 195.

> demeurent indéfiniment de participer, de communier avec la «surnature», c'est-à-dire avec les êtres mythiques à qui seuls leur groupe doit son origine dans le passé, le maintien de son existence présente, la garantie de son avenir.[18]

Investigating the mythical world of the peoples of Australia, North America, British New-Guinea and to some extent the peoples of Africa, Lévy-Bruhl speaks of the existence of certain "fluidité" to be one of the characteristics of their world "elle [fluidité] se rattache étroitement à l'orientation propre de la mentalité dont ces mythes sont le produit. Ce qui intéresse avant tout ces esprits, ce sont les puissances invisibles, les pouvoirs et les facultés mystiques des êtres."[19]. Opposing this line of thought, Ocol manifests explicitly his outrage and condemnation of traditional medicine men and herbalists offering "gifts" to death. For a Makarere graduate gestures such as pouring beer on the child's head symbolize, in fact, the climax of the irony echoing diviner-priests' charlatanism and incapacity to deal appropriately with deadly diseases. Furthermore, in a powerful assault against the whole traditional system of healing diseases and curses, Ocol puts Acoli herbalists and diviner priests in the role of rogues swindling people out of their money and property. Yet, Ocol admits that occasionally and by 'accident' "some of the herbs are effective"(p. 93) in healing some diseases.

In parallel, Lawino postulates the efficacy and primacy of Acoli wisdom fighting against illnesses and deadly diseases. Pascal Boyer investigates the reason for trusting diviners-priests, and concludes that on the criterion of 'truth' "whatever the witch-doctors say is true (…) whatever is said by persons who hold some knowledge bequeathed by former generations is true."[20]. Further, he examines the domain of reality in traditional societies which can be explained in three stages: *situation, procedure* and *diagnosis.* The *situation* is generally when people visit the diviner-priest or witch-doctor, meaning that there is something preoccupying and urgent to be mended, and to use Boyer's words 'something the matter'. For *procedure* it is a "set of operations which make divinatory situations different from ordinary situations of communication". As for *diagnosis* to be the ultimate phase to announce the detailed and accurate description of the '*situation*' at hand, which is achieved through the use of the *procedure*. Boyer seeks a cognitive explanation rather than pure anthropological facts in describing 'primitive' or 'magical thinking' of traditional societies. Okot is aware of this, therefore he does not want Lawino to elaborate on the efficacy of Acoli incantations. Instead, Lawino uses

[18]) Ibid, p. 44.
[19]) Ibid., p. 74.
[20]) Pascal Boyer. *Tradition as Truth and Communication*: A Cognitive Description of Traditional Discourse. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 58.

a persuasive logic proclaiming that all medicine men and women are "good and brilliant", meaning effective, when dealing with sick people, but only if their time has not yet come for "the great journey, the last safari journey" to Pegak (the place of no return, death's homestead to the Acoli) (p. 103). In fact, Lawino's prevailing fatalism concerning the inevitability of encountering 'death' hints to the inefficiency of both modern and traditional ways, as further evidence of the persona's wisdom and credibility.

We have noted earlier how Western education drifts Ocol astray from the cultural tide of his people, and eventually ensued his alienation from his own people. In the penultimate section of the Song "My Husband's House is a Dark Forest of Books", Lawino squarely directs her plea to her clansmen so as to make them share some of her sorrow and bitterness:

Listen, my clansmen,
I cry over my husband
Whose head is lost.
Ocol has lost his head
In the forest of books. (p 113)

Indeed, the strength of *S L* lies in the use of apostrophe as a rhetorical device to influence her clansmen who are, according to Emmanuel Ngara "her primary audiences as she expounds her views on the danger of books"[21]. Seemingly this is the "last straw" that breaks the back of Western values and principles, because conventionally books are regarded as the source of knowledge and enlightenment. However, in Lawino's sense books are more or less associated to 'darkness' and revengeful spirits, therefore Ocol's dark forest of books is considered as hazardous as the Evil Forest in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Hence, Okot painstakingly advances the source of all Ocol's misfortunes and misadventures in the extensive reading of White men's books and then makes Lawino desperately explode in: "reading/Has killed my man"(p. 113). Thus, Lawino establishes a climate of vengeance and terror enshrouded in Ocol's dark forest of books where readers would not miss gothic-like figures of Western authors on the covers of the books:

Some have pictures on their backs,
Dead faces of witch-looking men and women,
Unshaven, bold, fat-stomached
Bony-cheeked, angry revengeful-looking people,
Pictures of men and women
Who died long ago. (p. 114)

[21]) Emmanuel Ngara., op cit., p. 72.

According to Lawino those are the very 'ghosts' who have 'captured' her husband's head, i.e., his mind. In this context, Lawino suggests the irresistible power of books to 'capture' the mind of whoever dares entering or sitting by Ocol's "mighty forest of books" as in the following passage:

> If you stay
> In my husband's house long,
> The ghosts of the dead men
> …
> … scream whenever you touch any book,
> The deadly vengeance ghosts
> Of the writers
> Will capture your head,
> And like my husband
> You will become
> A walking ghost. (p. 115)

One has to bear in mind David Rubadiri's reflections concerning *S L* that Lawino is implying that one shouldn't read books, shouldn't go to universities, shouldn't eat with forks etc… According to him such 'surface interpretation' contradicts Lawino's profound philosophical "theme of a search for an identity that is meaningful and the meaningful must surely be that which first understands itself, before it enriches itself with the other"[22], a point discussed earlier in Same/Other dichotomy. In other words, the poet endorses the primacy of Africa's culture over other cultures, a statement which could epitomise all Okot's theory of Africa's Cultural Revolution. Away from Negritudinist idealizations and glorifications of African education and culture. In addition, more African voices have criticized Western education such as M'biti and Kenyatta, favouring the practicality of African teaching methods in preserving values, creeds, and good morals. Kenyatta echoes this in: "the importance of the Gikuyu education lies in its practice … the African method consists of showing straightforwardly how to behave properly with parents, grandparents, paternal or maternal family."[23]. Likewise, Ngara considers Okot's criticism of Western education as:

> a simple but effective way of explaining how African intellectuals who are educated in western-type schools become helpless victims of neo-colonialism in the same way as people who entered a dangerous forest in traditional society fell prey to the ghosts of dead people … Okot p'Bitek is analysing the malady of a social class of which Ocol is a

[22]) David Rubadiri in Christopher Heywood (ed), op cit., p. 154.
[23]) Jomo Kenyatta. *Au Pied du Mont Kenya*. Paris, François Maspero éditeur, 1960, p. 94. (Translation mine).

> representative. This class has been emptied of all its African cultural values by imbibing western culture.[24]

But Ngara mostly emphasises the sheer force of books in seizing people's minds and brainwashing their ideas and ideals. Ngara assigns this mission to ghosts in Ocol's dark forest of books which are keen to capture the 'head' of the victim, meaning his mind. In a broader sense, Okot postulates a pivotal issue, i.e., 'colonising the African mind' which reminds us of Ngugi's book *Decolonising the Mind* (1986) where Ngugi underscores the paramount importance of national languages in promoting African culture and nationalism, and thus opens his book with this strong statement: "This book … is my farewell to English as a vehicle for any of my writings. From now on it is Gikuyu and Kiswahili all the way"[25]. In his book *Moving the Centre*, Ngugi explicates the underlying reasons of the élite's alienation from their societies: "the elite in Africa is, in linguistic terms, completely uprooted from the peoples of Africa and tied to the West."[26] In the same context, Okot in *S O* illustrates very well how the European languages have come to supersede African languages through Ocol's request to African diplomats and delegates to:

> Tell the world
> In English or in French,
> Talk about
> The African foundation
> On which we are
> Building the new African nations
> Of Africa. (p. 150)

However, the argument turns soon into a bitter irony, because shortly after the independence of the newly established nation-states of Africa, the new African nations became lifeless and feeble structures with escalating poverty, repetitive coups and endless civil wars. In a word, very unstable nations, a point which will be discussed subsequently. Still about the issue of language, Frantz Fanon goes further in his book *Peau Noire, Masque Blancs* by advancing a plain argument: "Parler une langue, c'est assumer un monde, une culture. L'antillais qui veut être blanc le sera d'autant plus qu'il aura fait sien l'instrument culturel qu'est le langage."[27]. In fact, Fanon draws our attention

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[24]) Emmanuel Ngara., op cit., pp. 72-3.
[25]) *Decolonising the Mind*: The Politics of Language in African Literature. Oxford, James Currey / Heinemann, 1986, p, xiv.
[26]) Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *Moving the Centre*. The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms. Oxford, James Currey / Heinemann, 1993, pp. 37, 38.
[27]) *Peau Noire, Masque Blancs.*, op cit., p. 30.

to the capacity of language to alter and orientate "*l'homme colonisé*" towards the Whiteman's language and culture. With the same tone and more than Fanon, Albert Memmi in his book *Portrait du Colonisé* (1957) describes the two main protagonists of the *colonial situation* in terms of cultural imposition dictated by the coloniser's language and knowledge. He suggests that the colonised is the product or the victim of the apparatus of colonialism through the cultural standards of the coloniser. Hence, the colonised is condemned to use the coloniser's language:

> La langue maternelle du colonisé, celle qui est nourrie de ses sensations, ses passions et ses rêves…n'a aucune dignité dans le pays ou dans le concert des peuples. S'il veut obtenir un métier, construire sa place, exister dans la cité et dans le monde, il doit d'abord se plier à la langue des autres, celle des colonisateurs, ses maîtres.[28]

The best example of this lies in the archetype of Ocol who has already chosen the Western culture as a reference. On a deeper level, Ocol has embraced the attitudes of a new class, i.e., the bourgeois class which distances him further from the masses and even from his relatives as we showed earlier.

At the beginning of *S L*, Lawino intensively launches a sharp criticism against Ocol and his idealistic world. At the outset of the poem, Lawino rails against Ocol's bitter tongue which is sharpened with unbearable insults: "He abuses me in English /And he is so arrogant"(p. 35); she complains about Ocol who rejects her as a wife, because she does not "know the letter A"(p.34), a metaphor for her illiteracy. Thus the relationship between the characters is largely dominated by the issue of education. Ocol's relation with Lawino is dramatically interrupted when she is replaced by Clementine, the symbol of Europeanised beauty, a modern woman who "speaks English"(p. 36). The issue of language has been assiduously discussed by poets and writers like Léon Damas, the Negritude poet who expresses a sense of bitterness and disappointment in *Pigments*, recounting his bitter experience and lapses while a child with his mother who wanted him to speak French and have a French upbringing:

> Be quiet
> Have I told you or not that you have to speak French
> The French of France
> The French of Frenchmen
> French French.[29]

[28]) Albert Memmi., op cit., p 126.
[29]) Cited by Cartey, Wilfred, in *Whispers From a Continent.* The Literature of Contemporary Black Africa. London, Heinemann, 1971, p. 239.

Despite the immense intellectual gap between Lawino and her husband, Lawino dramatises publicly her plight like a professional griot, showing how Ocol comes to be alienated from his community and uprooted from his origins and traditions. At the end of her long dramatic monologue, Lawino mourns for the death of Ocol in a symbolical funeral, because Ocol has not only lost his manhood as husband, but also lost his dignity as a human being. Therefore, he becomes the object of collective wailing:

O, my clansmen,
Let us all cry together!
Come!
Let us mourn the death of my husband,
The death of a Prince
The Ash that was produced
By a great Fire!
O, this homestead is utterly dead,(p. 116)

In the final scene, Lawino shows her deep veneration of the traditional order, preferring to end up her plea in a joyful mood, celebrating proudly Acoli customs and traditions to be shown and not to be ashamed of in:

Let me dance before you,
My love,
Let me show you
The wealth in your house,
…
Let no one uproot the Pumpkin. (p.120)

Lawino chooses to end up her song in this tone and with this cultural manifestation; Rosemary Gray observes: "this is a culture … [where] word magic is revealed in Lawino's final appeal to Ocol to allow her to heal the breach between them and to restore his equilibrium through the redemptive power of traditional song and dance."[30]. Likewise, in *Song of Prisoner*, Okot pursues the same line of thought, describing the prisoner's longing to express his passion for dances and songs as follows:

Let me beat the rhythm
Of the orak dance.
Let my wife shake

[30]) "Counterpoint in print: Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol*", by Rosemary Gray in: *The Aesthetic Discourse of Arts.* Breaking the Barrier. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, (Ed). USA, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc, 2002, p. 92 www.books.google.com (30/08/2008).

Her soft waist before me
And remind me of our first meeting
At the dancing arena…
I want to join the youths
At the "get-stuck dance"[31].

In fact, Okot's Africa can be echoed in traditional manifestations inscribed in the memory of the African people.

II -Social Progress between Ocol's Misdirected Idealism and Lawino's Realism.

1. The 'Ocolian' View of Modernity and Progress.

Song of Ocol is the 'other view', a response, or rejoinder to Lawino's lament. It can also be read as the 'modernistic' view of Africa as envisaged by Ocol. *S O* offers the reader another image of Africa seen through Ocol's eyes and certainly in his own words. Actually, his vision of Africa reflects the official view adopted by Africa's new leaders. Bernth Lindfors thinks that Ocol is actually "speak(s)[ing] as a member of the ruling class that came to power after Independence with the ambition of transforming a former colony into a modern nation state." Yet, Ocol belongs to the group of political figures who are actually programming Africa's inescapable failure, and plotting for its self-destruction because of their 'crippled' notion of development. Lindfors adds: "their notion of national progress is a further imitation of Europe."[32]. Hence, Okot places rightfully Ocol as a man speaking on behalf of African leaders who unjustly seized power for themselves after the collapse of the last citadel of colonialism in Africa. Being their representative, Ocol appears an arrogant husband and a ruthless leader throughout *S O*. From the beginning he lashes back at his wife:

Woman,
Shut up!
Pack your things
Go! (p 121)

Ocol's ideas and assumptions show a man typically imbued with Western education and Christianity, and whose violence reaches a crescendo in section two. In fact, he wishes he could destroy everything that could stand for

[31]) Cited in: *A Selection of African Poetry*. By K. E. Senanu and T. Vincent. Essex, Longman Group Limited, 1982, p. 106.
[32]) "The Songs of Okot p'Bitek" by Bernth Lindfors in: *The Writing of East and Central Africa*. (Studies in African Literature). G.D. Killam (Ed). London, Heinemann, 1984, p. 152.

African culture or way of life. For Lawino's last request "Let no one uproot the Pumpkin" in her Song (p. 120), Ocol disdainfully answers her back:

> To hell
> With your Pumpkins
> And your Old Homestead,
> To hell
> With the husks
> Of old traditions
> And meaningless customs. (p. 126)

Through Ocol's mouth the poet weaves images of backwardness and meaninglessness of African societies and their culture. Worse still, he employs what Roscoe describes as an 'apocalyptic style' or tirade form in an effort to destroy entirely Lawino's universe for the sake of an indispensable modernity and inescapable progress. Instead of building Africa and helping to lift up misery, and eradicate poverty; Ocol appears as a firm iconoclast determined to deracinate every sacred aspect in his society, as in this statement:

> We will smash
> The taboos
> One by one,
> Explode the basis
> Of every superstition,
> We will uproot
> Every sacred tree
> And demolish every ancestral shrine. (p. 126)

Truly he wishes he could 'westernise' Africa at any cost, but firstly he has to eliminate obstacles and impediments to realise his ambitious project through the '*tabula raza* solution', razing to the ground people's granaries and set fire on them, and reducing Lawino's source of pride and dignity to rubble and ashes. In this context, Balandier echoes this meaning of modernity thus: "La modernité se trouve alors son sens que dans le changement radical, dans l'adhésion à un projet de re-façonnage total de la société [africaine] où le politique se fait croyance…"[33]. His remarkable notes go further when reflecting on the notion of progress in anthropological books based on the simple equation "modern" = "western", rendering "modernity" synonymous with "westernisation" if not its alternative through reiterating aspects like "*the uniqueness of the Western achievement*."[34] Perhaps because of the attractive ideas of modernity to many Africans, we can explain the predominant tone of

[33]) George Balandier., op cit., p. 298.
[34]) Ibid., p. 285.

vengeance which turns Ocol's song into a 'tragedy'. Besides, the severance and rupture between Ocol and his wife climaxes the mood of the poem into the form of a cry of anguish. Therefore, *S O* suggests what Abiola Irele calls a "veritable crisis of cultural memory"[35]. Thus, the poet accuses the African élite of being plagued by a sort of cultural 'amnesia', because of their subversive role in promoting Africa's Cultural Revolution. An analogous situation can be noticed in Chinua Achebe's novel *No Longer At Ease* (1960), when Obi Okonkwo is torn between his compliance with Ibo traditions and marrying his modern fiancée Clara, an *osu* girl that is untouchable in Ibo culture. In this context, Samuel Imbo suggests that Ocol is rather 'doomed' to suffer forces beyond his understanding or capacity, and eventually neither belonging to African nor the Western world.

Ocol's derisive ideas become intensively louder and stronger as he heaps scorn upon scorn on his wife and community alike, so that his mockery reaches a crescendo of pedantic utterances reflecting a sophisticated language acquired at Makarere University. The encounter with 'modern' ideas and new modes of life have chiefly influenced him so that he

> …will not simply
> Put the Maasai in trousers
> To end twenty five thousand years
> Of human nakedness,
> …
> … [but] will rip off
> The smelly goatskin skirts
> From the women
> And burn them, (p. 137)

Similarly, he calls upon Lawino to "beat the dust off your feet/ And jump into my Merc."(p.141) Indeed, through this and many other illustrations, Okot advances the argument that Ocol-like types are egoists striving for luxurious lives, possessing cars and houses in town. Such a materialistic interest suggests the élite's superficial understanding of modernity and progress. The poet caricatures Ocol as an unsympathetic and flat character whose sole goal is to get rich as a means to distance himself from the masses, i.e., joining the *nouveaux riches* or bourgeois class. At the same line, the gap between Lawino and her husband is getting wider, and equally between Ocol and society; therefore, the birth of a new form of struggle known in Marxism as class struggle in Africa.

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[35]) Abiola Irele. *The African Imagination:* Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora. Oxford/ New York, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 125.

The juxtaposition of powerful images in both *S L* and *S O* dramatises the growing rift between traditional culture and the sheer force of progress. Okot tries through the medium of poetry to question or rather condemn the political system at a crucial moment when Uganda undergoes bitter experiences towards Independence and the modernisation of society. As we noted earlier, in the process of constructing the nation-state, the élite performed a negative role without achieving a major success in eliminating the nation's sores and troubles. In fact, the reason for this failure lies in their equivocal perception of development and progress. Here one can notice Ocol's superficial concept of progress and its incongruity with the Acoli traditional universe. Across *S O*, Okot succeeds to comment on the binary contradiction of Traditionalism / Modernity emphasising the triviality and absurdity of the former, and necessity and vitality of the latter. As will be shown, Ocol urges Lawino to mourn over the destruction of the 'village world' which, undoubtedly, will not resist winds of progress and modernity:

Weep long,
For the village world
That you know
And love so well,
Is gone,
Swept away
By the fierce fires
Of progress and civilization! (p. 147)

The irony in this poignant description lies in the blaze which instead of lighting up Africa's darkest paths in facilitating development, has turned against every tribal life aspect to reduce them to ashes. In fact, the passage is expected, because Okot opens section eight thus: "I see cups of tears/ streaming down your cheeks". At the end of his song, Ocol calls upon his wife and his country men to bid farewell to their former departing traditional world. He mockingly orders his ex-wife to bid farewell to her dear world: the Old Homestead which is about to fall apart, to borrow Achebe's well-known expression:

…let the people sing and dance
And celebrate the passing of
The Old Homestead!" (p. 147).

The poet soberly employs some biblical references to hint to the influence of Christianity on the African élite as discussed earlier, referring to the Acoli being pilgrims, "men and women walking" towards the open gate of the "New City"(p. 149) like the Children of Israel undergoing various hardships to reach the Sacred Land in the Holy Scriptures. According to Ocol, the

traditional world is staggering about and eventually will vanish for good and for all, leaving room for 'modern' life or rather westernised Africa devoid of the magical world of spirits, ancestors and forefathers. In a memorable passage, Ocol is able to shock the reader associating Africa with "idleness, sickness, ignorance, darkness, poverty, and carelessness;" images devised by anthropologists as we have seen earlier. Ocol repeats myths about Africans being lazy, uncreative, doomed to an eternal world of poverty and ignorance in the following personification:

> Africa,
> Idle giant
> Basking in the sun,
> Sleeping, snoring,
> Twitching in dreams;
>
> Diseased with a chronic illness,
> Choking with black ignorance,
> Chained to the rock
> Of poverty,
>
> And yet laughing,
> Always laughing and dancing, (p. 125)

Despite the prevailing poverty, diseases and ignorance, Ocol remains passive or indifferent to these social plagues. In fact, the profile of Ocol exemplifies the élites' inability to promote development in their societies. In this context, such concepts as 'development', 'progress', 'modernity' are devoid of any signification, because the notion of social progress is tightly dependent on the West. Therefore, Ocol-like figures further Africa's dependence on Europe and perpetuate the "view that is based on the assertion that Africans are inherently and cognitively inferior and incapable of advancement without the knowledge of Europeans."[36]. In *Class Struggle*, Kwame Nkrumah goes in this sense by suspecting intellectuals' real political motives, since "they become alienated from tribal and village roots, and in general, [as a result] their aims are political power, social position, and professional status."[37]. Ghana's first president does not hesitate to attack what he termed the 'Oxbridge' élite whose profile matches Ocol in: "these are the bourgeois establishment figures who try to be more British than the British, and who imitate the(ir) dress, manners…"[38]. In sum, Nkrumah sharply criticises both the intelligentsia and the bourgeois for their lack of any sense of nationalist project. On the contrary,

[36]) Samuel Oluoch Imbo., op cit., p. 08.
[37]) Kwame Nkrumah. *Class Struggle in Africa.* London, Panaf Books Ltd, 1973, p. 36.
[38]) Ibid., p. 37.

he declares them the enemies of the African nation and its ambitious project: *the union*. Therefore, they embody the continuation of the colonialists' ideology and serve imperialist's interests. In other words, the sole purpose of the bourgeois class in Africa is not to bring about the long awaited *social progress and change*, but rather to replace the colonial '*system*'.

In the light of Nkrumah's words, Ocol's sense of progress has not come to achieve 'real' development in order to realize social facilities and prosperity for the masses, but rather to seek a social status, personal privileges, to get a share from the 'national cake'. In *S O*, Ocol imagines Africa as a "barren empire", a closed entity to progress and development, a land of enjoyment and merriment where "wild men and wild beasts"(p. 136) roam aimlessly, and an immense natural reserve bewitching tourists to flock from all parts of the world.

As if speaking on behalf of African leaders, Ocol maintains his 'modern ideas' through reinforcing his own 'law' and order. Once in power, Ocol pledges to abolish "the council of elders" (p. 137) and ban all traditional dances and cultural manifestations. In the name of modernity and progress, Ocol will run the country with an iron hand punishing *moi* entitled chiefs for their murders, to 'disarm' the traditional people "by force" if necessary and destroy all the spears, shields and other traditional weapons so as to hide all manifestations of 'primitiveness' and 'backwardness'. Ocol works on the judiciary model to exert his own vision of 'Africa' by virtue of the authority he has gained. Following the same ideology, Ocol intends to forbid all "stupid customs" and meaningless superstitions which would not be tolerated even on stage. Instead, Ocol introduces the metropolitan world -symbolised by the 'City'- to Lawino when he offers a woman from Pokot to walk with him "in the City garden"(p.138). In another expressive stance, Ocol uses ironically the word 'revolution' which is put out of its context, i.e., devoid of the sense of radical change and progress, away from the Fanonian definition of revolution. According to Ocol, without the militancy and determination of the present African leaders, including himself and the ruling powerful group, "Uhuru could never have come"; therefore they rightfully deserve a "token reward"(p.139). Incarnating the traits of the African leaders, Ocol denies accusations of being responsible for the people's misery as a futile attempt to cleanse his hands in the eyes of his countrymen:

Is it my fault
That you sleep
In a hut
With a leaking thatch?
Do you blame me

Because your sickly children
Sleep on the earth
Sharing the filthy floor
…
I am responsible
For the poverty of the peasantry?
Am I the cause of unemployment
And landlessness? (pp. 139, 141)

In this passage Okot's strategy makes Ocol lose the reader's sympathy so that the more he tries to prove his innocence, the more he reveals evidence of his direct involvement and implication in worsening Africa's social conditions. Thus Okot implicitly blames Africa's new leaders for the present precarious social, political and cultural realities. In order to cleanse African leaders from Africa's social evils and troubles, Ocol wants to appear to us as 'the man of the people' or as a Christ resurrected to save Humanity and restore the people's welfare. In this regard, Ocol affirms he has already "asked the minister /to build a school"(p. 141) but a number of questions arise here such as what kind of learning the school will provide, which material would be taught, does the material studied meet the needs of people, in which language teachers would speak to their pupils, etc…? We understand that Ocol is only throwing powder in the eyes, the same strategy follows when he promises people a better life at the marketplace in election time.

Exemplifying the Victorian lifestyle of a westernised man, Ocol comes from the 'Town' every week-end to breathe "the fresh air"(p. 142) of the country-side and to enjoy the smell of germinating flowers, leaving behind the city with its cars and streets. Now as a skilled political leader, Ocol warns his people that Uhuru means hard work, a concept greatly admired by Acoli people. Ocol reminds people that Uhuru does not render tree leaves into "banknotes" to be distributed by "the wind/Among villagers"(p. 142). In another perspective, Ocol wants the reader to be aware of his political victory at the end of section eight announcing "we have property/And wealth", because finally "we [Ocol and his acolytes] are in power". Once in power, Ocol illustrates the dictatorial behaviour of African rulers leading their countries towards more chaos and violence. Ocol's political perspective is perversely based on a repressive policy reserved for his opponents, he threatens to hang "thieves and robbers" and detain without legal procedures "disloyal elements."(p. 142). Indeed, Okot pictures through those political projections the profile of the bloody Idi Amin and his strong iron grip with which he ruled Uganda for almost a decade. Later on Okot develops the picture of Ocol who was metamorphosed into a gun-wielding soldier in *Song*

of Soldier, while Clementine expresses and defends herself in *Song of Malaya*, meaning a prostitute.

2. Lawino's Realist Definition of Social Progress.

Lawino's call on Ocol to regain his past dignity, pride and identity remains in vain or rather falls on deaf ears, as is the call upon Ugandan politicians to cease their hostilities and participate largely in the construction of the country. This reflects Okot's desire to contribute to Africa's political project. Obviously his political ambitions pushed him to try politics, but he was not as successful in it as in poetry. Still, the implicit political message in *S L* raised the anger of politicians, and embarrassed the Ugandan government which forced him into exile in Kenya until the overthrow of the dictator Idi Amin Dada in 1979. To enunciate his intrinsic political vision, the poet devotes a whole section to discuss political issues in "The Buffalos of Poverty Knock the People Down". Albert Gérard considers that *S L* provides us with a deep socio-political critique which "reflects the far more strident sense of grievance of the peasantry in the mid-1960's after the political inaptitude of the élite had become clear."[39]. As put in *S L*, on the eve of Uganda's Uhuru (freedom) the political scene witnessed the emergence of two major political parties: the Democratic Party led by Ocol and the Congress Party under the direction of Ocol's brother. The poet employs his persona to scrutinize Uganda's situation prior to independence. For a 'naïve' woman like Lawino the moment of breaking the shackles of colonialism is an unprecedented opportunity for Ocol and his brother to engage in a rat-race for power. Lawino pictures their candidature for presidency and political positions like rushing to a big 'feast' where every party claims its share:

> Independence falls like a bull buffalo
> And the hunters
> Rush to it with drawn knives,
> Sharp shining knives
> For carving the carcass. (p. 107)

Like the rest of the bourgeois élite, Ocol has benefited from his formal 'colonial education' to be placed as the leader of the Democratic Party. He pledges more stability and prosperity for the country, he takes upon himself to realize Africa's long awaited dream of Unity. Lawino expounds his project as follows:

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[39]) Albert Gérard. *European-Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa,* Volume 2. (Place and date not found), p. 925. www.books.google.com (07/01/2010).

He says
They want to unite the Acoli and Lango
And the Madi and Lugbara.
Should live together in peace!
…
And all the tribes
Should become one people. (pp. 103, 104).

Then Ocol the political candidate turns to attack his own brother calling him "a liar/A big fool"(p. 105) in a symbolical verbal war. Lawino does not grasp the meaning of this merciless struggle over power. She does not either understand the reciprocal feelings of enmity, hatred and animosity between the two brothers. Her puzzlement reaches a culminating point when she remarks:

The new parties have split the homestead
…
When my husband
Opens a quarrel
With his brother
I am frightened!
You would think
They have not slept
In the same womb, (p.105).

Ngugi comments on Lawino's desperate state and total confusion in: "she finds herself unable to wholly identify with either of the two warring parties, mainly because none represents her real interests. Why can't they join hands to eradicate the real foe of Africa?" [40] At this particular point, the poet hints at a crucial issue, predicting political disputes symbolised in a family feud over money and power where each party accuses the other of being vicious, mean and deceiving the hopes and aspiration of the nation. In this regard, the poet advances appropriately a serious debate over the real problems challenging Africa such as fighting illiteracy, reducing poverty and eradicating illnesses. Through the portrayal of Ocol-like figures, the poet refers to the political barrenness of the African élite, and eventually suggests the hypocrisy of the political leaders. Worst of all, those political leaders create dissensions within the army forcing the country into bloody civil wars and repetitive coups. Lawino unveils the true face of their fake 'nationalism' in this lengthy sequence:

[40]) *Homecoming*., op cit., p. 77.

… while the pythons of sickness
Swallow the children
And the buffalos of poverty
Knock the people down
And ignorance stands there
Like an elephant,

The war leaders
Are tightly locked in bloody feuds,
Eating each other's liver
As if the D.P. was leprosy
And the Congress yaws;
If only the parties
Would fight poverty
With the fury
With which they fight each other,
If diseases and ignorance
Were assaulted
With the deadly vengeance
With which Ocol assaults his mother's son,
The enemies would have been
Greatly reduced by now. (p. 111).

The poet accuses overtly Uganda's political system of being a fertile scene of rivalries which ultimately throw the country into the claws of poverty and ignorance. This trait of thought is also expressed by K. E. Senanu and T. Vincent in their anthology when commenting on *Song of Prisoner*. Both authors of the anthology consider that *Song of Prisoner* is a political poem which conveys an alarming message of a bitter socio-political reality, "in which the poet castigates the ills of a newly independent African nation with all the pious talk of freedom by her leaders: oppression of the poor, assassinations, corruption, falsehood, ostentatious living, etc."[41]. Okot appears pessimistic when dealing with Uganda's political issues and predicting no improvement in the foreseeable future, especially in *S L.* Yet, his poetry remains militant and didactic. For instance, Okot is juxtaposing pictures of the *nouveaux riches'* leading enjoyable life in towns, whereas the masses are suffering from grinding poverty in the countryside in this biting impressionistic passage:

… while those inside
Eat thick honey
And ghee and butter,
Those in the country side

[41]) Kojo K. Senanu and Theo. Vincent *A Selection of African Poetry*. Essex, Longman Group Limited, 1982, p. 107.

Die with the smell,
They re-eat the bones
That were thrown away
For the dogs. (p. 110)

Thus, Okot underscores in his diagnosis the reasons behind the source of Africa's social and political ills in the inability of the new leaders to realize the dreams and hopes of Africans. J. N. K Mugambi suggests in this context: "Uhuru (independence) has not fulfilled the expectations of the people. Yet, this lack of satisfaction has 'put people of all classes, creeds, clans and races into a prison-like situation."[42]. In this connection, Lawino once more questions the efficacy of Uhuru and of the promises made by politicians on the eve of independence in a series of dramatic questions like:

Where is the Peace of Uhuru?
Where the unity of Independence?
Must it not begin at home?
And the Acoli and Lango
And the Madi and Lugbara,
How can they unite? (p. 107).

Here Lawino's intention is to dramatise the 'institution' of a (betrayed) Uhuru. This kind of political discourse appears also in Adrian Roscoe's reading of *S L*. Roscoe considers that at this moment the poet is "caught by anxiety to assert his private vision, Okot at one point manufactures an opportunity to attack a betrayed Uhuru, with its broken promises and corruption, and the general chaos of an era which began with a golden dawn and somehow sank into nightmare."[43]. *S L* in this sense problematises the issue of monopolising power by a "clique" whose sole aim is sharing wealth among themselves at the expense of the nation. In fact, politicising socio-economic matters that concern African nations is a recurring theme in African literature. Valentine Mudimbe believes that African literature is an "invented" commodity through which present challenges mainly Africa's political struggle for liberation must be mirrored. For instance, Mudimbe refers to Mobutu's regime in the former Zaire as "a discursive drama [which] claims to be the sign of a social reality. However, it does not voice this reality". He intensifies his criticism on what he termed Mubutism as an institutionalized regime, a body of discourse through which "concrete mistakes are not erased, errors are transformed into victories, and failures are covered."[44]

[42]) J.N.K Mugambi., op cit., p. 88.
[43]) Adrian Roscoe., op cit., p. 53.
[44]) Valentine Mudimbe. *The Idea of Africa.* Oxford, James Currey, 2005, p. 149.

In opposition, Mudimbe welcomes Marxism as an ambitious project pregnant with promises for Africa; more than that, Marxism is "the exemplary weapon and idea with which to go beyond what colonialism incarnated and ordained in the name of capital."[45]. To suit and meet Africa's needs, Socialism "signifies: a political choice … the most useful for both cultural reassessment and socio political promotion."[46]. Therefore, socialistic thought and ideology dominated African literature, notably in the mid-sixties so much so that it constitutes a "myth" which generates endless debates and discussions. Here one cannot overlook Julius Nyerere's concept of *ujamaa* or communalism which means primarily, the creation of a new society, a nation based on the traditional model of family. Moving beyond the traits of the nation, the socialist project would imply a constant development of communalism for all peoples. There are other theories which attempt to promote social progress and economic development in the continent, such as Leopold Senghor's Socialism and Kwame Nkrumah's ideals of African unity. But despite their inspiring socialist theories, and their efforts to keep their promises, both of them turned against their own ideals and beliefs once in power. Thus, Nkrumah and Senghor became discredited rulers, because they failed to put their theories and principles into practice. Yet, their theoretical knowledge remains useful for generations looking for Marxist paradigms. (For further analysis see the third chapter).

In his remarkable chapter "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness" of *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon diagnoses the "schizophrenic personality" of bourgeois leaders before and after independence. His analysis goes thus: "Before independence, the leader generally embodies the aspirations of the people, political liberty and national dignity," he gives people the pretension that he works as hard as he could to serve his 'dear' nation. In this line of thought, the leader awakened the people and promised them a forward heroic revolution towards development and social progress. Such "revolutionary" discourse was intensively used during the struggle for national independences in Africa. Now after the achievement of independence with much sacrifice and bloodshed of the people, time has come for "the leader … [to] reveal his inner purpose: to become the general president of that company of profiteers impatient for their returns."[47]. This process happened in Kenya, Ghana and Senegal with leaders like Jomo Kenyatta, Kwame Nkrumah, and Léopold Senghor to name only a few. Fanon's worse premonitions came true shortly before his death, when he bitterly criticised the disruptive role of the so-called nationalist leaders drifting the nation astray from the real challenges facing the

[45]) *The Invention of Africa.*, op cit., p. 42.
[46]) Ibid., p. 93.
[47]) Ibid Frantz Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Constance Farrington. London, Penguin Books, 2001, p., p. 133.

nation: "today, he [the leader] uses every means to put them to sleep, and three or four times a year asks them to remember the colonial period and to look back on the long way they have come since then."[48]. At this level, the idea of struggle for real liberation becomes substantially urgent, taking into consideration the socio-political situation of Africa. As we have seen, a bitter reality is initiated by the bourgeois class who are bourgeois only in 'spirit' to use Fanon's term. In the following excerpt Fanon deepens his critique showing national bourgeoisie's inability to create a real industrial basis for the African masses:

> From the beginning the national bourgeoisie directs its efforts towards activities of the intermediary type. The basis of its strength is found in its aptitude for trade and small business enterprises, and in securing commissions. It is not its money that works, but its business acumen …[49]

In fact, Lawino's realism concerning political and social progress is evocative. Although *S L* primarily carries a cultural message, its author successfully investigates the political and socio-cultural reality of post independence Uganda. All that Okot wants is a radical change in politics, not only in terms of culture. The notion of change is a recurrent theme in African literature, especially in Marxist thought which elaborated on ideas such as the necessity for social transformation in Africa. In *Thresholds of Change in African literature*, Kenneth Harrow illustrates this further in: "the issue of change appears in the preoccupations of authors faced with the struggle of a society to adapt to, as well as to create, a new social and cultural order, it appears in the predominance of characters forced to face the dynamics of their own process of transformation."[50]. We will come back to the notion of change in the next chapter.

To assess *S L* objectively, one would say that in spite of the powerful images, the metaphors and the vivid figurative language used by the poet, there are some inconsistencies and weaknesses in the poem which could not escape the reader's attention. The best example of this lies in the impossibility of a peasant woman to become a political commentator, or rather an analyst without creating the logical circumstances that could justify her 'sudden' political maturity. Ngara queries Lawino's political awareness: "the behaviour of politicians in Uganda [in the Song] is so sophisticated that one wonders whether she is the same woman who is at one time amazed at the

[48]) Ibid., p. 136.
[49]) Ibid., p. 144.
[50]) Kenneth Harrow. *Thresholds of Change in African Literature*: The Emergence of Tradition. London, Heinemann / James Currey, 1994, p. 03.

ticking of Ocol's clock."[51]. There are other flaws and even contradictions in the poem. Still Okot discuses almost every essential aspect in the two songs. One has also to note that Ocol's negative socio-political position is underscored as a factor of African submission to European imperialism. Through the medium of these two long dramatic monologues, the poet presents a comprehensive view of Acoli culture, society and life. The remarkable character of Lawino has well articulated the vision of her people through counterpointing the two sets of cultures. Thus, the language of the griot that she adopts transports the reader to the heart of Africa's culture and traditions, namely to the Acoli universe in a journey similar to that of Okonkwo in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958).

Being a traditionalist and cultural critic, Okot presents two different words for which there is no possibility of hybridity nor reconciliation. As we have seen so far, the arrogant Ocol definitely espouses a 'new' modern world, while Lawino 'clings' assiduously to her Acoli customs and traditions. Unlike Lawino's, Ocol's predicament is rather serious, since he neither belongs to the Acoli nor to the Western world. Still, he thinks that 'modernity' is the only way out of Africa's troubles and traumas. For her part, Lawino's exaltation in her traditional world advances the argument that 'modernity' is inappropriate for Africa, because Acoliland is not ready to embrace modernity modeled after Western paradigms. The merit of both songs lies in Okot's human dimensions of cultural affirmation of national identity and above all human integrity. Thus, Lawino's lament is a call for tolerance, understanding and respect for African culture and civilization.

[51]) Emmanuel Ngara., op cit., p. 74.

CHAPTER THREE

NGUGI'S DEFENSE OF AFRICAN SOCIALISM.

"In African literature, we have very few positive heroes who would embody the spirit of struggle and resistance against exploitation and naked robbery by the national bourgeois and its global allied classes."

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Writers in Politics*.

CHAPTER THREE: NGUGI'S DEFENSE OF AFRICAN SOCIALISM.

I- Marxism as an Ideological Choice in African Literature.

Apparently Ngugi's fictional works mainly *Petals of Blood*, *Devil on the Cross* and *I W M* exploit Karl Marx's philosophy centred on the idea: "men are the real producers of their representations, their ideas … but real men react as they are conditioned by a determined development of their productive forces and mode of corresponding relations."[1]. In this chapter we shall study Ngugi's treatment of the exploitation of the 'productive forces' by governmental bodies which administer oppressive 'modes of production'. Ngugi has in large measure adopted Marxism as a philosophy which for him meets the aspirations of his country's proletariat, i.e., to defend ideals of communal solidarity and equity. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, the founders of Marxism 'invented' a scientific doctrine that shook the very foundations of the Western economic system in the middle of nineteenth century. They emphasised the importance of work as the principal condition of creating human life. Frederick Engels goes in this sense saying: "work is the first fundamental condition of human life, to a point that, in a certain sense, we must say: work has created man himself."[2] Indeed, Engels describes work in humane terms, as a basis for man to ameliorate his living conditions and create appropriate conditions for a decent life.

To begin with, let us describe the relation between 'Marxism' and 'literature', because literature was largely dominated by bourgeois ideas and thought since the Renaissance up to the Industrial Revolution and upward. However, the nineteenth century witnessed the spread of Marxist ideas and ideals which began to infiltrate the body of 'literature', and eventually succeeded to appropriate 'literature' by the means of operating human 'creativity' to 'reflect' a 'new order', i.e., social and economic realities brought about by the age of machine in Europe and particularly in Germany. Raymond Williams hints to this point:

> In the name of essentially general human 'creativity', to the socially repressive and intellectual mechanical forms of a new social order: that of capitalism,…The practical specialization of work to the wage-labour production of commodities; of 'being' to 'work' in these terms; of language … social relations to function within a systematic economic and political order: all these pressures and limits were

[1]) In "l'Idéologie Allemande" by Karl Marx in: *Marxisme et Linguistique.* Marx, Engels, Lafargue, Staline, (Eds). Paris, Payot, 1977, p. 43. (Translation mine).
[2]) "Le Rôle du Travail dans la transformation du Singe en Homme" by Frederick Engels., Ibid., p. 55. (Translation mine).

> challenged in the name of a full and liberating 'imagination' or 'creativity'.[3]

Again in his reference book *Marxism and Literature*, Williams maintains that Marxism does not only infiltrate the body of literature but also intersects and interrelates with 'culture' especially in the last century when there was a profound transformation of human relationships, directly connected with changes in the basic means of production. At this stage one has also to clarify some notions in the light of Marxist thought, such as the word 'ideology' which is charted by Williams as "a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group"[4], i.e., the proletariat plus the implications of the distinction between what is morally accepted and what is not, in compliance with Marx's doctrine.

Also, the social relations between men and 'productive forces' is bound to the way men produce and earn their material lives, therefore 'productive forces' constitute the very basis for the appropriate economic form operating within society. This idea is expounded in terms of economic 'superstructure' whose fundamental function is justifying or legitimizing the power of social classes to own the means of production. The term 'superstructure' is, according to Marx, a 'legal and political' form of social consciousness which could only correspond with social transformation: "the 'superstructure' is here the whole 'ideology' of the class, its 'form of consciousness', its constitutive ways of society itself in the world."[5]. As suggested by Williams, this latter rests on a certain real 'foundation' or 'basis' or better as 'base' defined in two basic categories as a 'form of property' and 'social condition of existence'. For this particular reason, Marxism attracted the masses and won popular sympathy, notably in Tsarist Russia where the *proletkult* class initiated the Bolshevik Revolution (1917) which ended with the overthrow of the tsarist regime. It is not our aim to state historical facts, but rather to investigate how Marxism operates as a workable theory admired and embraced by writers and dramatists in their imaginary creations. Academically speaking, Marxist 'dialectics' help intellectuals to sketch human feelings, such as sufferings, hopes and aspirations in the form of struggles for an effective liberation from capitalists' economic and social constraints. Terry Eagleton echoes this in the following:

> Marxism is a scientific theory of human societies and of the practice of transforming them; … it is the narrative Marxism has

[3]) Raymond Williams. *Marxism and Literature.* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 50.
[4]) Ibid., p. 55.
[5]) Ibid., p. 76.

> to deliver is the story of the struggles of men and women to free themselves from certain forms of exploitation and oppression.[6]

In this connection, Marx, Engels, and Lenin believe in a radical change of societies by means of 'class struggle' through social revolutions of upheavals to be led by peasants and workers aiming at a deep social transformation. Georges Lucas has dealt with this issue in *la Pensée de Lénine*. He observes that the material foundation of Marxism/socialism aims at "the adaptation of the needs of the laborious classes, its transformation is in the sense of more and more accomplished life."[7]. In his Marxist accounts, Engels investigates the phenomenon of social upheavals over power and wealth in Europe, especially after the rapid industrialisation of Europe and the influence of bourgeois ideas on political ideologies. It is out of those social and economic disturbances that a *class struggle* emerged between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie which takes what Lucas called a 'class struggle for bread,' as it will be shown in *I W M* through Gicaamba's suffering to earn his living under dire socio-economic conditions. Likewise, Engels, Marx, Lenin, Nkrumah and many other Marxist theorists envisage the liberation of the proletariat from the exploitation of the bourgeois class solely by the liquidation of capitalism. In this line of thought, Lenin outlines three major goals to accomplish a socialist revolution: "the overthrow of the bourgeoisie class, the abolition of classes, and the elimination of all forms of exploitation of man by man."[8]. The argument sounds more dramatic especially under neo-colonial regimes that made strategic alliances and granted economic privileges to former capitalist regimes.

It is now useful to turn to the strong impact that Marxism made on modern literature. In *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, Eagleton maintains that even the founding fathers of Marxism (Marx and Engels) appreciate very much literature and aesthetics; lining up openly against "overt political commitment in fiction [which] is unnecessary (not of course, unacceptable) because truly realist writing itself dramatizes the significant forces of social life, breaking beyond both philosophically observable facts and the imposed rhetoric of a 'political solution'."[9]. Eagleton was not the only one who refused the idea of putting literature at the service of party politics: the foremost German playwright, Bertolt Brecht, has also adopted this idea, because history has shown that opposing dogmatism in proletarian literature could mean for writers and artists doing hard labour in concentration camps, or worse

[6]) Terry Eagleton. *Marxism and Literary Criticism.* New York, Routledge, 2006, p. xii.
[7]) Georges Lucas. *La Pensée de Lénine. L'Actualité de la Révolution*. Paris, Editions Denoël, 1972, p. 109. (Translation mine).
[8]) Vladimir Lénine. *Culture et Révolution Culturelle.* Moscou, Edition du Progrès, 1969, p. 140. (Translation mine).
[9]) Terry Eagleton, op cit, p. 44.

undergoing physical liquidation. Despite his Marxist ideals and objectives, Brecht considers himself primarily as a dramatist, or a social reformer and mostly as a 'producer' of art dramatizing various social phenomena. In *Brecht in Perspective,* Graham Bartram considers that the 'committed' writer or dramatist is that who is engaged in a process of 'production' and "not simply mirror(s) a given social reality", "but an active, material part of that reality, and potentially able to contribute towards changing it."[10]. Hence, 'commitment' for Bartram is in its political context an active adherence or well-articulated sympathies with left-wing or 'progressive' values. Conversely, to T. S. Eliot and other writers who espoused the values and ideals of the right, Brecht is, in fact, a typically committed playwright or dramatist whose alliance with the revolutionary working class points to a crisis ensuing from capitalism.

This issue brings us back to consider a point discussed by Raymond Williams, that is whether writing *per se* is to be considered as 'commitment' or 'alignment'. Williams envisages the practice of writing to be basically a means of 'alignment' since writing means speaking from a point of view describing an experience or an event. In this sense 'alignment' is narrower in perspective than 'commitment' which "if it means anything, is surely conscious, active and open; a *choice* of position."[11]. Williams adds further that 'serious commitment' could be meaningful only if it is committed to a social reality. Again to quote Williams and recapitulate this issue, "Commitment, strictly, is conscious change of alignment."[12]. In doing so, the writer or dramatist has yet to create his characters in the novel or play according to some specific literary conventions. Working on specific 'characters' as typical 'persons' or 'individuals' (not in the liberal sense) to represent or reflect a social phenomenon. Such characters force us ultimately to recognize them as vivid representations of 'everyday life', and therefore one has no difficulty in identifying them with 'real' living people experiencing the same predicament. Perhaps modelling typical 'persons' thus, i.e., showing life almost 'like this' or even 'worse', would unequivocally be the main achievement of drama and literature.

In the *representation of persons*, as Williams notes, a typical 'person' or the 'hero' as an 'emblem' or 'symbol' emerges to express the deepest layers of human life through his external appearance and his social situation. The problematic of the 'hero' is discussed by the Russian formalist philosopher and critic Mikhail Bakhtin integrating the role of the hero with the theme of

[10]) "literature and commitment"by Graham Bartram in: *Brecht in Perspective*. Graham Bartram and Anthony Waine (Eds). Essex, Longman Group Limited, 1987, p. 99.
[11]) Raymond Williams., op cit., p. 200.
[12]) Raymond Williams., op cit., p. 204.

the story, as "the hero is only able to perform compositional function if he is a thematic element". Besides, for the formalists the role of the hero lies in his omnipresence in the play or novel "within a significant unity of one life, lived by one and the same hero."[13]. At this stage, the interplay between characters and the protagonist, the hero in this sense weaves altogether the plot and the theme as seen in *I W M* where the social reality of Kiguunda turns into a dramatic process. The crisis or the plight of this poor peasant reaches a culminating point in a sort of melodrama, only towards the end of the play, when the 'suspense' is replaced by a kind of *social consciousness* of workers and peasants. In his comment on Brecht's 'epic theatre', Arrigo Subiotto notes: "the enactment of incidents and events between individuals [is] generally structured to involve a conflict and its solution. The author is excluded in so far as the action is cast totally in dialogue between the characters."[14]. This sort of dialogue is also observed by Bakhtin in his dialogical syntheses. Hence, Brecht changed this kind of theatre to 'dialectical theatre' or 'theatre of contradictions'. Brecht's theatre is centred on the strategy of dialectics as an effective technique for the dramatization of society in an organic process of men's living together in a constant change. For this reason, the works of Brecht influenced Ngugi and oriented his attention to social issues.

For Terry Eagleton, Marxist criticism is moving away from its crude analysis of the relationship between 'text', 'ideology' and 'social relations'. He suggests that Marxist criticism is now concerned with all of them. Hence, social commitment imposes itself on writers and dramatists to reflect these social realities in the form of 'the search for truth'. Eagleton assigns to the writer the duty to 'express' his political opinions depending on the way the writer constructs his 'artistic/aesthetic' techniques. This is an attitude adopted by Lukacs and the Frankfurt school who believe in the capacity of art and literature to 'configurate' and 'interpret' 'social forces' through what is called 'texture'. Those notions are inexistent in the 'bourgeois theatre' or even Marxist extremism of the 'Moscow theatre'. In *Marxism and African Literature*, Georg Gugelberger thinks that the Marxist critics' chief task is to look how literature functions in society and therefore demand social change. In his introduction to this book, he comments on Marx's point that "the philosophers have only *interpreted* the world while the task is to *change* it."[15] Lucas also has dealt with the same issue when analysing Lenin's Marxist dialectics,

[13]) M. M. Bakhtin/P.N. Medvedev. *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship:* A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics. Translated by Albert J. Wehrle. Baltimore & London, The John Hopkins University Press, 1991, p. 137.

[14]) "Epic theatre: A Theatre for the Scientific Age" by Arrigo Subiotto in: *Brecht in Perspective.*, op cit., p. 30.

[15]) "Introduction" by Georg Gugelberger in: *Marxism and African Literature*. Georg Gugelberger (Ed). New Jersey, Africa World Press, 1985, p. vii. (Italics original).

emphasising the fact that philosophers have interpreted the world with different manners, but the question is how to transform it.

As we discussed above, social change and progress constitute a body of philosophical trends aiming at conducting social actions for deep social transformations in Africa. Such ideas have been discussed by Kwame Nkrumah and Léopold Senghor as two outstanding figures representing 'African socialism'. Yet, Nkrumah rejects the term 'African socialism' because "the myth of African socialism is used to deny class struggle and to obscure genuine socialist commitment"[16]. Instead, he welcomes 'socialism' and 'communalism' as workable frameworks to fulfil the masses' aspirations for better lives. Again to shed light on some ideas suggested in his booklet *Class Struggle in Africa*, Nkrumah follows the Fanonian paradigm criticizing the African intelligentsia and the national bourgeoisie who brought about neo-colonialist regimes. For the furtherance of his socialistic accounts, he affords a utopian vision for Africa in those terms: "it is around the African peoples' struggles for liberation and unification that African or Black culture will take shape and substance. Africa is *one* continent, *one* people, and *one* nation.". Then he adds in a highly revolutionist tone: "the total liberation and unification of Africa under an All-African socialist government must be the primary objective of all the Black revolutionaries throughout the world."[17]. Nkrumah advocates socialistic ideals and conflates 'socialism' with 'unity' as an inevitable step towards Africa's total liberation. Ghana's first president considers that socialism is a political choice and unity as a social strategy. Despite their socially-oriented discourses, Nkrumah, Senghor, Nyerere and many other leaders have failed to put their theories into practice.

Returning to the question of the deployment of Marxist discourse in African literature, Gugelberger and other critics regret the fact that African literary criticism has been mostly bourgeois, rather than Marxist in its orientation. As a Marxist critic, Gugelberger stresses the importance of Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* because the book has empowered readers with a Leninist examination of African realities through a solid attack against the new élite in neo-colonial Africa. In the same vein, Omafume F. Onoge discusses in depth the socialist tendencies in African literature, asserting that there is a sort of conscious reflection of African writers in their theoretical statements about the norms which govern writers' relationship with society, rather than with their novels, plays or poems.

[16]) Nkrumah, Kwame. *Class Struggle in Africa.* London, Panaf Books Ltd, 1973, p. 26.
[17]) Ibid., p. 88.

Ngugi's metamorphosis into a socialist activist is considered by David Cook in three major phases: Makarere's humanism in which the author adopted "a moralist-humanist outlook of human affairs", therefore his characters in *Weep Not, Child, The River Between* are propelled by "a confident hope in a better future."[146]. This is an attitude which he expressed in 1962 at Makarere conference and inscribed in "The African Writer and his Past", as the following: "I can remember the great air of confidence in the future of Africa and this confidence was expressed not in any kind of uniformity of outlook or in any kind of agreement during the discussions."[147]. The second phase is what David Cook puts as the "intermediary phase", which began in Leeds (England), when socialist ideas influenced Ngugi's thought to a more limpid vision for the betterment of Africa's social and economic conditions. This period coincided with waves of independences in Africa which pushed Ngugi to examine historical events experienced at home, i.e., colonialism, the Mau Mau upsurge, and then the neo-colonial stage. In this period Ngugi writes his book of essays *Homecoming* (1972) which bears the marks of 'pessimism' and disbelief in national independences.

In fact, his socialistic insights are also echoed when commenting on *Song of Lawino*, to be "a satiric assault on the African middle-class élite that has unabashedly embraced Western bourgeois values and models of life."[148]. Hence, Ngugi assigns the heroine of the poem the mission of being the spokeswoman or the voice of the peasantry and her ridicule and scorn is aimed at the class represented by Ocol. The poem in this context is an incisive critique of bourgeois mannerisms, colonial education and values. The third phase is characterized by a deep bitterness and disillusionment at the present social and economic reality brought about by the ruthless African "élite". In this case study, we limit ourselves to the drama made by Ngugi, particularly *Ngaahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want)*, but one has to consider that Ngugi's present effort can be inscribed under the rubric of 'revolutionary theatre' in compliance with Fanonian orientations. Ngugi himself advocates this kind of theatre so as to face up the consequent challenge: how to depict the masses in a historical perspective and give people courage in their struggle for total liberation.

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[146]) David Cook and Michael Okenimkpe. *Ngugi:: An Exploration of his Writings*. London, Heinemann, 1983, p. 13.

[147]) "The African Writer and his Past" by James Ngugi in: *Perspectives on African Literature*. Heywood, Christopher (Ed). London, Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1982, p. 03.

[148]) Ngugi wa Thiong'o (James Ngugi). *Homecoming*. Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics. London, Heinemann, 1972, p. 74.

II- *I Will Marry When I Want*: or Ngugi's Highest Point of Socialism: Africa's Social Progress in perspective.

It seems that Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Mirii have benefited from the Brechtian theatre, whether 'epic' or 'dialectical', creating thus the 'revolutionary theatre' as a literary form of expression profusely concentrating on the political and social realities of new Africa. Eagleton argues that theatre as a major literary manifestation of art, enables the dramatist to correlate the intimate relation between characters and action on stage, and the primacy of history to be intrinsic features of theatre. He also emphasizes its capacity to change, reflect, and produce a process of historical change:

> The task of theatre is not to 'reflect' a fixed reality, but to demonstrate how character and action are historically produced, and how they could have been, and still can be, different. The play itself, therefore, becomes a model of that process of production; it is less a reflection *of*, than a reflection *on*, social reality.[149]

In order to reflect on social reality, Brecht uses four basic components in his writings: *facts*, *history*, *class-consciousness* and *radical transformation of society*. Quite obviously, the dramatists profusely use the first three elements in *I W M*, perhaps the fourth could be implicitly understood as the basis of the play at hand. The two Ngugis used social realistic facts, such as the spread of poverty among the masses, the exploitation of the cheap working force and the unquestionable power and influence of the bourgeois over society: those are *facts* that enable the two Ngugis to comment on social injustice and inequality in neo-colonialist societies. *History* constitutes a touchstone with which Ngugi wa Thiong'o measures social fulfilments and failures, and this factor needs a further discussion in the following pages. Contrary to endless *facts* and smoothness of history, *class consciousness* is the culminating point at which characters push through their way towards self-realization or epiphany. It is of great import to apply this strategy to Ngugi's characters in *I W M*.

In Marxist literature, characters enter into an open conflict with the socio-economic establishment in the form of *class struggle* to realize their claims. In fact, the two dramatists weave the interplay between characters-actors with a kind of suspense from the very beginning. It is only towards the end of act one that readers understand the expected visit of the Kioi family is not to ask Gathoni's hand for their son John Muhuuni, as Wangeci hoped, but rather to inform Kiguunda and Wangeci of the sinful life they lead. Henceforth, the Kiguunda family undergoes a crisis which plunges them in moral turmoil and leaves them deeply indebted to a local bank. Kiguunda had to mortgage his one and a half acre of land to get the loan to secure the amount of money for

[149]) Terry Eagleton., op cit, p. 60.

the wedding necessaries to bless his Christian wedding. But soon the process turns against the Kiguunda family who lose the plot of land, their daughter and their social status alike. As we will see, creative works bearing Marxist thought usually end in a note of hope, here 'redemption' as a *dénouement* for the crisis of the story, or following Bakhtin's dialectic 'crisis and rebirth'.

In compliance with the Brechtian theatre, Ngugi has made recourse to the use of *history* so as to dispel the post independence illusions set by Kenyatta's and Moi's neo-colonialist regimes. He charts two opposing types or versions of *history:* the official or officialized history and the unofficial or the popular one: "there have been two types of history in Kenya: the *real living* history of the masses; and the *approved official* history."[22]. For Ngugi the present state apparatus has modified and distorted the true *history* of people. As a result, Kenya's glorious history becomes devoid of its essence and meaning. According to him, the true "history is being written by the millions of workers and peasants of all nationalities in Kenya who in their actions and songs are saying 'No' to imperialism and its comprador alliances in Kenya."[23]. As in *I W M*, Ngugi comprehends *history* in Fanonian terms to be a continuous process of struggle. Therefore, it is about human struggle with other humans over the control of that wealth. To recapitulate, Ngugi considers that it is high time for peasants and workers, who are the real makers of the Kenyan history, to benefit from their glorious history to achieve social progress. In *I W M*, the two Ngugis sketch their 'historicity' through inscribing the seven hard years following the declaration of the State of Emergency in Kenya, notably during the Mwomboko song and dance which encapsulates the people's desire to express their nationalism and commitment to freedom and liberation from British colonialism in the following patriotic symphony:

> *Freedom*
> *Freedom for Kenya our motherland*
> *A land of limitless joy*
> *A land rich in green fields and forests*
> *Kenya is an African people's country*. (p. 26).

Ngugi persistently advocates his own sense of historicism from an Aristotelian perspective. He observes the substantial difference between the historian and the poet, while the one describes 'a thing that has been', the other the kind of 'the thing that might be'. In the light of this distinction, Ngugi believes that the writer's noblest mission lies "in building a place to feel at home … By diving himself, deep into the effective consciousness of our own people… seek the

[22]) *Moving the Centre.*, op cit., p. 98. (Italics original).
[23]) Ibid., p. 100.

roots, the trends of the revolutionary struggle."[24]. Ngugi inscribes this line of thought to dismantle the control of the 'comprador bourgeoisie' and also to undermine the oppression and exploitation of the masses in post independence Kenya. Both dramatists try to articulate this kind of 'historicity' through giving voice to the defenceless masses to comprehend their own history marked by chapters of violence and horrors. The best example of this lies in describing the historical moment after the declaration of Emergency in Kenya. Kiguunda recalls those terrible moments in:

> Our homes were burnt down.
> We were jailed,
> We were taken to detention camps,
> Some of us were crippled through beatings.
> Others were castrated.
> Our women were raped …
> Our wives and daughters raped before our eyes! (p. 27)

Adding to the historical horrors witnessed in Kenya under colonialism, Ngugi admits that he lived in "a colonial situation" without knowing it. According to him colonialism fabricated this critical situation. Though latent and imperceptible, its effect was major on him, he remembers how "African workers would stream across the valley to sell their sweat for such a meagre sum of money." Though they were the true "creators of wealth but they never benefited from it: [because] the products of their sweat went to feed and clothe the children of the Indian trader, and those of the European settlers."[25]. It seems that *I W M* constitutes for him an opportunity to thrust light on this neo-colonial situation.

In his vivid historical narrative *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi sketches the heroic deeds of Kihika and the other freedom fighters in a parallel line against that of traitors like Mugo who acted against his compatriots as in betraying Kihika, one of the outstanding chiefs of Mau Mau freedom fighters, to the British administration. In *I W M*, Ngugi reiterates the theme of betrayal in the character of Samuel Ndugire who matches Mugo's profile in *A Grain of Wheat*, but as we noted before, drama is more effective than narrative in dramatizing historical elements. To our surprise Ndugire who appears as a devout Christian preacher, a 'saint' whose soul "has received the tender mercy of the Lord" (p. 45), used to be a cruel homeguard with a record full of terrible deeds: he was baptized 'Kimeendeeri' because of the way he "used to crush people's heads". What is ironical lies in the moment of his conversion to

[24]) Christopher Heywood., 08.
[25]) *Homecoming*., op cit., 48.

Christianity which coincides with the eve of Independence Day, Ndugire declares:

> …the Lord called unto me in 1963,
> It was the midnight of December twelve,
> And he told me:
> Ndugire … the only freedom is that of the soul. (p. 46)

There is another irony or rather hypocrisy of using religion to climb the social ladder, as a 'strategy' to get a "piece of the cake" and benefit from independence. Sketching the moment of Kenya's Independence, as it were, is significant in itself, an undeniable landmark separating the colonial past with its horrors from the brilliant present with hopes and promises. Independence in this context constitutes a decolonising moment shaping the mentality and conduct of the postcolonial generation. For Ngugi, the ultimate goal of the struggle in Africa is not only to break the shackles of colonialism, but also to make a major "step towards total liberation- spiritual and mental - of the African."[26]. His works engage in a questioning of the meaning of independence from the political, economic and psychological points of view. Obviously, political independence is but the formal transfer of the political power and administration from foreign authorities to the hands of national leaders. However, one can note that the benefits and fruits of independence went to the élite, a privileged group who has assimilated the Western culture and showed no interest in the current affairs of their people. Kwame Nkrumah defines the realisation of independence not as an end in itself, but as a prerequisite phase for a further phase of social struggle: "**Independence must never be considered as an end in itself but as a stage, the very first stage of the people's revolutionary struggle.**"[27]

Thus, Nkrumah casts doubts about the newly independent state because "**it is a state where political power lies in the conservative forces of the former colony and where economic power remains under the control of international finance capital**."[28]. In other words, the country continues to be economically controlled by Western interests which are alien to the ex-colonised masses. Likewise, Frantz Fanon is among the cultural and political apostles who criticized the post independence national bourgeois class whose tendencies and leanings ranked with the ex-coloniser camp. He imagined the African people living under undemocratic regimes as 'the wretched of the earth', a significant metaphor for an ominous gloomy future of people

[26]) Ibid., p. 14.
[27]) Kwame Nkrumah. *Handbook of Revolutionary Warfare*. A Guide to the Armed Phase of the African Revolution. London, Panaf Books Limited, 1968, p. 16. (Emphasis original).
[28]) Ibid., p. 08. (Emphasis original).

subjected to forces beyond their reach, social and economic forces that will be discussed subsequently. In *Pour la Révolution Africaine,* Fanon envisages the process of liberation of man from unjust institutions as part of the national struggle, since "Le combat pour la dignité nationale donne à la lutte pour le pain et la dignité sociale sa véritable signification. Ce rapport interne est l'une des racines de la solidarité immense qui unit les peuples opprimés aux masses exploitées des pays colonialistes."[29]. Economic independence seems to be then the real issue: Fanon shows that the economic structures of the young African nations have to face the hegemony of the former European power. But what is worse isn't the encroachment of European capitalism in national economy, but the influence of the comprador bourgeoisie, a class of profiteers that Fanon described as a 'parasite' destroying the social structure of the nation. Ngugi seems to confirm Fanon's statement when he shows that the independence of the Kenyan nation is not the one expected by the people.

Ngugi's *I W M* concentrates on this point, showing character-types like Kiguunda and Wangeci, a couple crushed under the socio-economic condition created by neo-colonialism in Kenya. David Cook thus sums up the play: "It tells of the underhand manoeuvres by which the wealthy Kioi achieves possession of the 1 ½ acres of land belonging to 'the down-trodden poor labourer Kiguunda' for the purpose of building an insecticide factory on it..."[30]. In one of her ironical comments, Wangeci associates Kioi, Ndugire, Ikuua and other local tycoons with mere bedbugs sucking the blood of people, as in: "Aren't they the real bedbugs/ Local watchmen for foreign robbers?"(p. 31), a reminiscent metaphor for Fanon's significant adjective qualifying the bourgeois as a 'parasitic class', for insecticide is the only medical prescription. The play does not bluntly cast the action of 'heroes' against 'villains', but focuses on a life-like struggle between poor characters as helpless 'victims' or 'preys' against their 'predators' such as Kioi, Jezebel and Ndugire. Yet, it also presents hero-type characters like Gicaamba and Njooki who refuse to be doomed to poverty and still militate for social progress in the name of justice and human dignity. Ngugi's major task in this context is "improving the financial condition of the uneducated and underprivileged masses whose only stake in political freedom lies in the improvement of their well-being- the only possible measure of their 'sense of dignity and self-respect."[31]. The ultimate target for Ngugi is then the attainment of psychological independence, i.e., when the material and spiritual fulfilment is secured and empowers Africans with self-confidence and autonomy. Objectively speaking, though psychological independence is posited at the top of Ngugi's priorities linked to

[29]) Frantz Fanon. *Pour la Révolution Africaine* : Écrits Politiques. Paris, François Maspero, 1969, p. 147.
[30]) David Cook., op cit., p. 08.
[31]) *Homecoming*., op cit., p. 14.

independence, its realization in Africa is still out of reach, taking into consideration the historical and political phases that Africa underwent under colonialism and its present socio-economic disorder.

Ngugi is eager to examine the falsities and contradictions of postcolonial Kenya. He points out that true patriot Mau Mau fighters and leaders like Dedan Kimaathi received official neglect and marginalisation. Hence, the dramatists speak about a sense of loss and disenchantment through the enactment and action of characters that fought for independence and got nothing, or lost everything including their dignity and integrity as human beings. Peter Nazareth comments on Wanja, Abdulla and the other 'wretched of the earth' of *Petals of Blood* as poor souls "who fought for independence and had lost limbs and loved ones [who] now discovered that the fruits of independence were not theirs."[32]. The same tone is felt in *Devil on the Cross*, where Ngugi portrays characters disillusioned and disheartened by independence despite their patriotism and love of Kenya. The depiction of the old Wangari is a striking example. In the matatu-bus, she tells the travellers how the neo-colonial regime has rendered her a hopeless soul. She recalls her bitter experience saying: "My small piece of land, two acres, had just been auctioned by the *Kenya Economic Progress Bank*, as I failed to pay back a loan I had burdened myself."[33]. Wangari goes on narrating unspeakable and unbearable horrors experienced in the streets of Nairobi where she desperately looked for a decent job. After a hard day, a certain shopkeeper offered her to 'spread her legs', Wangari feels a terrible pain burning inside her as she "felt a tear drop to the ground."[34]. The irony lies in the fact that those were the very legs which used to carry ammunition to freedom fighters in the forests and mountains of Kenya. Wangari's misfortunes reach a culminating point when one of the bosses orders her to sit down. At this moment, Wangari feels as if she is reborn again and her patriotic feelings come to the surface: "my heart beat with joy. *Independence* had truly come to our land. I waited for my good fortune with the patience of a fisherman."[35]. Actually Wangari doesn't know that another ordeal with the police and courts is waiting for her. She has been charged with an attempt at robbery and obliged to face a foreign judge. In fact, one can sense through Wangari's mishaps, Ngugi's revolt and disillusionment with the neo-colonialist political system which has failed to promote social progress and development in Kenya.

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[32]) "The Second Homecoming" Multiple Ngugis in *Petals of Blood* by Peter Nazareth in: *Marxism and African Literature.* George M. Gugelberger (Ed). New Jersey, Africa World Press, 1986, p. 119.

[33]) Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *Devil on the Cross.* Translated from the Gikuyu by the author. Oxford, Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1987, p. 41. (Italics original).

[34]) Ibid., p. 42.

[35]) Ibid., p. 43. (Italics original).

As dramatists, the two Ngugis maintain this line of thought and perhaps radicalize their position towards neo-colonialists' misdeeds, showing their utter anger and dissatisfaction with the aftermath of independence as a historical phase which does not put an end to Kenyan's suffering and misery. The gloomy presentation of the post independence era dramatizes the predicament of peasants and workers and suggests the absurdity of independence; Gicaamba's poignant remark goes as follows:

> How many years have gone
> Since we got independence?
> Ten and over,
> Quite a good number of years!
> And now look at me!
> …
> My trousers are pure tatters
> Look at you
> See what the years of freedom in poverty
> Have done to you! (pp. 28, 29).

At this dramatic moment and through the medium of soliloquy, Kiguunda seems to harvest some of the sour fruits of independence: "poverty has dug trenches on your face/ Your heels are now so many cracks…" This evocative image sounds bitter, when reading Kenyatta's *Suffering Without Bitterness* (1968), a book title which suits better characters like Kiguunda, Wangeci, Gicaamba and Njooki. In his autobiographical book the president Kenyatta writes: "Uhuru [Independence] for Kenya had to be joyful, not sombre; vigorous rather than brooding. National integrity and national dignity were the stuff of the future, and this was ours to create."[36]. The apparent falsity of Kenyatta's promises lies in the physical decay foreshadowed in Kiguunda's extreme poverty at the beginning of the play:

> Kiguunda's home. A square, mud-walled, white-ochred, one-roomed house. The white ochre is fading … [it] can be seen a pile of rags on the floor. The floor is Gathoni's bed and the rags, her bedding ... On one of the walls there hangs a framed title-deed for one and half acres of land … On one side of the wall there hangs Kiguunda's coat, ... The coats are torn and patched. A pair of tyre sandals and a basin can be seen on the floor. (p. 03)

Simon Gikandi reacts to this impressionistic physical description in these terms: "the walls and size of Kiguunda's home are easily recognizable as sign of abject poverty in the postcolony, a point reinforced by the rags on the floor

[36]) Jomo Kenyatta. *Suffering Without Bitterness*: The Founding of the Kenya Nation. Nairobi, East African Publishing House, 1968, p. xi.

and the torn and patched coats."[37]. But despite the visible poverty which comes out from the picture, there is only one important item that is 'the title-deed' of the one and a half acre land. At one moment Kiguunda causes the title-deed to fall – foreshadowing its imminent loss- hurries to pick it up "as if it was a title-deed for a thousand acre?"(p. 03) as Wangeci observed ironically. However, Ngugi is referring to the centrality of land owning in Kenya. In his book *Facing Mount Kenya*, Jomo Kenyatta underscores the centrality of landowning to the lives of the Gikuyu to the extent that it becomes their *raison d'être*. He points to this dependence on land in: "landowning is an essential factor for social, political, religious and economic life of the tribe. The Gikuyu farmers depend entirely on land which provides them with the whole necessary elements of life."[38]. Ngugi knows very well the unconditional subordination of people to their lands, and also the disastrous consequences ensued from disowning people from their properties. As a boy Ngugi himself had witnessed a terrible scene inscribed in his *Homecoming*, when a group of women "were being forcibly ejected from the land they occupied and sent to another part of the country so barren that people called it the land of black rocks…they were in convoy of lorries, caged, but they had a one voice… I stood literally unable to move."[39]. Such memorable instances seized Ngugi's thought as his father became landless, fostered him to embrace a socialistic reformist vision.

But as a cornerstone theme for African writers and playwrights, social consciousness functions as an effective strategy in helping fictional characters to head towards their liberation and therefore social transformation. It will be shown later that Gicaamba, the factory worker, and his wife Njooki appear from the outset 'conscious' of their social status. On the contrary, Kiguunda and his wife Wangeci appear 'naïve' or unconscious of their place and role in society. Their superficiality and lack of political maturity facilitates and later accelerates their descent in the social ladder. Indeed, in Marxist thought *social transformation* is a feasible objective to overthrow the bourgeois rule by means of class struggle of peasants and workers (the proletariat). Marxists in general especially the founders of this doctrine advocate social upheavals to fulfil a radical change in society. By virtue of their formulations, the architects of socialism in Russia intensified their criticism on the notion of *capital*, arguing that the Industrial Revolution in England and the series of social and political transformations in Western societies contributed to the creation of a new economic reality based on *capital* and the interrelation between the productive forces and man. From this stand point, Lenin endeavoured to fight capitalism,

[37]) Simon Gikandi. *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 02.
[38]) *Au Pied du Mont Kenya*., op cit., p. 34. (Translation mine).
[39]) *Homecoming*., op cit., 48.

relying on two factors: the historical and the humane "the history of capital is a history of violence and plunder"[40]. Up to now we described the outstanding characteristics of 'vulgar Marxism'. Out of these theories, Ngugi constructs ideas such as social justice, equal redistribution of the wealth of the nation and so on. Likewise, his socialist view of 'society' is exemplified by the use of characters like Kioi, Ikuua wa Nditika and Ndugire to consolidate themes of betrayal, greed and theft. These themes reappear with insistence in *Devil on the Cross*, where Ngugi tells the story of six character-types who discover mysteriously that they are summoned to a secret competition, the 'Devil's feast' to select the seven cleverest (modern) thieves and robbers in Kenya.

In *I W M*, the two dramatists' presentation of the bourgeois interior house is synonymous with the Victorian model. The subsequent presentation may serve as negative to the Gikuunda's home. The authors describe Kioi's luxurious house in Scene Two thus:

> Kioi's home, in the evening. A big well-furnished house. Sofa seats, TV, radiogram, plastic flowers on the table, and so on. Electric lights. On the walls are several photographs…The table has all sorts of dishes. There is also water on the table in a huge glass container … (p. 74)

They hint to the luxurious life the comprador bourgeois lead, a world which, though prosperous and opulent, is inauthentic and unoriginal in its essence. In an almost in comic-ironic stance, the two Ngugis go ahead caricaturing Ikuua wa Nditika, Kioi's partner as "a man with a belly as huge as that of a woman about to deliver,… busy collecting his things, bits of paper and so on into a small suitcase."(p. 75) Certainly the dramatists cast Kioi and his partner not as successful businessmen, but as professional thieves around tables counting their huge fortunes. In fact, Ngugi is keen to caricature unsympathetically landlords in 'parasitical' terms, in *Devil on the Cross*, Ngugi describes Gitutu, one of 'the modern thieves' as having "a belly that protruded so far that it would have touched the ground had it not been supported by the braces that held up his trousers."[41]. Ngugi echoes the man's unlimited greed and unquenched thirst for money so much so that he wishes to "trap the air in the sky, put it in tins and sell it to peasants and workers, just as water and charcoal are now sold to them (people). Imagine the profit we would reap if we were to sell the masses air to breathe in tins."[42].

[40]) Vladimir Lenin., op cit., p. 44. (Translation mine).
[41]) *Devil on the Cross*., op cit., p. 99.
[42]) Ibid., p 107.

In the play, the two Ngugis represent the encounter between the representatives of the bourgeois and the proletariat in a highly symbolical scene, the two groups confront each other as social adversaries, each of which is suspicious of the other. Simon Gikandi draws our attention to another level of antagonism, ostensible only to the Gikuyu audience, i.e., at the level of semantics in the connotation of the Gikuyu names used in the play, for instances "Kioi is the aggrandizer and the glutton while Kiguunda is a man of the soil, a simple peasant."[43]. Onstage one could observe this graphic scene as sketched in the following excerpt:

> Kioi sits on the chair which Kiguunda had been repairing. Ndugire and his wife sit on the bed, and Kioi's wife sits on empty water tin or small water drum. They sit in such a way that the Kioi group is on one side and the Kiguunda family on the other side, at least they should be seen to be apart, or be in two opposing camps. (p. 43).

This time, their appearance is quite visible, Kioi for instance wears "a very expensive suit with a hat", his wife Jezebel, too appears in "a very expensive suit and expensive jewellery," to a lesser degree "Ndugire and Helen have clean, tidy but simpler clothes.". Ngugi does not let the reader speculate on the reason for such a social difference, explaining: "the Ndugire family is dressed in a manner which shows that they have only recently began to acquire property"(p. 24) and money, that is newly joined the middle class, this latter made alliances and sympathizes with the bourgeois. Thus, the two Ngugis are able to represent the Kenyan society as a multi-layered society ruled by competition and interests. Kioi and Jezebel are working on domesticating their workers, who appear 'inferior' in their eyes, to accept derisory wages. Jezebel performs this role addressing her loud speech to Ndugire but actually meaning to Kiguunda:

> That tractor driver is very mature.
> He does not argue back.
> He does not demand higher wages
> He just believes in hard work,
> Praising our Lord all the time.
> He is a true brother in Christ (p. 43-44)

But later on, in Kioi's home, and as a response to Kioi's ironical statement "Kiguunda earns a lot of money", Kiguunda himself rejects the idea in one of the rare instances insisting on the precarious life his family is leading with a meagre sum of money not exceeding two hundred shillings:

[43]) Simon Gikandi., op cit., p. 191.

What do I get a month?
Two hundred shillings,
And you call that a lot of money?
Two hundred shillings a month
With which to buy clothes, food, water,
And you know very well
That prices are daily climbing up!
A person earning two hundred shillings,
Can he really cope with the rising prices? (p. 85)

In fact, the play shows many instances bearing proletarian claims and grievances. In African literature, Marxist ideals and social claims of better working conditions and higher wages under the domination of the whites has been primarily expressed by first generation writers like Peter Abrahams in *Mine Boy* (1946) which bears the marks of an imminent social struggle between bosses and workers in South Africa. In this proletarian novel, Xuma the main character undergoes hard working conditions, underpayment, social and racial discrimination, elements which contributed to self-awareness and political maturation at the end of the novel, notably in the final scene after the mine collapse. This incident has eventually converted Xuma into a leader initiating a general strike to improve the living conditions of the oppressed workers. Likewise, the playwrights work closer to this specific point validating history's ability to celebrate a possible revolutionary change. The play therefore, teaches the Kenyans ways of attainting such perspectives as social progress, economic development and social justice buried by neo-colonialists' landlords. The two Ngugis create onstage a memorable moment which goes back to 1948 when workers of the Bata shoe factory decided to go on a general strike which ended with a terrible carnage perpetrated by ruthless colonial police forces. On the stage the audience can observe:

> A procession of workers with placards bearing political slogans enter. They shout different slogans: 'we want higher wages; Down with prices; Up with Uhuru, Down with Imperialism; Down with traitors, Up With patriots; the factories and the country belong to us.' (p. 68).

Afterwards, this peaceful demonstration turns into a collective meeting for patriots to take the oath vowing unity and struggle to one of the Mau Mau leaders. During the public sermons, militants repeat after the leader:

I'll help members of this organization, [Mau Mau]
So that if a bean falls to the ground
We split it amongst ourselves. (p. 69)

This is an ostensible indication of the socialist doctrine and communalist ideology on which the Mau Mau upsurge was founded and its egalitarian principles adopted by its new adherents.

Moving back to the kind of bipartite split between the 'haves' and 'have nots', the dialogue between characters takes a dramatic stance through the dramatic ironies used in the scene. Actually the Kioi's' visit to Kiguunda's household is not to negotiate Gathoni's marriage, but to persuade them to remarry in church. Therefore, the Kioi's effort can be considered as a messianic mission, delivering the Kiguundas from their 'horrid ways'. But Kiguunda immediately repudiates Jezebel's suggestion that he "was living in sin." (p. 49) arguing simply:

> This is mine own wife,
> Gathoni's mother,
> I have properly married her
> Having paid all the bridewealth
> According to our national ways
> And you dare call her a whore! (p. 50)

He immediately chases away the Kioi group, threatening them with his sword. In the meantime, and to complicate the plot of the play, Gathoni who used to date John Muhuuni, Kioi's son, decides to leave home with her lover to Mombasa. Reflecting on that matter, it occurs to Wangeci's mind that remarrying in Church is a prelude to a possible wedding between Gathoni and John Muhuuni; therefore, establishing a close relationship with the Kiois. Wangeci prevails upon her husband and both make a visit to the Kiois to discuss the matter. But before this visit Kioi, Jezebel, Ndugire and Helen scorned Wangeci's food in a former visit to the Kiguundas. Now, arriving at Kioi's house, the Kiguundas are inappropriately received, and deliberately prevented from sharing food with the Kiois. When Kiguunda asks their help to cover the wedding expenses, Kioi finds no alternative except urging them to sell or mortgage their land to a local bank of which Kioi was the director.

The apparent antagonism between Kioi and Kiguunda enables Gicaamba, the factory worker to emerge as a hero-type whose appearance enables him to become the moral centre of the play and the conscience of the betrayed national consciousness. In addition, his charisma and former experience as a trade unionist shape the traits of a distinguished 'hero' whose political maturity and hypersensitivity signal pitfalls generated by neo-colonialist practices. From the outset of the play, Gicaamba and his wife Njooki attempt to convince their neighbours of the impossibility to make friends with the

Kiois or believe the lie of Gathoni's marriage for the simple reason that: "rich families marry [only] from reach families,/The poor from the poor! (p. 32)

At the beginning of Act II, Scene One, the Gicaamba couple visits their neighbours once more, and again they attempt to persuade Kiguunda and his wife of the absurdity of Gathoni's marriage, basing their argument on a social division created by the post-colonial situation, saying: "leave these people alone./They are just playing with you." (p. 55). In Act II Scene Two, we notice a plaque in Kiguunda's house on which an inscription reads: 'Christ is the head of the house', replacing the title-deed. The play reaches a climax of dramatization when the Kiguunda couple was proceeding with their wedding ceremony in an invisible church before an invisible priest. However, Gathoni's cry interrupts the process and abruptly ruins the whole event. Gathoni tells her parents about her pregnancy from John Muhuuni and his refusal to marry her. Immediately Kiguunda and Wangeci decide to visit the Kioi's place where they are received with rebuff and further contempt. In a fit of rage Kiguunda attacks Kioi with the sword which he has brought from home and under threat obliges his boss to sign a written agreement. But before doing so, Jezebel emerges out with a gun and forces Kiguunda to retreat back. In Scene Three we observe the disappearance of the furniture from Kiguunda's house as he fails to pay back the bank loan:

> Most of the new things are no longer there. The house is very much like the way it was at the beginning of the play, except for the picture …with the inscription 'Christ is the Head' hangs on the spot where the title-deed used to hang. Wangeci is sitting on chair, dejected.Njooki is standing near her, trying to comfort her (p. 103.4)

After their brief victory, the poor Kiguundas have been defeated. The beautiful Gathoni ends up a prostitute in a local bar, whereas Kiguunda finds refuge in alcoholism. One observes that all Ngugi's characters insist on the reiteration of their inevitable fate within parameters established by neo-colonialism. As in the Victorian melodrama, the two Ngugis are successful in demonstrating how socio-economic ills condemn African families to live in perpetual poverty and despair. David Cook comments on those social catastrophes as "scenes of human disaster [which] are altogether different in tone and import. They express a passionate denunciation of the wrongs suffered by an African working family under a capitalist system,"[44] championed by a powerful foreign and local capitalist. But despite the bitter defeat, the Kiguundas have not lost their vital power to further the class struggle. Moreover, such a

[44]) David Cook., op cit., p.172.

situation has raised their awareness as they intend to head towards a heroic struggle, a point which will be discussed subsequently.

In his magisterial work *The Novel and the Politics of Nation Building in East Africa*, Peter Simatei mentions that African writers and artists are substantially "haunted by (that) ironic reversal of expectations in which the dream of Independence dissolves quickly into a nightmare as the new state-nation reveals its kinship with its forerunner, the colonial state."[45]. One can deduce at least two remarks. First and foremost, the process of 'change' that Africa undergoes is actually destructive and not constructive, because during its revolutionary phase inner hopes and aspirations turned out to be mere illusions. Second, the inborn nation-state is substantially 'un-African' in its essence and substance, since it fails to rid the African masses of cycles of despair and delusion, therefore failures at social, economic, cultural and political levels. Hence, the idea of constructing a theory of politics that would comply with the soul of popular revolutions and all forms of resistance against capitalism and imperialism proves its primacy and legitimacy. In fact, writers and artist like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ayi Kwei Armah, Sembene Ousmane, Leonard Kibera, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Okot p'Bitek to name only a few, have dramatised the lives of African people in their narratives so as to describe the complexity of the postcolonial situation.

Of direct relevance to our theme, the two Ngugis denounce vehemently capitalism and imperialism in a way that stirs the theatre audience. Using workers slogans: "Down with Imperialism" (p. 68) in the play, is to reveal Ngugi as one of the most fervent resistants and activists against imperialism. In *Moving the Centre*, Ngugi demonstrates that imperialism is a sophisticated form of capitalism whose sole purpose is to undermine social change in Africa, Asia and South America. He maintains that a handful of shareholders in American and European stock exchanges "can determine the location, death and life of industries; they can determine who eats, what and where. They can also create famines, deserts, pollution, and wars. [Even] The peasant in the remotest part of the globe is affected by the[ir] power",[46] because of their tight wideworld commercial monopoly and mostly their manipulation of the *capital*. This ruthless politico-economic system empowers itself in three ways. It gives material and psychological support to the former colonies and arms its obedient ruling agents to oppress and massacre the masses in the name of law and order. Second, imperialism would not allow the emergence of any form of rival power or 'people-based revolutions'; in doing the imperialists tend to

45) Simatei, Tirop Peter. *The Novel and the Politics of Nation Building in East Africa*. Altendort, Germany, Bayreuth African Studies Series Bayreuth University, 2001, p. 29.
46) *Moving the Centre.,* op cit., p. 110.

nurture political and military tensions between people. Lastly, imperialism internally creates social and religious conflicts, and provokes topics like sexism, racism, violence and so on. However, Ngugi believes in the working people's power as the revolutionary alternative to challenge imperialism. According to him, such a policy brings its fruits in China, Cuba. In one of his interviews he declares the following:

> Capitalism and imperialism are the root causes of evil. Our economy is dependent on international capitalism. And capitalism can never bring about equality of peoples. The exploitation of one group by anther is the very essence of capitalism. The peasants and workers are very much exploited…they get very low pay, very poor housing, and employment affects them…[47]

In spite of the impediments and insurmountable obstacles set by the African ruling élites, the agents of Western imperialism, the dramatists are intent on depicting the workers' resilience and courage to carry on the battle for social justice.

As far as Christianity is concerned, the play stresses the historical role played by Christianity during which the Bible served the cause of Europe in its territorial extension over 'places of darkness', or 'savage lands'. Hence, religion worked as an effective instrument to 'civilise' the uncivilised and enlighten the minds of 'backward' people by means of a whole body of discourses, images and perceptions elaborated by anthropological works (see chapter one). John M'biti refers to the religious discourse in Africa as '*mission Christianity*' whose impact is undeniable in many parts of Africa and in various domains, notably its greatest impact on the cultural level, because "Christianity is closely associated with the concept of 'civilization'."[48]. Yet, the deployment of the Christian discourse in Africa has displayed a policy of double standard with people, that is either admitting the (domination) Christianization along Europeans lines, or else they face the mighty power of the Empire. Ngugi as a writer and essayist rejects this policy, because for him it only consolidates European hegemony. His character Gicaamba observes the 'dirty work' performed by European imperialists who penetrated into Kenya to further their domination over Africa in this historical stance:

> When the British imperialists came here in 1895,
> All the missionaries of all the churches

[47]) Reinhard Sander and Bernth Lindfors (Ed). *Ngugi wa Thiong'o Speaks*: Interviews Edited by Reinhard Sander and Bernth Lindfors. Nairobi, James Currey/E.A.E.P, 2006, p.73
[48]) John M'biti., op cit., p. 238.

Held the Bible in the left hand,
And the gun in the right hand.
The white man wanted us
To be drunk with religion
While he,
In the meantime,
Was mapping and grabbing our land,
And starting factories and businesses
On our sweat. (pp. 56, 57)

In his *Homecoming*, Ngugi echoes this with: "while the European settler robbed people of their land and the products of their sweat, the missionary robbed people of their soul."[49] Henceforth, Christianity worked hand in hand with colonialism and imperialism in Africa, even the great theologian John M'biti admits this fact, saying: "the [religious] image that Africans received … of Christianity, is very much coloured by the colonial rule and all that was involved in it." He testifies this by a Gikuyu proverb: "there is no Roman Catholic priest and a European – both are the same."[50]. This is the sole reason which spurred Africans to establish their own churches and forms of worshiping. M'biti calls this process of appropriation '*indigenization*' of Christianity in a particular form suitable for Africans. At any rate, in one of his interviews, Ngugi accuses Christianity of being "part and parcel of cultural imperialism … [it] has been used to rationalize imperialist domination and exploitation of the peasants and workers." He argues that Christianity works on the paradigm of "God-given" or "God-conditioned" rather than "socially conditioned", "so if you see you are poor because God has willed it you are more likely to continue to pray … but if you know that your poverty is not God-conditioned, but socially conditioned, then you are likely to do something."[51]

Indeed, both in *Ngaahika Ndeenda* and *I W M,* the two Ngugis have profusely used a biblical imagery and religious references, because of the remarkable role played by Christianity in shaping peoples' lives and destines. However, we can sense this ambivalence in discourse as in Gicaamba's ironical observation:

Goats and cows and money
Are not important.
What is important
Is the splendid face of Jesus
…

[49]) *Homecoming*., op cit., 32.
[50]) John M'biti., op cit., p. 231.
[51] *) Ngugi wa Thiong'o Speaks.,* op cit., p. 88.

But they, on this earth, this very earth,
They are busy carousing on earthly things, our wealth,
You the poor are told:
Hold fast unto the rosary,
Enter the church, (pp. 57, 58)

Though Christianity is a compatible with the lives of the African people, it loses its power. This is why Ngugi tacitly shows its subversive role in justifying slavery, admitting the apartheid system and rationalising the exploitation of the masses both in colonial and postcolonial periods. In Kenya, Christianity became an ardent opponent against the African struggle for freedom, i.e., against the Mau Mau socialist peasants' and workers' revolution. Through the technique of flashback, the authors try to enunciate the Kenyan history, showing the scandalous manner with which local priests mistreated freedom fighters like wa Njeeri in the play. Gicaamba remembers how one of the priests used to 'visit' them in detention camps at Manyani, Mageta. Ngugi's Gicaamba understands the historical lesson of 'pacification of the primitive people' to be a strategy implemented by colonialism to contain the popular anger of 'true' Kenyan nationalists such as Dedan Kimaathi and other rebellious figures. The two Ngugis sketch a dramatic moment when the priest "is still around preaching", interrogating wa Njeeri in his cell: "repent, repent/Confess the oath,/Reveal where the others are hiding." In those difficult historical moments, true patriots did not give in under the pressure of the Colonial Church. Gicaamba is moved by wa Njeeri's courage and high sense of patriotism implied in Njeeri's challenging words:

I Patriot Son of Njeeri
Will never sell the masses
Or sell my country for money!
I would rather die. (p. 59)

According to Ngugi, Christianity cannot avoid a paralyzing contradiction, being intrinsically "Christian dogma or doctrine from the European scale of values, and from European custom." In his socialist accounts, Ngugi goes further by arguing the complicity of Christianity with colonialism in a palpable discourse, because the underlying message of the Christian faith is "basic[ally] [a] doctrine (was) [of] love and equality between men, (was) [yet becomes] an integral part of that social force-colonialism … built on inequality and hatred between men."[52]. Such ambivalence is quite noticeable in the play through Gicaamba's repetitive complaints of the passivity and incongruity of the Church of Scotland Mission in Kenya:

[52]) *Homecoming*., op cit., 31.

… is it a sin to increase a worker's wages?
Religion … religion …!
Religion is the alcohol of the soul!
Religion is the poison of the mind!
It's not God who has brought about our poverty!
All of us were born equally naked. (p. 61)

Ngugi's is away from Lenin's extremist tendencies for abstract materialism which have ultimately driven Lenin to deny even the existence of God and trivialize all spiritual manifestations. In an opposing line, Ngugi calls for people to break away from the Church of Scotland Mission and establish a new African Church whose main role is to create a form of worship and evolve an education more in tune and harmony with people's hopes. As the play comes to its end, Gicaamba, Njooki, Kiguunda, and Wangeci establish their own Church. In a symbolical gesture alluding to the foundation of a new African church, Wangeci donates a shilling in a collective haraambe initiative (public fund-raising), despite her poverty in this scene:

LEADER:
It's a haraambe to build a church
For those troubled at heart
For those carrying pain in their hearts!
WANGACI unites a handkerchief and takes out a shilling which she puts into the container… (p .112)

In fact the establishment of their own Church was the fulfilment of a vow noted at the beginning of the play where the leader (soloist) vows to create the 'church of the poor' as a reaction to the 'church of the rich' represented by Kioi, Jezebel, Ndugire and Helen. In Act II Gicaamba, Njooki, Kiguunda and Wangeci attack their enemies when they incorporate a biblical imagery and references to 'the Satan of theft', 'the Satan of robbery', emphasizing the messianic coming of peasants and workers through rituals to exorcise their land from the evils and sins of colonialism and neo-colonialism. In doing so, the two Ngugis use a soloist and chorus group to perform collective songs and dances:

SOLOIST:
The Satan of poverty
Must be crushed
CHORUS:
Hallelujah he must be crushed,
For the second coming is near.
SOLOIST:
He destroys our homes,
Let's destroy him. (p. 05).

An alternative type of Christianity is thus being advocated in the play. Ngugi himself has never repudiated the Christian credence or called for the return to the traditional religion or ancestral gods as Okot p'Bitek has done in *Song of Lawino*. The establishment of the 'church of the poor' by Gicaamba and Njooki and the others is to be considered as a reaction to the mighty power and domination of the 'church of the rich' of which Ndugire, Helen are the representatives. Embarking on this belief, we realize that Christianity has been 'appropriated' by a specific category of people in order to improve their social status as a congruous medium to legitimize their action to the members of society. At one moment, Ndugire evokes how independence has bestowed on him wealth comparable to God who sent down manna on the Children of Israel in the Holy Scriptures. Likewise Ndugire ironically narrates to the Kiguundas how:

> God showed us a tiny garden in the settled area.
> It is a tiny garden of about a hundred acres.
> But it has a good crop of tea.
> The same Lord then took us by the hand,
> To inside a bank
> Where he enabled us to get a loan with which to buy it. (p. 46).

Almost like the atmosphere created in Peter Abrahams' proletarian novel *Mine Boy*, Ngugi himself acknowledges that the play works on the process of *proletarisation* of the peasantry in a neo-colonial society. In the same context the dramatists allow Gicaamba a long speech about his endless enslavement by working conditions set by the white exploiters in the shoe factory for a meagre wage of two hundred shillings. He boldly summarizes his dull working shifts in this way:

> Before you have drunk a cup of milkless tea,
> The Sirena cries out.
> …
> You jump to the machine.
> You sweat and sweat and sweat.
> Another siren.
> …
> Siren.
> It's six o'clock, time to go home.
> Day in day out… (p.34)

From the two previous opposing working pictures, one can affirm that the dramatists accentuate a social reality, i.e., the impossibility to reach a social

and economic deal under the neo-colonialist rule. In a wider sense, this is a *class struggle* in which there is an everlasting 'war of interests' raging between 'the haves and the have nots', the former exploit the masses and try to keep their social privileges and interests, the latter claim socio-economic rights and social justice. Here the dramatists discuss issues related to the postcolonial era, i.e., the binary categorisation of reality, as Ngugi's ideological understanding of postcolonial relationships in Kenya is one that is always between the oppressor and the oppressed, the exploiter and the exploited, the patriots and the traitors. Gicaamba, the hero-leader of workers in the shoe factory has revolted against the bitter reality they have endured in the factory, and he raises his voice to articulate the pains on behalf of his co-workers:

> We are the people who cultivate and plant
> But we are not the people who harvest!
> The owners of these companies are real scorpions.
> They know three things only:
> To oppress workers,
> To take away their rights,
> And to suck their blood. (p. 33)

In the tone of a trade unionist, Gicaamba portrays the monotonous work at the shoe factory becoming a sort of religion for which one would sacrifice his body, blood, wife and even children, "Why, because you hardly ever see them!"(p. 35) Gicaamba mentions the indifference, discrimination, and humiliation reserved for workers. He relates how workers are exhausted and left to die under terrible conditions. During his working career, Gicaamba witnessed several 'imperceptible' deaths due to 'chemical dust' in the factory. The two Ngugis illustrate a gloomy picture similar to that presented by Upton Sinclair in his book entitled symbolically *The Jungle*, where the workers die in a complicit silence under terrible conditions in meat-processing factories in the twenties and the thirties in America. Michel Foucault sees in this context a sort of "opposition between civil society and state"[53], a further contradictory situation that could be posited under the rubric of '*the struggle of identification* and war of positions'. In a further analysis of the phenomenon of social contradictions and social protests, Foucault argues that, because of the lack of a social contract to appease the social malaise, people often enter into a merciless opposition as a part of grappling with the established system:

> What is significant is that the protests are aimed at statements about things that are immediately a source of scandal – life and death. By bringing out these problems of health, one is entering an order of values that gives rise to an absolute, infinite demand. The

[53]) *Michel Foucault: Politics Philosophy Culture*., op cit., p. 168.

> problem raised is, therefore, that of the relationship between an infinite demand and a finite system.[54]

In fact, in *I W M*, Ngugi is expressing his anger and bitterness about the state's insensitivity to the suffering of the common man whose conditions and history move from bad to worse. The characters are oscillating in their actions and conversations between moods, i.e., an unbearable bitterness about their daily reality, and at other times gleaming dreams of freedom and progress. As a mark of resistance, figures like Kiguunda, Wangeci, Gicaamba and Njooki pursue their lives despite their social sufferings. By defending the nation's interests, they refuse to be reduced to pathetic beggars waiting for alms; or prostitutes for some shillings; or become refugees in the world of alcoholism. Ngugi's aim is to change the *status quo* by revealing the chaos beneath the main areas of 'destabilisation' of the nation: therefore Ngugi makes a major move from describing individual anxieties to reaffirming collective interests. As we pointed out earlier, Ngugi's characters become indefatigable change-seekers by means of self-awareness, 'class consciousness', up to class struggle.

III- Ngugi' Oral Literature and the Incorporation of Traditional Songs and Dances, or Celebrating the Nation's Vivid Memory.

We have argued earlier that the play tackles the social and economic convulsions brought about by neo-colonialism since the play is set in contemporary Kenya. Narrating the experience of the Kenyan people through Kamiriithu community spurs the authors to incorporate elements of oral tradition as songs, dances, proverbs and so on. Ngugi refers to them as "elements of form". He insists on the centrality of songs and dances not just as decorations, but also as an integral part of the conversation between characters. Therefore, as elements of oral literature, songs and dances really become the continuation of the action on stage. Opposing Wangeci's unfinished Christian wedding, Ngugi portrays Ngurario (the final traditional marriage ceremony to the Gikuyu) between Gicaamba and Njooki. Here their clans are negotiating and performing the final wedding ceremony in this sequence:

> Aagaciku: [The bride's clan]
> Here is the millet gruel, woman of the Mbui clan,
> You who know how to welcome guests!
> Now hand me my honey
> …
> To the Mbui clan
> So famous in war and peace.

[54]) Ibid., p. 173.

Let's now go back to cultivate our fields
While seeking ways of getting back
Lands stolen from us by the whites.
Aambui: [Women from the bridegroom's clan]
Yes, we join our two hands
To see if we can defeat the enemy
Of this, our land,
Our beautiful land of Mount Kenya. (p. 66)

In fact, we cannot miss the harmony of the wedding song through its expression of traditional values such as mutual solidarity, respect and collaboration. In the colonial period, songs did not only function as vehicles expressing joy, happiness, or sorrow; but also as popular channels transmitting revolutionary ideas, inspiring courage and praising heroes. Therefore, words as 'enemy', 'oath', 'war', 'defeat', 'our land' to name only a few, constitute the corpus of songs. It is for this particular reason that the British administration banned songs, dances, and gatherings of more than five people in order to silence patriotic feelings in people. David Cook considers that "musical and ritual passages tell(s) how an unjust colonial past has led to an unjust neo-colonial present."[55]. Hence, oral literature and written literature constitute an instrument of resistance against (neo)colonial cultural hegemony. V.S Naipaul echoes this opinion, considering that "literature and 'culture' are political weapons"[56].

As far as culture is concerned, both Okot p'Bitek and the two Ngugis embark on the belief of the centrality of culture in Africa. According to Ngugi culture can be understood in Fanonian terms. For him culture develops within the process of a people struggling with their natural and social environment. The culture Ngugi dreams of is neither past relics nor irrelevant traditionalism, nor a static entity. Culture for him is a flexible way of life, elaborating on its substance, and generating various meanings to life. Thus "Culture becomes the carrier of their moral, aesthetic and ethical values."[57]. At the end of the play, Kiguunda is highly aware of his role to continue the social struggle in post independence Kenya. He understands the root-reason of Gathoni's down fall in this self-blame: "we the parents have not put much effort/In the education of our girls." (pp. 104 - 5). But most importantly, Kiguunda goes on blaming his wife for despising her meaningful culture and aping foreign ways:

[55]) David Cook., op cit., p.169.
[56]) "Images, Commonwealth Literature" by V. S Naipaul in: *Critical Perspective on V.S. Naipaul*. Hamner, Robert D (Ed). London, Heinemann, 1979, p. 28.
[57]) *Moving the Centre.,* op cit., p. 27.

You an old woman
Wanting to go through a humiliating ceremony!
And all because of looking down upon our culture!
You saw fools going for foreign customs
And you followed in their footsteps. (p. 109)

And in the following evocative song, Gicaamba and Njooki join hands to sing unity between peasants and workers, and celebrating the departure of capitalists and imperialists from Kenya saying:

Foreigners in Kenya
Pack your bags and go
The owners of the homestead have come. (p. 41)

As they sing, the characters become true nationalists as they raise the 'sword of revolution' in the face of the local neo-colonialist as they did with Mau Mau fighters during the colonial era. As we mentioned earlier, proletarian works often finish with glimpses of hope for a better world, where there is no more exploitation and no more oppression. In the last scene of the play, Gicaamba, Njooki, Kiguunda and Wangeci join their hands and sing for imminent social change. Thus, the play ends with a note of triumphal hope:

The trumpet of the masses has been blown.
We change to new songs
For the revolution is near. (p. 115)

Indeed, the two Ngugis consider that plays are written to be performed, or to act upon a situation to promote change, notably changing postcolonial socio-economic realities. Therefore, *I W M* can be considered as a dramatization of these realities. It also proposes a corrective political ideology. From this standpoint, the two dramatist call for a sort of organization against the forces which have hijacked Africa's 'Uhuru', seeking a sense of '*redressement*' in social structures within national boundaries. Thus, the Ngugis succeed to bridge the gap between their literary anxieties and their political ideology. This is why this play made them the political enemies of the authorities. In fact, this play teaches the masses a lesson, i.e., they have the moral and physical capacities to determine their fates and overcome postcolonial social and economic traumas, and eventually promote development and social progress.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has focussed on the issues of cultural affirmation and social progress in Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol* and Ngugi's *I Will Mary When I Want* from a purely Afro-centrist perspective. As we showed in the study, Okot p'Bitek's *S L* lays the ground for Africa's cultural liberation. Okot's plea for Africa's 'Cultural Revolution' is actually, a call upon African people and the African élite alike to validate and appreciate their cultural heritage. In cultural terms, all the traditional elements embodied in *S L* can be interpreted as an attempt to rescue and regenerate, if possible, the African indigenous culture impaired by Western culture and education. The poet purposefully creates his inspiring epic character, Lawino, a firm representative of Acoli customs and traditions, who describes and values eloquently her community's way of life. Through *S L*, Okot's persona defends vehemently almost every aspect related to Acoli culture including the mores, beliefs, customs, traditions, habits, aesthetics, religion and politics. Despite, the simplistic message the poem carries, Lawino's lament constitutes in itself a powerful argument suggesting the idea of the 'search' for an 'African identity', or better an 'African philosophy' in compliance with M'biti's thought.

Being a traditionalist and cultural critic, Okot accuses the westernized élite of 'aping' the Western people, through creating the caricatures of Ocol, Lawino's husband, and Clementine, Ocol's second wife and Lawino's eternal rival. Okot's narrative sheds light on the ordeal of his protagonist who has been unjustly despised and rejected by her husband, Ocol, a Makarere graduate, for her 'clinging' to Acoli traditional life. To consolidate the interplay between characters, Okot employs Tina as an anti-heroine agent who speaks English and behaves like white women. She symbolises Ocol's deceptively attractive modern world. Instead of putting much effort to describing her exclusive beauty, Lawino devotes part of her critique to Tina's make-up, beauty and lifestyle. Through the use of satire, irony, mockery, and comical language, Lawino successfully ridicules and pokes fun at the Western lifestyle and aesthetic preferences, suggesting that Western culture fits only its creators. Besides, Lawino addresses Ocol, the abusive and arrogant husband by means of appeasement and reconciliation as an effective strategy to win the readers' sympathy. Again, Lawino persistently pleads with him not to 'uproot the pumpkin', the symbol of the Acoli homestead's stability. In fact, this call and other calls- to regain his dignity and identity- in different instances in the song remain fruitless.

Through displaying anthropological elements of the Acoli, the reader learns something about the Acoli traditional and religious life. For instance, defying

the power of ancestors and deities has inflicted on Ocol the worst curses such as losing his manhood. In addition, embracing Western culture makes Ocol lose also his 'mind', as demonstrated in "My Husband's House is a Dark Forest of Books". Okot undertakes a sharp critique against Western education so much so that he associates books, which are naturally, symbols of enlightenment and knowledge, to darkness and ignorance. For further dramatisation of Ocol's plight, Lawino presents Ocol as a selfish person who loses all desirable values such as respect, mutual help and solidarity. Regarding Ocol's career as an outstanding leader of one of the national parties, Lawino assesses his political project as a programmed failure, alluding in the meantime to the leaders' hypocrisy and unquenched thirst for power and money. In the tone of a skilled politician, Lawino criticises Uganda's politicians for their indifference to the suffering of the masses, and the élite's inaptitude to eradicate illnesses, poverty and ignorance.

In *Song of Ocol*, Okot gives Ocol the opportunity to defend himself in his own words. The song reaffirms the image of an educated man who is feverishly haunted by Western ideas and ideals. By adopting a westernized view, Ocol despises Acoli culture and traditions, and attempts to destroy Lawino's traditional world at any cost. Despite Lawino's call upon his consciousness to regain his dignity and identity, Ocol persists in his stubbornness and contempt by rejecting his wife, warning to burn her homestead and to destroy every sacred traditional aspect to the Acoli. When he reaches power, Ocol behaves as a ruthless dictator, pledging to imprison his political opponents, punish entitled elders, forbid traditional dances and so on. In fact, Okot's sympathies clearly lie with Lawino, who constitutes an outlet to express the best features of Acoli traditionalism. Discussing Okot p'Bitek's *Song Lawino* and *Song of Ocol* leads us to note the severance of partnership between the writer as spokesman for the people and the nationalist politician especially in post-colonial Africa. This rupture between African leaders and the masses is due to the aftermath of the independence of East African states and the emergence of a comprador bourgeoisie that appropriated power only to transform it into an instrument of oppression and exploitation. It is under such a bitter postcolonial situation that both Okot p'Bitek and Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Mirii have tried to comprehend the shortcomings born out of the apparatus of colonialism.

Indeed, Ngugi's anger and bitterness about the exploitation and oppression of the masses have troubled his conscience and ultimately thrust him into the Marxist ideology as a response to remedy social injustice brought about by the neo-colonialist regime in Kenya. Modelling *I Will Marry When I Want* after the Brechtian theatre, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Mirii strive to articulate the pains, sufferings, and hopes of ordinary people by expressing their proletarian claims such as claiming higher wages and decent working

conditions. In the play, we witness the ordeal of characters/actors like Gicaamba, Njooki, Kiguunda and Wangeci who undergo socio-economic hardships under a dire post colonial reality. The two Ngugis employ Gikuyu cultural manifestations such as songs, dances and mimes to reinforce and perhaps validate their socio-economic claims as legitimate popular grievances. Ngugi's social concerns of the wellbeing of his countrymen coloured a number of his novels. He discusses social matters in a pure political perspective, notably through Marxist leanings as a workable mode of governance in Africa. In one of his interviews he declares: "the socialist system is…the only system which encourages cooperation. The more I think about it, the more I believe this is the only salvation for Africa…I can't see where communal values can exist when the material wealth is in a few hands."[1].

Ngugi's Marxist perspective can be explained by the strong attachment to the interests of the African masses particularly peasants and workers. He assigns intellectuals the role of identifying society's maladies and nuisances only to find the adequate solutions for their countrymen, i.e., Ngugi cannot imagine the intellectual dissociated from his society. In other words, intellectuals of all tendencies are committed to their societies and their writings have to "urge justice and fair play in human affairs,"[2] which is the very objective achieved by both Ngugis in *I W M*. Socially speaking, Ngugi's and Okot's commitment to the masses could be understood in a sense of loss of confidence in the neo-colonial state's ability to build societies based on socialist/communalist lines.

It can be argued that both works are unambiguous in their support to the African people and their condemnation of a highly exploitative world. Ngugi admits that experiencing drama with 'real' peasants and workers at Kamiriithu open theatre revolutionised his thought, and with the help of Micere Mugo, they called for the establishment of the 'people's theatre', because theatre is not a mere walled-building, but rather an institution siding with people in their struggle for their liberation. Ngugi considers that "drama is closer to the dialectics of life than poetry and fiction", adding further: "drama encapsulates within itself this principle of the struggle of opposites [social forces] which generates movement."[3]. Such a world was created by the bourgeois philosophy and the manipulation of the notion of *capital* by imperialists at stock exchanges overseas. Ngugi and his disciples have rejected categorically neo-colonialist mode of governance, because under its reign people become captives to capitalism and imperialism. As demonstrated

[1]) In "Tolstoy in Africa": An Interview with Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *Ngugi wa Thiong'o Speaks*, ibid., p 55.
[2]) David Cook., op cit., p. 13.
[3]) *Decolonising the Mind.*, op cit., p 54.

through the Marxist dialectics, radical or 'revolutionary change' is an inevitable solution for Africans to promote development and social progress. Hence, 'Revolution' in Fanonian terms is a radical discourse to change the *status quo* imposed by colonial or *neo-colonial regimes*. Ngugi's and Fanon's revolutionary thought postulated in what is known as 'literature of resistance', based on the concept of *la Lutta continua* to confront what Ngugi has named the 'betrayal of hope'.

As influential figures in Third World societies, African intellectuals like Ngugi and Okot use writing as a weapon to express their bitterness, outrage and disillusionment. Ngugi's socialistic ideology in *I W M* is based on the collective endeavour of the poor masses struggling to survive the anomies created by the postcolonial nation-state. As in *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross*, Ngugi's characters in *I W M* seem to belong nowhere; they are out of time and out of place, and are thrown into a grinding poverty. According to Ngugi, the neo-colonial state rewrites history to suit its own interests and agendas. Hence, the adoption of a historicist approach to diagnose the nation's maladies is for him an effective instrument to envisage the appropriate remedy for the oppression and exploitation of the masses. The *radicalisation* of Ngugi's discourse vis-à-vis the (postcolonial) nation-state is, in fact, a way to draw attention to the failure of its policy and its hegemonic discourse. Okot's and Ngugi's characters reflect the bitter reality of the 'wretched of the earth'; Lawino, Kiguunda, Wangeci, Gicaamba, and Njooki represent the people who are deprived of their spiritual and material wealth. Yet, they are symbols of resistance and persistence and perhaps hope for social justice, progress and development in Africa.

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Annexes

The Untranslated chapter 14 of *Wer pa Lawino*, by Taban lo Liyong.

PUMPKINS IN LAST HOMESTEADS ARE NEVER UPROOTED
Pumpkins in last homesteads are never uprooted
Remove weeds from beneath them if you're wise
Manure them with ashes and animal droppings
Keep the sharp edge of the hoe from them, give them room.

If you really are the heir to your father's kingdom
Pull out the weed, leave the pumpkins alone;
Uprooting the pumpkins is taboo: nobody does it.

If you are the true son of your father, the hero
If you know what is what, dear brother,
Have a reverence for the pumpkin, respect it highly
You are old enough to know what is good and bad.

Pumpkins in last homestead are never uprooted
For, they are food and not play-things.
He who wastes food deserves to be short.

You hypnotically admire others' achievements
Didn't they tend theirs with care and love?
You scramble for crumbs under foreigners' tables
But those are the fruits of careful husbands!
Your eyes pop out admiring other's attainments

Which they had cultivated carefully, year after year.
Ocol grabs with enthusiasm cultural artefacts of the whiteman
Which they had nurtured after years of trial and error.
The pumpkin in the last homestead is never uprooted;
For, from time immemorial, pumpkin has been the sustainer of life;
The ripe fruit fills up a big basket when sliced into crescent shapes,
When they are dried, they are stored in granaries for later use.

Pumpkin seeds are tasty when roasted well
And salted; they're in vogue when the dry season is near
Pumpkin fruit is easy to cook, and ideal for feeding guests:
The more the guests, the more the pumpkin boiled.

Pumpkin in the last homestead is never uprooted
For, nobody knows where he might seek shelter.
Who knows where he might be when the sun sets?
Where to knock, seek shelter for the night, who knows?

Pumpkin in the last homestead is never uprooted
For, when the rainy season might commence is unknown:
Nor when guests might arrive, nor where they might seek shelter
Nobody has any knowledge of these, nor the ability to calculate them!
The pumpkin is good for promoting life and not for playing
And food, believe you me, is life,
Even when you're satiated, or it is already night.
Death from famine is worse than death from a gun.

Few people make it to the new homestead;
Death takes its toll all the time without any warning:
It hits you when you least expect it
It does not give you the chance to say good-bye.

Even if you crouch behind the biggest buffalo shield;
Even if you crawl into the rat's secret hole;
Even if you have not come forth from mother's cosy womb;
Even if you hid in the great rock's secret grotto;
Even if the very Himalaya is hiding you!

Even if you are a fast runner who never tires
You cannot flee from it, it follows you, catches up with you like shadow
Death cannot be untied, cannot be shed like a shirt
The chase ends in the grave: life meets death in the grave.

Death that ends life, its other name is 'who does it refuse?'
When it summons, you leave food for the living
Who will inherit all that's left behind, like wealth or wives.
The pumpkin in the last homestead is never uprooted
For the pumpkin is sweet, is tasty.
When night-time chances upon you in the ruins, you sleep:
You eat some pumpkin and feel homely.

Therefore, however glutted you may be
Even if you are filled up to your throat
And walk like humpty-dumpty with distended tummy,
Don't kick away the porridge calabash with your feet.
Don't break the pots when your stomach is bloated
And you are light-headed, wearing never to feed again.

If you have eaten, thank your gods, and go to sleep:
Don't look down on food, however sated you are.
Don't behave as if you are bewitched;
Do not play with fire near the granary
Where simsim, millet, or beans are stored: [simsim: sesame]
For, one day's satisfaction is not enough.

For, that which is in your stomach is mere bubbles
Mere airsacks, welling up for belching.
After releasing the pressure once or twice
Your stomach will demand a fresh levy:
It will demand food with the ferocity of the man-eating leopard;
It brooks no delay, it metes out quicker reprisals
It is hotter than fire, hotter than pepper:
The hungry stomach is more ferocious than the lion.

Truly speaking, mare, what your stomach contains is gas
And should it be released the whole place would be fouled up!
All the same, man's fate is such that
Daily feeding ends only when we die.

That we must develop, I do accept:
Our land should also move forward;
Water naturally flows downstream;
Human beings should become better everyday.

But, the big tree should sink its roots down
Deep into the ground, to withstand the buffeting winds.
A plant that squats without roots when the soil is soft
Should the thunderstorm come, it won't wait.

PUMPKIN IN THE LAST HOMESTEAD IS NEVER UPROOTED.
PUMPKINS IN OLD HOMESTEAD ARE NEVER UPROOTED.
PUMPKIN ARE NOT FOR UPROOTING!

Abstract in Arabic.

تتناول هذه الأطروحة النضرة الثقافية الاجتماعية لكل من الشاعر الأوغندي اوكوت بيتاك والكاتبان الكينيان نقوقي واثيونقو و نقوقي وا ميريي. حيث أن *أغنية لاوينو* تختصر النزعة الثقافية الفلسفية لاوكوت بيتاك من خلال إبراز فلسفة الثورة الثقافية لإفريقيا, فنجد أن الشاعر يلهم البطلة الملحمية لاوينو بأسلوب فني راق لعرض و تفسير ومن ثم الدفاع عن العناصر الثقافية الاجتماعية الخاصة بمجتمع الاكولي. حيث أن الشاعر يزود البطلة بشخصية كريزمايةٍ, بنضرة ثاقبة و بميول ثقافية لتصف لنا جوانب من حياة الاكولي من عادات, تقاليد, رقص, غناء, جمال, طبخ, طب, دين و غيرها. لذلك فهي تشكل حجة قوية لتأكيد على ضرورة البحث عن الهوية الإفريقية المطموسة. و كما توضحه الأطروحة, هذه الميول الثقافية لاوكوت تجسدها شخصية لاوينو من خلال استعمالها اللغة الموحية, الأسلوب البليغ و توظيف الصور البيانية من تشبيه استعارات مكنية و أسلوب التهكمي مؤثر. في الجانب المقابل *أغنية اكول* تجمع طموح و ميول "النخبة" الإفريقية أو الطبقة المثقفة والمشبعة بالأفكار الغربية والمتمثلة في شخصية اوكول الذي يتنكر لكل ما يرمز للثقافة الإفريقية. تتأزم مأساة اكول حيث انه يرفض زوجته لاوينو لينتهي به الحال إلى كره بشرته السمراء, تستمر عزلة اكول "الثقافية" في مجتمع الاكولي بفقده لكل مقومات ثقافة أجداده من تعاون و احترام. بسبب ثقافته الأوروبية ينتهز اوكول الفرصة ليتحول إلى حاكم فاشل مستبد همه المال و القوة, فعوض أن يحارب الجهل, التخلف, الفقر و المرض يدير ظهره لمجتمعه متوعدا بتحطيم كل رموز الاكولي من أماكن مقدسة, سجن زعماء التقليديين و غيرها, ومن هنا ينتقد الشاعر السياسات الاجتماعية الثقافية للزعماء ا لأفارقة و يشير للأسباب الموضوعية لكثرة الانقلابات و النزعات المسلحة في القارة ممثلة بصراع اكول الرمزي مع أخوه بعد استقلال أوغندا, أين لاوينو تتساءل حول جدية الاستقلال الوطني وما يمثله من ازدهار و تقدم اجتماعي, اقتصادي و ثقافي بأسلوب تهكمي ساخر و من ثم تبين البطلة لاوينو لنا خلو الاستقلال من معناه الحقيقي فهو ليس بذاك الاستقلال المنشود.

في مسرحية *سأتزوج حينما أريد*, يعالج كل من الكاتبان المسرحيان المشاكل الاجتماعية و الاقتصادية المؤدية لانهيار أسرة الفلاح قيكوند المستغلة من طرف أسرة كيوي البورجوازية. و بذلك يجسدان ما يسمى بمسرح الشعب أو مسرح المضطهدين على نمط مسرح الألماني برخت, فالكاتبين المسرحيين يعرضان جوانب من حياة قيكوندا اليومية و معاناته من الفقر و الاستغلال الممنهج من طرف الشركات متعددة الجنسيات بكينيا وبذلك يتهم نقوقي وا ثيونقو ضمنيا الرأسمالية الأوروبية و البرجوازية الوطنية بتفقير ا لأفارقة وعدم التفكير جديا بمشروع يرقى بهم و يستجيب لمتطلباتهم و أمالهم كما نجحت فيه من قبل ثورة الماو ماو المجيدة و التي فرضت على الانجليز الانسحاب من كينيا, و باعتمادهما على التاريخ تظهر لنا الملامح الماركسية في المسرحية كمحاولة لراب الصدع الذي نجم عن السياسات القاصرة للحكومات العميلة للغرب. من جهته يشدد على ضرورة إعادة تقييم الاستقلال الوطني لاستجابة لمطالب العمال و الفلاحين, وقد تبلورت هذه الأفكار عند نقوقي بعد انخراطه في مسرح كاميريثو المفتوح مع العمال و الفلاحين فلا غرابة في اعتناقه المبادئ الاشتراكية والماركسية و المطالبة بتجسيد العدالة الاجتماعية و المساواة لكل أبناء الوطن في كينيا. يعتقد نقوقي أن الثقافة الوطنية يمكن أن تساعد في بناء قاعدة لمجتمع تسوده العدالة الاجتماعية والازدهار, في حين نجد أن اوكوت يركز على ضرورة إحياء التراث الثقافي الإفريقي و الرقي به إلي ثورة ثقافية حقيقية للأجيال القادمة.