

Review

Hybridizing Gikuyu in the face of globalization: The case of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's novel *Murogi wa Kagogo*

Mugambi C. Ngumo

Department of Humanities, School of Education and Social Sciences, University of Embu, Embu, Kenya.

Received 25 July, 2020; Accepted 23 February, 2021.

African literature in European languages entrenches the marginalization of large communities who cannot use European languages. Therefore, the revolutionary move by the Kenyan writer, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, to write in Gikuyu is a bold step towards empowering marginalized groups in Africa. In his literary essays, Ngugi argues that in the era of globalization African languages should enrich themselves by entering into dialogue with other languages of the world. A reading of Ngugi's novel, Murogi wa Kagogo, using insights from sociolinguistics, reveals that Ngugi achieves this through hybridizing Gikuyu with English, Kiswahili, Sheng and even Latin. The article, specifically, attempts to show how Ngugi has hybridized Gikuyu using strategies like codeswitching, borrowing and diglossia. Drawing on Murogi wa Kagogo, this article argues that literature in African languages must embrace the strategies of hybridity in order to make African languages relevant to new global realities. The article further seeks to problematize the tendency by postcolonial theorists to almost wholly exclude African literature written in indigenous languages from the orbit of their critiques. This article is also an attempt to add to the few studies that exploit sociolinguistic approaches to examine literary texts.

Key words: Murogi wa Kagogo, hybridity, sociolinguistics, postcolonial theory.

INTRODUCTION

Resistance to Western metropolitan culture appears to define most postcolonial studies. Homi Bhabha has, for example, argued that a postcolonial perspective “enables the authentication of histories of exploitation and the evolution of strategies of resistance” (Bhabha, 1994). Thus, what is distinct about all postcolonial literatures is their emphasis on how they differ from the assumptions of the imperial centre (Ashcroft et al., 2002; Jazeel, 2019). This position is predicated on the understanding that Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the

medium through which conceptions of ‘truth’, ‘order’, and ‘reality’ become established. Such power is rejected in the emergence of an effective post-colonial voice (Ashcroft et al., 2002).

Therefore, Ashcroft et al. (2002) posit that the development of postcolonial literatures is dependent on the abrogation of the inhibitive power of the imperial centre and appropriation of language for new usages.

Abrogation, they argue, is denying ‘English’ the power over the means of communication while appropriation is remoulding English to new usages. They further observe

*Corresponding author. E-mail: mugambi.cyrus@embuni.ac.ke.

Author(s) agree that this article remain permanently open access under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

that because language is a medium of power, authentic postcolonial literature should adapt the language of the centre to local realities. Similar sentiments are expressed by Chinua Achebe who argues that the English he writes in “will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit new African surroundings” (Wa Thiong’o, 1986). In similar vein, Gabriel Okara wonders: “why shouldn’t there be a Nigerian or West African English which we can use to express our own ideas, thinking and philosophy in our own way” (Wa Thiong’o, 1986).

The common thread in these arguments is that the writers do not conceptualize an African or a postcolonial literature outside the sphere of European languages, a stand that this article problematizes. This article takes the position that a postcolonial theory that completely ignores literatures in indigenous African languages is deficient. This argument is reinforced by Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s very disturbing questions which are critical in any discussion on the language of African literature:

Why, we may ask, should an African writer, or any writer, become so obsessed by taking from his mother-tongue, to enrich other tongues? Why should he see it as his particular mission? We never asked ourselves: how can we enrich our languages? How can we ‘prey’, on the rich humanist and democratic heritage in the struggles of other peoples in other times and other places to enrich our own? (Wa Thiong’o, 1986).

Ngugi is unequivocal that literature written in European languages is not African literature; instead, he calls it Afro-European. He advances the view of moving the centre: that is embracing a world that is less dogmatic, a world defined by flexibility and pluralism, away from Eurocentricism (Wa Thiong’o, 1993). This pluralism and flexibility resonates with Androutsopoulos’ argument that globalization is not a process where cultural elements are uncritically adopted but one where the global is localized and productively used as a medium of local expression (Androutsopoulos, 2010). Thus, while Ngugi recognizes the danger posed by globalization to minority languages and cultures, he welcomes the diversity and fusion engendered by it and argues that African languages can benefit from other languages through what he figuratively terms “cross-fertilisation” between languages. The objective of this study therefore is to demonstrate how Ngugi wa Thiong’o hybridizes Gikuyu language in the novel *Murogi wa Kagogo*.

This article relies on sociolinguistics to show how Ngugi fuses the local and the global in keeping with his philosophy that the local and the universal are connected and should not be viewed in absolute opposition (wa Thiong’o, 1993). The study therefore seeks to do a close reading of the primary text to show how sociolinguistics can be used to reveal hybridity. By choosing Gikuyu over English, the study attempts to show that Ngugi chooses abrogation rather than appropriation. Broadly speaking,

sociolinguistics studies the relationship between language and society (Blommaert and Dong, 2010; Meyerhoff, 2006). Holmes (2013), for example, aptly captures this relationship by explaining that sociolinguists “are interested in explaining why we speak differently in different social contexts, and they are concerned with identifying the social functions of language and the ways it is used to convey social meaning”. Literature is a mirror of society and the characters and thematic concerns are often delineated to reflect real societies. Thus this article argues that any credible literary work must faithfully depict the society that inspires it. Ironically, there is a dearth of studies that utilize sociolinguistics to analyse literary texts, a gap that this study attempts to fill.

CREATING A HYBRID NOVEL

When Kamiti (Murogi wa Kagogo) meets Sikiokuu and his dressing seems to defy the stereotypical witchdoctor, Murogi wa Kagogo tells him that “*Abirika ya riu ni mutukanio wa ira, umuthi na rucii rwa mithemba miing*” (Wa Thiong’o, 2006) which translates “The Africa of today is a hybrid of yesterday, today and a tomorrow of multiculturalism.” Thus, this article holds the position that *Murogi wa Kagogo* is an agonized search for a synthesis between Gikuyu cultural aesthetics and a global culture in constant flux. In other words, this article is an attempt to show how Ngugi implements his call for cross-fertilisation in his Gikuyu novel, *Murogi wa Kagogo*, through hybridization of Gikuyu language. The article adopts the view that hybridity is the celebration of cultural diversity and fusion which inescapably leads to cultural transformation (Kraidy, 2005). Indeed, Homi Bhabha has argued against claims of “authenticity or purity of cultures” (Bhabha, 1994). Mikhail Bakhtin also stresses on the notion of hybridity in the following way: “the novel must represent all the social and ideological voices of its era, that is, all the era’s languages that have any claim to being significant; the novel must be a microcosm of heteroglossia” (Bakhtin, cited in Mair, 1992). While hybridity is a key concept in much postcolonial writings, it however tends to revolve around how various strategies have been used to hybridize English. This article is a departure from this and seeks to demonstrate how aspects of hybridity like code-switching and borrowing, serve various functions in *Murogi wa Kagogo*. In keeping with his philosophy of “preying” on other cultures to enrich African languages, Ngugi hybridizes Gikuyu with Kiswahili, Sheng, English, Sanskrit and even Latin to offer important insights into his characters and themes.

BACKGROUND TO THE NOVEL

Though Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s literary essays and creative works cannot be conflated, Simon Gikandi, nevertheless, argues that the “fictional works have a symbiotic

relationship to the critical essays” (Gikandi, 2000). Ngugi himself acknowledges that his fictional works and critical essays share the same world (Wa Thiong’o, 1972). To therefore appreciate Ngugi’s ideological and aesthetic underpinnings, one needs to examine both his fiction and critical essays. Ngugi stands out among African writers and scholars for his persistent call to write in African languages. His seminal book *Decolonising the Mind* (1986) and its follow up *Moving the Centre* (1993) notably outline his views on the politics of language in African literature. Significantly, Ngugi has continued to practise what he preaches by writing his creative texts, which include novels, plays, poems, songs, an epic and children books in Gikuyu. The play *Ngahika Ndenda (I will Marry when I want)*, co-authored with Ngugi wa Mirii, the epic, *Kenda Muiyuru (The Perfect Nine-not yet translated)* and the novels *Caitani Mutharabaini (Devil on the Cross)*, *Matigari Ma Njirungi (Matigari)* and *Murogi wa Kagogo (Wizard of the Crow)* were all originally written in Gikuyu and later translated into English.

All his works are defined by an overtly political commitment, a fact that has led to detention and a life in exile. In fact, Cook and Okenimkpe (1997) have described Ngugi as “pre-eminently the committed man of African creative writing”. His writings are concerned with the exploitation of the working people in Kenya by colonial and neo-colonial forces and how these ordinary people can rise up to resist and defeat this alliance. It is this political commitment that led Ngugi to abandon English as a vehicle of literary communication and turn to Gikuyu:

But I was becoming increasingly uneasy about the English language. After I had written *A Grain of Wheat* I underwent a crisis. I knew whom I was writing about but whom was I writing for? The peasants whose struggles fed the novel would never read it (wa Thiong’o, 1986).

To paraphrase Blommaert (2010), by writing in Gikuyu Ngugi reveals the vitality of the language in the making of meaning in the global arena. Blommaert correctly observes that the literature of globalization is dominated by ‘big’ globalized languages like English, French and Chinese, thus, writing in an indigenous African language is an act of writing from the periphery. Similarly, Ngugi notes in *Moving the Centre* that the current global order is shaped by European languages and the culture they carry inevitably influences the dominated (wa Thiong’o, 1993). But Ngugi also underscore the indispensability of local knowledge arguing that a novelist is “wholly dependent on the particular” (wa Thiong’o, 1993). Therefore, the act of writing in Gikuyu is for Ngugi not just the innocent undertaking of sending a message, but also a symbolic act of loyalty to African culture and resistance to domination. He says “my writing in Gikuyu language, a Kenyan language, an African language, is part and parcel of the anti-imperialistic struggle of Kenyan and African

peoples” (Wa Thiong’o, 1986).

Thus, a faithful reading of *Murogi wa Kagogo* must be anchored on the foregoing, since it is a novel that is a product of Ngugi’s explicit politics of the language of African literature. It is a novel that can in a sense be read as a satire on totalitarian leadership and its aftermath. Set in the imaginary republic of Aburiria, it in many ways captures the Kenya of the Moi era where his ubiquitous presence is reminiscent of George Orwell’s Big Brother in *Nineteen Eighty Four*. The novel portrays a ruling party that is a law unto itself. The party and government create a veritable police state where the leader -Mwathani- is equated to God (Mwathani is used in Gikuyu to refer to Jesus Christ or God). Then we have an attendant class of sycophants where some leaders in their overzealousness to please the ruler embark on the unprecedented. Machokali, the foreign minister, for instance, undergoes eye-surgery so that he can have bigger eyes that can see the enemies of Mwathani better. Sikiokuu, the defence minister, not to be outdone, goes for ear surgery to hear better for the ruler. This corrupt government is seeking funds from the Global Bank to construct a skyscraper (Matheca Itu) that will go all the way to heaven so that the ruler can get closer to God and even talk to him. Through the activities of Kamiti and Nyawira (both play the guise of Murogi wa Kagogo), Ngugi shows how ordinary people can use their creativity, courage and patriotism to defeat totalitarianism. The story is told in six books but for the purpose of this article, illustrations are mainly drawn from Book Three (*Mbuku ya Gatatu*).

HOW NGUGI LOCALIZES THE NOVEL

There is no question that this novel is firmly rooted, specifically, in the Gikuyu culture and the larger Kenyan nation. To borrow from Blommaert (2010), Ngugi’s novel casts the actions of characters and their biographies in recognizable local socio-semiotic and spatio-semiotic features. For instance, characters like Mwathani, Sikiokuu and Machokali bear striking resemblances to government officials who served in the twenty four years of the Moi dictatorship. Again, the planned construction of Matheca-Itu resonates with the aborted attempt to construct The Kenya Times Complex at Uhuru Park which was billed to become the tallest building in Africa in 1989. Its construction was defeated by successful campaigns by environmentalists led by Wangari Maathai, who later won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 (Maathai, 2006).

The novel also borrows heavily from Gikuyu oral narratives where aspects like proverbs, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, songs and the supernatural are common. Ngugi, for instance, extensively takes advantage of Gikuyu proverbs to address a multiplicity of concerns. Wanjohi (1997) argues that Gikuyu philosophy

is encapsulated in proverbs and in his analysis shows how these proverbs address issues of metaphysics, epistemology and ethics. Thus, as Chinua Achebe shows in *Things Fall Apart*, use of proverbs in African societies is taken to be a mark of wisdom (Achebe, 1958). Reacting to Kaniuru's suggestion that he gives him part of his wealth, Wangahu reflects "*ndiringagua itaumite irima* which translates "it (snake) is not hit until it comes out of a hole", a proverb that is apt in the situation since Kaniuru is acting in a cunning and hypocritical manner, therefore metaphorically a snake. Nyawira acting as Murogi wa Kagogo tries to tell Vinjina that she must be ready to embrace change if she wants to save the life of her husband who is being held illegally by the state using the proverb "*iriguciarira weruini yongithagiria weruini* which translates: "if it gives birth in the wilderness it must also suckle its offspring in the wilderness". She also advises Vinjina that she will only succeed if she unites with other people using the proverb "*Kamuingi koyaga ndiri*" which translates to "unity is strength". Ngugi also satirizes characters like Kaniuru who try to cement their ill-gotten power by impressing through use of proverbs. For instance, while trying to vilify Nyawira, Kaniuru tells her father and mother: "*githi tinyui mugaga nda yumaga muici na murogi* which translates "You are the ones who say that the womb produces a thief and witch". This proverb is misplaced and Kaniuru is rebuked by Nyawira's mother. Again, he unsuccessfully attempts to use another proverb but stops midsentence: "*Nguru iria yerirwo...* which translates "The tortoise that was said..." This is incorrect and Wangahu restrains himself from telling him it was "*warubuku*" (hare) not "*nguru*" (tortoise). The point Ngugi is making is that wealth and power do not confer knowledge to an individual. Kaniuru tries to use proverbs to impress and invoke traditional authority but fails dismally in his attempts.

Gikuyu songs also form a huge part of this novel which again firmly locate it within the Gikuyu culture and universe. As Kamiti goes to visit his village, Kiambu, he remembers a song they used to sing as children:

Mbura ura
Nguthinjire
Gategwa... (p. 22)
 It translates to:
 Rain come
 I slaughter for you
 a small bull

Thus, this song relocates him to the scene of his childhood and also underscores the community's reliance on rain and its belief in sacrifice. When he arrives home his father sings:

nyumba ni nene
Nyumba ni nene

Tiga twakite muhurunjiko (p. 24)

It translates to:
 The family is big
 The family is big
 were it not that we are scattered

This song is sung to introduce Kamiti to the family history where the father tries to impress upon his son that the Miti Family is large though it is now scattered due to slavery and colonialism. These are just a few examples of the songs we encounter in this novel which contribute in giving it its Gikuyu character and local texture.

Additionally, Ngugi localizes the novel by manipulating the Gikuyu language to create very poetic effects. The novel, for example, starts: "*Mwathani ari iceera agatiga king'ang'i king'ang'aini e wiki ng'a*" which translates "when the president was visiting he left a crocodile to rule on his own". The repetition of "*ng'a*" creates rhyme and musicality which is quite creative and enhances the aesthetic appeal of the text. Kaniuru wonders why Wangahu has not made any attempt to bribe him yet and he is now a powerful man: "*Kana arauga ino mathindithi wa mbethi iroimire ku?*" which translates "Or where does he think this Mercedes Benz came from?"

Drawing on Myers-Scotton's (1991) Markedness Model, it is clear to see that some linguistic choices in some domains are inappropriate (marked) while others are appropriate (unmarked). Speakers can instinctively tell what is marked or unmarked in a specific speech event depending on the norms of the community. Myers-Scotton explains that there are costs and rewards for making one choice rather than another. She graphically says that "while there are no "rules" which speakers must follow in making choices, a grammar of consequences does govern the interpretation of choices" (Myers-Scotton, 1991). Thus, Kamiti's visit to his home above necessitates the use of local idioms; otherwise, foreign linguistic items would be marked.

Ferguson's notion of diglossia, which was later reformulated by Fishman as extended diglossia (Wardhaugh and Fuller, 2015), can also explain this type of variation in language use as it is rare to spot cases of foreign language use in some domains of usage. In *Murogi wa Kagogo*, it is easy to see that the Gikuyu spoken in the home domain is largely pure, empty of any kind of foreign influence as seen in Kamiti's visit to his parents' home in Kiambu. Though Kamiti has university education and his father is a retired teacher, the Gikuyu they speak has no instances of English or Kiswahili. When Kamiti's father narrates their family history, his linguistic choices are faithful to the world of the past when Gikuyu language was largely untouched by foreign influences. Foreign linguistic elements in this domain would be marked, thus the two stick to their mother tongue. Similarly, the guise of Murogi wa Kagogo, either

as Nyawira or Kamiti, is performed using pure Gikuyu and the clients also speak in pure Gikuyu regardless of their economic or educational backgrounds. It is not difficult to see why this is the case—traditional Gikuyu healers are perceived to be steeped in tradition and in modern times people consult them after failing to get solutions from modern medicine, thus, indigenous solutions are expected. Indeed, Nettle and Romaine (2000) have correctly observed that “knowledge about local ecosystems is encoded in indigenous languages”. Drawing on Myers-Scotton’s markedness model, it would be appropriate for a person posing as traditional healer to communicate his knowledge in a hybrid code, and since Kamiti and Nyawira are hiding from the repressive state they would open themselves to suspicion.

HYBRIDIZING THE NOVEL THROUGH CODESWITCHING

As we move away from the local, to other domains, the ‘purity’ of Gikuyu language begins to be gradually eroded and we encounter more hybrid texts. Myers-Scotton (1991) has correctly noted that in Africa anyone who is socially, economically or geographically mobile is likely to be multilingual. In such societies, the question of language choice is critical in an individual’s daily interactions. In multilingual societies like Kenya, the habit of speakers switching between languages within the same utterance is called codeswitching. Myers-Scotton calls the mainstream language in an utterance the Matrix Language (ML) and the other language(s) the embedded language (EL). Many Gikuyu people speak Gikuyu, Kiswahili and English and it is normal for them to keep switching between these three languages. Gikuyu is the language of home, family and friends, Kiswahili is East Africa’s lingua franca while English is the language of formal education and also the official language (although Kiswahili has been recognized as an official language by The Constitution of Kenya (2010), it is rarely used in official transactions). Since literature is a reflection of society, it is therefore not surprising that characters utilize codeswitching as a mode of communication in *Murogi wa Kagogo*. I argue in this article that codeswitching in *Murogi wa Kagogo* not only serves communicative functions but also offers important insights into Ngugi’s characters and themes. Characters’ choice of language in this novel tells us a lot about their social identities and values. This is consistent with the notion of indexicality, that “no utterance is ever ‘neutral’: it always indexes some characteristic of the speaker” (Wardhaugh and Fuller, 2015). Giles speech accommodation theory may also explain motivations for code-switching (Holmes, 2013). He argued that speakers tended to adopt the speech styles of their interlocutors (converge) in order to reduce social distance, and speak differently (diverge) to

underline their distinct identities. In the case of divergence, codeswitching is marked and may be used to express authority (Myer-Scotton, 1993).

Codeswitching is, for instance, used in the novel for emphasis where the speaker first expresses the message in one language, then reiterates it in another language to amplify it or to make it more specific. For example, in the cross-examination of Tajirika, superintendent Njoya says “*ndwari ya ubaruthi* diplomatic illness” he continues “*kana kiria wiraini witu twitaga arambai. Alibi*” which translates to “or what we call in our work alibi, Alibi.” The emphasis in English underlines Njoya’s identity as a police investigator where words like “alibi” are commonly used. This can be interpreted as a form of symbolic domination (Myers-Scotton, 2006) where Njoya diverges from common expressions to reinforce his position as an expert in criminal issues as a way of asserting his authority. When Njoya craftily accuses Tanjirika of trying to elevate himself to the level of the president, Tanjirika retorts “No, no, no, *Aca*”. “*Aca*” is Gikuyu for “no”, thus, Tanjirika uses it to emphasize his denial. It also underlines his terror since what he is being accused of could spell his ruin. Again, Njoya accuses Tanjirika of making the “dissident” Nyawira in charge when he was away. Tanjirika retorts: “*Tiwe wari gitwe. Kana tuge tiwe wari* de facto which translates: “She was not in charge. Or can we say she was not the de facto?” “De facto” is also a legal term introduced by Njoya, once again, to achieve symbolic domination. By also using the term, Tanjirika is trying to converge to Njoya’s speech in order to reduce social distance. Notably, the natural translation for “*gitwe*” is “source” not “de facto”. Sikiokuu also blackmails Tanjirika by claiming he could be accused of trying to overthrow the government which makes the latter to plead: “Then help me. Please. *Ndeithia* (help me)” (p. 85). Tanjirika also reiterates his pleading to Sikiokuu using English: “*Tiga kundiga guku thamaini ya kioho*, this captivity,” which translates to “Don’t leave me in the captivity of imprisonment. this captivity.” These switches cement Tanjirika’s character as a sychophant since he is terrified of anything that creates the impression that he is not loyal to the ruler. This emphatic codeswitching is also witnessed when Kaniuru tells Nyawira’s father “*turuma haria uhoro uri, kana kingeratha* to the point *ni yo motto yakwa*” which translates to “be to the point, or in English to the point that is my motto”.

Another form of emphasis, through code-switching, is where characters reinforce their Gikuyu utterances using proverbs and idioms from either English or Kiswahili. In a bid to make him mistrust his wife, Sikiokuu tells Tanjirika: “*Atumia othe handu maruma ni a kabira imwe, Na arume kabira ingi, Ngeretha moigaga atia?* Women are from venus and men from Mars” which translates to “All women belong to one tribe. Men are from another tribe. What do the English say? Women are from venus and men from Mars.” The following conversation between Tanjirika and Njoya also illustrates this kind of emphasis.

Tanjirika says: “*Ugire njarie ma, Ma theri na ndikarute kana nyongerere undu ungi Ngai ndeithia* which translates to “You said that I tell the truth as it is, so help me God.” Njoya reiterates Tanjirika’s message by quoting the Bible in English: “And the truth shall set you free, *githi o na tiguu mbimbiria yugaga?*” which translates: “Isn’t that what the Bible says?”

There are also cases where characters switch to sayings in another language to create humour in order to tone down a potentially divisive situation. Kaniuru, who has recently been appointed the deputy chairman of the projected skyscraper (Matheca-ltu), tries to arm-twist Wangahu, Nyawira’s father, into transferring to him part of his property. Wangahu responds: “*Ihenya inene rierirwo riunaga gikwa ihatha. Ngeretha moigaga atia?*” Which translates to “Great haste breaks the yam. What do the English say? Hurry and hurry broke the house of Harry and Harriet.” Wangahu achieves two things with this saying that he has just coined but cunningly attributes to the English. He, first creates humour to scale down Kaniuru’s disappointment at the refusal to share his property, and by claiming it is an English saying, gives his decision force of intellectual authority and prestige. In similar vein, Sikiokuu implies that there must have been a good reason for Tanjirika to be arrested by quoting a popular Kiswahili proverb “*Dalili ya mvua ni mawingu* which translates to “Heavy clouds are a sign of impeding rain.” Then amplifies it in Gikuyu “*Hari ndogo hatiagaga mwaki*” which translates “where there is smoke there is fire.” Sikiokuu also advises Tanjirika not to trust his wife using the Kiswahili proverb “*Kikulacho kimo nguoni mwako*” which translates to “What eats you up is in your clothes.”

It is also apparent from Tanjirika’s cross-examination by Njoya, and Sikiokuu that code-switching, and particularly, from Gikuyu to English is used to reduce social distance. It is a way of saying, please cooperate after all we belong to the same social class. Superintendent Njoya uses guile to coax information from Tanjirika by liberally using codeswitching. The same trend is replicated by Sikiokuu who wants to trick Tanjirika that he is on his side so that he can implicate his nemesis Machokali in a plot to overthrow the government. Contrastingly, the brutal superintendent Kahiga who uses coercive methods to force confessions from Tanjirika uses Gikuyu without code-switching. While Tanjirika calls Nyawira “gitoi” (terrorist), Njoya uses intra-word switching to coin the verb “*guguterrorise*” which translates to “to terrorize you”. The word “terror” and its variant “terrorist” are common in security discourses and no wonder Njoya, a policeman, finds it more appropriate than the Gikuyu term. Additionally, due to a proliferation of terror groups “terrorist” has in modern times become part of global vocabulary, thus, it carries more weight than the local Gikuyu term “*gitoi*”. This novel is an evocation of the Moi dictatorship, and during this period, Kenya was viewed by many as a police state and dissent

was criminalized. Thus, the use of the word “terror” reveals not only Njoya’s mindset but also that of the entire police force. To them, government critics and political activists are terrorists or criminals which illustrate the climate of intolerance in Aburiria.

Hybridity is also seen in the allusion to philosophy and history of other parts of the world. Sikiokuu’s counsel to Tanjirika to doubt everybody including himself is informed by the 17th century French philosopher Rene Descartes logic of doubt. This western philosophy is hybridized with the Gikuyu text using codeswitching as in “*iyu ni yu itagwo nganja ya Cartes. Cartesian doubt?*” which translates to “That is what is called the Cartesian doubt.” Sikiokuu exploits this philosophy in the whole chapter in trying to trick Tanjirika to incriminate himself. The Gikuyu version is reiterated in English. Notably, Descartes is regarded by many as the pioneer of modern Western Philosophy. Again the Hindu epic *Mahabharata* is narrated by Kamiti when he meets Tanjirika in a cell. Kamiti says: “*uriwaigua rugano rwa Mahabharata kana Ramayana kana Bhagvadi Gita?*” which translates “Have you ever heard the story of *Mahabharata* or *Ramayana* or *Bhagvadi Gita?*”. Kamiti uses this story to reveal to Tanjirika how he once humiliated him while looking for a job in his office. Thus, codeswitching becomes a tool for enriching the Gikuyu text with relevant knowledge, aesthetics and experience from the rest of the globe. We also see Nyawira’s father, Wangahu, politely refusing to share some of his property with Kaniuru through the use of a Latin term as can be seen in the following conversation: ‘*Ndiroiga ati tukinyukirie mukinyukirie wa nguru. No ningi no kinya tucarie kiria Ngeretha metaga Vi Media,*’ which translates “I am not saying that we proceed like the tortoise. But let us practise what the English call *Via Media*.” Kaniuru corrects him: “Actually *kiu ti Kingeretha, ni Kiratini,*’ *Kaniuru akiuga*” which translates “Actually that is not English but Latin, Kaniuru said.” *Via Media*, literally the “middle road”, was the bedrock to ancient Roman civilization and can be traced to Aristotle who taught against extremism and instead advocated moderation in life and thought. The greedy Kaniuru is trying to coerce Wangahu through thinly veiled threats to transfer part of his plots and shares to him. It must be made clear that the switch to a Latin term is not merely for aesthetic purposes. Knowing the immense state power Kaniuru commands, Wangahu chooses the more remote Latin rather than Gikuyu to drive home his admonition. Indeed, within pragmatics, indirectness is a common strategy for achieving politeness (Brown and Levinson, 1978).

Some characters use Sheng, the code of Kenyan youth and popular culture, for obvious sociolinguistic functions. Sheng is an informal code whose origins can be traced to slums in Kenyan urban centres. It is basically a mixture of Kiswahili, English and indigenous Kenyan languages. It is mainly used by young people from working class families to emphasize their solidarity. It is unusual for foreigners

or upper class people to use Sheng, thus, when they do, it is marked and we need to interrogate what “rewards” or “benefits” they seek to gain from its use. Two examples are illustrative here: when Barack Obama, the former US president, visited Kenya in 2015, he greeted his audience in a global summit: “*Nianje wasee. Hawayuni?*” (How are you doing buddies? How are you?) (Odhiambo, 2019). Apart from creating humour, the use of Sheng was Obama’s way of reminding his audience of his Kenyanness, since his father was a Kenyan. Despite his upper class upbringing, President Uhuru Kenyatta whose father was Kenya’s founding president is also fond of using Sheng phrases when addressing urban youths, an obvious attempt to cultivate solidarity through bridging social distance. Thus, when in *Murogi wa Kagogo*, Sikiokuu, a government minister, uses Sheng to address Tanjirika, it can only be interpreted as a ploy to hoodwink him to believe that they are friends, especially because Tanjirika has run out of patience in the cell. Sikiokuu says: “*Hui, sasa, story zako? Nini makalau wanakubringiya kinaa?*” which translates “How are you doing? Why are the police giving you trouble?” However, Tanjirika, does not buy this false solidarity and angrily retorts in Gikuyu: “*Tiga guceng’era maceng’i macio maku...ti mathako ma bathe na mathe matumite njuke guku*” which translates “stop your sheng tongue twisters...I am not ready to take your *bathe* (father) and *mathe* (mother) jokes.” Clearly, Tanjirika diverges from Sikiokuu’s use of Sheng by responding in pure Gikuyu which can be interpreted as a form of symbolic protest (Meyers-Scotton, 2006). As we have already seen, within Giles Communication Accommodation Theory, divergence in language use creates social distance.

Lastly, in the imaginary world of Ngugi’s novel, unlike in the real world, the omniscient narrator is able to reveal to the reader the thoughts of the characters. In chapter 10, Tanjirika is summoned for cross-examination to the commission investigating queuing mania. The whole chapter captures what is going on in his mind, and remarkably, Tanjirika thinks almost wholly in pure Gikuyu. All the soul searching questions he poses to himself are in Gikuyu. This confirms that codeswitching in *Murogi wa Kagogo* is a sociolinguistic reality rather than a psycholinguistic one.

CREATING A HYBRID TEXT USING NAMES OF CHARACTERS

The stamp of globalization is inscribed everywhere in *Murogi wa Kagogo* as we, for instance, see a hotel called Chou’s Chinese Gourmet, which illustrates the increasing presence and power of China in the global arena. Another recreational establishment is named Mars Café, a testimony of the ever present Anglo-American culture in Kenya. Tanjirika calls his home Golden Heights, which underlines his elitism and alienation. But it is in the

names of characters where Ngugi best achieves his quest for a hybrid text.

Like in other literary works by Ngugi, the major characters in this novel have symbolic names and hybridity is seen in the names that Ngugi gives them. Some bear Gikuyu names while others have names drawn from Kiswahili and other cultural and linguistic backgrounds. To paraphrase Fowler (1991), the ideological grounds underlying choice of names in a text should be of great interest to a critic. The protagonists in the novel, Kamiti and Nyawira share the professional name Murogi wa Kagogo (Wizard of the Crow) drawn from Gikuyu. They perform the role of the wizard of the crow alternately depending on the circumstances. The name emphasizes power, since traditionally, such a wizard is believed to have the power to bring down a crow from the sky. Kamiti (the owner of plants or herbs) is similarly appropriate for it locates the source of Kamiti’s medicine and healing powers in the Gikuyu natural environment. In fact, the name Kamiti is to be traced to his clan, *Mbari ya Miti* (literally, the Clan of Trees). His father reveals to him that this was a clan of “*athi*” (hunters) and “*ago*” (diviners). His grandfather was, like Kamiti, endowed with healing powers and could fly like a bird just like Kamiti. The disruptive and destructive character of colonialism is emphasized as he was killed by the British forces. Thus, the use of Gikuyu in this kind of naming is understandable because the wizard derives his power from traditional knowledge. A result to herbal medicine in Africa is an invocation of the power of traditional knowledge, thus, Kamiti embodies Ngugi’s crusade for the primacy of African culture and resistance to foreign domination. By making Kamiti the fulcrum of his novel he is symbolically undertaking a restorative task with regard to Gikuyu culture.

The name Nyawira (the industrious one) is a common female name in Gikuyuland but Ngugi does not just use it here solely for the purpose of naming. It is in keeping with Nyawira’s character in the novel as a hardworking and strong-willed woman which is consistent with Ngugi’s explicit feminist commitment. Indeed, Nyawira belongs in the league of other great female characters in Ngugi’s novels: Mumbi (*A Grain of Wheat*), Wanja (*Petals of Blood*), Wariinga (*Devil on the Cross*) and Guthera (*Matigari*). These women embody the values of hard work, resilience and courage in the face of formidable challenges in a neo-colonial and patriarchal society. Another character who derives his name from Gikuyu is the ruler, who is satirically named Mwathani. Mwathani is deliberately used as a pun to highlight how power can corrupt an individual. Literally, “*mwathani*” means “ruler” but the word has undergone what is called in linguistic change amelioration, a situation where a word rises in its linguistic and social status. Thus, “*mwathani*” now means “Jesus Christ” or “God” and it is hard to hear any Gikuyu speaker calling a ruler or a leader “*mwathani*”. Ngugi, therefore, uses it as a proper noun to mock the

totalitarian and dictatorial tendencies of African leaders who act as gods in relation to their hapless subjects.

Then, we meet Kaniuru (literally, “a small nose”). *Ka-* and its variant *ga-* represent the Gikuyu diminutive morpheme, but apart from its grammatical function this morpheme also tends to carry value judgement. When used on children, and sometimes women, it is an indicator of fondness as in the case of *kahii* (a small boy) and *kairitu* (a small girl). But, significantly, Gikuyu is a patriarchal society and it is hard to think of a situation where diminutives can be used to describe a grown man in a positive way. In this regard, “kamundu” (literally “a small person” but in actual speech situations “a small man”) and *gathuri* (a small husband) are loaded with negative connotations. *Gathuri*, for instance, can be used to make reference to a man who is materially poor or weak and commands no respect from his peers and women. The name Kaniuru should thus be seen in this light as Ngugi presents him as a despicable individual. Ngugi repeatedly portrays him as an inconsequential man who imagines he has power that he doesn't really possess. He is easily flattered by the likes of Wangahu and is at pains to be socially validated by his former teachers at the university and Sikiokuu. Ngugi portrays him as a pathetic individual who tries to intimidate and blackmail those he deems vulnerable due to their distance from power. He is also completely emasculated and his bitterness continues to fester due to Nyawira's rejection. From his name and sycophantic predilections in the novel, it is clear that his work is to sniff out the enemies of the state but his character suggests he does not have the ability to execute this devious task. Before his meteoric rise, Wangahu rejected him as a son-in-law refusing to give him blessings to marry his daughter, Nyawira, largely because of his social class. Wangahu contemptuously dismissed him then as “*gathini*” (a small poor man).

But Ngugi also exploits the resources of Kiswahili for symbolic names of his characters. Machokali (fierce eyes) is the object of Ngugi's satire. He undergoes surgery to make his eyes bigger so that they can see better for Mwathani. Similarly, his counterpart and archrival in the cabinet Sikiokuu (Big ear) goes for surgery to make his ears better at hearing for the ruler. Then we have Tanjirika (get rich) a businessman who thrives on bribes and patronage from senior government officials. The common thread among these characters is their sycophancy, chauvinism and selfishness. One can only guess that the reason Ngugi gives them Kiswahili names is to dislocate them from the Gikuyu world. Though Kiswahili is an African language used in Kenya as the national language, it is not the carrier of Gikuyu culture. These Kiswahili names may also emphasize that the ruinous actions of these characters affect the whole nation and not just the Gikuyu community.

Characters like Maritha (Martha) and her husband Mariko (Mark) are staunch Christians and it is no accident

that their names have unmistakable resonance with the Bible. The narrator tells us that every Sunday their testimony was about their war with Satan. Then, “Vinjinia” the indigenized form of “Virginia” is the name given to Tanjirika's wife which is consistent with the practice of middle and upper class people in Kenya giving themselves names that are Western in origin. In many of Ngugi's novels, he uses Western names to underline characters' alienation and elitist inclinations and it is not different in *Murogi wa Kagogo*. In the case of Vinjinia, this is well illustrated, when in desperation to save her husband, goes to consult Murogi wa Kagogo. The diviner commands her to come back on a Friday dressed like an ordinary peasant or worker. Additionally, she is told to leave her Mercedes Benz far away and bring to the healer Gikuyu traditional dress. She responds by loudly screaming: “*Auuuu! Wauga njokerere ucenji?* This translates to “Are you saying I go back to uncultured practices?” This type of reaction illustrates that she considers peasants and Gikuyu culture as uncivilized or barbaric and savage.

Naming therefore makes an important contribution in creating a hybrid text in *Murogi wa Kagogo* as Ngugi exploits different linguistic and cultural resources to name characters and places. This naming, as we have seen, has distinct sociolinguistic and artistic functions in the novel.

HYBRIDIZING GIKUYU THROUGH BORROWING

When languages come into contact, changes are bound to occur. A consequence of language contact is borrowing. Borrowing is the “incorporation of an item from one language to another” (Mesthrie et al., 2009). The words that are borrowed are called loanwords. While some communities fear that borrowing may adulterate their languages, sociolinguists do not see a correlation between borrowing and language endangerment. On the contrary, borrowing can be seen to be at times a strategy of enriching a language. The wealth of English vocabulary, for example, can to some extent be attributed to periods of intense borrowing from French and Latin (Baugh and Cable, 2002; Lerer, 2008; Millar and Trask, 2015). Borrowing may occur at all levels of language, from phonology, morphology to syntax. Unlike code switching, borrowing involves the adaptation of lexical items into the phonetic, morphological and syntactic system of recipient language, and it does not imply a knowledge of the donor language (Holmes, 2013).

Once assimilated into the phonetic and morphological system of a language, speakers may not be aware that a word has been borrowed. In Gikuyu, for example, speakers may not be aware that words like *thengiu* (thank you), *taimanjini* (imagine) and *tereiconi* (television) are borrowed from English. In Ngugi's *Murogi wa Kagogo*, however, the situation is sometimes different

because the author exploits poetic license to the maximum and borrows words hitherto not in the Gikuyu lexicon. Words like “*ronjiki*” (logic), “*ngirumbu*” (globe) and “*arambai*” (alibi) are borrowings by the writer and outside the grasp of an ordinary Gikuyu speaker. Of course, there are instances where the loanwords have Gikuyu equivalents. Sociolinguists call this core borrowing because the recipient language already has viable equivalents in its lexicon (Myers-Scotton, 2006). Why borrow a word that already exists or can easily be created? Myers-Scotton (2006) explains that this may be done due to the pressure of the dominant language. English, for example, prevails over Gikuyu in the discourse of information technology and the internet. Ngugi is thus constrained to borrow and indigenize English words rather than coin Gikuyu ones in keeping with this global reality. The words he uses have become part of common global culture. Sometimes he uses both the Gikuyu equivalent and the loan word as in the phrase “*itaneti! Magomano!*” In this case “*itaneti*” (internet) is immediately rendered into its Gikuyu equivalent “*magomano*”. This tells us that Ngugi is not borrowing because he lacks a Gikuyu equivalent but because he feels that it is easier and more powerful to communicate using the English term.

But Ngugi, like Shakespeare, brings new words into Gikuyu through borrowings, and predictably, most of these words are from English by virtue of English being an international language and one of Kenya’s official languages. Thus, we see *bengi ya ngirumbu*, literally “global bank” for “World Bank”. Ngugi chooses the word “*ngirumbu*” instead of the Gikuyu equivalent “*thi* (world). The reason is clear to see, the word “global” is more fashionable and more pervasive in today’s discourse. The choice of “*ngirumbu*” instead of “*thi*” is thus not just a linguistic decision but fundamentally also a cultural one. Ngugi himself has emphasized in many of his writings that language serves both communicative and cultural functions. He seems to be saying that Gikuyu people must carve a space for themselves within the global culture. For this reason, we also encounter “*andirithi ciakwa na imiru*”) which translates “my address and email”. In this text, Ngugi borrows and indigenizes many technological, scientific and scholarly terms because English seems to have penetrated every corner of the globe. These constitute cultural borrowings which stand for words that are absent in the recipient language’s culture (Myers-Scotton, 2006). Legal terms like “*arambai*” (alibi) are in this category of borrowing. Ngugi also uses calque or loan translation where the actual word from the donor language is not borrowed but the recipient language conveys the desired meaning using its own words (Myers-Scotton, 2006). Calques tend to be compounds like when Ngugi uses the term “*Matheca-ltu*” (literally “pierce the sky”) for “skyscraper”. Again, this is not a word used by Gikuyu speakers but a product of Ngugi’s own inventiveness. We also see “*kieya kia*

rurenda” (website), “*Ngwataniiro ya Nduriri*” (literally “union of communities”) for “United Nations. We also encounter loan blends or hybrids as when Njoya says “*guterrorise*” (to terrorise) which combines the Gikuyu verbal bound morpheme “*gu*” and the English free morpheme “*terrorise*”.

Ngugi’s borrowing extends to grammar where we encounter the use of grammatical structures that are foreign to Gikuyu. A good example is where Nyawira says “*kai kinyururi kia maundu na kio anga niundu, i*” (p.30) (the irony of situations is puzzling). The noun phrase “*kinyururi kia Maundu*” (the irony of situations) is not natural to Gikuyu, it is a case of Ngugi first thinking in English then rendering the structure in Gikuyu. As a native speaker of Gikuyu I have never heard anyone use the word “*kinyururi*” (literally “sarcasm”) in such a construction.

From this analysis, we can see that Ngugi succeeds in creating a hybrid text through borrowing lexical items and grammatical structures from English. This borrowing is a fairly correct representation of the Gikuyu spoken today by any literate Gikuyu person.

CONCLUSION

This article has attempted to demonstrate how Ngugi exploits sociolinguistic resources to create a hybrid text in *Murogi wa Kagogo*. The article has also shown that this hybridity is anchored on Ngugi’s twin beliefs namely: the primacy of local knowledge encapsulated in African languages, and secondly, the need for African writers to enrich African indigenous languages by “preying” on other languages. Thus, as Ngugi puts it, in the world of this novel there is no contradiction between the local and the global, we instead witness a fusion of the two. The article has for example drawn on the concept of diglossia to illustrate that language use differs in different domains. Pure Gikuyu is used in the home domain as in the case where Kamiti visits his father in the village, despite the fact that both of them are well educated and conversant in both English and Kiswahili. During this visit we witness the extensive use of Gikuyu songs and proverbs. Contrastingly, when we move to the official domain as in the interrogation of Tanjirika by Njoya and Sikiokuu, we see pervasive use of codeswitching in English and Kiswahili and also the usage of English and Kiswahili proverbs.

The article has also shown how sociolinguistics can be used to analyze a literary text with a view to uncovering language use and variation and how this contributes to characterization and thematic concerns. Drawing on approaches like Communication Accommodation theory, the analysis, for example, shows how codeswitching is used by characters in the novel to create solidarity as well as social distance. We have seen characters like Superintendent Njoya who use technical language to

diverge, thus, achieving symbolic dominance over Tanjirika. Similarly, Tanjirika refuses to be drawn to speaking in Sheng by Sikiokuu which is a case of symbolic protest. The article has also exploited Myers-Scotton's Markedness Model to show how certain instances of codeswitching can be interpreted as marked or unmarked. Additionally, the article has laid bare the tendency of characters to result to codeswitching as a way of affirming their identity.

Ngugi also creates hybridity in the text through the symbolic names he chooses for his characters. We meet characters whose names are coined from the Gikuyu language with a view to authenticating and indigenizing their roles in the novel as in the case of Kamiti. Others, like Machokali and Sikiokuu, are named using Kiswahili to alienate them from the Gikuyu peasantry and also give their ruinous actions a national character.

The article has also examined the role of borrowing in hybridizing the novel, showing how it enhances communication. Core borrowing has for example been shown to be instrumental in placing the novel within the global map so that words like "*itaneti*" (internet) are preferred instead of the Gikuyu equivalent "*magomano*". The article has also argued that cultural borrowing as in words like "*mathindithi*" (mercedez) are inevitable because these words are absent in the Gikuyu lexicon.

This study has far reaching implications for literature and sociolinguistics since it has shown that the two are connected in a significant way: literature studies society while sociolinguistics studies how linguistics is related to society. Significantly, therefore, what can be studied by sociolinguists in society can also be studied in literary texts. Characters, for example, in a novel occupy a similar universe to that occupied by people in the real world. Clearly, more studies should be done to reveal how sociolinguistics can provide more insights into literary texts.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

REFERENCES

- Achebe C (1958). *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann.
- Androutopoulos J (2010). Localizing the global on the participatory web. In N. Coupland (Ed), *The handbook of language and globalization* (pp. 203-231) Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Ashcroft B, Griffiths G, Tiffin H (2002). *The empire writes back: Theory and practice in postcolonial literature* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.
- Baugh A, Cable T (2002). *A history of the English language*. (5th ed). London: Routledge.
- Bhabha H (1994). *The location of culture*. London: Routledge.
- Blommaert J, Dong J (2010). Language and movement in space. In N. Coupland (Ed), *The handbook of language and globalization* (pp. 366-385) Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Blommaert J (2010). *The sociolinguistics of globalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brown P, Levinson S (1978). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cook D, Okenimkpe M (1997). *Ngugi wa Thiong'o: An exploration of his writings* (2nd ed.). Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.
- Fowler R (1991). *Language in the news: Discourse and ideology in the press*. London: Routledge.
- Gikandi S (2000). *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Holmes J (2013). *An introduction to sociolinguistics* (4th ed). New York: Routledge.
- Jazeel T (2019). *Postcolonialism: Key ideas in geography*. London: Routledge.
- Kraidy M (2005). *Hybridity, or the Cultural Logic of Globalization*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Lerer S (2008). *The history of English language: Course guidebook* (2nd ed). Chantilly, Virginia: The Teaching Company.
- Maathai W (2006). *Unbowed: A memoir*. Knopf Publishing Group.
- Mair C (1992). A methodological framework for research on the use of nonstandard language in fiction." *AAA—Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 17(1):103-123.
- Mesthrie R, Swann J, Deumert A, Leap A (2009). *Introducing sociolinguistics* (2nd Ed) Edinburgh University Press.
- Meyerhoff M (2006). *Introducing sociolinguistics*. New York: Routledge.
- Millar R, Trask L (2015). *Historical Linguistics* (3rd ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Myers-Scotton C (1991). Making ethnicity salient in codeswitching. In J. Dow (Ed.), *Language and ethnicity* (pp. 95-110). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Myers-Scotton C (2006). *Multiple voices: An introduction to bilingualism*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- The Constitution of Kenya (2010). Retrieved from: www.kenyalaw.org
- Nettle D, Romaine S (2000). *Vanishing voices: The extinction of the world's languages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Odhiambo T (2019). Sheng, Kenya's lingua franca, is here to stay, *umegot? Poa*. Saturday Nation.
- Wa Thiong'o N (1993). *Moving the Centre: The struggle for cultural freedoms*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.
- Wa Thiong'o N (1972). *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean literature, culture and politics*. London: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Wa Thiong'o N (1986). *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African Literature*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.
- Wa Thiong'o N (2006). *Murogi wa kagogo: Mbuku ya gatatu*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.
- Wanjohi G (1997). *The wisdom and philosophy of the Gikuyu proverbs: The kihooto world-view*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa.
- Wardhaugh R, Fuller J (2015). *An introduction to sociolinguistics* (7th ed.). Oxford: John Wiley and Sons.