

Violence: The (Un)real, Power and Excess in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow*

Tendayi Sithole

Summary

In this article, the nature, form and content of violence are traced through the engagement of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow*, situating it in the context of the postcolony. In this context, the conception of the real and unreal qua violence is interchangeable and also entangled. Thus, performativity of power depicts how violence becomes ritualised and institutionalised. The excess of the body is also problematised as a site of exercising state power. These politics of excess are clearly marked by the omnipresence of the Ruler in private and public domains of the citizens of Aburiria, his plan of constructing the unlimited tower of Marching to Heaven, funded by the Global Bank, and the politics of eating which perpetuates dispossession of the Aburirian citizenry. Though the Ruler claims to be mighty and powerful he is still caught in the clutches of the puppetry of colonial power which reduce him to a typical colonial subject.

Opsomming

In hierdie artikel word die aard, vorm en inhoud van geweld aan die hand van 'n studie van Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o se *Wizard of the Crow* geskets en sodoende binne die konteks van die postkoloniale geplaas. Binne hierdie konteks is die begrip van die werklike en onwerklike as geweld omruilbaar asook verstrengel. So beeld die performatiwiteit van mag uit hoe geweld geritualiseer en geïntitutionaliseer word. Die oordad van die liggaam word ook geïntentionaliseer as 'n terrein vir die uitoefening van staatsmag. Hierdie politiek van oordad word duidelik aangetoon deur die alomteenwoordigheid van die Heerser in die private en openbare domein van die burgers van Aburiria, sy plan om die onbepaalde toring "Marching to Heaven" (Opmars na die Hemel), wat deur die Globale Bank befonds word, te bou en die eetpolitiek wat die onteiening van die burgers van Aburiria in stand hou. Alhoewel die Heerser verklaar dat hy magtig en kragdadig is, bly hy vasgevang in die kloue van die skynvertoning van koloniale mag, wat hom tot 'n tipiese koloniale onderdaan verlaag.

Introduction

It is in the space of the literary that political commentary is made and also in the space of the political that literary criticism is deployed. Where can it be if not in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow*, the very novel which combines satire, criticism and serious political commentary? The purpose of this article is to trace the elements of violence in the postcolony by means of exposition. The manner in which violence is in the space and time assumes metaphoric forms, and the argument is that the real and the unreal are the ways in which to understand the intricacies of such violence.

In *Wizard of the Crow*, a form of political practice by citizens questions the manner in which they are ruled. This popular agency provokes violence from the Ruler and his power apparatus as a whole. The fear of the Ruler is the fear of resistance and thus seems to justify the Ruler's use of violence on those labelled as enemies of the state. The context through which the novel is framed suggests the ways in which violence needs to be rethought as something embedded in the existential conditions of the citizens of Aburiria. The nature of this violence is both systematic and systemic in the manner in which it pervades the postcolony. The argument here lies in the fact that the traces of violence can be found in the ways in which Aburiria is the arrested time in which the Ruler dictates the modes of life in his own arbitrary rhythm. It is the traces of violence which are explored here, and it is through the engagement of *Wizard of the Crow* in the time and space called the postcolony that the theme of violence is manifested.

The (Un)real of Metaphor

The place of the metaphor in the political context is contested whether it assumes the figure of the real or not. It is in the blurry space of the real and unreal of the metaphor that violence is employed in its logic, desire, operation, and of course, its symptom. In his novel *Wizard of the Crow*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o confronts the problematic realm of the metaphor in its real and unreal form in order to articulate the postcolony – the fictional country called Free Republic of Aburiria being the setting. In this novel, the metaphor is not only symbolic, but also real and unreal. Some of the fundamental questions that become central are: What are the connections between the oppressive regimes and literary expression – that is, between violence and aesthetics? How is the political content of the postcolony treated in *Wizard of the Crow*, and how does it help us to understand the politics of the postcolony? Ngũgĩ succeeds in doing this by means of caricature as serious criticism, the very political commentary necessary to understand what underlies the postcolony. In deploying the metaphor, the novel exposes the mechanics of the regime through its state of collapse,

suggesting the theorisation of political oppression, dehumanisation of the oppressed and the laxity of power in its form, images and expressions. The manner in which the metaphor seems to be embedded in the postcolony suggests that the real and the unreal are interchangeable and entangled. The space which the characters in the novel assume consists of a range of forces in one form or another, which is of interest to see how the images of violence outplay each other.

The concept “postcolony”, as Mbembe (2001) coins it, suggests the era which does not mean after colonialism but rather sedimentation of epochs in one history. The postcolony is the interpenetration of epochs – that is, precolonial, colonial and postcolonial Africa. This formulation means the postcolony can be understood in the blurry line of the real and unreal in the metaphor. The postcolony as the state of perpetual abyss is what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009: 259) refers to as the “terrain of conquest, violence, police rule, and authoritarianism”. It is this regime of violence where the real is made into the unreal and the unreal is made into the real. So then, it is proper to situate *Wizard of the Crow* in its own setting, the postcolony, which is then the very liminal space where the complexity of the political can be understood.

According to Turner (1974), reality and metaphor have been mediated in that they can constitute the co-activity in one. This clearly shows that the metaphor which is often regarded as unreal can in effect become real. For Turner, the metaphor is in fact metamorphic and transformative in the ways in which the real and the unreal can be understood. The conception of the political fails to capture the nuisance issues if it fails to see the literary in the real, and of course if the literary refuses the real of the political. The postcolony calls for the dynamics of both the real and the unreal, and as Bayart (2009: 235) highlights, “[r]eality is often stranger than fiction”. The following interesting metaphor constitutes both the real and the unreal:

Rumo[u]r has it that the Ruler talked nonstop for seven nights and days, seven hours, seven minutes, and seven seconds. By then the ministers had clapped so hard, they felt numb and drowsy. Some did not reali[s]e that they themselves had become hoarse and were now producing barely audible whispers of *more, give us more, couldn't agree with the Mighty One more.*

(Ngũgĩ 2006: 496; italics in original)

The postcolony gives way to excremental language as a manner of critique, and more so, of political commentary. According to Esty (1999), excremental language, though not naturalistic fashion, is a governing trope in the postcolony. While there has been commentary by way of questioning and criticism of the postcolony, the latter has been a disappointment because it has been what Esty (1999: 53) calls the “state of historical unfulfillment”. So, the excrement is used as a form of object and symbol and it is read and engaged in that mode to engage the postcolony – the abyssal scandal.

Aburīria as the Postcolony

It is in Aburīria where the dramaturgy of power and its performativity take place. The drama of power is derived from the script that serves as a reference point and even a precedent on how power is performed and the forms of rules which bind the audience of the drama. The actors can alter the script as they want, but the audience are not allowed in any way to raise criticism even if the actors veer outside the boundaries of the script. To criticise is to be a threat, and the consequence of dissent is to be eliminated from the audience. The manner in which power dramatises itself is by means of violence. It is in the postcolony that the very intention of power in its logic of operation breaks, disciplines, punishes and on the other hand, also sutures the body of the subject. Ngũgĩ states that the Ruler's State House had a special chamber which he describes as follows:

The chamber was a cross between a museum and a temple; and every morning the Ruler, after first bathing in the preserved blood of his enemies, would enter, carrying a staff and a fly whisk, and then walk about quietly, looking at the various exhibits one by one; then, about to leave, he would suddenly stop at the door and glance one more time at the chamber and, with mocking gestures of triumphant contempt, at the dark holes and grinning teeth where once eyes and mouths had been.

(Ngũgĩ 2006: 11)

It is this place where the Ruler is said to be potent, the space from which he derives power. Power in its dramaturgy enforces the gaze – that is, the look which creates the climate of fear among the citizenry. The absence of the gaze will render power invisible (as performance), as something impotent. It is on this basis that power in the postcolony dramatises itself in the manner that such dramaturgy requires the spectacle to see the manner in which power works. In this line, the manner in which power dramatises itself is of course at the level of excess and for it to have a lasting impact. The two forms that will be briefly examined here include the ways in which displaying luxury and splendour takes place and also, what is done to those who are dissidents from the existing order of power in the postcolony.

The world of the oppressor is that which signifies the Ruler and his apparatus, the ministers, the police and the military. “In this literally performative response we see a remodulation of the apparatus of the theatre state” (Jackson 2004: 236). It is in this condition that the theatre state signifies at its performative level the absolute right to rule and even by whatever means necessary. As Outa (2001) adds, performativity of power is mostly prevalent in dictatorial regimes where subjection is practised in the way that opponents of power (perceived or real) are exiled, banished and even worse, killed without any trace. It is clear in *Wizard of the Crow* how the Ruler exercises these practices to show and prove his might. It is in this

form that power is exercised. What emerges is the recreation of power to animate itself as infallible since performativity is the projection of “reality” that is not supposed to be contradicted. Its symbolism and actuality create injustices, and the latter is seen as the way of life. Shanks, Platt and Rathje (2004) put forth that in Aburiria mundane things as they are banal come to carry the garbage of history; they become allegorical. What Ngũgĩ suggests is the manner in which power is exercised in an arbitrary fashion over the citizens of Aburiria who are marginalised and dispossessed under what Jackson (2004: 223) refers to as the “aesthetic regime of power”. It is the power of the image of ugliness that is wearing the mask of beauty while its constitutive ontology is ugliness. In this form, this power in its performativity legitimises itself through violence.

The illegitimacy of this power turns its image into that of legitimacy, and to a greater degree it reinforces this legitimacy to a point of dogmatic belief which must, in practice, make Aburirian citizens think that the Ruler is ruling them in a way that serves their best interests. Jackson states that in the postcolony, images of legitimate power are (re)invented and this, of course, suggests the image of the legitimate state. The regime of images suggests the ways in which the Ruler wants to be seen. What is clear from Jackson’s view is that the manner in which the images are used to legitimise power assumes tyrannical proportions because they are based on forcing the false image to appear as unfalsified. The ontology of the postcolony as Comaroff and Comaroff (2001: 628) note, is the “assimilation of persons, signs, and practices into the received order of things, to the deployment of native as alibi, as a fertile allegory for making people and objects strange, this to forge critical new social and political distinctions”. To situate Aburiria, is to situate it in the world of the oppressed and also what Comaroff and Comaroff (2001: 629) refer to as “conditions-of-being in the postcolony”.

The world of the oppressed is at the receiving end of performance, it is the world of the audience since power at its performative level to have its desired effect requires the spectacle and of course, the audience at the position of reception. In the novel,

[t]he birthday celebrations would start at the seventh hour of the seventh day of the seventh month, seven being the Ruler’s sacred number, and precisely because in Aburiria the Ruler controlled how months followed each other – January for instance trading places with July – he therefore had the power to declare every month in the year the seventh month, and any day within that seventh month the seventh day and therefore the Ruler’s Birthday. The same applied to time, and any hour, depending on the wishes of the Ruler, could be the seventh hour.

(Ngũgĩ 2006: 12)

This willed confusion of time in the imagination of the Ruler resonates with Mbembe’s view that the regime creates its own rhythm of time and this is

done arbitrarily. While the crowds of people will be in the scorching sun and dehydrated, Ngũgĩ states that those in the echelons of power in Aburĩria would be cooling their tongues with cold water. So it means that they will see their rulers living in luxury while they are in dire need. Mbembe argues that the excessive conspicuous consumption of the rich is contrasted to the abject existence of the poor:

In the postcolony, bodies have been used to entertain the powerful in ceremonies and official parades. On such occasions some of the bodies have borne the mark of famine: flaky scalps, scabies, skin sores. Others have attracted small crowds of flies. But nothing of this has stopped them from breaking into laughter or peals of joy when the presidential limousine approached.

(Mbembe 2001: 122-123)

In these ceremonial spaces of the narrative in the novel, power performs and the state applies its power authority of its visibility of dramaturgy. These ceremonies take precedence as they are an important part of the state's liturgical calendar which is manipulated at will (Mbembe 2001). This is what Spencer (2012: 151) refers to as "intrinsic fallibility of power". It is essential to note that performativity of power manifests as inflationary and absolute, but it is also precisely at this point that the same power appears as potency, the very thing that renders it impotent. That is to say, the purported potency of the Ruler as the figure that is infallible and beyond whatever exists around him really shows that such a figure is really vulnerable. The manner in which things happen in the postcolony assumes the character of the unreal whereas these things are in fact real. The line between the real and the unreal is blurred since the postcolony is in itself an elaboration of the forms of excess. The line between the real and the fictional is something that Spencer questions. In its extensive use, in this case, the use of satirical magic realism does not overshadow or is distant from realities on the ground. But when these realities are to be engaged even at the fictional level they are in many degrees reflecting (and even to the greater degree) realities on the ground. So then, it is clear that in the postcolony, the fictional and the real are entangled. As Dalleo (2012) states, the struggle in *Wizard of the Crow* is located at the discursive level, and the notions of rumours, propaganda, and truth are contested and yet proliferated. It is at this discursive level that the images of the real and the fictional come into being, and they are such that they (re)present reality as it is.

What is clear in the postcolony is that power is not power. It is its own extension – that is, it is only the manner in which it is exercised and distributed through the regime of violence, both in images and materiality. As such, this clearly shows that its practices do not mean its foundation and constitution. The power of the Ruler is the power that extends and is limited to Aburĩria only. The Ruler exercises power through instilling fear and terror

in the fiefdom where it assumes images that clearly expose him to the fact that he is not power in himself as he is dominated by another form of power on which he depends. This is the power that disciplines the Ruler, and it can be referred to as coloniality of power, which means the power that the Ruler exercises over the citizens of Aburiria is the fetish of power – a power without power (Mbembe 2001). The expression of power without power is to make the effect of power to be felt and this is even done in the manner that suggests decadence in the postcolony.

The Ruler as Everything

Who rules Aburiria, if not the ruler with no name, but the Ruler himself? The Free Republic of Aburiria is under the regime of a nameless figure. It is this name that is tied to the signification of the figure – the Ruler, that is. The Ruler, as Spencer (2012) identifies the types of rulers in the postcolony is the kleptocrat comparable to Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo); gangster and warlord comparable to Charles Taylor who ruled Liberia; psychopath comparable to Francisco Nguema of Equatorial Guinea; atrocious buffoon comparable to Idi Amin of Uganda. The Ruler fits all the archetypes except that of the liberation fighter because he has never been one.

The *everythingness* of the Ruler is something that he is not but claims to be. The Ruler claims to be everything that is said to be virtuous and also prudent. As Mbembe (2001: 155) amplifies, the Ruler is “the all-purpose man”. He is everything at the same time, but of course, only that which is virtuous and prudent. The citizens of Aburiria should truly believe this, it should be something real. It is also clear that the Ruler is not a supreme leader, he is everything even at the level of being God, a god. The Ruler is, as Tembo (2011: 345) asserts, “the Christ-like rule of the Free Republic of Aburiria”. Taking a cue from Comaroff and Comaroff (2001) it can be argued that Aburiria exists in the realm of magicalities, autochthony and ritual excess. In this realm, the Ruler assumes the figure of a deity. This then feeds the myth of the Ruler as the figure that commands respect willingly and without any form of opposition. In this situation, Aburiria is reduced to the state of exception, where law is suspended at will and without any form of justification (Agamben 2005). It is the law that is applied in the arbitrary form of “the law is the law”, and of course this is done in the context of absolute power that can render everything under its reign amoebic. On all the things being about the Ruler and also his persona, the rule of law is the Ruler himself.

Life in the postcolony is the entanglement of “the banality of everyday life, sentimental associations and the apocalyptic confrontation with horror, death, the clash of civilisations” (Shanks et al. 2004: 63). In Ngugi’s novel,

the Ruler as everything also means that the Ruler carries what Shanks et al. refer to as the garbage of history, the very condition that the Ruler opposes, more so if it is a burden. Garbage is something that is antithetical to the virtue and prudence of the Ruler, and for him, it must be removed from sight. The contradiction here is that the Ruler claims everything and that everything is not garbage, and therefore by some irony, the latter which must be removed from the sight of the Ruler is left intact. Garbage broadly points to “themes of ruins, remains, discard, decay, hygiene, dirt, and disease” (Shanks et al. 2004: 67). Garbage is what the Ruler produces, the wretchedness of the citizenry of Aburīria. So it clearly means that those who create garbage are the very same ones who do not want it.

Ngūgī mentions that the Ruler is also teacher number one, a supreme educator. The Ruler is also number one writer: “all the books published would carry the name of the Ruler as the original author” (Ngūgī 2006: 565). This even extends to the Ruler having prefaces and introductions in sacred texts like the Bible, the Quran, the Torah, and even Bhudda’s Book of Light. This is how much the power of the Ruler is perverted for him to be everything. Even professors of the disciplines are in line with the pedagogy of the Ruler, in which all disciplines are attached to the Ruler (history of the Ruler, science of the Ruler, theology of the Ruler, philosophy of the Ruler). “Similarly, the multiplicity of truths in *Wizard of the Crow* seems obviously meant to contrast with the desire to monopolize[s]e narration on the part of the Ruler” (Dalleo 2012: 147). The truth that the Ruler wants to propagate is that he is the beginning and the end, the alpha and omega. Mbembe (2001) argues that the self-portrait images are everywhere in the private and the public domain, even in the unexpected area of private life.

It is significant that the Ruler knows that his truth is not the truth, but it is what he wants Aburīria to believe as the truth. This form of truth springs from fear, since the form of regime is that which is predicated on violence in sadistic proportions. The Ruler rules by fear, and fear also affects the Ruler. He fears the citizens that he oppresses and knows that he might one day lose power – it is this fear that he is spreading. So, it means that the notion of fear has the mirror factor in that the fear that is externalised is the very fear that is internalised. But then, the latter is negated by and expressed by the Ruler’s affirmation of potency – the very form of impotency. The fear of the Ruler is mortal fear, the fear of coming to an end.

As the Ruler claims to be everything, nothing should exceed him. Colson (2011) argues that the Ruler aims to rule endlessly and for this purpose arrest time in order to prevent his inevitable end. Arresting time as Colson explains has to do with the criminalisation of the past and future and entrenching the present as the way of life in Aburīria. This gives enough leverage to the Ruler’s manipulation of existence in so far as time is concerned. It thus means there can be no Aburīria without the Ruler, and of course with some extension of bad faith the livelihood of the citizenry is

made to depend on the Ruler. The Ruler here is fighting for the present and revises history and actual realities, and even to some extent the imaginations of the future around his own delusion of solidifying power around him. Being everything that is absolute and can withstand any opposition, the space(s) of opposition are closed. The spaces of dissent are closed as opposition is met with sadistic tropes of deadly violence which deter any attempt of opposition itself or even the overt imagination of the Ruler's end.

The fact that the Movement for the Voice of the People is labelled a terrorist group serves as testimony to the fact that the Ruler fears his end. It clearly shows that what takes the central place in the novel is the manner in which the politics of labelling takes a form of representation in which those who oppose the power of the unjust state are deemed the enemies of the state. When those who dissent are stigmatised through politically motivated labels then the justification takes place that they must be erased from the polity. The Movement for the Voice of the People worries that the Ruler and his ilk are fighting hard to ban their movement. The Ruler "yearn[s] for a total, 'well-policed' state" (Ngũgĩ 2006: 261). The people must be vanquished because they humiliate the ruler, something which is not supposed to happen as the Ruler is beyond reproach. The Ruler is the leader for life and to mention something that is linked to his demise or death is a contravention punishable by death.

As Ngũgĩ notes, The Ruler deems any attempt on the part of the people to organise themselves as a challenge to his authority since this is a form of authority that reigns supreme. The oppositional political movement which wants the end of the Ruler and the forms of oppression that exist in Aburiria is struggling to realise the aspiration for liberation that citizens must have. However, the tragedy is also that in the postcolony, the economy of violence is perpetuated to such an extent that citizens do not see a difference between the colonial regime and the postcolony – the latter which seems to elaborate excessively on the former, and of course, pretending to be on the side of the citizens it violates. The manner in which Aburiria elaborates itself is, of course, through the centralisation of power and rendering it a fiefdom of the Ruler, his ministers and of course, marginal elites in the apparatus of state violence.

The Body in Excess

It is essential to note that the body is the centre in which power is embedded. Ngũgĩ (2006: 469) writes that "[i]t seems that the Ruler's body had started puffing like a balloon, his whole body becoming more and more inflated, without losing the proportion of parts". As a result of this swelling in excess the clothes even ended up ripping apart and the Ruler was clothed in sheets. Nobody could speak ill about the body of the Ruler since this is a form of

crime punishable by death. Nothing needs to be known about the Ruler's bodily excess since this would reveal his weakness and make him a mockery in the eyes of the citizens whose loyalty he demands. It is interesting to note that ministers have also expanded their body organs to pledge loyalty to the Ruler. Thus sparking a rumour – and of course, the excessive form of the Ruler can exist as something uncontrollable even in the state of containment – the rumours of the Ruler's pregnancy were such that they angered his sycophantic ministers. “The media came from many parts of the world to cover the widely circulating rumo[u]rs that the Ruler was pregnant” (Ngũgĩ 2006: 577). These rumours even created new rumours that amounted to the conclusion that the sources of these rumours should be hunted down and prosecuted. As it is an expected political role to hide the truth in the face of spreading rumours, in the novel, Benjamin Mambo countered all rumours and attempted by all means to falsify them. But as Colson (2011) confirms, “official attempts to curtail rumours often backfire”. The role of rumour in this discourse assumes that rumour is power and a form of multiplicity where what is mythically infallible can be demystified. But then, this denial of rumours leads to greater rumours. The power of the Ruler is then at odds with the discourse of rumour which in fact challenges the mystification that cannot be contested. Even though the Ruler was now out of public sight, the rumours were as if he had been seen in public.

The body of Machokali – one of the ministers – came to excessive proportions when he voluntarily underwent an eye operation. Machokali, who used to be an ordinary member of parliament of the Free Republic of Aburiria, flew to England, had himself admitted to a major London hospital to have an eye operation, and tragically, his eyes were enlarged to the size of bulbs. This was done to make his eyes “ferociously sharp ... so that they would be able to spot the enemies of the Ruler no matter how far their hiding place” (Ngũgĩ 2006: 13). As Ngũgĩ states, the size of the eyes dwarfed most parts of the face, as the eyes dominated other bodily features. This led Machokali to be rewarded with the important position of minister of foreign affairs. His bodily excess showed loyalty to the Ruler and it really touched the Ruler in a fundamental way. In service of the Ruler, Machokali would be “his representative eye wherever, in whatever corner of the globe lay the Ruler's interests” (Ngũgĩ 13).

Upon hearing of Machokali's shoot to prominence and proximity to the Ruler, Silver Sikiokuu – another state functionary – would in the service of the Ruler spy on the citizenry both in the private and public domains. He went to Paris where he even bought himself a hospital bed to have his enlarged to hear everything that is being said and even whispered about the ruler. “His ears were larger than a rabbit's and always primed to detect danger at any time and from any direction” (Ngũgĩ 2006: 14). As a result of this excessive bodily organ expansion he was, as minister of state, put in charge of spying on the citizens.

Power struggles between Sikiokuu and Machokali stem very deep. The two ministers, now in rivalry, assumed positions where “one considered himself the Ruler’s Eye and the other his Ear” (Ngũgĩ 2006: 14). Both are, as Colson (2011: 135) notes, “the ruling elite, exposing their infightings, insecurities, paranoia, and fear”. Both show loyalty to the Ruler, but at the same time harbour feelings of betrayal and suspicion. Both were secretly scheming and plotting against the Ruler while pretending to be loyal to him. Tembo (2010) is of the view that the rivalry between Machokali and Sikiokuu is informed by greed – the excess in unlimited proportions – the very form of self-interest that will make them betray each other at all costs to be in the top echelons of power. This is illustrated by their going so far as to undergo surgical operations to enlarge their body organs to be on the right side of power. The two also go to the extent of conspiring against each other and competing to find Nyawirira, a most wanted person suspected of being a mastermind attempting to overthrow the regime through the activities of The Movement for the Voice of the People.

In an attempt to shoot into the prominence of ministry, Benjamin Mambo “chose to have his tongue enlarged so that in echoing the Ruler’s command his words would reach every soldier in the country and his threats to his enemies before they could reach the Aburĩrian borders” (Ngũgĩ 2006: 15). However, Mambo’s bodily excess was problematic as it led to dysfunctionality: his protruding tongue rendered speech impossible. But, this is remedied with the assistance of Machokali who suggests that Mambo’s lips be enlarged as well. Despite these excessive bodily features the struggle of these ministers to catch the Wizard of the Crow and even to track and find Nyawirira with great effort remains a mystery. The bodily excesses symbolise the politics of failure and Aburĩria became a failure in itself by not being something that inspires hope. As Ngũgĩ (2006) states, the leaders of Aburĩria are murderers of hope. This view is supported by Colson (2011) for whom the power of rumour becomes so potent that it assumes the figure of being the discursive challenge to the authority of the Ruler. The ministers’ bodily excess is of no use, except that it serves their interests to be taken up in the higher echelons of power. It is in this existential condition that the politics of decay sets in – and can even amount to the politics of excretion.

Marching to Where?

The Ruler is self-representationally a god, and this provokes the sense through which his regime is organised. Being such a deity, the Ruler had to go to heaven and to speak to God every morning, which would require a building under the boldly claimed name Marching to Heaven. On how the imaginings of the Ruler came about, Ngũgĩ (2006: 16) compares the Ruler’s dream to “a building, except one by the children of Israel, and even they had

failed miserably to complete the House of Babel". The narrative of the Marching to Heaven project is articulated by Machokali as outdoing the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the Egyptian pyramids, the Aztecan Tenochtitlan or The Great Wall of China. These are the human-made structures that have stood the test of time, but the Marching to Heaven would reach the very gates of Heaven so that the Ruler could have direct communication with God. Ngũgĩ (2006: 16) writes that "[t]he Ruler would be the daily recipient of God's advice, resulting in a rapid growth of Aburĩria to heights never before dreamt by humans". It means that the Ruler would be near God, advised by God and, of course, this would result in the Ruler being supernatural and his commands being those of God himself.

The Ruler as deity, at the level of being equated with God, is someone who will be deriving direct wisdom from God. His authority will be divine and something that cannot be criticised since this will be considered blasphemous. Having the ability to communicate with God essentially means that the Ruler, despite his atrocities of killing enemies, oppressing people, and deceiving people to say the least, he still remains pious. The way he will rule Aburĩria is something that will be justified by the wisdom that God, whom he will see from time to time, gives him. The interesting question is how will the Ruler reach God by climbing Marching to Heaven? Ngugi states that there will be

a space luxury liner called the Ruler's Angel which will shuttle the Ruler to and from heaven. The landing vehicle will also feature under the name of Rock Rover in Heaven. Armed with a personal spaceship, the only leader in the whole world to possess one, the Ruler would make pleasure trips wherever and whenever he fancied, hopping from planet to planet, and once on the surface of each he would simply use the Rock Rover in Heaven to move and pick up gold and diamonds in the sky.

(Ngũgĩ 2006: 18-19)

The money for this project is to be expected from the Global Bank (the equivalent of the World Bank). While there is a Marching to Heaven, it seems people are to remain tethered to poverty. The masses cannot march to Heaven because they are not part of the national dream of which only the Ruler is part. Ngugi states that criticising the Marching to Heaven some beggars chanted slogans like "Marching to Heaven Is Marching to Hell"; "Your Strings of Loans Are Chains of Slavery"; "Your Loans Are the Cause of Begging"; "We Beggars Beg the End of Begging"; "The March to Heaven Is Led By Dangerous Snakes". These are slogans which when they reached the ears of the Ruler, caused the masses' liquidation. The protest by beggars is something that is repressed by the police in order to hide what the real state of affairs is. Ngũgĩ (2006: 135) writes that "[a]t least the Global Bank mission would never have known of the protest". This protest would have been seen as damaging to the image of the Ruler who propagates

Aburiria to the external powers as the land of peace. This is the protest by people who do not see the importance of Marching to Heaven, which of course is some expression of inflationary power on the part of the Ruler, and a parasitic constraint on the people who do not even have the minimal means to survive. This even shows that Marching to Heaven equates violence. It violates the very existence of human beings and it reduces them to a state of wretchedness – that is, a state of perpetual dehumanisation par excellence.

“After reviewing the entire project, the Global Bank did not see any economic benefit to Marching to Heaven” (Ngũgĩ 2006: 485). This is precisely because the limit of this project was indefinite. This indefinite state is created by the life of plenty, the luxury of laxity of resources in the hands of the few, the very form of deliberate deprivation which is a form of ontological violence. The approval of the loan by the Global Bank will see the money going to the lifestyles of those in the echelons of power. Bayart (2009) deploys the concept of the politics of the belly to understand the regimes based on the politics of eating. However, it is important to know that the forms of eating are contested as not uniform in the postcolony. Bayart states that the regimes of eating or politics of eating are just like bulimia and they were mostly common in Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo) and Nigeria, slimmer’s diet, schizophrenic greed, and voluptuous appetite. These forms of eating seem to be all identifiable with Aburiria. Eating expresses the domain of power since it is intrinsically linked with where one belongs in society and of course, in the domain of power. As Monga (2006: 230) notes, “[t]he collective infatuation with position of power in which one can ‘eat’ underlines the importance of eating in societies experiencing want”.

Those who are poor and dispossessed cannot eat what they want and when they want. That only applies to those who are in power. This is as much as those who are poor will not benefit from Marching to Heaven. What it will bring is nothing but adding to their perpetual misery and dehumanisation. The existential crisis, of course, is the signification of rushing to the spoils in competitive and yet asymmetrical ways and the emphasis that Bayart (2009) makes that not everybody eats equally. If the project of Marching to Heaven is to bring more money, then it follows that there will be some scramble for that money and it will only be accessed by those in power. Furthermore, the money might not be intended to be channelled to its intended project and sadly, no effort will be made for it to have some positive contribution to the lives of the citizens of Aburiria. From the understanding what this Marching to Heaven is all about, it is for the Ruler only to shuttle to and from Heaven. So it is about the Ruler, and the moment that comes with it from the stages of inception is something that will line the pockets of those in power. So clearly, there is no Marching to Heaven even if the Global Bank were to approve the loan.

In the Clutches of Puppetry

It is evident that Ngũgĩ critiques neocolonialism in his novel. This is done to show that the figure of the Ruler is a form of puppetry in the hands of the Western powers. The postcolony is caught in the clutches of coloniality of Western hegemonic power, and this causes the state to create a rotten regime. Tembo (2011) argues that the narrative of the novel is about what he calls the “rotten state” which could stand for any postcolonial state that is morally corrupt, inept and always looking up to the colonial master to save it. For Tembo, the neocolonial government in *Wizard of the Crow* is steeped in moral corruption and a nauseating stench. It is this condition of wretchedness which is clearly detailed in the forms of lives assumed to be lived in Aburĩria.

The Ruler is swallowed in the structured coloniality of power so that he is not democratic; he is in need of being civilised from his barbarism as a dictator and to embrace democracy. The notion of democracy which is meant to be the antidote to the postcolony is itself a problem if it is not situated in relation to the asymmetrical power dynamics of the global order. Outa (2001: 352) captures the coloniality of power when he suggests that “the brute force of colonial power itself needs elements of native power to express itself”.

The power of the Ruler is always dictated to externally both implicitly and explicitly. As Spencer (2012: 148) notes, “Africa has remained prey to the interference of external powers intent on perpetuating its subordination and therefore on nurturing pliant and authoritarian regimes”. It is still clear that Aburĩria is a colony and the Ruler the subject that rules the colony on behalf of the colonial empire. That is why also the existence of the Ruler is largely dependent on having to be the puppet of the colonial empire. So then, the Ruler and his regime are intermediaries of the colonial empire and this justifies coloniality. The power of the Ruler extends to and is limited to Aburĩria only, and to the defenceless population. The Ruler was humiliated in Washington by begging for the loan for the Marching to Heaven project in front of his ministers, and this is something which he expected an apology for since being humiliated is something foreign to him, a crime punishable by death, but only in the confines of Aburĩria – his fiefdom.

The Ruler would have preferred that the apology be delivered in front of his ministers. The imminent apology would ameliorate the humiliation he had suffered in America before them. But still his face lit up because the ministers would now see that his relationship with America was still close enough to warrant a message that could only be delivered to him privately by a special emissary of the most powerful presidency of the world.

(Ngũgĩ 2006: 581)

It needs to be noted that the Ruler is ruled by the coloniality of power, the global regime which he is accountable to. With reference to Paul Biya, the long-standing president of Cameroon and in resemblance to the Ruler, Mbembe gives the following account:

It is to that power that he has, in fact to account. It is also to that power that he is obliged for what he needs to get by. Thus, one fine morning, he is to be found on foreign soil, hand outstretched, begging for alms. But like other commodities, alms have a price. And the autocrat pays it in several ways.

(Mbembe 2001: 163)

It is in this global regime that the Ruler can even betray the aspirations of the country, and can even receive directives as to what to do and what not to do. The voice of the people from Aburīria does not matter. Coloniality expresses the form of power which disciplines the ruler, whether in diplomatic or crude terms, because this power does not have regard to the stature of the Ruler as ruler. It is clear that the Special Envoy from Washington did not see the might of the Ruler. The special envoy says to the Ruler, “So I have been sent to urge you to start thinking about turning your country into a democracy” (Ngũgĩ 2006: 580). It is this message that gives the Ruler the impression that he is not fit to rule and is impotent.

If the envoy had been a citizen of Aburīria, he would have faced a firing squad on the spot. The Ruler understood only too well what they were telling him: that he was senile and no longer fit to govern (Ngũgĩ i 2006: 582). This is just the imagination of the Ruler and something which is an impossible dream to dare to touch the sovereign subject, more powerful than him since this is the subject of the empire. The subjects of the empire do not have the same standing as those who are citizens of Aburīria, whom he can let live or die at his own will. Also, the position of the envoy is lower than that of the Ruler, but then, the envoy is more powerful than the Ruler by the mere fact of being an American – the messenger and representative from Washington.

In the face of coloniality, dictators are treated like children; nothing makes them distinct from the manner in which colonial practices take place. The fiefdom of Kenya where the Ruler claims power in excess and execute it as if he were in the so-called “international political scene” is subordinated to international interests of powerful countries. It is the very same America which installed the Ruler in power and he is accountable to it. He has to further the interests of America. So this means the Ruler is not what he is, he is, as Mbembe (2001) notes, a thing. The existence of the dictator needs to be understood within the matrices of global power, something which *Wizard of the Crow* deals with head-on. This shows that African leaders are complicit in the oppression of their own people, and they often work against the aspirations of their citizens. The Ruler is typically a tool in the hands of

the foreign powers which are informed by their own self-interests which are detrimental to the whole liberation the citizens of Aburĩria aspire to.

The Conclusion of Some Sort

The setting of *Wizard of the Crow* is in the postcolony. It is in this setting that the liminal space of the real and the unreal becomes central in affirming the positionality of the metaphor. It is in this positionality that the instigation of violence is normalised, and this can be traced from the manner in which the dramaturgy of power is performed in order to affirm subjection. No matter how the Ruler intensified his oppressive machinery, including the functionaries of this power through his ministers and also their protégés in assisting him, there were always ruptures of resistance and spaces of subversion. The discourse of the rumour as a form of political resistance and also as a discursive practice affirms the power of the citizens of Aburĩria in exposing the scandalous constitutive nature of power.

Even in the excessive means through which power is performed, and also its forms of disciplining those who are labelled as enemies (perceived or real), the power of the Ruler is not omnipotent as it expresses itself. The very affirmation of the potency of the power of the Ruler also affirms impotency. To be sure, the very form of this affirmation of instilling fear in the citizens of Aburĩria is the very fear that the Ruler has, and his being worse than being in power is only his means of existence. What is clear from *Wizard of the Crow* is that the world of the oppressor is the world of the oppressed. Both assume the same space and are proximate to each other, and of necessity the oppressor erects boundaries to maintain this binary line which is embedded in proliferation of phobias. It is of interest that the power of the Ruler is not complete, and the way he exaggerates his power is by disproportionately applying it to Aburĩria and he on the other hand being the puppet of the colonial empire. The image through which violence is foundational and constitutive in the postcolony is central. For whatever forms it takes, more so as practised towards citizens as means of disciplinarity, its form and character are captured well and accounted for if understood in the entanglement of the metaphor – the very liminal space of the real and the unreal. The political in the literary and the literary in the political is what *Wizard of the Crow* is all about. It is the ways in which the political critiques the imagination to avoid decadence.

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Tendayi Sithole

University of South Africa
sitholet@unisa.ac.za