THE TENSION BETWEEN MODERNITY AND AFRICAN TRADITIONAL CULTURAL ASPECTS IN OLE KULET'S BLOSSOMS OF THE SAVANNAH AND NGUGI WA THIONGO'S WIZARD OF THE CROW

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ABSTRACT

This study is set out to discuss the plight of traditional culture in the contemporary society in the context of Ole Kulet's *Blossoms of the Savannah* and Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Wizard of the Crow*. The statement of the problem is real in that it investigates the tension between modernity and the cultural aspects such as religion, social, political, economic and educational aspects in society through the texts. The study also evaluates language use in various aspects of culture. As well, the study analyses how characters in the two texts present the cultural aspect. This study is guided by Post-colonial theory and Orality theory. Post-colonial theory is applied in the study through the tensions, uncertainties and cultural conflicts among the Masaai community brought about by the encroachment of the white man's education and cultures in the *Blossoms of the Savannah* by Kulet. Likewise, Ngugi in his text *Wizard of the Crow* has used this theory to awaken the masses to realize the circumstances they live in and recommends serious resistance measures against the enemies of the people. The theory of Orality has been used by Ngugi in his texts whereby the narrative of Aburiria's decadence comes to the reader through the eyes, ears and thoughts of Kamiti, Nyawira and Constable Arigaigai. This theory as well manifests itself in Kulet's writing through the characters; Mama Milanoi, Joseph Parmuat, Resian and Taiyo. It's found out that these characters at one point have a story to share directly with the audience. For instance, Joseph Parmuat tells Resian and Taiyo a story on what led to FGM. Kulet in his novel brings to the fore Ole Kaelo's family which has lived in Nakuru for quite some time, when Ole Kaelo is retrenched, the family moves back to Nasila and the experience a culture shock. That Ole Kaelo is referred to as a mono-eyed giant walking on the legs of a straw because he has one wife. On his part, Ole Kaelo is alienated that he calls the clan elders megalomaniacs trapped in archaic traditions that would better be buried and forgotten. Ngugi wa Thiongo also expresses cultural deviation through the characters such as the Ruler and his Ministers. Through the Ruler, traditional systems of governance have been discarded as we no longer have them in place but instead western form of governance has been embraced. The Ruler has taken power with greed and his Ministers consider him as a god. This study is based on a qualitative analysis method. This was done through intensive reading of the selected primary texts *Wizard of the Crow* and *Blossoms of the Savannah*. Secondary data for the study was sourced from relevant books, journals, essays and internet. Findings from this study will provide useful information about cultural diversity. It will act as an eye opener for the revival and appreciation of traditional culture even as we embrace the western culture. It will provide referential material and theoretical approach for cultural diversity for researchers. Teachers and students in schools will find the work valuable in promotion and preservation of culture.

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Literature is the mirror of society and whether writers reflect on their culture on not, scholarship should prove it.

Currently European countries such as Denmark, Norway, Britain, Sweden, Ireland, Netherlands, Belgium and Spain still practice the historical monarchy system of governance.

Swaziland is one of an African country that is governed by traditional monarchy. After independence in 1968 king Sobhuza took over from the British colony.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Given the fact that culture was a rope that bound African traditional life, and that this cultural aspects gave African people an identity are deteriorating,there was therefore a serious need for this venture to create awareness of the critical issue of cultural degradation.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study was to investigate the unfortunate state of traditional culture in the contemporary African Society. Specific objectives were:

i.   To investigate the tension between traditional religious aspects and modern religious aspects in Ole Kulet's *Blossoms of the Savannah* and Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Wizard of the Crow*.

ii. To examine the conflicting tendencies between traditional political aspects and modern political aspects in Ole Kulet's *Blossoms of the Savannah* and Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Wizard of the Crow*.

iii. To evaluate the tension between traditional social aspects and modern social aspects in Ole Kulet's *Blossoms of the Savannah* and Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Wizard of the Crow*.

iv. To assess the tension between traditional educational aspects and modern educational aspects in Ole Kulet's *Blossoms of the Savannah* and Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Wizard of the Crow*.

v.   To weigh the tension between traditional economic aspects and modern economic aspects in Ole Kulet's *Blossoms of the Savannah* and Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Wizard of the Crow*.

1.4 Justification of the Study

The study was based on contemporary African culture. The choice of this study was made because there was a cultural study gap which requires to be bridged.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study are expected to be of great benefit to historians, philosophers and anthropologists. This will ensure a contribution to their scholarships in terms of topic, methodology and theoretical framework in many ways.

1.6 Scope and Limitations

The study was limited to the two selected texts: one from Ngugi's collection; *Wizard of the Crow* and another one from Kulet's collection; *Blossoms of the Savannah*.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Literature Review
2.1.1 Introduction
This section gives critical commentaries on Kulet's and Ngugi's creative works by putting checks on the tension between traditional cultural values and modernity.

2.1.2 Critical Literature on Kulet's and Ngugi's Fiction on the Tension between Modernity and Traditional Cultural Aspects

Mbugua (2004) in his MA Dissertation explores issues of cultural identity in Kulet's *Is It Possible*? And *To Become a Man.*

Korts (1985) in his article *Literary Criticism as a social philippic and personal exorcism*: *Ngugi wa Thiongo's Writings.* Korts asserts that Ngugi responds to certain social conditions which cry for attention.

Updike (2006) in his article *The Newyoker* examines Ngugi's work by providing a detailed analysis of the dehumanizing effect of colonization.

Ngugi's insistence on using his mother tongue as the principal medium of his writing is not simply a reaction against Anglicization; it is more about resurrecting the African soul from centuries of slavery and colonialism.

2.2 Conclusion
It is evident that there is a cultural crisis in the modern society which needs to be addressed by this study.

2.3 Theoretical Framework
This study engaged in Post-colonial and Orality theories to investigate the plight of traditional African culture in contemporary African society.

2.3.1 Post-colonial theory
The term post colonialism can be defined as a state of affairs representing the aftermath of western colonialism; the term can also be used to describe the concurrent project to reclaim and rethink the history and agency of people subordinated under various forms of imperialism.

Colonialism is viewed as a powerful and destructive historical force that shapes not only political systems of the countries affected but it may alter the identities of the colonized and the colonizers. This theory also states that successful colonialism depends on a process of 'othering' the colonized people.

Another assumption of this theory is that the aim of post-colonial study is to restore the history, the dignity, validity and cultural contributions to those whose experiences have been brought to view.

Karem (2001) in his works *On the Advantages and Disadvantages of Pan American Study*, points out on the strength of this theory by arguing that the theory forms a composite but

powerful intellectual and critical movements which renews the perception and understanding of modern history, cultural studies, literary criticisms and political economy.

2.3.2 Orality Theory

Orality theory can be defined as the use of speech as a means of communication. The term Orality has been used in a variety of ways, often to describe, in a generalized version the structures of consciousness found in culture that do not employ the technologies of writing.

According to Ong, oral thoughts and expressions are additive.

Alexander (1931) in his study *Comparing Oral and Literate Subjects in Remote Areas*, shows in his study that oral cultures are situational rather than abstract.

Oral cultures are emphatic and participatory and therefore the most reliable and trusted technique for learning is to share a close emphatic communal association.

Commenting on the strength of this theory, Luhan (1962) in his work, *The Gatenberg Galaxy,* discusses the work by Ong regarding print picture by saying that Orality gave us the stepping stone that allowed us to get where we are today, it was a necessity for growth and civilization. However, the weakness of this theory can be that oral societies can mount strong resistance to literate technologies, writing is inhuman, it attempts to turn living thoughts living in human mind into mere objects in the physical world.

CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Methodology

This study was based on a qualitative research methodology using textual analysis as its primary approach. Primary data for the study was gathered through a close reading of the selected primary texts: *Blossoms of the Savannah* and *Wizard of the Crow.*

Secondary data for the study was sourced from relevant books, scholarly journals, essays, dissertations and newspaper articles from both print and the internet.

3.2 Research Locale

The research was done in Kenya by looking at the plight of culture in the contemporary setting in the two selected texts; *Blossoms of the Savannah* by Ole Kulet *and Wizard of the Crow* by Ngugi.

3.3 Sampling and Sampling Techniques

The two primary texts were chosen to form a sample from the nine texts which Kulet has authored and twenty-one texts that Ngugi has authored.

3.4 Data Analysis

At the end of this study, a lot of information had been gathered from both primary and secondary sources. Library research materials were subjected to accurate and careful content analysis for validity by reading the data repeatedly for proper judgment.

3.5 Ethical Considerations of the Study

In this research, ethical duty of confidentiality was ensured by protecting the information from unauthorized access, use, disclosure, modification, loss or theft. This was done by ensuring there was physical safeguard, administrative safeguard by enforcing rules about who has to access the information about participants, technical safeguard including use of computer passwords and antivirus software.

To avoid plagiarism, references to certain publications were made every time ideas of other writers are included.

CHAPTER FOUR
DATA PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

"I've got to where I am in life not because of something I brought to the world but through something I found- the wealth of African culture"

-Hugh Masekhela
(South African trumpeter 1937-2008)

4.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to examine the conceptualization of traditional culture in Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow* and Kulet's *Blossoms of the Savannah*. The chapter aims to address critical questions relating to representation of African traditional culture in literature.

4.2 Traditional Aspects as Presented in the Modern Setting in Ole Kulet's *Blossoms of the Savannah* and Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Wizard of the Crow*

4.2.1 Religious Aspect

Historically, the African nations with their many tribal communities had their own religion. Traditional African religions were less concerned with faith and doctrines. They were much more concerned with rituals and ceremonies which provided a strong linkage between the life of humans and the world of ancestors. (Olupona 2014).

Due to the presence and influence of Christian missionaries in the 19th century, the Kenyan and African religion as a whole is fading away. In Kulet's *Blossoms of the Savannah*, traditional religion is portrayed to have waned. It is expected that since the text is based on the Maasai setting, we should be getting more reference on Maasai spiritual god who was historically believed to be the Maasai god. Instead, Mama Milanoi calls on the good Lord to give them journey mercies as they are about to set out from Nakuru to Nasila, "Let's pray that the good Lord gives us journey mercies" (06). This is an indication that the Maasai land has been engulfed by Christianity as the people have subscribed to it.

4.2.2 Political Aspect

During historical times, African countries had their own systems of governance. Leadership then was considered a very important institution because it dictated and influenced all the activities that took place. Therefore, traditional African societies attached great value to good leadership. At whatever level, whether at the council of elders or chiefs, good qualities were paramount (Moja Lefa 2018).

Traditional form of justice is applied in the *Blossoms of the Savannah* when the two vagabonds Ntara Muyo and Lante attack Resian and Taiyo with the aim of raping and injuring them. Consequently, the council of elders on their meeting, deliberate upon the case and their verdict is that the two boys pay Resian and Taiyo two heifers each, while Mama Milanoi's nephew Ntara Muyo is fined an extra heifer to cover the shame that he has occasioned by accosting his own sister. In addition, Ntara Muyo is banished from ever stepping into Ole Kaelo's home or having

anything to do with his daughters for the rest of his life. When that is done, peace returns in earnest (164, 165). However, Mama Milanoi and her two daughters Resian and Taiyo feel like the punishment for the two vagabonds is not enough. Mama Milanoi feels that the rascal should have been stoned to death while her two daughters feel that the vagabonds should be judged in a court of law (166, 167). Traditional justice system is threatened in this case because the offended oppose it and feel that it is inadequate.

4.2.3 Social aspect

Africans like any other people in the world, had a set of values which they considered worthwhile. The African communities lived by social norms, values, thoughts, concepts and ideas that guided them in their day to day life. (Sone 2018).

This is contrary to what we see nowadays as it is evident in Kulet's *Blossoms of the Savannah*. We are being introduced to communal life and brotherhood that has been practiced in the Nasilian society for decades. But according to Taiyo and Resian, they consider it a violation of their privacy when during the mornings, a horde of men and women come knocking at their door step. On enquiring what their mission is, they discover that the men and women have not come for any substantial business but to share breakfast with them. The girls having moved from Nakuru town are shocked about this as they consider it an intrusion. This shows that traditional communal aspect is oscillating due to modern influence.

4.2.4 Educational Aspect

In traditional indigenous African education, the pursuit for excellency and quality was always an important aim. Informal and vocational training constituted the core of indigenous education in African nations (Omolewa 2007). However, what we experience when reading *Blossoms of the Savannah* by Kulet is different. This is because traditional indigenous education is withering as we see Taiyo and Resian who have completed their secondary education while in Nakuru town. The girls have acquired formal education and they still intend to join university, giving them a foreign identity. At their age they are not aware of the Maasai indigenous education, the ancestry of their father. When the girls arrived in Nasila, their father bestows Joseph Parmuat a task to teach the girls basic cultural values that harmonized the lives of nasila people. According to Ole Kaelo, he stresses that in addition to what the girls have learnt in school, it is important that they also learn the traditions of Nasila culture. He adds that although he considers the girls intelligent, there is a need for them to learn the Nasilian values (70).The girls hold divergent views.

4.2.5 Economic Aspect

Economic values of traditional African society were marked by cooperation. The tradional economic aspect mainly rested on fishing and farming. Before the onset of modern day currency, Kenyans traded and exchanged goods and services through barter trade. (Zeleza 1991).

Kulet's text *Blossoms of the Savannah* presents a capitalist society. We encounter Ole Kaelo who lives in Nakuru with his family. He has worked at Agribix Limited for twenty two years and it has been the sole source of his family's livelihood. Agribix has provided them with financial support. Resian and Taiyo have been able to go to school because of the earnings from the company.

With the change of economy from traditional to modern, a character like Oloisudori cannot get satisfied with the wealth he has.

4.3 Conclusion

In this chapter we have shown through the analysis of traditional aspects in the modern setting, and the alarming loss of our African traditional culture accentuated by westernization.

CHAPTER FIVE
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

This study was pithy and conscious on the contemporary study of the plight of African cultural practices in the modern setting in Ole Kulet's *Blossoms of the Savannah* and Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow*. The culture that was implanted by Europeans during colonial period continues to impact the present day society.

5.2 Conclusions

This section endeavored to discuss cultural conflicts as portrayed in Ole Kulet's *Blossoms of the Savannah* and Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow*. The point of departure of the study was the need to highlight the various aspects from which the world has perceived traditional culture. Various aspects such as education, economic, religion, social and political were the prime concern.

5.3 Recommendations

In order to ensure that African nations' culture is preserved and continuity of the practices enhanced, serious teaching of traditional culture should be considered in schools and colleges.

The government should institute cultural policies that will recognize the validity of indigenous culture that was debased under British colonialism.

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