

The Journey Motif and Social Vision in Margaret Ogola's *The River and the Source* and *I Swear by Apollo*

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Abstract

*This study is a stylistic appraisal of Margaret Ogola's **The River and The Source and I Swear by Apollo**. The study undertook a critical examination of Margaret Ogola's social vision for Kenyans, irrespective of gender in her two novels. The study sought to investigate the role and function of the journey motif as encompassed in the text. Specifically, the study sought to investigate the utilization of the journey motif as a narrative technique; the role of the journey motif in enriching the literary meanings; and the role of these journeys on the intellectual growth of the mind of the character in **The River and the Source and I Swear by Apollo**. The study was predicated upon the assumption that journeying, as a social phenomenon, has provided a creative resource for the novelist in fulfilling the role of prose as a persuasive piece of art for sensitisation of change of attitude for a better society. This analysis was significant since it dealt with the author's social visions as the texts were written at a time when Kenya experienced a lot of social changes. The study was anchored on stylistic theory as espoused by Jakobson. It employed the descriptive research design. Using systematic content analysis, an in-depth analysis of both primary and secondary data was obtained during research in line with the objectives of this study. Primary data was collected from primary texts and secondary data obtained from library research which was conducted on scholarly works that have critiqued Margaret Ogola's texts. In addition, any available commentaries on Margaret Ogola's works were sought from journals and review papers. The study would contribute to the existing literature and literary scholars by exploring the area of journeying. This study would be of interest to literary scholars as well as educators to whom it would be of great significance. The study established that the journey was first elicited in the choice of different historical periods which represent different generations and these generations in turn represent journeys made by women of different generations that capture the transformations that take place in the society. In enrichment of literary meaning, Margaret Ogola has extensively engaged the stylistic device of imagery in the two texts. In the intellectual growth of the mind of the character in the journey motif and social vision, Ogola portrays the journey motif, as fundamental in giving the text a special meaning in that the successful completion of the journeys brings the female protagonists the attainment of liberation from oppression and this freedom enables them to form a new identity in the free spaces that have always been their quest- the social vision. In conclusion, Ogola has succeeded as a creative writer in her choice of journeying motif as a narrative technique. Its use as a narrative technique and in enriching literal meanings was significant in eliciting the social vision. However, the study notes that the use of journey motif in growth of the mind of the character did not clearly elicit the social vision.*

Keywords: Epiphany female protagonists, journey motif, narrative techniques social vision' stylistics.

Introduction

Literature is a product of the writer's artistic imagination. The writer accurately observes the happenings in his or her society, both contemporary and historical, and communicates to the readers through the use of vivid imagination and creative use of language. When authors write and put their ideas into words, they have many choices to make, which include words,

sounds, logic, and sentence structures (Reagan, Lewis, Dilan, Danforth, Dodds, 2016). Writers have adapted and fashioned structural strategies purposely to execute an intended meaning (Gichovi, 2016: 2).

In literature, the journey is a powerful symbol often used to represent a character's adventure leading to an epiphany, or some sort of self-realization. The idea of journey is transferred to the readers who do not become a physical part of it by the visual imagery employed by the author. It is not limited to the mere physical transference from one place to another, rather a rejuvenating experience for the psyche (Odhiambo, 2006). Thus, a creative writer can bring on board the journey motif with a range of visions. In 'Rebeka Njau's Social Vision' by John Mugubi (2003), vision is defined as:

A mental picture that a writer conjures through his perception of reality. It alludes to noble or excellent ideas about the future which may be attainable but some of which may require gallant and excruciating struggles to achieve (Mugubi, 2003: 11).

This definition ideally concurs with that of Soyinka (1975), Masheti (1989) and the one adopted in this study. It however goes a point further since it links the struggle to the achievement of the desired ideals envisaged through the journey motif. This means that an element of sacrifice is required by a society that desires a positive social vision.

In its analysis, Genga Idowu's fiction defined social vision as the insight of a desirable future society that emanates from a comprehension of the existing social realities (Masheti, 1989). It is positive in nature, as it is a yearning for humane social relationships that are the mainstay of a healthy society (Wahove, 2014). Social vision concerns itself with the future. It seeks to change social reality. Soyinka (1975) believes that the extension of reality into the realm of social vision is one of the fundamental functions of literature, thus making this study of the social vision of Margaret Ogola's fiction a worthwhile academic undertaking.

According to Sheme (2013: 175), journey has always been an important theme in literature and is one of the most widely used elements in American literature. This study was based on the assertion that journey motif, which is a deliberate and conscious effort by the author to achieve certain desired effects in a piece of work, is paramount in the delivery of the author's ideological perspectives. Clark (2014: 755) asserts that for an element to be considered a motif, it must have something about it that will make people remember and repeat it. It must be more than commonplace. The creative writer therefore has room to manoeuvre and manipulate an existing motif to develop the plot, characters and themes.

Mariusz (2008) noted that the journey motif appears not only in Greek works but also in Bible stories. The stories of Jesus and Moses are cited examples. Further, he observes that in *Odyssey*, the hero sets off from his home in Ithaka, Troy, to take part in the Trojan War and returns after many adventures, a man enriched by experiences; a journey speaking of change in the hero's consciousness.

The journey motif is common in African oral narratives, so is the case with many African language texts based on oral literature. In spite of competition from other forms, literature involving heroes and adventures remains popular. In Kenya, Margaret Ogola's *The River and the Source* and *I Swear by Apollo* novels are considered to represent heroic adventures of their characters. Indeed, Ogola's journeys back and forth across African societies help her to create a moral picture of present-day society. At the same time, these journeys allow the writer to seek for reasons and solutions in the past as much as in the present (Gichovi, 2016).

Writers like Ogola have employed their literary gifts not only to inspire and educate, but also to entertain their audience. Ogola's presentation of gender issues in the Luo society in *The River and the Source* and *I Swear by Apollo* is her unique way of ordering experience and bringing about change in society. In the two novels, she presents the most pressing issues of many men and women in Africa and the Luo community in particular. Women's reaction to the society's gender roles is another reason for their rejection of the prescribed roles. They see the society's distribution of gender roles as oppressive to them and since the very society does not offer forum to discuss this, these women use symbolism, satire and irony to bring out futility of the society's failure to bring out these anomalies that affect empowerment of both men and women in their daily lives.

Considerable research has been done on the appropriation of the journey motif as a narrative technique in creating literary meaning. Although scholars from diverse backgrounds have examined the journey motif, they have not conclusively identified its influence on the social vision. Thus there was a gap in the area of social vision in literary research, a point of departure in this study. This study examined how social change affected the socio-cultural perception of women in Ogola's fictional world. The woman character depicted in Ogola's fiction is shown to be going through considerable changes over time that begins right from the pre-colonial through the colonial and to the post-colonial times. This study, therefore, sought to investigate the extent to which the journey motif has influenced the images and status of women in society. It examines how the physical movements and relocations, emotional maturity and psychological re-awakening enhance the social vision in Margaret Ogola's two novels thus giving a spotlight on her social vision towards the emancipation of women in Kenya.

The aim of this study was to establish how the journey motif is artistically captured to elicit the social vision in the two novels. Specifically, the study sought to investigate whether the utilization of the journey motif as a narrative technique elicits the social vision in the texts; whether enrichment of the literary meanings in journey motif elicits the social vision in the texts; and whether the intellectual growth of the mind of the character in the journey motif elicits the social vision in the two texts.

Material and Method

This study employed the descriptive research design. Using systematic content analysis, an in-depth analysis of both primary and secondary data was obtained. It involved textual study whereby data was collected from the selected texts for critical analysis as guided by the objectives. Primary data was collected from primary texts and secondary data obtained from library research which was conducted on scholarly works that have critiqued Margaret Ogola's texts. In addition, any available commentaries on Margaret Ogola's works were sought from journals and review papers.

Qualitative research design entirely relies on descriptions for data analysis and presentation. It involves textual study whereby data is collected from the selected texts for critical analysis (Franklin, 2012). This is so because descriptive research aims to gather information that illuminates relationships, patterns and in this case, links the social vision to the journey motif utilization, enrichment and character growth in Ogola's writing. Systematic content analysis was useful in describing the various manifestations of the journey motif in the two texts.

Stylistic Approach as Theory

Stylistics approach by Jakobson (1960) was used as the theoretical framework. According to Wales (2001: 371) and Muia (2013: 8), style is the perceived distinctive manner of expression in writing or speaking, just as there is a perceived manner of doing things, like

playing squash or painting. Wales notes that there are different styles in different situations. Style variation occurs not only from situation to situation but according to medium and degree of formality; what is also sometimes called style shifting (Muia, 2013). According to Ngara (1982: 22-29), by emphasizing the interdependence of content and form, stylistic criticism thereby recognizes that sociological and aesthetic issues are of equal importance in literary study.

This study therefore intends to examine the texts for the presence of the journey motif as a narrative technique that enables the author to present her social vision. It evaluates the use of stylistic tenets of choice, situation, conformity and deviation in bringing out a social vision. Stylistics as a conceptual discipline may attempt to establish principles capable of explaining particular choices made by individuals and social groups in their use of language, such as in the literary production and reception of genre, the study of folk art, in the study of spoken dialects and registers, and can be applied to areas such as discourse analysis as well as literary criticism (Reagan et al., 2016).

The study of different styles is the preoccupation of stylistics. Stylistics can be applied to a wide range of discipline. Various authors have attempted to define stylistics. Ogum, (2002: 1) defined stylistics as the study of style. One of such areas is literature. Literary stylistics offers a meeting point between the science of human language (linguistics) and the aesthetic use of language to create as well as imitate experiences (literature). Ogum viewed stylistics as a meeting point between linguistics and literature. He also posited that stylistics is a multi-disciplinary concept which engages itself with the deconstruction of style in various fields of scholarship and stylistic enquiry.

According to Ullmann (1957: 23), the tasks of stylistics are primarily descriptive. This statement suggests that stylistics is one of the descriptive ways which can never become a fully comprehensive method of literary criticism. Furthermore, any study which deals with linguistic structures in a work of art evaluation should not be set aside. So, any linguistic study of literature already implies appreciation of art and its beauty.

The Journey Motif Concept and the Author's Social Vision

The journey motif, where a story's protagonist must complete a quest in order to satisfy honour, is one of the oldest in storytelling. Usually, there is a prize or reward promised, but often the true reward is different and more valuable, as the protagonist both proves and humbles himself or herself. Mariusz's (2008) study of the Greek motif makes a fundamental contribution to this study as it locates the origin of the journey motif. The style is as old as humankind citing examples from the Bible and classical Greek Literature. Zhang (2008) in his study employs the journey motif to critique a Chinese novel. Macharia (1988) brings to the fore how Ayi Kwei Armah uses the journey motif to seek solutions for his country in the past. By bringing to light the social concerns that necessitate Armah's writing, the journeying motif plays the added part of illuminator.

Macharia (1988) takes into cognizance the purpose of this fiction. He is first and foremost involved in a quest for black culture. He is trying to change the harmful effects of imperialism which have divested Africans of their human dignity and cheated them out of their heritage. Here, Armah is involved in the massive task of racial retrieval. Macharia's study is relevant to the present study in as far as it recognizes the journey motif as a major form in African literature. This study was bent on bringing to the fore how Margaret Ogola has used the journey motif to present her social vision for her society.

Social vision is concerned with the ways novelists deal with issues of society and politics. It is an attempt to restore the political dimensions to the reading of both 'classic' and contemporary authors and explore the formal strategies evolved by writers committed to a vision of society. The social role of literary criticism, as institutionalized by the educational

apparatus, has been to absorb literary works into the dominant ideology; to reconstitute by 'interpretation' the components of these works into forms expressing, or not disturbing the dominant ideology; and to exclude from the accepted canon of 'texts' those works that cannot be so absorbed (Mugubi, 2003).

According to Agoro (2011), social psychologists too have begun to recognize the importance of understanding how vision shapes social perception. More of the human brain is dedicated to visual processes than to all other sensory modalities combined. This anatomical fact reflects the central importance vision plays in both establishing and navigating us through our social worlds. Indeed, the visual system is particularly attuned to social cues in the environment. As a result, we are able to accurately 'see' others' mental and emotional states, understanding their desires and intentions and even detecting stable personality traits.

Wahove (2014) opines that in these periods of rapid social changes and social upheavals occasioned by technological advancement and dwindling economic fortunes of the people in a globalized economy, society is witnessing a re-evaluation of previously held traditional values. The shrinking social order occasioned by advances in technology and communication has made the world into what is now known as a 'global village'. Social criticism by literary artist has therefore appeared to be only a natural response to this social order as a means of examining man's relationship to man within society.

Utilization of the Journey Motif as a Narrative Technique

The journey is studied either as a physical displacement or psychological. Margaret Ogola has re-constructed a new narrative space for the representation of women by suppressing these patriarchal conventions. She introduces female characters who are subjects and not objects of the narration, thereby challenging the society's gender stereotypes. Zhang (2003) employs the journey motif to critique the Chinese novel. Kunene (1991) states that the journey motif is a common feature in African oral tales. He says that the journey as an analyzable feature of the epic has not been explored to its fullest extent (Kunene, 1991: 1). He asserts that in these epics, the hero ventures forth to rediscover his identity that the adversary has usurped.

Locally, Atsango (2006) investigates the journey motif as an elementary unit that accounts for the structural and thematic coherence in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* and Margaret Ogola's *The River and the Source*. She notes that in novels, they seek to explain the historical origin of alleviation of women from mainstream of equal participation with their male counterparts in the society. Wangari (2006) analyzes how the journey motif and narrative techniques depict themes in Edward Brathwaite's *arrivants*. She asserts that the journey is done to and fro without the arrivants settling in any of their destinations. In Africa, the arrivants faced many problems. They had hoped to arrive and fit naturally like hook and buckle but it does not come to pass (Wangari 2016; 59). They have been away from Africa over three hundred years. Every human being is susceptible to change, so are the arrivants. These studies have made a positive contribution in character development and transformation through the journey motif although they differ from the current study on stylistic approach in the use of narrative techniques to elicit social change.

Enrichment of Journey Motif on Literary Meanings

The journey in itself is not a motif until it is repeated to stand out. The journey in literature implies movement from one point to another. Thompson (1966) states that for an element to be considered a motif, it must have something about it that will make people remember and repeat it. It must be more than commonplace (p. 755). The literary writer can therefore manipulate an existing motif to develop the plot, characters and themes. In Africa, Nadifa Mohamed and Safi Abdi are novelists who have widely employed the journey motif to

explore heroic adventures of their prime movers. Their novels manifest stunning merit in the journey motif. Simatei (2001) indicated that Ogola's narrative breaks from the common stereotypes of the African male fictional writings such as Achebe's and wa Thiong'o's whose narratives are male-centred and give women passive roles. Stratton (1994) observes the following:

In characterizing African literature, critiques have ignored gender as a social and analytic category. Such categorization operates to exclude women's literary expression as part of African literature. Hence what they define is male literary tradition (Stratton, 1994: 1).

The analysis of Mwangi (2009) reveals that among the main dialogues taking place in the novel is when Chief Odera Gogni informs the Council of Jodongo of his decision to set a huge bride price for Akoko (Mwangi, 2009): 20-21). This dialogue reveals that Chief Kembo is uncompromising. If the chief's love for his daughter was ever in question, it is beyond doubt after he asks for so much from her suitor. How the styles used by Ogola elicit social vision inspired this study. Engaging stylistic theory, the analysis entailed interrogating through the stylistic theory how the journey motif was utilised as a narrative technique to bring out various literary meanings in the text.

Journey Motif and Intellectual Growth of the Mind of the Character

All great literature includes characters that inspire extensive research and debate, and characters are no exception. The unique development of characters over a series of novels gives readers a greater insight into many of the major characters. Oloo (2005) notes that Margaret Ogola portrays women in terms of reconstructing and empowering their agency as a way of initiating change.

Analysts to Ogola's work (Oloo, 2005; Mwangi, 2009) observe that many of her characters are independent-minded women; Akoko and Nyabera in the pre-colonial and colonial periods and Elizabeth, Becky, Veronica and Wandia in the post-colonial era. Akoko is a very hard-working woman who becomes a role model and a catalyst for change in a patriarchal society. The second part of the novel, 'The Art of Giving', narrates how Akoko lodges a complaint with the District Commissioner and reclaims the chieftaincy. Mwangi, (2009) contended that Christianity is depicted as binding different ethnic communities together where they are taught to be one and that they forget their traditional beliefs and move forward in life.

Summary of Findings

In the novels, the journey motif is extensively used and right from the onset, we come across the characters engrossed in one journey or another. These movements, whether they entail characters on arrival or departure from or to some place or space, highly inform their actions, interactions, thoughts and their world view depending on where they are from, where they are at a particular time and where they intend to go. The movements further influence the sequencing of events as the characters endeavour to flee from their place or space of discomfort in order to reach the place or space of comfort. The journeys they embark on are therefore, both spatial and temporal and their undertakings have a symbolic or metaphorical significance in the text. The psychological journey mostly elicited the social vision as it portrayed aspirations of the characters and transformation from traditional to modern life that is better with hope for a better future for coming generations.

The study sought to first establish how utilization of the journey motif as a narrative technique elicited the social vision. The journey was first elicited in the choice of different

historical periods. These historical periods represent different generations and these generations in turn represent journeys made by women of different generations that capture the transformations that take place in the society. Gichovi (2016) suggested that these journeys allowed the writer to seek for reasons and solutions in the past as much as in the present. The journeys by the female protagonists inform the plot development of the novel.

The novels profile the personal histories of four generations of women in a Luo family. The presentation of Akoko the matriarch against a patriarchal tyranny is a relentless effort to ensure the survival of her lineage. This extends through her daughter Nyabera, her granddaughter Elizabeth, to her great granddaughter Veronica. The author chooses physical displacement and psychological transformation. Physical journey is portrayed when Akoko and Nyabera her daughter resolve to abandon their homes in Gem after the death of their husbands and move to the new catholic mission in the far-flung Yimbo. Psychological journey is essentially a journey of the mind through which we see a character's thoughts run in a kind of mental continuum from a naïve state to a more elevated one. In the book *The River and the Source*, characters like Akoko, Nyabera, Elizabeth and Peter have demonstrated change all around. They embraced change and it did not let them down.

In seeking to establish whether enrichment of literary meaning in journey motif elicited social vision in *The River and the Source* and *I Swear by Apollo* novels, Margaret Ogola has extensively engaged the stylistic device of imagery in the two texts. To start with, in *The River and the Source*, she has used a number of similes. After the tragic death of Obura, Nyabera views life as being futile as expressed by the following simile: '...of what use is this life if one could be snuffed out like a poorly lit fire?' (Ogola, 1995: 64-65). Ogola has also employed metaphors to comment on the impact of death in the society. While trying to come to terms on her brother's death, Nyabera wonders, 'Why can't *Were* ...stab the world with lightning...' (Ogola, 1995: 64).

Dialogue is also used in enriching literary meanings in the texts. Among the main dialogues taking place in the novel is when Chief Odera Gogni informs the Council of Jodongo of his decision to set a huge bride price for Akoko (Ogola, 1995: 20-21). Contrast is also used effectively in the novel to clearly bring out character and reveal plot. This is the case with Vera and Becky (Ogola, 1995: 173-174). Ogola emphasizes the contrast between Vera and Becky by stating that they 'arrived within minutes of each other' (Ogola, 1995: 165). Literary stream of consciousness is a device used to render a character's mental process into text. Ogola has employed this technique to enable the reader to explore the inner thoughts of her characters. In *The River and the Source*, Vera is engrossed in her life as a Catholic. After having adhered to all the church rules as a Catholic like attending mass every Sunday, which to her makes her a good Catholic, she later learns that she knows nothing about Catholicism.

In the intellectual growth of the mind of the character in the journey motif and social vision, Ogola portrays the journey motif, as fundamental in giving the text a special meaning. This is because the successful completion of the journeys brings the female protagonists the attainment of liberation from oppression and this freedom enables them to form a new identity in the free spaces that have always been their quest. The female protagonists' enjoyment of emancipation on completion of the journeys is an indicator of a people who are harvesting the fruits of independence having endured the long walk to freedom from traditional subjugation.

The use of the journey motif in the work of Margaret Ogola's *The River and the Source* and *I Swear by Apollo* novels is thus an effective tool that significantly contributes to the blending of the form and content of the text; that accords women a pivotal portrayal in their commitment and fight against oppression; and that mediates elevated statuses for women where they become fulfilled and manage to form their identity. The text does not stop

at retelling the experiences women had during the colonial condition in Kenya: it reflects the past for purposes of championing the transformation that humanity needs to embrace in the different journeys towards liberation from all forms of oppression.

Conclusion

The physical journey was instrumental in making Akoko, the main character, to have a tremendous growth in all the spheres of her life. At the end of the physical journey, she is no longer the same woman we see before she undertakes the travel. Where she was naïve, she is now pretty prudent; where she was relegated, she is now highly elevated; and where she served the low and the mighty, she now serves in honour and dignity. The journey hence enables her to vanquish almost all the mountains that had barricaded her road to self-actualization, self-determination and self-fulfilment in her life.

Importantly, the writer has been able to elicit the social vision through the journey of the river from source (Traditional Akoko) to the mouth (Modern Akoko and family lineage). The journeys show the hurdles of transformation of women in the home and society and how sheer determination can help emancipate women into self-confident and able persons. The psychological and emotional facets of the journey motif were effectively infused in the novels to expose the challenging conditions that women have had to face in their contribution towards bringing positive social in the society. The psychological and emotional facets of the journey motif are instrumental in examining the maturation of the female protagonists as they progress from a point of oppression, vulnerability and naivety to a point of freedom, stability and ability. They therefore significantly supplement the physical facet of the journey motif in tracing the transcendence of women from points of oppression to points of emancipation where they are able to form and enjoy their new identity.

In conclusion, it is imperative to say that Ogola has succeeded as a creative writer in her choice of journeying motif as a narrative technique. Its use as a narrative technique and in enriching literal meanings was significant in eliciting the social vision. However, the study notes that the use of journey motif in growth of the mind of the character did not clearly elicit the social vision.

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