EXPLORING THE LIMINAL IN *MATIGARI*: A CRITIQUE OF NGUGI WA THIONG'O'S AESTHETICS OF RESISTANCE AND REVOLUTION

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Abstract
This article reads both resistance and revolution in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's approach to the concept of liminality in *Matigari* (1990). It detects threshold attributes in Ngugi's onomastic construction. Furthermore, it contends that linguistic abrogation and appropriation, as well as transgenericity and transgressivity in the novel confer a higher hybrid framework to the narrative. As such, the novel nurtures multifarious cultural interstices – idiosyncratic of postcolonial writings. As these liminal spaces intertwine to generate confusion, undecidability, and sense of loss, they question Eurocentric fixity and purported universalism. The irreconcilability of these entangled liminal spaces leads to a societal revolution which, eventually, brings about cultural hybridity and multiculturalism.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, liminality, resistance, revolution, milticulturalism

Résumé
Cet article relève la double notion de résistance et de révolution dans l'approche qu'a Ngugi wa Thiong'o du concept d'espace liminal dans son roman *Matigari* (1990). Il décèle des caractéristiques propres à ce concept dans l'esthétique onomastique de l'auteur dans l'œuvre. De même, il postule que l'abrogation et l'appropriation linguistique, ainsi que la transgénéricité et la transgressivité confèrent une hybridité plus prononcée au récit. Dans cette perspective, l'œuvre abrite une mosaïque d'interstices propres aux études postcoloniales. La confusion, l'indécidabilité et le manque de repère générés par cette liminalité plurielle résistent et défient le fixisme et l'universalisme de l'Eurocentrisme. L'irréconciliabilité de ces espaces multiformes débouche sur une révolution sociétale qui, en définitive, engendre l'hybridité culturelle et le multiculturalisme.

Mots-clés : Postcolonialisme, liminalité, résistance, révolution, multicutralisme

Introduction

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Matigari* exemplifies African writers' commitment to restore to "Africans a sense of their wholeness, of their validity as 'autonomous African subject[s]'" (Mbembe, 2001, as cited in Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2007, p.176), citing). First published in Gikuyu with passages in Kiswahili[*], this Afro-centric novel proves an alternative to the Eurocentric construct of Africans and African narratives (Araùjo & Maeso, 2012). Although written in English, the version in use in this study operates a form of 'patricide' as it challenges the condescending stand of Western languages. There ensues an overt deconstructive momentum that spreads through the characters, the language, space and time, and the story. As these aspects of the novel (Foster, 1974)

intertwine to confer an overall local flavor to the narrative, they imprint new forms and meanings to British imperial language, thus raising the notion of liminality.

Deriving from the Latin "limen", meaning "threshold", the term "liminal" was first used in psychology in 1884 (Chakraborty, 2016, p.145). This word was later used in 1909 by ethno-anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep to "refer to a state of 'in between-ness' during cultural and religious rites" (Sharma, 2013, pp.109-110). Gennep (1960) expands the meaning of this term assuming that 'the passage from one social position to another is identified with a *territorial passage*, such as the entrance into a village or a house, the movement from one room to another, or the crossing of streets or squares' (Sharma, 2013, p.110). Socioanthropologist Victor Turner, who revived this term and coined "liminality" from Gennep's notion, reads the liminal as "the condition of being 'betwixt and between', or in transition" (Taylor, 1998, pp.1-2).

Taylor (1998) supports that "like structuralism, liminality is borrowed from the field of social sciences" (p.12). Unable to date the beginning of its application to literature, Taylor cites Langdon who speculates on a long timeframe – "during the last hundred years" (p.23). Taylor nevertheless advances that "liminality, a twentieth-century term that originated from socioanthropology, has more recently become useful in the study of literature" (p.1). She describes "liminal and liminality" to be "interpretive strategies in readings of various literary texts" (pp.23-24).

The application of these approaches to *Matigari* is conducted through a postcolonial framework. According to Ashcroft et al (2007), 'postcolonialism' or 'post-colonialism' derives essentially from the works of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak (p.168). Drawing especially from the poststructuralist theory of colonial discourse exposed by Foucault, Althusser, Lacan and Derrida, postcolonialism concerns itself with studying "the material effects of the historical condition of colonialism" and "the controlling power of representation in colonized societies" (Ashcroft et al., 2007, p.168). Ashcroft et al. (2007) explain their contention enlarging postcolonial scope to embrace:

> European territorial conquests, the various institutions of European colonialisms, the discursive operations of empire, the subtleties of subject construction in colonial discourse and the resistance of those subjects, and, most importantly perhaps, the differing responses to such incursions and their contemporary colonial legacies in both pre- and post-independent nations and communities. (p.170)

Moor-Gilbert (1997) attempts a simplification of this complex and multifaceted object, underscoring the mode of analysis and the temporal connotation raised by the prefix "post". He subsequently views "postcolonial criticism" as a

> more or less distinct set of reading practices, if it is understood as preoccupied principally with analysis of cultural forms which mediate, challenge or reflect upon the relations of domination and subordination – economic, cultural and political – between (and often

> within) nations, races or cultures, which characteristically have their roots in the history of modern European colonialism and imperialism and which, equally characteristically, continue to be apparent in the present era of neo-colonialism (p.12).

As a subversive approach, postcolonial criticism focuses on "texts of both metropolitan and colonial cultures to draw deliberate attention to the profound and inescapable effects of colonization on literary production; anthropological accounts; historical records; administrative and scientific writing" (Ashcroft et al., 2007, p.173). This reading extends to cultural productions within larger communities wherein various types of discrimination occur. Spivak even considers a feminist wing to postcolonial studies (Abdalkafor, 2015). While, according to Ashcroft et al. (2007), it initially focused on deconstructing the colonial discourse by contradicting "its underlying assumptions (civilization, justice, aesthetics, sensibility" so as to "reveal [...] its (often unwitting) colonialist ideologies" (p.173), postcolonial theory has now widened its scope to "historical, political, sociological and economic analyses" (p.169). A contemporary ecological and environmental doctrine like ecocriticism even has a postcolonial counterpart, which James (2012) terms "postcolonial ecocriticism" (p.60).

Postcolonial criticism therefore provides appropriate theoretical tools to investigate the hegemonic assumptions inscribed in colonialism and neo-colonialism in *Matigari*. It especially sheds light on the author's responses, which subsequently generate various interstitial spaces in the novel. This article works out the mechanisms whereby Ngugi's novel achieves the construction of the liminal, following a three-fold articulation. The first underscores the liminal as a "transcultural space in which strategies for personal and communal selfhood may be elaborated" (Moles, 2013, p.49) in postcolonial studies as a whole. The second exemplifies instances of abrogation and appropriation, and other techniques which enable the novelist to construct names as liminality. The last part reads the interstitial spaces in *Matigari* as revolutionary venues which work for the advent of cultural hybridity and multiculturalism.

1. The Liminal in Postcolonial Studies

The English version of Ngugi's *Matigari* is conspicuous for its demarcation from the writing canons of both Western and African literatures. Gikandi (2000) underpins that shift wandering about Ngugi's new form of writing "with a specific set of formal questions" (p.223). Does, indeed, the

> overt and consistent use of allegory in the novel represent a new form of didacticism or does it lend itself to linguistic creativity? Is Ngugi's concern with the every politics of the postcolonial state a continued search for, and refinement of, techniques of realistic representation, or is the site of everyday culture one of experimentation, in the tradition of what has come to be known as the left-wing avant-garde? Is the powerful religious language of the novel an abdication of Marxist secularism, or is religion deployed in the name of an

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> aesthetic ideal and ideological ends? And what is the meaning of Ngugi's appropriation of Gikuyu oral narratives – does it constitute a significant move away from the tradition of the European novel, or is orality a mark of his embrace of postmodernism? (Gikandi, 2000, p.223)

Gikandi's interrogations indicate that the Marxist-inspired quest for social justice of eponymous character Matigari (Mwetulundila, 2016), in neo-colonial Kenya culminates in a narrative of self, cultural, political, and ideological reclaims. The writing strategies of this peculiar form of narrative integrates the notions of abrogation and appropriation, which foreground the concept of liminality in postcolonial studies.

Initially coined by Gennep (1960) in his anthropological survey of rituals in tribal societies, Langdon considers the 'liminal' to have been used in different terms in past literary works (Taylor, 1998, p. 23). As Taylor tries to retrace the history and the evolution of the term in literature, basing on three French novels, Georges Bataille's *Le bleu du ciel*, Julien Green's *L'Autre* and Assia Djebar's *L'Amour*, she discusses both its socio-anthropological and "philosophical roots" (p.1).

There comes out that, from a socio-anthropological angle, the term "liminal" gained true scholarship in Victor Turner's works, namely *The Ritual Process* (1969) and *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors* (1974). Turner uses Gennep's religious ritual hypothesis to explain the change that both the individual and the society undergo. According to Chakraborty (2016), Turner finds out that "human social life is characterized by an alternation between structured social roles and the blurring of social roles (i.e., anti-structure) which occurs in the ritual context" (p.147). This, in M. Sharma's words, leads Turner to contend that "attributes of liminality or of liminal personae ('threshold people') are necessarily ambiguous since this condition and these people elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural spaces" (Sharma, 2013, p.110).

Turner concludes that the "ritual transitional phase" induced by liminality is vital in the human's understanding of his humanity and his spirituality. This understanding comes out of the dialectical process between the continuity of life provided by social structures and the discontinuity engendered by the "in-between" space or phase, which, ultimately, turns out to be an anti-structure (Sharma, 2013, p.110).

Taylor (1998), whom we referred to earlier, traces the philosophical implication of liminality back to Derrida. She reads in "Turner's sociological label [of] liminality" "some of the same phenomena that Derrida discusses using philosophical terms such as "undecidability" and "aporia" (p.21). By "undecidability", Derrida describes what Alice Jardine (1985) sees as "the 'between' and the 'what's more' (en plus) in a movement impossible to describe, [which] upsets all boundaries, inside, outside, up and down. …

Writing [being] 'the general space' that disrupts the presence and absence and therefore all metaphysical notions of limits" (p.184). As for "aporia," Derrida defines it as "a function of an undecidability which he conceives as an active process: it constitutes the space and time to decide" (Taylor, 1998; p.23). Derrida's philosophical idea compares with Turner's socio-anthropological description of the initiate's movement, which states that, '… the state of the ritual subject ('the passenger,' or 'liminar,') becomes ambiguous, neither here nor there, betwixt and between all fixed points of classification' (Turner, 1998, p.23).

Having set the historical and conceptual frameworks of liminality, Taylor overviews its literary implication and application over time. She records a wide range of literary works referring to the notion of liminal, some of which express it in different terms. Taylor (1998) cites Thomas Pison's article entitled "Liminality in the Canterbury Tales" as one the first critical literary works (p.23) in this field. Taylor's inscription of Wangari wa Nyatetu-Waygwa's article titled "The Liminal Novels" (p.27), relates the poetics of the liminal to modern-day postcolonial studies. Nyatetu-Waygwa's liminal approach which "subverts, for instance, the idyllic nature of the African setting…" (Taylor, 1998, p.28) inscribes transgressivity and marginality, idiosyncratic of Gennep's, Langdon's, Derrida's and Turner's description of the "in-betweeness."

Standing as "a discourse in-between two positions or the juxtaposition of a dominant idea with a marginal discourse" (Moles, 2013, p.54), this "in-betweeness" is aptly exploited by cultural theorist Homi Bhabha to address Eurocentrism, and specifically the ensuing center/periphery construct that debases a larger portion of world cultures. Bhabha shapes his concept of liminality out of the cultural taxonomy which posits dominant Western *universalism* over colonized, debased, and marginalized cultures. In *Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha portrays cultural liminality as "a transitory, in-between state or space" (Chakraborty, 2016, p.145).

"The threshold concepts", involving "cognate labels like the liminal, the interstitial and the in-between" (Wilson & Tunca, 2015, p.1), and indeed the threshold itself, theoretically shape a conciliatory avenue for the dynamics of perpetual re-definition of identities. In postcolonial literature, the liminal space thus induced questions the notion of fixity. Caryl Phillips underscores the ideological implication of the liminal, focusing on British imperialism. He asserts that 'race and ethnicity are the bricks with which the British have traditionally built a wall around the perimeter of their island notion and created fixity' (Phillips, 2001, as cited in Duboin, 2011, p.14). Fixity tends thereafter to be inherent to the colonial discourse. Newton (1997) supports this view, contending that "fixity as a sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is

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a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition" (p.293)

Expounding Bhabha's conception, Hook (2005) sees fixity as "a kind of 'buttoning-down' of otherness, a normalization of difference, [which] is an attempt to instantiate notions of racial purity, to maintain ostensibly mutually-exclusive identity categories for colonizer and colonized" (p.5). As he further states, Bhabha "claims" fixity to be "a vital component within the ideological construction of otherness, which not only marks off the boundaries of cultural, and racial difference, but does so in ways that are both essentializing and paradoxical" (Hook, 2005, p.5). Bhabha's conception of the liminal is informed by the inherent contradiction within the colonial discourse, which foregrounds the colonial construction of the colonised and their cultures. Bhabha sees this inner contradiction as a form of ambivalence within the colonial ideology. It is this ambivalence and any other shortcomings in the colonial discourse that underline Bhabha's concern for the concept of liminality. For the "limitations of [these] linguistic and philosophical representations and their potential to mask the ambivalence of the representation between the coloniser and the colonised" (Moles, 2013, p.45) are convoked in this "third space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process" (Bhabha, 1994, p.37).

There originates Bhabha's approach to the concept of hybridity. This term "hybridity", which Kuortti and Nyman (2007) parallel with the notion of "métissage" [sic], is said to "be connected to the discourses of the biological sciences" (p.4). The hybrid – which, according to them, "is commonly thought to be a cross between two different species (botanical or animal)" – turns out to bear a negative charge, "owing to colonial ideologies of race emphasising the alleged purity of the white colonizers" (p.4). Thus, "while hybridization suggests 'fertilization against natural tendencies,' métissage [sic] was once used to refer to 'the hybridization of human beings implicating a distinction into different races'" (Kuortti & Nyman, 2007, p.4).

Yet, it is in its most positive implication as a cultural ideal – which "foregrounds complicated entanglements rather than identity, togetherness-in-difference rather than separateness and virtual apartheid… a concept that prevents the absorption of all difference into a hegemonic plane of sameness and homogeneity" (Ang, 2003, p.141) – that Bhabha seizes hybridity to expand his conception of liminality. For the back and forth movement implied by the interstitial encounters disrupts fixity and essentialism which hierarchize races and cultures. Bhabha (1994) substantiates his view basing on African-American artist Renée Green's metaphor of the stairwell as a liminal space in "museum building" (p.4). He contends that,

> The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the upper and the lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairway, the temporal movement and passage it allows, prevent identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed and imposed hierarchy (Bhabha, 1994, p.4).

The cultural hybridity inherent to the concept of liminality in postcolonial studies informs Ngugi's novel on various points. First of all, as a cultural production from an erstwhile colony – and following Ogude's logic that "any African work of art that has any value as a work of art" should reflect Africa's humiliating contact with the West (1990, p.6) – Ngugi's novel posits its "textuality" as hybrid. Yet, in its subtle deployment in *Matigari*, the notion of liminality debunks Eurocentric worldview, and connotes resistance to linguistic, cultural, and racial supremacy. Characters' names exemplify this resistance in *Matigari*.

2. Names as Resistance in Matigari

Just as performing initiation rituals generates both a geographical and metaphorical interstice in sacred societies especially (Gennep, 1960, 192), so English and Gikuyu/Kiswahili create a third space of linguistic discourses as they come across in *Matigari*. Being the major tool of British imperialism worldwide, English is erected on a pedestal as an official language in most African Anglophone states. This hegemonic status – a legacy of colonization, but still more a testimony to neo-colonial control (Hamburg, 2017) – suffers rivalry in Ngugi's novel.

Ngugi's ignorance of English as the "medium of instruction" in his country (Athiemoolam & Kibui, 2012, p.1) when he chose to write *Matigari* in Gikuyu in 1986 (Garnier, 2011, p.422) initiates a transgression. The English version's dedication displays the writer's motivation: "this novel is dedicated to…all those committed to the development of literature in the languages of all of the African peoples" (*Matigari*, 1990). This deliberate departure from the colonial language, which until then had cemented the writer's literary production, denotes not solely a denial or a challenge, but above all a resolute claim to personal and community identity. Subsequently, the Gikuyu version foregrounds that reclaim as it defies fixity and rigidity, characteristic of essentialism in the English-borne colonial discourse (Bell, 2004, p.21).

Yet, Ngugi's proleptic move therein bears all the patronizing seeds of the West's linguistic imperialism (El-qassaby, 2015, p.1) in Africa. Eponymous hero, Matigari, exemplifies this trend to imbed linguistic, cultural and historical pride, which tends to degenerate into abusive excess. His disproportionate sense of patriotism – anything that

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raises an onomastic interest, his full name reading "Matigari ma Njiruungi," that is, "The patriots who survived the bullets" (p.20) – leads to public conceit and melodramatic mayhems. From this very name down to the protagonist's mindset, wordings, deeds and feelings, to the rationale behind the narrative, down still to the post-colonial society depicted in the novel, everything reeks of liminality, even with the work in the African 'vernacular'.

For the reader, like me, who does not know Gikuyu, the implication of the name of the protagonist suffices to show that the text fails to inscribe true "Gikuyuness". Indeed, the eponymous hero of the novel owes his very name, at least in its semantic capture, to the rise of a nationalist conscience under the push of a foreign intrusion, namely British colonization. This colonial influence on African novels is highlighted by Anna Pöysä (2011, p.22), who for the case quotes from C. Adichie (2009): "…The Professor told me that my characters [are] too much like him, an educated and middle class man. My characters drove cars. They were not starving. Therefore, they were not authentically African". Matigari's patriotism, the foundation of the kennings that serve as personal designation in Gikuyu, denotes the prior presence of an opposite force to the realization of the national ideal. Although it is not overtly expressed, this "enmity" lies ubiquitous in the collective sub-conscience of the group that subsequently formulates the savior's name.

The name, thereafter, loses the essentialism one could expect in the local language version. It eventually turns out to be the product of the liminal space wherein enemy forces intertwine involuntarily to beget it in the first place. "Those who resisted the bullets" only happens to come into being at the interstitial space where conflicting interests between Western colonialism and indigenous Africa meet. Therefore, no matter the version (English or Gikuyu) Matigari, as a name and a character, turns out to be the fruit of a third space of enunciation.

This onomastic inscription of the liminal enlarges especially to characters who assist the "epic hero" – following Balogun's oral epic narrative paradigm (1995, p.129) – in his quest throughout the novel. Muriuki, Guthera, and to a lesser extent Ngaruro wa Kiriro, are names-concepts born from the on-going cultural turmoil provoked by the juxtaposition of British hegemonic worldview with Gikuyu tradition. This 'chaotic' encounter engenders a third space of enunciation in terms of temporal, spatial and discursive stances.

Pronounced "/MOH-ree-oh-key/" and meaning "One who is reborn" (*http://www.namesite.com/content/muriuki*) in Gikuyu, Matigari's young male-assistant owes his name (Muriuku) to the neocolonial context of post-independent Kenya. This

name is part of Gikuyu cultural heritage, and means "The one who is resurrected," as testified by Emmanuel Kariuki's 2016 survey on Kikuyu names. Yet, its relevance in *Matigari* opens a new semantic field as it matches that African tradition with European cosmogony. The "resurrected," here, while justifying Kikuyu naming tradition – according to which "no one really dies among the Kikuyu since he or she is likely to be reincarnated in his grandchildren or brother's children" (Kariuki, 2016) – traces back to the miraculous resurrection of Christian Saints, especially Jesus Christ (Whalen, 2010, p.15). This cultural equivalence might well appease or obliterate the conflicting interests in the liminal space of the novel. Yet, it is this very seeming resemblance that fuels the cultural battle in the liminal. For interpretation of the notion of resurrection varies according to each of the conflicting traditions. In the Gikuyu context, "resurrection" is a deliberate and reproducible act performed within the family line to keep memories of those who lived before present generations, be they still alive or dead (Kariuki, 2016).

Resurrection connotes differently in Western civilization. According to Nagaraj, Nanjegowda, & Purushothama (2013), "Christians believe that when a person dies their soul would sleep in the grave along with their corpse. The soul sleep continues until a time in the future known as the 'last day' or also known as 'the final judgement'" (p.171). That has given rise to the myth of "bodily" or "physical resurrection of Jesus Christ" (Geisler, 1989; Peter, 2015), which obviously differs from the Gikuyu's concern for lineage survival through the naming after elders. While the Gikuyu rendition of the notion of resurrection proves secular in the first place, the West's is metaphysical, and pertains to the lot of what Reverend Sanborn (2011) conceives of as "Catholic dogmas" (p.1).

The characterization of Guthera follows the same liminal logic in the novel. Initially, Guthera's portraiture validates Kessler's premise about Ngugi's progressive empowerment of the woman in successive novels (Kessler, 1994). Rising from "self-ignorance" entrenched in prostitution to the state of "awareness, assurance and self-reliance" (Sitwala, 2008, p.233), Guthera goes through Ngugi's ritual of rebirth that propels the woman to the vanguard of social struggle against neocolonial exploitation. Ngugi's ritual of rebirth equates with Van Gennep's "tripartite process in a rite of passage – […] separation, margin, and reaggregation" – which Taylor (1998) matches with the three liminal phases of "preliminal, liminal and postliminal" (p.13). Guthera, hereafter, undergoes a "threshold rite" to evolve into "the pure" one (*Matigari*, p.129), embodying the liminal in its spatial and temporal implication" (Taylor, 1998, p.13). Following Matigari's messianic stand, Guthera's portraiture compares mostly with biblical Mary Magdalene's, the repented prostitute who, ultimately, became a major figure in Jesus Christ's mission on earth (Kent, 2010, p.14).

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Flanked on either side by spiritual symbols deriving from names, Matigari can reasonably endorse the function of the African traditional priest, and perform the ritual of redemption of post-independent Kenya. And yet, visibly, Ngugi's champion displays syncretic features in his spiritual posture. In this regard, the author's initial search for African essentialist values likely to counterpoise Eurocentrism seems to have been betrayed. For his effort of characterization has but amalgamated African cosmogony with Western spiritual philosophies. So much so that although African cultural heritage seems prominent in aforementioned characters, it cannot claim originality and monopoly to them. There ensues that the heroes supposed to instill a revolutionary impetus in the exploited masses of post-colonial Kenya ironically stand as threshold constructs.

Yet, either in Gikiyu or in English, Ngugi's political "story" (*Matigari*, ix) operates a transgression of Western literary canons. Its postcolonial texture reinforces the sense of marginality which calls for resistance, and therefore justifies the linguistic abrogation and appropriation. The liminality that follows deploys its full ritualistic function as it purges Eurocentrism of its purported cultural superiority. Similarly, the liminal mitigates essentialism in the African narrative. From this perspective, liminality foreshadows a new order in post-independent Kenya. As an aesthetic then, the liminal underpins the revolutionary rationale behind *Matigari*.

3. The Liminal as a Revolutionary Venue in Matigari

Matigari bears the characteristics of a true revolutionary manifest in its subversive motive and provocative tone. Eponymous Matigari's commitment to a complete liberation of his people provides a rebellious mood to the narrative in the first place. As largely discussed above, Ngugi's onomastic technique portends a crisis in the development of his hero's story. As the narrative proceeds, the insidious tensions – expertly camouflaged in the names of characters – gradually disclose multifarious antagonisms. Two of these come out as the major oppositions which intertwine to web the revolutionary stuff of the story. One learns about an impending strike at the plastic factory with the introduction of Ngaruro wa Kiriro (*Matigari*, p.19). That imminent confrontation features the union of workers (dissatisfied with their working conditions and their incomes) and their employers, reportedly disregardful of the general welfare of their workforce.

That first crisis combines with the protagonist's relentless quest for "truth and justice" (*Matigari*, p.67) to foretell an explosive vortex by the end the narrative. Blurred with a figurative language at the start of the novel, Matigari's aspiration and its inherent

societal tension gradually evolve with clarity as he challenges the mainstays of the new order of his society. Matigari faces his first opposition with the street-children, who throw stones at him (*Matigari*, pp.16-17). Interpreting this act as a direct consequence of on-going decay in his society, Matigari condones, and even overlooks it. He nevertheless announces the mainstream antagonism ahead when, through vivid imagery, he opposes the luxury enjoyed by foreign companies (*Matigari*, p.14) with the misery of his "children […] scattered all over the country" (*Matigari*, p.15). By this, Matigari willingly embodies all the destitute people of his country, and readily prepares to avenge them.

Still, at that level, the reader is not yet clearly situated about the actual belligerents of the impending battle. Matigari's contention with Settler William and his suite show a true antagonistic situation. Matigari eventually triumphs, killing both William and John Boy, his maid. The protagonist's task becomes harder with a virtual target as he unearths his symbolic fighting arsenal. He attacks, in turn, the police, the "Minister for justice and truth", the heirs to Settler William and John Boy, and the country's authorities as a whole.

Matiagri's confusion is inherent to the dual liminal spaces he manifests. His personal liminal stand has largely been discussed above. The other aspect is informed by the temporal and spatial connotation of the liminal. Matigari lives in a time and space created by the intersection between indigenous Africa and European imperialism. This temporal and spatial paradigm turns out to be an interstice, characterized by "indeterminacy, ambiguity, hybridity…" (Chakraborty, 2016, p.145) or "undecidability" (Derrida, 1994). Matigari's confused quest is, therefore, contingent to his own being, but also to the socio-historical context it gestates in.

Yet, indeterminacy alone can hardly blur Matigari's aspiration. So much so that on roughly identifying the antagonistic forces, a twofold revolutionary stance informs the construct of the liminal in the novel. Variously theorized, the concept of revolution finds a most extensive scholarship in Marxian literature. Basing on Reinhart Koselleck's perception of the "concept" of revolution as a 'linguistic act of our modernity', Cheng (2017) attempts an etymological survey (p.41). He agrees with Koselleck that, "the term was originally a 'naturalistic metaphor' that framed political changes as part of an eternal 'circular course' in history, and was closely linked to the notion of 'civil war' as an ephemeral conflict between different strata of a fixed social order" (Cheng, 2017, pp.46-47). Citing Koselleck, Cheng (2017) pursues that,

> [i]t was only with the advent of political, social, and philosophical 'modernity' – gestating in eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought and unleashed dramatically by the 1789 French Revolution – that 'revolution' took on the sense of an absolute break from the 'senseless circling' of the past, a transformation that 'open[s] up a new vista in the course of 'human

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history.' (p.41)

Interpretations of that "absolute break" essentially fuel the various Marxian conceptions of revolution. For some, like Lenin (1918) who claims authenticity in his reading of Marx and Engels' doctrine, the concept of revolution is inseparable from violence (*https://www.marxists.org/ebooks/lenin/state-and-revolution.pdf*). This violence is inherent to the proletariat's process of seizure of "state power" and "abolition" of the exploiting bourgeoisie (Lenin, 1918). Lenin, who in the light of this interpretation later held an iron grip around his own people after the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, apprehends the Marxian doctrine for a "classless society" as a "panegyric on violent revolution" (Lenin, 1918). To substantiate his opinion, he quotes from Engels as follows:

> '…That force [violence], however, plays yet another role [other than that of a diabolical power] in history, a revolutionary role; in the words of Marx, it is the midwife of every old society which is pregnant with a new one, that is the instrument with which social movement forces its way through and shatters the dead, fossilized political forms...' (Lenin, 1918)

Reducing any other Marxian conceptions of revolution to "crudest forms" of ideological distortions by "petty-bourgeois and philistine professors and publicists" (Lenin, 1918), Lenin concludes that "this view of violent revolution lies at the root of the entire theory of Marx and Engels" (Lenin, 1918).

Following this Marxian revolutionary framework, *Matigari* features Lenin's concept of "irreconcilability of class antagonisms" (Lenin, 1918). The class antagonism captured in the novel reflects that which sustains Marxist orthodoxy, and which opposed in the past "discontented masses of the proletariat and petty-bourgeois" to "the French monarchy" during the Commune (Pereira, 2013, p.52). Ngugi forms his class antagonism setting on the one hand "the imperialists and their retinue of messengers, overseers, police and military," and on the other hand, "the camp of the working people" (*Matigari*, p.161). The latter group includes all the hapless composed of street children, plastic-plant workers, prostitutes, student unionists, intellectuals, the unemployed, peasants, and all the paupers of the country. He then charges Matigari with embodying the revolutionary fuel of this "discontented" social class.

Yet, the actual revolution worth noting tends to be the inescapable change framed in the transitory posture of the protagonists. Both the characters and the context manifest an interstitial pattern as a combination of African indigenous values with imposed foreign ways. The socio-historical background of the story, as well as the people who animate it, represent the spatial, temporal and cultural hybridity, which, inherently, bears a "potential for subversion and change" (Chakraborty, 2016, p.145).

Ngugi's creative technique, thereafter, induces the revolution which eventually breaks out by the end of the narrative. The liminal space thus created, inexorably generates

revolutionary seeds for the birth of a new order, in a new space. And magical realism helps reach that end even more. This substantiates Bouhadiba's contention, which reads Ngugi's resort to magical realism as a designed plan to "drive home his revolutionary message to the *grassroots*" (2016, p.1). For as Bouhadiba (2016) pursues, "magical realism has often been used to call for revolutionary *praxis* by Latin American writers" (p.1).

From this perspective, Ngugi's novelistic aesthetic alone could suffice to address his revolutionary ideal. Expressing it through Matigari's political activism, and coating it with a Marxist doctrine proves that Ngugi targets a multifarious audience. Both intellectuals – able to decrypt the literary intricacies – and the masses of the people are, indeed, committed to the necessary task of freeing the country from its deviant neocolonial capitalist inclination.

And although the masses of the people do not react until Matigari's final assault against the exploitative symbols, they are supportive of his revolutionary move from the start. Ngugi compensates for his failure to generate a mass movement revolution against the exploiters, as prescribed in Marxism, with intertextual artistry. He merges the Mau-Mau rebellion – which reportedly influenced the "timing of decolonisation in Kenya" (Nissimi, 2006, p.3) – with his Marxist-Leninist aspiration for his people. Ngugi, thereafter, unwillingly generates a third space wherein different revolutionary orthodoxies fuse. Consequently, his revolutionary philosophy is manifold.

Ngugi's onomastic technique conforms to the revolutionary essence infused in his characters' names. The liminal engraved in those names supports their messianic mission as these characters relentlessly seek to topple the exploitative political and economic systems. Suspicious of a betrayal of African elites years after formal decolonization, Ngugi chooses his revolutionary heroes among the commoners. Matigari is not an intellectual like "Jomo Kenyatta, the alleged leader of the Mau Mau" (Nissimi, 2006, p.7). His commitment has no prescribed ideological implication. His militancy seems mainly to draw from good sense in regard to human welfare. His portraiture rather reflects the image of the numerous peasants who rebelled against the colonial administration under the leadership of Jomo Kenyatta.

Matigari's symbolic liminal collocates with another threshold space in the novel. Matigari's quest for "truth and justice" is set in a time when Africa submits to a new turn in its history. It is the time of coexistence with Western norms characterized by ever-growing capitalist practices. With the complicity of post-independence African leaders, Western companies exploit, expropriate, and pauperize African masses. These masses, therefore, experience a time and space of "confusion and indeterminacy" or "undecidability" which inform the concept of liminality.

This confusing context, itself a product and a manifestation of various liminal spaces, calls for *change*, following Chakraborty's revolution paradigm. Just like "confusion and helplessness" inescapably resulted in the October 1848 Vienna insurrection (Engels, 2010, p.58), confusion and undecidability created by the liminal portends sociocultural revolution in *Matigari*. In this light, not only does Ngugi's revolutionary doctrine draw from Marxist orthodoxy, but it also reflects the logic of ritualistic changes induced by the liminal in sacred societies. For any initiation is a change in state, that is, a kind of revolution.

Conclusion

A postcolonial approach to *Matigari* has spotted diverse liminal spaces under Ngugi's onomastic aesthetic and in his skillful appeal to magical realism, transgenericity and plurilingualism. It has shown that these interstitial spaces constitute a transgression and a counterpoise to Eurocentric worldview. And that the frictions engendered by their irreconcilability generate frustration and confusion. In the neocolonial context of *Matigri*, that confusion causes hopelessness and marginality which end up fueling a revolutionary incentive in the exploited African mases. This work has concluded that following Ngugi's Marxist-Leninist revolutionary aesthetics, the confused context becomes a venue for a sociocultural revolution likely to favor cultural hybridity and multiculturalism. From this angle, this article has successfully highlighted the resistance and revolution features of liminality in postcolonial criticism.

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[*]**Note** : The novel was initially published in Gikuyu language under the same title in 1987; the English version came in 1989 in African Writers Series: *https://www.librarything.com/work/296354*