

The Embodiment of Power in the African (Acoli) and Western Cultural Perspectives as Presented in Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol*

Gladys Nyaiburi Ogaro

Department of Literature, Theatre and Film
Studies, Mount Kenya University
gnyaiburi@gmail.com

Diana Mutono Munyao

University of Eastern Africa Baraton, Kenya
munyaodiana@yahoo.com

Abstract

*This paper aims to explore the embodiment of power in Africa – in this case Uganda's Acoli – and Western cultural perspectives as presented in Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol*. It specifically examines how Okot uses the characters: Lawino, Ocol and Tina as bodies which possess power and how they play out such powers. These bodies are defined by contradictions that illustrate the fact that cultures have their strengths and weaknesses. Ocol and Tina represent Western culture while Lawino's body represents African culture. The play of cultural power as emitted through the bodies and speeches of these characters is examined. In this paper, the author argues that Okot p'Bitek in *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol* plays out the cultural conflicts by Western and Acoli value cultural systems. Both cultural value systems are mechanized in the bodies of characters: Lawino, Ocol, Clementine and also in space which manifests itself as either social or geographical body. Both cultural value systems are presented as complex processes which can either be positive or negative. In *Song of Lawino*, for instance, Okot presents Ocol, a body upon which power has been invested by the Western culture to out rightly denounce the power of the Acoli culture. Ironically, the power relationship between Ocol and the Western culture present Ocol as a puppet body symbolic in the execution of power. In a cunning way, the Western culture manipulates a way of exercising power over the Acoli culture. This then renders the Western culture 'invisible' while Ocol takes blame. The power of the Western culture seem to liberate and empower on the surface, for example, Ocol and Tina in *Song of Lawino*, on face value look better in their new outfit of the Western culture but underneath this is enslavement. In *Song of Ocol*, Ocol is a sophisticated, self-serving and unrepentant character who has embraced the new culture fervently just like Tina in *Song of Lawino*. The two become submissive to the Western culture as opposed to themselves and their Acoli culture. Ocol's adoration of the Western culture and Tina's change of behaviour and appearance to suit the West clearly displays how the Western culture has manipulated its ways of power over bodies to regulate and manage them. Ocol sees nothing worth presenting in the old ways and has hardly any reservations in saying so. He asserts that the future is with the western culture and technologies that make it dominant.*

Key Words: Embodiment, Power, African, Acoli, Western Cultural Perspectives, Okot p'Bitek *Song of Lawino*, *Song of Ocol*

INTRODUCTION

According to Foucault as read by Harland (1987), power manifests itself in two ways: the way of power over bodies and of the body's own power (the body's own force of will

and desire). However, the way that power manifests itself is only identifiable and recognizable through discourse. In Okot p'Bitek's poetry, power as a discourse plays itself out. It presents itself in a play of suppression and counter-suppression. At one level of this suppression and counter suppression, imperialism as a concept holds some bodies as the 'other' and constitutes institutions to conform to the superiority of the 'centre' over the 'other'. Ashcraft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989, p. 7) argue that one of the main features of imperial oppression is control over language. Language becomes the medium through which hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated and the medium through which conceptions of truth, order and reality become established. Thus, the English language, which is the colonial language, constitutes a way of power over bodies.

Okot uses the imperial language (English) as a strategy of creating a body through poetic language and style. Ironically, there is the refusal of language structures to express his thoughts and ideas; he virtually borrows images from the Acoli culture, which is a body that is fighting back against the colonial language. Therefore, the West and the Acoli signify bodies of power over and of bodies. Thus, Okot's use of language and style in a way is a renaissance of the oral tradition, which is the reason why he fits in the 'romanticist' mode, both in form and substance. His use of language and style become of generic hybridity; the language is neither English nor Acoli, the poems are sang, recited, narrated or dramatized.

Power of the body and over the body is also power in a political sense. Politics dictate power and vice versa. Politics in this case is not restricted to the level of general class relations but can be seen through domestic relations, cultural relations, sexual relations, schooling relations and parent-child relations. At one point or another, Okot, like other African writers, has given his characters the 'will' to act and change the scheme of things. He plays out this political power as established in certain relationships by giving his characters the voice to narrate their experiences and wishes in an attempt to reject or embrace certain ideologies as one body emits the power and the other receives and vice versa.

Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol*

Okot p'Bitek in *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol* plays out the cultural conflicts by Western and Acoli value cultural systems. Both cultural value systems are mechanized in the bodies of characters: Lawino, Ocol, Clementine and also in space which manifests itself as either social or geographical body.

Both cultural value systems are presented as complex processes which can either be positive or negative. In *Song of Lawino*, for instance, Okot presents an Ocol, a body upon which power has been invested by the Western culture to out rightly denounce the power of the Acoli culture. This is evident in Lawino's series of complaints about her Ocol. He has rejected her for a westernized woman and rejected the Acoli culture for Western culture. Ironically, the power relationship between Ocol and the Western culture present Ocol as a puppet body symbolic in the execution of power. In a cunning way, the Western culture manipulates a way of exercising power over the Acoli culture. This then renders the Western culture 'invisible' while Ocol takes blame. Ocol is a 'black' embodiment of the consequences of the Western cultural ways of power. This closely fits

into Foucault's idea that —The way of power of bodies over bodies usually does not appear in the form of negative repressive power but in the form of a positive expansionist power...l (Harland, 1987, p. 159).

The power of the Western culture seems to liberate and empower on the surface; for example, Ocol and Tina in *Song of Lawino*, on face value look better in their new outfit of the Western culture but underneath this is enslavement. Ocol was a 'bull' but now a 'boy'. Tina is more of a sexual object for men thus less human unlike Lawino who is a perfect model of an Acoli wife. In *Song of Ocol*, Ocol is a sophisticated, self-serving and unrepentant character who has embraced the new culture fervently just like Tina in *Song of Lawino*. The two become submissive to the Western culture as opposed to themselves and their Acoli culture. Ocol's adoration of the Western culture and Tina's change of behaviour and appearance to suit the West clearly displays how the Western culture has manipulated its ways of power over bodies to regulate and manage them. Ocol sees nothing worth presenting in the old ways and has hardly any reservations in saying so. He asserts that the future is with the western culture and technologies that make it dominant.

The power of the body seen through Lawino who is a symbol of the power of the Acoli culture that Ocol and Tina have denounced. According to Foucault (as cited in Harland, 1987), 'The power of the body resists all the imposed power over the body... This power is always being pulled out of itself, always toppling forward into newly opening spaces, always being drawn across boundaries' (p. 161). Lawino satirizes Ocol's and Tina's apemanship of Western culture through her series of complaints about Ocol's change of behaviour. In doing this, she paves way to show the power of the Acoli culture as evident in her praises of the Acoli's rich aesthetic values.

It is then clear that apemanship, hybridity and rejection are the choices present within the context of cultural contact. The two poems, *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol*, reveal the ways of power of cultures as mechanized in the bodies of Ocol, Clementine and Lawino. The bodies of Ocol and Clementine symbolize the power of Western culture while the body of Lawino signifies the way of power of traditional Acoli culture. It is in this sense that the ways of power of bodies over bodies and the body's own way of power in cultural sense are dramatized.

The Poet's construct of Lawino's body on one hand as ideal and Tina's and Ocol's bodies on the other hand as corrupt, reveal in many ways the two conflicting perceptions of culture. The Western cultural 'superiority' is symbolized in the bodies of Ocol and Tina and that of the African culture in the body of Lawino. These characters symbolize the ways of power of bodies and over bodies as manifested in the two cultures. Said (1978) argues that —European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the orient as sort of surrogate and even underground selfl (p. 3-8). It is within this perspective of the image of the West that the body of Western culture had the power to define Africa by what it (the West) was not. Memmi (1965) also says that —The colonized (Africa) becomes all that the colonizer is notl (p. 82). It is this that leads the Poet to present all aspects of culture in a binary opposition: in the bodies of the protagonists and antagonists. It is within the drama by the characters in these cultures that the play of power over and of bodies is exercised in the characters; for instance, formal education in

Ocol and its absence in Lawino and the 'modernity' in Tina as opposed to its absence in Lawino. This creates an illusion of power whereby one culture claims power and dominance over another on the basis of their differences. These differences are emphasized to justify the position of power.

The dialectical manifestation of western cultural body and the African (Acoli) cultural body, in this paper, is read within Michel Foucault's (1978) concept of power. Foucault's (ibid.) states that:

Power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization, as the process which through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they effect (pp. 92-93).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was mainly library-based. Other than the selected primary texts, the study made use of critical works written by Okot p'Bitek as well as by other writers who have commented on Okot's works and power discourses. The study also utilized the Internet services in accessing some publications that were relevant to the research objectives. The research was carried out in several libraries: The Margaret Thatcher Library, Moi University; Jomo Kenyatta Memorial Library and the Department of Literature Library, University of Nairobi, and Moi Library at Kenyatta University.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Ways of Power over Bodies and of Bodies in *Song of Lawino*

In *Song of Lawino*, Ocol's body can be said to have imbibed the power of Western education and civilization which makes it to have control over itself, other human bodies and environment. Paradoxically, this very source of power corrupts the body that it should have empowered thus, destroying it in the process. The body of Ocol suffers from this paradox of power. In *Song of Lawino*, Ocol has been both empowered and enslaved by Western education and civilization. The knowledge that he has acquired from this Western education makes him feel superior to the other people in his Acoli society and especially to his own wife. The way he exercises his power indeed resonates with Foucault's idea of the way of power over bodies. He uses this power to suppress Lawino and the tradition that she stands for. He claims to be a modern, progressive and civilized man who cannot afford to associate with his village and his wife Lawino who is a village woman.

Lawino shows how power of western education has corrupted the mind of Ocol making him behave irrationally. Ocol confesses his contempt for his wife Lawino because she lacks Western education. Ocol's use of English language to insult his wife and abuse his parents'-in-law is an indication of the power manifested upon him by the Western culture

so as to possess power over Lawino and her Acoli tradition to which she ascribes. Despite Lawino's complaints of Ocol's insults, Ocol who is Acoli does not fully ascribe to the Acoli culture and therefore it does not define him. This then leaves him an alienated man from himself and his traditional society and as Lawino puts it;

He behaves like a hen
That eats its own eggs (1972, p. 35)

His attempt to bring Western ideas to Africa, which have different cultural values, is unrealistic. He fails to understand that his wife and her people have not been to the West. Their values are different and he is presently in Africa where his newly acquired ideas are of no value. Lawino, through her use of language, confronts the way of power over bodies by resisting Ocol's power of abuses and insults because of his Western mannerisms. She cautions him against his foreign behaviour. Thus she constitutes the body's own power.

Ocol's masculine nature of being insensitive, as noted by Stalt (1990, p. 14), gives him the power over Lawino. He discards her without caring for her emotional feelings. Paradoxically, this very power over bodies is countered by the body's own power when he (Ocol) desires to have a modern woman, Tina. The Western culture that has given him power over bodies by making him (Ocol) an insensitive character towards what he liked before is the same culture that gives Clementine the power of a 'modern' girl. Ocol perceives Lawino as a primitive woman as she cannot read while Tina is modern as she speaks English. Tina possesses power that works over the masculine nature of being insensitive towards women. She is the 'modern' girl, who he is in love with.

The irony of western civilization as a way of power over bodies is a feature of post-colonial writings. This power is even more oppressive on those that have accepted it. For instance, in *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953), George Lamming portrays a highly alienated society in which the rhythm of life is totally controlled by a white man, even the simplest aspects of life such as the time to sleep. The people of Barbados believe they are in 'Little England'. The power of 'Big England' is too much over them. They act like robots to recite even what they cannot comprehend. Okot, just like Lamming, presents characters like Ocol who have totally accepted the Western culture which gives them power over bodies like Lawino who symbolizes the Acoli tradition.

Like Lamming, Okot satirizes the robot behaviour of Ocol in terms of time management. Ocol uses the clock to regulate all his deeds. This Western culture of time, oppresses Ocol, it has power over him. He lacks his own power over the western culture. His life is dictated and oppressed further by the power of western education, which has power over his body. His apemanship of western culture leaves him engulfed in his books and clearly demonstrates how he destabilizes other aspects of life within the Acoli culture. Ocol lives a lonely life and lacks the time to enjoy family life. Because of this, Ocol's body then generates power of the body that is exerted on Lawino's body. He criticizes Lawino of lacking the sense of time and Western education. Lawino as another body demonstrates power over Ocol by criticizing his alienation from himself and the Acoli tradition within which he is. For instance Ocol fails to recognize the values of Acoli and detests basic socio-values like the value of a child as argued by Lawino:

If a child cries
Or has a cough
Ocol storms like a buffalo
He throws things
At the child...
Is this not the talk
Of a witch ?
What music is sweeter
Than the cries of children? (1972, p. 67)

Further, Western knowledge as a way of power over bodies disempowers Ocol and makes him an escapist. He resents being questioned. It is ironical that while Ocol has the power of knowledge he has been denied the wisdom to use it. He feels he is in a vantage position compared to his people (the Acoli) and more so his wife Lawino. This is paradoxical as the power of knowledge that he has over his people who lack it, provoke the body's own power which creates an egocentric and antisocial Ocol. This alienates him from the Acoli society whose order is communal and social.

It is clear that in the Acoli society, communalism and relativity is power of the culture. Ocol's egocentric nature and criticism on his indigenous Acoli culture as power of bodies over bodies contrasts with the societal order and expectations. This is evident in Lawino's argument that Ocol is destroying himself when he forgets that it is his Acoli people and especially his Acoli parents who gave him life and its basics. It is from these that he has grown to acquire the Western culture, which has given him power over the Acoli culture. Through this, Lawino articulates the power of the Acoli culture and its people. For without it, Ocol would never have been. This is evident in Lawino's sarcasm towards Ocol's behaviour: 'He cares little about his relatives either of his own mother...' (1972, p. 92)

In most of the postcolonial writings, the characters who have embraced western cultural ways in terms of education, religion and behaviour among others, do not fall short of the African cultural ways. For instance, in Ngugi wa Thiongo's *The River Between* (1965), Muthoni who claims to be a child of Christ still accepts to go through circumcision which is condemned by Christianity. Her father, Joshua, who is a strong convert of the Christian faith, rejects circumcision in the strongest terms, as his faith perceives it as evil. Those who have gone through it live in the world of darkness: Egypt. Ironically, Joshua and his wife Miriam who have both been circumcised are Christians. According to the African culture, circumcision is a power that initiates one into womanhood and paves way for one to learn the ways of the tribe. It is for this reason that Muthoni wants to embrace both cultures.

This adumbrates that no matter how much power of the Western culture is manifested upon a character as a body, the power of the body's own power must also manifest itself. In *The River Between*, the power over bodies as manifested in Joshua, Miriam and Muthoni in form of Christianity encounters opposition from the body's own power as manifested in the same characters in form of the African cultural practice of circumcision. Thus, there is no way one can run away from the 'self'. Ocol, just like Muthoni, embraces both cultures at one point. Western culture has alienated Ocol to a

point of despising the African indigenous medicine. However, at one point he gets into consensus on the power of this indigenous medicine and acknowledges lack of power of the white man's medicine.

On the political scene, the poet presents the paradox of power as manifested in the leaders. Okot shows how after colonialism, power is entrusted on the Africans to rule themselves. Paradoxically, the entrusted leaders have already been polluted by the 'western ideologies' and they ape the power of the colonial master who has already empowered them with his values. Power of bodies over bodies in form of the western cultures' mode of leadership is manifested in Ocol and his brother. The two are in a power struggle for political leadership between the Democratic Party and the Congress Party. This thirst for power creates enmity between the two brothers. They forget their first inner power that they had as brothers, that is the bodies' own power of oneness over the bodies' powers of enmity and hostility. The persona observes:

They were like twins
And they shared everything
Even a single white ant...
Ocol says
His brother is a liar...
He says
His brother wants to kill him
He calls his mother's son that man! ... (1972, p. 103)

p'Bitek's (1983) presentation of the power of enmity concurs with Achebe's argument that 'Without peace, no meaningful social programme can be undertaken; without justice, social order is constantly threatened...' (p. 24).

Metaphorically, the two brothers symbolize the one body of 'Ocol' who has been empowered by the western cultural values including those of political leadership. As a leader, 'Ocol' is expected to lead his people (Africans) by solving their problems like ignorance, poverty and disease. Ironically, he fails. This 'Western power', which is power of the bodies over bodies, works on him. Ocol and his brother are just two sides of the same coin and by hating each other, is an indication of the paradox within 'Ocol'. He has been empowered by the power of the body of the Western culture, yet the same empowering body is destroying him. As a leader, 'Ocol' uses the Western power entrusted upon him to govern his subjects and deceive the people that if elected (given power by the people) he will deliver them from the prison of sickness, poverty and ignorance. Once empowered, he forgets the people's agony and only remembers when he requires them so as to gain political power. At this point, the people have power over him as they are the ones who empower him with leadership, but once in power, Ocol has power over them.

Although all through Ocol asserts the power of the western cultural values as embodied in him, Lawino feels he is powerless and there is need to empower him. She does this by reminding him of his initial superior position in society and not 'a white man's dog' as depicted in his current behaviour. According to Lawino, the Acoli culture empowers Ocol with power over his people and more so his family. He becomes a prince, a leader,

and an important person in society who is respected by all. Contrary to this, the Western culture that Ocol has fully accepted deprives him of his power as a man. He becomes a puppet of the Western culture. Like a robot, he does things to 'please' the expectations of the Western culture.

Lawino further satirizes the Western education that Ocol idolizes. She perceives it as ruining. She argues that the Western culture that is symbolized by books destroys the body of Acoli young men. This is another irony of ways of power that is initially meant to empower the characters who have embraced Western Education but instead it disempowers them. As mentioned previously, Ocol feels superior to his people and more so his wife, Lawino, because of the knowledge he has acquired from Western education. The effect of Western education on the African is metaphorically used to bring out the irony of how the very power of Western education that is meant to empower the African over his African culture has had a lot of power over the very African (Ocol). It renders him powerless as he cannot make sound judgment on issues to do with himself. He totally gets disempowered and becomes another culture's 'doll'. So the question is, how is power defined and by who? My assumption is that this concept could have been the Poet's own experience which he talks about in *Africa's Cultural Revolution* (1973). Okot (1973) says that he ended his formal contact with the study of European literature after his school certificate (A level) examination.

When the year ended, we made a bonfire of the now useless notebooks and English set books. Somehow, I managed to pass the literature paper; but on leaving school, I never read another novel or book of poetry and never visited the theatre until much later on (p. 21).

Lawino encourages 'Ocol' to free himself from alienation and disempowerment by accepting to be empowered by his Acoli culture. To do this, he is expected to discard his foreign ways and ask for forgiveness, accept his people's ways, his wife and empower his modern wife, Tina, with the Acoli cultural values.

Tina's body portrays the paradox of Western civilization on the body of the patriarchal woman. The patriarchal woman's body is usually packaged for the man. Therefore, we expect the civilized, modern 'woman's body (Tina's body) to be packaged for the woman, a perception held by Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* (1981) where she advocates for women to be independent of men. She urges women to make a claim of their own history and stop being objects for men. However, the portrait of Tina's body by the poet suggests otherwise. Hers is a body that has just acquired a new set of tools (from modernization) to serve the same old master: patriarchy.

The power of a modern woman can be seen through Tina's body and Ocol's strong desire for her. Tina's body, which symbolizes 'apemanship', becomes a way of power over Lawino and Ocol. Tina apes the Western culture of dressing. She forgets that she is black and not pink skinned as the white woman. Her newly acquired looks empower her to be 'modern' and therefore she has power over the 'primitive' African woman, Lawino and her husband Ocol. As a result, Ocol despises Lawino as well as her culture just because he prefers a 'modern' woman, Tina. The way of power of apemanship manifested in Tina's body conquers Ocol as a man. Ironically, the same power of apemanship

disempowers Tina who symbolizes it. It works over her body and enslaves her. The Poet describes this irony through Lawino's ridiculing voice. According to Lawino, the looks that Tina thought were presenting her as a beauty portray her as an ugly and emaciated figure.

The poet further contrasts the power of the two cultures through Tina's body of 'apemanship' and Lawino's ridiculing voice on Tina's looks. Okot shows that civilization as embodied in apemanship disempowers while primitivism as embodied in Acoli tradition empowers an African woman. When Tina apes the looks of a white woman, she forgets that she is black skinned unlike the white woman whose pink skin is already pale. She therefore deprives herself of the power of her natural skin beauty. Lawino on the other hand demonstrates the power of primitivism through her rejection of apemanship.

I do not like dusting myself with powder
The thing is good on pink skin
Because it is already pale
But looks as if she has dysentery
Tina looks sickly
And she is slow moving
She is a piteous sight (1972, p. 37)

The Poet presents the bodies of Lawino and Tina, as agents of power out to win the attention of Ocol. It is for this reason that Lawino satirizes Tina's 'modern' looks as she (Lawino) believes that she is better placed to win Ocol unlike Tina. On the other hand, Tina feels more attractive in her 'modern' looks than Lawino so as to win Ocol's admiration. It is for this reason that Tina desires to slim. She diets so as to achieve this. This, according to Lawino, leaves Tina's body unbalanced, as the head is bigger than the neck. Lawino also claims that Tina has had to abort so as to remain young and attractive. Ironically, Tina's body reacts to this kind of apemanship and ends up exposing her true age and denying her the power of a youthful look.

The power of Tina's body's own power therefore manifests itself over the power of apemanship. Tina is said to 'smear black shoe polish on her hair to blacken it' so as to give it a youthful nature. Unfortunately, the power of the body's (hair's) own power emerges as 'Yellowish, grayish, like the hair of the grey monkey' (1972, p. 54)

The poet in a comic way ridicules apemanship. The foreign (western) cultural values may empower a character in one way or another, just like Tina is empowered with a youthful look. At the same time the power that should have empowered a character may disempower the same character. This happens when the character's real 'self' cannot allow or take in much of the apemanship. The bodies' own power then emerges to reverse and contradict the foreign power over the body. The character in which the power play is manifested then becomes a comic figure as evident in the case of Tina.

The poet further demonstrates the power play in the Western and Acoli cultures as manifested in the social arenas. In the Western culture, liberalism is a symbol of power of bodies in the social life. For instance, the white man's mannerism of dance

compromise respect and morality. This power of liberty leads those who have aped the Western culture to misappropriate leisure, which is metaphorically referred to, thus:

There is no respect for relatives
Girls hold their fathers
Boys hold their sisters close
They dance even with their mothers... (1972, p. 45)

In this perception, Lawino defends the beauty of the African (Acoli) culture as its power is seen in the societal morals and appropriateness when it comes to social arenas like dances. It is in this that the power of the man and the woman are seen. This contrasts the value of dance of the western culture that lacks purpose.

The two cultural perspectives on the value of dance contrast as the Acoli social arena is portrayed as being purposeful while the western social arena lacks purpose. Through this argument, Lawino demonstrates the power of bodies over bodies and of bodies as manifested in the cultures. On one hand, the Acoli culture empowers the characters, as they are able to demonstrate their —manliness| in the case of men and the pride and importance of a woman as she resists being touched. On the other hand, the western culture disempowers the characters as they lack dignity and respect. They cannot draw boundaries over whom they should dance with. These characters that have embraced the western ways fail to fit within the Acoli society. They want to identify with the west yet they live in Africa. This power play as manifested in culture can be related to George Lamming's (1965) *In The Castle of My Skin*, which problematizes the concept of identity in the West Indies. Barbados is a place that has been completely emasculated by —Big England.' The power of Big England as a body over Barbados or Little England is shown in the way little England was faithful to —Big England.' Lamming says: —Barbados or Little England was the oldest and purest of England's children ... But Little England remained steadfast and constant to Big England... Big England had only to say the word and Little England followed...| (p. 37).

Anyone who holds another opinion about the power relations between —Big England| and —Little England| looks absurd just like Barbados, which has totally embraced the ideologies of —Big England'. Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* that is set within the Acoli culture is at risk of being infiltrated by the power of —Big England| as seen in the characters who have embraced the western mannerisms of dance.

The power of the bodies over bodies is also evident in the way the —modernized| and —civilized| characters are confronted by their own actions. These characters have been embodied with the power of liberty that leads them to smoke and drink shamelessly. Ironically this body of liberty generates power over them as the smoking and drinking renders the environment within which they operate uncondusive for them.

At the same time, their bodies resist the power over them. The power of bodies over bodies as symbolized by the liberty to drink and smoke provokes the power of the body that struggles to display itself through madness. This is demonstrated in the way the alienated character's negative traits are seen as they lose their power of dignity and civilization. They lack self-control as:

... And before she has untied her dress
She is already pissing
She forces out the urine
As if she has syphilis
The entire floor
Is covered with human dung...
All the tribes of human dung...
Vomit and urine flow by... (1972, p. 46).

The poet further presents the ways of power of bodies and over bodies as manifested in the cultural foods and methods of cooking. Lawino criticizes the power of the western lifestyle of cooking. The power of the western cooking elements has power over its users. Its destructive nature is symbolized through the charcoal stove that leaves one charcoal dirty and blackens your fingernails and the electric fire that kills; it is lightening. The food cooked by these methods, Lawino says, are for the toothless and invalids. To bring out the irony of the power of western foods on the Africans who consume them, Lawino argues that Africans are stronger and they require African foods like millet and sorghum to retain their strength. She further argues that the nutritional value in the White man's foods like eggs can be found in the Acoli traditional foods. Lawino's arguments demonstrate the power of the Acoli traditional foods and how they empower the Acoli people appropriately unlike the western foods that deprive the African of his strength. In this, the poet is asserting the fact that every culture has its power manifested in its own mannerisms and this depends on the geographical and socio-cultural setting. The poet cautions on the dangers of apemanship as aping another's ways may not work to one's benefit but rather destroy him.

The ways of power of bodies and over bodies is also embodied in religion. The Christian culture, which dictates what is good and what is bad gives and denies, characters power. The religious leaders who symbolize the power of Christianity dictate to the people what they should do and not do. In the process, they use this power to oppress and exploit their congregation. For example, the girls who go to church have to work for the wives of the protestant church teachers and priests. Lawino rebels to this power over bodies by refusing to be a Christian for fear of exploitation.

Ironically, the religious leaders who emphasize on morality and obedience and are expected to be upright are overpowered by their own body's desire to be the —real self and not the modeled —Christian men. They abuse, drink and become immoral. The western culture through religion has denied these religious leaders (priests) the power of freedom to have women in their lives. This is a contrast to the Africa culture that permits the freedom of association between men and women as a basic need for both. But as they struggle to operate within the realm of the western (Christian) culture, they fail to keep up to the expectations of Christianity. Their bodies give in to their Acoli traditional upbringing which proves to have more power over them than Christianity.

Paradoxically, the Christian doctrines are quite foreign and meaningless to the African audience and therefore they lack the power that they supposedly had over the congregation. The congregation's inability to comprehend the Christian doctrines symbolizes the body's own power.

Equally, the power of the Christian religion disempowers those who embrace it. It denies them the knowledge to give tangible explanations for its doctrines. Thus, they become escapist as they refuse to entertain questioning. Lawino sarcastically demonstrates the powerlessness of those who have embraced Christianity when she argues that the Christian teachers hate questions and prefer congregants who don't ask questions. On the contrary, the poet shows how the power of the Acoli tradition empowers its people by giving them the knowledge to tangibly explain its ideologies.

At the same time, the Christian names given to the Africans also lack meaning within the African context. Therefore, they lack the power of importance on the Africans who own them. This clearly indicates that the power of a character's name is in its meaning to the people of the particular society where the character lives. The Acoli people have meaning for all their names unlike the Christians.

The Politics of Power in *Song of Ocol*

The power of bodies and over bodies of the Acoli and Western culture as manifested in the characters Lawino and Ocol respectively empower them to take charge of their immediate environment. In the case of Lawino, the power of the Acoli culture that should empower her as the ideal African woman is the same power that destroys her. Lawino's marriage to Ocol, which was initially empowered by the Acoli culture, has now been contaminated by the Western culture. Ocol has had Western education and civilization that has given him different power from that of the Acoli culture. This has influenced their marriage institution. Ironically, Lawino fails to adapt to this change and instead resists the power of her current immediate environment of a 'civilized' husband and marriage. It is only natural that Lawino gives in to the influencing power of her current environment since she is in a patriarchal society where she is expected to be submissive to the man. However, she is antagonistic to the changing influences of her environment. This leaves her alienated from her husband and marriage. Ocol who is a symbol of western culture rejects Lawino in preference to a woman embodied with western culture, Tina.

This is clearly demonstrated in *Song of Lawino* as Lawino values the Acoli adornment that empowers her as the true, beautiful woman. It gives her power over the apemanship of Western culture by Tina. Paradoxically, the same adornment that should have empowered her turns out to disempower her. She is perceived as a dirty woman who will soil the bedding, and because of that, Ocol rejects her as a wife.

This power play is also evident in Ocol's contemptuous description of the African woman's appearance in *Song of Ocol*. The African woman's commitment to duty, for instance 'balancing a large pot on her head', and the act of exposing her beauty symbolize the power of the body of an African woman. Ironically, Ocol does not appreciate this. Instead he perceives the effects of her duty as a source of her disempowerment. According to Ocol, when the water Lawino has balanced on her head pours on her face, she gets ugly. This perception compares very well to Lawino's perception of the power that destroys Tina when she sweats. The destruction of the power of Lawino's beauty, as perceived by Ocol, is further imagerized in the way she walks bare foot. Her feet are cracked and her palms are worn out.

Lawino, in *Song of Lawino*, notes that the power of a woman is interpreted through her capacity for hard work. This implies that she must have a particular body physique that makes her to perform her duties as a woman. This is well captured when she says:

A woman who is jealous
Of another, with whom, she shares a man,
Is jealous because she is slow
Lazy and shy... (1972, p. 40)

However, the alienated body of Ocol does not understand that the body of the African woman who works is not actually a slaved body but is indeed one that is empowered. Ocol castigates the working body of an African woman, thus:

Woman of Africa
Sweeper...
Cook, ayah, the baby tied on
Your back...
Cart, lorry
Donkey... (1972, p 133)

Alienated Ocol wants to employ the power of his acquired Western perception of beauty to comment on the beauty of an African woman. He criticizes the beauty of an African woman and fails to realize that he has no moral authority to do this, as he does not ascribe to the Acoli culture.

From his scornfully comments of the Acholi beauty, Ocol presents himself as an absurd character who has been deprived of his initial power of knowledge of the Acoli aesthetics. He has been vested with western knowledge of beauty which does not fit within the Acoli cultural setting in which he resides. Ocol expects a woman to model her body to suit her husband's taste as evident in Tina. This is contrary to the Acoli culture that embodies a woman with its expectations of beauty. This shows the power conflict in the two cultures.

The persona, Ocol, shows the irony of the power of bride price, a practice that is adored by the African culture. In the African culture, bride price is a body of power that gives the woman the title 'wife'. The same powerful body of bride price that should have empowered the woman to 'wifeness' subjects her to a lot of emotional suffering and sexual exploitation. She becomes a property of the man, her husband, who uses her for his own leisure and pleasure.

Ocol denies the power of the African culture to a point of despising and pitying himself because he doesn't understand his own immediate geo-cultural space. He perceives Africa and Africanness as of no value: full of diseases, ignorance, poverty, and superstitions and devoid of any positive potential. This perception is contrasted with the power of the African aesthetic value: mountains, wildlife, lakes, valleys and a religion. Ocol personalizes Africa and in the process of scorning Africa, he ends up showing its aesthetics although he fails to acknowledge these values.

The poet satirizes Ocol's apemanship and alienation through Ocol's lack of acknowledgement of the African aesthetic values. The ways of power of bodies and over bodies as symbolized in the western culture manifests itself in the Africans who readily embrace the Western cultural values at the expense of their own African cultural values. They fail to see anything positive in Africa and Africanness. Ocol contemptuously paints Africa as a black continent.

Mudimbe in *The Invention of Africa* (1988) deals with 'inventing the invented'. He argues that the colonialists, 'other than dominating the physical space and bringing about capitalism also domesticated the mind of the native'. According to him, Europeans could not appreciate African art and religion because it (art and religion) was foreign to them. For this reason, they resorted to judging Africa using their own standards. In *Song of Ocol*, Okot clearly demonstrates how Ocol's mind has been domesticated by the power of the Western culture. He further shows the power of the African cultural values as a way of 'inventing the invented'. It is this 'domestication' of Ocol's mind that alienates him, makes him criticize African art and perceive Africa as full of inabilities. Paradoxically, it is the communal aspect of the African that gives African culture its power over the individualistic nature of the Western culture.

Ocol, who has totally embraced the western culture, speaks with a voice of the West on how to employ the power of the West over the body of the African culture by destroying the African customs and traditions. In this case, just like Mudimbe's (1988) argument, Okot p'Bitek is trying to show the lack of appreciation of the African aesthetics by the west because they are foreign to them. Paradoxically, this denial and urge to destroy the African customs and traditions, foregrounds Africa's history and the power of African customs and traditions. For instance, the mythmakers are said to sustain village morality.

In *Black Athena* (1987), Martin Bernal deals with the concept of 'The stolen Legacy' where he portrays Egypt as the cradle of civilization. In the same way, the poet, in *Song of Ocol*, asserts the power of Africa over the world's history. He does this through Ocol's sarcasm on the importance of African elites and the relevance of African history, art and religion in the world's history. Ocol dismisses the need to acknowledge great African elites and their contribution in the world. He emphasizes on the way of power of the West over the African by showing their (Africa's) irrelevance to the world. On the contrary, African culture indirectly emits the body's own power by presenting its elites, history, art and religion as a way of storing its 'stolen legacy' from the West as Ocol questions:

Where is Aime C'esaire?
Where is Leopold Senghor
Arrest Janheinz Jann...
Dubois is dead...
Who will build the citadel
Of Zimbabwe?
Of what relevance is it
Whether black men
Architected the Pyramid? (1972, p. 129)

The ways of power of the body of the West over the body of Africa is demonstrated by the Poet in the way he satirizes Africa for failing to recognize its heroes: the anthropologists, negritudists and architects. Africa has left the west to define it and recognize its (the west's) own in Africa. Ocol, an embodiment of the Western culture mocking Africa argues that the African streets will be named after the Westerners whereas the African rulers will be forgotten.

Africa has varied traditions, which are a body of power that empower and give identity to every tribe. This same body of power, which should empower Africa, also disunites Africa as a whole (1972, p. 137-138). The West, that Ocol symbolizes, is critical of Acoli culture, which for me in this poetry is synecdoche of Africa. The West takes advantage of the weaknesses in the African traditions to assert its power on Africa. As a result, it changes and models Africa in the 'western way' so that none of the African ways are left. Determined in this pursuit, Ocol metaphorically says:

I see an old homestead
In the valley below
Huts, granaries...
All in ruins;
I see a large pumpkin
Rotting
A thousand beetles
In it (1972, p. 124)

Just like in *Song of Lawino*, the poet satirizes the efficiency of the black leaders in leading their own black people as portrayed in *Song of Ocol*. The Africans struggled for the power of independence from the colonial master. After getting independence, the people celebrated the power of *uhuru* that they had acquired. Ironically, the power of *uhuru* for the people was missing as these celebrations only empowered the 'Ocols' who were already intoxicated with the Western values of leadership: capitalist society which creates classes of the 'haves' and those who do not have. These leaders, full of western values of leadership became bodies of ways of power over bodies (their subjects). The 'Ocol' in his pride of power despisingly brags about the wealth he owns to his subjects. The persona further suggests that the power of change is inevitable for survival.

You have only two alternatives
My sister
Either you come in
Through the city gate
Or take the rope
And hang yourself (1972, p. 149)

This change that the persona wants the people to embrace so as to be empowered has its strong roots in the West with a blend of the African values.

Tell the world
In English or French
Talk about

The African foundation
On which we are
Building the new nations of Africa (1972, p. 150)

The poet, Okot p'Bitek, through Ocol, advocates for the integration of the two cultures whereby the European language is a body of power through which communication of African ideas, which form another body of power, can be done. Ideally, this still creates a power struggle between the two cultures as each wants to create its own power over the other.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has explored the way Okot p'Bitek plays out ways of power over and of bodies as seen in the cultural conflicts between western and Acoli through examining the cultural ideologies of the two as presented in *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol*. The ways of power of the two cultures is mechanized in the bodies of the characters, Lawino, Ocol and Clementine as well as in the socio-cultural and geographical environment within which these characters operate. Lawino as a body that symbolizes the ways of power of the Acoli (African) culture criticizes power of western civilization in totality although at times the credibility of her criticism is questionable. This is because she is presented as a naive character yet able to see things beyond her naivety. Ironically, Lawino's criticism of western education, mannerisms, dressing code and time management exposes the power of western civilization to the audience. However, Okot's use of Lawino's 'eye' to present ways of the western culture is not authentic as Lawino hardly has any exposure to this culture that she criticizes.

It has been established that the power of culture can be destructive. For instance, Tina, who is black, lacks self-esteem, which is a power that constructs a character to be proud, of who she is. She decides to model herself to fit the definition of a modern beautiful woman as dictated by the power of western civilization. In the process, she destroys herself as her body's own power resists the foreign power of western mannerism; she therefore becomes ugly as opposed to the beauty she was in search of. At the same time Lawino in her endeavor to idolize the power of African culture ends up being dormant. Time is change; but Lawino lacks this power of progress. She therefore remains the labeling of an archaic model of a patriarchal society that is void of the power of progress. Ocol as presented by Lawino is a tool for use by foreigners. In his attempt to discard the power of African cultural values, he ends up discarding himself. He becomes a victim of double ambivalence. He is an African, black in complexion with African origin, but his acquisition of western mannerisms and ideologies leave him in 'limbo'. It is, therefore, worthwhile to note that there is no culture with absolute power over another; no culture is perfect. At one point, a culture may possess power over another and at another point lose its power to the other.

REFERENCES

- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (1989). *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London: Routledge 11New
- FetterMartin, B. (1987). *Black Athena*. USA: Rutgers University Press.
- Foucault, M. (1967). *Madness and Civilization*. London: Routledge 11New Fetter Lane.
- Foucault, M. (1970). *The Order of Things: An Archeology of Human Sciences*. London: Routledge 11 New Fetter Lane.
- Foucault, M. (1972). *The Archeology of knowledge*. London: Routledge 11 New Fetter Lane.
- Harlard, R. (1987). *Superstructuralism: The Philosophy of Structuralism and Post-structuralism*. London: Routledge.
- Heron, G. A. (1976). *The Poetry of Okot p'Bitek*. USA: Africana Publishing Company.
- Lamming, G. (1953). *In The Castle of my Skin*. Caribbean: Carlong Publishers.
- Memmi, A. (1965). *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Mudimbe, Y. V. (1988). *The Invention of Africa*. USA: American University Press.
- p' Bitek, O. (1986) *Artist the Ruler: Essays on Art, Culture and Values*. Nairobi: East African Educational Limited.
- p'Bitek, O. (1971). *African Religions in Western scholarship*. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau.
- p'Bitek, O. (1971) *Religion of the Central Luo*. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau.
- p'Bitek, O. (1972). *Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol*. Nairobi: Heinemann Educational Books Limited.
- p'Bitek, O. (1990). *Africa's Cultural Revolution*. Nairobi: Heinemann Educational Books Limited
- p'Bitek, O. (1974). *Horn of my Love*. London: Heinemann Educational Books.
- p'Bitek, O. (1989). *White Teeth*. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau.
- p'Bitek, O. (1990). *Africa's Cultural Revolution*. Nairobi: Heinemann Educational Books Limited.
- Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism* Michigan University, Pantheon Books
- Wa Thiongo, N. J. (1965). *The River Between*. Nairobi: Heinemann Educational Publishers Limited.
- Wolf, V. (1981). *A Room of One's Own*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich

BIO-DATA

Gladys Nyaiburi Ogaro holds a Bachelor of Education Arts and a Master of Philosophy in Literature from Moi University where she is also pursuing her doctorate . She has worked in as a teacher in Secondary Schools, lectured in various Universities and currently is a lecturer at Mount Kenya University. As a researcher, her area of interest is in both African Literature and Children Literature.

Diana Mutono Munyao holds a Master of Arts in Literature from Moi University. She is pursuing her doctorate at Kisii University. She has university lecturing experience in various Universities. Her interest in research is in both African Literature and Children Literature