

# Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's treatment of Hypocrisy and Deception in Wizard of the Crow

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p><i>Keywords— Hypocrisy, Deception, Democracy, Fictional, Kenya, Africa</i></p>	<p>This essay centres on abuse of democratic tenets with particular reference to Kenya, which typifies experiences of many Africa democracies and beyond. It reveals the twin evils of hypocrisy and deception as tools used by dictators to deflect the citizenry's attention from forming a formidable opposition. It captures the activities of unflinching loyalists or henchmen of abused system; with a strand of deception leading to the government deceiving the governed, deception and wrangling among inner-circle caucus_ each snitching and betraying one another_ collegial rivalry: a top-down effect with the self-ambitious-dictator-leader as the chief hypocrite who is good at fabrications and lies. The paper argues that silence is not golden in the face of governmental excesses and oppression as exemplified in the activities and advocacies of the protagonists; Kamiti and Nyawira in lending their voices against despotic government by spearheading defiant protests.</p>

## 1. Introduction

In Africa and beyond, a very significant number of leaders have exhibited an overwhelming great quest of sitting tight on power with a desire to remain ever relevant in the eyes of their subjects. To the intent, they have wantonly violated the sense of true humanity, the Rule of Law and constitutional provision necessary for a stable society. In order to assume a long stay or perhaps a lifetime paddling of the boat of power, such unpatriotic leaders stifled opposition, broke peaceful protesters they termed dissidents; clamping down on their activities. The masses, on the other hand, are left in abject poverty and impoverished- this has made them ever dependent; being mindful of how their lots could be improved instead of having a mind and will of their own to organise a formidable opposition, or at least quash excesses of dictators at the helm of affairs. Nigerian government cracking down on 'End Sars' protesters; an anti-police brutality protest in 2020 writes Emmanuel Akinwotu of The Guardian, is an example of abuses is recent times, with soldiers gunning down protesters in Lagos and conducted arrests of demonstrators (1). In the same vein,

despite widely known and documented police abuses, Kenyan authorities have done little to end police brutality, rarely investigating these killings. In February, 2020, Human Rights Watch found that Kenyan police had, between December and February shot dead at least eight people in Nairobi... (1). Amnesty International reports an increase in attacks against journalists in 2019 caused Ghana to lose its status as the best-ranked African country in Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index (1,2). Speaking on the drift from propriety and governmental hypocrisy, Mausi Segun of Human Rights Watch observes authorities in several countries, notably Tanzania and Uganda, weaponised the pandemic to quell popular protests and harass opposition politicians and their supporters, journalists and activists (2).

*Wizard of the Crow* beams searchlight to uncover how dictators or tyrants scheme their paths to hold sway on power through the machinery of hypocrisy and deception. It portrays hypocrisy and deception as viable dictatorial tools, with the party in power by means of falsehood, insincerity, duplicity and hypocritical deception have managed to walk their

ways into “Thy kingdom come” government with its attendant condemnable outcome of illegal/unwarranted arrests, incarcerations, strange disappearances and mass killings of patriots and other implicit opposers or perceived political enemies.

### **The African Writer and His Pen**

The mind of the African scholar is buoyed with burden that nothing can unladen; floods of thoughts expressed by ink on paper Posits Ali Mazrui. This is why African literature over the years has xrayed the experiences of people on the continent particularly in politics and governance, he also notes that, “Literature and politics in Africa continue to meet at a variety of points” (14). Art and particular literature derives its power from the fact that it is a vehicle of ideas, untrammelled and free-flowing that it becomes the enemy of the oppressor, Daniel Kunane admits. He further illuminates that, literature is the most reliable mirror that can be used to give a true reflection of any society and its people. The oppressor sees himself reflected in his ugliest form. In his word, “the oppressor sees the ugliest in the art and not in himself and instead of removing his deformities; he breaks the mirror” (426). Political dictatorship and abuse that characterized many African democracies is been obfuscated in the regalia of hypocrisy and deception this has over the years attracted attention of writers on the continent. Dan Izevbye rightly observes that, apart from novels about colonization, the bulk of African novels are political in the narrow sense. The themes of the African novelist have so far been related mainly to national politics. The literary artist also becomes an important part of the national process through his arts (22). In the same vein, Bhambra in David Yenjele opines that, in order to disrupt the seemingly invisible power of dictators in postcolonial states novelists such as Ngugi Wa Thiong’o in *Wizard of the Crow...* respectively employ the carnivalesque and the magical realist modes in charting alternative ways of conceptualizing egalitarian policies. Furthermore, postcolonial thinking “is more about re-inscribing ‘other’ cultural traditions into narratives of modernity and thus transforming those narratives both in historical terms and theoretical ones- rather than simply renaming or re-evaluating the content of these other inheritances” (115).

### **2. Background to Wizard of the Crow**

As a fiction set in the free Republic of Aburiria, *Wizard of Crow* represents Kenyan undemocratic

experiences of police state of brutality. It portrays the abuse on Human Rights; with prohibition on peaceful assembly, illegal arrest and torture with strange disappearances (secret execution of perceived enemies of the State). Hypocrisy, deception abuse of office, hunger, unemployment, poverty, extravagant government expenditure, corruption and embezzlement of public funds – the list is inexhaustible, are characteristic of Aburirian state; with huge restrictions on civil liberty.

As a birthday gift to the Ruler- presented by his deluded ministers on behalf of the nation- plans are made to erect in Aburiria the tallest building in the world, a tower that would reach "to the very gates of heaven so that the Ruler could call on God daily to say good morning or good evening or simply how was your day today, God?" Jeff Turrentine submits. As his lackeys pathetically battle for the Ruler’s favour, the tower boondoggle, officially christened "Marching to Heaven," precipitates a nationwide mania that compels tens of thousands of Aburirians to gather in front of the office of the project’s chairman. They form two lines: one filled with suit-clad businessmen seeking construction contracts on this Tower of Babel redux (and happy to pay whatever bribes are necessary); the other filled with poor men desperate for work. All is contingent, of course, on the release of funds from the Global Bank, the neocolonial Santa Claus of strings-attached capital. Against this backdrop, a love story develops between Kamiti, a beggar who is Masters of Business Administration (MBA) has not done him much good, and Nyawira, a political radical and Women’s-Rights Activist, who are thrust together while running from a policeman after a protest of Global Bank policies. To throw their pursuer off track, Kamiti makes a sign for their hideout indicating that all trespassers will have to answer to a powerful sorcerer, the Wizard of the Crow. The plan works too well: the terrified policeman flees the scene only to return later, meekly, as a paying client seeking the Wizard of the Crow’s occult counsel. Soon the charade has overtaken Kamiti and Nyawira’s lives; they must deal not only with the long lines that form outside their door each day but also with the machinations of the paranoid Ruler and his toadying ministers, each of whom, for his reasons, is eager to co-opt the sorcerer’s magic (2).

Too much of the book is devoted to the Machiavellian plots of the Ruler’s ministers, who spend every minute of their lives panicking and planning one another’s downfall. Their jobs become that much

harder when the Ruler, in one of the novel's many magic realist touches, begins to expand like a gas-filled balloon. He, like the country he has been exploiting and oppressing all these years via one-party rule, is headed toward an explosion- the one Nyawira has been fighting for. "The life of even the least among us should be sacred, and it will not do for any region or community to keep silent when the people of another region and community are being slaughtered," she tells Kamiti. "The wealth of science, technology and arts should enrich peoples' lives, not enable their slaughter."

Though Kamiti is only masquerading as a wizard, he is gifted with a preternatural ability to smell a person's true character; or, as he puts it, "there are times when the foul and the fresh appear to struggle for the right of passage into my nostrils, like evil and good spirits fighting for the domination of the soul." He has also, in a sort of dream state, flown overseas and mountains on a "global journey in search of the source of black power". Similarly, with *Wizard of the Crow*, Ngugi has flown over the entire African continent and sniffed out all of the foul stench rising high into the air: complacency toward despotism, repression of women and ethnic minorities, widespread corruption and- undergirding all of these- a neocolonial system in which today's lending banks and multinationals have supplanted yesterday's European overlords. But from that altitude, he can also see a more hopeful sign: large masses of people coming together, sharing triumphant stories and casting spells (3).

The Complete Review sees *Wizard of the Crow* as a long book at 766 pages, so it comes as somewhat of a surprise that it is in the "sweeping epic"- genre mount. Ngugi does pack a great deal into his novel, but does not force the issues; the result is a surprisingly breezy read that is enormously entertaining and almost incidentally provides a broad picture of the African condition in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (8).

Jaggi Maya observes that, *Wizard of the Crow* initially serialised, was also partly destined to be read aloud, as much like a piece of theatre as fiction. His (Ngugi's) new novel- *Wizard of the Crow*, is set in the Free Aburiria, a fictitious African dictatorship that owes much to the Kenya of Ngugi's erstwhile persecutor, former President Daniel Arap Moi. Yet the "Ruler", whose suit patched with big cat's fur has shares traits with despots from Marcos and Mobutu to Pinochet, Suharto and Idi Amin: As the author writes in London in the 1980s, when he helped to

campaign to free political prisoners from Kenyan and other post-colonial dungeons. The novel's atmosphere of paranoia about the "M5" secret police has its root from reality (3, 5).

### **Hypocrisy and Deception in *Wizard of the Crow***

Hypocrisy is regalia with which deception is finely clothed or decorated; there is always a deception at the root of every hypocritical prank. Or better still, it can be said that hypocrisy is deception. *Wizard of the Crow* is chequered with liters of hypocrisy and deception, in the face of autocratic dictatorship. As portrayed in the novel, tyrants can be so hypocritical with the true state of their country before the international eyes. A sort of window dressing and fair treatment of their subjects when the international community is visiting as captured thus:

...The police were there to protect the visitors from any intrusion

by hoodlum beggars, but they were under strict orders not to use

excessive force. Visiting dignitaries should not be given the

impression that Aburiria was awash in conflicts. The image

of the country at peace was crucial for wooing finance for Matching to heaven (74).

. Ngugi pierces sharply but humorously as he juxtaposes the government of his day; a dictatorial and the patriots that governed in transparent patriotism before, when he says: "...There are two kinds of saviours: those who want to soothe the soul of the suffering and, those who want to heal the sores on the flesh of the suffering..." (95). While the former is sincerely truthful with the masses (true democrats); the latter is hypocritical and insincere; a dictator. The use of some scatological words by Ngugi is deliberate; it is his way of projecting the putrefaction in the Kenyan government of that time. He remarks thus- "...The septic system collapsed; all the pails were overflowing with human waste. Even the floors were full of shit..." (71)- This is by extension the true deplorable state of things in Aburiria; the result of the Ruler's hypocrisy strain; a system

awashed with putrefying corruption and abuses- akin to human excreta.

The Ruler like many despots can be so evil that he can elicit his subjects to be at loggerhead; in so far it would make him prominent and his selfish agenda come true:

...The dictator's reputation for making ministers plot against the minister, region rise against region, and community fight against the community was now a matter of legend. He would side with one warring faction, which would rejoice at his alliance with power only to wake up one morning to find that the dictator had sided with the adversary, for a time, at least, before changing sides again or even goading altogether another faction into the fray. The dictator, seemingly above it all, is looking good as he appealed for peace and understanding, would be embraced by all the feuding parties as a Solomonic prince of peace (231).

It is a baffling hypocrisy and deception to read Sikiokuu, making a divinity out of humanity (hero worship) when in essence is a bid to curry favour, he says before the Ruler:

I swear by the Almighty on Earth and the one in heaven...If God and the Ruler were standing together side by side and their hats were blown off their heads at the same time, I would pick

up the one that belongs to the Ruler first, and without realizing

it I had said loudly: "Alleluia, may my Lord and Master be

praised forever and ever, Amen (541).

Ngugi x-rays the praise-singing, hero-worship in vivid terms to condemn the attribution of that worship only God deserves to mortal; but praise singers revere despots as God by their works and words- condemnable. The Ruler is somewhat soft with his flatterers but harsh with opposition; "I want the leaders of rebellious youths and women to be crushed like ants..." (558). A step to crush public opinion and freedom of speech is the worst thing that can happen to the citizenry for then, they are as good as the dead.

The Ruler's trickery in sending a helicopter with fake currency to disperse protesting crowd speaks volume of what despots can do. Aburiria which is held in the clutches of poverty, underdevelopment and unemployment, would naturally give in to the Ruler's hypocrisy and deception, but for the foresighted Nyawira who understands that hungry citizens can easily sell their conscience, especially when money is involved. She quickly shouted: "...it was counterfeit, the dictator's trickery to corrupt your souls and scatter you through temptation..." (689).

Collegial rivalry is characteristic of the Ruler's Cabinet ministers; with each minister pressing hard to outsmart one another, in hypocrisy and deception. For none of them wishes the other well; Sikiokuu's interaction with Kamiti later reveals the former's power ambition- for he has even wished the Ruler were dead so he can become the next (414). The same Sikiokuu is desperately worried if the Ruler should die in New York when a "save our soul" message demands that the Wizard of the Crow be flown there to attend to the ailing Ruler. His worries are whether Machokali his rival minister would take over as the new captain in the country incidentally. Suspicion and insincerity are a common trend even among the inner circle caucus of the dictatorship system.

To show his commitment towards the return of Aburiria back to democracy, the Ruler's "...huge board" revealing a drawing of the Ruler holding a baby vaguely resembling Aburiria in his fatherly arms. At the foot of the inscription in large Aburirian

national colours: BABY D. Behold Baby Democracy....” (698). But he wants to be “...the normal head of all political parties. This means that in the next general elections, all the parties would vote him of course, by choosing him as their candidate for the presidency” (699). The Ruler’s prescription rubs off on Nigeria’s Late General Abacha’s single Party system that was rejected outrightly by the masses- a so-called a return to democracy.

Despots can be shameless with lies and fabrications. The Ruler explains to the Parliament that:

...Marching to Heaven had been conceived by Machokali, a

scheme as absurd as to boggle the mind. There was devilish

cunning in it, and he, the Ruler, had gone along with the scheme

only to find out the man’s real intentions. Well, unfortunately,

Machokali was not around to explain what he had in mind, so we

shall never know what he was made up to, and there is no

point in speculation. The Ruler had now lowered his voice and

said that he was sad to say that the government had not yet been

able to find out how or where the late Markus had met his fate

or even the nature of that fate. However, the private detectives

he had hired from abroad had reported to him that this was the case of SID, self-induced disappearance. Let the scheme like its author, go the way of SID (697).

Marching to Heaven is the Ruler’s lofty, selfish, unattainable and a mirage ambition. Machokali is the Ruler’s mouthpiece; and as a Cabinet Minister, he is laden with the responsibility to announce that: the whole country, the Minister of Foreign Affairs was saying, the entire Aburirian populace, had decided unanimously to erect a building such as had never been attempted...” (16). It is an outright lie to say that the astronomical “impossible” project of *Heaven scrape* is Machokali’s sole idea. Dictators can be traitors too; especially when the going gets tough, they can give out a confidante to save their face and pride. It is startling to hear the Ruler calls *Matching to Heaven* an “absurd, devilish cunning...” because he has succeeded in attributing the project to Machokali’s sole ambition- a huge betrayal with tyrants here. The disappearance of Machokali is in the first place a calculated attempt by the Ruler and his power-mad lieutenants because; after the accomplishment of the dictator of Aburiria’s wish in the disappearance and murder saga of the Minister; who was falsely charged with “Acts of Treason”, it is disclosed that: “The Ruler was in a jolly mood, and he immediately promoted Kahiga and Njoya to Senior Superintendents of Police, A.G. was made Assistant Commissioner of Police”(599,606)- for a job well done. The hypocritical Eternal Ruler of Aburiria lacks moral right, and cannot prove innocence or be cleared from any charges inferential from Machokali’s ‘mysterious’ disappearance so to say- which is not mysterious as he claims but assassination. Though at a time, the Ruler implicates himself by calling Machokali “late Minister”. When he weighs the implication of this phrase, he immediately reverses the word. To paint his deception and trickery as veritable, the insincere Ruler delves into framing that; the Minister in question disappeared through Self-Induced Disappearance- SID: This is a sham and shameless fabrication. Besides, the assertion is not scientifically amenable; neither can it stand any substantiation or logical premise.

It is sarcastically laughable that Sikiokuu standing before the Dictator of Aburiria confesses: “Your Excellency, I am a sinner... when the Ruler responses: “I know..., Sikiokuu, do you want to be saved?” (671,2). This a huge deception and lies.

It is astoundingly surprising that a leader mutilates the truth, tell lies, gives or collects bribes, sacrifices the truth, wrests the law he is expected to uphold, hushes and quietens opposition, operates in deception to present a make-belief idea; so that the

people are deconscientised, misled and deceived. To the intent, they would not protest, seek or press on for their rights as captured thus:

There is no moral limit to the means that a ruler can use, from lies

to lives, bribes to blows, in order to ensure that his state is stable through

sacrificing truth rather than lives, bending rather than breaking the law,

sealing the lips of the outspoken with endless trickeries rather than

tearing them with barbed-wire and hot wax, if he could buy peace

through a grand deception rather than a vast display of armored

vehicles in the streets which often gave his enemies material for

propaganda, it will be sweetest victories (703).

The Ruler's grand scheme in setting up even his loyalist is captured thus:

His plan is simplicity itself. He would send his devoted minister,

his very trusted counsellor, on a last mission, to order the army

for a massacre. Blood would flow. And after the massacre he would

set up a commission of inquiry supervised by a couple of observers

from America and the European Union, if necessary, which would

end up blaming his Minister of Defense. He would then have him

executed publicly. Thought, Word, and Deed! (750).

People missing in Aburiria akin to Oceania in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a commonplace. For even when the interrogating officers looked into the records, they were able to confirm that indeed such men once existed, but their files had been closed and marked "...MISSING AND PRESUMED DEAD" (748). The slight difference between Aburiria in *Wizard of the Crow* and Oceania is that; while the former has traces of documents that show the expunged or missing citizens once lived and are not, the latter goes extreme by destroying every single evidence that may imply that such missing citizens ever existed: "... annihilated in the past as well as in the future" (Orwell, 230). This is an extent to which totalitarians and despots can go as far as a crime linked to them is concerned.

*Wizard of the Crow* is full of references to Kenya events and will no doubt evoke similar happenings in other countries, but the incidents are not literary historical "Queuing Menia" reminds us of the one party *mlolongo* elections, but the queues in Eldares only expresses conformity (Voice Awaaz 1). Ngugi combines the use of magic and satire in his fictional work *Wizard of the Crow*. It shows the intricacies of the African life, the place of mysticism that often reshapes the lives of people on the continent. By and large, he condemns the Ruler's oppressive neo-colonialistic principles expressed through hypocrisy and deceptive policies that make fellow black masses live in perpetual bondage, oppression and subjection.

### 3. Conclusion

The novel, *Wizard of the Crow* portrays democracy at its worse when Civil Liberty and Rule of Law are hitherto bastardized by the leadership of the day. From his Kenyan experience, Ngugi has argued with satire the entrenchment of true democracy amidst scores of Human Rights violations in a fictional state of Aburiria. To this end it does reveals place of activism, public sensitization and mobilization is central to revolution and national freedom. Whether it is Josef Stalin of Russia, Adolf Hitler of Germany, Benito Mussolini of Italy, Pol Pot of Cambodia, Kim Jong-il or Kim Jong-un all of North Korea, Mao Zedong of China, Robbert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, Fidel Castro of Cuba, Nicolae Ceausescu of Romania, Bashar al-Assad of Syria Muammar al-Gadafi of Libya, Augusto Pinochet of Chile, Omar al-Bashir of Sudan, Idi-Amin of Uganda, Saddam Hussain of Iraq, Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire, Daniel Arap Moi of Kenya or Sani Abacha of Nigeria and a train of others, dictators the world over share almost similar traits-

though some are more dangerous than the others- Hypocrisy, double-tongued policies, falsehood and selfish manoeuvrings are always their stock in trade. As Atifete Jahjaga asserts that: "Democracy must be built through open societies that share information. When there is information, there is enlightenment. When there is a debate, there are solutions. When there is no sharing of power, no Rule of Law, no accountability, there is abuse, corruption, subjugation, and indignation" (1). True democracy or constitutional government with the Rule of Law that guarantees equal rights to all citizens with a check and balances on those in power is a viable antidote against dictatorship or any subtle deviation from the tenets of democracy in any place.

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