

MUSIC AS A POINT OF RESISTANCE
IN NGUGI WA THIONG'O'S *MATIGARI*

Christine M. Timm

The consideration of cultural and linguistic variants in reading foreign vernacular or translated works is a common hurdle that one must overcome in order to fully appreciate literature written outside of one's own linguistic sphere. Kenyan novelist Ngugi wa Thiong'o recognizes a tenacious link between contemporary African literature and the traditional African music and orature (oral literature). In a 1975 interview conducted at the University of Nairobi, Ngugi drew an explicit parallel between music and literature by analogizing his role as an author with that of a singer:

One must listen to the beat of the drums. If a singer is out of tune with the drums, he is a poor singer. He is a sweet singer when everybody joins in. The sweet songs last longer, too. They have more meaning and more emotions.¹

Indeed, in African cultures music traditionally has played a strategic role in many aspects of daily life. The total integration of music is perhaps due to the inherent musical qualities of the languages. Prominent Ghanaian ethnomusicologist, J. H. Nketia, notes the communicative properties of pitch: "African languages are tone languages. Languages in which tone is phonemic or serves to distinguish words in much the same way as do vowels and consonants."²

Written African literature has its roots in the orature tradition of the culture. African history, mythology, poems, and tales have conventionally been passed on orally through the generations in a manner similar to the ancient Greeks. In their works most African writers confront the problem of negotiating properties of orature with written literature, particularly in a situation where they are forced to adapt their texts to a Western tongue. Ngugi himself has chosen in his last two novels to write in his vernacular, Gikuyu. Although one cannot ignore the obvious political ramifications of such a choice, part of the decision certainly lies in the realm of the aesthetic. In his latest novel, *Matigari*,³ written in Gikuyu, Ngugi concerns himself with the relationship between music and print literature. Before the musical complexities of *Matigari* can be discussed, however, African music and orature must first be discussed as a prerequisite to understanding the musical complexities of the novel.

J. Nketia relates that African instrumental music is often imitative of "melodic intervals, contours and phrases characteristic of the particular vocal tradition."⁴ In African song, this relationship of melody and speech is particularly apparent. Because a language like Gikuyu is a "tone language" (a language in which tone is phonemic) a melody might be suggested by the mere utterance of a phrase.⁵ In this way melodic composition is strongly guided by the tonal quality of African languages. Occasionally, the pitches of the spoken phrases conflict with the predetermined melodic sequence. In this case the spoken tone is altered to suit the melody and the word is understood through rhythm and context. One may then observe that in Gikuyu, melody and text are functionally interdependent.

Text and melody interact as well in the structure of song. Repetition is a hallmark of the African song tradition. Here a word, phrase, or stanza can be repeated antiphonally, lineally, or as a combination of both. A common form is the call-response structure in which a cantor sings a phrase which is then repeated antiphonally by the chorus (aa bb cc). It is the cantor's prerogative to alter the text, melody, or rhythm of the phrase; the chorus must follow his lead. Another procedure is for the leader to begin a phrase and for the chorus to help finish it (aa' bb' cc'). In a third form, the leader sings a phrase and then also joins in with the chorus on the repetition (aa bb cc) or the cantor may sing a melodic narrative phrase and the chorus interjects a repetitive stanza (ab cb db). In each case the cantor controls the text and the structure of repetitions. Although this leader/chorus antiphonal format is the most common type of African song organization, there are also structures which deviate from this call/response organization. Occasionally in this form the chorus supplies a repetitive ostinato underpinning over which the soloists sing in imitative polyphony. Another contrapuntal structure is formed when a group of soloists sing their phrases first individually and then simultaneously or in alternate groupings. This arrangement allows for individual expression within the communal unit.⁶

Some songs are accompanied by actions or hand movements to simulate various work tasks in preparation for future adult responsibilities. These action songs often evolve into games with the children arranged in a circle around a central figure or object.⁷

Subversive songs play a large role in maintaining many of the traditional social structures of African communities, and in the twentieth century it has become a standard tool of African political movements. Songs and music were favored for their intelligibility by the masses, expediency of communication, emotional patriotic effect, and inducement of the government to change. The Mau Mau movement in Kenya in the early 1950s, for instance, used subversive songs to

advertise the cause and elicit support. The leaders of the movement capitalized on the Gikuyu love of hymn-singing by setting seditious lyrics to familiar tunes. The Kenyans would memorize the songs, and the message spread with the melody.⁸ There were many advantages to using songs to promote the cause. The hymns were expediently circulated through even rural, illiterate communities and thus had a more far reaching effect than government print propaganda. Since it was not the custom for most Europeans to familiarize themselves with the regional languages of African communities in which they were living, there was little opportunity to decipher or understand Gikuyu political song. Moreover, the ruling bodies were not likely to feel threatened by songs and music because of the conventionality of the medium. The songs were, therefore, not suspect and were allowed to flourish and spread freely. These tunes also generated the same emotional effects among the citizens that were associated with the religious ceremonies and rituals; they promoted solidarity and patriotism through the emotional bond of the people.⁹

The traditions of African orature present an additional example of the synthesis of music and language. Due to the tonal quality of speech the narration itself suggests melody and rhythm. The performance of orature resembles that of song where the narrator is most often surrounded by his/her "audience." Also, in African performance the audience is less a silent spectator than an essential participant in the action. The narrator alternates from speech to song, depending on the tone and action of the story, and the singing of a phrase is often a signal to the audience to respond antiphonally by either intoning the phrase in imitation or providing an answer.¹⁰ Music structures are thus applied to the narrative. The leader, like the song cantor, controls the formal organization and content of the performance and likewise invites communal participation by the audience. In this fusing of speech and song in African oral literature, we can especially perceive the interdependence of music and language. As Finnegan suggests, orature is more analogous to music than to printed literature because of its style of performance. As she puts it,

... without its oral realization and direct rendition by singer or speaker an unwritten literary piece cannot easily be said to have any continued or independent existence at all. In this respect the parallel is less to written literature than to music and dance; for these two are art forms, which in the last analysis are actualized in and through their performance and, furthermore, in a sense depend on repeated performances for their continued existence.¹¹

In *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngugi wa Thiong'o relates the strong impression that the orature experience made on him in terms of communal participation: "I can vividly recall those evenings of storytelling around the fireside. It was mostly grown-ups telling the children but everybody was interested and involved."¹²

In his Gikuyu works, Ngugi clearly tries in many ways to recapture this experience of orature. Ngugi's first novel in Gikuyu, *Caitani Mutharabaini (Devil on the Cross)*,¹³ was immensely popular, and Ngugi attributes its success to the mass accessibility of the novel to even the suburban illiterate. The Gikuyu novel attracted performance by "professional readers" in local pubs. For the compensation of a constantly full mug of beer he/she would read the novel aloud to the gathered customers. Ngugi himself comments on this appropriation of the novel into oral performance,¹⁴ and the success of the novel as orature is no coincidence. According to the author, it was created with the rhythm and pitch of the language in mind. He tells us that he ". . . also borrowed heavily from forms of oral narrative, particularly the conversational tone, the fable, proverbs, songs. . ."¹⁵ In attempting to capture the musical spirit and orature in print, Ngugi was able to create a work that was successful in both the vocal and written forms.

Ngugi's second Gikuyu novel, *Matigari*, is also extraordinary for its immersion in music and song. Ngugi uses music in many ways: to create formal structure, to advance the plot, to further political ends. Indeed the resemblance of the novel to orature can be noted even before the story begins in the author's address to the reader/listener. The fact that he writes "reader/listener" is itself significant in that he presents the novel as not just a work to be read but a work to be performed. Ngugi invites the reader/audience to participate in the composition of the novel by choosing the country of the story, its time reference, "space," and the duration of its action. Ngugi invites the community to participate in his story just as the orature narrator enlists the help of the gathered group and the cantor signals the chorus to join in. This introduction, therefore, sets up Ngugi's narrator as an orator or cantor interacting with the reader/listener who actively participates in the creation and performance of the work. The prologue also resembles song in its structure. The address is in strophic form with a modified repetitive though sounding off each stanza. There are four stanzas of five lines each forming a symmetrical whole easily adaptable to choral repetition. The punctuation might be read as an indication of dynamics. The last line of each stanza and the first line of the final quasi-couplet all end with exclamation points, signifying a change in dynamic level and propelling the lines into the subsequent stanzas.

The lyrical structure of the prologue sets the tone for the ensuing novel. Indeed, the narrative form throughout is imitative of African song in style and formal organization. In chapter seven (page 19), for instance, the repetition in the dialogues simulates imitation between two soloists or choral groups. In many cases the substance of the question is included in the response.

'And who are you, my son?' he asked the man.
'Who, me?' the worker said. 'My name is Ngaruro wa Kiriro.'
'Ngaruro? Of the Kiriro clan? . . .'

' . . . Muriuki. My name is Muriuki.'
'Yes, that's right a place where Muriuki and I can find something to eat. . . .'

'Do you live in a children's village?' Ngaruro asked.
'Yes, that's where I live,' the boy replied.

Another variety of the imitative lyrical format is seen/heard at the beginning of the tale in chapter 2. In this passage, Ngugi begins each line similarly with either "his" or "he." The repetition is heard with the alliteration of the initial consonants. In Gikuyu the masculine personal pronoun and possessive pronoun would be repeated in much the same way as they are in English tradition.¹⁶

His feet felt heavy. *He* decided to rest for a while. *He* laid his coat on the ground and sat on it in the shade leaning back against the tree. *He* removed *his* hat, placed it on *his* left knee and wiped *his* brow with *his* right hand. *His* hair was a fine mixture of black and grey. *His* brow had creased with fatigue. *He* yawned drowsily. How could it be so oppressively hot so early in the morning (*Matigari*, 5. Emphasis mine).

This technique, common in the narrative passages of the novel, is reminiscent of the lyrical procedure in which each line is begun in the same fashion but completed in an improvisatory manner (ab ac ad ae).

In chapter 13, an additional song structure is integrated into the text. The scene takes place in the prison cell. Here, each prisoner consecutively sings/says a line in turn.

'First he retches! Then he pisses!'
'Now all that's left for him to do is shit on us!'
'Pinch him!'
'Punch him!'

'Wake up, *wewe punda milia!*' (*Matigari*, 52)

The lines are marked by exclamation points indicating excitement, a higher dynamic level, and perhaps a rapid fire execution. This procedure is analogous to the song structure in which the soloists sing their lines individually and sequentially. The similarity between this section and the lyric style is accentuated by Ngugi's choice of words later in the passage.

'So our vomit was some kind of sacrifice to God,'
 one of them said again sarcastically.
 'And your fart was no doubt the sound of thunder,'
 echoed another.
 'Rain, rain, come today, so I may slaughter a calf
 for you. And another with a hump!' somebody else
 sang (*Matigari*, 53).

The choice of the words "echoed" and "sang" is indicative of an imitative and tonal quality in the lines. Chapter 13 proceeds with each prisoner executing a short narrative in an attempt to identify himself or "tell his tale," a procedure analogous to the parallel song structure in which, after the individual lines are sung, they are expanded on by each soloist.

Not only do we find song structures embedded in the text as part of Ngugi's narrative style, we also see/hear song units interspersed throughout the work. The songs serve many functions within the novel. They are employed to approximate oral performance, to unify the piece, and to further the plot. Their aesthetic appeal is clear. Most African readers/listeners would welcome the interjection of song as reminiscent of their orature heritage. Both songs and phrases are used motivically in the novel as unifying and organizing tools.

The question, "Who was (is) *Matigari ma Njiruungi?*" is another motivic thread. The interrogative form of the motif is interesting because it invites a response. Even more intriguing is the fact that the question is never really answered. We find this motif interposed throughout and functioning to unify, as a lyrical phrase in a musical piece would. The query is first used as the last line in Chapter 9 of the first section (*Matigari*, 32). It is also the concluding phrase of the entire first unit (p. 66). The motif is then employed with increasing frequency. It is used as the final line in both the second section and the penultimate chapter of the novel. Thus, the question provides a motivic link between the three sections of the book and also contributes to the formal organization by being the concluding thought of each section.

Just as the community repeatedly intones, "Who was (is) *Matigari ma Njiruungi?*" *Matigari* presents his own motivic

interrogative, "Where can one find truth and justice?" This sincere question is also never answered, though Matigari poses it to almost every character in the novel. The two question motifs function in a similar but conflicting manner; Matigari does not provide a desirable response to the community nor does the community to him. This reciprocal lack of cooperation or communication creates a dissonance in the novel. In this case, the two units do not function harmonically, but seem to be on diverging paths. The questions provide a polyphonic stratification, one that is never blended or reconciled. This dissonant clashing of motifs contributes to Matigari's difficulty in making himself completely intelligible to society. Matigari attempts to use lyric to effect a response but no one cooperates.

Indeed, Matigari endeavors to use song throughout the story in order to elicit a communal response and involvement. His strategy is to set himself up as cantor in order to lead the community. Prior to his arrival in the city and his first interaction with others, he rehearses two traditional songs that he remembers from his days in his home town.

If only it were dawn,
If only it were dawn,
So that I can share the cold waters with
early bird (Matigari, 4).

and

Great love I saw there,
Among the women and the children.
We shared even the single bean
That fell upon the ground (Matigari, 6).

By trying to recollect songs that he thinks will still be relevant to his people, Matigari prepares for his future undertaking of the cantor role. Unfortunately, Matigari finds that the community has forgotten many of the old traditions, including orature and song. When he meets the children for the first time he asks "What was the song we used to sing?" but they don't seem to know the correct response. Again, in the prison he calls to his cell-mates, "What did we use to sing?" This time Matigari provides his own response with the "bean song." The prisoners listen but have forgotten how to respond.

Something in Matigari's voice made them listen to him attentively. There was a sad note about it but it also carried hope and courage. The others now fell silent. His words seemed to remind them of things long forgotten, carrying them back to dreams they had had long before (*Matigari*, 56).

Matigari repeatedly attempts to initiate others into the orature/song tradition in an effort to educate and recruit them into the political cause. When he meets Ngaruro wa Kiriro for the first time, Matigari strives to initiate Ngaruro into the orature rite thereby establishing a relationship of cantor/chorus or leader/follower. The introductory dialogue is marked by short repetitive phrases.

"What is your name?" Ngaruro Kiriro asked him.

"Matigari ma Njiruungi."

"Matigari ma Njiruungi?"

"Yes, that is my name." (*Matigari*, 20)

Immediately following this interchange Matigari lapses into the "Settler Williams narrative." There is a clear parallel between the structure established by the main character and that of orature and song. Alternating imitative lines followed by solo narrative is a common format in both genres. Here we see the similarity between the text and song forms. Indeed, Ngugi comments on the tonal and traditional qualities of Matigari's narrative.

His melodious voice and his story had been so captivating that Muriuki and Ngaruro wa Kiriro did not realize that they had reached the restaurant. History had transported them to other times long ago when the clashing of the warriors' bows and spears shook trees and mountains to their roots (*Matigari*, 22).

Through his song Matigari is attempting to relate what he considers to be relevant historical information. He assumes that by using the traditional orature/song form, his listeners will be not only attentive but moved to participate in the action of his agenda.

Matigari repeats this strategy of using the "Settler Williams motif" when he meets Guthera (Chapter 10) and when he encounters the prisoners (Chapter 13). Again, the motivation is the same; he is recruiting followers for his revolution. In each case it appears that Matigari achieves initial success in using traditional methods to captivate the attention of his listeners and to generate participation through response.

There are those, however, who have forgotten or who have chosen to forsake their cultural roots. In Chapter 10 Matigari employs his song strategy with John Boy but with disappointing results. His plan seemingly is to educate John Boy about his historical past through orature, but after several lines he is interrupted in mid-sentence by John Boy who complains: "Look, I don't want history lessons; I only asked you about the house" (*Matigari*, 45). It is clear that John Boy does not

wish to engage in the orature activity. He has become thoroughly colonized through his Western education. He has adopted the language, clothes, and philosophy of the imperial government and has relinquished his heritage. The motivations of both characters become clearer as the scene progresses. Matigari makes a further attempt to involve John Boy in the orature by singing a politically motivated song, perhaps designed to touch his emotions and spark his patriotism.

You foreign oppressor.
Pack your bags and leave!
For the owner of this house
is on his way! (*Matigari*, 46).

Matigari's methods prove to be ineffective, however, and the song is not adapted or repeated by the listener. In fact, when John Boy hears his father's name used disrespectfully, his response comes in the form of a crack of his whip. Matigari nonetheless persists in his struggle to win John Boy over by reminding him of the important role that music played in his youth.

Are you the boy we sent abroad? The boy the cost of whose education we all contributed to, singing with pride: Here is one of our own and not a foreigner's child over whom I was once insulted? The boy for whom we sang: He shall come back and clear up our cities, our country, and deliver us from slavery? (*Matigari*, 48).

Matigari tries to shame John Boy into accepting his national responsibility by reminding him that he was once the subject of their songs, their hope for the future. In this way he attempts to awaken John Boy to his obligations to his community through political action and reverence of tradition. The words are lost on John Boy, however, and he responds to Matigari's invitation to participate by speaking of the "freedom of the individual." His refusal of communal interaction is further evidence of his complete integration into the European social structures.

It becomes increasingly evident as the story progresses that many people have forgotten or forsaken the traditional ways. This can be seen in the reluctance of citizens and certainly the government officials to respond to Matigari's lyric. There are times when Matigari is the one who is perceived to be out of sync, the one who sings the wrong song and is not familiar with the more progressive melodies. In section II Matigari employs the "truth and justice motif" at a shopping center where the store owner and customers are busy singing the praises of the man who has become a legend, Matigari. Ironically, when

Matigari himself appears and invites them to respond, they either reject his song or more probably do not know how to reply.

"Kindly tell me this, my friends, where can one find truth and justice in this society?" They fell silent and just stared at the stranger as if he had struck the wrong chord of a popular melody. Then they started talking to one another complaining about the man who had spoilt their song (*Matigari*, 73).

It appears that although the people are fascinated by the image of the man, they are deaf to his message in song. In fact, the citizens of Trampville compose their own song to honor the legend of Matigari. The lyrics reflect their captivation by the tales and miracles surrounding Matigari but do not mention the substance of his tune.

Show me the way to a man
Whose name is Matigari ma Njiruungi,
Who stamps his feet to the rhythm of bells
And the bullets jingle.
And the bullets jingle (*Matigari*, 71).

Matigari is revered as the people's savior but they are slow to digest his message. This attitude is clearly presented in the scene in which Matigari encounters women at a crossroad exchanging fabulous versions of tales involving Matigari. Here, one of the women expresses the desire to meet the legend and to sing him the "Matigari ma Njiruungi" song personally. At this point Matigari, himself greets them and sings: "Our people Where can one find truth and justice in this country?" (*Matigari*, 77). Here, again, Matigari finds himself in the position of the singer of the wrong song. His lyrical invitation to respond is answered by "What? What is he asking now? Let me be off." The women do not understand his song and so it is left incomplete, in effect, unsung.

It is the teacher who finally clarifies Matigari's problem of being out of tune with society. He gives an anguished reply to the "truth and justice" song and reminds him in the process that the social climate has changed: "'Sssssshhhh. Stop talking so loudly,' the teacher cautioned him. 'Yesterday is gone and forgotten. Today is a new day'" (*Matigari*, 92). He proceeds to counsel Matigari on the benefits of singing the "approved tune" sanctioned by the laws now governing the community: ". . . there are those who reap benefits from singing the approved tune, those who dance in step with the approved dance" (*Matigari*, 92).

The teacher apparently views Matigari's songs as politically radical and subversive. Surely Matigari is aware of the revolutionary

tone of his songs. Indeed the integration of political song into the antiphonal song structure is part of his recruitment strategy. To his mind he is attempting to attain a logical goal through a traditional method that itself represents the heritage he is trying to preserve. The teacher seeks to dissuade Matigari from his goal by schooling him in the new neo-colonial song practice. Matigari is not convinced, however, and he retorts: "... Far better are those who are going to gaol singing songs of courage rooted in their commitment to truth and justice. . . ." (*Matigari*, 92).

It is in Matigari's "song of resistance" that he defines his motivations as seeker of truth and justice. The song of resistance or the "he-who-reaps-where-he-never-sowed" tune exemplifies Matigari's argument with capitalist society. The song is initially directed toward the priest who, naturally, as a product of colonialism does not value the message or play the game. He quickly tires of Matigari's "foolish questions" and "political fables" and endeavors to get rid of him as expediently as possible. Quite obviously the priest is only receptive to the "approved tunes" of colonization.

What are the tunes sanctioned by the government? This becomes clear in the courtroom scene. The government has compiled an approved repertoire of hymns that were composed to replace the traditional African songs. This collection was printed in a volume entitled *Songs of a Parrot*. Clearly, the songs are based on Western conventions, as they are recorded in the book "which had been composed by a group of specialists in the voices of parrots." The printed-text of tunes precludes any possibility for improvisation or community input. Indeed, the followers of parrotology did not seem to be able to sing without the hymn book as reference: "They sang three stanzas from *Songs of a Parrot* and then they sat down, clinging to the hymn book as though their lives depended on it" (*Matigari*, 104). Ngugi must have derived this reference to parroting from a 1984 speech made by President Moi of Kenya. His speech in part is as follows:

... I call on all ministers, assistant ministers and every other person to sing like parrots. . . you ought to sing the song I sing. If I put a full stop, you should also put a full stop. This is how this country will move forward. The day you become a big person, you will have the liberty to sing your own song and everybody will sing it. . . .¹⁷

It was President Moi's obvious intention to set himself up as an authoritative leader of song with every citizen parroting his philosophy in an effort to cultivate a structure which would resist subjective reception as well as preclude vocal agency of the masses, a structure

which indeed would corrupt the oral tradition. In the adaptation of this historic event into the novel, His Excellency ole Excellence seeks to seize the role of authoritative leader of song and philosophy by advocating Parrotology. Apparently the government also recognizes song as an effective tool of mobilization. Any attempt to completely colonize African societies includes the abolition of the music tradition and an installment of new Western lyric conventions. In the new dispensation, the perpetuation of the status quo can only be guaranteed by following the colonial examples.

The songs of the parrot are not the only pieces performed in the courtroom; in fact, this scene becomes a virtual cacophony of conflicting tunes and styles. It is Matigari who begins the agitation with his performance of the "resistance song" ending with "Where are truth and justice on this earth?" The minister for Truth and Justice does not comprehend the song style nor the text since it is not in the *Songs of Parrots* hymn book: "Stop speaking in parables. If you want to ask a question then do so in plain language" (*Matigari*, 113). Matigari's song presents a musically and politically dissonant clash with the approved parrot songs. Some of the citizens in the courtroom sing the song composed by the people of Trampville. The minister immediately informs them that he has "banned that song." Here we clearly see songs perceived as weapons by the government. They are to be rigorously controlled and banned. They represent a threat to the stability of the ruling class.

The priest contributes to the raucous scene with his orature of the twelve commandments, representing a colonial version of truth and justice. The student also takes part in the dissonance with his seditious composition:

Even if you detain us,
Victory belongs to the people.
Victory belongs to the people! (*Matigari*, 121)

The teacher responds to the student in support and cooperation: "I shall never sing like a parrot, never; I shall sing the same song of courage and hope that was sung by the brave and courageous student" (*Matigari*, 172). The teacher was forcibly hindered from singing the student's stanza so the people sang the song thereby providing the antiphonal response. Thus, the student's song becomes part of the African tradition and is assimilated into the political song literature.

The courtroom provides a forum for the juxtaposition of the three sources of political song represented in the novel; the government, Matigari's songs, and the songs of the people. Although the ruling body attempts to eradicate all subversive music through banning and substitution of its own tonal philosophy, the revolutionary songs

prevail. The scene ends with the people reiterating the Trampville song of Matigari ma Njiruungi despite the insistence of the minister that "all subversive songs and dreams are banned!"

It is apparent that even though the people have not fully digested and assimilated Matigari's songs, they have been inspired to create their own in working toward a common goal. Indeed, these radical songs of the people "spread like wildfire in a dry season" and "the people sang them day and night" thereby bringing the message of revolution to all citizens, even the illiterate.

The polyphony of song in the courtroom is an effective prelude to the climax in Section III. This occurs at the burning of John Boy's house and the Mercedes-Benz. The citizens form a circle around the pyre of these symbols of colonization and sing various improvisatory versions of the burn song. Here, we see the utilization of many of the various song structures. The call and response form is, of course, represented:

Everything that belongs to these slaves must burn!
Everything that belongs to these slaves must burn!

Their coffee must burn!
Yes, their coffee must burn! (*Matigari*, 168)

The repetitive structure is also presented:

Burn detention without trial - burn!
Burn detention without trial - burn!

Burn exiling of patriots - burn!
Burn exiling of patriots - burn! (*Loc. Cit.*)

Also, the form of a uniform beginning with varied ending is used:

They burned down the houses.
They burned down the tea-bushes.
They burned down the coffee trees. . . . (*Loc. Cit.*)

The burn songs bring the people together in a communal setting and create the emotion and excitement necessary to propel the participants into a frenzy. The citizens form a circle around the burning sacrifices as they would in a children's game or a religious ritual. Once again we see contemporary adaptation of traditional song procedures motivated by political desires. The novel ends with Muriuki's vision of all the nationalities of Africa singing "Victory shall be ours" in harmony.

Matigari's initial intention is to take on the role of cantor and convert the people with traditional song and musical procedures. He soon discovers that he must modify his approach. It is not enough to be vocally radical and "girded with the belt of peace"; one must also be "armed with armed words." Though it pains Matigari, he realizes that guns must be the percussion instruments to accompany the revolutionary songs if the people are to succeed:

"Matigari, stamp your feet in rhythm and let the bullets tinkle! May our fears disappear with the staccato sound of our guns."

Matigari bent his head and turned his face away. He felt hot tears sting his eyelids (*Matigari*, 140).

Although Matigari does not succeed with his original plan, he does effectively educate and mobilize the masses. They are not able to comprehend his "truth and justice song" but they are motivated to compose their own for the political cause that he has awakened them to. It is the legend of Matigari that effects a result and inspires them to action more than the message he brings. In the end Matigari and Guthera are swept away by the river currents, but it is almost inconsequential because the motivating legend remains. The mystery is part of the aura and in the end the question lingers: "Who was Matigari ma Njiruungi?" He remains a mystery and a legend to inspire subsequent generations to song and revolution.

NOTES

¹Bettye J. Parker, Interview with Ngugi wa Thiong'o (James Ngugi), 1975, in G. D. Killam (ed.), *Critical Perspectives on Ngugi wa Thiong'o* (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1984), p. 61.

²J. H. Kwabena Nketia, *The Music of Africa* (New York: Norton & Co., 1974), p. 184.

³Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Matigari* (Oxford: Heinemann International, 1987). All textual quotes are from this edition.

⁴Nketia, *Op. Cit.*, p. 119.

⁵Information derived from the Kenyan Mission to the United Nations.

⁶Nketia, *Op. Cit.* See, particularly, chapter 13.

⁷Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 310-311.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 285.

⁹*Ibid.*, See the chapter titled "Topical and Political Songs," pp. 272-298.

¹⁰Nketia, *Op. Cit.*, p. 178.

¹¹Finnegan, *Op. Cit.*, p. 2.

¹²Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind* (Portsmouth: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1986), p. 10.

¹³Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Devil on the Cross* (Oxford: Heinemann International, 1982).

¹⁴In *Decolonizing the Mind* Ngugi describes the inception of "professional readers" in local bars which developed in reaction to the oral qualities of *Caitani Mutharabaini*: "The process I'm describing is really the appropriation of the novel into the oral tradition. *Caitani Mutharabaini (Devil on the Cross)* was received into the age-old tradition of storytelling around the fireside. . . ." (p. 83).

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹⁶Information derived from Kenyan Mission to the United Nations.

¹⁷Excerpt taken from President Moi's speech on his return from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 13 September 1984. Cited in Ngugi, *Decolonizing the Mind*, p. 86.