USE OF JOURNEY MOTIF TO FOREGROUND THEMATIC ISSUES IN SELECTED WORKS OF K.W. WAMITILA

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Abstract
Wamitila who is a major name in the Swahili World has made a mark in all literary genres and other non-fictional works. He has made a significant mark in the use of the journey motif to foreground thematic issues in his works. Through journeys undertaken by his characters he opens up a new world to his characters who willingly or otherwise undergo transformations, alienation, enlightenment, discoveries of the world that surround them and even self-discovery and so on. This paper will examine these issues in regard to the following works by Wamitila; Tikitimaji (Watermelon) “Shingo ya Mbunge” (The M.P.’s Neck) in an anthology entitled; Shingo ya Mbunge na Hadithi yingine In order to highlight the issues under focus, the theoretical perspective that has been employed is Ecocriticism. This work will therefore seek to explore the activities of human beings on their environment and the resultant impact on themselves, others and even the planet earth.

Key Words: Journey Motif, Ecocriticism, Foregrounding, Eco-sphere, Social –sphere

1.0 INTRODUCTION
Wamitila is a respected name both in the Kenyan literary scene and the wider East African Region and wherever else Kiswahili Scholarship is put in focus. He has written in almost all the genres of literature ranging from the novel, the play, poetry, the short story and even in the non-literary areas where his works have attracted a very large audience. For the purposes of this article the focus will be on two works; Tikitimaji a novel and ‘Shingo ya Mbunge’ a short story from an anthology entitled; Shingo ya Mbunge na Hadithi Nyingine.
Journey motif has been effectively employed to foreground thematic issues in the selected works by the author. It is through the journeys that characters undertake that they get an opportunity to socialize with other people and in the course of that they discover many things and also some end up experiencing self discovery. Characters also interact with the environment and get affected physically, socially, economically and psychologically. In the works under consideration they adversely affect the environment to their peril thus realizing that their survival and wellbeing depends on how they treat mother nature.

Journey motif has to do with departure, obstacles that the character will have to overcome and the return. Each of these steps is very important. The initial step usually is preceded by thinking and reasoning in regard to the necessity of the journey. A journey can also be an escape from an adverse situations therefore it may not necessarily involve a planning phase. If a journey is preceded by some kind of planning the character may have to reason on several issues such as:

- Will the journey be under the cover of darkness or in full light? Will it be a secret journey or a normal journey? And ultimately where is the destination? The final phase is to plan the means to travel and how to encounter and overcome adversities on the journey. Finally the character may need to plan on how to come back if it proves necessary.

A journey may not necessarily be physical it may be a psychological shift; involving a change in the way one views himself or the world around them. This kind of journey though not physical still results in discernible changes this time in regard to the character involved.

A psychological journey may be triggered by the need to escape a disturbing environment in this case a character will seek to escape and seek refuge elsewhere. A character may also experience alienation due to finding themselves in unfamiliar surroundings. This discomfiting situation may create homesickness and a strong urge to return to the familiar surroundings.

In the stories under focus; Faustine, Levina, Solomon and the narrator in “Shingo ya Mbunge” and Zinji, Sapna, Kombo and Maya in Tikitimaji all undertake an epic journey full of surprises, disappointments and accomplishment as the foregoing discussion will show.

2.0 Literature Review

Mortimer (1991) quoted in Mugo (2006) comments on the journey motif thus:

Journeys are adventures or forced marches in which a traveler is seeking exorcism or an exile in search of a new home’… The travelers in such journeys are in pursuit of something that they miss in their lives and which, when found fills them with some form of satisfaction, contentment and identity. To get to this status, however, entails facing challenging and rigorous physical and psychological experiences that Traveler must surmount after which she or he is guaranteed a higher revelation. (pg 2).

From the foregoing it is clear that unlike a normal journey that has a defined itinerary with no handicaps beforehand, journey in literature explores unconventional travels fraught with dangers, opportunities for growth and awakening or disappointment and tragedy.

Mortimer op cited clarifies: “Travellers to Africa have not only been primarily European but they have also been almost exclusively men” (pg 4).

Mugo (2006) comments as follows on the plight of women in colonial Kenya:

The work examines the use of the journey motif in david Mulwa’s Flee Mama Flee. The study explores the significance of the journey motif and how it is appropriated as a tool in female identity formation particularly during the colonial condition in Kenya. More specifically the work the physical, psychological and emotional facets of the journey motif; and how the Journey embedded in the motif help shape or define female identity in 

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a subjugated society where the plight of women is far worse off compared to their male counterparts, first due to African traditional Patriarchal structures and secondly as a result of foreign subjugation (pg vii).

Mugo’s work is quite interesting and very informative on the extra mile women in Kenya had to travel to free themselves given the bias against them as a result of their gender and the colonial situation that created impediments to all colonial subjects.

Journey motif has been used by many authors in Swahili Scholarship such as; Mohammed S.M, Mkangi K., Habwe J, Walibora K amongst others. Each of them has used the journey motif in their own style.

In Mohammed’s *Nyota ya Rehema* the main character Rehema is forced to leave home when her father marries a second wife and relegates her mother to inferior dwellings. This change of circumstances gives Rehema the motive for escape. The author explains:

> At nightfall when she was in her humble abode, slightly better than the ones occupied by house helps, she dreamt of a better life outside that prison and she kept planning how to escape. (pg 22)

(Translated)

Eventually Rehema runs away. She heads to Mbinju a nearby town where she hopes to find a better life. Ironically she escapes through the forest. She stumbles and loses consciousness.

On gaining consciousness she realizes she is in the humble dwellings of Sulubu a peasant who lives off other peoples land that he rents. She is apprehensive as she is unaware whether she had been taken advantage off when she had lost consciousness. After she is finally directed to the nearby town she is received by three girls who are prostitutes.

They get her a job as a house help at Mansuri’s home whose wife is a mid wife. Mansuri eventually takes advantage of her vulnerability but eventually they are found out and she hastily gets sacked after being assaulted by Rosy, Mansuri’s wife. She sinks deeper into immorality until Bikiza journeys to inform her that her mother had died and she was the rightful owner of her late mothers land.

Eventually she returns home and her father grants her the land in Mbinju. The husband of her half sister Karim plots to take away this land and dies at the hands of Sulubu, Rehema’s husband.

This becomes the genesis of the revolution that led to a government take over.

In Mkangi’s *Ukiwa* (Loneliness) two school going children Matano (the boy) and Lila (the girl) developed a liking for each other. Their relationship developed into a love affair. Matano is admitted to the university while Lila goes to the city to train as a tailor. This parallel journeys lead to separation. The letter communication between the two of them come to an end. Eventually Matano receives news that Lila had died leading him to feel dejected and downhearted.

Journeying can lead to alienation as experienced by Maryam in Hilal’s (1972) story. In this short story Maryam who lived in the countryside is very excited upon learning that she will soon be joining a high school in the city. This excitement gets the better of her and one night she is unable to sleep. She ventures out in the dead of the night. The author explains:

> At that time a cool wind blowing from the ocean and from a far bushbabies were crying out and once in a while an owl could be heard. Also dry leaves and dry coconut leaves were falling accompanied by mangoes and coconuts (pg 28).

Maryam was definitely at home in this country setting. She was not worried of her safety as she ventured out at night. The surroundings were tranquil and soothing for her reducing her anxiety about the future.
Eventually she travels to the city and experiences an alienating situation n a girls hostel where she was staying. At nightfall she is unable to sleep but can not venture out like in her previous enviroment. We are told:

On the bed instead of hearing the sound of blowing wind, animals crying out and fruits falling off trees, she is hearing noises from people and vehicles hooting. She has no idea where they are going or coming from. All the windows are closed. She l

left in darkness…and the heat envelopes her as others snore on (pg 32).

The new environment that Maryam finds herself in is not only lonely but fearsome for a rural girl accustomed to open spaces. She feels lonely and apprehensive. however she can not venture out like in her former environment.

Finally Sabula (2014) analysed the role of women in environmental conservation in a novel entitled *Nakuruto*. Her thesis explores the efforts of women to conserve the environment despite the numerous set backs that they face.

From the foregoing review of related literature it is clear that journeys made by characters in the cited works make their lives to change fundamentally. The act of journeying then can be said to foreground the thematic concerns of the author.

The paper makes an analysis of two works by wamitila but the setting is not colonial nor is the perspective based on gender though interestingly the protagonists in both books include women. Although all the other works I have cited in this section use the journey motif apart from Sabula’s work the others have not emphasized ecological issues.

3.0 Theoretical Perspectives

This study will be premised on ecocriticim approaches. This perspective was highlited in a meeting of Literature scholars in Utah,(United States of America) in 1994. The position papers presented in regard to ecocriticism familiarizes the reader with this novel approach to literary works.

Branch (1994) explains: ‘The word ecocriticim’ traces back to William Rueckert’s 1978 essay’ Literature and Ecology: An experiment in ecocriticism (pg1). Not much attention was paid to this paper until 1989 when Glotfelty and Love revived the issue thus making this approach gain some traction. Glotfelty and Fromm (1996) explain:

Ecocriticism takes as its subject matter the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and Literature. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as atheoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and non human.(pg xix).

These critics do not in any way imply that the other approaches have nothing to do with nature. However it is clear that ecocriticism directly not implicitly foregrounds issues to do with natureand their impact on human beings and other non human species. Glotfely op cit further explain:

Ecocriticism can be further characterized by distinguishing it from other critical approaches. Literary theory, in general, examines the relations between writers, texts, and the world. In most literary theories the world is synonymous with society-the social sphere.Ecocriticism expands the notion of’ the world’ to include the entire ecosphere. (pgxix)

This therefore means that not all works of literature or art for that matter can be approached from this perspective. Some artists so to say foreground or dwell on matters concerning the environment and therefore their work would fit vey well in this mould. Glotfely and Fromm (1996) posits that:
Most ecocritical work shares a common motivation: the troubling awareness that we have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet’s basic life support systems. This awareness sparks a desire to contribute to environmental restoration, not just in our spare time but from within our capacities as professors of literature. (pg xix)

Therefore of interest to this approach are works that mainstream nature and how it impacts on characters or how characters themselves by their actions or inactions end up affecting the very environment that their survival depends upon.

Arising from these enlightening standpoints this paper will zero in on environmental issues and how they impact on the characters and their societies as they journey through varying areas.

It is true that their journeys may also involve the ‘social sphere’ to borrow the words of Glotfelty (1994) this too will be given credence as the papers will focus on how travel motif foregrounds thematic issues.

### 4.0 Discussions and Findings

In this section the focus is upon ‘Shingo ya Mbunge’ and *Tikitimaji*. Each of these texts will be subjected to a thematic overview from the perspective of ecocriticism. The focus will be on the travel motif and how it foregrounds thematic issues.

#### 4.1 Shingo ya Mbunge

*Shingo ya Mbunge* loosely translated as ‘The Member of Parliament’s neck’ is a short story in an anthology with the same name. It is a parody that focuses on the selfishness and greed practiced by politicians in the developing world where systems of accountability are not stringent enough.

The story in question revolves around the Member of Parliament who gets the privileged position of representing people in his country’s parliament. Reference to his neck which forms the title of the story arises from his transformed physique. Before becoming a member of parliament he was thin and had a slender neck thus his opponents taunted him for his looks. Eventually when he becomes a member of parliament he becomes huge and his neck balloons thus emphasizing his new status. Reference to his neck as the title is done sarcastically by the author to emphasize his selfishness that leads to his conspicuous consumption while his electorates wallow in poverty.

On his election he promised the electorate that he will address their problems without let-up. However upon election he becomes inaccessible and leaves the public with no option but to look for him even if it means journeying to his far off residence in the country side.

The author uses journey motif to foreground several thematic concerns in his work. The ecocritical perspectives bring issues to the fore because the journey undertaken by three main characters underscores the centrality of the environment in the survival of the populace in this work.

Initially the journey was to be undertaken by the narrator, Faustine, Levina and Solomon. Solomon treacherously preceeded them so as report on the rest and endear himself to the member of parliament and possibly get some hand outs. Therefore when the populace requested the four representatives to seek audience with the Member of Parliament (M.P.) only three of them travelled together having being preceeded by Solomon.

Issues of the environment are brought to the fore right from the start as the arduous journey is through varying landscapes that all tell a story. The travelers are forced to cut through narrow paths in the forest with many creepers impeding their movements. The narrator acknowledges though that the forests used to be even thicker.
The theme of superstition is weaved by the travelers as they claim that villagers allege that spirits reside in the forests. It is even claimed that villagers make sacrifices there offering meat to the spirits. It is even claimed that a group of young men decided to steal the roasted meat meant for the spirits. Their mischief was short lived as they were chased and whipped by unseen spirits until they dropped the meat and ran away.

The journeying trio now emerges from the forest and onto a clearing thus described:

The path they now took was full of loose boulders and pot holes an unforgiving terrain. A few months ago this land was different; it was a field of trees and plants But now the greenery and the trees had been undressed by tractors to scoop stones and ballast for road building projects. What remained was bare land devoid of tree or plant cover but full of stones, an earth that was meaningless. The land that was shocking………………………………………………………….Children cheered on as the tractors disemboweled the earth and roared on like a pack of hyenas grinning at their catch (pg 45).

(Translated)

As they travelled on they came across a quarry and next a hovel that was almost collapsing. They recollected how the environment used to look like previously. They remembered that the land around that area was full of greenery and farmers were working hard to plant maize and other types of crops. Alas the land was now bare and the rivers had turned to tiny rivulets that could no longer sustain the populace.

The three had made great sacrifices to enable the M.P. to ascend to power. Lavina was estranged from her husband on account of insisting on her right to vote despite her husband’s opposition. Her husband was denied handouts from politicians and therefore he decreed no one from his family will be involved in the voting exercise and therefore when Lavina defied him she was chased away from the matrimonial home.

Faustine on the other hand was involved in a scuffle over the campaign handouts. When the struggle degenerated into a fight he ended up getting nothing and in the process he lost two of his teeth.

The narrator was involved deeply in the campaign process and as a result he hurt his knees. His injuries were likely from the usual pandemonium that occurs during election time resulting in injuries to people and sometimes even lose of life.

Despite all these sacrifices when the M.P. finally emerged he greeted them impersonally and was least interested in the message from the electorate that was brought to him. The people he represented had myriads of problems and were hopeful that he would help them solve their problems.

The sickness of population due to lack of drugs, the dying of their livestock after the communal cattle dip was grabbed and the erosion of their land due to quarrying activities did not bother their M.P. He ordered a cup of tea for them and discreetly used the back door to escape and abandon the representatives of his electorate.

Cases of robbery and house breaking increased in the area. This new phenomena was likely brought about by the destruction of the environment that was now unable to sustain the population. Some of those unable to find other means of sustainance took to stealing from their neighbours. Insecurity escalated and generally the quality of life for the ordinary people dipped.

It is from journeying that the characters discover how the environment has been degraded. They also traverse through jungles where the local people believe spirits reside. Finally after reaching their M.P. who slights them and addresses them impersonally the theme of alienation plays out this together with the alienation of the land that has now been degraded leave the population in a precarious situation.

4.2 Tikitimaji

Tikitimaji is an interesting environmental novel woven skillfully by use of journey motif. The main protagonists are Zinji, Kombo Maya and Sapna. The four were brought up in an orphanage by Mama Rehema.
Having gone through Primary School and high School together they established very strong bonds of friendship.

Upon graduation from various colleges and professions they were now ready to take on life and face its challenges. Kombo trained as a policeman, Maya as a librarian, Zinj as a journalist and Sapna as an environmentalist. They were ever grateful to Mama Rehema who took care of them like a biological mother. Zinj was very keen to trace his roots-to understand where he came from before ending up in the orphanage. Mama Rehema informed him that he has to travel to Tikitimaji where the secret of his past would be unraveled. He informed him that he required to search for the elusive Ami Mdogo. He even gave him a small parcel that contained a letter to hand over to him.

His three compatriots who were on leave from their work gratefully agreed to accompany him in this treacherous journey. For him it was a big boost because they would not only bolster his courage but they would provide necessary support to make this difficult journey surmountable.

Tikitimaji was a strange place. Getting there was a big challenge. Mama Rehema gave them general directions. She told them that they were to alight from the vehicle at a place called Ganjonj. She also told them that they should not be scared by the big forest that they will have to pass through.

However on alighting they did not find a forested area apparently there was a lot of tree cutting and they noticed wheel marks of big vehicles. They reasoned that this were likely lorries hauling timber from the forest. Later on as they proceeded on their journey Mzee Juhudi who was directing them explained:

In the old days Tikitimaji used to have a dense forest cover and the area was beautiful to behold. The area was uniquely attractive. Trees of all types grew close to each other making the forest scary. It was no longer that way! People deforested the area and now the place that was scorching hot because there was no forest cover. It was said that the trees were required for building purposes in the city. (pg 44).

Mama Rehema had mentioned that they will encounter a big river called Unasi. However they found out that the river was drying up because of man’s greed that will not allow him to conserve the environment that formed the catchment area for the river.

This site of degraded environment prompted Sapna to explain that the sorry state of the environment was caused by careless humans. She reminded them about the good old days in the city. She explained:

People cut out all the tress in order to put up buildings The birds that were singing beautifully migrated…………………………………………………………………….The water that was so clean that you could see tadpoles Clearly how is it now? The water is now black like tar. (pg26).

This degraded environment was very heart breaking. It gave them a foregleam of the kind of people that lived in Tikitimaji. It was evident that they did not care about the environment. This attitude as evident from the text had negative repurcussions on the residents of Tikitimaji.

The four travelers eventually reached Tikitimaji. Before entering Tikitimaji they encounter an old man whom they had learnt would be an important informant on issues regarding Tikitimaji. He informed them that previously the leader of Tikitimaji was very humane. However he later developed selfishness and ended up selling to foreigners a prime mountainous area called Tirimacho. The foreign investor wanted to mine coal and therefore the local population was displaced. Eventually the minning and industrial activity started to chock the environment.
They also learnt that the authorities did not care about keeping the environment clean. Litter was dumped all over and near the town there was a big dumping area that was not only an eye sore but a health hazard.

Sapna requested for permission to create an environmental movement which she named WAZALIMA. The authorities were initially apprehensive since they suspected it might mutate to a political organization. She explained to them how such an organization would eventually be for the good of Tikitimaji. Eventually she was authorized to go ahead. The organization became popular and soon was able to carry out a major clean up of Tikitimaji.

Other issues that have been discussed in the book are the menace of Human Trafficking. Zinji and Sapna with the help of Shamsi traced a big house which was used as a holding ground for young girls. They were held against their will perhaps to be used as commercial sex workers.

Sabiya explained to them that she had come to Tikitimaji to look for a job. She and others were deceived that they would be employed in a plantation but they ended up in the holding house. She explained that some were shipped out to foreign countries to work as house helps.

Sapna cites the city of Gaviotas as an example of what can happen to Tikitimaji. She explains that it is an attractive city that was established in a dry and degraded piece of land that no one thought would one day be a glamorous city. With the prospect of Mama Rehema moving her orphanage to Tikitimaji the four friends now considered the possibility of staying on and helping to rebuild Tikitimaji which had been degraded both environmentally and socially so that it can become a good place for the inhabitants.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Writers have different ways of growing their thematic concerns. Some do so by expounding various issues. The interaction between the characters open up the issues on focus. Thematic issues in Wamitila’s two prose works; “Shingo la Mbunge” and his novel Tikitimaji are developed through travel motif.

In ‘Shingo ya Mbunge’ political hypocrisy, greed leading to environmental degradation become clearer as the main characters undertake an arduous journey to see their member of parliament.

The betrayal they experienced despite the sacrifices they made is accentuated by the journey motif. Through journeys they undertake they experience firsthand how the environment has been destroyed to benefit a few at the expense of the majority.

In Tikitimaji the journey undertaken by the protagonists is an eye opener. Through the difficult journey they not only discover how their country has been mismanaged but two of the characters come face to face with their past. Sapna learns that she was abandoned in a rubbish dump because she was of mixed parentage. One parent was Asian and the other African. Zinji on the hand ended up at a children’s home after her right to ascend to leadership was hijacked by her uncle arguing that she was a girl and therefore could not take up a leadership position.

Ecocriticism has helped us to see how environmental issues are intertwined with the existence of man on earth even in the socio-sphere and the political sphere. This comes about because political leadership is what creates policies that run countries. Environment issues are of central concern in the lives of people. In the works under consideration the link between man and environment is clearly discernible. Poor and irresponsible management of the environment led to poverty and misery among the general population whose lives depend on the resources kept alive by the environment.

When individuals decide to undo the harm done to the environment by establishing movements to restore it life becomes better. This is what is experienced by the residents of Tikitimaji. The heaps of garbage and the...
over exploited forests are restored to the advantage of the population. It is apt to conclude with the words of Schlenz (2014).

Ecocritics should seek to transform academe by bringing it back into Dynamic interconnection with worlds we all live in…inescapably Social and material worlds in which issues of race, class and gender Inevitably intersect in complex and multi-faceted ways with issues of Natural resource exploitation and conservation. (pg12).

Wamitila clearly shows how environmental issues are inescapably intertwined with social-political issues. Political leadership in both works neglect and mismanage the environment the ramifications that follow disrupt the economies of the communities concerned and in turn introduce a plethora of problems. Sapna in Tikitimaji explains that Tikitimaji can be like the city of Gaviotas. This comparison is deliberately chosen by the author because it is a concrete example of how prudent management of the environment can transform a degraded and hostile environment to an admirable city that is eco-friendly.

This paper traced the web that the characters spin on themselves and on others complicating lives, destroying livelihoods, endangering the present and the future by destroying the environment. The prospect of regenerating the environment by implementing action plans that can turn around degraded environments to successful and ecofriendly areas vindicate the use of ecocriticism in this analysis.

REFERENCES


